

TO THE ACTOR

On the Technique of Acting

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chapter 7

CREATIVE INDIVIDUALITY

To create by inspiration one must become aware of one's own individuality.

HERE SOME explanation is necessary for the term "the creative individuality of an artist" as used in this book. Even a brief acquaintance with some of its qualities can be useful to the actor who seeks ways for the free expansion of his inner forces.

If, for example, you were to ask two equally talented artists to paint the same landscape with the utmost exactitude, the result would be two markedly different pictures. The reason is obvious: each will inevitably paint his individual impression of that landscape. One of them might prefer to convey the landscape's atmosphere, its beauty of line, or its form; the other would probably stress the contrasts, the play of light and shadows, or some other aspect peculiar to his own taste and mode of expression. The point is that the same landscape invariably will serve as the medium for both to display their creative individualities, and how they differ in that respect will be apparent in their pictures.

Rudolf Steiner defines the creative individuality of Schiller as characterized by the poet's moral tendency: Good fights Evil. Maeterlinck seeks subtle mystical nuances behind outer events. Goethe sees archetypes unifying the multitudinous phenomena. Stanislavsky states that in *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky expresses his search for God; which, incidentally, is true of all his major novels. The individuality of Tolstoy is manifest in the tendency toward self-perfection, and Chekhov quarrels with the triviality of bourgeois life. In short, the creative individuality of every artist always expresses itself in a dominant idea which, like a leit-motif, pervades all his creations. The same must be said for the creative individuality of the actor-artist.

It has been reiterated that Shakespeare created only one Hamlet. But who will say with equal certainty what kind of Hamlet existed in Shakespeare's imagination? In reality there are, there must be, as many Hamlets as there are talented and inspired actors to undertake their conceptions of the character. The creative individuality of each will invariably determine his own unique Hamlet. For the actor who wishes to be an artist on the stage must, with modesty as well as daring, strive for an individualistic interpretation of his roles. But how does he experience this creative individuality in moments of inspiration?

In everyday life we identify ourselves as "I"; we are the protagonists of "I wish, I feel, I think." This "I" we associate with our body, habits, mode of life, family, social standing and everything else that comprises normal existence. But in moments of inspiration the *I* of an artist undergoes a kind of metamorphosis. Try to remember yourself in such moments. What happened to your everyday "I"? Did it not retreat, give place to another *I*, and did you not experience it as the true artist in you?

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If you have ever known such moments, you will recall that, with the appearance of this new *I*, you felt first of all an influx of power never experienced in your routine life. This power permeated your whole being, radiated from you into your surroundings, filling the stage and flowing over the footlights into the audience. It united you with the spectator and conveyed to him all your creative intentions, thoughts, images and feelings. Thanks to this power, you are able to feel to a high degree that which we previously called your real presence on the stage.

Considerable changes which you cannot help experiencing take place in your consciousness under the influence of this powerful other *I*. It is a higher-level *I*; it enriches and expands the consciousness. You begin to distinguish *three different beings*, as it were, within yourself. Each has a definite character, fulfills a special task and is comparatively independent. Let us pause and examine these beings and their particular functions.

While incorporating your character on the stage you use your emotions, voice and your mobile body. These constitute the "building material" from which the higher self, the real artist in you, creates a character for the stage. The higher self simply takes possession of that building material. As soon as this happens, you begin to feel that you are standing apart from, or rather above, the material and, consequently, above your everyday self. That is because you now identify yourself with that creative, higher *I* which has become active. You are now aware of both your expanded self and your usual, everyday "I" existing within you simultaneously, side by side. While creating you are two selves, and you are able to distinguish clearly between the different functions they fulfill.

Once the higher self has that building material well in hand,

it begins to mold it from within; it moves your body, making it flexible, sensitive and receptive to all creative impulses; it speaks with your voice, stirs your imagination and increases your inner activity. Moreover, it grants you genuine feelings, makes you original and inventive, awakens and maintains your ability to improvise. In short, it puts you in a creative state. You begin to act under its inspiration. Everything you do on the stage now surprises you as well as your audience; all seems entirely new and unexpected. Your impression is that it is happening spontaneously and that you do nothing but serve as its medium of expression.

