



SUTRA

A RESOURCE FOR
TEACHERS
AND STUDENTS

SADL
ERSW
ELLS



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INTRODUCTION

As a Set Work on the AQA A level dance specification, this resource is intended to provide an insight to Sutra (2008) created by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Through interviews with the artists involved, it explores the origins of Sutra, the creative process and contains an analysis of the work. It is designed to be used in conjunction with the Sutra DVD and includes written and practical tasks to support A level dance teachers in the delivery of the work.

It has been written and compiled by Lucy Muggleton with the generous support of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, his collaborators and the Sutra team at Sadler's Wells.



Sadler's Wells
Productions

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION



SUTRA

WORLD PREMIERE

27 May 2008, Sadler's Wells

DIRECTION & CHOREOGRAPHY

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui

VISUAL CREATION & DESIGN

Antony Gormley

MUSIC

Szymon Brzóska

ASSISTANT CHOREOGRAPHER

Ali Ben Lotfi Thabet

PERFORMERS

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Shi Yanbo, Shi Yanchuang, Shi Yanci, Shi Yandong, Shi Yanhao, Shi Yanjiao, Shi Yanjie, Shi Yanhai, Shi Yanli, Shi Yanmo, Shi Yannan, Shi Yanpeng, Shi Yanqun, Hi Yantao, Shi Yanting, Shi Yanxing, Shi Yanyong, Shi Yanyuan, Shi Yanzhu

MUSICIANS

Piano Szymon Brzóska, **Violin** Alies Sluiter & Olga Wojciechowska, **Cello** Laura Anstee, **Percussion** (Snare drum, Surdo, bass kick drum, Cajon, suspended cymbal, bell tree, finger cymbals, triangle, Chinese temple block) Coordt Linke

LIGHTING CONSULTANT

Adam Carrée

TOUR WARDROBE MANAGER

Leila Ransley

A Sadler's Wells Production

Sutra is co-produced with Athens Festival, Festival de Barcelona Grec, Grand Théâtre de Luxemburg, La Monnaie Brussels, Festival d'Avignon, Fondazione Musica per Roma and Shaolin Cultural Communications Company.

With the blessing of the Abbot of Song Shan Shaolin Temple Master Shi Yongxin.

SIDI LARBI CHERKAOUI



BACKGROUND, TRAINING & CAREER OUTLINE

Born in Anvers Belgium in 1976, to a Flemish mother and Moroccan father, Cherkaoui grew up in a multicultural, multi-lingual household with his father speaking Arabic, Spanish and French and his mother French and Dutch. "Translation was always a very important part of my life. In Belgium we are surrounded by other cultures so we tend to be very focused on understanding others."

At school he was good at languages and mathematics and enjoyed folk dance classes. At home he loved to draw. "I was raised in Belgium, and we pride ourselves on our painters and artists that work within

the visual arts so I think that was a big influence, visualising reality by drawing. I used to draw a lot when I was younger."

During his teenage years Cherkaoui loved watching Bruce Lee films fascinated by the Kung Fu movement in them. Hip Hop was just beginning to influence mainland Europe and inspired by the music videos he saw on television, Cherkaoui began imitating artists such as Janet Jackson and Prince.

During that time he took part in a dance contest with friends after school and someone from TV invited him to audition for television work, which he did and was successful. Whilst working for TV he was encouraged by the other dancers to attend classes so he began learning jazz, ballet, hip-hop, flamenco and tap.

In 1995 at the age of 19 Cherkaoui, encouraged by his ballet teacher, entered a dance contest for the Best Belgian dancer, organised by Alain Platel (founder of les ballets C de la B). He won first prize for his solo performance that he had choreographed combining voguing, hip-hop and African dance. Wim Vandekeybus was on the jury for the contest along with someone connected to the school of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (P.A.R.T.S – based in Brussels) and they suggested that Cherkaoui enroll at the school for the three-year training programme. "There I studied the techniques of William Forsythe, Trisha Brown and Pina Bausch. It was a very eclectic dance school that really allowed you to touch on very iconic contemporary dance styles and it was so inspiring to be there. So having experienced contemporary, modern, classical and pop culture dance it helped me to define my own criteria and find my personal voice within it."

In 1997, Cherkaoui was invited to join les ballets C de la B in Alain Platel's 'Let op Bach' and his debut as a choreographer was in 1999 with Andrew Wale's

contemporary musical, *Anonymous Society*. Since then he has made over 50 fully-fledged choreographic pieces and picked up a slew of awards, including two Olivier Awards, three Ballet Tanz awards for best choreographer (2008, 2011, 2017) and the Kairos Prize (2009) for his artistic vision and his quest for intercultural dialogue.

Cherkaoui's initial pieces were made at les ballets C de la B – *Rien de Rien* (2000), *Foi* (2003) and *Tempus Fugit* (2004). He undertook parallel projects that both expanded and consolidated his artistic vision: *D'avant* (2002) with longstanding artistic partner Damien Jalet at Sasha Waltz & Guests company and *zero degrees* (2005) with Akram Khan. He has worked with a variety of theatres, opera houses and ballet companies. From 2004 to 2009 Cherkaoui was based in Antwerp as artist in residence at Toneelhuis, which produced *Myth* (2007) and *Origine* (2008).

In 2008 Cherkaoui premiered *Sutra* at Sadler's Wells. This award-winning collaboration with artist Antony Gormley and the Shaolin monks continues to tour the world to great critical acclaim. After his first commissioned piece in North America, *Orbo Novo* (Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet) and a series of duets such as *Faun* (which premiered at Sadler's Wells as part of In the Spirit of Diaghilev) and *Dunas* with flamenco danseuse María Pagés (both 2009), he launched his own company Eastman, resident at deSingel International Arts Campus (Antwerp).

Spring 2010 saw him reunited with choreographer Damien Jalet and Antony Gormley to make *Babel* (words), which won an Olivier. That same year he created *Rein*, a duet featuring Guro Nagelhus Schia and Vebjørn Sundby, as well as *Play*, a duet with Kuchipudi danseuse Shantala Shivalingappa and *Bound*, a duet for Shanell Winlock and Gregory Maqoma as part of Southern Bound Comfort. In 2011 he created *TeZuka* and *Labyrinth* (for the Dutch National Ballet). In 2012 he created *Puz/zle*, gaining him a second Olivier. That year he also collaborated with Joe Wright on his film *Anna Karenina*, for which Cherkaoui helmed the choreography.

2013 saw the premiere of *4D* and *genesis* (Eastman), *Boléro* (co-created with Damien Jalet and Marina Abramović, for the Paris Opera Ballet), and *m/longa* (Sadler's Wells). He reunited with Joe Wright to co-direct *A Season in the Congo* at The Young Vic. In 2014, he created *Noetic* for the GöteborgsOperans Danskompani, *Mercy* (from Solo for Two) for Natalia Osipova and Ivan Vasiliev, which they performed at the London Coliseum and he directed his first opera, *Shell Shock*, for La Monnaie, with music by Nicholas Lens and text by Nick Cave.

In 2015, Cherkaoui directed his first full-length theatre production *Pluto* based on the award-winning manga series by Naoki Urasawa and Takashi Nagasaki at Bunkamura in Tokyo, bringing the beloved manga character Astro Boy to life on stage, and was movement director for Lyndsey Turner's *Hamlet* starring Benedict Cumberbatch at the Barbican Centre in London. He also made a trio *Harbor Me* commissioned by the L.A. Dance Project, and choreographed a new *Firebird* for Stuttgart Ballet. In the same year, Cherkaoui created a new production *Fractus V* for his company Eastman, in which he also performs.

Since 2015, Cherkaoui assumed the role of artistic director at the Royal Ballet of Flanders, where he has created *Fall* (2015), *Exhibition* (2016) and *Requiem* (2017). He combines this function with his title as artistic director of Eastman and keeps creating new work along with the artistic entourage of this company, for example *Qutb* (2016), a trio commissioned by Natalia Osipova, the operas *Les Indes Galantes* (2016) for the Bayerische Staatsoper and *Satyagraha* (2017) for Theater Basel, *Icon* (2016) for GöteborgsOperans Danskompani and *Mosaic* (2017) for Martha Graham Dance Company. Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui is also Associate Artist at Sadler's Wells.



CHERKAOUI DISCUSSES HIS INFLUENCES & SUBJECT MATTER ...

Who or what would you say has been the biggest influence on your work to date and in what way have they influenced your work?

I have always listened to a lot of Kate Bush's music. What I loved about her work was that she always found ways of speaking about very diverse subjects. It wasn't just simple love songs; she would know how to really touch upon particular elements. I think she was definitely a big influence. I loved her approach to intercultural music which would be

drenched by an Irish culture or influences from Africa, Australia, or Balkan electro music. It was extremely diverse but you could always feel her voice within it; she would find a way to resonate with it. So for me, she's definitely up there in being a hugely inspiring person.

So music is an integral part of your work. Could you comment on your interest and use of it?

As I went to a contemporary dance school (P.A.R.T.S), contemporary music and analysing classical music, was part of the curriculum. I learnt in dance school to perceive, absorb and analyse music. I had also met Damien Jalet, another Belgian choreographer and he introduced me to traditional Italian music. He was studying with Giovanna Marini, an ethnomusicologist. Her work is very interesting because she explores music from the cultural and social aspects of the people who make it and so delves into the old traditional songs of Italy that are sung during Easter or specific religious holiday periods. It was very intriguing to hear polyphonic singing. I was really impressed by it and felt it was something I wanted to study more. Often this traditional music isn't transcribed, you have to be there and learn it directly from others. A piece of paper can tell you the story but to be there with someone who has a personal connection and emotional attachment to the music helps you learn the song with a different type of care for it. So Damien, who I have now collaborated with for over 18 years, initiated me into this form of music.

To what extent do you think drawing has influenced your movement?

I don't like to say that drawing has influenced my movement because I think it's all part of the same expression. When you dance you are making drawings in the room, for example, when someone performs a pirouette it is actually a 3D rendition of the form of a circle. For me dancing is drawing, there is no question of that. I think of classical dance when they are holding a position, there is architecture in it. When they lift a leg and make a line, or bend it and create a triangle, it is completely akin to drawing, so the influence is huge but it's because I don't see it as being two different art forms.

You often create architectural spaces on stage and I wonder where that began, that interest in the design element on stage?

Well, it grew really from the encounters I had. At the beginning of my career I had one space in which everything happened, a specific type of room. Within this room everything would unfold, so I was very much looking for the right room to have for the right piece. For example in *Rien de Rien* (2000) it was some sort of mosque or a ballroom, so you could feel like you were in a religious place and at the same time there was a dance element to it.

It was working with Antony Gormley on *Zero Degrees* (2005) that absolutely inspired me. It transformed my way of looking at the space. So since 2005 I started developing a new type of work where the objects or the scenographic elements could be re-organised not only to generate new shapes but also new spaces, so suddenly you are in a graveyard or a temple or you are in front of a wall or stairs. It would all just be part of re-organising the Lego blocks and suddenly you would be somewhere else. I think since *Zero Degrees* I've been delving into that very much. Sometimes this has been a shared project with Antony where he would give me some sort of element to explore like in *Babel* (2010) or in *Sutra* (2008) and sometimes it would be on my own, for example *Puz/zle* (2012) or with *Fractus V* (2015) where we had a pentagon and I wanted to fracture it into many little triangles. So the use of design is my own obsession, mixed with working alongside fantastic artists like Antony Gormley.

SUBJECT MATTER

Your work draws on a variety of subject matter including the question of identity, mythology, religion, philosophy and you have commented on searching for a moral code. What do you think draws you to explore these areas?

I think it's just my life, all the things that concern my existence. I was born in a mixed marriage in a context in which this was quite unique. I am gay, I am vegan, there's a lot of aspects to my nature which didn't make me completely compatible with the society I was born in. Basically on all levels I ended up being on the margins of society and so I had to find a way to handle that constructively. Creativity was a very important factor for me to be able to survive the experience of being born in a world full of racism, full of inequality and injustice. To defeat the enemy, the mediocrity of our society, you have to be very creative to not let the system make you become all of those things too.

We don't know enough about what our ancestors have done and there's so much I discovered as I grew older and I thought "we need to make amends, we need to make peace, we need to reach out" so when you're asking how I came up with those philosophical things I think it's part of all of our duties, whether you are an artist or not to make life bearable for each other. It's a moral necessity.

In your projects you have worked with a wide variety of artists such as María Pagés in *Dunas*, Akram Khan in *Zero Degrees*, Theater Stap in *Ook* and Shaolin monks in *Sutra*. What attracts you to working with such a diverse range of artists?

When I work with someone like María Pagés I see the resemblances and I see where we connect and when I worked with Akram Khan I see where we connect and I can understand that when people are looking at us they see that we are so different but it's only the surface that's different. Within, we always connect, we see things from the same angle and we actually feel certain things from the same angle even if we were raised in other places. Whether it's Shantala (Shivalingappa) or the Shaolin monks or whoever I've shared a stage with, I've always felt that it was about our connection, about the things that we had in common and that was always much more than what was different.

The things that are different are only different as long as you don't absorb each other's language. Let's say that the Shaolin monk has a movement that's different to mine, but the moment I try to learn it then it's a movement that my body also accepts. Yes, I'm looking for people who are different but I don't think they exist. I only see people who I'm very connected to. I think people talk too much about different definitions and disciplines and not enough about imagination. With the artists I work with we don't work together because of the different disciplines; we work together because of the shared imagination.

SIDI LARBI CHERKAOU

STYLISTIC FEATURES

Interdisciplinary approach – theatre, dance, music and multi-media are treated with the same importance.

SUBJECT MATTER

- Inter-cultural dialogue
- Life/Death
- Myths
- Philosophies
- Beliefs

MOVEMENT CONTENT

- Eclectic, embracing movement languages from the people he works with (Contemporary, Flamenco, Kathak, Kucipudi, Ballet, hip-hop ...)
- Extreme flexibility through Yoga
- Martial Art
- Fluid arm and hand gestures
- Influence of Tanztheatre
- Fluidity is offset with extreme strength/attack
- Interest in duet work – mirroring, manipulating, intertwining bodies

DANCERS

- Collaborates with artists who have different techniques, physicality and nationality and celebrates their individuality.

CHOREOGRAPHIC DEVICES / FORM

- Synchronization system – text and pedestrian movement are performed in unison to emphasise an idea/narrative element.
- Displaced manipulation – an object or person controls another without physical contact
- Work is structured episodically

PHYSICAL SETTING

- Set - Architectural spaces, favours manipulative sets
- Long standing collaboration with sculptor Antony Gormley
- Lighting – at times used to manipulate the audiences perception of the performance space.
- Costumes – Simple everyday clothing allows the dancers to be seen as people and often with a cultural reference
- Use of props

AURAL SETTING

- Often collaborates with A Filetta (polyphonic singers)
- Polarisation – silence contrasts with the sudden introduction of sound
- Use of text
- Use of voice – singing and speaking (at times with speech disfluency in storytelling, as if telling the story for the first time)



ANTONY GORMLEY

Antony Gormley was born in London in 1950. His introduction to art was through his father, an art lover, and Gormley recalls regular Sunday visits to the National Art gallery and the British museum as a child.

He attended Trinity College, Cambridge in 1968 to read archaeology, history of art and anthropology. After graduating in 1971, he went to India for almost

three years living in monasteries and practising meditation. Whilst there, he contemplated becoming a Buddhist monk.

He returned home in 1974 to study at the Central School of Art (now Central Saint Martins) in London before moving to Goldsmiths and then the Slade School of Art where he completed a postgraduate course in sculpture in 1979.

Gormley is widely acclaimed for his sculptures, installations and public artworks that investigate the relationship of the human body to space. His work has developed the potential opened up by sculpture since the 1960s through a critical engagement with both his own body and those of others in a way that confronts fundamental questions of where human beings stand in relation to nature and the cosmos. Gormley continually tries to identify the space of art as a place of becoming, in which new behaviours, thoughts and feelings can arise.

