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CHILDHOOD OR THE PURSUIT OF SOLAR ACTING IN THEATRE:
interview with Guy Freixe

A INFÂNCIA OU A BUSCA DA ATUAÇÃO SOLAR NO TEATRO:
entrevista com Guy Freixe

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Childhood or the Pursuit of Solar Acting in Theatre:
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Abstract: Guy Freixe—actor, director, theatre researcher, and educator—shares his thoughts on theatre, drawing on his experience as a student at the *École Jacques Lecoq* and as an actor with the Théâtre du Soleil. The interview explores the approaches of Jacques Copeau, Jacques Lecoq, Philippe Gaulier, and Ariane Mnouchkine, highlighting the importance of the body, movement, and improvisation in their conception of acting. Freixe points out that Lecoq, influenced by the intuitions of Copeau, favours an archaic "memory of the body," connected to the outside world rather than to a subjective exploration of the actor's unconscious. This bodily memory is closely linked to childhood, to the instinctive mimicry of the child absorbing and reflecting their environment. In the wake of these reflections, Mnouchkine's notion of "entering childhood" and the idea of a transgressive childhood in Gaulier's clown's craft are also discussed. Freixe leads us to conclude that the appeal to childhood among these artists and educators is, in some way, tied to a search for a playful, light-spirited mode of acting—one that aspires to a radiant, sun-infused theatre.
Key words: theatrical pedagogy; childhood; Jacques Copeau; Jacques Lecoq; Ariane Mnouchkine; Philippe Gaulier.

A infância ou a busca da atuação solar no teatro:
entrevista com Guy Freixe

Resumo: Guy Freixe - ator, diretor, pesquisador e professor de teatro - compartilha suas ideias sobre o teatro, com base em sua experiência como estudante na École Jacques Lecoq e como ator no Théâtre du Soleil. A entrevista explora as abordagens de Jacques Copeau, Jacques Lecoq, Philippe Gaulier e Ariane Mnouchkine, destacando a importância do corpo, do movimento e da improvisação em suas concepções da atuação. Freixe ressalta que Lecoq, influenciado pelas intuições de Copeau, favorece uma memória arcaica do corpo, conectada ao mundo exterior, em vez de uma exploração subjetiva do inconsciente do ator. Essa memória do corpo está intimamente ligada à infância, ao mimetismo instintivo da criança que absorve e reverbera seu ambiente. Na esteira dessas reflexões, a noção de Mnouchkine de "entrar na infância" e a ideia de uma infância transgressora na abordagem de Gaulier ao *clown* também são evocadas. Freixe nos leva a concluir que o apelo à infância entre os artistas e educadores mencionados está de alguma forma relacionado à busca de um jogo atoral ligado a elementos lúdicos, à leveza e a um estilo solar de atuação no teatro.
Palavras-chave: pedagogia teatral; infância; Jacques Copeau; Jacques Lecoq; Ariane Mnouchkine; Philippe Gaulier.

1 Introductory note by Rodrigo Scalari

As part of my doctoral research on the child as a model in theatre pedagogy, this interview was conducted on 27 June 2016 at Café de l' Industrie, near the Bastille in Paris. Lasting an hour and a half, it was later edited by the authors for clarity and length for this 2025 publication. The translations of this interview and of excerpts from documents originally in French were carried out by me.

2 Interview

Rodrigo Scalari: What are your current occupations in the field of theatre?

Guy Freixe: I am the director of a theatre company, Théâtre du Frêne, which is subsidised by the Ministry of Culture, and I co-direct Théâtre Plateau 31 in Gentilly. I teach at several national drama schools. I am also a professor at the University of Franche-Comté in Besançon, where I teach theatre history and aesthetics.

Rodrigo: How did you get started in theatre? Could you tell me a bit about your theatrical journey?

Guy: To summarise, I worked as an actor in the south of France. Seeking formal training, I enrolled in the two-year programme at the École Jacques Lecoq in 1979, where Philippe Gaulier was one of my teachers. After graduating, I joined the Théâtre du Soleil as an actor and remained there until 1986, performing in the Shakespeare[1] cycle and in *Sihanouk*[2]. I eventually left the Théâtre du Soleil to pursue directing, and in 1988 I founded my own company, Théâtre du Frêne, which I continue to lead today.

Rodrigo: Based on your experiences as a student of Jacques Lecoq and as an actor at the Théâtre du Soleil, do you find that some actors are more talented than others? If so, on what aspects are they more talented?

