Chapter IV

Vernacular Notions of Mimesis in Contemporary Culture

A mimetic work is therefore necessarily a discourse with gaps ... a wandering signifier in search of the signifieds a reader will bring to it.

- Luiz Costa Lima

Although we began with the simple idea of mimesis in its most commonly translated form as imitation, we have seen in the last two chapters that this is only one fraction, albeit an important one, of the conceptual story of mimesis, having its antecedents in the Platonic idea of art as a ‘imitation of reality’, in other words, mimesis-as-imitation. This is the form in which it has also been commonly appropriated, in popular as well as scholarly media. Yet, the previous two chapters revealed how misleading this is as ‘[t]he manner in which a subject actively engages in ‘making oneself similar to an Other’ dissociates mimesis from its definition merely as imitation’ (Spariosu 1984:34). We saw some of its other avatars in Chapter II: mimesis-as-creation, mimesis-as-emulation, mimesis-as-imitatio, mimesis-as-copia and mimesis-as-representation. We also got some indications from the Indian traditions, about the nebulous place of mimesis within it. In Chapter III, we discussed two important themes thrown up by the various conceptual apparatus of historical mimesis. No doubt there are others, but we chose the ones most relevant to our quest in this dissertation.

In this chapter, we look at the various ways in which this attempt to ‘make oneself similar’ happens, as well as the ways in which this ‘impetus to similarity’ occurs, ironically, even when we actively engage in making ourselves different. This impetus is what we have called the ‘mimetic impulse’ in human beings, as we explain below. We explore various ways in which this arises in different facets of life, before we turn to contemporary Indian culture in order to examine the forms in which mimesis occurs and recurs there. In anthropological terms, it gives us the vernacular notions of mimesis as opposed to the more ‘etic’ ones of historical mimesis which we unearthed through a diachronic analysis in Chapter II. This perspective is important
and if we look through the lens of historical mimesis, we find its transmutations in the vernacular.

**Mimetic Impulses and Vernacular Notions of Mimesis**

We have understood the ‘thematic complex’ of historical mimesis in Chapter II, largely as it appeared in the textual tradition. In Chapter III we saw its appropriations by writers and artists, many of whom actively engaged with it in order to reveal its assumptions. Why and how is a further exploration of mimesis in contemporary India of relevance to us? We need to see how mimesis appears in different facets of Indian contemporary culture, particularly when the knowledge gained from this dissertation is directed towards young people and education, so that we can explore its use in pedagogy. We have had a brief glimpse of the postmodern conceptualizations of mimesis as Derridean ‘iterations’, Baudrillard’s ‘hyperreal’ and ‘simulacrum’ which also are a part of contemporary culture.

However, we are interested in not just the esoteric or the obscure, but the terms that people use and can identify with in daily usage – the vernacular notions of mimesis, in other words. The mimetic ‘impulse’ suggests a force beyond our volition which drives our mimetic endeavors. It is not conceptual itself, but something that can be harnessed in order to access one or other of the robust forms of conceptual mimesis, on the one hand, as well as the vernacular forms on the other. Mimetic impulses thus give rise to both mimetic concepts as well as vernacular notions of mimesis. It is more similar to Dewey’s ‘imitative instinct’, but different from Michael Taussig and Walter Benjamin’s idea of mimesis as a ‘faculty’. Taussig, for instance argues that, ‘the mimetic faculty is the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the *faculty* to copy, imitate, create models, explore difference, yield into and become Other’ (Taussig 1993, emphasis mine), thereby suggesting that mimesis is a *capacity* prevalent in the human being.

We appropriate Nietschze’s distinction between *kraft* (force) and *macht* (power) to suggest that ‘mimetic impulse’ could be understood as a ‘will to mimesis’. Rather than looking for mimetic concepts in contemporary culture, we look instead for vernacular notions, different *kraft* (force), which conveys the idea of something more mechanical which is used in order to harness *macht* (power). Thus vernacular notions of mimesis are more aligned with *kraft* or force, are more mechanical, and non volitional ways of being mimetic. By using the phrase mimetic
impulse, we suggest that mimesis is more than a capacity, it is a drive, a force, _kraft_ which we need to use more consciously in our pedagogy in order to transform education into _macht_.

Being _mechanisms_ associated with mimesis, such vernacular notions demonstrate the faculty to imitate or copy which is prevalent in different arena. They do not coalesce necessarily into a concept, the way we have used concepts in this dissertation, and are largely action-oriented, always ‘doing’ something. These vernacular notions of mimesis are probably innate, in the sense that they are present at birth in human beings, (and probably other species) as will be clearer in the next section.

Interestingly, BR Ambedkar used the idea of imitation in his thesis on the origins of caste or how they were formed when he says, ‘endogamy…. had originated from the Brahmin caste … and was whole-heartedly imitated by all the non-Brahmin division or classes who, in their turn, became endogamous castes’ (Ambedkar 1979: 41). He refers to the ‘infection of imitation’ that was caught by various sub divisions as they moved towards differentiation and turned them into castes. So great was its power that the propensity to imitate, according to Ambedkar, could only be seen as ‘a deep-seated one in the human mind and need not be deemed an inadequate explanation for the formation of various castes in India’ (Ambedkar 1979: 41). He uses Gabriel Tarde’s laws of imitation and substantiates them through analysis of castes in India. Ambedkar also refers to the mechanical aspects of this imitative propensity, a quality that is of interest to us as we have explained. This impetus to imitate the higher castes was also called ‘Sanskritization’ by social anthropologist MN Srinivas (1952), and involved, among other things, copying habits, behavior, dress-codes and customs of higher castes by the lower castes in an attempt to move up the caste hierarchy.

We highlight seven different kinds of vernacular notions in a typology of sorts generated from our purview of contemporary domains. We categorize these into seven major iterations of vernacular mimesis in varying order of complexity:

1. Copying, replicating
2. Repeating
3. Substituting
4. Juxtaposing
5. Emulating
6. Re-producing
7. Re-presenting

The vernacular notions cannot be clearly demarcated, as is clear from the list. There are, of course, overlaps between them and possibly also some gaps in between. The reason for making this typology of sorts is to get a better handle on the concepts for their later use in pedagogy. Moreover, in opening up the concept of historical mimesis we have come to know the range of meanings, some even contradictory, that it both refers to as well as evokes. It is the same with this typology of vernacular mimesis in contemporary culture. As Melberg points out, ‘Mimesis is never a homogenous term, and if its basic movement is towards similarity, it is always open to the opposite’ (Melberg 1995: 3).

In an earlier paper written about plagiarism (Nayak 2011), the notion of ‘karaoke’ which is essentially mimetic, was used to trace the complexity of a culture of copying in the classroom to the way we learn from the time we are born. We now briefly explore some of the more evolutionary, biological, neurological and genetic arena which have used the idea of mimesis in their knowledge formation. We then move into more mechanical domains to invoke ‘mechanistic mimesis’, which is merely the use of some technology to mechanically reproduce something as with blocks, etchings, moulds, xeroxes and copying. After that we examine five contemporary domains – mimicry, contemporary Indian music, classical Indian music, contemporary dance and yoga to discover mimetic impulses in them as well as understand how mimesis has been an important part of transformation in them. We will thus see how mimesis remains so integral to the way we are as human beings.

The purpose of the three sections is to bring two ideas together: the pervasiveness of mimesis (to suggest that we must accept and work with mimetic impulses in pedagogy) and the mechanical nature of mimesis to suggest that even when we do something mechanically, transformation is possible at finer levels of observation than the gross levels that pedagogy is used to functioning at. The five domains which we explore in the latter half of this chapter are good examples of this transformation through one or other mechanical aspect of mimesis as represented in the vernacular. They demonstrate how kraft gets transformed into macht.
Mimicry in Other Species

Although we are looking at human culture, a glance at the world of insects, plants and animals may not be out of place at this juncture to give an idea that mimetic impulses are common even to other species. Mimicry is the form of mimesis that in fact has been an important facet of different aspects of animal, bird, insect and plant life. Amongst animals, for instance, mimicry goes back to evolutionary biology where one species evolves to share the characteristics (called signals) of another species. Semioticians like Sebeok and Noth consider biological mimicry to be related to iconicity in nature (Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok 1992; Noth 1990). There are many ways in which a species mimic the signals of other species. For example, a species may imitate the sound, scent, look, or behavior of another species in order to protect itself from predators. Camouflage is another variation of mimicry wherein the organism is inseparable or indistinguishable from its physical surroundings. This could also be called dissimulation, used by armies across the world in the guise of combat fatigues which material have patterns and colors of the forest on them so as to better merge with the surroundings of jungle warfare. When the mimic takes on the properties of a specific object or organism to which the thing ‘duped’ is indifferent, then it is called mimesis in evolutionary biology. As we learned in high school biology, insects such as flower mantises and moths commonly use this strategy whereby they resemble a bark, twig, or leaf in order to avoid detection by a predator.

