

Essay by Ros Steen and Joyce Deans

## What we may be: the integration of Lecoq movement and George voice work at the RSAMD

*We know what we are, but know not what we may be. (Hamlet, 4.5.43-44)*

On the evening of Tuesday 13th November 2007, a meeting between two women who had never previously met took place in a Parisian restaurant. The *rencontre* had been arranged by the writers on behalf of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, the National Conservatoire of Scotland, where we have both worked for many years. The two women, Fay Lees Lecoq of École Jacques Lecoq and Nadine George, of Voice Studio International,<sup>1</sup> both guardians of their respective fields of endeavour, both leading two important movements in 21st century actor training, were shortly to become the recipients of the first International Fellowships to be awarded by the Academy.<sup>2</sup> In conversation, the links between their schools of training began to emerge more clearly.<sup>3</sup> For the writers, already engaged in the process of researching the work, the conversation confirmed that the time had come to embark on a more detailed research investigation into specific aspects of both techniques. This article reports and reflects on that investigation together with its implications for the future.

### The Base

*Thou sure and firm-set earth. (Macbeth, 2.1.56)*

The theatre practice disciplines of Lecoq Movement and George Voice work had, over a long period of time, become embedded at the heart of the Academy's flagship Acting programme. We ourselves had worked together on productions, deploying these approaches separately.<sup>4</sup> As time went on, we became increasingly interested in seeking a deeper artistic integration of our respective practices. This led us to co-direct a number of productions and our practice-based research led to an enhancement of the student learning experience.<sup>5</sup> The award of the International Fellowships had major implications for us, as well as for the Academy generally.<sup>6</sup> As part of the Fellowship remit, staff development study time in movement and voice was opened up to all drama staff rather than subject-specialist teachers alone. This allowed Steen to observe Lecoq movement teaching at first hand while Deans could work with Nadine George on her own voice. Our studies enabled us to embark on a more focused and systematic enquiry into the connections between the techniques at the same time as Fay Lecoq and Nadine George began their own fruitful dialogue.

### The RSAMD and Nadine George

The origins of the connection between Nadine George and the RSAMD's School of Drama go back to 1988 when George began planning to return to the UK to teach. In 1990 she left the Roy Hart Theatre based in France of which she had been a founder member.<sup>7</sup>

After 15 years in France I felt that I had done everything I could do artistically with the Roy Hart Theatre. I had to meet other people and find other ways of working. I felt the need to return to England and my own language, and to my first artistic love—William Shakespeare. I wanted to see where the theatre in England was after being away for 15 years, and to see what young British actors were doing and how they were being trained. It was important for me to find out if it was possible to use the work I had done with Roy in my own country and with actors training for the theatre. I also wanted to see if I could find a way of linking the voice work that I had done with Roy with the work on Shakespearean Text that I had done before I met him.<sup>8</sup>



Ros Steen is Head of Research and Centre Leader for the Centre for Voice in Performance at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Scotland's National Conservatoire. Trained at the RSAMD, she holds an MA(Hons) from the University of Glasgow. She spent many years studying with Nadine George and pioneered the use of her voice work as a

medium of rehearsal in professional theatre in Scotland. She is Scotland's top voice specialist for Theatre, Film and TV, an Associate Editor of International Dialects of English Archive and a Guest Lecturer in Europe. She was awarded Fellowship of the Academy in 2008.



Joyce Deans is Lecturer in Acting and Directing at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Scotland's National Conservatoire. Trained as an actor at RSAMD, she then studied at École Jacques Lecoq. She worked professionally as an actor, director and movement director before her appointment to the

RSAMD. As well as her acting teaching, she has directed many productions including the Greeks, Shakespeare and Contemporary texts. Her work has taken her to Poland, Germany and France. She continues to maintain a strong connection with École Jacques Lecoq, recently participating in an international LEM workshop based in the school's scenography department.

1. Voice Studio International is George's own international business. She teaches in the National Theatres and National Theatre Schools in Denmark, Sweden, France and Iceland in addition to her International workshops in London for voice teachers, actors and directors. See website [www.voicestudiointernational.com](http://www.voicestudiointernational.com). Her work is also taught by others in these countries. In the UK, in addition to the work at the Academy, the work is now being taught at the Arden School of Theatre in England and Dundee College, Scotland.

2. Both Fellowships were awarded in Nov 2007. In addition, the Academy awarded a doctorate to Fay Lecoq in July 2007 and to Nadine George in July 2008. Both were made a Doctor of Drama.

3. Email correspondence between N George and R Steen, 16th and 17th October 2008, citing the links as 'in-depth work' (on body and voice respectively) done with 'international actors', not just actors from France and Britain.

4. Steen, R and Deans, J, *Co-Direction : How Creativity is Translated Educationally In a Moment of Rehearsal*, p2, ELIA Teachers' Academy Papers.

5. Ibid, pgs 4-5

6. 'In 2008, the Academy introduced a programme of International Fellows which include such luminaries as Nadine George and the Lecoq family in drama... These international Fellows infuse the Academy with inspiration and excitement through their masterclasses and workshops.' RSAMD prospectus, 2009-10, Professor John Wallace OBE, Principal.

7. For an account of George's introduction to Hart and her becoming a founder member of the Roy Hart theatre, together with the roots of her work in Alfred Wolfsohn's researches, see George, N. "My Life With Voice," *Shakespeare Around the Globe*, Pg 33-4, VASTA, USA 2005.

8. Ibid, Pg 34.

9. George was teaching at Le Centre du Rencontre in Besançon, the National Theatre School in Odense, Denmark and Statens Theatre School in Copenhagen as well as for the Danish Actors' Union.

10. For an account of the development of her technique in conjunction with the University of Birmingham see Ibid, pgs 35-39.

11. Cicely Berry had been a teacher of George's when she was training to be an actor at the Central School of Speech and Drama in the late fifties. Berry had given workshops and masterclasses at the Academy and had been made a Fellow of the RSAMD in 1987.

12. Letter from Cicely Berry to Ros Steen, July 5, 1987 regarding Berry's conversation with George and letter of introduction from N George to Ros Steen, Sept. 9, 1987.

13. Steen, R. *Teaching Voice in the New Millennium*, p15, International Centre for Voice, Central School of Speech and Drama, 2006.

14. Jean Moore was Head of Voice in the School of Drama at the RSAMD from 1979-2006

15. The *Project Voice* seminar was held at the RSC, Stratford upon Avon in January 1992

16. Steen subsequently attended all George's teachers' workshops held in 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005 and 2007.

17. Steen, R. "Seein Oursels As lthers See Us", p285 -8 in *Voice and Gender*, VASTA, USA, 2007.

18. Between 1999 and 2003 the RSAMD offered an MDra in Directing. At that time the voice work was an optional extra workshop for directing students. Between 2003-7 there was a revision of postgraduate provision and in 2008 a new MA(Classical and Contemporary Text) with an acting and directing pathway was launched. In the new programme voice work became part of the curriculum for directing students.

19. In 2000, Steen co-directed *Solemn Mass for a Full Moon in Summer* by Michel Tremblay with Philip Howard for the Traverse/Barbican. The production opened in Edinburgh 28/4/2000 and transferred to London on 17/5/2000.

20. Steen and Saunders co-directed three productions for the RSAMD : *The Greeks* (2000) *Prometheus* (2001) and *Oedipus* (2002) and Steen and Deans co-directed *Twelfth Night* (2004), *King Lear* (2005) and *The Tempest* (2006) for the Shakespeare in the City Festival at the Arches Theatre, Glasgow.

21. Steen, R and Deans, J. *Co-Direction : How Creativity is Translated Educationally In a Moment of Rehearsal*, p 3-5, ELIA Teachers' Academy Papers. 2007

22. The Centre for Voice in Performance was formally established in the summer of 2006. Steen was appointed Centre Leader in the autumn of that year, becoming Head of Research and the Centre for Voice in Performance in 2008.

23. Research continued through a number of productions : *Heritage*, *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, *Outlying Islands*, *Homers*, *The Nest*, *In the Bag*, *I was a Beautiful Day*, *Gorgeous Avatar*, *Tilt*, *stranger*, *babies*, *Carthage Must Be Destroyed*, *Night Time*, *The Pearlfisher*, *Cherry Blossom* (Traverse Theatre) *Little Ones*, *Singles Night* (lookOUT Theatre) *Winter's Tale*, *Measure for Measure*, *Duchess of Malfi*, *12th Night*, *Monkey*, *Romeo and Juliet* (Dundee Rep) *Word for Word*, *the Big Bang* (Magnetic North) *The Small Things* (Paines Plough) *Mancub*, *Little Otik* (Vanishing Point/National Theatre of Scotland) *Black Watch* (National Theatre of Scotland) *Re:Union*, *Eclipse* (7:34) *Beneath You* 287 (Birds of Paradise) (continued on next page)

While continuing to work in France and also Denmark,<sup>9</sup> she began to research her technique in conjunction with the Drama Department at the University of Birmingham.<sup>10</sup> At the same time she wished to open her teaching to more places in the UK. On the recommendation of Cicely Berry of the Royal Shakespeare Company,<sup>11</sup> she wrote to Steen regarding the possibility of teaching at the Academy.<sup>12</sup> In 1990, she conducted her inaugural workshop at the Academy which Steen observed. Steen then asked George to work with her on her own voice.

