

*Amos de Haas*  
*Frits Vogels*

*Mime*Handbook  
A Handbook for Mime Corporel

Translated by Pieter Smit

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

## **COLOFON**

### **Mime Handbook; A Handbook for Mime Corporel**

Second, revised and updated edition

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Design: Stijn van Diemen | Metacy, based on an original design by de fabriek de labor

Print: Wilco Printing & Binding

ISBN 978 94 63720 48 9

Editor: Amsterdam University Press  
Nieuwe Prinsengracht 89  
1018 VR Amsterdam  
The Netherlands

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# Preface

This *Mime Handbook* provides an overview of the mime corporel (corporeal mime) as developed by Etienne Decroux. It offers a practical overview of its basic techniques, the historical and theoretical backgrounds, and a wide range of illustrated exercises.

This book is intended for anyone who is in any way involved with mime corporel: mime performers; students; teachers; and mimographers, and provides an essential overview to help them understand this subject. Some readers who are already familiar with the subject may use this handbook to explore the world of the mime corporel further and delve deeper into its practice. For practitioners of other art disciplines, this book may provide new perspectives on the expressive potential of the human body.

This *Mime Handbook* assembles the various mime corporel experiences of Dutch mimes from different generations, Frits Vogels and Amos de Haas.

Frits Vogels (Bloemendaal, 1933) came into contact with Etienne Decroux's mime corporel in the 1960s, through Jan Bronk and Wil Spoor. He won a lifetime achievement award in 1994 and is still active today.

Amos de Haas (Amsterdam, 1965) was a student at the Mime School in Amsterdam, which was founded by Frits Vogels, and subsequently trained in Paris in the early 1990s with Decroux's last assistants, Steven Wasson and Corinne Soum. Amos de Haas worked with the Frits Vogels Grif Theater for eight years, taught at the Antwerp Mime Studio and the Mime School in Amsterdam, and is currently a teacher at the Moving Academy for Performing Arts (MAPA).

With the development of his philosophy and his repertoire, and through research with his students and assistants, Etienne Decroux's mime corporel evolved throughout his life. Much has been written about the great significance of Decroux's work for the modern theater at large in the twentieth century.

In addition to his writings and videos, he has, over a period of more than 50 years, passed on the wealth of his knowledge to all those international students and assistants that he worked with. This means that the mime corporel is primarily an oral tradition, and one that sometimes seems to resemble a game of 'Chinese Whispers': different students have different interpretations and memories of what Etienne Decroux told them, or they developed their own technique based on what they took from his teachings. In any case, all were inspired by what Decroux called "the art of the actor."

In this *Mime Handbook*, we have tried to give the broadest overview possible of the basics of the mime corporel technique. To describe the technique, we returned as far as possible to its foundations to build up the concepts from their origins. We have done so with the help of illustrations, trying to manage the limitations of what cannot be shown on a page or described in words.

The book is composed of two parts: the first part covers the historical and theoretical principles of the mime corporel; the second part contains a large number of exercises.

Our starting point was to identify and explain the exercises that are essential for mastering the basis of the mime corporel system. The objectives are to offer an overview, to refresh the (physical) memory, and to stimulate the reader to make their own variations.

In addition, this manual adds new elements to the work of Etienne Decroux: the chapters on “Space” and “Mimography” are both founded on his work and are an extension of his philosophy. In the Dutch mime tradition, the concepts of “Space” and “Mimography” are two inescapable subjects that are integral to the teaching and practice of mime.

Frits Vogels is the spiritual father of what later came to be called “Location Theater.” He has built a lifelong mime oeuvre, in which the physical –or architectural – space plays a central role. Building on the movement language of mime corporel, he and Arnold Hamelberg made an analysis of the actor’s use of space in the 1960s. In addition, Frits Vogels gave mime an autonomous place in the Dutch theater landscape by emphasizing the importance of creating mimographies and the need for recording and saving these unique works. (See also the publications at the back of this book that make the connection between mimeography and visual work.)

There were already plans for an English translation when the *Mime Handbook* was first published in 1994. In the years that have passed since the first publication, interest waxed and waned regarding the translation. Just when the embers seemed to be dying out, Ide van Heiningen – the tireless founder of MAPA, Director of the former Nederlands Mime Centrum, and the promoter of this and previous editions – spoke up. Thanks to his energy and inspiration, a translator was engaged in 2020 and the publisher in 2021.

The original *Mime Handbook* was translated from Dutch to English by Pieter Smit, and, in the process, it was completely revised and updated. The language was simplified, descriptions sharpened, additions were made, and the use of certain technical terms was adjusted. Our great thanks go to Pieter Smit for his eye for detail and endless perseverance.

