

Performing Past and Present:
Mask and the Living Archetype

by

Edward Bauer
Class of 2008

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Theater

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....2

Introduction.....3

Chapter One

 Campbell, Jung, and the Archetype.....9

Chapter Two

 Three Masked Histories.....20

Chapter Three

 Creon, and the Mask Today.....43

Conclusion.....59

Works Cited.....63

Acknowledgements

I'm convinced that I never would have finished this thesis without the overwhelming support of my teachers and peers. Understanding that this page could never stretch to fit every single person who has aided me over the course of my work on this project, I would nevertheless like to thank just a few of those people who have made it possible. Professor Yuriy Kordonskiy, for teaching me so much over the past four years, advising me in this culminating project, and directing me through the discovery of Creon in *Oedipus Rex*. My first venture into the world of the theatrical mask was an unforgettable one. Professor David B. Jaffe, for creating in *Big Love* the kind of creative and collaborative process that I have been proud to call a part of my senior thesis in acting. Professor Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento, for reading my thesis, attending both of my performances, and constantly, tirelessly helping me to be a better and more thoughtful actor. Professor Will Eggers, for reading my thesis, attending both of my performances, and always being extraordinarily receptive and supportive despite our relatively brief acquaintance. Patrick Kelleher-Calnan, for his keen critical eye in editing my paper. The rest of the inhabitants of 7 Vine St., for not yelling at me when I didn't do my dishes. The entire cast and crew of both *Oedipus Rex* and *Big Love*, particularly Tori Amoscato, for everything we accomplished together. And finally, Gedney Barclay. Both for helping me to make this paper what it is, and for endlessly supporting me even when I didn't deserve it.

Introduction

Near the end of the eighteenth century, an artist and author by the name of Denis Diderot had become frustrated with the quality of acting showcased upon the stages of Western Europe. Over the course of several years he developed *On the Paradox of Acting*, his definitive argument against the actor's reliance upon the evocation of emotion in performance. To use Diderot's own words, he attempted to elucidate the failure of "play[ing] from the heart" (198). The essay is a rhetorical dialogue between three unnamed characters, and early in the text one of these voices poses the following question:

If the actor were overcome by feeling, how could he play the same part twice running with the same spirit and success? Full of fire at the first performance, he would be worn out and cold as marble at the third. (198)

The simple answer is that he could not. There is no place for emotional vulnerability in Diderot's ideal theater. In this model the actor "has rehearsed to himself every note of his passion," relying only on "bodily strength" to complete his action and allowing himself "a full freedom of mind" (Diderot 200). An actor must inspire in his audience the effects of such emotion without ever feeling them himself. This is the essence of an actor's paradox, and Diderot's proposed key to an effective performance.

This perspective did not originate in the mind of Denis Diderot. Centuries before, both the Italian Commedia dell'Arte and the Japanese Noh had thrived upon prioritizing a mastery of technical skill and eschewing an actor's emotional connection to any role. Rather than being the vanguard of a new theatrical movement,

On the Paradox of Acting was indicative of a gradual shift in perceiving acting that would not truly enter the mainstream until the twentieth century. Now, it would be rare to find an actor or director who did not feel—whatever else they might believe—that an actor should possess and hone “a healthy body, in good working order, capable of beauty, proportion, balance... physical intuition and inspiration” (Stanislavski, *Building a Character* 38). The actor’s body is understood to be a carefully-tuned instrument; it is not a “vessel” either for character or for emotion. And yet winding throughout the works of many influential theater artists is a strand of thought that complicates this seemingly simple—almost scientific—approach to acting. This strand is the belief in an artistic ideal too great to be achieved by any single body performing in a vacuum, a state of performance requiring more than rote physical specificity in a given moment. I will attempt to illuminate this theme by isolating its presence in the writings of various artists, and to submit an answer to its fulfillment in performance.

Constantin Stanislavski’s premises for a successful performance largely agree with Diderot’s, but suggest the need for some greater personal investment from an actor. In *An Actor Prepares*, the figure of Tortsov demands that his students “never lose [themselves] on stage,” and “always act in [their] own person, as [artists].” Not doing so, and letting one’s attachment to a character drive a performance, is “the beginning of exaggerated false acting” (192). The model of acting sought by Stanislavski is one characterized by truth, which according to him relies upon technical precision and a separation of the actor’s experience from that of his character. And yet, Stanislavski claims that to “overplay truth for its own sake” is “in

itself, the worst of lies,” and leads to a kind of acting that is essentially false (142). This falseness is often created by “exceedingly clever technicians, interested only in the external perfection of a performance.” Such a narrow devotion to naturalistic detail is antithetical to Stanislavski’s concept of an ideal performance, which must contain “something natural, something organically creative, that can put human life into an inert role” (170). Performance must contain some measure of an actor’s personal inspiration, balancing his rote physical score and creating that which “we can believe in with sincerity, whether in ourselves or in our colleagues” (141-2). Acting, in short, cannot be choreography. The question which remains is how believability is consistently achieved; what this “natural” component is that gives the spark to otherwise stale acting. I submit that the crucial component is not held within the performance itself, but rather within the *relationship* of a performance to some other factor. Stanislavski does not identify this final element, but I believe it to be a primordial, archetypal basis for action; some greater ideal upon which the shadows of our contemporary performances are invariably based.

Vsevolod Meyerhold found Stanislavski’s definition of a theatrically effective performance to be flawed. It was largely in response to Stanislavski’s “unscientific and anachronistic” methods of actor training that Meyerhold developed his Biomechanics, a system he considered more suited to the new “demands of the mechanized age” (Meyerhold 183). The Biomechanics program is a series of precise exercises and études designed to teach an actor the basics of motion onstage through “natural, organic movements” (Gordon and Law 99). Its ideal result is an actor with not only utter control of his physical faculties, but a clear perception of himself from

the outside looking in. Meyerhold was an expert at discerning “what the effect of a performer’s action would be on the audience,” and his system attempted to pass on this skill (96). This would seem to be a system that strips away from Stanislavski the need for an actor’s relationship to anything but his own body. While the practical use of this form of training is indubitable, I question just how any movement or gesture can be assumed to be “natural, organic,” and inherently comprehensible based only upon its kinesthetic quality. Without some elemental physical vocabulary from which to draw, Biomechanics could not function. Only by starting from the premise of some quintessential human form, understood and agreed upon by both actor and audience, can the worth of Meyerhold’s exercises effectively be realized. As with Stanislavski, the relationship of this work to an archetypal ideal is both unspoken and crucial.

