

***Tout Bouge [Everything Moves]:***  
**The (Re)Construction of the Body in Lecoq-based Pedagogy**

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## Introduction

*You: crouched in the grass while the devil screeched up in a car and cavorted to deranged techno music; jogged to a set of stairs and watched a wind-up band playing demented vaudeville; squinted through the gloom and watched a real-life silent movie playing out in the near distance; leaned against a wall while a huge student cast sang a song of heartache and near-redemption; held your breath while you walked through the dark with characters hissing sour nothings in your ear.*

*-Quinton Skinner, Review of *The Master and Margarita*<sup>1</sup>*

In this review, Quinton Skinner captures the imagistic rather than narrative framework that shaped the devising of *The Master and Margarita*, an outdoor, site-specific collaboration mounted by University of Minnesota theatre undergraduates in September-October 2006. Performers translated potent images from the novel into embodied theatrical events which loosely follow Mikhail Bulgakov's story in his novel of the same name. In his novel, Bulgakov tells the story of the devil's visit to the Moscow of Stalinist Russia and involvement in the love affair between the Master, a writer who has been vilified in literary circles for his novel about Christ and Pontius Pilate, and Margarita, the woman who strikes a deal with the devil to be reunited with her lover. The adaptation was co-directed by Michael Sommers and Luverne Seifert, two local theatre artists who also teach at the university. Sommers teaches puppetry and co-runs Open Eye Figure Theatre, a Minneapolis-based puppetry company. Seifert teaches acting at the university and is a professional actor in the Twin Cities; he and Sommers have both worked extensively with the now-defunct Théâtre de la Jeune Lune, a theatre founded by graduates of École Jacques Lecoq. Rehearsals for *The Master and Margarita*

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<sup>1</sup> Skinner, Quinton. "Curtain Call." Citypages 27 Dec 2006, sec. Arts: 1.

were therefore strongly informed by Lecoq's methodology, including clown and *le jeu* [the play or the game].<sup>2</sup>

During rehearsals for *The Master and Margarita* I observed a number of pedagogical effects including increased agency among performers, the ability to access embodied knowledge, and the development of collaborative working relationships. As I explored the strategies for creating a space within which these effects were facilitated, I arrived at a conception of the uses of *disorientation* to create a different type of space, a space that allowed new patterns of thought and behavior to occur. This idea became the lens through which I approached a later practice-based study of the Neutral Mask and Clown workshops at École Philippe Gaulier, in which I examined the ways in which students and teachers engaged with ideas and practices that have been a part of the French mime tradition from the late nineteenth century, including the natural body, the artificial or mechanical body, and the "authentic self".<sup>3</sup> These practices are considered

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<sup>2</sup> *Le jeu* is a form of improvisation central to Jacques Lecoq's concept of theatrical creation. Lecoq defines *le jeu* as "lorsque, conscient de la dimension théâtrale, l'acteur donne un rythme, une mesure, une durée, un espace, une forme à son improvisation, pour un public" [when, conscious of the theatrical dimension, the actor gives a rhythm, a measure, a space, a form to his improvisation for spectators] (*Corps* 41; unless indicated otherwise, all translations in this chapter are mine). Mask work includes Neutral Mask in which movement without expression is explored, Larval Mask in which shapes suggest expressivity, and Character Mask in which strong personality must be embodied. Clown is a type of character and a performance technique that also operates within *le jeu*. This figure is related to circus and Commedia clown traditions, but is also highly specific to a style developed by Lecoq with his students at the school over several decades. The central feature of the Lecoq clown is openness—a vulnerability that allows for spontaneity in the rehearsal process.

<sup>3</sup> I use "authentic self" to mean the idea of a pre-socialized identity that lies "behind" socialized habits of thought and behavior, or movement. Much actor training in the twentieth century has been geared toward stripping away these habits; this includes movement training (see Evans 2009), voice training, for example Kristen Linklater's system of "Freeing the Natural

part of Lecoq-based pedagogy, a pedagogy that I have chosen to analyze utilizing both historiographic and practice-based methodologies for its approach to the performer's body. This expands on current research (including Murray 2002 and 2003 and Evans 2009) that focuses on and theorizes the key ideas that Lecoq espoused but which lacks current practice-based data, as these existing studies rely on memories of students rather than observations in the actual classroom. Additionally, my research links Lecoq-based practice to twentieth-century mime beginning with Jacques Copeau in contrast to studies that do not look further back to French mime practice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which I propose significantly informed later twentieth-century developments. In Chapter 2, therefore, I analyze late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French mime practitioners and theorists as they encountered, produced and struggled with these themes of mechanization and authenticity; in Chapters 3 and 4 I turn my attention to Gaulier's classroom to study the ways in which students and teachers within a tradition drawn from French mime continue to engage with these themes, interrogating, rupturing and reinscribing conventional notions of the body and self. I return to the site of *The Master and Margarita* in Chapter 1, digging more deeply into my concept of a "pedagogy of disorientation" and situating this and other key Lecoq ideas within a larger scholarly conversation, which sets the stage for my analysis

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Voice" (1976), and Lecoq-based clown training in which students are encouraged to "discover" their personal clown, generally identified in the classroom and in writings (including Lecoq 1997, Fusetti 1999 and Gaulier 2007) as the student's "true" self. I explore and challenge this idea of the "true" or "authentic" self in more detail in Chapter 4.



of Gaulier’s classroom. This introduction lays out the larger questions of my research, and details my methodology and existing literature in the field.

In this dissertation I explore the question of how the body has been historically constructed as a performing agent in Lecoq-based performance pedagogy through investigating the ways in which the body has been and continues to be a site of contestation—revealing underlying ideas about the “natural”, the mechanical, and the “authentic” self—within the French mime tradition. This interest began with my personal experience of Lecoq-based pedagogy, in which I observed intersections between contemporary Euro-American pedagogical approaches to the body, which position it as an object to be controlled by the mind, and Lecoq-based pedagogical practice, which positions the body as a thinking agent. I chose to study the ways in which the body has been constructed and mobilized within the Lecoq pedagogical tradition by analyzing specific classroom practices at the Lecoq-based École Philippe Gaulier, and tracing themes that emerged—including the idea of the “natural” versus the “mechanical” body and concurrent themes of emotion and the “authentic” self—back through the shifting French mime tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I have undertaken this research, therefore, in order to understand how the body is both constructed and mobilized, in dialogue and in tension with normative constructions of the body, within a specific pedagogical context. This work represents, therefore, an intervention in current acting theory that is increasingly concerned with both Lecoq-based practice and questions of the body and of

authenticity; my research digs more deeply into the ideologies underpinning the broad Lecoq-based pedagogical practices of today, opening up a rich site of inquiry into the ways in which body and self have been and continue to be constructed and contested within actor training.

In 1956, Jacques Lecoq opened a physical theatre training school in Paris. Lecoq shaped his training and pedagogy around a French tradition of mime and mask work whose genealogical roots included the Commedia dell'Arte tradition, particularly as it was revived and revised in nineteenth to early twentieth century French mime and clown. Lecoq died in 1999, prompting a dissemination of his teachings as Lecoq-trained pedagogues spread throughout the world. As a theatre practitioner and pedagogue, I have found the intersection between Lecoq-style training and student reception asks the performer to cultivate a “thinking body,” allowing actions on stage to be prompted by the body rather than the mind—“the mind” figured as the Cartesian *cogito*, the “ghost in the machine,” a paradigm that positions mind as transcendent and body as mechanical object. In Lecoq-based pedagogy, the body is privileged as locus of knowledge and creative generation. This focus contains an implicit (but possibly pedagogically necessary) contradiction: while attempting to undermine or at least complicate Cartesian dualism by privileging the body as thinking mechanism, the language used in actual practice in the classroom reinscribes this very dualism by defining the body against the (de-privileged) mind. In Gaulier’s classroom, for example, students are encouraged to privilege movement above text or mental image. A common

refrain of Giovanni Fusetti, a Lecoq-trained pedagogue, is “Ignore your mind—listen to your body.”<sup>4</sup> This allegorizing of the body—the body becomes a communicator of spoken language—points to the necessary hybridity and contradiction within the concept of Western mind/body ideology. I argue that by employing what I call a “pedagogy of disorientation”, Gaulier insists on a moment-to-moment awareness of the body unencumbered by habits of thought and movement. The new habits of thought and movement that Gaulier’s pedagogical method encourages students to encounter is where I situate my analysis: specifically, what understandings are revealed in the Lecoq-based classroom about the relationship of bodily movements to thoughts, mental images, language, emotions, and the self? How did these constructions of the body and self emerge in Lecoq-based pedagogy, how are they deployed in a twenty-first century Lecoq-based classroom, and what do students’ encounters with them reveal about their existing experiences and ideas of their bodies and selves?

In order to explore these questions, I trace the development of the idea of the “natural” versus the “mechanical” body alongside ideas of the “true” or “authentic” self back through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in French mime tradition. I chose these historical eras for several reasons. First, Lecoq was greatly influenced by the pedagogical practices of early twentieth-century French mime practitioners, particularly Jacques Copeau. This is a link that has been studied and documented by scholars including Simon Murray (2003), Tony Gardner (2008), Mark

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<sup>4</sup> From notes taken during “The Red Nose”, a May-June 2007 workshop conducted by Giovanni Fusetti in Minneapolis, MN.

Evans (2009), and most extensively by Mira Felner in her 1985 book *Apostles of Silence: The Modern French Mimes*. My study goes back further than Copeau, however, to French mime artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries including Champfleury, Georges Wague and Paul Hugounet, who, I argue, advocated and developed a minimalist mime technique amidst shifting ideas about the “natural” body, both nostalgic and anxious. By the time Copeau founded his mime school École du Vieux-Colombier in Paris in 1920, the idea of the “natural” as a sought-after state for actors had become entrenched enough for Copeau and other mime artists of the era, including Étienne Decroux and Jean-Louis Barrault, to structure their pedagogical practices around an ideal of producing the “natural” body. This ideal went hand-in-hand with a construction of the “authentic” self as revealed through practices that strip the body of its socialized habits; both assumptions continue to be discerned in Lecoq-based pedagogy. By looking back further than Copeau at how the constructions of the “natural” body and “authentic” self that Copeau and his colleagues drew on were produced within French mime, and placing these alongside an analysis of how students in the twenty-first century engage with this ideology in the classroom, I explore how and where an analysis of Lecoq-based pedagogy exposes fissures in the seemingly uncontaminated space of such ideology, and how those fissures and the pedagogical alternatives to traditional approaches intersect and interact with the ideologies with which they are engaging.

### ***Methodology and review of literature***

One strand of my research is *historiographic*: I trace the genealogy of Lecoq-based pedagogy in order to explore why and how certain discourses of the body—scientific, pedagogical, aesthetic—rationalize ways of thinking about the actor’s body. My research does not map out an evolutionary path of this pedagogy (a mapping that situates past events as forerunners or less-developed versions of Lecoq’s pedagogy). Rather I follow Joseph Roach’s lead by tracing the genealogy of the intersections of acting theories and various framings of the body as, for example, material excess, or the Cartesian paradigm of the body as machine. I focus on the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries in Paris, examining the changes that occurred during that time within the French mime tradition to constructions and understandings of the performer’s body. In Chapter 2 I examine performances of Pierrot, a clown/mime with roots in the late seventeenth century Commedia dell’Arte performances in Paris. The performed figure of Pierrot shifted during the late nineteenth century between a “natural”, base figure with overflowing corporeality and a sinister, automaton-like stage presence marked by a mask-like white face. A corresponding shift occurred in the gestural style of mime, away from the set gestures of Delsartian-inspired representations of the passions and towards a minimalist, subtle style. This dual shift is documented in letters, memoirs, reviews and essays by performers, critics and literary theorists, as well as in dramatic texts and musical scores of Pierrot pantomimes. I examine these archival documents for the language they use that reveals assumptions

that performers who played Pierrot and the critics who wrote about them were drawing on about the performing body, and how this understanding shifted as the figure's appearance and performance style changed. I argue that the language used to describe the "natural" versus the automaton-like Pierrot, as well the valuing placed upon the minimalist gestural style, reveal what I term "contamination anxieties"—anxieties about racial, class and gendered contamination of the body—that played out upon the performed figure of Pierrot. Sources for this exploration also include dramatic texts of performed Pierrot pieces including *Le bras noir* [The black arm] (1856), *Crime et châtime* [Crime and punishment] (1891) and *Pierrot assassin de sa femme* [Pierrot assassin of his wife] (1888); Tristan Rémy's biography of Jean-Gaspard Deburau; Jules Janin's detailed accounts of performances at the Théâtre des Funambules (where Deburau's Pierrot first appeared on stage); responses to Pierrot in memoirs, letters, reviews and essays of writers including Théophile Gautier, Champfleury, and Catulle Mendès; and musical scores of pantomimes featuring Pierrot including *Pierrot qui pleure et Pierrot qui rit* [Pierrot who cries and Pierrot who laughs] (1899), *Barbe-Bleuette* [Blue-Beard] (1890) and *Pierrot assassin de sa femme* [Pierrot assassin of his wife] (1888). I look at the emergence of mechanism in both scientific and theatrical discourse, as described in theatrical texts including Diderot's *Le paradoxe sur le comédien* [The paradox of the actor] in 1830, Heinrich von Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* [On the Marionette Theatre] in 1810, and Edward Gordon Craig's "The Actor and the *Übermarionette*" in 1908. The main questions I address are: What are the

understandings of the body that influenced the way an actor performed Pierrot? How did those understandings and techniques shift during the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century? What are the intersections between these shifts and larger discourses on acting and the actor's body?

The other strand of my research is *practice-based*: by closely examining what happens in an actual physical theatre rehearsal site—*The Master and Margarita*—and classroom—Philippe Gaulier's *Masque neutre* [Neutral mask] and Clown workshops—I analyze the intersection between pedagogic style and student/actor reception, an investigation that provides specific documentation on Lecoq-based pedagogy as it is currently practiced. My central practice-based research question is: What meaning is made around the construction of the body by students who are steeped in Western mind/body dualism encountering a pedagogy that appears to challenge that ideology? My research focus is tied to the question of pedagogical efficacy: if physical theatre is based upon a different understanding of the body, what the students actually learn and are able to access in the classroom is crucial to the question of whether such a new understanding is being enacted. I determined how the students made “meaning” through their own descriptions of their experience, their questions and comments in class, as well as close observation of their bodies in the classroom, particularly as their language about the body and their movements shifted based on pedagogical interventions. I continually engaged with the question of how do I read and analyze

discursive practices of the body, as the two domains central to my practice-based research design are language *and* movement.

Looking at both a rehearsal and a classroom site allowed me to examine physical theatre practices framed differently by their institutional and pedagogical codings. Rehearsals for a university production serve a dual function: pedagogical (students are learning production skills including rehearsing a role, learning lines, blocking, and working within a production team) and functional (each moment of rehearsal exists as a step towards a final product that will be performed before an audience). In the case of *The Master and Margarita* at the University of Minnesota, the pedagogical lessons included that of devising, as most students involved in the production had little to no prior experience with this method of theatre-making. Because of the interaction between the pedagogical and the functional, however, the lessons about how to devise had to be folded into the process of actually making the show—so the students learned how to devise by actually doing it, under time constraints and with an intended resulting product. This largely meant that the directors Seifert and Sommers, both of whom had years of experience in devising, had to resort to on-the-spot strategies for “fixing” student habits of rehearsal behavior that worked against a devising process. With the exception of one speech that Seifert gave on the first day of rehearsals in which he introduced the concept of “proposing” ideas and positioned this as central to the collaborative rehearsal process, there simply was not enough time to teach students devising methods as they would be taught in a classroom with time for exercises,



reflection and analysis. Seifert and Sommers therefore taught the methods through warm-up games and on an ad hoc basis, explaining to students in the moment of devising how to do it. My observations of this process led me to develop the idea of a “pedagogy of disorientation” that operated as a strategy to teach students behaviors that were unfamiliar to them; in Chapter 1 I analyze some of the key concepts around this type of pedagogy, and examine the ways in which it was deployed in *The Master and Margarita* rehearsal site.

The structure of the classroom site at the École Philippe Gaulier allowed me to focus on the specific pedagogical practices used by Gaulier and analyze the ideas and assumptions that lay behind them. The École Philippe Gaulier is one of several Lecoq-based training schools that focus on the pedagogy of one teacher (including the École internationale de théâtre Jacques Lecoq and Giovanni Fusetti’s Hèlikos: Scuola Internazionale de Creazione Teatrale), following the twentieth-century actor training trend in Europe and the United States of methods developed by and attributed to one figure. Gaulier began developing his pedagogy at Jacques Lecoq’s school, which links him to the “Lecoq-based” pedagogical tradition and its connections to early twentieth-century French mime practitioners such as Copeau and Decroux; his pedagogical techniques, however, were unique in many ways to him, meaning that a “Gaulier-trained” clown takes on a particular meaning that differs from, for example, a Fusetti-trained or Wright-trained clown. One of the unique aspects of Gaulier’s classroom was its framing as a parody of an authoritarian classroom, in which he performed the role of

the stern, highly-critical teacher; he and the students understood this as a clown performance due to his deliberate distancing of himself from the role through his displays of “pleasure” in performing it—a function of *le jeu* [the play or the game] as aesthetic distance that I analyze in Chapter 3. This framing is key to understanding clown performance: as I discuss in Chapter 4, the clown is funny when he attempts to do something (including making the audience laugh) and fails; the failure makes the audience laugh. However, this laughter only occurs within the framing of a clown performance, when the audience interprets the failure as a performance, as watching a person actually fail to do something tends to result in spectators feeling uncomfortable or what Fusetti terms *sympathique* (I discuss this concept in relation to different types of laughter in Chapter 4). Gaulier’s clown classroom operates as a sort of liminal space between the clown performance—an audience in a theater watching a clown—and the actual failure of a person attempting to do something, by positioning the students themselves as clowns. This is possible because Gaulier frames the classroom itself as a performance through his parodic representation of the authoritarian teacher, which means that everything a student does in the classroom is re-framed as a performance. The student experiences herself—not a character she is performing—actually failing repeatedly on stage (the institutional coding of the student genuinely attempting to please the teacher still exists), yet the spectators in the classroom can laugh at this failure and the reaction it provokes because within the framing of the classroom, they

are watching a clown performance. I discuss the implications of this positioning on Gaulier's identification of the student's "true self" in Chapter 4.

My practice-based research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Minnesota in 2007 and utilized a participant-observation approach. I was present for every day of the workshops. I used a methodology of triangulation, collecting multiple sources of data including archival, interviews and observations to develop converging lines of inquiry. I looked for how different sources both agree and disagree, as my goal was not to develop one homogenous, cohesive narrative but rather to allow for overlapping and dissenting layers of narrative that informed my central research question of how the body is both constructed and mobilized, in dialogue and in tension with normative constructions of the body and the self, within a specific pedagogical context. Data collection included observations (documented through my own written notes and body sketches based on classroom observations of physical theatre exercises and rehearsal techniques, photographs and video documentation of classroom practices, and student journals and notes that I received permission to use), open-ended interviews with students and teachers, and semistructured interviews after the class/rehearsal processes were completed.<sup>5</sup> The open-ended interviews took place

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<sup>5</sup> "Open-ended" interviews are guided by a set of general questions (in this case questions based on my research focus and classroom observations), but give respondents a great deal of flexibility in articulating their responses, meaning that responses may occasionally stray from the research focus but may also provide new directions for research (Schensul et al 135). "Semistructured" interviews combine the flexibility of open-ended interviews with a more focused directionality to the questions, and are used to further clarify specific factors in the study (Schensul et al 149-150).

in the “in-between” times of the workshop—during breaks, immediately after class, during social gatherings. These were generally brief and informal, and focused on a particular point of interest—for example, asking Gaulier to clarify a statement made during class such as “You have not given your guts,” or asking a student to expand on their idea, raised in class, of what performing one’s “true self” meant. I conducted the semistructured interviews during the week following each workshop. These were from one to two hours, and were structured around key points that I had observed in the classroom such as the idea of emotion in neutral mask performance, the performance of the “true self” within clown training, and the notion of “beauty” as a marker of a successful, open performance style. Both the open-ended and the semistructured interviews were informed by my own research questions such as: What is the teacher’s intention behind specific pedagogical strategies such as instructing students to “Put on the mask and do not let your body have a past” or banging a drum unexpectedly? What are the students’ perceptions and interpretations of such pedagogical strategies? What is a student’s experiential and interpretive description of particular moments of tension or difficulty while engaged in an exercise? What language do the teacher and students use to talk about the body and the self? Do differences emerge in these descriptions at different times in the training? I used this data to look for evidence of underlying ideologies of the body and the self, such as language referring to a “true self” or pointing to the eyes while discussing a student’s performance of “beauty”, and to ask

whether interventions in these ideologies appear to have occurred, and what these interventions look like.

### *Critical pedagogy and the body*

My research draws from the fields of critical pedagogy, theoretical explorations of the body and self, and acting theory. I draw on critical pedagogical theorists in my focus on how the body is situated and mobilized in the classroom. Paulo Freire's notion of "humanization" through a dialogic relationship between student and teacher points to the importance of understanding knowledge as situated and contextual (1970). This model, however, does not address the body in the classroom; indeed, several critical pedagogical theorists have recently called attention to the absence of the body in critical pedagogy, including Henry Giroux (1988), Peter McLaren (1995) and Sherry Shapiro (1999). Others, such as Jill Dolan (2005), bell hooks (1994), and Margaret Werry and Róisín O'Gorman (2007), have pointed to the lack of serious discussion of affect. In her chapter "Re-Membering the Body in Critical Pedagogy" in *Pedagogy and the Politics of the Body: A Critical Praxis* (1999), Shapiro looks at how situated knowledge is "incorporated by the human subject, and ... inscribed in and on the body as a lived process" (79). I find Shapiro's work useful in its attempt to articulate a new pedagogical model that understands all knowledge as body-mediated, and particularly her attention to the "ocularization" of pedagogy that is found even in work on the body, in which pedagogical process and theory structure "seeing" as "knowing." Shapiro's premise, and

the work she does to re-imagine knowledge in corporeal terms, aids my practice-based engagement with such seeming contradictions as Gaulier's language of visibility in the Neutral Mask workshop: "We must see her joy," indicating that affect is to be shown visually on the body and read through the eyes of the spectators; other pedagogical instructions, however, directly contradicted this indication ("Do not show, just do," for example).

Much of the pedagogical literature on physical theatre focuses on exercises and goals of the training, utilizing a language that reveals the ideological encounter with Western mind/body dualism (specifically physical theatre's construction of a "thinking body") without interrogating it. Three notable exceptions are Phillip Zarrilli (2002), Philip Auslander (2002), and Joseph Roach (1985). In his Introduction to the first section of the compilation *Acting (Re)Considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (2002), Phillip Zarrilli addresses the question of mind/body dualism and theatrical pedagogical (supposed) privileging of the body by tracing the acting systems of Delsarte, Stanislavsky, Meyerhold and others through a modernist objectivity paradigm that he argues informed their "systems". He locates a paradigmatic shift in mind/body duality in the phenomenological challenge of Merleau-Ponty, traces this influence through the avant-garde theatrical movements of the 1960s, and discusses the influences of Artaud, Grotowski, Schechner and Lecoq on challenges to the traditional dualist approach. Zarrilli struggles with the question of how to revise theatrical pedagogical language without simply replacing one modernist "truth claims" system with another, concluding

that the language must continue to shift and adapt to particular contexts and particular purposes.

Positioning the body as the site of creative impetus has the potential to disturb normative, modernist conceptions of the self as stable identity based on a logocentric hierarchy of mind as foundation of truth. I find Philip Auslander's reading of performance theory through the lens of Derrida's critique of this "metaphysics of presence" in "'Just Be Your Self': Logocentrism and difference in performance theory" (2002) useful for interrogating the ways in which text-based acting techniques reinscribe and maintain an Enlightenment-inherited ideology of presence. Auslander examines the performance theory of Stanislavski, Brecht and Grotowski for their reliance upon and insistence on access to an actor's "self." I wish to extend this analysis to Lecoq-based pedagogy, in which a construct of the performer's "true self"—in clown work, the goal is to "reveal" the "deepest self" of the performer—exists alongside techniques that disrupt conventional notions of stable, linear identity by relocating consciousness to embodied processes and insisting on a moment-to-moment awareness of a continually shifting creative process.

In *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (1985), Roach traces the intersections of acting theories and scientific discourses on the body. Following Kuhn and Foucault in their rejection of the evolutionary view of knowledge accretion, Roach argues that "each acting style and the theories that explain and justify it are right and natural for the historical period in which they are developed and during which they are

accepted,” and positions his project as a restoration of “the meaning of outmoded terminology and explanatory principles” as regards scientific discourse on the body (15). His work provides me with a strong model for undertaking this kind of historical research, as I examine philosophical discourses on the body as they intersect with acting theories in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French mime, and later twentieth-century Lecoq-based acting training.

### *Lecoq-style pedagogy*

Much of the literature on physical theatre/Lecoq-style pedagogy is quite recent, and stems from the 2000 publication of *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre*, David Bradby’s English translation of Lecoq’s 1997 *Le Corps poétique: un enseignement de la création théâtrale*. In this book Lecoq lays out the pedagogical trajectory of École Jacques Lecoq in Paris, and discusses his impetus for starting the school and the influences that shaped his pedagogy, which is framed within a two-year training program that he had developed for the school, a physical and movement-based program centered on the structuring principle of *le jeu* [the play or the game] and culminating chronologically in an exploration of Clown. Lecoq describes how he drew on multiple and diverse traditions of physical theatre, mask and mime, most heavily influenced by the Commedia dell’Arte. During the half century since the school opened, there has been a proliferation of pedagogical and theatrical sites that utilize techniques of *le jeu*, including mask and clown, as they were synthesized and systematized by



Lecoq, including but not limited to École Philippe Gaulier in Paris, Pierre Byland workshops in Switzerland and Dell'Arte School of Physical Theatre in Northern California, and theatre companies Complicité in London, Pig Iron Theatre in Philadelphia and Théâtre de la Jeune Lune in Minneapolis.

Lecoq's death in 1999 marked a turning point for the emerging written archive about his pedagogy. Prior to 1999 only a handful of articles and book sections had appeared that discussed his work; these included writings that focused on Lecoq's approach to movement in mime such as Bari Rolfe's "The Mime of Jacques Lecoq" (1972) in which he presents an overview of Lecoq's pedagogy. Discussions of Lecoq's use of the Neutral Mask appeared in Sears Eldridge and Hollis Huston's "Actor Training in the Neutral Mask" (1978, republished in 2002) and Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow's *Improvisation in Drama* (1990). Thomas Leabhart's *Modern and Post-modern Mime* (1989) contains one chapter on Lecoq that traces the development of his pedagogy and the opening of his school in Paris. Arguably the most comprehensive account of Lecoq's teachings, as well as that of early twentieth-century French mimes including Jacques Copeau, Étienne Decroux and Jean-Louis Barrault, is Mira Felner's *Apostles of Silence: The Modern French Mimes* (1985), in which she chronicles the development of French mime in the twentieth century beginning with Copeau and ending with Lecoq. I both draw on Felner's extensive documentation of the development of French mime pedagogy, and go further by linking it to the idea of the "natural" body as it was constructed and contested in the late nineteenth century. I thereby draw a connection

between early twentieth-century French mime practitioners with the mime practices that preceded them, and their mobilization of the body with concurrent and preceding discourses on the body, in order to map a shift in the way the “natural” body was understood and valued, a shift that continues to resonate in contemporary physical theatre classrooms.

Lecoq published several writings about his own practice, including an article on his style of mime, “Mime – Movement – Theatre”, in 1973 (translated by Kat Foley and Julia Devlin), in which he discussed his particular form of mime as distinct from the *pantomime blanche* [white mime] of the nineteenth century in its focus on pure movement—what Lecoq calls *le fond* [the foundation]—rather than gestural translations of language. In 1987 he edited and contributed chapters to *Le Théâtre du geste: mimes et acteurs* (published in English in 2006 as *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*) in which he discussed the transition of nineteenth-century *pantomime blanche* into twentieth century mime, arguing that the latter (which he calls “mime” in contrast to “pantomime”) is less rigid and formalized than the former, and in a separate essay considered the ways in which gestural style varies based on geographical origin and societal roles. His most famous and far-reaching book has been *The Moving Body* (originally *Le Corps poétique*). Both *Le Théâtre du geste* and *Le Corps poétique* were only translated into English following Lecoq’s death, when an interest arose among former students, teachers from the school, and practitioners around archiving his teachings.

Much of the writing on Lecoq and his pedagogy has been published since 1999, including translations of *Le Théâtre du geste* and *Le Corps poétique*. The remaining works can be divided into three broad categories: practical writings that draw on Lecoq or contain physical theatre artists' re-workings of Lecoq-based exercises (including Callery 2001, Wright 2007, and Gaulier 2007), writings by or about former students that focus on the ways in which Lecoq's teachings have informed their current theatrical practice (including Schechner 1999, Mason 2002, and Shruballsall 2002), and—closest to my own work—writings that document and theorize the pedagogy (including Wright 2002, Murray 2002 and 2003, Peacock 2009, and Evans 2009).

The first category—practical writings that draw on Lecoq or containing re-workings of Lecoq-based exercises—include Dymphna Callery's *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre* (2001) which focuses on exercises for activating body-based play, and contains a brief section on the divergence of the physical theatre pedagogical system from traditional Western theatrical pedagogies. John Wright, another Lecoq-trained practitioner who now lives and teaches physical theatre in London, published *Why Is That So Funny? A Practical Exploration of Physical Comedy* in 2007, combining descriptions of classroom-based exercises with passages on the philosophy that undergirds physical theatre. In November 2007 Philippe Gaulier published *Le Gégèneur: jeux lumière théâtre / The Tormentor: le jeu light theatre*, a description of his own brand of pedagogy that is both based in and diverges from Lecoq's style, chiefly around the question of the performer's identification with that

which the body is performing (Lecoq believed that a “melding” of sorts should occur, and Gaulier felt there needed to be a separation between the performer’s “self” and that which the performer’s body was playing).<sup>6</sup> Gaulier’s text provides a rich compendium of the language used in his classrooms, language which is often intentionally vague as a part of a pedagogical strategy to avoid overly reducing the pedagogical process to a step-by-step teleological model, an example of what I call his “pedagogy of disorientation”, which I explore in greater detail in Chapter 1. While these pedagogical source materials provide a wealth of information about pedagogical technique—and Gaulier’s text in particular provides me with material for examining his specific pedagogical language and practice—none examines the ideologies of body and self that inform the pedagogical practice.

The second category—writings that discuss the ways in which Lecoq’s pedagogy has informed later artistic practice—includes Richard Schechner’s 1999 interview with Julie Taymor in *The Drama Review* in which she discusses the influence of Lecoq’s mask work on her later artistic work, particularly *The Lion King*. In “The Well of Possibilities: Theoretical and Practical uses of Lecoq’s Teaching” (2002) Bim Mason reflects on the ways in which Lecoq’s teachings have been useful to him as a practitioner of street theatre over the past 10 years, particularly his use of movement training to construct physical routines. In “Jos Houben: Understanding the Neutral Mask” (2002) Anthony

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<sup>6</sup> The first half of Gaulier’s book is written in French, and the second half is his English translation; all subsequent quotes from the book in this chapter include both his French and English versions.

Shrubsall explores theatre teacher Houben's integration of neutral mask (influenced by his training with Lecoq) with Moshe Feldenkrais's 'Awareness Through Movement' program. He compares Houben and Lecoq's approaches by studying a 1996 workshop that Houben conducted in Edinburgh. Shrubsall focuses more on Feldenkrais than on Lecoq, and his account of the workshop focuses on practice rather than ideological background.

Writings that document and theorize Lecoq's pedagogy, the third category, include Wright's "The Masks of Jacques Lecoq" (2002) in which he discusses Lecoq's pedagogy of *via negativa* and his relationships with both Copeau and Amleto Sartori (from whom he learned mask-making skills). In *Serious Play: Modern Clown Performance* (1999) Louise Peacock discusses Lecoq's definition of the clown and Lecoq-based clown training practices (32-8). The work of Evans (2009) and Murray (2002, 2003 and 2007) is most closely connected to my research, in that they both interrogate Lecoq's pedagogy with reference to the underlying ideologies of the body and self that inform it. In *Movement Training for the Modern Actor* (2009), Evans analyzes movement training for professional actors in the UK through an examination of movement principles including the natural and neutral body. His research includes interviews with students at theatre schools in England and at the École Jacques Lecoq, and detailed analyses of ideologies of the body as they influenced actor training in England and France from the nineteenth century to the present. My research expands on Evans's work in content—as focusing specifically on the performed French mime body allows me to conduct a more detailed

analysis of how particular ideologies operate in this specific site—and in methodology—as I conduct practice-based research from within an actual classroom. Murray's *Jacques Lecoq* (2003) is part of the Routledge Performance Practitioners series, each volume of which addresses the background and practices of an influential twentieth- or twenty-first-century performance practitioner. In the Lecoq volume Murray gives an informative overview and explanation of Lecoq's life and major influences, his texts, companies founded by former Lecoq students, and several practical exercises. In *"Tout bouge: Jacques Lecoq, Modern Mime and the Zero Body: a pedagogy for the creative actor"* (2002), Murray interviews three Lecoq-trained performers to explore four pedagogical features of Lecoq. These are mime, neutral mask, *autocours* (weekly self-created performances by students) and play. In his section on neutral mask he discusses the philosophy of students unlearning socialized habits, a theme that I take up and expand upon by investigating the archive of early twentieth-century mime records to examine how this idea of the neutral mask developed. Murray also raises the issue of "presence" as linked to Eugenio Barba's idea of pre-expressivity, citing it as an issue that needs expanding upon but is beyond the scope of the article (26). "Presence" here is an elusive quality that marks the difference between a performance that works and one that doesn't; in Murray's text, former Lecoq student Alan Fairbairn describes a student performing mime techniques as follows: "He could do all the technical exercises perfectly, but ... [he] had absolutely no presence whatsoever" (26). Gaulier uses the term "beauty" in a similar way that Lecoq students use the term "presence"; this is an

issue that I explore in Chapters 3 and 4 in my discussion of Gaulier's deployment of the term "beauty" as linked to the performer's "true self". Murray's rigorous interview-based methodology provides valuable documentation of how Lecoq's pedagogy is constructed and deployed, but his evidence has been collected years after the event.<sup>7</sup> The practice-based portion of my research therefore adds a valuable layer to existing scholarship by being conducted in the moment of the classroom experience. I was able to document bodies as they moved in the classroom, to transcribe classroom encounters, and to conduct interviews when the experiences were still fresh and recent. This represents a significant addition to a body of work composed mainly of interviews conducted years after the event or written accounts of personal memories.

Written work about Gaulier is far more scarce than that about Lecoq. Murray (2002, 2003, 2007) references his own and others' experiences as a student of Gaulier and Monica Pagneux (who taught with Gaulier when he first established his *École Philippe Gaulier*) in relation to pedagogical themes including *via negativa* and Gaulier's emphasis on "pleasure" and "play". Peacock (2009) mentions Gaulier's focus on the flop and pleasure, and describes his authoritarian teaching style (37-8). Evans (2009) references Gaulier briefly in a section about the twentieth-century construct of the movement teacher as expert (133). Wright (1990) briefly discusses Gaulier's authoritarian teaching style in relation to pedagogical efficacy. In "Amusez-Vous, merde!

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<sup>7</sup> Murray acknowledges this necessary distance and attempts to correct for it by structuring his interviews so as to evoke a sense of what it was like to be in the classroom in order to "uncover their feelings and sense impressions at the actual time of the experience, and not with the wisdom of hindsight" (Bouge 19).

The Effect of Philippe Gaulier’s Teaching on My Work as an Actor and Writer” (2002)

Victoria Worsley remembers her time as a Gaulier student and discusses the effect Gaulier’s pedagogy—particularly his focus on pleasure, the injunction to enjoy oneself on stage—has had on her devising work, such as her ability to be much more in tune with fellow devisers. She describes several principles of Gaulier’s teaching Talks about Gaulier’s teaching of “rhythm as a fundamental performance tool” (90). Like the writings of and about other former Lecoq students including Mason and Shrubbsall, Worsley’s work is based largely around analyzing the effect the pedagogy has had on her current practice from the distance of several years after the event. While she recounts specific events that occurred in the classroom, her analysis is based on what happened *after* she left Gaulier and began to apply his teachings to her own artistic practice. Similarly, analyses of Gaulier’s pedagogy (Murray, Evans, Wright) draw from memories or later interview accounts of classroom experiences. My research focuses on specific moments of classroom encounter as observed by me in the actual classroom, and ties these moments to the larger tradition of French mime beginning in the late nineteenth century.

### ***Chapter organization***

In the latter section of this chapter, I introduce my central pedagogical concept of a “pedagogy of disorientation” that in Chapters 3 and 4 I examine in my Gaulier research. I explain how this concept arose for me as I observed rehearsals for *The*



*Master and Margarita*, a site-specific adaptation devised with University of Minnesota undergraduates in September-October 2006. I compare this rehearsal process to another collaborative rehearsal process that I observed in May 2006 for a show titled *Kill the Robot* directed by physical theatre artist Jon Ferguson with a group of high school students previously untrained in physical theatre. As I observed this latter rehearsal process, it became apparent that as the students learned this method, they learned it through their bodies—no amount of verbal explanation could alter their habitual patterns of relating to authority. This experience underscored the rigor involved in re-disciplining bodies to engage in physical theatrical processes of collaboration and play. The body stores knowledge in its muscles; neural patterns are deeply engraved through habitual movement. Augusto Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed* describes the process of unlearning habitual movement patterns as “disjunctive,” designed to “disjoint” the body: “The exercises ... are designed to “undo” the muscular structure of the participants. That is, to take them apart, to study and analyze them. Not to weaken or destroy them, but to raise them to the level of consciousness” (128). I unpack the idea of a “thinking body” and introduce my structuring ideas of myself as a “haptic researcher” and a “pedagogy of disorientation” that I utilize in my practice-based work at the École Philippe Gaulier in Chapters 3 and 4.

In Chapter 2, “*Ventre and Cerveau: Contamination Anxieties in Late Nineteenth-Century French Mime*”, I trace the genealogy of Lecoq-based pedagogy in order to explore why and how certain discourses of the body—scientific, pedagogical,

aesthetic—rationalize ways of thinking about the actor’s body. I follow Roach’s lead by tracing the genealogy of the intersections of acting theories and various framings of the body as, for example, material excess, or the Cartesian paradigm of the body as machine. I focus on the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries in Paris, examining the changes that occurred during that time to performances of Pierrot, a clown/mime with roots in the late seventeenth century Commedia dell’Arte performances in Paris. The performed figure of Pierrot shifted during the late nineteenth century between a grotesque, scatological clown figure and a sinister, automaton-like stage presence marked by a mask-like white face. A concurrent shift occurred in the gestural style of mime from large gestures based on Delsarte’s system of representing the passions to a minimalist, subtle gestural style. These transitions are documented in letters, memoirs, reviews and essays by performers, critics and literary theorists, as well as in dramatic texts and musical scores of pantomimes, which I examine in order to explore the assumptions that performers who played Pierrot and the critics who were writing about the figure were drawing on about the performing body, and how this understanding shifted as the figure’s appearance and performance style changed amidst what I call “contamination anxieties” around the body.

Turning my focus to the present day in my exploration of the assumptions actors draw on about the performing body, in Chapter 3, “Puppets and Bodies: Mechanical versus Natural in Neutral Mask Training”, I explore the pedagogy of Neutral Mask, drawing on my practice-based research conducted at École Philippe Gaulier in

November 2007. In Gaulier's Neutral Mask workshop, students brought with them ideas of emotional expression that resulted in confusion when emotion was apparently both stripped away from the Neutral Mask form and encouraged in it. I trace the complex relationship of the Neutral Mask form to both mechanization (the body as machine) and the natural (the body as free of socialized habits of movement) by analyzing the emergence of the form from Jacques Copeau's development of the *masque noble* [noble mask] in the 1920s through to Lecoq's *masque neutre* [neutral mask], interrogating ideas of mechanization (the performer's body as machine), of the natural body as efficient and therefore "neutral", and of sincerity as it was understood and applied to French mime pedagogy in the early twentieth century. I tie these ideas to classroom experiences in Gaulier's workshop, particularly the ways in which students engaged with questions of emotionality and techniques of mechanization.

In Chapter 4, "Locating the Self: Narratives and Practices of Authenticity in French Clown Training", I analyze the pedagogy of clown as it relates to ideas of the self using practice-based research gathered at Gaulier's Clown workshops in June 2008. I explore a central theme that emerged in this workshop: the idea of "authenticity" or the "true self," and this self's connection to the body. Following on from my dual practice-based and historiographic structuring in Chapter 3, I weave between classroom analysis and tracing the development of ideas and practices of "authenticity" as they emerged within French mime in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I argue that while the pedagogical language in Gaulier's classroom reinscribed the notion of a stable

unified self, classroom practices simultaneously undermined this idea by externalizing the self that judges performance and disorientating students into a moment-to-moment awareness of their embodied practices. I also explore how students connected—through language and movement—the physical body to the idea of the self, focusing on the difficulty in articulating and embodying the form of the “true self” that emerged in the workshop.

