

**Mihai Măniuțiu**



**Act(ing) and Mimesis**

**ESSAYS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ACTOR**



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Translated from the Romanian by  
Jozefina Komporaly and Nicoleta Cinpoes

Compiled and edited by Anca Măniuțiu

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*To Anca*



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## In Search of the Actor

*At the end of his effort, [the actor's] vocation becomes clear: to apply himself wholeheartedly to being nothing or to being several.<sup>1</sup>*

Albert Camus

Strange is the being who feeds on being looked at, who absorbs the imperceptible and gives it value in its own heart, who builds its kingdom from how others see it. Its joy seems to be founded on what remains equivocal and can only be confirmed in the moment(ary).

If it holds true that there are contacts that intensify the desire which conjured them, then it is in this zone of dynamic unfulfillment that one must search for the source of theatrical eroticism. While

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, transl. by Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 79-80.

acting, the performer dissolves the censorship that customarily applies to the liberty of metamorphosis inherent to Eros. The actor is several beings and things; ambiguities are no hindrance. What stimulates and gives life to an actor is permeability or, more specifically, the actor being *penetrability* itself.

An allusive being *par excellence*, the actor represents the object exposed to the spectators' hidden desires, the human puppet with whose help we can return to our imaginary childhoods. The actor creates the androgynous being, neither real nor imaginary, through which we personify our phantasies, the flesh and blood puppet that enables everyone to possess without being involved in the act of possessing, to imagine themselves outside of their selves, to be impudent while prudish, primitive while refined and excessive under the guard of minimum responsibility. In the end, everyone's jester reveals itself as the demon of irony who inhabits everyone and subjects each one of us to our own public gaze.

The context from which theatre emerged and developed was, initially, the sacred; today the sacred survives only as the obscure and un-assumed backdrop for the stage action and the actor's actions. Actors enter into contact with this sacred origin every time they renounce, through play, the conceited affirmation of their own selves and devote themselves instead to the disinterested representation of the ceremonies of existence by adopting an impersonal or above-personal stance.

The ludic, performing persona of the actor reaches out to us, spectators, from a mythical realm, from a golden age when to be meant performative play and playing (while performing) meant being. Like any primordial ghost that witnessed our spiritual birth, this persona reconnects the thread of ancient dreams: in their comprehension, the human being is a fantastical creature, devoted to perpetual becoming – no world rejects this being and no element is refused to it. Our feelings can fill many bodies and our desires many lives. Actors, as inverted exorcists, recall within themselves the chimeras lying in the

depths of our psychological magma and recast us, this time in awoken dreaming, under the sign of the *possible*.

Among idols, very likely begotten from the same clay, actors often appear like the innocent children of gods. Let us not be fooled, though: the exuberance of actors borders on vertigo and the thrill of their grace is close to a deadly chill.

Every looking glass must shatter when the actor examines his or her own self in it. This shattered looking brings up from the depths the portrait of the actor.

## **The Magic of the Leap**

The actor practises the leap in the void blindfolded.

Exposed to the risk of de-personalisation, the actor manages – repeatedly – to overcome the drawback of duality and to add to the fictional world of the stage a third entity, a third body, one that is neither the actor's own nor the character's. In the newly born triad, this third entity will manifest itself independently and will be, for the entire duration of the performance, the true vehicle, the true essence of the other two bodies. Such metamorphoses lead, as we can see, not to enigmatic transformations but to unexpected acts of "comings into being". In addition to both the private person and the dramaturgically inferred outline of the part to be played, the actor projects an

encompassing body, one which is superior to all those who “preceded” it and which completes the triad mentioned above with an entity embodied exclusively for playing the part and devoted entirely to performing. Though unknown, this entity is so transparent that the other two (the actor’s person and the part the actor plays) would be much more readily enciphered or deciphered through it.

In theatre, illusions are robed in sensory armours and they practise the harrowing pathos of the flesh. The embodied illusion that is fleshed out from actors is their acting being, that is, their ludic, performing persona. This being encases actors into a fate and destines them to the heightened and elliptical feeling of the part’s inevitability. Night after night, a limit experience, one that pushes the actor to the extreme, precedes this phantasmal transition from a random existence to a necessary one. We, thus, witness a sort of simulated “suicide” of the actor: the circular horizon of the actor’s individuation becomes fuzzy and unclear, its boundaries quasi-real and thus easy to

transgress. This is the paradoxical moment of fullness in emptiness, when the actor is almost everything and almost nothing. Exposed to any potential metamorphosis and seemingly benefitting from spectacular possibilities of being, all actors have at their disposal is a multitude of ways to negate themselves, to allow Alterity to penetrate the self, to conquer their territories which the spirit, out of implicit vocation, has temporarily deserted. How strange, how absurd, after all: to be invaded by your own self, which is an Other, and to find yourself in the spectre that haunts the place of your absence!

It has been said that nothing exists to an extent that does not need inventing. It is on such basis, on such kind of intuition, which tames the anxiety of being and subjects it to the methodical exercise of imagination, that the art of the actor rests. Moreover, this applies to the same extent to the life of actors, which, without being an annexe or an appendix of their trade, is nevertheless the latter's halo (with uncertain tones and flashes of brilliance) and resonance chamber (with odd amps

and silencers). What intervenes, in the actors' work, with the necessity and measure dictated by inspiration, it erupts in the life of actors in unclear manifestations and outside a rational and coherent control. Throughout the performance, daily living is abolished by means of a continuous anti-mimetic effort, through numerous sublimation techniques. However, the moment the tension fails and actors go off stage, relaxed, emptied of everyone and everything, alone with turmoil and unrest of their hearts, the "reflexes" of playing – for the most part unknown, unsuspected and dressed as deceiving masks – suddenly invade them, baffle them, instilling in them an apparent and transitory calm. The performing being, the ludic persona, does not live on in the actor after the performance, but its diffuse aura is so impetuous that we are bound to term it creative, one that is creative of a private existence.

Exposed to a "non-existent" scourge, actors do not know – under its whippings – what succumbs within them, how some things fall ill, and how many others blossom into either sheer



beauty or foulness. We say that actors do not know. However, like anyone who pushes the limit out of the desire to test that indeed nothing is forbidden, actors know that they do not know, or rather that they do not *want* to know. In addition, this amounts to playing precisely with their own self in a forbidden way. Actors reach the deepest closeness to life precisely when and where they refuse it! To play – what a voluptuous nightmare! Therefore, it comes as no surprise to discover that the motto of a true actor reads “irony above all”. There is, buried within each of us, someone who laughs at us – the demon of irony – and actors disappear the moment this inner voice, its laughter and sneers fall silent within them.

This ludic persona can be termed the *natural being* because its new, invented body overlaps completely with the actor’s own body, and everything it bears the actor bears, too. This ludic, performing being, however, also needs to be examined in terms of *artifice* because it disappears the moment acting seizes, while the actor remains. In this sense, the actor is forced to create a third

sacrificial-body for every performance. This third sacrificial-body belongs to the world of transfiguration that is intermediary and ambiguous. Under each mask, there is a place for the mask that reconciles, in equal measure, the being and the non-being.

The actor is the result of an uninterrupted self-creation. At the foundation of the actor's spectacular somersaults lies a never-ending urgent demand: any hiatus in the *to be* continuum cancels the actor; any distraction, any inattention suppresses a miracle from happening on stage. Is there any aesthetic existence under more threat than that of the actor? What means everything this moment can collapse the next: the actor certainly knows the dizzy heights of the void, after all they make the actor's daily occurrences. Why, then, should we be at all surprised that actors live their lives under the sign of the artifice and that by "dying" so often they have invented a death that they cannot die of?

Seeming demands a regime of psychological and physical concentration verging on trance –

while the trance, once directed, is allowed improvisation. The evolution of acting has obligatory stages and stations, seeing that it elaborates on its own spontaneity. Every single ludic, performing act must achieve the synthesis between the character to be played on the stage and the actor's private persona in order to give birth to the ludic, performing being.

Actors dislocate their structures and seek to shatter the routine of normal biological behaviour, in order to steal themselves from the habitual vital rhythms. How else can they root in themselves the core of another (invented) being and live its destiny in the space of a few hours? Thus, actors need physiological excess and "extravaganza", which they use in order to enthrall inspiration. Only an inspired being overcomes convention, transcends itself and is more than someone else's "instrument". This inspired being accedes to a nature that has the prerogatives of the real, the nimbleness of the dream and the vitality of the symbol, because it is inspirited by a sensory hyper-conscience. A deeply felt state of absolute

present prefaces acting: here the inspired being is in its imagined world, living its minute of glory, of indestructibility; here it is, solid, carved out of the hardest material and yet fluid, open, fusing within itself the antinomies – suddenly revealed – at the heart of reality. How can any description capture such evasion in oneself? The sensory delirium marries the peace of this being that appears free of any condition and conditioning. For us, ephemeral spectators, as ephemeral as the excess actors practise, the effect of this corporeal magic is dematerializing: we levitate in the aura of our own flesh – at once owning and not owning it, we keep it, earthly in its multiple emotional germinations, but we do not look back, narcissistically, to it. The fluid induced in us transforms us into the actor's internalised partners and into as many inspired beings. We are what does not possess us, what does not enslave us to the limit and we sit at our centre as if at the centre of a world we irradiate.

The identification with the actor, the consecrated minister of *being*, and not with the

character consecrated to *making* – that is, making a pre-established destiny – restores in us the original meaning of theatrical adventure. The actor – a pristine, material breath of indescribable presence – breathes himself or herself, and breathes us. Beyond every possible simulacrum trembles this blood beat.



## **On the Perpetual Beginning**

If we assume that every face mirrors a soul, how many souls, then, can we identify for one actor? And how many of these faces reflect fully rounded psychological structures?

Can the actor ever be the one or is the actor the perpetual “other” – metamorphosis itself, the absence of plain, elementary identity? One thing seems certain: in order to have a unique soul, changing only within, the actor would have to claim and possess simultaneously all the possible faces. Multiple-faced as they may be, actors do not own the endless line of transfigurations and disguises. What lies at the origin of the actor’s will to embody is the nostalgia for the irretrievable unity of the self.

For the actor, every part to play has the value and meaning of a new beginning. This is because the embodied character demands not only marginal changes of the actor's personal traits, but also the actor's re-composition and remodelling, alongside eliminating routine behaviour, standard responses, pre-existing reactions. All actors feel the need for a newly found receptivity when engaging in a novel process of creation; they do not mystify their nature in order to adapt it, now modified, to the concrete demands of the role. Instead, actors work to find within themselves authentic "origins" for the demands of the role, to find in their body and soul valid sources for these.