Guy: As soon as I decided to leave the Théâtre du Soleil, I was invited to give training courses abroad. That gave me the opportunity to question what I could transmit based on my experience at the *École Jacques Lecoq* and my experience as an actor at the Théâtre du Soleil. From the first course I taught, I looked for a specific approach common to my two masters. To answer

1 *Richard II* (1981), *La Nuit des rois* (1982) and *Henry IV* (1984).

2 *L'Histoire terrible, mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, Roi du Cambodge* (1985).

your question, I realised – and I continue to realise – that in the tradition of Lecoq's school, and in Ariane Mnouchkine's work, there is attention directed to gesture, to movement, to physical improvisation and to imagination through the body, more than to text, and at times they show little sensitivity to acting from a pre-existing text. Why does that happen? Deep down, there is a line of acting defined in that school which is reflected in Mnouchkine's work, and which is more interested in choric playing than in the individual work of an actor facing a character. Now, as to whether some actors are more talented than others, the answer is yes. Of course there are. But for what reasons? That is a complex question and can depend on many different factors. An actor who cannot reveal himself with one director may well do so in another context, under a different gaze. A given gaze upon an actor can allow him to bring to birth a part of himself that until then was unknown to him.

Rodrigo: In your book "La filiation Copeau-Lecoq-Mnouchkine"[3], you propose the recognition of a French line of acting and demonstrate the links and differences between the approaches of Copeau, Lecoq, and Mnouchkine. In certain theatre learning systems, creation is often recognised in a place other than the everyday body. In Stanislavski, we observe the importance of the actor's creative unconscious. In Grotowski, there is an emphasis on an almost involuntary memory of the body, in a process of removing the actor's blocks so that he can rediscover what he called the "body-memory." Where does the actors need to position themselves to access the creative gesture in Copeau, Lecoq, and Mnouchkine?

Guy: Now you're talking about memory. I will try to answer with a sentence Lecoq used to say to his students: 'The body remembers.' What does it remember? He didn't give an answer, but the entire first year at Lecoq's school was a journey designed to allow students from very different cultures – that international dimension was very important to him – to rediscover a common poetic ground. What is it that, beyond our differences and particularities, makes us share a common poetic ground? Lecoq liked to use a mask to find that common poetic ground, so that what appears on stage is connected to the body, without speech, because the neutral mask is a complete mask under which one does not speak. I'm referring to the mask we use during the first year of the school, which allows us to travel more by impression than by expression. In other words, the idea is to become impregnated with the world and imprint it within you. It is not a matter of starting from oneself, as in Stanislavski and Grotowski who, it seems to me, is aligned with Stanislavski's conception of acting.

Lecoq starts from a different approach, from another intuition—an intuition that comes from Copeau, according to which the memory an actor must awaken is a memory of the body, an archaic memory. This memory does not arise from the individual and his unconscious, but from the world. The first task is to receive the world within oneself, rather than seeking it in one's subjectivity.

3 The Copeau–Lecoq–Mnouchkine lineage.

Over time, the two may converge, but the initial intuition is distinct. Receiving the world is linked to the theory of anthropologist Marcel Jousse, who proposed that we are profoundly shaped by miming. Every child engages in miming in relation to their small world: the people around them, their parents, the affects they experience, and the environment they perceive—luminosity, the vibrations of a place, the sea (if nearby), the mountains… These elements underpin the meaning of the phrase "the body remembers." For Lecoq, training an actor primarily means cultivating sensitivity to what the body can replay[4] from its memory of the world. That is why, in the first year, Lecoq designed a journey that allowed actors not to reproduce interpersonal situations, but to internalise the great rhythms of nature—water, air, the elements, materials—everything that enables the body to become a translator of hidden impulses. Thought carefully, this is a poetics that opens a perspective while making the actor a bodily player, one who enacts the world through the body. This specific pathway of actor training was devised by Lecoq as he developed Copeau's intuition.

Rodrigo: "The body remembers". It is interesting because we could think of this phrase as the bodily memory of an actor's learning with Lecoq. But, closer to what you just said, I remember a passage from your book in which you talk about your work with the wind and how it reminded you of the tramontane[5] of your childhood.