My conclusion positions my research as complicating the “mechanist”/“vitalist” duality as defined by Roach (1985), and as providing a detailed study of a pedagogy that provides an alternative model to the positioning of the body as an inanimate object and the encouraging of students to perform in traditionally “successful” ways. This latter point links to my exploration, in Chapters 3 and 4, of the centrality of failure to Gaulier’s pedagogy, a failure that I argue produces a productive state of disorientation that helps students encounter a new way of thinking and moving. I now return to my discussion of this idea of a “pedagogy of disorientation”, which emerged for me the year before I began my research at École Philippe Gaulier, during rehearsals for *The Master and Margarita*.

## Chapter 1

### Disorientation and the Haptic: Devising *The Master and Margarita*

In this section/chapter, I introduce the idea of disorientation as a pedagogical strategy, and explore the rehearsal site of *The Master and Margarita* that led to the development of this idea. I ask what kind of space was created in the rehearsal process and what strategies (intentional and otherwise) were used to create this space? I argue that by using pedagogical techniques of disorientation, the directors restructured both the consciousness and the collective organization of those people who together made up the body of the theatrical piece. The techniques therefore produced a productive disorientation in which familiar, recognizable boundaries and roles were shifted or blurred, allowing for a different sort of creative process to operate. This observation sets the groundwork for my practice-based analysis of Gaulier's classroom in Chapters 3 and 4.

#### ***Pedagogy of disorientation***

My practice-based work in this dissertation focuses on this idea of a “pedagogy of disorientation” which, I argue, produced disorientation amongst and within students with the intention (sometimes successful, sometimes not) of opening their bodies and minds to new ways of moving and thinking in order to help them encounter a construct of the body as a “thinking body” that can be experienced and engaged with somatically rather than intellectually. For example, in rehearsals for *The Master and Margarita*

many students were learning how to devise for the first time. By fragmenting the rehearsal space to allow students to work on their own or in small groups outside of the presence of the directors, the directors disrupted the assumed hierarchy that often prevented students from coming up with their own creative ideas. This opened a space for a relationship to creativity and the development of material that positioned the performer as creator.

My use of disorientation references theories of flow and play, overlapping categories that relate to, but can be distinguished from, disorientation. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi theorized the psychology of flow state in works including *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness* (1988) and *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (1990). Csíkszentmihályi developed his theory of flow from observing visual artists immersed in their work; he was particularly struck by the contrast between the intense absorption of the artist while working on a piece, and the indifference with which the finished art object was treated. He theorized that the state of absorption was intrinsically motivating—that is, the state was itself the reason for the absorption, not the piece that was being created. His theory of flow posits that a person in a flow state is fully immersed in the activity, losing self-consciousness, an awareness of time, and even awareness of physical needs (3-4). While the emphasis on *loss* certainly resonates with the state of disorientation in which I am interested (the word itself implies a loss of markers that help one orient oneself spatially and conceptually), I distinguish the flow state from disorientation based on both the quality of

concentration involved and the duration of the state. The extremely absorbed concentration that marks Csíkszentmihályi's flow state is markedly different than the sudden "blank" mind that results from a moment of disorientation. Furthermore, flow is a state that one can be in for a potentially extended period of time, while the disorientation that I focus on in the rehearsal space and the classrooms of my study is momentary—there may be multiple instances of it in rapid succession, but the state itself is experienced as a sudden and temporary loss of moorings, quickly regained when mental and physical habits reassert themselves, or new habits emerge.

The theory of flow consciousness intersects with Roger Caillois's theory of the state of "*paidia*" or playfulness. Caillois developed his theory in dialogue with Huizinga's 1938 seminal work on play *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* in which Huizinga set forth a theory of play as intrinsic to human behavior, and identified defining characteristics including that play is always set apart from "real life", that play is always structured by order (or rules), and that play has no material benefit outside of itself (8-13). Caillois both expands upon and diverges from Huizinga's theories of play in *Man, Play and Games* (1961) in which he identifies not only the structured activities that can be defined as play (which he terms "*ludus*"), but also unstructured, spontaneous activities ("*paidia*") which can be characterized as playfulness (27). This latter category, "*paidia*" or playfulness, is significant to my study in that it brings together the action of play with a mode of consciousness that is spontaneous—a mode that in Chapter 2 I identify with the concept of *automatisme* that emerged in late nineteenth-century

French psychology, and which in the twentieth century influenced the development of Jacques Lecoq's *le jeu* methodology.

*Le jeu* [the play or the game] has been interpreted variously by different teachers in the Lecoq tradition. Philippe Gaulier's focus, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, is "pleasure" and the necessary distance between performer and character that allows that pleasure to be visible and shared by spectators. In *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997) Brian Sutton-Smith links play examples to William Empson's delineation of seven types of ambiguity (1955), including a category that lies close to Gaulier's definition of play: "the ambiguity of intent (do you mean it, or is it pretend?)" (2). As I explore in Chapters 3 and 4, Gaulier defines successful play as communicating the "pleasure of the play" to the audience; the performer is meant to take visible delight in the "ambiguity of intent", the inter-"play" between meaning something and only pretending to mean it. Giovanni Fusetti, another teacher in the Lecoq tradition, identifies this as a quality intrinsic to a scene that either "plays" or doesn't play:

When you say something like "*Ça ne joue pas*", it's like "That doesn't play", like a scene not playing. It's not just about the actor "*qui ne joue pas*", you can say "you're not playing", but you can [also] say something doesn't "*joue*", "*il ne joue pas*", the scene, "*il n'y a pas de jeu*", there's no play. And you have a scene with exactly the same things, same texts, same lights ... exactly the same thing, with or without *le jeu*, and it's



completely different. And if you write it down, you find absolutely no difference. (Interview 2007)

Fusetti emphasizes here a quality of performance that can only be discerned in the experience of playing or observing; significantly he separates *le jeu* from written text and places it firmly in the realm of embodied performance. I examine *le jeu* in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4; in this chapter I look at disorientation as a specific pedagogical strategy that can be used to help students encounter new ideas and practices that require new habits of thought and movement, including *le jeu*.

### ***Theories of disorientation***

Among those citing disorientation specifically as a pedagogical technique is Nels Christensen, who in “The Pedagogy of Disorientation: Teaching Carolyn Chute’s *The Beans of Egypt, Maine* at the University of Michigan’s New England Literature Program and Beyond” attributes a productive disorientation in students’ study of the literary work to their presence in a disorienting physical landscape, as students attended a three-week workshop in the Maine woods. Like Christensen I make a link between physical space and learning, and in my analysis of *The Master and Margarita* rehearsal process place this idea of disorienting space at the heart of the pedagogical shift that occurred in the rehearsal site. Moving from space to identity, Gregory Jay explores the idea of disorientation affecting identity in his essay “Taking Multiculturalism Personally: Ethnos and Ethos in the Classroom” in which he advocates a “pedagogy of

disorientation” as a useful strategy for engaging with multiethnic readings; he invites readers into the “adventure of disorientation” that a resulting reconsideration of their own cultural identities entails (628). Jay’s focus here is on disorientation as an inevitable effect of opening oneself up to alternate readings produces, an effect to be embraced; my focus on disorientation and challenges to conventional notions of the “authentic self”, which I explore in Chapter 4, positions disorientation slightly differently in that I approach it as a technique used to produce this effect of identity shift, not as the effect itself.

Travis Proulx and Steven J. Heine’s 2009 study “Connections from Kafka: Exposure to Meaning Threats Improves Implicit Learning of an Artificial Grammar” proposes that “meaning threats” improve cognitive ability to discern patterns in the immediate environment. They hypothesize that when faced with an experience that the brain cannot make immediate sense of (a “meaning threat”), the brain responds by seeking—and successfully findings—patterns that it *can* make sense of. What is interesting about this study for my analysis is that immediately after the disorienting moment, the brain appears to have heightened abilities to discern patterns that it would not have otherwise perceived. When I consider the ways in which students in Gaulier’s classroom, for instance, encounter the idea of the “true” self as something separate from their own sense of themselves, as located instead in the space between their performing bodies and the spectators (a topic I take up in Chapter 4), this might be described as a new pattern, a new way of understanding the idea of the self, that can be

better discerned from a space of disorientation. Gaulier's use of disorienting techniques (such as sudden loud noises) in his classroom, therefore, serves a specific pedagogical function.

I connect the process described by Proulx and Heine with David Perkins's work on "threshold concepts" (1999) which are concepts that lie just outside of the student's current conceptual framework; to understand them, the framework must shift. In "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines" (2003) Jan Meyer and Ray Land argue that if this transformation is protracted, the knowledge is considered "troublesome." "Troublesome knowledge" is therefore knowledge that the student finds difficult to engage with as it requires a fundamental shift in habits of thought (this distinguishes it from, for example, knowledge that a student resists because they simply disagree with it—troublesome knowledge lies outside the student's current conceptual framework). Using this definition, the ideas and practices that students encountered in my research could be classified as "threshold concepts" in the case of relatively straightforward lessons like devising techniques and collaborative creation in *The Master and Margarita*, and in Gaulier's classroom as "troublesome knowledge" due to the protracted confusion students had when encountering his pedagogy. In both sites I observed pedagogical techniques of disorientation being used to help students encounter these new ideas and behaviors.

Eugenio Barba's concept of disorientation resonates with the aforementioned pedagogical studies, as he ties disorientation to the creation of a space free from pre-conceived ideas: "During rehearsals, the technique of disorientation consists in giving space to a multiplicity of trends, narratives and directions without bending them, right from the start, beneath the yoke of our choices and intentions" (*Dramaturgy* 60). Disorientation here produces a fruitful space of multiplicity, in which freeing cognition from its habitual patterns allows for a virtual explosion of new ideas. His "body-in-life" extends disorientation from the cognitive to the embodied realm, in which the thinking body "proceeds by leaps, by means of a sudden disorientation which obliges it to reorganize itself in new ways" (qtd. in Magnat 74). In this scenario a momentary disorientation effectively allows for a paradigm shift of the body, in which the body before the disorientating moment is structurally different from the body after. This is not an explosion of new ideas, but a structural shift; one could say the body has new muscular habits, new neural pathways that allow for a new way of moving in the world. Barba's dual approach to disorientation resonates with my own analysis of it as a pedagogical technique that through momentary interruptions in habitual cognitive/physical patterns allows for new patterns of thinking and moving.

In her essay "Devising Utopia, or Asking for the Moon" Virginie Magnat poetically describes the disorientation element of devised theatre as "the art of losing one's moorings to the familiar, a fruitful loss yielding a kinesthetic and associative form of awareness" (74). I would add to her description the *intentionality*, in devising, behind

“loosing one’s moorings to the familiar,” as disorientation can and does occur across widely differing rehearsal techniques—lines or blocking can be suddenly forgotten; unexpected sounds, movements or even moods can open up the process to the unexpected. Devising, however, often places disorientation at the heart of its process, intentionally creating spaces and encounters that challenge expectation. Like the theorists discussed above, Magnat links disorientation with new ideas and new movements, the opportunity for a student to move out of the realm of an existing framework to a space in which “threshold concepts” (cognitive and/or embodied) can be realized. Unlike the other theorists, she focuses on disorientation not just as an effect of a process but as the process itself, made up of strategies, though she does not articulate what these specific strategies are. I agree with Magnat’s assessment and take it as my starting point, with two key differences: I focus on the specific disorientation strategies used, and the topics of my analysis—what the students encounter—is slightly different than hers. Specifically, in Chapters 3 and 4 I look at the “threshold concepts” that students at École Philippe Gaulier encountered including the natural versus the artificial body and the idea of the authentic self as different from the assumed self. I interrogate these encounters as continually in flux, positioning both students and teacher in a continuing dialogue with them, a dialogue that I trace back to key concepts that emerged in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French mime.

When I look at habits of body and of thought that are challenged using disorientation techniques, I focus on what Diana Taylor describes as the “repertoire” in

her distinction between the archive and the repertoire (2003). Taylor focuses her definitions on the ways in which cultural memory is transmitted: archival memory through documentation, media and archeological remains, and repertoire memory through embodied activities including performances, gestures and movement (19-20). She challenges the presumed permanence of the archive and ephemerality of the repertoire, pointing out that archival items can disappear from or never make it into the archive, while memories transmitted through the repertoire can leave their embodied mark. She writes: “The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there,’ being a part of the transmission” (20). Drawing on this definition I look at two distinct repertoires in my practice-based work: that of Lecoq-based performance and pedagogy itself, and that of student behaviors that were brought into the classroom and rehearsal site. The encounter and resistance between these two repertoires, I argue, was handled pedagogically through strategies of disorientation, which opened up a space within which new habits of thought and movement were possible.

### ***The haptic view***

My approach to practice-based research in this dissertation stems from my experiences in rehearsals for *The Master and Margarita*. Productive disorientation was facilitated in these rehearsals in part through a spatially-fragmented rehearsal site. The piece was physically structured through mobility: a site-specific promenade show, each

scene occurred in a different geographical location on the university's Arts Quarter section of campus, requiring the audience to walk from site to site. A similar operation played out in the rehearsal process: during each four-hour rehearsal, after gathering in Studio A on the fifth floor of the Rarig Center (home of the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance) for a half-hour warm-up game, performers scattered throughout the theatre building and through various outdoor sites, devising and rehearsing fragments of the show. While Studio A remained the official spatial reference point to which people returned to find others and to be given new rehearsal assignments, there was no centralized site for either rehearsals or for the performance. Rehearsals were scattered throughout the six floors of the theatre building as well as in a multitude of outdoor locations, and more often than not no one possessed a complete knowledge of what was happening where. A common sight was one of the two somewhat harried stage managers running frantically from floor to floor, asking for the location of a particular performer.

A week or so into the rehearsal process I began to bemoan the fact that, due to this spatial scattering, I was not able to conduct what I thought of as a comprehensive data collection process. I had tried handing my digital video camera to stage managers and fellow graduate students who happened to be wandering through, asking them to record as much as they could while I ran off to another site to furiously scribble notes; I had tried catching performers in transit from one rehearsal location to another to ask them to describe what they had been doing; but despite my best efforts, I was acutely

aware that my data collection represented only fragments of what was occurring each night in rehearsals. Adding to my difficulty were the multiple roles I played in the rehearsals: I was officially the show's dramaturg, which chiefly consisted in my being given Kira Obolensky's text to edit and consultations with the directors on connecting scenes and drawing out central visual and movement themes. Since Sommers and Seifert believed in utilizing any skill that walked into the room, and since I was eager to contribute in any way they found helpful, in short order I also found myself running vocal warm-ups and coaching performers. My one attempt to record myself with my digital video camera running a voice workshop with the actors who played the Master and Margarita is useful for its documentation of an researcher-practitioner struggling to capture every moment, and perhaps for its humor value as the spoken conversations became increasingly stilted due to the presence of the camera, but proved far too intrusive to become a repeated practice.

A fellow graduate student, Ashley Majzels, who happened to be passing through one of the outdoor rehearsals one evening reframed my dilemma for me: "That's appropriate," he said in response to my anxious account of the problems I was having in collecting data. "Your own research process is haptic, which is allowing you to mirror in your methodology the actual experience of being inside a large devised rehearsal process."<sup>8</sup> He was referring to Deleuze and Guattari's distinction in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* between the optic and the haptic view (492-9).

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<sup>8</sup> This quote is a paraphrase of what Majzels said based on my rehearsal notes.



The optic is the bird's-eye view: the view of a city, for example, seen by looking at a map. While the eye's focus can move from detail to detail, each segment of the map is seen, if only peripherally, in relation to every other segment. From a practice-based research perspective this could represent the "view from nowhere," the outside observer looking at a coherent whole in order to analyze it from a privileged viewpoint. The haptic view, by contrast, would be that of a pedestrian walking through the city's streets: the eye would take in an individual fragment of the city in relation to fragments directly surrounding it; as corners were turned other fragments would come into view, and eventually a mapping of the city would become possible, but the city as a whole would never be accessible to the gaze. Deleuze and Guattari also liken the haptic/optic distinction to the difference between the vision one has of an object (a painting, a wheat field) and that of the observer standing at a distance. The close, haptic view is of "smooth" space, not yet "striated", or demarcated by observable (or tactile—Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that these distinctions apply to all of the senses) patterns that separate sections from each other and produce a whole that can be taken apart and analyzed: "Cézanne spoke of the need to *no longer see* the wheat field, to be too close to it, to lose oneself without landmarks in smooth space. Afterward, striation can emerge: drawing, strata, the earth, 'stubborn geometry,' the 'measure of the world,' ... " (493). Deleuze and Guattari position the haptic view of smooth space as temporally prior to the optic view of striated space, and as necessary to the later act of analysis.

I define myself in all three of my practice-based research sites in this dissertation as a “haptic researcher”. Within this role I understand myself to initially experience (or “see”) “smooth” instead of “striated” space; the striations are created by me when I compile my notes, sit down to write, to create a narrative, and to construct theories that my examples support (and that are selected because they support these theories). So I create an optic view for the reader from my haptic experience as a participant-researcher, fully acknowledging that my striations are one set of patterns on a landscape; another researcher (and other participants—the students, the teachers/directors) might very well create another set. Deleuze and Guattari highlight this more rigid aspect of the striated space/the optic view: “It is less easy to evaluate the creative potentialities of striated space, and how it can simultaneously emerge from the smooth and give everything a whole new impetus” (494). As the creator of this view I acknowledge my own labor and the stripping down of the “creative potentialities” that have necessarily occurred as I moved away from my haptic experience of the sites, and emphasize the creative potentialities that continue to exist in these sites, other stories that could be told.

As I tried on my new identity as haptic researcher in *The Master and Margarita* rehearsals, I began to notice resonances with the experiences of other participants that pointed to the uses of disorientation to structure the process. Specifically, no one ever seemed to know everything that was going on, even the traditionally-omniscient stage managers who were successfully if at times grudgingly adapting to this unaccustomed

state of affairs. This did not mean that the process was chaotic, however—each participant could recite a rough outline of the show’s chronology and spatial mapping, and rehearsal sub-groups were limited to particular sites. Yet the more clearly demarcated boundaries seen in traditional rehearsals—marked out by a written script neatly divided into acts and scenes, one stage on which the bodies of performers rehearsed, and the singular room of the theatre within which every participant can be found—were much more blurry and fluid. Standing at the top of a set of stone stairs behind the music building, looking down and across a road to where Sommers was asking one of the devils to explore ways to appear over a wall, a performer waiting for instruction asked another, “Do you know what he’s doing?” and received the response, “No idea.” They smiled and continued to wait for a framing that would allow them to create their portion of the scene.

This disorientated framing could also prove frustrating for consistency. During another day’s showing of the first scene in which the Master and Margarita appear next to a bonfire in an outdoor amphitheatre and, as they recount their memories of recent events in Moscow as well as their own love story, roll together on the ground in laughter, Shawn McConneloug, the choreographer, stood next to me and murmured, “If I had known this is how they would do this scene I would have choreographed the table scene differently.” The “table scene” was an embodied telling of the two lovers’ affair; Shawn was referring to the fact that the movement themes she had choreographed for them were not consistent with those in the bonfire scene. For the performers, however,

the disorientation caused by this disorientating structuring of the rehearsal process was at worst bemusing and at best creatively productive.

Later in this chapter I tie this idea of disorientation to my observation of a lack of clearly delineated leadership and subordinate roles within groups tasked with creating vaudeville scenes for the show. In these moments, I argue, the lack of a recognizable structure created a space within which the boundaries of habitual social roles and hierarchies loosened. Many of these students brought with them years of classroom experiences in which they had learned to be silent and wait for instructions, and had come to understand that their role was that of interpreter rather than creator, their bodies disciplined to perform low status within recognizable hierarchies of authority in the space of the pedagogical setting. Once a new space had been created, performers were recast as collaborators, and began to relearn appropriate ways to perform within this rehearsal space. Another way to look at this horizontal creation process, in which every student contributed, made suggestions, comments and critiques, might be to consider the empty spaces that opened up in the absence of a recognizable hierarchy. In a text-based, hierarchical rehearsal process the space of the rehearsal is filled with predetermined meaning centralized in the script and in the director's vision or concept—meaning that can be played with and transformed, certainly, but there is always a sense of where the creative impetus is coming from. In rehearsals for *The Master and Margarita*, gaps existed within the given meaning of any particular scene, gaps that could be filled with new meaning, and new material.

### ***Embodied knowledge: The tape ball warm-up***

Given our culture's privileging of discursive reason over embodied knowledge, devising opens up a pedagogical realm that asks participants to explore alternate ways of knowing. "Tape Ball" (which also goes by other names including Ball Juggling and Keepy-Uppy) is frequently played as a warm-up game in devising rehearsals. The game develops kinesthetic awareness in relation to others, helping to build ensemble through embodied experience. Players stand in a circle and throw a ball into the air; the objective of the game is to keep the ball from hitting the ground by hitting it with the palm of the hand. Everyone in the group shouts out the number of times the ball is hit ("One! Two! Three! ..."), and the goal is to reach the highest number possible before the ball hits the ground.

This was the standard warm-up game played at the beginning of each rehearsal for *The Master and Margarita*. I identify the use of this game as a standard warm up on each day of rehearsals as a deployment of the strategy of play, of engaging students in an embodied exercise that, through its fast rhythm and reliance on immediate physical reaction, put students into a state of moment-to-moment awareness of their bodies. Observing this game through the four-week rehearsal process, I was struck by both the improvement of the group in keeping the ball up (once the high number reached 138), and the parallels between what I was observing in this game and what I was observing during rehearsals. Success in this game relied on a collective ability to negotiate shared

tactics: when one person hits the ball she is simultaneously setting it up for someone else; when two people go for the same ball they must figure out—quickly—who takes it; the physical spacing of bodies through the room (how much space between members of the circle, how rigid are the boundaries of the circle) affects the flexibility of hits. Participants became more skilled at negotiating—as a group and without discussion—where to position bodies in the room. At times the boundaries of the circle would become nebulous as participants stepped outside or inside the original circle, forming rings of circles that enabled the group to cover more ground. When bodies became *too* dispersed to facilitate effective playing, rhythmic clapping would begin—again without discussion, and almost immediately spread through the entire group—and the circle would re-form with its original tight boundaries.

The daily repetition of this game trained the performers' bodies to respond quickly to impulse, to negotiate shared space, and to imaginatively connect to each other by shouting out a number whenever *anyone* hit the ball. Shouting engages the body viscerally, meaning that every time the ball was hit each body in the room had a visceral experience. This quickly produced an atmosphere in which each individual success (hitting the ball) was treated as an ensemble success (triumphantly shouting out a number). Watching the performers collaborate once the rehearsals proper got going, I saw this elision between individual and ensemble manifest as the hierarchies that usually develop within groups were diminished to such a degree that I had difficulty discerning them. Performers treated each proposal—whether or not it had originated

with them—as valid and worthy of exploration. It was as if each individual’s creativity had been multiplied by thirty. Performers described being “surprised” at the ideas generated during the devising process; more often than not pre-existing ideas about what would happen in a particular scene were rendered obsolete or unrecognizable once the group had “played” with it.

The difficulty of enacting collaborative behaviors in the rehearsal space with performers not extensively trained in devising was illustrated in a rehearsal process that I observed during the summer of 2006. The piece, titled *Kill the Robot*, was directed by Jon Ferguson, a Minneapolis-based clown and physical theatre director, with a cast of teenagers participating in a summer community drama course. Ferguson was experienced and skilled at creating a space for devising with experienced adult actors, yet I watched him struggle to continually deflect the teenagers’ expectations that he, as director, was in charge and would therefore tell them what to do. The teens were able to grasp *intellectually* the concept of devising, of embodied play, yet when the time came to propose ideas they would stand still, bodies significantly immobile, looking at their director expectantly. A significant difficulty was the rehearsal space: a classroom inside of a community theatre building, which encouraged the teenagers to perform the role of student and position Ferguson as their teacher. Ferguson responded by increasing the time devoted to physical improvisation exercises. This forced the performers to engage directly with each other rather than with their director, and to respond quickly in the moment without time to reflect and come up with the “right”

answer. The teenagers initially found this challenging, and these exercises often petered out as movements became more and more tentative then slowed to a standstill, and the performers turned to look at Ferguson. It was as if a gravitational force continually pulled their bodies back into the submissive pose of the expectant student looking to the teacher for advice. Over time, however, I could discern the effects of these embodied exercises as the performers began to propose. The proposals were hesitant, and embodied play never developed beyond brief bursts of performer-generated creativity, but it was an improvement. What became apparent to me was that to the extent that the students learned this method, they learned it *through their bodies*—no amount of verbal explanation could alter their habitual patterns of relating to authority.

This observation references an idea of embodied knowledges that I explore in this dissertation. The entrenched physical and cognitive habits that I examine in the rehearsal site and classroom can be understood through Peter McLaren’s concept of “enfleshment”, the process of the physical body coming into being as culturally inscribed through muscular habits and states of tension (47). The body stores knowledge in its muscles; neural patterns are deeply engraved through habitual movement. McLaren proposes “refreshment” as an innate ability of the body to learn new behaviors:

Since we cannot put on new bodies before we desocialize our old ones, the task at hand requires us to provide the mediative ground for a



refleshed corporeality. This means the creation of embodied knowledges  
... (65-6)

McLaren ties embodied knowledges to refreshment; in order to change the body, one must *engage* the body in a process of knowledge creation. This is an important point about bodies thinking; in both the rehearsal and classroom sites I analyze in this dissertation, students engage and struggle with new knowledges primarily through their bodies, often making discoveries at odds with their verbal attempts to come to grips with the new knowledges. I make this distinction between engaging with the body and with the mind advisedly, aware of the danger of reinscribing Cartesian mind/body duality. Perhaps a more accurate way to describe what I am talking about would be to say the students engaged *more* of their bodies in these exercises—when students were simply “talking about” the ideas with which they were engaging, their bodies were often quite still, their eyes focused on the teacher/director, mouths moving and brows furrowed. When engaged in what I call “embodied exercises”, they activated the muscles of their arms and legs, their breathing quickened, their facial muscles tended to relax. Additionally, the new knowledges often manifested themselves not through students’ ability to verbally describe them, but through their ability to physically enact them. Augusto Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed* describes the process of unlearning habitual movement patterns as “disjunctive,” designed to “disjoint” the body: “The exercises ... are designed to ‘undo’ the muscular structure of the participants. That is, to take them apart, to study and analyze them. Not to weaken or destroy them, but to

raise them to the level of consciousness” (128). Boal developed his theories working as a theatrical activist in Brazil, and his “disjunctive” techniques were meant to reveal ways in which oppressive societal structures play out in the actual muscular structure of bodies. What I find pertinent to my study is that in Boal’s theory of disjunctive exercises, the body is situated at a level below consciousness, containing knowledge that can be “raised” into conscious to be analyzed. This positioning of embodied knowledge resonates with the late nineteenth-century idea of *automatisme* that I examine in Chapter 2 and Freud’s theory of the unconscious that I connect to the development of mime pedagogy in Chapters 3 and 4. It also intersects with my interest in knowledge that can only be produced through the body, as raising the knowledge of muscular habits to the level of consciousness cannot happen without the body being physically engaged in disjunctive exercises. By engaging the body to produce knowledge, altering these habits becomes possible. I explore this in greater detail later in the next section when I look at specific strategies used by Sommers and Seifert during rehearsals for *The Master and Margarita* to help students enact collaborative relationships in the devising process much as Ferguson’s use of physical improvisation exercises had helped to disorient his performers and encourage their self-generation of proposals.

### ***Vertical to horizontal: Collaborative relationships***

One of the students’ most trenchant habits that Sommers and Seifert worked to alter was students’ tendency to defer to the directors during devising moments, a

behavior reminiscent of the performers in *Kill the Robot*. While the scattered rehearsal space aided in breaking students of these habits, this almost-intractable tendency made it difficult to send students off in small groups to create material for the show, as students were hesitant to create anything without specific instructions and constant checking in with the directors. This reflected an implicit assumption that the relationship structure in the rehearsal process was vertical, with Sommers and Seifert at the top holding all pertinent knowledge, and the students at the bottom waiting to receive this knowledge. In order to shift the agency for devising to the students, the directors continually deflected student attempts to enact this relationship by lowering their status. This was particularly observable during rehearsals for the vaudeville scene, when Sommers and Seifert asked groups of students to independently create acts for the vaudeville.

In Bulgakov's novel, the devil (Woland) makes his dramatic and deadly public appearance before the citizens of Moscow on stage at the Variety Theater in a chapter titled "Black Magic and Its Exposé." For the adaptation's version of this scene, Sommers and Seifert invited the performers to create pieces for what came to be called the "vaudeville show," performed on a small wooden stage with red curtains tucked into the corner of the back of the music department concert hall with the audience seated on the sloping grass verge opposite. Since this segment was the only one created entirely by the performers with directorial assistance only in the final week when the show's timings were being polished (the other moments in the show were worked on

collaboratively between performers, directors and the choreographer), this was the site in which I most strongly observed the fluidity of hierarchical social structure.

Standing in the outdoor arena theatre that was to serve as the site of the show's opening scene, Sommers and Seifert instructed the performers on creating vaudeville pieces, instructions that framed the context of the scene (vaudeville, variety shows) without telling the performers what to create. Despite the practice the performers had had in proposing, and the continued emphasis that had been placed by the co-directors on the performers rather than the directors as primary creators, a structural habit reasserted itself much as it had in *Kill the Robot*. After Sommers and Seifert had finished speaking, several of the performers approached them asking for clarification on what the directors "wanted" them to do. This included a group that had been devising a piece around the idea of the automaton. During his instructional remarks, Sommers had used this group as an example of how the creative process might work, and proposed an act that would evoke religious imagery—a crucifixion scene. The performers in this group took this proposal as an actual suggestion for content, and approached him with apparent concern to ask how they might stage this, given their discomfort with the subject matter. Sommers immediately rearticulated his proposal as simply an *example* of a route they might take, and specified that he wanted the group to devise content separately from what they imagined he "wanted." Seifert also stepped in to aid Sommers in emphasizing the performer-based proposal process that they were

continually attempting to articulate against the traditional hierarchical rehearsal structure of director-as-creator, performer-as-interpreter.

So strong was this traditional structure for the performers that one proposal thrown out as a possibility among many that language of coercive instruction framed the performers' responses: "What do you *want* us to do?" "Is it *supposed* to be like this?" To work against these habituated language patterns, Sommers and Seifert had to explicitly lower their status in relation to the performers: "Don't listen to me," Sommers said at one point, "I have no idea what I'm talking about—*you* come up with something." By responding in this way the directors were inducing a disorientation around the status behaviors students expected of them, a strategy that placed creative responsibility in the hands of the performers themselves. This technique is a form of *via negativa*, a pedagogical technique coined by Grotowski and widely considered to have been used by Lecoq (though he does not use the term in his writings) as well as the teachers who work with his method. Grotowski developed *via negativa* as a method that specifically addressed his aesthetic of the poor theatre, a technique that rejects the approach of accruing techniques such as how to display emotion or how to move in particular ways in favor of stripping away any habit that stands between the actor and spectator: "*via negativa* eliminate[s] from the creative process the resistances and obstacles caused by one's own organism, both physical and psychic (the two forming a whole)" (24). In Lecoq's version of *via negativa*, the teacher does not give answers or direct feedback to the student, but creates a space in which the student must

experiment until she discovers the answer for herself. John Wright (2002) describes Lecoq's use of the technique as a strategy to "manipulate creative energy":

Sometimes he [Lecoq] knows exactly what he wants his students to find and sometimes he simply uses it as a strategy to generate urgency; an atmosphere of white-hot discussion and experiment as his students struggle to find exactly what it is they think he is looking for. (73)

Many former students of Lecoq-based pedagogy describe the frustration engendered by this technique. Mark Evans describes his experience: "You sometimes felt: why can't I understand intellectually, and then just do it?" (qtd. in Murray *Lecoq* 51). The technique's pedagogical payoff is widely considered to be temporally deferred; Simon Murray writes of his own experience as a student of Gaulier and Monica Pagneux (who taught with Gaulier in Paris for several years): "...many 'results' of what I learned did not emerge or surface until years later. Often the body only understands and becomes able to articulate what it has learned long after the event itself" (*Lecoq* 50); Lecoq writes of his teaching of the *commedia dell'arte* to students who are too young to yet have acquired the "tragic dimension" necessary to fully understand and incorporate the lessons into their performances:

A vingt ans, les élèves n'ont souvent pas le vécu nécessaire, il leur manque notamment la dimension tragique, élément constitutif important de ce territoire. Si nous faisons malgré tout ce travail à l'École, ce n'est pas pour une utilisation immédiate mais pour qu'ils gardent le

souvenir de ce niveau de jeu dans leur corps et dans leur tête afin qu'ils puissent s'en servir plus tard.

[At twenty, the students don't often have the necessary life experience, they notably lack the tragic dimension, the most important element of this territory. If we carry on despite this with the work at the school, this is not for an immediate use but so that they will retain a memory of this level of play in their bodies and in their head so that they can use later.]<sup>9</sup>

(*Corps* 125)

Lecoq references the idea of the thinking body here by suggesting that both the body and the head store memories of classroom experiences, which can be drawn on later in life.

In the rehearsal space of *The Master and Margarita*, *via negativa* operated slightly differently than in the classroom, as Sommers and Seifert attempted to create a space within which new material would be generated from the students, rather than teaching a specific method; therefore they deliberately undercut the implicit authority of themselves as teachers (who students attempt to “please” in Lecoq-style *via negativa*). As often occurs within a loosely structured space, students sought a central authoritative voice; when Sommers and Seifert refused to play this role, therefore, it began to emerge among the performers themselves. Senior and more verbally

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<sup>9</sup> Philippe Gaulier also uses this technique, often taking it to an extreme form, which can be frustrating for students used to an educational model in which techniques and facts are passed on directly from teacher to student. I examine his particular methods in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

expressive of the cast members led what chiefly amounted to verbal brainstorming sessions. The more outgoing members of the group, the ones who are used to performing as leaders, quickly took control of the creation process, and those more used to submitting and following fell into their own established roles. By the end of the first week, however, I began to observe a shift in devising technique away from verbal consultation and towards physical play. This was accompanied by a blurring of the roles within the groups; it became more and more difficult for me to discern who was “leading” any one devising session.

This blurring of roles was conveyed both verbally and physically. Verbal cues included multiple voices all seeming to speak at the same time, yet somehow all contributing to the creative task at hand. Within the seemingly simultaneous chatter I discerned a conversational structure that included proposal, response, validation and critique. Voices often overlapped within a group, though without a sense of interruption or fighting to be heard. Rather, the overlapping voices were engaging in meaning making that was less linear and more a sense of deepening into an idea. For instance, when I observed the group creating the “baby tumblers” act working on a problem that had arisen in their piece involving how to negotiate a tricky lift and turn of one of the performers, all of the members of the group appeared to be speaking simultaneously, yet a solution to the problem was clearly emerging. Rather than one voice laying out a complete idea and another singular voice responding to that phrase in its entirety, the speaking seemed to be an ongoing process, each performer shifting what they were



saying mid-sentence based on what other voices were saying: “Because we can’t lift like this ...” “ ... she’d turn and ...” “ ... maybe turn this way ...” “ ... and then I’d take her ...” “ ... and you’ll come through ...” “ ... and then we ...” “ ... stand up and bow ...”.

Physical cues included ruptures in familiar status movements and gestures, as these familiar physicalities (lower status participants fixing their gazes on a higher status person, tilted heads and bent body postures indicating lower status, vertical stances and broad gestures marking higher status) began to disappear in favor of continual shifting between movement and stillness, eye contact and looking into the distance, bent postures and standing upright. Status was shifting from one member of the group to another, paralleling the voices emerging and being subsumed back into the group buzz. Leadership flowed from participant to participant, a behavior pattern also reflected in—and, I believe, symbiotically connected with—the warm-up game of Tape Ball.

***Conclusion: Disorienting space***

In this chapter/section I have described several strategies that facilitated a devising process among a group of students inexperienced in devising. There was more to the process than a straightforward teaching of rehearsal techniques. In my experience, students/performers who have been habituated to traditional classroom and rehearsal structures find it extremely difficult to shift their patterns of knowledge creation; Ferguson’s experience with the teenagers in *Kill the Robot* was typical in this regard, as was *The Master and Margarita* cast’s initial difficulty with taking ownership of

the vaudeville scene. As I moved through the rehearsal process for *The Master and Margarita*, alongside shifting behavior patterns I became increasingly aware of a spatial shift that had occurred: the space within which students collaborated was marked by loosely defined boundaries, shifting centers of authority, and fragmented groupings of collaborators occupying diverse locations. The space, in other words, was marked by disorientation. I identify the spatial scattering that Sommers and Seifert employed as a strategy to produce corporeal and cognitive disorientation, thereby short-circuiting students' impulses to fall back on habits of student-teacher (in this case, actor-director) behavior. This was in contrast to the classroom-situated rehearsals of Ferguson's *Kill the Robot*, which I believe accounted in part for students' difficulty in breaking out of habitual behavior patterns as they continued to consciously orient themselves within a recognizable classroom hierarchical structure.

As discussed above, I believe that these pedagogical techniques that disorient the student allow for shifts in cognitive and muscular habits. By becoming unanchored from a sense of "knowing," from a familiar reference point that marks the pedagogical space as a traditionally structured through hierarchy, one can occupy a new subject position that does not automatically fall into prescribed modes of behavior. This is not to claim that these pedagogical and rehearsal spaces allow for some imagined complete freedom of the subject—new prescribed modes of behavior are of course generated in this space—rather, I am interested in this space of disorientation because I believe the pedagogical implications—in this case, agency, embodied knowledge and collaborative

relationships—to be of value within an educational system that is increasingly commodified, positioning its students as consumers of ready-made knowledge, training them to be as passive as the body is traditionally understood to be to the demands of cerebral cognition.

In *The Rainbow of Desire*, Boal describes his concept of the “aesthetic space” which is a space of knowledge creation: “The aesthetic space possesses gnoseological properties, that is, properties which stimulate knowledge and discovery, cognition and recognition: properties which stimulate the process of learning by experience. Theatre is a form of knowledge.” Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed work depends on the successful creation of an aesthetic space that opens up possibilities of being and doing that would be foreclosed within a traditional hierarchical space of director as leader and actor as follower. While *The Master and Margarita* was not a TO piece—and I am careful not to conflate any pedagogically transformational theatre with Boal’s specific work—I find Boal’s concept of “aesthetic space” useful for its focus on the need to create a different kind of space within which transformative processes can occur. I believe that the space of disorientation can be one such space, and find the “pedagogy of disorientation” a useful lens through which to frame my analysis of classroom encounters with ideas of the body and self within French mime that I examine in the following chapters.

## Chapter 2

### *Ventre and Cerveau:*

#### Contamination Anxieties in Late Nineteenth-Century French Mime

Student lore has it that the break between Philippe Gaulier and Jacques Lecoq hinged on their disagreement over whether the performer, when imitating a non-human entity through movement, is meant to “become” that entity.<sup>10</sup> In the case of the element of water, for instance, Lecoq asked his students to “identify” with the water by becoming it: “*Je suis face à la mer, je la regarde, je la respire. Mon souffle épouse le mouvement des vagues et, progressivement, l’image se renverse et je deviens moi-même la mer*” [I am facing towards the sea, I watch it, I breathe it. My breath follows the movement of the waves and, progressively, the image reverses itself and I myself become the sea] (*Corps* 53).<sup>11</sup> Gaulier, by contrast, expresses his view on the matter in no uncertain terms: “You have pleasure to pretend to be the water. You do not become the water—if you think you are water, you do not belong in the classroom, you belong in a mental hospital.”<sup>12</sup> So fundamental was this disagreement, the story goes, that Gaulier left École Jacques Lecoq in 1980 and founded his own school to practice his pedagogy based around the performer’s “pleasure in pretending” to be that which is imitated.

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<sup>10</sup> From workshop notes, *Masque Neutre* [Neutral Mask] workshop at École Philippe Gaulier, November 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all translations in this chapter are mine.

<sup>12</sup> From unpublished research notes taken during a *Masque Neutre* [Neutral Mask] workshop at École Philippe Gaulier in November 2007.

