The Architect of Chaos: Physical Actor Training in Farce Through Mask Techniques for Bernard in *Boeing-Boeing* by Marc Camoletti

Rusharnon Whongkomonl

Abstract

This research explores the application of masks in the training of actors within farcical performances, specifically examining the character of Bernard in Marc Camoletti's *Boeing-Boeing*. The study addresses the blend of specific physical training associated with masks Neutral Mask, Character Mask, and Commedia dell'Arte within the context of theatrical farce performance to hone the actor's precision and comedic timing. The approach to the research integrates practical mask techniques with rehearsal within the framework of Jacques Lecoq's mask techniques as a basis for theoretical analysis. As a researcher, I designed targeted mask training sessions to overcome challenges I personally faced in physical expression and comedic timing. Neutral masks provided barebones physical presence awareness while eliminating personal quirks. Character masks allowed thorough engagement with Bernard's traits, enabling him to respond and react in an exaggerated manner. Commedia dell'Arte masks of Arlecchino, Zanni, and Il Capitano specifically refined comedic timing and broad movement necessary for farce. The scope of data gathering encompassed self-assessments through in-depth reflections and analyses of one's own videos, external evaluation from 342 audiences over three public performances, and focus group interviews with six creative collaborators and one expert in mask techniques. The results indicate significant advancements in physical control and mobility, resulting in enhanced range of motion, agility, and fluidity. Independent evaluations corroborated these findings, with 57.9% of the audience recognizing natural movement and bodily control, and 66.7% acknowledging effective comedic timing. These insights indicate that mask training equips actors with heightened skills in physical mime, thus improving their ability to embody a character, especially those that require rapid emotional transitions and precise physical comedy. This research helps to fill the gap in the literature regarding the application of traditional mask techniques to contemporary actor training, especially for challenging comedic performances.

Keywords: Mask techniques, Farce Performance, Neutral Mask, Character Mask, Commedia dell'Arte, Actor Training

Introduction and Background

The complexities inherent in theatrical farce pose challenges that far exceed those encountered in standard dramatic performance, yet current pedagogical frameworks frequently overlook the genre's distinctive physical demands. Farcical acting is not simply about humour, it requires performers to cultivate advanced physical skill sets, rapid shifts in emotion, meticulously timed comedic actions, and the orchestration of what can only be described as deliberate, controlled chaos. While mask techniques are a staple of actor training literature, there is a noticeable gap regarding their targeted application to farcical roles and their efficacy in fostering the heightened physicality fundamental to comedic success.

The demands placed on actors in farcical situations go beyond traditional character development. Such performances necessitate exceptional stamina, emotional agility, and technical exactitude. Actors must execute highly complicated comedic sequences while ensuring narrative continuity and ensemble synergy. Mainstream training methods often fall short, leaving actors to develop vital farcical skills through informal experimentation rather

than systematic instruction. This shortcoming becomes especially acute when actors are tasked with portraying characters who serve as catalysts for chaos, yet must simultaneously appear to maintain authority amid increasing disorder.

This study seeks to address this notable gap by examining the systematic integration of Jacques Lecoq's mask techniques into the development of farcical performance skills. Although Lecoq's influence on general actor training is well documented, the specific use of his methodologies in roles that require the careful orchestration of comedic chaos remains underexplored. The research centres on Bernard from Marc Camoletti's *Boeing-Boeing*, a character emblematic of what this study terms an "architect of chaos," meaning one who meticulously constructs, yet inevitably loses control over, complex systems. The challenge for the actor is to convincingly navigate the character's attempts at composure alongside his rapid descent into disarray.

Portraying Bernard reveals the broader requirements of farce. The actor must project a facade of confidence and mastery while the physical performance increasingly communicates distress and turbulence. The role demands an intricate blend of physical choreography, emotional authenticity, and ensemble cooperation. Bernard's elaborate plans, coordinating multiple fiancées by their flight schedules, unravel into a series of farcical complications, requiring the actor to deliver swift physical transitions, precise reactions, and consistently effective comedic timing. As Christopher Olsen succinctly states, "In comedy, timing is everything. It's about knowing when to pause, when to emphasize, and when to let the punchline hit" (Olsen, 1999, p. 34).