To create means to re-structure yourself, temporarily, to sacrifice for a "presentiment" the constructive elements at your disposal at that given moment; the metamorphosis, in this case, is the equivalent of regeneration. The components of the actor's double will be, always and simultaneously, "something" and "something else", destruction and genesis, the act of dwelling



between the abandoned form and the prefigured one.

The actor is the one who eternally begets oneself: this is the actor's glory. When parting with a role they have played for a while, actors reject implicitly all possible developments, which the "beginning" required and initiated by that particular role could have deployed within, were the role pursued until the very end. However, the end is consistently refused; it is this refusal that dedicates actors to a fidelity of a higher order, namely the freedom to consume more and more experimental existences, and to make out of their succession one, continuous, formative experience. Actors seduce only on condition that they are being seduced, that they surrender to the magic of the eternal beginning.

In the realm of actorial vocation, the moments of "unconsciousness", of so-called losing one's self in another self or thing, are the actor's plunges into one's own levels of depth, into one's unknown zones, yet undiscovered. Lucidity borrows here the language of affect, nerves think,

and nerve endings send waves; the body asks, touches, searches like an extended, intelligent antenna, endowed temporarily with super-sensory perception. Overcoming the flesh and its limitations, its wants, the body creates its stage aura: it asserts itself as desirous to conquer the inanimate spaces that surround it by transmitting them its rhythm, pulse and beat. The body gives life and personifies. Behind its extravaganzas lies the calm intransigence of a willpower that refuses to accept that there is an end(ing) to something.

For many actors, performing is driven and sustained by the naïve and refreshing pleasure of hatching, from semblances, multiple and polychrome physiognomies that can express their great ability to be. For such actors the intensity of experiencing is mistaken for the desire to germinate within them as many of their possible selves. Acting looks to trigger inspiration: when this shoots out of the nebulous inner life that had kept it fettered and takes over the zone of performance, actors can surrender to spontaneity. The improvisations they allow themselves mark

the moments of high emotional frequency typical of an evolution with no discontinuities, with no break between the work of art and the interpreter, between the human being and the artist. Under the sign of talent, the stage simulacrum becomes a spiritual act.

Actors are present concomitantly in their opposites. Without knowing their bodies down to the last detail, actors know the poles of their bodies to perfection. The equilibrium that ensures the aesthetic begetting and transfiguration of actors can be achieved only through a strained ratio of their extremes – variable on their common axis. They are, in short: intensity, but not pushed to delirium, norm, but not limitation.

Therefore, actors respond to a double imperative: on the one hand, it requires of them an acting structure at once created in the deepest recesses of their inner being and manifested to the external gazes. The underground current must, thus, shoot out through all the pores and, while doing so, not lose a jot of the force of its intimacy. Thus, actors strive to be “more” and “many more”,

and, while doing so, not decrease their being, diminish their respective self. It is by losing that actors win; it is by multiplying that actors get firmly closer to their self. All things that appear and disappear in the moment – resonances, impressions, perceptions of the most diverse nature, visions and evanescent ideas – are the actors' own; the filter of the actors' aesthesia composes and decomposes them into instances of a self in continuous search for the *perceptible*. Only the tensions capable to create bodies have a theatrical and spectacular character. Every hypostasis, every action their body is capable of creating corresponds to an imaginative somersault of their aesthesia.

Perceptions create around every actor a second epidermis of sorts, one that is moving, like a hive, fluid and in continuous making: the higher its density, the more marked its penetrability.

Every actor is an identity in continuous becoming, in an uninterrupted process of alterity; hence, perhaps actors find it easy to appear again and again as the pathfinder of Another's visions.

They do not sell others' dreams and neither do they live these dreams in the spectators' place – they only demonstrate, through their successive incarnations that this or the other dream is practicable, achievable. Through the actor, the others' barely sketched visions and chimeras become, from ethereal and impalpable, extremely concrete, tangible and, one by one, they give away their secrets.

From this revealed abundant reverie of the public, actors learn to create a distilled expression of the collective Eros, of the collective desire to share and participate (the desire to merge the disparate individualities of spectators that make up the mass of onlookers). This is why it is important for actors to “get the feel of their audience”, to assess somewhat the audience's makeup, its dominant vibes, its pulse and, like the spellbinding creatures they are, to absorb the audience's will, turning it into an appendix of their performing, creative power.

In the theatre, every dream is dreamt in a state of wide-awakeness. Its embodiment in actors

initiates a potential reality. For the utopian, exile is the true “home coming”; in the same way, venturing into the character (into alterity) for actors (who in this sense resembles the utopian) is wondering awake through the forgotten, dormant labyrinths of their self. It comes as no surprise then that actors have chosen the public arena to practice with quasi-athletic virtuosity, the dangerous game of losing and finding their self. Every moment, actors are at once identical with their own self and with an other who faithfully mirrors the spectator. It is thus that actors have found, in the midst of the community, a salutary way to dedicate themselves to their respective selves in the most intensely generous form.

Wide-awake dreaming necessitates an image (a sketch of the action that is coherent and rational by definition), an atmosphere (that is, its own hue, saturated with all the intuitions generated by the subjectivity of the actor) and a meaning. The image lends an objective style to the theatrical work; the atmosphere brings the subjective, unmistakable touch of the creative

personality of every actor; the meaning represents the fulfilment of the creation beyond its body and materiality. Ultimately, meaning is constituted in the others, the spectators: not the spectators to the moment in which the creation reveals itself, but those who will be touched by the moment of its revelation.





## The Enigma of the Mask

*When I live I do not feel myself live.  
But when I act, it is then that I feel myself exist.<sup>2</sup>*

Antonin Artaud

The difference between theatre and life lies not so much in the former's artifice but in the fact that the theatre accepts to divulge its mechanisms and to expel its protagonists out of the theatrical world at the end of each "magical encounter". Life owns masks that are touched by necrosis, tyrannical ones, from which you cannot steal yourself without risking the sanctions brought about by hubris; theatre, on the other hand, deals

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<sup>2</sup> Antonin Artaud, 'The Theatre of the Seraphim', in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Susan Sontag (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 275.

in false, playful masks, which always promise more than they fulfil and arouse stronger desires that they can satisfy. Having dedicated themselves to the profoundly erotic dynamism of the world, theatre's masks go on tempting and keeping awake the desire for *something else*.

The masks that life reduces us to demand a contained fanaticism, monotonous and tenacious (and thus, constancy); their idol is duty or, in other words, social determinism. Masks that are explicitly theatrical (whether born out of affective spontaneity, or out of the imagination's struggle against reality, or out of instinct, etc.) have chosen pleasure as their guiding principle (thus, inconstancy), hence – perhaps – a particular servitude, weakness they betray especially when compared to the masks of life.

The duel between these two categories of masks leads, in the sphere of individual existence, to moments of crisis, of revolt, of denunciation of travesty and even to a radical shift in one's personal regime of dissimulation. Pushed to the limit (where the two categories of masks reach the

same value threshold), this conflict gives birth to actors. They commit themselves to the stage roles with the extreme dedication demanded of life roles; conversely, actors treat life roles with the freedom and “casualness” learnt from stage roles.

Authentic acting requires “morals of quality”; each and every actor takes on board only the suggestions that enhance our capacity of manifestation in a developmental direction. Simulation, in this case, means (exclusively) the openness towards one’s realm of possibility.

As such, I, as an actor, escape from myself, from a “self” that suffocates me, under the pretext of encompassing my wholeness, everything that is most precious within me, namely my plurality. I escape within “us”, an “us” that I allow to surround me precisely because it does not trap me, it does not limit me – on the contrary, it enables my expansion – and which, above all, does not alienate me since it is just a happy expression of the intensification of “my self”. For me, as an actor, the extension of my being is the form taken by the intensity of opposites at my disposal when performing.

The individuals dedicated to the excess of acting aim to shape not so much other roles (opposite to their own) but to escape from the set-role, the prison-role imposed on them by society's cast-iron convention. So actors will always be more firmly present in the evasions risked, in those without a certain goal, rather than in the firm complicity with the limit – the so-called “chastity belt” of mediocrity. Acting demands that actors live their virtuality, that they experience euphorically their potential as yet unreached.

Where does this desire to amaze, to surprise, to disconcert, come from, if not out of the long-term inner need to oppose blatantly, at least now and again, the role we are coerced into by rigid social determinism? Every spontaneous liberation, every internal decompression, reveals a certain potential for aggressiveness. Acting extroversion is no stranger to such implicit violence. However, by virtue of its unequivocal need for assistance and its positive evaluations, its praise (without which the meaning of acting would be profoundly offended), acting extroversion carefully conceals its asperities

and seeks to dress them in attractive forms. While indecent by definition, this extroversion adopts, cunningly, the protocol of decency and it disguises itself. Brutal in its intent, it disciplines its appearances in order to make more tolerable those contents that are often uncouth, coarse, to begin with.

If the individuals possessed by the acting genius simulate what they would like to do (but do not do), it needs to be clear to us that they do so not only by virtue of a compensatory act but also because they aim to experiment a state denied to them under normal circumstances. This is the condition of occupying a central position in the midst of the group and, in doing so, being its own centre.

By acting *for* the others, such individuals manage to ransom themselves, to overcome their petty conditioning and during a “vindictive” passion, initially selfish, these individuals get to taste the invigorating elixir of communicability. Seeking to give themselves pleasure, they learn to give others pleasure and to create – albeit having

started from a moment of personal crisis and dissatisfaction – an atmosphere of cheerful shared relaxation.

Acting intervenes with its healthy, robust nerve (of primitive origin) on the small and numerous stages of social life, where the dramas of inadaptation, of loneliness, of break-up, of failure take place in order to transform them in as many ways of uncoercive reintegration of the individuals into the community.

The art of the actor opens the perspective of intimate transgression and, by allowing its “patients” to catch a glimpse of a stage superior to their condition; it initiates them in the art of self-remodelling. This art prefigures a potential reality, yet one that can be turned into lived reality from the first moment of this prospective initiation. By imagining, then, human beings can overcome barriers that they dared not get anywhere near. The courage to dream is the preamble to daring to do. The limit ignored in daily life and revealed through performing

becomes a step and a support in the attempt to overcome arbitrarily imposed limit(ation)s.

Actors have always deserved their fate because they, out of those graced with inspiration, have been given the chance to be their own celebration, to officiate the ceremonies of atonement within their own self and body, and not in an external work of creation.

