

# Sutra

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui



A-level Dance  
Section B of Exam Paper: The Optional Set Work

# What Am I Studying?

This unit is called 'critical engagement' which is just a fancy word for 'analyzing dance'. AQA also wants students to show they can fully understand, interpret and contextualize a dance work; for A-level dance you will be required to study *Rooster* by Christopher Bruce and *Sutra* by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. This guide will help you with your studies for the *Sutra* essay.

AQA also want to test your ability to understand the greater context of the work, it's choreographer and how a style of dance has developed and evolved throughout history. Depending on what genre of dance you are studying (in this case, contemporary dance), you will learn about it's features including:

- Style
- Technique
- Influences
- Key practitioners (choreographers)
- Professional repertoire of the choreographer
- How dance ideas are communicated through constituent features.

## Written Exam Summary

The written exam consists of two sections:

**Section A:** short answer questions (25 marks) and one essay question (25 marks) on 'Rooster' and British New Dance.

**Section B:** two essay questions - one on 'Sutra' and one on the development of Independent Contemporary Dance Scene in Britain (25 marks for each essay).

For the purpose of this revision guide, I am going to name the 4 main questions in the exam paper by the following terms:

Section A (i) - Compulsory set work, 'Rooster'

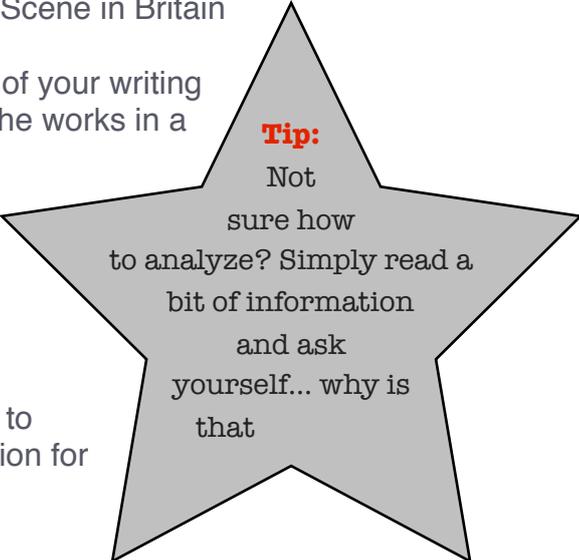
Section A (ii) - Area of Study: Rambert

Section B (i) - Optional set work, *Sutra*

Section B (ii) - Area of study: The Independent Dance Scene in Britain

Each essay will demand a different approach in terms of your writing styles. When analyzing *Sutra* you will need to look at the works in a similar manner to your GCSE analysis. At A-level, you will be building your analysis skills so that higher-order thinking strategies are adopted in order to gain high marks. It is important to note at this point that the level of detail and exploration needs to be much greater than that of GCSE level.

Throughout the guide, **there will be questions in red** to help encourage you to analyze information in preparation for the exam.



**Tip:**  
Not  
sure how  
to analyze? Simply read a  
bit of information  
and ask  
yourself... why is  
that

“What topics must we cover in preparation for question B(i)?”

You will be tested on a range of potential factors such as:

- The significance of the characters
- The subject matter(eg theme or topic)
- The treatment of the subject matter (literal or abstract)
- The form of the dance (eg phrases, sections) and its effectiveness in communicating the subject matter
- The constituent features (movement and production features) of the dance and their relevance in embodying the subject matter
- The particular technique, movement style and choreographic style of the choreographer (also known as the choreographic approach)
- The influences affecting the development of the choreographer
- The origins of the dance
- The relationship between the dance and its historical, social or cultural context
- The importance of the dance in the development of both the choreographer and modern dance.
- The similarities and differences between the dance and other works by the choreographer.
  - It is important to have an understanding of other works by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui so that you can fully understand how his style has developed and where it fits within the genre of contemporary dance.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS!

## Essay – Sutra

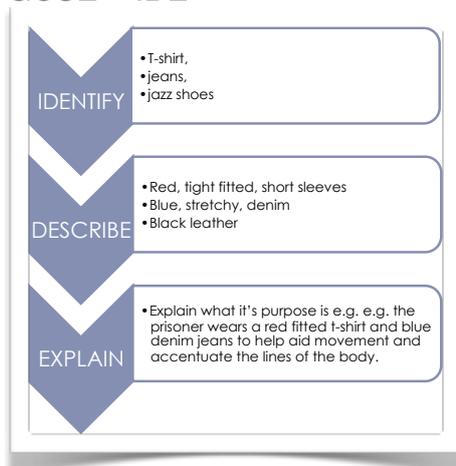
Make sure...	Do not...
Sustain focus on the question at all times and follow a logical structure.	Misuse time by spending more time on one essay than the other.
Support statements with movement evidence referring to A,S,D,R.	Give vague or inappropriate examples.
Give detailed analysis and explanations. Build up the layers and depth in discussion by making links between different parts of the question	Ignore the command word (e.g. analyse, compare, discuss, explain, consider etc)
Use time equally between both essays.	
You write in a style that is appropriate to the command word. An essay asking you to 'Compare' will be different to an essay asking you to 'Discuss'.	

# How is analysis at GCSE different to A-level?

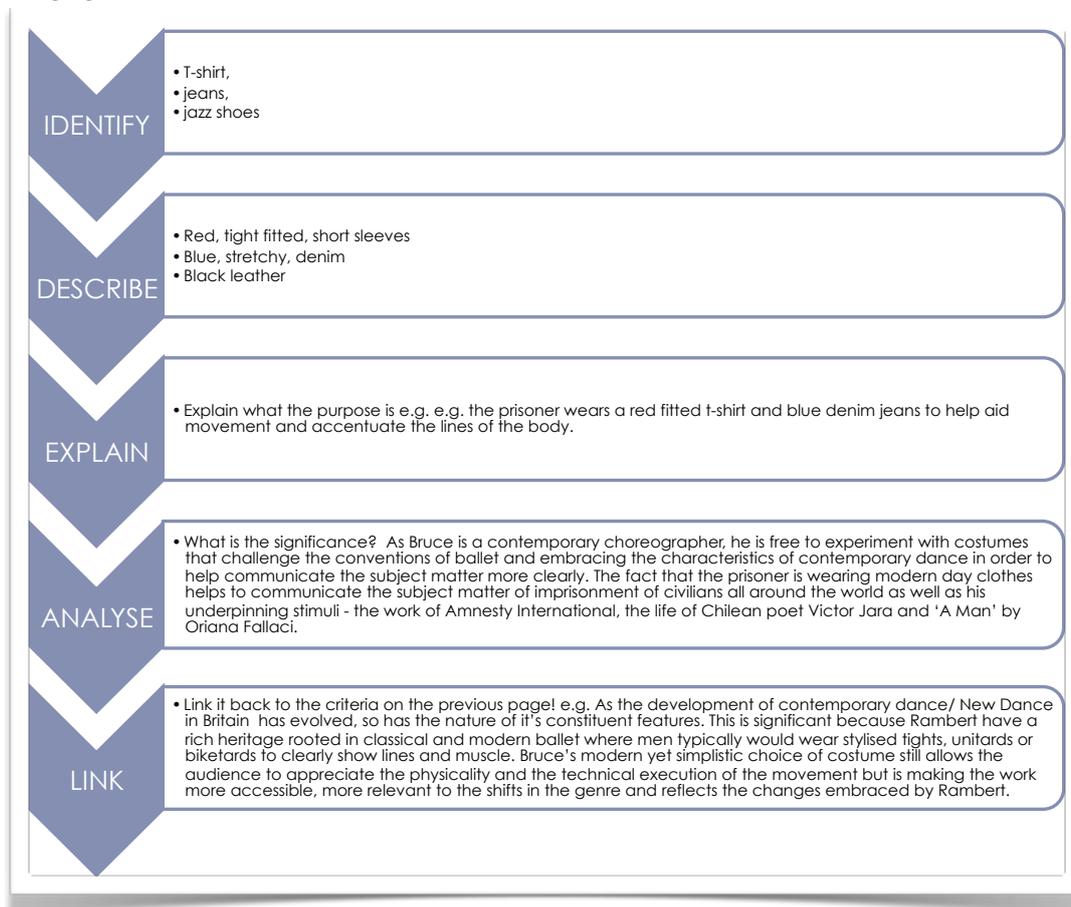
Lots of teachers use different acronyms to help students remember how to write articulate answers. Examples include PEE (point, evidence, explain) and PEA (point, evidence, analyze). When analyzing the works with my pupils, I use IDEAL (identify, describe, explain, analyze, link back to the question).

Below is an example using Swansong (from the old GCSE specification) to show the difference in detail required when analyzing.

## GCSE = IDE



## A-level = IDEAL



“Now i’m confused... You say I need to use different writing styles so how are the two questions in section B different from one another?”

## Area of Study: Section B (ii)- The Independent Contemporary Dance Scene in Britain

In this essay, AQA really want you to understand how dance has evolved; who influenced or taught who; who influenced the development of contemporary dance; how audiences have evolved through time and what companies have played a significant part in our dance history. Yes, you still need to study and understand about the different pieces choreographed by the other practitioners (Matthew Bourne/ Akram Khan/ Jasmin Vardimon etc) however, this DOES NOT mean that you have to analyze the movement components in class in *huge detail*. The focus is on the **historical period** so you need to focus on their significance to the style, rather than to the audience.

You can achieve this by watching their works with objectives or a particular focus such as:

- The stylistic features
  - How the stylistic features relate to the genre
- The choreographic approach (the particular technique, movement style and choreographic style) of a minimum of **two** named practitioners (such as Matthew Bourne/ Akram Khan/ Jasmin Vardimon ) showing the range within the genre, including:
  - The influences affecting the development of the named practitioner’s technique and style
  - At least **two** works from the two selected named practitioners, including the following features of each work:
    - Significance of the character of each dance
    - The subject matter (eg theme or topic) and its treatment
    - The form of the dance (eg phrases, sections)
    - The constituent features of the dance and their relevance in embodying the subject matter
  - The importance of the practitioners’ works in the development of the genre in relation to the area of study
- The relationship between the development of modern dance and its context, i.e. the position of the genre within history, culture and society
- The genre’s capacity to reflect and challenge society
- Terminology specific to the genre

## Essay – Independent Contemporary Dance Scene

Make sure....	Do not....
The essay is highly factual with very little description. Similar to a history essay.	Refer to dynamics, space or relationships unless explicitly asked to. It's not necessary.
Evidence is to the point and should only be 1-2 sentences long.	Waste time interpreting movement. Marks are not necessarily awarded for it. Save it for when you are discussing Sutra or Rooster.
You consistently and fluently use ballet, modern dance and jazz terminology throughout the essay.	Start the essay without a plan. Failing to prepare is preparing to fail. If you don't have a clear plan, you won't get into the higher grade bands. This is the same for terminology. You need to move away from GCSE words like 'reach', 'bend', 'balance' and think like an A-level student; you need to be very familiar with your ballet terminology because it underpins so much of today's choreography
Emphasis is on the 'point' a pupil makes to answer the question and the analysis of the evidence. Analysis allows for many opportunities to gain marks.	
Consistent use of dates are included to gain knowledge marks.	
You have a clear, chronological structure with appropriate balances between the different practitioners.	
Unless the question specifically asks you to focus on one practitioner, you must refer to a minimum of two.	