The rationale for focusing on mask techniques derives from their demonstrated ability to heighten physical awareness, minimize ingrained habits, and broaden expressive range. Yet there is little research on how these traditional tools might be adapted for the specific rigors of contemporary farce. This study contributes to the discourse by documenting how three distinct mask approaches can be synthesized into a structured training program for physically demanding comedic roles, offering concrete insights for actors, directors, and educators aiming to cultivate the specialized skills essential for effective farcical performance.

Research Purposes

1 Objective

To investigate and develop an actor's capacity to embody a character who functions as the "architect of chaos" in a farce, specifically Bernard in *Boeing-Boeing*, through the application of mask techniques.

2 Hypothesis

Training in Neutral Mask, Character Mask, and Commedia dell'Arte will significantly enhance an actor's physical precision, versatility, and ability to execute the rapid, exaggerated movements and comedic timing essential for portraying Bernard as the architect of chaos, thereby enabling natural and effective communication of humour in farce.

Literature Review

This section examines the historical significance of masks in theatre and explores relevant theoretical concepts and exercises related to mask techniques, all viewed through the lens of their potential to empower an actor to command and navigate comedic chaos.

The methodology draws specifically from influential works including Lecoq's *The Moving Body* and *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*, Eldredge's *Mask Improvisation for Actor Training and Performance*, and various works on Commedia dell'Arte, providing a robust theoretical framework for developing the physical skills needed to manage farcical chaos.

1 The Historical Use of Masks in Theatre

The theatrical mask began its journey in ancient Greece, around 535 BC, acting as a powerful tool for transforming characters and amplifying expression. Previously, Greek actors used masks to go beyond their individual selves, making their voices and emotions big enough to reach huge audiences. It was an early, vital way to tell stories with real impact. Fast forward to the 16th century, and Italian Commedia dell'Arte really cemented the mask's role. "Maschera" wasn't just about the physical mask, it represented the entire essence of a stock character, their personality, voice, and unique way of moving. This tradition directly influences the exaggerated physicality and archetypal portrayal essential for a character like Bernard, who embodies a specific comedic type.

In modern Western theatre, Jacques Copeau brought the mask back into focus as a teaching tool with his "Silent mask." Building on Copeau's ideas, Jacques Lecoq developed the "Neutral Mask" which is a simple, plain mask designed to help actors achieve a state of physical and mental neutrality. Lecoq called this a "starting point before action," allowing actors to shed old habits and discover pure, unfiltered physical expression. (Lecoq, 2000, p.38) For an actor getting ready to play Bernard, the architect of chaos, this neutrality is fundamental. It lets the actor build Bernard's specific chaotic energy from a clean slate, instead of overlaying personal mannerisms. As Lecoq explained, this mask is a tool used to enhance physical awareness and understand the actor's self. Wearing the mask reduces facial expression, forcing the actor to rely on body language to convey emotion and tell stories. This technique is particularly useful for farce, where physical expression is key to engineering and responding to chaos. (Lecoq, 2000)

2 Preparatory Exercises Before Mask Training

Following Copeau and Lecoq's principles, physical and mental readiness are essential before engaging with mask work. These preparatory exercises aim to heighten bodily awareness and achieve a state of physical and mental neutrality, enabling the actor to become a more responsive instrument for generating and reacting to chaos.

Preparatory Exercises before Mask Training	
Standing Zero	To establish a balanced, neutral physical and mental state, free from personal expressions that might impede the portrayal of controlled chaos.
Neutrality Walk	To help the actor shed personal gait patterns and discover efficient and unburdened movement, it is essential for an actor who must appear effortlessly in control even as the character's plans unravel.
Undulation and Inverse Undulation	To develop fluid, dynamic movement capabilities, enabling the actor to physically manifest Bernard's energetic attempts to maintain control.
Éclosion & Contraction	To train understanding of how bodily energy can expand and retract, mirroring Bernard's bursts of confidence and moments of shrinking despair.
The Nine Attitudes	Lecoq's archetypal postures, used to explore the relationship between body, space, and expression, providing a vocabulary for Bernard's wide range of emotional states and physical reactions.

Molino	A body rotation exercise that develops awareness of interconnected bodily functions, fostering the coordinated movements necessary for Bernard's complex physical comedy.