This work was my missing piece of the jigsaw. While Cis's work strongly influenced my approach to helping actors connect with the text in practical ways, George's was crucial to a profound understanding of the nature of the voice and its direct channel into the heart of the acting process.<sup>13</sup>

Following a meeting in Stratford upon Avon between Steen, Jean Moore<sup>14</sup>, and George (the latter two being on the faculty of the RSC Voice Department's international seminar, *Project Voice* at the time<sup>15</sup>), George was invited to become a regular Guest lecturer at RSAMD where Steen was able to observe all her work while continuing to work with her on her own vocal development. In 1996, George established the first of her International workshops for voice teachers, based in London, which Steen was invited to attend.<sup>16</sup> After the workshop Steen began to introduce elements of the work into the voice curriculum of the Acting program where, initially, the new voice practice existed in harmony alongside more traditional ways of teaching voice. At the same time she started to research and develop her own approach to the work in conjunction with professional theatre partnerships in Scotland where the innovative voice practice led to the evolution of the role of specialist voice person into creative collaborator in production.<sup>17</sup> The resulting performance practice was brought back into the Academy as new and best practice in actor training and later director training.<sup>18</sup> The specialist voice teacher's role within the profession continued to undergo further evolution from that of creative collaborator in production to co-director.<sup>19</sup> This role was subsequently developed in the conservatoire setting by productions co-directed by Steen and Movement colleague Mark Saunders and those co-directed by her and Acting colleague Joyce Deans.<sup>20</sup> In these productions the voice work was instrumental in facilitating a closer integration of voice, movement and acting within actor training.<sup>21</sup> With the establishment of the Academy's Centre for Voice in Performance<sup>22</sup>, the innovative voice practice became the main approach to vocal studies in the School of Drama's acting and performance curricula. RSAMD was thus the first conservatoire in the UK to have pioneered George's technique as part of its voice curriculum and the first to have established it, through the work of the Centre, as its mainstream practice. In addition the work continued as the focus of the Centre's practice as research agenda undertaken in conjunction with the profession.<sup>23</sup> At the same time as teaching and researching the work, Steen continued to study the voice work with George herself.

### The RSAMD and Lecoq

The RSAMD-Lecoq connection was of an even earlier provenance. It began in 1955 when Fay Lees, having completed her first year of drama training in the School of Drama under Colin Chandler<sup>24</sup>, went to Paris to study mime.<sup>25</sup> While studying and working as an actress in Paris, Fay met Jacques Lecoq who had recently returned from eight years in Italy, where he had been choreographing and directing shows as well as creating the Piccolo Theatre School in Milan with Giorgio Strehler.<sup>26</sup> After his years in Italy, Lecoq felt as if he had

## Heightened Text, Verse and Scansion

## What we may be: the integration of

*Lecoq movement and George voice work at the RSAMD* by Ros Steen and Joyce Deans (continued)

been 'squeezed like a lemon'<sup>27</sup>, and now wished to pursue his interest in teaching. In 1956, Fay and Jacques founded what was to become École Jacques Lecoq.<sup>28</sup>

Over the next decade, Colin Chandler continued, through Fay, to maintain a keen interest in the work of the school and in 1967 he sent movement teacher Peter Lincoln to study there.<sup>29</sup> Through Lincoln's movement teaching, the association with École Jacques Lecoq continued to thrive, with many RSAMD graduates continuing their professional training in Paris. Mark Saunders and Joyce Deans also trained at the Lecoq school.<sup>30</sup>

In 1981, Jacques Lecoq was invited to the RSAMD to give a summer workshop and perform his lecture-demonstration *Tout Bouge*. The following year he was made a Fellow of the RSAMD, and in 1985 his youngest son, François, graduated from the RSAMD's technical diploma course.<sup>31</sup> Following a career as an actor and performer, François now teaches at the Lecoq School. In 1990, as part of an International Workshop Festival, Jacques Lecoq was invited to give a two-week LEM<sup>32</sup> workshop at the Academy, along with Krikor Belekian and Pascale Lecoq, for actors, architects, theatre directors and designers. Lincoln, Saunders and Deans were all participants and continued to study over the years with Jacques Lecoq himself as well as with Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier, former teachers of the School.<sup>33</sup>

In September 2008, Saunders and Deans returned to Paris, this time with their personal experience of Nadine George's voice work linked to their explorations in performance, movement and design.<sup>34</sup>

The confluence of all of the above (stimulated by the catalyst of the International Fellowships)—the Academy as historic site of the two practices, the ventures in co-directing, the practice-based research in training and the profession and the commitment to further exploration—led to this current investigation in which we set out to examine and evidence our perceptions of parallels between the two techniques. We hoped thereafter to integrate them more fully with each other and thence into performance, thereby providing a deeper, more holistic actor-training experience which often perceives movement, voice and acting as three related but distinct subject areas. We already knew that each technique leads the actor to tap a deep connection to inner resources which can then be used artistically. At the same time, arguably, these defined techniques can reveal those resources in greater depth and detail than the use of the actor's own emotions as a starting point.<sup>35</sup> While there were many aspects of each technique we could have looked at, we concentrated on two central tenets of each approach: the relationship of George's vocal qualities to Lecoq's *les trois étages*<sup>36</sup> and the relationship between neutral mask and what George calls "the real voice."<sup>37</sup>

## The vertical column

*For yonder walls, that pertly front your town,  
Yond towers, whose wanton tops do buss the clouds  
Must kiss their own feet.*

*I must not believe you,  
(Troilus and Cressida, 4.5.218-221)*

*Resurrection* (Oran Mor). A research voice workshop for professional actors, led by Steen was established in Aug 2003 and for directors in Oct 2005. In addition to previously cited papers see Steen, R., "Helena, Hitler and the Heartland," in *Shakespeare Around the Globe*, VASTA, USA, 2005 and Steen, R and Wright, B. *Double-hinged doors: the RSAMD's voice work in Training and Theatre*, LIPA conference proceedings, 2008.

24. Colin Chandler was the first Director of the School of Drama at the RSAMD, from 1950 to 1974.

25. The course was of six weeks duration and its focus was pure mime. It was taught by Etienne Decroux. Fay Lecoq in interview with RS 14th Nov 2008.

26. Lecoq, J, ed Bradby, D. *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*, Chapter 6, p108, Routledge, 2006

27. Fay Lecoq in interview with RS, 14th Nov 2008.

28. The School opened on the 5th of December 1956 at Rue d'Amsterdam in Paris.

29. Peter Lincoln trained as an actor at RSAMD from 1964-67. He subsequently studied at École Jacques Lecoq from 1970-71. He was appointed as a Lecturer in Movement, Acting and Directing in 1971 and took over as Head of Movement in 1992 until his retirement in 2008.

30. Mark Saunders studied at École Jacques Lecoq from 1977-79. He was appointed Lecturer in Movement to the RSAMD in 1992. In addition to teaching movement he directs and also performs. Joyce Deans originally trained as an actor at RSAMD 1975-78 before subsequently studying at École Jacques Lecoq from 1978-80. Following a career as a professional actor and director, she was appointed Lecturer in Acting in 1990.

31. François Lecoq studied at the RSAMD from 1984-86.

32. LEM stands for Laboratoire d'Étude du Mouvement. It is a separate department of École Jacques Lecoq. As an extension of the courses given by Jacques Lecoq to the architect students at the Paris School for Fine Arts (Ecole Nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts), a stage design department was set up as an ancillary part of the Jacques Lecoq School of Theatre and is the result of a joint effort carried out with the architect, Krikor Belekian. The LEM officially opened in 1977. For more information about LEM and its principal teachers Krikor Belekian and Pascale Lecoq, see École Jacques Lecoq's website [www.ecole-jacqueslecoq.com/index\\_uk.htm](http://www.ecole-jacqueslecoq.com/index_uk.htm). Accessed 17/11/2009.

33. Lincoln studied with Jacques Lecoq at a summer school in Edinburgh in 1990 and a LEM summer school in 1993 in Glasgow. He also studied with Monika Pagneux in 1991 and 1992. Between 1980-92 Deans undertook further training in London, Paris and Edinburgh with Jacques Lecoq, Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier. Saunders too studied with Pagneux (1987), Lecoq (1990 and again in Paris in 1991) as well as in London with Philippe Gaulier (1991).