Guy: As I showed in my book, these identification exercises were already being practised at Copeau's École du Vieux-Colombier. In other words, there is continuity. I believe that rediscovering the concrete contribution of the mask allowed actors to escape a subjective and realist practice of acting. First, because when we cannot express ourselves through words, we must open ourselves to other forms of acting that emphasise the language of the body. At Copeau's school, there were exercises in which, under the mask, actors became the river and tried to embody the morning light. He noticed that actors moved differently when they tried to represent the wind or the night. Étienne Decroux, who studied at the École du Vieux-Colombier, admired all the ways in which the body could develop a new language. The richness of this language made it possible to write in a transposed and stylised way. What I mean is that, essentially, when we improvise elements that are far from us—elements of the world—the pedagogical objective remains to stay attentive and to express ourselves authentically in a way that awakens a personal memory linked to affects. It is here that, indeed, having improvised fire makes us realise that fire is closely tied to our own reverie of fire, to our dream-image of it. At a certain point in the process of working with what is far away, we

4 Freixe uses the French word *rejouer*, which in a literal translation means "to replay." In Lecoq's pedagogy, the term *rejeu* (replay), among others, derives from the teacher's adoption of the terminology of the French anthropologist Marcel Jousse, applied in his studies collectively known as the Anthropology of Gesture. For Jousse, "replay" is a human dynamic that consists in the absorption of elements from the environment by the human body–mind and in their subsequent gestural expression in the world, as a way of introjecting and working through the stimuli that the external world offers the individual.

5 The tramontane is a regional wind that blows mainly in southern France, especially in Occitania.

discover that the "very far away" enriches the "very close" — what we might call the actor's inner world. But we do not start from that inner world, because for Lecoq it is risky to begin with what is highly subjective. He does not name the zone he wants to reach. Pedagogically, he begins with the distant—what lies far away—but his aim is to strengthen the actor's personal centre. That is the pedagogy of the detour. He never asked us to improvise from directly subjective material. He would not say, "Replay your father's anger," for example. Instead, through elements connected with many other things — "Improvise a volcano," "Be in the midst of a storm"—he would detect possibilities for creating connections, for making associations, what he called "reverberation." And that is what makes his pedagogy a true "poetics of the body."

Rodrigo: Did all these questions seem clear to you while you were following the training with Lecoq? Did you have any expectations regarding this training when you enrolled at the school?

Guy: When I went to that school, I wanted to engage in physical theatre in which the body came first. At the same time, I was not very well prepared physically. So, in the first term, as a young actor who liked to play characters, I plunged into a completely new realm. I was fascinated by that way of approaching theatre outside the realm of dramaturgy, improvising in such distant domains, but at the same time it took me away from what I believed were my theatrical strengths. I was confronted with a tool of expression—the body—with which I had never really learned to work. So, I had to work hard to understand what was happening, because I needed to gain control and rightness[6] in the body. And in that sense, Lecoq was an extraordinary teacher, because he wanted the actor to have rightness in their movement. And movement did not mean just being supple. An improvisation had to "move well"; in other words, it needed a beginning, a development, and an end. It had to be organic. When the improvisations we showed him did not correspond to what he was seeking, he would say, "It's fixed; it doesn't move". Lecoq perceived the rightness of a movement—the place where the movement is rightly positioned. A body could be a little stiff, not very loose, and yet still move with rightness. Whereas another student, with a more flexible body through classical dance, for instance, could on stage have a body that "did not move rightly".

Rodrigo: How do you understand this notion of "rightness"?

Guy: For Lecoq, rightness was tied to very precise data, to the laws of movement. I recommend his book "Le Corps Poétique", where he discusses these physical laws. There are

6 Freixe uses the term *justesse*, a word very frequent in Lecoq's pedagogical vocabulary. In Lecoq, *justesse* relates to notions of precision, coherence, and organicity. It is not merely a formal precision, but precision in both mechanical and organic terms of an action, a movement, or even the acting itself. In line with the senses of precision, organicity, and coherence, the expressions "with rightness," "in the right way," and "rightness" will be used later in this translation to avoid a proliferation of different terms that could confuse the reader.

four main dynamics: to push, to pull, to be pushed, and to be pulled. Regardless of aesthetic fashions, these laws remain. Either the body pushes or pulls, or it is pushed or pulled. We have the horizontal axis of the sea, the vertical axis of the mountain, and the diagonal axes. Tragedy lies in verticality, and melodramatic emotions in the diagonals. Our body is bilaterally structured: two arms, two legs, and so on. The body that takes an 'élan' cannot cheat. If a sportsman takes an 'élan' to score with a header, there is a rightness in the athletic body. Lecoq was a sportsman. His logic was that the body moves correctly because there is only one right way to move. When you repeat a gesture thousands of times, whether in athletics, swimming, or other activities, you see that rightness of the body is necessary. If you want to swim well, you will take lessons and see that there is a right relationship between the body and the water, which means that if you don't swim correctly, you end up struggling against the water. But once you move rightly, you are in harmony with the water.