And yet, although your higher self is strong enough to take command over the entire creative process, it has its tendon of Achilles: it is inclined to break the boundaries, overstep the necessary limits set during rehearsals. It is too eager to express itself and its dominant idea; it is too free, too powerful, too ingenious, and therefore too near the precipice of chaos. The power of inspiration is always more intense than the means of expression, said Dostoevsky. It needs restricting.

That is the task of your everyday consciousness. What does it do during those inspired moments? It controls the canvas upon which the creative individuality draws its designs. It fulfills the mission of a common-sense regulator for your higher self in order that the business should be carried through correctly, the established *mise-en-scène* kept unchanged and communication with stage partners unbroken. Even the psychological pattern for the whole character, as discovered during rehearsals, must be followed faithfully. Upon the common sense of your everyday self devolves the protection of the forms that have been found and fixed for the performance. Thus, by the co-operation of both the lower and higher consciousnesses, the performance is made possible.

But where is that *third* consciousness previously referred to, and to whom does it belong? The bearer of the third consciousness is the Character as created by yourself. Although it is an illusory being, it also, nonetheless, has its own independent life and its own "I." Your creative individuality lovingly sculpts it during the performance.

On previous pages the terms "genuine," "artistic" and "true" were frequently used to describe an actor's feelings on the stage. A closer inspection, however, will reveal that human feelings fall into two categories: those known to everybody and those known only to artists in moments of creative inspiration. The actor must learn to recognize the important distinctions between them.

The usual, everyday feelings are adulterated, permeated with egotism, narrowed to personal needs, inhibited, insignificant and often even unaesthetic and spoiled by untruths. They should not be used in art. Creative individuality rejects them. It has at its disposal another kind of feelings—those completely impersonal, purified, freed from egotism and therefore aesthetic, significant and artistically true. These your higher self grants you while inspiring your acting.

All you experience in the course of your life, all you observe and think, all that makes you happy or unhappy, all your regrets or satisfactions, all your love or hate, all you long for or avoid, all your achievements and failures, all you brought with you into this life at birth—your temperament, abilities, inclinations, whether they remain unfulfilled, underdeveloped or overdeveloped—all are part of the region of your so-called subconscious depth. There, being forgotten by you, or never known to you, they undergo the process of being purified of all egotism. They become feelings *per se*. Thus purged and transformed, they become part of the material

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from which your individuality creates the psychology, the illusory "soul" of the character.

But who purifies and transforms these vast riches of our psychology? The same higher self, the individuality that makes artists of some of us. Therefore, it is quite evident that this individuality does not cease to exist between creative moments, though it is only when being creative that we become aware of it. On the contrary, it has a continuous life of its own, unknown to our everyday consciousness; it goes on evolving its own, higher kind of experiences, those it lavishly offers up as inspiration for our creative activity. It is hardly conceivable that Shakespeare, whose everyday life, as far as it is known to us, was so insignificant, and Goethe, whose lot was so placid and contented, drew all their creative ideas from personal experiences only. Indeed, the exterior lives of many lesser literary figures have yielded up far richer biographies than those of the masters, and yet their works will scarcely bear comparison with those of Shakespeare and Goethe. It is the degree of inner activity of the higher self, producing those purified feelings, that is the final determinant of quality in the creations of all artists.

Further, all the feelings derived by the character from your individuality are not only purified and impersonal, but have two other attributes. No matter how profound and persuasive, these feelings are still as "unreal" as the "soul" of the character itself. They come and go with the inspiration. Otherwise they would become forever yours, indelibly impressed upon you after the performance is over. They would enter your everyday life, would be poisoned by egotism and would become an inseparable part of your inartistic, uncreative existence. You would no longer be able to draw the line of demarcation between the illusory life of your character and that of your own. In no time you would be driven

mad. If creative feelings were not "unreal" you would not be able to enjoy playing villains or other undesirable characters.

