



Copeau and Bing's Childhood Laboratories: a group of children, the embryo of the *École du Vieux Colombier*

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ABSTRACT – Copeau and Bing's Childhood Laboratories: a group of children, the embryo of the *École du Vieux Colombier* – The article presents the results of research on the child as a model in the theatrical pedagogy from the concretization, by Jacques Copeau and Suzanne Bing, of *childhood laboratories*. One of these laboratories – the children's group of the Club de Gymnastique Rythmique, which is considered as the embryo of the *École du Vieux Colombier* – is highlighted to emphasize the role of Bing and the importance of children's play in Copeau's theatrical pedagogy. It is concluded that this laboratory was extremely relevant for the pedagogical preparation of Copeau and Bing as well as for the opening of research horizons, such as mime and animal imitation, later deepened at the *École du Vieux Colombier*.

Keywords: **Childhood. Theatrical Pedagogy. Jacques Copeau. Suzanne Bing. Actor.**

RÉSUMÉ – Laboratoires d'Enfance de Copeau et Bing: un groupe d'enfants, embryon de l'École du Vieux Colombier – L'article présente les résultats de recherches sur l'enfant comme modèle dans la pédagogie théâtrale à partir de la création, par Jacques Copeau et Suzanne Bing, de *laboratoires de l'enfance*. L'un de ces laboratoires - le groupe d'enfants du Club de Gymnastique Rythmique, considéré l'embryon de l'École du Vieux Colombier – est évoqué afin de souligner le rôle de Bing et l'importance du jeu de l'enfant dans la pédagogie de Copeau. On en conclut que ce laboratoire a été extrêmement pertinent pour la préparation pédagogique de Copeau et Bing ainsi que pour l'ouverture d'horizons de recherche, tels que le mime et l'imitation d'animaux, approfondis par la suite à l'École du Vieux Colombier.

Mots-clés: **Enfance. Pédagogie Théâtrale. Jacques Copeau. Suzanne Bing. Acteur.**

RESUMO – Laboratórios da Infância de Copeau e Bing: um grupo de crianças, embrião da *École du Vieux Colombier* – O artigo apresenta resultados de pesquisa sobre a criança como modelo na pedagogia teatral a partir da concretização, por Jacques Copeau e Suzanne Bing, de *laboratórios da infância*. Evidencia-se um desses laboratórios – o grupo de crianças do *Club de Gymnastique Rythmique*, considerado o embrião da *École du Vieux Colombier* – a fim de se ressaltar o papel de Bing e a importância da brincadeira infantil na pedagogia teatral de Copeau. Conclui-se que esse laboratório foi de extrema relevância para a preparação pedagógica de Copeau e Bing bem como para a abertura de horizontes de pesquisa, como a mímica e a imitação de animais, posteriormente aprofundados na *École du Vieux Colombier*.
Palavras-chave: **Infância. Pedagogia Teatral. Jacques Copeau. Suzanne Bing. Ator.**

Introduction

According to some scholars, Jacques Copeau is the man who liberated the scene from its decorative elements, the theatrical director of the emblematic naked stage. According to others, he was the founder of the school in which Etienne Decroux learned the foundations of that which would later become *dramatic corporeal mime*. There are also those who point to him as the man who took the dramatic text away from the actors and covered their faces with cloths so that they could express themselves only through their bodies. Others point to him as the driving force behind the great movement of theatrical decentralization that took place in France in the first half of the 20th century. All these views about Jacques Copeau are legitimate, but they sometimes leave in the shadows people, efforts and experiments that, even if forgotten, were essential in the set of *great achievements* and *great principles* relegated by this and other great masters of western theatre to us, theatre people of today. In this sense, one such set of efforts and experiments by Jacques Copeau, assisted by Suzanne Bing, is characterised by a fine attention to children's play in situations that are here designated as *childhood laboratories*.

And what did these laboratories consist of? In short, these laboratories were characterised as situations in which Suzanne Bing and Jacques Copeau experimented and observed a series of theatrical practices with children. Practices that they would later apply to their actors in training at the *École du Vieux Colombier* (1920-1924), and even to professional actors, as in the case of the training of the *Copiaus* troupe (1925-1929) once the director and his troupe decided to close their school in Paris and set off for a new theatrical adventure in Burgundy.

In this article, one of those laboratorial situations will be approached, one of those *childhood laboratories*, the one which consisted in a course of theatre and rhythmic gymnastics carried out with a group of children in the Rhythmic Gymnastics Club of Vaugirard Street, in Paris, between 1915 and 1916, for about 6 months. Framework in which Jacques Copeau and Suzanne Bing initiate themselves in the pedagogical activity and experiment with innovative theatrical exercises, carrying out what Suzanne Bing summarised as their propaedeutics¹.

The central questions of the present article are formulated as follows: what pedagogical learnings and what research horizons were opened for Copeau and Bing from their experimentation with the group of children of the *Club de Gymnastique Rythmique* of rue Vaugirard between 1915 and 1916? What was Bing's importance in this experimentation? By trying to get closer to answers throughout the present text, we will be able to see that, even though Copeau and Bing's initial objective with the work was not reached, a set of findings and practices emerged from this specific laboratory situation, showing that, in artistic research, the fact that an objective is not exactly reached does not in any way mean a loss, because, as in the case presented here, the practice presents new research horizons as or more interesting than those glimpsed a priori. Basically, what we can perceive, from this experiential decal of Copeau and Bing in 1915-1916, is the way in which a theatrical pedagogy originates and distinguishes itself from other understandings about the same problem, in this case, that of the actor's training and the consequent renewal of the theatre.

This text derives from the research I conducted in order to obtain my PhD degree, whose thesis — entitled *L'enfant comme modèle dans la pédagogie théâtrale. Dans les approches de Jacques Copeau, Jacques Lecoq et Philippe Gaulier* (Scalari, 2021a) — carried out under the supervision of Josette Féral, was defended in January 2021 at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris III and funded by the CAPES Full Doctorate Abroad Programme. In the research in question, I investigated the way through which the child became a model, understood as a 'speculative instrument' (Black, 1962), from which three theatrical pedagogues — Jacques Copeau, Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier — rethink and reformulate issues in the field of actor's training. The research was characterised by an ethnographic approach, with field work through practical training of the author at the *École Philippe Gaulier*, also relying on broad documental research in unpublished material about the *École du Vieux Colombier* available at the *Fonds Copeau* of the National Library of France, with interviews with figures involved with the studied pedagogies and with extensive bibliographical research.

