



Corporal Mimesis: creative observation

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ABSTRACT – Corporal Mimesis: creative observation – This article examines corporal mimesis, a technique created and developed by LUME Teatro. The objective is to explain how, with this technique, the performer poetically embodies different stimuli that are found in everyday life, be they people, images, voices, sounds, animals, or even texts or monuments. The concepts of mimesis, observation, and affectation, which form the basis of this practice, are discussed. Then, different experiences with corporal mimesis are described. Finally, it is concluded that this technique is an open field for exploring acting, which is found in an intermediate place between creation and training based on the sensorial universe of the artists who develop it.

Keywords: **Mimesis. Observation. Acting. Poetics. Technique.**

RÉSUMÉ – Mime Corporel: l'observation créative – Cet article traite de la mimésis corporelle, une technique créée et développée par LUME Teatro. L'objectif est d'expliquer comment, à travers cette technique, l'interprète incarne poétiquement différents stimuli que l'on retrouve dans la vie de tous les jours, qu'il s'agisse de personnes, d'images, de voix, de sons, d'animaux et même de textes ou de monuments. Les concepts de mimesis, d'observation et d'affectation, qui forment la base de cette pratique, sont discutés. Ensuite, différentes expériences de mimétisme corporel sont décrites. Enfin, on en conclut que cette technique est un champ ouvert à l'exploration du jeu d'acteur, qui se situe à une place intermédiaire entre la création et la formation à partir de l'univers sensible des artistes qui la développent.

Mots-clés: **Mimesis. Observer. Actif. Poétique. Technique.**

RESUMEN – Mímesis Corpórea: la observación creativa – El presente artículo trata sobre la mímesis corpórea, técnica creada y desarrollada por LUME Teatro. El objetivo es explicar cómo por medio de esa técnica el actuante encarna poéticamente diferentes estímulos que se encuentran en la vida cotidiana, sean estas personas, imágenes, voces, sonidos, animales o, inclusive, textos o monumentos. Se discuten los conceptos de mímesis, observación y afectación, los cuales se constituyen en la base de esta práctica. A continuación, se describen diferentes experiencias de mímesis corpórea. Finalmente, se llega a la conclusión de que esta técnica es un campo abierto para la exploración actoral que se encuentra en un lugar intermedio entre la creación y el entrenamiento a partir del universo sensible de los artistas que la desarrollan.

Palabras clave: **Mímesis. Observación. Actuante. Poética. Técnica.**

We must not forget, within the seduction of the gaze, its power to radiate over the entire body. If it is true that specular reflection of the body originates in the reversibility of the gaze, then it is the entire body that becomes the gaze¹ (Gil, 2005, p. 56-57, translation by the author).

Corporal mimesis has been a field of study at the Interdisciplinary Nucleus for Theater Research, LUME Teatro, since its beginnings in 1985. This technique, created by Luis Otavio Burnier, continues to be developed by LUME artists and researchers and has been the basis of several of their presentations. In addition, through workshops, courses, and collaborative works, they have shared this technique with various artists, who, based on what they learned, deepened its study to develop their own creations.

In the words of its creator, corporal mimesis is defined as:

A process of technification of everyday actions through the observation, imitation, and codification of a group of physical and vocal actions removed from predetermined contexts, based on studies of actions of certain types of people with specific characteristics. The question presented was: would a technical elaboration based on direct imitation of physical and vocal actions of different people be possible?² (Burnier, 2009, p. 62).

Although Burnier speaks of a technical elaboration based on imitation, in practice, the meaning of corporal mimesis is much more closely linked to the ancient etymology that gave origin to the word:

'Mimesis' comes from 'mimós' and 'mimeisthai', terms that originally refer to the personality change that some worshipers experienced in certain rituals when they felt that they were incarnated by non-human natural beings - divine or animal - of another time. 'Mimeisthai' is not so much to imitate as to represent, to embody a being afar from one³ (Bozal, 1987 apud Gutiérrez Canales, 2016, p. 98).

Corporal mimesis does not seek to imitate as much as to incarnate, that is, to give flesh, a bodily shape, either to an idea, a concept, a being, or person different from the artist. According to the Diccionario de la Real Academia Española de la Lengua (Encarnar, 2020, online) to *incarnate* can also mean, in the case of "[...] an arrow, a sword or another weapon: to enter through the flesh". Here we can also find a relationship, since these stimuli (images, ideas, objects, characters, etc.) become sharp points that are

introduced into actors' flesh (body) to allow them to generate forms that become understood by others.

After honouring Apollo, Leto, and the precise archer Artemis with praise, the girls sing hymns that evoke achievements of the past, and can mimic the voice and attitudes of all men to the point of confusing the listener as to who is really speaking. Such is the excellence of their sweet song⁴ (Bozal, 1987 apud Gutiérrez Canales, 2016, p. 99).

We are not in the presence of mere imitation but of the embodiment of identity qualities of an alterity upon different bodies, and within a temple. It is a kind of transfiguration that is surprising precisely because of its unprecedented and magical nature⁵ (Gutiérrez Canales, 2016, p. 99).

Since its origins, mimesis has been linked to a total incarnation; that is, it is not a simple imitation, but involves revealing the magical character of possession. In addition, Gutiérrez Canales (2016) suggests another important characteristic to consider, which is the great modern misunderstanding that relates mime to silence or a lack of words when in fact, since its origins, mimesis had always been related to voice, singing and poetry.