3 Neutral Mask

The Neutral Mask, as Lecoq envisioned it, is a tool to help actors tap into a state of pure, uncluttered presence what he called a calm that is the starting point before action. By hiding the face, the mask forces actors to communicate only with their bodies, making them deeply aware of their physical habits. For playing Bernard, the master of chaos, this mask is incredibly important. It helps the actor shed personal quirks that might get in the way of Bernard's unique physical blueprint for creating mayhem. As Lecoq pointed out that wearing the mask reduces facial expression, forcing the actor to rely on body language to convey emotion and tell stories. (Lecoq, 2000, p.36) This technique is particularly useful for farce, where physical expression is key to shaping the humour.

Neutral Mask Exercises	
Waking Up (Le réveil du masque neutre)	To re-engage with the body and space from a state of pure neutrality, allowing Bernard's complex physical journey to unfold.
The 4 Elements	To explore how the body moves in response to universal forces, providing a foundation for Bernard's dynamic and often elemental reactions to chaos.
Walking in Space	To practice simple, universal movements without personal characteristics, allowing the actor to discover the foundational physical vocabulary for Bernard's seemingly controlled world.
The Journey (Le voyage)	To develop storytelling through the body by experiencing various encounters and challenges, helping to sculpt Bernard's arc of escalating panic.
Identification with Nature	To explore the essence of natural dynamics, providing a source for organic and expressive physical movements that ground Bernard's comedic actions.

4 Character Mask

Unlike neutral masks, character masks are all about embodying distinct, specific personalities. They push actors to discover the dominant physical traits and archetypes baked right into the mask, turning the limited facial expression into hugely amplified bodily communication. For Bernard, the character mask becomes an incredibly powerful tool for digging into his architect of chaos persona. It really lets the actor fully inhabit his particular mix of charm, cunning, and that inevitable frantic unravelling. As Lecoq mentioned that Character masks stimulate actors to find clear and specific physical expressions. When facial expressions cannot be used, actors must communicate through the movement of the entire body. (Lecoq, 2000, p.57) Within the context of farce, where exaggerated physical expressions are paramount, character masks serve to amplify the actor's movements, thereby accentuating Bernard's physical endeavours to maintain control, resulting in a heightened comedic effect.

Character Mask Exercises	
Mask Observation and Analysis	A meticulous examination of the mask's characteristics to understand the persona's essence before embodiment.
Mask Transformation	The physical and mental process of "becoming" the mask, allowing specific physicalities and reactions to emerge, guided by the mask itself.

Environmental Response	Exploring the masked character's reactions to varying situations and environments, particularly as his meticulously planned world descends into chaos.
The Paradox of Mask: Counter Mask	Exploring the inner conflicts and complexities within the character's mask and layered performance.



Charater Mask Training Exercises

5 Commedia dell'Arte

Commedia dell'Arte, with its improvisational core and reliance on those distinct stock character masks, offers up a rich language for exaggerated and precise physical expression. The masks, often just half-face, allow for both incredible physical dynamism and clear vocal expression. Think of characters like Arlecchino, with their agile, almost cat-like movements; they provide a direct lineage for developing the nimble, often frantic physical comedy that Bernard's role as the "architect of chaos" absolutely demands. As traditional sources described that Arlecchino exhibits the characteristics of many animals. The agility of the cat combined with the mischievousness of the monkey is expressed through the movements displayed by the actor. This character requires great agility. (Eldredge, 1996) This description perfectly translates to Bernard's need for lightning-fast evasions, frantic orchestrations, and those hilarious physical reactions to his unfolding disasters.

Commedia dell'Arte Exercises	
Stock Character Embodiment	Studying characters like Pantalone (the greedy old man) or Arlecchino (the agile servant) to understand their distinct physicalities, which can be adapted to amplify aspects of Bernard's character.
Mask Connection	Deeply connecting with chosen stock character masks (such as Inamorato for Bernard's charming side, or Zanni/Arlecchino for his desperate agility), allowing the mask to dictate movements and expressions. Lecoq emphasized, "The half-masks of Commedia dell'Arte are very specific; the body must respond in the way the mask demands."
Improvisation with Scenarios (Cannovacci)	Developing improvisational skills based on traditional cannovacci, allowing the actor to explore Bernard's reactions and detailed behaviours within rapidly changing, chaotic scenarios, thereby refining his ability to "architect" or respond to comedic mayhem.