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The term mask means here any role actors adopt in order to perform themselves as somebody else, to live an essentially intimate adventure under visibly attractive appearances. Therefore, actors need this subterfuge in order to be seen and followed; they know no way to reveal themselves other than that governed by the rules of stage performance. Only in the public arena actors know how to be alone in fruitful ways; only there they manage, sometimes, to discover themselves as the ideal measure of their existence, as the unique reality of their dream of life. Under the fictional

and, thus, somewhat protective auspices of the stage, actors find the courage to risk themselves beyond the convention they have temporarily assumed. The mask is never an end in itself, but the continuous process or metamorphosis that renders, through itself, all ends inexhaustible.

Because actors discover themselves to be very little at the same time they sense that they can be a lot more, the actors' art defines itself as a necessary minimum that hints at and propels towards a maximum possible.

Protected by the mask, the ludic, performing persona of the actor advances into the possible, into more and more experimental existences, as if they were the performer's own domain, and asserts the actor's unperturbed autonomy. Any conquest (albeit ephemeral) is there for the take. The actors' states and acts manifest themselves with an imminence never felt in day-to-day life. So actors conquer their common condition and live, exaltedly, the sensation of existing for an hour, two or three as a matter of utmost necessity. It is in such privileged moments of performing that the balance



between the actors' desire and ability to be, between enthusiasm and inspiration, is achieved.

I chose the term "mask" over "part" because I believe the former pays due emphasis to the ever-changing nature of every actor's performance. At the same time, this term also stresses the fact that actors conceal themselves into something concrete and immediate, into something that is their own self without seemingly being so, into something that shapes and opens them to their own depths in ways more subtle than they themselves would be capable of doing, alone, in that particular moment.

In other words, the mask stands for the maximum distance actors can take from their own self without disrupting the link with their core; it is the maximum inner distance they can take from what they think they are at a given moment. The mask means to leave in order to come back, to estrange oneself spiritually from one's own nature to such an extent that one feels one is beginning to lose it only to return into oneself as an unknown, a yet unrevealed "self".

The mask subordinates the actor's subjectivity to an expressive rigour, within which, however, the actor experiences a paradoxical freedom. This constraint purifies, cleanses the actor's subjectivity of narcissistic accidents and details, supporting thus its individualisation. Instead of the chaotic dispersal of the actor's self – which, when left to its gratuitous spontaneity, would at most affirm its exuberance to the detriment of the “affirmations” this exuberance is called to create, after all – we have the concentration and transfiguration into the performing, ludic persona.

Saving it from being gratuitous and facile, the mask enhances the transparency of acting: we see more clearly what the actor conceals, we understand better what the actor does not utter rhetorically, we feel more firmly what the actor offers by antithesis. We can know the actor on condition that we recognise the actor-in-the-mask. This is easily achieved every time the mask appears as a stylistic exaggeration of the actor's personality, as an emphasis (in the ontological

sense) of the actor's nature, thus justifying and validating all there is in terms of personal excess in the actor.

For aesthetic purposes, actors cultivate in their ludic, performing persona, in their play with their masks, potentialities which translate – consciously or unconsciously – to their private persona and automatically change the character. Subjecting actors to strict ethical norms, alienated from their initial conditioning, they accuse the actors of numerous defects – primarily of character. Metamorphosing, doubling, substituting, uncovering publicly one's inner being, masking or covering one's outer being, disguising, etc., have been held as main charges against actors over the centuries. Actors have been charged off stage, time and again, with everything their art created on the stage. The confusion between the actors' real existence and their performing one has been – undoubtedly – crass, but not always unmotivated. The accusations were founded every time actors did not succeed or did not aim to separate hermetically their most authentic source of theatre making,

namely their ever-changeability, from everyday life. The self-begetting potential of the actors' art does not mean being an Other every night, but always being several. When taken as separate from the stage necessity that brought it into being, the actors' capacity for ever-changeability would be seen as incriminatory.

Therefore, the actors' intended ambiguity comes from the fact that the actors' private persona has to maintain a "clandestine" state with regards to their ludic, performing persona, and to forbid their private persona the morally unsanctionable privileges bestowed on their performing, ludic persona. However, contamination between these two personae cannot always be entirely avoided.

All actors are governed by the intensity of their own consummation: they are what *consumes* them. Naturally, we are seduced by the actors who appear to consume themselves unreservedly; what attracts us are the actors with impetuous, imaginative, passionate natures, who drive their ludic, performing personae to total combustion. It is the actors who do not try to spare themselves, to

save their inner energies that exert a particular fascination on us. They *are* when they *risk* their selves truly, when their stage performances are a devastating bet against their limit (that is, a particular form of existence that demands to be overcome) and an attempt at self-giving that aims to remain unparalleled. Nothing would be more dejected than an actor lacking the joy of self-giving!

Any innovative attempt in the field of acting is doomed to fail if it is not founded on the aim to suppress the natural individualism and vanity of actors, if it does not start from the idea of re(-)forming the character of the one destined to experiment with a new method of acting. What is essential to stage act(ing) is that fact that it demands of actors to manifest themselves creatively in relation to their own life. For actors, the role is either an opportunity to reach moments of maximum intensity of being or nothing. Simple entertainers, on the other hand, would be satisfied just with converting – through the characters they disguise themselves into – their own hysteria and individualism, this egotism, into megalomania.

The privilege of every actor is to exist beyond one's self, as a clear externalised being; however, every escape from the inner self re(-)forms the actor's inner world and remodels, imperceptibly, one's nature. The interiority of the actor is an extension of the actor's exteriority. Authentic acting always brings about an enlightening of the performer's conscience – the fake and mystifying acting, could only bring about its darkening.

At every moment in the creative act, the actor is more the-one-who-has-not-been-yet than the-one-who-has-already-been. The future, its actualization, and not the already-spent past, is the actor's temptation and substantial resource. Actors will live their masks as exceptional and unexpected life *circumstances*; to explore rather than to exploit oneself would be each and every actor's intimate desideratum. Like the magical human being, actors believe that the value of their acting resides in the intensity with which this is lived in performance. Every actor wears a particular mask in order to be recognised as a mask-bearer and, simultaneously, as the character

or expression of that mask. The actor's private persona is transfigured in both, hiding in one in order to reveal itself in the other and thus projecting the ambiguous interplay of illusion onto the whole realm of stage performance.

Often, during the performance, we sense a profound imbalance, a deep ambiguity within the actor. In addition, we are suspicious without really knowing why. Yet we are never wrong in doing so! The acting spirit is a culpable one because it is devoured by melancholy, the melancholy born of loving what it does not believe in – personae, masks – and by believing in what it loves not, that is, oneself. Actors exist only in their personal utopia, in the cave where the chimeras are fashioned in their image, take the semblance of the actors' flesh and speak the language of the actors' heart. They live only by feeling lived beyond themselves. The force of genius in every actor is the spur not to spare oneself, to excel in giving oneself, to expand continuously the boundaries of this freedom of being, even at the risk of exhausting one's own real resources of vitality.

The collapse into the self is inevitable: there, at the limits of forbidden freedom, the deconstructive subject discovers oneself, sooner or later, as the unique object to be destroyed that continues to exist. This is why actors cannot love themselves fully; this is why, while loving the masks that have enabled the ludic creation, actors must, nevertheless, acknowledge their fiction(ality). Actors, thus, are the tragic manifestation of the ultimate and sacred limit of internalising the *to be*.

Given that every actor exists in embodied form in imagined lives and that the actor's biological life is contained and contains all imagined ones, it follows that the actor has a *generative* rapport with the Imagination. This rapport is as much constant as it is ambiguous: it takes shape in the unreal, the fictional, it replaces appearances, lending imagination a material body and, in doing so, extending – imperceptibly – the echoes of the imagined into the real(ity).

In the art of performance, the spirit is the pseudonym for the body transfigured through acting.



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The present chapter has focused on the mask, that is, on the role the actor plays. In order to pre-empt any possible confusion, I would like to end with a clarification, a disambiguation: the mask covering the actor's face (or other bodily part) is a rich and efficient means of summoning up and constructing not a character, but the constitutive action of that character in its most intense moment. Before conferring the character an identity, the object-mask points to the meaning of the mask-bearer's acts of performance.

In the agonising relationship between spirit and body, inherent to the manifestation of acting, the object-mask intervenes as a factor of radical reconciliation. This intervention forces every actor's dichotomic expressivity to renounce the conflict between the psychological and the physical – on which its dynamism was founded – in favour of the dynamism of the body elevated to the dignity and adeptness of the spirit. The body

“crowned” with the mask is the spirit viewed from within, the spirit in its organic interiority.

This body may seem equal to the sum of all its bodily parts; in reality, however, this body is an *event* superior to any creation in the material realm. It eliminates from its homogenous sphere hierarchy, any hierarchy, any subordination: its radiating centres of energy are spread into all its cells; the acting potential of the hand is not above that of the torso, and the thigh does not speak less than the calf or the shoulder. All parts aspire to the subtlety and the concentration of the forms kept under close watch by the intellect.

Far from creating imaginary configurations of muscles or decerebrated flesh forms (given that the head is no longer the exclusive centre for movement and action), the object-mask lends intelligence to the actor’s corporeality and claims a body that thinks.

## **Mask and Embodiment**

In the art of the actor, performing presupposes – outright and above all – embodiment. Embodying is the act through which the performer is doubled and builds – around the impalpable and the barely perceptible – a body that is material, distinctive, temporary and relatively new. Imagined and manifesting itself as figured, the performer's body constitutes a material entity that is unmistakable and whose character is, first of all, direct, immediate and palpable, and only afterwards suggestive, analogical and referential.

When performing, actors operate with the elements of their respective living body. In doing so, performers dislocate these elements from their common, daily flux, and turn them into signs by

reinvesting them symbolically and by treating them, at every opportunity, as purely figurative substitutes of themselves. To create a body dedicated exclusively for performance means, for any actor, to self-fashion as a physical blueprint for the imagined due to be represented – and not at all to constrain the actor's body in order to make it fit imagined shapes the performer has not created. The matrix is always the result of the process of instrumentalizing the actor.

The actor's double represents, therefore, an expression of the way in which actors take possession of themselves, as living bodies, in order to become instruments of a creation that is about to be embodied on the stage. This process of possession-taking resembles (in fact, as the following suggests, rather appears to resemble) a radical dispossession because, caught in the act of embodying, performers choose to actualise into performance only possibilities that are capable of bringing to life the imagined character. Through this, performers constrain themselves *to be* those elements – namely, the elements of their

psychological and physical life. When dedicating them to the conventional world of the stage, it is these elements that performers feel compelled to estrange from their selves and, at the same time, de-naturalise with regard to personal life.

In creating a character, actors succeed in outlining its shape and conferring it a palpable bodily structure precisely because they have become an instrument. This instrument has come into being through the actors' alienation from their own nature, from the accidental, the conjectural and the arbitrariness of their private moments in life, and thus has won, in relation to these, the formal-poetic freedom of fiction.