As with many narratives told by those with second-hand access to the events, this story is too simplistic; Gaulier's reasons for establishing his own school cannot be ascribed to a single pedagogical contention.<sup>13</sup> But the issue of "identifying with" versus "taking pleasure in pretending to be that which one is imitating" points to differences within contemporary mime theory over what the performer's body—in the language of mime, her gestures—reveal about her inner state.<sup>14</sup>

In their own pedagogical essays, manifestos and letters, the most famous of the early twentieth-century Parisian mime practitioners—a group that includes the seminal figure of Jacques Copeau and subsequent teachers, practitioners and theorists reacting within or against his work, including Étienne Decroux, Marcel Marceau and Lecoq—differentiate their techniques from mime theorists and practitioners in nineteenth-century Paris by ascribing to the latter a concern only with a gestural style meant to replace words. This is set against the presumably twentieth-century concern with how interiority informs gestural movement as expressions of abstract feelings and concepts

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<sup>13</sup> For example, when Lecoq published his pedagogical book *Le Corps poétique: un enseignement de la création théâtrale* in 1997 [translated by David Bradby in 2000 as *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre*], he included a caveat about "identification": "Bien entendu, il ne s'agit pas de s'identifier complètement, ce qui serait grave, mais de jouer à s'identifier" [Of course, this is not about identifying completely, which would be serious, but about playing at identifying] (*Corps* 53), a description that resonates with the view usually ascribed to Gaulier.

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that Philippe Gaulier strongly disavows any connection to the mime tradition; his school is not considered a "mime school", although the mask forms he teaches are drawn from Jacques Lecoq's pedagogy which was heavily influenced by French mime. The connections I draw between the French mime tradition and Gaulier's pedagogy are therefore not technical, but ideological.

rather than translations of words by movement.<sup>15</sup> A close reading of the language used in the writings of late nineteenth-century Parisian mime artists and critics, however, reveals a more complex relationship to the question of how they understood gestural expression. The textual examination that I conduct in this chapter illuminates anxieties over the ideological construct of the “natural” body as it was positioned against the constructs of socialization and civilization in the late nineteenth century and identified with concepts of gross materiality (such as bodily fluids) and the organic (the living, breathing body set against the cold corpse). I argue that late nineteenth-century nostalgia for and simultaneous disgust with a “natural” Pierrot influenced the development of techniques of mime based on minimalist movement. By minimalist I mean small and contained bodily movements that are discernable only at close proximity, a mechanized performance style marked by rapid, rigid movements associated with the automaton—positioned against the “natural” body as identified with the fluid and organic.

My analysis of the emergence of minimalism within mime practice, through close study of the language used in the writings of practitioners and late nineteenth-century pantomime scripts, focuses on its simultaneous links with “natural” gestures and with empty/mechanical movement vocabularies. Mime artists and critics of the era including

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<sup>15</sup> See for example Mira Felner’s discussion of denotative versus connotative mime techniques, in which she links the terms to their linguistic uses. Denotative mime, therefore, translates words into gestures; connotative mime evokes more general ideas. Felner suggests that denotative mime therefore relies on preexistent language, and connotative mime strives to emulate “gestural expression prior to language” (152-4).

Georges Wague and Paul Hugounet increasingly viewed emotional expressivity conveyed via the physical body as suspect. I consider the ways in which this contested site of late nineteenth-century mime practice performatively theorized racial anxieties, specifically around the idea of contamination. To do this I examine the language used to describe both gestural style and Pierrot's physical body in late nineteenth-century French pantomimes in order to position the performed figure of Pierrot as a site through which a process of what I call "contamination anxieties" played out. I use the term "contamination anxieties" here to refer to anxieties related to maintaining the purity of the white body, which I argue connects to racial anxieties in the wake of colonialization. For instance, Pierrot's skin is white, and many pantomimes of the era such as Fernand Desnoyers's *Le bras noir* [The black arm] (1856) and Paul Margueritte's *Pierrot assassin de sa femme* [Pierrot assassin of his wife] (1888) link this whiteness with both purity and sterility and blackness with *bêtism* and the overflowing of corporeality. This duality suggests, I argue, anxieties over the intrusion of racial difference into the white body in the era of Charles Darwin's 1872 publication of *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, which connected human expressivity to a common descent from animals. Through close reading of the language used in mime writings of the era, I relate the late nineteenth-century minimalist mime style in France to these anxieties over threats to the purity of the white body. Contamination anxieties also link to class, as pantomime artists in the late nineteenth century increasingly sought to distance themselves from the working-class audiences that frequented the more

popular pantomime venues, such as the Théâtre des Funambules, earlier in the century, as evidenced in *Souvenirs des Funambules* (1859) by Jules-Francis-Félix Husson (popularly known as Champfleury). Additionally, minimalist mime styles described in language suspicious of emotionality and the body in favor of reason and cerebral activity, as in Jules Laforgue's poetry about Pierrot, also points to anxieties over the gendered body.

In this chapter I begin by discussing my sources, methodology and intervention in existing scholarly discussions on nineteenth-century French mime. I then analyze the late nineteenth-century move towards a minimalist mime style in light of earlier mime styles that emphasized set gestures, linking this shift both to a concurrent shrinking of the performance space and to a shift in how the body is understood to convey emotion, which I argue was tied to an understanding of Pierrot's body as split between a grotesque, corporeally-overflowing body and an empty, mechanical, pure body—in Hugounet's terms, *Pierrot-ventre* [Pierrot Stomach] and *Pierrot-cerveau* [Pierrot Brain], respectively. I then analyze the influence of ideas of *sang-froid* [cold-blooded] and *automatisme* [automatism] on late nineteenth-century French mime styles. I argue that the ways in which these qualities were understood in nineteenth-century France revealed a dual role of the "natural" as a quality to be both sought after—as small, rigid mime techniques were believed to more accurately reveal internal reality—and feared—due to the linking of the "natural" with animality and a disruption of the automaton-like body. I then look closely at late nineteenth-century French pantomime



scripts, musical scores and poetry about Pierrot to analyze the language of emotional expression and the ways in which this shaped the body of the performed figure of Pierrot, suggesting that this figure became both a stand-in for a modern self expressed through subtle and “natural” movements, and simultaneously an empty body with a plaster-white mask for a face that performatively theorizes the threatened survival of the white race. I dig further into these “contamination anxieties” through an analysis of pantomimes and the nineteenth-century idea of *bêtism*, suggesting that these anxieties account in part for the apparent contradiction between minimalist mime techniques that were meant to more authentically express emotions and a performed body distanced from signifiers of the organic, and concluding that late nineteenth-century mime techniques repositioned the qualities of *bêtism* as an external mask and *sang-froid* as a distanced inner self, in alignment with emerging ideas of the self, in ways that allowed artists both to celebrate and to distance themselves from the anxiety-provoking category of the “natural.”

### ***Sources, methodology and review of literature***

In order to investigate this emergence of minimalist gestural styles and concurrent “contamination anxieties” over the natural body, I analyze the language used in Pierrot pantomime scripts and *opéra-comique* [comic opera] pantomime musical scores from the era alongside language used in Laforgue’s poems about Pierrot. I selected twelve pantomime scripts and eight musical scores that were published and

performed between 1856 and 1914, choosing those that were written by or most frequently referenced in the writings of artists and critics (these categories often overlapped as in the case of Wague and Champfleury) including Hugounet, Jules Janin and Tristan Rémy. I also study the contemporaneous writings of French pantomime critics, playwrights and teachers on Pierrot performers, performance spaces, audiences and gestural style as well as psychological publications that dealt with the emerging idea of *automatisme*, including the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* [Philosophical review in France and abroad], a monthly journal founded in Paris in 1876 which influenced the development of modern psychology in France (Estingoy 2008), and Pierre Janet's *L'automatisme psychologique: essai de psychologie expérimentale sur les formes inférieures de l'activité humaine* [Psychological Automatism: Evaluation of experimental psychology on the lower forms of human activity] (1889). I analyze these sources for the ways they deploy language that references emotion, the body's expressivity, and the natural versus the artificial or mechanical body. I look specifically for language that ascribed value to particular modes of gesture and physical appearance, and link these descriptions to concurrent racial theories.

In my analysis I draw and expand on previous theorists who have studied the figure of Pierrot in nineteenth-century France including Rémy (1945, 1954 and 1964), Robert Storey (1978 and 1985) and Louisa E. Jones (1984). I find all three authors useful in part for their careful compilation of often-obscure records of nineteenth-century Pierrot performances, reviews and critical writings which I draw on. I add to their

archival research both by analyzing previously-unexamined passages in critical writings including Champfleury's *Souvenirs des Funambules* [Memories of the Funambules] (1859), Janin's *Deburau: histoire du théâtre à quatre sous* [Deburau: four-part history of the theatre] (1881) and Hugounet's *Mimes et pierrots: notes et documents inédits pour servir à l'histoire de la pantomime* [Mimes and pierrots: notes and unpublished documents to be used in the history of the pantomime] (1889), and by analyzing previously-unexamined language in pantomime scripts that reveals gestural style, including Léon Hennique's *Le songe d'une nuit d'hiver* [A midwinter night's dream] (1903), Léo Rouanet's *Le ventre et le cœur de Pierrot* [The stomach and the heart of Pierrot] (1888), Charles Aubert's *Le suicide de Pierrot* [The suicide of Pierrot] (1897), and *opéra-comique* [comic opera] musical scores including Jean Hubert's musical version of Edmond Rostand's *Pierrot qui pleure et Pierrot qui rit* [Pierrot who cries and Pierrot who laughs] (1899),<sup>16</sup> Paul Vidal's score for Margueritte's *Pierrot assassin de sa femme* [Pierrot assassin of his wife] (1888), and Francis Thomé's musical score for Raoul de Najac's *Barbe-Bleuette* [Blue-Beard] (1890), none of which are examined by Rémy, Jones or Storey. Rémy is well-known in the field as the most prolific writer on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French mime, and I draw on his works *Les clowns* [The clowns] (1945), *Jean-Gaspard Deburau* (1954) and *Georges Wague: le mime de la belle époque* [George Wague: the mime of the belle époque] (1964) both for his extensive documentation of mime and clown in the nineteenth century and for his analysis of the

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<sup>16</sup> Jean Hubert is the pseudonym of Alexis Rostand, Edmond Rostand's uncle.

White Clown/Auguste circus duo. I use Rémy's differentiation between the White Clown/Auguste figures as an example of the emergence of two types of Pierrots in the late nineteenth century: a pure, automaton-like figure and a "natural", base one.

Storey also documents nineteenth-century Pierrot performances in *Pierrots on the Stage of Desire: Nineteenth-Century French Literary Artists and the Comic Pantomime* and *Pierrot: A Critical History of a Mask*, focusing on a psychoanalytic reading of the figure and documenting the late nineteenth-century shrinking of the performance space for pantomime, influenced by the desire of late nineteenth-century mime artists and critics to make pantomime an elite art form. In France at the end of the nineteenth century, as Storey documents, artists and critics tied a minimalist approach to movement to direct expressions of inner thoughts and emotions.<sup>17</sup> In an article titled "Comment on monte une pantomime" [How to mount a pantomime] that appeared alongside his play *Pierrot confesseur* [Pierrot confessor] (1892) in the compilation *Les soirées Funambulesques* [Funambulesque/acrobatic evenings], Félix Galipaux wrote:

Today ... the study of character, of feelings—psychology, in a word—is the thing ... And the mime certain of pleasing the public is the one whose

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<sup>17</sup> This minimalist approach influenced the development of twentieth-century physical theatre training: after abandoning Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's system of eurhythmics for placing music before movement and being too rigid in its uniform exercises, Copeau turned to Georges Hébert's system of "natural gymnastics" which focused on economy of movement, a philosophy that Lecoq was later to adopt. I discuss Copeau and Lecoq's mime techniques in more detail in Chapter 3.

means are simple and varied, his gestures restrained, hardly perceptible, but extraordinarily suggestive! (104, qtd. in Storey, *Desire* 288)

Galipaux spoke for many of his peers in the Cercle Funambulesque, a group founded in Paris the spring of 1888 to re-invent pantomime in response to a decline of general interest in the form that had occurred after Jean-Gaspard Deburau's death in 1946. Deburau had made the role of Pierrot famous in the first half of the nineteenth century at the popular Parisian venue the Théâtre des Funambules; mime artists who took over his role after his death, including his son Charles Deburau—popularly known as Deburau *fils* [son of Deburau]—and Paul Legrand performed in smaller venues for smaller audiences, and critics including Champfleury and Hugounet expressed a desire to elevate pantomime from a populist to an elite art form.<sup>18</sup> The Cercle was comprised of seventy-five writers, artists, actors, journalists and composers, headed by ministry official and future theatre manager Félix Larcher. Members included Margueritte, Najac, Champfleury, Legrand and Jules Lemaître. The publicly-announced goals of the Cercle Funambulesque included the revival of the “classical” pantomime of Deburau; the presentation of pieces recovered from the *commedia* tradition; and the production of new works of modern pantomime and playlets inspired by the old *commedia*.

I expand on Storey's observations about the shrinking of the performance space and gestural style by examining the ways in which pantomime artists themselves describe gesture in the pantomime scripts that I selected as outlined above, looking

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<sup>18</sup> For ease of identification, for the remainder of the chapter I will use “Deburau” to refer to Jean-Gaspard Deburau, and “Deburau *fils*” to refer to his son Charles Deburau.

closely at language that reveals gestural style. This includes, for instance, language that can be read as instructions for the performer's physical performance, as well as language that reveals what the body might have looked like—or how the author intended it to appear—while performing. I also examine the writings of critics of the era such as Hugounet, Janin, Champfleury and Wague for how their language expresses value about theatrical space, theatrical bodies (performers' and spectators') and emotional expression. I tie the concern with directly representing internal emotions to the emerging discipline of psychology in France and the theory of *automatisme*, which created a new level of consciousness—the subconscious—that theorists understood as the repository of non-intentional, and therefore more truthful, human impulses.

In *Sad Clowns and Pale Pierrots: Literature and the Popular Comic Arts in 19th-Century France* (1984), Jones examines French grotesque iconography throughout the nineteenth century and analyzes it in relation to the mime practices of the era. I find particularly interesting her work on the iconography of the latter part of the century, which she argues reveals “cultural tensions between natural energies—those which traditionally provide the exuberance of carnival humor—and the materialism of an industrial age which feared animality” (121). I complicate Jones's reading of the natural/materialist binary by suggesting that late nineteenth-century attitudes toward mime were inflected by a simultaneous desire and disgust which both informed the minimalist style attributed to the pure Pierrot. In the following chapters I further these analyses by drawing a link between this late nineteenth-century desire/disgust influence

on mime styles and twentieth-century conceptions of the mime body—neutral, natural and mechanical—and the idea of the “true self” which informed the development of contemporary French mime training.

***Pierrot-cerveau, Pierrot-ventre***

In his 1889 historical exploration *Mimes et pierrots: notes et documents inédits pour servir à l'histoire de la pantomime* [Mimes and pierrots: notes and unpublished documents to be used in the history of the pantomime], Hugounet describes a mid-century split of Pierrot into *Pierrot-cerveau* [Pierrot-brain] and *Pierrot-ventre* [Pierrot-stomach] using racialized terminology: “Pierrot sera-t-il blanc, sera-t-il noir? Ventre ou cerveau?” [Will Pierrot be white, or will he be black? Stomach or brain?] (206).

Hugounet here divides Pierrot both racially and into body parts representing, respectively, vulgar appetite and elevated reason—an implied division between body and mind. This is a telling division during a time when mime artists advocated a gestural style based on minimalist movement and centered around the subtle expressivity of the face, the *cerveau* section of the body. These words appear in a section on late-century Pierrot performers including Kalpestri; Hugounet spends several pages expressing his disapproval of Kalpestri’s performance style, which he viewed as base and grotesque, over-exaggerating movements in contrast to more refined mime artists: “soulignant sans nécessité ce que Charles eût indiqué d'un coup d'oeil, ce que Gaspard eût fait comprendre d'un sourire” [stressing unnecessarily that which Charles had indicated with

a glance, that which Gaspard had conveyed with a smile] (179). Hugounet here expresses the common late nineteenth-century valuing of minimalist gestures over heightened physicality, comparing Kalpestri to Deburau and Deburau *fils*. While Deburau *fils*'s mime style had been influenced by the subtle emotional expressivity of Paul Legrand and therefore prefigured the late nineteenth-century emphasis on gestural minimalism, Deburau's early nineteenth-century mime style was marked by heightened poses within the large theatrical space of the Théâtre des Funambules; he therefore was unlikely to have represented an emotion through a smile alone. Hugounet's description of him in the passage above is nostalgic, revealing a value placed upon subtlety of gestural style in the late nineteenth-century and applying it retroactively to a highly-regarded early-century performer.

Hugounet also identifies Deburau *fils*'s body with that of a puppet: " ... le fantoche traduit par Charles Deburau avait la colique plaisante, gaie; celui de Kalpestri était naturaliste, sale" [ ... the puppet interpretation of Pierrot by Charles Deburau had a pleasant colic; that of Kalpestri was naturalist, dirty] (181). Here a clear division can be seen between the supposed purity of the mind (*cerveau*) and the contamination of the body (*ventre*), as Hugounet removes Deburau *fils*'s from the realm of the "natural", the fallible and "dirty" corporeal body, due to his puppet-like movements. Associations of mime performers' bodies with automata and puppets were common in late nineteenth-century France, a popularity that I position alongside the works of Heinrich von Kleist



(1810) and Edward Gordon Craig (1908) on the performing marionette, as well as the emergence of *automatisme* in French psychology.<sup>19</sup>

Hugounet's concern with the purity of the mime's performing body and the corresponding subtle gestural style is echoed by late nineteenth-century pantomime artist Wague, who wished to modernize mime practice by positioning minimal gesture as the ultimate communication of interior reality. A sign in his studio stated in no uncertain terms: "LE MINIMUM DE GESTES/CORRESPOND AU MAXIMUM D'EXPRESSION" [minimum gestures/correspond to maximum expression] (qtd. in Rémy, *Wague* 27). He defined "modern" pantomime against its earlier "classical" form by attributing to the latter an exclusive focus on gesture as silent language (Rémy, *Wague* 39). Early nineteenth-century French mime had used gesture as a form of sign language; scripts were written as spoken language that the performer would then translate into gestural "speech". This was in part because much early nineteenth-century pantomime developed in the wake of state restrictions on spoken language (Jones 16). These "sign language" mime techniques existed alongside gestural techniques of striking set poses to convey a recognizable passion developed by François Delsarte in the mid-nineteenth century, techniques he developed within theories of stage gesture brought to the fore by Diderot, which drew a one-to-one correlation between outer expression and inner feeling. Wague's desire to change these techniques into a more "modern" form reflects a common tendency to attribute "artificiality" to earlier acting styles. This tendency

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<sup>19</sup> I examine *automatisme* in greater detail later in this chapter, and analyze the influences of Kleist and Craig on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French mime in Chapter 3.

persists into this century; mime techniques of the turn of the century were regarded as emotionally “false” when pantomimes were revived in the first decades of the twentieth century, and teachers such as Copeau took on the task of reinventing the form in a more “natural” style.

Early to mid nineteenth-century mime artists had understood the performance vocabulary of Delsartian pose-inflected mime as rendering emotions legible to the audience through a set system of gestures. In the latter part of the century a shift occurred in France towards conceptions of acting technique based on movement marked by temporal flow, as pursued by Constantin Stanislavski, from the earlier conception of static gestures and facial expressions as techniques deployed by the skilled actor which represented the character’s interior condition. The latter is indexed by Denis Diderot’s description of David Garrick’s impressive sequence of facial expressions in *Le paradoxe sur le comédien* [The paradox of the actor] (published posthumously in 1830). In *François Delsarte: A Codification of Nineteenth-Century Acting* (1999) George Taylor describes how this technique of set expressive poses was taken up in detail by Delsarte in the mid-nineteenth century (70). Delsarte’s close observations of “natural” gestures compared with the conventions of the stage was based on the Law of Correspondence which posited the body as a reflection of the soul. By the end of the century, codified systems of gestures such as that of Delsarte were regarded by French theatre practitioners as quaint and out-of-date (72). This could be understood as one reason for the decline in the popularity of pantomime and of Pierrot after Deburau’s

death in 1846, a situation that the Cercle was founded in part to address. French mime practitioners of the late nineteenth century wished to reinvent the gestural system of mime in line with the increasing emphasis within acting theory on temporal flow, or the movements of thought that practitioners increasingly understood as defining emotion.

The shift can be discerned in language used in by practitioners and critics to describe the mime performer's emotional expressivity. One of the members of the Cercle, Paul Legrand, was a well-known mid nineteenth-century Pierrot performer who, despite using set gestures, was widely acclaimed for his ability to show a range of emotions onstage. Rémy's high praise for him centered on this emotional expressivity: "Paul Legrand a exprimé ses sentiments" [Paul Legrand expressed his feelings] (*Deburau* 176-7). Félix and Eugène Larcher—Legrand's editors and later co-founders of the Cercle Funambulesque—give an account of Legrand's performance as Pierrot in *The Butterfly* (1887) that foregrounds emotional expressivity: as Pierrot courts a rose, his face "expresses" ecstasy, and a "tear" reveals the depth of his grief (*Pantomimes*, qtd. in Jones 162-3). The emphasis on Legrand's face and on subtle expressions of emotion (a single tear) is echoed in the language used in pantomime scripts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which I examine later in this chapter, to indicate emotional gestures to performers. These indicators of emotional expressivity point to a shrinking of the gestural style of mime and an increased focus on subtle expressions of thought.

A mime style based on small gestures and a concurrent increased emphasis on expressing thought and subtle emotions represented one outcome of the shifting understanding of what constituted “natural” performance and the resulting decline in popularity of the gestural mime style based on large set poses. This style developed in the late nineteenth century within increasingly elite and exclusive theatres. Storey documents how Pierrot performers in the 1880s and 1890s performed in increasingly small venues for increasingly select audiences (*Desire* 290). Performances sponsored by the Cercle were often limited to three performers inside a salon. As this elite interest in Pierrot developed, so too did a mime technique based on minimalist movement, as critics increasingly regarded the earlier mime style based on set poses as artificial. Najac performed several pantomimes at the Cirque Molier, a popular mime venue in Paris, and blamed their failure on the size of the audience who could not perceive his subtle gestures (Jones 167). Subtlety of gesture had been praised as far back as Deburau; while his gestural style, however, had likely been far more exaggerated than his critics’ praise might suggest, the subtleties attributed to Najac and other late-century Pierrots were likely informed by the small size of the performing space—a space that could be more easily controlled, could exclude unpredictable or chaotic elements.<sup>20</sup> This careful control

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<sup>20</sup> In *Souvenirs des Funambules* [Memories of the Funambules] Champfleury writes disparagingly of the working-class audiences in the Théâtre des Funambules, attributing base qualities to them using comparisons to nature and a white as purity/black as filth duality: “Quand les voyous applaudissent avec leurs grosses mains, noires comme l’aile d’un corbeau, crevassées comme un ravin et solides comme de la corne de bœuf, ça sonne pire qu’un tambour” [When the thugs applaud with their big hands, black like with wings of a raven, cracked like a ravine and strong as an ox horn, it sounds worse than a drum] (181).

of the interior of the theatrical space parallels a similar obsession with controlling the interior of the body that can be discerned in the descriptions of Pierrots and other mime performers by both critics and playwrights, which describe their bodies as empty and cold.<sup>21</sup> This emptiness and coldness could be understood as a form of sterility, and positions the idealized Pierrot body as a mechanical one, set against a “natural” body of warmth, corporeality and fecundity. In the next section I trace the emergence of minimalist mime gestures which, I argue, were tied to this idealization of a mechanical Pierrot body alongside, in a seemingly-contradictory duality, a push towards “natural” gestures that revealed thoughts and subtle emotions; I then take a closer look at language revealing contamination anxieties that I argue underlie this duality.

### ***Sang-froid and automatisme in late nineteenth-century French mime***

In France at the end of the nineteenth century French mime practitioners increasingly linked a minimalist approach to movement to direct expressions of inner thoughts and emotions. This was in contrast to Deburau’s early nineteenth-century style of *mime sautante* [leaping mime], based on striking set poses. After Deburau’s death in 1846, Deburau *fils* took over his father’s role of Pierrot, investing it with his own performance style: elegant, graceful, a prototype of what Hugounet later termed *Pierrot-cerveau*. Mime critic Janin’s praise in 1881 of Deburau *fils* significantly included

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the description of Pierrot’s face as “une inondation glacée” [an icy flood] (Hennique 6); of Pierrot’s movements as “glacial et calme” [glacial and calm] and “froid” [cold] (Laforgue 2, 7); of his body as freezing: “Il a très froid” [He is very cold] (Beissier 6).

the term *sang-froid* [cold-blooded]: “Deburau trouva son sang-froid ... qui fait sa grande supériorité” [Deburau found his *sang-froid* ... which gave him his superiority] (69). In Janin’s usage, *sang-froid* described that quality of flexible acting ability praised by Diderot, a quality held by the performer who could seamlessly shift from one held attitude to the next. Janin connected Deburau *fils*’s renowned *sang-froid* to his robust emotional power; the mime’s ability to transition quickly between fixed attitudes was understood, following Diderot, as a strength that allowed performative flexibility rather than a capitulation to the whims of momentary passions: “C’est au sang-froid à tempérer le délire de l’enthousiasme” [It is with *sang-froid* that one tempers the delirium of enthusiasm] (Diderot, *Paradoxe* 36). Writing in 1881 about mime artists from earlier in the century, Janin’s use of *sang-froid* as a term of praise resonated with a valuing of *sang-froid* as impassivity that began to gain traction in the French mime world from the mid nineteenth century. Practitioners lauded the ability of the artist to be un-moved and un-movable (as opposed to *sensibilité* which denoted an ability to be affected or moved by feelings) as allowing the artist to occupy a privileged vantage point of objective vision. In a letter to Louise Colet written in 1852, Gustave Flaubert references this idea of *sang-froid* when he writes that the work of a great artist is to make one “aware of a *secret impassiveness* in every atom and at every angle of vision; the effect on the spectator should be a kind of astonishment” (qtd. in Nichols 11, emphasis added). Flaubert’s use of “secret” points to an emphasis on the private sphere, a sense of the self as divided between a private, “authentic” self and a public

performed self. This emphasis led to an increasing paring-down of Pierrot's accessibility from a public figure intimately tied to *le peuple* (as Deburau's Pierrot, performing to the large crowds at the Funambules, had been viewed) to a solitary figure, misunderstood by the mass of humanity, speaking to the state of the isolated artist. Pierrot's performing space accordingly shrank from the open air of the Boulevard at the start of the nineteenth century to the enclosed yet still publicly-accessible Funambules to, in the last half of the century, the tiny salon theatre that could only accommodate a small number of spectators.

Late nineteenth-century French pantomime texts reveal a corresponding shift in gestural style from the *mime sautante* [leaping mime] of Deburau to a more subtle style marked by tiny movements that would only be legible in a small performance space. Hennique, in his 1903 *Le songe d'une nuit d'hiver* [A midwinter night's dream], describes minute facial expressions of Pierrot: "l'œil aiguisé, la lèvre méchante" [eye sharp, lip nasty] (3). The physical gesture that the Pierrot performer would have used to denote a sharp eye or a nasty (presumably curled) lip would not have been legible from the stage of the Funambules; the smaller performance spaces of these late-century pantomimes allowed for such minute gestures. Similarly, Colombine's eyes become a focal point to represent her mood in Part III of Fernand Beissier's *La Lune* [The Moon] (1890): "les yeux de Colombine sont moins sévères que tout à l'heure" [Colombine's eyes are less severe than before] (2). In the opening section of *Le Suicide de Pierrot* [The Suicide of Pierrot] (1897) Aubert sets the piece in a "salon modeste" followed by a passage

describing subtle emotional gestures for Pierrot: “Peu à peu il s’attendrit, son visage s’allonge, ses traits deviennent grimaçants; il pleure. Soudain une résolution éclate dans ses yeux” [Little by little he softens, his face lengthens, his features become grimaces; he cries. Suddenly a clear decision shows in his eyes] (3-4). The late nineteenth-century focus on minimalist gestural style is revealed in this increasing focus on the face in these pantomimes: the face elongating, lips curling, eyes revealing emotion or ideas.

One of the effects of shrinking the gestural mime style was a universalizing one: by appearing to distance themselves from the passions that their bodies represented, mime performers in the minimalist style embodied the objective, “neutral” observer unencumbered by the idiosyncrasies that might reveal (racial, class, gendered) difference. The implications of this embodied practice correspond to language used to describe gesture; Xavier Aubryet in the Cercle prologue of 1888 describes gesture in universalizing terms: “[Since Gesture], unlike discourse, cannot be empty, and since it extends its domains over all humanity, Gesture is the eternal Word of all humanity” (qtd. in Jones 168). The belief that gesture accessed a core of common humanity, bypassing the issues of spoken language comprehension, was an extension of the eighteenth-century tenet, which nineteenth-century French acting theory had inherited, that all human beings are born with a pre-existing natural morality. This tenet also included the notion of “human nature” which required reason to align actions with natural morality; those that were capable of this therefore behaved more “naturally.” While mime gestural techniques in early nineteenth-century France focused on



conveying literal meaning due to the restriction on spoken language in the boulevard theatres, as mime became increasingly bourgeois in the late nineteenth century, focus turned to questions of authenticity of emotional expression.

This figuring of the mime as a transparent medium for emotion can be linked to an idea of universality that Jules Lemaître ascribed to Pierrot in 1890. According to Lemaître, Pierrot's gestures conveyed an internal reality that, when viewed by the audience, would evoke universal truths. Lemaître wrote of an ideal pantomimic theatre in which

... these silent spectacles would work their magic by awakening within us a mass of memories, impressions and dreams ... the smallest gesture of Pierrot would be suddenly combined, in our memories, with about six or seven great poets. (*Impressions deuxième* 354, qtd. in Jones 165)

This links Pierrot's gestures not only to general human experience ("memories, impressions and dreams") but to the artistic elite ("great poets"), representing two levels of the universal. In an article written about Margueritte's 1888 pantomime *Pierrot assassin de sa femme* [Pierrot assassin of his wife] (a piece I analyze in greater detail later in this chapter), Lemaître expands on the artistic level of universality, linking the physical appearance of Pierrot's face to the tradition of classical masks:

... cette tête simplifiée, artificielle, sans cheveux, sans modelé, cette lune oblongue où Ton [sic] ne voit sur la blancheur plate du fond que les trous des yeux et des narines et la ligne des sourcils et de la bouche, cette tête

est très réellement tragique ... Au fait, elle l'est précisément de la même façon que ces autres têtes artificielles, ces masques dont se couvraient les acteurs pour jouer les drames d'Eschyle et de Sophocle et qui, à coup sûr, ne donnaient nulle envie de rire aux Grecs ingénieux.

[ ... this simplified head, artificial, without hair, without modeling, this oblong moon where one sees nothing on the flat whiteness but the holes of the eyes and nostrils and the line of the eyebrows and mouth, this head is truly tragic ... In fact, *it is tragic in precisely the same manner* as other artificial heads, the masks worn to cover the actors who performed the dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles and who certainly gave the ingenious Greeks no desire to laugh.] (*Impressions troisième* 351, emphasis added)

Lemaître's text both reveals assumptions about the universality of the mask form ("it is tragic in precisely the same manner ...") and describes Pierrot's face as a lifeless mask marked by whiteness broken only by the dark, empty holes of the eyes and the nostrils. This image evokes the acrobatic Hanlon-Lee brothers (Figure 1) who performed Pierrot pantomimes in the 1870s and 1880s using a mime style based on frenetic movement, a style that complicated the meaning of *sang-froid*, retaining the idea of universality but altering what gesture "revealed" about human nature and the ways in which the human body's interior was conceptualized. When the acrobatic Hanlon-Lee brothers appeared in the 1870s with their violent, frenetic acrobatics, the figure of Pierrot in pantomimes

was increasingly that of a cold-blooded murderer, and *sang-froid* had taken on a sinister quality, a sense of exposing the emptiness behind the mask.



Figure 1: *The Hanlon-Lees*<sup>22</sup>

In a section titled “La Pantomime” in his essay *Le naturalisme au théâtre* [Naturalism in the theatre] Émile Zola praised the Hanlon-Lees for their coldness: “L'observation cruelle, l'analyse féroce de ces grimaciers qui mettent à nu d'un geste ou d'un clin d'oeil toute la bête humaine” [The cruel observation, the fierce analysis of these grimacing men who expose with a gesture or with a wink all of the human beast] (34). He linked their violent pantomime techniques to larger philosophical themes of the emptiness of human existence: “Au fond, c'est la négation de tout, c'est le néant

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<sup>22</sup> The Hanlon Lee brothers in *Le Voyage en Suisse* [The Voyage in Switzerland]. Photo attributed to Nadar, c. 1878-1879.

humain” [At the bottom is the negation of all, is human nothingness] (36). D.L. Murray concurred, describing the brothers as “the cynic philosophers of the *fin-de-siècle*, the unconscious prophets of the crash of civilization” (qtd. in Townsen 175). Critics explicitly connected the performance style of the Hanlon-Lees to mechanism, describing their movements as precise and regulated. Roland Auguet summarizes the wide consensus on their gestural style when he writes:

Their comic effects were drawn primarily from *automatism*, from the production of gestures in series whose perfect linking, leading to unexpected convulsions, induced laughter. They gave to the human body the virtues of the machine. (51, qtd. in Jones 154)

This reference to “automatism” is significant, and points to a link between concurrent ideas in French psychology and the emptiness behind the mask that marked the appearance and descriptions of the Hanlon-Lees. Late nineteenth-century French mime artists were increasingly obsessed with the automaton, the marionette, and *tableaux vivants*. This fascination in the mime world coincided with French psychology theorists’ interest in the idea of *automatisme*. In the latter part of the nineteenth century the field of French psychology was comprised of a combination of philosophy, spiritualism and physiology, with theorists in the latter camp attempting to tie together mental and physiological phenomena. In 1885 Théodule Ribot, a philosopher, and Charles Richet, a physiologist, founded the Société de Psychologie Physiologique in Paris with the intention of furthering the study of states such as hypnosis, hysteria and

cataplexy, including the automatic movements that accompany these states, classed as *automatisme*. Ribot, Richet and many of their contemporaries advocated an idea of *automatisme* that positioned it as entirely mechanical, operating without consciousness; they disseminated many of these ideas through the monthly journal *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* [Philosophical review in France and abroad]. This idea of automatic human actions such as convulsions—actions that the Hanlon-Lees incorporated into their mime style—performed without consciousness resonates with the empty-eyed appearance of the Hanlon-Lees, and the idea that the mask of their faces hid an inner emptiness (lack of consciousness).

However, this idea of movement performed in the absence of consciousness was challenged in 1889 when Pierre Janet, a young psychological professor who was a member of the recently-formed society, published his thesis *L'Automatisme Psychologique: Essai de psychologie expérimentale sur les formes inférieures de l'activité humaine* [Psychological Automatism: Evaluation of experimental psychology on the lower forms of human activity]. In this thesis Janet reworks the prevalent theory of *automatisme* that defined it as an entirely mechanical act, arguing that a degree of consciousness is always involved. Janet begins by challenging this idea of *automatisme* as “purement mécanique et absolument sans conscience” [purely mechanical and absolutely without conscience] (2), arguing that this is based on a misunderstanding of the full range of human consciousness which can include automatic elements:

Cette interprétation a été l'origine de confusions nombreuses, et beaucoup de philosophes se refusent à reconnaître dans l'esprit humain un automatisme, qui est cependant réel et sans lequel beaucoup de phénomènes sont inexplicables ... Nous croyons que l'on peut admettre simultanément et l'automatisme et la conscience ...

[This interpretation originated out of several confused notions, and many philosophers refuse to recognize an automatism in the human spirit, which is however real and without which many phenomena are inexplicable ... We believe that it's possible to recognize simultaneously both automatism and consciousness ... ] (2)

Janet proposes a different level of consciousness, the subconscious, that governs automatic actions. He separates the subconscious from the part of the consciousness that maintains the persona, the sense of self or "l'idée du moi" (39). To do this, he redefines "moi" from a transcendent being to a collection of ideas, memories and habits that together constitute a sense of self:

L'idée du moi, en effet, est un phénomène psychologique fort compliqué qui comprend les souvenirs des actions passées, la notion de notre situation, de nos pouvoirs, de notre corps, de notre nom même, qui, réunissant toutes ces idées éparses, joue un grand rôle dans la connaissance de la personnalité.

[The idea of me, in effect, is a complex psychological phenomenon which is made up of memories of past actions, the idea of our situation, of our power, of our body, even of our name, which, bringing together all of these disparate ideas, plays a large role in the knowledge of our personality.] (39)

What is significant here about Janet's theories is both his reworking of the self and consciousness which prefigured Freud and an early twentieth-century interest in the "authentic" self that lies below consciousness, themes that I take up in Chapter 4. The wider theories of *automatisme* that he argued against, which identified the human with the mechanical, resonate with practices in late nineteenth-century French mime that position the body as mechanical, flesh as rigid, and *sang-froid* as inner coldness.

Pantomimes of the era increasingly referenced statues, automata and puppets, and the movement styles of mimes became smaller, more rapid and "mechanical" or stiff. In *Pierrot sceptique* [Pierrot skeptic] (1881) by Hennique and J.K. Huynsman, Colombine is compared to a statue: "Elle se tient rigide, sans regard, comme une statue" [She stands rigidly, without seeing, like a statue] (23). Eugène Sue's heroine Basquine in his pantomime *Martin ou les misères des enfants trouvés* [Martin or the misery of the found children] (1851) explains how one become "une fille de marbre" [a marble girl]: borrowing multiple artificial roles has left her incapable of feeling, with only "that leprous soul one acquires inevitably from being a saltimbanque [acrobat], a vagabond, a thief, a street singer or an extra onstage for six sous." She has become "a living marble,

worse than marble, for marble cannot laugh” (qtd. in Jones 138). In Jones’s examination of late nineteenth-century grotesque iconography, she documents how the circus clown with a huge triangular head (often accompanied by a sinister smile) emerges for the first time in posters and circus costuming. Pierrot’s severed head appears with increasing frequency in grotesque iconography, and his pantomime costume includes a white headband to extend the size of his forehead. Jones argues that large foreheads were a feature of the Romantic era as well, but then they were associated with richness of intellect, with interior multiple worlds. By the late nineteenth century, however, the large head had become the seat of “cerebral eroticism”, associated with both power and illness—once again bodily imagery is extended into larger social realms, for it was during this time that Paul Verlaine described Paris as an enlarged head to insist on its overgrown importance, and cerebral medical terminology becomes increasingly associated with the mechanical, head-enlarged clown. Jones draws a connection between the mechanical movements of clowns and hysterical epilepsy in late nineteenth-century medical terminology: it is significant, for example, that the term “clonic spasm” (from the Greek *klonos*, violent motion) in mime discourse became *clownisme*. Critics and playwrights increasingly described Pierrot as mechanical, having a tic, a way of moving that suggests machinery—the clown’s growing association with puppetry (136).

I extend and complicate Jones’s analysis here by arguing that, paradoxically, the very automaton-like movements of late nineteenth-century mime are the gestural style



of a “natural” Pierrot, a Pierrot whose minimalist gestures convey inner reality. In the next section I take up this question of the “natural” invading and disrupting the dispassionate *sang-froid* and mechanical body of late nineteenth-century mime, both as an intentional performance style (when small, rigid, precise movements drawn from the movements of automatons function explicitly as a new “natural” mime technique) and as a performative working out of contamination anxieties, in which the “natural” (as animality, the visceral, *la bêtise*) disrupts the automaton-like body. In other words, late nineteenth-century French mime was engaged in a complex and conflicting dialogue with the “natural” as a quality to be both sought after and feared.

### ***Minimalism and “natural” anxieties***

In 1920 a small mime piece titled *Mains et masques* [Hands and faces] opened at L’Olympia Paris written by and starring the famous *fin de siècle* Pierrot performer Gustave Fréjaville Séverin, who had first published the text in 1914. In the pantomime, as later described by Rémy in *Georges Wague*, Pierrot appears as a spectral figure whose hands and face are the only visible parts of his body moving across the dark stage: “Pierrot, tout de noir vêtu, fondu dans les noirceurs d’une toile de fond ne laissait plus voir que son visage et que ses mains” [Pierrot, dressed entirely in black, melted into the black background leaving no more to see than his face and his hands] (153). Rémy ascribes this reduction in the visibility of the body to Wague’s mime technique:

Ainsi Séverin réduisait son pouvoir de suggestion à la technique de Georges Wague qui depuis longtemps enseignait que les mains et le visage devaient être les source essentielles, sinon absolues, des moyens d'expression du mime. 'Mains et visage, disait-il, parlent aux spectateurs mieux que les gestes des bras et les attitudes du corps'.

[Thus Séverin minimized Pierrot's power of suggestion following the technique of Georges Wague who for a long time had taught that the hands and the face must be the essential, if not the absolute, source of the mime's expression. 'Hands and face,' he said, 'speak to the spectators better than the gestures of the arms and the attitudes of the body.']