This article is inscribed in the domain of Theatre Studies, more specifically in the field of Theatre Pedagogy, although it presents interrelations with Theatre History itself. Having Jacques Copeau's work as the centre of

this reflection, it is important to emphasise that the figure of the French director has been revisited to think the fields of Actor's Work and Theatre Pedagogy, whether the latter has the training of actors as purpose or not. In this context, it is worth mentioning the publications: *Copeau-Lecoq-Mnouchkine: une lignée théâtrale du jeu de l'acteur* (Freixe, 2014) in France; *Pedagogia Teatral e Cuidado de Si* (Icle, 2010) in Brazil; *Il progetto educativo del teatro di Jacques Copeau e l'Educazione ala Teatralità* (Miglioni, 2009) and *L'educazione ala Teatralità: il gioco drammatico* (Oliva, 2010), the last two in Italy.

In addition to the above books, Copeau's theatrical pedagogy has also been highlighted in articles in scientific journals in Brazil and abroad. Thus, the theatrical improvisation and the poetics of acting investigated by Copeau in *Vieux Colombier* have been discussed in publications by Borba (2009), Faleiro, Giannetti and Bertolli (2009), Faleiro (2008), Freixe (2017). From the point of view of Copeau's influence in Latin America and Brazil, the articles by Javier (1997) and Riechel, Soler and Faleiro (2010) also stand out. Often relegated to the background, the work of Suzanne Bing alongside Copeau is duly highlighted by Doyon (2019), who questions the erasure of Bing from the perspective of gender studies.

This article contributes to the research on Jacques Copeau's theatrical pedagogy by examining the traces of a specific experiment, in order to elucidate how the child, and more specifically a given group of children, generated horizons of technical exploration that were later transported to the training of adult actors at the *École du Vieux Colombier*. The text helps to fill a gap in this field of studies, because, although often mentioned as important, the child's play in the pedagogy of Copeau and Bing not infrequently lacks concrete examples of the laboratory situations that enabled specific research on this element. As argued by Icicle (2010, p. 53), 'Copeau believed that renewal would come from the outside, that is, only those who were not impregnated by the theatre could save it' (my translation)². In this article, I address one of those experiments conducted from the outside, where Copeau and Bing could experiment with figures not impregnated by the theatrical habits of their time, practices that, firstly *from outside*, enter the universe of the actor's work, remaining active to date in schools that inscribe themselves in the tradition of the researches of the *Vieux Colombier*.

Although this article is founded on the field of Theatre Studies, it can be read in an interface with what is contemporarily called *cultures of childhood* (Ferreira; Hartmann; Machado, 2017) and in dialogue with the field of *Childhood Studies / Children's Studies* (Brooklyn College /CUNY).

Suzanne Bing – from inspiration to act



Figure 1 – Suzanne Bing.

Source: Fonds Copeau photo (BNF, Richelieu site), file on the Vieux Colombier School.

We know that theatre history has often been silent about the great women who created the conditions for great men of theatre to create and develop their work, their aesthetics, their methodologies, etc. One of these women, without whom the emblematic *École du Vieux Colombier* might not even have existed, was Suzanne Bing.

Bing already belonged to the world of theatre before coming into contact with the *Vieux Colombier*. Between 1905 and 1907, she successfully followed a training course at the *Conservatoire de Musique et Déclamation* in Paris. A few years later, living in Berlin with her husband Edgard Varèse, she works on productions by Max Reinhardt. In June 1913, Bing auditioned for the *Théâtre du Vieux Colombier*, and Copeau, ‘impressed by the quality of her voice and the discretion of her performance’ (Copeau, 1991, p. 568)³, decided to hire her for his company. Bing would reach an im-

portance that only names such as Charles Dullin or Louis Jouvet had in Copeau's troupe. In addition to her qualities as an actress, she was the figure who was most deeply involved in the pedagogical branch envisioned by Copeau, the most valuable part of his theatrical renewal project. Researcher Raphaëlle Doyon sheds light on the nature of the relationship between Copeau and Bing, which lasted for several years after the opening of the Vieux Colombier: 'emotionally invested beings, equally and alternately in a professional, pedagogical and personal love affair' (Doyon, 2016)⁴. Copeau, for his part, acknowledges Bing's faith, intelligence and selflessness, highlighting the role she played in the creation of his school:

When, in 1921, I proposed the creation of a Vieux Colombier School parallel to the theatre, to nurture a new generation of actors, I asked Suzanne Bing to help me. Without her, the project I had formed would probably never have come to fruition. For more than ten years, she took on the brunt of a thankless task. She largely sacrificed her own career as an interpreter and spent her strength to the limit. Through her experiments, tirelessly repeated and developed, she provided me with the elements of a method for the training of young actors (Copeau, 1999, p. 32)⁵.

If Copeau is inspired by children's games and continuously takes up the experiments — observations and theatre courses — that he carried out with children in his projects and conferences on the Vieux Colombier School, it was up to Suzanne Bing to verify these intuitions in practice through pedagogical actions whose express purpose was to observe the benefits of these children's games for actor training. Copeau was a visionary who found in the child the power to reform the theatre. However, because he was often too busy to realise each of the visions that came to him, when it came to moving from thought to act, he delegated many tasks to those around him. It then fell to Bing to move from observation to pedagogical action with children on two specific occasions: the first, on which this text is focused, took place in Paris in 1916, at the Gymnastics Club on Vaugirard Street; the second, in New York in 1918, at a Montessori oriented school for children. Although in these two situations Copeau observed and even conducted working sessions with the children themselves, it was Suzanne Bing who ensured the regularity of these experiments, not only for having taken upon herself the responsibility of conducting most of the theatre courses for the children involved, but also for having methodically taken

precious notes on these researches and then delivered the records she made to Copeau. This material then formed the basis for experiments that would later appear both in Copeau's theoretical texts on his pedagogical research and in the practices of the *École du Vieux-Colombier*.

In both experiments there is a fine line between the intention of training children for the theatre and studying them for the training of adult actors. Thomas John Donahue (2008, p. 110) notes that, in the 1916 experiment, Copeau was primarily interested in the artistic and professional outcomes of theatre classes for children, that is, in the concept of training actors from childhood. Suzanne Bing, on the other hand, was notably more sensitive to the process, which opened the horizon of these works with children to, from this, reflect on and structure the training of adult actors. In any case, the first perspective could not be reached, and it is with young actors that the results of this research on children will be explored later. The transfer of this rich experience with children to the work with apprentice actors concretely will be made by Suzanne Bing. As we will see below, her work with children left deep marks in the practices of improvisation and mime at the *École du Vieux Colombier*, two great horizons of research on acting opened by this emblematic school in the twentieth century.

The embryo of the *École du Vieux Colombier*

However, this preliminary training should bear good fruit. Training that, by the end of the 1913-1914 season, could be considered to have reached maximum efficiency. I say: training. Not: education. My experience at that time set me on the path of certain principles of education. But the only result really achieved was a bond created between my young group and me, the confidence they now had in me, the educational virtue in the widest sense, of work, of life together, under the direction, under the influence of a single personality who, without sparing himself, gave himself for their benefit. I felt from then on that there was a real, living principle there, capable of generating something great and lasting. I had engaged my whole group for three years [...]; I was thinking of spending the summer studying the means of setting up the school when the war started (Copeau, 1979, p. 254-255, my translation)⁶.

