



Luciana Martuchelli's parents: Gê Martu and Gisele Lemper. Photo: Personal archive

Luciana Martuchelli

Poetics, Borderlessness, Frameworks

Principles of theatre anthropology in film

Abstract: In this article Luciana Martuchelli presents her theatre poetics in dialogue with historical figures and film acting techniques, with examples of the principles of theatre anthropology she has used in her work as acting coach for films.

Keywords: Acting techniques; Luciana Martuchelli; Acting coach; Film making; Brazil

POETICS

The Ugly Duckling and her flight school

“The Ugly Duckling”, by Hans Christian Andersen, beyond symbolical aspects of rejection and wounded narcissism, speaks of the creative nature that struggles to stay alive when forced to face adverse circumstances. In my case, I refer to the various worlds and fields of knowledge in which I wandered for almost thirty years to stimulate my curiosity, as well as my creative and pedagogical nature, in a constant anthropophagy of techniques and principles.

I am daughter of theatre and film actors, artists active during the Brazilian dictatorship period (1964-1985). I grew up in this environment and turned it into the raw material of my values and languages. My parents’ lifestyle and artistic entropy made me a kind of “expressive polyglot”, but I was also regarded as different and inadequate since an early age.

As a child, I did not understand that it was precisely the diversity of my expressive qualities that generated rejection. I never belonged to any place, school, method, group or tradition, and thus I had to seek and create my own anthropophagic world without aesthetic, geographic, moral, dogmatic, physical and mental boundaries.

“She belongs to the theatre,” say those from cinema. “She belongs to the cinema,” say those from theatre. Loneliness taught me that, when you do not belong to anyone and nothing, you are free.



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Some decades and winters passed before I met Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley. I was ready to hear Eugenio's words. Julia's plural presence on stage shattered the enchantment or a mild lethargy I was struggling to maintain.

I was already used to this kind of event, a sort of internal death to the emergence of a new world. I had lived this 'death' with Antunes Filho, Aderbal Freire-Filho, Jean-Claude Carrière, Peter Brook, Tizuka Yamasaki and Liu Pai Lin. They are all masters and polyglot mirrors of art without whom I would not have reached where I was. So I recognised the opportunity and took off my sandals to step barefoot on the sacred ground of the encounter between master and disciple.

Truth is what brings us comfort

This article about the construction of authorial dramaturgy for the camera based on the principles of the theatre anthropology, would be completely different if it had been written before the pandemic.

When the pandemic started, we floating islands were dragged out to the sea, floating on top of our costumes and prop boxes with no exchange value. My group and I had to close the doors of our theatre, cancel seasons, festivals, workshops and tours, migrating to the online reality. From there, we try to connect and deduct resources to survive until we can open-up again. While the pandemic isolated us and closed geographic borders, it opened virtual and virtuous borders.

Artists from theatre and cinema, both students and professionals, asked me to continue to work online in the expectation that, when the pandemic passed, they would be alive, believable and active. They did not want to lose the richness of their experience. Many were scared, subsided, spending hours in front of television and social media, consuming impotence. And I wondered, "What can I do to help them? How to explain that this catastrophe is also a golden moment, that we cannot shut down or distract ourselves?"

It was not just a matter of talking, moving, recording or transmitting, but of building new presence, dramaturgies, rhythms and relationships in this space for the spectators to see and get associations through the use of the camera. The power of technique erupted against useless information, life trivialisation, and the current lifestyle colonised by electronic devices and the advance of its social values. Before I knew it, in combination with the teaching of the use of technologies, an abundant authorial and unprecedented creation emerged from the elaboration, refining and exchange of contemporary poetics in multimedia communication.

Months later, numerous grants and laws for online creation, theatre and film festivals came about. A Brazilian television channel bought one of my theatre performances. And, like many of my colleagues, I attended festivals without leaving home.

In 2020, I also convinced Eugenio and Julia to realise the 13th edition of *The Secret Art of the Performer* remotely, achieving a virtual experiment with one hundred artists from all over. I was aware of the importance of their words for the floating islands in the pandemic context. Managing to get Eugenio and Julia to accept this possibility encouraged me even more.