(*Wague* 153-4)

This reference to "attitudes" of the body evokes the Delsartian-inspired gestural style that had influenced French mime in the first part of the nineteenth century, a technique that Wague explicitly worked against. As described by Rémy, Wague positioned his mime technique against "classical" mime defined by the exaggerated gestures of melodrama, a style that Wague believed could not accurately convey serious feeling: "Les sentiments venus de la profondeur de l'être, nul geste, nulle grimace, nulle emphase ne peut les suggérer qui ne soit ridicule, c'est-à-dire comique" [The feelings that come from the depth of being, no gesture, no grimace, no emphasis can suggest them which is not ridiculous, that is to say comical] (*Wague* 104). Wague preferred instead minimalist movement that conveyed feeling "par l'intensité des expressions du

visage, par la concentration d'une attitude seulement traversée par des réflexes esquissés à peine et qui traduisent les réactions d'une pensée en perpétuelle action" [by the intensity of facial expressions, by the concentration of an attitude only shifting through barely defined reflexes, which translate the movements of thought into perpetual action] (*Wague* 104). Wague's connection, according to Rémy, of feelings with both the "depth of being" and thought and his dismissal of large bodily gestures reveals a mistrust of an apparently-uncontrolled physical body, a privileging of inner cognitive process, and a positioning of the performer's self deep within the body, a theme I take up in Chapter 4. He posted the following three phrases above the doors of his mime school in Paris:

SANS LA PENSÉE LE GESTE EST INUTILE.

LE GESTE N'EST QUE LE COMPLÉMENT DE LA PENSÉE.

LE MINIMUM DE GESTES

CORRESPOND AU MAXIMUM D'EXPRESSION.

[Without thought gesture is useless.

Gesture is nothing but the complement of thought.

The minimum of gestures

corresponds to the maximum of expression.] (*Wague* 182)

The body here is dismissed entirely in favor of the value of cerebral activity; gesture is only useful as a direct and very subtle vehicle for thought. Wague hailed his "modern"

pantomime as a technique that, by controlling the expressions of the body, allowed the direct expression of thought and feelings from the “depth of being”.

This increased privileging of minimalist movement can be discerned in shifts that took place in the gestural language within French pantomime texts of the second half of the nineteenth century. Earlier pieces describe action in fairly straightforward language, alongside “speech” that Pierrot is meant to mime. For instance, the 1879 pantomime *Pierrot terrible* [Terrible Pierrot] by Richard Lesclide and featuring the acrobatic Hanlon-Lee brothers describes action with no modifying adjectives: “Les Pierrots s’en réjouissent et s’en lèchent les doigts” [The Pierrots rejoice and lick their fingers] (2). Lesclide does not specify here *how* the Pierrots perform rejoicing or licking their fingers; this is a style that he uses throughout the piece as in his description of the great tumult that ensues when a banker catches the Pierrots stealing: “on crie, on appelle, on se sauve, on se bat” [they cry, they call out, they try to escape, they fight] (3). This straightforward description of action can be contrasted with pantomime texts from the following decades in which writers describe movement using increasingly specific and minimalist language, and increasingly tie gesture to thought and assign it to subtle facial movements. Hennique and J.K. Huysmans in *Pierrot sceptique* [Pierrot skeptic] (1881) instruct Pierrot to perform his gestures more gently in Scene 8: “Ses manières deviennent plus douces” [His mannerisms become softer] (21). They assign a thought to Pierrot that the performer would convey through mime: “« Les parfums de feu ma femme, pense-t-il »” [‘The perfumes of my late wife’, he thinks] (21). This pantomime

and Lesclide's were produced within two years of each other, and can be seen as representative of a moment of shift in French pantomime's gestural style from the *mime sautante* [leaping mime] that had been popular in the early nineteenth century and the late nineteenth-century subtle, minimalist style.

This latter style is evidenced in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century pantomimes including Hennique's *Le songe d'une nuit d'hiver* [A midwinter night's dream] (1903) in which Pierrot is described with "l'œil aiguise, la lèvre méchante" [sharp eye, wicked lip] (2). Colombine conveys disapproval of Arlequin through her face in Najac's *Barbe-Bleuette* [Blue Beard] (1890) in which her face "prend une expression méchante" [takes on a wicked expression] (3), "a un sourire malicieux" [has a malicious smile] (4), and conveys a plot point to the audience: "elle ... lance au placard un regard qui fait prévoir au public que Pierrot ne sera pas le dernier mari de Barbe-Bleuette" [she ... gives a look to the closet that conveys to the audience that Pierrot will not be the last husband of Barbe-Bleuette] (6).<sup>23</sup> This "look" does not denote emotion, but intention—an example of gesture becoming increasingly tied to thought. A passage in Rouanet's *Le ventre et le cœur de Pierrot* [The stomach and the heart of Pierrot] (1888) appears to describe Pierrot moving through a series of emotional poses reminiscent of the earlier nineteenth-century gestural style of striking attitudes, with the exception that it is his *face* striking the attitudes: "La physionomie de Pierrot exprime tour à tour la surprise, la passion, le ravissement, l'extase" [the face of Pierrot expresses in turn surprise, passion,

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<sup>23</sup> "Bleuette" is the feminine form of "bleu" [blue] in French, and is used in this pantomime because the name refers to Colombine.

rapture, ecstasy]. These facial attitudes were likely intended to be subtle (not the “grimaces” that Wague so disdained), based on a letter to Hugounet that Rouanet composed in 1887 in which he describes the gestural style of his pantomime as “une succession de gestes nobles et calmes” [a succession of noble and calm gestures] (qtd. in Hugounet 234). In *Le Suicide de Pierrot* [The Suicide of Pierrot] (1897) Aubert similarly locates an expressive attitude in the face: “Toute sa physionomie a une expression stupide” [His entire face has a stupid expression] (7). Paul Lheureux, at the beginning of *Crime et châtement* [Crime and punishment] (1891), describes a sequence of actions that Pierrot performs angrily; he describes the emotion itself as “concentrated”: “Sa fureur, pour être concentrée, n’en est pas moins terrible” [His furor, for being concentrated, is not the less terrible] (4).

Late nineteenth-century theatrical works with a speaking or singing Pierrot similarly contained language that privileged minimalist emotional expression over extreme, melodramatic displays of feeling. In Rostand’s 1890 play *Les deux Pierrots ou le souper blanc* [The two Pierrots or the supper in white] (a revision of his 1889 *Pierrot qui pleure et Pierrot qui rit* [Pierrot who weeps and Pierrot who laughs]) in which the Pierrot characters speak in verse, two Pierrots—one happy and one sad—vie for the affections of Colombina.<sup>24</sup> Pierrot Two (sad Pierrot) weeps effusively throughout the piece; Colombina describes his eyes as “streaming” (3) prior to his entrance, and much of the dialogue that ensues between the three characters concerns these physical signifiers of

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<sup>24</sup> The English translation that I use in this section is Thom Christoph’s 2007 translation of *Les deux Pierrots ou le souper blanc* [The two Pierrots or the supper in white].

emotion. Significantly, Pierrot One expresses skepticism over the sincerity of Pierrot Two's expressed feelings in language that connects the latter's emotions to theatrical performance: "While he, with trembling voice and stagy tricks, / Emotes" (17); "Must you always give your hearts / To those who weep? To frauds who play their parts / Like sorry players, acting out dejection ... " (31). The "trembling voice" here could be interpreted as a vocal equivalent to the melodramatic pose of the Delsartian tradition; that Pierrot One links this technique to representational falsity—and further links representational falsity to the craft of actors—reveals a mistrust of gestural displays of emotion (the gestures popular in nineteenth-century French mime) that runs through the piece. Pierrot One further questions the reliability of external emotional gestures in rendering an accurate depiction of the body's interior: "Who'd guess, / To see me, that my stomach's hollowness / Creates my laughter's resonating space? / Who'd guess from his unhappy, livid face / That he's well-fed?" (19). Again, outward displays of emotion cannot be trusted to accurately reveal inner states. The exception appears at the end of the play in the form of minimalism, when Pierrot One sheds a single tear, convincing Colombina of his sincerity:

COLOMBINA

But—you're weeping!

PIERROT ONE

I, weeping? Nonsense!

*(Then suddenly, simply:)*

Well, then ... yes, I am. (32)

Pierrot One's display of emotion is so subtle and so involuntary (a link to *automatisme*) that he does not realize he is weeping until it is pointed out to him by an external observer. The stage direction "simply" further points to a minimalist style of rendering emotion legible to the audience, and Colombina trusts this simple, minimal gesture of grief over the more elaborate gestures of Pierrot Two: "Ah! Dearer is this single tear you've brought me - / More deeply has it moved me, this small tear - / Than all his noisy sobbing" (33); she holds Pierrot One's "furtive tear" in higher regard than Pierrot Two's "endless streams" of "too prodigious tears" (34). Colombina chooses Pierrot One over Pierrot Two because of the minimalist quality of his emotional display which, as simple, subtle and involuntary, ties his emotions to *automatisme*, thereby giving an authenticity to these external signifiers of his internal emotions.

Members of the Cercle also advocated a minimalist gesture style as a response to Wagner's theories of the musical drama and the leitmotif, which gave a musical theme to specific theatrical elements including individual characters. In an 1892 interview conducted by Hugounet, Cercle member Larcher discussed his desire to transfer gestural expressivity from the mime performer to musical instruments:

Supprimer les gestes conventionnels et inintelligibles de l'ancienne pantomime et pour cela avoir recours à des comédiens, exiger une adaptation constante et étroite de la phrase musicale à la situation scénique, *mettre la parole du geste dans l'orchestre*, c'est-à-dire en fin de



compte, appliquer tout simplement à la pantomime les théories les meilleures de Wagner, il me semble que cela devait produire pour un public restreint mais de choix un spectacle des plus intéressants.

[Suppress the conventional and unintelligible gestures of the older pantomime and for this to have recourse to actors, to demand a constant and close adaptation of the musical phrase to the theatrical situation, *to put the speech of gesture into the orchestra*, which is ultimately to say, to simply apply to the pantomime the best theories of Wagner, it seems to me that this would produce for a limited audience the most interesting choice of performances.] (qtd. in Bonnet 10, emphasis added)

Larcher's description of the gestural style of the old pantomime as "unintelligible" privileges the intellect as interpreter of gesture; his implied critique is that the old style of gesture is over-emotional, tied to the body rather than the intellect. His desire "to put the utterance of the gesture into the orchestra" leaves one wondering what was left for the mime to perform—does the mime now follow the music, which is where gestural utterance is found?

In the musical scores that accompany many pantomimes in this era, in which the text from the written pantomime appears above each line of music, music appears to emphasize or underscore both emotion and certain physical gestures. In Vidal's musical score for *Pierrot assassin de sa femme* [Pierrot assassin of his wife] (1888), for example, the music appears to emphasize the described emotion of "horror" when Pierrot "prend

un bouteille de rhum, la regarde, implore en vain Colombine et boit avec horreur” [takes a bottle of rum, looks at it, implores Colombine in vain and drinks with horror] (68-9). Where “boit avec horreur” is written above the musical line, the music becomes *pianissimo* (very quiet) and suddenly contains quick repetitive notes, diminishing over eight measures during which there is no written pantomime text; during these eight measures the performer playing Pierrot would presumably perform horror to the accompaniment of the evocative music. The style of his gestural representation of “horror” cannot be deduced, only that the expression is simultaneously found in the accompanying music. Physical movement, however, does appear to be dictated in parts by the music, as at the beginning of the pantomime when Pierrot and the undertaker tip-toe into the room: “Pierrot et le Croque-Mort entrent titubants, flageolants, une-deux, une-deux” [Pierrot and the undertaker enter staggering, weak, one-two, one-two] (7). Here the physical action of the footsteps are represented textually by “une-deux, une-deux”, which is written above four corresponding chords of music. The performers would therefore have had to time their foot movements to the musical chords. Soon afterwards Pierrot opens his eyes one at a time and sees the portrait of Colombine: “Pierrot ouvre un œil, l'autre, les deux, regarde” [Pierrot opens one eye, the other, both, he looks] (8); this text is positioned exactly above specific musical beats and so once again the performer’s body would likely have been choreographed to specific musical beats. His moment of seeing the portrait, which would have required a gestural shift, is specifically timed to a shift in the music: “Ah! là! vois!” [Ah! There! See!] (9).

In Thomé's musical score for Najac's *Barbe-Bleuette* [Blue Beard] (1890), the music similarly both underscores movement and dictates it. The former is evidenced in such sections as when Pierrot "fait domino" [falls] accompanied by descending sixteenth notes played across four measures (14), and when "il tremble de tous ses membres" [he trembles in all of his limbs] alongside music played simultaneously "*piano*" [quietly], "*agitato*" [agitated] and "staccato". The latter—music dictating movement—appears as Pierrot approaches the ominous cabinet in his new wife's house and opens it: "Un deux, trois, quatre, dans l'armoire. Oh!" [One two, three, four, in the cabinet. Oh!] accompanied by four base notes ascending during "Un deux, trois, quatre", four staccato notes ascending during "dans l'armoire" (presumably this indicates Pierrot's frightened hesitation before opening the cabinet), followed by a chord on "Oh!" as he opens the cabinet door (23). As in *Pierrot assassin*, the musical score indicates that at times the performer had to move his body with the same rhythm as the music, a linking of the performer's body with a musical instrument.

It is in the popular *comédies en musique* and *opéras-comiques*—the specifically-musical pantomimes—of the era, however, that traces of a shift of gestural expressivity from performer's body to musical instrument can be discerned. In the 1899 publication of a *comédie en musique* version of Rostand's *Pierrot qui pleure et Pierrot qui rit* [Pierrot who cries and Pierrot who laughs], composer Hubert writes many of the musical dynamics in emotional language. He instructs the viola to play "*Allegretto, avec une expression souffreteuse*" [Allegretto (moderately quick tempo), with a sickly expression]

(30), "avec une expression exagéré de tristesse désolée" [with an exaggerated expression of apologetic sadness] (31); the violins are to play "Maestoso – Mouvt de marche lente et pompeuse" [Maestoso (stately) – A slow and pompous marching movement] (76) and "Très tranquille" [Very calmly] (136). As Pierrot Two laments the misfortune of life, the instruments are instructed to play "thème de la chanson triste, en chargeant l'expression tragique" [theme of the sad song, emphasizing the tragic expression] (133). Emotional instructions for the performers consistently target the body's musical instrument, the voice. Pierrot Two sings of his sadness with "une voix dolente" [a doleful voice] (109). Pierrot One sings of his joy "gaiement et avec désinvolture" [gaily and flippantly] (118); the composer ties his emotional expressivity to that of his counterpart using the voice: Pierrot One's emotion is to be conveyed "en contrefaisant la voix de Pierrot II" [by imitating the voice of Pierrot Two] (117). Colombine instructs the audience to listen to the sad singing of Pierrot Two, focusing on the musical elements of the pantomime—the voice and the melody—as emotionally expressive, rather than the story or physical expressions: "Pierrot qui pleure, en bas chante ... / Vous l'entendez ! / La mélodie est très larmoyante ... " [Pierrot who weeps, in a low voice ... / You hear him! / The melody is very tearful ... ] (34). Here Pierrot's emotional expression of weeping is conveyed through his voice ("in a low voice"); the audience does not see the emotion, but hears it. The melody conveys the emotion, not a gesture or a pose. Emotional expressivity has shifted from the movements of the physical body to the aural form of music, a shift that prefigured the mechanistic mime

practices of the early-twentieth century, in which the linking of the performer's body with a musical instrument was taken up by early twentieth-century movement practitioners such as Émile Jacques-Dalcroze, whose system of eurhythmics—and its effect on the mime pedagogy of Jacques Copeau—I discuss in Chapter 3.

Minimalism also pervaded late nineteenth-century poetry about Pierrot, which tended to portray him as a dispassionate, pessimistic philosopher, further shifting emotion from the body to the intellect. Jules Laforgue took this tendency to its extreme in his *Complaintes*, adopting an attitude that influenced multiple other writers of the time. Laforgue identified himself with Pierrot, writing of his own artistic trials through the figure. In a letter to his sister written in May 1883, Laforgue describes his new writing style that sounds strikingly similar to the late-century mime style expounded by the Cercle Funambulesque and Wague:

I find it stupid to intone in an oracular voice and to posture eloquently.

These days, being on the one hand more skeptical, less easily carried away, and on the other hand possessing my language in *a more minute, clownesque fashion*, I write whimsical little poems, having only one aim:

to be original at any price. (20, qtd. in Storey, *Mask* 146, emphasis added)

Laforgue's association of "minute" with "clownesque" is telling at a time when the fashion for gestural style in mime was towards increasing minimalism. This "minute, clownesque fashion" takes on a gendered tone in his poem "Autre complainte de Lord

Pierrot" [Another lament of Lord Pierrot], in which Laforgue confronts his philosopher-hero with Woman who is the slave of Illusion:

*Celle qui doit me mettre au courant de la Femme!*

*Nous lui dirons d'abord, de mon air le moins froid:*

*"La somme des angles d'un triangle, chère âme,*

*"Est égale à deux droits."*

*Et si ce cri lui part: "Dieu de Dieu! que je t'aime!"*

*—"Dieu reconnaîtra les siens." Ou piquée au vif:*

*—"Mes claviers ont du cœur, tu seras mon seul thème."*

*Moi: "Tout est relatif."*

*De tous ses yeux, alors! se sentant trop banale:*

*"Ah! tu ne m'aimes pas; tant d'autres sont jaloux!"*

*Et moi, d'un œil qui vers l'Inconscient s-emballe:*

*"Merci, pas mal; et vous?"*

[She who must put me in touch with Woman!

We say to her first, with the least cold air:

"The sum of the angles of a triangle, dear soul,

"Is equal to two squares."

And if she cries, “Oh God! I do love you!”

—“God looks after his own.” Or pierced to the bone:

—My keyboard has a heart, you are my only care,

I: “All is relative.”

In her eyes, alas! she feels too banal:

“Ah! you don’t love me; and so others are jealous!”

And I, with an eye toward the Unconscious:

“Thanks, not bad; and you?”] (132)

Pierrot’s encounter here with Woman pits his impassive immobility, as the protector of Reason, against the temptations of Illusion which Laforgue here depicts as extreme emotionality. In Pierrot’s responses to Woman’s impassioned pleas, one can discern traces of the dispassionate, stone-faced Pierrot performed by Deburau *films* and increasingly popular among late-century mimes.

The feminine was not only a representative of unbridled emotion in Laforgue’s writings; his 1885 volume *L’imitation de Notre-Dame la lune* [The imitation of Our Lady the moon]—whose centerpiece is a series of poems about Pierrot—*La Lune* is a figure of sterility. Pierrot had been associated with the moon since the beginning of the century, an association emphasized in sentimental, dreamy portrayals such as Legrand’s. Laforgue explored the philosophical implications of this connection; in his poems

(including the aptly named “La lune est stérile”) the moon is barren. Pierrot himself becomes identified with this frozen, barren moon, becoming nothing more than a statue, a man of marble:

Je ne suis qu’un viveur lunaire  
Qui fait des ronds dans les basins,  
Et cela, sans autre dessein  
Que devenir un légendaire ...  
[I am but a lunar being  
Who moves about in the depths  
And there, with no other purpose  
Than to become a legend ... ] (12)

Identifying Pierrot with the moon, whose reflected light lacks the substantiability of active existence, makes of Pierrot a figure of shadow, of questionable existence—a corporeal fading that had been predicted by Théophile Gautier in his mid-century review of Legrand: “This pale, gaunt creature, ghostly (*famélique* [starving]) ...” (qtd. in Jones 79). Language of sterility, furthermore, connects Pierrot to late nineteenth-century hysterical sterility, which positioned the mainly upper-class white women suffering from the disorder against non-white women’s supposed over-fertility. This racial discourse simultaneously distanced the “civilized” white woman from the animality (expressed through purportedly heightened sexual and reproductive characteristics) of the non-white, poor or immigrant woman, and accused the former of endangering the race. This



fear of sterility intersects with what Laura Briggs calls “overcivilization”, a final category to be added to Edward Tylor’s social evolutionary stages of “savage” to “barbarian” to “civilized” (Briggs 248). The figure of the late nineteenth-century Pierrot therefore becomes both a stand-in for a modern self expressed through the body’s subtle and “natural” movements, and simultaneously an empty, corporeally-vague body with a plaster-white face that embodies the threatened survival of the white race.

### ***Contamination anxieties***

Sterility and the shrinking of the body in both literary depictions of Pierrot and the minimalist mime technique connected with Wague are particularly significant alongside the late nineteenth-century fascination with the automaton that affected mime styles such as those practiced by the Hanlon-Lees. If these techniques were meant to more authentically express emotions, why was the body so distanced from signifiers of the organic (fluid movements, full visibility of the body)? One answer, as I’ve suggested above, lies in the late nineteenth-century French mime’s body as performative site of contamination anxieties, anxieties tied to racial, class and gender-inflected discourses of animality. These anxieties can be discerned in pantomimes of the era in which Pierrot’s body is simultaneously mechanical and grotesque (corporeally-overflowing). Anxiety and ambivalence over Pierrot’s status as *fantoche* [puppet], for example, runs throughout *Pierrot assassin de sa femme* [Pierrot assassin of his wife] (1888). In the pantomime’s opening stage directions, Margueritte describes Pierrot as

having a forehead enlarged by a white headband: Pierrot in his typical aspect of “overcivilization.” The Pierrot of this piece is painstakingly set apart from a human body of gross materiality—that body is represented by the undertaker’s man who drags Pierrot in from the funeral of Pierrot’s wife Columbine: the undertaker and Pierrot are described using corporeal and racial language, respectively as “le gros vivant et le spectral ... noir, blanc” [the course living being and the specter ... black, white] (5). The line between living bodies and dead objects is thin and porous: the crimson bed seems to breathe and Columbine—Pierrot’s murdered wife—seems to laugh within the cadence of the music (an example of placing the “utterance of the gesture into the orchestra”). After Pierrot has been left alone on stage to confess his crime to the audience—which he accomplishes through a reenactment of how he tickled Columbine to death as she lay in their bed—the bed itself awakens and its curtains appear to burst into flame. Columbine’s hanging portrait comes to life, a portrait that has always held more of the flesh than Pierrot’s own alabaster body, her image described at the beginning as “tout en chair, les seins nus, rit à belles dents, *vivante*” [completely in her flesh, her breasts bare, laughing with beautiful teeth, *alive*] (5). The gendered association with Columbine’s body with flesh is significant: her naked body is both terrifying and organic (“*vivante*” [alive]), indicating ambivalence toward the “natural”, living body. When the terrified Pierrot touches the portrait—no longer distinguishable from the body of Columbine herself—he dies, the organic touch resulting in his body fully losing its organic status, becoming entirely a corpse.

Margueritte consistently presents Pierrot as far less grossly material than the dead-yet-alive objects in the room. A *Pierrot-cerveau*-type (to draw on Hugounet's terminology) with an enlarged white forehead, his movements are marked by mechanical rigidity, his physical body by the trappings of the automaton: alabaster skin, lips of plaster, an inclination towards convulsive, maniacal laughter, the clonic spasm of his *clownisme*. He is described as "déjà mort" [already dead] (10) before he touches the portrait; the touch turns a walking corpse into a fallen one. Yet the language Margueritte uses to describe Pierrot overflows with bodily material references. His Pierrot is a walking corpse, a plaster exterior encasing a void. A grossly material interior announces its existence and continually threatens to erupt. His body elicits anxiety over this eruption of an interior corpulent excess associated not with the mechanical, puppet-like *cerveau*, but with his counterpoint *Pierrot-ventre*.

Margueritte describes Pierrot's confession as a vomiting, of interior bodily excess erupting through a gaping hole: when Pierrot is left alone onstage to confront the audience he opens his mouth repeatedly, the confession that lies inside waiting to burst forth is described as coming "à ses lèvres" [to his lips] (6); after several hesitations "ses lèvres tremblent et alors une force invincible arrache de Pierrot le secret monté à sa bouche" [his lips tremble and soon an invincible force wrenches from Pierrot the secret rising to his mouth] (6). When the portrait begins to make its presence known, Pierrot mimes his fear by using his hand to indicate an interior accelerating heart beat. His eye gleams out from its socket: "hagard, terrifié, luit" [haggard, terrified, (it) gleams] (8). The

description of the eye's "gleam" stands in stark contrast to the dark, empty eye sockets popular among contemporaneous mime performers such as the Hanlon-Lees, and announces corporeality to the spectral form. When he mimes the death-throes of Columbine, his body becoming hers in a transgression of cleanly-demarcated performed identity (and a significant blurring of gendered bodies), his throes are described in language of illness invading the body's interior: "un mal contagieux et vengeur" [a contagious and vengeful disease] (9).

Anxiety over the natural intersects with racial anxiety in Desnoyers's 1856 pantomime *Le bras noir* [The black arm]. The black arm of the title belongs to the villainous moor Scapin, with whom Pierrot has a violent fight in which each pulls off one of the other's arms and proceeds to beat the other with it. Pierrot manages to beat Scapin to death with Scapin's own arm, then visits a doctor to have his arm put back on. But the doctor reattaches the wrong arm—with the bodily fluid saliva he sticks Scapin's black arm onto the white body of Pierrot. The evil black arm leads pure white Pierrot into a series of crimes that land him in prison; when he attempts to escape the jailor grabs his black arm and it comes off. As Pierrot flees, an enormous black arm rises up from the ground before him, a racially-charged image evocatively rendered by Gustave Courbet in 1856 to publicize the pantomime (Figure 2). Pierrot, terrified, turns to stone (6). Just as the *Pierrot-cerveau* as described by Hugounet escapes the charge of dirty and naturalist through his puppet-like movements, so the Pierrot of *Le bras noir* escapes defilement through exterior rigidity, turning to stone. When threatened by the arm that

represents black defilement of white purity, Pierrot retains his purity by ceasing to be an organic body. Purity leads to sterility.

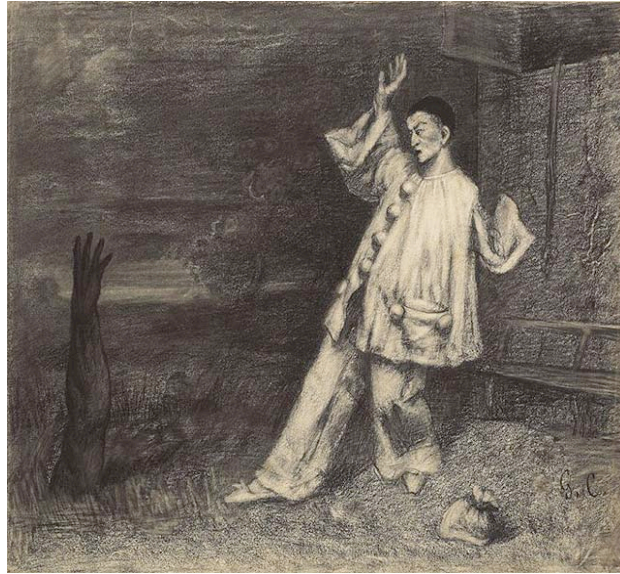


Figure 2: *Le bras noir*<sup>25</sup>

Yet the frozen body of Pierrot has been hybrid—his body remains facing the limb that was only recently attached to it. Racial hybridity was a contentious issue in late nineteenth-century anthropology struggling to absorb the Darwinian impact of the descent of man from animals. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) Darwin had categorized human emotions as mental states connected specifically to neurological functions and physical expressions that could also be observed in animals, blurring the human/animal distinction:

With mankind some expressions, such as the bristling of the hair under the influence of extreme terror, or the uncovering of the teeth under that

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<sup>25</sup> Drawing by Gustave Courbet in 1856 to publicize the premiere of Desnoyers's pantomime at the Théâtre des Folies-Nouvelles.

of furious rage, can hardly be understood, except of the belief that man once existed in a much lower and animal-like condition. (12)

As the demarcations between human and animal became more tenuous, so too did the clear lines between human races, producing sterile white bodies both celebrated (Pierrot's defilement cannot continue once he has frozen) and feared (the body can no longer reproduce, threatening the survival of the white race). That Pierrot's frozen, sterile body experienced racial hybridity performatively theorizes this complex societal anxiety, the conflicting and contradictory relationship to contamination of the white French artists, critics and audiences of late nineteenth-century French mime.

In the late nineteenth century, nostalgia for the early-century "popular Pierrot" positioned this figure as one who connected directly with *le peuple*.<sup>26</sup> Writers described this figure as exemplifying *la bêtise*—a highly ambiguous term, often translated as "foolishness" but whose associations with animality cannot be ignored, which appeared

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<sup>26</sup> Rémy attributes this nostalgia for the "popular Pierrot" of the early nineteenth century to a myth-making that identifies the romanticized object with a generalized raucous joy of the happy working-class crowd:

La légende de la foire perpétuelle qui se tient sur le boulevard du Temple, avec ses cris de joie, son ambiance insoucieuse, la foule béate devant le tapis des acrobates, la liesse des fêtes et du carnaval, les descriptions brossées de main de maître, les fresques brillamment colorées, n'existent que dans l'imagination des chroniqueurs de la fin du XIXe siècle qui parlent du commencement du-dit siècle comme aujourd'hui on raconte 1900 et la Belle Époque.

[The legend of the perpetual fair on the Boulevard du Temple, with its cries of joy, its careless ambiance, the blissful crowd standing before the acrobats' mats, the jubilation of the festivities and of the carnival, the masterfully-painted descriptions, the brilliantly-colored frescoes, do not exist except in the imaginations of the chroniclers of the end of the nineteenth century who speak of the beginning of that century as today one remembers 1900 and the Belle Époque.] (Deburau 68)

frequently throughout the century in reference to fool figures of clowns and mimes. *La bêtise* is a potent term and needs a bit of unpacking in its relationship to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourses on animality and the human-animal divide. In the eighteenth century René Descartes's doctrine of the "*bête machine*" had posed the question of whether animals, if they were truly "machines," had souls. The question came to mean "not that animals were pure automata devoid of sensation and self-awareness, but rather that the various manifestations of consciousness, instinct, sensibility, and even intelligence, all of which seemed empirically to typify animal behavior, ought to be explained exclusively in terms of the organic machine" (Vartanian 58). Despite the apparent similarities between this doctrine and that of *l'homme machine* [man as machine] that Julien de la Mettrie (1748) later took up, one key difference remained between *l'homme* [man] and *la bête* [beast]: unlike animals, humans had rational souls.

Yet in the debate between mechanistic and vitalist acting theories that typified the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *la bête* held the advantage within the latter camp of a more direct link to the passions. Later in the nineteenth century George Henry Lewes placed expressivity at the center of the art of acting in *On Actors and the Art of Acting* (1875). He believed that great actors had an "animal" physiology, "animalism," a physical fluidity that allowed the organic expression of the passions (Roach 184). The return of the language of animalism in late nineteenth-century pantomime points in part to a reaction against the fixed, rigid mime style associated

with late nineteenth-century Pierrot performances, a style that was enjoying popularity not only on the pantomime stage but also in such traditions as the *tableau vivant*. Janet's theory of *automatisme*—which prefigured Freud's theory of the unconscious—cleaved the self into the self of conscious awareness and the more “authentic” self—tied to non-rational, instinctive forces—that resides in the space of the subconscious. In their pursuit of gestural honesty, of a mime technique that signified an inner state, mime theorists who called for a return to a Pierrot driven by “instinct” were therefore drawing on the late nineteenth-century understanding of the “authentic” self situated in the subconscious, defined as the space of non-rational and instinctive forces, and thereby supporting an idea of the actor's “animalism.” When Lewes had advocated for the “weighty animalism” of the great actor, he had specified a fluidity of thought and movement: “a fluid interdependence of body and mind, muscle and imagination, including a physique free from muscular tension, rigidity, and superfluity of motion ...” (Roach 184). Similarly, nineteenth-century ideas of sincerity derive in part from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's assertion, expressed in his *Second Discourse*, that the savage is more sincere because of his fundamental connection to himself rather than to society: “The savage lives within himself, the sociable man knows how to live only in the opinion of others, and it is, so to speak, from their judgement alone that he draws the sentiment of his own being” (qtd. in Trilling 62).

Decriers of the *fin de siècle* Pierrot saw in this sentimental figure an attenuation of the robust, lively Pierrot of Deburau's time. Deburau's “popular Pierrot” was



described nostalgically as a naïve, childlike figure who acts out of instinct. This idea of instinct straddles both romantic nostalgia and fear of animality, for this figure is both innocent and murderous, as portrayed in a long article announcing the premiere of his 1896 pantomime *Chand d'habits!* [Clothes merchant], performed by Séverin, in which poet and novelist Catulle Mendès called for a return of the “popular Pierrot”:

We poets have been wrong ... Because Pierrot is as white as Leda's swan, because Pierrot is white like the melancholy pallor of the moon ... we have turned into a poetic, subtle and also perverse Gilles in the style of Watteau, the popular Pierrot, the former miller's apprentice who could not care less about rhymes and who, ingenuously and brutally, with puerile instinct served by virile forces, ignorant of the complexities of refined souls, rushes headlong, without premeditation as without remorse, without science and without conscience, towards every satisfaction, through crime if need be, who jingles in his blood-stained hands the coins of the purse he stole, happy at his good luck, with the funny face of a cat who has stole milk! Or else, he will lie, after the murder, in the bed of the woman he has made into a widow—because that was what it took to get there—caressing her with childishly murderous hands, not more restless than if they had been crushing strawberries! For he is Instinct that wants and does not know. (240-1, qtd. in Jones 202-3)

The description of this “popular Pierrot” as a child (“childishly murderous hands”) is no accident. Writers from the early part of the century who had made Deburau famous—and who had created the Deburau-Pierrot myth from which Mendès draws—had consistently referred to the working class audience members who frequented the Théâtre des Funambules as children. This terminology functioned in part to position the writers as *flâneurs*, literati with sophisticated tastes who were always at one remove from the artists and audiences about whom they wrote. It also functioned to romanticize the figure of the child (connected to the working class audience), who for writers of the era was the emblem of purity, the figure best positioned to gain the most direct knowledge through experience unmediated by excessive thought. If this child engaged in crime (“who jingles in his blood-stained hands the coins of the purse he stole, happy at his good luck ...”) he is redeemed by virtue of his innocence: an “uncomprehending” mind cannot act out of malice.

Mendès’s use of “Instinct” in the passage above similarly draws from the Romantic concept of the child as emblematic of innocence and purity, who has unfettered access to interior emotion (again because his access is unmediated by excessive cerebral activity), and links this figure with the nineteenth-century idea of the non-rational, and through this to the idea of the animal. When Deburau began to draw attention from critics in 1832, critics considered pantomime—since it was based not on language but on gesture—as a more primary expressive medium in which one could not lie; Bernadin de Saint-Pierre described it as “the first language of mankind” (qtd. in

Jones 65). When late nineteenth-century practitioners and critics such as Margueritte yearned for the return of a popular, natural Pierrot, then, the figure they created—and the mime style they adopted in pursuit of these qualities—was not that of *Pierrot-ventre* who, as performed by Kalpestri, was a vestige of street performance from the beginning of the century, and viewed as degrading the increasingly elite and literary art of the mime. Rather, they pursued a Pierrot connected to Romantic ideals of innocence, nature and the child.

The retrospective revaluing of this “natural” figure can be found in texts as late as Rémy’s 1945 *Les Clowns* in his discussion on the circus clown duo the White Clown and the Auguste. The circus clown pair the White Clown and the Auguste could be seen as speaking examples of the silent *Pierrot-cerveau/Pierrot-ventre* types. The White Clown was a whiteface figure who had an authoritative and often cruel air; the Auguste was a low-status buffoon who, despite attempts to look “gentlemanly” in poorly-tailored coat and tails, was too drunk and too stupid to be anything but the butt of the White Clown’s jokes. Rémy argues that the two types were in fact equals:

Le beau dialogue du clown blanc et de l’auguste ne met pas aux prises le supérieur et l’inférieur, le bourreau et sa victime, l’exploitant et l’exploité. Les deux partenaires sont sur un pied d’égalité. Ils sont deux forces égales, deux principes aussi positives l’un que l’autre. Le “blanc” n’est pas plus supérieur à l’auguste que la pensée ne l’est à l’action, ou la sérénité à l’émotion.

[The lovely interaction of the White Clown and the Auguste does not place them in positions of superior and inferior, the executioner and his victim, exploiter and exploited. The two partners are on equal footing. They are two equal forces, two principle figures each as good as the other. The “White” is no more superior to the Auguste than thought is to action, or serenity to emotion.] (*Clowns XVI*)

By equating the White Clown with the mind (thought, serenity) and the Auguste with the body (action, emotion), Rémy taps into the late nineteenth-century French acting mechanist/vitalist debate that revolved around such concepts as dispassion and *sang-froid* on the one hand, and passion, instinct and *la bêtise* on the other. His claim that the two were in fact equals, alongside late nineteenth-century French mime artists’ celebration of Deburau’s *bêtism*, advocating both a “natural”, organic mime style while simultaneously putting forth a minimalist, mechanistic style that appeared to produce a non-organic body, reveals the complex relationship that late nineteenth-century French mime artists had to the value of the “natural” body.

In his 1881 biography *Deburau: histoire du théâtre à quatre sous* [Deburau: four-part history of the theatre], Janin deploys *la bêtisse* in a manner that demarcates appearance and reality, allowing him to both celebrate the quality and distance the ideal mime body from it. Describing the superiority of lower-class theatre (“l’art ignoble”) for its vitality (178-181), Janin contrasts the elite Parisian theatres (“l’art noble”) with lower-class theatre using corporeal language: “Le Théâtre-Français, livide

et hideux, étale son squelette transparent à coté de l'embonpoint du Vaudeville ... “  
[The Théâtre Français, pale and hideous, flaunts its empty skeleton next to the corpulent Vaudeville ... ] (178). This positions the living, vital, corporeal body above the dispassionate, cold one, and is underscored by Janin’s frequent use of the term *la bêtise* in reference to Deburau’s Pierrot. In Janin’s use of the term, however, *bêtise* is a charming outer façade that conceals an inner controlled intelligence: Deburau’s Pierrot is aloof, detached, his *bêtism* a dual identity that allows him to be the clumsy yet witty fool. In his biography of Deburau, a barely-discernible shift occurs: Deburau is still “au niveau de toutes les bêtises de l’époque” [on a level with all the *bêtises* of the time] (68), but, in a move that connects Deburau with the self-image of the Romantic artist, he is *bêtise* only on the outside, in his performances; his interior self is distanced. In the same passage in which he names him *bêtise*, Janin explicitly celebrates Deburau’s *sang-froid*:

Il a remplacé la pétulance par le sang-froid, l’enthousiasme par le bon sens; ce n’est plus le Paillasse qui s’agitait çà et là, sans raison et sans but; c’est un stoïcien renforcé qui se laisse aller machinalement à toutes les impressions du moment, acteur sans passion ...

[He has replaced petulance with *sang-froid*, enthusiasm with good sense; this is no longer the street clown who is tossed here and there, without reason and without purpose; this is a strong stoic who allows himself to

mechanically explore all the impressions of the moment, an actor without passion ... ] (68)

Janin retains here the “impressions” that the *bêtise* performer explores and conveys to the audience, while altering the inner experience of the mime from emotionality (“petulance”, “enthusiasm”, “passion”) to dispassion, coldness, *sang-froid*—his gestures have no bearing on his actual inner state. Janin thus refigures *bêtism* as a performance that only affects the exterior of the body; interiority is protected and relegated to the objective distancing and neutrality of *sang-froid*. This understanding of *sang-froid* permeated late nineteenth-century mime theories, in which the calm, cold and often sinister mind controlled a body that shrank both in scope of movement and in actual on-stage visibility as minimalist mime techniques came to the fore.

***Conclusion: Twentieth-century mime practitioners and the narrative of the nineteenth century***

Energies associated with the “natural” flow through the figure of Pierrot in his manifestation as *Pierrot-ventre* in his corporeal overflowing, his identification with the working class and his gleeful participation in *la bêtise*—all qualities ascribed in the latter part of the century to the early Pierrot of Deburau, an idealization based on nostalgia for an idea of the “natural” linked to childhood and purity. Racial, class and gender-inflected societal anxieties over contamination with the natural, with animality, find their expression in the automaton-like Pierrot, *Pierrot-cerveau*, who as the century wore

on took on more and more mechanized, spectral and sinister features, while simultaneously—as I have argued—engaging in grotesque performance styles such as in Margueritte’s *Pierrot assassin de sa femme* [Pierrot assassin of his wife]. As the end of the century approached, performers and critics alike attempted to shift Pierrot back to an idealized earlier version of the “natural” Pierrot, the “popular Pierrot” of Deburau. This nostalgia paradoxically existed alongside a disgust for the mime techniques of such performers as Kalpestri and an uneasiness with markers of the organic in the performed body of Pierrot; a paradoxical layering that reveals conflicted feelings toward themes of contamination that continually erupted in late nineteenth-century France of the colonial era. These contestations produced a performing body in French mime tradition that was mechanistic in its identification of the body with *automatisme* and musical instruments, expressed through a minimalist gestural style, while simultaneously “natural” in its presumed gestural access to deep emotions and thought.