For Jacques Copeau, the idea of theatre is always linked to that of a school. The training he conducted with his actors in Limon in the summer of 1913 further strengthened this conviction, and he would have liked to

continue working with them in the search for a technical and ethical renewal of the actor, starting from a more radical deepening of his school project. The outbreak of war in 1914 prevented him from fulfilling the task in practical terms immediately after his troupe's first season. However, his ideas about the school continued to develop, and if Copeau was not able to train his own actors at this time, we could say that he took advantage of this interval to train himself, and it is in this sense that he went to meet Edward Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze in 1915. According to Copeau, the need for the creation of a school became even stronger after seeing Jaques-Dalcroze working in Switzerland: 'I will write to him one day about the "School," which is the first and most important of my present concerns' (Copeau, 1999, p. 92, my translation)⁷, he writes to Craig on 6 December 1915. When he left Geneva to return to Paris, Copeau accepted an invitation for a practical experiment in a place that disseminated Jaques-Dalcroze's methods to the Parisian public, the *Club de Gymnastique Rythmique*, at 52 rue de Vaugirard, in the 6th *arrondissement* of the French capital. The proposal: to give classes for children that *as recreation* — this was the excuse — would mix rhythmic gymnastics and theatre. It was not yet his school, but, as he admitted to Jacques Rivière in a letter, the embryo of his school⁸. At the core of the embryo of the *École du Vieux Colombier* is then a group of children.

Jacques Copeau's notebook. Step one.

Monday 1 November 1915:

On several occasions, I had already had talks about creating a children's group at the *Club de Gymnastique Rythmique*, 52, rue de Vaugirard, which was the first draught of a school for the theatre. The great difficulty has always been the recruitment of children. On Monday, November 1, at 2 p.m., Paulet Thévenaz introduced me to one of his friends, Mme. de Manziarly [...], a forty-year-old Russian woman, involved in much charity work, and passionate about the cause of children. Mme de Manziarly advised us, in order to facilitate recruitment, not to mention our real aims⁹, and simply to open, at the *rue de Vaugirard*, every Thursday to begin with, a sort of device where the children would be recreated. By means of this slight subterfuge, she took it upon herself to bring us a dozen children. Afterwards, it will be possible to talk to the mothers about the aptitudes of their children, thus arousing their interest, and decide on some of them (Copeau, 1999, p. 93, my translation)¹⁰.

According to Copeau, he accepts the invitation to this work ‘so that something exists’ (Copeau, 1999, p. 93, my translation)¹¹, in reference to the impossibility of engaging these children directly in a professionalisation program as well as to that of working with his own theatre company during the war. But if, on the one hand, this experiment fills a certain void caused by the conflict between European powers, on the other hand, it makes it possible for Copeau to experiment in a field that is dear to him, the child’s play. As we can at this point realise, Copeau had long been interested in children. He had just returned from Switzerland, where he had seen Jaques-Dalcroze working with his children, and one can imagine that this experimentation at the Parisian gymnastics club materialised what had hitherto only been a project. With the example of the Swiss master at his disposal and curious about the contributions of rhythmic to actor training, Copeau decides to undertake this work with children. The main objective of the experiment was to find a possible connection between Dalcrozian rhythmic action and children’s games, because, according to Copeau, this could be the source of a new method to train actors, his personal method of work. In other words, the work in the Gymnastics Club was the practical field where he could experiment with some of the children’s games that he loved, from which he wanted to recover certain elements for the training of actors. Thus, he puts these elements in parallel with research in rhythmic gymnastics, which he considers a fundamental corporal discipline for the actor to develop a sense of rhythm and of ‘internalising music in the organs’ (Copeau, 1999, p. 166, my translation)¹².

This experiment took place between November 1915 and April 1916. The classes were weekly and were based on a programme whose sequence was defined beforehand: 1. technical gymnastics, taught by Paulet Thévenaz; 2. solfeggio, by Lily de Lanux; 3. rhythmic gymnastics, by Paulet Thévenaz; 4. games, initially with Mme Thévenaz in charge and then entrusted to Jacques Copeau and Suzanne Bing. The group, which started with eight participants and grew to 28, included children between the ages of 6 and 14 years. Jeanne de Lanux and Suzanne Bing are assistants in all the work. Bing was, even then, the key figure in this pedagogical venture at *Vieux Colombier*. While Copeau came every fortnight to observe and conduct the exercises, Bing not only took charge of the game’s classes from the

third session onwards, but also took on the role of scribe, taking notes of all the work done, both when Copeau was absent and when he was teaching the classes himself — ‘Thanks to Suzanne and I will be able to see myself working’ (*Fonds Copeau*, my translation)¹³, Copeau writes in his Diary about the *Vieux Colombier* School. Moreover, soon after the second session, Copeau records in the same diary criticism of Paulet Thévenaz and Lily Lanux, in whom he identifies ‘goodwill’ (Copeau, 1999, p. 95, my translation), but too much ‘softness’ (Copeau, 1999, p. 96), and, testifying his complicity with his faithful collaborator, he adds: ‘There is only Suzanne Bing who understands what I want to do, and who gives herself to me with all her strength’ (Copeau, 1999, p. 96, my translation)¹⁴.

This experiment with children led by Copeau and Bing covered diverse proposals, from skill games to mime fables. A lesson plan recorded in Copeau’s notebook provides a good notion of the activities for which he and Bing were responsible:

Today, for the first time, I will lead them. Everything changes. Contact ignites in them something we had not seen before. They feel excited, exalted. I keep them in that suspension.

1° Military exercises. Alignment and walking.

2° Ball game. Throw the ball in the air and catch it without moving, body straight, heels together. Throw the ball in a circle, from one to the other, faster and faster. In line: the teacher throws the ball, without warning, trying to deceive the vigilance of each one, one or the other who must catch it and get rid of it immediately (attention, awake faculties, speed of decision, skill of hands and eyes).

All of this very quickly.

3° Quick grouping and ungrouping.

4° Sit all together when I clap a palm.

Stand up.

Skip.

Jump two, three times. Clap your hands and feet together.

Ditto, but making a sound.

5° The cat and the old mouse. I read them La Fontaine’s fable, explain it to them and lead them to do the mimicry generically (Copeau, 1999, p. 99, my translation)¹⁵.