The double reveals itself to be, in essence, the very process of the actors' *instrumentalization*, a process through which every actor abandons, temporarily, the sensorial, spatial and temporal reality, and bestows it onto the performer's creative faculties. The aim of this process remains turning the actors' private persona into a spectre and creating a fictional flesh-and-blood image. The paradox inherent in such playing with one's self

guarantees every actor – throughout the rehearsals and the performance proper – a dynamic unity, safe from stereotypes or kinaesthetic automatisms. It reflects the actors' pathos in the effort to transgress their inner limits and inflexibilities.

Internal contradictions and disagreements, which appear as dispersive phenomena within the performer's private persona, can be reconciled and brought together, temporarily, in the body of the actor's double. This acting body functions as the receptacle of all contradictions existent in actors and of all their experiences as a whole.

Accomplishing or configuring the performing body requires overcoming the primary and non-reflexive sensory stage; the transfigured body becomes the sensory that, as Artaud envisaged, thinks and instils thinking. The activity of producing the double involves the actor both as object destined to be transfigured and as transfiguring power. From this point of view, acting entails, first of all, symbolic self-devouring. Thus, in the same act, the actor simultaneously gives and receives, creates and bears, increases and decreases,

tears at and adds to the self. It would be wrong to assume that actors are passive instruments, ones in which the impulses and shapes of their fictional selves are moulded. We can truly recognise the actor only in becoming a specifically ludic, acting persona who, by erasing the boundary between instrument and its principle, turns their interrelationship – one that is circular and in continuous flux – into the support of the actorial existence. The double is precisely this acting, performing being, manifested in its triple form as concrete reality, symbol of its own reality and internalised theatrical fiction. In this sense, the double is the very expression of the co-existence and circularity of the above three qualities.

This embodying does not resort to magic; neither does it rely on the hallucinogenic resources of imitative expression. On the contrary, embodying captures a mystery: the fall of the character's spiritual body into the actor's material body. A double magnetism precedes the creation of the ludic, performing being out of this double "altering". The two elements that enter this collision

lose themselves by the same measure they find themselves, altered, in what they are about to become together. The embodying is the result of this encounter between two equally illusory beings outside the classical merging scene, outside the aesthetic moment of the communion that instates their co-existence; they cannot be clearly distinguished until after they have been united.

We can see the character as the actor's shadow only if we accept that this shadow is made of a subtle matter, of something akin to a palpable atmosphere, one that vibrates around an invisible form; when em-body-ing it, the actor solidifies its "ethereal" structure.

Should we see the actor as a simple impersonal vehicle, then we would immediately observe that the character does not live within the performer unless it is consciously reflected first. The vehicle is, thus personal and reflexive, while the character is precisely the existential rapport the actor has with it. Embodying gains a privileged nature every time one can attest to the fact that the character-within-the-actor has encountered the actor-within-the character.



What is required of the actor is to reinvent, continuously, personal experiences while at the same time forbidding these to infiltrate as such into the creation of the character. This way, the actor avoids introducing the deadly *mimesis* where the present continuous of genuine living must reign. The superstition of the lived experience in creating the part makes the part itself lose its core feature as an immediate, tempting and transformative experience for the actor, and turns it into a commentary on a spent experience that has taken place within the actor a long time ago. The part acquires a poignant existential character only when it encompasses surpassing the actor's personal experiences.

The actor, it follows then, is a mask bearer not only on the stage but also in daily life. Not all masks, though, are as visible in the actor. Some, however, are so evident, so authentic, that the actor's own daily appearance may seem a camouflage and a dissimulation of the actor's true image taking refuge in the mask. The character pre-exists in the actor as a virtual possibility; it takes the

form of a disputable neurotic tension which, in the absence of the dramatic character, risks undergoing necrosis, not finding its liberating expression. As the inner mask is a yarn-ball made of enigmas layered upon enigmas and, thus, covering one another, or a temptation the impetus of which finds no bank to flow in, an external shock is necessary to catalyse it and to bring it to full life. The character, thus, comes about as an existential opportunity for the actor, as a solution for this tension, as a language for everything that was yet un-articulated within the actor. The real character that corresponds to the homuncular-character from deep within the actor is a veritable unfettering and dissolution of the spiritual aporia the actor was in. The theatrical character asserts the actor; it puts at the disposal of the actor's vitality a vast space for exploration and growth.

If the character-within-the-actor is a reality that exists but is unintelligible and inarticulable in the absence of a theatrical character, then the actor-within-the-character is a fiction of the fiction that aspires to find its real counterparts, the ludic

agents capable of em-body-ing and giving materiality to it. By saying that an actor was destined for a part, we infer that the actor matches perfectly the generic type of actor envisaged and virtually contained in the character penned by the playwright. We feel that the actor's particular given abilities and characteristics chime in with those of the "fictional fiction" and that the actor has the ability to personify and make real what it suggests. The meeting point between the actor-within-the-character and the character-within-the-actor is precisely where and when the ludic, performing persona – as the vehicle for both – is born.

This embodiment, this transfiguration begins with rejecting mimetic figuration. The actor preserves within ample reserves of inadaptation prior to the world's ready-made forms and objects; through this and this alone the actor will manage to avoid becoming a puppet experienced in the mechanics of simulation. It is only the pre-sentiments that actors must "imitate" and, in doing so, force the invisible and yet inexistent to be created and embodied within them.

The character is not the elaborated theatrical mask of Someone Else; neither is it the biographical outline the actor should, one way or another, internalise, nor a “poetic proposition”. The character simply represents a *nucleus of forces*, of psychological and physical possibilities hard to differentiate or name. Initially faced with this nucleus, the stage professional cannot but feel unnerved, defeated, in a state of *active panic*, and so begins to look for a solution. Before becoming functional, before being discovered as such, the nucleus of psychological and physical energies sends the actor into a shock, it inflicts an *artificial wound*. Symbolic of unconsciously assuming the character, this wound cannot heal other than through the performer’s self-change and self-renewal.

Being the actors’ field of risk, the character is the organised labyrinthic space that tests the actors’ capacity to perpetuate themselves through their own stage doubles. Even when actors make way into the character’s labyrinth as if it were Someone Else’s labyrinth, as performers they

choose instinctively the path that leads to their respective selves.

The seductive tension of the ever-alternating masks demands of the actor a hyperbolic involvement in the act of embodying. Consequently, we are faced with a paradoxical creative act: the performer does not understand just acting a part and giving up the pleasure of acting one's own self. What the performer finds fascinating, above all, is transferring one's own self into the realm of the imagination. The more so given that the actor loves not the character, but the actor's self in the character. This love affair defines the meaning of every actor's remodelling. The condition of the actors is to recreate themselves, through the means of the double, as receptacle and dynamic centre for the appearances that flood the stage and will manifest themselves through the duration of the performance. Actors believe in the aesthetic value of the actor's person transfigured and integrated in the characters' fictional order.

The change of masks – as one devours and replaces another – is a guarantee of the actor's

vitality; inertia linked to any of the masks could lead to interpretative mannerism. After all, only those who delight in being played with – as if they were a being who is artificial by definition – will know the true pleasure of acting. Such abandon anticipates, in this sense, self-possession and the fascination exerted on the audiences to this act.

The laws of the stage ritualise the actors' fantasies and systematise the actors' delirium. "Clinicalising", and thus seeking to integrate actors into a sphere of the unreal and the irrational that is domesticized and subjected to a standardised formal-poetic usage, these laws impose a paradoxical dogma on the actors' heresies.

The boundary between the two vital fluids that feed the performer – on the one hand, the accidents in the personal life and on the other, the adventures in the imaginary universe – is unstable and shifting. As such, it privileges within the performing persona embodied by the actor an intense traffic in both directions. From this point of reference, all the actor's dispositions and adventures are impure. What seems "not to be"

rests on what seems “to be”, and the other way around; like on a chess board, the “existence” and “inexistence” squares alternate while suddenly changing into one another within a split second. It remains impossible to ascertain what extent of any given actor’s performance is dream as opposed to awakeness; wakefulness in this case might only be a stage of dreaming, and the imaginary an insufficiently explored stage of the real. In the art of the theatre, appearance plays into the hands of essence, and essence plays into the hands of appearance every time.

Who could possibly measure the amount of unreal that makes its way into the reality of an actor – and who would, even if they found a way into the actor’s intimate life, be entitled to state that they have grown to know in the actor anything more than a(n efficient) degree of appearance? Similarly, when can anyone say that actors are at one with their own selves? Is it in the moment of the overall perception of one actor’s possible or probable doubles? In that of an actor’s self-emptying of all the temptations and offers posed by the potential?

In multiplicity? In the refusal of each and every identity? When the actor seems to be – as Camus would have it – “several” or “nothing”?

The freedom with which actors play with their nature, their humanity when embodying diverse characters and elaborating their doubles verges on the forbidden. More so, all actors come across as clearly inclined to extract from the depth of their nature and to speculate, above all, on its irregularities, lending them later – under one mask or another – developments out of the ordinary. Actors have no other choice because the poles – between which the type of acting that is called for on stage takes place – are the extreme opposites, not the middle ground, of human nature. An actor who, when performing, does not travel back and forth, at lightning speed, from one limit to the other, an actor who does not create an acute sense of danger by overtly pushing these limits to breaking point, will never manage to command our attention and become – for the duration of the performance – the centre of our dreams, of our expectations and of our desires.



## **The Body**

How strong and how stubborn does a body need to be in order to face the assault of masks that want to take it into their possession, eager to impose their mark? The actor's body constitutes a fundamental principle of unity, a principle that is dominating and necessary in the face of devastating claims to supremacy and uniqueness put forward by masks-in-conflict. The spectral decomposition of masks actually saves the performers; their mutual coexistence, however, would dissolve the performers' sole support, their body. Could it be though that such a placental protection of the latter constitutes in fact none other than an actual act of indifference towards oneself? A superb and almost inhuman indifference that will always accuse the

performer's own body, rather than that of others, of a pompous and rampant gratuitous behaviour.

The actor emerges as the primary *physical* successor of the character, the latter being consistently taken on and assumed in conditions of material, bodily non-existence, irrespective of the number of previous potential embodiments. Each and every subsequent embodiment is endowed with the qualities of the very first one, seeing that it originates in the absolute material non-existence of the character. Besides, its content has never entirely been free from the kinaesthetic field in which the body of the performer felt and imagined the character.

Taking into possession a different destiny, overcoming it and conditioning it to break out of its own corporeality, the stage actor experiences a passage from nature to artifice that is a more than symbolic. What precedes and determines this leap, this "originary anamnesis", is the body perceived as medium, as instrument and as receptacle of the ludic, performing act(ing).