As an artist whose work is concerned with the human body it was perhaps natural that this would lead Gormley to an interest in dance. In the article '*Shape-shifter – Antony Gormley captures the vitality of dance*' Gormley said,

"Contemporary dance is a form of expression that gets to the fundamentals of life. Because the body is the essential tool for communication, contemporary dance can reach the kernel of what it means to be human – and indeed what it means to possess a body." (Edelstein, 2011)

In 2005 Gormley was invited to work on 'zero degrees' with Akram Khan and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui contributing two life-sized body casts of the artists to the work and in 2008 he collaborated with Cherkaoui again on 'Sutra' for which he created 21 large wooden boxes. In 2011 Gormley was awarded the Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dance for the set design of Cherkaoui's 'Babel'.

Gormley's work has been widely exhibited throughout the UK and internationally with exhibitions at the Long Museum, Shanghai (2017); National Portrait Gallery, London (2016); Forte di Belvedere, Florence (2015); Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern (2014); Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasilia (2012); Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (2012); The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg (2011); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2010); Hayward Gallery, London (2007); Malmö Konsthall, Sweden (1993) and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk,

Denmark (1989). Permanent public works include the Angel of the North (Gateshead, England), Another Place (Crosby Beach, England), Inside Australia (Lake Ballard, Western Australia) Exposure (Lelystad, The Netherlands) and Chord (MIT – Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, USA).

Gormley was awarded the Turner Prize in 1994, the South Bank Prize for Visual Art in 1999, the Bernhard Heiliger Award for Sculpture in 2007, the Obayashi Prize in 2012 and the Praemium Imperiale in 2013. In 1997 he was made an Officer of the British Empire (OBE) and was made a knight in the New Year's Honours list in 2014. He is an honorary fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, an honorary doctor of the University of Cambridge and a fellow of Trinity and Jesus Colleges, Cambridge. Gormley has been a Royal Academician since 2003.

SYZMON BRZÓSKA



Originally from Poland, Szymon Brzóska graduated from the Music Academy in Poznań, Poland as well as the Royal Flemish Conservatory in Antwerp, Belgium, where he studied under composers Miroslaw Bukowski and Luc Van Hove.

Szymon Brzóska's work explores synergy between music, movement, and image. The composer's particular interest has led him to participate in many collaborative projects across various art forms.

His musical language can be placed somewhere between contemporary avant-garde and expanded tonality with a touch of minimalism, yet is deeply rooted in the very tradition of the classical music.

Through his music, Szymon creates a world of diverse colours, specific atmospheres, intimate and personal emotions and conditions of the mind. Next to his autonomous work, Szymon Brzóska has an established career in creating music for dance. He has worked with many award-winning choreographers (Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, David Dawson, Maria Pages, Vladimir Malakhov), acclaimed orchestras (Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden, Het Balletorkest) and reputable dance companies (Het Nationale Ballet, Semperoper Ballett, Cedar Lake Company, Eastman). His compositions have been performed many times over in numerous prestigious venues and festivals across the world such as Sadler's Wells Theatre, Sydney Opera House, Lincoln Centre and BAM in New York, Semperoper in Dresden, Esplanade in Singapore as well as at the Festival D'Avignon.

Szymon's autonomous compositions were performed during the music @ venture festival in Antwerp, Festival of Polish Piano Music in Słupsk, Biennale Ars Polonia in Opole, Sounds New Contemporary Music Festival in Canterbury, Operadagen in Rotterdam, Tehran International Contemporary Music Festival and En Avant Mars Festival in Gent.

INTRODUCTION TO SHAOLIN MARTIAL ARTS

The Shaolin Monastery is an enigma. The Buddhist faith prohibits violence, and yet the Shaolin Buddhist monks have been perfecting their fighting techniques for centuries. How can they ignore a primary article of their religion that forbids killing a living being?

It could be argued that individuals and collectives alike have always found ways to justify violating their professed ideologies. However, one wonders whether the



Shaolin case is not altogether different. Perhaps, the Shaolin martial arts are not intended for fighting but rather for mental self-cultivation. Perhaps, the Shaolin monks are not training their bodies for battle; rather they are cultivating their minds for spiritual awakening. If so, how and when did their unique synthesis of mental and physical training emerge?

An examination of the historical records reveals that the origins of the Shaolin martial arts were economic and political rather than spiritual. Large stone steles that are still extant at the monastery are engraved with inscriptions attesting the historical conditions under which, some 1500 years ago, the Shaolin monks resorted to arms. As early as the Chinese Middle ages – the sixth and seventh centuries – the Shaolin Monastery possessed a large agricultural estate that required military protection. In times of political turmoil, Shaolin monks defended their monastery against bandits and marauding rebel armies. Economic concerns for Shaolin's wealth were joined by its strategic location on a narrow mountain path leading to the then Chinese capital of Luoyang. In the early seventh century, the monastery was embroiled in a military confrontation over the capital of far-reaching political consequences. Its heroic monks assisted the future emperor Li Shimin (600-649) in the campaigns leading to the founding of his mighty Tang Dynasty (618-907). The grateful emperor bestowed upon the monks an imperial letter of thanks, sanctioning their military activities for centuries to come. Imperial authorisation was joined by divine sanction. The history of the Shaolin martial arts reveals an intimate connection between monastic fighting and the veneration of Buddhist martial deities. Even though Buddhist ethics condemns violence, the Buddhism pantheon of divinities features numerous warriors who serve as the divine protectors of the Faithful. Wrathful gods who trample demons underfoot flank the entrances to Buddhist temples throughout Asia. Such warrior divinities provided divine sanction for violence to the Shaolin monks, who venerated them for their military might.

If Shaolin monks exploited the violent potential of Buddhist military divinities, they made similar military use of another Buddhist emblem – the staff. As in other

religions – consider the Catholic crosier – the staff functioned in Buddhism as a symbol of religious authority. Monastic regulations required itinerant monks to carry a staff, which Shaolin warriors gradually transformed into an effective weapon. Indeed, all through the 16th century, the Shaolin monastery was renowned in China primarily for its superior staff techniques, which were lauded by military experts. The association of fighting monks with the weapon extended to popular fiction and drama, which celebrated staff-wielding clerics. The most beloved Buddhist warrior in Chinese popular culture – the heroic monkey Sun Wukong – manipulates the staff as his quintessential weapon.

It was likely no earlier than the 16th and 17th centuries that Shaolin monks gradually began to develop the bare-handed techniques that, by the 21st century, have made their monastery famous the world over. These empty-handed fighting methods are known in Chinese as quan (literally: fist), and their emergence signalled a profound transformation. Beginning in the 16th and 17th centuries the Chinese martial arts were no longer intended for fighting only. Rather, Shaolin monks (and other warriors) have transformed martial practice into a unique system of physical and mental self-cultivation. The Shaolin techniques of bare-handed fighting have been designed for military, therapeutic, and religious goals alike. It is arguably this unique combination of fighting, healing, and spiritual self-cultivation that have made them attractive to millions of practitioners all over the world. The Shaolin methods of fist fighting draw on native traditions no less than on the imported Buddhist faith, which had arrived to China from India. Even as these barehanded methods are couched in the Buddhist vocabulary of enlightenment, they largely derive from an ancient Chinese gymnastic tradition that had evolved centuries before the arrival of Buddhism in China. As early as the first centuries BC, Chinese manuals described elaborate breathing and callisthenic techniques, which were premised upon one's inborn vital energy, which was called qi. During the 16th and 17th centuries this ancient Chinese gymnastic tradition was gradually integrated into the newly emerging systems of barehanded fighting, creating the Shaolin synthesis of fighting, healing, and religious self-cultivation. The modern era has witnessed the globalisation of the Shaolin martial arts. Millions of Western practitioners are attracted to the Chinese martial arts, even as Kung-Fu cinema is enjoying tremendous popularity, influencing Hollywood film-making. The history of the Shaolin martial arts is still unfolding.

Meir Shahar is associate professor of Chinese Studies at Tel Aviv University. He is the author of *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

THE SHAOLIN TEMPLE

The warrior monks performing in Sutra are from the Shaolin Temple situated near Songshan Mountain in the Henan Province of China and established in 495AD by monks originating from India. In 1983, the State Council defined the Shaolin Temple as the key national Buddhist Temple. They follow a strict Buddhist doctrine, of which Kung-Fu & Tai Chi martial arts are an integral part of their daily regime.



Master Shi Yongxin, Buddhist Abbot of Songshan Shaolin

A patriarchal clan system presides within the Temple and in nearly 800 years, there have been over 30 generations of monks. The representatives of the current generations have, in their surnames, the characters of 'Su', 'De', 'Xing', 'Yong', 'Yan' and 'Heng'. Master Shi Yongxin is the present Abbot of the Shaolin Temple. Shaolin Kung-Fu is one of the oldest Chinese martial arts traditions.

Based on a belief in the supernatural power of Chan Buddhism, the moves practiced by the Shaolin Kung-Fu monks are its major form of expression. According to the guidebooks handed down in the Shaolin Temple Kung-Fu has 708 movement sequences, plus another 552 boxing sequences and 72 unique skills for capturing, wrestling, disjointing and touching vital points in order to cause injury.

The monks of the Shaolin Temple regard the perfection of their Kung-Fu warrior skills as their lifelong goal. Fully understanding life with no fear in their hearts, their physical and mental practice embodies the ancient Chinese belief in 'the unity between heaven and man'.

CREATIVE PROCESS & COLLABORATION





INTERVIEW WITH SIDI LARBI CHERKAOU DIRECTION & CHOREOGRAPHY

How was it working with the monks?

I was working with young guys, they're aged around 19 and they have a lot of energy and also a lot of imagination. They were not born in the temple; they were born in a normal family, somewhere in a village, or in Beijing. Some of them were rich, some were poor. They used to watch TV so they have a sense of what's out there. I could talk about the Temple for hours because there's so much prejudice. People think that they're in this distant place, which they are, but they weren't born in it. They were born somewhere else but then they went to that temple to find peace or to find a form of brotherhood. What is amazing, fantastic and inspirational is that they have a relationship with the body. They accept the body and they allow the body to express itself and I think that's maybe why I had to go all the way to China to find a temple that fits my philosophy because I could not find it here.

Also the Temple became the place where I felt I belonged. I never really felt I belonged anywhere as I'm gay, white, an Arab, raised Muslim, I love to say that I was raised 'Muslim' and ended up vegan and that I'm gay and that I make art. It's very important to say this in today's world, because people tend to connect certain dots that should not be connected. So the Temple became a special place for me and working with the monks was very inspiring.

Could you tell me if you did any research before arriving at the Temple?

It's a temple that's used to accepting foreigners within its walls, so it has a tendency to explain itself to you. When you arrive they explain the history, they give you a tour, they show you around, they have a tradition of sharing information. There is a mythology there that you pick up as you arrive. They have a discipline there where they get up really early in the morning to pray and have food. Their whole daily routine is extremely heavy and very intense. It's all very clear when you arrive there so it wasn't necessary to do any further research.

In an interview with Guy Cools he describes your process as being like a science lab where all the dancers have a lot of autonomy. You give them ideas but you also give them responsibility and freedom. To what extent was this the process with the monks?

At times I did give them certain tasks. We experimented with the boxes to see what we could create with them. If they would just stand there or lie there, and sometimes we just put them next to each other or pushed them. For the Dominoes section, for example, the child monk, Dong Dong, was just climbing over the boxes, and it felt like we could make one long row of them just suddenly arriving there. We experimented with people being inside them. We basically built up the ideas together from scratch. We tried to see how many people could fit into one box and that kind of gave this effect of the boat. Then we thought that they could jump off from another situation into that box so it looked like you had to jump from land into that boat. So those were certain images that we felt spoke to us and it was really step by step that themes emerged.

In the evenings at the hotel I was always trying stuff with the miniature boxes and taking pictures and then when I was happy I would propose it to the monks and say "can you build this?" Half of the things we didn't build, for example we tried to build towers and really crazy

things that couldn't be done because it would take maybe 15 minutes to build it, and we wanted to be very efficient. We wanted the shapes to emerge organically and not take too much time to be built so certain things had to be thrown away.

So choreographically how did you arrange their set sequences?

Sometimes I took half a phrase, or a quarter of a phrase, sometimes it was just putting one phrase after the other, it depended. For me Kung Fu became a classical dance language, that is how I looked at it and it made it very acceptable suddenly. It was a big shift in my head because when I worked on this piece I suddenly realised how dance was limiting itself by not understanding that these other forms are also part of its family. Now I look at movement, style and technique very differently. I could look at a football player and see a movement. I see the choreography and it just liberates me from all the obsessions about style and what is the right way to do this or that style. It just frees me up from that trap.

Also in Sutra the monks have to relate to objects, which became part of the movement as well. Moving the boxes around, having them slide or fall, they were actually part of the choreography, as well as the sticks and swords. It's great to realise we can use objects to dance with, to just go beyond your own body.

THEMES

In terms of the themes that were emerging, were there any that were purposeful or did they all come through play with the boxes?

I think they came through play. It wasn't like I was genuinely looking or trying to speak about what it feels like to lose your land. As we were playing, the meaning emerged step by step and then eventually it felt right to do this, after that. For example with the lotus flower it is a very organic form. I felt that once it opened all of 'mankind' should push it, trying to close it again, trying to make a cube. A cube out of an organic shape feels like a very male thing to do, to frame it all, to slot it back together again, but actually you've just made a prison out of it, or around it, it's lost its spirit. The origins of certain religions might be very natural or organic but eventually end up being extremely dogmatic and closed minded. It's things that I read as we were making the piece and I think as you're watching it, you're not surprised but at the same time it's surprising, and I like that balance between expectation and surprise. I feel if it touches me then I think it's also probably going to touch other people too. I try to stay moved by the things that we were making, so that as I saw it I also felt something while I was watching it.

In an interview Antony Gormley talked about ideas of freedom and containment within the work. Would you agree that this was a key theme that emerged?

I totally agree. There is one short solo that I do in the middle where I am inside a box and one of the monks suggests, "Why don't you try it too, to live within this?" and then you realise how hard it is to express yourself within a space that is so limited. I try to dance a whole solo that in my eyes speaks of loneliness, being caught within yourself. If you really put yourself out there, you are also confronted by yourself and your own limits. It's a very interesting thing to be in a box, to be put in a box by others, because I feel we all put each other in boxes, "men think this about women, women think this about men, we think this about Shaolin monks, we think that about gay people, about Arabs" so when Antony talks about confinement, it's also the confinement you create for yourself. It's the confinement you create for others; it's the confinement others create for you. That's why at the very end, in the final section, all the boxes are form a courtyard around the edges of the stage so that finally there is space that we can share, where Kung Fu really breathes and where everybody can be.

COLLABORATION

You have spoken about how much you enjoyed working with Antony Gormley on Zero Degrees. Could you talk a little about what attracted you to work with him on this particular project?

I just adore his work. I think his work is really powerful, very clear and very radical. It's very personal and it speaks to me. In his sculptural work, I feel weight, I feel movement. I can sometimes see political statements in the materials that he is using, so it is very accessible work but at the same time complex to develop. He is a very inspiring person, so when I met him it was the person, first and foremost that really moved me, and I discovered the work afterwards. I believe in cultural exchange and I felt with Antony, that there was someone who actually heard me in that moment in my career where I felt that sometimes people weren't really listening. I had these ideas in my head and I felt that Antony was really open to talk about them.

Could you tell me what thoughts you had about how Antony's work could correlate with ideas you had for the project?

When I saw Antony's work I always saw these statues that were a multiplication of a singular element. The first thing you see when you come into the monastery is everyone wearing the same thing and everyone with the same shaved head. So there is a certain multiplicity that really reminded me of Antony's work. I wasn't sure what he would come up with. It could have been creating statues of the monks just standing there. There were so many possibilities in his response to the temple. When he travelled there, he eventually ended up thinking of the 'coffins' as an element with which we were going to create the work.

And once the boxes had been created and you began the process, was Antony there working with you?

Well the dormitories, for instance, were something that he had drawn quite early on and were an image that I also liked so it was included into the work. When he came to watch a run he was really surprised and said we had really used the boxes much more than he thought we were going to. I was allowed to put them how I wished. He gave them, in a way, as a gift for the choreography to express itself. He didn't have any kind of big demands, just suggestions. Once he saw what I was up to and what I was doing with it, then he came up with certain proposals.

How did you come to work with the composer Szymon Brzóska?

I met Szymon in Antwerp. He was quite a young composer who had seen some of my work and I loved how he resonated with the work I was doing. I was still looking for music when I went to the Temple and it just happened that he had offered me some of his music to listen to. It gave me an element that was lacking in the work, a certain melancholy, something that would bring a certain sense of sadness and something Eastern, without being really Chinese. So Szymon came on board, which was really exciting because his music has that sense of mystery or enchantment which worked perfectly with the boxes.