The remarkable duality of Copeau’s personality is evidenced in these notes recorded on this day of work with the children. His domineering side

is revealed when it comes to defining the objective of this work: ‘perfectly flexible and nuanced instruments [...] which respond to the thoughts of the conductor and the master’ (Copeau, 1999, p. 98, my translation)¹⁶. For this, the requirement of strict discipline in relation to the timetable was a *sine qua non* for Copeau. The demand for discipline also extended to certain pedagogical activities proposed by Copeau, in particular *military exercises*. As noted by Guy Freixe (2014, p. 27): ‘The military model — we are at war, let us not forget — is omnipresent, both in discipline and in the gymnastic exercises he makes them perform’ (my translation)¹⁷. But if this image seems rather rigid to us, it is counterbalanced by the figure of a Copeau who appears to have a taste for fun and to be aware of his role as a facilitator as a pedagogue, elements necessary for the child to fully enter into a playful state capable of carrying them into the fiction in these games: ‘It is necessary that at the moment the exercises begin, the child feels grasped and lifted from the ground by an irresistible hand in which they can have total confidence, and that they do not release this attachment until the end of the game’ (Copeau, 1999, p. 98-99, my translation)¹⁸.

Among the exercises developed with this group of children, perhaps it was the mime of the fables of La Fontaine that generated the greatest number of developments. This work was later taken up by the *Compagnie du Vieux Colombier* in their training sessions in the United States, in the research on improvisation at the *École du Vieux Colombier* and in the work sessions of the *Copiaux* in Burgundy ten years later. In a text by Marie-Hélène Dasté (1962, p. 53) about her father, the actress recalls the long evenings that Copeau’s children spent around him listening to the fables of La Fontaine, each child having the right to choose the one they wanted to listen to the most. However, it was inspired by Jaques-Dalcroze’s exercises involving tales such as Snow White — work that consisted of verbally telling the tale and then having the children improvise movements from what they had listened to — that Copeau decided to seek out the drama and physicality that could arise from literary fiction. This was one of the main paths followed in the research on mime later at the *École du Vieux Colombier*. Below is the first record of this pioneering experiment, that is, the first proposal from which this work of mime on fables was developed, recorded by Suzanne Bing:

The cat and the old mouse. The reading amused them a lot, they understood well the words you explained to them, and they all had a happy movement when you said: 'let's try this. First of all, how does a cat walk?' They just walked in the position on all fours, it wasn't enough. 'And how does a dog walk?' Then they understand the difference, they timidly made the dog walk a bit briskly. 'And now, how does a cat walk?' They had understood and some of them got a silent, elongated walk. 'Why?' The child who answered best replied: 'So that it doesn't make noise. - Yes, so that the mice don't hear. With these few words, they were already in the drama of the fable, and alone Etiennette made an almost perfect cat. She answered that the cat stops if it hears a noise, but she stopped without thinking of listening; she understands better when you show him stopping dead in the position he was in, stretching out his ear. - Now we do the fable. Big Jean is the cat, all the others are mice. We follow the events of the fable: they retire to their burrows. 'Where are their burrows?' Everyone chooses the little room behind the pillars and a boy goes behind the curtain. The cat enters; you remind him that he is Attila, and at the same time that he is not to be heard. The mice are told several times to hide better. A bench is brought to the middle of the room in which the cat can stand and appear to be suspended. He climbs on the bench, at first barely. - He does so again, jumping up and down on four legs at the same time and without making a sound. He remains like that until you allow him to rest, suspended as you indicated, by one leg, with the rest of his body and head hanging like a rag. The rats: put their noses in the air, show their heads a little; then return to the rat's nest - with the rush, the panic that your tone communicates to them. Then they come trotting in a semicircle in front of the cat; the latter, in a single leap, is in the midst of them, who are running away, he chases one of them, and we stop there. You could feel them all in their characters (Bing apud Copeau, 1999, p. 99-100, my translation)¹⁹.

Bing's account concentrates a series of principles that were later deepened in Copeau's approach. First of all, we note that, despite Jaques-Dalcroze's influence on Copeau's proposal, the latter begins from then on to establish some differences that would later define his pedagogical identity. In some of the exercises that Copeau observed at the Jaques-Dalcroze Institute, the rhythmic master looked *a posteriori* for the movements that would correspond to the spoken words, in a rather formal and descriptive relation, sometimes remaining at the level of the narrative illustrated by the movements, which for Copeau was a 'great danger: the introduction of literature and, with it, of aesthetic pedantry' (Copeau, 1999, p. 83, my trans-

lation)²⁰. In another direction, Copeau throws these children into the realm of drama, of the physical composition of the characters, of the testing of their conflicts, in other words, into the realm of action. Even if he reads the fable, so that the children know what they are going to play, we also notice in the exercise the absence of a literary approach. In Copeau's conduct, it is not a matter of recalling words read previously, it is not questioning the meaning, or the moral conveyed by La Fontaine's fable. What is important about the fable is the theatricality that arises from it, through an entry into drama, the transformation of real space into imaginary space — 'Where are their burrows?' — and the credulity in the character's lives — 'One could feel them all in their characters.'

However, following the example of Jaques-Dalcroze, we can observe in Copeau's approach a dialogue with the innovative pedagogical currents of the time, where the teacher builds the knowledge according to the empirical experience of the students, so as not to teach them content, but to make them discover a knowledge. Thus, the awareness of an error — 'They just walked in the position on all fours, it wasn't enough' — is generated from a questioning to the students — 'And how does a dog walk?'; and, instead of using theoretical explanations or simply showing them a *how to do*, the search for correction is an invitation to action: 'And now, how does a cat walk?'

All this, as Suzanne Bing points out, takes place in an atmosphere of playful pleasure felt by the children as they accept the challenge of dramatising the fable. We note that Copeau and Bing, artists who had already made a number of theatrical performances, are in fact seeking the very essence of play, of drama incarnate, of the dramatic instinct responsible for the transmutation of self into other. However, the exercise described in the long quotation above is also the first step into a new field of exploration that Copeau has just felt to be important for the actor: the field of observation and imitation of animals. Again, it is in opposition to something he had observed in Jaques-Dalcroze that Copeau wants to undertake this research.

I have already noticed, particularly with Dalcroze, that as soon as we appeal to a feeling (tiredness, joy, sadness, etc.) to provoke a movement, to determine a mime, the student immediately, and perhaps unconsciously, by necessity, allows the intellectual element to predominate in his action, the play of physiognomy. This is the open door to literature and to histrionic behav-

our. I believe that for the simplest exercises, it is from the observation of animals that we should draw inspiration. [...] Have the student observe animals in nature, then in art (Copeau, 1999, p. 101, my translation)²¹.

And again:

And later this mimicry of observation and the experience of our exercises will be of great help to the artist in the more or less forced and caricatural representation of the characters of comedy (Copeau, n/d, my translation)²².

Through observations of Jaques-Dalcroze's work, Copeau realised that direct work on the physical expression of feelings most often triggered nothing more than mental clichés illustrated by movements. Telling children to act happy or angry, for example, led to mere physiognomic exaggerations. Even if Copeau saw in the imitation of animals a potential for the construction of caricatured characters in his new improvised comedy, the contemporary recreation of *Commedia dell'Arte* that he envisioned doing, imitating animals, is above all a creative deflection for the actor to get at emotions, or states that are less rational and non-psychological, more instinctive and organic. Copeau's intuition about animal imitation is consistent with the practice of several 20th century theatre masters — even Stanislavski experimented in this field²³.