Finally, an artist who recognizes and refers to both sides of this apparent discontinuity between Stanislavski’s inspiration and Meyerhold’s mechanical precision is Jerzy Grotowski. In a collection of his essays, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Grotowski writes that any actor’s process not characterized by “formal articulation and disciplined structuring of the role” is doomed to “collapse into shapelessness” (17). Yet he goes on to assert that the physical demands of training are not sufficient to create an effective performance. Rather, an actor must struggle with “the experience of our forefathers which lives within us,” engaging in a clash of “the superficial traits of the present day and its deep roots and hidden motives” (52). Grotowski does not disagree with either Stanislavski or Meyerhold in this regard; he simply articulates what they do not. Both the endeavor for an ideal performance and the reflection of an ideal human form are encompassed by what Grotowski calls the

basis of contemporary theater: “a sincere and absolute search into our historical ego” (53). By confronting the past and exploring it within the present, an actor undergoes a deeper understanding both of himself and of theater’s potential as an art form. The only question that remains is how a concept as airy and metaphysical as this can be practically enacted upon the stage.

It is my goal within this thesis to prove that an example of a theatrical form which directly addresses a culture’s relationship to its “historical ego” is the mask. For the audience, the mask obliterates the sense of performers’ individual humanity. Instead of people, the audience is presented with archetypes: eminently recognizable character types and effectively universal modes of behavior. An audience viewing a masked performance does not merely absorb text as spoken by a character or “furnished by the dramatist,” it encounters “the roots from which the lines have sprung” (Meyerhold 206). Yet the sense of watching a living performance remains; the images of our history are simply catapulted by the mask into the present. For the actor, the mask dramatically reshapes the primary locus of communication and interpellation. It activates “the sophisticated dramatic technique of creating an unlimited number of expressions in the mind of the viewer” by denying them the “unruly” reference point of facial expressivity (Komparu 224). The concealment of an actor’s eyes alone forces him to assume a much greater indicative clarity in action: a new form of physical expression that does not originate from any inward conception of the role, but from the external and iconic presence of the mask itself. This simple object, the mask, has the unique theatrical potential to imbue present action upon the stage with the mythic and archetypal resonance of all that has come before it. In doing

so, it creates an effect that I will call the *living archetype*. My aim is to identify both the existence and relevance of the living archetype within masked theater's history and the possibility of evoking it in the present day.

My first chapter will be a brief study of the archetype as researched and developed by Joseph Campbell and Carl Gustav Jung. In it I will identify more specifically the meaning of the word and why its role in the study of human experience is crucial to the understanding of mask work. The second chapter of my paper will survey three masked theaters—ancient Greek drama, the Italian Commedia dell'Arte, and Japanese Noh—that were greatly characterized by a relationship between their theatrical past and present. In each one, archetypes—in the forms of mythology, cultural self-identification, and formal traditions—were linked to the mask in crucial ways. In my third and final chapter I will examine the viability of enacting the living archetype in the present day, specifically through the lens of my own masked interpretation of Creon in *Oedipus Rex*.

Chapter 1 – Campbell, Jung, and the Archetype

One of the earliest known uses of the word “archetype” is found in a text written by one St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons during the late second century. In this volume, *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus writes that the world and its inhabitants were not fashioned directly from the form of God, but from archetypes that existed even outside of his divine self (Jacobi 34). For centuries there has existed this conception of an ideal form upon which the human experience is modeled, an essential starting point shared by all life. In 1919, Carl Gustav Jung reintroduced the archetype to philosophical and scientific discourse in his attempt to isolate its presence and utilize its potential in study of the human mind. All “mythologems,” all “legendary or fairy-tale motifs,” all these elements of our collective experience are archetypes. They “concentrate universally human modes of behavior into images” and “perceptible patterns,” tightly focusing the search for commonalities within our human histories (33). In 1949, Joseph Campbell published *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, an analysis of his own research into the specific appearances and parallels of these “perceptible patterns” in myths and stories throughout history. I submit that the masked theaters which have existed for millennia can be productively added to this list of fables and fairy tales, all elements of that factor Grotowski named the “historical ego.”

This is not to say that the archetype is necessarily simple to define in its entirety. A full and productive understanding of Jung’s or Campbell’s collected work is generally regarded as little less than a life’s pursuit, and to narrow the focus to their development of the archetype still leaves many years of research. This is particularly

apparent in the work of Jung, whose concept of the archetype was protean, changing aesthetically and functionally many times over the course of his life (33). Much of this work is not easily parsed even by expert psychologists. Jung often closes doors and confuses issues with statements such as, “whether [these] elements, the archetypes, ever ‘originated’ at all is a metaphysical question and therefore unanswerable” (qtd. in Jacobi 32). In her 2007 book, *Jung, Psychology, Postmodernity*, Dr. Raya A. Jones names her first chapter “The Relevance of Jung,” and proceeds to argue for it as for a concept under great debate. Despite these “metaphysical” vagaries and contemporary reservations, I have no doubt of the archetype’s value. In order to most clearly represent my argument for the mask as the key to this living archetype, I will begin by analyzing the writing of Joseph Campbell before proceeding to the more complex claims of Carl Jung.

Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* provides a relatively straightforward point of entry into a discussion of archetypes, as it focuses primarily on their presence within literature and mythology. Campbell believes in what I have now referenced several times without naming, which he calls the “Monomyth.” This is the “basic, magic ring of myth” in which we can find the blueprints for religion, philosophy, the arts, and presumably any other human pursuit imaginable (Campbell 3). The main thrust of his argument, the defense of the Monomyth’s universal existence, relies upon his book’s titular many-faceted Hero figure. This Hero is defined by its undertaking a quest or journey that consists of three distinct phases: separation, initiation, and return. Campbell summarizes them in the following passage:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (30)

Each phase may potentially contain several sub-phases, but the basic frame of the journey is quite simple. His first brief examples of this journey are staples of classical mythology, including Prometheus's theft of the divine fire, Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, and Aeneas's descent to Hades. Not all Heroes originated in ancient Greece, of course. Campbell gives a detailed explanation of Gautama's long struggle to reach enlightenment and the status of Buddha, and compares it to Moses' flight into the wilderness and ascent of Mount Sinai. "The whole of the Orient," writes Campbell, "has been blessed by the boon brought back by Gautama Buddha—his wonderful teaching of the Good Law—just as the Occident has been by the Decalogue of Moses" (33). This particular example of Heroic action begins to show the scope of Campbell's theories. The cultural disparities and geographic expanse between Moses and the Buddha establish the Hero's journey as a form with massive cross-cultural significance.

More striking than the somewhat generalized comparisons Joseph Campbell draws between major mythological-religious figures are the smaller and more specific echoes of myth resonating across the world. Many of these are presented in Campbell's descriptions of the component parts of the Heroic journey's three larger segments. In "The Call to Adventure," Campbell describes the opening of the Grimm brothers' "The Frog King." At the beginning of the story, a princess drops her

treasured golden ball into a pond, and it is retrieved by a frog who carries it up out of the dark water in his mouth (50). Having referenced this fairy tale, almost certainly a common story to his predominantly American and European readership, Campbell then introduces two relatively obscure Chinese counterparts. He invokes the central images of two tales: “the great Chinese Dragon of the East, delivering the rising sun in his jaws, [and] the frog on whose back rides the handsome young immortal, Han Hsiang, carrying in a basket the peaches of immortality” (52). Though the exact shape of the creature in question varies, as does the gift it bears, these images all contain salient similarities despite their cultural and temporal disparity. By presenting this fabric of images woven across the world, Campbell begins to create a template by we may view the theater’s masks as similarly universal.

The section entitled “The Crossing of the First Threshold” presents another unlikely cultural parallel. In an ancient Buddhist fable, a young hero named “Prince Five-weapons” has recently completed his military education, and on his way home to his father’s palace is waylaid by an ogre named “Sticky-hair” (Campbell 85). The ogre, of course, refuses to let the young prince pass unmolested, and so Five-weapons employs his martial prowess. He strikes at the ogre with each weapon in turn, but each simply sticks harmlessly in its hair (86). He strikes with each of his limbs and his head, but they meet the same adhesive interference. When the ogre asks, finally, if Five-weapons is ready to relent, the prince seems not to understand the question. He says quite calmly that he has “in [his] belly a thunderbolt for [a] weapon,” the “Weapon of Knowledge” that will destroy the monster from the inside out. The unnerved ogre lets him go free. The similarities between this tale and the Brer Rabbit

“Tar-Baby Story” are immense. In both, the Hero is completely entangled within a foe, and in both he is released only by his wisdom. Five-weapons possesses the thunderbolt of perfect enlightenment, whereas a tar-covered Brer Rabbit simply tricks the predatory Mr. Fox into tossing him into his favorite briar patch, but the parallel remains. Campbell goes so far as to call this Buddhist fable the “earliest known example of the celebrated and well-nigh universal” folk tale (87).

The story of Prince Five-weapons has one final lesson to impart. After telling the story, Campbell explains that the warrior-prince was in fact “none other than the Future Buddha, in an earlier incarnation” (87). Even within Five-weapons himself, a kind of archetypal cycle of rebirth is in effect. This is the purpose of the Hero’s journey. It is not a question of hunt or of battle, though these are the outward trappings. It is a call to introspection and discovery so deep that it reaches into “depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long lost, forgotten powers are revived, to be made available for the transfiguration of the world” (29). In the Hero we are challenged to see ourselves, and in recognizing the relationships of these archetypes within us to make some deeper sense of the world. We are called to do the same in viewing the mask.

Campbell’s concept of archetype eventually extends past the Hero’s journey. Symbols and stories seem to repeat themselves in the dreams of ordinary people, as well. Campbell writes of an Australian aborigine tribe with a particularly prominent ritual of male circumcision. As a part of the rite before the incision, elders say to a young boy, “The Great Father Snake smells your foreskin; he is calling for it.” It is common for the boy then to take refuge with a maternal figure, who will “wail over

[him] ceremonially.” In a striking parallel of this rite, Campbell refers to a patient of Carl Jung’s. The man, just “beginning to free himself from the bonds of his mother complex,” dreamed “that a snake shot out of a cave and bit him in the genital region” (11). However prominent both maternal figures and phalluses may be across cultures, the likeness here is uncanny. It is appropriate for Jung and Campbell both to cite each other and to be read side-by-side. Even leaving out anecdotally impressive instances such as the snake dream, it is Campbell’s belief that mythology and archetype are forms of “psychology misread as biography, history and cosmology.” He goes so far as to attribute to the study of mythology the potential to “come to an understanding of the deep forces that have shaped man’s destiny,” almost as if to present a solution to the ancient question of life’s meaning (256). It is crucial, however, that this understanding is not reached by looking backwards alone. The archetypes that may enlighten us are

controlled and intended statements of certain spiritual principles, which have remained as constant throughout the course of human history as the form and nervous structure of the human physique itself. (257)

It is my assertion that among these “certain spiritual principles” is the existence and development of the theater. There is, I believe, the potential for the long-standing cultural significance of theater and its mask tradition to affect change on a level as lasting as religion. The mask, as I will later discuss, has surfaced in many varied cultures since before the classical era. Often these civilizations had no geographical chance for communion, no cultural ties to link them but the mask itself. Perhaps,

though, it is too early to appoint theater to this position in the understanding of archetypes. The subject of Campbell's study is prevailingly literary, and theater is not a singularly literary art form. As such, it behooves one to examine archetypes in a new light, one which attempts to define the archetype in even broader and more universal terms. In this case, I turn to the writings of Carl Gustav Jung.