Even some birds like the Lincoln Sparrow exhibit signs of mimesis when, for instance, they mimic the songs of other species. ‘Some oscines learn the songs of alien species in the laboratory, but in the world generally learn only conspecific songs’ (Luis, Morton and Pereyra 1981). It has been suggested that the repertoire of such mimicked songs may serve to advertise individual fitness of birds and a larger territory. Clearly, older birds possess a larger repertoire. The study also shows how some birds improvise within the mimicked pieces.

This idea of using strategies in order to ensure survival from a predator is also taken up by Adorno in his discussion of mimesis which, for him, is biologically shaped. He too distinguished between mimicry and mimesis, posing the former as a predecessor to the latter and he suggested that survival is dependent on identification with something external to the organism.

Interestingly, evolutionary biology points out that while visual mimicry is familiar to humans (as the vague familiarity of many of the above examples will attest, along with facets of
culture such as fashion and music), mimicry can also be of smell and sound. Regardless of the types of mimicry and the organisms which practice it, it is commonly acknowledged that such mimicry is a positive adaptation of species. Caillois (1984) however disagrees with this position. He believes that there is no benefit to an insect pretending to be a leaf or a twig; in fact the opposite may well be true that it is disadvantageous as it may now be eaten up by predators whose food is a leaf or twig.

Another important and relevant mimicry from the world of biology is called Vavilovian mimicry wherein weeds come to resemble domesticated plants through artificial selection. A species of grass is now found as a weed in paddy fields – it looks identical to the rice plant and is difficult to separate from it. These weeds have also become resistant to the pesticides used by farmers, so there is almost no way to control their growth. Lastly, through chemicals, in pharmacy, we see also the attempt is to replicate synthetically the healing component or property of what is available in nature.

Interestingly, plants, insects, birds and animals not only evince aspects of biological mimesis as shown above, but some also imbibe the mimetic quality of social learning as we see in apes and macaque monkeys. We know about the teaching of sign language to the ape, as well as teaching it to ‘understand’ basic commands. This teaching has a strong element of mimesis in it, much like what is involved in the teaching of young toddlers. More recently, research done in neurobiology in the 1990s on mirror neurons has shown that these neurons reflect what they see, or in other words, ‘mimic what they observe’ (Buchanan 2011). A macaque neonate monkey who instinctively mimics its caregiver, by sticking out the tongue for instance, is an illustration of mirror neurons at work with regard to physical information. According to Buchanan, it is also hypothesized that such mirroring happens even for mental information which we repeat either orally or in our minds or even repeatedly hear. As newer research in these fields becomes available, we may see a different understanding of the way repetition effects the neurological system, including the brain.

**Mimesis in the Evolution of Cognitive Development**

Mimesis has been used in the newer understanding of human cognitive development within an evolutionary framework which may give us an insight into why the mimetic faculty is so prevalent. Decades ago, biology and brain neurology were examined alongside a host of other disciplines from archeology to anthropology to develop a theory of cognitive evolution based on
mimesis (Donald 1991). This theory suggested that human beings moved from the pre-symbolic cognitive levels as they developed new information storage systems. According to this theory, human beings separately ‘progressed from other primates by developing gestural, linguistic, written storage and thought structures’ and thus got their formidable mind power. His evolutionary cycle for all of humanity is in three stages which are episodic, mimetic, and mythic. Australopithecines coincide with episodic consciousness when they were able to bury their dead and develop a range of sophisticated tools, all without language. However, they had no external symbolic system and no way of reflecting on the past or future, and in addition, no signs of innovation in, for example, systematic cooperative hunting techniques (Donald 1991: 16). They were able to use signs but were unable to invent them, and in this, australopithecines were just like apes.

With the evolution of Homo erectus, we see some explanation accounting for the leaps in cognitive development, based upon simple expansion of the existing cognitive apparatus and rate of change. This is the second transition where Donald locates the disproportionate change in cognition to Homo erectus’ ‘most basic level of human representation, the ability to mime, or re-enact, events’. This is mimetic culture. In this stage, confronted with a problem, Homo erectus are able to solve them but are unable to plan against its recurrence as they have no symbolic system and no memory. There is limited ability to plan for a future which develops in this mimetic stage, considered by Donald to be the link between Homo erectus and Homo sapiens or modern humans. This part of Donald’s theory coincides with modern educational theory where rote-learning is considered insufficient to learning as merely comprehending what one has learned is of little use unless one is able to apply it to newer situations or problems and contexts. In Homo erectus, according to Donald, there is an ability to problem-solve but no ability to plan against recurrence since they have no memory and no symbolic system. Thus, in terms of the interests of this dissertation, it appears that ability to remember is critical to the cognitive development of apes from Homo erectus to Homo sapiens, rather than problem solving. One can continually problem solve but if time is spent on repeatedly reinventing the wheel, the fact that young people can do it may be of lesser importance than the fact that they are able to remember what has been done before and factor that into inventing things other than the wheel.

In Donald’s framework, it is with the change from Homo erectus to Homo sapiens that the transition occurs from mimetic to mythic culture. Mythic consciousness arises in the form of
representational systems developed by humans which are however, based upon mimetic abilities. There is not just the ability to mimic but to also have abstract thought. Proto-language and speech, non-linguistic song, body decoration all develop in this period. Knowledge of a kind is passed down from generations, such as tool-making. It is in this stage of mythic consciousness that modern humans develop the capacity for symbolic thought and language, along with constructing and decoding narrative. Language is invented along with graphic drawings and eventually script (Donald 1991: 16-17). The latter allow for the human brain to deal with a great deal more data than was hitherto possible.

The third transition in cognitive evolution was ‘marked by visual symbolism and the development of external memory’ and results in ‘external symbolic storage’ (Donald 1991: 17). In current times, this includes technological memory storages but what Donald originally referred to resided in the technology of culture. Aspects such as reading depended upon, and in turn led to, changes in cognitive architecture. Thus for Donald, it is the mimetic stage which is critical for the development of human cognition and consciousness in the third stage, as it is the time when the structures of cognitive development get established through mimesis. This was an interesting way to look at cognition of humans in evolutionary framework, especially as it isolates mimetic ability as the basis for the growth of cognitive development in humans; secondly, it also looked at the role that external memory storage systems (once symbolic, now also technological) play in cognitive evolution. It would appear that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny here too.

**Replicating and Re-producing: Genetics and Memetics**

In genetics, mimesis as replication and duplication of genes occurs across generations. The idea of genes is founded on DNA which stores and transfers genetic information, replicates itself during cell division while chromosomes duplicate themselves in the process of cell division. Although we tend to associate different forms of mimesis with behavior, art or technology, there is a strong element of mimesis in biological arenas as the material above demonstrated. Ironically, human reproduction itself is another example of mimesis. Note the importance given to the biological ‘copies’ of humans through reproduction of genetic material, every time a new baby is born. The newborn is of course not referred to as a copy, even though ‘[a] new being is created by this act of copying, whether through the blending of the genomes of the father and
mother or, in the case of asexual reproduction of certain bacteria through mistakes in the transcription of a genetic code that should otherwise be perfectly repeated’ (Boon 2010: 84).

We share or are ‘like’ chimpanzees in the sense that 90% of our genetic material is alike. A human mother and daughter share 99.95% of their genes. From here to cloning was only a step away and Dolly, the cloned sheep was created in 1997. John Harris in his book *On Cloning* talks about why there is so much resistance to cloning as it appears to violate some core ethical issues across cultures, if applied to humans. He tries to convince us otherwise through an exposition of the benefits that human cloning would bring, among them the minimization of risk of passing on undesirable or potentially harmful and unhealthy genes through sexual reproduction. He identifies mimesis as one of the almost dozen reasons he gives to build an argument in favour of cloning, barely stopping short of projecting it in the language of immortality: ‘the idea and fascination for likenesses, facsimiles, duplicates and reproductions …. holds a mirror upto nature … feels perennial, eternal, in a way that abstraction seems and perhaps is, transient’ (Harris 2004).