Perfectionism is aseptic and life contaminated

*Novelty landed on the beach
With the rare quality of a mermaid
Some wishing for her goddess kiss
Others wishing for her tail at supper*

The poem above is the lyrics of the song “A Novidade”, by the Brazilian music group Paralamas do Sucesso. It talks about a mermaid that appears on the beach and provokes a duel between the poet and the starving, ripping and shattering the miracle. During the pandemic, something similar happened in the virtual world between purists and those hungry in body and soul. Artist friends said that theatre could not exist or happen without present audience. I had similar thoughts, but this was not useful to me. I needed to create, so I was not interested in the words and concepts that did not help me. Many of the artists I admire could afford to wait for things to get back to normal. I could not. Neither did I want to.

As if it was not enough being unable to meet and perform, another type of virus was emerging, that of asepsis and boycott of resilient creative processes. It emerged not as a debate, but as censorship and ideological patrolling in the face of endless artists’ reactions on virtual media: what is right or wrong in art, is it theatre or not, is it film or not. And although the pandemic was a blow also to my personal and professional life, something in me - perhaps the expressive and polyglot bastard of the clans - saw everything as an opportunity.

Finally, what are artists doing during the pandemic? Theatre or film? Filmed theatre or theatrical cinema? For scholars, this debate has great value. But it is not very useful in practice. My focus, and that of many, was that it should work, that artists and audiences should transform and that everyone could be touched in the process. It was important that we were on our feet and skilled when the pandemic passed, that this unique wealth of modern-day productions would make our lives healthier. And, too, that it would immunise us against impotence, thus increasing our humanity. I do not know where we were nor how to call what we were doing, but I felt at home.

Syncretism was my birthplace. I was baptized in the Catholic Church and also in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé religion. At home, I always learned different names for the same saints: Our Lady of Conception is Oxum and Saint Barbara is Iansã. I have always lived in the shades of grey between white and black, in the space of unthought-of possibilities and in the comparative studies that exist between film and theatre. I needed bridges between theatre and my interest in psychology, neuroanatomy, mythology, martial and plastic arts, and dance. I needed to put together knowledge from Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, Peter Brook’s empty space, Antunes Filho’s blank canvas, Eugenio Barba’s pre-expressivity, Liu Pai Lin’s Taoist presence, Tizuka Yamasaki’s relationship of the actor and the camera, as well as Brazilian soap operas and American, Asian, European, Hindu and Latin American films.

BORDERLESSNESS

*There is no such thing as a theatre, film or television actor.
The professional actor modulates according to the customer.*

The sentence above by Japanese-Brazilian filmmaker Tizuka Yamazaki guided me for over a decade in search of references that would help me break the mental cages of theatre actors who attributed to the camera the lack of vigour and charisma of their performances. The truth was harder and more liberating at the same time: in addition to their lack of knowledge in media codes, what prevented their performances from being believable were taboos, resistance, prejudice and an apparent absence of fair-play and “presence”. The latter was the most enlightening to me. These aspects were perhaps already manifest in their theatre performances, but only catalysed and unmarked before the camera.

The camera does not lie. It is just a magnifying glass of what is already there. Whether I am nervous and anxious, or my eyes are full of intent and humanity, it does not matter: the camera will reveal both shamelessly. It is up to me to take control of what I want it to capture and convey, using it as a bridge between the spectator and myself. But presence is not something we are taught or that is easily cultivated. Presence in life and art requires training, alertness and constant choice. I approached film and camera research in search of presence.

The study of the states of representation through physical and mental presence in an organised structure became an obsession of my personal and artistic pursuits. The presence in everyday life and the presence of the actor on stage are where the compass of my work points at, a sort of filter over traditions to find new names for old knowledge. Pedagogically, I started to use the camera to trigger and enhance the states of presence and to amplify the performances, while I researched known methods and developed new exercises.

Many acting methods for actors in theatre have developed since this trend took place. All bring a great diversity of styles, forms and functions, rooted in recurrent psycho-physical impulses and principles. Most film actors’ techniques are metamorphoses of systematised approaches to actors’ theatre training. I only bring up the relevant cardinal points that repel or create magnetism towards film and my pedagogical and professional practice within it.