6 Farce

Farce, as a theatrical genre, really thrives on humour that springs from exaggerated situations and movements that just defy normal behaviour. For an actor playing a character like Bernard, who actively builds and then gets completely stuck in this absurdity, top-notch physical skills aren't just important, they're absolutely essential. The ability to tell absurdly comical stories through strong, energetic performances, along with perfect timing for both giving and taking jokes, is the absolute foundation of this genre. *Boeing-Boeing* is a perfect

example of farce, and Bernard's role is truly its comedic anchor. The actor needs to have not just physical agility, but the precision to start and react to escalating chaos, making him genuinely the "architect of chaos" within the play itself.

Methodology

This investigation employed a single-subject case study design, integrating mixed-methods data collection to examine the implementation of mask techniques in developing farcical performance skills. The research incorporated autoethnographic elements alongside external validation measures to comprehensively document training outcomes and performance efficacy. While the design's inherent limitations prevent definitive causal attributions, the systematic documentation and utilization of multiple data sources provide valuable insights into the training process and its observed impacts.

The research process followed a systematic six-phase framework designed to ensure rigorous documentation and evaluation. The initial phase involved comprehensive examination of mask acting methodologies through academic literature, expert consultation, and pedagogical analysis, establishing the theoretical framework for integrating the three mask approaches into a cohesive training program. This was followed by systematic analysis of *Boeing-Boeing*'s farcical elements, with particular emphasis on Bernard's function as both catalyst and victim of escalating chaos. The third phase involved practical application of selected mask techniques through structured rehearsal processes, focusing on developing precise movement vocabulary and reactive patterns. Three public performances were then conducted at the Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts, Chulalongkorn University, from April 4-6, 2025, with each performance accommodating approximately 140 audience members. Comprehensive assessment utilized video documentation, audience feedback surveys from 342 respondents, and qualitative interviews with six creative collaborators and one mask technique specialist. The final phase integrated all research findings and formulated training recommendations.

The mask training intervention was implemented over a twelve-week period with carefully structured progression. Weeks 1-4 focused on Neutral Mask training through six ninety-minute sessions, establishing foundational physical awareness and eliminating personal mannerisms. Weeks 5-8 concentrated on Character Mask development through six additional ninety-minute sessions, exploring Bernard's specific personality traits and physical manifestations. Weeks 9-12 emphasized Commedia dell'Arte techniques through six final sessions, developing the exaggerated movement vocabulary and precise timing essential for farcical performance. Throughout this period, integration sessions during regular rehearsals provided ongoing application opportunities, totalling 54 hours of mask-specific work supplemented by 24 hours of integrated rehearsal application.

Data collection employed multiple instruments to ensure comprehensive evaluation. A structured audience questionnaire assessed four critical dimensions of physical theatrical expression using five-point Likert scales, addressing physical expression clarity, character believability, movement naturalness, and ensemble interaction quality. The survey was designed for ten-minute completion and distributed via QR codes in performance programs. Semi-structured interviews with creative collaborators and the mask technique specialist covered observed changes in physical expression, character development progression, and ensemble interaction quality. Video analysis of training sessions and performances focused on movement pattern identification and technical skill progression, while reflexive journaling examined self-reported development themes throughout the training process.

Research Approaches

1 Pre-Production

1.1. Analysis of the *Boeing-Boeing* Play

Marc Camoletti's *Boeing-Boeing* burst onto the scene amidst the social shifts of 1960s Paris, a time marked by evolving gender roles and sexual liberation. The play masterfully captures the changing tides of love and marriage, earning widespread acclaim and even inspiring a sequel, *Don't Dress For Dinner*. As a classic farce, its comedic brilliance hinges on a sophisticated structure fuelled by precise timing and the actors' vibrant physical performances. The humour escalates from mounting chaos, and at the heart of it all, Bernard is the architect.

A close look at *Boeing-Boeing* reveals the intricate and utterly chaotic world Bernard tries to manage from his plush Paris apartment. His meticulously planned schedule for three flight attendant fiancées, each from a different airline, becomes the very blueprint of his "architecture of chaos." The comedic tension truly ignites when unexpected flight changes throw his carefully arranged rotation into disarray, forcing all three women to converge on his apartment at the same time. The unannounced arrival of his close friend, Robert, only cranks up the tension and chaos, creating a vortex of misunderstandings that even his exasperated housekeeper, Berthe, can't sort out. Bernard's relentless struggle to keep things under control, even as mayhem spirals, is what drives the play's humour.