## Just to be clear – a dance vs history



# The Choreographer: Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui



Choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui achieves a high-wire balancing act between different media, ideas and angles, at the same time as juggling the eclectic styles of his diverse performers. Since 1999, he has made more than 20 fully fledged choreographic pieces and picked up a slew of prestigious awards.

# Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui

## His background

- Born in Antwerp in 1976. His mother is Flemish and his father is Moroccan. He was raised with both dual-nationality and dual religion; he was influenced by both Catholicism and Islam.

How could this effect his identity?  
Are there any other factors that affected this?

- He felt similarly with his sense of reality, often turning to drawing as a means of expression and perspective.



- At 15 he became hooked on dance, inspired by music videos and television (Bruce Lee, Prince, Janet Jackson, Fame). His father was against him taking part in any dance activities but Cherkaoui immersed himself in dance classes once his parents separated.

What information can we gather about culture during this time?

- He was talent-spotted and, still in his teens, became a dancer on TV. At the same time he began to take classes in all kinds of styles – ballet, tap, hip-hop, jazz, flamenco.

How would this effect his choreographic style?

- At 19 he entered a national dance competition set up by Alain Platel, founder of the highly influential dance company, Les Ballets C de la B and won first prize for his solo performance, which mixed voguing, hip-hop and African dance. The competition was also judged by Wim Vandekeybus, someone who Cherkaoui would cite as an influence of his. Through the competition he was introduced to a new world of contemporary dance and it was recommended that he enrolled at Parts, a prestigious contemporary dance school in Brussels run by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker.



## His training and early career in dance

During his time at Parts, he continued to dance for television and performed hip hop with The Bang Gang Dance Company, an African and hip hop dance company.

**Parts training** – ballet, contemporary, Improvisation, choreography, repertoire, history, yoga, shiatsu, pilates, anatomy, theatre, music analysis, singing, rhythm studies, philosophy, sociology, performance analysis and management skills.

**What does this tell us about his training?**

**How could this affect his choreographic process/ stylistic features?**

In 1997, Cherkaoui joined Les Ballets C de la B in Alain Platel's international hit 'Lets op Bach'. Platel became Cherkaoui's mentor but did not necessarily inspire or influence Cherkaoui's style. Cherkaoui described Platel's work as "very harsh for me, very uncomfortable. It reminded me of a kid, being a low social class – I want to get away from that. During his time with Les Ballets C de la B, he made two works for the company entitled Rien de Rien and Tempus Fugit.

### Who is Alain Platel?

**Alain Platel was Cherkaoui's first professional mentor.**

**He is known for 'radical dance theatre'/ Les Ballets C. de la B. / improvisation**

- Belgian-born Alain Platel creates radical dance theatre works that are hard to classify.
- In *Wolf* (2003), fourteen dogs wander the stage. His internationally acclaimed *Lets op Bach* (1998) is made up of seemingly random events.
- He often casts children and fairground performers.
- Platel loved theatre and mime.
- Platel says his professional choreographic career began as an "accident". Calling themselves Les Ballets Contemporaine de la Belgique, Platel and his friends got together in 1984 to perform for small audiences in Platel's loft. A festival director attended one evening and invited them to perform in his festival.
- Now called Les Ballets C. de la B., the company is a choreographic collective, with Platel as its driving force. All along, Platel has encouraged young and talented choreographers and dancers to join the collective, including Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui.
- Les Ballets C. de la B. typically features dancers with both classical and contemporary training. Platel's working method is free form. For months, he improvises with his dancers as they move, sing and recite text in an open-ended process. His creations grow out of this material. The method has influenced dancers and choreographers all over the world.

He later performed in 'It', a solo production choreographed by Wim Vandekeybus based on a short story.

## Establishing a career as a successful choreographer

1999 - Cherkaoui made his choreographic debut in 1999 with Andrew Wale's contemporary musical Anonymous Society.

While Cherkaoui's initial pieces (Rien de Rien, Foi, Tempus Fugit) were made as a core member of the Belgian collective Les Ballets C. de la B

(2000) Choreographed Ook with Nienke Reehorst for the mentally disabled actors of Theater Stap

Choreographed D'avante (2002) with long term collaborator Damien Jalet

During 2005, Cherkaoui created a duet co-choreographed with Akram Khan entitled 'Zero Degrees'. Cherkaoui's career drastically accelerated with Zero Degrees' success.

Toured the globe with Khan

Parted ways with mentor Alain Platel.

Touring was physically, emotionally and creatively draining and needed "a new way of expressing myself, a new place to be". He found it at the Shaolin Temples in China.

2006-2009, he became assistant artist in residence at Het Toneelhuis in Antwerp

2008, Sadler's Wells named him as an Associate Artist and guest artistic director of the National Youth Dance Company (also based at Sadlers Wells).

2010 he was appointed as the artistic director of the Festival Equilibrio in Rome.

Later that year, Cherkaoui launched his own company, resident at the Toneelhuis in his home town. Entitled Eastman, the company's name is the literal translation of his own Arabic surname.

2010 - Cherkaoui choreographed the multiple-award-winning Babel, co-choreographed with long-time collaborators Damien Jalet and (set designer) Antony Gormley.

To date, he produces work via three different routes -for his company, Eastman; large international companies such as Dutch National Ballet, Paris Opera Ballet and Les Ballets de Monte Carlo and thirdly with renowned duet partners such as Akram Khan, Shantala Shivalingappa and Maria Pages. Through duet partners or his larger scale works, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui regularly fuses various techniques – including hip hop, modern, jazz, ballet, Irish, African and kathak – into his own choreographic style. His works are subsequently theatrical, dynamic, music-driven productions.

# Key Dates Poster - Cherkaoui's Career



1995 - entered a dance competition judged by Alain Platel and Wim Vandekeybus. He blended a range of styles and unknowingly was his first experience of contemporary dance.



1995 - Enrolled at Parts, a dance schools in Brussels ran by Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker



1997 - Joined the dance collective, Les Ballets C de la B

ANONYMOUS SOCIETY

1999 - Made his choreographic debut for the musical, Anonymous Society



2000 - choreographed 'Ook' for Theatre Stap for mentally disabled actors.



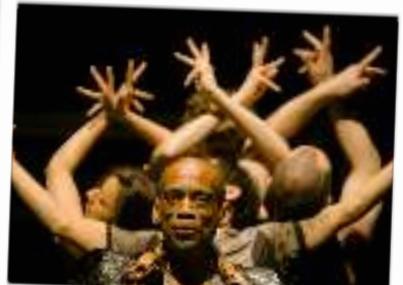
2002 - Choreographed 'D'avant' with long term collaborator, Damien Jalet



2005 - Choreographed the groundbreaking work, Zero Degrees with Akram Khan.

Sadler's Wells  
London's Dance House

2008 - Sadlers Wells named him as an Associate Artist and the Artistic Director of the National Youth Dance Company



2010 - Created his own company 'Eastman' in Antwerp.  
2010 - Choreographed 'Babel'

# Cherkaoui's influences



*Wim Vandekeybus –  
Animal like movement quality  
through tension, conflict,  
impulses, physicality and  
instinct.*



*Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker  
– post-modern dance qualities  
such as gesture, repetition and  
work without narrative*



*Pina Bausch –  
Emotional works with striking  
aesthetics and lyrical movements. Her  
works reflected social issues and  
questioned the male/female  
relationship at a time when views were  
polarised*



*Trisha Brown*

*Studying the skeleton and  
anatomy through the teachings  
of Release Technique*



*William Forsythe*

*Composition of choreography  
using mathematical structures  
e.g. drawing circles with head.*

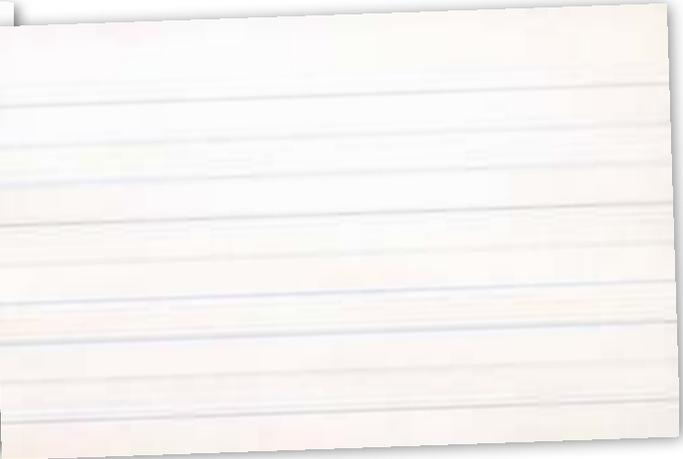


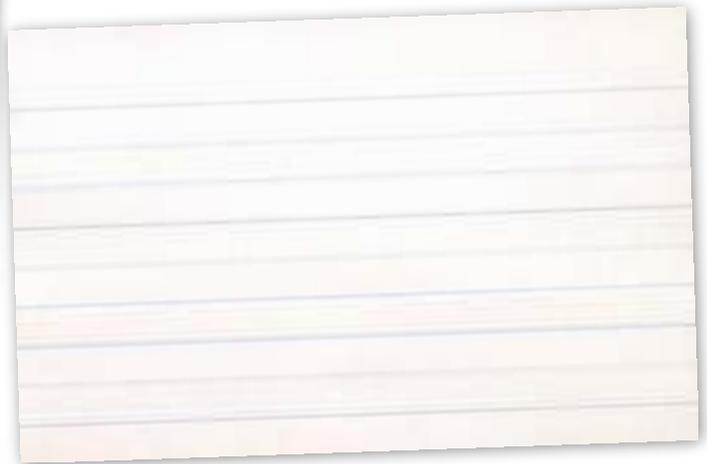
*Pop Culture through film and  
music*

*- Bruce Lee*

*- Michael Jackson & Prince*

Revise like a boss! Watch 1 or 2 clips of these people on YouTube and simply write what you notice about the movement style or production features (lighting, costume, set or music). This will really help with your analysis if asked about his influences in an essay question!





# Social, cultural, historical influences on his works.

## Post-structuralism/ Conceptual Art

Post-structuralism is the way that you look, interact with, portray and perceive objects. This approach was used with the wooden boxes in Sutra. The box isn't just a box (as a structuralist would perceive); it is used to show a boat, wall, coffin, graveyard, city landscape, metaphor for the mind etc.

## Post-Modern Dance

Post-modern dance had become well established in both the United States and Europe.