As far as pedagogues directly influenced by Copeau are concerned, this approach was adopted by Jacques Lecoq and Philippe Gaulier and included in the pedagogical programme of their schools to this day. The path that includes observation, imitation and humanisation of the animal is now widely known in many schools that belong to the lineage that goes back to Copeau. Few know that this work derives from Copeau's exploration with the children of the Gymnastics Club between 1915 and 1916.

The cat and the old mouse. [...] you come back in more detail and individually draw attention to the gait of the animals, show them pictures of mice, the way they shake their heads. You correct the movements corresponding to the text, dividing them into equal groups of mice hiding facing each other. [...] Then you show them that no matter how perfectly you imitate animals, you will never manage to make it look like you are one, even if you walk on all fours, so let's now do the same thing, but standing up. Now we need only give the impression of a cat, of its elongated walk, of its stroll through the dining room, of a noise it hears, of its hands gathered together like front paws, ready to pounce, of the trap it prepares for the mice, hang-

ing in the middle of the room. [...] (Bing apud Copeau, 1999, p. 104, my translation)²⁴.

But then, what is the importance of children in this kind of experimentation carried out by Copeau and Bing? Why did they first carry out exercises with children and not with adults? These questions lend themselves to the most diverse speculations. However, some of Copeau's notes on a session of work with adults, in parallel with his work with children, show that the type of questions raised, paradoxically, seems to be more primary in comparison with the work done with children.

The work is [...] a bit disorganised. [...] I struggle, trying to make contact, to create an atmosphere where individual mistrust melts away. [...] Conversations. Exercises designed to force them to disregard all their acting skills, to approach a text with humility [...]. This is the hardest thing. Preventing them from doing it in a premeditated way, to try to impress me. Approach the text modestly, since we have time. Turn them into a tabula rasa, make them give up ready-made, handy procedures that you pull out of your bag of tricks (Copeau, 1999, p. 116, my translation)²⁵.

This work carried out 'in an almost elementary way' (Copeau, 1999, p. 128, my translation)²⁶, as Copeau would later say, also shows the theatrical culture with which he was dealing. It may be that these early twentieth-century actors, too accustomed to the external effects against which Copeau invariably struggles, were not yet able, without some resistance, to give themselves fully over to the kind of experiments Copeau and Bing were conducting with children. As Claude Sicard reminds us: 'The demand for total physical discipline, for imbibing the character, the being, the thing, the animal.... We see this being done today, but at the time it was not at all common' (Sicard apud Mignon et al., 2000, pt. 1/4; 43', my translation)²⁷. Moreover, one has to consider that, in 1915, Copeau and Bing were two novice teachers, they did not yet have the mastery over a pedagogical knowledge or the mastery of their own methods, they were still searching for them.

On the other hand, several of Copeau and Bing's accounts of working with children corroborate the availability and enthusiasm with which the latter received their proposals, which were quite innovative in the field of theatre. However, the reasons why Copeau decided to undertake this experiment are not limited to the hypothetical *ease of* working with children. In

fact, this work represented a laboratory that was both an experiment in certain musical principles and in children's games, but also a learning experience in pedagogical practice for Bing and Copeau. Although these children were the guinea pigs of an experiment, it is no less true that Copeau and Bing also put themselves to the test, with the aim of finding their own pedagogical path and methodological approach, as Suzanne Bing admitted to researcher Maurice Kurtz, 35 years after this work at the Gymnastics Club:

The *Patron*²⁸ doesn't explain himself to me, he doesn't explain him to himself. But it is not difficult to understand that this hard-working man, who since before *Vieux-Colombier* has given himself to the task of training actors, is taking advantage of this forced leisure time (!) to put two essential elements in his hands, a group of children and a musical education, to, from scratch, consider, feel where he is going to 'take his work,' and that he is inviting me into an experience. The children were not, therefore, pupils, let alone pupil actors: we were those who were pupil teachers, who were doing something like our propaedeutics (Bing apud Copeau, 1999, p. 113-114, my translation)²⁹.

Bing's testimony shows the laboratorial character of the work with these children. It was in this laboratory that they could prepare themselves to approach the actors later on, in order to accomplish the dramatic renewal envisaged by Copeau. We can see that, if, on the one hand, the child is taken as a model in the sense of a *reference object* (Caplat, 2008, p. 5-6, my translation)³⁰, whose qualities one 'tries to reproduce,' on the other hand the child is a model as a *speculative instrument* (Black, 1962, p. 237)³¹, on which Copeau and Bing test hypotheses and from which they extract certain knowledge.

As for the main objective of this experiment — to find a link between rhythmic gymnastics and children's play —, which would be the very prototype of the new method sought by Copeau, the links found are more evident in terms of fundamentals than in formal terms. We can recognise in Copeau and Bing's approach with children some exercises inspired by Jaques-Dalcroze: the use of a story or a tale to link rhythmic exercises, rapid groupings and un-groupings, round songs etc. In a memoir³² that he began writing two months after starting this work, Copeau designs the teaching of rhythmic gymnastics at the *Vieux Colombier* School, holding out the hope of finding this link with the child's play.

At some meeting point of gymnastics and natural play may lie the secret from which our method will arise. At some point in rhythmic expression, spoken expression may be born of itself, fatally, - first the shout, the exclamation, then the word. At some point in improvised play, staged improvisation, dramatic improvisation, the drama in its novelty, in its joviality, will appear to us. And these children, in relation to whom we believe ourselves to be the masters, will be, no doubt, our masters, some day (Copeau, 1999, p. 135, my translation)³³.

The central objective not only attests to Copeau's pedagogical vocation, but also points to an early and important intuition of the director. Rhythmic gymnastics, based on concrete musical elements such as tempo, rhythm and metrics, in dialogue with the child's game, seen as a nucleus of spontaneity, freedom and invention, would create the conditions for the discovery of a method; the core would be the ability to give a measure through exterior and mathematical rules coming from music to the natural impulses coming from the child's game. 'I see this connection with music, this musical adjuvant, in the education of the actor. Internalisation of music for the organs, for all the faculties of the performer, to obtain precision and freedom' (Copeau, 1979, p. 352, my translation)³⁴, Copeau reveals a few months after the experience with the children in the Gymnastics Club. What we can notice here is the intention of building a method through the resolution of a problem that worries many researchers of the actor's work during the whole 20th century: the one of the balance between precision and spontaneity. Nevertheless, finding this fusion between the precise musical laws and the free flow of the child's play is an unfinished mission in Copeau's journey. And this is exactly what Suzanne Bing would say years later.

