

# **DRAMA** *Works*

**Styletasters 4**  
**Barrault and Berkoff**

# EXTRACT

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## SAMPLE EXTRACTS FROM STYLETASTERS 4

### EXTRACT I.

### NOTES

1. This resource completes the work started in Styletasters 3, on Rudolf Laban and Jacques Lecoq. The mission was to identify the influences on Steven Berkoff and what inspired him to become the maverick theatre person he is. On the way I have discovered some amazing practitioners. Though I had heard of Laban, done some work on Lecoq [who I admire greatly] and knew that Barrault was an inspirational mime artist, all three are so much more. I hope these two latest Styletasters will allow you to dip a toe in little known waters too and even decide to explore them further.
2. As usual with the Styletaster series, there are suggestions for a Final Project, which could be the starting point for what exam boards are demanding of students now – a piece of work using a particular practitioner's style.
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## Extract 2

### THE THEORIES EXPLORED PRACTICALLY

... **Do not translate the four legs of animals to human legs and arms. Better to capture something of the fluidity of its movement, the way it uses its head and neck, for instance. Our own two legs can imitate something of the way an animal moves on their own. We can also see whether an animal is watchful, nervous, by how it uses its head and eyes, its capacity for stillness, and so on.**

**Bring back your study to show the rest of the class and take it seriously. Slip into the skin of your chosen animal. Be it.**

With the third stage of this kind of observation exercise one can see most clearly the necessary progression of the actor from objectivity to subjectivity, from observation to becoming.

**Each student must choose any object around the studio, or they could have brought in their own chosen object for this exercise, which would be better still. Observe it first and describe it in words. Analyse its purpose and really look at it. Then remove the object, or turn away from it and describe it to the rest of the group. This description is about what it looks like but also its function; you need to have discovered a real appreciation for the specialness of this chosen object.** [This exercise was also mooted by Brecht, who wanted his actors to see things 'strangely', that is from a different perspective, using Verfremdungseffekt.]

So far you have been on the outside of your object; you have described it objectively. **Now try the subjective approach. This involves becoming the object. Again, as in the study of an animal, you don't have to force your body into impossible shapes, it's more about imagining what it must feel like to be, say, a chair. How do you feel about being sat on? Are you proud of how necessary and useful you are, or humiliated? What kind of chair are you – roomy and soft, hard and functional?**

Barrault uses the example of a match, squashed into a box in straight lines with other matches, but with the potential for a moment of glory, a poetic flowering

into flame. He sees it as a frustrated creature, confined in a prison like a coffin with its brothers and sisters, but within it is the potential for becoming a symbol of life and death.

**Apply the same questions as for a realistic character: where have I come from? Where am I going? What is my reason for being here now – what am I here to do?**

**See if you can present your object as a living image in this way to the rest of the group. What kind of character does your match, or chair, for example, become? What is its potential?** This is the way that poetic symbols, which abound in Physical and Total Theatre, are found.

**Here are some objects that you might be able to find, observe and see the potential for ‘more’ within: a wardrobe, a key, a mask, a clock, a torch, a knife, a musical instrument, a phone, a tree, a cloud, a stream. Find your own object or use one of these as your starting point. ...**

#### EXTRACT 3]

... Going further with the playful use of accessories to access character, start first with Naturalism and then work outwards into more ‘poetic’ realms, Barrault often cited the need to find an object – whether it’s a piece of costume, a hand prop or an item of furniture, through which to explore the character’s expressiveness. He uses the word ‘refuge’ in this context, as a means of hiding or concealing emotion. Often by seeking to *conceal*, the character actually *reveals* more than s/he realises. For example, one refuge might be the way a character fiddles on his/her lap with a hat, pulling and wringing it as s/he seeks to conceal inner anxiety. Or the refuge could actually be a part of the character’s body – for instance, a woman fiddling with her hair, as a diversion, or to reveal concealed nervousness.

[The idea of ‘refuges’ is explored more fully at the end of the next but one section, on mime.]

Try the following ideas, all of which should reveal a hidden interior emotion.