- The Judson Church in America had developed their practice in contact improvisation and pedestrian gesture
- Merce Cunningham had developed his highly technical yet abstract methodology (or technique).
- In Europe, particularly in Belgium and Germany, Tanztheatre (Dance Theatre) was evolving. Pina Bausch was creating works with elaborate set where performers spoke and performed repetitive yet symbolic gestures. Bausch blurred the boundaries between dance and theatre in order to provoke the audience's emotions through movement and occasionally, their participation.
- Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker had developed highly pedestrian and repetitive movements that were timed through pattern and accumulation.
- Works were increasingly multidisciplinary and abstract in aesthetic with pure movement being the primary focus of works. This is something that Cherkaoui has adopted as he wanted the audience to appreciate the core essence of Kung Fu and not its superficial and cliché qualities.
- Cherkaoui was awarded the 2009 Kairos Lareate; Europe's most prestigious cultural award.



Above: example of Pina Bausch's work  
Below: Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker  
'Fase'



- Post-modern works would often use conceptual art within works through the influence of Bauhaus and the cultural shifts within the arts in the 1960s. Art was becoming less pretentious, slang was incorporated into poetry, plays lacked a linear narrative and rock and pop music were increasing in popularity.



Bauhaus dancers,

Work of William Forsythe

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui 'Babel'

## Inclusive Theatre

Inclusive dance – The role of the performer was shifting. A number of choreographers/ companies have used handicapped dancers including Cherkaoui, Lloyd Newson (DV8), Alain Platel, Candoco and Stopgap Dance Co. Cherkaoui has conducted workshops with mentally handicapped participants and made the work, *Ook*.

**Feminism** - questioning the role and image of women and men.

One of the reasons why Pina Bausch's work resonates with Cherkaoui is because she isn't afraid to address social issues in her work. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, as the second wave of feminism spread through the United States and Europe, Pina Bausch explored gender politics through her choreography and use of her dancers' bodies. With her company, Tanztheatre Wuppertal, full of strong female and male-bodied dancers,

Bausch portrays socially political ideas and images. Her work includes highly gendered costuming, juxtaposition of violence and equality between the sexes, exploration of social roles, repetition, teaching, learning, and failing. Bausch has frequently remarked that most of her pieces deal with searching for love and intimacy, and relationships—particularly between men and women, with all their tensions and difficulties. Cherkaoui has said that Bausch's representation of men and women remind him of his parents who separated whilst he was still a teenager. This is far from the traditional representation of love typically associated with dance such as a pas de deux in ballet. Cherkaoui never felt that love was real in stories like *Romeo and Juliet*.

# Typical Features of Contemporary Dance



- Grounded movement which is often performed barefoot.



- Use of breathe and gravity to shift weight



- Frequent use of floor work - Ascending and descending quickly and seamlessly



- A blend of dance styles including ballet, jazz, folk, indian, urban, acrobatics.



- Incorporate multiple disciplines such as speech, art, live music, projection, IT etc.



- Gesture and pedestrian/ inclusive movement.



- Works often deal with themes or concepts as opposed to narratives.



- The dancers do not necessarily depict a gender and the movement can be the sole focus of the dance.



- Derives from Graham technique so there is frequent use of flexion, spiral (twisting of the spine), contraction (curving of the spine) and high release.

# Cherkaoui's Stylistic Features

Suggested task 1: Choreograph a phrase/ dance exercise in pairs that showcases all of the 9 stylistic features to improve your recall.

Suggested task 2: Match these images against the features of contemporary dance slide to see how the genre reflects Cherkaoui's style.



hyper-flexible, almost contortionist movement



Uses a diverse range of performers from a range of ages, abilities and genres



elastic and fluid dynamics - movements start where another ends creating flow.



Mirroring



folding and unfolding



utilizes gravity as a means to transfer weight around the space and from different levels



fuses multiple dance styles together including street, ballet and African dance



precise footwork and placement inspired by yoga and martial arts



portrays social and human issues

# Sutra - A guided analysis



## **Sutra (2008)**

*Choreographed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui*

*Music Szymon Brzóska*

*Visual Creation & Design by Antony Gormley*

*Performed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui & The Shaolin Monks*

*Produced by Sadlers Wells*

# The Origins of Sutra

## **Life After Zero Degrees**

After a drastic acceleration in his success as a choreographer following the collaboration with Akram Khan, Cherkaoui found himself struggling with mental, physical and creative fatigue. Cherkaoui had also parted ways with his long term mentor Alain Platel and sought solace in the form of the Shaolin Temple over a period of several months between 2007 and 2008. Shaolin, located in the Henan province of China, became his escape from the Western world.

## **The Shaolin Temple**

Typically, outsiders are not allowed to practice with the monks but Cherkaoui was invited into temple in May of 2007. The Temple's leader had a keen interest in art and calligraphy but was interested in the art of choreography. His hope was that Cherkaoui could bring change and variety to the monks' movement. The temple were open to Cherkaoui's ideas, particularly with the involvement of the boxes as props.

The Shaolin monks have a strict way of living despite embracing technology and having access to the outside world via the internet. There are times of the day e.g. prayer and meal times when talking is prohibited. Cherkaoui was fascinated with how disciplined the monks were whilst projecting an atmosphere of calm and serenity. This is important to Cherkaoui as a practitioner/ follower of yoga and meditation but feels he is not always able to embody serenity in Western society.

The Shaolin Technique is characterized by its speed and agility and was developed originally as a defense against feudal aggressors. Cherkaoui has interpreted as the differences between the East and the West.

## **A New Appreciation**

As a child, Cherkaoui was influenced by Bruce Lee and soon developed an appreciation for the philosophy and physicality needed behind the discipline of Kung Fu. He was interested in the explosiveness of the movement as well as the monk's ability to express energy in short bursts followed by pure stillness. This conceptually and choreographically was appealing to him as he too needed a release of energy and needed the spiritual nature of the discipline.

# Choreographic Process - Sutra

- Upon arriving at the Temple, the monks discussed their culture and how Kung Fu connects with the outside world. They explained to Cherkaoui how their Buddhist teachings helps them to relate to animals and the environment. This philosophical way of thinking about movement lead Cherkaoui to an important decision - he wanted to repel the clichés of Kung Fu (which he encounters with all styles of dance). Audiences have a set perception about what is and what isn't correct for a discipline or art form so Cherkaoui challenged this by wanting to give Kung Fu another aesthetic. This allows the audience to see the essence of the movement, not just it's power and difficulty. He also did this through costume and set so that there is greater room for interpretation and imagination.
- Being in the temple, he observed that all the monks are doing the same thing in unison and it reminded him of clones. This is similar to Antony Gormley's work during Zero Degrees so he was seen as the suitable designer for the work.
- The ideas of boxes reminded Cherkaoui of when he played with legos as a child as he made them into different objects through play and exploring his imagination. The monks were very receptive to the idea of the boxes.
- Cherkaoui was given sections of the score before starting the choreography. Cherkaoui works with the music instead of commissioning a score as part of the choreographic process.
- Cherkaoui always works with images first before creating narratives, particularly because of his love for drawing. He then builds the choreography from experimenting with an image in mind e.g. skyscrapers and mazes, through improvisation tasks.
- He decided to use 11 year old Shi Yandong, at the suggestion of the head monk to expand the range of movement within the box due to his small size. As he is younger, he found the boy to be less prejudice and was therefore more open to experimentation with imagery during the improvisation process. He didn't question his tasks however wild they may have sound e.g. pretending to be a monkey climbing through the trees. Throughout the process, the child developed his own ideas and would suggest movements. At times, he would even lead Cherkaoui through new improvisations.

- Some of the work's most iconic moments, such as the opening of the lotus flower, happened by accident as a result of improvisation tasks.
- 11 traditional forms/ phrases of Kung Fu were used. Typically, a command will be shouted and that phrase will be performed, followed by stillness. For Sutra, Cherkaoui would link phrases together to make long choreographed sequences which the monks were not used to.
- The running and flips were part of their daily warm up but subsequently became a section in itself for its sporadic and daring nature became exciting to watch in such a small area (downstage)
- The monks responded well to Cherkaoui's choreography, particularly if it resembled hip hop because they have recognized and tried to replicate movements from music videos. What they struggled with was the contemporary technique as it is less defined and more expressive. Throughout the sharing of movement, Cherkaoui was surprised to see how movements have been borrowed and reinterpreted across dance styles and martial arts. Several of the movements that the monks use have been used in contemporary dance throughout Cherkaoui's training so they used these mutual movements to create phrases of unison.
- Despite being at the temple, Cherkaoui was not there to attempt to learn Kung Fu. He was there to establish a relationship with the monks so for the first few weeks, he learnt some of their movements through observation and analysis. It was over a period of time that he then started to attempt some of their movements for the work.
- When all of the sections had been choreographed, they were arranged into a coherent order, creating a sense of progression and journey.
- The last scene was developed early in the process but was the most profound scene so made sense that it was at the end. The maze was created towards the end but he knew it fitted the beginning as an entrance to a fantasy world (the imagination).

# Communicating the Subject Matter

## Accompaniment

- The music was composed prior to the choreography as this is how Cherkaoui works. Changes were made throughout the process to enhance the choreography.
- Emotion in the music – he found the monks very melancholy and wanted the music to be meditative. The martial art world is not only about fight but it is also about relaxation and meditation.
- This piece is about contradictions – movement and stillness, soft and strong and this was inspiring for the composer. E.g. soft and fast sections.
- Traditional chants were also used live as part of the choreography.
- He didn't want any traditional Chinese music – it was a collaboration. The experiences of Szymon helped inspire the score. He was invited to take part in foreign prayers and during the sermon they used percussion. He was also inspired by the landscape, the movement of the monks etc
- Separate pieces of music were composed and then the music was matched and rearranged to suit scenes in the dance. When they were considering how to make the music flow, they would consider adding additional sounds to help give the music coherence, emotion and create different 'places' such as city skylines, a pond etc.
- The musicians follow the monks, the monks don't follow the music. The monks are not dancers and are not used to working with music so the challenge was to create a score that could be adapted to the speed of their movements without disturbing them. The musicians follow the dancers but the dancers take cues from the musicians so there is a constant exchange of energy which is not common for musicians to work with dancers in this manner.
- At the end of the piece in the ensemble, the music had the theme of **Passacaglia** – something that keeps repeating itself like a mantra. When Cherkaoui was choreographing, the composer would add extra layers to make the music build, matching movements that have force e.g. punching the floor.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PS4FowV6cMU> – this is an excellent video explaining/demonstrating this.



## Physical Setting

Antony Gormley was fascinated with the project because he would be working with intelligent bodies that had a different reason for movement to normal contemporary dancers.

"For me, in life," says Cherkaoui, "sometimes it's the body that stops the mind from being free, but sometimes it's the mind stops the body from developing. So, sometimes the box and the monk are like the body and the mind, but sometimes it's the other way around'.

"Because of the monks' being like a collective," says Cherkaoui, "it felt like a sort of cloning, even if they are individuals. The 'replica' nature of Antony's work is very like that, and I knew that Antony had studied Buddhism for three years too. We brainstormed, and then he came up with the idea."

Design – already thought about human conditions such as containment and shelter. This inspired the box idea. They were built using 60x60x180 dimensions.

By using so many boxes onstage, it creates a collective body – a way to visually make something bigger than any individual on stage.

He wanted to create larger structures but in the end it became about how these boxes could be maneuvered to create imagery through found patterns of distribution (e.g. in canon). They explored basic formulas of distributing the boxes into different shapes and transitions.