Rodrigo: For example, if you move like the sea, under the neutral mask… What makes one person "right" and another not?

Guy: That is delicate, because it is not the sea itself that is right. What is right is the undulation. A body that undulates rightly can be both felt and seen. I realised much later that Lecoq combined two perspectives. On one hand, there was the eye of the physiotherapist he was, capable of telling an actor, "Lower your left shoulder; you'll feel better" or "You are off-centre; your hip is more to the left than to the right". He had an extraordinary sense for the rightness of the body in motion, something he could describe with precision. On the other hand, he also addressed the actor-student poetically. If an actor sought to find the correct rhythm of the sea but produced a completely broken undulation, Lecoq would guide the actor technically to ensure the undulation flowed through the pelvis. There was thus a strong technical foundation. Beyond technique, however, there was imagination. In the realm of imagination, one must never speak as one does in the realm of technique. Imagination is closely linked to sensations. Deeply, and this was always present in Lecoq's work, one must ensure that the audience can perceive what is imagined. In other words, imagination, as conceived in Lecoq's school, is meant to be visible. One does not work in isolation, developing imagination in a private corner. The audience must see it. If people see the sea, then the work succeeds. Lecoq would always ask, "Did you see the sea?" He was attentive to the exchange between actor and spectator. If the audience sees nothing, the actor's imagination does not communicate; it remains private. The goal is not merely for the actor to feel the experience internally, but for it to be shared. A movement of the sea that moves rightly is a movement we recognise as belonging to the sea. Similarly, if an actor is working with fire, that fire must also burn visibly for the audience. Sometimes, actors whose bodies were not technically perfect still managed to convey the image of fire. Lecoq never fully explained why, but he opened up other territories, continuously proposing a journey through materials, sounds, colours, light, and poetic words. He used to tell his teachers at the school that two kinds of discourse were necessary: technical discourse

and poetic discourse. The poetic discourse occurs when one speaks metaphorically, opening the imagination to be shared and perceived by others.

Rodrigo: When we read Jacques Lecoq's writings and listen to his interviews, we get a strong impression of someone who is not only a teacher but also a great observer of the actor and the world, a true researcher. In "Le Corps Poétique"[7], he says: "in fact, I have always wanted and loved to teach, but to teach above all in order to know" (Lecoq, 1997, p. 22) … What is the role of observing the student in the pedagogical approach of Jacques Lecoq's school?

Guy: Lecoq was a passionate researcher; that is, he allowed his pedagogy to evolve according to how his proposals were received by his students. In my book, there is an interview I conducted with Alain Mollot, a distinguished teacher at the school, who says: "Lecoq tried to perceive the changes of an era, of our world, in order to develop his teaching methods and exercises"[8]. He never approached things in the same way, as he sought an organic flow for his classes. For instance, for a time he stopped practising Commedia dell'arte. In other words, his teaching evolved according to the period and what he felt. Over forty years, the school evolved in response to what he observed in his students. Yet, what was also remarkable is that he did not want things to change too quickly. He was wary of fashions. He sought a pedagogy independent of fleeting fashions, while ensuring it remained connected to the major transformations of his era. Therefore, he wanted to distinguish between what constituted a major change and what was merely a passing fad. He called them deep movements and superficial movements.

Rodrigo: Lecoq also says that the teacher must always rediscover "the innocence of the gaze so as not to impose the slightest cliché" (Lecoq, 1997, p. 59). What does this "innocence of the gaze" mean for the teacher?

Guy: Jacques Lecoq was very attentive. Why did he value this mask so much, the neutral mask? That was part of the reason. For him, the neutral mask was a mask of openness, also linked to the innocence of the gaze. In my book on the mask (Freixe, 2010), I demonstrate that Lecoq learned much from Jean Dasté, a former student of Copeau. There is a photo of a mask created by Dasté that he called 'the innocent'. Copeau referred to this practice as an exercise with a 'noble' mask, while Dasté described it as 'wild' or 'innocent'. An innocent gaze – that is, one that is alert and curious about life. Curiosity aptly characterises the neutral mask: it must be open to the world while remaining free of judgment, which Lecoq termed 'innocence'. Curiosity is the virtue Lecoq required of students wearing the neutral mask.

