



Online Larval Masks: pedagogical challenges

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ABSTRACT – Online Larval Masks: pedagogical challenges – This article presents pedagogical procedures related to research work with larval masks, emphasizing the adaptations of the remote mode due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. Based on the practical experience of an online workshop held in 2021, the study aims to examine the specifics of the language of this mask, share practical exercises, and update and disseminate this knowledge. Based on the pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq (1921–1999), historical, conceptual and technical aspects of the use of these masks are addressed.

Keywords: **Larval mask. Jacques Lecoq. Theatre Pedagogy. Acting.**

RÉSUMÉ – Masques Larvaires en Ligne: défis pédagogiques – Cet article présente les démarches pédagogiques liées au travail de recherche avec les masques larvaires, en insistant sur les adaptations apportées au mode à distance en raison de la pandémie de Covid-19 au Brésil. S'appuyant sur l'expérience pratique d'un atelier en ligne organisé en 2021, l'étude vise à examiner les spécificités du langage de ce masque, partager des exercices pratiques, mettre à jour et diffuser ces connaissances. En s'appuyant sur la pédagogie de Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999), les aspects historiques, concepts and techniques of l'utilisation of masques sont abordés.

Mots-clés: **Masque Larvaire. Jacques Lecoq. La Pédagogie du Theatre. Jeu de L'Acteur.**

RESUMO – Máscaras Larvárias Online: desafios pedagógicos – O presente artigo apresenta procedimentos pedagógicos relacionados ao trabalho de pesquisa com as máscaras larvárias, enfatizando-se as adaptações realizadas para o modo remoto devido à pandemia de Covid-19 no Brasil. A partir da experiência prática de uma oficina *online* realizada em 2021, o estudo visa examinar as especificidades da linguagem dessa máscara, compartilhar exercícios práticos, atualizar e disseminar esse conhecimento. Com base na pedagogia de Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999), abordam-se aspectos históricos, conceituais e técnicos sobre a utilização dessas máscaras.

Palavras-chave: **Máscara Larvária. Jacques Lecoq. Pedagogia Teatral. Atuação.**

Introduction

This article deals with the pedagogical challenges encountered in teaching acting with larval masks, considering their specific characteristics and the transposition to the virtual mode. Resulting from a study with larval masks, the problem examined here is mainly of a practical nature, concerning the teaching procedures of this specific theatrical technique and the methodological adaptations necessary for the remote mode. Sharing this experience aims, specifically, at disseminating knowledge about these masks, provide instruments for those who are interested in adopting such practice, analyse and compare in-person and virtual procedures.

I begin with a brief historical and conceptual overview of the use of masks, highlighting the pedagogical approach of Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999), in order to establish the focus of the perspective addressed. Then, I present the methodology developed both in the preparation and in the execution of an online workshop held during the COVID-19 pandemic, whose pedagogical procedures will be analysed. I tried to describe the exercises and improvisations in detail so they serve as practical proposals for those who wish to experiment with this language.

My interest in larval masks began when I studied under Professor Jacques Lecoq at his *École Internationale de Théâtre de Jacques Lecoq*, in the 1992/93 season in Paris. The research currently underway involves historical and technical studies on these masks, as well as in-person and virtual meetings focusing on playing with them. The question that interested me the most since the beginning of this research is: why masks in the 21st century? Specially during a pandemic, with social isolation and difficulty in working with performing arts? Above all, because we are artists and we need to continue making art so as to exist, to give meaning to life, to dialogue with society. I believe that masks promote a connection with the public that transcends cultural boundaries and leaps across centuries. Thus, the opportunity to continue this theatre tradition — through the transmission of this knowledge — proved a space for breathing and encouragement in these times of lack of silence and listening. Times of rejection of the arts, of knowledge, of craftsmanship, and of delicacy. The language of masks, especially the larval mask, can arouse the interest of and inspire those who feel

the need for a poetic language of a different, non-everyday nature: a chance to travel in the world of imagination.

In 2021, I was invited to give a practical workshop¹ with the larval masks. My initial proposal — which aimed to conduct a work focused on exploring acting from improvisation, theatrical composition and body practices with this type of mask — has not changed. However, with the decision to shift to digital means, several challenges have emerged: how to work the relation between the body and the space? How to establish communication of the mask with the public and among them? How to stimulate the development of a proper body to wear such a big mask? How to carry out the displacements in such diverse spaces? How to work the triangulation? And the focus? How to cultivate the fundamental aspects of this language without sharing the same space, without the presence of the bodies? In short, these are the challenges that I try to analyse here, pointing out some of the problems and solutions found.

Instead of fretting, I decided to invest in the expansion that the human senses have been developing through the uses of the most recent technological media and in the fact that the manifestations of art, especially those of the theatre, are no longer separated. Encouraged by these statements by Fusaro (2021), I decided to acknowledge and deal with the new technologies as “interceptors of potential agencies of their sign settings,” as “[...] new possibilities of updating reflections requested for art and education and as potency for new creative actions.” In terms of puppet theatre specifically, I was encouraged by the position of Farias (2021), which reinforces the importance of this work in these times of social isolation, enabling us to escape while coming to terms with something that is strange to our reality. According to him, interrelating puppet theatre and new technologies can be an opportunity to rethink cyberspace as a new way of producing knowledge and art. Thus, I sought to view the workshop as research also in this aspect of experiencing new modes of expression for masks.