Cherkaoui changed the syntax of the boxes – they informed the possibility of the choreography. The boxes were integrated entirely into the movement. The boxes were so versatile that they became multifaceted creating the appearance of a platform/ stage, a dividing wall, beach huts, skyscrapers, coffins, dominoes, secrets and traps, beds, mole holes, boats, an altar, a labyrinth, a lotus flower and the flipping of the boxes in rows created the idea of ripples in a pond. When Yandong explored the maze, that was supposed to represent a rabbit underground.

It is an exploration of freedom and containment as well as the notion that the body can be in one place and the mind and imagination be elsewhere. This can be seen in the opening scene with the juxtaposition between the miniature figures and the life-size boxes.

There is tension between the body and the box, the individual and the collective. Several interpretations can lead back to the subject matter and themes. The first being that being inside the box shows how we construct barriers in our own mind. It is our responsibility to accept or recognize our limitations and search for liberation or freedom. This is shown through the banging of the boxes which shows the dancer's physically hammering against their limitations. The boxes can also represent our mind's need and longing/ searching for balance.

## **Lighting**

Lighting has a few key purposes. Firstly, to cast focus on the dancers. A stark white square spotlight is cast downstage right to keep the audience's focus on the miniature boxes which are usually manipulated by Yandong (the young boy) or Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui.

Similarly, light is used to remove identities and portrays dancers as a silhouette image.

Another purpose is to help hide and show the musicians who are living on stage behind a backdrop.

Lighting is used several times throughout the piece to establish a mood or an atmosphere.

## **Costume**

Suits – Larbi was insistent on them wearing suits to challenge the perception of monks.

Contradictions in costume – kung fu wearing suits, melancholy European movement for Chinese monks

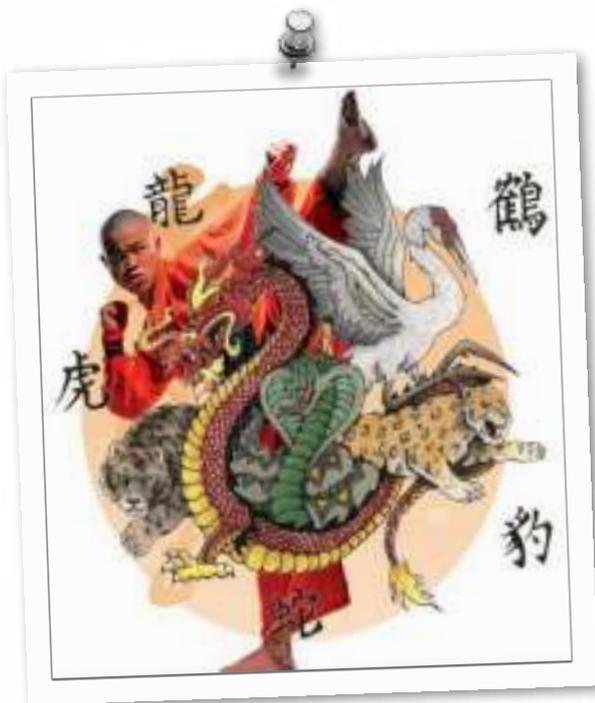
## **Character**

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui represents himself; a westerner who is learning from the Shaolin Monks.

Shi Yandong, aged 11– Cherkaoui appears as his master but throughout the dance, Yandong is an avatar, a translator of things and at times it is unclear who is guiding who.



# Themes/ Subject Matter



## Buddhist Philosophy

- The monks draw energy and inspiration from the world around them.
- Identify with other living creatures such as tigers and snakes.
- Perceive themselves as a conduit for universal energy and transformation.
- Unity of thought
- Accepting and embracing of all living things.



## Contradictions and juxtaposition of the mind and body

*Definition of juxtaposition: the fact of two things being seen or placed close together with contrasting effect.*

- Inner calm vs outward energy
- Meditation quiets the mind vs Kung Fu quiets the body.



**East vs West**



**Freedom and Containment**



**Cherkaoui's spiritual  
journey whilst at the  
Shaolin Temple**

Cherkaoui's treatment of these themes could be described as conceptual. He explores the use of set to create clear images that can easily be interpreted against these ideas. The use of the boxes is a post-structuralist approach; it is not just a box – the box is anything you want to make it.

The dance has an episodic structure but is not linear as it has no narrative. Instead, each scene depicts a different 'image' created from the improvisations.

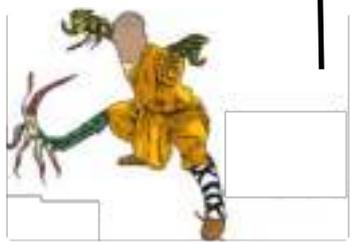
# The 5 Animals of Kung Fu



Crane - become stable. Trains concentration, accuracy and



Dragon - becomes powerful, light and quick. Trains the spirit of the mind



Snake - Fast, sensitive and aware. Prolongs life.



Tiger - become strong, quick and direct. Builds muscle and strengthens bone marrow



Monkey - cunning and ferocious. Develops leaping strength



# A Full Analysis of the Constituent Features

**SLC - Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui**

**The Young Boy - Shi Yandong**

**Monks - Ensemble**

Analytical points and links to the criteria will be in italic

Suggested revision tasks - use highlighters to highlight key information. You can then consolidate this information onto flash cards ready for quizzing.

Yellow - movement components that show the subject matter (action, space, dynamics, relationships)

Green - production features that show the subject matter

Blue - evidence of his technique, movement style or choreographic process

Pink - evidence of his influences

Orange - links to the origins of the dance

Purple - links to social, cultural or historical contexts



## Section 1

SLC is sat facing the young boy on a box (turned upside down).  
SLC is sat facing the young boy on a silver box turned on its side.  
Across centre-stage there is a stage made from six larger boxes. In front of the duet there are miniature blocks to represent what is happening on stage.

The dance starts in silence. There is an initial spotlight on the duet. As a wash of white light emerges it reveals the larger stage. SLC mimics the choreography of the monk with the sword with his finger. It is almost as if SLC is teaching the young boy. At times his finger is in close proximity with the boy's face as he reaches across the blocks as if to entice the young boy to learn from him. The boy sits and stares at SLC and his gestures, with his hand underneath his chin. Key motifs include pointing, circling of the finger, swiping of the finger. There are also times that the boy follows the hand gestures with his head as if he is in a trance. *This can be linked to idea that the monks train using characteristics of snakes.*



The adult monk on the life-size stage swings the sword around his body whilst performing traditional kung fu movements. As the monk pulled the sword out of the blocks and hold it in front of his face, the dynamics are slow and controlled as if he is examining the sword.

Movements are explosive with sudden movement of stillness and control. The monk performs lunges, leans, jabs, swinging the sword around his head and body. He also balances the sword and balances on 1 foot. His pathway is from stage left stage right, back to stage left and

finish at centre stage. As the monk finishes his solo, he uses a traditional chant in kung fu to signal that his solo has ended.

SLC revealed his palm which initiates for the young boy to start turning the miniature blocks as if he is being given permission to experiment.

The life size boxes tip in silence. The young boy gets up and runs through the space in between each block. The adult monk stares at them both, holding his sword in a defensive stance. The young boy steals the sword and runs off stage for comedic purposes. The adult monk dives into one of the empty boxes leaving SLC standing on top of the wooden boxes holding a long wooden pole.



## Section 2

A faint squeaks of a violin can be heard as SLC hits his stick into one of the boxes, pulling out a monk in the process as they battle over the stick. It soon becomes clear that SLC is controlling the monk because he soon let's go once the monk is fully out of the box. The monk continues to move erratically with the stick as SLC dictates his movements with his pointing motif.

At this point the music changes. The music is very melancholic with long slow sweeps on the cello. The monk initially performs a routine where the stick is constantly in a circular motion around his body and over his head. This is performed with extreme accuracy and speed whereas SLC remains entirely static, staring at him from upstage centre. The swinging of the pole soon merges with the pointing motif as if to suggest that the monk has learnt something about himself. *This could link to SLC is theme of his personal journey. He has said that he has learnt from the monks by watching and analyzing their movements, rather than participating alongside them.*

SLC sits on top of the boxes, still staring at the monk who is now stabbing the pole into a downstage box. A second monk emerges from the boxes holding onto the stick. This transfer of energy means the first monk lies down in one of the boxes. The second monk moves with less accuracy than the first, instead he continues with the pointing motif. He also performs sudden accents and contractions to create a sense of off-balance. The monk jumps up onto the crates and struggles to find his balance as he walks alongside the edges. *This could link with SLC is theme of searching for mind-body balance.* The tempo is slow and the dynamics are gradual with sudden burst of energy and exaggeration. *It was this change in dynamics thoughts initially interested SLC in kung fu.*

The second monk then starts to swing the stick in front of his face but uses a scooping motion with a finger in front of his face and chest in between sudden bursts of kung fu actions. Intermittently he continues with the rippling/contracted movements which inevitably make him fall backwards into a box.

The stick falls into a downstage box which reveals a third monk. The monk appears weak and exhausted as he pulls himself out of the box. The contracting action and the balancing motifs appear again before performing short swipes with the pole like the first monk. There are times when the monk works with and against the melancholic sounds of the strings. There is no set time signature but the dynamics certainly reflect the pace of the strings signaling that there is a mutual coexistence relationship, rather than a direct correlation relationship.

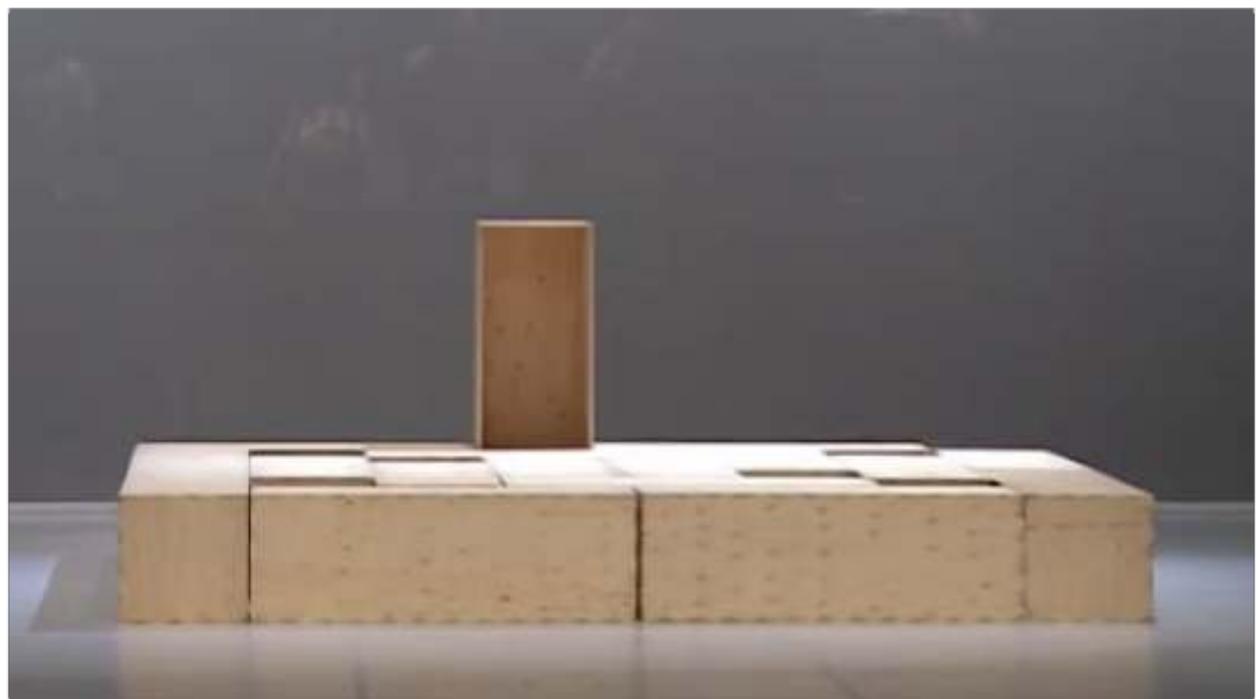


SLC has wandered in a circular pathway towards downstage right and hold onto the pole held by the third dancer. He gently makes the dancer jump down from the boxes onto the stage. The monk continues to try and move with the stick but SLC pulls the pole closer to him and out of the grip of the monk. They stare at one another intently

until SLC vertically strikes the stick down onto the floor as if to dismiss him and causes the music to change, acting as a cue.