7 Book translated in English as "The Moving Body", see: (Lecoq, 2006).

8 See: L'école de la vie. Enseigner à l'École Jacques Lecoq. Entretien avec Alain Mollot. In: Freixe, 2014, pp. 221-232.

Rodrigo: Yes, but what about the teachers themselves?

Guy: This also applies to teachers. For Lecoq, the pedagogue keeps within himself not the knowledge of what he wants from the student, but rather a blank page, as if he knew nothing, so as to be constantly surprised – in other words, to receive without judgment whatever the student may offer. That was the fundamental difference between Lecoq and the other teachers at his school during my time there. Many teachers were influenced by his pedagogy but sought to achieve something specific. With Lecoq, however, you never felt constrained by a fixed program; he had an open mind, and you had someone truly attentive before you, enjoying the present moment. The same openness was also evident in Philippe Gaulier, though for different reasons. Lecoq was a great pedagogue because he operated in a space of invention. He created his own teaching methods, whereas other teachers who later reproduced his pedagogy did not. Even when a teacher does not invent the pedagogy he uses and must adapt to someone else's method, I would argue that there must at least be openness, even if innocence is absent. In Lecoq's case, innocence went further: it meant being stripped of burdens, namely prior knowledge. Lecoq was wary of conceptual frameworks imposed on theatre. He read extensively and possessed great erudition, yet he never overloaded his teaching. He sought to maintain the naïve gaze of the innocent, which made him highly receptive to students' proposals.

Rodrigo: You mentioned innocence in Gaulier…

Guy: Yes, he had that too, but expressed differently, through the clown. I think it represents a different kind of innocence. Gaulier was the only teacher at Lecoq's school who did not want to submit to rules. He loved to say, during our work with the neutral mask: "I don't care about the neutral mask… I don't like the neutral mask… never be neutral". He was transgressive, as a clown should be. In doing so, he taught us something important – to which we will return later: childhood, that openness to things not governed by pre-established rules.

Rodrigo: A kind of anarchy?

Guy: 'Entering childhood', as Mnouchkine also demands, is to be able to rediscover within oneself the strength of belief and the capacity to marvel.

Rodrigo: I would like to ask you about the notion of the "miming body"[9] (Lecoq, 1987; 1997; LES DEUX, 1999). Of course, the miming body Lecoq talks about goes beyond mime as a theatrical form, which perhaps finds its excellence in Marcel Marceau. However, in several passages,

9 The French term is *corps mimeur*, which could be rendered as "mimetic body," "miming body," or "imitative/miming body"; I adopt "miming body" here. This notion is also borrowed by Lecoq from Marcel Jousse's Anthropology of Gesture. "To mime," in this context, means to apprehend and physically express images and elements of the external world.

Lecoq associates this miming body of the actor with childhood and with the child's '*mimisme*'[10] in the sense proposed by Marcel Jousse…

Guy: The first intuition comes from Copeau. A man of letters and a theatre critic, he realised that, in order to find the poet's words in a truly theatrical space, the essential problem was the body. He believed the actor's body was the key issue. So, he decided it was necessary to found a school to reinvent the actor. In that school, he argued that the focus should be on improvisation – what he called a "school of creation" – rather than on interpretation, which Stanislavski had already been developing successfully in Russia since the beginning of the century. He began this school project not with the *École du Vieux*-Colombier, as is often claimed, but with children aged ten to fourteen[11]. Using a fable by Jean de La Fontaine, he instructed the students not to speak; instead, he wanted them to work with miming, which is closely linked to children's play, because he wanted to observe and learn from his own children. This is where the context of the Copeau family becomes important. Copeau did not believe in the schooling practices of his time and kept his children at home in La Ferté with his wife, Agnès Copeau, who taught them herself. The children played constantly, and Copeau believed they learned a great deal in that environment. It is striking: he was not afraid of "truancy" or of questioning the idea that school is the only thing that matters. He believed that his children learned profoundly through improvisation and play. He spent hours observing them as he planned his school. He concluded that theatre should rediscover the freedom he saw in his three children; he recognised in their play the very source of theatre. That was new. Stanislavski did not have such intuitions. Copeau even asked his daughter, Marie-Hélène, to note the games she played with her younger siblings. At fourteen, Marie-Hélène Dasté became a source of inspiration for his pedagogy. In other words, the pedagogy that would later influence Lecoq was born from the play of a fourteen-year-old child with her siblings. And how did these children play? They played at imitating the world, at imitating people. The collection that Jacques Copeau asked Marie-Hélène to compile consists of all those games, which became the foundation of Copeau's pedagogy[12]. At the same time, playing the morning wind and other such exercises would later form the basis of Lecoq's pedagogy. What changes in Lecoq's approach, in relation to what you asked, is his attentive reading of Marcel Jousse's writings, which provided a philosophical foundation. Lecoq knew more than he revealed. Unlike Copeau, twenty years later Lecoq drew on post-war phenomenology around 1945–46, which deeply influenced his teaching. As you pointed out, children have the ability to learn any language at an early age – a point on which everyone agrees. What is less often perceived is that the same applies to gestures. Children's gestures are shaped by the power of mimicry. If you speak to a child in Brazilian Portuguese, Inuktitut or Arabic, they