**Use a coat to express:**

**the heat of embarrassment**

**a desire for orderliness because your world is falling apart**

**hatred or anger with the person standing in front of you**

**Use your hands to express:**

**the desire to run away, though you are stuck in a situation you cannot leave**

**anxiety for a loved one who is departing into danger**

**an inner desire to command or squash someone who is defying you**

**Use an umbrella to express**

**irritation**

**overwhelming love and concern for someone who is oblivious of you**

**despair**

You will notice that sometimes the whole emotion is expressed both through the object [or body part] and your own body language and sometimes you are using the object as a refuge, making every attempt to conceal evidence of that emotion from your own body or face, which may even contradict your inner feelings. Thus, sometimes the object and your whole self become extensions of each other while at other times the object is expressing your real self while your body is trying to conceal it. All of this is crucial for an actor and also for a mime.

**Revisit the above ideas with a partner, and explore whether the refuge is successful or not. How does your partner respond to your efforts at concealment? Does s/he even realise that you are concealing something? You can see what a useful idea this is for actors in a naturalistic situation.**

For realism, finding the right object to become the character's refuge or means of expression in a scene is imperative: a coat to fiddle with, a chair to use as a refuge, etc. an umbrella, and so on.

In each of the following scenarios, one of the characters is concealing something important to him/her. It may be that the activity being undertaken will supply the prop for that person's refuge. Otherwise, find some likely prop, even part of your own clothing or body, as your refuge....

#### EXTRACT 4:

....Mimed language needs 'attitude, gesture and indication'. The character must have an **attitude** which will dictate how they make the **gesture** and what they intend by that gesture [the **indication**].

We will work through a number of what might read like stage directions and add attitude, gesture and indication where necessary. The first example is Barrault's own: 'The warrior draws his sword.' You need to add adverbs and adjectives to this sparse direction to illumine the mimed version, for instance the *angry* warrior... draws his sword – how? And with what intention? **Supply your own and demonstrate it as a mimed action ending with a freeze in position.**

**Now try the following, adding mood, the 'how' of the action and intention in all cases. Follow by demonstrating each one practically.**

**The young woman gets out of the car.**

**The clown walks along the tightrope.**

**The man packs the suitcase.**

**The man/woman waves the flag.**

**The waiter clears the table.**

**The magician shows the playing card.**

**The teacher picks up a book.**

**Do any of these already start to look interesting enough to carry into a more extended piece of mime? If so, give it a go but keep it short.**

You will notice that the above exercise closely echoes what Barrault stated was necessary for any actor entering a playing space: ***Where have I come from? What state of mind am I in? What resolution have I made which brings me into this space?***

Mime expresses the silence and solitude that lie at the heart of society's noise. 'Gestures often reveal the secrets which lurk behind them', to which Barrault adds that psychologists will understand the gestures a disturbed patient will use, will indeed find them often more revealing than what the patient says.

Can you think of examples of the truth of this? **Think of, and demonstrate, the body language of someone who is arrogant, thinks he's a lord of the**



**universe, and someone who is abused, always bottom of the pile.**

Good mime will be spare, economical, pure and clean. 'It is an art which starts from a tragic situation,' and is always essentially tragic, even when taking refuge in comedy. If you think of any Charlie Chaplin film, or Laurel and Hardy, you will see the truth of this. These characters go through all sorts of desperate situations, are ridiculed, put upon, insulted, abandoned, but each situation is lifted into the realm of laughter. The mime teaches us to laugh at difficulties, at all the problems and nastiness life throws at you. Barrault says that mime teaches us how to live. It is the 'anti-death art,' and as such, because life is a continual struggle to conquer death, awareness of that keeps the mime's whole body alert from 'the tips of the toes to the tip of the brain'.

This struggle is reflected in the body's fight to overcome gravity [ see also Augusto Boal in *Styletasters 2*] and the atmospheric pressure through which the body has to wade at every moment and with every gesture [see also Rudolf Laban in *Styletasters 3*]. Atmospheric pressure must always be fought against by 'skyward energy.' Here we are certainly talking of the poetic mime which Barrault champions – the art of mimicry that lifts the mime and with him the audience out of the ordinary, out of the mire of living and into the light of life and hope where death does not rule.

#### EXTRACT 5:

Barrault's idea of Total Theatre, which is certainly inspired by his contact with and admiration for Antonin Artaud, contains many of Artaud's ideas but whereas Artaud never succeeded in communicating those ideas successfully to actors, Barrault, perhaps inheriting a world of actors that had been softened up by such as Artaud and other visionary practitioners to make them more receptive, built on the important aspects of Artaud's work and gave them a different emphasis.