Drawing upon the ideas of genes, biology and culture, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins came up with the idea of the ‘meme’ in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976). According to him, the meme is a unit of cultural transmission or a unit of imitation. It is ‘an idea, behavior or style that spreads from person to person within a culture’ (Dawkins 1976). Melodies, catch-phrases, fashion are all considered to be based on memes. Memes are supposed to self-replicate, mutate and respond to selective pressures the same as do genes. Strong memes are the ones which survive, adapt or even mutate; weak ones are the ones which are not replicated and are thus driven into extinction. Memes are thus subject to the laws of natural selection according to its proponents.

In the mid 1980s, the field called ‘memetics’ was born to study memes. Prominent scientists such as Charles Lumsden and EO Wilson (both sociobiologists and collaborators) supported this idea of memes. But important questions remained: how is the unit of a meme recognized and defined and what is the medium through which they are transmitted. Further work was done and memetic theory expanded. For instance, Adam Mc Namara divided memes into two types depending on whether they are transmitted through the nervous system itself or whether through an external media. The former is called an i-meme or internal meme and the latter is called the e-meme or external meme.
Another proponent of memetics, Susan Blackmore, in her book *The Meme Machine* (1999), has carefully and incisively described memes, their existence, transmission and mutation through the filter of biological or genetic evolution. She points out that unlike genetic evolution, memetic evolution can reveal both Darwinian and Lamarckian characteristics. She uses the example of hammering a nail whereby it is possible to follow each movement of the demonstrator by watching her; or it is possible to directly hammer the nail in. The former is ‘copying the instructions’ type of evolution of Darwin; the latter is ‘copying the product’ evolution of Lamarcke.

The biological-genetic and memetic models we have studied are influential in contemporary society and we need to be able to understand what use they could have for pedagogy. Memes are now all over the internet too and their popularity is evidenced by their going viral. The work we do in developing the pedagogy is premised upon such new and popular mimetic impulses, by using largely visuals and some text and mediated by technology.

**Re-presenting: Illness as Simulation**

While talking about genetics and biology, we think about the related area of medicine which has its own type of mimesis as we see in the case of patients who mimic symptoms of diseases, usually mental ones, but have no genesis for them. In illness, here is an age-old saying used by Baudrillard (1994) which captures the idea of mimesis in sickness in two senses: ‘Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and pretend he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms’ (Littre). The two different ways in which mimesis occurs here is mimesis as feint and mimesis as simulation. This distinction has implications which may be important to note at this juncture. Baudrillard points out that feigning keeps the reality principle intact so we know what the sickness is and we can deduce from the symptoms that the person doesn’t have it. For example, a child may feign a fever in order not to go to school. In this case, we can easily take her temperature and infer that she is not “really” sick but is only feigning sickness. In the case of a person simulating a sickness, the simulator produces true symptoms and therefore the implications are more grave as the division between true and false, between real and imaginary, itself gets blurred (Langford 1999).

Another case of mimesis in biology is in biomedicine, specifically psychiatry. Mimesis has been used most recently to examine some of the work in post-traumatic stress disorder (Leys 2000) especially those which have focused on literary and medical accounts of responses to
PTSD. In *Trauma: A Geneology*, Leys looks at mimetic and non mimetic perspectives to post-traumatic stress reactions. According to the mimetic perspective, there is a destruction of the person’s cognitive-perceptual capacities such that the trauma is rendered unavailable to consciousness and therefore remains unintegrated and the sufferer imitates or identifies with the aggressor or the trauma (Leys 2000). Thus, according to Leys, a mimetic perspective in this case is registered with the active participation of the sufferer. Although not studied anywhere as a separate category, such a perspective can also be used in the case of the more familiar Stockholm syndrome where the victims of hijack identify with the hijackers themselves and appear to justify and legitimize their reasons for hijacking.

In an interesting article on medical mimesis which looks at the signifying practices of an Ayurvedic doctor in an Indian metropolis, Langford (1999) does a neat flip on the above idea of a patient simulating an illness which blurs the boundaries of sickness by doing an ethnography of a doctor simulating a cure and therefore blurring the boundaries of true and false medicine. He asks, ‘What is the status of the doctor who simulates a cure? Whether a simulating doctor who simulates wellness is a doctor or a quack?’ (Langford 1999: 24). In this instance, mimetic practices challenge the authenticity of the cultural object (‘authentic Ayurveda) and its consumer-oriented copy (pulse diagnosis as practiced by the *Ayur vaidya*).

Having seen how mimesis operates in evolutionary, biological, genetic and medical areas, it appears that mimesis does have deeper roots in mimetic impulses. We next move to the mechanical section where we see how tools and technology have historically created mimesis through repetition.

**The Idea of Mechanical Mimesis: Blocks, Moulds, Etching**

This brings us to another manifestation of mimesis, namely, reproduction in the cultural sphere through replicating. A brief look at the origins of cultural reproduction itself is in order. Reproduction dates back to antiquity across cultures: stamps and seals were commonly used in Mohenjo Daro and Harappa, as well as ancient Egypt in Mesopotamia where they date back to 3000 BCE. Wooden blocks used in printing with the use of inks and dyes of various kinds, also date back to ancient China where they were used for printing onto fabric (earliest evidence is from 220 CE) and only much later, paper. Curiously, although papyrus was made early in China between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE, woodblock printing was never done on it until many centuries later, around 650 CE. In India, block printed textiles date back to 1000 CE. The
Chinese ‘Terracotta Army’ (210 BCE) built by Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi was part of huge necropolis comprising halls and gated structures, all protected by a massive army of 8000 warrior figures made of terracotta. These were built ‘from fired clay and mass-produced from interchangeable units or modules’ (Farthing 2011: 47) which thus indicated a degree of standardization (and therefore reproduction) made possible through the use of a limited number of moulds.

The technique of using moulds to generate replicas was taken to new heights in the Roman Empire (400 BCE) when the category of collectors of Greek statues grew. In order to meet the heavy demand, ‘moulds taken from the original sculptures were used to make plaster casts that were disseminated throughout the Roman Empire, where they were replicated in marble or bronze’ (Farthing 2011: 55). Replicas of Greek sculptor Myron’s *The Discus Thrower* (Latin: *Discobolus*) circa 450 BCE were widely available across the Empire to affluent Romans and is an early example of mass reproduction technique.

Metal etching was a technique firmly established in medieval Europe and probably going back to antiquity. It was a popular method used to make several hundreds of copies at a time with little technical skill required, unlike metal engraving which was a highly skilled profession originating with goldsmiths whereby designs were actually beaten onto metal sheets as in the metal embossing and painting, a popular art form in South India in the mid 1990s. Metallurgy in India, as in the Chola Bronzes, are another example of statuettes made through wax casting.

Tools and technology of various kinds have thus been an important component of reproduction in the ancient forms of *techne* or crafts. Print technologies have aided the copying of the written word, even if these have not entirely replaced or substituted writing in the larger contemporary culture which has also become more occulocentric (visual based). The act of writing may appear to be deeply conventional as it is also institutionalized in modern schools of one kind or another; yet at a deeper level, the formation of convention itself is mimetic or imitative of speech. In fact, with the introduction of writing and the easy access to cheap paper, repetitively inscribing holy names or chants rather than chanting them, became a form of meditation. Inscribing ‘Hare Ram, Hare Ram, Ram Ram Hare Hare’ is an instance of this. Orality comes first as a communicative device and only then literacy. And in an integral sense, even oral cultures depended upon mimesis as other forms of knowledge, such as music and dance, are equally privy to this kind of imitative learning, albeit in the form of repetition.
Mirroring: Xeroxes, Copies
As children go to schools, not only is script-writing a matter of copying of ‘marks’ made on the blackboard by a teacher (captured by the phrase ‘copying it from the blackboard’) but repetition in the form of practicing it is necessary to master the basics of script writing.