The value of Jung in this particular situation is not exactly a widening of archetype's definition. This is largely because I have no interest in the archetype as a purely biological factor of psychology. There it can simply be acknowledged as a recurrent image or motif that shapes and informs cultural identity and personal understanding throughout history, as Campbell's work has established. What is most important about Jung's work is the quality of reaction it has elicited from psychologists, particularly in the past several decades. In general they seem to have a profound discomfort with regarding the archetype as a scientific truth. Raya Jones calls Jung's archetype theory a "powerful narrative," "correct in the way that a literary novel, poem, musical piece or abstract painting is correct" (14). I believe "play" can be added to that list of art forms without offense. While this suggests that archetypal theory is wholly conceived and internally coherent, there is a strong suggestion that it lacks true psychological application. Yet her assertion that "our existence is made meaningful to us at a more basic and immediate level by means of poetic images and stories" is very strongly reminiscent of Campbell's position on the revelatory potential of archetypes (15). Despite Jones' obvious doubts about the quantifiable practicality of Jung's work, she apparently cannot deny some measure of its elemental truth. June Singer, in her *Boundaries of the Soul*, even directly invokes a

relationship between archetype and theater in her own assertion of the crucial presence of archetypes in human thought. Singer writes that although psychologists themselves may be dubious about the “necessity” of archetypes, “the great playwrights and artists have always known” of their importance, and presents one of William Blake’s poems—*Visions of the Daughters of Albion*—as an example of artistic inquiry into archetypal impulses (106). Clearly these thinkers have a great investment in Jung’s concept of the archetype, to the point that in order to preserve its relevance they are willing to transmute a scientific perspective into an artistic one.

The tension between scientific thought and pseudo-mystical belief is a guiding theme within Jung’s body of writing. Raya Jones actually coins a term, “poetic empiricism,” to describe this struggle within the mind of Carl Jung, and the choice of the word “poetic”—instead of “spiritual,” for instance—was not made casually (15). In 1922, Jung himself said quite clearly that “art is by its very nature not science, and science by its very nature is not art” (qtd. in Jones 15). This is a strong statement with which Campbell almost certainly disagreed, given the connections he drew between psychology and forms of creative human endeavor. Yet perhaps Jung protested too much. Nine years earlier, after recording several “disturbing fantasies” he had experienced, he wrote:

‘What is this I am doing, it certainly is not science, what is it?’ Then a voice said to me, ‘This is art.’ This made the strangest sort of an impression on me, because it was not in any sense my conviction that what I was writing was art. (qtd. in Jones 15)

There is a parallel here between Carl Jung and Constantin Stanislavski: both have an obvious aversion to anything less than clearly delineated and process-oriented thinking, yet both are nevertheless drawn to its opposite. Jung's belief in the archetype cannot be explained entirely by quantitative empirical data, and almost unconsciously he admits this. Stanislavski and Meyerhold likewise cannot be summed up entirely by the regimens of physical training and precise physical action that they employed. The Russian artists seeking objectivity find themselves under the influence of unquantifiable archetypal thought; the Swiss psychiatrist finds his own scientific inquiry directed toward the bounds of art without his consent. Archetype and art seem to be natural companions.

The mask in particular shares many qualities with the functional archetype as described by Carl Jung. He writes that the essential archetypal images "may be considered the fundamental elements of the unconscious mind, hidden in the depths of the psyche." They do not determine personality *per se*, but rather impel "the inherited *tendency* of the human mind to form representations of mythological motifs" (qtd. in Jones 11). The universal pervasiveness of the archetype reveals that humanity necessarily views itself and its surroundings through the lens of these archetypal images. Its parallel to masked theater is nearly self-explanatory; my next chapter will deal explicitly with the role of the mask in several theaters as a fragment of a culture's history brought to life. They do not determine personality or character *per se*, but rather are "systems of readiness for action," through which human beings can determine the possibilities inherent in understanding and interacting with the world (qtd. in Jacobi 37). In that exact fashion, the mask does not ultimately

determine an actor's performance. It presents them with a set of rules and imperatives, both physical and thematic, which only begin to provide a theatrical framework. Finally, Jung's definition of archetype that Raya A. Jones considers "arguably his most important" unites it perfectly with the theatrical mask (11). Archetypes, she writes, are "*forms without content*" (qtd. in Jones 11). As theatrical text is only a bare skeleton that must be brought to life on stage, so the mask represents only the *potential* for action, infinite though it may be. As Kunio Komparu writes in his treatise on Noh,

only when the mask... is given life and breath in performance does it exhibit its astonishingly expressive wealth and reveal to us its true beauty. (231)

The mask is not a complete work of art until its actor is in action upon the stage. Likewise, the archetype itself has no inherent value except for that heightened self-awareness which humanity achieves by living in relationship to it. It is for these reasons that I believe the mask to be the archetype exemplified, and the catalyst of a unique theatrical and historical experience.

I defer to the experts of archetypal psychology—Jacobi, Jones, Singer; and Jung and Campbell themselves—and recognize what some might view as brazenness in attempting to apply these theories as a specific analog to acting. At the same time I draw confidence from their assertions of the metaphysical and interdisciplinary vagaries of archetype study, which open wide the door for a robust interpretation of the archetype in performance. As Jung himself grudgingly allowed, the line between artistic pursuit and the science of the mind is frequently indistinct. The blurring of

this line, and the functional parallels between mask and archetype, are crucial to an understanding of the value of the mask in our time. Art exists to illuminate our understanding of ourselves and our historical ego, and the mask plays a crucial role in this discovery. Having established these factors, I will now explore the mask's history of practical use within the theater. After all, it is deserving of its archetypal associations not merely in speculative or theoretical terms. It is the emblem of a vast subset of theatrical art; one passed along—often literally, physically, from hand to hand—through countless generations and imbued by each with new individual and historical significance.