His idea of Total Theatre was; 'the total utilisation of all the means of expression at the disposal of a Human Being and the total utilisation of [his/her] whole range of musical and plastic expression [song, lyrical diction, prose diction, cries, breathing, sighs, silences, prosaic bodily expression, the art of gesture, symbolic gesture, lyrical gesture and dance.]'

Artaud put far more emphasis on what the whole gamut of theatrical effect

could offer apart from the actor. He saw actors as only a component part of the Total Theatre experience. Just as important are sound, rhythm, light, music, and setting which might include giant props, masks and puppets. In a sense Artaud saw the stage as his chance to create a vast moving, breathing, living Surrealist canvas with which to unsettle the audience. The audience are swept along into a dream [or nightmare] world in which nothing makes obvious sense. Instead they understand in the way that a child or a primitive tribes-person from pre-history might: feeling, hearing, seeing, experiencing with wonder as well as fear as they are surrounded and battered with impressions that defy logic. So reason is abandoned, since nothing in the production will fit into that pocket and each member of the audience's 'double' - his dream self, his buried inner self – is woken.

Much of this Barrault did use, not necessarily all in the same production but he put far more emphasis, as we have seen in the quotation above, on the actors. Notice that in his list of what makes Total Theatre, everything, including the sounds etc. are what can be made by the human body.

Elsewhere Barrault does often refer to the idea of the 'double', but does he mean the same thing as Artaud did? At first it seems so. Sounding like an echo of Artaud here, our double, he says, is 'he who at night lives our dreams.' And the theatre, he goes on, like life, is a dream, an illusion created by actors and designers. This is where he diverges somewhat from Artaud, who saw 'real' life and the dream-life of a person's double as essentially one and the same thing. Instead, Barrault asserts that acting is 'filtered life', an artificial recreation of life in order to make sense of it. Doing this, he says, is therapeutic, can recharge the batteries, for what the actor produces on stage is not 'the lifeless copying of nature, but the recreating of life...' which goes further than real life, for reality, through that act of recreation, is transformed by the artistry of the actor into something magical.

Artaud and Barrault do often concur. The differences come from the practical applications that Barrault successfully managed and which at times reduce, through practice, Artaud's sometimes wild and drug-infused wishes. But Barrault is not without the poetry of his mentor. Consider this: 'Theatre is ... the art which takes place in the present and appeals simultaneously to all the senses, all the nerves, all the instincts, all at the same time. It is essentially the art of sensation, the art of the present ...' I can hear Artaud applauding!

Both tell us that theatre started as magic – dances, shouts, songs,

incantations and warlike mimes using animal masks, the paintings of animals and the copying of the movement of animals all as a form of sympathetic magic. The idea is that by depicting the animal, whether by painting, sculpting an animal mask or by imitation of the animal through sound and movement, brings the animal to us literally and figuratively. As part of a hunting ritual, where the actor 'becomes' the animal, the hunt will be magically blessed on the morrow. It is a kind of wish or dream fulfilment: what you desire or dream of will magically come to pass, whether it's the killing of your enemies, the bringing of meat to the arrow, or the bringing of sun and rain to the buried seed. All it needs is the magical intermediary of the dreamer, who is the actor.

When Barrault directed Aeschylus's *the Oresteia*, he used many of the ideas Artaud suggested as part of the Total Theatre experience: rhythmic sound and breaths, plus rhythmic movement with the feet and the knees. In addition he used African type masks of leather to enhance eyes and mouths, both practically and to give a visionary look to the chorus. These masks were designed by Sartori, the same man who also designed Lecoq's training masks. He retained the 'magic circle' of the orchestra and a wooden setting, a building with entrances, as a backdrop, much as the ancient Greeks would have done. Thus we see how Barrault always marries aspects of Total Theatre with the kind of ideas which will resonate and make sense of his production with an audience. This causes what I think is a blend of theatre practicality and Total Theatre magic that made all his productions unique whilst remaining accessible.