The best example (and contributor) to this aspect of copying is technology-based today as photographs and film themselves are considered mimetic. But it was with Xerox machines (formerly called a ‘copy machine’) that mechanical copies or duplication became closely linked. Invented and developed in 1938 by Chester Carlson for printing images, it soon was named ‘xerox’ (from a combination of the roots of two Greek words meaning ‘dry writing’). In 1959, Carlson in collaboration with John H Dessauer invented the model 914 that has been called ‘the most successful single product of all time’. There was no looking back for copy machines which gained such a hold on our activities and imagination that, over time, we began to use the word ‘xerox’, hitherto the brand name of a particular type of machine, and then the name of the manufacturing company itself, to mean ‘copy’. No mention need be made about the widespread prevalence of ‘making xeroxes’ which persists in our culture, despite the paperless offices and the awareness of environmental impact.

Computer-based or digital copies add another dimension to this subculture of technology-associated copying, whereby one can ‘download’, in other words, copy, visual as well as audio files via the internet. Usually free, or available for a nominal charge, they can be copied repeatedly. Films and TV serials are also widely available in this manner, suggesting that the days of the infamous ‘piracy’ are numbered.

Technology also brings home the close relation between copying and reproductions in another way. After all, it is with industrialization that Walter Benjamin’s ‘age of mechanical reproduction’ was born. In his influential essay, Benjamin (1936) sought to explore the role that art would play when it lost its ritualistic value. The short answer was that art would then be used for political purposes. John Berger makes the point more emphatically in his book (also a TV series produced by BBC’s Channel 4) called Ways of Seeing where he states that reproduced images have destroyed the authority of art.

Technologies of copying have transformed the sphere of music. When it comes to music and mimesis, many people would remember the pleasure of taping songs and music from a vinyl record or another cassette onto a cassette. In a spin of Boon’s (2010) experience of mixtapes, my
earliest memory of childhood in fact was a large spool onto which my father had taped the voices of my sister singing songs. As nice as the childish singing voice was to listen to, the most memorable part was the self-conscious giggle at the end of the tape. Thus, the spool was a copy of ‘nature’ or the natural voice, more ‘real’ and ‘mimetic’, in a way, than a photograph of my sister at the same age would be.

There is a mimetic pleasure of a different kind in composing ‘mixtapes’ which are tapes containing a mixed bill of recorded songs, individually and personally selected by someone (Boon 2010: 54-55). He points out that the making of a mixtape captures the very ideas of copia in classical rhetoric manuals mentioned in the section on Latin (Roman) mimesis – ‘inventio (the selection of tunes to be played), dispositio (the ordering or sequencing of them) and elocutio (the cuts and edits made but also the loving care put into the handwritten cover and decoration of the cassette) all deployed to charm the recipient of the tape’ (Boon 2010: 55). While the same process is employed in burning songs onto a CD, resulting in copies in both cases, there is still another deeper similarity other than the creation of likeness which, according to Boon, reveals the mimetic basis of this process. It is the transformation that has been achieved through making the mixtape that creates value (Boon 2010: 57). Transformation is integral to Latin mimesis.

**Domains of Contemporary Culture**

We now move to study five domains of contemporary culture in some detail to see how these mimetic impulses are deliberately used and yet result in transformations. This is an important aspect to understand as it creates the logic of using repetition, juxtaposing and ornamenting in transformation which we shall use in the mimetic pedagogy developed in Chapter VII.

**Mirroring, Re-presentation: Mime, Mimics and Pantomime**

Some scholars think that the concept of ‘play’ is involved in much of the cultural contexts within which mimesis occurs, to one degree or another (Boon 2010). Play acts as a motivator as well as is the effect of mimesis. According to Boon, Plato’s suspicion of mimesis can be seen as arising because of this aspect of play, in the inauthenticity that he believes is a characteristic of the copy (Boon 2010: 127). It took Aristotle to point out that human beings learn through mimetic play: that of children, of course, but also in art and performance in general. Mimetic play in children is also pleasurable because of recognition of sameness, of familiarity. Whether seen ‘only’ as play or as learning device, the word ‘mimic’ is largely used in the performing arts where it is used predominantly in comedy or farce and marginally in other genres. This usage still retains the
trace of ‘play’, but now rather than exploratory and conditioned by the environment, the element of play becomes appropriated to form a self-conscious genre, its playfulness nowhere more apparent than in cinema.

Long before the advent of sound in film, the great masters of the screen such as Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977) were excellent at pantomime – a genre based on mimicry. Later, the long running hit series ‘Laurel and Hardy’, featuring actors Stan Laurel (1890-1965) and Oliver Hardy (1892-1957), also essentially depended upon mime and physical comedy. Their best body of work arose in the era of sound motion picture, where minimal dialogue and good sound effects along with mime managed to successfully convey their predicament in a variety of situations. Although the list is endless for actors inspired by pantomime who entered film, the best known of them currently is Rowan Atkinson’s 1990 co-creation, Mr Bean, whose physical comedy and minimal dialogue carried through an entire film, not just a TV series. All three are examples of actors focusing on some elements in situations of ordinary life but bringing a different meaning to them through the use of exaggerated physicality and expressions bordering on contortionism. These mimetic genres clearly depend upon the comprehension, tacit or explicit, of intertextual meanings by their audience and trace their roots to Latin imitatio.

In India, inspired by Charlie Chaplin, Jogesh Dutta is one of the early mime artists who staged his first act in 1956 at Bally, near Kolkatta.¹ Raj Kapoor was an adept mimic, especially in his film, Mera Naam Joker (a homage to Chaplin’s Limelight) (Jain 2009) where he used mime to extraordinary effect. His grandson Ranbir Kapoor also followed in this tradition when he mimed effectively in the hit film Barfi! Actor Sonam Kapoor, no relation of the Kapoor clan, in fact did an experimental photoshoot where she posed as a mime artist for photographer Rohan Shreshta in 2012. Currently, in Kerala the mimic Suraj Vengaranmoodu is enjoying great popularity as can be evidenced by his taped performances on You Tube.

Mime is used by club artists as well as street performers abroad. In high international tourist areas such as Paris, their exaggerated body movements make up for differences in language among the audience. The college game Dumb Charades is an adaptation of mime to the arena of games and is still a popular event in college festivals. The impact of mime can also be seen in the fact that it constitutes an important part of theatre training for achieving both body control and a ‘speaking body’.

¹ http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/arts/the-life-and-mime-of-jogesh-dutta
Mimesis, in this avatar of mimicry, has deeper roots. Based as it is upon observation, imitation is the *sine qua non* of learning, especially among young children. There is evidence to show that infants, like the macaque monkeys mentioned above, learn their facial expressions from their caregivers and much of what we think as innate or genetic could actually have a basis in social and cultural learning. Children unconsciously imitate the walking gait and posture of parents, their facial gestures are identical to caregivers, and finally language and its related components such as tone of voice and prosody are also learned through imitation. In fact, the relation between language and mimesis is so integral that it has been described akin to magic, as generation after generation of humans have perfectly learned language through imitation. As Benjamin puts it, ‘… language may be seen as the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most complete archive of non-sensuous similarity: a medium into which the earlier powers of mimetic production and comprehension have passed without residue, to the point where they have liquidated those of magic’ (Benjamin 1986: 336). Learning language is thus heavily based upon mimesis as repetition.

**Mirroring, Replicating, Substituting, Re-producing, Re-presenting: Indian Classical Music**

Just like learning language, learning music is an example where learning is based upon copying and repetition. Whether vocal or instrumental, learning depends upon imitation of notes, pitches and tones of a teacher. No matter how students have been taught music, whether in the ancient *gurukul* style in the teacher’s home, a modern institutionalized class, or indeed via skype, the pedagogy of music has depended upon repetition for ‘training’ the ear and (only then) the throat. Even someone who ‘learns by themself’ such as by listening to taped music, partakes of this imitation in the early stage as they are drawn to music through listening to a particular melody or lyrics of a song and repeatedly practice it themselves. The concept of *riyaaz* or practice in even informal contexts is conventionally considered to be about warming the vocal chords through repetition of the notes on a scale, but is equally about ‘tuning’ the ear to tones, micro tones and pitch. Even in art, the great copiers of paintings by the great western masters are excellent examples of how replicas have been made historically, but considered in the language of fakes and forgeries only after the idea of the original artist came about alongside Western Enlightenment. Hitherto, aspiring artists apprenticed themselves to an established one, or a master craftsman, and learned the trade, so to speak, through copying their form and content.
It appears that as far as the physical domain is concerned, practice makes perfect and repetition is a major way in which one not just learns but learns perfectly – or as near perfection as one is capable of doing. However, a word of caution is necessary here to prevent us from reducing repetition to a mechanical act. Although repetition is restricted to one aspect - such as training the voice in classical Hindustani music – its effect is on other aspects too, such as training the ear. We see the same thing in yoga, later where the repetition of *asanas* is in the physical domain but the effect is on the mind too. It is in this sense that both are excellent illustrations of the Nietschean kraft becoming macht.

