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The Embodied Performance Pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq

This paper traces some of the many resonances between Jacques Lecoq's performance pedagogy and the precepts of embodied cognition, arguing that its phenomenological rationale of situated action anticipates both theoretical hypotheses and experimental findings in the neuro- and cognitive sciences. In *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells us About Performance* (Routledge 2012), I proposed that 'A focus on the body, its actions and its cognitive mechanisms identifies principles ... that link the three elements of theatre; Story, Space, and Time. The three meet in, are defined by, and expressed through the actor's body.' Lecoq's training focuses on the body and its actions and assists performers in consciously linking sensorimotor experience with the actional roots of verbal and nonverbal communication. Lecoq's influence on modern theatre is significant. He founded an international school of performance training in Paris in 1956 at which he taught until a few days before his death in 1999. The school continues to thrive and has trained over 5,000 students from at least 84 countries. In the mainstream theatre many have held a misperception of Lecoq's teaching that, as it originates in movement, it is not as sophisticated an approach to acting as Stanislavski's script oriented process. However, Lecoq's approach is both more nuanced and more broadly applicable to performance than is generally appreciated. The remarkable synchrony between his pedagogy and the precepts of embodied cognition arises from his insistence that the starting point for theatre is not a script but the actor's engagement with the sensorimotor experience of her environment:

In my method of teaching I have always given priority to the external world over inner experience. ... It is more important to observe how beings and things move, and how they find a reflection in us. ... People discover themselves in relation to their grasp of the external world ...

(Lecoq, 2001:19)

This principle correlates with what many consider to be the most fundamental insight that has emerged from neuroscientific findings; that sensorial and motor experiences form the neural foundations for mental concepts. Thus phenomena such as consciousness, empathy, intersubjectivity, affect and aesthetic responses 'come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities [that] are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological and cultural context' (Varela et al., 1991:173). Beginning with sensorimotor investigations and moving through spoken, then written language, Lecoq's training grounds performance in an explicit re-experiencing of human cognitive development:

[T]he laws of movement govern all theatrical situations. A piece of writing is a structure in motion. Though themes may vary (they belong to the realm of ideas), the structures of acting remain linked to movement and its immutable laws ...'

(Lecoq, 2001:24)

Through examination of exercises such as neutral mask 'identifications' and exploration of the movement dynamics of verbs I will demonstrate correlations between Lecoq's practice and concepts of embodied cognition such as those contained in theories of

Action-Based Language (Glenberg and Gallese 2011), Embodied Narratology (Wojciehowski & Gallese 2011) and Affective Narratology (Hogan 2011). (499 words)

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