A great thank you as well to our indispensable mime corporel colleagues Dean and Claire Fogal for their reviews, language corrections, and suggestions.

Likewise, we are grateful to experts Corinne Soum and Steven Wasson for their inspiration and advice.

We owe the striking design of the book to the designer, also of the first edition, Stijn van Diemen.

We are aware that few, like us, have had the opportunity to publish a book about the practical knowledge and experience of mime corporel. We therefore feel very privileged to be able to make the *Mime Handbook* edition from 1994 available to an international audience in the year 2022.

Etienne Decroux’s mime corporel is not only of historical importance, but it is also essential to future generations of mimes. It is only through their interpretations and exploration of this material that Decroux’s mime corporel can evolve and stay relevant for today’s theater practice. We hope that, with the translation of this handbook, we will inspire international colleagues to share their knowledge and experience of Mime Corporel not only in their studios, but also by publishing their findings both on- and offline.

The 1994 *Mime Handbook* replaced the 1989 *Mime Handbook*; this translation is a revision of the 1994 *Mime Handbook*. We look forward to the next *Handbook*.

Amos de Haas and Frits Vogels, Amsterdam 2022.

## Transport of the Weight

### CHAPTER 3

*The following exercises are about moving the center of gravity and reducing the base that supports the body. They demand to push the weight to the maximum and take the risk of falling. The central body axis moves parallel to the vertical line. The corps composé of the tronc is maintained vertically. This results in an asymmetry in image and in movement . These are exercises in taking the maximum risk to fall. These exercises remind us of Decroux's words in Chapter one: "A walking man has decided to move; and what he moves first is his own center."*

In our everyday way of standing, we are dealing with a constantly moving center of gravity. Alternately, the body rests either on the front of the feet or the heels, it stands either on one or two legs. Standing is not a static activity, therefore standing still is a conscious act.

Moving the center of gravity (the tronc) from one leg to the other is called a **transport**. It can also be called a **translation** when it concerns a straight shift (see also Chapter 8, Translations).

In the exercises, which always begin in the 1st, 2nd, or 4th position in which the weight is evenly distributed over two legs, the base is reduced. An active use of the abdominal and buttock muscles is important to control the weight and to guarantee a solid base for extending through the spine.

The leg that gets released, the "free leg," is always in harmony. It does not need to express anything special and in the image it is subordinate to the tronc. The free leg relaxes, there is a slight opening/outward turn in the groin, and a slight bending of the knee- and ankle joints. The heel shows itself.

**I. TRANSPORT OF THE WEIGHT FROM THE 1ST POSITION**

- 0 1st position zéro dynamique
- 1 transport of the tronc sideways until the weight is on the front of the supporting foot (this is called on the ski, as if leaning forward over a ski)
- 2 back to zéro
- 3 transport of the tronc forward until the weight is on the front of both feet
- 4 back to zéro
- 5 transport of the tronc backward until the weight is on the heels
- 6 back to zéro



0



1



2

*The harmonious bending of the free leg is as follows: the leg turns out, knee and ankle are slightly bent, the heel lifts up and pushes forward.*

**II TRANSPORT OF THE WEIGHT FROM THE 2ND POSITION**

- 0 2nd position zéro dynamique
- 1 transport of the tronc sideways until the weight is on the ski
- 2 plié in the supporting leg until the heel lifts slightly off the ground, the tronc lowers perpendicular to the floor. At the same time, the free leg stretches until the foot touches the floor
- 3 back to zéro following the same positions in mirror-image



0



1



2

*The harmonious bending of the free leg is as follows: the leg turns outward, the knee and ankle are slightly bent, the toes are stretched, and the heel is off the ground and pushes forward. Eventually, the foot may be pulled along with the toes touching the floor.*





3



4



5



6

The end positions that are now the result of each individual transport can also be connected with each other by making a circular movement of the vertical spine. This is called *grue* (crane).

**IIIA FROM THE 4TH POSITION FORWARD ON A BENT LEG**

0 4th position *zéro dynamique*

1 transport of the *tronc* forward on a bent supporting leg until the weight is so far on the forefoot that the heel of the supporting leg is slightly off the ground

Followed by:

**IIIB FROM BENT TO STRETCHED LEG THROUGH SISSONNE**

2 Bend the supporting leg even more in order to extend it (countermovement: the weight presses down in order to go up). In the extension of the leg the weight remains forward as much as possible. (For more information on the *sissonne*, see *contre-poids scolaires exercices*).



0



1



2

The free leg remains extended here, and the ball of the foot fixed, causing the heel to turn forward along the floor.

The harmonious bending of the free leg is as follows: the leg turns out (the knee points outward as much as possible), the knee is slightly bent, the foot is extended, and the heel pushes forward.