The methodology for preparation and adaptation for the online mode involved, firstly, the manufacturing of more masks with the paper craft technique and their distribution to eight students with whom I had previously conducted some practical work based on Lecoq’s pedagogy. With the masks in hand, I brought this group together in online meetings where we experimented with different activities and improvisations. This previous ex-

perimentation was fundamental to adjust my proposals to that medium, to test the possibilities that the Zoom app provided, and to have a specific feedback on which exercises seemed most effective for the objectives established. Considering the losses and gains with this adaptation, I organized the pedagogical approach as described below, in order to inform, compare and update the work with larval masks in the current situation.

Brief Historical Overview

To describe the main source of the work with masks, I begin by presenting a very brief history of Lecoq's pedagogical approach. Jacques Lecoq (1921–1999) was highly influenced by the training of the *École du Vieux Colombier*, coordinated by Jacques Copeau (1879–1949), as pointed out by several studies: Sachs (2004), Murray (2003), Sachs (2013), Scheffler (2014), Freixe (2014), and Evans (2016), among others — in addition to Lecoq himself (1997). As these studies cover other trainings, I will only focus on aspects related to working with masks, especially the larval mask.

Jacques Copeau initiated his experiments with masks at the *Vieux Colombier* in 1915, with the aim of eliminating the vices of interpretation of *naturalism* — which he abhorred — and expanding the actor's² expressive potential. He believed that the use of the mask aroused control and release, by deprivation of the face, enabling the actor to obtain self-knowledge and develop other bodily possibilities, normally dormant, under what he called the *dictatorship of the face*. The master sought to find a mask that would produce in the actor a state of neutrality, silence, immobility, which would become the basis of his training. He started by covering the actors' heads with a cloth, moving on to the noble mask, which would later become Lecoq's neutral mask. With these procedures, he observed that, as soon as the actor was deprived of his face, his whole body would wake up, as if another being started to flow inside them, evoking other emotions and even another personality, which would achieve his pursuit of a more genuine acting, detached from the social and everyday being.

Largely based on Copeau's teachings, the mask forms the basis of the *École Internationale du Théâtre Jacques Lecoq's* tutoring since its beginnings in 1956³. With the same objectives mentioned, it serves as a benchmark for the scenic game as a whole, aiming at its expansion, the engagement of the

whole body in the action, the “essentialization of the purpose, the character and the situation” (Lecoq, 1987, p. 115). The use of the mask helps to define the body’s gestures, enabling actors to find a more evident expression of the gesture and the attitudes of the body, filtering the essential, highlighting the action. Being devoid of face and words, actors can allow themselves greater freedom, since they have only their body to communicate. Little by little, feeling *protected*, students take the risk of doing what they have never done in life, accessing a dimension of the game that has its source in the deepest part of their being. The use of the mask requires the courage to try another way of doing, of daring, of launching oneself into another sphere of play.

The use of masks is rooted in the theatre tradition. In *Commedia dell’arte*, for example, when improvisation was the basis of the masked game, there were precise rules for their use, although without fixed and coded gestures as in oriental theatre (Sachs, 2004, p. 90). In order to know the value of a mask, it is necessary to know its behaviour through the game of movements that it arouses. It is about “trying to enter the mask, feeling where it resonates with the actor and playing from within” (Lecoq, 1997, p. 66). It is definitely a non-everyday body that the mask evokes, with precise movements, clear gestures, as if drawn in space. It is the poetic body, as proposed by Lecoq, which initially encourages students to find what is common to all, working with the notion of a Common Poetic Foundation⁴, so that, from there, one can find what is particular to them, whose differential will create their own theatre, own text, compose their own characters and dramaturgies (Sachs, 2013, p. 74).

The full masks are always played⁵ in silent improvisations: speaking with the mask on is considered heresy. The half-mask, which leaves the lower part of the face free, enables the use of words. Expressive masks include character, larval and utilitarian masks (those used in daily life – for swimming, for riding a motorcycle, etc.)⁶. As the name implies, they are those that present some expression, and it is up to the actor to find the appropriate game for it, seeking to identify with what it proposes, organizing the body and acting toward that purpose. Unlike the neutral mask, which is just one, the expressive masks are quite varied. As Gaines (2016, p. 138) clarifies⁷, while the larval masks are “beings” that remind us of ourselves through their behaviour, the expressive masks are clearly human. Their faci-

al features are more recognizable and are reasonably proportioned, yet retain an exaggerated effect.

Discovered by Lecoq in the 1960s at the carnival in Basel, Switzerland, the larval masks are also called *Basel Masks* and they are simplified forms of the human figure. They can be round, pointed, curved, with the nose being of great importance and directing the whole face. They are usually white, large, exaggerated, with small eyes, a nose and no mouth, with the appearance of unfinished faces. The larval masks provoke a broad, simple, elementary and highly poetic game. Some of them can even be used upside down, presenting another acting possibility.

Of the few records on the work of transposing these masks to the theatrical universe carried out at his school, one statement by Lecoq (1997, p. 68) is noted: that his research with the larval mask led to the discovery of an undefined, unknown population, bizarre, which refers to an unfinished body, necessarily different, which provokes the imagination. In line with his pedagogy, he considered important that actors are willing to play, to have fun, something that recalls the logic of cartoons, where anything is possible.