Raquel Scotti Hirson, an actress/researcher in the group, who currently teaches the Corporal Mimesis course in the *Jornada Internacional Atuação e Presença*, mentions: "Today, when I must define corporal mimesis in very few words, I say that it is a poetic recreation of something that is observed"⁶ (Hirson, 2018, p. s/n).

Corporal mimesis is a practice of observation, the idea is that observations from daily life can be embodied, that is, that they are brought in and transformed into body in the actor. Mimesis has a great range of observation. It has increasingly become a methodology for observation, [which results in the construction of] corporal inspirations (R. S. Hirson, personal communication, Campinas, Brasil, Apr. 3, 2019).

Corporal mimesis is a process that begins from the observation and encounter between bodies, bodies and images, whether these are generated from audio-visual materials, from texts, from the relationship with objects or from that which emerges from memory⁷ (Souza apud Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).

Corporal mimesis worked with procedures that sought to expand the actor's ability to be affected by the encounter with bodies⁸ (Giannetti apud Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).

This technique, created in the 1980s, has been worked on and continues to be developed by actors and actresses of LUME Teatro and by new artists who have seen it as a fruitful path for expanding their investigations. As they all affirm, mimesis is based on observation, but does not involve just a peripheral and utilitarian look, neither is it an exclusively scientific or analytical look. In contrast, it is an observation that is open to subjectivations and is attentive to the affectations that provoke an encounter of the observer's body with another body, regardless of whether this other body is a person, an object or a sound. It is an encounter in which both the observer and the observed will be affected, a space of contamination from which new forms and relations emerge.

The relational is the field of observation, because there is no observer without an observed object, nor an observed object without an observer: "The object of study moves from the analysis of an isolated perceiver in a predetermined world to the investigation of its relationship which, necessarily, constantly modifies it"⁹ (Sofía, 2015, p. 45). In this way, not only the object that is observed is studied, but also how this modifies the body that is observed and what becomes of this relationship, in a process that involves simultaneous observation and self-observation in constant movement.

To work with this idea of 'coexistence of projection and porosity in relation to the external', Ferracini created the concept of subjective-body, which is 'this diluted-projected of subject and object'¹⁰ (Ferracini, 2009, p. 125-126 apud Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).

Training and Creation

The technique requires close observation, different from what most people naturally practice in their daily lives. It is necessary to train the gaze for this type of observation, however, it is also necessary to train the body to be porous to the affectation.

First, one must know how to observe. This observation is no longer the natural observation from when we were young, but a professional, precise observation that requires competence in the *métier*. This means that when observing the general and the detail, the actor observes a series of precise elements, information important to his work¹¹ (Burnier, 2009, p. 182).

The first investigations conducted using the corporal mimesis technique were realized with people through encounters or by using photographs. Because of the training that Burnier had in France in corporal mime with the master Etienne Decroux, at first he taught his students to observe the large articulations that are worked with in corporal mime: head, shoulders, chest, hips and extremities. He then had them observe the smaller articulations such as the fingers and movements of the face. Then, how the weight of the body is distributed and the compensations that take place to balance that weight. The physical elaboration of these bodies generates points of tension and rigidity, knots, points that are more relaxed or points that are too loose (Hirson, 2018). Until now, these indications continue to be used within the courses, and, although the research has been diversified, these postulates for working with people are still fully valid.

Work that began with still images (photographs or sculptures) needed ways to create movement from them; thus, Burnier worked exhaustively on what he called the *ligaments*, small elements of union between actions, either to make them more direct, dissolve them or break them down and then rebuild them (Hirson et al., 2016).

This technique is a hybrid because it focuses simultaneously on the training of the actor and the creation process. In this way, it sharpens the observation of what is exterior and of the self, which intensifies the capacity for contamination/affectation, provoking a state of attention and improving the reactions to stimuli. It is also a procedure for collecting creative material, which can then be coded for later development. It involves building, cutting, pasting, sewing and creating corporal matrices that serve to create characters or situations.

The materials used for this are not chosen arbitrarily: prior information guides the selection. This may operate consciously and voluntarily because these materials are part of the research being carried out, or more intuitively because they are part of some memory or recollection. They are choices that, in one way or another, carry an emotional and sentimental charge, whether one is aware of this or not. In such a way that it is not always the researcher who chooses the material, sometimes it is the material that steals the researcher's attention and prompts her to work with it.

All these materials that are worked with in the studio through the perception of one's own body and the observation shared with colleagues will be the tools on which the field work will be based.

A Meeting Place

Corporal mimesis presupposes the encounter with this 'in between', it is as if I empty myself and I am no longer exactly me: Rachel-actress, but I am not what I observe either. What is observed is there, outside of me, in its place. So, what is in that space, in this communion between what I am and what is observed, regardless of whatever is being observed, in this zone of influence, confluence and friction, generating a third possibility which is not me, nor what I am observing? (R. S. Hirson, personal communication, Campinas, Brasil, 3 April 2019).

Two requirements are questioned here: the first is to find this void and the second is to open a space to allow ourselves to be inhabited by *the other*, knowing that from this encounter will emerge a third party, independent of both. A person who wants to recreate life on stage must first learn to empty him or herself and thus allow that other life to enter. Emptying oneself means breaking with paradigms about the *I am* to open spaces of unawareness in which to examine "[...] what I do 'I use here without making explicit the notion of I' it is not rigid and immutable, but has a certain state of plasticity, even of indetermination, of undefinition, which makes it conducive to transformations"¹² (Gil, 2005, p. 3).