### **Section 3 -8.16**

The music has a militant beat by a piano and the monks appear to wake from their boxes and get to work constructing a structure built by SLC and the young boy on the miniature blocks down stage. The grey backdrop no longer appears grey, a light shines on the backdrop to reveal a raised platform with five musicians playing. Meanwhile, the true extent of how many dances were on stage all along becomes clear as a monk appears out of every box. SLC uses eye contact with the boy and move the blocks with precision. He also stares intently at the boxes with slightly hunched shoulders as he moves the block around the blocks around the aluminum box. Once the structure, both miniature and life-size is complete, SLC sits back and looks at the boy as if to give him permission to leave. The adult monks stand alongside stage left and stage right facing centre stage. The box now resembles a maze with six mole holes and one vertical box which is placed up stage. Once the construction of the maze has been completed, the music stops abruptly.



The young boy chants and performs a series of backhand springs across the stage towards the boxes. He runs across the maze and on top of the vertical box, holds onto the boxes side and performs a front-roll down into the hollow of the box before disappearing into the maze. The suddenness and smoothness of this action causes the audience to laugh. *This section was intended to show the entry to a fantasyland but also to show a rabbit trap. Combined, this has similarities to Alice falling down the rabbit hole in Alice and wonderland.*

Minimalistic piano notes are played as the young boy appears from the holes and gazes around innocently. As he retreats back to the maze his arms sweep over his head as if to dive back into the holes. He doesn't always travel within the maze, there are times when he moves over the maze and sits in a crouch-like position. Many of his hand gestures are rabbit like paws/animalistic as he holds them to his chest and places his hands away from him as he stares. He appears panicked and jumps into a hole as the monks rush in to divide up the maze.

He is left in a box which is now horizontal on its side. The boy explores the box trying to escape, bumping his head several times in the process. SLC approaches the box and flips it vertical and diagonally. To maintain silence, the boy presses his hands and legs and back against the sides of the box



so that he is suspended up into the air within the box. When the box is placed back to the floor, he yells and bangs on the inside of the box. *This links back to SLC theme/choreographic intention that the box is a metaphor for our minds which can cause limitations to a bodies. This is further reinforced because the boy immediately points to his head after slapping the bottom of the box.* The boy continues to look panicked and continues to hit the sides of the box and kick his legs around. A sombre atmosphere is created as the audience are forced to listen to the boys

cry for help over the minimalistic and melancholic tempo created by the piano and cello accompaniment.

#### **Section 4**

SLC and a monk approached the box that the young boy is in and turned the Box 90° clockwise towards the audience which encloses the young boy under the box. Immediately the remaining monks push the remaining boxes forward to create a linear catwalk from downstage to upstage. SLC stands on top of the box placed down stage and walks backwards as the monks systematically slide the boxes into place in time with SLC's steps. SLC walks towards his aluminum box; half of the monks climb on top of the catwalk whilst the remaining monks divide off via upstage right or upstage left. This is performed entirely in silence. As SLC walks along the catwalk the monks are in a squatting position and creates the image of them sitting at a table for dinner. *SLC has commented that when he arrived at the temple, everyone must be silent at meal times. He observed their extraordinary work ethic and discipline around the temple, stating that everybody had a job and everyone knows what they must do to be efficient.*



SLC plays with the small building blocks at his aluminum box. Meanwhile this has no correlation to what happens centre stage. The monks perform a fast paced routine and perfect canon with one

movement occurring from the next. SLC slowly and carefully move the blocks around the aluminum block whilst the monks perform a ferociously aggressive routine. Much of the canon is characterized by



punches, lunges circling of the arms above the head, jumping on and off the block, pike jumps, spins bending of the elbow, holding martial arts poses touching their toes, slap in the box. They finish and start the canon in a similar way.

At the beginning, they breathe in whilst they raise their hands up the torso and as they exhale they push their hands down towards the ground. At the end of the canon, they circled their arms away from their body and up above their head before pressing their hands together in a prayer position and bringing it down towards the sternum. *Both of these movements have strong links with martial arts and with yoga as it encourages one to feel calm and at one with their bodies/breath. This was again another observation of SLC whereby he determined that the stillness created in kung fu had elements of calmness about it. In kung fu, they believe that energy is passed through the body and not stored in the body which is how they can achieve this amount of control.*



They then follow each other single file with a hand and a prayer position as they walk upstage to the end of the box. Every other dancer goes to the left or right as they maintain this prayer position. The dancers then

lift the boxes vertical, revealing the young boy who looks disorientated as he stares around towards the audience. He sees SLC sitting on the aluminum box manipulating the miniature boxes and walks over to him staring at the boxes intently in a kneeling position.

The life-size boxes now are entirely vertical in two linear pathways from upstage downstage. The young boy performs a series of backhand springs down the centre of these boxes towards upstage and sits in a kneeling position. A chant acts as a cue as the monks who were inside the boxes now step forward, walk to the back of their box and squats behind it. The boxes are pushed together once more to make one single vertical line, SLC is doing the same with his miniature boxes. This is in silence. The monk closest to down the stage chants which signals a ferocious canon. This creates two diagonal pathways of dances with seven dances on each side. The dancers towards stage left maintain a very wide second position with their hands clenched near their shoulder and above their head. The monks towards stage right maintain a wide second position lurch with their hands in a horizontal sparring position. Both sets of dances cannot see what the others are doing on the other side of the boxes.



A second Canon happens towards the box and then a third again away from the box only this time the formation has changed. During the final canon, all of the dancers run into their individual box. As the last monk enters his box, a single monk staggers out of his toward stage right.

The young boy climbs on top of the box closest to upstage and is observed by this individual monk. The boy walks alongside the tops of the boxes which is mirrored by the monk. The monk then performs an explosive burst of kung fu movement including slapping of the floor, circling of the arms, swapping of the feet, highlight kicks (touching his toe at its height with his hands), swinging his arms past his thighs, punching his fist into his palm and ending in a fighting stance position. It is performed in silence to enable the audience to hear the chants of the monk. Once the monk has held his position, the young boy tries to mimic the monk with uncertainty and hesitancy. His sparring movements are performed in miniature and with dynamics as if he is analyzing the movement *in the same way that SLC has done in real life upon visiting the temple.*

The monk walks towards SLC maintaining eye contact with him and in one swipe pushes the miniature boxes off the aluminum box and onto the floor. SLC looks hurt and vulnerable. The monk then picks up the aluminum box and drags it to join the remaining vertical boxes in the centre of the stage. SLC walks towards the box, guarded by the monk as the boy stares down from above.

## **Section 5**

The lighting changes from a bright intense wash to a dull white spotlight. The musicians are still present and visible through the backdrop canvas. The monk walks towards upstage as SLC is standing in his box. SLC walks into all 3 sides of the box which increases in speed and projects a nervous energy. The music is a minimalistic piano which again creates a sombre atmosphere. It makes the audience feel sorry for SLC as he examines the confines of his box. He does this through a series of hand movements where he places his hands against the edges of the box in front of his body.

As he turns towards the back of his box, he also pushes his hands against the roof of the box. This pressing motif increases in difficulty as he not only explores the confines of the box but also explores the space

around his body. His arms twist behind his back, his feet across to help him spin, he presses his feet against the sides of the box so that he balances on 1 foot. Like the young boy, he also presses his weight against either side of the box so that he is suspended up into the air but then releases the tension to help him slide gradually to the bottom of the box with his hands pressed against his face as if he is in despair. The young boy who is still on top of the box appears over the roof of SLC's box. SLC presses one hand against the floor and the other against the side which enables his legs to walk up the side of the box so that he is upside down. Still experimenting with the confines of the box, SLC's legs stretched out towards the corners of the box so that he is entirely balancing on one hand. The young boy ducks out of the way so that he is not seen by SLC. Continuing to control his body, SLC performs a penche and intertwines his hands around his body to help him stand and perform a backbend. The young boy flips into the box with SLC who helps him down to his feet.

SLC lifts his left leg into a develope in order to make room for the young boy to which the young boy Mimics this with his left leg. SLC holds onto the boys foot and presses his face against it as they stare into each others eyes. SLC lowers his leg down which causes the boy to

drop his and they mirror each other's movements by performing backbend (one on top of the other). Larbi supports the head of the young boy once standing and listen to the roof of the box. They both push their weight against the sides of the box so they are both suspended up in the air. The boy is cradling his face in his palms Larbi is cradling his head which is in between his knees *creating a sad image, perhaps portraying mental illness, sorrow or Cherkaoui's mental fatigue as he entered The Shaolin Temple.*

SLC continues to support the young boy by offering his feet as a platform to stand on to help him down from the



height of the box. They hesitate as they reach for one another's hands which allows the young boy to balance upside down.

SLC performs a backwards roll in order to exit the box but the boy reaches out desperately and pulls SLC back into the box quickly. They continue to perform mirror images of one another using different levels and and pulls SLC back into the box quickly. They continue to perform mirror images of one another using different levels and SLC continues to support the young boy and his weight by lifting him. The young boy points to the roof of the box and SLC lifts him to help him escape.

As SLC reaches over the roof of this box towards Yandong, he kicks his legs around to suggest that he doesn't want to be left alone. SLC turns towards the audience vulnerably and pulls the aluminum box down towards the floor to encase him. The young boy looks back and realizes that SLC is nowhere to be seen and cries into the palm of his hand. *There is a vulnerability and sadness in a scene which is heightened by the lighting and the music. There are also several gestures which help with the interpretation of the scene. There is definitely a caring aesthetic to the peace as the boy seeks to be an emotional support for SLC whereas SLC is a physical support for the young boy.*



## **Section 6**

The light changes back into a stark white wash and monks immediately jump out of their boxes into two linear formations-one in a wide plie position; the others are in tiered formation starting with one in a a jazz split and the end in a lunge position. The boy is still on the roof of the vertical boxes.