The larval mask discovers the world, but doesn't necessarily understand it... It can be fickle and potentially anarchic in an endearing way, but this mask's defining characteristic is its insatiable appetite for play and fun. The larval mask requires more sensitivity than precision, and more fun than accuracy (Wright, 2002, p. 79 apud Murray, 2003, p. 119).

Lecoq's approach is based on observing the masks, what each one evokes as form, lines, mood, emotional expression. The aim is to find the type of movement that corresponds to it, the dynamics, the rhythm, the direction suggested by that shape. Movement is the source of inspiration; imagination is the muscle to be worked both metaphorically and physically⁸. It is from there that we work, at first: how to put this form in motion? How to follow this shape according to its lines, volume, weight? What body would carry this head? How does it play? How does it relate to the others in the scene, to the objects, to the spectator?

Adapting to online mode: the screen as a mirror

As pointed out by Costa (2010, p. 22), there is no single way to work with the mask. Similarly to Figueira (2021), I do not intend to establish a methodology for remote work with masks, but to share a possible course for

their learning, aligned with the author when she proposes “[...] a practice aimed at the production of new territories of sensitivity, in which freedom and the production of life are a reference for the creation of pedagogical practices and procedures, regardless of the established circumstances,” in which masks constitute important resources.

Usually, the pedagogical work with masks starts with the neutral mask, aiming at a first *emptying*, a way of establishing some norms in relation to movement, the notion of neutrality and economy, a state of alertness and presence as a preparation to wear any other mask. As the participants of this larval workshop had previously carried out a course on neutral masks⁹, with the same workload, within this project of the Laboratory for the Study of Masks in the Itajaí Valley (LEMVI), I did not have to deal with it.

The first exercise I proposed for the transition from in-person to remote mode was to *adjust* the space for video work. To that end, each participant had to *lock*¹⁰ their screen so that they could only see their own image, like a mirror, without seeing the other participants. The screen as a mirror becomes the space of the scene, hence the importance of choosing what will be shown there in that window, now considered the stage. We started to experiment with some possibilities of entering and leaving the scene, different ways of *attacking*, as Lecoq used to say, emphasizing the first moment when the mask is seen. Choose what will be shown, whether just your head, a part or all of your body. The objective here was to establish the acting space, the relation between what appears to the audience and the real physical space of the bedroom, the living room, home. Define your setting, establish the scene and backstage space, explore entrances from the sides, below, above, slowly or abruptly, close to or far from the camera, playing with your own image, still without a mask.

The use of the mirror is often a controversial point in acting and masking work. As learned in Lecoq’s school, I have always worked without the mirror, believing it to be an inhibitor to acting, or something that leads to superficiality in the work. I learned and I revere the art of acting through our presence, our breathing, our gaze, our relation with the space, with our partners, the setting, the costumes, in short, always in a relation from inside out. In working with masks, specifically, we work according to the sensation of that object, its weight, its shape, the sensation it elicits from us, as a

sort of projected image. Here, therefore, the mirror will be a tool to establish the relationship with the audience.

The current of Michel Saint Denis (1897-1971), nephew and disciple of Jacques Copeau, for example, uses the mirror as a fundamental part of working with masks. Along the same lines, one of the precursors of working with masks in Brazil, Professor Elisabeth Lopes (2010, p. 39), also considers the mirror an indispensable element for the use of masks. According to her, “[...] the impact of the masked student is extremely important to accelerate the psychophysical process, because the mask represents, above all, an internal reality to be manifested through external actions.”

It is important to point out that all these initial procedures were necessary to adjust to the virtual language and the possibilities of the Zoom app, specifically. In an in-person course, we usually start with the observation of the masks displayed in the room and, after a brief conversation about their features, shapes, lines, moods and emotions they arouse, we put on the mask and go directly to the scene to experiment with it. The whole body is immediately summoned to find the dynamics that these characteristics give rise to and that are the starting point of this masked being. The mask enters the scene and these limitations of the gaze begin to be perceived, with the help of the teacher who guides, and with her whole body as support to put it into play. From there, the actor experiences reactions according to the response of the audience, with laughter and with quiet moments, as well as in relation to what the scene partner proposes.

Triangulation

Having established the limit of its scene, we move on to the next mask work tool: triangulation. A characteristic technique of the comic game, notably known in the *Commedia dell'arte*, for example, triangulation consists of direct communication with the audience, a comment that the actor makes apart from the scene, which aims to establish complicity with them, breaking the fourth wall that separates them from the spectators. As those wearing full mask are not allowed to speak, triangulation constitutes a different possibility of discourse for them, who, through a non-verbal narrative, manage to establish direct communication with the audience. The focus and sharing of their reactions will enable the public to establish a rela-

tionship with these beings and embark on their very own and unusual logic, capable of moving through different worlds with complete freedom. In this sense, triangulation is considered a crucial tool for the game within this language, albeit not mandatory.

It is important to emphasize that we can work with the mask without a direct relation with the audience as well. However, understanding the triangulation mechanism becomes fundamental as a pedagogical resource for the mask game and its communication possibilities, even considering the limitation established by the remote mode. “It is a mechanism capable of enhancing the encounter, since the public is invited to participate in the scene, establishing a relationship of complicity, an opening for a communion between those involved,” points out Padilha (2011), when establishing relationships between triangulation and the notion of convivial encounter by Argentinian researcher Jorge Dubatti. More recently, Dubatti (2020) presented the *technovivio concept*, which would encompass the experience at a distance, the virtual presence through technological intermediation, closer to what we have experienced in the pandemic. Thus, we invested in triangulation as a potentiating resource for the *technovivial encounter*.