34. Deans participated in a LEM workshop, 8-19th September, 2008 and Mark Saunders participated in a workshop for professional actors and directors on Comedy and Tragedy also 8th-19th September, 2008.

35. 'I do not search for deep sources of creativity in psychological memories'. Lecoq, J with J-G Carasso and J-C Lallias. *The Moving Body*, p17, Methuen, London. 2002 and 'The technique gives you the mental and physical tools to play the parts. Feeling is not enough.' George, N as recorded in RS's journal of the International Teachers' Workshop, 2001.

36. That is, 'three levels'. The word étage also refers to a ledger line on a musical stave.

37. The 'real voice' is a term often used by George in her work to designate a voice fully expressive of the person and their life energy, which emerges out of the 'covered' or 'withdrawn' voice often used in (con't next page)



everyday life. It is 'not produced' in any way but comes from a deep body source of the individual, and, importantly, 'It goes back to the person's roots. I came from a working class background with a deep voice and a lot of energy and strong accent. I then went to a private girls school where I took elocution lessons to speak well, this changed the source that I was drawing my voice from—it was coming from my head energy and not my body energy. Therefore it was not my real voice from its true source that I was using.' George, N. email to RS, 4th Dec 2008. 'The voice carries what's in you, not you carrying the voice.' Steen, R. Workshop journal, 2007. Finally, as one of the actors from the Actors' Research Workshop wrote, 'Every time I opened my mouth I felt like I was declaring myself. "This is who I am, now, at this moment." Knowles, P. email correspondence with R Steen 2007

38. George describes the breathing work in some detail in *My Life With Voice*, p35-6.

39. The warm up consists of starting on C (middle C for women, C below middle C for men) going down to G and back up to C for the deep male energy. The three other qualities start on the same C and go up to F and back down to C. The spoken lines used in the warm up are: "Is this a dagger which I see before me/The handle toward my hand." *Macbeth*, 2.1.33-34 (Low male). "The raven himself is hoarse/That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan/ Under my battlements." *Macbeth*, 1.5. 38-40 (High male). "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks." *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2.2 (Low female). "Gallop apace you fiery-footed steeds." *Romeo and Juliet*, 3.2.1 (High female).

40. "For Lecoq the undulation was the movement behind all physical effort. The action of the walk involves an undulation. It is a wave-like movement, a wave of energy, that travels through the body and out into the space. The first, simple undulation starts with the torso hanging down towards the floor. To initiate it there needs to be a *point d'appui*, a leverage, from the ground. The movement travels through the legs—(the knees bend)—up through the centre—(the pelvis comes forward)—up through the spine (the solar plexus comes forward)—until finally the head comes up to the vertical, and the whole body is drawn up to its full height. The torso then angles forward and down towards the floor... and the undulation begins again. There are many types of undulation, reverse, lateral, kneeling, lying down etc, but all share this principle of movement travelling through levels in the body; in the above example the legs (knees), pelvis, solar plexus and head." Mark Saunders, email to RS 18/11/2008 "*L'éclosion* otherwise known as 'open/close'. The body goes from a closed position, starting crouched, with weight over the balls of the feet, and arms folded across one another as if encircling a small, round space between arms and knees; then it comes up in one uninterrupted movement to end up in an open position—body tall and upright with arms up and out on diagonal lines. It is most important to find the sense of openness in the body as a whole as it comes up in the space and to keep the centre active and balanced right through the movement with an energy that finally comes out into the space. (Integrating the movement with breathing helps this). The final open position is arrived at through a dynamic energy that travels out into the space. The focus of the eyes should reflect this open, dynamic quality." Description by Mark Saunders, email correspondence to the writers, 7th November 2008

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## Research Methodology

Before we could physically explore the connections between our chosen aspects of the techniques, we first had to evolve an apposite, practice-based research methodology. We conducted our primary research through a series of practical laboratory sessions which consisted of empirical teaching and study followed by reflection and documentation. We also drew on our existing knowledge, research and professional teaching expertise as well as the evidence-based experience of others—students, teachers, professional actors and directors. We consulted written resources but were particularly fortunate in being able to go directly to the sources themselves for clarification, Fay Lecoq and Nadine George.

The structure of work in the labs for the relationship between the four vocal qualities and *les trois étages* was framed as follows:

- George's initial breath and energy work starting from the supine position on the floor followed by a return to the vertical where energy continues to be opened through the breath and body<sup>38</sup>
- her vocal warm up in all four qualities<sup>39</sup>
- first individual voicing of the vocal quality selected for study
- observations noted
- Lecoq physical work based on his 'natural' movements—undulation or *éclosion*<sup>40</sup>
- Lecoq physical exploration of the selected étage
- second, more extensive individual voicing in the selected vocal quality immediately following the étage exploration
- voice used in speaking

The practical work generated physical, vocal, psychological and imaginative experiential information which was then subjected to observation, scrutiny and interrogation during the reflective and documentation period which followed.

At first, given our trainings, the movement work was guided by Deans and the vocal work by Steen. As the research progressed, roles became less obviously divided: Deans, for example, began to evolve her own intuitive leading of the piano work for Steen rather than simply playing the notes. At times both were also guided by the observations of Mark Saunders from his deep knowledge-base of the Lecoq work.

## The Four Vocal Qualities and *Les Trois Étages*.

George's vocal technique is based on the principle that four different qualities of voice, two male and two female, exist within each human voice. The vibration, energy and quality of these sounds, sung from the body, are explored and linked directly to text. She connects these energies and qualities to what she terms the stomach (or abdomen) the chest and the head, with two different qualities sharing the chest:

On the deep male sound I chose AW, because it goes directly into the depth and the energy connected to the stomach. On the high male sound I chose the vowel AH, because it goes directly into the high male energy connected to the chest. On the deep female sound I chose the sound OO, because it goes directly to the low female energy connected to the chest. On the high female energy I chose the vowel AH, because it goes directly to the high female energy connected to the head.<sup>41</sup>

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It is important to note that in the vocal exploration, 'notes are voiced not as conventional musical sounds but expressive ones connected to inner states, imagination and identity.'<sup>42</sup>

*Les trois étages*, or the three levels, is Lecoq terminology for the physical location of energy in the human body. The levels are divided into the pelvis, the solar plexus and the head. There is a correspondence, in terms of architecture, to the base, the vertical column and the 'eyes' or horizontal 'gaze' of a building.<sup>43</sup> In both techniques the body 'as a means of dynamic and dramatic expression'<sup>44</sup> is the basis of the work.<sup>45</sup>

i) *Le bassin* and the deep male energy.

We began work on the pelvic *étage* and the deep male energy, the first vocal quality. In both techniques the abdominal/ pelvic area is connected to the rooting down of physical energy and is the location of the animal, the primitive, and the sexual.<sup>46</sup>

We began with one of George's breathing sequences, starting from supine, to balance and release tension from the body at the same time as contacting its deep source of breath and energy. George's supine starting point is entirely linked to Lecoq's horizontal as "a listening, resting neutral place"<sup>47</sup>—for both, it is a place of calm and balance from which to begin the work. In the breathing work, there is a move from the inner space to the outer:

At the end of the breathing exercises, Student A was told to open his eyes, thus going from "an internal contact within himself to an external contact with the space."<sup>48</sup>

This precedes the return to the vertical. As Lecoq says "You must know about the horizontal to undertake being vertical—there's a link, a reverberation between inner and outer space."<sup>49</sup>

After the initial breathing work followed by the voice warm up, Steen began singing in the deep male energy, beginning on middle C, going down to G before completing an octave to G above middle C and back down to C. The movement work began with undulations followed by an exploration of being led through the space by the energy in the pelvis. Working with this location of energy, Steen was initially conscious of some tension in the abdominal area while trying to become rooted in physical movement, though this began to disappear after a while. The shoulders felt very released towards the floor, the eyes were open but with a feeling of weight around the temples and strong contact was made with the earth through the feet. This linked with her previous experiences in the voice work where energy moved down through the legs and the feet while she climbed higher and higher vocally; the importance of "hold fast with whole body in vocal production,"<sup>50</sup> both literal and metaphorical. The connection of depth/height, as with darkness/light or animal/angel for instance, is the connection and fruitful tension between opposites which is the source of the dramatic.<sup>51</sup> The range for the second singing was widened from the initial notes to continue up to the C above middle C then back down through two octaves to the C below middle C. When Steen resung in the deep male quality following the movement exploration, she held the depth quality right into the C above middle C though at the very top she went into chorded sound—the male energy opening within the female energy. Going back down

41. George, N. *My Life With Voice*. Pg 37

42. Steen, Ros. *Helena, Hitler and the Heartland*. p46

43. A proposition explored in the LEM 2008 summer workshop attended by JD.

44. LEM brochure for London workshop, September 2003, produced by the Lecoq school.

45. 'This confirmed for me what I had believed for many years that real meaning comes from the body not from the head. In the moment that the actor speaks the words with vocal power and works with his breathing at the same time, he goes directly to the body. Because the feeling connection to the character and the text is coming directly from the body, the actor can repeat it again and again, developing it each time.' George, N. *My Life With Voice*. p38.