Chapter 2 – Three Masked Histories

On the French side of the Pyrenees mountain range near the village of Montesquieu-Avantès is a cave. Anthropologists have named it “Les Trois-Frères,” and they prize it for the prehistorically-dated paintings adorning its walls. In one particularly famous piece, “thirty bison, ten horses, four ibexes and one reindeer,” graze upon an open field (Rudlin 38). In the midst of them is a single man. He is crouched down among the animals, “and the area from [his] shoulders to the small of [his] back is covered by a goat’s skin.” He is in a position of coiled readiness, and his hands grip a “taut bow.” Finally, upon his face he wears “a goat’s mask with horns and a beard,” and, transformed, he nearly blends into the herds himself (Fo 19). Yet this is not simply a skilled and furtive hunter stalking his quarry. In most circles “the ‘hunter’ is... thought to be a sorcerer, and his bow to be one of a musical variety” (Rudlin 38). He is more poet than pugilist, more bard than barbarian. And so we have our first example, previous even to the ages of recorded history, of the mask used as more than a camouflaging vestment. The art of “Les Trois-Frères” shows us that the mask has been a tool of art and storytelling for thousands upon thousands of years. This is the ancient and profound legacy of the mask, begun long before the dawn of recorded history. This is the inheritance bequeathed to each and every mask in action on stage today.

Within this chapter I will examine dramatic use of the mask within three distinct theatrical traditions. First is the theater of ancient Greece. At the effective beginning of recorded history, the mask and the theater itself were born and grew in tandem, linked inextricably in an exploration of their culture’s “historical ego.”



Fig. 1: The “Sorcerer” of Les Trois-Frères. (Bahn 237)

Second is the Commedia dell’Arte, which cast off the trappings of the mythic plots to focus solely on stock character-types, archetypal images themselves. Finally, there is the Japanese Noh. With similarities to both of these other theaters, Noh created a formalized system of masked actor training and staunchly upheld Japan’s spiritual and mythological traditions in all of its performances. By investigating the similarities and differences between these three traditions, I hope to illuminate the qualities of the mask that over the years have demanded its use upon the stage. Without forgetting its symbolic and archetypal power, I will endeavor to make clear why and how the mask has provided actors with the chance to embody this idea of the living archetype in performance.

Greek Theater

Unfortunately little is known today about the theater of ancient Greece. Many grand amphitheaters remain standing to this day, but ultimately these architectural structures do little to express the true character of the theater's performance. Almost all contemporary analyses of the dramatic work come from the *Poetics* of Aristotle, and for centuries this text defined what theater truly ought to have been. Yet it analyzed theater largely as a literary text, and has done little to preserve for us a sense of the theater's physical reality. Nearly all extant physical examples of the elaborate masks worn by Greek actors are in the form of illustrated pottery, a stylized medium that is less than ideal in preserving an accurate image for posterity. It is true that we do possess many actual texts, and that they form an important cornerstone of our conception of theatrical history, but even these scripts comprise only a portion of a much greater whole lost to history. "Thirty or so" Greek tragedies have survived the ravages of time and remain in our possession today (Knox 3). There is evidence of eighty-one plays by Sophocles *alone* that will never be read. All told, scholars are aware of 262 Greek tragedies that will never be read in full—or at all—as well as presumably a similar number of lost comedies (8). In effect, what modern artists have in their records of Greek drama is almost a *mythology* of a theater; a curious parallel to the Greeks' mytho-centric understanding of their own history.

The Greece of roughly 2500 years ago was a culture defined by a spurious historical perspective. Until Herodotus wrote *The Histories* in the late fifth-century B.C.E., there was essentially no "coherent dating scheme" at all within Greek history. For all that many of the chief myths had their own internal chronologies and a sort of

relative consistency, there was ultimately “no written record of these events,” and no way of verifying their actuality. “There were only the myths,” lost for centuries in the mists of time, and they were generally thought by the people to be sufficient (Knox 10). Bernard Knox makes the point that although the dating of Greek mythology might be called imprecise at best, it still served a function as a comprehensible temporal reference point. For example, the Trojan War lasted for ten years, as did Odysseus’s sojourn following it. These were discrete periods of time around which were constructed stories that sounded eminently historical. Knox compares this aptly to Hindu mythology’s *Mahabharata*, and the death goddess who “for fifteen thousand million years stood on one foot” in order to avoid the commands of Brahma (11). These are two kinds of mythologies with staggeringly different purposes, evidenced by the huge disparity between their temporal frames. For all of their relative remoteness, the myths of ancient Greece provided its people with a particular understanding of a plausible shared past that defined and united them.

In addition to establishing a common past, the mythology of the Greek people unified them in their present. The myths explored within the Greek theater were concerned not only with the grand scope of a certain history, but with what it meant on an individual level to be a member of that history’s people. Of all the tragedies we have access to, either in full text or in fragment, not a single one of them is concerned chiefly with the acts of the divine. The gods play secondary roles in many plays, as the arbiters of justice—the *deus ex machina*, as they have come to be known—or expositors of the plot, but only in the two *Prometheus* dramas could they be considered “major” characters (Knox 8). Instead of stories describing the gods’

evolving dominion over the earth, the theater as a venue concerns itself with an investigation of the human condition when the gods do *not*, for the most part, take an active role. Bernard Knox breaks down the primary sources of theatrical tragedies in the following summary:

The Trojan War and its ramifications account for no less than 68 of the known plays; the voyage of the Argo, its antecedents and consequences, for 21. The house of Cadmus and the story of Thebes down to its capture by the Epigonoï give us 33 titles, the house of Tantalus, from Pelops through Atreus to Iphigeneia, 31. (9)

All of these stories illustrate the travails of mortals. Incited often by the prophecies and decrees of Olympus, to be sure, but ultimately comprised of their own human errors. Knox's list, of course, is not exhaustive. It leaves off such famed heroes as Odysseus and Heracles. This, however, tells us something in and of itself. Despite their widespread familiarity even in the modern day, these two heroes were only featured in roughly ten plays each. It seems quite possible that the overtly fantastical nature of their stories—Heracles's semi-divine status and superhuman feats; Odysseus's frequent encounters with sorcery and deific imposition—distanced them from the average Greek citizen and made them less than ideal subjects for the pens of tragedians.