This three-act play delves into infidelity, deception, and the concealment of truth. Its subtle core message underscores the self-deception that comes from insincerity and the foolishness of overconfidence, themes perfectly embodied by Bernard's character.

1.2. Analysis of Bernard's Character

Bernard stands as the undisputed main character, embodying a compelling blend of charm and confidence. He functions as an architect not only by profession but also in his approach to his polyamorous relationships, constructing a system he believes is foolproof. However, beneath his confident exterior lies a fundamental lack of responsibility and ethics, which ultimately fuels the play's comedic engine. While maintaining its farcical nature, Bernard's behaviour serves as a magnified reflection of societal shifts concerning love and marriage, subtly inviting the audience to ponder the implications of honesty and deception in relationships.

Following thorough analysis of the play and the chosen case study character, I collaborated closely with the director and acting team. This collaboration proved crucial for developing Bernard's specific background and for strategically planning the integration of mask acting training with experts, alongside the broader rehearsal process involving all actors. The focus remained on how Bernard's physical and emotional states, as the "architect of chaos," would evolve and be expressed.

2 Production

My personal dive into mask acting started with a performance theory course and a specialized workshop at Chulalongkorn University, led by Assistant Professor Dr. Wankwan Polachan and Master Nikorn Sae-tang. This initial experience sparked a deep interest in using masks to push past my own physical limitations and develop the ability to embody characters completely outside my comfort zone, especially those

who create or navigate comedic chaos. The teaching principles of Assistant Professor Dr. Wankwan Polachan and Master Nikorn Sae-tang, which were rooted in Copeau and Lecoq's methods, gave me the foundational framework. After that, I thoroughly researched and put together a customized set of exercises specifically designed for portraying Bernard, and then integrated them directly into my own rehearsal process.

2.1 Physical Development Training Incorporating Mask Techniques

My training started by grounding myself. I focused on self-awareness, core breathing, and cultivating a present moment awareness with 'the Standing Zero exercise'. This really helped quiet my mind and body, shedding any personal emotional or physical vocabulary that might hinder Bernard's intricate movements. Exercises like '20-Points Isolation' allowed me to meticulously pinpoint and work through any physical tension, especially in my back, crucial for Bernard's sometimes frantic physicality. Assistant Professor Dr. Wankwan Polachan's emphasis on the Neutrality Walk was a game-changer, it helped me recognize and shed ingrained habits like slouching or pinching my elbows, which went against the confident, upright posture Bernard needed, even as his world collapsed. I also incorporated Lecoq's 'Undulation and Inverse Undulation,' 'Éclosion and Contraction,' 'the Nine Attitudes,' and 'Molino' exercises to build physical stamina, which I realized I sorely lacked. This foundational work was essential before even touching the masks that Master Nikorn Sae-Tang emphasized.

Then came the Neutral Mask. This mask forced me to communicate entirely through my body, stripping away my personal expressions. Exercises like 'Waking Up' and 'the Four Elements' helped me shed my everyday physical habits and discover new ways of moving, highlighting the stark differences between my natural physicality, more earth and water-like, and Bernard's fiery, quick-thinking persona. Moving through imaginary spaces like airports or restaurants while masked pushed me to react physically without relying on facial cues, building immense confidence in bodily expression.

Next, I moved to Character Masks. Each mask embodies a specific personality, demanding I find the dominant physical traits within it. This became a powerful way to explore Bernard's complex mix of charm, cunning, and eventual frantic desperation. Even with a shared mask, I noticed how differently each actor embodied the personality, and I had to actively work to stop relying on my own habitual gestures. Using 'The Counter masks' helped me understand Bernard's layered dimensions, revealing hidden cowardice or pride, and pushed me to find new physical expressions outside my comfort zone.