For the duration of the performance, the actor's body becomes a bolster for an imaginary

alterity. At first, it might appear that the theatre professional deprives characters of their “opportunity” for infinite variations, by way of conferring them a unique interpretation. The actor removes the character from the sphere of pure virtuality and introduces it into a threefold determinism: of theatrical embodiment, of the specific conventions of theatrical representation and of audience perspectives. All of these will align the actor to the standards of artistic achievement in a given performance. Moreover, this ambiguous situation is complicated further by the fact that in the energy fields of the ludic, performing persona, the actor is mysteriously intertwined with the character; dissociations between them are only viable up to a point.

On stage, we witness a dual “alienation”: of the character and of the actor, whereas the corporeal discourse is a sort of “delirium” within which the two parties encounter each other at the frontier between the realised unreal and the mimed real, otherwise known as theatrical act(ing). On the one hand, there is the performer

who sneaks into the action as a mediator, on the other hand, there is a virtuality that, by the sheer virtue of being mediated and materialized, encloses itself into a unique form. In this sense, the actor seems to symbolize the character's death as a transcendence of the stage.

While performing, actors "lend" their bodies. Even if there is no psychological or emotional identification with the role, there is a physical correspondence between the character and the person embodying it. The stage actor's body assumes the representation of another – imaginary – body. No performer can mime something that does not exist, which is why the actor invents and then embodies this invention in order to lend it credibility. Simulacrum commences at the point where actors intimate that they have departed from *two* distinct bodies in order to arrive at the one presented on stage (as if the character had been a person, a live model whose reality can be directly entrusted to anyone). In actual fact, the actor's own, *instrumentalized*, body has been invaded by the immateriality of the other, assuming its fictional

and non-real qualities. The body sums up the character, but it does not reveal or explain it. It would be very simple and, at the same time, extremely boring if actors' bodies looked like screens on which any number of images could be conjured up as long as the projector attached to the text was directed at them. Before and beyond the actors' flesh, there is the aura of their flesh, inhabited by spectres of a higher order, illusions that convey the truths of life in a deeper and more natural fashion. If we acknowledge that forms have souls of their own, and that the spirit recognizes itself in the visions of the flesh, we are bound to investigate, first and foremost, everything that is strikingly visible in actors in order to then encounter this "unseen" that nurtures their actions.

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### *The Voice*

Despite its unitary character, the voice is not monolithic, seeing that every single aspect of it is composed of sound particles, the expressiveness of

which, autonomous from the strictly semantic sphere of words, represents a form of direct competition, yet no potential substitution. These particles are endowed with significant associative and combinatorial capacities, and their potentially infinite diversity makes them impossible to classify and codify. They emit musical scripts, which instead of concealing words with a view to protecting them from alteration, actually transform them into a scintillating ephemeris and insert them into the realm of time. In this way, they also find themselves in possession of a rich biological and personal content.

In case the perception of the body seems, at times, to circumvent duration or even manifests itself as a visual symbol of resistance to time, the voice is never actually detached from the idea of the flow, of the transitory and of the irreversible. It could even be argued that the voice is none other than the flow or time itself, which can be heard in a prolific, incantatory and harrowing fashion in every actor. The voice is a memento of falling into oneself, of the reabsorption of each and every body

into its own, dissolving matter. The voice betrays, in addition to the level of performance or sophistication, the perishable condition of its medium. The charm it surrounds itself with hails from its inability to conceal its profound subjectivity and individual conditioning, and its “degradation” with time. Above all, it is in the intangible that we feel the lethal shiver of the flesh; its intrusion into the art of the theatre can be neither avoided nor denied.

### *The Gaze*

The actor’s gaze emanates or absorbs: it is unable to merely observe. Even hermetic instances, of momentary opacity, can reveal the sparks of affect, given that, in its case, observation is always passionate. The gaze involves and gets involved; the gaze is “shameless” in the joy with which it resembles things or makes things resemble it. It would appear that, at times, the gaze estimates and weighs things up, but in fact it does not qualify or

approximate. The gaze dresses and undresses objects, beings, etc., and plays with them in utter seriousness. It *inspires* and relocates them from the realm of their initial habits and “ordinariness” to a zone of “all possibilities”. By making such objects, beings, etc., mobile or rigid, terrestrial or aerial, soft or rough, awake or benumbed at will, irrespective of their actual condition, the gaze is capable of infusing them with novel vital rhythms.

The performer’s gaze assails the world out there, wanders its shores and, at the same time, constitutes its boundary, a boundary that is trench-like and capable of toppling and engulfing everything within it. The gaze establishes and organizes hierarchies that the body, by virtue of its actions, maps out and then validates by way of embodiment. Owing to the fact that it is capable to smell, to touch, to moisten and to dry, we are entitled to talk about its physical properties and its material virtuosity. The actor’s gaze has acoustic sonority and violence. It does not randomly chime in with anybody or anything but seeks to ascertain its affinity with other live or inert phenomena that



surround it on stage; unbeknown to those faces that do not respond to it, the gaze is the sight of those who offer themselves up to it.

After all, what thought does not indulge in a gaze? Moreover, what idol, appearance or fantasy would not peek out from under our eyelids? There is always scope to ask ourselves who or what exactly within the actor's body catches us unawares.

### *The Mouth*

The mouth hints at complicity: where could one's frenzy or moderation find a more loyal support, and what other part of the body could prove itself capable of expressing the impact of deprivation or inner excess in a more concentrated fashion? Biological kingdoms meet in its flesh and cavity: lips belong to the kingdom of plants, teeth to that of minerals, tongues to that of animals.

Being evanescent, the mouth digresses, changing colour and shape depending on the

impalpable concreteness of the sounds that it filters. It covers a portion of the actor's body that does not have to betray its inner tensions, except by way of converting the directions of this imperfect double into pictorial combinations, asymmetries or relevant regularities. Navigating the spectrum between the suave-voluptuous and the bitter-tragic, as well as between the elegiac and the tumultuous, the mouth yields in to every single intimate or rhetorical paroxysm one after the other. Its only "naivety" consists of an excessive submission to the most varied influences, though it consistently appears much more sensitive to the ceremonies of the mind than to its substance. Yet it only evokes those forces that have succeeded to convince it: this makes the mouth a follower, one that is all too willing to serve.

The mouth is regressive, its outlines do not facilitate an opening of the face as such, but the aperture on the face of an organ in which voice originates. (It is a known fact that the voice can literally originate in the plexus, the heart, the thighs, the genitals, etc.) Whereas the eye can be

either “Apollonian” or “Dionysian”, the mouth remains fatally “Pythiatic” – a testimony to its servile contagion.

Serene, the mouth is in a state of interlude when it no longer reacts to the reflexes and rumours transmitted by sunken, submerged sounds of the body. It is only between the stages of “I felt” and “I sense” that the mouth can experience its moment of spiritual glory.

The mouth and the eye bring together the expressive advantages of the human physiognomy. Hair introduces an element that is less artificial than prone to artificiality, and, for this reason, it belongs to the live, fetishist stage properties of the actor. The ears are positively passive: they denote a stain, a line, a roundness, a protrusion, a concavity but, overall, they do not transcend the boundaries of minor league. The nose is mainly involved in caricatural compositions – comedy, as a rule, holds it in pride of place – and has the choice between retaining its grace as an accessory or pleading for grotesque accentuation.

The physiognomy composed in this way does not run the risk of being opaque: its elements, envious of one another, continually compete for pre-eminence, and situate it under the sign of eternally returning physiognomic restlessness.

### *The Hands*

Only the hands that convey meaning are truly alive, their reflective quality being ensured by the fluid, predominantly spiritual, that runs through them and that, in principle, has the role to guarantee their perfection.

Hands overtake thought – they evoke, entice and echo it. How they resemble a chameleon! How they are experts in modelling, penetrating, stealing away, biting, sliding and hiding! Observe the ambiguous lying in wait inherent in their undulations! Note their greedy ways of grabbing, aiming to mould everything into their shape or, conversely, observe their gift at leaving their mark on everything yet still

managing to retain their abstract nature and be intangible. Examine the subtle crust, of inner mimesis, that covers them: an entire glove of sensations. See how much egotism is built up in the heel of the hand, what generous waste in the fanning of fingers, these erectile tongues and fragile accessories that can only protect us by deceit. Note the carefully played games in their touch! It is in the fingertips that the mysterious world of those who have learned to dream commences.

As far as their relationship with the body is concerned, the hands are familiar with both harmony and discord; they exist sometimes in the gravitational field of the latter, and at other times strive to detach themselves from it. Not being under pressure to act simultaneously, they have the advantage to resort to an infinite variety of gestures and signals. Hence, they are in a position to sing the tune that the body can only murmur, and dance the dance that the soul barely manages to sketch. No intention is ever forbidden to them. Their exteriority reveals the dramatic, their

plasticity implies the lyrical, while their variety hints at the epic.

It is perfectly natural to imagine hands as having *inner life*: nothing of a psychological content is ever denied to them. Hands appear natural when they seem willing to entertain the sensation of their rationality (of their suitability to strictly determined goals), but they can also appear monstrous when they no longer wish to be dependent on any internal or external authority. Then they turn into extended nervous swellings of bodily delirium or agonizing extremities of a shape that is about to depart from itself. The hands balance the body and coerce it into unity and coherence, taking over simultaneously its anarchic reactions and its rebellions.

On stage, hands make use of either an abstract language or of arabesques and useless graces. However, their true domain is that of the “figurative”, where they invent, forge, imagine, sketch, describe, delimit and accomplish – in other words, hands beget. They preserve the nobility of the word, of speech acts, whenever the actor remains silent.

### *The Torso*

The performer's torso is the confluence of all of its visible components. Its degree of personal independence is lower than that of other body parts, seeing that in the physical hierarchy, its role is "to organize", to support in a material sense, and to constitute their permanent coming together. Corporeal elements acquire an illusion of progressive liberation from anything that could determine them in too strict a fashion, on condition that the torso limits their needs and, as much as possible, takes over some of them. The expressivity of the torso depends on the breadth, span and direction of the material flux that goes through it, and that is materialised in the outline of the various limbs and the face. It is familiar with movements barely noticeable when viewed from the outside, movements that convey a certain pace and radiate energy towards all bodily zones, as it is the sanctuary of respiration and of vital breath.