The atheist fundamentalism

One of the best-known practices incorporated in film doubtlessly has been Stanislavski’s System, which aimed at extracting maximum realism from the actor. The actors need to seek the refinement of concentration, voice, physical skills, observation, emotional memory, as well as elements in common with the character for a more accurate representation. The System continued to be revised by Stanislavski throughout his life but was first taught in North America in the 1920s by former members of the Moscow Art Theatre,

the Polish theatre director and filmmaker Richard Boleslavski and Russian actress Maria Ouspenskaya, who also acted in film, both Stanislavski's direct disciples.

Boleslavski and Ouspenskaya's bond with film is not a detail: the "system", still under construction, travelled in the luggage of these artists to the cradle of the United States, where the film industry had the wind in their sails. Thus, it germinated in a hybrid way, both on stages and in cellulose nitrates. Stanislavski's insights and practices would survive for generations, despite telling his pupils not to slavishly depend on these practices, but to build something that worked for them. And that is what happened. Among the many metamorphoses it underwent, his System would give life to the technique called The Method.

The Method began as a substrate of the System, developed and credited to Lee Strasberg (1901-1982) and members of his theatre group. Actors Sanford Meisner, Robert Lewis and Stella Adler helped him develop this acting technique focussing on the practice of connecting to a character through personal emotions, helped by a set of exercises including sense memory, substitution, and emotional memory. The emphasis on reconstructing the actors' personal experiences for use in the theatre - an aspect that Stanislavski himself had already discarded - was just what interested artists such as Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, responsible for introducing The Method in the productions of the new North American dramaturgy at the time.

Sanford Meisner (1905-1997) created his dissent by not wanting the actors to focus on themselves, but on others, as if only that moment existed. Focussing on impulses, he asked actors to listen to each other and react, rather than thinking about what to say and do, responding freely and spontaneously, both physically and vocally.

Stella Adler (1901-1992), actress and teacher, who had been a direct pupil of Stanislavski, would also break away from The Method, developing a unique style of acting, centred more on the actor's imagination. She believed that focussing on personal memories and emotions was not a healthy way to approach the art of acting. "Drawing on the emotions I experienced - for example, when my mother died - to create a role is sick and schizophrenic. If that is acting, I do not want to do it," she said.

Robert Lewis (1909-1997) was one of the greatest propagators of the System in the United States. He was an actor, director and playwright and was directly influenced by Michael Chekhov, a Russian actor who Stanislavski himself considered one of his most brilliant students. Lewis, who also disagreed with The Method's approaches because he considered its interpretation of Stanislavski's ideas wrong, founded the Actors Studio. Later, with Lewis' departure, Strasberg would assume the artistic direction, integrating The Method into the training centre. The Actors Studio became one of the main schools of the Method and Stanislavski's System, from which some of the most influential artists of American theatre and film in the second half of the 20th century have emerged. Aside from his artistic career, Lewis gave a series of lectures on the misunderstandings between the System and The Method, entitled "Method - or madness?"

I put birth and death dates next to the names to pinpoint how the people and their methods survived into the 80s and 90s, going through two wars, silent and talking film, technological changes, the advent of television up until today's film industry. The uninterrupted pedagogical action of its living founders adds power to this longevity that

would educate practically all coming generations of artists. The stereophony of these methods took root and unfolded and like all charismatic knowledge, it obviously also created dogmas, influencing aesthetically and morally North American film, its actors and schools wherever it reached.

Another relevant factor is that, for years, many of us did not have access to film production from other countries as we received high doses of American production. Meanwhile, actors and actresses in these productions have become icons and their interpretations, coveted references. What methods did they use? What schools did they attend? Who were their teachers? What books did they read? The limited offer of diversity tends to create a conducive environment to colonisation.

Since the beginning until the present day, little vocabulary has been added to the qualification of film actors. About 90% of current training is interpretation left from The Method or the System. Their apparent sense of renewal and personalisation is given by the cyclical reinterpretation or exclusion of the original principles which, nevertheless, do not hide their worn-out aspect. This sterility is evident in the crises and creative blocks of many contemporary actors who seem to want something different.