In the initial stages of physical sport, perfection is about reaching levels of competence – thus for instance, one needs to practice a lot to be able to even perform correctly the act of throwing a ball swinging a bat in cricket. After this minimum competency level is achieved, it requires more repetitive practice to achieve genuine skill and maybe style. The same is true for mastery of a musical instrument where repetitive practice is required to even make the violin sound musical in the early period of learning to play it. It is only then that one graduates into melody and rhythm, structure and so on.

**Repetition and Improvising in Indian Classical Music**

Indian classical music system is historically a completely oral knowledge system and has no system of notation integral to it. Notations which have been made in modern times tend to be notes on the genesis of ragas ie the *thaat* or family that a particular *raga* belongs to, its *jati*, and other such ‘biographic’ details, or what could be called a genealogy of ragas and their classification. The notations regarding ‘content’ may include the details such as the framework of melodic composition or combination of notes used in the particular composition called a *raga*, individual permutations in the form of *taan*, but no other directions on how this can be rendered such as pitch, prosody, length of *meend*, *gamaka* etc. The setting up of audio archives, most

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2 The work in this section is based upon my understanding of Hindustani classical music which I studied for several years. As much of it is common property resource (and there are few textual sources available in English), there are almost no citations.

3 Vishnu Narayan Bhatkande’s *Hindustani Sangeet Padhati* (1909-1932), a four volume compendium on the North Indian style of classical music, was one such ‘modern’ attempt which suggested a notation for the music. Although projected as being a ‘standard’ notation system, this is so only within some professional institutional setups. Many musicians tend to develop and follow their own idiosyncratic notations, and a vast majority of young people who learn classical music in classes all over the country are not taught this notation system and depend upon memory. Other improvements of the Bhatkande system have also been made.
recently digital ones, of renditions by classical singers, is the only documentation we see of this age-old oral tradition. They are necessary but insufficient as they contain only the end products – renditions – but not the process of reaching it without repetitive imitation, as happens in a ‘live’ teaching situation.

Having said that, it is equally important to note that although the pedagogical practices of Indian classical music tradition is largely based on imitation and repetition, the goal is improvisation but in accordance with the structural rules of the raga. Many times, imposing the understanding of orality (for instance, the Lord-Parry ‘formula’ consisting of ‘repetitions’, ‘stock epithets’ and ‘epic clichés’) onto musical genres is not necessarily the full story as has been shown in the case of improvisation in jazz (Gillespie 1991). This is true even in the case of the Indian classical music genre where this would be a reduction of an extraordinarily complex system. The word ‘structure’ is probably a more appropriate term than formula in this case. Even the simple rendition of a taan (particular combination of notes in a raga) although appears ‘the same’ when viewed from the notations of both teacher and student (or two different performers) as they use the same notes, can involve immense differences in rendition due to differences in prosody, namely differences in rhythm, stress and intonation by each performer as they develop the raga based on their understanding of its structure.

It is germane to note four things about Indian classical music in the context of mimesis:\footnote{Our observations in this dissertation about Indian classical music are based upon Hindustani music and thus the terms are those used within this system rather than the Carnatic style which has its own equivalent terms. However, both systems are based upon largely the same structure, and differ only in emphasis in contemporary times as, for instance, improvisation in Hindustani style is emphasized much more than in contemporary Carnatic.} one, that repetitions are directed not only towards ‘training the ear and the throat’ but also towards understanding the structure and system of the music. By ‘structure’ we mean understanding the precise notes and pitch of each raga, the aroha and avaroha – the syntax of moving between notes on ascension and descension which thereby promotes an understanding of the rules of combinations and permutations that are allowed. In addition, specific ornamental phrases called khatkas, kanas, meendhs and the like, which may be repeated in various emphasis and rhythm to additionally convey the distinctiveness of each raga.\footnote{Walter Benjamin has mentioned the importance of embellishment or ornamentation which allowed a different pattern to become visible to the eye. ‘Ornament as the set of possible ways in which a perception of a particular form might emerge out of a pattern or weave’ (quoted in Boon 2010: 59).} Two, although the number
of ragas are vast but limited and many are based on ‘traditional’ compositions or bandishes (in the Hindustani system), giving the impression that this system of knowledge is static, passive and constricting, the reality is that the Indian classical system is anything but that due to the deep structural understanding that guides the music. Three, there is a large space for improvisation in Indian classical music. Improvisation is again performed within what could be called ‘enabling constraints’ – the same features mentioned in points one and two above guide what is permissible in improvisation. In fact, given our understanding of mimesis, these characteristics suggest that Indian classical music can be viewed as being quite Aristotelian, having an inner logic which, however, is explicit and defines the genre itself. Catharsis, when it occurs, is also guided by this inner logic, not by mere desire for aesthetic compulsions. It is completely predictable and can be defined as the moment or point when both vocalist or instrumentalist and percussionist simultaneously reach ‘the sam’. Fourthly, time is an important feature of this system and is evidenced in two ways – through rhythmic cycles of the percussive accompaniment which moves repetitively in beats of 16 or 12 or 7 and so on. Time enters also through tempo or laya directing attention to the fact that the same repetitive rhythm can be slowed down to vilambit or made fast into drut.

All the above features of the raga while understood by musicians and connoisseur alike, are unfolded during the performance through the musician’s skill and knowledge of aesthetic mood or rasa. As pointed out in the comparative section on Greek and Indian theatre in Chapter II, Indian aesthetic theories prioritize the use of all the above devices so as to lead to contemplative enjoyment of the performance. This holds good for the dramatic genres as much as for the classical music one. Thus, a complex array of devices underlie what appears to be a repetitive oral knowledge system and transform Indian classical music into a dynamic one whereby each rendition of a particular raga by different performers, and indeed the same performer at different times, will be different but similar. In addition, Indian classical music has proved to be extremely versatile in yet another way: it has shown itself to be open to ‘foreign’ influences such as the Arabic and the Persian in the medieval period leading to the birth of new
synthetic forms like *quawwali* and *khayal*. In contemporary times, Indian classical music has engaged with other international forms to create distinct sounds of fusion music.

Folk singers in the US who despite singing the same songs sung by others, make it their own through a variety of strategies. For instance, they may introduce the song by describing where they heard it first. They may end it in a different way from others who have sung it as well when they have sung it another time (Boon 2010). This is the same with Indian classical music and jazz performances, both of which additionally have the technique of improvisation. Thus, even in Hindustani classical music, where people sing many of the ‘same’ *bandhish*-s or compositions, improvisation is part and parcel of the rendering of the larger composition as explained above. A *gharana* may be recognized because of a particular way of rendition by a singer which includes differences in the way the metre of the *alaap* is set, the use of *sargams*, whether rhythm is given priority and the like. In Carnatic music, in contemporary times, improvisation has become more restricted and *raagam-taalam-pallavi* is the section where improvisation occurs.

The idea of style is slightly different but also based on the same principle: in fashion, for instance, one may imitate an icon’s style such as Madonna; other times imitating oneself in order to build a distinct style of one’s own. In the arts, a group of painters may be driven by the same impetus and coalesce around a distinct yet similar style of painting which addresses the same vision, such as the impressionists. These are all important evidence of what Aristotle had distinguished between medium, object and manner to show that mimesis has a nature of its own and does not have to imitate anything else.

Thus we see there are structural ideas and an array of devices used in definite ways in Indian classical music. Some of these fundamental ideas influence the framework of pictorial mimesis which we develop in the section on pedagogical possibilities to teach critical thinking.