Greek mythology had a sizeable pantheon of deities, of course, and it is not as if their representations were completely absent from the confines of the theater. Instead of populating tragedies, they were the frequent subjects of both comedies and satyr plays. Comedies were generally the subtler of the two. Aristophanes, one of

Greece's greatest comic playwrights, was an apt satirist who was "amusingly provocative on issues of contemporary concern" (Ley 15). The satyr plays lay at the other end of humor's spectrum. They were usually performed at the end of a long festival, presumably in order to ease the audience after the cathartic experience of tragedy, and characterized by "rude action, vigorous dancing, boisterous fun, and indecency in speech and gesture" (Griffiths, *Commedia* 4). In a comedy by Hermippus entitled *The Birth of Athena*, the goddess herself delivers a humorous speech relating the anecdote of how she was named by Zeus. Compare this to her presence in *The Eumenides*, where she exists as a vengeful plot device commanding her Furies to chase down Orestes. In Achaeus's satyr play *Hephaestus*, a callow Dionysus persuades Hephaestus to climb mount Olympus, and "the many representations of [his] return [on pottery] suggest that this was a hilarious and drunken scene" (Knox 9). In Athens at its peak, drama was not a venue for reverence of the divine. The gods were allowed to play out their stock roles, but in the high art form of tragedy it was the human experience which was explored, tested, and submitted for the judgment of the audience.

The Greeks recognized theater as an art form uniquely suited to this investigation of human kind's inner nature, and instrumental to the success of this art form was the mask. Because the myths of ancient Greece were so intimately known and felt by audiences, the dialogic interplay between actor and spectator was a crucially important aspect of their realization. Bernard Knox writes that drama "*must* be immediately intelligible to a mass audience on some level, must appeal at once to that audience's deepest sympathies, its secret fears, its ambitions, its hopes" (3). It

must be predicated upon the archetypal premises hinted at by Stanislavski in order to engage Grotowski's conception of the historical ego. It was the mask which practically bridged this gap. As the theater of Athens at its height could hold roughly fourteen thousand spectators, visual and vocal enhancement for the actors was required (Ley 20). As such, masks were made not only to cover the face, but to envelop the head with quite a bit of room to spare. The masked actors were larger than life and identifiable from great distances. This empty space also allowed for the placement of an amplifying funnel, both deepening an actor's voice and increasing its volume. The overall effect was one of significant magnification, and allowed the enormous amphitheaters of Greece to serve as comfortable venues even at full capacity (Komparu 227). On a crucial level, it was the mask that brought the theater's stories to its audience.

When examined in conjunction with the Greek historical perspective, the mask begins to transcend the status of technical tool or theatrical illusion. It becomes an ideological symbol of how ancient Greek theater reflected its myth-centered culture. Because all roles were masked, the actor was able to disappear. Given the proper textual circumstances it was possible either for one actor to play a single character over a series of plays, or for "the same actor to play both father and son, mother and daughter," with the latter situation believed not to be uncommon (Ley 36). Our earliest known model for theater, then, pre-figures the collapse of later "star systems" such as the ones so prominent in the English Restoration period and modern American drama. On the other side of the spectrum, Greek theater also did not embrace systems of hereditary training—later observed in the *Commedia dell'Arte*

and Japanese Noh—in which “the skills and the theatrical persona of well-known characters were handed down from one generation to the next” (Griffiths, *Commedia* 2). While these systems had their own resonances with archetypal theory, their Greek predecessor allowed for any actor to carry out any role. The actors of this time were the unadulterated vessels of their myths, perhaps more so than would ever be true of performers again. This philosophy of performance created a world in which actors were subsumed, physically and thematically, by the mask itself. For the Greek people, as “the masked actors onstage *were* the great figures of the audience’s past,” the plays became not so much a simple performance as a shared reliving of their cultural experience (Knox 15). Through the mask, forms were imbued with content, and the heroes of old walked among the people of the present day.

It is ironic that we know so little about the actual form and technique of Greek masked drama, considering how little the theater’s original creators knew of their own history. Yet even with this gap in our knowledge, much can be gleaned from what information has survived. Illustrated records and theatrical architecture confirm the technical necessity and near-universal presence of the mask. Records of the tragedies, the dramatic art’s highest form, make it clear that masked theater’s primary subject was humanity; ancient and mythical humanity, but humanity nonetheless. Knowing the mythic-historical perspective of the Greek civilization at the time, it follows that drama became not simply a venue for storytelling, but for reliving those myths and exploring their messages of what it meant to be a human being within that society. The mask allowed both performer and audience to be fully absorbed by the events onstage, as individuals were lost in the greater story of the culture as a whole.

These simple facial coverings continue even now in their role as mediator. As time marches on in the theater's history, and the past seems ever more distant and incomprehensible, the mask itself bridges the gap. Over time, each mask has become imbued not only with its own individual set of meanings, but with the rich and ancient history of acting itself. This unification of past and present in the action of performance is what results in a manifestation of the living archetype.

The Italian Commedia dell'Arte

Despite the nearly two millennia which passed between the height of classical Greece and the development Italy's Commedia dell'Arte, in some ways our knowledge of the latter tradition is just as limited as the former. Specifically in that we largely lack a textual understanding of it. In his evaluation of contemporary understanding of the Commedia, Jacques Lecoq notes that hardly any "genuine" plays are now accessible (115). What we possess in lieu of full scripts are documents known as "scenarios." These scenarios themselves were simple pieces of paper arranged backstage to provide for the actors "a plot summary, the bare bones of who does what when" (Rudlin 51). The meat of the scenes themselves would then be provided by the actors, combining improvisational comedic bits with the knowledge of where their action was required to begin and end. Through these scenarios we can access a great number of Commedia plots, as well as learn what sort of actions were performed by the tradition's great number of stock characters. Any sense of a poetic core to the plays themselves is lost, but in fact this does us a service. In studying Greek theater, the paucity of information regarding dramatic aspects *other* than the

scripts creates a kind of inalterable textual canon. This forms a primary locus of inquiry through which all other aspects of the theater must be approached. The opposite is true of the Commedia. Even when studying the text of these scenarios, what one truly observes is an example more of a living theatrical process than of a formally codified relic. As such these scenarios are not the sole gateway into a rich and productive exploration of Commedia. Instead, one must work from the inside and from the actor's perspective. Through study of the development of stock characters and the technique demanded by the masks that define them, one arrives at a deeper understanding both of this theater and of the mask as fulfilling the living archetype.