LIFE AFTER SUTRA

Looking back how did the experience of creating *Sutra* shape you as a choreographer?

Well every piece I have made has some impact on me. I was very thankful for having the experience of making *Sutra*. It definitely gave me strength. Before *Sutra* I was very sensitive and I had a way of dealing with certain things that was different after the temple. It made me strong for very simple reasons. We were there working and it was ice cold and very dirty in the space we were rehearsing in. We had little heaters, which were on the side and hardly worked. In this really harsh environment the monks didn't complain and I thought to myself 'I must really toughen up'. Also the explosiveness of their movements was really inspiring. The signature of my work is around the flow of movement and to suddenly feel how fast the monks could move and how strong they were completely inspired me to rethink, to open up and just to become stronger. The temple is a place that strengthens your soul, and I think there is definitely still a mark left from that time. I think my work is gentler after *Sutra*. I think there was an existential harshness that I let go of. It gave me certain new tools to look at myself and grow strong.



INTERVIEW WITH ANTONY GORMLEY VISUAL CREATION & DESIGN

What drew you to working on this project?

The thing that attracted me to this project was the combination of Larbi and China and working with intelligent bodies that had a completely different reason for movement to any contemporary dancer that I might have come across. I'd already thought 'is it possible to make an evocation of the human condition needing shelter and containment' in another way, so I said let's try and make a box for each person, for each of the monks.

What initial ideas were discussed?

The boxes are three times longer than they are broad and deep they're 60 x 60 x 180. I did think at the beginning that what I was proposing was in some way talking about a collective body, to make something bigger than the individual. I was interested in the beginning about what were the basic formulas of distribution for the boxes. You could make a stage, a wall that has two sides, one that is a flat wall and one that was almost like a row of beach huts or sentry boxes. When the 'stage' was flipped it was almost like a pond, or something almost dangerous, because it had depth but you could only walk on certain bits of it.

I was keen early on to make more ambitious rising structures but in the end and quite rightly it was the ability to integrate the various formal distributions of the blocks with the movement. It was quite remarkable the sequences that came about that were really about how you might, through doing minimal moves, move from one pattern of distribution to another.

I had this idea you would use four assemblies, maybe the flat form, the wall, the distribution of the boxes as a forest of pillars and the one I love most of all, the dormitory and that they would be constant while the evolution of the dance took place. In the end Larbi integrated the boxes entirely into the movement, it was amazing, it was extraordinary. They weigh 32 kilos, the

monks are very physical but they're quite slight and it's a tribute to both them and Larbi that they managed by the end to look like these moves with the boxes were entirely inevitable and smooth.

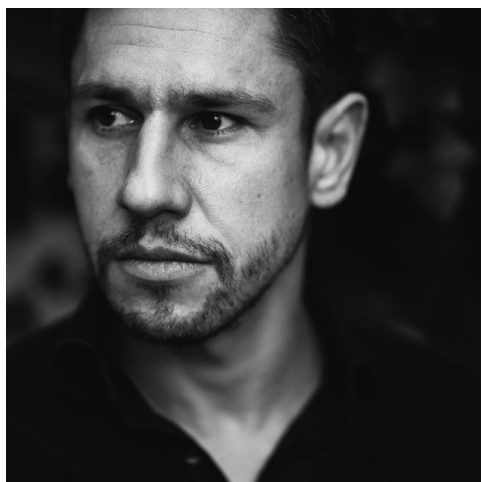
What is the essence of the work for you?

I would hate people to see the work as a re-framing of traditional kung-fu moves even though it's built out of those as much as it's built out of the blocks. It's an investigation of freedom and containment and simple propositions like the body can be in one place and the mind somewhere else. The body can be confined but in some senses the imagination, whilst being dependent on the body, can go anywhere. Right from the beginning there's this tension between the body and the box, the individual and the collective and in some way mind control. The way you can read it can go in two directions. One, you can see this as someone planning what is about to happen, while it is happening. Or you can see it as a deposition of the artistic process as a whole; the whole thing is about some ludic activity through which you discover things, which you didn't know simply by observing the way that things fit together. It's never quite clear whether this is a sinister form of control or a game. It's very interesting what happens with the character of Dong Dong, the small monk. It seems at first that it's clear that Larbi is in some senses his master but in the evolution of the dance it becomes clear that actually Dong Dong in some ways is an avatar, a translator of things and when they do their duet in the box it's completely unclear who is supporting who. All of those uncertainties are a part of what makes this performance intriguing.

The monks change from their traditional robes into black suits during the piece. What was the intention here?

Suits are very important I think and that was Larbi's insistence and he was absolutely right. We had to cut through a placid acceptance that these are monks and we're watching them do their stuff. Another one of my favourite scenes came out of their early morning warm-ups. When we were there in March it was very cold and the monks would warm up by running from one end of the space to the other. After ten minutes, spontaneously individuals would do head flips, or a 360° turn or a somersault. Putting fast moving bodies into the straight jacket of a box was a difficult to take proposition but then to also put those fast, agile bodies into a soundscape that is full of European melancholy is another huge risk and it's a huge tribute to Szymon that it works. That counterpoint allows us to look at the work in a completely different way.

** Transcribed interview from the Sutra DVD*



INTERVIEW WITH SZYMON BRZÓSKA COMPOSER & PIANIST

How did you come to meet Larbi?

I met Larbi in Antwerp in 2008 after I went to see 'Myth'. At that time I was graduating from postgraduate studies in composition at the Royal Conservatoire in Antwerp where my teacher was Luc Van Hove. Knowing I was interested in ballet and contemporary dance he suggested that I should see Larbi's work and try to talk to him. I went to see the show and after the third performance of it (I was completely mesmerised by it!) I approached Larbi and gave him a CD with some of my music. A couple of days later we met and immediately started discussing 'Sutra' which was our first collaboration.

What attracted you to working on this project?

Everything about this project was what a young, fresh after studies, composer could dream of. It was a big dance production with amazing and incredibly inspiring artists (Larbi and Antony) and there was the opportunity of absorbing the culture and tradition of the monks from the Shaolin Temple.

What were your starting points for the music? What sources did you draw on?

For me, the starting point for composing is emotion. Larbi and I discussed certain moods, atmospheres and emotions before I started working but also the movement, in terms of its energy, pace and structure. Furthermore my few travels to the temple brought some inspiration, particularly the landscape and the morning prayers in the temple. I was using certain melodic patterns, or techniques (like glissandi) that could refer slightly to traditional Chinese music although my aim was never really to copy any particular style. I wanted to stay true to what I do as a composer and I believe that that's why Larbi invited me for this particular project.

I understand that Larbi likes to have music prior to creating the work. What were the challenges for you in composing the music prior to seeing the work?

Yes, that's true. It's quite a challenge and takes a close dialogue and understanding between two artists. It also requires some trust and that's always the case with working with Larbi. Most of the music was already composed before the rehearsal period in China.

The idea was to write a score that didn't interfere too much with the monks' inner rhythms but rather surrounded them gently, sometimes accentuating the energy following the movement, sometimes creating a certain emptiness while staying in the background.

Could you describe the creative process? How much did the music change through the process?

A few weeks before the premiere we went to China together with the rest of the musicians where we rehearsed live with the monks and some things slightly changed. For example at some points the tempo changed, some sections had to be repeated or re-worked, extended, etc. So we worked together on the final shape of the show, regarding the music.

How would you describe the relationship between the music and the movement in Sutra?

There are a few moments when the music is very coherent with the movement and those mostly refer to the Foreigner's character. For the rest the music follows the general structure of the show more rather than the movement itself. The monks are not used to moving on the music so (apart from a few cues) most of the time the musicians follow them and their pace. That can change from show to show; in fact the show has to be played live it couldn't really work with recorded music.



INTERVIEW WITH ALI THABET ASSISTANT CHOREOGRAPHER

Can you tell me about your pathway into working with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui?

My first collaboration with Larbi was in 2004 for a piece called *Tempus Fugit* for the festival d'Avignon. I was fresh out of a circus school in France, and I was already tired of the clear-cut distinctions made between theatre, contemporary dance, circus and other classical stage arts. At this time, Larbi came along to

break this idea of strict categorisation. The question and focus with him when considering a work is "what story do we want to tell" no matter what the background of the performers are. In this show, actors, dancers, circus artists, musicians were all in at the same level and we were learning from each other, seeing different points of view and sharing movement, singing and acrobatic skills and techniques.

Based on this experience it was impossible for me to go back into my 'circus world' and this started a long collaboration with Larbi on many projects, and *Sutra* stays, for me, the greatest highlight of my artistic sharing with him, but also in my performance career.

Could you tell me about your role in *Sutra*?

This role focused on the mutual experience Larbi and I had in the Shaolin Temple. We were there for 3 months with no idea of what the final result would be. The role and the 'story' of *Sutra* only started to be clear two weeks before the premiere at Sadler's Wells, ten years ago.

Larbi came to the Temple with a lot of ideas, fantasy and imagination but the thing that made this experience so unique was the fact that we were much more curious about the Shaolin mythology than our idea of fantasy.

We both grew up being fascinated by Bruce Lee movies, Kung Fu and martial arts. When we began to share this with the monks we discovered that they too grew up with the same fascination! That was a start in finding common ground and we then began to look more deeply into the spiritual aspects of the Shaolin culture.

What was your involvement in the creative process?

My role was Assistant Choreographer, but as you can imagine, titles mean nothing when you work with Larbi. So I acted as a kind of mirror for him, a way for him to imagine and see how a western character could fit into the show. So he would watch when I was improvising on stage and I would watch him when he was improvising and we would discuss how we felt about the movement that we'd explored together. It required a lot of multitasking, and I learned a lot during this creation period.

What appeals to you about working with Larbi? What are the challenges?

Honestly, I didn't find any challenges working with Larbi. Instead I treated it as an opportunity to discover what I wanted to follow in my personal research, and I believe that every great collaboration requires you to do this and think about it.

Working with Larbi has opened many doors for me and provided me with a number of opportunities, but I couldn't pursue them all, only the ones that are right for me. Of course to be fully involved and immersed in this process was the best way for us to go about creating an interesting and unique collaboration. I can tell you now, this project was a great life experience!

Can you describe how Larbi typically prepares you for a rehearsal, for example what kind of warm up do you do? Did this change when working with the monks?

For Sutra, we did a lot of yoga together, but Larbi never imposed a strict type of warm up. Most of the time in Larbi's projects, we come from different schools and backgrounds of movements, and the interesting thing is to share all of our different warm ups. However, the monks are young and full of power and energy. I was 33 years old when we started Sutra, and even with my background in circus, I was not ready or prepared to fall on the concrete from three metres high like they do!

How does Larbi normally generate movement material with the dancers at the start of the creation process? How is the material edited and refined over time?

Larbi has a particular skill in being able to understand essentially every kind of movement. He has his own personal sensibility or approaches and is an incredible dancer, but also, as a choreographer, first he always tries to understand the type of movement his dancers create and he respects their way of moving. Sutra is a very good and radical example. Having the monks in the show was not about making them learn contemporary dance, or to try and make Kung Fu more accessible. Their martial art and skill wasn't being used to prove anything or impress, the point was to use the movement in space and try to create something that most represented this huge Shaolin movement culture.

Sharing with Larbi a fascination of Bruce Lee and the Shaolin movies from Hong Kong and being in the place where Kung Fu was born was really humbling. We had so much to learn from the monks about this style of movement, even more than they had to learn from us about our styles. Ultimately, we just tried to make a show that best translated our 3-month experience in the temple with the monks.

How was the process different working with the monks? Were the monks given any tasks to generate movement material for example?

The process was very unique with Sutra. I remember once after about three hours of work, Larbi said, "I'm happy with the material for today!" At first I was surprised as I was used to working 12 hours a day on his other projects. But that was the point, to respect and understand that every kind of movement has its own rules. Some Tao (animal Kung Fu dance) takes only 2 minutes, but the monks are completely exhausted after doing it! Their skills require a huge amount of control and strength and there was no point in making them repeat the movement so many times.

How would you summarise Larbi's movement style?

It's really difficult for me to describe it exactly. I could use the elements: water, fire, earth, wind and energy, to describe what he was using to think about movement to choreograph this piece, but that may sound a little bit too mystical!



INTERVIEW WITH LEILA RANSLEY TOUR WARDROBE MANAGER

How did you come to work with Larbi on Sutra?

The Production Manager, Al Wilson, asked if I was available for a weekend's work, to go and buy a selection of suits and then to accompany him to Antwerp to show them to Larbi. The Abbot of the Temple had approved the inclusion of suits for the monks. This two-day job expanded into prepping the costumes for tour and then becoming the Tour Wardrobe Manager.

What ideas were you initially given with regards to the costumes for the piece?

I came into the project reasonably late in its life and the costume design, such as it was, had been decided - the robes and shoes that the monks wear in their everyday life. I don't think anyone really 'designed' the costumes because the Abbot was firm about how the monks were to be perceived. Changing the tone of the piece by having suits was the result of a very delicate negotiation between Larbi, the producer, Hisashi Itoh, and the Abbot who was very reluctant for the monks to be 'mis-perceived' as Western. Once the suits and a simple change out of robe jackets had been confirmed I was tasked to find neutral t-shirts, socks, shirts and belts to finish off the costumes.

In what way do you think they help to communicate the ideas within the work?

I haven't ever discussed the 'meaning' of the costumes with Larbi, but it seems to me that the initial costumes, the robes, present otherworldliness because they are a clothing type worn by the select few who are identified as monks by their robes. (*Point of interest - when on tour the monks always wear robes for official trips; they never drink, smoke or eat European food whilst wearing their robes*). Once into the suits, the monks are more 'everyman' whom we see fight, perform sign language, live together, play together – the whole gamut of human behaviour ending in a moving and powerful set of movements during 'The Courtyard' section.

It's also worth contemplating the uniformity of the robes and how sartorial uniformity contributes, even subtly, to groupthink. Larbi's character is an individual travelling the various lands created in the piece, yet he is in the company of an army and one, in this case, whose original reason for existence was to provide protection. Throughout Sutra, Larbi is the thread, the sutra, which binds the individual sutras (Maze, Lotus, Wall, Temple etc.) together. He is welcome, challenged, witness, guest, lone traveller and many other things during the piece and his army are with him and change and morph according to the moment. He has few real interactions with the army; he is mostly on the periphery of the action. In this regard I think the costumes help stabilise and root the story. The uniformity of their costumes keeps them together and Larbi separate, but at the same time offer continuity.

Larbi's costume is intended to be a mix of Eastern and Western and losing his jacket gives him more space for his solo in the box – another pragmatic costume change. His character wanders through the worlds created by the box formations, cherry picking what he wants and discarding what he doesn't, and his costume has something of this about it too. Larbi wanted to be partly in the monks' world and partly foreign to it – hence he has a Western jacket from the beginning.

From my point of view, the costumes serve three purposes – they are a practical solution for clothes; they contribute to the overall design and help to frame the conceptions of the audience; and they move the 'story' along. Their best contribution, I think, is their sameness contributing to the visual language of the whole piece with its limited colour, shape and object palettes - making it quick and easy for the audience to settle into the piece.

I think it's easy to overlook how the audience usually has a perception of monks as being quiet, religious, Buddhist young men when actually they are exuberant teenagers who happen to be monks, rather than the other way around. With that perception comes stereotyping and wishful thinking about the costumes. I have been asked if the robes are silk, are the straps around their legs made of leather and other questions where the ideal answer would support an idyllic worldview of the monks. The robes are actually a very nasty polycotton!



INTERVIEW WITH ADAM CARRÉE LIGHTING CONSULTANT

Adam you have worked with Larbi on several projects now. Can you describe how the creative process usually works between you?

The process is very similar for all pieces. We would start with a very early conversation exploring Larbi's overall vision or intention for the work. Larbi would then go and spend some time creating some initial movement based material and perhaps playing with objects or scenic element for example the boxes used in Sutra. I would then visit and observe this early movement to gain a sense of the visual framework of the piece. This is really important to inspire how light can work with those objects and those dancers/performers.