Here, then, comes the next challenge: how to work with triangulation *online*? We initially experimented with the exercise of triangulation without a mask, with very specific guidelines: 1. the actor enters the scene; 2. looks at the screen, focuses on the viewer; 3. sees something off-screen; 4. takes an imaginary object *out of the scene*, brings it to the scene, shares it with the audience, that is, looks at the screen; 5. returns the object out of our field of view.

Extremely technical, the exercise gave rise to a reconfiguration of the individual space, the relation with the screen, and the bodies of the actors. Figueira (2021) mentions her difficulty in embracing the codes and principles of the mask game itself and the audiovisual language, two territories to be explored. In our case, seeking to encompass these two instances, I realized the importance of dedicating a long time to this issue of *technovivial triangulation*. This exercise was fundamental for understanding the language of the mask, becoming the *modus operandi* of the workshop.

Another important difference between the online workshop and the in-person workshop, which is worth noting, is that the student can usually

try different masks, looking for ways to *wear them* and bring each one of them to life, something that causes significant differences in their acting and in the relation with the space. In our online experience, each participant had only one mask that had been mailed to them, with which they played throughout the course. A limitation, on the one hand, but a gain in being able to deepen the game of that particular mask.

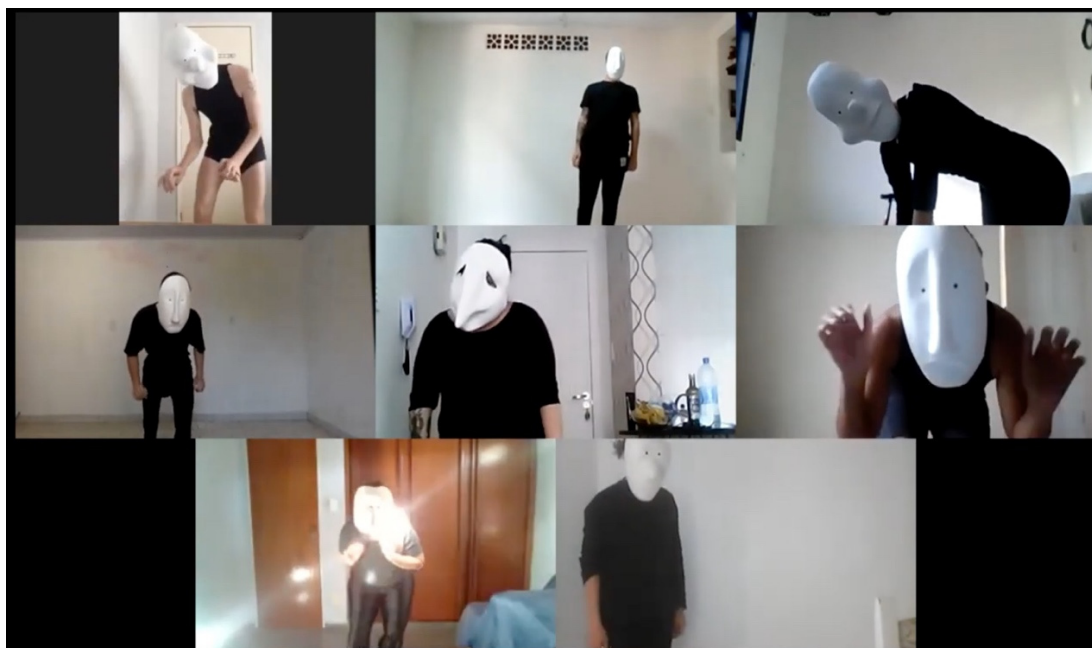


Figure 1 – Workshop record: *mirror as screen*. Source: Author's archive.

The Online Larval

Having defined the scene space and the triangulation in this mode of virtual windows, we proceeded to perform these same exercises now wearing the mask. With the objective of a first contact with the mask, to feel the object on the face, its weight and size, the change in breathing and the possibilities of movement, the first proposal was *the mask discovers itself*: the mask¹¹ enters the scene, perceives the space where it is, discovers itself in the mirror, experiences its abilities and the freedom to look at itself, its intimacy.

Apparently simple, the exercise of entering and exiting the scene showed the first difficulty with the larval's language: the limitation in vision. Both in person and virtually, the tiny eyes of this mask are a challenge for the actor, making them see very little of the space around them. However, this limitation is precisely what leads to a sensorimotor expansion, sharpens the spatial perception, whether of the surroundings, the presence

of the partner and the audience. Without the support of the gaze, the body starts to act and move with all the senses, now refined due to necessity. Listening becomes essential, both for the smallest sounds that can be perceived, and for the body as a whole, which needs to be in tune with the surroundings. In online mode, this challenge was intensified, because, in addition to having little real space, as they were working at home, the scenic space was even smaller: just the computer or phone screen. We explored these inputs and outputs alternating moments when everyone was executing it at the same time, when only the workshop listeners and I saw what was happening, with moments when everyone closed their screens to watch and analyse only one mask to work. The individual work enabled us, the audience, to comment and guide the participants. From the beginning, all participants were encouraged to express their comments and perceptions as a way of approaching the theoretical and historical issues that we had seen before, in an attempt to strengthen the relationship between us, the *techno-vivio*.