46. George, N. *My Life With Voice*, p38. cf Francois Lecoq's 'recipe' exercise. In this, the actors explore une *étage* and then become a chef working and talking through a recipe linked to the energy they have been exploring. RS observed that in the pelvic energy the voices were full of appetite, 'like sexy gross gourmands who growled like animals.' Workshop 13/11/2008

47. Shrubsall, A. *Jos Houben: Understanding The Neutral Mask*. p100 in Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre ed F Chamberlain and R Yarrow. Routledge, 2000.

48. George, N. *My Life With Voice*, p36.

49. Shrubsall, A. *Jos Houben: Understanding The Neutral Mask*. p100.

50. Hart, R. *How Voice Gave Me A Conscience*. A paper written for the Seventh International Congress of Psychotherapy, August 1967. Roy Hart Theatre Archives, [www.roy-hart.com](http://www.roy-hart.com) accessed, 17/11/2009.

51. See George, N. *My Life With Voice*. p38-39 for discussion about the connection between dark and light energy in both *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet* text work.

52. All quotations are from the performance lab journals of RS and JD unless otherwise stated.

53. At the LEM course undertaken by Deans autumn 2008 she described how her final 3D design embodied this tension which she recognised as intrinsic to herself at that point in her life. Verbatim conversation with RS, 7th October 2008.

54. 'Suspension describes the rising sensation of lift in the body; an upward movement towards the sky away from the ground. It reaches towards the vertical. It is also used to describe a contra-movement made at the beginning of another movement. For example, if one is standing in water about to lower the whole body under the water, the in-breath will lift the body up, therefore there is a rise or suspension before the descent. The opposite can also be true. For example, in the act of jumping the body, prior to the jump, lowers itself towards the ground in order to gain the necessary *point d'appui*.' Saunders, M, email 27/11/2008.

55. 'Power makes the opening. Balance is the work. Because you open in the height, you embody the depth more'. Voice journal, RS, kept during George's international teachers' workshop, summer 2001 p37. Also, 'Wolfsohn says, we all have to descend into the depths of ourselves before we can ascend into the heights... this applies literally when working with the voice, the lower you go the easier it is to reach the higher registers.' Alfred Wolfsohn *alias Amadeus Daberlohn*, a lecture given by one of his pupils, Sheila Braggins. [www.royhart.com/amsterdam.lecture.htm](http://www.royhart.com/amsterdam.lecture.htm), accessed 28/11/2008.

56. Nakamura, J, and Csikszentmihalyi, M. *The Concept of Flow*. Ch 7 p90, in *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, Snyder, C.R. and Shane, J. Lopez. Oxford University Press US, 2005.

57. Goleman, D. *Emotional Intelligence*, p90-91 UK: Bloomsbury Publishing plc 2004.

the piano the chorded sound once more became single sound with a double balance in it as the two energies were now held together within the note right down to the bottom C. Deans observed that some harshness had crept in towards the top but as the voice came down it was very focused, powerful and warm. This transferred immediately into the spoken voice.

Deans then repeated the sequence of work. In her first voicing of the quality she experienced her feet coming off the floor and a tendency to lift to the chest quality in the sung sound rather than staying in the deep male energy. Her perception of herself—"I can't sing"<sup>52</sup>—and therefore her insecurity in pitching to the piano note was overt, though many notes were in fact true to pitch. She then began the physical exploration of the *étage*, feeling "energy coming from the pelvis in a beam of light." At the same time she experienced a strong connection into the floor, linked to a tree in her imagination, and felt so grounded that she didn't feel able to run. She noted that, like Steen, she walked in straight lines through the space feeling a "no-nonsense" focus in the eyes. Afterwards she commented that this physical rooting meant it was easier to go "where the voice wanted to be" in the second time of voicing the quality.

The physical exploration and its stimulation of the imagination had helped her commit to the opening of the sound. The slight insecurity of pitch notable on the first voicing had gone by the second. As the sounds progressed upwards and into the octave above middle C, the treetops/root image allowed Deans to access the height/depth connection in the voice and she sung more into the centre of the sounds. At first she didn't feel she could lift her eyes above the horizon but was encouraged by Steen to do so. This led her to become aware of a pull between two opposing but linked forces. One moved towards the vertical or upward dynamic through the chest and the other, its diagonal opposite, was a downward dynamic through the pelvis and feet into the ground. The pull between the two dynamics exemplified her interior world.<sup>53</sup> For Steen it indicated where the next opening in her voice was to come—the holding of the depth right through the chest into the head to integrate the voice both physical and emotionally.

It was clear that images and physical work had taken Deans directly into her energy expressed through sung sound. In the singing, Deans experienced a strong sense of her vocal power and felt she could have gone even lower than the bottom C. The voice's depth of vibration was then noted in Deans' speaking of the Shakespearian text line. The direction in Lecoq work of suspension<sup>54</sup>—going up to come down—directly links to George's belief that working in the depth makes openings in the height in the voice and vice versa.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to these observable connections, both techniques necessitated a conscious awareness while working: the need to stay completely in the presence of the experience but to be equally able to be sufficiently detached to take direction and make adjustments in the moment. This is to be "in flow" where "experience seamlessly unfolds from moment to moment,"<sup>56</sup> a subjective state characterised by intense focus and concentration and a loss of reflective self-consciousness. Individuals in flow exhibit "a masterly control of what they are doing, their responses perfectly attuned to the changing demands of the task."<sup>57</sup>

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Bim Mason has described the balance of internal/external within Lecoq technique thus:

Working as I do in both theatre based work and work based on circus skills this balance is a constant issue. The actors tend to find it hard to master technique because they are used to working in a way where their physical actions are the result of physical emotion and these may slightly differ each time. They find technique too artificial, lifeless and constricting. The circus performers, on the other hand, find it harder to give actions much feeling because they are used to working from the exterior actions using constant repetition through practice. They find the whole business of acting unpredictable, indefinable and frustrating, devoid of learnable systems. Because Lecoq's teaching works both from the inside to the outside (in the improvisation classes) and also from the outside to the inside (in the physical technique training), it provides a whole range of tactics to deal with this crucial issue.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly in George's technique the actor in the act of giving voice is highly aware what s/he is doing technically at the same time as consciously allowing access to feelings or emotions.

The ways in which the text streamed out of me were very organic...I found I was able to access an emotional response from myself and the audience simply by going into an "oo" sound. It seemed to tap into the sorrow Othello was feeling as he contemplates murdering the woman he loves. But from those tears I could stop, take direction, and then use the sound to get back in, often with a great deal of laughter in between.<sup>59</sup>

Both techniques, by opening the body and voice through rigorously channelling and directing physical energy, expedite contact with creative and artistic impulses, in the moment of their creation. Creativity and the expression of that creativity happen simultaneously.

ii) *La tête* and the high female quality

We chose *l'étage de la tête* and the high female energy as the subject of our second investigation. Similar findings resulted from our study. In both techniques the head is connected to the air and to the light. George is careful to link this energy with the stomach/abdomen otherwise it can be "on the surface and not very embodied"<sup>60</sup>, which parallels Lecoq's observation that "an actor preparing to play Nina in Chekhov's *The Seagull*, will be incapable of developing an ariel glide unless she has first acquired a basic rootedness."<sup>61</sup>

After the breath and energy work, the voice in the first singing was taken into the high female quality through the octave above middle C before movement exploration began, again starting with undulations. Another Lecoq technique was then introduced—*le carton*. In *le carton*, a sheet of light, flexible cardboard is held at various levels in front of the body. In exploring the head *étage* it is first held just below the head, (to "cut" the head off from the body) and the actor walks in the room, being aware of the sensations this causes her to feel and imagine. After a short time, *le carton* is held below the eyes and the walking/observation process continues before it is finally held above the head while walking and observing. Three more Lecoq exercises exploring the element of air were undertaken. The first, called *bougeant l'air* or moving the air, is where the air is imagined as a substance to be pressed and pushed physically in the

58. Mason, B. *The Well of Possibilities: Theoretical and Practical Uses of Lecoq's Teaching* in Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre, Ch 3, p47-8 ed Franc Chamberlain and Ralph Yarrow. Routledge. 2002.

59. Steen, R and Wright, B. *Double-hinged doors: the RSAMD's voice work in Training and Theatre*. Paper for Creativity and Employability Conference held at Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts, March 2008, publication in preparation.