**Try as a whole group, bare foot, creating rhythms with feet, knees, hand slaps on thighs and hand claps. Have someone as chorus leader to start the rhythm off. When all have joined in, a second person puts in a counter rhythm. Allow that to be picked up by a few before a third person sets up yet another counter rhythm. Keep them simple at first but then see how complex you can make these rhythms without losing the beat.**

**It might be advisable to allocate letters A, B and C, to the group before starting, with a leader for each of the three letters. Concentrate on establishing and maintaining the rhythms, but don't add movement at first or you'll lose the core of what you're seeking to achieve. Only when they are secure on the three rhythms and how they interweave should you allow them, as a group, to try impose a shape, using movements of the head, torso, hips and arms [when not**

**slapping with palms.] You could allow voice – whoops, clicks of the tongue, and so on, to add to the mix.**

This exercise is much harder than you think and needs a strong central rhythm around which to weave the counter rhythms and other sounds, only when you feel confident. ...

#### EXTRACT 6:

... Apart from his desire for a Total Theatre, the importance of SPACE was another main element of Barrault's work. The actor can give an impression of the space he is working in by his physicality. The theatrical setting, including lighting, also contributes. When Barrault talks of Space it is as a part of Total Theatre, where every element contributes. But as in all of Barrault's work, the centre of everything is the human being, the actor. It is he who, by his actions, defines the space. Theatre, he says is 'the poetry of space by means of the human being.'

Exercises involving SPACE:

**Whatever the size of your group and your studio, start by striding around using every inch of the space. Swing your arms freely, move with confidence [avoiding bumping into anything or anyone else]. Think to yourself that you are walking along a huge sandy beach, or a stretch of heathland, the wind exhilarating you, your mind blown free of cobwebs and troubles. Enjoy the space and feel that enjoyment affect your whole body.**

**Now move into an imaginary tiny space, such as the inside of a lift crammed full of people - again whatever your group size is. Feel how your body is affected as more and more people enter, squashing you further and further in. How do you feel?**

**Add sound to both these. This might be breaths and sighs or anything that feels right. How does the perception of the space you are in affect your breathing and the sounds?**

**Take turns entering the playing space, showing by your body stance and movement, plus breathing, where you are - the size of the room or the type of situation into which you have entered. How does it impact on your entire**

being?

**Reverse the freedom of the first exercise by crowding together as a whole group into a lovely comfortable huddle. You feel warm and safe together, in a herd. Now, on an instruction from the teacher or group leader, gradually feel yourself forced apart. You resist as hard as you can but the force pushing you away from each other is inexorable, until you have reached the outer limits of the space. Here the further away you move from each other the more panicky you feel, shown by the tension in your bodies and the panic in your breathing and the sounds you emit.**

Like Laban and, more recently, Boal, Barrault thought of space as a physical presence. Air is invisible to us, but it is there. We can feel it as wind. We can flap our hands in front of our faces and feel its movement against our skin.

Barrault talks a lot about upward movements, of feeling light and positive, full of energy as an assertion of Life. Gravity, the pulling down of your body affects your spirits too. The human being has a duty to defy Death and assert Life; for Barrault the process of Theatre and of Acting is an assertion of human life, a celebration of it.

**Try this exercise:**

**Lie on your stomach on the floor. Feel as if a great weight is pushing you down, trying to push you into the floor itself. Fight it. Try to move individual limbs; it is almost impossible. Yet you must get up, it is what you want most in the world. Struggle until you're on your hands and knees. Your spine is still sagging under the pressure from above but also the gravitational pull from below. It must be conquered. Struggle to your feet and stand. Everything in you wants to sag, to return to the floor. Fight it and start to walk. Every step is an effort at first, but gradually, as you move around you see the surroundings, other people, the view through a window perhaps, and you start to feel lighter. Your steps become springy, your neck straightens and your spine. You are filled with a rush of joy.**

**Discuss how your breathing was affected throughout this exercise.**

**You are slaves going round and round in a tight circle on a treadmill. There is no hope you will ever do anything in your life except this job, day in and day**

**out, forever. Plod round in that circle for long enough to feel something of what that would mean. There is a heavy chain around your neck, bowing your head down. Your arms are chained at the wrist behind your back.**

**You hear shouts and gunshots outside and you are afraid. Would you stop moving? How are you feeling now? How has the fear affected your breathing?**

**Then the door to your dark space is flung open and someone comes in. He goes to the mechanism which works the treadmill which also keeps your chains locked together and turns it off. All at once your chains fall away. You are led out into the light and space of outside. You realise only gradually that you have been freed, that you will not have to return to your slavery.**

Discuss after the exercise how it makes you feel and how it affected both your spirits and your breathing. It may be helpful to have the group leader/ teacher call out the different sections of this exercise e.g. 'The switch is thrown. The treadmill stops moving. Your chains fall to the ground.... '

The settings chosen for a play also require a sense of how the space will be used. Barrault was often very innovative and experimental in his settings. Here are some examples.