10 "*Mimisme*" is a neologism coined by Marcel Jousse to designate a human process that consists in absorbing the surrounding world and "replaying" or physically expressing stimuli coming from the outside. According to Jousse, this process is especially recognizable and intense during childhood. Here it is translated as "miming", according with its translation in the book "The Theatre of Movement and Gesture", see: (Lecoq, 2006).

11 On this work by Jacques Copeau and Suzanne Bing with children, see: (Scalari, 2023a).

12 On the importance of Copeau's children's games for his pedagogy, see: (Scalari, 2022).

possess an infinite mimetic capacity for sounds and signifiers. The same holds true for gestures: a child's body is shaped by everything they see, and they replay it from the very first days – some now say even from the mother's womb. Lecoq and Jousse said from the first days, but today we know it begins even earlier: we are marked by the external world from the first sounds and vibrations. It is the external world that makes us who we are. That is the power of miming. We learn by playing. When you attend Lecoq's school and later have children of your own, you realise: yes, now I understand everything I played. You see how profoundly a baby replays the world: when facing the sea, the child becomes the sea; when facing the mountain, the child embodies the mountain.

Rodrigo: Did you recognise Lecoq's work in your own children, for example?

Guy: Of course. I only have one child. With other people's children, we often do not spend enough time observing them. But when you are sensitive to that pedagogy and then have a child of your own, you say to yourself, "My God, it's true!" You realise how true it is and how obvious it seems. It is as obvious as Freud's claim that a child is sexual from day one. When you have your own children, you think, "But it's so obvious—how had we not seen it before?" The same is true of miming. Miming is one of the great forces of life. Our bodies are marked from our first days by what the child embodies—not only what comes from their parents but also what comes from beyond, from grandparents, great-grandparents, and even great-great-grandparents, as well as from the life around them, from Mother Nature.

Rodrigo: In Lecoq's pedagogy, in a way, is there a recognition of the need to return to the physical and sensory relationship with the world that we had as children?

Guy: The body remembers, as I was saying earlier — it remembers, even if you think you have lost that connection. All you need to do to remember is to put on a mask and step out of the zone defined by your social identity. And to remember, you need to engage in deep listening — not an intellectual listening, but a bodily listening. In this way, we awaken within ourselves a primitive knowledge of the body, and that knowledge is right because it is in tune with the world. Children are right when they play; they play with a natural sense of correctness. There are few children who do not play well. Even in refugee camps, it is striking to see how play is necessary and urgent for life, just as love is. When children play, they truly play: they develop imagination, perceive the invisible, and exercise their creativity. That is the source and foundation of this pedagogy.

Rodrigo: And how should the actor's miming be different from the child's miming?

Guy: Lecoq describes this difference by distinguishing between 'replay' and 'play'. He sees certain exercises as replay. One needs to replay in order to discover things within oneself. These are exercises — replays, identifications — but they are not yet play. For Lecoq, play occurs when the

aim is to engage the audience. It is not primarily about the actor moving for himself. The actor, being observed, offers his mask to the audience, allowing them to join in the play. For Lecoq, play is linked to communication. If there is no play, there may still be replay, which allows the actor to reinvest himself in memory, to work on himself, and so on. But for Lecoq, that is not the same as play. In his teaching, he always distinguishes between what is replay and what is play.