60. George, N. *My Life With Voice*. p37.

61. Lecoq, J with J-G Carasso and J-C Lallias. P44, *The Moving Body*, Methuen, London.2002.



space; this was followed by *en volant* or flying followed by *les planeurs* or gliders:

These are all to do with the process of physical identification with the natural world...in this case, the element of wind and air. One can have a sense of the air simply by standing and moving the arms in the space around the body. This can be developed by imagining one is in a light mist and moving the mist as one travels through it. With flying...how to express the dynamic of flight in an earthbound body? By running smoothly up the space, is it possible to create a wind-like energy that can be felt after the body has come to rest? The image of the glider—a construction with no motor, simply supported by the wind—is apposite. The physicalization of this (arms held outstretched, legs gliding, quiet contact on the floor with the feet) demands a suspension in the body, and an openness especially in the upper torso. And if the wind becomes turbulent? Is it possible to keep the movement light and free?<sup>62</sup>

62. Mark Saunders, email correspondence to the writers, 18th November 2008.

The physical sensation to aim for is “the feet just happen to touch the ground because that is how long the body is.”<sup>63</sup>

63. Instruction given by Joyce Deans, during the lab.

For Steen *le carton* under the head caused a stretch in the length of the back and a feeling of going up in the space; when placed under the eyes the vision was narrowed and the ceiling felt much lower. The eyes, leading the body, had to work more strongly with *le carton* in that position. When *le carton* was held above the head, the feeling was one of release and expansion as well as lightness. Imaginatively, Steen had the feeling of being “a goddess,” and of superiority, looking down from a lofty position like an eagle. In the other exercises she still had the feeling of “up” in the space and experimented with the sense of hanging from the head so the feet skimmed the ground.

In her voice work in the high female energy, Steen’s voicing started more gently and with a more childlike feel than prior to working with *le carton*. Her focus was “very sustained” and she sang in flow with the whole face and eyes “very opened up and round.” As she went into the octave from the C above middle C, the sound became very powerful “like a bird or harpy,” almost moving into a “scream.” At the point this happened Steen was aware that it was necessary to be more grounded if she was to open the rooted voice right into the height or it would be “as if my head might come off.” As she came down the octaves to the C below middle C, she passed through moments of effort to stay in the sound when “Ros crept back into the room” (Deans became aware of Steen working, rather than being in flow) before reaching the bottom where the sound was again warm and fully rounded. For Deans, Steen’s speaking voice thereafter was lower and fuller—“not a performed voice but real, unperformed voice akin to the voice of the neutral mask.”<sup>64</sup> The height/depth interconnection had caused integration and enrichment in the middle, heard immediately in the speaking voice.

64. See section on neutral mask.

In her own physical exploration, Deans noted a “sense of weightlessness” as she moved in circles and spirals through the space. This continued in the first placement of *le carton* but in the second she found herself slowing down and “spying” as the sensation of focus moved to her forehead. In the third placement, especially when she replaced *le carton* with a hand above the head<sup>65</sup>, the “suspension” and “effortlessness” returned. She noticed a major difference between her two sets of piano work. After the movement exploration, she felt

65. When the hands tire of holding up *le carton* all the time, it can be replaced, now and then, with a hand, creating the sense of ‘an energy cloud’.  
JD direction during the workshop.



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more “innocent” and had the freedom to go “much higher than she thought she could previously.” Like Steen, the sound was quite childlike to start with, moving towards “a newborn cry” in the second octave above middle C (up to the F/G) and as she came down the scales she was able to maintain the sense of suspension, particularly as Steen guided her to “fly into the sound.” She moved through “breathy, angelic” sounds in the voice (images of humans with wings came to her) to the depth where the low notes were warm and rich. Her speaking voice thereafter was lower than her customary voice, rounded and fuller. She felt “totally energised from head to toe” and felt the energy both through the top of the head and into her feet. Her final observation was that the feeling of going up “helped with going right down into the abdomen.”

For both, there was the same direct correspondence between the physical placement of the energy of *l'étage de la tête* and the energy used in the high female quality of George's vocal technique as there had been between the pelvic *étage* and the deep male energy. Again, the ability to be fully present in the experience physically, imaginatively and emotionally at the same time as being able to take outside suggestions and direction was observed.

iii) *Le solar plexus*/chest, high male and deep female qualities. The more complex area of correspondence was to be in the centre of the body. Here, each technique talks about the area between pelvis and neck differently, so the scope for a lack of correspondence was wider than with the other two areas we had already investigated. In Lecoq work there are only three levels mentioned while George has four vocal qualities. Previously, however, in her own explorations of *les étages*, Deans had felt that the *les trois* could be considered as four, with a separation between the solar plexus proper and the upper chest. More support for this point of view came from a conversation with François Lecoq regarding *les étages*. If we take the other meaning of *étage* as a ledger line, three ledger lines provide four spaces.<sup>66</sup> The potential for correspondence between the two techniques then became clearer as it allowed for two places within the torso where there are two different vocal energies. An investigation into whether the high male and the deep female qualities corresponded directly to the upper chest and solar plexus was to form the next part of our study.

The solar plexus, a large, complex network of nerves located behind the stomach and in front of the crura of the diaphragm, is popularly thought of as the “pit of the stomach” and is associated with the emotions. It is linked to “gut feelings” and instincts. The chest is the location of the heart and its protective rib cage as well as the lungs. This area too is associated with emotions and for George, these are often protected or held in by the shoulders.<sup>67</sup>

After the customary breath and energy work we began by voicing, in turn, the high male quality and the deep female quality, through an octave range. Movement exploration started with undulations followed by an “internal undulation” with breath only—an imaginative continuation of the undulation process with barely perceptible movements. The move from full engagement of the body in the movement before a reduction to a smaller but still intensely felt movement has parallels with the journey in George's work from “full voice,” “a term George uses to describe the biggest possible vocal sound that is supported by breath used to vibrate text through the body”<sup>68</sup>, to *decrescendo* where the voice can then be reduced in volume while retaining the vibrated quality of the larger vocal commitment.

66. The space below the first ledger line, the space between the 1st and the 2nd, the space between the 2nd and the third and the space above the third. Conversation between the writers and François Lecoq, 12 Nov 2008.

67. Steen, R. Personal voice journal, p4, kept during George's international teachers workshop, summer 2001.

68. Steen, R and Wright, B. *Double-hinged doors: the RSAMD's voice work in Training and Theatre*, p2. LIPA conference proceedings. 2008.

We began to explore moving in the room led by the solar plexus. We then returned to the piano for the second voicing in each of the two qualities. Our findings were intriguing.

Deans was physically very centred in this energy, moving with “ease and strength” through the space. Once at the piano, however, she was less comfortable and found some difficulty in voicing the high male quality linked to the solar plexus from middle C upwards—it was a “struggle.” She felt “a physical block” she needed to get over. By contrast, she found the deep female easier from the same physical location. Steen heard this in Deans’ voice as a vocal insecurity in the high male quality not present in the deep female. In her own exploration, Steen also found an ease, almost “a comfort” in the area of movement led by the solar plexus and felt “well balanced” in herself. She found she could sustain the high male sound from the solar plexus into the octave above middle C though it took a great deal of energy to do so; Deans observed that “you are very focused in this....in flow.” Steen’s voicing in the deep female took less energy, sitting as it did for her more naturally with that physical location. Deans attributed her own struggle in the high male quality to the fact that she had voiced from a downward connection of solar plexus to abdomen. Steen’s instinct was that a downward connection was linked more closely to deep female sound while an upward one related more closely to high male.

69. Or, *point of leverage*. Marks Saunders in conversation with RS 19/11/2008. Another translation is *fulcrum*—the support or point of rest on which a level turns in moving a body. *Point d’appui* is an important term for Lecoq. It is also translated more poetically as *point of departure* in Lecoq’s poem *Tout bouge*, quoted in *The Moving Body*, J Lecoq with JG Carasso and J-C Lallias, Methuen, 2002, London.

The explanation which this suggested was that there is a “tipping point” in the solar plexus *point d’appui*,<sup>69</sup> experienced as an internal, almost imperceptible muscular movement which, directed by thought, can connect the solar plexus both downward to the abdomen and upward to the upper chest. This is visible to an observer as a physical shift in posture: when the solar plexus connects upwards to the upper chest the lower ribs lift upwards and outwards, the shoulders move back and down, with a slight arching in the upper spine and when the solar plexus connects downwards to the abdomen the spine re-aligns as the ribcage lowers and the pelvis moves slightly forward and tilts up towards the ribs. Further research was instigated to investigate the relationship of the upward connection from solar plexus to the upper chest in body and voice.