The *Patron* did not introduce me to Jaques-Dalcroze's theory, it was only later that he entrusted me with the two volumes of the method. But it was natural for the *Patron* to expect that a musical teaching that took the human body as its medium would be the very teaching of the actor: that of the language of the poetic creator. However, Rhythmic Gymnastics is exactly the opposite: the musical language (Art of sounds) existing before and outside the student is proposed to him from outside (piano). His corporal participation is equivalent to a notation, a translation (the word is Gide's) of the musical language according to a previously established grammar. [...] In actual experience, no contact could, at any time, be established between this language made of a foreign convention and the free improvisation created by

the child's play, the inner music of this game, one might say. There, the rhythmist finds himself disoriented (Bing apud Copeau, 1999, p. 114)³⁵.

However, in terms of the relation between precision and spontaneity, the recognition of the problem is surely more important than its hypothetical resolution. Moreover, we cannot take Suzanne Bing's statement as an applicable truth outside the scope of her experience with this group of children. We know that Jaques-Dalcroze himself also researched child's play and that this search for balance between the two elements is also at the core of rhythmic gymnastics. It was in fact to find spontaneity in the rigidity of traditional music teaching that Jaques-Dalcroze created his *Gymnastique Rythmique*. Although Copeau criticised certain aspects of Jaques-Dalcroze's work, his praise for the Swiss master also abounded when the latter was working with children in Geneva. Bing's criticism of Jaques-Dalcroze is based less on the lack of connection between children's play and Dalcroze's Rhythmic Gymnastics than on the search for a specific path resulting from her collaboration with Copeau. However, if we analyse the fundamentals — that is, basic notions such as experience before elaboration, the importance of silence for something to sprout, the aim of educating both mind and body —, we will see that Copeau will maintain these principles even when he proposes exercises that are completely different from Dalcrozian Rhythmic Gymnastics.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, I attempted to demonstrate how Copeau and Bing's experiment with a group of children was rich in the sense of opening horizons of research about the actor's work, later deepened at the *École du Vieux Colombier*, and I tried to re-establish, through this specific case, the importance of Suzanne Bing in Copeau's pedagogical enterprise. In this sense, we can recognise that, although the original objective — finding the connection between the child's game and Dalcroze's Rhythmics — was not achieved by the pair of researchers, in other aspects this experiment was fundamental.

As true researchers, Copeau and Bing not only sought to confirm their initial intuition, but were also surprised by their discoveries, which is why the mimicry of fables and the imitation of animals opened up important

horizons in their pedagogy. However, the contributions of this experiment are not limited to these two horizons.

We can recognise within this experiment the testing of a number of small working attitudes and the result of useful empirical discoveries for the *Vieux Colombier* duo. For example, it was in this experiment that Suzanne Bing for the first time explained to the students the importance of appropriate clothing for physical activity and of taking off their shoes to be more comfortable in the theatrical activity (Copeau, 1999, p. 96). Discipline and punctuality were also reinforced here. The power of games to stimulate the imagination becomes evident to Bing when three girls drag a rope behind them as if it were a snake, as she observes: '[...] They seem to love this game (I remember being very excited, with a lot of imagination [...]) the object comes to life, it seems to gallop by itself' (Bing apud Copeau, 1999, p. 97, my translation)³⁶.

Accordingly, the child's state of play, so close to the 'mood of the improviser' (Copeau, 1999, p. 109)³⁷, which Copeau recognises in clowns, is also sought after and often found when the director proposes games: 'As I approach them, I observe a little ecstasy of pleasure, a kind of slight agitation on the spot, and that they do not fail to amuse themselves throughout the lesson' (Copeau, 1999, p. 115, my translation)³⁸, Copeau writes in his notebook about the *Vieux Colombier* School. Copeau and Jouvett's discussions about this experiment also led to the idea of 'keeping the children away from the text' (Copeau, 1999, p. 118, my translation)³⁹, an idea later taken up with the adult actors in order to discover 'what they know how to do' (Copeau, 1999, p. 118, my translation)⁴⁰ without the theatrical text, thus reinforcing the importance of Copeau's break with dramatic literature in a pedagogical situation in order to research new possibilities of improvisation. Moreover, as an outline of the *École du Vieux Colombier*, this experiment enabled Bing and Copeau to delve into the pedagogical field, which constituted, as Bing summarised, their 'propaedeutic' (Bing apud Copeau, 1999, p. 114, my translation).

If Copeau envisioned the *collaboration of children* in his theatrical project from the beginning of the *Théâtre du Vieux Colombier*, after this work in 1915-1916 he would constantly return to this idea. He would like to take the children into the countryside, close to nature, have them daily, cre-

ate favourable conditions to work with them, giving them the status of boarding school students. Full of this hope, Copeau declared: ‘By grouping together at the *Club de Gymnastique Rythmique*, 52, rue Vaugirard, some children, boys and girls, the first exercises gave us the certainty that, conducted methodically, they would produce all the expected results’ (Copeau, 1999, p. 128, my translation)⁴¹. However, there would be no children at the *École du Vieux Colombier*, created four years later in Paris. That, in no way, annuls the importance that the child and the child’s play had in the pedagogical elaboration for the training of a new actor undertaken by the founder of the *Vieux Colombier*.

Notes

- ¹ To learn more about these *childhood laboratories*, I recommend reading two other articles of mine: *Quand le théâtre rejoint l’enfance: Apports de la Children’s School à la pédagogie de l’acteur au sein de l’École du Vieux-Colombier* (Scalari, 2021b); Copeau e os laboratórios da infância: as brincadeiras de seus filhos, ou, melhor dizendo, *le tout rond* (Scalari, 2022).
- ² In the original in Portuguese: ‘Copeau acreditava que a renovação se daria pelo lado de fora, ou seja, somente aqueles que não estivessem impregnados do teatro, poderiam salvá-lo’.
- ³ In the original in French: ‘frappé par la qualité de sa voix, la discrétion de son jeu’.
- ⁴ In the original in French: ‘des êtres émotionnellement investis, indifféremment et tour à tour dans une histoire d’amour professionnel, pédagogique et personnel’.
- ⁵ In the original in French: ‘Lorsque je me suis proposé, en 1921, de créer à côté du théâtre une École du Vieux Colombier et d’y élever une génération nouvelle de comédiens, c’est à Suzanne Bing que j’ai demandé de me venir en aide. Sans elle, le projet que j’avais formé n’eût sans doute jamais abouti. Elle a assumé, depuis plus de dix ans, la plus lourde part d’une tâche ingrate. Elle y a, dans une grande mesure, sacrifié sa propre carrière d’interprète, et dépensé ses forces jusqu’à leur extrême limite. Par ses expériences, inlassablement reprises et développées, elle m’a fourni les éléments d’une méthode pour l’éducation des jeunes comédiens’.