The Lecoq/Gaulier disagreement that opened this chapter over the mime’s identification with that which is imitated can be situated within the larger narrative of shifting constructions of the performer’s body in French mime, and understood as one site of contestation within a larger tradition around what physical gesture denotes about inner feeling and self. This contestation continued from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries into the 1920’s self-conscious “renaissance” of French mime by practitioners such as Jacques Copeau and Étienne Decroux, whose style can in part be traced to a deliberate narrative of mime theory that they crafted in which they self-

consciously defined their work against that of the late nineteenth century. The conventional narrative of the revival of mime in early twentieth-century Paris draws a sharp distinction between nineteenth- and twentieth-century French mime styles, attributing to the former an artificiality and reliance on literal gestural translations of spoken language in contrast to the more “natural,” “internal” style of the latter—a distinction reminiscent of late nineteenth-century French mime’s practitioners’ views on early nineteenth-century French gestural style. The idea of an interior authentic self demarcated by a false exterior, a dislocation between the mime’s inner self and his outer mask, that developed in late nineteenth-century French mime informed early twentieth-century pantomime techniques which in turn influenced the development of *masque neutre* [neutral mask] pedagogy and clown pedagogy’s positioning of the performer’s body as site of authenticity, each of which is taken up respectively in the following chapters.



**Chapter 3**  
Puppets and Bodies:  
Mechanical versus Natural in French Neutral Mask Training

On a sunny afternoon in the third floor studio classroom of École Philippe Gaulier on the outskirts of Paris, the atmosphere shifted almost imperceptibly. Five students stood in the center of the room with white expressionless masks in their hands, looking confusedly at the grizzled man who sat slumped in a chair at the center of the row of student spectators, cradling his frame drum on his lap. I sat several chairs to the right, brow furrowed, my pen poised above my notebook within which I had just jotted multiple question marks. Philippe Gaulier had just finished his instructions for that afternoon's neutral mask exercise: "Neutral Mask walks forward, sees ocean—when see ocean, big emotion comes in. Neutral Mask picks up stone and throws it into ocean. Surprise, emotion, top emotion, throw."<sup>27</sup>

It was the second day of Gaulier's Neutral Mask workshop, and the confusion evidenced by nearly every student in the class resulted from Gaulier's use of the word "emotion." The previous day, when we had donned the neutral masks for the first time, Gaulier had explained the premise behind the mask in no uncertain terms: "An idiot behind a Neutral Mask is much more abstract."<sup>28</sup> "The Neutral Mask does not have problem. He wakes up, he stand [sic] up, he was not drunk yesterday." This erasure of

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<sup>27</sup> Quotes from the Neutral Mask Workshop at École Philippe Gaulier, both of students and teacher, are taken from my own written notes and are often paraphrased.

<sup>28</sup> Gaulier frequently used the term "idiot" to refer to a person. The term was not meant pejoratively, but as an affectionate reference to the human condition as ultimately expressed through the mask form of Clown, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

individual personality and physical or emotional past is central to the Neutral Mask, a form derived from Jacques Copeau's use of the expressionless *masque noble* [noble mask] as a training device at the École du Vieux Colombier in Paris in the 1920s. By the second day of the workshop, students held tightly to the notion of the Neutral Mask as comprising *lack*: lack of personality, of physical idiosyncrasy, of interiority—certainly of emotion. So when Gaulier said the words “big emotion,” the atmosphere in the room thickened with confusion, a confusion that manifested for the rest of the day in questions posed to the teacher that received no clear response and that evening in conversations on the train back into central Paris. One student had decided to wait a week and ask the question again in hopes of getting a clearer answer. Others believed Gaulier had been asking for a quality of energy rather than emotion. Alex from New Zealand framed the lesson in terms of psychological acting techniques. “It’s the eternal acting question, isn’t it,” he commented as we stepped off the train. “It’s the same question as in Stanislavski: how much do you as the actor actually feel the emotion inside, and how much do you just externally show it?” thus succinctly framing the classroom event within the discourse of Diderot’s paradox of the actor.<sup>29</sup> This framing attempt, however, revealed more about the assumptions Alex was bringing to the workshop about the quandaries of acting than the issues that Neutral Mask pedagogy attempts to address, which focus on linking a “natural” body to “neutrality”, marked by

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<sup>29</sup> Denis Diderot’s famous “paradox of acting” is the duality between the actor’s personality on stage and the role he or she is performing; the seminal question that Diderot poses in his *Le paradoxe sur le comédien* [The paradox of the actor] is whether the actor actually experiences the emotions he/she is representing on stage.

efficiency of movement. Throughout the remaining three weeks of the workshop students struggled to come to grips with this mask form whose apparent lack of organic markers (personality, physical idiosyncrasy, emotion) pointed to mechanization, but which was being taught through a pedagogy that foregrounded a natural body that had become increasingly valued in French mime practice throughout the twentieth century.

This chapter analyses the Neutral Mask as it developed in the twentieth century as a pedagogical tool within Lecoq-derived actor training, focusing on the ways in which this form arose out of a mime practice engaged in attempts to define and articulate both the “mechanized” and “natural” body. It takes as its departure point the November 2007 Neutral Mask Workshop at École Philippe Gaulier, in which I participated as both student and researcher. My methodology, as outlined in the Introduction, weaves between practice-based research and historiography. I work to unravel the intricate and often competing approaches to and understandings of the body that informed specific embodied events within the classroom. These practices can be traced back through the development of twentieth-century acting training, particularly that branch of acting training developed by the mime practitioners of early twentieth-century France including Jacques Copeau, Étienne Decroux, Jean-Louis Barrault, and later Jacques Lecoq. These practitioners were working with and often explicitly against the mime traditions of the nineteenth century, set against the backdrop of the increasing mechanization of the body and, alongside this, shifting cultural values placed upon the “natural” self, as discussed in Chapter 2. By closely examining the moments of

interaction between a specific teacher’s pedagogy and student reception—particularly moments of frustration and struggle—the multiple and often competing understandings of mechanization and “the natural” that inform how bodies act and are understood within a contemporary Neutral Mask classroom become visible, particularly the ways in which the “natural” has become increasingly valued during the twentieth century in actor training generally and Lecoq-based French mime training specifically, a valuing that was both reinscribed and challenged in Gaulier’s workshop as the construction of the “natural” that inform the pedagogy simultaneously positions the body in a way that students tended to interpret as mechanical. In the Gaulier classroom sections I focus particularly on what I term Gaulier’s “pedagogy of disorientation,” a technique that reframed the student/teacher relationship and created a space within which new approaches to movement and the Neutral Mask pedagogical approach to the “natural” body were explored.

Following a brief description of my research site and outline of my chapter structuring that builds on my methodology as detailed in Chapter 1, in this chapter I examine the emergence of a valuing of the “natural” as the interior or innate self in early twentieth-century French mime. I argue that French mime paradoxically retained its hold on the mechanical even as it increasingly valued the idea of the natural body, developing a pedagogy centered around the idea of body as machine. To understand the emergence of this pedagogy I begin with Copeau’s development of the *masque noble* [noble mask] which later became the *masque neutre* [neutral mask] used by

Lecoq. I analyze Copeau's complex relationship to both the mechanical and the natural, and suggest that Copeau's idea of neutrality resonated with both: with mechanism by allowing the performer full control of his body, and with the natural in its emphasis on revealing a more authentic body through stripping away socialized habits of movement. I then return to Gaulier's classroom to look at how neutrality operates within this pedagogical setting, analyzing Gaulier's deployment of a pedagogy of disorientation, which included the practice of a Lecoq-based *via negativa*, in order to strip away habits of thought and movement to help students encounter this unfamiliar embodied practice, and his concept of "beauty" that, I argue, is tied to a loss of self-consciousness that Copeau sought in his *masque noble* work. I link the physical precision of Neutral Mask pedagogy to early twentieth-century ideas of the body as machine and Decroux's development of Copeau's pedagogy into a more explicitly mechanistic style, and complicate this mechanistic approach in Gaulier's classroom by teasing out language of emotionality—specifically of the body revealing authentic emotion or "pleasure." I then analyze the ways in which the body in Gaulier's classroom was privileged over categories of cognition—specifically text and mental image—in this communication of emotion, while the performer is distanced from this emotion through the practice of *le jeu* [the play or the game] which links to "pleasure" and prevents full identification with that being performed. I conclude by suggesting that much of the confusion students experience stemmed from their assumed ideas (and concurrent habits of thought and movement) of emotionality linked to the natural, and the natural linked to the conscious

self, as they encountered an apparently-mechanical—because lacking markers of past or personality—Neutral Mask whose emotionality is located at a distinct remove from the performer’s self. I tie this to an idea of the authentic self lying behind the “mask” of the persona, a theme that I take up in Chapter 4.

### ***Site and structure***

The Neutral Mask workshop at École Philippe Gaulier took place in November 2007. The students in my section of the workshop came from Brazil, Spain, China, England, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Greece and France. Students were generally in their twenties and early thirties and from privileged middle-class backgrounds (a self-selection of this type of training which has both high tuition fees and demands the financial resources to live in Paris during the training). Most students had had previous acting training, and about two-thirds had professional acting experience. The workshop was conducted in English, and students whose first language was English tended to be more vocal in the classroom than students from Brazil, Spain and Greece who had various levels of English proficiency, most likely because of the ease of speaking in one’s first language.<sup>30</sup> The issue of Gaulier’s comprehensibility is addressed in this chapter through my analysis of his “pedagogy of disorientation” which meant that even first-language English speakers were continually confused by his

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<sup>30</sup> In Chapter 4 I examine an instance when a woman from Brazil who had been learning English over eight months of the workshop misunderstood an interaction with Gaulier, which resulted in a derailing of the intended pedagogical outcome of the encounter.

statements which he both delivered in broken English that belied his fluency—a deliberate technique, according to one of Gaulier’s sons who was in the other section of the workshop—and that made his statements intentionally, therefore, obtuse.

As discussed in Chapter 2, late nineteenth-century French mime had a complex and fraught relationship with the “natural” body, a relationship forged within discourses of racial, class-based and gendered impurities. This resulted in mime performances that apparently stripped the body of its organic markers (flushed skin, breathing) through a celebration of a corpse-like appearance of Pierrot and a performance style lauded as *sang-froid* [cold-blooded], while simultaneously revealing a fascination with the body’s visceral interior. Lecoq’s Neutral Mask pedagogy emerged out of an early twentieth-century reaction with and against late nineteenth-century French mime traditions, and has developed within late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century classrooms during a time when the “natural” body has gained in currency. I argue that Neutral Mask is a practice with a complex and apparently-contradictory relationship to the ideology of the “natural” body as it developed in the early twentieth century: simultaneously steeped in early twentieth-century ideas of the natural body as efficient and economical in movement (hallmarks of the “neutrality” pursued by Copeau), yet challenging the idea of the natural as organic by positioning the body as having no past or intentionality, an echo of the late nineteenth-century empty, automaton-like body in French mime discussed in Chapter 2. The students in Gaulier’s Neutral Mask workshop in late 2007 were therefore encountering a mask form that promoted the idea of the natural as that

which lies beneath culturally-imposed physical habits—a concept that resonates with such theories as Peter McLaren’s “enfleshment” / “refleshment” and Augusto Boal’s “disjunctive” embodied techniques, as discussed in Chapter 1—yet that simultaneously challenged ideas of the natural body as one with markers of its own lived history. My central questions in this chapter are: how did students engage with a mask form that promotes both the natural (by stripping the body of its enculturated habits) and mechanization (by stripping the face of expressivity)? What are the implications for how the “natural” is understood in contemporary French mime training, and what does this mean both for the bodies that encounter this training and the ways in which it is deployed?

Due to the multiple intersections between moments in the classroom and the layers of gestural, body and actor training approaches that underlie them, I have structured this chapter by interweaving the practice-based with the historiographic, beginning with a moment in the classroom—when Gaulier confused students by using the word “emotion” to refer to the Neutral Mask—and using that moment and others from the workshop as launching pads both for dipping into early twentieth-century innovations in mime training and for closely examining the dynamics of the workshop itself, both within and outside the actual classroom. While this structuring lacks the clarity of a chronological ordering—either of the story of mime in the twentieth century or of the story of the Neutral Mask Workshop from day one through to the final class—in its looping movements it allows, I hope, for a productive layering of events that



teases out approaches to and understandings of the body that found their way through decades of actor training into a specific contemporary classroom.

***“You have not given your guts”: Interiority’s shift***

The seven bodies onstage jerked and flailed, filling the room with echoing thuds. The low thump of a hand drum sounded above the din marking the end of the exercise, and the students removed their masks, stood up and waited for the verdict. Feedback was characteristically grim; only one student had “a little something, maybe.” The rest, including British student Stephen, were “bad, horrible.” As Gaulier’s pedagogical approach omitted any specific demonstrations or direct references to gestural movement,<sup>31</sup> Stephen asked for clarification:

Stephen: I understand everything I did was bad. But how was my movement?

Gaulier: You have not given your guts. If you don’t give your guts, we say “bad.”

Stephen: But can you ... can you be a bit ...

Gaulier: You have given something *commensurant* [commensurable], and we do not see something beautiful from you. We see *classique* [classical] actor.

A couple of themes jump out in this exchange: Gaulier’s use of “guts” which points to a

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<sup>31</sup> A pedagogical approach commonly referred to as *via negativa*, discussed in Chapter 1 and revisited in greater detail later in this chapter.

shift in the value placed upon the visceral body during the twentieth century in French mime,<sup>32</sup> and his reference to the “*classique* actor” which evoked the idea of traditional, text-based theatre and its corresponding acting training that can prioritize textual meaning over physical spontaneity. His evocation of this perceived dichotomy—with the physical placed in the superior position against the textual—is revealing, pointing to an important shift that occurred in the early twentieth century in the understanding of the “natural” body. This physical/textual dichotomy of course is overly simplistic and rooted in a Cartesian mind/body split; Giovanni Fusetti is one of many practitioners who question this rhetoric, asking “So if one is physical what is the other one?”:

If we analyze the words we see that straight [the non-physical] refers to a linear thinking based on structures and ideas, well expressed by texts.

While physical involves a more fluid and dynamic movement, based on the body, in which movements are not straight but they mostly follow curves and spirals. (Paradox 1-2)

Fusetti’s association of “physical” with fluid, curving movements links the physical with the organic or “natural” body; his association of linear thinking (“well expressed by texts”) with “straight” points to the mechanical. Similarly, in Gaulier’s feedback to Stephen one can discern the opposition of text with physical, of linear with fluid. When

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<sup>32</sup> While at the beginning of the twentieth century performative references to a visceral interior of the mime’s body had been simultaneously shunned and desired as mime practice engaged in a complex working-out of racially-tinged contamination anxieties (as discussed in Chapter 2), in the latter half of the century the “natural” body became more valued; I discuss this further later in this chapter and in the following.

Gaulier told Stephen that his movement is bad because he has not given it his “guts,” he was drawing on an understanding of the natural body (fluid) as set against the mind (linear, mechanical), privileging the former.

This understanding of the natural body’s relationship to the mind can be traced through nineteenth-century reactions to the Enlightenment emphasis on reason and the role of the intellect, or the will, in mastering instinct, *la bêtise*, as discussed in Chapter 2. The first few decades of the twentieth century saw a shift in the value assigned to the latter categories in mime theory and practice, as practitioners increasingly mistrusted intellect and began to privilege the idea of an innate wisdom buried deep inside the body. This was partly due to the increased importance placed on the subconscious as repository of fundamental truths about the self that were not directly accessible to the conscious mind, as constructed by Pierre Janet’s late nineteenth-century theory of *automatisme*, explored in Chapter 2. Freudian psychoanalysis rigorously mapped out this architecture of the self, with the unconscious realm positioned below the surface of conscious reality, capable of spilling through seams and gaps in the supposedly stable ego in the form of physical neuroses.

As Jacques Copeau, Étienne Decroux and Jean-Louis Barrault set themselves to exploring physical training methods of the new mime, this understanding of the dual conscious/unconscious nature of the self became heavily entrenched in France.<sup>33</sup> Both

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<sup>33</sup> In the first few decades of the twentieth century, these mime artists in Paris set themselves to reinvigorate and reinvent the mime form. The form was widely considered to be in serious decline, and fault was largely placed on the gestural system it employed, which was felt by many

the process of psychoanalytic therapy and the physical training for performers developed by these practitioners reinscribed the notion that a deeper, more essential truth lay beneath the rigid outer surface of the persona and physical habits. Despite a self-conscious demarcation between the new mime and the old, however, these artists were fashioning their mime techniques both within and in response to understandings of mechanization and the natural that had been prevalent in the theatre world since Diderot. It was during the early decades of the twentieth century that they came to see the body not just as a machine to be controlled by the will, but also as a sedimentation of socialized habits that distanced the body from its natural state (Roach 218-219). Natural—in forms that had been both celebrated and decried as *bêtisse* in the nineteenth century—became sought after by mime practitioners committed to the reinvention of mime as a twentieth-century art form.

In Chapter 4 I will explore further these themes of the natural self, which intersect with understandings of authenticity, sincerity and spontaneity as they emerged in the context of French mime training in the twentieth century. What is important to note at the beginning of a chapter on the Neutral Mask—a mask form steeped in the mechanization of the body that occurred in the early twentieth century—is the seeming paradox at the heart of early twentieth-century French mime approaches to the body, in which an understanding of the body as machine existed and developed alongside a valuing of the “natural,” “organic” body. What is particularly notable is that these two

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to be both too literal and not naturalistic (Felner 15-21). I explore this issue of gestural systems later in the chapter.

threads—of mechanism and the natural—appear difficult to separate in the case of twentieth-century French mime training; mechanization has maintained its hold within this tradition even as other forms of acting training have moved towards the natural, and has paradoxically incorporated a valuing of the natural into its pedagogy of the body as machine.

***“Paralyzed by a morbid timidity”: Copeau’s masque noble and the freeing of the body***

In 1920 Jacques Copeau opened a school and laboratory for training actors, *Le Théâtre du Vieux Colombier*, built upon principles articulated seven years earlier in a manifesto entitled *Un Essai de Rénovation Dramatique* [An Attempt at Dramatic Renovation]. At the time formal actor training in France existed only in the *Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation* which trained actors for the *Comédie-Française*. Theatre practitioners including Copeau and André Antoine found the training offered by the Conservatoire inadequate to developing the craft of acting; Antoine offers the following description of the Conservatoire’s methods:

Each student received only about ten hours of personal attention a year. ... Then again the teaching is limited to a small number of scenes from classic plays and roles are assigned indifferently to all temperaments. It is possible for a student to work on a single part for three years, and on the strength of that, win the *grand prix*, and be elected to the troupe of the *Comédie-Française*. (Copeau *Texts* 3)

Copeau wished to explore a new kind of pedagogy for actors, one that approached the “instinct” for theatre as fundamental, that sought to strip down the accretion of socialized habits—including the elocution techniques at the core of the Conservatoire’s training—that he believed engendered simplistic acting based on imitation. His belief in craft (*métier*) as technical perfection combined with his desire for “sincerity” in actors. Heavily influenced by Constantin Stanislavski, he wished to develop a system of training that focused on psychological motivation for movement (Felner 39). He began by stripping away stage accoutrements, creating the *tréteau nu* [bare stage] (Felner 37), then turned his focus to the stripping away of impediments to the actor’s body.

One of Copeau’s greatest concerns was the freedom of the actor’s body. In his *Réflexions d’un comédien sur le paradoxe de Diderot* [Reflections of an actor on Diderot’s paradox] (1929), Copeau explores the ways in which the actor finds himself at odds with his own body on stage: “La lutte du sculpteur avec l’argile qu’il modèle n’est rien, si je lui compare les résistances qu’opposent au comédien son corps, son sang, ses membres, sa bouche et tous ses organes” [The sculptor’s struggle with the clay he is modeling is nothing, if I compare it to the resistances to the actor from the oppositions of his body, his blood, his limbs, his mouth and all his organs.<sup>34</sup>] (16) Copeau’s positioning of the viscosity of the body as impediment is revealing in light of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mistrust of the visceral body in French mime. His simultaneous concern with the freeing of this visceral body, however, is evident as

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<sup>34</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all translations in this chapter are mine.

he follows a hypothetical actor preparing a role, initially inspired within his imagination but slowly finding himself impaired by his inability to embody that which his mind dictates—another take on the body-as-machine controlled by the mind/the will discussed in Chapter 2. His response to Diderot’s paradox—a response evoked by Alex’s comment while stepping off a Parisian train nearly a century later—is that the actor *should* feel the emotions he is playing, while acknowledging that frequently this type of sincerity is lost in lieu of mechanical proficiency.

According to Copeau (*Réflexions* 16), his use of masks for pedagogical reasons developed unexpectedly when a student in his class found herself frozen onstage—what Copeau described as a freezing of the blood, or *sang-froid*. Copeau’s choice of language redefines the term that had referred to the quality of detachment so admired in nineteenth-century mime performances. The goal remained that of detachment, but the imagery of the body’s interior had shifted: no longer was the blood to be frozen; rather, the “natural” body was to be released, freed from the constrictions of performing one’s societal role. In his search for techniques with which to free the actor from the kind of self-consciousness that froze the blood and paralyzed the body, Copeau describes stumbling upon a key realization: that if the actor’s face is covered, her body gains more expressive capabilities:

... So, in order to loosen up my people at the School, I masked them.

Immediately I was able to observe a transformation of the young actor.

You understand that the face, for us, is tormenting: the mask saves our

dignity, our freedom. The mask protects the soul from grimaces. Thence, by a series of very explainable consequences, the wearer of the mask acutely feels his possibilities of corporeal expression. It goes so far that, in this manner, I cured a youngster paralysed by a morbid timidity. (*Texts* 51)

Copeau's positioning of "grimaces" as antithetical to dignity and freedom is reminiscent of Georges Wague's stance against the body's grimaces explored in Chapter 2.

Interestingly, however, Copeau here identifies the grimace with the soul rather than the body, a shift in emphasis from external corporeal gestures to an inner state. Copeau's approach to *sang-froid* and the corpse-like body also marks a shift from earlier attitudes: for nineteenth-century French mime artists, as discussed in Chapter 2, *sang-froid* was a positive attribute that indicated a performer's ability to remain detached from full identification with emotion and a corresponding disturbing loss of corporeal control, a construction that informed late nineteenth-century descriptions of Pierrot as corpse-like. Copeau's deployment of *sang-froid* and his language of morbidity, however, position these qualities as impediments to performer's expressive freedom. The "possibilities of corporeal expression" had to begin, for Copeau, from a state of openness marked by lack of motion:

The departure point of expressivity: The state of rest, of calm, of relaxation, of silence, or of simplicity ... This is the first point. An actor must know how to be silent, to listen, to respond, to stay still, to begin an



action, to develop it, and to return to silence and immobility. (*Écrits* 53, qtd. Felner 44)

The image of the silent and immobile actor that Copeau conjures here bears striking similarities to an image described one century earlier by Heinrich von Kleist in his *Über das Marionettentheater* [On the Marionette Theatre] (1810), a work which likely influenced Edward Gordon Craig with whom Copeau had had early contact as he was developing his pedagogy. Kleist structures his essay as a dialogue between the author and a dancer, in which the author explains to the dancer the superiority of marionettes to live dancers in the formers' ability to execute perfect movements from a precise center of gravity: "... such a figure would never be affected. For affectation appears, as you know, when the soul ... located itself at any point other than the center of gravity of the movement." The author's ideal dancers are "dead, pure pendulums...the spirit cannot err where it does not exist" (24). Describing the center of gravity as the marionette's "soul" (23), the author makes of human idiosyncratic consciousness a disorderly force, working against harmony: "... consciousness creates disorder in the natural harmony of men" (24). In an image that Copeau's description of the youngster "paralysed by a morbid timidity" evokes, the author describes his young friend trying unsuccessfully to repeat a spontaneous artistic gesture with foot: "An invisible and inexplicable power like an iron net seemed to seize upon the spontaneity of his bearing" (25). Shifting briefly to the possibilities of mechanical perfection that

reside within organic beings, a bear is put forth as a superior fencer due to his minimalist movements (25-6).

Craig had famously responded to such ideas with a proposal to do away entirely with the fallible human body on stage. The paradox at the heart of such theories—the necessity for full control over the actor’s body in order to achieve the effect of “spontaneity”—gained increasing hold over mechanistic theories of acting in the late nineteenth century, when the push for self-expression gained currency in the wake of Romantic artistic individualism and the rise of psychoanalysis. The somewhat misleading terms “realism” and “naturalism” which have been used to describe late nineteenth-century impulses towards self-expression can be better understood if looked at not as attempts to represent, in Julian Olf’s words, “an optically or psychically authentic state of reality” (492), but as the struggle over the need to reckon with the actor’s ego, the psychic interiority of the performer, as an additional element of stagecraft. Richard Wagner’s call for the *Gesamtkunstwerk* had mandated the subordination of all elements of the *mise en scène* to the overall design. The problem, addressed directly by mechanistic theorists including Craig, was that the unpredictability and instability of the actor’s inner self (and its concomitant expression by the body’s movements) did not allow for the control needed to accomplish this.

Copeau, agreeing with the necessity of a neutral starting point for movement, differed with Craig in that he believed it was possible to develop teaching techniques that would allow a human body to achieve this neutrality. He brought in the sculptor

Albert Marque to help design a *masque noble* [noble mask] (Felner 45). Lecoq's later development of the *masque neutre* [neutral mask] drew on Copeau's *masque noble*, so named because Copeau based its design—and, in part, its function—on the masks worn by eighteenth-century aristocrats who wished to remain anonymous in public. Copeau's *masque noble* served a similar function of providing anonymity, as he wished to free the student from the stultifying effects of personality (Hodge 72).

Reclaiming the eighteenth-century mask tradition of disguising one's societal identity, Copeau created his noble mask based on the Venetian *bauta* mask (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Traditional Venetian bauta mask<sup>35</sup>

The name may have derived from the German *behüten* (to protect), which suits the

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<sup>35</sup> Source: [www.lamanomasks.com](http://www.lamanomasks.com)

function of the mask in covering the face and altering the voice pitch so that the individual identity of the wearer could not be ascertained. The name's derivation may also be found in the German *bau* or *babau*, a German monster used to frighten misbehaving children into obedience: "Se non stai bravo viene il babau e ti porta via ..." ("If you do not behave, the babau will come and take you away ...") (Delpiano), a connotation that evokes the uncanny aspect of an expressionless mask hiding the face of a moving human body.

Copeau foregrounded two functions of the noble mask in his work: the hiding of the face which allowed for freedom of expression, and the playing of the mask itself, which was meant to encourage neutrality—complete balance, a state of physical readiness—in physical bearing. A subtle but important link connects the two: if neutrality is what can be found when the self-consciousness of facial visibility is removed, then neutrality is what is imagined to remain after physical habits that perform one's role in society have been stripped away. This links neutrality with "natural" and "organic," that which exists both prior to and beneath socialized habits of physicality, and which was later to inspire Lecoq's pedagogical use of the Neutral Mask to "permettez d'éprouver l'état de neutralité avant l'action, un état de réceptivité à tout autour de nous, sans le conflit intérieur" ["enable one to experience the state of neutrality prior to action, a state of receptiveness to everything around us, with no inner conflict"] (Lecoq *Corps* 36). In the next section I analyze Gaulier's Neutral Mask workshop, looking at the ways this idea of neutrality was deployed within this particular

pedagogical setting.



*Figure 4: Students working with the Neutral Mask in Gaulier's workshop*

***Gaulier's pedagogy: Via negativa, beauty and pleasure***

On first day of the Neutral Mask workshop I found myself entering an existing community. Most of the students had been working together for a month, having just completed the first workshop in Gaulier's annual progression, *Le Jeu* [Play]. This initial workshop, for which I was not present, was described by students as "difficult," "disorienting," "impossible," "frightening" and, perhaps surprisingly, "fun."<sup>36</sup> Students were thrown up on stage with directions as minimal and vague as "Be funny," and quickly learned that every technique they had brought in with them to please—to please an audience, a teacher, fellow students—did not function as anticipated or

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<sup>36</sup> Student quotes from written classroom notes, November 2007.

intended. Colin, a recently-graduated university theatre major from the U.S., described feeling like he was madly regurgitating every performance technique he had ever been taught, until he was left with “nothing.” And it was this “nothing” that Gaulier was apparently after: Colin recounted the teacher telling a group of exhausted, demoralized students that the point was to move through a “tunnel of failure,” shedding each of their acquired habits until they emerged open and “beautiful.”

This notion of shedding acquired habits is tied to the pedagogical method of *via negativa*, originally articulated by Jerzy Grotowski, which though not explicitly named as such is widely practiced in both the Lecoq and Gaulier schools (Murray Lecoq 49-50). The teacher does not tell the student what to do, does not demonstrate; rather, he or she witnesses the student try various strategies, with feedback limited to variations on “No, that wasn’t it” (often colorfully embellished in Gaulier’s classroom with suggestions for how the audience might like to “kill” the student for his or her “horrible” performance), and an occasional “Yes—beautiful”—likewise with little or no explanation of why. *Via negativa* is rooted in understandings of the physical body as a calcification of acquired habits which have misshapen its “natural” state, an assumption that gained currency during the first few decades of the twentieth century and which has become a staple of contemporary Western acting training. *Via negativa* is then a method that attempts to avoid teaching the student by piling on yet another physical habit or technique; rather, the student’s “truest” self is understood to be located underneath the body of habit, buried beneath layers of what Pierre Bourdieu terms cultural

habitus;<sup>37</sup> therefore accessing this deepest self which can then activate the body in a more natural, “beautiful” way requires the student to do it him- or herself; the teacher can only serve as a witness who guides the minimal amount necessary.<sup>38</sup>

What criteria does the teacher use for determining whether a student’s performance merits a “Yes” or a “No”? In Gaulier’s case, it is “beauty,” a term that he ties to the notions of “true self” and, I would argue, “instinct.” In the Neutral Mask workshop student’s innate beauty was connected to an idea of the “natural” body following its own instincts, set against the intellectualism of the mind. When Ivone attempted to incorporate text into her fire movement during one exercise, her eyes squinted as she spoke, drawing attention to the movements of her facial muscles. Gaulier described her performance as too “academic,” and reiterated the importance of prioritizing “pleasure” in the movement. “Pleasure” and “fun” were linked frequently in feedback to students; when a student “lost the fun” of the movement her movement became “boring.”

This was well illustrated during the animal exercise of the third week. At the end of the second week Gaulier had instructed us to visit the zoo over the weekend and find an animal to observe, which we would explore with movement the following week.

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<sup>37</sup> According to Bourdieu, cultural habitus is "the 'taking in' of values, dispositions, attitudes and behaviour patterns which become part of our daily, apparently individual conduct ... [It is] deeply embodied and not merely a mental and cognitive construction" (qtd. in Webb et al. 37). Bourdieu draws on Eugenio Barba’s concept of “inculturation” as what performers “have absorbed since their birth in the culture and social milieu in which they have grown up. Anthropologists define as inculturation this process of passive sensory-motor absorption of the daily behaviour of a given culture" (Barba & Savarese 1991: 189).

<sup>38</sup> I analyze this idea of the “true self” in more detail in Chapter 4.

Matt's experience on Monday was not atypical: he attempted to exactly replicate the movements of the animal he had chosen—the sea turtle—but this literalism caused him to “lose the movement” when he stood up. He described his frustration in terms that revealed acting techniques based on intellectual control of the body, acting out images one has in one's head:

Matt: I don't know what to do—I have the images in my head, I went to the zoo, it's just how my mind works.

Gaulier: You do the rhythm on the floor, and when you stand up it is absolutely not the same.

Matt: So sometimes the movement is good on the floor?

Gaulier: Yes.

Matt: Is it that the rhythm is too human, and you lose the animal? [This statement pointed towards an idea that he was supposed to literally recreate the animal's movements, to present a realistic animal to the audience.]

Gaulier: It's that you don't have the fun in the animal.

Matt's focus on the “images in [his] head” and how his “mind works” highlights an approach that most students had to representation as an embodied translation of a mental image. Matt's insistence that he went to the zoo underscores this approach: he physically experienced an event that was translated into his mind in the form of a memory, which he was now drawing on in class to translate the image of the animal into



the movements he performed. When Gaulier critiqued his standing-up movement, Matt interpreted this as a failure on his body's part to accurately translate the image of the animal; what Gaulier was after, however, was not the literal accuracy of the movement, but a quality within it: "having fun."

This injunction placed students in the predicament of "having fun" on stage within the structure of a class that made one absolutely terrified to perform, a pedagogical technique that produced a disorientation with implications for self-consciousness reminiscent of Copeau's battle against the self-conscious "freezing of the blood." Each exercise began with Gaulier banging on the hand drum he held, as he sat in a chair in the center of the audience, slumped over, chin nestled in beard, eyes glowering at us from beneath bushy eyebrows, a perpetual frown on his face. This was not the face of encouragement, and it was made clear to us that as soon as he became bored with our performance, he would bang the drum and we were to immediately stop what we were doing. This induced a frantic quality in us as we attempted to engage with each exercise, knowing that we would almost certainly be verbally ripped to shreds once the exercise was over. The anticipation of the drum being hit was almost unbearable; in exercises in which Gaulier's instruction was for us to run on stage one by one and "play" until Gaulier was "bored" with us, students occasionally pre-empted the judgment by running off stage themselves before the drum had been hit.

I had known of Gaulier's reputation, of course, before I arrived at the school; what I was unprepared for was the quality of lightheartedness, warmth and humor that lay

behind it. Laughter almost always accompanied students' displays of terror, and whenever Gaulier began feedback with a long sigh and "Do you think that we love Stephen? That he is most beautiful thing we have ever seen? Or do we take him to a cliff with a very small piece of rope ..." delighted giggles filled the room in response to this hyperbole, and the recipient of the lengthy diatribe more often than not smiled abashedly and nodded in agreement with the pronouncement. My personal experience was shared by most students I spoke with: once I had become accustomed to being "killed" rather than praised, I ceased to care quite so much when I did an exercise badly, found the exaggerated criticisms a bit of a relief because both their frequency and their hyperbolic quality cushioned their impact, and on the one or two occasions that I was praised, felt that I had truly accomplished something. I also became better at discerning when I had performed "beautifully" and when I had been "boring," a distinction that lay in a nebulous quality of self-consciousness: when I was extremely aware of my movements and worked to control them, I fared poorly, whereas when my body seemed to "take over" and lead me through what I perceived as spontaneous movements, the feedback was positive. This detachment from self-consciousness—which could be linked to the self-consciousness that Copeau had noted in his students as a freezing of the blood—was described by one student later in the year as "pleasure":

To me, I think, pleasure was more about being comfortable, and that was something that took a long time to feel. As soon as I started feeling comfortable, I started to have more pleasure. So the two of them kind of

combined. The ease to be on stage, or the desire to stay onstage ... I think it was whenever you stopped thinking about yourself ... whenever your drive is not you, when it's someone else. (Interview 2007)

This notion of focus shifting from oneself to something external was a common one among Gaulier students, and was echoed as well by a former student of Lecoq's, who identified it as the single most useful lesson she learned during her year studying at École Jacques Lecoq.<sup>39</sup> Giving the student an external focus to free him from the constraints of self-consciousness is a pedagogical lineage of Copeau's interactions with the marionette acting theories popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, descended from such theorists as Kleist and Craig. Copeau—who felt strongly that these theories were only valid if actualized by actors in the classroom and on the stage, and who admired Craig yet criticized him for his inability to realize these theories in the actual theatre (*Texts* 16)—along with his followers in the early twentieth-century French mime tradition worked to create pedagogical methods for helping the student lose self-consciousness. At the center of these methods lay the *masque noble*, which Lecoq developed into the *masque neutre*, the neutral mask.

### ***Puppet bodies: Mechanization and neutrality***

The Neutral Mask as positioned in Gaulier's workshop was physically a-temporal, with no bodily past that might influence the body's present moment. On the first day of

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with former student, 2009.

the workshop three students stood up, put the mask on and turned to the audience. Gaulier instructed them to walk downstage to the beat of the drum he held; as they walked he pointed out elements of their physical bearings that were out of alignment: “Nose higher, lower, one millimeter higher, bon.” His use of such highly precise instructions for physicality—“... one millimeter higher ...”—draws on early twentieth-century understandings of the body as machine which influenced the development of Lecoq’s Neutral Mask. The early twentieth-century fascination with the body as machine was most explicitly explored in Russian Constructivism and Meyerhold’s biomechanics. The former repositioned all stage elements including the actor’s body as functional rather than representational, and the latter developed a rich system of physical training that allowed the actor to achieve ultimate control over his body—an expansion of nineteenth-century Will controlling the body-as-automaton. In France these ideas were augmented by an interest in sports pedagogy; Lecoq famously came to theatre from sports, enriching a tradition that was already steeped in physical movement systems derived from explorations of human movement that approached the training of the body functionally, as one would approach the proper and most efficient functioning of a machine’s parts. In his search for a pedagogy of movement that would reinvigorate mime, Copeau was initially heavily influenced by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze’s system of eurhythmics. Dalcroze (1865-1950) developed eurhythmics as a pedagogical system that would train actors in musical rhythm and dance in order to improve their coordination and help them to synchronize movement and speech. Aspects of his philosophy find

later echoes in Lecoq's pedagogical system, such as his belief that each bodily gesture expressed an "inner voice" and that rhythmic movement produced inner emotions (Murray *Lecoq* 165). What led Copeau to later reject Dalcroze's work in favor of Georges Hébert's "natural gymnastics" (a system based on economy of movement) was what eurhythmics tended to become in practice: sequences of uniform exercises that trained performers' bodies to imitate a strict form, rather than the cultivation of individual expressive ability at the heart of Dalcroze's pedagogical theory (Olf 490). This seeming split between theory and practice, however, is complicated when one looks at Dalcroze's theoretical intersections with mechanistic theories of acting, expressed in such statements as "fundamental to all individual training is the discipline of emotion and the practice of reaction" (qtd. in Olf 490) and his expressed desire to "play on this marvelous keyboard which is the muscular and nervous system" (qtd. in Olf 490), a paradox that evokes the marionette theories of Kleist and Craig who wished to achieve "spontaneity" through full control over the actor's body.

Decroux's expansion of Copeau's *masque noble* drew on Craig's marionette theory, as Decroux wished to move away from naturalistic gestural styles towards the abstract. In order to achieve a state of abstraction, the imperfections of the human body had to be minimized. Decroux's system of training was based in the performer achieving absolute control over his body; "involuntary" physical movements, linked in this age of psychoanalysis to the unconscious realm of instinct and emotion, had to be somehow brought under voluntary control. Craig had believed this to be impossible; in "The Actor

and the *Übermarionette*" (1908) he writes:

There has never been an actor who has so trained his body from head to foot that it would answer to the workings of his mind without permitting the emotions even so much as to awaken ... never, never: there never has been an actor who reached such a state of mechanical perfection that his body was absolutely the slave of his mind. (7)

Craig's emphasis on emotions is telling: the mechanical body is marked by lack of emotion; emotions here are the markers of the organic, the "natural" body. Decroux took up the challenge posed by Craig and attempted to create a mime form in which a human performer could encompass the qualities of a marionette. Having masked the mime's face, Decroux developed the *gymnastique dramatique*, a series of exercises intended to give the mime complete mental control over his body: "What I have done is to consider the human body as a keyboard—the keyboard of a piano ... Nothing should happen in the body except what is desired and calculated" (qtd. in Felner 64). His *gymnastique dramatique* focused on the isolation of body parts, following the keyboard analogy of the instrumentalist playing upon discrete keys, and prompting Eric Bentley to comment "In his [Decroux's] presence ... we glimpsed the übermarionette in the process of creation" (187, qtd. in Felner 65). This echoes the identification of the performer's body with musical instruments in late nineteenth-century French mime, as discussed in Chapter 2. This work further developed into *le mime statuaire* form which Decroux contrasted to *le pantomime blanche* of the nineteenth century in its focus on the

expressive qualities of the torso over the gestures of the hands and the face:

The old pantomime is dead; the pantomime as one performed it in days gone by—anecdotal, chatty, burdened by futile traditions, and subordinated to an alphabet, an all too formal code. The mobile statuary mime bears it so little resemblance that it actually constitutes a new art, a modern art. (qtd. in Felner 65)

Ironically the minimalist mime style of the late nineteenth century, that focused gestures in the hands and face, had been developed in response to what practitioners understood as an excessively “formal code” of Delsarte’s gestural system. Decroux here echoes the reasons of late nineteenth-century practitioners for developing a new mime form, while attributing to their new style the same thing they were attempting to reject. Once again the newest mime form is understood as the most expressive, the older form burdened by artificiality.

While Decroux and Copeau intentionally and explicitly set their respective techniques *pantomime statuaire* [statue pantomime] and *jeu physique* [physical play] against the *pantomime blanche* [white pantomime] of the nineteenth century, these new mime forms drew on ideas of *sang-froid* and detachment that had marked the nineteenth century’s tradition, reframing them as “neutrality.” Nineteenth century *sang-froid* had been considered a necessary skill for conveying control over the gesturing body; by maintaining an air of detachment the mime was able to enact successfully the system of gestural language that conveyed specific meaning to the

audience. Early twentieth-century mime practitioners rejected the idea of this type of gestural language, finding it too literal and merely a lesser, silent version of spoken language. Decroux took this reaction against the body miming spoken language to an extreme, attempting to develop a mime form that was completely independent of text, inventing a grammar of the body unconnected to spoken language (Felner 56). They embraced “neutrality” as a state of full physical potential, a perfect balancing of the body from which the mime could enact movements that conveyed meaning. The neutral state itself was not considered to contain meaning, and was tied to the idea of the natural self, the self prior to inculturation.<sup>40</sup> Thus when Lecoq later developed his school’s curriculum, he placed Neutral Mask at the beginning of the mask sequence and Clown at the end, as the red nose was considered the most idiosyncratic and highly personal of the mask forms.