In this example, the set is in sympathy with the action and is used symbolically. In a play called *Les Nuits de la Colere*, about a plague of cholera, the set disintegrated more and more as the characters died.

In another play he used slices of light to represent steps up which the mime actor climbed.

Most plays had minimal sets as the actors created the setting with their own bodies, bringing alive the place through sound effects and action. You will have tried this with the work on *Autour d'une Mere*....

## EXTRACT 7

... For a long time I have wanted to do something about Steven Berkoff as a practitioner. A year or so ago that was my starting point. I had already written a popular resource on *Metamorphosis* and have quoted and explored some of his

techniques in my other resources *Exploring Physical Theatre* and *Artaud Through Practice*, but I had not written something devoted to him alone.

Researching him I found that he'd studied at Laban's School of Dance as well as with Jacques Lecoq at his Ecole Internationale in Paris. So it seemed sensible to write about each of those since both were major influences on Berkoff and his style, as well as being important theorists and practitioners in their own right. These two practitioners proved to be so weighty that I ended up putting them together in *Styletasters 3*. There was no room for two more practitioners there.

Despite Berkoff being my starting point, please note that I don't mention Berkoff in the *Styletaster* on Laban and Lecoq, though I do credit both those teachers when I come to the work on Berkoff in this resource. Laban and Lecoq are both extremely influential practitioners and theorists in their own right, who have inspired and taught many others in the theatre world. Berkoff took only what he needed from them when he developed his own style. But their work goes far beyond the ideas that influenced Berkoff, and I have tried to credit each one's influence in their own right.

Then there was Barrault, a figure that Berkoff views with the utmost respect, almost amounting to hero-worship. Why? It is a combination of factors, I believe: Barrault's feeling for Total Theatre, his extraordinary skill as a mime-artist, and also his success in the French commercial theatre, the kind of success Berkoff hankered for in his early years as a performer. More than either Laban or Lecoq, Barrault is the theatre person that Berkoff most adheres to, probably most aspires to. Naturally, however, Berkoff has, as always, his own take on all of his influences, out of which he creates his own unique style.

You should see these four, divided between *Styletasters 3* and *Styletasters 4*, as a grouping of practitioners whose starting point is the human body and its potential. Each of them have had a profound influence on all those companies who specialize nowadays in what is known as Physical Theatre . If you as teachers are contemplating anything in the realms of Physical Theatre, both these resources are essential for you....

## EXTRACT 8

...Berkoff is excited by language and uses it in a unique way. After the Kafka period,

which sticks quite closely to the language used in the original prose version, he started to become more experimental. He had been reading widely from the classics, perhaps ashamed of his ignorance when first at Webber Douglas. The language he began to use was a hotch-potch of his reading, street-language and references from the family and friends he had known as a young man. Shakespearian phraseology features often, sometimes quoting directly, sometimes subtly altered. As his reading of classics expanded so did his language. It began to encompass similar references to Greek classical drama, all the time mixing these with the patter of street-sellers, Cockney slang, Jewishisms and anything else his squirrel mind had read, encompassed and stored. The result is a unique language all his own, robust, often shocking, capable of poetry of a softer kind but all of which has a remarkably real feel to it, as if people really speak like that, though they don't. The believability of the speeches is a marvellous achievement, belying the skill it has taken to create them.

Here is an example from the very start of *East*, in which you can see how the effect is gained by the mixture of Shakespearian language and modern street-lingo – rarely direct quotes; it is the reference bound to a modern word or phrase that creates the effect, sometimes raising a laugh, sometimes underlining the horror. Les is talking about his name, which Mike hasn't taken to: 'It's soft, it's gooey ... but choose it I did not ... in my mother's hot womb did she curse this name on me ...' Mike responds with a half-quote from Julius Caesar: 'Oh he doth bestride Commercial Road like a Colossus ...' brought down to earth by 'that's my manor ...' a glance, a collusion with the audience.

The 'thy's and 'thee's give the speeches a timeless feel. Words are piled on top of each other, often contradictory, but always punchy and rhythmic. Violence and cruelty are punctured by 'fuck this for a laugh' or similar, the sudden recognition amidst the welter of sounds, creating a bark of laughter in the audience, almost of relief, as the characters become briefly normalized before soaring off once more into something else – something more poetic, alien, larger than life – heroic.

