

Microanalysis of mimetic processes in the early mother–child interaction

Sigrid Klasen

Mimesis is a particular way in which human understands the world. In processes of simulation he adapts to the world and creates new forms as a response to what he has received from it. We could say it is a faculty that mediates between the inner and the outer world.

In this sense mimesis is also a forming principle which plays a significant role in the ontogenesis of a child. Through the mimetic action, the figure of „becoming similar“ and „imitation“, the child is able to step out to the world of adults by after-constructing their emotions, actions and representations in her own peculiar way and, at the same time, shaping something new of them.

In that course, the mimetic access to the world shows itself not only in the symbolic, i.e. in the internalization of the Other as a model, but begins already much earlier in the exchange of emotions, in the every day experiences the infants have in contact with their caregivers.

From the very first parent-infant-dialogues, there are emerging patterns of perceptions, actions and affects which bear individual as well as social traits.

The body during this early period constitutes a central starting point as a mediator between child and world. By affective, mimic and gestic actions, motions, and sounds an infant learns to „know“, how she can expel or lure his parents and induce them to certain actions. In the course of this she manages to trace their moods, needs and intentions quite accurately.

According to Daniel Stern, this „implicit relational knowledge“ continues to exist throughout the whole life and constitutes a kind of second track besides language without us becoming aware of it.

The mimetic becomes visible in the scenic form of the early dialogues in the way its elements are repeated in many variants, in the temporary and affective tuning of motions as well as in the rhythmic courses of contrastive phenomena, such as action/pause, loud/silent, tension/relaxation, closeness/distance etc. – to put it shortly, all that, which Stern has subsumed to the notion of „vitality affects“ or

„-contours“.

It is like a dance during which each dancer takes turns in leading the other; the infant will acquire a kind of micro-structure of being-together with persons in his closest surroundings. That micro-structure represents him a foundation for the experience of their emotional state and through this foundation the child is able to enter the world of the Other.

From the standpoint of the mimetic, the micro-analysis of a video-recorded play-scene between a 13-weeks-old boy and his mother – its total length amounts to 71 seconds – provides us an impressive insight into their relation-forming, very close to the body.

In everyday life, these rapidly successive connections, disconnections and re-establishments of relations, created by eye contact, facial expression, gestures and voice, are for us invisible. But they are nevertheless exactly that, what constitutes the origin of the process called social development.

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