Having observed some of the material and early ideas I would then spend time 'drawing' and 'designing'. Resulting in a 3D visualisation of the space. This is done using very specific software. And it allows us to see how light can affect the dancers and the scenic elements. We will meet and discuss in detail how light affects space and dancers. Once the above stages have been completed we would then meet again and explore/discuss how to use the conceptual ideas to structure the space. Then we go from there!

How early on are you involved in the process?

Very early on, especially if the piece might include scenic elements like a backdrop, projection, objects. Even if ideas evolve and change it's incredibly useful to be there at the very beginning.

With Sutra did Larbi ask you to create certain atmospheres or environments? If so could you please provide some examples?

No. It was more about working with Antony Gormley and Larbi to build the lighting arch for the piece. I was assisting Antony Gormley in the realisation of the lighting. The light in Sutra is conceptually Gormley's as Designer.

How much did the set affect your lighting design ideas?

For Sutra Set and Light were treated as the same visual space. Gormley's idea of plain, un-shadowed Omni lit space was to facilitate the audience in choosing what they wanted to observe in the space, based on the structure of the set. With the idea that light did not overwhelm what the eye was looking at. It's ultimately a sculptural way of looking at scenic design, rather than a theatrical one.

ANALYSIS OF SUTRA (2008)



ORIGINS, THEMES AND STYLE OF SUTRA (2008)



ORIGINS

**What inspired you to want to work with the Shaolin Monks?
How did the project come about?**

I was tired of working in the field of contemporary dance and I was also working with ballet companies and there was something about the relationship with dancers. I wanted to

create a work but I didn't want it necessarily to be with dancers. I went to the Shaolin temple and I met people who had a physical discipline, Shaolin Kung Fu, who also had a spiritual and moral way of being and they were on a journey. They connected their physicality with their spirituality, which was something I was kind of doing for myself for a long time, but I felt very alone in it. I always felt dancing was a very spiritual experience.

I met some of the monks who were also artists. Some of them would do calligraphy, some of them would make music and so I was very excited about being over there and they were quite intrigued by the fact that I was a choreographer. They asked, "what is a choreographer, and what do you do?" I had to try to explain my vocation and it was very hard because I was saying "well, I put people on stage and people look at the people on stage, and I put them in certain formations and make them do certain movements and that moves the people in the audience to either applaud or reflect." So they said "why don't you try this with some of our younger monks, to choreograph Kung Fu" and that's kind of how it came about, to apply very basic elements of choreography like canons to their Kung Fu movement which is usually performed in unison. The whole ending of the piece for example, is when I had connected a lot of traditional forms to each other to make one long sequence. Usually they have very short, very sharp pieces of one minute and there I had made something of six minutes. It was very intense for their bodies to do something that long.

What were your initial starting points for *Sutra*?

It was really the Shaolin philosophy. I was really interested in Buddhism. I was interested in finding ways of recycling energy; it's always about life and death. After lots of exchanges with Antony Gormley the idea of these boxes came to life. It was obvious the boxes looked like a coffin but it was also about the space that's given to a body. So I was really inspired by the relationship between the Shaolin monks on the one side, their environment, the Temple and Antony's boxes and how they relate to each other.

My own role in there was not easy. I always felt like the foreigner, the intruder. As a choreographer you say, "right you go there and you do this " and I thought "who am I and why do I have a right to decide these things?" Of course as a director, as a choreographer it's a normal thing to have that authority. But being the only white man made me feel really uncomfortable so I wanted to play by their rules as much as make up the rules with them and also find my own rules.

Sutra is as much about the Shaolin temple as it is about me trying to enter the Shaolin temple and failing. A lot of the ideas in the work are connected to the doors being shut and at the same time making a lot of friends, especially the little child monk who is like a guide. He has no prejudice towards you because he is open to play the game together with you, but then you end up feeling that although it's a community you still come in as a foreigner. It could have been one Shaolin monk coming into a community in England but it just happened that it was me coming into a Chinese temple. It's about a singular element that comes from abroad, entering a place where people have found a unity and how that individual disturbs but also transforms that unity. Sometimes it's done with manipulation, sometimes it's done by clumsiness and all these elements were the things that inspired me to make the choices I made in that piece.

Sometimes there's a funny interaction, sometimes it's extremely violent. I felt that Shaolin Kung Fu has all these elements in it. Also they incarnate different animals so sometimes they're like a scorpion, an eagle or a tiger so they have these animal forms that at times can be very frightening or can be very funny.



SUMMARY OF SOURCES FOR VOCABULARY, THEMES & STYLE IN SUTRA

SOURCES FOR VOCABULARY

- Shaolin Kung Fu
- Antony Gormley's boxes
- Buddhist Philosophy
- Yoga
- Pedestrian Movement
- French Sign Language
- Tai Chi
- Shaolin Temple

KEY THEMES

- Freedom and Containment
- Old and New China
- Journey of acceptance
- Building and Destroying
- Transformation

STYLE

- Conceptual
- Integral interaction with set design
- Use of gesture to communicate ideas
- Use of solo and duet against group

- Pedestrian movement
- Yoga / Extreme flexibility
- Shaolin Kung Fu – Drunken Fist, Staff and Sword fighting, Animal Forms
- Fluid and gentle quality of Tai Chi
- Synchronised gesture - French Sign Language
- Use of Kung Fu weapons – Sword, Staff, Monkey pole, Spears
- Mutual co-existence with music
- Use of transitions
- Use of unison and canon
- Displaced manipulation
- Narrative thread

STRUCTURE OF SUTRA

DVD: Sutra; Cherkaoui, Gormley, Brzóska with monks from the Shaolin Temple. Recorded live at Sadler's Wells, London, on Saturday 31st May 2008 – Axiom Films, Sadler's Wells on Screen

CD: Szymon Brzóska, Sutra, recorded 2009, produced by Sadler's Wells and Cherkaoui bvba.

Section No.	Section Title	Start/End Time on DVD	Section title on CD	Relevant DVD Chapter
1	Sword	00.51 - 03.30	The Sword/Cadenza 1	2
2	Pond	03.30 - 08.11	Strings (not on the CD)	3
3	Maze	08.11 - 12.19	Machine Music The Maze	4
4	War	12.19 - 15.56	The Dragon	5
5	Box	15.56 - 19.37	Slow Down	6
6	Lotus	19.37 - 23.19	The Lotus Flower/Barocco	7
7	Boat	23.19 - 27.05	Redemptio	8
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9	Solo	30.20 - 32.12	Inside the Box/Cadenza II	10
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12	Pagodas	36.58 – 40.53	Flowing I The Coffins	12
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16	Wall	55.12 – 59.30	Building the Wall/Cadenza II Flowing II Dichotomy	16
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INTRODUCTION TO ANALYSIS

This analysis is made on the following film: Sutra, Cherkaoui, Gormley, Brzóska and the monks from the Shaolin Temple. Axiom Films, Sadler's Wells on Screen (2008) and is divided into 18 sections. The names of these sections have been kindly agreed with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui.

It is suggested that students use the Sutra Analysis Sheet included in this resource so they go through their own analytical process first in order to gain a clear and detailed insight into the work. Analysis tasks for each section are also available along with suggestions for practical sessions, to help deepen students' understanding of the work.

SECTIONAL ANALYSIS

Section One – Sword



As the curtain rises a white spotlight is focused down stage right on a rectangular aluminium covered wooden box. Sitting cross-legged on top of the box is a male dancer, the Foreigner, who is looking directly at a child monk who sits opposite him. Twenty small rectangular wooden boxes are joined together to form one large rectangle and are placed on the box between them.

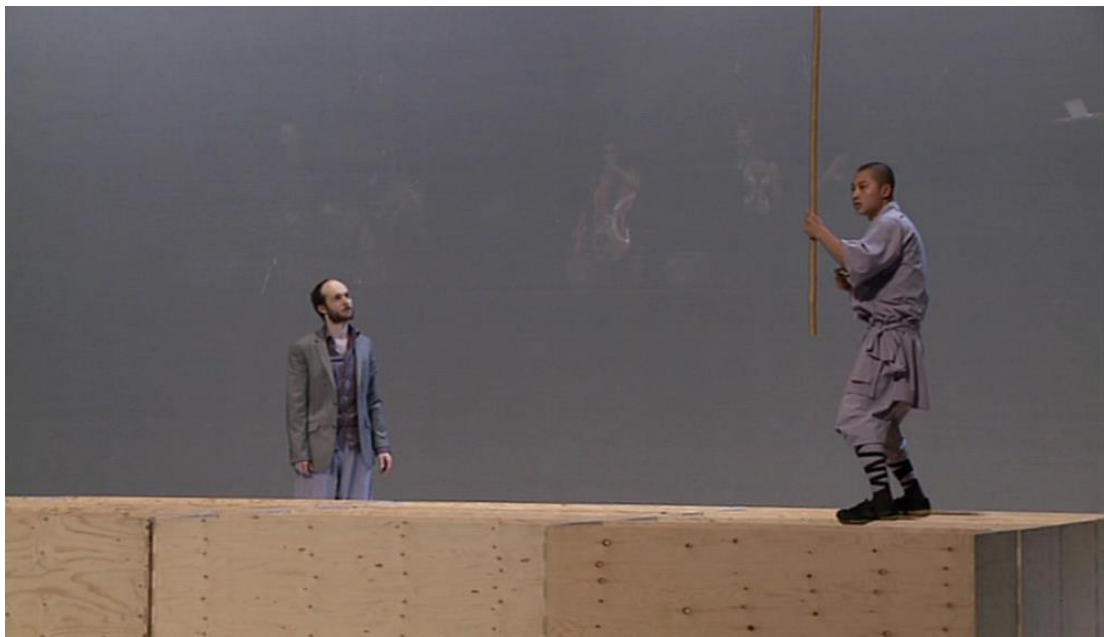
The dance begins in silence. The child monk places his right hand under his chin as he looks, with interest, at the boxes below him. A slow fade up of lights, to a warm white wash, reveals an enlarged replica of the wooden box formation centre stage. In the centre, placed in-between the joined boxes, is a Kung Fu sword (Jianshu) with a red Wushu tassel attached.

The Foreigner raises his left hand and slowly turns his left wrist inwards. As he does so a warrior monk enters upstage right. The Foreigner traces a pointed finger along the length of the boxes towards the child monk as the warrior monk steps up onto the larger set of boxes and walks along the same pathway. As the Foreigner reaches the centre of the boxes with his finger, he starts to raise his wrist still pointing his finger downwards. At the same time the warrior monk raises the sword out from the larger boxes centre stage, accompanied by a note on the violin. The Foreigner turns his wrist to point his finger upwards and the warrior monk performs the same action with his sword. At that moment the child monk scratches his head as if unsure which move to make next. It is clear a game is being played here. The Foreigner continues the pathway of his finger towards the child monk as the warrior monk walks backwards in the same pathway on the larger boxes. The Foreigner leans his finger backwards, towards upstage, and we see the adult monk lean back on his right leg extending his left foot forward. At this moment a solo violin begins to play. The monk leans further back

as he points the sword horizontally out towards the audience. A series of brisk and agile movements follow with the monk, pointing, tilting and sweeping the sword around his personal space whilst performing lunges, leans and a moment of balance. The Foreigner who circles and points his finger in the same directions as the sword seemingly controls the movement. The child monk intently focuses on the direction of the Foreigner's finger following the movement with his head. To signify the end of the sequence of movement, the warrior monk calls out and the music stops.

The Foreigner gestures towards the child monk opening out the palm of his hand. The child monk in response starts to turn the small boxes over. As he does this we see the larger boxes also turning over row by row. The warrior monk stands on the last line of boxes observing the movement of the boxes in front of him. The Foreigner walks towards upstage and the child monk runs across the large boxes to reach the warrior monk. Both the Foreigner and the child monk then turn the final row of boxes eventually reaching the warrior monk who is standing on the last box. They pause for a moment looking at the warrior monk then the child monk suddenly grabs his sword and exits stage left adding a moment of humour. The warrior monk jumps into one of the upturned boxes and the Foreigner turns over the final box to find a wooden stick (Gunshu), which he picks up and then climbs onto the large boxes.

Section Two – Pond



Faint sounds can be heard from the violin as the Foreigner climbs up onto the upturned boxes and walks across them with the stick in his hand. He looks around before placing the stick into one of them. As he pulls it back out of the box we see that a monk is holding onto the end of it. The Foreigner circles the stick whilst the monk holds on causing the monk's upper body to rotate at the same time.

The child monk re-enters upstage right and walks towards the miniature set of boxes turning over the final back row before sitting back on top of the box. The Foreigner lets go of the stick now only circling his hand but the monk continues to hold on to it whilst rotating his upper body. The Foreigner stops moving and focuses on the monk who falls back slightly before looking intently at the palm of his hand. His hand for a moment appears to lead his movement as though the Foreigner's energy and ability to control had been passed to his hand. His head rocks forwards and backwards as his hand moves towards and away from him. Suddenly the monk grasps and raises the stick and the music changes to slow sweeping notes on the cello.

The monk performs a series of circling movements with the stick which increase in pace before he points the stick at the Foreigner. His movements then have a weightier, slower dynamic as he raises each knee whilst circling the stick. He creates a semi circle with his thumb and forefinger extending his arm in front of himself, which slowly draws up the front of his body as he leans his head back away from it. When his hand reaches his face he tips his head back and opens his mouth as if drinking something from a cup. He steps forward slightly swaying and bangs his stick against one of the boxes. After circling his stick again he too places a stick into one of the boxes and, repeating the Foreigner's earlier movement, pulls out a monk before he falls back into his original box. This and movements that follow draw from the Shaolin Kung Fu 'Drunken Fist' style.

The Foreigner continues to watch the action sat on the edge of one of the boxes. The second monk standing inside his box sways forward and then leans back in correlation with a sustained note on the violin. He performs a quick change of direction with a strong dynamic quality before leaning back and focusing on his right hand, repeating the cupped shape of his fingers performed by the previous monk. There is a variation here with the movement. As the monk draws his hand towards his mouth rather than leaning back and appearing to drink from it, his head and body jerk forwards. The monk jumps up onto the boxes but has less balance and control than the other monk as he slightly falters in his walk across the boxes. He repeats the knee lifts performed by the previous monk and again repeats the motif of raising the cupped hand to his mouth this time tipping his head back as the previous monk did. Following this he slowly sways and then performs a quick succession of movements jabbing and circling the stick around his head before the cupped hand draws up the front of his body and he tilts his head back as if to drink from it. The body appears to react from this action causing him to sway and lose balance slightly.

The monk places his stick into another box as the music repeats the same sound as before. The second monk falls back into his box as he passes the third monk the stick. The third monk leans back against the boxes and draws his hand towards his chest with cupped fingers as seen previously. He springs up onto one of the boxes, falters slightly backwards whilst focusing on his cupped hand and then performs attacking jabbing gestures before his hand draws up the front of the body with cupped hands as he leans back and drinks from it.

The Foreigner slowly begins to walk towards the child monk who has remained seated watching the action take place on stage. After a series of jabs and circles of the stick the monk on the larger boxes points his stick towards the Foreigner who grabs hold of the end and pulls the stick away from the monk before stamping it into the ground at which point there is a music change.

Section Three – Maze



As the piano begins to play lights behind the grey gauze are lifted to reveal the five musicians placed on a raised platform. Violin, Viola, Cello and wooden temple blocks support the playful rhythm created by the piano. The Foreigner, who is now sat behind the aluminium box with the child monk on top, begins to re-order the miniature boxes. The monks, centre stage, climb out of their larger boxes and begin to manoeuvre them into the same formation ending with one large box, which resembles a maze with six holes, and one hole containing a vertical box, which is placed upstage.

The music stops abruptly and the monks stand still either side of the stage. The child monk calls out as he punches into his hand before performing a series of backhand springs travelling across the front of the stage and then a forward roll before stopping in front of the large boxes with his fist hitting the ground. He scratches his head before jumping up onto the large boxes and then onto the single raised vertical box. He tips forward to look inside the box and then rolls forward, holding onto the edge of the vertical box, before falling inside it and disappearing from view.