**Re-presenting: Contemporary Music**

We mentioned the transformational value of mixtapes above. This transformational value mentioned by Boon has importance in understanding that the same song becomes different according to the context of performance. This difference is enabled even in ways of sharing. Thus MP3 made and shared on P2P (peer to peer) networks, a mixtape or a podcast are all ways in which tapes participate in ‘gift economies’ and these change the very nature of copies involved (Boon 2010: 59). Similarly, the contexts of listening will also change the nature of the
‘same’ song – hearing the song ‘Fever’ in a film, in a pub, in the airport, and at a dance party, as well as listening to it at different ages make the same song different. Readers of a favorite book, who return to it repeatedly, are better aware of this quality. Some say, you never read the same book twice - and there are those who believe that you never really read a book until you’ve re-read it! We have seen in the section on Indian classical music above that this similar-yet-different is not left to ‘chance’ and the smaller idiosyncracies of folk performers but is enabled through a set of constraints which need to be thoroughly understood, making repetition lead to similarity and difference.

Boon makes the connection between copia and transformation in another way: he points out that all copying is inherently an act of repetition. ‘A copy repeats, is a repeat of something’ (Boon 2010: 91). Drawing upon the work of Tarde (1962) he says that this is not the whole story: something else also happens when repetition happens. ‘Difference manifests itself in repetition and manifests a transformation that happens within repetition’ (Boon 2010: 91). Others have also supported this viewpoint. For Canetti, imitation is the first step towards transformation. Another position about the dynamic nature of repetition is that of Derrida and his concept of iteration, whereby one never repeats exactly the same thing and there are interesting things that happen between iterations.

In contemporary music, the idea of ‘covers’ is a good example of achieving such transformation. A ‘cover’ is trade jargon which means ‘to record something which looks like a hit on someone else’s label’ (Chicago Tribune 1952). Covers involve reworking, updating or interpreting another artist’s song as a way of commemorating them or paying a tribute to them. ‘Cover bands’ which is what most Indian bands were until the 1980s, were bands which played music and songs of other bands – in the case of the Indian bands, the music was usually western in origin and usually rock and roll, jazz or popular. In fact, sheet music was published in order to facilitate the performance of popular pieces by as many artists as possible. Thus, in music at least, copies – even the ones which don’t achieve transformation such as the music of cover bands - have been encouraged by the system in the above ways. When they have successfully achieved transformation such as Jimi Hendrick’s cover of Bob Dylan’s All Along the Watch

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6 Two undergraduate students – Priyankar Kole and Aditya Warrier - music aficionados themselves, brought my attention to the idea of covers, mashups, remix mashups and verse mashups and explained them. Much of the description on this as well as in the section on remixes is based upon their explanation of these terms and their linkages.
Tower, or Santana’s 1970 cover of Fleetwood Mac’s 1968 Black Magic Woman, they have been hugely successful commercially also. More recently, there have been covers of Britney Spears Toxic done by A Static Lullaby which set her essentially pop tune to rock and roll and metal.

An important point made by Boon is that copia is essentially antithetical to the idea of private property. Hence, all the newer modes of fileshare that have arisen, and the net as a ‘commons’ or common property resources, are indications of the increase in copia rather than its decline. It involves a movement that is ‘open, unobstructed, and - from the point of view of form – inherently multiple, excessive, and abundant’ (Boon 2010: 76). Witness the kinds of subversions that have occurred to challenge the intellectual ownership by publishing houses who own copyright to different forms of printed knowledge: deeming this to be unfair, xeroxes of books abound as they have always been part and parcel of academic culture, as well as the larger intellectual culture in India. This is because books were too expensive and illegal xeroxes (and xeroxes of xeroxes) of entire books enabled wider reading access. Video piracy went through a similar evolution, and even today, pirated copies of non-Indian movies, complete with printed DVD covers simulating ‘the original’ DVD are widely available.

Mirroring, Replicating, Substituting, Re-presenting, Re-producing: Adoptions, Adaptations, Lifts, Remixes, Mashups in Contemporary Indian music

Despite the exposition above on imitation as being integral to musical creativity, the idea persists that creativity in music as being about producing ‘original’ numbers. However, this is the domain where copia abounds. There are many different types of making copies. In the colloquial, we refer to them as ‘lifts’ – tunes that are ‘lifted’ from elsewhere. Such a term conveys an essential characteristic of ‘lifts’ which is that they are carried in their entirety. The famous song Mehbooba Aa Mehbooba from the hit film Sholay was a melodic replica of Say You Love Me by Demis Roussos. Here, we see that there is a change of instruments as well as a change in emphasis, plus a change in introductory arrangements; different pitch and a deeper bassy vocal than in the original song all combined to give a complete change of mood - from a semi desperate one of the English song to a sensual and sexy one of the Hindi. In other words, ‘transformation’. Other examples are Laila Mein Laila from the Hindi film Qurbani which was a copy of Black Blood’s Chicano, and Akele Hain To Kya Gham Hai from the Hindi

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7 This section on Indian film music and copies owes a lot to the enthusiasm and help of film director Srinivas Bhashyam.
film *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* which is the melodic replica of *The Shadow’s Return to the Alamo.*

Copies and adaptations don’t occur only from the west to India but also within India and are dubbed ‘multiple version’ songs. As can be expected, there have been adoptions and adaptations across many languages. Venkataraman (2013) has categorized such songs in the Tamil but this can be done for all four south Indian languages. He divides these into three categories: inspired and adopted melodies, songs from dubbed versions, and songs from remakes. He makes a relevant point that by and large, between the 1940s and 1960s, the trend was to adopt from the Hindi and adapt into Tamil. According to him, there were no songs which went in the opposite direction for this period. Popular songs in this group were the Hindi *Chup Chup Khade Ho Zaroor Koi Baath Hai* from the film *Badi Behen* (Elder Sister, 1949) which became *Enni Enni Parka Manam* in the film *Vazhkai* (The Life, 1949).

Deshmukh (2013) points out that early Hindi cinema in Bombay was dominated by Marathi composers and singers and the songs composed in Marathi were copied with identical tunes and translated lyrics. Actors came from theatre background and the songs were in turn ‘based on’ (or copied) Marathi *Natyageet*, the tunes were also of famous *Natak* songs. He also points out the borrowing from *Bhavageet* (devotional genre) such as *Koi Pyaar ki Dekhe Jadugari* from the film *Kohinoor* (1960) was based on the *Bhavageet He Doodh Tujhya Tya Ghatatale* sung by Lata Mangeshkar. In more recent times, music composers such as AR Rahman’s compositions since the 1990s are simultaneously for all language versions of the songs in the movie, although lyrics may be written or adapted by different lyricists.

A newer form has come about which was very popular for 5-8 years in the mid 2000s, which involved taking hit Hindi film songs and ‘remixing’ them. Some of the ‘adopted’ songs got ‘remixed’, as indeed happened with *Laila Mein Laila* by DJ Varsha. Many Hindi film songs are direct copies of folk songs on one hand or western pop numbers on the other and even at this simplest level are examples of mimesis in musical culture. Some Hindi classic songs were ‘adoptions’ of the melodic element of western ones and in today’s terms may be considered as

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8 All these examples may be heard (and viewed) at http://www.pinkvilla.com/trending/copied-bollywood-songs/15-bollywood-classics-you-didnt-know-were-copied
precursors to remixes. For instance, \textit{Dil Tadap Tadap Ke Keh Raha Hai Aa Bhi Ja} was similarly a melodic replica of a Polish song with a small change in tempo which transformed it’s mood from a slightly whimsical one to one full of hope and lightness. It took a deep understanding of a basic Indian classical music concept of \textit{laya} to achieve this change in mood or emotional effect - what is called \textit{rasa}.

In contemporary remixes, the tune is usually retained but the rhythm is changed by increasing (or decreasing) the pace or by putting it into a totally different genre such as rap or reggae. This innovation which involved retaining ‘original’ lyrics and tunes but setting it to a different rhythm was welcomed by young people as being very innovative. It originated in Jamaican dance floor music of the 70s when DJs worked hard to keep dancers on the floor for longer lengths of time. It later became the music of cars, ‘cruise music’, as well as dance floors. In India, remixes were the rage in the 2000s and were usually the efforts of DJs who worked with either turntable consoles or later, on button consoles to compose their music. Hit examples are \textit{Kaanta Laga} (DJ Doll, 2002), \textit{Chadti Jawani} (DJ Aqueel, 2003)) and \textit{Chod Do Aanchal} (Bombay Vikings, 2008) were examples of old Hindi songs, all of which were remixed into a more livelier, and sometimes sexier versions resulting in eminently more danceable music and explicit double entendre. Thus, intertextuality and subtexts are high in their music and music videos.