This shift from *sang-froid* to neutrality was indicative of the shift in the implicit value of the “natural” self. When *sang-froid* was practiced to display mastery over instinctive, base, unpredictable and uncontrollable *bêtism*, it reinscribed a mistrust of the natural that was deeply tied to discourses of race, class and gender, as discussed in Chapter 2. Neutrality, by contrast, lionized the “natural state”; practitioners developed extensive training regimes aimed at breaking down the calcified habits of the body in

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<sup>40</sup> I use “inculturation” here as defined by Eugenio Barba, who described it as what performers “have absorbed since their birth in the culture and social milieu in which they have grown up. Anthropologists define as inculturation this process of passive sensory-motor absorption of the daily behaviour of a given culture.” (Barba & Savarese 189). Barba sets this against “acculturation” which is “a secondary ‘colonisation’ of the body, but a deliberate and planned one” (Murray et al *Physical* 140).



order to access the pure, balanced natural state beneath. What is remarkable about both approaches is the effort and discipline applied to, in the first case, controlling the natural state, and in the second case, achieving it. In the first case the natural was understood as self-motivating and excessive, capable of bursting forth at the first sign of weakness in the controlling *sang-froid*. In the second case, the natural is hidden away, nearly inaccessible; the inculturated body with its iron grip on physical movement must be broken down. The view of neutrality as the freeing of the natural, pre-inculturated self was closely tied to two events: the devaluing of text in favor of abstract gesture, and changing understandings of how knowledge was generated.

A key factor in the shift from neutrality as *sang-froid* to neutrality as organic freedom, then, was in the understanding of how knowledge was generated. The marionette theories espoused by Craig and taken up by Decroux left the rational mind at the center of knowledge generation. When Lecoq entered the mime scene in France in 1956, precise movements and absolute control over the body were at the center of mime pedagogy. Marcel Marceau, disciple of Decroux, had created a gestural system that brought to life an invisible world of objects before the spectators' eyes. Lecoq, finding this style of gesture too literal much as Decroux had found *pantomime blanche's* silent language trapped within textual realism, based his pedagogy on the premise that knowledge is generated primarily through the body.<sup>41</sup> Decroux had positioned the body as that which imitates thought: "Everything is permitted in art, provided it is done on

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<sup>41</sup> For detailed accounts of the development of Lecoq's pedagogy, see Lecoq 2000, Murray 2003 and Felner 1985.

purpose. And since in our art [mime], the body of man is the basic material, the body must imitate thought” (Decroux *Paroles* 114, qtd. in Felner 149). Lecoq’s divergence from Decroux on this point altered, slightly but significantly, the way in which each defined neutrality. For Decroux, the neutral body was a disciplined body, from which the mime’s self had successfully dissociated to the point where the body itself was merely an imitation of thought. Lecoq, by positioning thought as a *result* of movement rather than its instigator, merged the body with consciousness. In order to achieve a state of neutrality, or physical freedom, Lecoq’s mime performer played with movement in order to discover physical inculturated habits and shed them, a process that Lecoq describes as an erasure of pre-existing (embodied) knowledge:

Au commencement, il est nécessaire de démystifier tous que nous savons afin de nous mettre dans un état de non-connaissance, un état de franchise et la disponibilité pour la redécouverte de l'élémentaire. Pour maintenant, nous ne voyons plus ce qui nous entoure.

[In the beginning, it is necessary to demystify all that we know in order to put ourselves in a state of non-knowing, a state of openness and availability for the rediscovery of the elemental. For now, we no longer see what surrounds us.] (L'école 41)

In this *mime naturel* [natural mime] the neutral state was no longer a dissociated one, but one of “openness” and “availability.” Thus Lecoq’s Neutral Mask pedagogy began to include physical explorations of the natural world—the elements, animals, colors. The

mind was re-framed as an impediment to knowledge rather than knowledge's source.

Earlier in the century, Decroux was interested in taking gestural expression to its most abstract form. Yet his understanding of neutrality retained the anti-organic, instrumentalist-upon-a-keyboard aspect of late nineteenth-century marionette theory. He believed that in order to achieve a state of neutrality, the performer must use his mind to completely master his body. Interestingly, while spoken text was done away with as too literal and the mime's face and thus his identity were removed through the mask in order to separate the human body from its traditional form, the rational mind remained at the center of knowledge generation for Decroux.

### ***Gaulier and confusion: A pedagogy of disorientation***

The playing of neutrality was initially approached by many students in the Gaulier course as a style of movement that had to be learned, an understandable assumption given the close relationship between the development of the Neutral Mask pedagogy and the use of intensive physical training techniques such as those of Dalcroze and Decroux. During a Day Two bathroom break, a British woman named Anna turned to a group queuing in the ladies room and asked whether any of us knew how we were "supposed" to be moving as the Neutral Mask. "Are we supposed to be graceful? Big? Beautiful? What? I feel like we're supposed to be graceful, like dancers—he seems to like people who look like they're dancers when they move," she explained, then added with a hint of desperation, "But I'm not a dancer, I can't move like that."

This response pointed to Gaulier's establishment of a clear hierarchy in his classroom, in which he was the sole and ultimate arbiter of a student's performance—an example of the marionette paradox of spontaneity through control applied to the teacher/student relationship. Gaulier would often solicit feedback from other students, but usually in the form of such leading questions as "Do you think, when you see Victor jump up and down like a horrible chicken, 'Ah, this is the most beautiful movement I have ever seen, thank you, I have found true beauty now.' Or do you think, 'This is the most horrible jumping I can imagine, I want to kill him?'" Students quickly learned to discern, even when such questions were phrased more ambiguously, what Gaulier wanted them to say; the format of feedback was to create a uniform and powerful judgment, not to discuss the subtleties of what worked and what didn't. Gaulier repeatedly states, in class and in his recent book that his goal as a teacher is not to teach one static method, but to allow each student's individuality to emerge:

Entre Attila et mon enseignement : un océan. Là où l'un passait ; l'herbe ne repoussait pas, là où l'autre pénètre ; des fleurs ou des cactus, ou des orties fleurissent à tous bouts de champs. Et des originaux ! Pas des facsimilés ! Pas des copies ! De l'authentique ! / Quelles différences entre ces anciens étudiants ?...ils sont tous dissemblables et merveilleux dans leur art. / Aucun rouleau compresseur ne les a ratatinés, aucun prof. ne leur a refilé un style comme des apprentis marlous fourguent des photos pornographiques subrepticement, sous le manteau./ Un prof. donne des

libertés. Pas plus. / Et le style ? / Il fleurit sur la poésie de chacun. Ne pas y toucher ! Fragile !

[Between Attila and my teaching: a whole ocean. Where one of them passed, the grass would not grow again. Where the other seeps in, flowers or cacti or nettles flourish in great profusion. And originals! Not facsimiles! Not copies! They are authentic. / What differences are there between these former students?...they are all dissimilar and marvellous in their art. No steamroller has squashed them down. No teacher has fobbed them off with a style the way apprentice pimps sell pornographic photographs, surreptitiously, on the sly. / A teacher gives freedom. Nothing more. / And the style? / It flourishes in the poetry of each individual. Don't touch it! It's fragile!] (*Gégèneur* back cover)<sup>42</sup>

Many Gaulier students would agree wholeheartedly that Gaulier practices what he preaches in this regard; that his pedagogy is ultimately about bringing out the unique beauty of each individual student. The authoritative methods he uses to achieve this, however, frequently spark resistance in students, as I explore further in Chapter 4.

Anna's question was an attempt to understand technique, to grasp the correct style of movement for the Neutral Mask. Hers was not a unique query; one of the common side effects of the *via negativa* pedagogical approach is confusion among

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<sup>42</sup> Gaulier wrote *Le Gégèneur: jeu lumière théâtre/The Tormentor: le jeu light theatre* (2007) in both French and English; the first half of the book is in French, and the second half is his English translation. All subsequent quotes from the book in this chapter include both his French and English versions.

students as to what the teacher wants, what is the “correct” way to perform.

Importantly, *via negativa* is not about an absence of specific technique, an “anything goes” approach. The philosophy behind this approach reflects an explicit engagement with a pedagogical paradox: there is no one “right” technique that can be demonstrated to the student by the teacher, yet there are many “wrong” techniques that the student might attempt. The students in Gaulier’s workshop had figured out that they needed to perform in a certain way in order to garner a rare positive response from the teacher; questions asked between exercises and at the end of class reflected our attempts to piece together the knowledge we needed to perform the “correct” technique.

Questions requesting clarification on a specific criticism were quickly abandoned as a strategy by most of the students once they realized they were unlikely to receive a satisfactory response. After the first day of the workshop when Gaulier continually offered specific feedback on physical technique (“Nose higher, lower, one millimeter, bon”), exercises were conducted in silence apart from the bang on the drum, and post-exercise feedback ranged from “Pam I kill”<sup>43</sup> to “Rachel is beautiful, no?”<sup>44</sup> Most students in the Neutral Mask workshop had been in the prior *Le Jeu* [Play] workshop, the first in the annual series, and had learned the futility of asking Gaulier for specific

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<sup>43</sup> Gaulier’s use of “kill” was meant not in a literal sense, obviously, but as a connotation of absolute dismissal of the performance. When Gaulier said he “killed” someone, he meant that their own individual beauty had not manifested anywhere in the performance; they had drawn merely on convention.

<sup>44</sup> Similarly, his use of “beautiful” was not meant in a conventional sense, but to indicate the visibility of the student’s unique internal beauty in the performance: “An actor is beautiful when he doesn’t hide his soul beneath the personality of his character, when he allows us to perceive, behind the character, the face he had when he was seven” (Gaulier Journal 12).

feedback. Gaulier encouraged questions and always answered them, but did so in a deliberately opaque style, often drawing on metaphorical turns of phrase. The task of untangling his poetic yet confusing phrases was made more arduous by his broken English, which made it difficult to know how specific his terminology was.<sup>45</sup> Having described nearly every student's performance as "horrible," for instance, he responded to Jesse's question "Was my movement bad?" with "The rule of the school is we don't say it was horrible." Did this mean that "horrible" was not a viable term in the school—a point contradicted directly by the word's frequent appearance following an exercise—or was he referring specifically to Jesse's performance? Gaulier's explicit "rule" ("The rule of the school is we don't say it was horrible") contradicted one of his implicit "rules" of the workshop (students were meant to consistently fail). This contradiction itself fuelled another of the implicit "rules": the students were meant to be confused by their exchanges with the teacher. After a confused pause, Jesse made another attempt: "But was it too much water?" which was answered with, "Yes, and too much baby." Jesse gave up questioning. In response to a student's question about why she was "horrible" when she saw the ocean, Gaulier explained, "You need to have violence, with the pleasure to answer the beauty of the ocean." Matt, sitting in the audience, leaned over to Stephen and whispered, "How do you show pleasure with your body?" He had learned that such a specific question about physical technique would not be directly

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<sup>45</sup> Gaulier's use of broken English is widely believed to be deliberately affected, a point confirmed for me by his son Balthazar (who was taking the course at the time I attended), and who described his father's English at home as much more fluent.

answered by Gaulier; the students therefore turned to each other for advice. Gaulier's expressed intention in this strategy was to prevent students from expecting and receiving answers that would intellectually clear up their confusion; his pedagogy was experiential and predicated on disorientation.<sup>46</sup>

A shift in this trend took place on the fifth day when the movement teacher Juan—a current second-year student at Gaulier from Barcelona—ran the mask section of the workshop, and students attempted to break out of the disorienting setup of the class by asking more direct questions. With the scowling Gaulier safely ensconced in a doctor's office miles away, questions that had been whispered between students were asked out loud to the teacher. When, during a review of water, Juan told Sarah “That was thirty-three milliliter bottled water” (a criticism in Gaulier-speak), Sarah responded with, “Okay. So not enough movement?” rather than the mute nod of the head that would have followed the same criticism offered by Gaulier. Juan became aware of the status differential quickly, when Matt explicitly disagreed with his assessment of Ivone's water movement as “a little too artistic.” Matt jumped in (an unimaginable interruption in a Gaulier classroom) with, “But there's nothing wrong with that. It could be artistic, but if it has the movement of water ...” Juan replied, “I am not Philippe, you can disagree with me. But I have the last word.” When Gaulier returned the following day, traces of student questioning that had developed during one class with Juan could still be discerned. Matt, having just been criticized in typically opaque yet unmistakable

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Gaulier, November 2007; the link to “disorientation” is mine.



fashion (“Matt I kill. No problem.”) asked, “Why?” to which he received a response that answered the question without offering a specific physical technique to employ:

“Because the voice doesn’t go *through* your body.”

A similarly untraditional approach to the question-and-answer session can be found in Gaulier’s pedagogical writings. Gaulier’s *Le Gégèneur: jeux lumière théâtre / The Tormentor: le jeu light theatre* (2007) lays out the pedagogy that informs his school, alternating between practical exercises and theoretical passages. The latter are structured as interviews, in which Gaulier splits his voice between himself as teacher and the *Interrogateur*, whose italicized questions mirror those posed by students at the school, both in their searching after clear, logical explanations and in their frequent ability to (mockingly) infuriate the teacher:

J’écoute votre question sans malice aucun.

*Pourquoi, au début de notre entretien, vous avez, bille en tête, embrayé sur le sujet de la tragédie alors que votre école, disons votre enseignement, prélude avec le « jeu » ?*

Interrogateur, encore vous me désarçonnez ! Qui a posé la première question ? Vous ! Quel en avait été le libellé ? Je le répète mot à mot : -  
Quelle définition donnez-vous d’un tragédien ?

[I listen to your question with no ill will.

*Why, at the beginning of our interview, did you immediately get into the subject of tragedy when teaching at your school starts with Le Jeu?*

‘Interrogator’! You throw me off course again. Who asked the first question? You did. How was it phrased? I repeat, word for word, ‘What is your definition of a tragic actor?’] (25 & 189)

These playful exchanges allow Gaulier to theorize his pedagogy within a framework that distances him from the words he uses to explain his methods; his apparent insistence on literal communication (“I repeat, word for word...”) ironically confuses the subject while seeming to insist on clarity. Gaulier is famously suspicious of theorizing his practice (an irony that is not lost on me as I write these words), believing that the drive to analyze “beauty” and “pleasure” by definition excludes the possibility of truly understanding their meanings. This points to a tension that exists not just in Gaulier’s pedagogy but in that of Lecoq as well: the tension between the need for distance that lies at the heart of *le jeu* [the play or the game] on the one hand, and the need to physically enact exercises in order to understand the pedagogy—a concept rooted in Lecoq’s contention that knowledge is generated within the body—on the other.

One of the effects of Gaulier’s use of *via negativa* was a shrinking of physicality during exercises. Most of the students had been previously trained in acting, and brought with them movement techniques that had become habituated and which they therefore easily fell into on stage. These tended towards the slightly heightened physicality that typifies most late twentieth-century stage acting, which is based in a kind of amplified naturalism. It took only a couple of rounds of being told they were “horrible” for students to begin to abandon their learned stage physicalities, which

resulted in a physical tentativeness that typified exercises in the first week. This tendency was simultaneously encouraged by Gaulier's harsh feedback and countered by his exhortations to be "big—like a giant."

Matt, whose most common facial expression in class was a frown and a brow so furrowed that he seemed to be suffering from a chronic headache, had more tension in his performances than anyone else. He was constantly being "killed" by Gaulier, and constantly made an extreme effort to get it "right," looking miserable when he was criticized even as other students had learned to laugh at their critiques, which were nearly always presented as embellished grandiose parodies. His physicality during exercises was marked by slowness and rigidity; I felt as if I could read his thoughts on each muscle movement: "Is this right? Maybe? How about this?" When the exercise would end he would hunch over, brow furrowed, breath shallow, and take in whatever criticism Gaulier leveled at him with apparent confusion and misery. This was in contrast to the post-exercise physicality of most of the students, which tended to be marked by a lower level of tension as students stood slightly slumped, one hip out, hand on hip, feet shuffling, a wry smile on the face, ready to receive the promised lambasting—or, in the rare case of praise, to receive it very, very humbly (Figure 5).



*Figure 5: Students waiting to receive feedback*

Matt's tension found an outlet during "Fire," an exercise that demanded considerable energy and resulted in multiple bruises as our bodies, "playing fire," convulsed on the floor. When Matt's group was up the room resounded with thumps and rattling; Matt's body, lying in a tight fetal position on the floor, alternated between sudden bursts of convulsing and small, muted trembling. Students who were watching appeared impressed—several of them conversed with each other and pointed at Matt. When the exercise was over and the students on stage sat with masks in hand, gasping for breath, Gaulier described Matt as "... generous. Did he give with the fun of fire, or with the revenge—after five weeks 'they will see what they will see.' Very generous, but a bit revenge." This provoked laughter from the group and, unusually, from Matt, who nodded in acknowledgment of his heartfelt attempt to impress the group after weeks of failure.

Matt's level of tension stood out in contrast to the physical performance styles of most other students in the class, who unlike Matt had had previous formal acting training. Late twentieth-century movement training for actors has been marked by an emphasis on "freeing" the body to move spontaneously; many movement exercises are derived from experiments in bodily movement conducted in the 1960's by groups including The Living Theatre which, as Joseph Roach has documented, experimented with freeing the body from socialized codes that restrained movement (218-226). Wilhelm Reich's *The Function of the Orgasm* (1942) heavily influenced such experimentation, positing physical rigidity (or movements characterized by the mechanization style) as symptomatic of neurosis (Roach 219). Reich's work was of great interest to early twentieth-century mime practitioners, who wished to make mime into an autonomous art form based on an expanded range of physical movement. The kind of movement training that many students in Gaulier's workshop had already encountered, therefore, was derived from these early and mid-century techniques that had been developed in an attempt to release the body's musculature from pre-existing socialized habits in order to allow for a greater range of movement. Improvisation, which allows for spontaneity, is at the core of this training; the goal is to let the body follow its own spontaneous movement patterns, with as little interference from the mind as possible. So when students with prior theatrical movement training (including myself) entered Gaulier's classroom, we carried with us physical techniques that were easily activated when told to "play water."

But these techniques didn't work, as we all quickly learned. As I lay on the floor during the first exercise, I felt my limbs "naturally" respond to the idea of moving like water. I have always thought of myself as quite a "watery" person, and as I lay down on the floor and placed the mask over my face I felt a twinge of pride that the first element I would be able to demonstrate to Gaulier would be the one I was so good at. Gaulier had begun the day explaining to us that as we began to explore the movements of various elements and other aspects of the natural world, we would find that some we were good at, some bad. He himself, while a student at Lecoq's school in the 1970s, had apparently been bad at air but good at fire. I knew before we began that water would be my strength. The drum sounded; I waited for a dramatic beat before softly undulating my torso, using my rhythmic breathing as impetus. I moved on to slowly sweeping my arms and legs across the floor in fluid arcs. When the drum sounded indicating it was time to move to a standing position, I allowed gravity to exert its pull on my head, my hips and my upper chest as I slowly swayed upright. I was fully "in the water," and when the drum sounded marking the end of the exercise I removed my mask and waited for the inevitable praise. It never came. Gaulier didn't stop at "I kill Laura." He paused and eyed me closely, then muttered "Horrible. Just horrible." Another pause, a shake of the head, and "Horrible. Thank you goodbye" and the drum sounded the instruction to take our seats.

In Gaulier's class we quickly learned that our techniques of performing the "free," "spontaneous" body were just as habituated as the techniques we had shed in previous

movement classes in order to achieve this freedom. One of the chief effects of Gaulier's hyper-critical pedagogy—accompanied by a near-constant glare as he slumped in his chair, caressing the drum in anticipation of hitting it to mark a student's failure—was to make apparent to us the physical strategies that we brought with us to please a teacher in an acting class, strategies that often had become naturalized through years of corporeal training. When Gaulier describes the pedagogy of Neutral Mask, he focuses on this making-visible of habituated movement patterns:

Le divorce entre les exigences du neutre et les anomalies (ou les singularités) dans lesquelles l'étudiant s'est réfugié saute aux yeux. C'est le masque qui les divulgue.

Il dévoile : les espaces rétrécis, les agressivité, les peurs, les hontes. Le professeur les signalera.

[There is an obvious gap between the demands of the Neutral Mask and the 'abnormalities' (or peculiarities) under which the student has hidden himself [sic]. It is the Mask which reveals these abnormalities. It uncovers the shrunken spaces, the aggressions, the fears and the shame.

The teacher points these things out.] (*Gégèneur* 19 & 183)

Gaulier's statement that the Neutral Mask "divulges" the "anomalies" under which the student has hidden himself points to the shift discussed earlier in the way the body was viewed in the early twentieth century, from a machine that could be controlled—to virtuosic effect—by the mind or the will, to a calcification of socialized habits; to use

Roach's phrase, seeing our bodies "as damaged by the kinds of lives we have lived" (218). What I have termed Gaulier's "pedagogy of disorientation" was an approach to revealing socialized habits that attempted to bypass the habits of learning that many of us had brought with us to the workshop from other actor training experiences (or, in Matt's case, from academic classroom experiences)—habits that had ingrained in us the idea that new ways of engaging with our bodies could be learned analytically, and the classroom hierarchy successfully engaged with through learning how to "please" the teacher by deducing what he was looking for and performing it. Both types of habits—embodied, socialized habits of movements and habits of learning/performing learning in the classroom—were challenged by the movement/text dichotomy that became the focus of much of the workshop.

***Movement and text: Competing approaches***

At the end of the first week, Gaulier asked the students to perform an exercise in which the Neutral Mask wakes up, then "assistants" walked on stage to remove performers' masks. The instruction was to speak or sing a piece of text while continuing the movement. Jean began, after standing up slowly: "Why should I yoke myself nine to five..." His body stopped moving; his sternum sagged slightly. Gaulier banged his drum and barked "No! You are not in the movement." Several other students made similar attempts, and received similar feedback. By the end of the session Gaulier had begun repeating the refrain that would follow us through the remaining weeks of the course:



“Don’t destroy the movement with the text.”

This idea of text destroying movement became a central theme that was discussed by students outside of class, particularly as students struggled to make sense of exactly what this meant. A general consensus eventually emerged that the *rhythms* of text and movement needed to be different; if the text and the body were doing the same rhythm then the body seemed to be merely underscoring the text, which according to Gaulier was “boring for the audience.” Those actors who had previously trained in conservatory settings in England and the United States found this particularly difficult to embody, as traditional movement training in such settings is focused on movement following from and drawing on text. Colin described the movement classes he had taken in his home university’s actor training program, noting that on the first day of class the instructor had told her students “I will teach you to embody your text,” a concept that was anathema to Gaulier. Colin struggled to conceptualize this alternate approach to the movement/text relationship in his online journal:

The actor rises. Slowly. "Neutral." They attempt to suggest nothing.

Drum beat. The actor freezes. The mask is removed. Drum beat. The actor continues moving.

Now, the actor speaks. But the actor does not embody the text. The text is placed on top of the movement. The text follows the impulse of the body and never shapes it.

The actor is focused not on the text but the movement. The actor has the

pleasure to put the text on the movement.

There is no life in the text. The text is text. The life is in the actor ...

There is only life in the actor. And the actor's impulse. The impulse is not the text. The actor puts the text on the impulse.

Colin's dichotomy between text and movement/life/impulse reinscribes a division between the intellect connected to text and the body connected to movement that echoes an early twentieth-century shift in mime practice from gestural codes that replicate language to gesture as a transparent medium for emotion.

When Victor tilted his head downwards during an exercise one afternoon, Gaulier read emotion into the gesture: "Victor, you are too sad—higher." Dave asked, "How can you say we're showing emotion when our faces are behind the mask?" to which Gaulier responded, "We see the body is not having fun, going up, is hesitating, is saying 'Oh, I'm not happy' ... With the quality of your movement we see everything—what you want, what you don't want, when you are happy ..." This shift in emotional expression from verbal and facial to gestural clues—the body "speaks" in Gaulier's quote above—made the students aware of the extent to which gestural codes convey information not only about physical activities (as in the mime work developed in the early 1930s by Decroux and Marcel Marceau), nor do gestural codes merely replace spoken language (as in the *pantomime blanche* of the early to mid nineteenth century), but convey inner states such as emotion as well. In the first part of the nineteenth century *pantomime blanche* had been associated with a gestural system that literally replicated spoken language.

Skilled performers such as Gaspard Debureau had been lauded for their ability to convey specific meaning through their gestures, a trend that grew out of the suppression of spoken text on the stages of non-state theatres by Napoleon II. As discussed in Chapter 2, this style of gesture-as-speech had fallen out of favor by the end of the nineteenth century as emotional expression became increasingly sought after, a phenomenon that was enhanced by the shrinking of theatre spaces and audiences, removing *pantomime blanche* from the large public spectacles that had marked its emergence and placing it within the realm of elite literary theatre art. Decroux, together with Barrault, redefined the question of gesture-as-speech within an anti-realist aesthetic, creating what he called a “grammar of mime” (Felner 56) in which movements were equated with parts of speech. The idea behind this “grammar” was not to mime speech as in the early days of *pantomime blanche*, but rather to tap into an expressive power of the body that Decroux believed realism, and its attendant reliance upon text, concealed. In *Réflexions sur le théâtre* [Reflections on the theatre] (1949) Barrault describes a “sentence of silence”:

I, the *subject*, is made up of the spinal column and the respiratory system. It is the torso. It is oneself. It is the silhouette. It is the *attitude*.

The *verb* is the being in *movement*. It is the very action of the torso.

The complement is created by the limbs. It is *indication*.

This is how my body says a sentence of silence in space: Subject or attitude; verb or movement; complement of indication. (36, qtd. in Felner

56)

These explorations of alternate ways for language to function were increasingly common in the French avant-garde movement. In Zurich Dadaism was engaged in radically reworking the signifying abilities of language, while in Vienna Sigmund Freud was articulating an embodied language of the symptom, and theorists from the Prague Linguistic School worked towards a semiotics of the object, with Jiri Veltrusky exploring the theatrical relationship between man and object (1940). What each of these efforts shares in common with the others is an interest in finding new techniques of language that are not dependent on text, in opening the range of expressive possibilities beyond the spoken word. The difficulties of such an undertaking were visible in Gaulier's classroom as students struggled to make sense of his instructions not to "kill the movement with the text," to find ways of speaking text in which the body's habituated movements which underscore the text were abandoned in favor of a "movement first" approach.

These difficulties extended to the realm of "image," which like text is traditionally associated with mental cognition, and which therefore had to be reconceptualized in a classroom in which the body's movement was prioritized. This struggle was at the center of a class during the second week of the workshop. Matt had asked the first question, as usual, and this time more and more students picked up on it, repeating variants of the inquiry in an attempt to get a coherent answer from the teacher: "So, I picture wind in my head, and act it out?" "You have pleasure in playing the wind." "So

my body imitates the image I have in my head?" "You imagine wind, and you play it."

The questions were persistent because Juan, not Gaulier, was teaching the course that day. The theme referenced by Matt, of mental image and physical movement, had emerged nearly every day of the course in some variant of this question: "Should I act out the image in my head?" Usually the question was posed by Matt; usually Gaulier's answer was some variant on "You take pleasure in the playing of the water/the wind/the earth/the oil/the acid." The "image in the head" was one of a variety of physical elements and objects that Gaulier asked the students to play.

Colin explored this theme in his online blog:

You have to embody the lake / So you do the exercise. / The professor says it is terrible. / He lets you try again ... And then something happens to you. You stop thinking about how to do the exercise and you become aware of the room. You imagine for a moment the size of a lake, its immensity. Your body stops moving so much and feels somehow supported by this imagined size and immensity. / Your mask is removed. / You are told to rise to your feet while maintaining this quality, and speak a text. / So you rise, you speak, and this size it stays with you. And you feel free.

Gaulier explicitly tells students *not* to "embody" an element, insisting that the actor's job is not to become another thing ("or we send you to the mental hospital") but to take pleasure in "pretending" to be that thing. Colin's use of the word "embody" here occurs

because this segment of the blog was written during the first week of the workshop; Gaulier's point had not yet been repeated enough to counteract Colin's previous acting training in which, he explained to me, such a word was commonplace, much as movement was understood as informed by text. Gaulier's focus, however, was on the "pleasure" of the distance between the performer and that which was being performed:

Le MN ... s'amuse à imiter l'eau, à prétendre qu'il est eau.

... Il est préférable de s'amuser à prétendre plutôt qu'à être ...

On n'est jamais ce qu'on regarde. Toujours une pointe d'humour avertit de la supercherie.

[The NM enjoys imitating the water, pretending it is the water

... It is better to enjoy pretending, rather than to 'be' water ...

You are never the thing you look at. A touch of humour always reveals the trickery involved.] (*Gégèneur* 20 & 184)

This is a key difference based on the idea of *le jeu* as aesthetic distance; the Neutral Mask here "enjoys" its representational distance with "a touch of humour" making visible this non-identification with the object of representation.

***Conclusion: Revisiting "emotion"; Le Jeu as aesthetic distance***

The following passage by Gaulier reveals both his alignment with the twentieth-century view of the body as comprised of layers of socialized habits, and his focus on a performative distance marked by an elusive inner quality of "pleasure" or "beauty":

Si le prof corrige, rêvant de changer la personne de fond en comble, il se fourvoie.

Le prof corrige, songeant que peut-être un de ces quatre matins, l'étudiant s'amusera de ses désordres.

Le prof ne change rien, il apprend à faire avec.

Avec quoi ?

Avec l'amusement.

[If the teacher corrects the student, hoping to change the person in his entirety, the teacher is making a big mistake.

The teacher corrects the student hoping that, maybe one of these days, the student will have fun with their 'disorders'.

The teacher doesn't change anything but rather teaches how to use these things.

How?

With enjoyment.] (*Gégèneur* 19 & 183)

Significantly, Gaulier does not propose to do away with these "disorders" through his pedagogical method, but to teach the student to "have fun" with them, to "use" them "with enjoyment." This was part of a focus on performing with "pleasure", displaying "beauty" in the performance, that lay at the core of the workshop. Gaulier frequently used two words to connote the quality of movement he was seeking in us: "beauty" and "pleasure." These quickly became elided with "emotion" as the students spent an end-

of-class question and answer session fixating on this question of what one was supposed to be “feeling”:

Student: Are you supposed to *show* emotion or feel it inside?

Gaulier: You don’t need to show emotion, just have the moment, fixed ...

Emotion is you in front of the audience, but not you with an emotion.

Student: But do you *feel* an emotion?

Gaulier: No. You pretend to feel emotion in front of the audience. You are a magician with your feelings. If you are presenting your emotions, you can’t be free and play.

This idea of “freedom” linked to *le jeu* resonates with the idea of freedom from socialized embodied habits that marked the mime explorations of such practitioners as Copeau in the early twentieth century; Gaulier’s deployment of the concept, however, associates it not with a freedom from particular habits of movement, but a freedom from a supposed injunction to perform “real” emotions on stage. Emotion here is devalued, replaced by an elusive idea of “beauty” which Gaulier interestingly (given his apparent disdain for the intellect in his text/movement dichotomy) located within the head:

Gaulier: If here [points to head] everything is beautiful, you *can’t* change. You can’t ... It’s delicate here [points to head]. If you open, you have to carry on the dream of what you’ve opened ... In your head, something has to be beautiful. Your head has to be full of beauty.



Gaulier's gesture of pointing to the head when he spoke of beauty referred, he later told me in an interview, to his central point of the performer distancing herself from her character; by approaching everything from a perspective of pleasurable detachment, the performer can play with whatever is presented onstage. Yet at this early stage of the workshop, when students—even those who had been present for the *Le Jeu* [Play] workshop—were still struggling to make sense of his central tenets, the action of pointing to the head while making poetic but semi-incoherent statements about beauty served to direct confused students towards a conventional idea of trying to pinpoint the locus of emotion, a confusion illustrated by the story that opened this chapter of students attempting to decipher the question of whether the performer engaged in Neutral Mask practice is meant to “feel” emotion. This focus on the head led to post-class conversations that struggled to make sense of Gaulier's confusing responses, revolving around an increasing certainty that Gaulier meant everything our bodies did to originate in the mind. Rita, a psychologist from Greece, stated with confidence that we were meant to “feel it [emotion] in your brain. You have images of it in your brain, and you give these to the audience.” Rita had linked Gaulier's discussion of beauty in the head with both emotion and images, two concepts with which students struggled, as they seemed to draw attention away from the body.

Gaulier's pedagogical focus on *le jeu* served to emphasize this distinction between mind and body, or the persona of the performer (situated in the mind) and the performed (the body). At the heart of *le jeu*, for Gaulier, is the pleasure one takes in

lying to the audience. This apparent deception is mitigated by a key requirement: the audience must be able to know that the performer is lying, must be able to sense the pleasure the performer takes in this game. During the *Le Jeu* [Play] workshop Gaulier had introduced an exercise that was repeated by Juan in the Neutral Mask workshop (much to the confusion of students such as myself who had not been present for *Le Jeu*): the game of dancing couples. All students stand on the stage, and pick a partner. The teacher pushes “play” on a CD player, music fills the room, and the couples dance together. Whenever anyone becomes “bored” with their partner, they wink at the teacher who stops the music and begins asking individual students, “Was it you who winked?” When I first played this game I was not given the key instruction beforehand that the student who is asked this question is meant to deny that he or she winked, taking great pleasure in the act of denial:

...chacun doit dire à l’autre que ce n’est pas lui qui a cligné de l’œil  
(surtout si c’est lui). Tout le monde s’amuse à mentir.

[...everyone must say to their partner that it wasn’t them who winked  
(especially if it was actually them!). Everyone loves lying.] (Gaulier

*Gégèneur* 37 & 201)

Ignorant of this rule, when Juan (who was running class that day) accused me of winking, I made a heartfelt protest, genuinely trying to reassure my partner, Jesse, that I had not winked, that I was not bored with him, that I had truly been enjoying our dance. Jesse smiled, leaned over and whispered, “You’re supposed to *enjoy* saying that you

didn't wink," which confused me even further. Juan, realizing I wasn't playing the game but was instead responding "earnestly" (a quality humorously ascribed to Americans by the British students in the workshop), turned his attention to another student and I was able to observe the style of performance we were meant to give. She opened her eyes wide, laid her outstretched palm on her chest, shook her head slowly from side to side in exaggerated mock-innocence and said in a sing-song voice, "Me? *No*, Juan, I absolutely did *not* wink! I *love* dancing with Ivone! I *never* would have winked!" This game, I came to learn, illustrated a key point for Gaulier: that actors are always engaged in deception, and that the game, *le jeu*, is to allow the audience to participate in the fun of that perception through a (usually metaphorical) "wink":

Voix des acteurs égale celle des menteurs. Elle en a les inflexions, les modulations, les tonalités qui se perchent un tantinet vers les aigus. Elle n'est pas naturelle pour un rond.

Quand la voix est naturelle ça cloche. Le jeu n'est pas la réalité. Il en est la répétition générale, « pour du faux ».

[Actors' voices equal liars' voices. They have inflections, modulations, tonalities which veer slightly towards the high-pitched. They are not natural.

When the voice is natural it sounds wrong. The game is not reality. It is its dress rehearsal, 'for pretend.'](Gaulier *Gégèneur* 37 & 201)

Once again, Gaulier warns against the collapsing of the distance between performer and

that which is being performed; emotions should not be “real” onstage; the “natural” is “wrong”. When Gaulier responds to a student’s question about whether the actor should actually feel the emotion he or she is playing with a vehement “You do not feel the emotion, you take pleasure in pretending to feel emotion,” a shift can be discerned between early twentieth-century mime practitioners’ quest for sincerity and an embracing, following Roach, of the actor’s “professionalisation of two-facedness” (137). When Lecoq began to conceptualize *le jeu*, the existing rhetoric of “play” was found in Copeau and Meyerhold, who both encouraged an openness to exploration within a theatrical moment (Murray Lecoq 65). Additionally, Bertold Brecht’s concept of *Verfremdungseffekt* had fundamentally challenged prevailing notions of theatrical sincerity, calling into question the actor’s process of identification with the character. The concept of *le jeu* developed by Lecoq and adapted by Gaulier was similar to the *Verfremdungseffekt* in allowing the audience to see the distance between performer and character, but diverged from Brecht’s concept in focusing on the pleasure at the heart of playing.

A common analogy used by both Lecoq and Gaulier is that of the pleasure the child takes in playing, which involves a full commitment to the game, always inflected by a clear distance between the child and what he or she is pretending:

Quand on jouait aux cow-boys et aux Indiens, à d’Artagnan, à la guerre avec les soldats de plomb, *on ne ressentait pas des sentiments*. On s’amusait avec l’histoire, avec les héros, les protagonistes. Tout était filtré

au travers du « jeu » qui laisse passer une réalité déjà transmutée, celle dont on a enlevé le poids des douleurs (« Pour du faux » dit mon fils Samuel en parlant de la réalité avec laquelle il s’amuse et « Pour du vrai » parlant de l’autre).

[When we played at cowboys and Indians, or being d’Artagnan, or had battles with lead soldiers, *we didn’t have feelings*. We enjoyed the story and its heroes and protagonists. Everything was filtered through the ‘Game’ which allowed a transmuted reality to pass, a reality without the weight of sorrows. (‘Not for real,’ my son Samuel would say, when talking about the reality he was having fun with, or “For real”, when talking of the other one).] (Gaulier *Gégèneur* 32 & 196, emphasis added)

Gaulier’s assertion that when playing “we didn’t have feelings” reveals the status of the “we” as the distanced persona of the performer, while the “feelings” are understood to reside in the bodies that performed the characters. In the classroom students’ confusion was rooted in part in their linking of emotionality to the natural that students brought with them to the workshop, which hit up against an apparently-mechanical, because lacking markers of past or personality, Neutral Mask. This mask form seemingly-paradoxically required a distinct separation between performer (identified with cognition, the face and the false persona) and performed (identified with the body and true expressivity). The seeming paradox for most students was that they brought with them ideas of expressivity as expressions of emotions and ideas that emanated from

their conscious idea of themselves—what Pierre Janet, discussed in Chapter 2, called “l’idée du moi” [the idea of me]. In the classroom, the idea of “playing” emotion became a major sticking-point for many of the students, a topic that was revisited frequently throughout the three weeks of the workshop. To Gaulier’s statement “Emotion is you in front of the audience, but not you with an emotion,” a student responded with “But do you *feel* an emotion?” as other students looked on in confusion. Having established the need for distance from feeling an emotion, for taking pleasure in pretending to have the emotion for the audience, another student responded with “But deception is an emotion as well.” Gaulier distinguished between deception and the “pleasure” he was attempting to describe: “Big emotion. But not one for *fun*.” The slippery distinction between the detachment of “fun” that Gaulier taught and deception was articulated through a language of presence: the performer was not to attempt to actively deceive the audience, but to always maintain a detachment that allowed the audience to see the performer’s self underneath the mask of the character, taking pleasure in performing. The difficulties inherent in a pedagogy focused around the performer’s “authentic” presence were foregrounded seven months later in Gaulier’s Clown Workshop in June 2008, when a confused student tried to articulate the difficulties he had been having in “being himself” on stage, asking how he could know he was being himself when his own judgment couldn’t be trusted. His question distilled themes of sincerity, authenticity and the “true self” that permeate clown work and whose roots, like those of mechanization and neutrality, can be traced back through nineteenth- and

early twentieth-century French mime tradition; themes that are taken up in the following chapter.

**Chapter 4**  
Locating the Self:  
Narratives and Practices of Authenticity in French Clown Training<sup>47</sup>

*De belles choses débutent au pays des mauvais.*  
*Beautiful things begin in the land of the bad.*<sup>48</sup>  
Philippe Gaulier (*Gégèneur* 129 & 289)

The drumbeat comes with no warning. Gaulier’s reputation is that of the mean clown, the teacher whose pedagogical techniques involve throwing students up on stage with minimal instructions, glowering at them, and if they fail to be “beautiful,” sending them offstage unceremoniously with the bang of a drum and a gruff “Thank you for that horrible moment. Goodbye.” The four-week Clown workshop is grueling; after the tenth time hearing in elaborate detail how “shit” one’s performance is, accompanied by a suggestion for “how we kill you” (Gaulier’s favorite phrase for conveying disapproval), even the most resilient performer faces—significantly for Gaulier’s pedagogy—a crisis of ego.

This chapter explores clown pedagogy as in dialogue with the idea of the “authentic” or “true” self, taking as its starting point the clown workshop at the École Philippe Gaulier in June 2008 in which I was a participant-researcher.<sup>49</sup> As described in

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<sup>47</sup> An edited version of this chapter will be published in an upcoming edition of the journal *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* (Routledge).