We then proceeded to mask triangulation. We repeated the same exercise performed earlier, now with the mask. To stimulate this game, I put on a soundtrack of birds singing and proposed the following sequence: the mask listens to the bird; takes it (imaginary object) out of the scene; brings it to the scene, that is, to the audience's field of vision; looks at the animal; reacts; looks at the audience showing what they felt, what is happening; looks at the bird again; finds a way to get it out of the image.

Here we point out another great challenge of the larval: the focus! As the full mask sees with the nose, an adjustment of the whole head is necessary so that it looks at the object and then at the camera, at the screen, so that the triangulation can occur. In addition, we had to deal with another specificity of working with masks: highlighting the difference between looking and seeing. To indicate that the mask has seen something, there must be a movement, albeit small, of the nose towards the object. The nose leads the head in that direction, a movement performed by using the neck. *I look, I see, I go*, a sequence that we gradually internalize through technical and meticulous work, the starting point for mask acting. We repeated the procedure of exercising all at the same time, at first, and then individually or in pairs, so that we could guide and understand the way the mask sees and determine when it looks at us directly. Once again, I align with Lecoq (1997,

p. 31), who used to emphasize the importance of learning to observe, referring to his pedagogy as a “school of seeing,” seeking to develop in the student an understanding of the organic organization of the movement and the scene as a whole.



Figure 2 – Workshop record: *Improvisation with the box – triangulation*. Source: Author’s archive.

The next challenge is *not to lose the mask*. The game is always frontal, since laterally the mask normally does not cover the ear. This may vary depending on the mask maker and the origin of the mask, but we are always careful not to reveal the actor’s head. Accordingly, part of the acting work consists in developing strategies to be able to move without turning the face completely, using the whole body to accommodate changes in levels, in direction, in focus. When two masks are present on the scene, for example, one should be slightly ahead of the other so that it enters the field of vision of the one further back. Thus, they will move around and act so that they can be seen by each other without having to turn their heads and break the magic by showing the actor. This perception of space is fundamental to the mask game and will contribute extraordinarily to the work of acting without masks as well, in the development of a corporal-kinaesthetic intelligence. We potentiate proprioception, the ability to locate spatially, the position and orientation in relation to one’s surroundings, one’s own body and each part with the other ones.

In order to work on this aspect, of *not losing the mask* in online mode, I asked a volunteer to demonstrate the movements I was proposing, so that

we could observe and define the possible limits for her mask. With simple commands to look up, down, to one side and the other, it was soon evident the instant in which she *lost* her mask. Aiming at providing each one with time to perform this experiment and realize the possible limits for their game according to their mask and workspace, I separated pairs of participants in simultaneous Zoom rooms. There, they alternated between playing and watching their colleague to give them external feedback, as this work could not be done in mirror mode.

Masks at play

Once the work and scene space had been established, the feeling of carrying the object and the limits of the mask in relation to the frontal game, we started to improvise. We performed a series of walks with the mask, always paying attention to the *attack* of the scene and not to lose the mask. According to each one of the masks, they had to find the walk that matched its shape, lines, sensation, emotion, speed, and rhythm of movement. We carried out the exercise of crossing the room: a) Trajectory from A to B, recognizing its whole space, including what the audience is not seeing; b) Trajectory from A to B, halfway discovers the audience (curiosity, reaction with the whole body); c) Trajectory from A to B, in the middle of the way, a noise (made by me), which causes an emotion; follow the walk in that other emotion.

Some important points highlighted throughout the improvisations, which would be the same in the in-person mode and continued until the end of the workshop: focus (nose) towards the object, towards something; reaction to this object, this thing, this colleague. Does that cause interest or aversion? Is it something large or small? How can we see the difference? Try different paces of travel, fast or slow approach? How to make this reaction evident to the public? At first, I encouraged the students to make all the big gestures, to allow themselves to exaggerate, to change the rhythm, in order to get away from bodily and everyday gestures.

The difference in the *online mode* is that the trajectories are short, limited by the furniture of the room they are in and by the camera angle, which complicates the experiment. Although it does not hinder the exercise, as we could see in their practice, it constitutes a limit of the remote mode,

since displacements are essential for the experimentation and discovery of the mask's characteristics on stage, especially for its ways of walking and for defining its posture. As for the focus issues, we managed to work well, using the effect of the camera's approach as a highlight, in which the mask manages to punctuate some actions in a clear and also fun way.

Gradually, we started to experiment with improvisations with slightly more complex situations. Dance competition: two masks, each one in a window. According to the provocations I make, the masks react, competing. Who is the most talented? Who knows how to dance something that no one has ever seen before? What is your specialty? And at the same time, I make positive and negative observations, so that the mask can react with different emotions, such as joy, pride, but also sadness, embarrassment, competitiveness, envy, etc. This exercise is the same both in person and online. The difference is that, in the latter, the masks cannot keep up with what the other is doing, as it is very difficult to see it on screen — albeit not impossible. The masks play *in the dark* and whoever watches it is the one who gives meaning to the scene. As soon as the students understood the proposal, I encouraged them to actively participate with comments and suggestions for their colleagues. This procedure was very productive, the group became more comfortable and freer to improvise as well, with different readings of what was happening and suggestions that encouraged the masks in the scene.