Being both axis and sinusoid, and benefitting from the mobility inherent in the spine, the torso confers strong and subtle accents to the body's polyphonic voices. Underneath its monolithic texture, there are seething forces of a rare subtlety; the hidden waves and currents erupting from its visceral density constitute a genuine horn of plenty as far as actorial creativity is concerned. It is sufficient for actors to open their inner eye, in order to conquer all that is important in their so-called "secrecies", to voluptuously breathe in the air within, and to conclude that nothing that verges on the authentic could be impure. Opening themselves up to the heresies of the flesh, actors have toned those warnings down whereby their reason tried to appease their impulses and sever them from their original organic source. Actors have dared to conjure up instincts and learned that everything that is obscure within, must be brought onto the stage as obscure, and what is transparent, as transparent. It is observing these nuances that renders authenticity to their ludic, performing act(ing), and



not seeking to spread fake lights where only darkness would be suited to the endeavour of speaking of humankind.

### *The Legs*

The ambition of hands, the aggressively concessive duplicity of the mouth or the predominantly spiritual contamination of the gaze are equally alien to the legs; they rather seem to expect to be given a “theme” on which to improvise – thus subverting the serial canons that they are meant to join. The legs regain their ease and spontaneity only when they attach themselves to fantasies that are not their own. Having said that, they are never allowed to behave like an absent or forgetful instrument. They even have the possibility to conjure up original postures and configurations. It is the torso that teaches them the discipline of emotions and transforms them into an earthly conductor, by means of which they can release, if need be, some of the accumulated tension.

The legs constitute a seismic foundation that has a bearing of sorts upon the entire corporeal architecture: after all, the gait fashions, to some extent, the body itself. The actor's and, above all, the dancer's legs have areas of differing sensitivity: the soles are receptive to nuances, the calves to pressures, the knees to articulations and modulations, and the thighs to rhythms and intensities.

Despite being loyal to their earthly role, legs nevertheless flirt with the void. Yet even when they "levitate" and detach themselves from the ground, they are in fact aiming at an additional opportunity to seal their destiny, which is none other than the unfailing contact with the surfaces that attract or model them.

### *Genitalia*

The "erotic" impulse for actors is most clearly revealed in their transformation. The ludic, performing metamorphosis does not satisfy desire

or act as a brutal section of its verticality, but rather softens, corrupts and encloses it in itself. It is this ceaseless refashioning governed by the pleasure principle, originating in its own self and culminating in others (spectators), that represents the pulsional foundation of acting.

Through this transformation, without entirely evading from themselves, performers evade from a hitherto unknown limit. They seem to traverse foreign moulds continually, but in fact, they only cover the ground of their own self, aiming to achieve a fluid status within. The fewer barriers there are within, the higher the chances for their somatic malleability to culminate in a playful spirit. Everybody craves to enthrone above the docile and sombre empire of their flesh Ariel's suave frenzy.

Genitalia impose their rigid dominance within the physical frame of the actor, while indicating a certain willingness to negotiate a spectrum. The performer will always have only one sexual organ that remains unchanged, yet at the same time, have access to endless potentially

erotic centres. Performers, therefore, will have to identify, activate, and intensify these in the course of the stage evolution of their body-as-masterpiece. Generally, genitals are quite “arbitrary”, searching for their favourite place within the different corporeal combinations that the process of acting sets out and prescribes at any given time.

It is desire or, rather, its forms of manifestation that invent the performer’s gender. It is not so much the ambiguity of genitals as an organ that is noteworthy but their ambivalence in terms of presence – the actual location of presence that is. Gender is constantly negotiated, and is able to adapt to the colour, consistency and shape of the zones it feels attracted to, thus lending its function a vague magnetism and a difficult charm, by way of which we also get a hint of the transitory nature of its presence. The regime of internal mutations so typical for actors tends to fuel this “restlessness”. Only such wandering and endless re-inventing (the ultimate truth of which is none other than mystification) makes gender capable of adapting to all the demands involved in stage illusion.

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Without playing down the successes of the civilisation within which it operates and flourishes, theatre advocates a rejuvenation of our senses, of that sensitive crust that covers us, and of our body that, being deprived of destiny, has resigned to living in an absence of sorts. We have become accustomed to meeting our own selves in the mirror, instead of having the strength to venture out and embrace our actual and real doubles, regardless of what nature, background or origin they might be. Our doubles have withdrawn into our fantasies, together with everything else within us that refused to turn into history or give in to passing succession or momentariness. It is for this reason that our dreams are likely to be closer to our essence than our achievements of which we are so proud.

Genuine actors delve into their own fantasies in order to reclaim a meaning of the

corporeal. Moreover, they can never be alive and credible unless they master a spirit that is continually alert, a sort of “primitive” spirit that is being chased by the senses and, by continuous instruction, is obliged to rise, either in desperation or in calmness, above their cognizant delirium.

The body is a fluid entity: it is never fixated in a given posture, and its every instance is a moving image. Fundamentally mortal, the body is the ceaseless expression of a state of transformation. It only appears identical to itself in metamorphosis, in the thrilling instability inherent in the passage of time.

The actor is akin to a “multiple body” that casts a different shadow in each and every moment, as if its translucent interior would suddenly materialize into an ever-increasing number of new forms and shapes. Its countless “spectres” – fantasies of its bodily virtualities ready to manifest themselves – re-constitute a world of their own that is coherent and conventional. Within the kinaesthetic body of the performer, we can sense the presence of another body, caught up in a

passionate fusion or mimesis of all forms imaginable within the world of the stage.

As an actor playing, say Iago, I do not adopt another body, but mystify the one I already have – at times, up to the point where I can hardly recognise it. I am entirely honest in this process of mystification. I am aware of the artificiality inherent in this activity: no matter how hard I try to “come out of” my own body, I keep falling back into it, from variable angles and “heights” – and it is precisely these corporeal constraints and readjustments that modify me in the direction that I desire. Irrespective of the options I chose in order to adopt the material aspects of my character, my body will naturally occupy a central position in this process of character formation. My body will constitute a point of reference and will offer me support, balance and an aim. I will only forget it in order to encounter it yet again with a sensation of newness, and to look at it from an unexpected perspective. In order to be able to work it, I have to experience my body anew and unknown every step of the way. By knowing it – I occult it; by

limiting it – I investigate it; by offering it – I take it back into my possession; by metamorphosing it – I expose it to hitherto unexplored seductions. I anaesthetise it in order to lend back to it, one by one, its reinvigorated senses; I cast it away only to have the opportunity to rejoice in the miracle of its gradual return. I play a double and paradoxical game, aiming for my contested, yet unaltered, body to reconquer me, and brutally regain all its shapes and forms that I took away undetectably. This is a tense and blissful game that I play with my own self. The character feels as if it were another experience of my body – while the doubling, through which I have access to this experience, is the beginning of the process that instrumentalizes my entire being. Thus, I conclude that, being predicated on acting and professional entertainment, theatre is a formative adventure: performing requires doubling, whereas doubling is none other than a requirement of cognition.



## **Performing: Ludic Act(ing) and Stage Action**

The origin of ludic act(ing) lies in the unyielding impulse that is being born, wholly and without mediation, within actors, in the sphere of their vocation and for the duration of the performance. Whenever this impulse fulfils itself by itself, actors transmit to themselves, to their mental and material body, an authentic flux of life, a flux that generates form (gesture, movement, sound, etc.), and that emerges as the *necessary spectre* of this fulfilment. This act is also a *genesisic impulse* and a *field of development* for the forms it has already generated.

The impulse contains virtually all forms inherent in the stage actions that derive from it, or to be precise, it is about to expel. This act is the silence prior to speech: a place of origin that is

never passive, mysterious in all its attempts and endeavours. Action, on the other hand, can be defined as a mode of the act-within-the-limits-of-convention. Thus, action is a continuation of impulse, achieved at the cost of moving into the realm of minimal realisation, in a censored existential register based on *retention* rather than simulation. Stage gesture is not based on imitation from the very start – it only suspends its real consequences at the last minute. Destined to ever-deferred fulfilment, it has an aesthetic value as long as it manages to do something while not-doing, and to be while not-being.

The images of stage action, whilst helping us to perceive the genesic impulse, steal it away from the moment of its unaltered emergence: the free movement of the act (impulse) ends up in censored movement (action) that invokes its predecessor again, and so on and so forth. The first movement of the act is addressed above all to performers, thus reconfiguring it in themselves, but also to spectators, propelling them outside themselves and their habitual condition.

The birth of impulse presupposes the mobilisation of the actor's self into a unique vital generator. Here, those who make and those who are being made intersect in such a way that all of their components constitute a reflection of a totality that allows them to manifest themselves in equal measure. Only our outer gaze separates them; still, they cannot be dissociated from each other without altering their original substance. They are one and the same entity: ludic act(ing) places actors at the point of being entirely open as far as their generative uniqueness is concerned.

The act(ing) modifies everyday reality, whilst spilling over into it. At the same time, it internalizes reality in the person of the stage agent, thus altering the agent's private details and exposing the former to a ceaseless and unpredictable metamorphosis.

The ludic act(ing) creates and instils states – a state itself being none other than the act's highly efficient halo and field of radiation. The act establishes those moments in which actors are saved from their repetitive egos, also known as

mimesis, and accesses an “Adamic” originality. All that irrepressively springs from the act(ing), i.e. the character’s gestuality and logos, takes place as if for the first time and gives rise to matters and meanings that will not emerge in any other situation, whether generated by this performer or others.

Ahead of engaging in performing, actors already contain the work as much as the work also contains itself. At a pre-ludic moment, actors represent an absolute of sorts, and can become anything they have not yet achieved, seeing that the acts, just about to preside over their stage journey, happen to still benefit from the backing of the unlived infinite. Once lived and achieved, even if in a manner impossible to repeat, these acts have made the passage from potentiality to existence and, therefore, the absolute is being abolished. In order to carry out this necessary passage, both work and actor have to discover and then set their own boundaries. Ludic act(ing) contributes by definition to the setting of boundaries and establishes the extent of a given artwork’s

freedom, yet it also obliges the actors' private personae to transgress their limits and to turn into transfigured nature.

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Models have the lure of imitation: they make thinking repetitive and favour mimicry. This observation is valid both in the realm of performance and in everyday life. We follow models when it comes to action, words, states, reactions, etc., without the slightest awareness of the hermetism to which we condemn ourselves. We are the quasi-mechanical puppets of a socialised and impersonal being; repetition perverts our nature and self-pastiche encloses us into unbreathable horizons. Only intensifying the principle of contradiction within us can save us from the asphyxia of voluntary and involuntary mimesis. The roles once adopted for survival have transformed us into a requiem-like variant of nature; being alive often defines itself as the nearly non-existent. Intensities have abandoned us for the

sake of apathetic conservation. It is thus natural that the energy of the act – especially that of the ludic act(ing), which entails the annulment and the re-establishment of the self at the same time – should by sheer contrast appear to us like a *sui generis* demiurge, considering that it breaks the sequence by way of a violent and undeniable manifestation of the authentic, in other words, of the particular and the unique. Through imitation, actors flirt with the hypnosis of self-negation and with emotional *passéisme* even though their body is only suited to a small number of situations. Through act(ing), however, the body and the soul recover their senses under the imperative of the unrepeatable: everything that is as-yet-unlived enthuses them.

