

DISTRACTIONS

Possibilities of being entirely ourselves

JOSEPHINE GRAY

Can we ever be ‘entirely ourselves’?

In Jerzy Grotowski’s poignant essay *He Wasn’t Entirely Himself* he discusses Antonin Artaud’s ideas about The Theater of Cruelty and remarks that at a certain stage in Artaud’s life he himself exclaimed “I am not entirely myself.”

The essay highlights the difficulties Artaud faced when confronted with the task of putting his ideas into practice and his inability to develop an actual method for his theater. One might argue that considering the state Artaud was in during the last decade of his life contributed to his inability to develop a method proper. But there is also the possibility of looking at it from the perspective of him having been subjected to constant distractions after the institutionalization. Whether or not that was the case I will not discuss here, I will rather turn the attention to the obvious fact of distractions and what effect it can have on the creative process. The exclamation “I am not entirely myself” will be a starting point for deeper research into the state of the actor by its ability to transpose the daily, superficial, struggles we face with a deeper sense of not being able to catch with the undercurrents of our own being.

The world we live in is a world of the mind. A world of premeditation. The spontaneous flow of life has been suppressed and neglected. At times people may touch upon it and feel a surge of energy and life rushing through their forgotten bodies. We distract ourselves and we distract others.

When working with a performance or any articulation of the creative act all these issues surface. Because of the limits of our daily mind and the conventions we are placed in throughout society it is easy to be fooled into superficiality. We are not making a theater of signs and gestures to convey a message. We are digging into multiple layers of the body as to see if an ever-shifting principle of our mystery within can show itself. We cannot predict how it will show itself nor the shape it will take. That is the novelty of creation.

But how to reach this point of a core. The core of the actor. The core of the human-being. One has to doubt... Doubt every belief, custom or habit that has taken possession over our bodies. Our daily minds and the mind of the world keep telling us that we are the ones in control of our bodies. We are the drivers in this machine we call the body. It is rather the opposite. Our reality is anchored in our corporeality, our bodies are not only vessels through which we experience, act and move. The fabric of the body, our flesh, brings with it millennia’s of experience, of growth, expansion, but also the most minuscule movements of evolution. It is our preceptor of the world we live in. It has molded us into a so-called ‘human-being’. So when entering the process of creation one needs to shed the skin of daily life. Like the snake that leaves its old skin behind – without regret or sorrow. It is a process of leaving our habits in the way we perceive the world through our bodies.

If the body contains so many layers of being why is it that we cannot feel them present at all times? Our receptors are closed off by the struggles of daily life and our

bodies react with shutting down. But somewhere in that inactivation they lay hidden and if one searches deep enough one may find them. Sometimes those modes of expression that are hidden from us may need another face. They do not seem to correspond with the face we carry daily. Even if we do work with facial exercises to break out of the habits we carry within it it can sometimes be useful to take the aid of full facial masks. As soon as an actor places a mask on his/her face the body intuitively changes. It is not a change of the mind but a change of the modes of expressions in the body. When confronted with another face one (or more) of the hidden layers of our bodies may have the courage to emerge. The actor has to be very tentative in this process as to not disturb his/her own hidden layer of expression as any control of the mind will scare it away and instead of becoming a rich and full blooming the hidden layer will fall flat back into the depths from where it emerged.

When speaking of matters of such it is always important to remind oneself that it is not psychology we are looking for. We cannot think the hidden layers out. They remain a mystery for us and it may very well take an entire lifetime to discover just a few of the layers that lay in the darkness. Even if we should 'think them out' in abstract terms it would not do our bodies any good. We would have just simply repeated a pattern of our capacity for abstraction.

Work-in-progress,
Following questions;

How to use mask?
How to avoid patterns?