For centuries, this idea of emptying oneself has been studied in different cultures through meditation. However, meditation as it is known in the West, is not a space for openness, but a solitary and introspective space. Therefore, it is necessary to search for other tools that would allow this simultaneous void and opening.

Exchanges with artists from many countries have brought new sources of knowledge to the group, which have influenced its research. This is the case of the Butoh dance, which has also influenced the technique of corporal mimesis. Raquel speaks of the space *between* and of the *void*, which are two concepts widely used in this art.

Theirs is a theater of sense impressions and the space *in-between* through which they move. In Japanese (and in Zen), this space is called *ma*. We have no equivalent for this experiential concept in the West. *Ma* is not merely a perceptual and spatial concept; it is also an expansive state of mind. The mind that has been freed from thought can dwell in-between, not looking

back with regret or forward in anticipation. A calm mind is free from the need to judge. Ugliness and beauty are let be, as perceptual and impermanent (Fraleigh, 2010, p. 6).

This state of mind that does not judge, nor anticipate or regret, is ideal for locating the emptiness needed to access the active and affective observation that mimesis requires. To reach this state, corporal tools are used that are based on stimuli that dilate the body to intensify perception. Exercises such as jumping until you find the impulse to jump without the need to jump, casting a far off gaze (*the farther you go, the farther you'll go back until you reach the past*, Raquel S. Hirson said during the class), or *dancing diffuse images*, train the body so that it is able to enter the *in between* space of contamination, which is not the same as the Butoh dance, nor does it use exactly the same techniques, but which was born from the contamination between the two theatrical cultures, adapting to the need to open porosities in the body and allowing it to access those other bodies.

An expansion in our ability to affect and be affected, generating an intensive state where the other is no longer the object, the outside, which I map and decipher and becomes a living presence. The 'between' is installed and with it an entire field of forces and intensities is propagated, creating a magnetic field between the bodies, a dual becoming¹³ (Colla apud Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).

A tension of this paradox mobilizes and drives the power of creation, to the degree that it places us in crisis and imposes on us the need to create forms of expression for non-transferable sensations with the representations available to us¹⁴ (Rolnik, 2011, p. 13 apud Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).

In this regard, training for corporeal mimesis is based both on observation and on the practice of allowing oneself to be affected by what is observed. There are people who are naturally good observers, however, this does not mean that they are necessarily good at mimesis. This is because it requires learning to access these places of friction and contamination, two elements that are in constant conjunction. It is necessary to be a good observer, of the exterior world and to observe oneself to understand how what is observed reverberates on oneself and in this way allow these reverberations to be born as a matrix, scene or character, as various pieces that fit together.

In recent decades, neuroscientists have shown that observation is embodied, given that the observed actions generate a resonance in both cognitive and motor functions of the observer (in a constant relational reorganization), using a complex neuromotor system that is triggered by the mirror neurons. Moreover, this incarnation implies a biographical experience because the organization of the observer's neuromotor system is directly related to the experiences lived in her past (Sofía, 2015, p. 194)

Time is a requirement for reaching this place of bodily contamination where the stimulus is embodied, a time that is not chronological but based on the dilation of observation itself: on the focus on details, of both what is observed and of oneself, and simultaneously on the relations that these bodies compose. This could be compared to the experience of watching a watercolour as it is being painted by a person. At first it is not well understood but little by little, line by line, the image becomes legible until it slowly becomes clear. Thus, both the artist and the viewer experience a sense of metamorphosis that leads them to the character, producing a magical, surprising and pleasant effect.

The becoming-other, therefore, arises from an already unstable situation, from the disposition to become. The body must be defined as a complex of possibilities, at each given moment: it becomes something other than itself⁵ (Gil, 2005, p. 294).

The body, defined as the field of possibilities, is a complex of possible others that can come to be, by being permeated and by giving room to what is observed (heard or perceived). However, this body as well, or the motor action generated by it, is only the expression of another field of possibilities generated internally and that works as a simulator of different potential actions, of which one is not aware (Sofía, 2015, p. 74).

Fieldwork

Although it is not essential to corporal mimesis, since the first use of this technique, fieldwork has proven to be a powerful generator of creative materials. The affectation produced in a field of experiences and encounters, filled with sensations, aromas, tastes, and micro perceptions cannot be transmitted by any other alternative means. Furthermore, the difficulties in reaching the places where these encounters occur make them powerful convivial acts that reverberate in the bodies and memories of the art-

ists/researchers. This accumulated information carried within each artist can then be used as poetic material for their creations.

Burnier himself, at the beginning of his research on corporal mimesis, had recently arrived from France before creating LUME Teatro and began to work on this technique with street children. From this first experiment, the work *Macario* was born, based on the story with this name by Juan Rulfo.

For four of LUME Teatro's artists/researchers, Cristina Colla, Renato Ferracini, Jessor da Souza, and Raquel S. Hirson, their first approach to field research work occurred before they became part of the group in the year 1993 when, together with the rest of the colleagues from the undergraduate course, they asked Burnier to direct their graduation show.