This way of working was that which resulted in most engagement, pleasure and understanding of the larval mask game. When provoking competition between them, we worked on different moods (the happy, the sad, the jealous, the proud), and types (the sporty, the academic), building a *photo gallery* so that they could perceive themselves as a figure, as a mask being. The naivety that this mask initially proposes affords all these other possibilities of emotions and, consequently, of discourses. Consistently, it is clear that the larval masks are very similar to the *clown game*, which facilitated the understanding for those who were acquainted with this language.

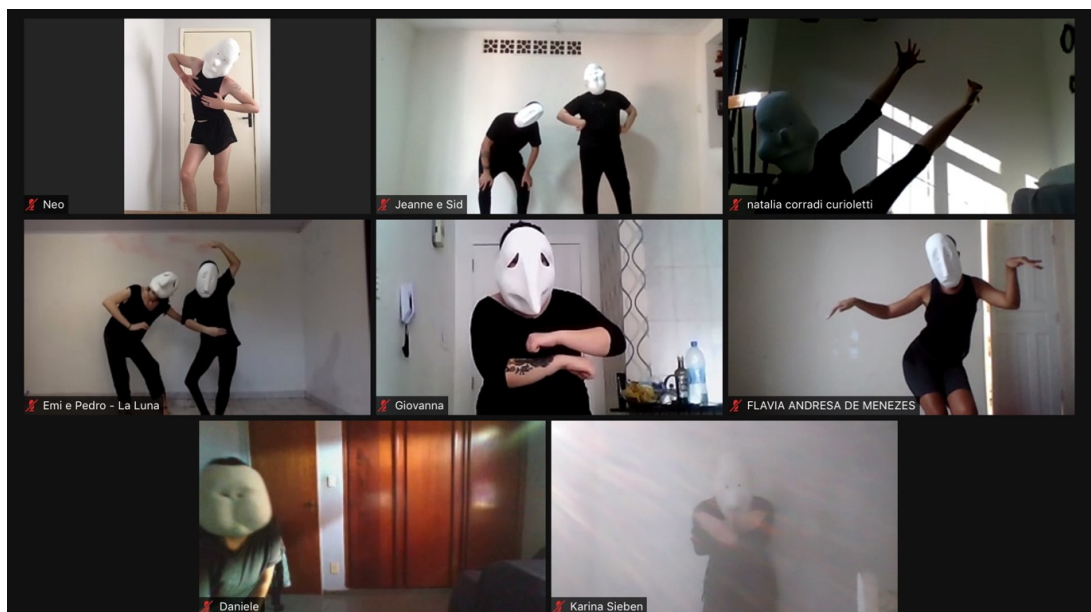


Figure 3 – Workshop record: Improvisation *Photos for the contest*. Source: Author's archive.

Improvisation Exercises

For the last stage of the workshop, I encouraged participants to repeat the improvisations and film them for group analysis. I asked them to bring a box with some objects inside, which, if possible, should be chosen by someone else, so that they really caused surprise. In addition, I asked them to bring some accessory, such as a hat, clothes, shawl — whatever they wanted.

Thus, we started our next meeting by watching the recorded scenes, through which we were able to trace the elements that we had studied before. Then, we started the improvisations, using the “hot chair” approach, as shown by Wilsher (2017, p. 71), which provokes the mask that is on stage to play with different emotions. In addition to comments on what they are doing, so they know if it is *working*, we ask them questions to trigger reactions, which the masks should give an emotional response to and which can provide opportunities for them to discover traits about their characters and pertinent actions. It is always interesting to encourage the mask to feel confident, exaggerate, show off, and then break that flow so they can show the change in their body and actions.

In the first hot chair, the mask enters the scene, recognizes the space. “Hello. Are you okay?”. She answers in her own way. “That is great! Find the best place to be on the screen.” She looks around and chooses a spot.

“Are you sure this is the best place for you to stay?” She looks again, some embarrassment may arise, try somewhere else. We move on with these dynamics of question and time for reaction, from which we keep provoking. “Are you sure now? Are you happy to be here? Oh, really? I thought you hated the dentist! As you know, it can be very painful, a lot of blood and stuff like that. I thought you were being very brave. Are you brave? Show us, then. Let’s take a picture showing how brave you are! People are really enjoying it! Oops, they’re all gone!”.

In the next improvisation, we started in a different way, so the actor could not prepare what to do. We put a chair in the scene, and I asked them to start outside, without being seen. So, I started to propose: “Hello? Is anyone there? Please, come in. Did I say sit down? (or any other action they have proposed). Well, don’t do it again, please. Okay, you can sit down now if you want. You don’t look very happy today. Well, try doing something that makes you happier. Think of something happy. Ah, this is pleasing people here. Attract their attention. I think it’s working! Oh sorry, you weren’t the one they were looking at!”.

In the same way, the next proposal also starts with the masks out of the screen: “Hello? Is anyone there? Please, come in. Today is your birthday, how wonderful! Is there going to be a party? I hear there’s going to be a surprise party, but you’re not supposed to know. Anyway, it’s good to prepare, right? Look, I hear noise, they must be coming! Pretend, or they’ll think you already knew!”. After making the mask excited about the possibility of the party, we started to deconstruct the situation so that she can vary her reactions. “Look, João and Denise said they can’t come. I got a message just now saying they dropped out of the party!” At that moment, when the mask was already sad and frustrated, one of the participants suggested through the chat that we sing happy birthday to her. This was amazing, as we all started singing together, causing a huge turnaround in the game! Here we can see the power of working together *online*, which by then was already quite familiar to us.