70. An ‘opening’ is usually manifest in a clear physical change. Sometime this is a movement within the face, body or eyes as the new energy starts to flow through, sometimes it is an actual shift in quality on a sound, sometimes it is an opening to the feeling—it can take different forms dependent on the person and the moment.

With the movement exploration this time led by the upward connection Deans felt a “real freedom, openness and sense of liberation.” She could “run easily” as opposed to a more measured walking pace in the downward connection and when she came to voice in the high male, taken from this connection, she now found it easier to go into the quality and the sound had more freedom, making a new opening.<sup>70</sup> She felt like “an adolescent boy” as the sound fluted up from the chest to the head and back down again. It was still easier for Deans to access the deep female from the solar plexus even with the upward connection though as she came down below middle C, it felt connected to the abdomen. For Steen, the movement exploration taken from the upward connection still had the ease of the downward one, and at the piano, it gave the high male more warmth and release. However, as she went up in the deep female, it took her away from the abdominal connection and she found that quality now more difficult to sustain. Deans observed a slight “crack” in the sound in the octave above middle C in the height and, as she came down, an alteration in the vowel so it was nearer /aw/ than /oo/ in the depth in order to move through the range.

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The conclusion was that there was a complex area of cross-over of male/female energy in the torso in which the high male correlated to the upward connection (solar plexus to chest) and the deep female correlated to the downward connection (solar plexus to abdomen). For both researchers this was felt most clearly in the notes around middle C. The high male from the upward connection held right up to the head and back down to *le bassin* was as different from high male from the downward connection up to the head and down to *le bassin* as the deep female sounded from the two physical directions. This crossover in the middle of the voice gives great potential for more openings at that point, as well as greater flexibility in the voice linked to powerful integrations of male and female energy.

Interestingly, each writer had historically experienced an organic area of difficulty in opening the voice in the chest, but in opposite qualities. For Steen, the high male quality was the last area she broke through vocally in order to reach integration of all the energies in her voice. Deans, in the short space of time she had been working in the vocal technique, had identified the deep female as the one “I find most difficult.” In both techniques, difficulty can be a source of fear but also of creativity. For George:

There is a direct connection to the creative power through the energy. It has to connect to the personality of the individual. There is always one difficult spot and usually that's your creative source, hence the fear of going into it.<sup>71</sup>

Lecoq echoes this when he says, “The School is a place of struggle, of tension and crises out of which creativity is sometimes stimulated,”<sup>72</sup> as “without error, there is no movement. Death follows.”<sup>73</sup>

Our research confirmed for us that George's four vocal qualities could be directly mapped onto Lecoq's *trois étages*. An actor, with the embodied experience and knowledge of both techniques, is able to dissolve the boundaries between voice and movement in the moment of performance. S/he then has a richer pool of possibilities from which to make conscious choices.

The current final year, as we write, is the first cohort to have begun their voice training with George's technique from the start and also to have had workshops taught by George and François Lecoq themselves. Their reflections on the connections between both processes have been illuminating. One student explained that the two techniques were initially experienced separately until she began to prepare for a performance in the Athenaeum, the Academy's large proscenium theatre. Then she consciously connected François Lecoq's injunction to “gather the space into you and own it” with the channelling of full voice into the space. She realised that she was filling the space freely and effortlessly through this synthesis. For the student, performance was finally where the two techniques crystallised.<sup>74</sup>

**Neutral Mask and “The Real Voice.”**

“Le masque neutre est un masque unique, il est le masque de tous les masques.”<sup>75</sup>

The neutral mask, a “perfectly balanced mask”<sup>76</sup> with “no particular expression or characteristic”<sup>77</sup> starts by discovering the space but ends by discovering the self. It became for Lecoq “the very centre of his teaching.”<sup>78</sup> Working with it is revelatory in many ways but one of its profound uses is to lead the

71. N George, as quoted by RS in her personal voice journal, p17, kept during George's International Teachers Workshop, summer 2001.

72. Lecoq, J with J-G Carasso and J-C Lallias. p99, *The Moving Body*, Methuen, London.2002.

73. *ibid*, p21.

74. Final year student H MacK in discussion with the writers, 2 Dec 2008.

75. ‘The neutral mask is unique, it is the mask of all masks.’ From the 50th anniversary brochure of École Internationale de Théâtre published in 2006.

76. Lecoq, J with J-G Carasso and J-C Lallias. p36, *The Moving Body*, Methuen, London.2002.

77. Lecoq, J, ed Bradby, D. *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*, Chapter 6 Pg 105, Routledge, 2006.

78. Fay Lecoq, verbatim, lecture-demonstration, RSAMD, 12/11/08.

79. Lecoq, J, ed Bradby, D. *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*, Chapter 6 Pg 105, Routledge, 2006.

80. Lecoq, J with J-G Carasso and J-C Lallias., *The Moving Body*, Methuen, London.2002. p41.

81. Lecoq, J, ed Bradby, D. *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*, Chapter 6 Pg 105, Routledge, 2006.

82. Lecoq, J with J-G Carasso and J-C Lallias., *The Moving Body*, Methuen, London.2002. p39.

83. There is an interesting connection with masks in Wolfsohn's own vocal research. In his manuscript, *Orpheus or the Way to Mask*, he describes how he investigated singing with intensity and concentration into a 'death mask' while it was being sculpted onto his face. At first he was unable to recognize the mask's face that resulted until he realised that he was looking at 'a portrait of himself as a young boy, a replica of a photograph of himself he had carried around for years as a sort of talisman, but a picture he could never identify with.' Recognizing himself now helped to heal the psychic wounds of the war. Like Orpheus, he had descended into hell, refining his soul through the voice. *The Way Alfred Wolfsohn Taught*, Sheila Braggins, 2005. Roy Hart theatre archives, [www.roy-hart.com/sheila2.htm](http://www.roy-hart.com/sheila2.htm).

84. Pikes, N. Afternoon Introduction, *The Contemporary Voice*, p24, ed Wooding, B, International Centre for Voice, London 2006.

85. Ibid, pg 25.

86. 'I haven't lost the [vocal] discoveries I got from the workshop. [with NG, Feb 2008] Oddly they feel truer to my sense of self than how my voice is in everyday talk.' FB, RSAMD acting student in his reflective journal.

87. Verbatim, DA, acting student at RSAMD to another student during NG workshop. Also NG to RS after an extended vocal exploration 'Your face is transformed—I've never seen you look like that, ever' recorded in Steen's voice journal from International Teachers' Workshop, July 2005.

88. Murray, S. *Jacques Lecoq*, p72, Routledge, Oxford. 2003.

89. NG to 2nd year students in discussion with them about the technique, Feb 2008, also recorded by Steen in her voice journal from International Teachers' Workshop July 2005.

90. 'I would ask them to have two focuses: one directly forward and one on the wider horizontal plane.' George, N. *My Life With Voice*. p36. George sometimes talks of the horizontal focus as a 'universal' focus, drawing a difference between that and simply personal focus. This is echoed by the embodiment of feeling, that is, when one touches a 'universal feeling' eg of sorrow, rather than a personal one. This is directly connected to Lecoq's 'essence of life, which I call the universal poetic awareness'. Lecoq, J with J-G Carasso and J-C Lallias. p47, *The Moving Body*, Methuen, London.2002.

91. In *The Tinder-box*, by Hans Christian Anderson, the soldier meets a dog with eyes 'as big as teacups', one with eyes 'as big as mill-wheels' and the third with eyes 'as big as towers'. 297

wearer to remove "the mask that you wear in everyday life" which is now "devoid of any purpose."<sup>79</sup> Initially it puts the actor into a calm balanced state in order to facilitate receptivity and discovery, both physical and imaginative. As with the voice, feelings and emotional responses may arise but they are not the starting point of the exploration.

It is essential to begin in relationship to the chosen mask. There are male and female masks—like George, Lecoq recognises that men and women are not "uniform" (cf the different starting octave for each)—with the male mask being slightly bigger and wider than the female. But they are also universal and each puts one in touch "with what belongs to everyone."<sup>80</sup>

The neutral mask, says Lecoq "is a tool that forces the actor to search deep within."<sup>81</sup> At the end of the explorations, when the mask is taken off, the face of the actor will be relaxed, as the mask will "have drawn something from him, divesting him of artifice."<sup>82</sup> The actor will, in essence, be unmasked; the mask paradoxically, reveals hidden truth.<sup>83</sup>

Similarly, the vocal technique, its roots in Wolfsohn's original work which "took voice out of the larynx and the throat and showed that the whole person—body and psyche—was the key to its further development"<sup>84</sup> unearths, as he did, something "beyond beauty in search of authenticity in the sound of a voice."<sup>85</sup> This authenticity to the person is the hallmark of George's real voice.<sup>86</sup> Its uncovering in the voice work is invariably accompanied by an observable, visual change in the face equivalent to watching a mask drop off.<sup>87</sup> The vocal technique, like the mask, leads to a deep inner search. Both however are teaching tools. The mask is used as a "way of understanding performance, not a way of performing"<sup>88</sup> and similarly, the vocal technique is "the process, not the end result."<sup>89</sup>

#### i) *La reveille*

For our explorations of neutral mask and the real or essential voice there was one change to the research methodology—the first step was different. As the wearing of the mask accomplishes the same as George's breathing work, we replaced step 1 with *La reveille* or "waking up." Putting the mask on for the first time, Steen observed a changing relationship to the breath which moved from a slight sense of being limited towards a deeper calmer breath after a while. Steen and Deans both noted an expansion of vision caused by "looking out" to the horizon. Deans felt her vision expanded "not just through the eyes but through the temples." Steen was conscious of "a slight blurring at the edges of vision while the centre was sharply in focus" an experience she had had while "in flow" in the voice work. *La reveille* begins with the masked actor adopting a sleeping position on the floor before "waking up" to discover s/he is on a beach with the sea a little way off, stretching into the horizon. The actor moves towards the sea allowing its rhythm to affect the breath.