Burnier challenged the actors: 'You want to talk about Brazil. You want to 'sing' through the work of an actor the 'melody' of these people. Well, do you know these people? Have you seen them? Have you heard them? Have you ever sensed their smell? Have you ever lived with them? For example, have you ever shared a 'supper' made exclusively of manioc flour and water from the Amazon rainforest? Or a 'bone soup' in Paran  (Tocantins), or a soup of *chuchu* in Uruc ia (in the backlands of Minas Gerais)? Have you ever felt hunger? If the answer to these questions is 'no', you have no right to represent these people. You will not be able to produce a faithful portrait of these people, or at least part of them. To do so, you must experience them'¹⁶ (Souza, 1998, p. 99-100).

Beginning with this provocation, the young actors and actresses packed their suitcases and went on a trip, alone or in pairs, to explore those remote places in their own country; to collect those stories they wanted to tell and to live those experiences that they had never had. These trips marked the artists, both in a professional and intimate way. They wrote the accounts of their processes in articles and books in which they detail anecdotes of their experiences in the field and how they processed their materials inside the studio (cfr. Colla, 2006; Hirson, 2006; Ferracini, 2006; Souza, 1998).

Corporal mimesis is worked with as a trigger for processes and experiences of what was lived in the field, experienced as a procedure for re-creating other relationships with the city and nourishing the relationships between art and life beyond the scene¹⁷ (Gianneti apud Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).

It is in the field where all the materials that can trigger these memories, sensations and stimuli necessary for work in the studio are collected. These can be registered: in photographs, recordings, texts or objects. The materiality of the objects with which one works is important so as to be able to access them with some ease: the images are usually placed on the walls of the work room; the texts can be read by the artist himself or by another, or memorized; the audio recordings can be listened to with headphones to work on the voice or the details, or, it may be music that causes sensations; and the objects will be manipulated to create relationships between the two bodies (artist-object). For now, we do not work with videos or digital images, but, as an open field of research, there is always room for experimentation.

A Vast Field

Corporal mimesis, as seen, has a wide range of observation since it allows working with many different materials: people, images, paintings, animals, sounds, texts, music, objects and even places such as houses or monuments. A small summary is presented of the fields in which we have worked using this technique, accompanied by a brief description of the methodology developed.

– Mimesis of people: Most of the descriptions that have been made up to now speak about the mimesis of people. As seen, it is necessary to observe the articulations, beginning with the largest to the smallest; how to find the support points, balance, the position of the weight and rhythmic cadence, but above all, how to be attentive to what this person provokes in the observer, what attracts her, what draws attention and what she rejects.

In the studio, the first work of observation will be between classmates, always bearing in mind that, no matter how fun or funny the exercise may be, it does not have a comic purpose, but rather an exploratory and didactic one. In it, all sensations and feelings are welcome as long as the objective is not lost sight of. Dynamics with animals are also worked on because they help perceive different bodily qualities, that is, a different animal can be worked for each large articulation. This will help, for example, if the person being observed is much larger; working with an elephant on the chest can help find that different weight and size. Combining this with the corporal

dilation and the opening of the porosities creates this *subjective-body* mentioned by Ferracini (2011, p. 2).

During field work, most information should be obtained from the people observed, which does not mean conducting exhaustive interviews and getting involved in biographical details, but rather being attentive to everything that this person projects. Special attention should be paid to what is said, but much more to what is not said, which is reflected in manners and movements. Sometimes a fleeting encounter can be imprinted in memory in a much more perennial way than a long conversation. It is also important to collect images. Images captured spontaneously in daily activities will be more interesting than those in which a person poses, depending on the person. Voice recordings are also very useful. Once the encounter is over, all relevant information should be documented in the field diary along with the useful technical details, the sensations, memories, emotions and all material that may reverberate for the researcher during the work in the studio.

Then, I could combine the observation of her photographs with the observation of the encounter, taken up again with the help of the notes in the work diaries, which had not yet been mentioned, but which was fundamental to the memory of what was experienced in the studio and in the field. A complete edition combines the photographs as anchors, stations; the notes full of images and sensations of the encounter connect them; texts are chosen as overlappings that sometimes lead to actions and sometimes feed and fill them; and breathing is the ligament that regulates time and brings memories of the days of meeting Dona Maria¹⁸ (Hirson, 2018, p. s/n).

– Mimesis of images: The images can be photographs, drawings, or paintings, realistic or abstract. Needless to say, for didactic reasons, it is better to start with the work of realistic and human images because in this way a direct imitation of the observed body by the recreated body takes place. Although it has been mentioned that mimesis is not an imitation, it is necessary to go through this step to open the body to this different space, to this new creation, and to the difficulty of allowing that this other body have a space in the observer's body. Perhaps, with more experience and training, it would be possible to access the places where the two bodies reverberate more easily, that is, the corporal forms and movements that carry the essence of a person, making this essence or quality of a person be recognizable in the other, an act of incarnation.

During the courses, the images are attached to the walls of the studio so that they can be worked with at any time during the training. This alters the atmosphere of the room, since it ceases being a neutral space where magic happens and becomes a gallery of the sensations and memories brought by each participant, to which the memories built in the work together will be added. This also forms part of the work of mimesis of people since the printed photographs of those observed will also occupy space on the walls of the work room.

Methodologically, the first work is a physical, muscular warm-up that dilates the actor's bodies and expands their energies. After having entered this state of expansion and susceptibility, the images are observed. This leaves the observers more open to being affected by what they see; a zone of turbulence and friction can be entered; the actors can react with their bodies to allow what is observed to be embodied. There should be an obsession with details and an attempt to be as faithful as possible, because although it will never become a copy, in these attempts, this different energy is generated, this third party which will be the material of the creative work.