Here you can also see what a dangerous as well as inartistic mistake some conscientious actors make by trying to apply their real, everyday feelings on the stage, squeezing them out of themselves. Sooner or later such attempts lead to unhealthy, hysterical phenomena; in particular, emotional conflicts and nervous breakdowns for the actor. Real feelings exclude inspiration and vice versa.

The other attribute of creative feelings is that they are compassionate. Your higher self endows the character with creative feelings; and because it is able at the same time to observe its creation, it has compassion for its characters and their destinies. Thus the true artist in you is able to suffer for Hamlet, cry with Juliet, laugh about the mischief-making of Falstaff.

Compassion may be called the fundamental of all good art because it alone can tell you what other beings feel and experience. Only compassion severs the bonds of your personal limitations and gives you deep access into the inner life of the character you study, without which you cannot properly prepare it for the stage.

To summarize the foregoing quickly, the true creative state of an actor-artist is governed by a threefold functioning of his consciousness: the higher self inspires his acting and grants him genuinely creative feelings; the lower self serves as the common-sense restraining force; the illusory "soul" of the character becomes the focal point of the higher self's creative impulses.

There is yet another function of the actor's awakened individuality which should be dealt with here, and that is its ubiquity.

Being comparatively free from the lower self and the illusory existence of the character, and possessing an immensely extended consciousness, individuality appears to be capable of straddling

both sides of the footlights. It is not only a creator of the character but also its spectator. From the other side of the footlights it follows the spectators' experiences, shares their enthusiasm, excitement and disappointments. More than that, it has the ability to foretell audience reaction an instant before it takes place. It knows what will satisfy the spectator, what will inflame him and what will leave him cold. Thus, for the actor with an awakened awareness of his higher I, the audience is a living link which connects him as an artist with the desires of his contemporaries.

Through this ability of the creative individuality the actor learns to distinguish between the real needs of contemporary society and the bad tastes of the rabble. Listening to the "voice" speaking to him from the audience during the performance, he slowly begins to relate himself to the world and his brothers. He acquires a new "organ" which connects him with life outside the theater and awakens his contemporary responsibilities. He begins to extend his professional interest beyond the footlights, he begins to ask questions: "What is my audience experiencing tonight, what is its mood? Why is this play needed in our time, how will this mixture of people benefit from it? What thoughts will this play and this kind of portrayal arouse in my contemporaries? Will this kind of play and this kind of performance make the spectators more sensitive and receptive to the events of our life? Will it awaken in them any moral feelings, or will it give them only pleasure? Will play or performance perhaps arouse the audience's baser instincts? If the performance has humor, what kind of humor does it evoke?" The questions are always there, but only Creative Individuality enables the actor to answer them.

To test this, the actor need only make the following experiment: He can imagine the house as filled with a specific type of audience,

such as only scientists, teachers, students, children, farmers, doctors, politicians, diplomats, simple or sophisticated people, people of different nationalities, or even actors. Then, by asking himself the foregoing or similar questions, he should try to sense intuitively what the reaction of each audience might be.

Such an experiment will gradually develop in the actor a new kind of audience sense, through which he will become receptive to the meaning of the theater in present-day society and be able to respond to it consciously and correctly.

In fact, the actor would do well to experiment with all the thoughts expressed in this chapter, going over them until he is certain that he has them in his grasp. By so doing he will understand why this or that particular exercise was suggested as sequential to the professional approach. Eventually the principles of this book will clarify themselves and become a well-integrated whole, wherein every step is designed to attract the actor's individuality and draw it into his work in order to make him always an inspired artist and his profession an important instrument of human utility. Properly understood and applied, the method becomes so much a part of the actor that, in time, he is able to make free use of it, at will, and even modify it here and there according to his own needs and desires.

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