Suddenly the men run into that box causing them to fall as the boy runs towards downstage to avoid falling. He jumped onto to SLC is box for safety and looks back as the boxes lay in two rows.

He studies SLC's aluminum box and knocks on the roof of the box calling his name. He then walks through the centre of the wooden boxes and as he passes, the monks set up in the boxes and then lie down before the boy turns around. This again is for comedic purposes. It is as if the monks and the young boy of playing a game of grandmother's footsteps. The young boy soon gets sight of one of the monks in front of him and goes to examine the box. One of the monks chants and all of the monks set up simultaneously and get out of the box. This is all done in silence.

The monks start to stand up the boxes in three rows. As the boxes are stood up right, the monks and inside them and carry the weight of the box on their backs as they walk around the young boy in a circular formation. The young boy is standing on the roof of a vertical box and is pointing in a circular motion at all of the boxes. SLC is also in side a box. The wooden boxes close in on the young boy in a circular/cluster formation whilst SLC removed himself from the group, taking his box towards downstage left.



The young boy reaches his arms out in front of him in parallel (he is sat cross-legged) and draws his hands in towards his chest to create the image of a Buddha. This moment was created by accident through improvisation tasks during the choreographic process. The young boy lift his palms towards his face and then pushes his hands up towards the

ceiling and then back down again towards his torso. *This is to symbolize the gathering of energy from the Earth And embodying it. This links to SLC is theme of Buddhist philosophy as well as medication as a method of calming the mind. The atmosphere is very calm which is created through the minimalism happening on stage as well as the minimalist nature of the accompaniment.*

The boy creates a large circular motion with his hands and points to both his elbow and his face. He then draws his hands away from the body and holds this Buddha like position. The boxes open up and outwards into a Lotus flower formation. The young boy performs a series of sweeping hand gestures, always coming back to the prayer gesture as a transition. Once the boxes are lying down in a circular formation the monks perform a forward roll so they are lying down in their boxes. Performed with extreme control and strength due to its incredibly slow tempo.



The young boy points with his thumb and index finger as he pushes his hands towards the audience before repeating the Buddha pose. He presses his two wrists together and circles his hands around one another with the fingers placed in a traditional lotus flower pose, *typically associated with Indian dance, meditation and yoga.*



The monks do another slow motion forwards role to get out the boxes which reveals SLC hanging upside down in his aluminum box positioned down stage right. The monks kneel at the foot of the box whereas SLC is mimicking directions within the confines of his box. The monks and the young boy had their hands in a prayer like position whereas SLC has his hands covering his face. *This is an example of juxtaposition whereby*

*both scenes are similar in nature but have different connotations at the positioning of a simple gesture. One depicts openness, calm and spirituality whereas the other portrays entrapment, confinement and limitations.*

The calm atmosphere is abruptly brought to an end when the box which the young boy sits on is shaken violently, revealing an adult monk who scares the young boy away towards SLC. SLC is sat in his box with his miniature boxes in a small square spotlight. The remaining monks charge the boxes towards the upright box and the monks enclose him in. SLC mimics this with his miniature boxes to create a four times vertical platform.

The young boy stands on the miniature boxes and soon a monk struggles to free himself from the larger boxes. At first we see his hands reaching for freedom but he soon pulls himself from the boxes and sits on top of the structure. He stumbles and stares at SLC and the young boy in the spotlight. With a single chant all of the monks run onto the roof of a larger structure, followed by the young boy who is too short and instead falls to the floor.



This is all performed in silence creating a tense atmosphere as the monks single out and stare down the escapee who is forced off the ledge and falls to the floor. He cowers on the floor but SLC walks confidently over to him, helps him up and gaze into his eyes before looking up at the other monks. *This could be symbolic of Cherkaoui's*

*mental state prior to arriving at the temple - desperate to escape the pressures of the West following his success of Zero Degrees. He was desperate for an escape, regardless if people would be pleased by his departure. The fact that Cherkaoui is manipulating the miniature set within the confines on the aluminum box shows the juxtaposition of mind and body.*

## **Section 7**

As SLC touches the large box structure, the music starts. It is very minimalistic and is a mixture of piano and violin strings of a high pitch. SLC touches another box which is then removed which constricts the amount of space the monks have to stand on. He repeats this until all of the monks are remaining on the final four boxes. The young boy drags SLC box towards the edge allowing them to escape one by one until they are all tightly packed in the horizontal aluminum box. SLC is calm and calculated as he orders the boxes away one by one but the monks are so squashed that the young boys lifted onto their shoulders. The young boy makes searching gestures with his hand pressed against his forehead; he also makes binoculars with his hands. *The monks sway from side to side as if to suggest that is the boat.*



SLC walks towards upstage left where the boxes have now been moved into a tight cluster formation (standing vertically). The minimalistic accompaniment is starting to increase in volume (not tempo) to create

suspense. Three monks emerge from the boxes with Wushu swords, creeping towards centre stage. These are curved, flexible pieces of metal on the end of the long wooden handles. These three monks all are wearing different colored costumes now to show that they are separate from the monks in the boat. They are wearing the same trousers but they are wearing brown T-shirts. The young boy exclaims and points frantically in their direction causing panic amongst the monks in the boat. *This could be significant because the Shaolin technique was developed as a method of fighting off aggressors.*



Once the aggresses have been spotted the sound of a beating drum is introduced and the speed of the cello drastically increases in volume and tempo. The monks run in a circular formation from centre stage to downstage onto upstage-left in order to hide behind the boxes. The young boy is cowering at the foot of the aluminum box as the aggressors protect the area with their swords, swiping them from right-to-left and around the body. The young boy pulls the aluminum box back towards downstage right and the three aggresses spread themselves out across the stage (stage left stage on stage right).

The monks stare at the blades of their swords, throw their weight forwards and on the rebound backwards expose their palms to the audience. Afterwards, they pause and fold their fingers into a fist one by one in a controlled and sadistic manner. One of the aggressors (play centre stage) performs a traditional wushu routine where he frantically

swings the sword around his body. Because of the flexible nature of the metal, a thrashing sound can be heard. Some movements within the routine are typical of contemporary dance as well such as a barrel roll. In between these momentary bursts of energy, the monk will stare down the blade of the sword and carefully swipe the sword in front of his body and around his head. He also includes some aerial moments such as jumps and downward facing barrels to create excitement and drama. Energetic bursts of choreography are always finished with either a pose or a gradual descent to stillness. During this display of skill, the music has built in intensity and layering and quick successions of the piano are introduced alongside the passion and the cello.

The remaining monks emerge from behind the wooden boxes with long wooden poles. They have also changed into the same costume as the aggressors. They are pointing the wooden poles towards the three aggressors and walk slowly and cautiously towards them as if to intimidate (see image below). One of the aggressors displays open palms as he stretches out his arms as if to welcome a fight. There is now the three aggresses facing upstage and 12 monks facing downstage in a stand-off.



Upon hearing the chant both parties slam their weapons to the floor dramatically and begin to point their weapons at one another.



Three formations occur with four against one. The monks with the long wooden sticks fight against the aggressor with Wushu swords.

Some of the monks with the wooden poles have over-the-top facial expressions as if to suggest they had been injured in the fight.

This can also be seen in some of

the movements e.g. one man is

holding the pole close to his torso as he slides down towards the floor implying that his abdomen has been penetrated by the pole.

A large fight breaks out using traditional swords subtly exit the stage but to monks with wooden poles are singled out by the rest of the cast. They are back to back whilst the remaining monks form a circular formation around them. Both men in the middle charge towards the other dancers which creates two groups of four; one position and upstage centre and the second position and stage right. Many of the movements including flips and martial art tricks such as kicks, flips and leaping onto their opponents chest with their feet. The music still maintains a fast pace with a deep underlying beat from the piano to heighten the tension and the seriousness of the fight. The use of eye contact and facial expressions also helps to show this. The scene ends with a monk entering with a sword and slaying the final standing warrior which is heightened with silence. The aggressor stares around as the monks lay dead on the floor, scattered around the stage. After a moment of stillness, he drops his needs and drop his weapon (see image).



SLC emerges from behind the wooden boxes with a large metal pole (pictured).

He is now wearing a black jacket. He walks amongst the dead towards downstage right before dropping the metal stick and climbing into his aluminum box. There is no emotional reaction.

## **Section 8**

The light immediately changes from a whitewash to a blackout with a spotlight on SLC. The music consists of two violins and creates a sombre atmosphere as SLC lies flat in his box.

His head suddenly appears and looks around frantically. He wriggles around in the box hitting the side against his shoulder twice before reaching out and around the box. Thrashing his arms around, he melts down back into the box before 1 single-handed emerges, reaching up towards the ceiling and passing the edge of the box. A secondhand emerges which helps him up to stand. It appears as though the second leg is stuck in the box as he tries to escape, but cannot. *This could link back to his original theme of the picking the box as limitations for the mind. SLC wants to escape the confines of the box but cannot physically do it.* As it admitting defeat, SLC retreats back into the box and his body falls limp over the side.

He stands and stares around towards the light and collapses down into the box as he has fainted. As if from nowhere, the young boy emerges from behind the box and the lighting goes into a brief blackout before changing into a bright white wash again. The boy performs a side aerial off the box and onto the floor followed by an akeido roll.

## **Section 9**

As the young boy pick up SLC's metal stick, a single violin plays long melancholic notes. Yandong experiments with the metal pole as he has been watching the adults from earlier in their fight. It is clear that the young boy is not skilled in using the pole as the pole get stuck behind his back and around his head. Meanwhile adult monks appear from behind the wooden boxes situated upstage left and perform a series of acrobatic tricks. The monk performs some abrupt and abstract gestures and stares around in short successions. It soon becomes clear that his movements look monkey-like. *SLC has said that he used monkeys as imagery in the improvisation process to create choreography. This is in order to show that the Shaolin Monk's believe that they can relate to all*

*living things including animals who in this case appears to be foraging and holding food.*

As the young boy runs off stage, the monk picks up SLC's metal pole and performs the same routine as the young boy only with greater finesse and accuracy. He plants the bottom of the pole down into the floor which propels him into a counterbalance suspended in the air (see image) . He performs more gestures and propelled him self into the air once again only this time the pulse begins to turn him. As he descends to the ground he performed an Aikido roll and pounces towards the boy who scrambled out of the way. *The Shaolin monks have also developed a technique that centers around five key animals-the tiger, the monkey, the snake, the Dragon and the crane. Each animal has different characteristics which inspire movement in their training. In the case of the monkey, the characteristics include being cunning and ferocious whilst developing leaping strength. This explains why the monk leaps onto the metal pole.*



The young boy tries to copy the choreography of the old monk who is simultaneously performing his monkey like motif from earlier in the choreography. The monk and the young boy hold each end of the metal pole and briefly tug at each end to the success of the monk. As the monk repeats his monkey gesture motif with the the pole, the young boy does a backflip to avoid it's swipe. The monk exits via upstage right but the young boy pushes against the wooden boxes making them fall towards the corner (pictured).