– Mimesis of the word: It is important to emphasize that the name of this technique is *mimesis of the word* and not of texts. More than an attempt to understand the logic of a text, it works with words, without conducting an analytical review of a text. Rather, it seeks an affective relationship with it in a work in which words are triggers of images and sensations that vibrate in the artist's body. In this sense, mimesis becomes a dance of words.

It is necessary to understand how to work with words; Sometimes it can be by repeating a single word; at times it may be by repeating an entire text; at times a phrase, at times by singing a phrase and even shouting it; other times another person may read the words, etc. How words become images should be explored, and it should be learned which methodology functions. All of this depends on the relation of the text with the person who works with it.

It is not necessary to flee from the illustrative when working with the word because the body has a different time: the text may change its meaning and the body may still be in the preceding action, being slower or faster. They may travel on two parallel tracks that do not need to coincide; each should be allowed to develop at its own pace.

The purpose of the mimesis of the word is to have the word propose a poetic construction in the body. The word is not only understood as a unit of written language, but as a textual approach, whether poetic or not¹⁹ (Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).

– Mimesis of monuments: This research was born during Raquel S. Hirson's doctoral studies. Her first intention was to work with the mimesis of the word using texts by her great-grandfather, the Brazilian poet Alphonsus de Guimaraens (1870-1921), however, during the process, Raquel's great-grandmother's house became more and more present in her memory and this led her to work with these memories in the studio. She would dance not only the façade of the building, but also the life contained in it; the old boards, the mould that competed with the termites to destroy the walls, the yellow pages of the books that no one read anymore as a metaphor for Alphonsus's own life, which also slowly deteriorated to death (Hirson, 2012).

The memory of my great grandmother's house, a large house in Minas Gerais from the beginning of the 20th century. The creaking of floorboards of the work room brought me to the restoration of the boards of that house and with it what I would come to call mimesis of monuments. Only later did I realize the coincidence with Proust's involuntary memory. I danced the images from this house, from the bricks, from the cement, from the wood, until reaching the termites, mould, the water that penetrated the wood. I took this trip in memory, but later I built a procedure for real observation of monuments (home, building, tree, wall, etc.) and of what is this body-monument from the lines, the vectors, the weight, because all this is in the observed body. From this starting point, a fantasy observation was born of what lives inside the monument and what it brings beyond the static that is seen. What it brings of life and what can it bring from movement²⁰ (Hirson, 2018, s/n).

From this procedure arises a way of observing and being affected by the city as a generator of images, which can be experienced in the studio to be used in scenic creation. The deconstruction of the play Alphonsus, Raquel S. Hirson, culminates by demonstrating a scene in which she mimics the house of her great-grandmother being demolished. It is not possible to describe what was observed because of the simplicity of the actions. This contrasted with the power that emanated from the body, which was slowly unravelling; a human body that emanated something *non-human* (the old and dilapidated house being demolished), which slowly broke down and

agonized many deaths. In any case, this description is a metaphor, since what is written is only a subjective profile of what has been lived and cannot replace the value of an experience.

“The relationship with monuments changes substantially, being appreciated as pieces of value that represent the grandeur of the (historical) past that must be preserved”²¹ (Lourés Seoane, 2001, p. 142). The term *monument* has been adopted, not because of the grandeur it denotes, but because it refers to objects that become symbols of the past and that at the same time create new affective relationships with people. These monuments are spaces of memory made concrete in stone, wood, metal and other materials, creating the habitat of the cities where most of the human beings live. It is a way of revaluing everyday relationships to reflect on their impact on the lives of the human beings that inhabit these spaces. Some examples may be: the summer house from childhood, the tree where the children were awaited after school, the República metro station in Santiago de Chile, where student protests began in 2019, a fence broken during protests in Ecuador in the same year, walls with bullet marks from the Spanish civil war in Barcelona, etc., because they are spaces of the social and intimate history of humanity that do not need a plaque to remember their relationships with the past, because its power reverberates in the bodies. This reverberation can also be worked on, developed, and used in artistic creation through mimesis.

– Mimesis of the voice: This is a study related to the work of the mimesis of people, and requires a lot of time to listen and experiment. The recordings must be listened to insistently to find the rhythm, the *tempo*, the cadence, the accent, and the intonation; the phrases must also be repeated until being able to, in some way, join the two voices, the one heard and the one mimetized. In addition, it is necessary to find words and phrases that trigger the voice, that can help to find this melody of the character, to be able to get it back if it is lost during the improvisational work.

Raquel S. Hirson (2006), in her book *Tal qual apanhei do pé*²² tells about the countless hours she spent listening to the recordings she had made of people who participated in her research, searching for where their voices came from and trying to recover their cadence and melody. Some of these mimeses were used for the characters in the play *Café com queijo*²³.

An interesting anecdote about corporal mimesis is that, 20 years after the field research was conducted in the villages, its creators returned to the same places to present the play mentioned above, and, although some of the people had died, the relatives who saw the play broke into tears with emotion when they saw how their relatives were *reincarnated* in the bodies of the actors and actresses. In a scene from the documentary *Café com Queijo – uma viagem para além da cena*, which recorded this return trip, the relatives of one of the investigated people asked Raquel to sing the song that her elderly grandmother used to sing in her native language. Surprised, they could not understand how it was possible to hear the voice and song of their relative in the actress who visited her house 20 years ago (Café..., 2019).