In order to understand the very nature of the ludic act(ing) we must adopt a dichotomous vision of actors, and acknowledge that there is a *clinical space* between the actor and his or her respective inner self. In this context, the ambivalent figure of a “madman” bears the consequences of the concentrated psycho-physical

energy that is the act(ing), on the one hand. On the other hand, it serves as a buffer between this kernel of, often destructive, forces and the private persona of the actor, thus protecting the latter from premature and pointless disintegration. The act(ing) is always experienced in the reality of it being lived, and not in the reality of its material condition.

The *temporal* interval (practically unnoticed by spectators) between the inwards-effective realisation of the act(ing) and the outwards projection of its expressive *shadow* (action) belongs to the limits of the ludic trance: a necessary and beneficial limit that sanctions performing as an art. Let us imagine a corridor in chiaroscuro, through which actors are fumbling about or progress at a steady pace – this is the space of their interiority, a space functioning as the entirety of their vocation. Somewhere at the end of the corridor, there is a wide open door through which the cold and diffuse light of life outside the stage seeps in. It is the threshold of this door that separates act(ing) from mimesis. Inspired actors never step over this

threshold, yet they continue to be aware of its presence and let themselves be guided by the light beyond it that they are unable to forget. Should the door close and the corridor be enveloped in complete darkness, and should the negligible interval still existent between the inner fulfilment of the act(ing) and the projection of its shadow in the actor, performing would descend into the realm of the pathological.

In its unitary movements, act(ing) appears as a double, affirming and negating *itself within itself* with the same vigour and force. The act(ing) discharges its real energy entirely into the actor, only to un-realize itself as soon as it leaves the latter's inner domain. The act(ing) manifests itself as the actors' anti-mimesis, loyal to some *mimesis* or other in the character they embody. This ludic act(ing) introduces a distance and establishes a qualitative difference (measured in extent) between the actors' experiences that are real and self-oriented, and those that are symbolic and oriented at others (such as character and spectator). On every actor's inner stage, impulse is



consumed for real, producing modifications in accordance with its uncensored nature – modifications that are reflected as being “defused” on the outer, material stage of the performance. The action appears to be composed of simple “signs” that are indications of acts not yet subject to fatal disintegration.

We can infer up to a point the degree of the real inherent in the impulse that was born and spent in the intimate sphere of the actor’s vocation, in a *mediated* fashion, owing to the intensity of the reality impact transmitted by the stage action. We must admit, however, that we do not have adequate means to assess the intensity of action and, hence, the degree of the real inherent in the ludic act(ing); we only possess unreliable organs with approximate sensory capacities that also vary from one subject to the other. We can only understand the importance of the “invisible” after we have covered all the avatars and densities available within the realm of the visible.



## **The Truth of Illusion**

If we were to identify all the intimate resources available to actors, recognize in their movements the appetites that govern them and detect all the reasons behind their particular temperament, we would most certainly be either frightened or disappointed by the “vital dilettantism” that animates their beings. Yet it is the pleasure of frivolity that gives rise to the most remarkable spectres, whilst enthusiasm, in its original definition of sacred delirium, can be understood as subsistence in the strictest sense. Why would we blame actors for preferring the passionate simulations of insufficient reason and the artificial liberties of a convenient and sterilising contact with life?

We enter, or rather fall into, our lives without capturing the moment that seals – tyrannically and in a concealed fashion – our entire existence. In the course of one's life, there are moments when individuals turn into captives and the world confines them for good into a cell already prepared with this purpose. We are unique, yet the squares that set the limits for our steps have narrow margins and subject us all to the same corrections. As Paul Valéry observed, 'I was born as several, but will die as one only'<sup>3</sup>. This is the way of the world and the law of destiny. It seems impossible to escape this as long as such a state of affairs is re-affirmed, be it as late as one's very last moment on earth. Only those who have ceased to exist and finalised their worldly adventures have a destiny. Somebody closes a door and the journey we have traversed up until its threshold, without even thinking of stopping there, turns all of a sudden into that very same implacable self that we have set in stone in our

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<sup>3</sup> Taken from Paul Valéry, 'Eupalinos ou l'architecte', *Poésie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 60.

own frozen eternity. The darkness into which we immerse ourselves is, thus, decreed as none other than our very own self-portrait.

We are confined to exist forever within the boundaries of our very own mould since life for us has been reduced to a gradual elimination of our potential doubles, since we resigned ourselves, for the sake of individualisation, to the laws of univocality, and since we preferred the certainty of reason over the unreliable promises of fantasy. We intend to stay loyal to this arrangement, awaiting to be dissolved into nothingness together.

The question is whether the fate of Proteus is any happier. He dies as several – so does he die less or more easily? Needless to say, we will not be able to answer such a question. We shall take the liberty, however, to claim that any heresy is preferable to obeying the above law, and that any conspiracy against mortification and existential routine give us more chances for holding out than apathy or aligning ourselves with the predictable. Even if art (which, by way of its very essence, tempts us with the fate of Proteus) were nothing

but a bunch of lies and illusions, the nobility of its deceptions would compensate for its gratuitousness. It would also help us – at least temporarily – to free ourselves of the tightly prescribed roles of everyday and social life, so unachievable in their unquestionable reality.

Following their natural disposition, actors have opted for illusion as an instrument of knowledge. What a bizarre choice, some would say, to look at the landscape through violently painted windows! Let us not forget, however, that illusion is a process, not a given: “the window” is painted by the artist (the actor) directly onto the spectator’s retina of the soul, and it is far from irrelevant what patterns, colours and combinations they introduce between their outer visions and their inner universe. Illusion appears as a relatively mediatory term, as a fortunate *impact* between two seemingly irreconcilable worlds. Hence, it belongs to our transfigurational faculties.

Actors do not aim for the entire audience to wear their mask, imitate their actions or identify with them, but insist that all members of the

audience maintain a live rapport with illusion, because this is the only way they can share the same world, and take part in communion despite any potential differences.

To start with, spectators are “anonymous”. It is precisely their adoption of the mask that propels them from this initial state and leads them to a personal relationship with the sphere of illusion – in other words, to securing an identity within the fiction of theatre. It is up to them to determine the latter’s degree of reality; after all, not all people have the same dreams, yet all people do dream.

Illusions are capable of endowing spectators with a “scene of desire”, which polarises the unresolved tensions of individuals, their virtual inclinations or secret impulses billeted as virtual, intensifying them beyond the limits of the phantasmal, despite being unable to actually solve them. The role of illusion is restricted to incitement, provocation and temptation, and to the shaping of a horizon for everyone’s personal aspirations. Only catharsis corresponds, in a positive fashion, to this scene, seeing that it is the

sole avenue that manages to satisfy expectations and to dispel them in the aura of enjoyment that accompanies tragic or comic commotion. Cathartic liberation is a fundamental transcendence of illusion, even though it is the former that lies at the origin of its enthusiasm.

Actors work with the illusions of spectators, with the virtual consequences of their feelings, instituting on stage a space for updating audience instinctive feelings. Actors create the impression of fulfilling the germs of act(ing) to be found in spectators, and of the fact that action progresses, to an extent, also because of this particular germ. (It is almost unnecessary to point out that theatre also means a fragmentary and active projection of the passive collective *psyché*.) The audience participates in fact in their own adventure, being nevertheless protected from violent external intrusions owing to the mediation of the stage that interposes a secure experimental space in between cognition and the audience. In this sense, it is only the actor who assumes all the shortcomings and inconveniences of performing.



For spectators, the stage constitutes a parenthesis for life, where “to be” signifies both more and less than “to live”: less, because the spectator’s inner time is in this case reversible; more, because, unlike everyday life where the meaning of our actions is imprinted onto their fabric without actually being that fabric, on stage we play with signification in order to model and remodel actions. From the audience’s point of view, theatre is a luxury of interiority, represented without running the risk of an attempt on its intimate conditions of manifestation.

Stage illusion has a primary ideological level and a secondary ontological one. The former halts the spectator’s gaze at the object, at the spatio-temporal fragment reproduced on stage; the latter, if attained, transforms the gaze of the audience into a vision, and propels it beyond the mimetic appearance of the represented world. This second level operates akin to a translucent screen that makes the real beyond immediate reality visible. The first level is characterised by opacity, reduced sensation and thought as far as perception

of the eye in relation to image is concerned, and the second, by the transparency that facilitates the dis-illusionment of the viewer's judgement, without having the slightest impact on the enjoyment of watching.

Naturalist-illusionist practice implies the passively narcissistic contemplation of its productions: spectators recognize themselves unchanged in the characters' actions, in their environment and atmosphere, and can identify in the most convenient fashion with those who fuel their familiar fantasies. In this case, illusion is like a placenta wrapped around the ego of the receiver, lending it, ruminatively and occasionally, to an introverted voyeurism. Whether declared or implied, the aim of ideological illusion lies in conformity, in serving the audience prescribed and conventional models of sensibility and thought. By plugging the individual into the isolated and secure cell of extra-theatrical conventions, illusion leads to a false integration of narcissistic subjectivity into the community. This "integration" is founded, in a far from paradoxical fashion, on

the lack of genuine communication among the members of the audience. All members of this audience can only perceive themselves and their own most intimate sensations, thus reducing all others to these personal sensations, too. Everybody considers themselves an absolute in their own sensitive bubble and absorbs, at their own pace, the illusions that reflect their respective detachment from the real. It is one thing, however, to dream in order to forget, and another, to remember; one thing to make use of dreaming as a soporific parenthesis to life, and another, to exploit it as a platform to insert ourselves into an existential zone that would otherwise be inaccessible to us.

Illusion that is open to its ontological dimensions does not obscure the world; it does not become for it yet another ornament or protective membrane. On the contrary, it tends to crack an opening into our consciousness, to suggest that underneath the crumbly surface on which we exist there lies, concealed and imminent, *the possible*, and urges us to respond to its demands. The second

level inherent in illusion is hard to grasp, as it is predicated on the collaboration between actors and audiences, in an effort conscious of its engagement and consequences. Often enough, when it comes to a particular performance, this collaboration is reliant on a pre-established community, already trained up to a point in this respect.