Mixing and re-mixing in ‘turn-table consoles’ as early DJs do for live dance floors involved simple devices. On the other hand, ‘button consoles’ were complex and gave DJs a huge array of devices by which they could mix and re-mix music. This was also enabled by virtue of breaking down tracks into pre-recorded bits called ‘samples’ and storing them for use during the evening’s ‘performance’ by the DJ. For instance, a simple example would be a two-minute loop from a song could be stored and then re-mixed for the dance floor with just increasing the tempo. It could also be combined with other loops created out of samples. Thus, DJs needed improvisational skills but located them within a predesigned broad framework of rhythms, which is crucial for improv. Acoustic music could be used along with electronic music to create remixes too.\footnote{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7so7GxsCL0s} A good example of this is Dualistic Inquiry’s remix of a Japanese artist
Rustam’s piece where he uses live acoustic guitar and electronic button consoles. A group remix is Midival Punditz’ *Naina Lagey* which is a (noisy) remix using electronic and acoustic music.\(^{13}\)

‘Mashup’ is another kind of remixing in contemporary music where the lyrical track of one or more songs is seamlessly laid over the instrumental track of another song, (which provides the chorus). Both the songs already exist and the mashup creates a third audio ‘text’ which is distinctly different. There are different types of mashup. For instance, there is remix mashup in which the ‘original’ numbers are both remixes whose tracks are then laid on each other seamlessly – *Laila Main Laila* by DJ Varsha is an example of this. Verse mashup is a type of mashup where verses or stanzas are taken from a variety of artists and then laid seamlessly. For example, the hit Tamil song *Urvashi, Urvashi* by AR Rahman was taken into a verse mix called *It’s My Birthday* co-composed by hip hop musician Will.i.am and AR Rahman and released in May 2014 when it hit the top ten in UK and the top 30 in Australia.\(^{14}\) Usually mashups depend upon electronic versions and therefore are based upon a strong beat.

Several other practices of rearrangement have existed in music with the invention of the technology of taped music and the recording of tracks in the nineteenth century. Electronic music has merely upped the limits on this kind of creation. Folk songs, for instance, have been thus ‘appropriated’ by classical music and jazz songs have been re-done anew by several artists. In Hindi films, the song *Dekho ab to kisko nahin hai khabar* from the film *Janwar* starring Shammi Kapoor and Rajashri was based on western pop music set for twist. Not only did it have Beatle look-alikes, strumming four guitars in the background, the entire set and dance is a ‘lift’ or adaptation from the western popular culture. Unlike mashups, however, these were in many cases, copied entirely from the original as were *Mehbooba* and *Akele Hain To Kya Gham Hai*. Mashups thus appear to be new versions of copying which are dynamic and transformatory.

There are many who contest viewing such ‘copying’ as a slur against the original. However, having had a brief glimpse of the kinds of strategies involved in copying, it appears that it involves a diversity of devices, leading to transformation which results in new subgenres, as in the case of mashups. One of the critics of copying is Stephen Feld who talks about the negative relation between mimesis and music in his study of the polyphonic music of pygmies. The complex pygmy music is mainly singing as a way to negotiate between disorder and order,

\(^{13}\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irVY2SQTYfE

\(^{14}\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQ7z2bNodNc
as a means to sing to the forest which is their abode and reinforce community. This music is being imitated all over the world with no reference to its origins or purpose through ‘…the use, circulation and absorption of sound recordings… split from their source through the chain of audio production, circulation and consumption’ (Feld 1996: 13). This is what he calls ‘schizophrenic mimesis’. Feld questions whether it is right for this music to be removed from their original location and purpose and used in the production of say jazz music eg Watermelon Man by Herbie Hancock. (Feld, 1996). This logic can be similarly used in India where songs of subalterns are being copied and made into great hit film songs, usually without attribution of genesis. However, it would be a response which has not understood the basis of mimetic creativity in contemporary culture.

Going by our discussion above, it would be very hard to defend Feld’s position after understanding how mimesis and copia function in contemporary culture. First of all, if we accept that there is a strong element of imitation in everything we do, and place this knowledge alongside the question of the original, it is hard to believe in the romantic notion of unchanged music itself. Secondly, simply because the music plays a particular role in one community does not prevent it being transformed into something else somewhere else. This does succeed in making it ‘anew’. Drawing upon the idea of different listening contexts mentioned above which change the song ‘Fever’, for instance, it is important to note that it is not only the same song (such as a recorded one) heard in different places that would render it different, but also the one singer singing or playing the same piece at different locations and times which makes it different although similar. These latter are all iterations of one song which draw our attention to the change in meaning(fullness) inherent in one song. It also shows the persistence (and longer history) of sameness, (but not identicality) as Foucault pointed out.

If we enter the domain of films, copying becomes even more abundant and transforms into literal copia: abundance. Remakes of films may be near identical in terms of screen by screen shots replicated in the remade film, translation of dialogues from one language to another, and sometimes even the same actors in the remade film. Other times, the film may just involve dubbing the movie into a different language but even here, identical product is impossible as cultural nuances do occur. For instance, in one science-fiction movie of the 1990s Independence Day dubbed from the English Hollywood into Hindi, the last scene has both the protagonists male and female together in a scene. As it is clear they have defeated the invaders and sent them
back to space. They get married and in one of the later scenes, turn to each other to say something. Both speak at the same time. The opening word of the dialogue is ‘you’ in the original English. In the dubbed Hindi version, the woman begins by saying “Aap…” and the man simultaneously says “Tum…”. Such cultural mimesis makes it clear that it is impossible to maintain identicality even in dubbing and subtitles. Further, as translation studies itself shows us, there are those who view the translated work as a new text altogether rather than a copy.

Re-presenting, Re-producing: Contemporary Dance and ‘Exceeding movement’

As with learning at some stage in all performance art, mimesis is strongly constitutive of Indian dance too. In contemporary Indian dance, it appears that the movement vocabulary of many successful dancers and dance troupes starts with classical forms of *Bharatanatyam, kalaripeyyettu* or others. Even those dance troupes which claim to be ‘free style’ actually imitate the movements of Bollywood style dance, itself a composite of western and Indian dance forms. How is innovation then possible within such genres? A lot of times, we judge folk forms of music and dance to be repetitive performances since the repertoire is limited and, yes, repetitive. Yet, every performance IS different, but also the same, as we explained in the section on music above.

In Indian folk theatre, for instance in *Yakshagana*, some themes from the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata are normally used. Yet, even when one watches the same troupe performing it, there will be differences in execution. In *Bharata Natyam*, students may be taught a particular way of performing certain *adavu* which makes it a distinct ‘kalakshetra’ style. In all cases in the arts, as the simple examples above show, it is not just learning that is deeply embedded in mimesis as imitation but also the advanced representations of it. However, repetition in this tradition is not something static but is very dynamic as it draws upon a range of diverse strategies.

Contemporary Indian dance takes off from a variety of movement traditions, including *kalaripeyyettu* (a martial art form) and yoga as well as the classical and folk dance traditions. The question is germane here about how (contemporary) dancers learn movements? In an interesting paper on mimesis and dance, Barbara Sellers-Young (2008) talks about the

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15 *Attakkalari*, a Bangalore-based repertory company has developed a complex and distinct contemporary dance idiom based upon the movement vocabulary of Bharata Natyam and Kalaripeyyettu. They are a great example of transformative mimesis.
importance of technique in dance and the demand from teachers and choreographers alike, that even as it is replicated, it is also exceeded. Regardless of the dance form and the particular pedagogical style and technologies involved, she points out that what is common is that ‘dancers strive to master a technique through a process of repetitive replication of a movement vocabulary…’ (Sellers-Young 2008: 1). She describes three ways in which movement techniques are taught to dancers which she calls optical, somatic and mediated. ‘Optical’ is the standard method of dance instruction and involves ‘direct transmission’ (of technique) from the body of the teacher to the body of the student through their reflections in a mirror, as well as physical modifications a teacher may show in order that the students understands the kinaesthetic meaning of the movement more completely (Sellers-Young 2008:2). In this form of teaching, she says that two things contribute to the student’s abstraction of their body: one, the optical consciousness which comes through viewing oneself continuously in the mirror and two, the student’s own experience of self. Interestingly, it is this abstraction of the body and by extension themselves, ‘that allows them to become imagistic representations of a choreographer’s imagination’ (Sellers-Young 2008: 3).