The piano returns and we see the child monk's head popping out of various boxes as he travels through the maze that has been created. The monks and the Foreigner observe him. He appears from one of the boxes upstage left and pulling himself out, performs a somersault, before throwing his arms over his head to dive back into another hole. He appears again upstage right and repeats the somersault. He then shifts forwards on his bottom with his hands curved over like paws, creating the image of a rabbit that has just appeared out of its warren or a monkey playing. He springs onto his feet and looks around sharply before diving quickly back into the maze as the monks charge towards the boxes and begin to turn them. Downstage right the Foreigner is manipulating the smaller boxes in the same formation as the larger boxes placing them into two vertical lines, eight stage right and eight stage left. The monks sit at the end of each box as if sitting at a table.

The child monk is left centre stage crouched inside a box placed horizontally. He crawls along the inside of the box and hits his head when he reaches the end causing him to rub his head. He repeats this in the other direction again bumping his head, highlighting his confinement

within the box. He performs a somersault and a backward roll before sitting still and scratching his head.

The Foreigner walks over to the box and tips it to become upright. He walks around and leans it towards stage right and then back to centre. The child monk remains inside, at first holding on to the edges of the box and then he presses his hands, legs and back against the sides of the box so that he is suspended. As the box returns to its horizontal position the child monk calls out and hits with his hands and feet against each side of the box. A monk approaches the box and slides it, together with the Foreigner, towards downstage. As the cello and piano play melancholic notes, the child monk continues to cry out. The Foreigner and the monk slowly turn the box over enclosing the child monk inside. The audience are left with the image of the child monk looking around frantically as the last sombre note on the piano is played and the box finally covers him.

Section Four – War

In silence the monks quickly shift their boxes to form a vertical line centre stage starting with those nearest to downstage and ending with the final boxes joining the line upstage. The Foreigner stands on top of the box containing the child monk inside. As each box joins the platform the Foreigner walks along them whilst the monks crouch down beside them. When the final box is joined, twelve monks in canon, starting from downstage, step up onto the platform whilst two exit upstage left and two upstage right. They slowly uncurl and raise both hands up to their chest and then release them down again whilst taking a deep breath in with legs in a wide parallel. A suspended cymbal creates a hypnotic rhythm to support the movement. At the same time the Foreigner returns to the aluminium box downstage right and begins to slide the miniature boxes to form the same image as the larger boxes.



With the introduction of the strings the monks break into a series of movements in canon that travel onto and off the boxes including punches, kicks, lunges, jumps, spins, arms circling over the head and high leg kicks. The changing levels and snaking pathways created by these actions create images of a Chinese Dragon. At one point in canon they each crouch down

circling their hand over their head before slapping it down onto the platform. As the music quietens the monks draw their feet together and raise both arms up by their side before joining the palms of the hands together in a prayer position to the chest. One by one they turn to the left and walk towards upstage as the suspended cymbals return. They climb off the boxes and then walk either side of them towards downstage with hands remaining in a prayer position.

The first box downstage is raised up revealing the child monk. He looks around as if disorientated and walks towards stage right where the Foreigner is now arranging the boxes into a new formation, replicated by the monks with the larger boxes. Each box is being raised vertically to the right or left of centre stage to form two lines. As each monk raises a box they stand inside it.

The child monk walks over to the corridor created by the boxes and calls out before performing backhand flips towards upstage. As he ends his sequence with a Kung Fu command the music stops and the monks step out from their boxes and walk through the spaces between each box to stand behind them. In canon starting from the boxes upstage they slide them forwards to create a single vertical line. The Foreigner who has remained on the aluminium box slides his miniature boxes to also form a single line. Contrasting the silence there is a sudden explosion of movement as the monk closest to downstage calls out causing each monk to move outwards in canon to form two diagonal lines of eight monks either side of the boxes.

A second canon travels in towards the boxes, a third away from the boxes and the last configuration repeats the original formation. The two groups appear at war with one another with a clear sense of attack. The monks punch outwards, hit the floor and call out aggressively to one another. The wall dividing them further enhances the idea of a battle between two sides. One by one each monk jumps back inside their box calling out as they move. As the last monk enters a box, another monk topples out of one from upstage and falls towards stage left before looking around. He turns to face the wall and notices the child monk has climbed onto the top of the last box in the line upstage. The child monk walks forward along the line of the boxes also looking around. Suddenly the monk explodes into a series of Kung Fu movement circling his arms over his head and slapping the floor, kicking his leg high and hitting it, stamping both feet together on the ground, circling the leg round to hit against it and ending in a lunge to the side with a punch extended out towards the wall. The child monk who remains on the wall and has been watching the actions of the monk, tries to imitate them but with uncertainty, as though trying them for the first time.

The monk stops what he's doing and focuses on the Foreigner sitting on the aluminium box. He strides towards him and the Foreigner stands up and slightly backs away as if uncertain of what may happen. The monk swipes all the miniature boxes off the aluminium box onto the floor and looks straight at the Foreigner before picking up the aluminium box and dragging it to join the other boxes centre stage. He stares back at the Foreigner who then joins him centre stage. The monk nods his head towards the box as if telling the Foreigner to enter, which he does.

Section Five – Box



Melancholic notes are played on the piano as the lighting darkens across the stage leaving a white spotlight focused on the aluminium box. The monk exits stage left and the child monk, who has remained on top of the boxes, walks towards downstage.

The Foreigner, facing the inside of the box, presses his body and face against each side of it twice. He nudges his shoulder against the right and left side of the box before criss-crossing and pressing his hands against the outside vertical edges of the box. He sweeps each arm in a circular motion away from the box as if to feel the space outside of his confined area. The child monk, lying down on top of the line of boxes peers over in fascination.

The Foreigner folds one leg over a bent supporting leg and curves his body over with his arms folded, supporting his head. He reaches his arm up, grabbing hold of the edge of the top of the box and swings his body round before drawing his feet underneath himself, suspending

himself inside the box. He covers his face with both hands and slowly slides down the box before placing his right hand down and raising both legs off the floor. He tips himself around to extend one leg up to the roof of the box and places his head against the knee of his supporting leg. He twists his body round and performs a back bend before the child monk folds himself into the box from the roof of it helped down by the Foreigner. The Foreigner raises his left leg against the side of the box and the child monk observing this does the same. Together they perform a backbend with the Foreigner layered over the top of the child monk. The Foreigner supports the child monk by lifting him to the top of the box and together they curl their bodies, pressing their backs and feet against the box to support themselves. The Foreigner lies on his back and raises his feet in a flexed position. The child monk places his feet on top. For a brief moment the Foreigner escapes the box performing a backward roll away from it. The child monk quickly reaches towards him and pulls him back inside the box. Together they repeat the backbend but this time they mirror one another.

The Foreigner lifts the child monk down who points to the roof of the wall so the Foreigner raises him up by the soles of his feet assisting him to climb on top of it. For a brief moment the Foreigner reaches after the child monk as he disappears from view. He then tips the aluminium box over his head and the child monk returns reaching towards the Foreigner as he closes the box over himself. The child monk walks back along the wall towards upstage with his head in his hand and the piano and violin stop playing.

Section Six – Lotus

As the lights return to a full white wash across the stage, a monk calls out, 'Zǒu', which translates as 'let's go'. This provides a cue for the monks to roll out in unison from each of the boxes that form the vertical line. On stage right a tiered line begins with the monk downstage sliding onto the floor extending their left leg forwards with their right knee bent behind them and the line ends with a monk standing in a lunge position. They each punch their fist towards the wall, which divides this group of eight monks from the other eight monks. The monks placed stage left are in a wide second position with both legs bent and their arms are curved upwards.

Starting from upstage, in canon, each monk runs into his individual box causing it to tip over and land horizontally on the floor. This triggers the child monk, who is still standing on top of the boxes, to run quickly downstage along the vertical line of boxes before this explosion of movement throws him off.

The child monk safely reaches the aluminium box downstage centre and he quickly turns his head to see the collapse of the last box. The boxes lay next to one another in two vertical lines, forming images of a graveyard. The child monk gently knocks on the roof of the aluminium box twice and then says 'Larbi'. He pauses, waiting for a response and then slides himself off the box and walks along the corridor created by the two lines of horizontal boxes. As he walks down two monks lift their heads up from the boxes downstage left and right and call out to the child monk. The child monk swiftly turns around but misses seeing them as their heads return back inside the boxes. The child monk continues to walk along the line of boxes and a third and then fourth monk calls out. The child monk sees the fourth monk appear and runs to his box upstage left and peers in. Another monk calls out from a box centre stage and suddenly all the monks sit upright in their boxes. They stand, climb out of them and raise them up vertically to place them onto their backs. The Foreigner who has remained inside the aluminium box also stands and places the box onto his back.

The string instruments begin to play and the monks and the Foreigner slowly walk in a circular pathway dragging the boxes on their backs. The child monk, assisted by another monk, climbs up onto a vertical box placed centre stage. He turns slowly in a circle on his box and raises his index finger upwards as he looks around. One by one the other boxes are joined to this central vertical box and are leant against it, except for the aluminium box, which the Foreigner has returned to downstage right.

The child monk sits down, crosses his legs and joins his hands together in a prayer position, closing his eyes as he does this, creating a clear image of Buddha. He raises his arms up above his head opening his eyes, with the palms of his hands facing upwards. He pushes the palms downwards, closing his eyes again, gathering energy and embodying it. He circles his right arm horizontally in front of his body with the thumb and forefinger joined to form a circle depicting the Buddha teaching. The creation of the circle symbolizes perfection with no beginning or end.



A note is played on the Tam Tam and gently the vertical boxes are slowly lowered to being just above the floor creating an image of a lotus flower opening. The child monk folds his arms inwards and outwards and sweeps both arms behind his back leaning his torso forwards before joining his hands together and drawing them back towards his body in prayer. At this moment the monks finally lower the boxes to rest on the floor.

The child monk repeats the gestural material from earlier as the monks roll into their boxes head first to lie on their backs inside them. The child monk pushes the palms of his hands forward towards downstage and then opens his palms upwards and back in towards his body, repeating this gesture twice. He circles his wrists together, creating a gestural image of a lotus flower, at which point the monks sit up in their boxes and roll head first out of them, slowly lowering each leg to the floor. They turn in to focus towards the child monk who has his hands together in a prayer gesture and resting on their knees. They too bring their hands into a prayer position.

During the action taking place centre stage, the Foreigner is inside the aluminium box placed downstage right and he slowly rotates from facing upstage to downstage. He rolls down through his spine and performs a *Niralamba Sirsasana* resting only on his head for support before slowly releasing his legs down to rest on his knees as he draws his hands together in a prayer gesture towards centre stage at the same time as the monks. A note on the triangle is played and a moment of calm is realised.

Section Seven – Boat

The box supporting the child monk is suddenly shaken causing him to fall off the top of it. A monk appears from behind the box suggesting he had shaken it. He walks towards the child monk who backs away from him towards downstage right, to the aluminium box and the Foreigner. At that moment the other monks suddenly slide and raise all the boxes vertically in

towards the monk, enclosing him. Stage right, the Foreigner and the child monk construct the same cube structure with their miniature boxes, consisting of 16 boxes in a 4 x 4 formation.



Having together completed their miniature cube, the Foreigner points to the finished product whilst the monks walk away from their larger construction to fold their arms and face one another in two lines, stage right and stage left.

The child monk stands on top of the miniature cube and looks across at the enlarged structure centre stage. The Foreigner removes boxes from underneath the child monk's feet, confining him to a smaller area to stand on each time.

A hand is raised up from the inside of the large cube and it drops down, the other hand is then raised which also drops down on top of the box. A monk's head then appears before he pulls his whole body out from inside the cube to stand on top of it, percussion accompanies his movements. Together the monks call out and run towards centre stage to leap up onto the top of the cube. The child monk also runs towards the large cube but fails to reach the top, falling onto his back on the floor. The monks peer down at him before turning to face the monk who had climbed up from inside the cube. They edge towards him as he backs away and eventually he falls off the cube, rolling across the floor when he lands.

The Foreigner walks directly towards the monk who has fallen and places a hand on his shoulder. The child monk and the other monks focus intently on his actions. The Foreigner walks towards the monks and places his right hand on top of the back line of boxes. A piano followed by a violin creates a minimalist dissonant sound. As the Foreigner pulls a box away from the cube, the whole back line of boxes moves towards upstage left by monks contained inside them. This action is repeated with the next two lines of boxes leaving only four boxes for the remaining monks to stand on. Their space has been confined in the same way the child monks had been earlier.

The child monk pushes the upturned aluminium box over towards the remaining line of boxes. He jumps inside it and waves at the remaining monks gesturing for them to join him in the box. One by one they jump down into it as each vertical box is taken from under their feet.

The child monk, sitting on the shoulder of another monk has raised his hand to his forehead and looks side to side as if searching for something. He places each hand around each eye to create the shape of binoculars and looks out towards the audience. The monks sway side-to-side suggesting that they are in a boat and are being rocked side to side by waves.

The Foreigner walks towards upstage left and enters into the space that has been created by the new box formation, as the last few notes of the piano are played.

Section Eight – Forest



As a violin plays, the blades of three *Pu Dao* swords appear from above the pillared construction, created upstage left. As they reach the front of the construction the three monks lower their swords down and an urgent bass kick drum begins followed by a cello. The monks, who have removed their robes, begin to edge towards the boat pointing their swords. The child monk shouts out, warning the others and points towards the three monks, causing the other monks to scramble out of the boat and exit upstage left. The child monk drags the aluminium box back towards downstage right as the three monks holding the *Pu Dao* swords circle them around as they walk around the space.

Standing centre stage, one of the monks extends his left hand forward holding his sword in his right hand. His palm is facing outwards and his fingers are spread wide. Slowly he closes each finger in to form a fist before calling out and throwing his right arm holding the sword forwards. A traditional Wushu fighting sequence is performed by the monk and accompanied by the fast paced cello and piano. The intense music is enhanced by the thrashing sound of the flexible metal blade of the sword. Punctuated with moments of stillness, the monk's actions include lunges to the side, fast spins, crouching low to spring back up, kicks and elevated moments such as a jump whilst kicking his right leg out to the side and a butterfly kick. The sequence ends as he leans back in a lunge and extends his palm out towards the audience. At this moment the monks who had escaped from the boat, appear cautiously from out of the pillars, upstage left. They too have changed costume and are now holding wooden sticks. They form a line upstage facing the three monks with *Pu Dao* swords who are downstage.

A monk calls out and they hit their weapons on the ground. A battle ensues between the two groups as they charge at one another hitting wooden staffs against swords. Movements include rolls across the floor, somersaults over the wooden staffs, kicks to the chest and high elevations whilst kicking. At one point four monks with wooden staffs press against a monk who is raising his *Pu Dao* sword above his head attempting to lower him to the ground. He bends low before he springs back up throwing them all to the ground. Two monks with swords are circled centre stage with others pointing their staffs at them allowing a pause in the action before another battle begins this time causing some monks to exit upstage left and others to

fall, seemingly injured, to the floor. One monk crawls forward but another monk creates the image of hitting him over the head to knock him unconscious. The monk who performed the initial solo with the Pu Dao sword re-appears from the pillars and strikes his sword across the stomach of the last remaining monk appearing to kill him as he holds his stomach collapsing to the floor. The monk looks around at the bodies lying on the floor, drops his sword and collapses to his knees.

The Foreigner enters from upstage left through the pillars holding an aluminium staff. He looks briefly at the monk on his knees before walking to the aluminium box downstage right past the bodies, which remain on the floor. Before he reaches the box he drops the aluminium staff he is holding, which creates a loud clanging sound against the silence.

Section Nine – Solo



The Foreigner steps into the aluminium box, which initiates a change in the lighting from a white wash to a spotlight on the box, the rest of the stage is in darkness. A violin begins to play and the Foreigner appears to walk down an imaginary set of stairs inside the box, walking on the spot but lowering his body down further each time. He disappears inside the box for a moment before raising his head up to look around. His body appears to be pulled along the inside of the box but is then thrown back, as if caught in a whirlpool or as if his body is inside a bath and is disappearing down a plughole. He reaches his arms over the top of the box, gripping onto the sides of it. His arms flail above his head as his body sinks inside the box. His arm reaches up from inside the box as he circles his wrist, tapping the outside of the box, as if looking for something to grip onto. His other arm reaches up and holds onto the outside of the box as he pulls himself up to standing. In a slight variation from earlier, his body is again pulled along the inside of the box, this time standing rather than kneeling. He steps with his left foot outside the box reaching forwards with his arms, but his right leg remains trapped inside. He steps with his left foot in a circle around the edge of the box retaining his right leg inside. As he steps his left foot back inside the box it's as if he is caught in the whirlpool again as his body falls inside seemingly uncontrollably and again he grabs onto the side of the box. His body is thrown within the box in different directions with his arms flailing above his head. He leans back and again disappears from view. He reappears in correlation with a note from the violin before disappearing again. He stands upright for a brief moment before his body falls sideways back inside the box out of view, accompanied by a high-pitched note on the violin.