Finally, Commedia dell'Arte masks provided a rich vocabulary for exaggerated, precise physical comedy. While finding authentic masks was tough in Thailand, a seminar with Assistant Professor Dr. Wankwan Polachan and practical classes with Assistant Professor Dangkamon Na Pomberjra introduced me to archetypes like Arlecchino, Zanni, and Inamorato. Arlecchino's agile, animalistic movements were a direct fit for Bernard's need for rapid evasions and frantic orchestrations. Improvisation exercises, often using *Boeing-Boeing* scenarios, showed me how challenging, yet vital, comedic timing and the precise moment of stillness were in creating humour. I also explored full-face masks for powerful, expansive movements and half-masks for vocal exploration using gibberish, which truly liberated my

emotional expression through body and voice. Exaggeration and animal embodiment exercises further helped me expand my physical range, crucial for farce.

2.2 Rehearsals with the director and casts

During rehearsals with the director and other actors, I kept my mask training separate but stayed in a "mask-like" physical state. Since I wouldn't wear a mask during the actual performances, maintaining that specific physicality was key. Early on, I felt a disconnect without the mask, but incorporating adapted mask exercises (like animal embodiment and improvisation) into regular rehearsals helped bridge the gap. I also found that my physical expression was sometimes closer to Robert's character than Bernard's, so I doubled down on character and Commedia mask exercises, even filming myself to compare my masked movements with my unmasked rehearsals. I learned to consciously recall the physical sensations and impulses from mask work and apply them when unmasked for consistency.

Results

1 Performance Implementation and Outcomes

Three public performances of *Boeing-Boeing* were conducted at the Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts, Chulalongkorn University, from April 4-6, 2025. Each performance accommodated approximately 342 audience members, providing a comprehensive evaluation context for assessing the effectiveness of mask training techniques in character portrayal.

2 Performance Development Trajectory

The performance series showcased a progressive refinement in character embodiment and technical execution. Prior to each performance, Guy Fawkes masks were employed as preparatory tools, chosen for their visual impact rather than historical significance, to facilitate mental and physical preparation for embodying Bernard's character. This pre-performance ritual proved instrumental in establishing the psychological foundation necessary for effective character transformation.

The first performance marked a significant breakthrough in character embodiment, with the performer experiencing enhanced connection to Bernard's physicality compared to rehearsal sessions. However, residual performance anxiety continued to affect comedic timing precision, indicating areas requiring further development.

The second performance demonstrated substantial improvement through implementation of focused calm-mindset techniques and deliberate cultivation of positive ensemble energy. This approach yielded exceptional audience engagement, with sustained laughter throughout the performance and the performer experiencing genuine character integration characterized by increased physical agility and expressive range.

The final performance successfully integrated the optimal elements from previous shows, achieving profound character connection and embodiment. While audience energy levels fluctuated compared to the second performance, the performer maintained consistent character portrayal and technical execution.

3 Quantitative Audience Evaluation

A comprehensive audience evaluation survey assessed four critical dimensions of Bernard's character portrayal using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Data collection yielded 342 complete responses across all three performances, providing robust statistical analysis capability.

3.1 Physical Expression and Movement Quality

Evaluation of physical expression clarity revealed exceptional audience recognition of enhanced theatrical physicality. A substantial 65.50% (224 respondents) strongly agreed that physical expression and gestures were exaggerated and clearer compared to realistic drama conventions, with an additional 21.64% (74 respondents) agreeing, yielding a combined positive response of 87.14%. This overwhelming positive response indicates successful implementation of mask training principles in creating heightened physical performance appropriate for farcical comedy.

Assessment of movement naturalness and bodily control demonstrated strong audience appreciation for technical execution quality. Results showed 57.89% (198 respondents) strongly agreed that movement and bodily control appeared natural throughout the performance, with 21.05% (72 respondents) agreeing, resulting in a combined positive response of 78.94%. This high approval rate suggests effective integration of mask training techniques without compromising movement authenticity.

3.2 Character Embodiment and Believability

Character portrayal effectiveness received substantial positive evaluation from audience members. Analysis revealed 58.19% (199 respondents) strongly agreed that the actor effectively conveyed Bernard's personality and behaviours believably, with 26.32% (90 respondents) agreeing, producing a combined positive response of 84.51%. This strong endorsement indicates successful character interpretation and embodiment through physical performance techniques.

4 Qualitative Feedback from Creative Collaborators and mask technique specialist

Six creative team members including the director, five fellow actors, and One mask technique specialist, provided structured feedback through semi-structured interviews conducted post-performance. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed consistent observations across multiple evaluation dimensions.