‘Somatic’ is the second pedagogical style, which, according to Sellers-Young, is found in the Japanese classical dance form, Nihon Buyo. There are no mirrors and the student stands just behind and to the right of the teacher and attempts the movement by observing the teacher through the peripheral vision. Only the teacher’s voice - singing or emphasizing the rhythmic underpinnings of the music - guide the student. At intervals, the teacher may adjust different parts of the student’s body in relation to another. ‘With each repetition of the phrase, the dancer’s body takes on the nuances of the teacher’s body – the shifts of weight, the adjustment of the spine and torso, the turn of the head, the placement of the arms and hands – until her entire being embodies the movement phrasing of the teacher’ (Sellers-Young 2008: 3).

The third pedagogical style is ‘mediated’. It incorporates the analogue and or digital mediation: from photographs to films, TV, VHS, DVD and so on, with their capacity for feedback. The experience though is that these new forms of mirroring reduce the reflection to a two-dimensional one. Further, ‘the camera acts as a perceptual intermediary between teacher and student’ (Sellers-Young 2008: 3). In such a learning environment, which is virtually mediated, the student pushes her understanding and her imagination based on her own ability to choose between different media formats. Both these are therefore ‘framed in a virtual world’ (Sellers-
Young 2008: 4). She recalls Bourdieu’s (1990) theorization of habitus wherein he says that ‘the repetitiveness of the act intersects with the context of the act to create a memory in which body and mind are one’ (Sellers-Young 2008: 5). In the first style, there results an abstraction of self; in the second, the dancer becomes a kind of cultural repository and in the third, the dancer is free to choose between different media conceptions of the self. She thus suggests that ‘all bodily actions, including dance, are reliant on the conscious, repetitive use of neural networks within a particular set of intersecting relationships’ (Sellers-Young 2008:6). Her analysis reveals how student-dancers participate in divergent forms of mimesis leading to differing consciousness which in turn informs the different senses of self.

Although Sellers-Young’s work is related to dance, her analysis and theorization are useful to reflect upon as it projects dance movements as something which is not just about movement but about ‘exceeding movement’ in her words. Thus, imitation and repetition are both involved in teaching-learning dance movements no matter what the medium is, but they are directed towards something beyond repetition for the sake of itself – a consciousness of body and self. John Dewey’s concept of habit, which we will discuss later in some depth, is again very germane to this wherein repeated action gives rise to habits but these habits are not to be understood as routine-driven but as driven by other things such as desire, ambition and the like. When they are thus driven, as in the superficially repetitive skills of a surgeon, habits are intelligent and desirable. Observing dance classes from the outside, one may not catch the difference to be effected in the student and judge it to be only about repetition and routines. As Sellers-Young shows us, this is not the case in dance. We found this is to be of relevance to learning classical music as discussed above. We will find these ideas to be true of yoga, recurring, albeit in a different way, in the next section.

**Mirroring, Replicating, Re-producing: Yoga as Inner Transformation**

Mimesis as imitation is also at the foundation of a very Indian tradition: hatha yoga. Interestingly, each of the *asanas* mimic objects and creatures seen in nature. For instance, *bhujangasana* imitates the snake; *matsyasana* imitates the fish; *mayurasana*, the peacock and so on. Ancient sages and sadhus imitated postures found in nature and developed what is commonly understood to be a regulatory and healing practice based upon them. In addition to creatures, *asanas* even imitated inanimate objects such as bridge (*setubandhasana*) or plough (*halasana*),
and flowers (lotus: *padmasana*). BKS Iyengar notes that ‘there are as many *asanas* as there are creatures’ - in sum 840,000.¹⁶

There have been some contemporary analysis which use mimesis in relation to yoga in precisely the context of the purpose of imitating objects in nature which is transformative rather than simply imitative, as Alter’s (2004) work described below. In Patanjali’s *Yogasutra*, the word *anukaraha* means imitate, resemble, follow and be engaged with. In yogic philosophy, there is no separation between the mind and the body hence to focus on only the body through the performance of *asanas* is never an end in itself. This idea is captured in the Bhagavad Gita in terms of working by oneself in order to gain wisdom as ‘… in this world there is no purifier equal to wisdom; that finds he who becomes perfected by yoga, by himself in his self in the course of time’ (quoted in Scharfe 1992: 35). The physical *asanas* are only the gross biology which leads to an access to the finer physiological body and ultimately the nonmaterial mind. This is the common understanding among advanced practitioners of yoga.

Alongside yogasana is another important practice, that of *pranayama* or breathing. Based on the belief that control of breath is a key element of yogic practice, there are several breathing techniques which have been developed and passed down over generations. Each of these is directed at different interim goals such as cooling the body, warming it, clearing the mind. These too are imitative: *bhashrika* - making the sound like the bellows; *bhramari* – making the sound like bees. As does yogasana, pranayama prepares one for other larger goals of self-achievement. Observing it from the outside, it appears mistakenly to be a mindless exercise based on repetition. At the minimum, pranayama invigorates the body through repetitive practice but this is not the complete yogic achievement.

The idea of replicating objects of nature through the manipulation of the body *asanas* and their repetitive practice is also not an end in itself in yoga, as it may be for calisthenic exercises. It is not even about physical fitness per se. Yoga is an important example of how something can be predicated upon repetition for transformation. Joseph Alter’s ethnographic work on yoga delves deep into this and he says, ‘To manipulate the body is not to reflect reality but to transform it’ (Alter 2004: 25). Further, there are deeper levels at which mimesis operates in yogic philosophy wherein intelligence, *buddhi*, is defined as that which reflects Spirit, *purusa*, as well as that which has no other purpose than to reflect it (Alter 2004: 217). To achieve this state

is to go through *pratyahara* by withdrawing attention from external objects and imitating ‘the nature of the mind-stuff’ as the Yogasutra states (Iyengar 2002). Another well-respected yogi and teacher, TKV Desikachar in *The Heart of Yoga*, translates the same sutra on *pratyahara* in the following way: ‘When the mind is withdrawn from sense-objects, the sense organs also withdraw themselves from their respective objects and thus are said to imitate the mind.’ Thus, the act of meditation is *pratyahara* but *pratyahara* is also mimetic since it tries to imitate the state of the so called ‘inner mind’.

In an important sense, yoga, like dance above, is another good example of Dewey’s concept of habit. Thus yoga can be driven by mere desire for exercise in which case it will remain more or less calisthenic; but when animated by something else – the desire for equanimity, for instance – yoga ‘exceeds movement’, to put it in Sellers-Young’s words, and brings about transformation over time.

With yoga, we complete our study of the five domains of contemporary culture. We have seen how in each of them, mimetic impulses are worked on quite mechanically in order to create transformation of one kind or the other. We use this idea in the development of our new mimetic pedagogy in Chapter VII.

**Summary**

In this chapter, we have delved into the activities and arena that concern us as a species, such as cognitive evolution, genetics, and illness to mimetic aspects that we are familiar with in everyday life such as those abounding in aspects like moulds, blocks, Xeroxes, copies. This was done in order to explore the innateness of mimesis as well as show the mechanical nature of mimesis. We saw these mechanical aspects of vernacular mimesis used in five contemporary fields ranging from mimicry and classical dance to yoga, contemporary music and contemporary dance. This endeavor was to bring the esoteric concept of historical mimesis out of the ivory tower of philosophy and build a bridge to get to the other side, namely pedagogy. This bridge of contemporary culture makes it easier to link the foundational aspects of historical mimesis with a range of activities and approaches that we are all familiar with, to greater or lesser extent, and thus makes mimesis accessible to all those working in education. The aspect of contemporary Indian culture is also important as it allows teachers to start with young people’s interests and build into other kinds of knowledge. It also accepts the existence of mimetic impulses and has
shown that by using vernacular notions of mimesis quite mechanically, as in repetition, it is possible to create transformations.