## **Section 10**

SLC sits up within his box whilst the remaining monks carry the boxes on their backs into their new equidistant formation. The music is lighthearted with the use of a triangle, violins and piano. The time signature is 3/4 timing which gives pace to the transition as well as providing a light-hearted atmosphere for the one monk who cannot quite find his position (this is intentional).

The music suddenly switches to a deep beat of the drum in 4/4 timing. After a brief introduction, a cello is introduced and monks appear from the boxes dressed in black suits. They run and interweave with themselves and the boxes. The young boy screams and emerges from the box performing a series of front flips towards downstage. This prompts the men to follow - five run to the edge of the stage and perform an acrobatic trick. These include aerials, barrel rolls, 360s, back handsprings, Arabians and other acrobatic variations. Once they have finished their trick they would run via the edge of the stage towards the back in order to create a constant flow of tricks. *Anthony Gormley said that they seen was created spontaneously as a result of the Shaolin monks. The energy and the accurate sense of spatial awareness was fascinating to SLC and therefore was developed into a section of its own.* SLC is not present/ seen.

As the phrase develops, the music builds and create a crescendo which is bought to an abrupt ending at the Cue of a monk's chant.

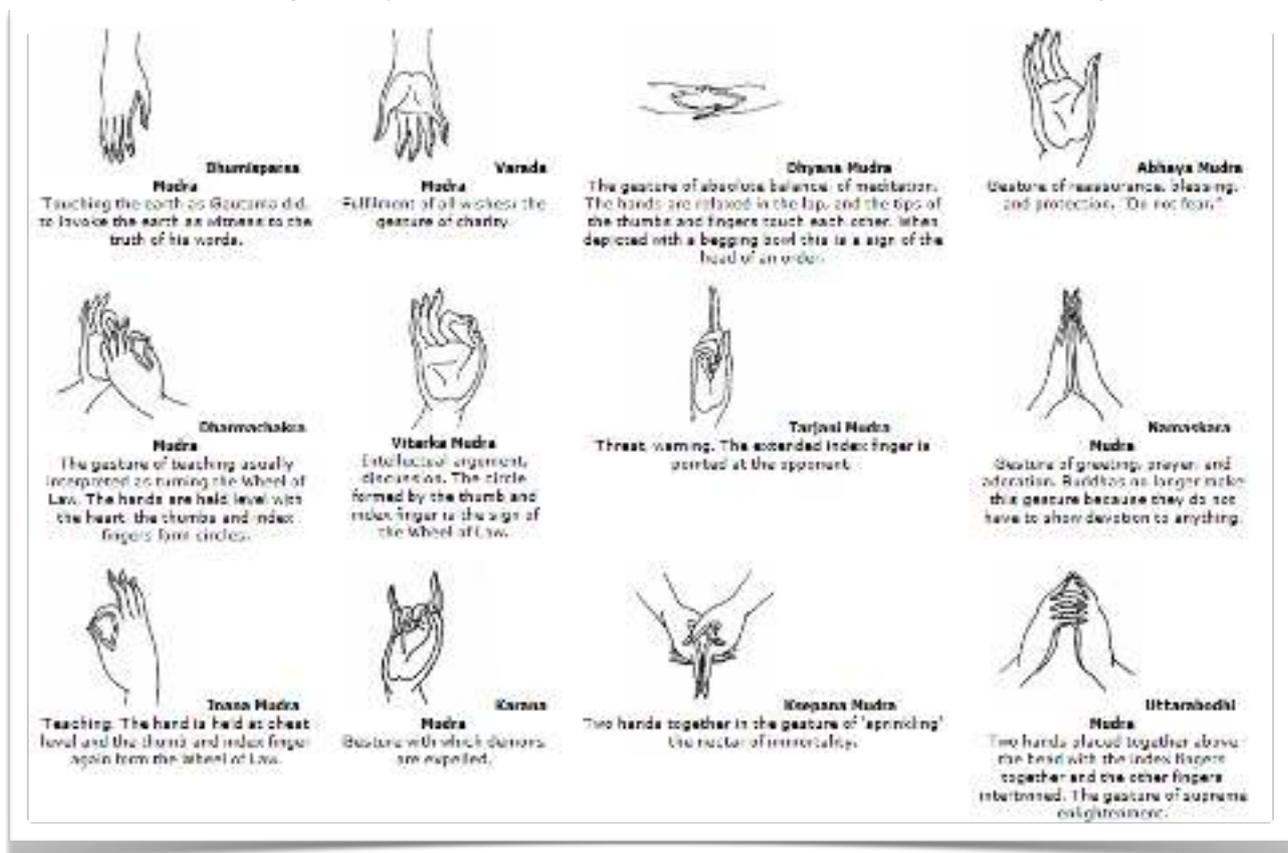


## Section 11

In silence the monks climb on top of the wooden boxes and stand. They gaze around the space as if they've never seen it before. They are also joined by the young boy. SLC enters the stage and stares back at them.



SLC sits with his back to the audience (facing the monks) and performs a series of hand gestures. The monks follow him exactly. These hand gestures at times appear like sign language. *Some movements could be interpreted but others like the bending of fingers, are more abstract but could have a deeper underlying meaning. Hand gestures often have underpinning meanings in Asian (particularly Indian) dance forms such as 'mudras', frequently used by Akram Khan through his choreographic blend of contemporary dance and Kathak as seen in Zero Degrees.*



*During the choreographic process when the monks were questioned about learning contemporary dance from SLC they replied with "we do as cherkaoui asks". This is also significant because SLC himself said that when he arrived at the temple, he was astounded by how the monks would move in such accurate unison. So much so that it reminded him of clones. This, combined with the exchanging of ideas between SLC and the monks could be the inspiration behind this section.*

The sound of a triangle can be heard which initiates the monks to force their boxes off balance, making them crash to the floor. *This is done with total focus and control which could link back to one of the themes of mind/body balance. There is also evidence of the theme of juxtaposition because the monks are standing strong and steady outside of the box whereas SLC runs into his box causing it to fall clumsily with him still inside it. This juxtaposition is heightened because as the introduction of a cello emerges, the monks pull their boxes into a new formation. On the other hand, SLC attempts to follow the monks by pulling on the edge of his box but is unsuccessful in moving his box as he is inside it, showing yet another limitation of his mind.*



SLC is left with nothing to do but attempt to drag the box using one leg which makes him appear clumsy and off-balance (pictured). Once free from the box he conforms with the dynamics of the other monks who have made a line of graves. SLC appears to walk into his grave suggesting that the mind is free when death comes.

A set of hands appear from the boxes. He pounces on top and bursts out with a ferocious kung fu routine started by fame jump. The routine is incredibly aggressive with lots of slapping of the feet on the floor with

lots of crouching movements followed by explosive, elevated tricks. *This section is demonstrating characteristics of the tiger in kung fu. The training qualities of a tiger includes strong, quick and direct movements that strengthen the bone and build muscle. The crouching motif and his acrobatic ability matches this description perfectly evidencing the theme of the Shaolin philosophy.*

Another hand appears from the box to which another monk appears. He also performed an explosive routine but the dynamics differ considerably to the previous solo. His movements are a lot swifter and lighter than the previous solo and performs many elevated tricks with quick accents and descent from the floor. *This could link to the characteristics of the Dragon-powerful, light and quick movements that train the spirit of the mind.*



When the third Monk appears, a minimalistic piano accompanies his solo.

His dynamics are a lot more controlled than the others although occasionally perform sudden acrobatic tricks. His solo is characterized more by the stillness and the control of his actions with the acrobatic tricks being transitions rather than the focus. Throughout the solo it does

increase in speed and aggression but then finds moments of stillness and catches the gaze of the audience. Balancing on one leg or balancing with his feet crossed and his arms outstretched to the side a common features of his solo. Flexed wrists and the pointing/ curling of fingers is another common motif. There are also times when the soloist would slowly flap his arms and hold them in moments of stillness. *For this reason I believe this dancer is showing the crane, characterized for his stability, concentration, accuracy and evasiveness.*



Another soloist emerges characterized initially by the flexion of the wrist which appears throughout as a motif. The dancer

performs an impressive array of traveling flips was landing perfectly and safely on his side lying on the floor. He swiftly springs to his feet, spiraling his arms from the momentum which leads him into a series of backflips. He again lands flat on his side with his arm stretched out, being his focal point. As he springs back onto his feet he dropped suddenly to the floor and flexes his wrists, gazing over his fingertips. For this reason I think he is depicting the characteristics of a snake. Snake movements become incredibly fast with the performer having increased sensitivity and awareness.



A final soloist appears that creates a more visual representation of a snake. The previous solo embodied the characteristics of a snake through the medium of kung fu whereas this soloist hisses and pitches his leg

backwards into an attitude to create the illusion of a snake's tail. SLC slips out of his box and catches the eye of the soloist. He pulls his leg backwards into an attitude and they mimic each other's body language. SLC moves towards the soloist by performing a walkover before getting himself into a balance where he entirely relies on his hands. *This is very characteristic of Cherkaoui as a choreographer because he is known for his hyper-flexibility and contortion-like movements. SLC uses contortion like movements such as tripods, bridges and walkovers to intimidate and challenge the other soloist who tries to copy SLC.*



The soloist performed a series of floor work tricks towards SLC in retaliation. SLC reacts by holding a split whereas the soloist is in a crouching position. SLC leans forward over his leg and bend his back towards his head into a scorpion. He holds the scorpion as he rolled onto his front towards the soloist. Eye contact is maintained the entire time. They perform a series of mirroring movements until suddenly the monk performs a roundhouse kick which sends SLC into a bridge. Both SLC and the monk perform a series of our movements similar to the crane before the monk forces SLC to retreat back into his metal box. The young boy emerges in an attempt to scare the monk off. SLC is sitting on top of his box and the music stops suddenly. He reaches down towards the young boy and pulls him on the top of the box to sit with him. The lighting dramatically becomes dimmer. Two circular lights are used covering up stage and down stage. The wings are predominantly in darkness.

Whilst the duet has been occurring, the remaining monks have stacked the boxes horizontally one on top of the other to create a wall up stage. Some of the monks are already lying in these boxes whereas others are climbing up them to get into them. *This is influenced by SLC's visit to China where he was shocked at the standard of living. In Hong Kong, apartments have been dubbed as 'coffin apartments' as groups of people are forced to live in cramped living conditions. Bunkbeds resemble cages and would be stacked 4-5 beds high as if bodies were stacked on top of each other. Another image used for a stimuli was the external appearance of these apartments (all imaged below).*



The beat of a percussion signals the start of the music. There is a dreary tempo on the cellos and violins and the beat of the percussion creates variation. One of the monks gets out of his box and like a monkey on

monkey bars, explores the boxes. SLC and the young boy sit/stand and observe. The monk find himself on top of the boxes and stares at the young boy. He performs a walking bridge followed by a walkover before looking round and retreating to his box.

A squeaking sound start to occur and all of the monks circle their legs and pound on the side of the boxes before falling out of them and walking into the new triangle formation. SLC joins them in this formation. The monk is at the tip of the triangle and in canon and the monks behind him imitate his movements exactly. SLC wanders through amongst the monks and examines the boxes with curiosity. The monks do not focus on SLC at all and work in perfect unison. Meanwhile, SLC has found a

box in the top right hand corner and hangs upside down and it goes in towards the audience.