4.1 Physical Development and Transformation

All collaborators noted observable and significant changes in movement quality and physical presence compared to early rehearsal phases. Participants consistently reported enhanced physical vocabulary, improved gestural precision, and increased confident embodiment of character physicality. The director specifically noted marked evolution in the performer's ability to maintain character consistency through sustained physical expression.

4.2 Character Consistency and Believability

Six collaborators reported substantial improvement in character portrayal consistency across rehearsals and performances. Fellow actors particularly emphasized the performer's enhanced ability to maintain Bernard's character integrity during challenging ensemble moments and comedic sequences.

4.3 Comedic Timing and Ensemble Dynamics

Four collaborators specifically mentioned enhanced comedic timing and improved responsiveness to ensemble dynamics. Fellow actors reported increased ease in collaborative scenes due to the performer's more predictable and intentional physical choices. The director noted particular improvement in the performer's ability to balance individual character expression with ensemble requirements.

5. Performance Analysis and Self-Assessment

Video recordings of rehearsals and performances provided objective documentation of observable changes in physical expression throughout the training and performance process. Systematic analysis revealed distinct developmental phases corresponding to mask training implementation.

5.1 Pre-Training Baseline Characteristics

Initial video analysis documented limited range of movement vocabulary and tendency toward repetitive gestural patterns. Physical expression remained within the performer's natural movement habits, with minimal character differentiation evident in physicality. Comedic timing showed inconsistency, with limited physical support for humorous moments.

5.2 Post-Training Demonstrations

Following mask training implementation, video analysis revealed expanded physical vocabulary and more varied gestural patterns. Character-specific movement choices became evident, with clear distinction between the performer's natural physicality and Bernard's constructed physical presence. Improved spatial awareness and ensemble responsiveness were consistently observable.

6.Training Effectiveness Assessment

The comprehensive evaluation data confirms significant effectiveness of mask training techniques in enhancing physical performance capabilities for theatrical character portrayal. Each mask training component contributed distinct benefits to overall performance development.

Neutral Mask training established foundational movement principles and mental preparation techniques essential for character work. Character Mask development facilitated specific personality exploration and expanded movement range while breaking established physical habits. Commedia dell'Arte training refined exaggerated physical comedy skills and energy management crucial for farcical performance success.

The integration of these three mask training approaches created a comprehensive physical performance foundation that enhanced character embodiment, improved comedic timing, and strengthened ensemble collaboration. Audience evaluation data confirms successful translation of training benefits into effective theatrical performance, with particular strength in physical expression clarity, character believability, and ensemble interaction quality.

Discussions

The implementation of three distinct mask training approaches successfully addressed fundamental performance challenges, particularly the limitation of repetitive movement patterns that had constrained character development. The comprehensive training program facilitated embodied character connection through physical exploration rather than purely intellectual analysis, resulting in more natural and convincing character portrayal. This approach aligns with Lecoq's theoretical framework regarding the mask's capacity to eliminate

habitual behaviours and establish neutral physical states from which character-specific movements can emerge organically.

Neutral mask training established essential groundwork by developing core body awareness and systematically eliminating personal mannerisms that interfered with character embodiment. This training component provided the mental calm and physical centring necessary for effective character work, creating the foundation from which Bernard's specific physicality could be constructed without the interference of personal movement habits.

Character mask exercises facilitated direct exploration of Bernard's personality traits, including his exaggerated confidence, cunning nature, and underlying fears, enabling organic development of comedic chaos through physical expression while refining timing precision. The training significantly expanded physical vocabulary, pushing performance beyond familiar gestural patterns to discover character-appropriate movement choices that felt both authentic and sustainable.

The incorporation of Commedia dell'Arte techniques, particularly those derived from Arlecchino, enhanced physical agility and developed capacity for exaggerated movement with quick, flexible reactions. This training proved crucial for adapting to unexpected performance situations and managing energy variations required for diverse comedic intensities. The systematic approach to physical comedy development provided essential skills for farcical performance success, particularly in executing the rapid transitions between control and chaos that Bernard's character demands.