In *Agamemnon*, where Berkoff sticks quite closely to a direct translation of Aeschylus' language, when he differs it has a particularly powerful effect. Here is the Herald speaking: 'Great Agamemnon's coming back/ render him the welcome he deserves/ Troy has toppled down/ her shrines dissolved in dust/ her seed exterminated by/ chattering machines of death that spit from iron mouths/ by the hot breath of napalm...' followed by a catalogue of horrific modern weapons and the



results they achieve. It is the sudden leap into the weaponry of modern warfare that is shocking and plunges the audience into a realization that all war is obscene, then or now. Contrast this with the poetry of 'Paris's paeon to Helen:

Your hair is the colour of sun/  
Your mouth has the taste of music/  
Your thighs disturb my dreams...'

Here is a writer who can play with an audience through the power of language, changing mood quickly and absolutely, provoking laughter and horror within seconds of each other. This is Alex Sierz's 'in-yer-face-theatre' par excellence, a theatre of superlatives, of heightened language which you will either ride with delight or which will swamp you....

## EXTRACT 9

A Berkoffian actor has to be nimble of lips and tongue. Speeches are often long and often the breaks in them, for breath and for the audience's comprehension, have to be exposed and built in because Berkoff won't always be using normal punctuation but just a forward slash or a dash. The speeches are written 'to attack the audience with an avalanche of language.' Note the word attack. 'In-yer-face' is always confrontational and will often appear threatening. Even when it's not it will be delivered with a delicious enjoyment of the sounds and the structure of the words. To cope with Berkoff's use of language you have to love it yourself: the sounds of it, the contortions your lips and tongues must make.

**To work up to this try some tongue twisters first, beginning slowly and then increasing speed until you are speaking as quickly as you can without losing a single syllable. When you are starting slowly, explore and pull out the muscles in your face that are involved. Allow your tongue and lips to explore the words by lengthening the vowels, lingering on them and by making each consonant have exaggerated definition. If a speedy delivery makes you lose some of those sharp edges to the words that a slow approach allowed, pull back till you have regained that, at a speed you can manage. In every case attack the words with gusto and perform them with energy to the rest of your group. Approach each one as if it is the start of a longer speech where you are seeking to capture the attention of the audience.**

**a.] See how Mr Mephistopheles the marvellously mysterious magician makes miracles out of magnetic mesmerism.**

**b.] From faggots of facetiousness we will raise a fire to fell all feeble and fastidiously fainting followers.**

**c.] With this pitiful pittance the platoons must be placated - a pretext, a pretentious prevarication to prevent the potentiality of an uprising.**

**d.] With gimlet eye the ghoulish ghost gibbers in the gloaming and, groaning and grumbling, gloats on his own jaw-dropping guilt. ...**

#### **EXTRACT 10**

**Try miming the following in extreme slow motion. Pull out your body so that arms, legs, head, back etc. are used to their fullest.**

**throwing a ball**

**taking off a hat and making a bow with a flourish of the hat**

**covering your mouth with your hands to convey shock**

**pulling a reluctant dog along**

**offering a plate of goodies**

**playing a violin**

**opening a door to let someone through**

Divide the class in half so everyone has a chance to see the effect of such slow motion. What does such slow motion add from an audience point of view? Does what you see look more comical? Sarcastic? Does it make you notice the body more? Berkoff often uses slow motion, both as a rehearsal technique and in performance. Can you see why?

**Next use the same slow motion mimed moments, only in different moods:**

**with fury, anguish, horror, outrage/shock, antagonism**

Once again, divide the group in two to allow everyone to view as well as to participate.

**In pairs, choose one of the above moods with which you are tackling the following tasks. Don't forget to keep the body language extended to its utmost**

**and stick to mime...**

## **EXTRACT 11**

**...Invent further choral moves for groups of any number, a minimum of 5, around the following ideas.**

**Nosiness**

**Delight/ joy**

**Fear/ alarm**

**Panic**

**Anger**

**As well as movements that EITHER interweave – that is the chorus members come up with their own moves, but in the same rhythm as each other - OR are absolutely together, find ways of giving the moves a background of sound using your voices or bodies. Examples might include:**