No knowledge is better than any kind of knowledge

Times have changed. Currently, fewer actors and actresses spend years studying the same technique until taking it to its ultimate consequences, transmutation or authorship. Recipes for immediate success and reward sell the least effort for the maximum result. Throughout my career, I have spent a lot of time correcting misunderstandings and unblocking professional actors whose techniques did not give them freedom or pleasure in their craft. For nearly three decades, I have seen an exodus: entire generations of actors robbed of the transgressive experience of learning to learn. Looped, stagnant careers. They sought freedom and excellence, but they were content with compilations, a delivery of exhilarating fragments of the craft and knowledge that did not become experienced, leaving them with an excess baggage of little practice, conflicting theories and anxiety.

Drenched in precepts about the effectiveness of emotional memory, the first question many film actors ask me is: “How can I cry?” It is not “How can I interpret a text?” or “How can I move in space?” or “How can I create a character?”. It is: “How can I cry?” So, understanding what constitutes emotion was the first of my technical immersions in film.

In acting coaching for film, the theme of emotional memory and other psychological, substitute and cathartic contiguities epitomise the “methods”, almost like a taboo, taking away, in my view, the essential focus and watershed of Stanislavski’s main legacy: the physical actions and how they lead us to emotion. And not the other way around.

Like Stella Adler, I also rejected the processes that proposed that actors should have a miserable life to lend truth and tone to their characters. In my practice, I identify with Stanislavski when he claims that imagination is much more powerful than memory. He considered emotional memory a useful technique for a while but stopped using

it due to the many problems it caused. Sooner or later, anyone using this resource discovers this.

This important redress, where Stanislavski talks about the damage and poverty of the use of emotional memory as a strategy, remains ignored by many for the most diverse reasons. Obviously, there are those who defend the use of emotional memory, disagreeing on its removal from the System. What I look upon critically is the use of the weight of Stanislavski's name by fundamentalists who hide this information in order to continue practicing and spreading a fragmented and expired theory.

*Knowledge that does not pass through the body
can produce nothing but destructive truths.*

For me, the actor's dramatic and empathic process needs a great deal of physicality: It needs a more social than biographical structure, and, above all, a repeatable structure. In general, in theatre, life on stage is like a huge wide sequence shot. In film, on the other hand, we work in a non-linear way and a scene itself is often made up of several takes, filmed from different angles. If I choose to film a dramatic and emotional scene with multiple shots - wide, medium and close-up - I will need the physical actions to be the same in all shots to ensure continuity. In editing, the shots must merge into a single scene giving coherence and fluidity. The same applies to emotions. We cannot afford for an emotion to be one in the wide shot and another in the close-up, or to be burnt like petrol after each take, or, even less, that the actor ends up emotionally massacred.

When Julia Varley is asked about the use of emotions, she replies that, in her acting work, emotions are not the starting point. Rather, they are the consequence of something that happens, reactions to a physical or vocal action.

The word "emotion" comes from the Latin "movere", which means to move outwards, movement, commotion, the act of moving or moving away. From the perspective of neuroanatomy, our emotional system corresponds to a functional concept in which various structures and neural networks are included. The processing of these aspects is based on various systems, the limbic, chemical and somatic, that is, the physical. All are related to memory and motivation, which is what drives us to act differently.

Emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, disgust, anxiety and joy have roots and inductions in the body; they comprise physical manifestations, such as fighting, fleeing, withdrawing, teeth grinding, smiling, screaming and even crying, but also a myriad of timeless organic responses that carry together physical dilations, breaths, melodies and distinct timbres.

We have a repertoire deposited in our bodies. And because it is repeatable, it can be systematised in compositional strategies. Like a 7-octave piano, actors can reproduce incredible harmonies regardless of their mood. Which is to say that emotions, once mapped, can be handled physically, through concrete internal or external stimuli, in a technical and lyrical way. Their manifestation, from the perspective of composition, goes beyond the psychological field and can obtain much more surprising and multiform nuances than those of everyday life.

To actors who ask me how to cry, I answer: "Start from the opposite, from not want-

ing to cry, and see what happens.” Meanwhile, I remind them that nothing is worth anything if the audience is not moved.