However, several methodological limitations require acknowledgment. The single-subject design without control conditions means observed improvements could be attributed to multiple influences including general rehearsal effects, increased role familiarity, expectancy effects from belief in training effectiveness, natural skill progression through repeated practice, and concurrent director feedback and ensemble work influences. The audience evaluation system, while providing valuable feedback, lacks operational definitions for key concepts such as natural movement and comedic timing, limiting the objectivity of findings. The simultaneous occurrence of mask training with regular rehearsals creates temporal confounds that prevent definitive attribution of performance improvements to mask training specifically.

Despite these limitations, the findings suggest that mask techniques offer valuable tools for physical actor development, particularly for roles requiring exaggerated physicality and comedic timing. The systematic application of neutral, character, and Commedia dell'Arte masks provided a structured progression for developing performance-specific skills that addressed individual training needs effectively. The training approach appears particularly beneficial for actors seeking to expand beyond their natural movement patterns and develop character-specific physicality, creating a comprehensive framework for physical performance enhancement that addresses the unique demands of farcical theatre.

This exploratory investigation provides preliminary evidence that integrated mask training techniques may enhance physical performance capabilities for farcical theatrical roles. The positive audience reception, collaborative feedback, and subjective experience of performance transformation suggest potential benefits of this systematic training approach. The research demonstrates that mask exercises serve as powerful tools for developing actor physicality, especially for roles that differ significantly from the performer's natural personality, enabling deeper role exploration and producing more convincing, nuanced, and authentic performances through embodied character discovery.

The integration of traditional mask techniques with contemporary actor training represents a promising area for continued investigation, particularly for roles requiring heightened physicality and comedic precision. While this study offers valuable insights into the subjective experience of mask training application, it also highlights the need for more

rigorous methodological approaches to validate these traditional pedagogical methods systematically.

Suggestions

Future research should implement controlled experimental designs with comparison groups, develop standardized measurement instruments for physical performance assessment, conduct longitudinal studies tracking skill development over extended periods, and examine the transferability of mask-derived skills to diverse performance contexts and genres.

For practicing actors, the profound physical development offered by mask techniques training extends beyond farcical performance to all theatrical genres. However, realizing the full potential of these techniques requires consistent, ongoing practice paired with critical attention to physical and mental well-being. Managing personal schedules, health, fatigue, and stress directly impacts physical and mental readiness for mask work and rehearsals, affecting timing precision and connection with fellow actors. The research suggests that actors willing to engage deeply with mask training methodologies can expect significant expansion of their physical vocabulary and enhanced capacity for character embodiment, particularly when portraying roles that challenge their natural movement patterns and emotional ranges.

This investigation contributes to the limited literature on applying traditional mask techniques to contemporary actor training while demonstrating their particular value for challenging comedic performances. The findings support the continued integration of mask work into comprehensive actor training programs, especially for developing the specialized skills necessary for successful farcical performance. The systematic approach documented in this research provides a replicable framework for other actors and educators seeking to develop enhanced physical performance capabilities through time-tested pedagogical methods.

References

Callery, D. (2001). *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*. Nick Hern Books.

Camoletti M. (2013). *Boeing-Boeing*. Trans. Beverly Cross and Reverend Franscis Evans. Paris: Samuel French, Inc.

Eldredge, S. A. (1996). *Mask improvisation for actor training & performance: The compelling image.* Northwestern University Press.

Lecoq, J. (2000). *The Moving Body.* 1st Published. Great Britain: Methuen Publishing.

Lecoq, J. & Carasso, J. and Lallias, J. (2001). *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre.* David Bradby, ed. New York: Routledge.

Murray, S. (2003). *Jacques Lecoq*. Routledge.

Olsen, C. (Ed.) (2016). *Acting comedy.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Oliva, G. (2016). *Education to Theatricality and Neutral Mask: Psycho-Pedagogical Approach.* Creative Education,07(11), 1656-1675.

Rudlin, J. (2010). *Commedia dell'Arte: An Actor's Handbook*. Routledge, 67-70.

Vervain, C., & Wiles, D. (2001). *The Masks of Greek Tragedy as Point of Departure for Modern Performance.* New Theatre Quarterly, 17(3), 254-272.

Wright, J. (2013). *The Masks of Jacques Lecoq. In Jacques Lecoq and the British theatre* (pp. 71-84). Routledge.