Steen experienced the same dynamics as in the voice work—calm and energy, the balance between vertical and horizontal (she was conscious of an opening across the chest as she moved) and the eye focus/blur in the double focus of the eyes.<sup>90</sup> Deans observed when Steen took the mask off that her eyes were "bigger and more open" as indeed were Deans' own—"like tinder-box dogs."<sup>91</sup> As Steen looked onto the horizon and felt taken into it while taking it into



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herself through the breath, a line of text came to her unbidden, “Then felt I like some watcher of the skies/When a new planet swims into his ken.”<sup>92</sup>

92. Keats, J., *On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer*.

We then undertook two longer neutral mask exercises, *le voyage* or “the journey” and *l’adieu* or “farewell.” As in our previous examination of the two techniques, we began a first voicing at the piano, then the movement exploration, followed by a second voicing into speech. However, because one does not speak with the mask on—“it is rooted in silence”<sup>93</sup>—the mask was taken off each time we worked with the voice. As previously, we compared the voice that came after the movement exploration with the voice that preceded it.

93. Lecoq, J., ed Bradby, D. *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*, Chapter 6 Pg 105, Routledge, 2006.

ii) *Le voyage*

In *le voyage*, the masked actor emerges from the sea at sunrise, crosses a beach and enters a dense forest from which s/he emerges to discover a mountain in the near distance. The actor climbs the mountain and from the summit (it is now midday) sees the landscape open up to a valley with a flowing river which needs to be crossed before finally traversing a plain to meet the sunset.

Steen experienced a vivid opening of the imagination during the journey as she traversed the space. Her *voyage* was pleasurable as she saw images of particular places she knew from the forests of Prince Edward Island to the wide desert plains of Uluru in Australia. When she began moving, the body was not fully engaged—“the head was coming forward”—but in the forest “you were looking with the whole body.” When Steen was watching the river, Deans could see “breath in the pelvis and abdomen” and “there was a lovely moment when you stood rooted on the rock/river bed with water flowing around you.” At the end, when the mask came off “you were like an Egyptian goddess, Isis.” In the voice work, Deans found Steen had an easier focus in the second voicing than the first with “extraordinary” sounds at the upper end.

It made me think of Lecoq rainbow work—all the colours of the rainbow in a straight line like a tube... the bottom of the singing was violet/purple/blue—coming up from the bottom was like moving backwards from death to the colour red—to birth and life.<sup>94</sup>

94. Performance Lab journals, Steens and Deans, 2008.

It was notable that this was the point when Deans began to lead the vocal exploration instinctively rather than following a set of notes with her playing becoming more expressive and less percussive: a journey of her own. For Steen, the mask “released images that I sang in relation to” rather than her previous voice experience of images occurring through the sung sound, and the voice held feelings relative to the emotions that real forest and plain had originally aroused, but worked with in calm. As Mark Saunders explains: “The spaces of the journey through the landscapes should resonate within the body, exterior space meeting interior space.”<sup>95</sup>

95. Saunders, M, email to the writers 15/10/2008.

At the same time, Steen was able to be perfectly conscious of the marks on the wall facing her in the room. Her speaking voice mirrored the “rainbow” of sounds and spaces it had passed through.

Deans’ own exploration was different. For her the journey, entirely unpremeditatedly and unexpectedly, turned out to be difficult and dangerous, culminating in an emotional encounter with the mountain that took her to a very deep place in herself, one where she was “defenceless—*no masque quotidienne*.”<sup>96</sup>

96. ‘Everyday mask’.

Again, the mountain was related to a real one with a strong effect on her, though in the moment of seeing it, it changed to a different mountain, “equally connected to one she knew.” Seeing them both, she felt “stripped to the skin—there was nothing to protect me” and experienced “waves of sadness” in the body. For Steen, her face after she took the mask off was “vulnerable, small in the landscape but very human.” She was struck by the sense of longing it held.

Where the first voicing had evidenced some physical tension, the second was characterised by an initial reluctance to sing, owing to the depth of emotion the mask had revealed and Deans had to remove the image of the mountain before proceeding. Giving voice was a struggle though, paradoxically, less effortful than the first time round and the resulting voice was very resonant and full of vibration. From time to time, on some notes, emotion stopped her singing and then Steen guided her until she found “a security or holding through the voice.” At that point, Steen asked her to go to where she wanted to be in the voice and she said the male chest which was “a curious choice, in a way, but I knew I would be safe.” As she worked in it (below middle C then upwards and back down to that note) some laughter came in, and when she went to speech, her speaking voice sounded whole and at rest.

### iii) *L'adieu*

*L'adieu* explores the universal theme of saying farewell to a loved one, not simply as a goodbye but as a separation:

I am part of someone else, we have the same body, a body shared between two people, and then suddenly part of this body escapes. I try to hold it back....but then no! It has gone off and I am separated from part of myself.<sup>97</sup>

97. Lecoq, J with J-G Carasso and J-C Lallias, *The Moving Body*, p41, Methuen, London.2002.

A ship is leaving the jetty with a loved one on board. The masked actor runs down to the edge of the jetty, to wave goodbye to the person on board. S/he watches as the ship moves off until it disappears on the horizon. The actor then completes the gesture of farewell, holding the moment of realisation in stillness before removing the mask. At this point, we wanted to explore the voice that comes out of the mask's silence as we intuited a connection to George's “real” voice. We took the mask off slowly and let the voice come through from where it was at that moment.

Deans found her sensation of seeing the ship leaving the jetty akin to seeing the mountain, but as the ship moved on the horizontal (as opposed to the mountain being vertical) and that dimension was linked for her to the downward connection of the solar plexus, she was able to hold the sense of sadness—personal but universal at the same time “like a Greek tragedy”—in the body. When she removed the mask, Steen observed in her face the universal abandonment and loss which it had accessed. When she spoke the lines of Keats that Steen suggested to her in the moment<sup>98</sup> the voice came “from her solar plexus” and was low and resonant, holding organically in balance both vertical internal dimensions of feeling and horizontal external dimensions of expression as noted in the face.

98. Keats, J., *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*.

In Steen's own exploration, *L'adieu* took her to a physical landscape she knew—a beach at sunset. The ship was “a tiny, black cartoon ship on the horizon” which had her children on board. Steen felt left but not abandoned: grown up children need to sail off into their own lives and future. Deans observed from her masked movement that there was “something very ancient or primitive

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about her, like the first person ever to have seen the sea.” Her wave was bright—“a mother’s wave.” When she removed the mask Deans noted Steen had “the face of an ancient, without protection—also sadness and recognition.” When Steen spoke the Keats lines after taking the mask off, “I was speaking from inside the experience. The words came not just from inside but from the very middle of me.” Deans heard the voice as coming from low and deep in the abdomen with the falling inflections of resignation and acceptance. Reflecting afterwards, Steen noted that her voice was not as extended in vibration as after vocal exploration with George; rather it was akin to where the voice was when it was at rest some time later.

We found that the mask’s ability to reveal the essence of the actor through movement was directly comparable to the vocal technique’s ability to reveal the essence of the actor through voice.

“It was great to see so many links between our core voice training we get and our work with Lecoq.”<sup>99</sup> For our students, there are, unquestionably, clear and deep connections between the two techniques. Over and over again, in conversation<sup>100</sup>, they cited in both techniques, the “intentional placement of energy in the body”<sup>101</sup>, the same feelings of “alertness, sharpness, focus and presence”<sup>102</sup>, the “open place” they were in after the movement exploration being “the same as after the vocal exploration”<sup>103</sup>, the “observations of others being crucial to self development”<sup>104</sup>, and “both techniques as revealing the essential self.”<sup>105</sup> In addition, they spoke of how they themselves had brought elements of the two techniques together in their group preparation for performance.