During the mimesis courses it is not possible to perform the deep and meticulous work required to find the mimesis of the voice, however, it is possible to make an approximation so that the researchers can approach the range of possibilities that this technique offers.

– Mimesis of music: This is a relatively recent field, developed particularly by performing artists related to the area of music. Like the mimesis of the word, the research focuses on a search for the images that sound brings, such as emotional/affective stimuli and on the dance of these images. The intention is not to try to dance the sounds, nor to go for or against the rhythm and melody, but rather to be able to explore other imaginary layers (images) of the work with music. This exploration is being carried out by musicians/performers who seek a way to express their emotional relationships with music through theatre.

This brief explanation does not intend to limit the fields of action of corporal mimesis, to the contrary, it tries to show examples of creativity. As shown, mimesis is a research path that is open to many possibilities and that remains receptive to new explorations.

Beyond Technique

In the arts, techniques and methodologies are paths for exploration that do not lead to a safe harbour since, the very moment a technique becomes quite useful, it can become fossilized in its mechanization and no

longer serve. So, one must look for new ways to find oneself, new limits to break or new paths to navigate.

As Ariane Mnouchkine said (1974 apud Drain, 1995, p. 125), “[...] the problem is we are very much beginners within this process. For each show we’re beginners. If we don’t now want authors, it’s because an author never considers himself a beginner [...]”, that is to say, that no matter how many years of experience one has and no matter how precisely one follows the rules of a technique, the work material is always new, the actor’s body changes constantly and each approximation has the same possibility of getting it right or wrong.

There is a method: training; discovering and codifying the potential energies, observing; vocal imitation through recording, text memorization; corporal imitation from memory; photos and notes, and finally, the creation of an organic score. It is not always organic, and this will depend fundamentally on the actor, no matter how many methods there are to help him [...]. There is something in this connection that is not taught. There are fundamental tools, but they are not always enough²⁴ (Hirson, 2006, p. 138).

For each person and each situation, the way of entering the flow of the character created is different. That is why it’s necessary to experiment different methods and stimuli to provoke it, starting with movements that can be both internal (such as those that arise from the throat, stomach, or gaze), or external (the ones arising from the hips, feet, a shoulder or any part of the body). In LUME Teatro the characters are not studied from a psychological structure, as in other more classical theatrical styles, but through the body; intensities, relationships, and affects are recreated which seek to increase the potential of life.

Mimesis is useful for any aesthetic, as was clearly demonstrated by the work of one of the participants of the 2020 workshop, who used a clown technique together with the work of mimesis of the word. The independence of the aesthetics is not a unique quality of corporal mimesis, it is rather a search of all of LUME Theater’s works and investigations, which becomes evident when working with highly recognizable aesthetics, as is the case of the clown or contemporary dance, which use the various techniques investigated and shared by the group.

A Revealing Example

Conducting this research during fieldwork included participation in the courses *Mimesis corporéa* in 2019 and *Mimesis corporéa aprofundamento* [Deepening corporal mimesis] in 2020. The following text is an excerpt of a work diary that describes in detail an exercise carried out during the *Mimesis Corporéa* course in 2019. This technical and emotional description sought to improve understanding, of both the methodology and the potency of this work for performing artists:

For about two years an idea has been emerging; to produce a performance about María Luisa Gómez de la Torre, my great-aunt. She had a feverish and fertile life, and among her many struggles, the most important was certainly to create, together with her partner Dolores Cacuango, a Spanish-Quechua bilingual education system for the aboriginal people of the Ecuadorian highlands, in a historic moment in Ecuador, in which the lack of rights of the native peoples was a common denominator, in such a way that they had to begin this project clandestinely.

Before conducting the Corporal Mimesis workshop, Raquel S. Hirson asked the participants to bring 10-15 images and 3 texts related to their personal or research interest. I decided to look at those materials that felt connected to my research: photos of María Luisa, Dolores Cacuango, paintings of my city (Quito) by the surrealist painters Endara Crown, and Luigi Stornaiolo, as well as other images related to my life: a photo with my grandmother, a painting of the 'Butterfly Boat', a hummingbird, the Mandala of Destiny, a photograph of the Cotopaxi volcano, and others. These are images that represent me and my relationship with this distant relative.

The texts included parts of a letter from María Luisa, well known phrases from a speech by Dolores Cacuango, and a song in Quichua, one of the few that became famous during my childhood.

One of the exercises that moved me the most and vibrated within me, as an actress and as a person, although it is difficult to draw a dividing line, was the mimesis of the word exercise. I was lucky enough to be the first in the group of artists/students to propose the material, and I say lucky because I started immediately after the demanding psychophysical warm-up that is not limited to exercise, but is an active exploration of memory, of remembrances and of sensations through the body. It was then that Raquel asked me to look at the photograph of Dolores Cacuango (Figure 1). In that state of openness and sensitivity, I observed the wrinkles and the distant gaze of an old woman, a woman from the moor who was used to seeing the mountains and living in the hills.



Figure 1 – María Luisa Gómez de la Torre and Dolores Cacuango, photo used for the workshop of Corporal Mimesis, year 2019. Photo: Rolf Blomberg (1969).
Source: Ecuador (2021).