- ⁶ In the original in French: ‘Néanmoins cet entraînement préliminaire devait porter de bons fruits. Entraînement qui, au bout de la saison 1913-1914, pouvait être considéré comme ayant atteint un maximum de rendement. Je dis: entraînement. Non pas: éducation. Mon expérience me mettait, à cette époque, sur la voie de certains principes d’éducation. Mais le seul résultat véritablement acquis c’était un lien créé entre ma jeune troupe et moi, la confiance qu’ils m’accordaient désormais, la vertu éducative dans le sens plus large, de leur travail, de leur vie en commun, sous la direction, sous l’influence d’une personnalité unique qui, sans compter, se dépensait à leur profit. J’ai senti, dès lors, qu’il y avait là un principe réel, vivant, capable d’engendrer quelque chose de grand et durable. J’avais réengagé toute ma troupe pour trois ans, [...] je pensais consacrer l’été à étudier les moyens de constituer l’école, quand la guerre éclata’.
- ⁷ In the original in French: ‘Je vous écrirai quelque jour à propos de “l’École”, qui est le premier et le plus important de mes soucis présents’.
- ⁸ Letter from Copeau to Jacques Rivière of 20 February 1916 (Copeau, 1999, p. 123).
- ⁹ That would be to recruit children to join the École du Vieux Colombier and receive a theatrical training from then on.
- ¹⁰ In the original in French: ‘Cahier de Jacques Copeau. Première démarche. Lundi 1er novembre 1915: À plusieurs reprises déjà, j’avais eu des pourparlers pour créer au Club de Gymnastique Rythmique, 52, rue de Vaugirard, un groupement d’enfants qui fût la première ébauche d’une école pour le théâtre. La grande difficulté a toujours été le recrutement même des enfants. Le lundi, 1^{er} Novembre, à 2 heures, Paulet Thévenaz m’introduit chez une de ses amies, Mme de Manziarly [...], femme de quarante ans, russe, intéressée dans beaucoup d’œuvres d’assistance, et passionnée pour la cause de l’enfant. Mme de Manziarly conseille, pour faciliter le recrutement, de ne point faire mention de nos véritables desseins, et d’ouvrir simplement, rue de Vaugirard, tous les jeudis pour commencer, une sorte de patronage où il serait question de récréer les enfants. Moyennant ce léger subterfuge, elle se charge de nous amener une douzaine de sujets. Par la suite, il sera possible de parler aux mamans des aptitudes de leurs petits, par-là de les intéresser, et d’en décider quelques-unes’.
- ¹¹ In the original in French: ‘afin que quelque chose existe’.
- ¹² In the original in French: ‘Intériorisation de la musique aux organes’.

- ¹³ In the original in French: ‘Grâce à Suzanne je vais pouvoir me voir travailler’.
- ¹⁴ In the original in French: ‘Il n’y a que Suzanne Bing qui comprenne ce que je veux faire, et qui se donne à moi de toutes ses forces’.
- ¹⁵ In the original in French: ‘Aujourd’hui pour la première fois, je les prends. Tout change. Le contact allume en eux quelque chose qu’on n’avait pas encore vu. Ils se sentent emportés, exaltés. Je ne les laisse pas toucher terre. 1° Exercices Militaires. Alignement et marche. 2° Jeu de balle. Lancer la balle en l’air et la rattraper sans bouger de place, le corps droit, les talons réunis. Lancer la balle en cercle, de l’un à l’autre, de plus en plus vite. En ligne: le maître lance la balle, sans prévenir, en essayant de tromper la vigilance de chacun, à l’un ou à l’autre qui doit la rattraper et s’en dessaisir aussitôt (attention, facultés en éveil, promptitude de décision, adresse de main et d’œil). Tout cela très rapide. 3° Groupements et dégroupements rapides. 4° S’asseoir tous ensemble au claquement des mains. Se relever id. Sauter id. Sauter deux fois, trois fois. Frapper des mains, du pied ensemble. Id. en émettant un son. 5° Le chat et le vieux rat. Je leur lis la fable de La Fontaine, la leur explique, la leur fais mimer *grosso modo*’.
- ¹⁶ In the original in French: ‘des instruments parfaitement souples et nuancés. [...] qui répondent à la pensée du chef et du maître’.
- ¹⁷ In the original in French: ‘Le modèle militaire – on est en guerre, ne l’oublions pas – est omniprésent, dans la discipline comme dans les exercices de gymnastique qu’il leur fait faire’.
- ¹⁸ In the original in French: ‘Il faut qu’à l’instant où commencent les exercices l’enfant se sente saisi et soulevé de terre par une main irrésistible, dans laquelle on peut avoir toute confiance, et qui ne relâchera pas son étreinte avant la fin du jeu’.
- ¹⁹ In the original in French: ‘Le chat et le vieux rat’ La lecture les a amusés beaucoup, ils comprenaient bien les mots que vous leurs expliquiez, et ils ont eu tous un mouvement de plaisir quand vous avez dit: “on va essayer de faire ça. D’abord, comment marche un chat?”. Ils ont tout simplement marché à quatre pattes, pas bien. “Et comment marche un chien?”. Alors, ils comprennent la différence, ils ont timidement fait marcher le chien un peu plus fort. “Et maintenant comment marche un chat?”. Ils avaient compris et quelques-uns ont réussi une marche silencieuse et allongée. “Pourquoi?”. Celui qui a le mieux fait, répond: ‘pour ne pas faire de bruit. - Oui, pour que les

souris n'entendent pas'. Avec ces quelques mots, ils étaient déjà dans le drame de la fable, et Étienne toute seule a fait un chat presque réussi. Elle a bien répondu qu'il s'arrête s'il entend du bruit, mais elle s'arrêtait sans avoir pensé à entendre; elle saisit mieux quand vous le lui représentez s'arrêtant net dans la position où il était, en tendant, en allongeant son oreille. - Maintenant on fait la fable. Le grand Jean est le chat, tous les autres des souris. On suit les péripéties de la fable: se retirent en leurs tanières. "Où sont vos tanières?". Tous choisissent la petite salle derrière les piliers et un garçon se glisse derrière le rideau. Entre le chat; vous lui faites souvenir qu'il est l'Attila, et en même temps qu'on ne doit pas l'entendre. Les souris se font dire plusieurs fois de se mieux cacher. On porte un banc au milieu de la salle sur lequel puisse se tenir le chat pour sembler s'être suspendu. Il y grimpe, mal d'abord. - Il recommence, en bondissant de quatre pattes à la fois et sans bruit. Il reste ainsi jusqu'à ce que vous le permettiez de se reposer, suspendu comme vous le lui avez indiqué, par une patte, tout le reste du corps, et la tête, pendant comme une loque. Les souris: mettent les nez à l'air, montrent un peu la tête; puis rentrent dans leurs nids à rats, - avec la précipitation, la panique que votre ton leur communique. Puis viennent en trotinant se grouper en demi-cercle devant le chat; celui-ci d'un seul bond est au milieu d'elles qui se sauvent, il en poursuit une, on s'arrête là. On les sentait tous dans leur personnage'.