**sounds made by slapping your palms against another part of the body**

**shuffling or stamping your feet against the floor**

**using your tongues and lips to create noises**

**creating a constant stream of vocal gobbledygook.**

**Here are some more, this times groups of types, which can be caricatured through choric movement that can be, but does not have to be, the same.**

**Remember too, that as in the first exercise with the Lodgers, the moves could happen in sequence as in a round. That gives you a number of options with which to work.**

**Gossips**

**Conspirators**

**Flatterers**

**Very Important People [who know they are]**

**Victims**

## **EXTRACT 12**

**...The idea of being trapped by circumstance, by upbringing, by class, by bureaucracy is central to Berkoff's work. Discuss as a group what might act as a**

**trap for people in the world we now live in. Use your knowledge of current affairs as well as you own observations to inform the discussion.** Out of the sharing of ideas may well come something you can use for your own work in the style of Berkoff.

In *Metamorphosis* the family are trapped by their claustrophobic home brooded over by the omnipresent insect. Awareness of the presence of Gregor as insect dominates the environment, which is why the scaffolding set needs to be suggestive both of a cage and of the legs of an insect. The lighting contributes by casting giant shadows.

In addition, the family themselves are often confined to three stools. They sit, sleep and mime the actions of their daily lives from these stools. It is a similar idea to that explored in *Decadence*, where the two sets of characters are confined to their separate sofas. It is possible for the characters to get up, but it is as if each person is attached to that stool or sofa by an invisible umbilical chord. They cannot move far. This is why it is an important moment at the end of *Metamorphosis* that, with the death of Gregor, the family can finally leave their prison of a home. The lighting suggests springtime, freedom, a breath of fresh air. 'a lovely peace rests' in Mrs Samsa's heart. Greta says she wants to 'leave this house for ever', something which is actually now a possibility. They talk of the future and of finding a husband for Greta. She 'releases their hands and stretches' to symbolize her stepping away from the imprisonment of the family into an unknown and hopeful future, a future where 'crocuses will just be coming out.'

With sets which are symbolic the mime work of the actors needs to be exact and precise. Only complete clarity will have the ability to carry an audience along with the actors. It is necessary, says Berkoff, echoing both Lecoq and Barrault here, for the mime to be so exact that it can be 'shared with the audience whose imaginative participation is required to make it live.' This imaginative awakening of the audience through a shared link between what is happening on the stage and in the auditorium is something that almost all practitioners specify in different ways. That link, the magic which makes what is happening far more than the sum of its component parts, is what makes unforgettable theatre and almost every practitioner since the end of the nineteenth century strives to achieve it. And of course, like Peter Brook's 'golden

net ... the moment of wonder' it doesn't always happen.

Berkoff's mime is both precise and symbolic. It is not precise in its finicky detail; when a symbolic point is being made, often it is broad and generalized. Consider the family's eating in *Metamorphosis*, and that of the Lodgers, which we've already examined.

Try out this section. Greta and the family are concerned because Gregor is not eating. Greta suggests trying a number of things and observing what he wants to eat now he is an insect by what he chooses.

Mother, Father and Greta are sitting on their stools. The three 'make things appear from the air' and put them onto the imaginary dining table in front of them all. The handling and showing of specific items is not important, but generalized. What is important is the rhythm. In the background, Gregor's excitement is shown by his 'Yes!' after every suggestion.

**Try the scene in a foursome. ...**

### EXTRACT 13

...'A set,' says Berkoff, 'should be able to melt in an instant and never represent a really heavy piece of pseudo-reality.'

Berkoff's settings are often as much mental as physical. Thus, in *the Trial*, Joseph K's bewilderment with the bureaucratic trap he finds himself in is mirrored and given a physical form. But it is never static. The ten frames that made up the set, held by members of the cast, could expand and contract very quickly and even spin around poor K, mirroring his confusion inwardly and outwardly. It could suggest corridors, doorways, rooms, picture frames, windows and mirrors, all according to the necessities of the script.

**Using your canes to suggest two sides of the frames, choose one member of your group and create this moveable set. Start with a door, leading into a room ... then a corridor ,, leading to another room ... which suddenly becomes smaller – threatens to squash him, until another door appears... and so on. You can experiment and add a family picture gallery, a hall of mirrors such as you might have at a funfair... and now you are moving away from an**

**experiment with set of *the Trial* into your own invention.**

This exercise will give you ideas that might surface in your final project. See if out of what you have just done a story is beginning to emerge....