<sup>48</sup> Gaulier wrote *Le Gégèneur: jeux lumière théâtre/The Tormentor: le jeu light theatre* (2007) in both French and English; the first half of the book is in French, and the second half is his English translation. All subsequent quotes from the book in this chapter include both his French and English versions.

<sup>49</sup> The workshop took place at the École Philippe Gaulier in Sceaux, France, for four weeks in June 2008. I attended the workshop both as a participant and as a researcher; my observations are drawn from direct experience in the classroom and interviews with students and Philippe Gaulier.



Chapter 1, I use “authentic” or “true” self to mean the idea of a pre-socialized identity that lies “behind” socialized habits of thought and movement. In Lecoq-based clown training, students are encouraged to “discover” their personal clown, generally identified in the classroom and in writings (including Lecoq 1997, Fusetti 1999 and Gaulier 2007) as the student’s “true” self, positioned against the falsity of socialized habits of thought and movement that perform a persona which obscures the “true” self that lies behind it. Within this training, I argue, a construct of the “authentic self” exists alongside techniques that disrupt conventional notions of stable, linear identity. These techniques—grounded in a strategy of disorientation—relocate consciousness to embodied processes that can be externally read by spectators, and promote a moment-to-moment awareness of the student’s continually-shifting performance. Taking up the ways in which ideas of the authentic self intersected with the French mime tradition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I examine how such notions continue to be revealed within the contemporary clown classroom.<sup>50</sup> Specifically, I look at how the pedagogical language used by Gaulier and the descriptive language of students discursively reinscribe the idea of a stable, unified self, while Gaulier’s descriptions of his pedagogy as well as specific classroom practices simultaneously disrupt it. By juxtaposing and drawing connections between an older mime tradition and a current

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<sup>50</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2: “Philippe Gaulier strongly disavows any connection to the mime tradition; his school is not considered a ‘mime school’, although the mask forms he teaches are drawn from Jacques Lecoq’s pedagogy which was heavily influenced by French mime. The connections I draw between the French mime tradition and Gaulier’s pedagogy are therefore not technical, but ideological” (2).

pedagogical incarnation, I wish to highlight the ways in which the idea of the self has been and continues to be contested, altered and redefined within a specific site of performer training.

In what follows, I first outline the connection of Lecoq-based clown practice with the idea of the “true” or “authentic” self, positioned by Lecoq at the opposite end of the spectrum from the Neutral Mask which lacks personal idiosyncrasy. I then propose that the dominant code in Gaulier’s classroom was the distinction between success and failure, in which Gaulier deliberately structured exercises in the Clown workshop to promote failure, causing students to directly experience the perpetually-failing state of clown. I complicate the connection between clown and the “authentic” self by suggesting that Gaulier’s interest lay not with evoking the student’s inner self, but with encouraging a more nebulous sense of “beauty” or “pleasure”; despite this, however, language of authenticity still crept into the classroom as both students and teacher linked beauty and pleasure with “being oneself”. I then turn to an examination of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mime practices that repositioned the true self as both “beneath” the conscious self, as in Freudian psychoanalysis, and as external to the performer, as in practices that encouraged the performer to validate the sincerity of their performance using mirrors. I argue that Gaulier disrupts the idea of direct access to an inner self through his use of techniques of disorientation produced by constant failure, producing “spontaneous” reactions from students. I return to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French mime practice to interrogate this idea of

spontaneity and its linked conception of sincerity, which in Lecoq-based pedagogy, I argue, is tied to the idea of *le jeu* [the play or the game] and Gaulier's idea of embracing the "flop." This brings me back to the classroom, where I analyze a technique in which students are encouraged to recount their flops in order to make visible their "authentic" selves to spectators. I then analyze the language and embodied movements that surround attempts to articulate this "authentic" self, which reveal a difficulty in clearly locating or describing it. I conclude by suggesting that this "authentic" self is positioned in Gaulier's classroom as not clearly accessible or recognizable, but as negotiated externally in the space between performer and spectator, accessed only in moments of disorientation. I propose that while this positioning of the self does not fully escape logocentrism (as it reinscribes ideas of authenticity), I believe there is a pedagogical value in a momentary disorienting experience of a self outside of clear definitions and recognizable patterns, an experience that resists collapsing the moment into a singular idea of "self."

One important point to note is that Gaulier's portrayal of the authoritarian teacher operated on two levels: the level of the performed role, in which he "played" the role of the terrifyingly strict teacher, often to the delight of the students when he launched into an elaborately ridiculous critique; and the level of "actual" teacher (a tricky distinction, but for the purposes of this argument I mean the ways in which his role functioned as a teacher in the more conventional sense), in which students genuinely looked to him for cues on how to perform and how to respond to others' performances. Often these two

levels overlapped, as, for example, when students quickly learned to agree with Gaulier's assessment of a student's performance, whether it was "beautiful" or "horrible". On the level of the performed role, students were playing bumbling fools in relationship to Gaulier's role of comically-authoritarian teacher. On the level of "actual" teacher, students learned lessons from Gaulier's responses about the nature of vulnerability, beauty, and a successful performance of one's "true self" in Gaulier's pedagogy. This latter level raises the issue of how Gaulier drew distinctions between performances that were "beautiful" and those that were not. Later in this chapter I discuss the confusion that arose among students who initially believe they *were* being beautiful, vulnerable, "themselves" on stage, only to be told otherwise. This leaves open the questions of whether markers of vulnerability (and thereby, in this pedagogy, "authenticity") can be different across geography, gender, ethnicity, and whether these markers can therefore be misread, particularly when the standard for reading them resided in one white French man. The answer, I would argue, to both questions is yes; vulnerability and its correlate authenticity were defined and "read" in particular ways in Gaulier's classroom based on Gaulier's standards, and I do not wish to suggest in this chapter that when students successfully performed these states that they had tapped into a transcendent category of authenticity. Rather, I interrogate the ways in which this particular idea of authenticity emerged within the French mime tradition and was deployed in Gaulier's classroom, and suggest possible positive effects that might arise from such an experience.

### ***Clown: The actor's true self***

On the first day of the Neutral Mask workshop, as discussed in Chapter 3, Philippe Gaulier emphasized the Neutral Mask's lack of physical or personal history: "The Neutral Mask does not have problem. He wakes up, he stand [sic] up, he was not drunk yesterday." The physicality of the Neutral Mask is one of perfect balance, the body precisely aligned, no twisting or slumping to indicate a bodily history. At the opposite end of the spectrum in Lecoq-based pedagogy is Clown: the most personal, idiosyncratic of the mask forms. While Clown is not as readily identifiable as a mask form as its counterparts—Neutral, Larval and Expressive Masks—which cover the entire face, Lecoq considered the small red nose that the student dons "the smallest mask in the world" (Gaulier *Gégèneur* 293), one that allows a high level of vulnerability: "Quand l'acteur entre en scène porteur de son petit nez rouge, son visage présente un état de disponibilité sans défense" [When the actor enters wearing his little red nose, his face presents a state of availability without defense] (Lecoq *Corps* 154).

The point of this vulnerability is to expose what clown teachers including Gaulier and Giovanni Fusetti refer to as the student's "true self" a self that lies "beneath" the layers of persona built up over a lifetime of learning behaviors that help one function as an apparently competent member of society. At the core of this pedagogy is the assertion that everyone is a clown at heart, meaning everyone is constantly in a state of only precariously maintaining the semblance of competence. According to Jacques

Lecoq and clown teachers including Pierre Byland, John Wright, Angela de Castro, Giovanni Fusetti and Philippe Gaulier who continue to practice and develop his clown pedagogy, each person is most lovable when we can see them in their most vulnerable state, the state of clown.

### ***Success and failure in the classroom***

As with my participant-observer research in the Neutral Mask Workshop, for Gaulier's Clown Workshop I focused on the most salient language and movement patterns that emerged within the classroom and in interviews with students, and compiled notes based on observations of the physical behaviors, social interactions and spoken words that most frequently accompanied these codes in order to analyze what was happening in the classroom through physical as well as verbal evidence. The dominant code within the clown workshop was the distinction between success and failure. Gaulier structured his classroom as a parody of a traditional classroom. He played the role of the terrifyingly authoritarian teacher, positioning students as fumbling fools (clowns) continually failing. One irony—intentional, according to Gaulier—was that the students were not performing these roles from a distance, they actually *experienced* themselves as fumbling fools desperately trying to please the teacher. The intensive focus on redefining success and failure in the clown classroom is predicated on Gaulier's belief that traditional classrooms discipline the student's body to perform in a rigidly codified manner, thereby calcifying the persona into a set of

approved behaviors. The act of failure, according to Gaulier, creates a rupture or a break in this persona, revealing the clown—the student’s “true self”—within. Gaulier therefore structures classroom exercises to encourage students to fail as often as possible.

The inevitable paradox that is created by such an approach is that students quickly learn that to succeed in the course they must fail in a way that is pleasing to the teacher. This was a tricky proposition, however, as Gaulier was extremely inconsistent with his expressions of approval, both across behaviors and across students. A student could perform an action during an exercise that would be met with “Ah, beautiful,” only to be told she was “Horrible” the next time she performed the same action. Similarly, rarely did one student consistently receive positive feedback; while one or two students could be said to be “doing well” in the workshop, this was meant generally, and at the first sign of a student becoming overly-confident Gaulier would shoot them down. This was demonstrated powerfully on the final day of the workshop when students were invited to perform either new pieces or pieces they had developed during the workshop. Three women stood up to perform a piece that had met with hilarity and unanimous approval earlier in the week. They ran onto the stage to the introductory music beaming, smiling and leaping. Gaulier immediately stopped them, calling them “horrible girl scouts on crack,” then banged his drum and ordered them to leave the stage. Their despair at not being able to perform the piece they had prepared led to tears, and after two hours of other students performing Gaulier invited them to perform their piece

again, this time through their tears. They were barely able to get through the piece, yet their performance was well-received by both students and teacher, who described their tear-streaked faces as “beautiful.” Gaulier later explained that the students had seemed too confident in their initial attempt; by forcing them to fail in a humiliating way, he had shattered their confident personas and opened them up to performing their vulnerable clowns.

A major shift that occurred during the four weeks of the workshop was the lessening of student questions that involved the following phrases: “ ... supposed to ... ” “you liked”/“you didn’t like”, “was this good”/“was this bad”, “should I have ... ”. These phrases never died out completely, yet increasingly students learned that the appropriate response to Gaulier’s expressed disapproval was a quick nod of the head and silence. For some students, this shift expressed a letting-go of the need to get things right; failure became so routine that it could be shrugged off. For a few students, however, this silence expressed frustration, and was nearly always accompanied by a clenched jaw and labored breathing.

Paradoxically, and perhaps inevitably, there existed a code of behavior within the classroom that was “correct,” a code that students quickly learned. This involved always agreeing with Gaulier’s opinions on other students’ performances, and submitting wholly to his assessment of one’s own performance. Only one opinion existed within the classroom: Gaulier’s. The longer students had been in the school, the more frequently their descriptions of the work was peppered with key Gaulier words such as “beautiful,”



“vulnerable,” “boring” and “horrible.” Students who I interviewed during the clown workshop who had been in the school the entire year used these words the most frequently, and consistently quoted Gaulier even when asked for their own opinions of what happened within the classroom. This was in contrast to students for whom Clown was their first workshop, who focused more on contrasting Gaulier’s methods to other training they had received. The fact that these students were entering a community that had been forming for nine months gave them additional outsider status, as many of the classroom community’s behaviors and words that had become normative were visible to a newcomer, in contrast to the experience of students during the first couple of months of the school year who were all learning the rules together (and therefore this accumulation process was more invisible to those in the midst of it). While Gaulier’s structuring of the classroom around failure disoriented students and forced them to perform their student roles differently, therefore, a new role of “Gaulier student” tended to form over the course of several workshops, indicating a lessening of the disorientation effect. For the clown workshop specifically, however, the idea of the “true self” that was “beautiful” and emerged during moments of extreme vulnerability was a new one even for those students who had been at Gaulier’s school for the entire year, and therefore Gaulier was able to use techniques of disorientation to help students engage with this experience.

### ***Classroom re-structuring***

The central rule in Gaulier's clown classroom is that the clown is one who provokes genuine laughter from the audience. The test of a student's effectiveness on stage is quite simply whether the audience is laughing. One major change that must occur in the classroom in order for students to repeatedly fail at being funny is re-training other students not to give what Fusetti calls laughter that is *sympathique*—laughter meant to encourage a struggling student.<sup>51</sup> This change is particularly difficult, based on my experience and observations, for Americans, whose pedagogical culture tends toward the *sympathique* in which praise and constructive criticism are valued. During a clown workshop in Minneapolis in 2004, Jon Ferguson—a British clown teacher trained in the Lecoq tradition as developed by John Wright—conducted an exercise in which a student leaves the room and the teacher demonstrates, silently, a simple sequence of actions, such as walking upstage, picking up a chair, placing it center stage, and folding his arms. The student is invited back into the room where the other students sit quietly; the point is for the student—now the performer—to enact this exact sequence of events, his only clue being the applause he receives if he is doing the right thing. If he walks upstage towards the chair, the other students applaud; if he turns back downstage before reaching the chair, the applause stops. The point of the exercise is to teach students to attune themselves to the audience's reactions, as the clown always tries to please the audience. During the exercise, it became clear that the students *wanted* the performer to do the right sequence of actions: when he picked up the chair

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<sup>51</sup> From workshop notes: "A Clown's Life" workshop conducted by Giovanni Fusetti in Boulder, CO, October 2007.

at the correct time, the applause was accompanied by soft cheering; when he put it back down in the wrong space, small sad groans filled the room. When he had completed the sequence and folded his arms, the room burst into cheers and applause; when the noise had died down Jon stood quietly for a moment, shook his head, and said “That’s something I love about teaching this work in the States—the audiences are so generous, you *want* each other to succeed. It’s much meaner in England and France.”

While it is perhaps true that in most cases British and French students are accustomed to a less overtly encouraging style of theatrical pedagogy than their U.S. counterparts, the desire to encourage and help out fellow students nevertheless had to be actively suppressed in Gaulier’s classroom, which was composed of students from France, Spain, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, England and the U.S. (the latter contingent was tiny, consisting only of myself and one other American student, a paucity attributed by other students to the difficulty many Americans find in adapting to a harsh pedagogical style such as Gaulier’s). Gaulier achieved this shift through a variety of techniques embedded into the structuring of the workshops, beginning with the daily warm-up game “Balthazar Says,” a variation on “Simon Says” in which Gaulier banged his hand drum and shouted a quick sequence of instructions such as “walk,” “run,” “stop” and “jump” which, if not preceded by “Balthazar says,” qualified the student for corporal punishment (usually having the arm twisted behind the back, the thumb pressed down and the back pinched). Students were encouraged to take pleasure in noticing when their friends had messed up and in “denouncing” them to the teacher;

the denounced student could then only avoid punishment by successfully asking for kisses from other students who, again, were encouraged to take pleasure in denying the request. By the time I joined the workshop in Neutral Mask this game was well-established and marked by laughter, even from students subjected to punishment. Being singled out for punishment became a sign of affection in the classroom, and the mock outrage shown by students denounced by their peers was given the lie by the laughter that almost inevitably accompanied it. Students who joined the workshops later in the year, including myself, quickly learned not to take the game seriously, and that denouncement was a form of expressed affection.

More difficult was suppressing the urge to laugh sympathetically when a student was flailing onstage; sitting silently with a stony face—the mode we were taught to adopt—was excruciating for many of us as tension would build through a student’s failed attempts to please us. Gaulier modeled the role of audience member for us, glaring at students onstage with a slight frown unless they did something that prompted spontaneous laughter (a rare occurrence). Gaulier defined “spontaneous” laughter as uncontrolled laughter, laughter that erupted out of us without premeditation or desire to please the performer. His definition resonates with the late nineteenth-century idea of *automatisme*, particularly the linking of *automatisme* and “truth” as explored in Chapter 2, in which a non-conscious bodily action is taken to be more “authentic” than a conscious one. This extended the lesson of authenticity to spectators as well as performers, as the “correct” performance of a spectator in the classroom was as open

and spontaneous as the vulnerable moments of the performer. Gaulier expected us as spectators to resist performing in habitual ways, specifically laughing strategically in order to support or encourage the person on stage.

### ***Re-framing failure***

Philippe Gaulier's career as a clown teacher began at the École Jacques Lecoq in Paris where he taught between 1976-80, helping to develop the school's clown pedagogy. In his 1997 book *Le Corps poétique: un enseignement de la création théâtrale* [translated by David Bradby in 2000 as *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre*] Jacques Lecoq describes the appearance of clown in his school in the 1960s when he explored the connections between the Commedia dell'Arte and circus clowns. The Medrano circus had closed in 1963, leaving the Cirque d'Hiver the only circus remaining from the nineteenth-century explosion of Parisian circuses (Fusetti Commencement 10). The multiple figures of the "clown" as defined by Tristan Rémy in his seminal 1945 book *Les Clowns* likely influenced Lecoq, particularly the figure of the Auguste—the circus clown figure discussed in Chapter 2 who was frequently paired with the cruel and sinister White Clown, a figure that has visual and persona resonances with the late nineteenth-century murderous Pierrot. The chief marker of the Auguste was his persistent failure to do anything right. Lecoq describes a discovery of the funniness of failure with his students, in which he asked his students to sit in a circle, and one by one to stand up and do something in the style of the circus clown to make the others laugh:

Le résultat fut catastrophique. Nous avions la gorge serrée, l'angoisse au plexus, cela devenait tragique ... ils arrêtaient leur improvisation et allèrent se rasseoir, dépités, confus, gênés. C'est alors, en les voyant dans cet état de faiblesse, que tout le monde se mit à rire, non du personnage qu'ils prétendaient nous présenter mais de la personne elle-même, ainsi mise à nu. Nous avons trouvé !

[The result was catastrophic. Our throats were tight, chests constricted, it was becoming tragic ... they stopped their improvisation and went to sit down, vexed, confused, embarrassed. That was when, seeing them in their state of weakness, everyone started to laugh, not at the personas they had pretended to show us but at the person herself, so exposed. We had found it!] (*Corps* 153)

Lecoq universalizes this discovery by describing the realization made collaboratively by himself and his students that day as the inherent ridiculousness of the human condition: "Nous sommes tous des clowns, nous nous croyons tous beaux, intelligents et forts, alors que nous avons chacun nos faiblesses, notre dérisoire, qui, en s'exprimant, font rire" [We are all clowns, we all believe ourselves to be beautiful, intelligent and strong, while each of us has our weaknesses, things to be derided, which, when we express them, cause laughter] (*Corps* 153). The clown in Lecoq's pedagogy tries to make the audience laugh, fails, and it is paradoxically his failure and his subsequent reaction that provokes laughter. Lecoq understand this failure as representative of the human

condition: we are constantly attempting to succeed in the eyes of others, and never quite making it. In Lecoq-trained clown Robert Rosen's words, the clown is always "in the shit" (Personal correspondence 2007). According to Lecoq, when others see the moment of vulnerability that accompanies failure, they respond with laughter. Lecoq and other clown teachers in his tradition including Gaulier and Giovanni Fusetti attribute this laughter to a recognition of a universal humanity, predicated on the assumption that the moment of vulnerability reveals the performer's true self: "En allant jusqu'au fond de ma propre individualité, je touche l'universalité, où chacun peut se reconnaître" [By going to the root of my true individuality, I touch the universal, where everyone can recognize themselves] (Fusetti Commencement 87).<sup>52</sup> The authentic self, in other words, can be accessed through clown pedagogy, and once accessed is something that spectators will instinctively recognize.

Lecoq's innovation was to make this into a pedagogical method called "clown". The paradox at the heart of this method is found in the juxtaposition of the clown's failure with the structuring of the classroom, in which a student is expected to succeed at learning whatever technique or lesson is being taught. For in order to "succeed" in clown—success that is defined in Lecoq-based clown courses as making the audience laugh—the student must fail repeatedly to make the audience laugh. This repeated failure forces the student to abandon techniques she has acquired to please both spectators and teachers, leaving her with whatever is left after these learned techniques

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<sup>52</sup> Unless specified otherwise, all translations in this chapter are mine.

have failed. This assumption and the practices that surround it lie at the heart of my analysis of Gaulier's clown workshop, in which students frequently understood "whatever is left" as the authentic self.

This focus on the "authentic self" existed in the workshop despite the fact that Gaulier himself is expressly uninterested in the inner self of the student; unlike other Lecoq-based clown teachers including Giovanni Fusetti and Angela de Castro, Gaulier does not emphasize finding one's inner clown.<sup>53</sup> Rather, his pedagogy is focused on the "pleasure" of performing, the "beauty" of the state of vulnerability, and the failure discussed earlier as the central classroom code. Each of these concepts is found in other Lecoq-based pedagogies; Gaulier however gives them more centrality than a search for the inner clown. His techniques, correspondingly, are designed to disorient the student, including using costumes that encourage students to transgress type (Peacock 38). However, language that invoked authenticity frequently crept into the classroom, both from Gaulier—when he praised a student for being "himself" or "herself" on stage—and more frequently from the students, whose post-class discussions nearly always defaulted to an assumption that "being oneself" on stage was the goal of the workshop; indeed, the phrase "being myself" was frequently used interchangeably with "being beautiful" (an expressed aim of Gaulier's pedagogy) in both interviews and discussions.

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<sup>53</sup> Describing his clown pedagogy, Fusetti says, "People can play themselves at the moment that they feel they can play with things that are actually theirs—their bodies, their forms, their perceptions," emphasising the simultaneous distance that is a result of the structure of play; he contrasts this with other types of performance that rely on distinguishing oneself from one's character (Interview 2007)



Gaulier repeatedly positioned beauty in opposition to the practice of acting, deriding a performance with such phrases as “he is horrible actor, no?” This led most students with whom I spoke to interpret beauty as that which remains when the masks of socially learned behavior are stripped away: “When I’m beautiful is when I’m really being myself, not acting or pretending” (Interview with workshop student 2007). This language displays traces of a modernist conception of the “true self” that lies within the body, a self strongly contested in nineteenth-century mime when that which lay beneath the mime’s mask was portrayed as a void, as with the Hanlon-Lees, and yet an instinctive realm marked by *automatisme* that became tied to an idea of the authentic self.<sup>54</sup> This idea gained traction in the early twentieth century as psychoanalysis gained increasing influence, positioning the self deep within the body, accessible only through indirect external symptoms.

***Gesture and interiority: “The mirror is an enemy for the mime ... ”***

The belief in a hidden interiority and its complex relationship to the mask gained strength in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French mime, a tradition that was one of the chief influences on Lecoq. Realism in the theatre of the late nineteenth century rested upon an assumption of representative transparency, in that meaning was directly linked to outer manifestation. “Reflection” is perhaps an apt word for this brand of representation; in the same way that sets, costumes and lighting were configured to

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<sup>54</sup> See Louisa E. Jones (1984) for a detailed account of this iconography.

produce an effect of “everyday reality”, so too were the bodies of actors on the stage choreographed to look visually identical to the everyday, as in the Meiningen Players’ famous crowd scenes.<sup>55</sup> The intersection of psychological realism with this pictorial realism builds a second layer onto the use of the body as representative of meaning: not only was the body strategically placed and choreographed on stage to mirror the everyday, the recognizable meaning of physical movement and gesture, but the style of gesture became smaller and increasingly indicated subtle movements of thought rather than the earlier style of gesture standing in for language, as discussed in Chapter 2.

As they increasingly linked gesture with thought, mime artists also began to shift their rehearsal techniques towards interior methods of self-analysis. In the early twentieth century, the famous French mime Gustave Fréjaville Séverin described why he chose to eschew the use of mirrors as training tools in favor of cerebral process: “The mirror is an enemy for the mime, at least for the mime who thinks ... His mirror should be his mind: his eyes, mask, body should be always in direct contact with his thought” (qtd. in Jones 171). The use of mirrors had long been encouraged for actors. In the eighteenth century the predominant acting method was to strike one of six “attitudes” that conveyed a clear passion (assumed to be universally legible to audiences), holding the tableau for a length of time before quickly transitioning to the next attitude. This reflected a strong connection between acting and fine arts; each passion was given an idealized physical representation that was understood to impress its template upon the

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<sup>55</sup> The Meiningen Players toured Europe between 1874-90, pursuing an aesthetic of pictorial illusionism meant to duplicate reality with great accuracy (Brockett and Hildy 389).

human form. As the passions were considered “universal,” the performer’s body had to achieve a state of “harmony” in order to successfully convey the idealized template. In order to achieve the physical representation of this template, the actor was encouraged to practice meticulously in front of mirrors, a technique that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe later encouraged (Roach 69-71 & 167).

French mime Raoul de Najac’s endorsement of the use of mirrors in his *Souvenirs d’un mime* is differently inflected than Goethe’s, for while the latter was concerned with precision of movement conferred on the actor by an all-controlling director, Najac encouraged the development of individual gesture. For him mirrors were useful not for achieving an ideal physical position through comparing the reflected image against an outwardly-available one (via drawings or directorial description), but for testing the effects of one’s own individual creation. The difference between his technique and Séverin’s, therefore, lay not in the emphasis on outer-directed versus inner model, but in the locus of the performing self in relation to that self which judges the performer’s gestural accuracy, a process that could be called self-awareness. While Séverin’s cognitively-experienced sensations of his body (his performing self) were judged by his thinking mind—“His mirror should be his mind: his eyes, mask, body should be always in direct contact with his thought”—Najac externalized his performing self by placing it onto the reflective surface of the mirror, positioning his judging self as literal spectator. His eye looks outward from the surface of his body to view the two-dimensional image of his performing body on the reflective surface of the mirror. Until the middle of the

nineteenth century, the mimetic technique of copying what one literally sees was dominant among actors, most of whom came from acting families in which the craft was passed down; those new to the theatre had to learn to imitate attitudes and stage positions quickly, as there was very little rehearsal time (Taylor 73). By the late nineteenth century, however, this technique was increasingly connected to an idea of the dissociation of the self, echoes of which can be found in the Gaulier's focus on "pleasure" as a distancing technique that delineates the distinction between performer and performed.

The increasing popularity of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory had refigured the idea of "double consciousness" formulated in Denis Diderot's *Le paradoxe sur le comédien* [The paradox of the actor] by positioning the truest, deepest self in the realm of the only indirectly-accessible unconscious. Diderot's *Paradoxe* had drawn on an eighteenth-century conception of the self versus the mask; the exterior of the body, the mask, could be made by the skillful actor to mimic emotional states while the actor's interior self remained unaffected. His concept of the rational versus the instinctive self is echoed in William Archer's *Masks or Faces?* (1888) in which actors who give way to their emotions on stage in spite of their better judgment are described as "beside themselves" (96). Diderot had connected sensibility with the instability of bodily processes:

La sensibilité, selon la seule acception qu'on ait donnée jusqu'à présent à ce terme, est, ce me semble, cette disposition, compagne de la faiblesse

des organes, suite de la mobilité du diaphragme, de la vivacité de l'imagination, de la délicatesse des nerfs ...

[Sensibility, according to the only acceptable use given to the term, is, it seems to me, that disposition that accompanies the weakness of the organs, follows the movement of the diaphragm, of the liveliness of the imagination, of the delicacy of the nerves ... ] (72)

Having tied sensibility to nature (37), he underscored its specifically irrational aspect: "... cette disposition ... incline ... à perdre la raison, à exagérer, à mépriser, à dédaigner, à n'avoir aucune idée précise du vrai, du bon et du beau, à être injuste, à être fou" [ ... this disposition ... inclines one ... to lose one's mind, to exaggerate, to be contemptuous, to scorn, to have no precise idea of the true, the good and the beautiful, to be unjust, to be insane] (72).

In contrast to Diderot's clear association of mechanical acting with rationality and sentimental acting with the propensity to "lose one's mind," in the late nineteenth century Archer argued that "there is no reason why actors who feel, be they good, bad, or indifferent, should not at the same time have all their wits about them." Addressing Diderot's contention that an actor who interrupts his laughter at a joke in the greenroom to go onstage for a suicide scene could not possibly feel any emotion in his role, Archer ties mechanical acting not just to lack of emotion but to lack of comprehension: "But of these truths we have an obvious explanation, involving no paradox. It is simply that the ruck [disparaging term for 'group'] of middling and bad

actors perform their parts mechanically, not feeling, *not even understanding them ...*" (95, emphasis added). A similar shift occurs in the understanding of "coldness": Diderot lauds the actor Lekain-Ninias for discreetly pushing a dropped diamond offstage with his foot in the midst of a scene in which his character is horror-stricken: "Direz-vous qu'il est mauvais acteur? Je n'en crois rien. Qu'est-ce donc que Lekain-Ninias? C'est un *homme froid* qui ne sent rien, mais qui figure supérieurement la sensibilité" [Do you say that he is a bad actor? I don't believe it. What is, therefore, Lekain-Ninias? He is *a cold man* who feels nothing, but who represents sensibility in a superior way] (64, emphasis added).<sup>56</sup> Archer echoes the use of coldness to denote mechanical acting, though he views it with more caution than Diderot (96 & 115).

In his explicit positioning of self-awareness within the thinking mind, Séverin was reiterating the concept of the "inner model" which had gained hold in late nineteenth-century acting theories. The concept can be traced to Diderot's concept of the "*modèle idéale*" or "*modèle intérieur*,"<sup>57</sup> which referred to the creation of an image within the mind of the artist that he then copies to create a sculpture or painting. In contrast to the

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<sup>56</sup> It is important to distinguish the French definition of *sensibilité*, the ability to be affected by physical impressions, including feelings, from *sentiment*, the faculty of feeling and feelings themselves; this distinction is true in English as well (Roach 99-100). When Diderot ties *sensibilité* to irrationality and Archer ties it to both feeling and cognition, they are not speaking of feelings in and of themselves but of the ability to be affected by feelings. While Walter Herries Pollock translates the last section of the passage above as "...who is without feeling, but who imitates it excellently" (38), I have chosen to retain the term "sensibility" which, while it makes the sentence slightly more clunky, I believe better conveys Diderot's use of the term to indicate an actor imitating a person who has the capacity to be affected by feelings, rather than imitating feelings themselves.

<sup>57</sup> When translated literally as "ideal model" or "type," "*modèle idéale*" conveys Diderot's neoclassical view of art improving on nature; Roach suggests connecting the term to Diderot's later "*modèle intérieur*" since both terms refer to an image in the mind's eye of the artist.

exteriorizing action of the literal mirror, the “inner model” placed the faculty of sight not within the eye (which sees outward from the edges of the body) but within the mind, spatially located in the interior of the body. Instructing artists on the rendering of nude figures in drawings, Diderot writes, “Try to imagine, my friends, that the whole figure is transparent, and to place your eye in the middle ...” (*Essais* 466, qtd. in Roach 126). This spatial shift is tied to a concurrent discourse of authenticity, in which the individual is answerable only to himself, as there exists a negative relation between crafting one’s actions to conform to the opinions of others and being authentic. In theatre this translates into the artist’s reference only to himself or to a transcendent power rather than to the approval of the spectators (Trilling 97). The gaze of spectators upon the surface of the performer’s body has no power to determine or create authenticity—a possible reason behind Séverin’s explicit rejection of the externalizing function of the mirror: “The mirror is an enemy for the mime, at least for the thinking mime ...”.

The shift that occurred in psychology with Freud’s theories of the unconscious and the symptom—which tied the unconscious inextricably to the body—deepened and further layered this understanding of the body as legible locus of interior meaning, for his theory of psychoanalysis ruptured the formerly assumed one-to-one connection between perception and representation. No longer was an embodied gesture a reliably transparent pointer to underlying psychological meaning; the symptom had replaced the mirror as a *symbol* rather than a reflection, and only a new methodology—

psychoanalysis—could unlock its meaning. That the meaning hidden within the unconscious could be made legible within the correct methodology, however, does not negate the severity of the paradigm shift vis-à-vis meaning and the comprehensible subject ushered in by Freud. One need only look to the tenets of nineteenth century realism—particularly its naturalist manifestation—to perceive the disorientation Freud’s theories inaugurated for the stability of the subject. Whereas within naturalism the subject was understood to be transparent and readily legible, once Freud’s psychoanalytic theory took hold the notion of “underlying psychic reality” became unanchored from a one-to-one correspondence of inner reality to outer manifestation. Even within the methodology of psychoanalysis, the process of uncovering unconscious meaning was a long, multifaceted one, as any of Freud’s own narratives in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1914) will attest. The increasing popularity of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory had refigured the idea of “double consciousness” formulated in Diderot’s *Paradoxe* by positioning the truest, deepest self in the realm of the only indirectly-accessible unconscious. Constantin Stanislavski similarly privileged the subconscious over the conscious mind as the “realm where nine-tenths of any genuine creative process takes place” (Legacy 172); his acting techniques including emotion recall (*Actor* 164) are intended to access this realm of true creative process.

Lecoq’s reworking of his pedagogy around a deliberate distancing of the performer from the role, however, foregrounded and privileged the two-facedness of acting; sincerity became linked to the presence of the actor *behind* the mask of the character.



This shift in the language used to describe the archaeology of the self from *underneath* in Freud's "unconscious" to *behind* in Lecoq can likely be attributed to the mask work that forms the foundation of Lecoq's pedagogy: from Neutral Mask through Larval, Expressive and Character masks and finally the Red Nose, the strongest signifier of the performer's identity—her face—is located *behind* the mask, leading to a logical slippage that positions the presence of the performer's "true self" behind the mask of the character she is performing. For Lecoq this presence is detected through spontaneous reactions to external stimuli:

Or le jeu ne peut s'établir qu'en réaction à l'autre. Il faut leur faire comprendre ce phénomène essentiel : réagir, c'est mettre en relief la proposition du monde du dehors. Le monde du dedans se révèle par réaction aux provocations du monde du dehors. Pour jouer, rien ne sert de rechercher en soi sa sensibilité, ses souvenirs, son monde de l'enfance.

[But play cannot occur except through reaction to another. They must understand this essential phenomenon: to react is to place in relief the idea of the outside world. The inner world reveals itself through reactions to the provocations of the outside world. To play, it does no good to search for sensitivities, memories, the world of childhood.] (*Corps* 42)

The key distinction here between Najac's use of mirrors discussed earlier and Lecoq's expressed pedagogical aim is that while in the former the actor himself judges his own

performance, in the latter the performance is fundamentally dependent on the reactions of others. Lecoq's linking of interiority to "the provocations of the world outside" produced pedagogical techniques designed to disrupt the student's habitual reliance on his own sense of interiority, including techniques of disorientation that forced students to focus on the unpredictable reactions of spectators. Gaulier enacted this disruption through techniques of disorientation produced by constant failure, continually linking this state of failure to that of the clown.

### ***Spontaneity and getting the timing wrong***

Gaulier opens his clown workshop with a story. He describes an "idiot" wandering through the streets of Paris towards a bistro where Monsieur Marcel, the "white wolf," sits and dispenses his wisdom to curious seekers. In his book *Le Gégèneur: Jeux Lumière Théâtre/The Tormentor: Le Jeu Light Theatre*, the story is rendered in the first person, Gaulier himself asking Monsieur Marcel for advice on what in real life became one of his most famous clown acts with Pierre Byland in which the duo smashed multiple plates before a live audience. In the story, the idiot/Gaulier informs Monsieur Marcel that he has left traditional theatre and wishes to do a clown routine with a friend, and asks for advice on « une idée de gag qui fera rire le public, à coup sûr » / "a gag that'll make an audience laugh, something sure-fire." Monsieur Marcel advises the aspiring clown to break a plate, as « ça a toujours amuse le public » / "that always makes them happy" (120 & 280). Gaulier's description of the outcome of the show

illustrates a key distinction in clown between performing something funny and being funny because of the *failure* to perform something funny:

J'ai fait le spectacle.

Quand mon ami Pierre Byland et moi avons cassé une assiette, le public n'a pas ri. Quand nous n'avons pas compris pourquoi l'idée géniale de Monsieur Marcel n'a pas fonctionné, il a rigolé jusqu'à s'en éclater la rate. Nous avons pensé : le public n'est pas dans le bon rythme. Nous avons cassé une seconde assiette afin de le mettre dans le bon rythme.

Nouvel échec : nouveaux rires décalés.

Nous avons cassé deux cents assiettes chaque soir afin de mettre le public dans le bon rythme.

Un beau gâchis.

... L'idée d'un numéro de clown est soufflée par un cornichon à une andouille.

Celle-ci tentera d'en faire un fromage.

Le public rit du ridicule et de l'humanité de l'andouille. Peu du gag.

[I did the show.

When my friend and I smashed a plate, the audience didn't laugh. We didn't understand why they didn't laugh at Monsieur Marcel's brilliant idea. This made them laugh uproariously.

'The audience's timing is all wrong,' we thought. So we broke another plate, so they could get their timing right. Another failure. More laughter at the wrong time.

We broke two hundred plates every evening so the audience could get their timing right. A fine mess.

... The idea of a 'clown' routine is transmitted by a nitwit to a numbskull.

The numbskull will try to make a number out of it. The audience laughs at the absurdity and humanity of the numbskull, more than it laughs at the gag.] (120-1 & 280)

The audience's laughter here disrupts the performer's expectations of when laughter is meant to occur in the comic piece, forcing the performer into the state of clown in which performance and audience response cannot be predicted, but must be encountered spontaneously.

At the core of "discovering one's clown" in Gaulier's classes is this idea of spontaneity. Spontaneity in the nineteenth century was linked to the concept of the automatic and through this to Stanislavski's notion of "second nature" as the workings of conditioned reflexes (Roach 162-3). The interior space called the unconscious, which was dubbed as such by Eduard von Hartmann in his *Philosophy of the Unconscious* of 1868, translated into French in 1877 (Roach 179)—became the repository of the instinctive, irrational forces of *bêtism*. Copeau, a great admirer of Stanislavski's, wished to explore pedagogical strategies for re-connecting the actor to his "natural" self, to his

unconscious. Nineteenth-century views of the unconscious as the home of irrational forces, together with Freud's psychoanalytic methods for bypassing the rational ego, carried over into early twentieth century experimentation with helping actors achieve "spontaneity." Spontaneity at this time was and continues to be defined in much the same way as Stanislavski defined "second nature", and was pursued by Lecoq later in the twentieth century.

In order to bypass the actor's rational mind, Lecoq drew on an indirect training method—"par ricochet" (*Corps* 63), which I translate as "indirectly", and which David Bradby has translated as "a sideways approach" (*Body* 53). Lecoq connected this to his early career experience in sports:

En cela, l'enseignement ne fonctionne pas en direct, mais *par ricochet*, comme pour certains entraînements sportifs. Pour faire un bon lanceur de poids il faut le faire courir, pour former un bon judoka, il faut lui faire faire de la musculation. Ce détour est également nécessaire dans le domaine du théâtre.

[In this the teaching does not function directly, but *indirectly*, like in some sports training. To make a good shot putter one must run, to make a good judoka, one must lift weights. This detour is equally necessary in the field of theatre.] (*Corps* 63-4, emphasis added)

Gaulier students also connected this idea of spontaneity to physical processes, frequently describing it by evoking the idea of reflex: as the ability to react to whatever situation is in front of you, without cognitive thought:

It's this idea that you're not to presume anything, not to think about what's going to happen next, and that's quite a hard thing to do when you know what's going to happen next. But just to be open to, to react to exactly what is going on, and what the other actor is giving you, and what the audience wants you to do. (Interview with student 2008)

One student, describing an improvised scene in which the visiting instructor Christine Langdon-Smith had given the two students onstage a distraction—she placed one student in a wheelchair in order to distance them from their learned interpretations of a classical scene—linked their ability to be spontaneous to an idea of freedom: “That was to me one of the most open moments to watch. And it was just this idea that they could have, it felt like they could go anywhere with it, and they were just free, in their own bodies and their own self” (Interview 2008). Freedom is connected here to temporal and spatial presence; being “in the moment” and reacting to what was happening physically in front of them on stage. The rational mind is positioned as a block to spontaneity in its constant attempts to control action based on preconceived ideas.

A link can be drawn here between the view of the rational mind as a repository of preconceived ideas that prescribe action by inhibiting spontaneity, and the twentieth century vitalist view of the body as a calcified set of learned habits that must be

bypassed in order for the actor to achieve physical spontaneity. This is one route to the notion of the “thinking body” that lies at the heart of physical theatre, with the body’s thinking aspect comprising two contrasting strands: the thinking associated with rationality, preconceived ideas and calcified physical habits; and the idea of the body’s innate wisdom, connected to the wisdom of the unconscious. Both of these strands can be linked to an early twentieth-century ideas of sincerity as it was deployed in French mime pedagogy.