Throughout the scene music is gentle and could be described as pretty. There are delicate piano notes with a gentle pace allowing the focus of the seem to be on the beauty of the monks hand gestures and movements and

SLC's curiosity. *This could reflect SLC and his arrival at the Temple during a time of emotional, physical and creative fatigue searching for solace and serenity.*

SLC lies down in the box as the music changes into a stern beat of the drum. The monks pull the box off the top shelf forcing him to maintain his shape upside down. The monks push him around the stage in the box. He is propped up on a diagonal pathway facing downstage right where the young boy has created the same formation using miniature boxes. The music has a militant quality to it which is emphasized by the fact that *all of the monks have a job to do in the same way that SLC observed when he arrived at the temple.* On the command of a chant, all of the monks step inside the box. A young boy then pushes the boxes which creates a domino affect.



All of the monks are lying against the side of the box perfectly but SLC, who is the end of the oncoming domino effect, crouches down and is therefore propelled to the edge of his box upon impact. He looks shaken

and vulnerable through his facial expression and body language which is matched with the increasingly sombre accompaniment.

The young boy leaps across the boxes as if they were roofs on a house terrace and finds SLC in a trance-like state. He tries to manipulate SLC to stop with little success.

Meanwhile the other monks are propping up the boxes and maintaining order once again

by pushing them all together to create a dividing wall. On the demand chant, all of the monks carry the weight of the box on the back to rotate the boxes so the backs are facing the audience whilst maintaining constant contact and a straight line. This cuts SLC off from the rest of the cast. He thinks he has found a gap in the wall but this gap is currently closed by the remaining two monks. The boxes then proceeded to move down stage whilst SLC walks backwards towards downstage left.



The lighting changes into a blackout with a single spotlight on SLC. SLC spots his shadow and begins to examine it. His attention then changes to the wall itself and tries to find a way through the wall by pushing on the boxes. He also peers through the gaps. *This could symbolize the fact that he is a Westerner looking in to an Eastern practice. The Shaolin Temple does not usually allow outsiders to come and collaborate/train with them so this could represent the theme of east versus west.* The atmosphere isn't particularly distressing (as if they have shut him out maliciously), instead it is one of intrigue.

## Section 12

Deep and continuous cello notes are played but the sounds of a glockenspiel and Violin begin to fade in. The deep use of a cello set a serious atmosphere for the section. Two silhouette figurines stand on top of the wall holding long spears in their right hand. The sound of a glockenspiel matches the actions of SLC as he knocks on the wooden box. The young boy meanwhile, is sat downstage right in a square spotlight paying with the miniature model. A triangle is also struck as SLC continues to find gaps in the wall. The silhouettes perform a mirror image routine involving the spear. The movements are typical of the Shaolin technique whereby the dances exert a significant amount of speed and force followed by sudden moment of stillness. *The fact that SLC is unable to see what the monks are doing symbolizes the fact that he is a Westerner who is not accustomed to the eastern practice of the Shaolin monks.*



The silhouetted monks now stand side-by-side (centre stage and on top of the boxes) as if they are guarding the entrance to the temple. The young boy runs from downstage right and towards the boxes below the silhouette guards. He knocks on the wall and a single wooden box lowers to the floor like a drawbridge over a moat. The young boy steps into the box and walks through the wall; the box folds up behind him leaving SLC alone.

SLC leans on the aluminum box which falls backwards behind him; he repeats this with the wooden boxes. The action isn't sudden or comical; instead his weight is absorbed by the wooden boxes making this a smooth transition. *SLC appears to be weak as he uses fall and recovery technique/release technique in this sequence. This is significant because SLC described himself as emotionally, creatively and physically drained prior to arriving at the Shaolin Temple. This followed the success of the zero degrees tour with Akram Khan. The use of release technique is something that he has acquired through his training at PARTS and his influence, Trisha Brown.* The accompaniment builds in tempo and layering with piano and violin being the predominant characteristics of the accompaniment.

Once all of the boxes have peeled away from the wall, the boxes form the shape of Temple. Monks appear and disappear behind the "pillars" of the temple. The accompaniment has changed from a heavy use of piano and violin to a strong use of percussion (drums). The pace is fast and militant which matches the disciplined nature of the dancer's unison. The dancers appear as silhouettes and therefore all look the same. This could link back to SLC's observations that the monks appeared as clones. This section ends abruptly.

A lone monk appears through the centre of the "temple ". The use of foot lights are used and the general whitewash returns to enable the audience to see the monks face and features. Several other monks emerge and SLC appears in a black suit. The breathing motif (of gathering energy and pushing it back down to earth) is repeated in a sustained and slow motion.



The dancers perform a tai chi routine in unison. Tai chi is characterized by circular, calm, continuous movements with intent and energy. *This links back to the Shaolin*

*philosophy of how the monks believe that they consume energy from the ground and everything around them. They also believe that energy is borrowed, passing through the body and is not contained.* The music is

melancholic and relaxing which allows the focus to remain on the dances and their actions. Cello and violin is again use with the cello creating a continuous drone like a mantra in meditation. The young boy is sitting cross-legged with his eyes closed in between two rows of miniature boxes. This does not correlate with what is happening with the life-size boxes.

After the tai chi routine, the monks walk over to the life-size boxes and push down all of the wooden boxes which startles the young boy. The only box left standing is SLCs aluminum box.

### **Section 13**

SLC wanders around the stage looking overwhelmed and mystified. All of the other boxes are dragged along the edge of the stage as if he is now in a training ring. A monk enters the space with SLC and performs a solo. Movement appear to be a accumulation of everything that we have seen so far. *There is evidence of the five animalistic qualities from the Shaolin technique but there is also evidence of re-occurring motifs such as the pointing and the imitation of being pulled and controlled despite not holding a pole.* The lighting on the upstage canvas is brighter and therefore the musicians are a lot clearer than in previous scenes. The black screen backdrop now appears black whereas in previous sections, the backdrop has appeared grey. The music has a reflective and calm quality to it. It is very minimalistic which matches the calm nature and dynamics of the monks, SLC and the young boy as they all enter the stage.

The dancers all clasp their hands in a prayer position and perform a bow. They all have their eyes closed and are facing different directions.



The monks and SLC perform a martial arts routine in perfect unison. There are lots of punches, kicks, gestures, suckling of the arms and lunges. The use of slapping, punching, stomping and chanting helps to dancers to remain in unison despite having their

eyes closed and the music not having a identifiable beat.

The section varies in formations, use of number and duration but all of the variations have a centre stage position with many of them facing



inwards as if they all have the same goal and philosophy. As the section progresses, the accompaniment becomes more multilayered. This gives the illusion that what the monks are doing is faster when in actual fact the music is becoming faster, not the action. The busyness of the accompaniment however is match with the number of dancers. The more busy the music, the more dancers there are on stage.

The dancers hold a final crouching position and the musicians continue to play as the lighting fades out using a tint of blue. The percussion dramatically speeds up, creating a crescendo, followed by a dramatic pause signaling that the dance has ended.



# Comparing Similarities and Differences

You don't need to know other works by Cherkaoui in massive depth just as long as you are able to discuss what the main similarities and differences are with clear examples.

Below, I will start a comparison chart showing some of the main similarities and differences. In class, as homework or as revision, see if you can add some of your own ideas...

Work	Similarities to Sutra	Differences
Zero Degrees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cherkaoui has fused an unfamiliar style with contemporary dance.</li> <li>● The dance was created through collaboration</li> <li>● Same set designer, Antony Gormley</li> <li>● Choreography was created as a result of improvisation</li> <li>● The set and lighting design is minimalistic with shades of grey.</li> <li>● The set leaves room for interpretation and can be perceived as conceptual art.</li> <li>● Both works explore the idea of clones.</li> <li>● Cherkaoui works again with the idea of opposites. In Zero Degrees he examines life and death whereas in Sutra he explores the mind and body.</li> <li>● Cherkaoui displays his true choreographic/ movement style which includes hyper-flexible contortionist movement with yoga references.</li> <li>● Both works explore Cherkaoui's personal life. In Zero Degrees, it explores his dual nationality/ religion whereas Sutra explores his journey at the Shaolin Temple.</li> <li>● Much of the choreography is stylized using speed with moments of stillness/ sustained movements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sutra does not use speech/ verbatim theatre.</li> <li>● Akram Khan is an established choreographer and was heavily involved in sharing the choreographic process. The monks are not trained in dance and although participated in the improvisation tasks, the creative process was very much guided by Cherkaoui.</li> <li>● Zero Degrees used music visualization whereas the music for Sutra used mutual coexistence, like a mantra for meditation.</li> <li>● The score was developed alongside the choreographic process for Zero Degrees. For Sutra, the music was pre-prepared.</li> <li>● subject matter</li> <li>● Costume in ZD is typical of contemporary and Kathak. The costumes for Sutra were inspired by the theme of East vs West.</li> <li>● ZD is a duet. Sutra is an ensemble piece.</li> <li>● ZD used Indian music to match the subject matter. Sutra didn't use Chinese music despite the Chinese Shaolin Temple being of such importance to the subject matter.</li> </ul>

Milonga	Similarities	Differences
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Used a style (tango) outside of his normal style.</li> <li>● The choreographic process was collaborative with the dancers.</li> <li>● costume was suitable for the main discipline (tango) in the same way that the costume for Sutra was suitable for Kung Fu.</li> <li>● He wanted to showcase tango in a different perspective so that the focus was only on the movement. He wanted to achieve this with Kung Fu for Sutra.</li> <li>● He is inspired by the quality of movement and wants to showcase disciplines that he feels are undervalued by bringing new perspectives to them.</li> <li>● musicians can be seen on stage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● music is traditional to the style (tango)</li> <li>● one couple had a background in contemporary and was able to experiment with them to help come up with the contemporary choreography.</li> <li>● Unlike Sutra, he worked with the cliches of tango (not against them) to help the audience feel that they could understand the movement and instead explore the 'grey zones' of tango that are more complicated.</li> </ul>

Babel	Similarities	Differences
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>👤 Set Design by Antony Gormley</li> <li>👤 explores the idea of opposites.</li> <li>👤 Heavy use of set design which is symbolic rather than realistic. Set is manipulated and moved the create 'images'</li> <li>👤 Evidence of post-modern influences</li> <li>👤 use gestures as motifs</li> <li>👤 moments of storytelling and comedy without a linear structure. Clear evidence of dance theatre's influence.</li> <li>👤 musicians are live on stage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>👤 Co-choreographed with another choreographer, Damien Jalet.</li> <li>👤 All dancers were different clothing.</li> <li>👤 sound effects e.g. robot laughing.</li> <li>👤 Images are created with the body, not just the set. For example, one dancer is turned in the Terminator/ robot, a bird and a Sheik on his throne.</li> <li>👤 speech</li> <li>👤 talking directly to the audience.</li> <li>👤 accompaniment is reliant on the musicians vocals.</li> </ul>

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