My mother, who was an actress and writer, used to say that words have trapdoors. We have to get inside them. Alone, they invariably do not want to say what they say. We actors say what we want the words to say. My mother, as a poet, in her immense mastery of the Portuguese language, used to play with words, turning nouns into verbs and vice-versa. As an actress, when I start from the text in search of new dramaturgy, I do not go from the text to the text. This only offers me predictable images. I start from the text to the imagination or the body; this is a journey through paradisiacal landscapes.

The word “drama” means “action”. It is wonderful that, in film, the director says to the actors: “Action!” Our job is clear: to act. To act like, when, for what and why. To be. Or not to be. Verbs contain the action’s cognitive gene. They retain in their semantics the conflict’s plot. I propose a constant physical and linguistic investigation of the verb in the creative process, instead of surrendering to it on one’s knees and obeying its commands. It is like a corporeal verbiage, capable of releasing the subject - the character - from our anxieties, tendencies and projections. The verb reveals the oppositions, tensions, active and latent possibilities that constitute the human being.

Exploring the verb as the DNA of action in drama pushes us to stop being ourselves, in the sense of taking distance from our pre-constituted identity and give a demiurge step towards the scope of the persona that we were invited to give body and voice to. In the context of acting, this filters the abstraction and melodrama of nouns and adjectives, embodies chaos, polishing our tenacity, exorcising the Dionysian until the Apollonian can shine.

*From the path comes the “one”,
from whose consciousness the “two” arises,
of which the “three” is implicit.*



Luciana Martuchelli working with a student. Photo: Filipe Lima

Tai Chi was one of the traditions I discovered outside acting and that offered me direction to experience in my body the theories hovering in the air as part of my actress training for more than a decade. My Taoist master Liu Pai Lin told me that, in order to find presence and control energy, I needed to beat movement through stillness, hardness through softness, speed through slowness. From the years I followed him, I will mention only the basic aspects that guided me in building a practice for actors, that I still use today. Master Liu Pai Lin and Antunes Filho were the first teachers of whom I was a pupil in the etymological sense: one who gives continuity to the work of another person.

The training consisted of learning sequences that worked with organised elements in pairs of oppositions: sky and land (north and south), mountain and lake (northwest and southeast), fire and water (east and west) and thunder and wind (northeast and southwest). My practice of these trigrams, which at the beginning had only the ambition of surviving the pressure of a film set, consisted of actions around the Tai Chi symbol: how to divert, roll, press, push, pull, divide, advance and look. But presence is like being in love: no one can tell you whether you are or are not. You simply know it. It corrupts, addicts like the legitimate stillness and understanding of the complementary opposition couples. It becomes an inclusive *modus operandi* that acts like a kind of Samadhi, breaking the sterile poverty of the excluding merely dual binary. It was a logic that would forever change my way of seeing, thinking, creating and being.

Rodin of ourselves

The principle of opposition is present in all methods I studied. This applies both to physical actions and to characters' internal images. It is a creative logic necessary for the actor: to think and react in categories of pairs of opposites. Every action hides a non-action; every "yes" has a "no" inside; the bow must be drawn back as far as possible for the arrow to hit the target ahead; every villain carries a hero within and every hero acts of villainy. Statements full of affirmation and actions obviously showing their intentions without hiding oscillations and contradictions are amalgamated in a goo of stereotypes, reinforcing clichés. It is through this tug of war composed of opposing forces that the spectator relates to us. This understanding and its effective use in the character's physical actions, text work and dramatic composition ensure that the germ of ideas displaces the spectator's perception and penetrates to deeper and more effective levels.

Thus, I continued to develop exercises and tools to integrate this knowledge and resources in the acting coaching and authorial creation for theatre and film. This way of thinking about presence and repertoire, interrelating them with different physical practices and the values of a wild and voracious labour market, led me to seek increments in techniques that dialogue with similar interactions. The Method and its variations continue to be useful to many styles of film, but I see them limited in the face of the growing and unprecedented spectacular and multicultural demand of film that requires openness and disciplinary mutation from actors to remain "extra" ordinary, which means surprising and beyond the ordinary.