This is how I began this exercise: looking afar, far from the studio, feeling these mountains in the distance. Then, Raquel began to read the texts from Dolores Cacuango that I had given to her: ‘We are like grains of quinoa, if we are alone, the wind carries us far, far, faaaaaaaaar.’ I felt my stomach contract, my throat tighten and my eyes water as my head repeated ‘alone’, and thus, turgid as a grain, ‘the wind carries afar’, my recoiled body moved around the studio without control, then fell to the ground, then got up [...].

Raquel: ‘But if we are united in a sack, the wind does nothing,’ slowly my feet take root, my gaze returns to my companions and I feel that my hands want to collect their gazes. I fight the wind. Raquel continues ‘The wind does nothing. We will wobble, but it will not bring us down.’ Raquel repeats single words or small phrases and my body responds with a falling-dropping dance, carried away without will, with enrooted legs and hands that gather.

Raquel continues ‘We are like straw from the moor that is cut and grows back again’. I feel my body expanding trying to reach the highest point and fall to the ground like cut straw ‘and we will sow the world with moor straw’, then I feel that my spine is the straw being born that comes out of my stretched arms, my gaze seeks the gaze of each one of my colleagues.

Raquel repeats words and short phrases from the orations while my body responds, creating a dance of reactions, until she stops saying the phrases, which continue to be repeated in my body, without order, without apparent meaning, but with the same energy with which they were born.

Then, Raquel puts on the song ‘Niña Tamyá’ by the group Jayac, to which I dance the actions created before without my head having space to think or judge.

I am only reacting to the words that are no longer there and to the music that is accompanying me, my strength, and my sensations.

I finish the exercise exhausted and moved, few times have I felt an acting work with such commitment and so present. The questions are many: is this my first personal dance? How can I maintain this level of attention, sensitivity, listening, energy, so that it becomes material for my work on stage? A tentative response appears: I must keep working [...].

Notes

- ¹ From the original: “Não devemos esquecer, na sedução do olhar, o seu poder de irradiar sobre o corpo todo. Se é verdade que a reflexão especular do corpo tem a sua origem na reversibilidade do olhar, então é o corpo todo que se torna olhar” (Gil, 2005, p. 56-57).
- ² From the original: “[...] um processo de tecnificação de ações do cotidiano a partir da observação, imitação e codificação de um conjunto de ações físicas e vocais retiradas de contextos pré-determinados, decorrentes de estudos das ações de certos tipos de pessoas com características específicas. Ora, a questão colocada foi: será possível uma elaboração técnica a partir da imitação direta de ações físicas e vocais de pessoas diversas” (Burnier, 2009, p. 62).
- ³ From the original: ‘Mímesis’ deriva de ‘mímós’ y ‘mimeisthai’, términos que se refieren originariamente al cambio de personalidad que algunos fieles experimentaban en ciertos rituales, cuando sentían que en ellos se encarnaban seres de naturaleza no humana – divina o animal – o seres de otro tiempo. ‘Mimeisthai’ no es tanto imitar como representar, encarnar a un ser alejado de uno (Bozal, 1987 apud Gutiérrez Canales, 2016, p. 98).
- ⁴ From the original: Las muchachas, luego de honrar con alabanzas a Apolo, a Leto y a la certera flechadora Artemisa, entonan himnos evocando las hazañas del pasado, y pueden mimetizar la voz y las actitudes de todos los hombres, al punto de confundir al oyente sobre quién realmente se encuentra hablando. Tal es la excelencia de su dulce canto (Bozal, 1987 apud Gutiérrez Canales, 2016, p. 99).
- ⁵ From the original: No estamos en presencia de una simple imitación, sino de la encarnación de cualidades identitarias de una alteridad sobre cuerpos diferentes y al interior de un templo. Es una suerte de transfiguración que sorprende precisamente por su carácter inédito y mágico (Gutiérrez Canales, 2016, p. 99).

- ⁶ From the original: “Atualmente, quando preciso definir Mímesis corpórea em pouquíssimas palavras, digo que é uma recriação poética de algo que se observa” (Hirson, 2018, p. s/n).
- ⁷ From the original: “Mímesis corpórea como um processo que parte da observação e do encontro entre corpos, corpos e imagens, sejam elas geradas a partir de materiais audiovisuais, seja a partir de textos, da relação com objetos ou daquilo que emerge da memória” (Souza apud Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).
- ⁸ From the original: “Mímesis corpórea trabalhava com procedimentos que visavam ampliar a capacidade do ator de deixar-se afetar pelo encontro com corpos” (Giannetti apud Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).
- ⁹ From the original: “El objeto de estudio pasa del análisis de un perceptor aislado en un mundo predeterminado a la indagación de su relación que, necesariamente le modifica de manera constante” (Sofía, 2015, p. 45).
- ¹⁰ From the original: “Para trabalhar essa ideia de ‘coexistência de projeção e porosidade em relação ao externo’, Ferracini criou o conceito de corpo-subjétil, que é ‘esse diluído-projetado de sujeito e objeto’” (Ferracini, 2009, p. 125-126 apud Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).
- ¹¹ From the original: “Primeiramente deve-se saber observar. Esta observação não é mais a observação natural de quando éramos pequenos, mas uma observação profissional, precisa, que demanda uma competência no métier. Isto significa que ao observar o geral e o detalhe, o ator observa uma série de elementos precisos, informações importantes para seu trabalho” (Burnier, 2009, p. 182).
- ¹² From the original: “[...] que o meu EU ‘emprego aqui sem explicitar a noção de eu’ seja não rígido e imutável, mas que tenha um certo estado de plasticidade, de indeterminação mesmo, de indefinição, que o torna propício a transformações” (Gil, 2012, p. 3).
- ¹³ From the original: “Uma ampliação em nossa capacidade de afetar e ser afetado, gerando um estado intensivo onde o outro deixa de ser o objeto, o fora, que mapeio e decifro e passa a se tornar uma presença viva. O ‘entre’ se instala e com ele todo um campo de forças e intensidades se propaga, criando entre os corpos um campo magnético, um duplo devir” (Colla apud Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).
- ¹⁴ From the original: “A tensão desse paradoxo que mobiliza e impulsiona a potência de criação, na medida em que nos coloca em crise e nos impõe a necessidade de criarmos formas de expressão para as sensações intransmissíveis por