### ***A craft grounded in sincerity***

In the early part of the twentieth century, Copeau set himself to articulating a training for actors that would make the actor’s “sincerity” genuine. “Sincerity” was a catch-phrase in early twentieth-century mime theory for a host of concepts connected to the idea of truth: presence, ennoblement, authenticity. Louis Jouvet called for saving actors from their “monstrous egotism, that congestion of sincerity” (qtd. in Gardner 4). In his “Conseils à un jeune élève,” Charles Dullin makes his point starkly: “Insincerity, there’s the poison,” arguing that insincerity leads to *cabotinage*, an affected style of acting that damages the actor’s humanity as it “involves a hardening of the heart and an abandonment of the soul that in the end degrades a man” (qtd. in Gardner 6). This “hardening of the heart” and “abandonment of the soul” evokes the *sang-froid* for which Pierrot performers were so lauded in the nineteenth century, as the highest praise a mime could receive was that he created the appearance of absolute

disengagement from his performance. That the mime practitioners of early twentieth century France were so preoccupied with avoiding this appearance of disengagement, of “renormalizing” the actor so that he could perform with “sincerity,” points not to a new value placed on the actor’s “sincerity”—for this concern over the actor’s profession had been well-established as far back as Shakespeare—but rather an important shift in how interiority was viewed. In the nineteenth century, a mime’s *sang-froid* was evidence of his sincerity, for spectators were able to see the mime as a performer executing his craft with virtuosity; if a tear ran down Charles Deburau’s face during his performance in a Pierrot pantomime, this was evidence not that the performer himself felt sadness, but that he had used his “will” to master his body’s physiological reactions to the point where he could seemingly “spontaneously” produce a tear.

The push towards *métier* [craft] in early twentieth-century French mime was simultaneously a rejection of the *sang-froid* of the nineteenth century and a continuation of the nineteenth century focus on the craft of mime as the mind/will exerting control over the body as machine. Tony Gardner (2008) has documented the ways in which the continuation of these ideas—articulated as the need for training techniques to strip the actor of socialized behaviors—was informed in part by the embracing of neo-classical ideals in France after the first World War, the so-called *Rappel à l’ordre* [Call to order]. Fueled by a rejection of Romantic ideals for their Germanic origins, the *Rappel à l’ordre* joined the influence of the scientific method in encouraging a systematic approach to art, which Charles Edouard Jeanneret expected to



“induce the sensation of mathematical order, and the means of inducing this mathematical order should be sought among universal means” (qtd. in Gardner 6).

Copeau identified rigorous technique as the route to sincerity in acting:

Emotive expression grows out of correct expression. Not only does technique not exclude sensitivity: it authenticates and liberates it. It upholds and protects it. It is thanks to our craft [*métier*] that we are able to let ourselves go, because it is thanks to it that we will be able to find ourselves again. (*Texts* 77)

Copeau had admired and drawn on Stanislavski’s techniques for pursuing “sincerity” and “truth” in the actor’s emotional expression (Felner 39). In order to give the actor techniques for freeing the body from learned habits of expression, Copeau explored various types of movement training, a method meant to “follow the natural development of the instinct for play in the child” (qtd. in Felner 40).

Lecoq made *le jeu* (“play” or “the game”) central to his pedagogy; Gaulier focuses even more strongly on the “pleasure to play.” Gaulier’s focus on *pleasure* continually reminds the performer to remain disengaged from the performance: the actor and character are never one. This means that the performer never actually feels the emotion that he or she is playing, but takes pleasure in *pretending* to feel it. This “pleasure in playing” is at the heart of *le jeu* for Gaulier, and underlies everything he teaches. So, as discussed in Chapter 3, when he asked students to play the Neutral Mask seeing the ocean and having a “big emotion” and received confused responses and questions, he

reiterated his central point that the performer was to take pleasure in playing the big emotion of the Neutral Mask. In this instance the emotion of the mask was to be treated as any other action: a momentary shift out of neutrality into expressivity, just as leaning over to pick up a stone was an upsetting of the neutrality of perfect balance and alignment. Critiques of students' unintentionally expressive postures and movements ("Nose down," "Head up," "You look sad," "He maybe had too much to drink last night") applied to the state of neutrality that preceded expressivity and action. Students had learned from such feedback that expressivity was not wanted, and therefore responded with confusion to the instruction to have a big emotion. Unintentional expressivity in the neutral state came from the student's pre-existing emotional/physical state, whereas the Neutral Mask's emotion at seeing the ocean was a shift out of pre-existing neutrality. These two types of expressivity were conflated, understandably, leading to Alex's comment, cited at the beginning of Chapter 3, about the perennial issue of whether the actor feels the emotion he is playing, when Gaulier's instruction had had nothing to do with what the performer felt. This disengagement from identification with that which is being played is reiterated in Gaulier's Clown pedagogy, with a key difference: in Clown, the disengaged self who takes pleasure in playing is identified with the student's "true" self against the learned persona composed of socialized habits. Gaulier's strategy for breaking these habits is one of disorientation: making the student, who has been socialized to succeed in the classroom by pleasing the teacher, repeatedly fail, or "flop".

### ***The flop and disorientation in Gaulier's pedagogy***

Lecoq embraced the notion of a necessary crisis in the re-construction of the self, putting forth the flop as the core of clown training:

Le clown est celui qui “prend le bide”, qui rate son numéro et, de ce fait, place le spectateur en état de supériorité. Par cet échec, il dévoile sa nature humaine profonde qui nous émeut et nous fait rire.

[The clown is the one who “flops” (lit. “takes the belly”), who misses his turn and, in this way, positions the spectator in a superior state. For this failure, he reveals his profound human nature which moves us and makes us laugh.] (*Corps* 155)

Gaulier frequently referred to “*Monsieur Flop*” during the clown workshop as the clown’s best friend; when the clown senses a flop, she should think to herself “Ah, I sense *Monsieur Flop* is near—I thank you, *Monsieur Flop*, for you will allow me to save the show” (my paraphrase of Gaulier’s in-class description, 2008). The flop is the mistake. In a clown performance before an audience, it is a rehearsed mistake; in the clown classroom, it is genuine—the student truly messes up and faces a moment—often unbearable—of not knowing what to do next. The authoritarian structure of Gaulier’s classroom, as discussed above, facilitated frequent opportunities for flops.

The intensive focus on redefining success and failure in the clown classroom is predicated on the belief that the student’s body is disciplined within traditional

classrooms to perform in a rigidly codified manner, thereby calcifying the persona into a set of approved behaviors. The act of failure, correspondingly, creates a rupture or a break in this persona. Gaulier's classroom is deliberately structured to produce disorientation through ensuring the failure of any pre-existing strategies for pleasing the teacher that a student brings with her. The use of "impossible" exercises (throwing a student onstage and demanding she instantly "be funny"), the drum that could strike, startlingly, at any moment (Figure 6), and the culture of harsh critique were the chief strategies for producing disorientation among students.



*Figure 6: Gaulier ready to hit the drum*

The sudden, often fear-inducing techniques employed by Gaulier links these states of disorientation to what Roger Caillois identifies as vertiginous games:

The last kind of game includes those which are based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stabili

ty of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness. (23)

The shock element of vertiginous games resonates with one student's description of the flop, which she linked to Gaulier's description of the "necessary crisis":

Gaulier talks a lot about the beautiful process, and having this crisis where you're in a tunnel and you don't know what you're doing. He feels, it's his opinion, that you need that, to then come out of that, because that's the time when you really struggle with yourself and figure out what you're doing and why you're doing it. (Interview 2008)

Gaulier describes his pedagogy in physically harsh terms, pitting himself against the habits of performance and persona:

Quand j'enseigne le clown, je boxe : un uppercut dans la gueule du gentil petit personnage, un crochet du droit dans les gencives de la volonté, de la détermination, des résolutions, des volitions, un direct dans l'estomac du comique de bas étage, un crochet du gauche dans le thorax de celui qui se croit drôle avant de l'être, trois swings contre les idées conventionnelles.

[When I teach clown, I box. An uppercut on the face of the nice little character, a right hook in the gums of will, determination, resolution and volition. A smack in the stomach of the cheap comic, a left hook to the

thorax for someone who thinks they're funny before they really are and three pile drivers for conventional ideas.] (130 & 290)

His expressed aim is to dismantle the student's sense of self accrued through imitative habits, forcing her to fall back upon what exists underneath this mask of the persona. While Gaulier does not use language that evokes the "natural" or "pre-inscribed" body, students nevertheless tended to link the idea of successfully following an impulse on stage in the midst of disorientation with being in touch with the "self"—a common elision, as Mark Evans points out, in actor training that focuses on reacting on impulse rather than habitual response (*Movement* 84).

While Gaulier's clown classroom was structured around the idea of failure, his harsh authoritarian demeanor simultaneously structured a space in which students felt compelled to figure out how to succeed in pleasing the teacher. Students quickly learned that there was a right way and a wrong way to fail: if the failure produced laughter, it was correct; if the failure resulted in the sound of a drumbeat followed by Gaulier's muttered "Thank you, goodbye," it was wrong. Gaulier, however, directly challenged this assumption at the end of the third week of the course, when the classroom had been implicitly divided between those who were doing relatively well (a tiny minority) and the remaining students who were increasingly frustrated over their ability to fail correctly. On Friday afternoon at the end of the third week, all forty-three students from the two groups that the class was divided into were gathered together in the classroom studio for the weekly group session. Shoulders were slumped, faces were

pinched, and the general sense was that of dread mixed with increasing despair. Gaulier banged his drum and said, “So. I want a bad student now to get up.” After a brief pause Paula—a thirty-three year old Portuguese Brazilian woman who worked as a professional clown in Brazil and whose English abilities were sparse—sighed, stood up and took centre stage.<sup>58</sup> “Now,” Gaulier instructed, “tell us about your flops, when you have flopped here.”

Paula began to describe the attempts she had made over the past three weeks to be funny, describing the exercise instructions (“We were to come on and save the show because the clowns had been in plane crash”), her attempt to do something funny (“And I came on and danced and presented show”—this accompanied with a slight smile as she recalled the fun she had had in the exercise), and her subsequent failure (“... and no one liked it.”). At moments during her recounting scattered laughter broke out in the room, usually during her transition from describing her efforts into stating that they had failed. Her spirits, along with her shoulders and facial expression, seemed to droop as she carried on recounting her flops, until Gaulier stopped her with a bang of the drum, looked around and asked the room at large, “She is beautiful now, no? She has something,” to which the room at large murmured consent. He then turned to Paula, leaned forward, and said, “Why you not be like this, like you are now? You are yourself—you are beautiful, this woman here is beautiful. Why you do this awful performing, be this horrible actress, instead of this beautiful woman?” Paula began crying, shook her

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<sup>58</sup> All student names have been changed.

head, and murmured “I don’t know.” He asked her whether she had heard the audience’s laughter as she recounted her flops; when she shook her head, he said, “They laughed because this is beautiful. This here is you,” reinscribing the idea that beauty is tied to the emergence of the “true” self before spectators, and simultaneously linking the true self with expressions of confusion and sadness.

Paula’s approach to clowning in the workshop had been influenced by her existing career as a clown in Brazil performing mainly for children, both in theatrical settings and in hospitals through the organization “Doutores da Alegria” [Doctors of Joy] in Sao Paolo. The clowning style that she had developed was physically broad and expressive, marked by exaggerated gestures and facial expressions. In the hospital setting, according to Paula, the clown performs the roles of joyful playmates for the hospitalized children, encouraging them to laugh at the clown’s silliness and join in games that are meant to distract them from the rather grim setting of the hospital and the presence of illness and injury. Paula describes the core of this approach as a belief that the human heart is a site of creativity and joy; the clown aims to visibly embody these qualities.

For Paula as a Brazilian hospital clown, therefore, “beauty” lay in large physical gestures and deliberate expressions of joy and wonder. Gaulier’s definition of “beauty”, in marked contrast to this, was rooted in an idea of openness marked by physical minimalism and cognitive confusion. His praise of Paula during the “describe your flop” exercise focused on her lack of large gestures and facial expressions, and far from



expressions of joy, he only described her as “beautiful” when she began to look confused and dispirited, his praise heightening as she began to cry. This encounter tapped into one of the contradictions at play in the workshop: the role of emotional expression on and through the body. Gaulier’s disparagement of certain markers of the unruly body including exaggerated gestures and facial expressions revealed the French mime tradition’s shrinking of the body as site of expressivity and mistrust of overt emotional markers, markers that Paula’s body displayed. The centrality of an idea of pleasure defined as an “openness” predicated on lack of muscular tension came into conflict, in that moment, with an approach to the joy of clowning that privileged visible displays of emotion on the body. The minimalism associated with the state of clown in the French Lecoq tradition not only points to a mistrust of the conscious self, but of the excessive, unruly body—an early twenty-first-century manifestation of the late nineteenth-century contamination anxieties analyzed in Chapter 2. When Paula was on stage in the workshop, her body moved in large, sweeping gestures: head high, chest out, hips swaying as she smiled broadly and laughed and winked at the audience. This, according to Paula, was her interpretation of the clown’s joy, which she identified as the “pleasure” that Gaulier endorsed. Gaulier’s reading of this level of bodily expressivity was as inauthentic display, as excessive effort that he described as repellant to an audience.

His praise of involuntary crying, however—and this praise was repeated throughout the workshop whenever a student cried on stage—privileged an idea of

authentic emotion that evoked the concept of *automatisme* as involuntary movements produced subconsciously. This latter concept of authenticity reveals a mistrust of the conscious self (what Janet termed “l’idée du moi”, as discussed in Chapter 2) that represents emotions onstage. Gaulier interpreted large expressive gestures such as Paula’s as rooted in the conscious self, in an “idea” rather than an involuntary emotional reality. He interpreted crying on stage, conversely, as a spontaneous eruption of the authentic self (echoing Janet’s idea of the subconscious) that was more real and therefore more “beautiful” than deliberate, conscious displays of emotionality.

When I spoke to Paula later about her experience in the exercise, she expressed conflicting feelings and ideas over what had occurred. Immediately after the class finished, she was still in tears, and ascribed her inability to “hear” the laughter to a translation issue: when she had arrived in Paris from Brazil nine months previously, she was barely able to speak English at all; throughout the year she had been struggling with Gaulier’s heavily-accented English. Maria, a young woman from Greece, sat with Paula as she cried in the dressing room and repeatedly invoked the lesson at the center of Gaulier’s clown pedagogy: “You are beautiful now, you are really yourself. See, this Paula, here, being vulnerable, is so beautiful. That’s what we love to see on stage.” Paula nodded in apparent agreement as Maria spoke, but simultaneously countered what she was saying by returning to the issue of translation: “He asks me to do things and I don’t know what he’s said, and how am I supposed to do the exercise if I can’t understand?” On a surface level this could be said to point to Gaulier’s use of

disorientation as a specific tactic, yet Paula's genuine difficulty in understanding Gaulier's instructions and feedback removed her interaction with him from the frame of the clown classroom that he had set up, as this framing relied on students understanding the process and becoming disoriented *within* it. Paula had experienced an authoritarian classroom in which there was no distancing from the performance that made it a parody; despite Gaulier's insistence that she had been "beautiful" when she cried on stage, her vulnerability in that moment existed as a genuine breakdown of communication between teacher and student, not a moment of disorientation produced through Gaulier's intended pedagogical strategy. This latter type of engagement required a level of understanding of the classroom framing that allowed the student to function within her intended role.

After Paula returned to her seat, an English student named David—who earlier in the day had asked how he could know that he was being himself, when "I *think* I'm being real, and being myself, but apparently I'm not, because I'm not beautiful"—stood up and shuffled to center stage. He smiled somewhat sheepishly and began describing his flops: "Right—well, during the first week we did this exercise and I thought it would be a brilliant idea ..." He laid out a litany of failure, his normal self-assured, somewhat cocky demeanor replaced by the physical cues of confusion: complexion pale, brows slightly furrowed, shoulders slumped. Describing a moment in class when he had been confident that his idea would be greeted with laughter, he briefly characterized himself performing a ridiculous grimace, smiled and chuckled briefly at the humor *he* had found

in the performance, then sank back into his look of confusion as he remembered that no one else had laughed. This confused look was marked by a softening of the facial muscles: his jaw dropped very slightly, his cheek muscles which had contracted when he smiled relaxed, also resulting in his eyes opening wider.

The audience laughed, a small chuckle. David, who appeared about to continue his story, paused, surprised: his eyebrows raised slightly, opening his eyes further. This resulted in a louder laugh from the audience; the more confused and surprised David appeared, the more we laughed. The laughter stopped quite suddenly when he “struck a pose,” lifting his sternum, clenching his fist and contracting his facial muscles into a fixed smile. This was described later by several students as him falling back into his “cocky” demeanor, and the room was silent until the lack of laughter confused him further, prompting another relaxation of the muscles. “You looked so sad and vulnerable,” one student commented to him after class. This moment—experienced by only a few students in the workshop—is described as “finding one’s clown,” the moment of complete openness and vulnerability brought about through the failure to please the audience, an effect heightened when the performer had been so confident in his performing abilities that the failure is that much more disorienting. This process links the “untrue” or “false” self to the habitually performed persona, linking it to French mime theories of the early twentieth century that identified the “true” self with the body’s ability to break free of socially-conditioned habits of movement and to an idea of sincerity as that which lies behind the mask of the character performed. However,

Gaulier's technique of disorienting the student in order to reveal a self behind the student's own persona takes this idea of sincerity one step further, identifying the student's habitually-performed persona with the mask of a character. So the self who takes pleasure in performing, marked by a dissociation of the performer from character, is a self distanced not only from the character performed, but from the performer's own idea of who she is behind the mask. That spectators only catch a glimpse of this "true" self when the performer is in an open, vulnerable state of disorientation produced through failure makes this "true" self difficult to identify or define outside of a vague sense of openness and what Gaulier calls "beauty", as any clear definition would become yet another component of a socially-constructed persona. I discuss this vague sense of openness, and students' attempts to articulate it, in the following section.

### ***The beautiful/true self***

After the class in which students had recounted their failures, over drinks at Au Claire de Lune, the buzz of conversation revolved around the beauty of people when they were "really themselves" onstage. "You can see it in their eyes, when they're themselves," Zoe, a twenty-three year old student from England, told me. When I asked what she thought "being oneself" meant, she hesitated for a moment, then responded, "It's when they exist for us in our imagination, when they are strongly in our imagination." This response resonated in light of David's question from earlier in the day, when he expressed confusion over thinking he was being himself but being told he

was not. This observation was underscored by the apparent surprise shown by students when the audience laughed as they recounted their flops; these moments of laughter were understood as being signals that they were being their “true selves,” but the signal was external and dependent on the other people in the room; nothing about the moment registered for the performers as more “real” than the moment before. And Paula, who hadn’t registered the laughter, was confused as to when and how she was “being herself.” The “true self” was functioning in this event as an external, visible marker that produced a particular reaction in the audience without necessarily being recognized by the person observed.

In subsequent interviews with students I raised this question of the “true self,” asking how they would define that concept, and how or whether one could know when one was being one’s real self. The answers were varied and vague, though everyone with whom I spoke had a strong sense that they knew when these moments occurred, that *something* happened to signal the emergence of the real self, the visible marker usually being the eyes. And everyone I spoke to had at least one story of a moment in Gaulier’s class when they knew they were being beautiful – which was nearly always interpreted by students as being themselves – before receiving feedback. The eyes emerged as the locus of self and beauty—specifically, a kind of “gleam” in the eyes. Many students described non-beautiful eyes, the eyes of a performer who was “performing” instead of being herself, as “dead” and beautiful eyes, which were taken to signify the presence of the performer’s self, as “alive”. While most initial descriptions

of what distinguished the two placed the markers on the performer's body (particularly the eyes), secondary responses tended to relocate the markers within the spectator: "I *felt* more connected with him"; "When she became alive and beautiful she existed for me in my *imagination*." Interiority takes on two aspects here: a generalized sensory feeling located within the body but without a clear locus, and the imagination, where the performer's true self existed within the spectator.

Corporeal and cognitive perceptions were often described in tandem, the boundaries between the two frequently elided. When I spoke with Liz, she explained how she knows when a performer is being truly her or himself by "sensing it." I asked her if she could be more specific about this sensing – where on or in the body did she perceive the sensation? And what was the sensation *of*? She hesitated, her brow furrowed, and replied, "I don't really know." As she attempted to articulate responses to my questions, her body enacted a movement that I was beginning to recognize during conversations on these topics: one of her hands went to her chest and hovered there, moving out and back as she said "You just *know*, you *feel* it, in here..."

There was a perceptible difference in external body gestures and tension between the state described as "not beautiful"/"performed" and that lauded as "beautiful"/"your real self." My own observations were primarily of a softening of the facial muscles, which widened the eyes slightly, a slight extension of the neck upwards accompanied by the head moving back and up, and a slight droop in the elbows and wrists as the arm muscles relaxed. When this occurred in the "Describe to us your flop"

exercise to both Paula and David, the audience began to laugh, and both hesitated, widening their eyes even further, followed by a slight furrowing of the brow. I found myself laughing in these moments as well; it appeared to me as if a soft-focus filter had been placed in front of each of them for just a moment; when the muscular tension returned, sharp focus returned.

“Vulnerable” was another word used to describe this state by both Gaulier and the students. The red nose mask is understood to reveal the performer’s “inner stupidity,” the term not meant pejoratively but in the sense of the archetypal fool, whose openness and innocence allows for the greatest wisdom. I became personally convinced, early on in the clown course, that the pedagogy was experiential – that we were being set up for repeated failure and humiliation so that we would begin to experience the actual state of the clown, who is always “in the shit.” The “describe your flop” exercise confirmed my suspicions. Most of the students who came to the school were trained performers; when every technique our bodies had learned failed to please Gaulier, provoking the dreaded drumbeat, the muscles in our bodies first tensed even more – exaggerating the techniques with which our bodies had been disciplined – then slowly began to relax. Often this relaxation was accompanied with feelings best described as frustration and despair. Most of us looked literally beaten down by the end of the third week.

On the other side of the spectrum were those students who became *more* tense as the courses progressed. Matt, a 22-year-old English student who had been in the



“Neutral Mask” workshop (and was discussed in Chapter 3), seemed to have a perpetually furrowed brow, so much so that he often appeared to be suffering from painful headaches. The brow furrowed the hardest as soon as he got on stage, mirroring the tension throughout his body, a tension that created stiff, jerky movements that often provoked laughter – but a different sort of laughter than that provoked by softening. He asked more questions of Gaulier than anyone else in the class, and spent Metro journeys attempting to work out what it was we were *meant* to be doing, since Gaulier was famous for vague instructions (“be funny”), criticisms (“horrible – thank you goodbye”) and praise (beautiful – she has something, no?”).

Also in the increased tension camp was Tim, an American professional magician who was new to clown and to physical theatre training generally. When on stage, Tim would put on a charming smile and squint his eyes in what I soon came to recognize as his magician’s persona. Throughout the four weeks he never relaxed this facial expression, save for a couple of moments of a “dead” look, when his facial muscles relaxed completely and immediately reshaped into a resentful, slightly angry expression. And Tim was angry – he was used to studying with teachers who explained their methods, who explained the techniques they were teaching, and Gaulier’s deliberate deflections to his precise questions (“What was it exactly about what I just did that wasn’t beautiful?” “He is sexual fanatic, no?”) frustrated him endlessly.

The idea of being rooted in the present in Gaulier’s course was consistently tied to the idea of vulnerability. The performer who was vulnerable was completely open

and able to respond to what was happening both onstage and in the audience. One student linked this openness to the senses:

We talk about the same thing that you get through meditation, as in a way similar to what Gaulier is teaching, the idea of being very present, of being here, and being open, and being, your senses being alert and awake and aware of what is going on around you. And that makes you sensitive. And being vulnerable. And being open to whatever, whatever happens. (Interview 2008)

Given the structure of failure and criticism that Gaulier set up in the classroom, however, this level of vulnerability was extremely difficult to access if approached as a concomitant of relaxation. The persistent threat of the loud deep resonance of the hand drum signaling one to leave the stage immediately kept the level of tension high on stage. This was linked by one student to the difficulties of being open and vulnerable while dealing with the pressures of living in Paris:

And [vulnerability is] quite a difficult thing to keep up, I think, particularly in everyday life, because you have so many situations where you can't, you have to have a bit of a front, just to survive. Particularly like in Paris [laughs]. And I remember talking to Colin, and this is the kind of paradox, I find, of a school like Gaulier is being in Paris, is that I think, I've never felt like I need to tougher than when I've lived in Paris, and at the same

time I'm going to a school that's trying to teach me to be sensitive and open. (Interview 2008)

Yet the vulnerability that Gaulier sought was not the relaxation achieved through feeling safe and secure in one's habitual persona, but the openness of disorientation, of being between thoughts, caught in the moment of the mistake. Simon Murray draws a useful distinction between the openness and pleasure of play and a feeling of self-satisfaction:

For Lecoq and Gaulier, the *pleasure of play* is not simply some kind of self-indulgent tomfoolery where having a wonderful time is the key to creativity and effective acting. Rather, an ability to play is more about *openness*, a willingness to explore the circumstances of the moment without intellectual 'editing', but within a set of rules or expectations germane to the style or form of theatre under investigation. (*Lecoq* 50)

In pursuit of creating genuine if uncomfortable moments of disorientation, Gaulier frequently set up situations within exercises to confuse the student. On the second day of the workshop he asked ten students to dance around the stage with red noses on to vibrant music taking pleasure in imitating fish. We had been dancing for about half a minute when the drum was hit and Gaulier called out to Miho, a young Japanese woman, that she was imitating the wrong animal; he then instantly hit the drum again and shouted "Go!" Five seconds later he stopped the exercise once again to tell Miho she was doing it wrong, and then had us continue dancing. The high-paced nature of the exercise and intermittent and confusing criticisms led Miho, who had some difficulty

understanding Gaulier's English, to be thoroughly confused as to what he was asking her to do; she latched on to me and tried very hard to imitate my movements, which were impeded by an injured knee and looked more like a strange sort of dancing horse than a fish. The intensity of her concentration on "getting it right" while inadvertently getting it completely wrong led to immense laughter from the audience, and a final pronouncement from Gaulier and several students that her performance was beautiful and open.

### ***Conclusion***

Miho's experience of confusion over the reason for the audience's laughter points to a feature of disorientation that challenges conventional understandings of the self as located within the core of the body (as represented by the gesture of pointing to the chest), accessible and recognizable. It points to a self that was negotiated externally, in the space between the performer and spectator, as the performer's body signified a self that caused the spectator to respond with laughter, even as the performer was unaware of this communication. During the flop exercise in the third week, David had addressed this issue directly; his question pointed to a shifting positionality of the self in Gaulier's classroom: at times the student felt the emergence of his or her "true self" from within; at times the self seemed to be located externally, in the gaze of the spectator. Whether or not the student *believed* he was being himself in this latter case did not matter; this was a "self" located in the eyes of the beholder—specifically, in the

perceptions of the spectators watching the performance. The external cue of the audience's laughter marked the successful performance of the self; the performer relied on hearing spectators' laughter to know he was "being himself". This shifting locus of the self in Gaulier's classroom contains traces of the self's multi-positionality in Najac's mirror exercises, in psychoanalysis in which the patient's symptoms were read by the external analyst, and in Lecoq's discovery of the moment of a student's confusion, a moment that provokes audience laughter.

Authenticity was identified in the early twentieth century with the unconscious, positioning the idea of the "true" self below consciousness, perceptible only through the embodied symptom. The practices with which students engaged in Gaulier's Clown workshop points to this locus of the self below consciousness—or more accurately in the language of mask training 'behind' consciousness as the performer's face is behind the mask—since the self students understood themselves to have was positioned as a persona, or a performance of socially-constructed behaviors that had accrued within consciousness to mean the "self". David's articulation of this struggle with a perceived self ("I *think* I'm being real, and being myself, but apparently I'm not, because I'm not beautiful") illustrates the power of a "self" identified with that aspect of consciousness that perceives and categorizes—the "ego" in Freudian terminology. Jouvett might have called this a "monstrous egotism", an over-accretion of the sense of self that ironically prevents the performer from being truly authentic, from acting from a place of instinct.

Gaulier's pedagogy of disorientation was deployed as a strategy to help students encounter this other self, the self of instinct and the unconscious, by short-circuiting habits of thought that could only produce a persona. The "true" self of instinct and the unconscious is necessarily only perceptible to spectators within the student's moment of disorientation, since as soon as the student becomes aware of a "self" it has already been collapsed into a system of conscious cognition. Students' difficulty with verbally articulating this "true" self, the self marked by the vague category of "beauty", points to the positioning of this construction of self outside of consciousness. The repeated embodied gestures and references that accompanied these attempts at articulation—touching the chest, pointing to the eyes—further links this construction of self with the Freudian symptom, the body's evidence that is only legible to the external observer.

Returning to Philip Auslander's critique of logocentrism as discussed in Chapter 1, the moment of disorientation in Gaulier's clown classroom was meant to reveal an "authentic" self rather than disrupting the very idea of authenticity. Yet I believe there is something valuable occurring in these moments in which students shift out of existing habits into something that cannot be clearly defined or captured. Perhaps this value lies in the momentary experience of a disrupted pattern of thought and behavior, a disruption that might allow for a reorganization of these patterns, or even provide an experiential encounter with what it might feel like *not* to have a pattern for just a moment. Again, the identification of these moments of disorientation with authenticity, with the "true" self, works against this latter possibility by assuming a stable self that is

more “true” than the habituated self. But I would like to suggest that while the language remained logocentric, the experience—dependant on disorientation—resisted collapsing the moment into a singular idea of “self.”

## Conclusion

The challenge for the student actor ... is to understand and control their movement and its cultural, theatrical and professional significance, whilst at the same time 'losing' and 'finding' themselves in the ever-changing experience that is their own body and their consciousness of that body.

Mark Evans 2009 (184)

In this dissertation I have identified and traced key ideas within the French mime tradition from the late nineteenth century to the present including the idea of *automatisme* that emerged in French psychology in the late nineteenth century alongside Janet's development of *l'idée du moi* [the idea of me]; nineteenth century French mime practitioners' simultaneous fascination and repulsion with the idea of *bêtisme*; and the shifting understanding of *sang-froid* [cold-blooded] from a productive distancing in the nineteenth century through Copeau's rejection of the "freezing of the blood" in the early twentieth century and his resulting development of the *masque noble* [noble mask] form to free the student to move more naturally, through to the inner distancing of Lecoq's *le jeu* [the play or the game] pedagogy and Gaulier's idea of pleasure. I have identified what I term "contamination anxieties" at play within these shifts in French mime, arguing that the continual movement towards minimalism reveals a mistrust of the excessive or unruly non-white, female, working class body. Just as the mask-like white face and rigid, mechanical body of the late-nineteenth century Pierrot performatively theorized the white, elite male body, as French mime moved through the twentieth century the bodies it produced were marked by straight lines and small, subtle movements, privileging again the white, male "contained" body against the



non-white, female body of fluidity and excess. The practice of Neutral Mask, for instance, asked the student to straighten the lines of the body (head directly above torso, torso above hips, hips facing forward, arms straight at the sides) and move in a more rigid manner marked by clear beginnings and endings of gestures. This practice straightened the curves of the female body, which tends towards breaking the straight line of head-torso-hips, and bending the joints during gestures. This disciplining of the body into an efficient machine therefore positions female movements as excessive, equating “neutrality” with “male”. Similarly, Clown pedagogy links subtle movements with authenticity, privileging a minimalist expressive style over larger gestures that a student like Paula brought with her from her Brazilian clown training, which became defined in Gaulier’s classroom as inauthentic, the movements of an “actress” rather than a “beautiful” human.

I have traced the idea of *automatisme* as linked to authenticity from the late nineteenth-century performed body of Pierrot through twentieth-century French mime and the development of Lecoq’s pedagogy. In late nineteenth-century France *automatisme* operated both as a marker of authentic bodily action (the involuntary movements produced by the subconscious mind) and as a rigid, mechanical mime style that distanced the performed body from markers of the organic such as fluid movements and large emotionally expressive gestures. This emphasis on a minimalist and mechanical mime style reveals, I argued, contamination anxieties around the purity of the white, elite male body, particularly as the performed body of Pierrot emerged

from popular *commedia* performances, Parisian street clowns in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and the French circus tradition that included the racially-mixed white Footit and black Chocolat pairing. Footit and Chocolat were one of the most famous White Clown/Auguste duos in the French circus of the late nineteenth century. Chocolat (Raphael Padilla) was born in Cuba, and as a teenager was sold into the service of a wealthy Portuguese merchant who took him to Portugal. Padilla escaped, moved to Bilbao, and began performing in cabarets, where he was noticed by the clown Tony-Greace who brought him to the French circus (Towsen 219), gaining fame as the clumsy fool paired with the cruel, authoritative Footit. The visibility of black bodies in France in the nineteenth century lay in part in such “freak” performance spaces as the circus and the exhibition hall, where the “savage” black body was put on display as part of an anthropological focus on differentiating the bodies of the white European body and black Africans.<sup>59</sup> The French circus as performative display of the “freak” body in the nineteenth century is therefore a further site for studies in this area, as the excessive bodies that late nineteenth-century French mime practitioners reacted against in their construction of the pure, white, elite figure of Pierrot can therefore be located, in part, in this site of popular performance.

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<sup>59</sup> See, for instance, Louis Figuier’s *Les races humaines* [published in English as *History of the Human Race*] (1872), in which he extensively describes the inferior physical and cognitive characteristics, in contrast to those of white Europeans, of the people living in Dahomey, a West African kingdom (today’s Benin) that France had begun to colonize in the mid-nineteenth century.

The mechanical body of the late nineteenth-century Pierrot therefore served a dual function: to protect the pure body from (racial, gendered, class-based) contamination, and to more “authentically” portray subtleties of thought and emotion in an era in which psychologists and mime practitioners viewed the small, rapid movements of *automatisme* as more authentically revealing of the inner self. Copeau’s search for authenticity in his development of an early twentieth-century French mime style led him to pursue an ideal of neutrality as a body free of idiosyncrasy and expression and therefore, for him, more authentic. The construction of the neutral body in the French mime tradition of the last century privileges straight lines and “efficient” movement positioned against excessive gesture, an echoing of late nineteenth-century minimalist mime techniques that practitioners believed more accurately conveyed inner reality, defined as thought and subtle emotions. This emphasis on subtlety is revealing; when students in Gaulier’s Neutral Mask workshop “expressed” through their bodies in non-linear, minimalist ways—such as Ana from Greece who arched her head back in a chorus exercise or Tammy from New Zealand who struggled not to sway her hips as she walked—Gaulier’s feedback was that they were pushing too much, adding unnecessary movement to the mask, not and therefore not neutral. Neutrality here becomes a particular type of disciplined body, one that moves in straight lines with small, “efficient” gestures, a movement style that is arguably gendered male against the fluidity and curves of the female-gendered body. This is a neutrality, furthermore, that privileges an Anglo-American minimalist gestural style that developed within an acting

discourse of naturalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and therefore excludes the gestural styles of students from other cultures such as Greece and Brazil. This form of “neutrality”, then, represents a reemergence of contamination anxieties in the twenty-first century classroom around issues of non-white male embodied practice; the unruly, excessive bodies of students who use more physically expressive cultural codes and particularly of women are disciplined within Neutral Mask training to perform with straight, linear, minimalist physical gestures, a performance identified in the French mime tradition with the neutral—and therefore universal and authentic—body.

*Automatisme* intersects once again with *l'idée du moi* in Gaulier's Clown classroom, in which Gaulier identifies the authentic self as that which emerges in moments of disorientation, when the conscious mind and the mental and embodied habits that accompany it (which echo Janet's definition of *l'idée du moi*) is sufficiently distracted through a moment of surprise that the “real”, “true” self that lies beneath emerges. As with the Neutral Mask, the embodied practices that accompany these moments of “finding one's clown” are marked by minimalism: lack of large gestural expressivity and muscular tension. The clown in Gaulier's classroom can perform large gestures in play, but must always make visible the “pleasure” behind the gesture, a distancing effect that positions the performer as open and vulnerable, unattached to the emotions he or she is portraying. When Paula moved her body in the style of the Brazilian hospital clown with large expressive gestures of joy, Gaulier denounced these

gestures as the “horrible” gestures of an “actress” in favor of the subtlety of physical markers of “openness” (relaxed muscles, subtle movements) that represented pleasure within his pedagogy. One can discern here an echo of the minimalism encouraged within the French mime tradition during the late nineteenth century. Despite the apparent changes made by Copeau in the early twentieth century to mime practice, the moments of shift in French mime towards more “natural” performance styles have tended to follow a pattern of positioning the earlier style as artificial, the new style as natural, with a concurrent mistrust of the excessive body (large bodily gestures, organic markers such as fluid, curved movements) accompanying the definition of the “natural”.

Alongside these shifts towards a more “natural” performance style has been a concern with authentically representing inner experience. In the late nineteenth century the focus of inner experience became increasingly cerebral, as pantomime scripts increasingly referenced characters’ thoughts as content that performers would convey through silent gesture, and Georges Wague’s mime theory positioned thought at the core of gestural validity—the more that gesture expressed thought, the more it represented the performer’s inner condition. This privileging of cerebral process can be discerned in twentieth-century concerns over the “neutral” body that remove physical markers of idiosyncrasy (thereby shrinking the body’s expressivity), yet is apparently challenged in clown training that demands instant reaction to a stimulus, achieved through a state of disorientation, with no recourse to a pre-existing idea. Yet in one of the paradoxes of the practice, clown training retains the concern with truthfully

representing the performer's authentic inner condition, and mistrusts the body's excessive expressivity in denoting this authenticity. The authentic self sought through clown training is individuated (it is an idea of the performer's unique self), yet is simultaneously only constituted socially in the space between performer and spectator, when the performer's body lets go of its excessive habits of expressive movement.

The constructions of body and self that emerged in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French mime are not straightforward, singular ideas that have been applied monolithically in mime training, nor is there one clear idea of what the "body" and "self" signify in the twenty first-century physical theatre classroom. Rather, students and teachers in the tradition of French mime in the twenty first century continue to engage with the body and the self in ways that both reveal traces of earlier constructions and redefine them for twenty first-century Lecoq-based training, much as Evans describes the process of continually "losing" and then "finding" oneself in the experience of movement training. It is perhaps appropriate, then, that the pedagogical practice that formed the core of my analysis was a "pedagogy of disorientation", introduced and contextualized in Chapter 1, as a strategy used strategically to help students encounter new ways of moving and perceiving themselves. I believe that the practice of "losing one's moorings to the familiar" (Magnat 74) applies both to these strategic pedagogical aims and to a larger process continually occurring within the French mime tradition in understandings and constructions of the body and the self are continually in flux. I have aimed in this research to analyze and draw connections

between the body as it moves and is articulated within the moment of classroom practices of French mime in the twenty first century, and historical constructions of the body and the self that produced this pedagogy. While existing work on Lecoq-based pedagogy trace his influences back to Copeau, in Chapter 2 I have looked further back to the French mime practices of the late nineteenth century to interrogate what understandings of the body and of the self French mime practitioners were drawing on in the twentieth century, and in Chapters 3 and 4 I have analyzed twenty-first century classroom practices through the lens of these constructions.

Continuing this theme of ongoing engagement with constructions of body and self, I view my research as yet another encounter with these ideas and practices, rather than as a definitive account of how Lecoq-based pedagogy functions. I believe that the relevance of my work to the field of theatre studies lies in my assertion that physical theatre provides another way of talking about the body as something other than an inanimate object, and makes a strong contribution to the field of critical pedagogy by examining a classroom practice that can be an alternate to the teaching model of student performance of the disciplined body that brackets out its thinking aspect and encourages students to perform “successfully” in habituated ways. My research represents a significant intervention in the field of theatre studies as the only practice-based study (with research conducted in the actual moment of the classroom) and theoretical analysis to date on Lecoq-based performance pedagogy, a pedagogy that is growing and gaining influence in the theatre world. While the body is talked about

extensively in critical pedagogy, and the performance-based classroom is recognized as a potent site for investigating the body, very few actual practice-based studies have been conducted in these sites.

The field of actor pedagogy has generally defined a clear separation between what Joseph Roach terms “mechanistic” and “vitalist” approaches (1985). My research seeks to complicate this distinction by suggesting that French mime practices from the late nineteenth century to the present have been engaged in an enactment of both mechanistic and vitalist practices through a complex relationship to ideas of the natural body and the self, in which “natural” expression exists side-by-side with mistrust of corporeality and contamination, Neutral Mask pedagogy draws on both a valuing of the natural body as free from socially-constraining habits of movement and a positioning of the body as a machine to be controlled, and Clown pedagogy both reinscribes and disrupts ideas of the “authentic” self. I view my research as an initial inquiry into the complex topic of the body within Lecoq-based pedagogy. By observing, documenting and analyzing how these techniques are taught and what physical principles are involved, and by identifying a “pedagogy of disorientation” with a strategy for helping students encounter new ways of being and interrogating this strategy for the model of the body and self that it constructs, I intend it as a grounded contribution to the growing fields of critical pedagogy, body studies and acting theory, and as a critical pedagogical reference for theatre artists and other educators. I have focused on a Western conception of the body; further research in this field could be done around questions of



how bodies marked by different cultural patterns of movement, ethnicities, socioeconomic classes and gender specifically encounter, challenge and continue to shape this pedagogy. I therefore hope that my research both adds to a growing scholarly discussion of Lecoq-based theatre and opens further lines of inquiry into the body in the classroom.

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