My dissatisfaction brought me to Antunes Filho's powerful and rigorous theatre. There I found for the first time a set of palpable theatrical tools that had the purpose of stratifying our pseudo spontaneity, giving room to a body and voice aware of the nexus of spectacular perception. Antunes abominated those who exchanged the sacred stage space for the gains of media visibility; those who treated theatre as a television factory for actors. He looked at me with love and mistrust for belonging to these two worlds. When I decided to spend time in Africa coaching the cast of the early Angolan soap operas, he did not forgive me.

Upon returning to Brazil, the repercussion of the actors who had attained concrete results through my work led me to teach at the Academy, where the heterodox clashed with the orthodox. This would only be alleviated after my encounter with Peter Brook and Eugenio Barba and their pedagogical and aesthetic arsenals of absurd impact on the spectator. That would deplete my mestizo alphabet, a collage of recurring principles, towards an artistic concentric scope.

FRAMEWORKS

*Comprehending what someone else feels, is to be them.
And being someone else is of great metaphysical utility.*

In 2017, I was invited to participate as an actress in the film "Por Que Você Não Chora?" directed by Cibele Amaral. She called me precisely because she knew about my physical work; she wanted a film actress with an extra-daily physicality. The character was the mother of the protagonist, a borderline girl called Jessica. I would be part of two universes: one in Jessica's real life and another in Jessica's nightmare. My character was very different from my reality: a strict, bitter, dry, laconic, countryside evangelical lady who had absolutely no physical love for her daughter and, most of all, who had never really seen her. I was the mother without eyes.

To create the character in Jessica's real life, I took inspiration from the dry trees of the *cerrado*, a woodland region of Brazil, where life is contained within and seems dead from the outside. One morning, while filming in the streets of a provincial town, I observed women who, despite being relatively young, seemed older because of the punishing weight of expressionless relationships and lack of freedom. With my spine I worked on a lizard, to give my neck and eyes a certain lack of mobility but with a dynamism of flight or attack.

The biggest challenge was the mother of Jessica's nightmare. In this scene, the mother literally had no eyes. I spent about five hours in makeup to cover my eyes. I was led then to the set in total darkness. There, I had to count the steps that separated the window from the camera's close-up point, and the distances between the wall and the cupboards. The director led me telling me where my hand should be and where to position myself to create silhouettes. Because I was blind, I had to have a millimetre precision of the actions in space, without bumping into the set.

This experience encouraged me more and more to share and teach my experience of physical theatre also to film actors.

One of the actors I have recently coached was Gabriel Santana, for the film “Made in Favela” (2021) directed by Izaque Cavalcante and Cristiano Vieira. He played the Brazilian rapper Hungary Hip Hop who, in addition to being alive, was very successful and well known. I told him that, even if he had to play a character existing in real life, the important thing was to remember that, in film, other laws govern the impact of a story; the goal is to take the real story into a realm of archetypes and masterpieces.

I especially remember the most important scene in the film: with the death of his best friend, he considers giving up being a musician. It was a scene of mourning, something Gabriel, at the age of 21, had not experienced yet. Gabriel worked with opposites all the time: we built on good memories, which acted as barriers to the perception of the loss. We created exhalation and physicality points of departure from animals.

This quality of dilatation raised new centres of gravity, responses to stimuli, behaviours, rhythms and, above all, equivalences and a repertoire of physical actions. Six shots of the scene were taken in midday light in a public square, in an very exposed environment unfavourable to concentration. In all of the shots, Gabriel’s interpretation, emotion and actions were identical and equally poignant. I felt we had done a good job when I realised that the crew and film directors were emotional at the end of the filming.

In theatre, when we create an improvisation, it comes full of vigour. But we know that, by repeating it, it will gradually lose its lustre and flavour, thus becoming sterile. It is a natural, inevitable process. However, we must keep repeating it until the original life completely dies and another life blows its breath into the scene. Actors used to this logic know that doing this in theatre is the fruit of years of work. This reconstructed life in film does not enjoy the time theatre has. Doing the same in film requires a fine tune between body and mind, presence and agile perception.