- ²⁰ In the original in French: 'grand danger: l'introduction de la littérature et, avec elle, du pédantisme esthétique'.
- ²¹ In the original in French: 'J'ai déjà remarqué, notamment chez Dalcroze, que l'élève, dès l'instant où on fait appel chez lui à un sentiment (fatigue, joie, tristesse, etc.) pour provoquer un mouvement, déterminer une mimique, aussitôt, et peut-être inconsciemment, par besoin, il laisse prédominer dans son action l'élément intellectuel, le jeu de physionomie. C'est la porte ouverte à la littérature et au cabotinage. Je crois que pour les exercices les plus simples, c'est de l'observation des animaux qu'il faudra nous inspirer. [...] Faire observer par l'élève les animaux dans la nature, puis dans l'art. Lui faire dessiner, découper des silhouettes d'animaux, inventer des accessoires [...]'
- ²² In the original in French: 'Et plus tard cette mime de l'observation [sic] et l'expérience de nos exercices seront d'un grand secours à l'artiste pour la représentation plus ou moins forcée et caricaturée des personnages de la comédie'.

- ²³ As in the example of the two scorpions exercise given by Bogdan Korzeniewski (Barba, 2004, p. 92).
- ²⁴ In the original in French: ‘Le chat et le vieux rat. [...] vous revenez avec plus de détails, et, individuellement, sur la démarche des bêtes, et leur montrez des images, des souris, la façon dont elles agitent leur tête. Vous réglez avec précision les mouvements correspondant au texte, les partageant en groupes égaux de souris cachés l’un en face de l’autre. [Puis vous leur montrez qu’aussi parfaitement qu’on imite des bêtes, on n’arrivera jamais à faire croire qu’on est une, même en allant à quatre pattes, alors qu’on va faire la même chose, mais sur ses pieds. Il faut maintenant donner l’impression d’un chat, de sa démarche allongée, de sa promenade autour de la salle à manger, d’un bruit qu’il entend, les mains ramassées comme des pattes de devant, prêtes à bondir, du piège qu’il prépare aux souris, pendu au milieu de la salle. [...].’
- ²⁵ In the original in French: ‘Le travail s’en ressent. Il est un peu désordonné. [...] Je paye surtout de ma personne, cherchant à prendre contact, à créer une atmosphère où se fondent les défiances individuelles. [...] Conversations. Exercices tendant à les forcer de faire abstraction de tous leurs moyens de comédiens, d’aborder un texte avec humilité [...]. C’est ce qu’il y a de plus difficile. Les empêcher de réaliser d’emblée, de chercher à m’épater. Épeler modestement, puisqu’on a le temps. Table rase de procédés tout faits, à portée de la main, qu’on sort de son sac à malices’.
- ²⁶ In the original in French: ‘d’une façon presque élémentaire’.
- ²⁷ In the original in French: ‘l’exigence d’une discipline physique totale, s’imprégner du personnage, de l’être, de la chose, de l’animal... On voit aujourd’hui se faire, mais à l’époque cela ne se faisait pas du tout’.
- ²⁸ Patron (French word which means ‘Boss’ in English) was Jacques Copeau’s nickname in his Vieux Colombier troupe.
- ²⁹ In the original in French: ‘Le Patron ne m’explique pas, ne s’explique pas. Mais il n’est pas difficile de comprendre que ce travailleur acharné, qui dès avant le Vieux-Colombier s’est donné pour tâche l’éducation du comédien, met à profit ce temps de loisir (!) forcé pour s’en mettre sous les yeux, entre les mains, deux éléments essentiels, un groupe d’enfants, un enseignement musical, afin, partant de zéro, de considérer, de palper par quel bout il va ‘prendre son ouvrage’, et qu’il me convoque à une expérience. Les enfants n’étaient donc pas des élèves, à plus forte raison des élèves-comédiens: c’est

nous qui étions des élèves-professeurs, qui faisons quelque chose comme notre propédeutique’.

³⁰ In the original in French: ‘objet de référence’.

³¹ In the original in French: ‘speculative instrument’.

³² This memoir would later become Copeau’s project for his school. See: Copeau (1999, p. 124).

³³ In the original in French: ‘En quelque point de rencontre de la gymnastique avec le jeu naturel se trouve peut-être le secret d’où jaillira notre méthode. À quelque moment de l’expression rythmique naîtra peut-être d’elle-même, fatalement, l’expression parlée, - le cri d’abord, l’exclamation, puis la parole. À quelque degré du jeu improvisé, l’improvisation jouée, l’improvisation dramatique, le drame dans sa nouveauté, dans sa verdeur, nous apparaîtra. Et ces enfants, dont nous nous croyons les maîtres, seront sans doutes les nôtres, un jour’.

³⁴ In the original in French: ‘Cette liaison avec la musique, cet adjuvant musical, moi je le vois dans l’éducation du comédien. Intériorisation de la musique aux organes, à toutes les facultés de l’exécutant, pour obtenir la précision et la liberté’.

³⁵ In the original in French: ‘Le Patron ne m’a pas fait connaître la théorie de Jaques-Dalcroze, plus tard seulement il me confie les deux volumes de la méthode. Mais il était naturel que le Patron s’attendît à ce qu’un enseignement musical qui prenait pour moyen le corps humain fût l’enseignement même propre au comédien: celui du langage du créateur poétique. Or, la Gymnastique rythmique est exactement l’inverse: le langage musical (Art des sounds) existant préalablement et extérieurement à l’élève, lui est proposé du dehors (piano). Sa participation corporelle équivaut à une notation, traduction (le mot est de Gide) du langage musical selon une grammaire convenue d’avance. [...] À l’expérience, aucun contact n’a pu, à aucun moment, s’établir entre ce langage fait d’une convention étrangère, et la libre improvisation, créé, proposée par le jeu de l’enfant, la musique intérieure de ce jeu, pourrait-on dire. Là, le rythmicien est désorienté’.

³⁶ In the original in French: ‘elles semblent adorer ce jeu (je me rappelle comme m’étant moi-même beaucoup excitée, avec une grande part d’imagination [...]) l’objet s’anime, semble galoper seul’.

³⁷ In the original in French: ‘L’humeur de l’improvisateur’.

- ³⁸ In the original in French: ‘au moment où je me rapproche d’eux, j’observe un petit frisson de plaisir, une sorte de léger trépignement sur place, et qu’ils ne cessent de s’amuser pendant toute la leçon’.
- ³⁹ In the original in French: ‘garder les enfants à l’écart du texte’.
- ⁴⁰ In the original in French: ‘ce qu’ils savent faire’.
- ⁴¹ In the original in French: ‘En groupant au Club de Gymnastique Rythmique, 52, rue Vaugirard, quelques enfants, garçons et filles, dont les premiers exercices nous donnent la certitude que, poussés méthodiquement, ils produiraient tous les résultats attendus’.

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