Both techniques share key characteristics and through these, the actor can *tappez le profond*.<sup>106</sup> These characteristics include:

- the importance to the actor of the body/voice not only as the site of exploration and knowledge but also the means by which it is applied<sup>107</sup>
- a foregrounding of the body’s intelligent knowledge in the creative process<sup>108</sup>
- a highly structured teaching technique following a precise progression which paradoxically allows the actor great freedom
- use of a “non-naturalistic” theatre language to reach psychologically realistic truths
- ego as superfluous<sup>109</sup>
- emphasis on opening the mind of young actors who will take the work on in their own way and be agents for change in the theatre of the future.<sup>110</sup>

Our findings are echoed by those of others:

Pour moi les deux enseignements partent d'un même postulat: rien ne sert de mettre de la psychologie ou de l'émotion avant il faut partir du physique si on veut contrôler et pouvoir refaire...Les deux sont un travail d'observation, d'attention...étant donné par exemple une sensation venue des profondeurs il faut faire le chemin inverse en plongée pour voir d'où elle vient, comment elle est née, quel rapport elle a avec la surface...Et évidemment il ne faut pas plonger sans le bon équipement de plongée... et la technique qui permet de remonter!<sup>111</sup>

99. Second year acting student, PR, in his reflective performance journal, Dec 2008.

100. Conversation held with a group of final year actors, RS and JD, 5th December 2008.

101. JR, male final year actor.

102. RS and JJ, male final year actors.

103. AW, female final year actor.

104. TR, female final year actor.

105. AW, female final year actor.

106. ‘Tap the profound’. Jacques Bourgaux, Belgian actor with a Lecoq background, who had also worked on his voice with George, Nov 2007. In conversation with JD Sept 2008.

107. ‘To mime is literally to embody and therefore to understand better...the action of miming becomes a form of knowledge.’ Lecoq, J with J-G Carasso and J-C Lallias. p22, *The Moving Body*, Methuen, London. 2002. and ‘They began to see that the voice—used with their whole body, mind and soul—was vital to their work as actors, and that it came from their body.’ *My Life With Voice*, p39.

108. ‘I discovered that the body knows things about which the mind is ignorant’ Lecoq, J with J-G Carasso and J-C Lallias. p8, *The Moving Body*, Methuen, London. 2002. and ‘You had to go directly to your body; and trust that and not the brain. I began to realise...that the voice really did come from the body and was physical and not cerebral.’ *My Life With Voice*, p34.

109. ‘The ego is superfluous.’ Lecoq, J with J-G Carasso and J-C Lallias. p17, *The Moving Body*, Methuen, London. 2002, and ‘I asked them to do this [work] with respect for the person they were collaborating with...without artistic respect for your own work and your fellow students and without a creative atmosphere built on this respect, it is impossible to work on a deep level with yourself and your peers.’ *My Life With Voice*, p37.

110. ‘The aim of the school is to produce a young theatre of new work...students we train acquire an understanding of acting and develop their imaginations. This allows them either to invent their own theatre or to interpret written texts, if they so desire, but in new ways.’ Lecoq, J with J-G Carasso and J-C Lallias. p16, *The Moving Body*, Methuen, London. 2002., and ‘We have to help young actors stand in themselves. They have to have their own sense of direction and to take responsibility for their own potential.’ Pg 10 of RS’s personal voice journal of N George’s International Teachers’ Workshop, 2001.

111. ‘For me the two teaching methods start from the same fundamental principle—there is no point in putting psychology and emotion first. You have to start from the physical if you want to make conscious choices and have the power to repeat. The two techniques rely on observation and a scrupulous attention to detail... having experienced for example a sensation that comes from the depths it is necessary to follow the path in reverse and dive in to see where it came from, how it was born and what relationship it has with the surface... and, of course, you mustn’t dive in without good diving equipment and the technique which allows you to come back to the surface.’ Email to JD from Jacques Bourgaux, 29th Nov 2008.

112. Steen, R., & Deans, J. *Co-Direction: How creativity is translated educationally in a moment of rehearsal*. Teacher's Academy Papers, European League of Institutes of the Arts. UK: University of Brighton. 2007.

113. For example, Steen in voice teaching this year began referring to the solar plexus as well as chest and used the 'energy cloud' in walking work; Deans now directly connects the four qualities and *les trois étages* in her rehearsal process.

114. *Earthing the Electric* was set up by Steen and director Lorne Campbell to bring professional actors and directors together in a sustained and documented process to explore the work of the RSAMD's Centre for Voice in Performance and its application to acting, direction and rehearsal performance practice. In the first stage of the project, a core group of directors committed to the project came together to explore the use of this distinctive voice work in developing their own creative voice and to examine the application of it to their direction process. Research laboratories were conducted by Steen in September 2008 and the evaluation of these is currently being undertaken.

115. The Traverse Theatre is Scotland's international theatre of new writing, based in Edinburgh.

116. From 'Earthing the Electric' research proposal by Steen, R and Campbell, L, Oct 2007.

117. J. Levick, freelance director, in an email to Steen, 14/10/2008

118. Actors' research workshop actor D Gallagher in an email to RS, 19th Nov 2006

119. The Lighthouse is Scotland's Centre for Architecture, Design and the City. [www.thelighthouse.co.uk](http://www.thelighthouse.co.uk)

120. Jos Houben, trained at École Jacques Lecoq and was an original member of the Théâtre de Complicité company. He is a freelance actor/director and has taught at the school in Paris since 2000.

## The eyes

*Not working with the eye without the ear.* (Henry V, 2.2.134)

With this study we have moved forward significantly from our previous discoveries of the connections between the main movement and voice techniques at the RSAMD and their place at the heart of the rehearsal process.<sup>112</sup> An enriched, integrated movement/voice vocabulary has emerged which is already making its way into actor training.<sup>113</sup> With two years of these International Fellowships still to run, new possibilities for integration will continue to be opened up for both staff and students alike. At the same time, these possibilities find their echo in new connections between the Academy and the profession.

In the summer of 2008, the first phase of *Earthing the Electric*,<sup>114</sup> a research investigation into the voice work, directors and the direction process undertaken by the RSAMD in conjunction with the National Theatre of Scotland and the Traverse Theatre<sup>115</sup>, took place. The initial research question it sought to address was:

how can the voice work of the Centre for Voice in Performance resource the director's own voice and vocabulary as an individual and collaborative artist and how does it connect to the director's process?<sup>116</sup>

While this was the initial phase of a longer project, it has already begun to challenge existing ways of making theatre by enhancing directors' understanding of how actors need to work with their bodies and voices if they are to connect to text at a deeper level. It also yielded fresh insights into the voice work's role in the rehearsal process. After the investigation one director wrote:

I am desperate to explore more and find out what else the work can offer... we all felt that having the time to reflect on our own practice and on ourselves as artistic leaders, was a wonderful indulgence (even though it shouldn't be) and not one to be forgotten. On a more personal level, I felt it set me up on the first rung of a ladder for a long line of work I was about to enter into, and have since felt far more aware/considerate of nervous actors and their connection to their voice and of course the text.<sup>117</sup>

The second stage of the project will seek to examine what happens when directors and actors share this physical knowledge and understanding of the voice technique when approaching text and its effect on the rehearsal process. What implications would that have for the making of theatre? One of the stimuli for this exploration came from the Actors' Research workshop:

I think our discussion about respecting "the moment"...touched on the essence of this. One would need to be very brave to really take this to its extreme in the rehearsal room—not least because the template does not yet exist—but if it can be done...<sup>118</sup>

The project is ongoing.

Meanwhile, in Autumn 2009, as part of the Diaspora International Theatre Festival held by the RSAMD in conjunction with the National Theatre of Scotland and the Lighthouse<sup>119</sup> Pascale Lecoq and Joyce Deans will be leading a LEM workshop with RSAMD students, professional actors, designers, directors and architects. Jos Houben<sup>120</sup> will also lead a performance workshop with our students and members of the profession as part of Diaspora 2009.



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Jacques Lecoq once said “The students leave the school...they will develop in their work and often don’t realise that we on our side progress in our researches, and that new dramatic areas are going to open up.”<sup>121</sup>

121. *Lettre à mes élèves*, Lecoq, J, 4th Dec 1996.  
‘Letter to my students’, written on the occasion of  
the 40th anniversary of the school.

Whatever the future holds, for us the immediate result of this research, is that our eyes and ears have been awakened and, like Bottom—“the eye of man hath not heard/ the ear of man hath not seen”<sup>122</sup>—we have experienced a richly creative mix. We are aware as we move forward that the edges of what can be discerned are as yet still blurred, though the centre is focused and sharp. We now know much more about what we are.

122. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 4.1.209-210.

Just out of our line of vision, what we may be, beckons.