Actor Victor Abrão, when shooting the same scene various times for the film “Campus Santo” (2016) directed by Marcio Curi, had to keep a choreographic precision: repeat the same actions in an identical way and, at the same time, organically, always as if it were for the first time. The scene, which was shot from multiple angles, began with his character at the bar, picking up two bottles of beer and taking them to friends. As pouring the beer, Victor had to talk with the friends. Victor had to be aware on which side the label of each bottle was, how many steps he had to take to reach his friends, the height of the bottles in relation to his body during his lines, how his hands carried them and when and how to drink. In the following scene, when his character was drunk, instead of looking for psychological tones to give likelihood, he worked with his axis and feet in precarious balance in order to give a sensation of dizziness to the spectator, in sync with the camera.

The aim of the project “Performer Lab” (2021) with actor Gustavo Araújo was to merge theatre, cinema and performance and describe the process that integrates and distinguishes these languages. He wanted to give life to the character of Shylock from Shakespeare’s “The Merchant of Venice”. I had already mapped this environment with my performance “Shakespeare’s Dreams” (2016). The performance was the result of an immersion in the principles of theatre anthropology and designed to be an installation that flirted with performance and cinema.



Luciana Martuchelli working with Gustavo Araújo before shooting. Photo: Sylvio Lima

At “Performer Lab”, Gustavo and I worked on the construction of the character using action techniques and physical scores extracted from the verbs in the text and their antonyms. In order to create new associations for the scene, we tried the score with four different objects: a bench, a sheet of paper, a purse and a candlestick with candle. To get closer to a cinematographic tone, we reduced the physicality, keeping the oppositions in the spine and modulating the actions in different equivalences. Thus, the same sequence of physical scores gave rise to four different scenes.

The preparation for the short film “Redenção” directed by Kleber Macedo, in December 2020, was permeated by a series of challenges, starting with the restrictions imposed by the pandemic: actors Bernardo Felinto, Rebeca Reis and Mateus Ferrari had been in social isolation for nine months, only training in their apartments and through remote conference apps, where meetings and rehearsals took place. Their minds were heavy and their bodies rusty, but they needed to work together. Besides the action scenes in the script, the characters bore intense conflicts, which involved loneliness, rejection, betrayals, addictions and mysteries.

In the first online meetings, we analysed all the verbs in the script, to understand what the characters said and what they did, how they expressed themselves throughout the story by means of actions. They had to find unusual reactions and physical alternatives different from their personal tendencies. These verbs were a “mine map” to identify physical actions inherent to the characters, where they could anchor the work and create their own colour. In the face-to-face preparation, each one built an individual series of

Kempo katas that functioned as exhaustion exercises, expanding energy and achieving an alert stillness. On the set, I would tease the actors, using breathing and corporeality, allowing these universes to emerge and activate the images before the “action!” call.

Nautical Chart

“You have all the time in the world to be a teacher. You can do that when you are 80, if you still want to. But the time to be an actress and director fully is now.” My mother told me this when I had to choose between becoming the coordinator of a Master’s degree in film at an important university, or going to Denmark and continuing for the next few years learning and working with Eugenio, Julia and a huge artistic family from Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Mexico, Germany, United Kingdom, Malaysia, Japan and Taiwan. Our flights together give me vitality and a sense of belonging to a whole, spurring me on to encourage artists to transgress boundaries that threaten to blur freedom of expression and authenticity, so they can make discoveries that might offer hard-to-reach goods to the world, such as humanity and empathy.

All my work with actors in theatre and with the camera involves teaching them not to direct themselves, not to plan discoveries but to flow in the face of them. In its preparation process, the actors must do all the hard work prior to the moment of filming, in order to open their vision and presence to the poetic dimensions and, thus, gather new insights. The sum of their expertise and openness to the freshness of the moment takes them to where unthinkable worlds reside.

A floating island by itself is not aware that there are other islands or even continents, until an explorer or castaway visits it and tells stories about other islands and habits. This feeds the curiosity of exploring life overseas, of uprooting ourselves in pursuit of diversity. That is what the whole study of theatre anthropology means to me: a treasure map, a nautical chart of floating islands. And the treasure is the existing civilization awaiting us. It is like finding an entire Atlantis, just within reach to be touched by the very experience of the body. ■

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