After a brief moment, the child monk appears from behind the box containing the Foreigner, adding a moment of surprise before the lights fade.

Section Ten – Monkey

As the lighting returns to a warm white wash across the space, the child monk climbs onto the aluminium box and performs an aerial cartwheel followed by a somersault, accompanied by notes on the violin. He grasps hold of the aluminium staff left by the Foreigner in the previous section and shifts on his feet with his knees bent low to downstage left where he repeats his somersault on the floor. Kneeling he circles the staff around his head and torso before standing and repeating this action around his body. As he shifts across the space a monk climbs up onto the top of one of the pillars upstage left and also performs an aerial cartwheel into a somersault on the floor. He springs up drawing both feet underneath himself and curves his right hand above his head before landing in a crouch. Movements that follow draw on Shaolin Monkey Kung Fu traditions, known for its ape-like movement and attack. He performs high leaps into somersaults on the floor, small shifting steps with hands curved over the head and quick sharp looks side to side. There are sudden drops to crouching before springing up, shifting around the space on all fours and collecting and hiding imaginary objects in his tunic. At one point the monk springs up onto the metal staff looking out with his hand raised to his forehead. A second time he spins around the top of it. The child monk attempts to copy some of these movements jumping up onto the staff and repeating the spin. Momentarily the two monks battle for control of the staff resulting in the child monk being pulled around the space by the monk who eventually gains control of the staff as the child monk falls onto his back. The monk swipes the staff in front of the child monk who performs a double back flip to avoid being hit by it. The monk exits upstage right as the child monk performs a somersault towards the pillared boxes.



Section Eleven – City



As the monk exits the Foreigner's head appears from the aluminium box as he sits bolt upright and looks around. The child monk, having travelled towards the boxes upstage left, stands up and pushes against one of them. This initiates the start of the music for this section; a soft bass kick drum alongside a triangle is played followed by a piano and violin to create a playful, light-hearted atmosphere.

The monks, standing inside the boxes, slowly lower them onto their backs and begin to walk around the space. Black trousers can be seen from underneath each box as they hold it horizontally.

The child monk walks amongst them whilst the Foreigner re-arranges his aluminium box to stand upright downstage right. All the other boxes are placed upright and are spaced out on the stage. As the last monk finds the correct space to place his box the music ends.

A heavier drumbeat follows as the monks appear from behind the boxes wearing black suits with grey shirts underneath. They walk in and around the upright boxes increasing their pace into a run. The music establishes a clear 4/4 rhythm created through a repeating motif on the cello and drum.

The child monk cries out before performing a series of flips towards downstage left. This initiates the other monks to perform a variety of elevated movement appearing at the front of the stage as well as performing movements in between the boxes. These include tucked and cartwheel aeriels, Arabians, Lotus kicks, corkscrews and front and back flips. The boxes combined with the hurried walking and urgent aerial movement material soon creates an image of city dwellers rushing to work amongst skyscraper buildings. The music builds and the movement increases in speed before the monks suddenly disappear behind the boxes as the music abruptly stops. A monk calls out and together all the monks including the child monk jump up onto the top of the boxes. They stand and look around the space as if discovering it for the first time. The Foreigner walks across to centre stage looking up at the monks and slowly their gaze turns towards him.

Section Twelve – Pagodas



The Foreigner sits on the floor cross-legged to face them with his back to the audience and the monks sit on their boxes to face him. A note on a triangle is played initiating the Foreigner to lead the monks into a gestural sequence incorporating movement derived from French sign language. Halfway through the sequence the piano accompanies the movement but stops when the sequence ends with a prayer gesture.

As the Foreigner stands, the monks follow and stand on their boxes. A single note on the triangle cues the monks to tip forward in canon on their boxes causing them to crash to the floor. The Foreigner walks amongst them looking up at each box before it falls. As he reaches upstage centre he suddenly runs towards the aluminium box jumping in to it, which causes it to drop forward with him standing inside.

A cello begins to play and the monks drag their boxes around the space creating a circular pathway, appearing like elephants holding onto one another's tails. The Foreigner tries to move his box but he is stuck inside it. He pulls on the edges whilst moving his feet as if to try to walk somewhere. Repeating a movement idea from Section Nine, the Foreigner walks around the edge of his box with one foot inside it and the other outside causing the box to move slightly with him. He finally manages to escape the confines of the box and he steps back from it scratching his head whilst staring at it. He tentatively reaches towards the box, placing his hands on the edge of it, and drags it to upstage right to join the other boxes which have now formed a horizontal line from upstage right to upstage left.

Each monk climbs inside his box once it has joined the other boxes in a line and together they create an image of a line of coffins. The Foreigner enters his box and repeats another idea from Section Nine as he walks inside the box as if going down a flight of stairs, eventually joining the other monks to lie down.

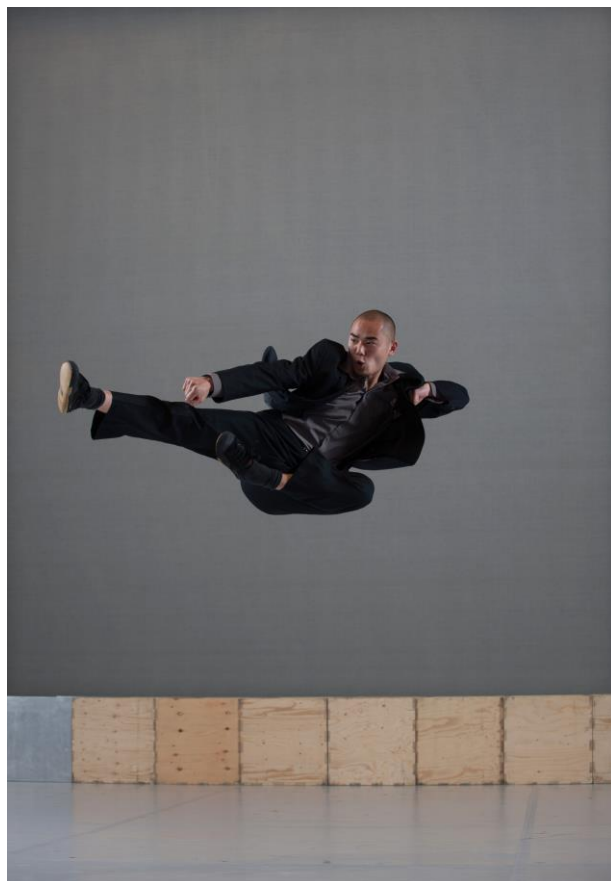
Section Thirteen – Animals



In silence a monk's widespread palms appear from inside one of the boxes. He crosses one in front of the other and then opens them out to grab hold of each side of his box. With his head and body curved over he pulls himself up on top of the boxes crouching low onto all fours. His torso shifts side to side before he jumps high in a split leap to land on the floor in front of the boxes. He performs a series of Kung Fu movements whilst calling out; including a somersault and a backwards somersault in the air. He returns to his low crouching position and repeats the shifting movement side-to-side characteristic of the 'Frog' from Shaolin Kung Fu before leaping raising his whole body off the floor. This movement is repeated twice and presents the image of a frog leaping from one space to another. Following a series of explosive acrobatic movement the monk returns to the frog position before rolling towards his box and climbing back in.

his left arm forward whilst pulling his right elbow back. His hands remained clawed throughout characteristic of 'Tiger' Kung Fu and he shouts out emphasising each movement. He performs

a series of leaps, backward somersaults and leg slap kicks incorporating moments of pause where he leans in a lunge with arms outstretched and hands clawed. His sequence ends with one leg crossed over another as he focuses to his left clawed hand before getting up and running back to his box.



A third monk jumps out of a box and extends both arms into a V shape to the side accompanied by the piano. He slowly bends his knees before springing off the boxes tucking both legs underneath him. Movements that follow consist of fast, explosive jumps contrasted with various held positions each time with arms outstretched, flexed wrists and clawed hands reflecting images of the 'Eagle' in Shaolin Kung Fu. For example he performs an aerial cartwheel into a split jump in second before landing in a low balance, legs crossed over one another arms outstretched with wrists flexed and fingers splayed. From this position he curls his fingers inwards before turning in the air and kicking his leg out to slowly rise on his right leg, left knee bent and arms outstretched to the side. At the end of

his sequence the monk waves his arms up and down reflecting a bird in flight before rolling towards his box and climbing in.

A hand appears from inside another box. It is curved at the top with the thumb below away from the rest of the fingers to create the image of a snakes head and open mouth. The monk stands and repeats this gesture this time with both hands placed one above another. He springs out of the box performing a somersault onto the floor. He stands momentarily taking in the surrounding area with arms stretched wide to each side before travelling backwards and then repeating the snake motif, rocking forwards and backwards slightly in a lunge facing stage right. This section consists of aerial corkscrew turns landing on the side of the body, leaps pushing up from the back to standing and backwards aerial somersaults. Whilst this action takes place the Foreigner's head appears from the aluminium box observing the scene.

A final hand appears from one of the boxes and it quickly flicks before each finger folds in to the centre. The monk stands in his box on his left leg with his right leg curved behind him. He shifts slightly side to side with a smooth then sudden action and adds a hissing sound to enhance the movement and create the clear image of a scorpion. He jumps out of the box and runs forward before performing a tuck jump with both legs extended forward before performing a somersault to land on his back. He springs up and then lands repeating the scorpion motif. Whilst the monk performs a series of flips and rolls the Foreigner slowly climbs from his box and focuses towards the monk. He too creates the image of a scorpion with his right leg raised behind him and both hands placed on the floor. Facing one another they both raise their 'tail' and roll in towards each other.

At this moment there is a repeat of the music from the 'maze' section. The monk and the Foreigner continue to move around one another whilst the monks step out from their boxes to create a new configuration. The Foreigner performs a front walkover into a low balance on his hands with one leg extended forwards; the other leg is bent behind. He circles his legs around his head before both he and the monk walk backwards in a crab position. The Foreigner shifts back away from the monk to land in the splits with his arms reaching behind his back and he raises his right foot behind to rest his head back on it. Both the Foreigner and the monk repeat movements from the Frog Kung Fu crouching low and repeating the leap forward. Together they perform an Eagle motif spreading their arms in a wing like position. They both roll towards the aluminium box downstage where the Foreigner climbs to the top to escape and the monk is shooed away by the child monk who adopts some of the Monkey Kung Fu gestural action. At this point the music stops.

Section Fourteen - Dormitory

In silence the child monk reaches his hand to the Foreigner who pulls him up to join him on top of the box and they both stand in a soft spotlight to face a new configuration of the boxes. The boxes have been placed in horizontal rows one on top of the other in a 4x4 formation. A soft focused light highlights them in the space upstage centre. The monks lie inside each box and the image of beds in a dormitory is created. Percussion and strings begin to play slow melancholic music as the Foreigner points to the rows of boxes lined up.

A monk slides out from his box and reaches with his hand towards other boxes. He travels across the rows looking around and exploring the space as he does so. His animalistic movement as he swings from one arm to another to hang from the boxes gives the appearance of a monkey exploring its cage. The monk reaches the top of the boxes and crouching on all fours looks towards the Foreigner and the child monk before reaching over into a backbend and walking along the length of boxes. He performs a walkover looks around the space and then retreats back into his box.



The music ends and the monks lying on their backs begin to pedal their legs creating a loud squeaking sound with their feet as they scrape the inside of the boxes with their shoes. The machine-like movement increases in pace and volume as they bang their feet against the boxes. Eventually they each tip out of their box and fall to the floor.

The Foreigner jumps down from his box and walks over to join the monks who create a triangular formation. He looks at them with curiosity as they begin a sequence of Tai Chi in canon, before he walks upstage to look closely at the row of boxes. The music consists of piano, percussion and strings and has a soft, gentle melody to accompany the movement. He climbs up to a box at the end of the row stage right and sits inside it. He twists himself upside down and drapes his legs over the top of the box as the sequence and music come to an end. The monks look around and at each other before the majority disappear behind the boxes.

Section Fifteen – Dominoes

Three monks remain in the space and observe the Foreigner who imitates the monks scraping of the shoe and banging against the inside of the box from earlier. The Foreigner rolls to lie on his side before the remaining monks slide the top row of boxes with him inside, towards stage right. Each box is lowered to the floor and the monks push the box containing the Foreigner across to downstage left whilst he sits observing the scene around him, creating the image of a visitor to a new country being transported to a new place. They raise his box vertically whilst he remains inside and he begins to feel the sides of the walls looking around as if contained by them.

The child monk sits on the floor stage right and creates a long diagonal line with the miniature boxes. He pushes the end of the line causing a domino effect as the boxes topple onto one another. He stands up and walks to the line of larger boxes and repeats the action causing the

larger boxes, which have the monks and the Foreigner inside, to also topple as the music reaches a climax.

In silence the child monk jumps up onto the top of the boxes and runs across them. The Foreigner has rolled out of his box and is lying on his back slowly pedalling his legs round with his head raised off the floor. The child monk approaches him but the Foreigner seems unaware he is there. The child monk presses his body downwards and then pulls him up to standing whilst the other monks, on a command, step out from their boxes and begin to move them.



Section Sixteen – Wall



The monks slide the boxes together and then rest them onto their backs and in unison, keeping the boxes packed tightly together in a line, they turn around so the open end no longer faces the audience. The Foreigner has remained downstage walking around in a trance, seemingly unaware of the action taking place.

A line of boxes is pushed forward in the space to join with the aluminium box downstage creating a long wall. The Foreigner walks in front of the wall towards stage right and then as the boxes shift forwards he walks backwards towards stage left. The lighting changes from the whole space being lit, to a warm, white focus on the wall with the rest of the stage in darkness. The music stops and the Foreigner suddenly seems more aware of his surroundings as he places his hands on the last box in the line stage left.

He then looks closely through the joins of the boxes as if searching for a crack in a wall to peep through. He runs along the wall searching for a way in, looking up and bending down to try to see what's behind the wall.

Eventually he reaches the aluminium box and the piano, strings and percussion return as he places his ear to one of the boxes and then knocks on the wall (the sound is enhanced by a temple wood block).

The lighting above the wall of boxes is lifted and two monks in a silhouette are revealed standing on top of the wall at each end holding spears (Qiang) in their right hand. The monks turn in to face one another and raise their spears before travelling towards and away from each other spiralling their spears and hitting them against the ground.

A spotlight stage right highlights the child monk sat on the floor with his own wall of boxes. The Foreigner continues to travel along the line of the wall before he reaches the child monk. He looks at his miniature boxes and follows him as the child monk gets up from the floor and walks to the centre of the wall. He knocks on it and slowly a box is lowered down, like a drawbridge opening out. The two monks standing on the wall are either side of this box and appear as guards to the entrance of the Temple. The child monk steps inside and the box is raised back up. The Foreigner, who has observed this, standing in front of the aluminium box, leans back against it causing it to slowly lower to the floor. He stands up and repeats the action with the next box and the following box whilst at the other end of the wall the monks are sliding each box away until eventually the wall has disappeared and a new configuration is created.

Section Seventeen – Temple



As the final box is raised to complete the new configuration the music increases in pace and intensity with forte piano and strings alongside percussion. Representative of a Temple, the new configuration has 7 arches in a wide V formation.

The monks call out as they appear in silhouette from behind their box into each archway. This is repeated and then developed with a leg kick, each time disappearing back behind a box. A variety of Kung Fu movement is performed including punches and kicks and the monks appear and disappear as they perform these sequences in a rhythmic pattern. The music comes to an abrupt stop and the monks disappear again behind their boxes.

One by one each monk, in silence, walks through each archway starting with the central one. Quietly, accompanied only by the strings and a gentle playing of the piano, they raise their elbows up to their chest drawing energy and then releasing it.