This way of acting made everyone excited both to play and to participate as an audience creating a possible dramaturgy. In line with Costa (2010, p. 22), who said that “[...] the work [of the masks] with energy levels, a game of oppositions and tensions composes a dramaturgical space in

which the spectator is a co-participant,” here we can really establish this *online* relationship.

Thus, with this type of interaction dynamics, we moved on to the following game proposals:

a) Generations: the same mask will experience being a child, being an adult, being old. Before starting, choose one of the ages and experience how the mask behaves: how does it affect your weight, your rhythm, your actions and reactions? After everyone tried it out, I asked them to choose one of the ages they liked best, and we tried two windows at the same time to see how they related.

b) The Contest: two or three windows at the same time. Similar to the dance competition exercise performed before, the mask now enters the scene with an accessory, recognizes the space and puts themselves in the place where they feel best. “You look so pretty in that hat/scarf/wig! Interesting how you know so many ways to use that accessory of yours! Well, are you ready for the contest? We’ll be taking some pictures, get ready! Who is the most beautiful? The ugliest? The bravest? The strongest? The smartest? Who is more skilful with their accessory? Show us what you can do!”. Power games arise here, showing feelings such as arrogance, seduction, oppression, envy, compassion and many others. The objective is to lead the masks to extrapolate their possibilities, to enable themselves to act in unique ways in order to find the unique logic of the larval and launch themselves into the particular universe that it raises. I also encouraged them to use other accessories, always as a trigger when the game was falling down, when they did not know what to do, provided the use of the accessory was not random, it should cause a shift in the game, that would contribute to make the scene advance. With each accessory something has to change!

c) Another variation: “Hi! Anyone there? You may come in! Well, no one has arrived yet... but feel free! No, but not there. Don’t touch anything, please. Soon the judge will arrive. It’s the first time we’ve had this kind of meeting here. Don’t worry, everything will be fine, we hope...”. After a few uncomfortable moments, when the actors have to deal with that silence, when apparently nothing is happening, I propose: “Look, there’s a R\$ 100 bill in the middle of the room! What will you do?”. This proposal

clearly promotes the game of the counter-mask, when the actor plays the opposite of what the mask suggests.

d) Improvisation with the box, based on the idea of Wilsher (2017, p. 48). The instructions are all presented before we start: the mask enters the scene and finds a box. Surprise, emotions, curiosity. What is it? What can you do with this object? How to open it? Does what's inside match or frustrate your expectation? Different emotions can come out: fear, joy, paranoia, jealousy, greed, passion, let the mask react, don't think before! The box can also be full of that emotion inside! A box full of passion! The mask is taken over by this emotion. These objects are special gifts from a loved one. Let the mask unwrap them. What does the mask think of them? Is she satisfied? Would you like to exchange? What else could she use this gift for? In the audience position, I encouraged the participants to observe what in the game of that particular mask makes it more interesting. Why do we like one more than the other? Usually, what we appreciate most is truth, readiness, imagination, surprise, lack of inhibition.



Figure 4 – Workshop Record: *Terror*. Source: Author's archive.

On the last day, we resumed some of the previous proposals, according to the preference of the participants: a) *Terror*: two masks in separate windows. In each one the mask enters, recognizes the space, hears noises in the apartment next door. What will it be? The more she tries to protect herself, the more she scares the other. The public intervenes based on what they see to feed the mask game; b) *Encounter*: two masks in two windows. An old woman and an old man getting ready to go to the Sunday dance in anticipation of a tryst; c) *Improvisation with the box solo and in pairs*: most of the proposals were designed for the solo game, since almost all of the participants were alone on their screens. However, there were two pairs work-



ing in-person together. For them, I suggested that they relate with the object, with the colleague and with the audience, keeping the triangulation! Here we were able to get a little closer to the game as we know it, on-site, in which the other challenges of the work — concerning space, the limitation of vision and focus, now including objects, audience and masks — appeared.

Throughout the work I emphasized what I consider fundamental in the mask game, especially for larval: valuing triangulation, oppositions, the fixed point that will value the object. Remember that every movement comes from the mask, and it shows its life through movement! Realize the quality of energy, the intensity of the body and the scene, the precision, the pauses!! Pausing is also a challenge! The actor's tendency is to combine one action with another, one movement with another, there is no pause between one proposition and another. Punctuate the action! What justifies your movement? Your action? How to take advantage of this limited vision? Think about the tensions of the scene, the possible conflicts that will be the motor of the action. Allow time to establish the problem and to react to it. Always work on the focus, locate something, demonstrate your interest and what that generates in the mask. What justifies your action? Even if it is absurd, it should not be baseless. It is important to understand the game's possibilities, take advantage of everything that *doesn't* work out, allow yourself to embark on the difficulty and try other ways to solve it.



Figure 5 – Workshop Record: *Encounter Improvisation*. Source: Author's archive.