Rodrigo: In this regard, one of the emblematic exercises of Lecoq's pedagogy is the "Childhood Bedroom" which he says is a practice of "replay." At the same time, Lecoq (1997) says it is not about remembering one's own childhood. So, in your opinion, why does he refer to childhood and not to another period of life, such as adolescence or old age? What is Lecoq's fascination with childhood?

Guy: Lecoq was very careful to ensure there were points of reference in his pedagogy. I think the "Childhood Bedroom" exercise was when he sought to perceive his students' emotional qualities. This exercise took place at the beginning of the first term. Through it, he wanted to gauge the intensity of each person. After that came the neutral mask, but before masking the students, he wanted to see them play with unmasked faces. When I attended the school, in the first term from September to December, there were four groups of thirty-five students. In the second term, thirty-five students were eliminated. I believe the "Childhood Bedroom" was one of the exercises in which he identified qualities he could not see with a mask — qualities related to what an actor can bring to a performance, such as emotional force. I remember that, during these exercises, he was very attentive to elements he would never revisit later. In other words, the capacity to be fully immersed in what one was experiencing, to the point of being able to cry, for example. I remember picking up a doll that did not exist — because everything was mimed — and stroking its hair, miming care and affection. These were exercises unrelated to anything we would do later. That improvisation work was like an 'anti-exercise,' perhaps a way of identifying actors strong in their capacity to relive emotions. It was a psychological exercise: you had to enter and be emotionally touched by a room you had not visited for ten or fifteen years. It is indeed a Stanislavskian exercise.

Rodrigo: It is interesting that it is a childhood bedroom, with all the relations children have with their toys, that slightly enigmatic territory of play, of primordial memory…

Guy: Again, it is a question of memory. Lecoq was also very interested in the relationship with the body — that is, everything connected to the memory of the body in its smaller, childhood form: 'sitting on a small chair,' 'picking up an object that once seemed very big but now seems very small.' He paid attention to details that revealed how the body experienced a small room that had once seemed enormous. Details like these. Beyond that, I cannot say more.

Rodrigo: Regarding the buffoon, Lecoq states that "There is no more child than the buffoon, nor more buffoon than children" (Lecoq, 1997, p. 133). In your opinion, what is this "state of childhood" to which he refers? What are its characteristics, and how is this state essential for the dimension of buffoonery?

Guy: Bouffon is a second-year exercise. It was introduced at Lecoq's school at a moment when he sought to explore the masked body. When speaking of childhood, there is a term I have not yet mentioned, very characteristic of Mnouchkine: *bricolage*. Here, it is necessary to mention Mnouchkine as well. What did she retain from Lecoq and that tradition? She retained childhood in the process of creating theatre - inventing a figure and a body, for instance, a big belly or large legs, a body that is not one's own. With the neutral mask, we work with our own body, connecting to another who is not ourselves. But in the Bouffon dimension, each part of the body needs to be masked: exaggerated or absent shoulders, large buttocks, and so on. We place balls on our elbows and extend our fingers using sticks. We constantly question what we can do with our body. Here, we encounter the polymorphous dimension of the child - the metamorphosis of the child - playing with elements that transform us, whether a cardboard box, a hat, or other objects, becoming monstrous. This aspect is linked to carnival and to a long tradition of the grotesque body. It is central in Lecoq's work, and it was not present in Copeau's pedagogy. It is an invention of Lecoq.

Rodrigo: Lecoq says that he asks students to play situations like "the schoolyard", to do what children do when they hit one another…

Guy: There is a carnivalesque and anarchic side to the schoolyard. Everything seems possible, and one moves from one activity to another very quickly. That is one of the elements Ariane Mnouchkine retained: that childlike spirit and her refusal to take herself too seriously, avoiding theatre 'à la Grotowski'. Lecoq did not like Grotowski. In the 1970s, there was a trend in physical theatre where students risked injury, but Lecoq ensured that none of his students were physically harmed. When he invoked childhood, it was to encourage not taking oneself too seriously. He also detested the psychologising theatre associated with the Actors Studio, preferring distance through humour. He liked to laugh. The Mediterranean was very important to him, and he had a distinctly Italian approach to acting. His references included Dario Fo, Marcello Mastroianni, and Anna Magnani. He favoured a radiant, sun-infused style of performance, where laughter was present even in tragedy — the tragedy of Greece and southern Italy, marked by a clear separation of light and shadow. It was not a northern tragedy; he was not Bergmanian.