A Tai Chi sequence is performed in unison focusing on energy and breath. The movement consists of slow and sustained drawing in and pushing away of energy as hands draw in towards the centre of the body and then push outwards away from the body. There is a sudden change of dynamic half way through, the music pauses and the dynamic is faster with more attacking movements as they hit their hand against their elbow and stamp their feet heavily against the floor. A slow section is repeated along with another more attacking phrase and they end as they began slowly drawing the elbows up and releasing them down as the music draws to a close. Stage right the child monk has re-arranged the miniature boxes into a row behind and to each side of him forming a courtyard around where he is sitting cross-legged. He has his eyes closed and his hands resting on his knees. The monks slowly turn and walk back towards the Temple configuration.

Section Eighteen – Courtyard

The monks push against the pillars of the Temple causing the boxes to crash to the floor. The child monk is startled, opening his eyes and looking over to the boxes. The monks focus on the aluminium box, which has remained standing amongst all the wooden boxes, which have fallen. The Foreigner steps out from behind the aluminium box in silence and places a hand on it. A monk calls out and the others spring into action sliding and lifting boxes to create the final formation, a Courtyard. The Foreigner observes the action taking place around him and then begins to retreat back to upstage right as a lone monk performs various Shaolin animal Kung Fu styles including the Praying Mantis, Snake and the Eagle.



As the solo finishes monks walk into the space from stage right and stage left with their hands in a prayer position and the Foreigner joins them. Facing different directions they bow to one another before beginning a series of fragmented Kung Fu sequences. The movements include punches, leg slaps, leaps, kicks, lunges and stamps into the floor. Monks depart and re-join the unison sequence until the music builds to a climax. Here all the monks and the Foreigner perform together as the music increases in pace until in unison they suddenly drop to the floor punching a fist into the ground, bodies all facing stage left with heads dropped over. The musicians continue to play as the lighting fades to a dim pool of light over the monks and the Foreigner before fully fading to black out as the final notes are played.

USING SUTRA IN TEACHING



ANALYSIS TASKS

Section One – Sword

1. Look at online reviews of Sutra. What quote could you include in an essay to highlight the relationship between the child monk and the Foreigner?
2. What do you think is the relationship between the Foreigner and the warrior monk here?
3. How does the use of the violin in this section enhance the atmosphere? What is the relationship of the music to the movement?
4. Look at the list of Cherkaoui's stylistic features on page 11. What key choreographic device is employed by Cherkaoui here? Provide a specific example to support your answer.

Section Two – Pond

1. Research Shaolin Drunken style Kung Fu and its history. What actions from Drunken style are performed here? What is the history of this style?
2. The boxes in this section create an unstable base for the monks and images of a pond or even the sea are given as they balance carefully whilst moving across them. Cherkaoui has said this section felt like a way of showing the appearance of man on earth. He was interested in the appearance of one man emerging from the earth below him and pulling out another man, sharing energy or the elixir of life between them and slowly repeating the process until everyone appears. What use of action, space and dynamics communicates this dance idea?
3. What role does the Foreigner play here? Why is he the first to draw a monk from the earth?
4. How might this section link to the theme of Old and New China?

Section Three – Maze

1. In an interview Damien Fournier explained that ideas for the maze came from being at the Temple, as there were so many interesting places and corners to explore there. How is this shown through the set design and the movement?
2. How does the music support the dance idea as they re-arrange the boxes to form the maze?
3. It has been suggested that the child monk enters a fantasy world in this section, almost like Alice in Wonderland with the child monk disappearing down the rabbit hole, but it becomes a trap – why? How might this link to the overall themes of the dance? If the child monk is representing an animal here, how might this change our view on what is being communicated?
4. Consider the different ways freedom and containment are communicated within this section.

Section Four – War

1. Look at images/footage of a Chinese Dragon and observe its movement and pathways. How do the monks imitate this through their movement?
2. What is the significance of the wall and the monks' actions here in communicating ideas of Old China?
3. What is the effect of canon as a choreographic device here? How does it help to communicate the dance idea?

4. Why does the monk swipe all the miniature boxes from the aluminium box? What idea might this communicate? How could the role of the Foreigner be viewed here?

Section Five – Box

1. How is the theme of freedom and containment explored in this section?
2. How might this section link to Cherkaoui's experience of working with the monks at the Shaolin Temple?
3. What stylistic features of Cherkaoui can be seen here?
4. How does the music and lighting support the movement in this section?

Section Six – Lotus

1. Research the significance of the Lotus flower to the birth of Buddha and its general significance in Buddhist philosophy.
2. Explore Buddhist Mudras and observe the child monks gestural material. Examine what is being communicated here?
3. How does the use of space, action and dynamics communicate the dance idea here? How do the lighting and the aural setting further support this idea?

Section Seven – Boat

1. What happens when the monk disturbs the meditation at the start of this section when he pushes the child monk off the 'stamen'? What ideas are communicated here through both movement and use of design?
2. In the live performances with Ali Thabet playing the role of the Foreigner, his character pushes the child monk off the stamen, is enclosed by the cube and is subsequently edged off the top of the cube. How does this change the interpretation of these moments?
3. Freedom and containment appear as a theme here. Explore the various ways it is shown.
4. What connections are perhaps made to Old and New China, with land being taken away or invaded, escaping from danger and moving to a foreign land?

Section Eight – Forest

1. With reference to Old China and the history of the Shaolin Temple what ideas are being communicated here?
2. Describe the costume of the monks holding the Pu Dao swords. How does their change of costume enhance our understanding of the dance idea at that moment?
3. The Pu Dao soloist drops his sword and collapses to his knees towards the end of this section. What idea is being communicated here?

Section Nine – Solo

1. In the interview with Cherkaoui included in this pack, he references ideas of loneliness, of being caught within yourself and confronting your own limits in this solo. How are these ideas communicated through action, space and dynamics? Try to provide specific examples to support your responses.

Section Ten – Monkey

1. Research Shaolin Monkey Pole Kung Fu. What are the origins of the technique? What ideas from the Monkey Kung Fu traditions can be seen in this section?

Section Eleven – City

1. How does this section communicate ideas about New China? Consider the use of costume, aural setting and set design as well as the movement and provide specific examples to support your answers?

Section Twelve – Pagodas

1. How might the opening of this section reflect the meeting between Cherkaoui and the monks? What choreographic device, characteristic of Cherkaoui, is employed here?

2. What idea is being communicated when the Foreigner tries to move his box but remains inside it? How might this link to how he felt when he was at the Temple?

3. Research the Forest of Pagodas at the Shaolin Temple. In what way has Cherkaoui drawn ideas from this?

** Note - The French sign language sequence used text from a book entitled 'Women who run with wolves' by Clarissa Pinkola Estes.*

Section Thirteen – Animals

1. Each new cast performing Sutra bring their specialist animal Kung Fu. For the DVD version the Frog, Tiger, Eagle, Snake and Scorpion are performed alongside Monkey Fu, which is always in each production. Research the significance of these animals and try to identify their key movement characteristics.

2. What aspects of Cherkaoui's style are evident in his solo material?

Section Fourteen – Dormitory

1. What ideas are being communicated here through both the design and the movement? How does it connect to Cherkaoui's visit to 'New China'?

2. What is the role of the Foreigner and the child monk here?

3. How does the use of lighting further enhance the dance idea?

Section Fifteen – Dominoes

1. In an interview Damien Fournier, rehearsal director and performer of the role of the Foreigner, suggested that the circular motion of the feet inside the boxes in the previous section suggested machine-like motion and linked to the idea of the monks getting up every morning and repeating their same routines of yoga, meditation and Kung Fu drills. Why does this develop into the monks banging against their boxes? The Foreigner repeats some of that machine-like motion in this section but in a trance-like state. What is perhaps being communicated here?

2. What image is created as the child monk runs across the top of the boxes?

Section Sixteen – Wall

1. What role does the Foreigner have here? With reference to Cherkaoui's interview within this pack, how does this section communicate Cherkaoui's thoughts and experience when first visiting the Temple?

Section Seventeen – Temple

1. Research Tai Chi, in particular the use of breath and the passing of energy through the body.

2. How does this section along with the Lotus section help to show audiences the more spiritual aspects of the Shaolin monks?

Section Eighteen – Courtyard

1. What ideas are being communicated in the final section? Consider the Foreigner's role here?
2. With reference to Cherkaoui's interview why is the design for this section a courtyard? What does it allow in terms of the movement?

PRACTICAL TASKS

* For the warm up and the practical tasks we recommend using the Sutra CD, available from www.sadlerswells.com/shop.

Teacher's note: there are only tasks linked to some sections, not all, but it is expected that some of the tasks may take a couple of lessons to complete.

Warm up

Roll down to the floor, melting into it. Feel a sense of pull towards the vertical as you move through the floor extending arms, legs or torso to the ceiling and then feel a connection to the downward pull of the floor.

Find ways of creating spaces against the floor with the body and move in and out of the spaces you've created. Think about 'painting' into those spaces or drawing into them using feet, an elbow, arms or head. Find different departures of the movement.

Now try to articulate your movement as if you are an animal for example moving through a shoulder joint like a tiger or being led by your head as if a snake. Enter an imaginative space for example an eagle flying above a mountain landscape – how might its body move? Consider the movement of other animals such as a scorpion or a crane. Find soft, fluid movement and then contrast it with fast, attacking movement.

Section One – Sword

1. In groups of three re-create the very opening of this section focusing carefully on the relationship between the Foreigner and the warrior monk. Observe the Foreigner's gestural movement and the warrior monk's response, as well as the relationship between the child monk and the Foreigner. What is the use of focus between them?

2. Now create your own developed version of this. Decide as a group how you can further show this idea using your own movement ideas. For example, enlarge your movement incorporating the whole body, play with dynamic variation or change of levels.



Section Two – Pond

1. In pairs, focus on passing energy between you. How can you demonstrate this idea clearly? Think about changes in the dynamic quality each time the energy is passed between you. Consider a powerful energy and a weaker one. Use different body parts to connect and share the energy between you.

2. Now try moving as if on an unstable platform. How does this change your movement material? What do you need to consider in your movement to show that the ground is unstable.

Section Four – War

1. Learn some of the movement material from the Tai Chi sequences performed in Section Seventeen – Temple. In groups of four or more create a vertical line and then perform the Tai Chi sequence in an overlapping canon. Develop the material by extending and playing with

your pathway to recreate images of the Chinese dragon. Also try to change your energy within the sequence, from moments of stillness with a focus on breathing to fast-paced attack.

Section Five – Box

1. Mark out a small square in the space against a wall – just enough to allow yourself to stand comfortably feet in parallel. With a partner explore ways that you can move within the confined space – try not to go outside the space. Be as inventive as you can and consider different points of contact with one another as well as devices such as mirroring, unison and opposition.

Section Six – Lotus

1. Learn some of the child monk's gestural material and say the meaning of the mudra as you perform it.



Section Seven - Boat

1. Explore ways of re-creating images of the Lotus, Cube, Boat and Forest using dancers' bodies rather than boxes. Consider use of gesture to reflect being trapped inside the cube or to highlight that you are in a boat.

Section Nine – Solo

1. Improvise movement ideas where you are caught within yourself. How could this idea be communicated clearly?
2. If you have tables in your space turn them on their side and play with 'stage tricks' such as walking down the stairs or appearing to be pulled by an outside force in different directions.

Section Ten - Monkey

1. Research movement ideas from YouTube for Shaolin Monkey Kung Fu form. Create a short motif from this research and teach the others in your group. What are the key characteristics of the movement?



Section Eleven – City

1. This section was inspired by Cherkaoui's observations of the monks warming up at the Temple. Try using this image in class as part of the warm-up. Have half of the class standing as pillars in the space for the others to travel through then swap over.

Section Twelve – Pagodas

1. Divide the French sign language sequence into sections then each learn a section to teach to the rest of the group in the following lesson.

Section Thirteen – Animals

1. Watch clips of the different forms of animal Kung Fu on YouTube. In pairs learn movements/gestures that reflect a Kung Fu animal and the group must guess which animal you are.

Recall task - As a group create a gesture to symbolize each section's title. Learn the order of each section/gesture and perform it as a group in synchronisation, saying the titles at the same time to help you remember the order for the written exam.

Sutra Analysis Sheet

Section No:

Title of Section:

Action Content/vocabulary Any clear motifs with meaning?	Dynamic Qualities	The way dancer(s) use the space Personal & general
The way dancers relate to each other on stage	Physical Setting Set/props/costume/lighting	Aural Setting Does music help show theme?
Box Design		

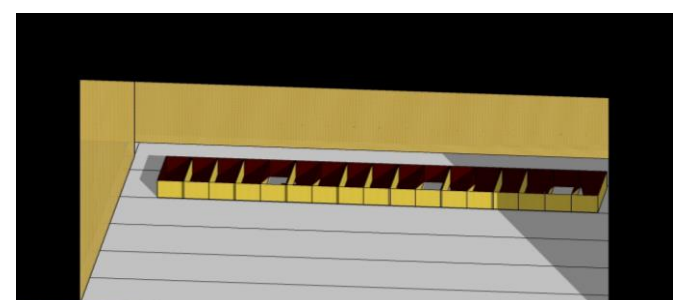
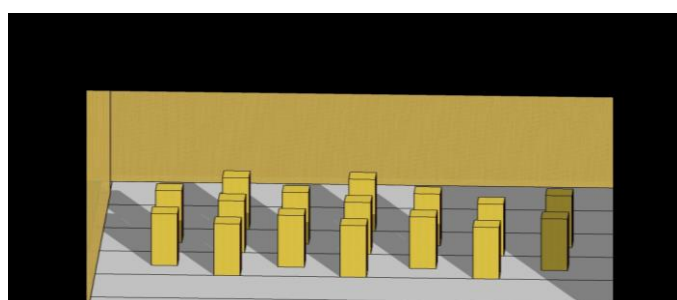
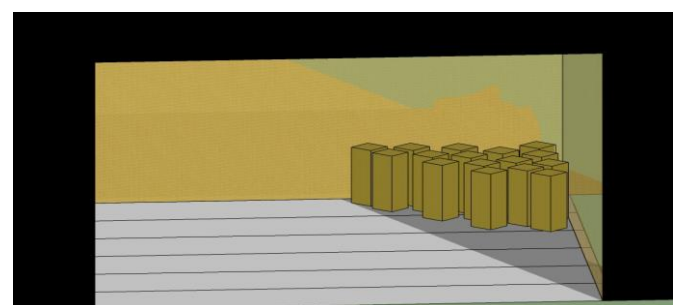
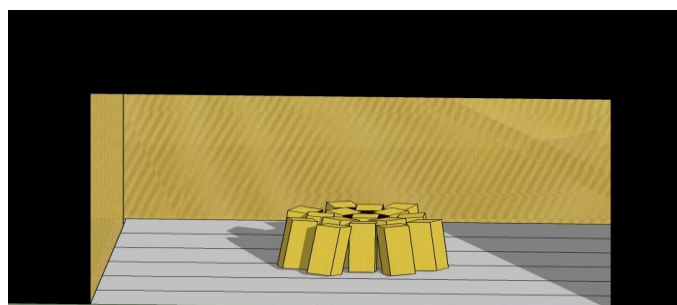
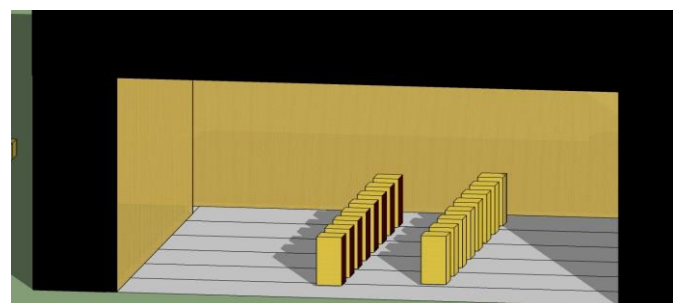
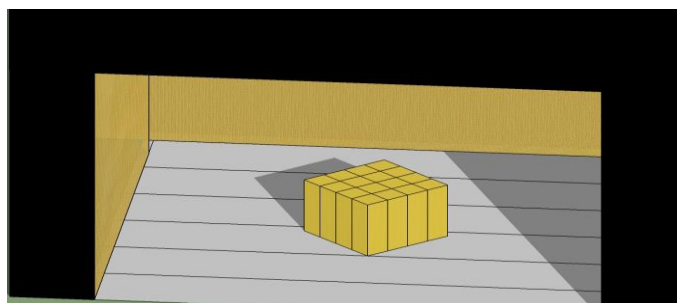
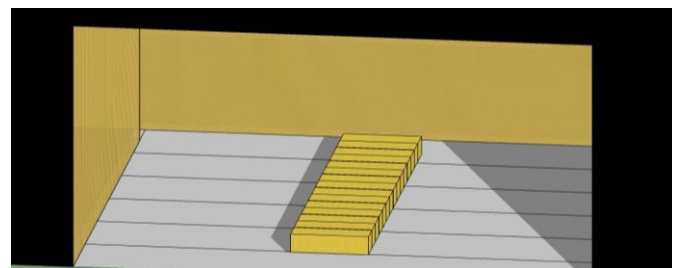
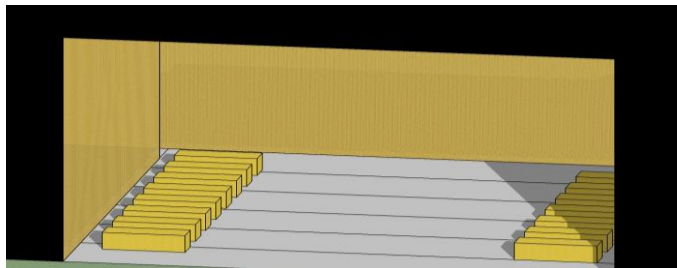
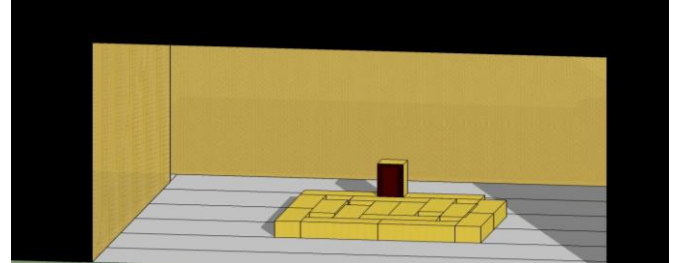
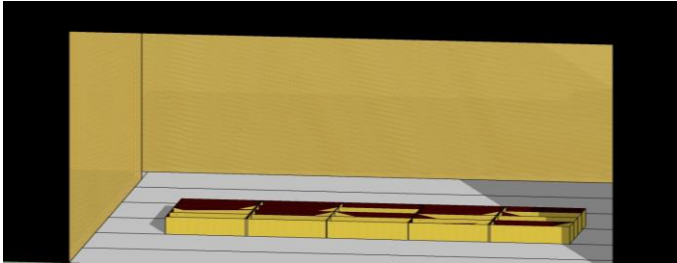
Evidence of Cherkaoui's training/influences/ stylistic features:

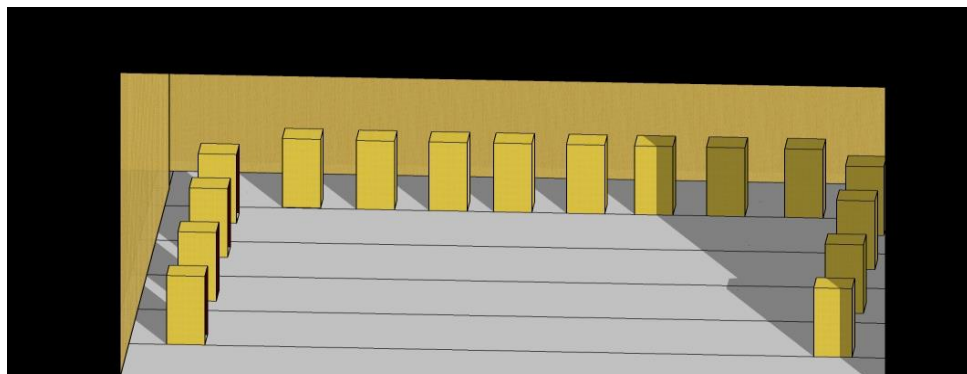
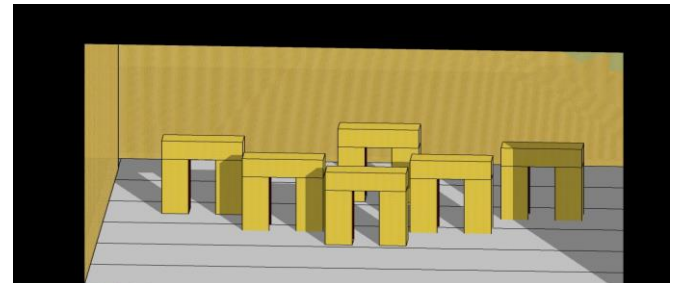
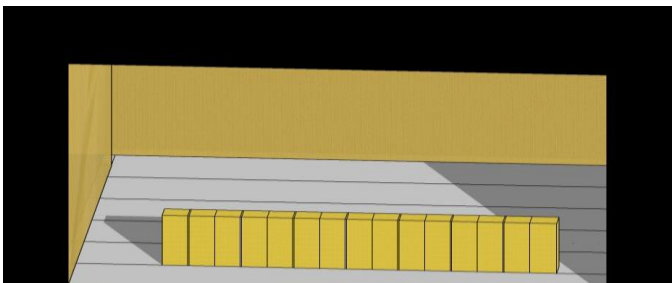
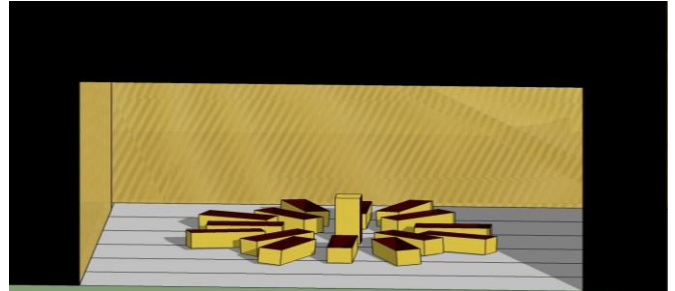
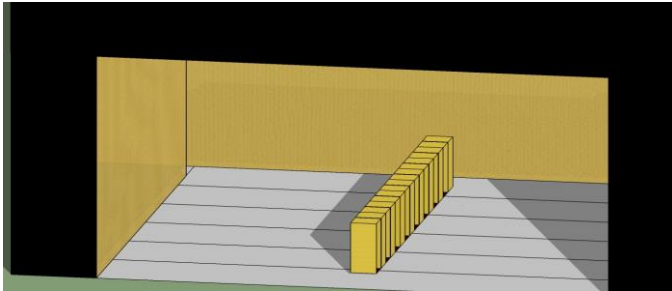
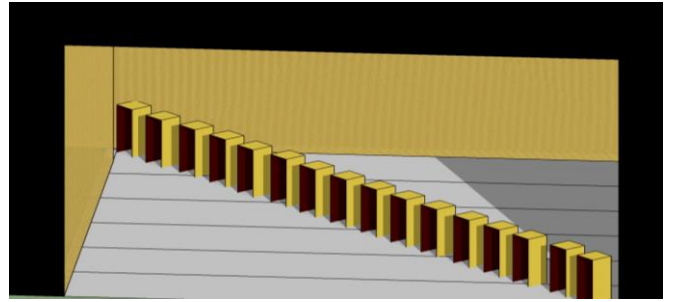
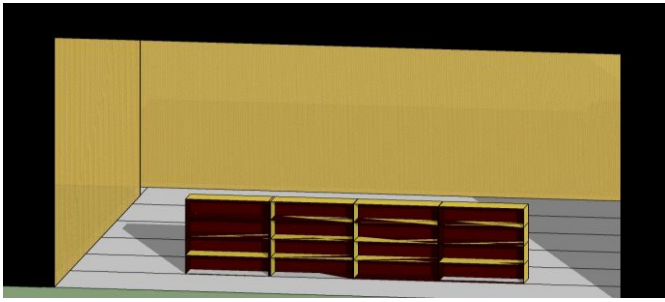
Interpretation of the section:

APPENDIX



SUTRA BOX FORMATIONS





A journey like no other

Mark Monahan March 2018

"I was a bit stuck in a comfort zone of working with and being around dancers," says Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, thinking back to 2007, the year he turned 31, "and I felt like I wanted to break out of the usual things I was doing. I was talking about this to my friend, the producer Hisashi Itoh, and he asked me, What are you really interested in? I mentioned all the things in my head that were important to me – including martial arts and yoga – and he said, Well, why don't you go to the Shaolin Temple? You could meet the monks and talk to them."

Even setting aside Cherkaoui's specific passions, it is small wonder that Itoh's suggestion proved so irresistible. Cherkaoui was born in Belgium to a Flemish mother and a Moroccan father, and is a teetotal vegan. An Arab who doesn't eat meat and a Belgian who doesn't drink beer, he has always considered himself an outsider, and this sense of apartness has helped propel him on a lifelong quest to explore foreign cultures in order to find out what links us all. In conversation, as in works such as *Babel*, *TeZukA*, *Mjlonga* and *4D*, he displays an intoxicating optimism about the potential for superficially diverse cultures to find common ground.

Only with a mind as thirsty and as fertile as Cherkaoui's could dissatisfaction with the dance world yield one of the most extraordinary dance shows so far this millennium – and yet, that is exactly what happened. *Sutra* ("Thread"), which eventually grew from that exchange with Itoh, was a critical and popular triumph from the out. Only the third show (after 2005's *PUSH* and 2007's *Havana Rakatan*) to be a top-to-bottom Sadler's Wells production, its premiere in May 2008 had critics tripping over themselves to find superlatives, and since that first, sell out run it has toured to 66 cities in 33 countries. This week's tenth-anniversary revival marks its 200th performance – not bad for a dance show with a 20-strong cast that includes just one dancer.

Cherkaoui's trip to the Temple – birthplace of Zen Buddhism in 495AD, on the western edge of the Songshan mountains in Henan Province – proved revelatory. "I had an image in my head of what the monks' lives would be like," he says, "but when I was there, it gained so much more depth, when I understood the emotional journey that it must be to want to be a monk. Because everybody had their own journey to be there, and I had mine – I was there because of the things that I was dealing with."

Nor did Cherkaoui's connection with the monks end there, or indeed with their vegetarianism. "I went and met Master Shi Yanda," he told me back in spring 2008, when I was lucky enough to join him at the temple for a couple of days, "and I felt I'd finally met someone who I could ask the questions that mattered. Like, why are they preaching such peacefulness and yet fighting like madmen? He told me how meditation is to quieten the mind and how kung fu is to quieten the body, and that it's all about interconnectedness with animals, and the way they admire various animals for the way they move. I related to that, because when I choreograph, feel increasingly inclined to want to think more like an animal and less like a human being."

But who to design the show that was beginning to germinate in Cherkaoui's mind? He had been friends with Antony Gormley ever since collaborating on 2005's *zero degrees* (also at Sadler's Wells), and was well aware that the celebrated British sculptor had previously travelled extensively in Asia to study Buddhism. "I called him right away," says Cherkaoui, "and I said, you have to come over here – there's something about what you are about that I see here. We had been talking about wanting to do another project together, and I just felt: this is the one." Gormley needed no further persuasion. "I'm very, very interested in China," he says, "because I think China, whether we like it or not, is the future. I think – in Buddhism and perhaps even more so in Daoism – it's got very important things to tell us about the reconciliation of mind and matter." What's more, he adds, "It's [the 19th-century German

philosopher] Schopenhauer who insists that actually we resist the greater part of our humanity if we ignore the animal, and linking then the animal with higher consciousness – that for me was the lesson of Sutra and indeed the experience of being at Shaolin, the discipline of the monastery.”

Gormley’s entire career has stemmed from his fascination with the human body, and his (crucial) contribution to Sutra reflects this. “In my very limited and amateur role as a designer for dance,” he says, with characteristic modesty, “I am interested not in manipulating light to tell you what kind of emotion you’re supposed to be having, or illustrating narrative, or making scenes in order for you to know where you are. I’m interested in giving the bodies of the dancers’ extensions that can be themselves continually manipulated into new configurations.”

And so, after, as Cherkaoui describes it, “a lot of ‘ping-pong,’ Antony came up with this idea of these boxes. And I could feel that we were on to something really big.”

I put it to Gormley that Sutra’s 21 oblong, five-sided wooden boxes feel quintessentially “him” in representing a kind of ultimate simplification of the human form.

“It was the logical conclusion,” he confirms. “I’d reproduced the principal dancers’ bodies in Zero Degrees, and I wanted to deal with space and in a sense with architecture, and this was a minimal piece of architecture that could be used as a large brick to make larger architectures. But the proportions of the box are really important – 60cm x 60cm x 180cm. You could say this is a mean, a human mean, and I think [in the show] they are sentry boxes, baths, cupboards, beds and coffins, but as ‘bricks’ they can be used to make a ziggurat, Stone Henge, a mountain, a lotus flower, a forest of stele.”

For the score, Cherkaoui turned to a composer who – unlike Gormley, who’d won the Turner Prize almost 15 years earlier – was just getting started. Born in Poland, Szymon Brzóska was 27 at the time, and had only just finished studying composition in Antwerp. “That year, 2007, I saw Larbi’s [new] piece Myth in Antwerp,” he recalls. “I loved it very very much, and saw it three times in a row actually. I approached Larbi at a certain point after one show, gave him my CD, and then a few weeks later he proposed that I work on Sutra!”

Having written some musical “sketches” for Cherkaoui, Brzóska settled on a melancholic score for violin, viola, cello, piano and percussion that in many ways would contrast with the bracing physicality of the monks’ movements.

“I never intended to write music that would be inspired by Chinese music in a clichéd kind of way,” he says, “but I did want a certain flavour of Chinese music. There was some direct inspiration – we used some percussion instruments from China, from the temple – but it was more about a kind of atmosphere. The strings helped me create that, as well as the harmony that I wanted, and I used piano because I’m a pianist myself, and because I thought it could come in between. It brings harmony, but at the same time it can bring rhythm, even a percussive element.”

And so, in early 2008, clutching an early recording of Brzóska’s score, Cherkaoui returned to the temple to make the piece, and suddenly found himself in a makeshift rehearsal room with the monks.

“That very first time, it was all about movement,” he says. “Martial arts and Shaolin kung fu have movements, so I was just asking, what are the moves you have, and what’s the vocabulary? And then, from what they showed me, there were some things that I felt were really interesting, and others that I didn’t know how to approach. I loved their animal incarnations, when they’re being like a panther or moving like a snake. It’s real theatre – and it’s like dance. When you’re doing Swan Lake, you have to believe you’re a swan. And so, when you have a martial artist who believes he’s an eagle, it’s the same, the same imagination.”

As Cherkaoui talks about the production that evolved from these early workshops, a word that comes up time and again is “journey.” I suggest to him that that’s very much how Sutra comes across: as his journey – led by a young neophyte – into the mind of a monk; his bid to understand the monks’ existence, to see what they’ve expunged from their lives, to square their physical prowess with their spiritual stillness.

“Yes, I think that’s fair,” he replies, “but the moment I chose to be in it as a performer was in the last two or three weeks before the premiere. I was creating all these collective things with the monks, and I felt like I need someone to go against the stream. There are little moments when it’s clear that there is a leader within it, and that leadership shifts from one monk to another. But still, I felt like the bigger narrative was still going to be my own perception, and that this character could give perspective, a certain identification. That’s why a lot of people liked it, because they could feel themselves going along with that character.”

“A lot of people,” while true, is an understatement – 200 performances (and counting) over ten years is an extraordinary achievement for such an experimental show. I wonder, too, if Cherkaoui now sees this sort of cross-cultural venture as more valuable than ever in what, many would argue, is a time of great insularity in the west. “I totally think it’s important to keep reaching over to the other shore, you know?” he says. “To understand that there is someone there that is like you, and that can inspire you. I had to go all the way to China to find myself again. I was very stuck, and didn’t like who I was seeing when I looked in the mirror. Going to the temple, I learnt to care about myself more, to realise: oh, I’m ok. And it’s the monks who gave me that strength, by welcoming me, and by asking me questions that were on the one hand so naïve, and on the other hand essential. They were simply like, ‘What’s a choreographer?’, and I thought, That’s the best question I’ve ever been asked! What am I? “I wish this upon everyone,” he concludes, “to have this feeling of a fresh start.”

Mark Monahan is arts editor and dance critic of the Daily Telegraph

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