Final considerations

Adapting our teaching practice to remote mode is a major challenge. The research experiment in this form of online workshop turned out to be a great opportunity to review all the work with the larval masks. From the preparation to the last moment of the course, I had to review and adapt the entire pedagogical approach, which required me to get out of my comfort zone and expand my way of thinking about these practices. The pleasant surprise was to realize that it was possible! I tried to point out the main aspects of the mask game, the challenges that emerged during the meetings and the ways to overcome them, believing in the contribution for teachers and students interested in this language, since I present a group of guidelines for practical work seldom put together in such an objective way.

Some comments from the participants about the workshop and the way I conducted it highlighted the value and depth of the work, the accomplishment of a real investigation, the respect for the people and for the knowledge that each one contributed, the listening, the possibility of everyone's participation. They also mentioned the feeling of a safe space, which makes it seem "that we can do it," due to the way I encouraged the work, passing on the passion I have for masks and the generosity with which I offered this knowledge. Last but not least, the reception at a delicate moment of the pandemic, the gratitude for the organizers and for the opportunity of giving the workshop, for the possibility of having attenders.

Listening becomes presence and the teacher's word is also inscribed, producing the effect that embodies the encounter; thus, technologies, whether digital, analogue or printed, are gaining ground as a new space to be occupied in an unprecedented way, both by teachers and students, as a place of bond between teacher, student and knowledge (Charczuk, 2020).

Aligned with what Charczuk (2020) presents, I perceive remote teaching as "[...] a pedagogical action, in which a certain transposition from on-site teaching to teaching mediated by digital tools takes place." Although one cannot deny the difference that the presence of the physical body makes, we can perceive the value of the meetings held, understanding that "they consist in different ways of being with the other," something that we are increasingly used to experiencing. Although the author above refers to remote teaching in schools, the same issue of how to promote the transition from on-site to remote learning applies here, emphasizing the importance of the bond between teacher, student and knowledge that "[...] produces effects of recognition of subjects and authorship in the teaching and learning processes. [...] because, when working with people, the profession requires them to deal with the relationships established with these people and not only to know the content to be taught, choosing a methodological proposal to transmit knowledge."

In this experience presented, I tried to point out the challenges that emerged during the meetings and the ways to overcome them, believing in the contribution for teachers and students interested in this language. Considering the pedagogical strategies presented, we can see that the online workshop effectively enabled an advance in our conceptual understanding,

our practical work in the language of larval masks, and was characterized as an effective meeting between teacher and students.

The work with larval masks delights for its non-human characteristic, of a being in formation, naive, curious and open to the world, ready to be surprised by this planet. As pointed out by Carmona and Barbosa (2004, p. 184): “[...] The larval mask mirrors — in a non-illustrative but magical and poetic way — the day-to-day turbulence crossed by a crack contained in the time and space.” Thus, the language of larval masks can arouse interest and inspire those who feel the need for a poetic language of a different nature, not ordinary, an opportunity to travel in the world of imagination, something valuable amidst the creative aridity caused by restricted socialization in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020.

Notes

- ¹ Online larval mask workshop at the invitation of the LEMVI mask research group (Laboratory of Mask Studies of Vale do Itajaí), with a total workload of 24 hours. Participants: Daniele Rocha Viola, Emeli Bruna Barossi, Flavia Andresa Oliveira de Menezes, Geovana Mangiavacchi, Giovana Bittencourt Mostastoni, Karina Sieben, Maria Eugênia Santos Monção Caldas, Natália Corradi Curioletti, Neo da Silva, Pedro Torres dos Anjos, Sidney Michael Dietrich, and Jeanne Martins Speckart.
- ² We chose to use the masculine gender whenever we refer to the acting work, to facilitate the fluidity of the text.
- ³ For more information on Lecoq’s School, both on historical and conceptual aspects, see Sachs (2004; 2014) and Scheffler (2014).
- ⁴ The original term, in French, is ‘*Fond Poétique Comum.*’ Common Poetic Foundation is a fundamental notion in Lecoq’s pedagogy, a search for the essentialization of natural phenomena. For more information, see Sachs (2004; 2013; 2016). The translation used here is from David Bradby’s English version in Lecoq (2001).
- ⁵ We use the term *play* in line with the original French *juer*. We highlight the importance of the use of the term *play the mask*, since it is at the base of Lecoq’s pedagogy, and determined the correction of the Portuguese translation in the publication of the 2nd edition of the book *The poetic body: a pedagogy of theatrical creation*, performed by the author of this article (Lecoq, 2021).

- ⁶ We do not include here the half-masks, used when studying *Commedia dell'arte* in the second year of school. Here we focus on those used in the first year only.
- ⁷ David Gaines studied and later worked as a teacher at the Lecoq school, in addition to founding and acting in the prestigious English company *The Moving Picture Mime Show*.
- ⁸ In my doctoral thesis, I address the issue of work on the imagination, both from a physical and a subjective point of view. See Sachs (2014).
- ⁹ The workshop on neutral mask was held with Prof. Dr. Tiche Viana, Barracão Teatro/Campinas/SP, in June 2021, also online.
- ¹⁰ Work proposal suggested by my research colleague, the actress, singer and professor Dr. Bárbara Biscaro. In English, *pin*.
- ¹¹ The term “mask” can be used both to indicate the mask object and the actor wearing the mask, as explained by Gaines (2016, p. 135), referring to the being or character that the audience will recognize on stage.

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