Rodrigo: Regarding the clown, Lecoq states that "the technical work is done on the forbidden gestures that the actor has never been able to express in his social life… certain gestures remain at the bottom of the child's body without ever being expressed" (Lecoq, 1997, p. 156). Can we say that clown work opens a door to the actor's subjectivity, allowing them to reconnect

with their childhood and express these subterranean gestures? Lecoq said that his school proposes a journey "from the outside in" and then "from the inside out". Would clown, at the end of the school's training, be an open door to the actor's subjectivity?

Guy: Yes, it's true. Bouffon and clown – two of Lecoq's great pedagogical inventions that left a lasting mark on theatre pedagogy. With clown, he was very innovative; here he created something entirely new, and it is fantastic. Childhood, for example in Gaulier, is expressed through his clown: the naughty child, the one who cannot express themselves, the transgressive child. There are clowns of every kind – the grumpy ones, the mangy ones, the devilish ones, and even clowns whose origins we do not know. Gaulier's clown is very coarse, very anarchic – reflecting a part of childhood that disappears in adulthood and suddenly reappears through the clown. Psychologically, this is very powerful, because with clowning there is both the stylisation of theatre and a deep appeal to each individual's subjectivity, which was set aside during the first year of training. At the end of the training, something emerges that is unique to each individual, rather than reflecting the common poetic ground of the neutral mask. That is where the school's great journey culminates: allowing our own secret child to use the power of theatrical transposition to appear, with just a dab of colour on the nose – Lecoq's great creation. This pedagogical focus did not exist in Copeau. There lies the entire strength of Lecoq's pedagogy: guiding the student through this journey toward a zone where the child exists theatrically, in total connection with the audience. Because the clown exists only through the audience's eyes. It is not a child who is self-centred. It is the strength of the child manifested on stage. Another of Copeau's great intuitions comes into play here: his fascination with the Fratellini clowns. For a period, he would go to see them every night, thinking, "my God! They manage to improvise according to the audience's laughter, the reaction of this or that person…". They truly treat each moment as one to respond to. This connects back to the power of the child: a child can play the same game many times, but always differently. If that does not happen, they are not truly playing. When we become involved in our own play, inventing characters and dialogues, we touch the very power of imagination. The clown's imagination, in contrast to the solitary child, exists only in relation to the audience. Lecoq's exercises are based on the birth of the neutral mask and the clown: what is the audience's reaction? How does the performer use that response? Lecoq described the red nose as like a cork balancing on the audience's stream of water – the performer must react to the audience's response.

Rodrigo: How does childhood appear in other dramatic territories of the school, such as Tragedy, Melodrama, or Commedia dell'arte? Are there areas in which the evocation of childhood is more appropriate than in others?

Guy: Much can be said about that. Mnouchkine, for example, even in tragedy, maintains the great principles of childhood. We worked on Shakespeare's *Richard II* like children playing in an empty lot, with the same carefree spirit and freedom…

Rodrigo: But what about Lecoq himself? Did he talk about childhood when you were exploring tragedy?

Guy: No, he did not speak about childhood. Not in tragedy. In the Commedia dell'arte, yes. But I would like to finish here and tell you to make a connection with Chaplin. Because Chaplin is the master of acting for Copeau. And for Mnouchkine as well. Chaplin is, after all, the only person whose virtuosic acting can be compared to the lazzi of the Commedia dell'arte. So, what is it in Chaplin that is specific to childhood? That is an interesting point to explore… Through Chaplin you define a line of theatrical acting that is a line of lightness. And what is the link between lightness and the spirit of childhood? That is an open question[13]…

3 Final considerations

The interview with Guy Freixe demonstrates that childhood, far from being a mere biographical category, operates as a driving force of invention within the practices and pedagogies of Copeau, Lecoq, Mnouchkine, and Gaulier. This reimagined childhood manifests itself in the remembering body, the innocent gaze, buffoonish bricolage, and the clown's anarchy — elements that converge to create a scene in which curious listening to the world forms the basis for shared theatrical gestures. Within this horizon, Chaplin becomes an emblematic figure; by combining technical rigour and playful openness, his work illuminates a mode of acting that retains the subversive power of childhood without compromising formal elaboration. Thus, childhood fluctuates between the conditions of metaphor and model, revealing itself as a formative principle of a solar theatrical performance, generating invention and openness both to oneself and to others.

13 On Copeau's inspiration in the figure of Chaplin, see also Rodrigo Scalari's article on the child as a model in the pedagogy of clowning: (Scalari, 2023b).

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