Illusion perceived in its ideological dimension has the capacity to appease the audience, to assure them that they live in a world that is immutable and far from dangerous, considering that all that exists only does so because it can exist. (The naturalist stage is a perfect example for this thesis.) Illusion perceived in its ontological dimension, however, makes us restless and champions a menacing world, in which *everything that can be imagined to exist, does exist*. (It is the expressionist stage that tends to rely on this second level of illusion.) In such situations, the limits of the world seem relative, and so do our stability and safety.

Ideological illusion appears as a final and complete component of reality, of the only reality

that is possible: the one that this term represents. Ontological illusion, on the other hand, is constituted as a vehicle between the immediate reality of life on this side of the stage, and the real (perceived) beyond the stage. The difference between the two levels of illusion consists not so much of the character of their conventions or of their location, but of the manner in which the audience collaborates in their reception: one ends, whereas the other begins by triggering audience reactions.

The *state of theatrical presence* is endowed with content by way of the capacity *to be here*, undivided and unharassed by the rigid doubts of everyday life, by the ability to dedicate oneself exclusively to it in the *here and now*, and by sharing this capacity with someone else within the framework of a festive occasion. Spectators are likely to bear total witness whenever they consider themselves absolutely essential to keeping actors in their process of performing, and whenever actors offer them a passionate and vital relationship with regard to the stage. In return,

actors will show their presence only when, placed within the circle of other presences (awoken by them), they will adhere to them as if they were a categorical imperative, and will subject themselves to their crude, childish and avid absolutism. In this moment, actors have the revelation of the unavoidability of representation, the sentiment that they are caught up in a game *with no escape*, that continues until the bitter end, until total exhaustion, being pushed to an ending that is *their* end, and which only happens to coincide with the ending of the play by mere chance. (How could this feeling not justify “stage fright” more than anything?) Actors are overwhelmed by this strange yet expected abolishment of their ransacked freedom. Formally, this exists in every single performance; night after the night the audience follows an obligatory trajectory when it comes to the plot, and Hamlet will die without a fail at the very end. Sure enough, formally, Hamlet will always die, but he will not always die *as an absolute necessity*, considering that the actors’ performance will not always be subject to audience pressures

conveying an immediate and real decision with the force of destiny.

This mutually communicating co-presence of spectators and performers gives rise to a sombre and exultant sensation of *fatum* in performance – its frisson hinting at sacred fear and the awareness of the numinous. The state of presence – a fundamental aspect of ontological illusion – acts upon theatrical representation as a sort of leftover, as a reminiscence of the age-old forces of fatality.

Actors move within the circle of their own halo in a solitary fashion. Behold them every now and then, be it after failures and victories, at their favourite as well as definite age: that of the regal encounter with the world and its wonders. Is this a sign of naivety? No, not at all. Nonetheless, how much ingenuity in someone who attaches the face of temptation to hope, and who is unfamiliar with hope, except through seduction! To be alive is to desire and to be desired! This is the whole secret, art and science of it! To be a beat – and the heart will carry on beating anyway! To be a wave, a vibration, an organ through which to feel another,

to be a body through which the entire space that you animate can breathe in and out! To well and truly believe that this abstract and neutral place that is the stage, modified and heightened by your very presence, can mark not only a fictitious parenthesis to life but also an irradiative centre, a centre that provides meaning and spiritual energy! Above all, by using actorial masks, to confer to every syllable of theatrical time an inimitable accent, in which the being of the performer should recognise itself as whole, “eternal” and, at the same time, as fluid, perishable and nearly non-existent. To allow yourself either a paradoxical existence or an ambiguous or material ecstasy that may crop up in your heart even in your ultimate moments of grace...

It can happen that, as they are running away from their own selves, seeking asylum in indifferent and gratuitous situations, far from what they would normally find frightening or disgusting in their immediate existence, individuals experience an attraction to theatre as if it were an ideal receptacle for their escapist selves.



Promising entertainment, it is theatre's veil of appearances that is at the root of this impulse. Once having traversed these porous surfaces, however, people unexpectedly find themselves, overwhelmed and defenceless, in the midst of the events they had initially wanted to escape. Suddenly, the spectacle is revealed to them as a miracle-trap in which every single clue is pointing at the fugitive and the marginal as the protagonist (or, in Bossuet's terms, at the "secret actor in the tragedy"). Thus, the shelter that spectators have been craving all along turns into a nodal point of the reality that has fuelled their desire for diversion, concealment and destruction. This furtively conducted avoidance projects them violently into the heart of their most intimate conflicts. Deserting, they find themselves in the frontline of the conflict hitherto taking place on a scale that they did not even dare to consider so far. Great theatre always functions like a trap that captures disguised consciences and reverts them to their actual inner truth. Imitating (with the help of a vast entertainment apparatus) the centrifugal

movement that pushes everything to the margins, authentic spectacle operates in fact as a centripetal force that turns every member of the audience into a direct source of the tensions developed in the course of the performance. Any evasion inspired by the stage is a *refuge to the centre*.

Genuine actors do not hesitate to create a symbiotic environment for all the sensibilities that come into contact owing to the spectacle that they offer. It is only when all these meet and recognise one another, by proposing the adoption of shared measures, that their aim can be attained: the transformation of the ludic, performing environment into a long-lasting live replica of the disappointing reality that assails them.

Nothing can be more sombre or desperate than an existence deprived of witnesses. Spectators constitute an obstacle in the way of nothingness – because everything that does not reflect us is none other than nothingness.

Actors aim to re-establish in audiences the awareness of the centre, the conviction that the zone demarcated by performing is an intensified

territory of the real, a central area that dissolves its neutral appearances and temporarily ascends to the prestige of exceptional recognition, one equivalent to a temporary *axis mundi*.

Yet it would be delusional to imagine that performers are capable of establishing a foundation by themselves, only to later imprint this, in a mystagogic act, onto others as if they were made of some soft, passive wax. The centre gains importance as a result of concerted efforts, carried out with the prior or gradual agreement of all participants in the performance (the former can be classed as ritual, while the latter as stage conventions). The centre passes through spectators and only gains its real (mental and material) outline by way of their mediation, manifesting itself as an indirect “emanation” of the audience. Stemming – as a proposal or energetic impulse – from actors, the centre develops, as a psychological, affective and spiritual entity in the favourable context of viewers-as-witnesses and reconfigures itself – as a material, unanimously

accepted reality – over the performance space, thus transforming it.

Focalisation in the audience's single "point" of perception and waves of consciousness creates a solidarity among members that does not need anything other than to be experienced. This solidarity needs no particular expression, except for being contained in all the respective expressions that the ludic, performing acts produce.

Taking into account the temporary nature of the recognition that the centre enjoys, the stage has to systematically renounce its prerogatives and, night after night, dismantle itself as soon as it has been established. The events taking place under its influence retain their meanings and perpetuate themselves in the memory of the audience, along with other significant episodes of their lives.

Whenever it looks as if actors were at the service of an activity that indicates supreme order (foundation of centres), they slowly but gently introduce "anarchy" in our midst: the centre founded by them prematurely abolishes, in the

eyes of the audience, any other “directional” centre of society or of the world.

As officiants “merging” their identity with that of their double, performers exercise the right to expect, in turn, a similar renunciation of consciousness on behalf of those who want to get involved in performing. This exchange generates the convention. The paradox of the situation lies in the dual message that theatre professionals have to transmit to their audience. On the one hand, they promise revelations, and their role is to discover and communicate a world or a character, in other words, to open up. On the other hand, they are constrained to accentuate the closed character of this action and to exaggerate its spatio-temporal circumscription. Making use of this artifice, theatre professionals sow the seeds of an initiatory sentiment in spectators, the mechanisms of which, once unleashed, lead directly to the empire of illusion. The performance is symbolically charged with the prerogatives of initiation, while the actors’ essentially ingénue manoeuvres give rise to a

community relationship that would be otherwise difficult to conduct.

Actors are heresiarchs of illusion, the content of the latter being in constant flux from one performance to another or even within one and the same performance, depending on the conventions used. Rather than merely “showing”, it is more important to experience a continuous (and, of course, coherent) metamorphosis of what is being shown.

## **The Stage as *Imago Mundi***

Among the numerous facets of their therapeutic vocation, we find actors embrace “the monsters” from within the audience and let themselves be macerated by them in order to eliminate their negative charge. Thus, they turn into “outcasts”, and switch from being an element in the gratuitousness of acting into a subject dedicated to symbolic and ritual elimination, in other words, “dying” by way of assuming someone else’s death. Performers identify at the same time with both the fantasy that needs to be destroyed and the executioner of this purging. Finding themselves at ease when practising this exorcising game, actors assume in equal measure the role of the victim and that of the executioner, whilst being caught up in the act of theatricalizing audience conflicts. As it happens, the stage does

not become more “civilised” from one era to the next. For centuries, loyal followers of great theatre have not budged from the sacrificial stone.

The dynamic contradiction of the stage consists of the fact that, on the one hand, akin to prisons and hospices, it isolates characters and “powers” that common law banishes from society, and on the other, it offers a dedicated ritualistic space in which the same characters and “powers” are perceived as beneficial transgressions of the human condition.

The stage as *imago mundi*: we are delirious, so that nature itself could afford not to be delirious within us; we wear masks in order to protect ourselves from repulsive metamorphoses; we die in effigy in order to perpetuate ourselves by way of the flesh; we feign in order to live longer and better. Ludic demiurgy, whether on stage or in life, liberates the soul from tensions that run the risk of suffocating it. Imitating the game of the Creator, we turn into amenable creatures ourselves.

The stage alienates our desires, makes them exist in our ludic, performing doubles in order to



render them back to us (at a time when they seemed to be nearly consumed) in their utmost burning form. To put it simply, we could argue that the stage dictates two different (though not divergent) attitudes to spectators regarding their own image. They are present in the performance space in order to get to know an Other, who miraculously turns into themselves; or they are there in order to get to know themselves, which self, most enigmatically, turns into an Other.

The stage sets the world aside from some of its parts, and then treats the latter as its most relevant zone. Broadly speaking, the stage generalizes rupture; or perhaps it would be more accurate to observe that society creates enclaves of imaginary freedom, making sure, however, that therapeutic fiction does not radiate from beyond clearly prescribed boundaries. In this sense, the stage is an incarcerated space of freedom.

On the stage, the so-called demystification consists of both acting and theatrical artifice. Attempts at revealing conventions and spurious tricks become, under the suggestive powers of

actors, a new source of conventions. After all, actors are not seeking to annihilate illusions or to dispel their charm, but to align them with the constantly active and innovating stance of the paradoxical. Any emotion must adopt the latter's guise in order to regenerate itself: in the world of the theatre, which is a world of potent illusions, it is the paradoxical that constitutes a bridge between perplexity and jubilation.