meio das representações de que dispomos” (Rolnik, 2011, p. 13 apud Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).

- 15 From the original: “O devir-outro parte, portanto de uma situação já instável, de disposição para o devir. O corpo deve ser definido como um complexo de possíveis, a cada momento dado: vira-se para outra coisa que não é ele próprio” (Gil, 2005, p. 294).
- 16 From the original: “Burnier questionou os atores: ‘Vocês querem falar do Brasil. Querem ‘cantar’ através do trabalho de ator a ‘melodia’ desse povo. Pois bem: vocês conhecem este povo? Já o viram? Já o ouviram? Já sentiram seu aroma? Já conviveram com ele? Por exemplo, já compartilharam uma ‘janta’ composta exclusivamente de farinha de mandioca e água na floresta amazônica? Ou uma ‘sopa de osso’ em Paran (Tocantins), ou uma sopa de chuchu em Urucua (serto de Minas Gerais)? J sentiram fome? Se a resposta a estas questes for ‘no’, voces no tem propriedade para representar este povo. No tero condioes de realizar um retrato fiel desse povo, ou pelo menos de parte dele. Para este fim, voces tem que conhec-lo” (Souza, 1998, p. 99-100).
- 17 From the original: “A Mimesis corporea  trabalhada como desencadeadora de processos e de experiencias do vivido em campo, experimentada como um procedimento para re-criar outras relaoes com a cidade e alimentar as relaoes arte e vida para alem da cena” (Gianneti apud Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).
- 18 From the original: “Pude, ento, unir a observaao de suas fotografias  observaao do encontro, retomada com auxilio das anotaoes dos diarios de trabalho, ainda no citados, mas fundamentais para a memoria do vivido em sala e em campo. A ediao completa une as fotografias como ncoras, estaoes; as anotaoes repletas de imagens e sensaoes do encontro as conectam; os textos so escolhidos como sobreposioes que por vezes conduzem as aoes e por vezes as alimentam e recheiam; e a respiraao  o ligamen que regula o tempo e que traz memorias dos dias de encontro com Dona Maria” (Hirson, 2018, p. s/n).
- 19 From the original: “O objetivo da mimesis da palavra  fazer com que a palavra se proponha uma construao poetica no corpo. A palavra no somente compreendida como unidade da linguagem escrita, mas como uma abordagem textual, seja ela poetica ou no” (Hirson et al., 2016, p. s/n).
- 20 From the original: “A memoria da casa de minha bisavo, casaro mineiro do inicio do seculo XX. O ranger das tabuas do piso da sala e trabalho me trouxeram a atualizaao das tabuas daquela casa e com ela o que eu viria a denominar

mímesis de monumentos. Somente depois me apercebi da coincidência da memória involuntária em Proust. Dancei as imagens dessa casa, dos tijolos, do cimento, da madeira, até chegar aos cupins, fungos, a água que penetra na madeira. Fiz essa viagem na memória, mas posteriormente construí um procedimento de observação real de monumentos (casa, prédio, árvore, muro, etc.) e do que é este corpomonumento a partir das linhas, dos vetores, do peso, pois tudo isso está no corpo observado. Deste ponto inicial nasceu a observação fantástica, do que vive dentro do monumento e do que ele traz além do estático que se vê. O que ele traz de vida e o que ele pode trazer de movimento” (Hirson, 2018, p.s/n).

- ²¹ From the original: La relación con los monumentos cambia sustancialmente, siendo apreciados como piezas de valor que representan la grandiosidad del pasado (histórico) que es preciso conservar (Lourés Seoane, 2001, p. 142).
- ²² In English: Just like I got it from the tree.
- ²³ *Coffee with cheese*, a play premiered in the year 1999 last performed in 2019.
- ²⁴ From the original: “Há um método: treinamento; descoberta e codificação de energias potenciais, observação; imitação vocal através de gravação, memorização do texto; imitação corporal a partir da memória; fotos e anotações e por fim, criação de uma partitura orgânica. Nem sempre é orgânica e isso vai depender fundamentalmente do ator, por mais métodos que haja para auxiliá-lo [...]. Há neste enleio um algo que não se ensina. Há ferramentas fundamentais, mas nem sempre suficientes” (Hirson, 2006, p. 138).

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This original paper, translated by Ángel Enriquez and copyedited by Jeffrey Hoff, is also published in Portuguese in this issue of the journal.

Received October 20, 2020

Accepted on March 20, 2021

Editor in charge: Ana Sabrina Mora

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