Like its Greek precursor, the Commedia dell'Arte was deeply fascinated and concerned with the place of humanity within and resulting from the mythologies that comprise our world. One of the most crucial differences between it and the Greek theater, however, is that it disentangled itself from the primacy of dramatic tragedy. In classical Greece, actual human characters were for the most part kept out of the raucous comedies and satyr plays. This tradition of deific mockery in fact extended all the way to the height of the Roman Empire, where it developed a strong resemblance to comedic tropes that would be found much later in Commedia. Take, for example, a series of over one-hundred vase paintings based on the events of a classical "mime-play," the *Phylax Dramas* (Griffiths, *Commedia* 4). One in particular bears an illustration of Jupiter—identifiable as such by not only his amorous ascent, but his deific phallus—ascending a ladder to his lover's window, while Mercury stands beside him with a torch. In a companion image, presumably next in the set, the ladder has fallen down onto Jupiter's head, and Mercury seems to be moving towards

the window himself. This bit of slapstick reversal would be quite at home within any performance of the Commedia dell'Arte, a theater summed up by David Griffiths as being “at its heart... painful to the victim,” and an exemplar of “the comedy of derision” (17). The clear difference is that within Commedia the subjects of this raucous pain are no longer divine avatars, effectively able to withstand any such denigration. Ultimately, Commedia dell'Arte managed to broaden the scope of theater's portrayal of humankind. No longer were the epic tales of a forgotten past the only venues for meaningful human action. Suddenly great joy and pain could both be found in the mundane and vulgar, and a lesson could be learned as a ladder fell on someone's head.

Commedia departed from its classical roots in exactly how it utilized the mask. Instead of each individual character warranting a unique façade, a single mask was designed for each extant character archetype, or “stock character.” Any given *pantalone*, *il dottore*, *capitano* or *arlecchino* mask—with slight exceptions resulting from regional flavor and craftsmen's differing levels of skill—was identical to any other. Each manifestation of a type was expected to conform to certain standards not both in its performance and in its mask's design, two qualities which were inextricably linked. The primary traits of every stock figure were “completely crystallized in their masks,” writes John Rudlin in *Commedia dell'Arte: An Actor's Handbook*. Actors were forced to work within the artistic boundaries established by the mask instead of, as he puts it, “escap[ing] into the complexities of personality” (35). These artistic boundaries were quite specific; as I have mentioned, the skills required to portray a particular stock figure were generally handed down through

families, and so the traditions were kept strong. Rudlin emphasizes how important this “crystallization” of character was in his chapter titled “The Stock Characters.” In it, he provides detailed descriptions—as well as illustrations and photographs of their masks—of all the stock figures, including notes on physical stance, typical movements, and style of speech. The portrayal of these characters was above all else a matter of technical expertise. Finally, I submit a note on terminology to emphasize how crucial the actual, physical mask was to the conception and performance of these archetypes. As Rudlin notes, an expression often used as a substitute for “Stock Characters” was and is the simple “Masks” (62). Neither the physical object nor the actor himself can be separated from this ideal notion of the Mask, the indelible archetype.

Masks were not simply representations of bygone myths, but drawn from the social dynamics of the Commedia’s time. All theater, of course, is necessarily a product of the society in which it originates. Commedia in particular is inextricably linked to the mundane and eminently human practices of business and trickery. It was in fact “born,” John Rudlin goes so far as to say, “in the marketplace” (Rudlin 23). The basic *zanni* figure speaks in “a loud, coarse voice” not as an abstract or illustrative character choice, but because he is based upon the Venetian salesman who would either make himself heard in the bustling market or go hungry (23). The slightly more complex and prominent stock figures were often based upon what the English knew as “mountebanks” and the Italians as “*ciarlatini*”: swindling salesmen who would give riveting performances in order to sell their cheap wares (24). Often a mountebank would be accompanied by masked assistants—one account speaks of a

ciarlatino attended by “Pantalone, Il Dottore, Brighella and Arlecchino,” all stock figures (27)—who would serve as buskers, collecting money in character while the charlatan spoke. The eventual reward presented to their “sufficiently tapped” audience would be a short theatrical performance by the busker-actors (28). The performance of myth in ancient Greece confronted its audience with a living image of their familiar historical ego; the performance of *Commedia* in Italy wove a new mythos out of the vulgar and universally comprehensible fabric of everyday life.

As this new theatrical mythology developed in tandem with the specific demands of the stock figures, the interplay between the two began to manifest the living archetype in the being of the actor. The specific stylistic and technical demands of embodying the Mask characters created a theatrical setting in which regimented physical and vocal training was a necessity. The training itself then worked in tandem with the visual power and familiarity of the mask to create an effect wherein “the total psyche of each character was embodied within it,” writes David Griffiths (*Commedia* 2). Similarly to the Greek theater, this functionally destroyed the viability of any Restoration-esque “star system” before it had even had an opportunity to insinuate itself into the minds of audiences. This primary focus on the mask, as well as a resultant lack in the performer’s ego, would have allowed an actor to be fully absorbed into his character and action without any hint of the “emotional” techniques so prized among the “method” actors of today. The actors might “lose themselves,” but only in the sense that their own emotions and egos could be entirely separated from the performance of the Mask. Not an ounce of physical control was ever forgotten, and one’s role as performer was always paramount. This level of mastery is

what allowed the aforementioned scenarios to be the effective scripts they were without containing a single line of dialogue. David Griffiths sums up this relationship to character by explaining that

Once [the actor] was convinced that his character, his 'act,' contained enough reference points of security to which he could always rely, he could launch into any improvisation with a similarly prepared actor, with a heightened sense of 'disciplined' freedom. He would so 'become' the character he was playing, that he would be able to plot his route confidently through a narrative, adapting his material according to the scenario, and according to the response of the audience. (*Ibid* 24)

With Griffiths' assertion of the importance of audience response within Commedia, we return again to its genesis: the Italian marketplace. This setting of constant, unpredictable human interaction and the mundane cruelties of every-day human life is the perfect metaphor for an ideal production of the Commedia dell'Arte. Out of seeming chaos, unscripted and subject to radical change based upon a single person's laughter, comes an event perfectly formed to mirror the roots of humanity's experience in a theatrical vocabulary eminently understandable to the audience.

As with the drama of classical Greece, the Commedia dell'Arte was defined by its investment in archetypes. The Commedia simply delved into a less remote assortment of stories and figures: representations of humanity's present state, instead of its distant past. Its characters were born of the common Italian marketplace, not the shores of ancient war-torn Troy. In both theaters, the mask served as a crucial

dramatic cornerstone. Commedia, however, called for a new use of the mask. Pulled away from the hallowed context of the great tragic plot, the mask's function was adjusted to exist, as it were, within a vacuum. The mask became the image of the archetype itself: a recognizable core of meaning removed from its greater trappings. Its simplified nature allowed it, then, to fit any number of variable performances, resulting in the bare-bones scenarios that today can still structure infinite performances in the Commedia style without specifying so much as a line of dialogue. With this amazingly versatile tool in their possession, performers of Commedia then used their inherited training to bring any number of stories to life, knowing with each one their role in the greater tradition. The mask, as Meyerhold writes,

enables the spectator to see not only the actual Arlecchino before him, but all the Arlecchinos who live in his memory. Through the mask the spectator sees every person who bears the merest resemblance to the character. (131)

This is why the Commedia dell'Arte has avoided becoming an anachronism. Even though its chief subject is the petty squabbling of masters and servants from centuries before, Commedia's purpose has never been singularly social or self-contained. It has always been able "to shed light on human nature through its comedy," which, as much as the archetype itself, "belongs to every time and every place" (Lecoq 116). The mask is a lamp through which this light still shines, through which an actor evokes the living archetype that illuminates both past and present.

Noh Theater of Japan

Japanese Noh finally provides a subject of study the origins and practices of which are not lost or obscured to us by the ravages of time. Indeed, several primary documents concerning the development and proper technique of Noh have received new translations and publications in English as recently as within the last decade. Of particular note is *The Flowering Spirit* by Zeami, the man who elevated *sarugaku*, one of Japan's earliest theatrical forms, to the nationally esteemed canon of Noh. Texts such as this have been able to survive the nearly six hundred years since Zeami's death in 1443 because of the exclusive hereditary rights to training and preservation held by a select few estates: the Kanze, Hosho, Kongo, Kita and Komparu families (Griffiths, *Noh* 31). While it has always been possible for a gifted performer to be "discovered by his teacher and recommended and then accepted into a Noh family," this was and is atypical. One's "hereditary right" and foothold in one of these dynasties traditionally trumped all three of "age, ability and experience," when it came to education in the way of Noh (32). Those few who were brought in from the outside, however, were inducted into the family and their children were given the privilege of Noh training. This let the dissemination of Noh technique occur on a low level while preserving the responsibility of the chosen families as custodians and teachers. The onus felt by these familial lines is presumably what has kept the traditions of Noh so vibrantly alive. The very preservation of this theater over the course of centuries is a reflection of its status as the vessel of archetypes, enacted through masks upon a sacred stage.

Noh is directly linked to the early cosmogony of Japan, which endows it with a significance unlike that of the two theaters I have previously examined. The Commedia dell'Arte was, first and foremost, a reflection of the recent human history and the mundane conflicts of humanity writ large. Bernard Knox surveys attempts to link Greek theater to a specific and immediate background in Dionysiac ritual and calls their foundation “shaky at best” (4). Greek theater was a secular exploration of the stories that defined its people, not a religious celebration of them. The mythological origins of Noh, the theatrical form itself, stretch back to some of the earliest Japanese mythology. In *The Flowering Spirit*, Zeami writes this of the creation of *sarugaku*, Noh’s immediate formal predecessor:

The story has it that when the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu Omikami, shut herself up in a cave in heaven, the world was plunged into immutable darkness. The myriad of gods gathered together on Heavenly Mount Kagu and performed sacred music and comic dances in order to lure her from the cave. [...] Amaterasu quietly listened to the voices of the gods, then opened up the cave door just a little and the land was filled with light. (98)

In short, the first performance of *sarugaku* saved the world from utter godless darkness. It would be difficult to invent a much stronger assertion of the elemental necessity of theater to a culture. In case this seems to set Noh too far apart in greatness from its secular counterparts in Greece and Italy, a final note: in their plea to Amaterasu, the gods performed both “sacred music” *and* “comic dances.” Even within this sacred form handed down by the gods, Noh does not shun the light-

hearted and comic expressions that characterize Commedia. Noh festivals incorporate comedies into their repertoire much in the same way as the Greeks. The Japanese analogue to the satyr play is known as Kyogen, characterized by “healthy, naturalistic humor closely tied to the life of the common people,” and intended to balance the effect of Noh’s “sharp focus upon the true nature of tragedy” (Komparu 96). Despite its divine roots, Noh is first and foremost a human expression.

In Noh, more than the stories possess a strong mythological significance; the dramatic form itself is a re-enactment of ancient deific performance. This is true of every aspect of the theater, beginning with the stage’s construction. Despite the fact that Noh stages are indoors, they are always roofed. This roof is both a reminder of the fact that the earliest Noh was performed outside, and a symbol of “the sanctity of the space beneath it” (Komparu 111). It is linked by Kunio Komparu to “the sacred architecture of shrines,” all of which had similar gabled roofs in the Shinto tradition. Specifically, the roof over a Noh stage is built in what is called the *shinmei-zukuri* style. In Shinto shrines, this would be a sign of “the dwelling of a god” (111). In the Noh stage, one might say it indicates the dwelling of a god’s *image*: the masked visage of the actor. In addition to being roofed in this style, the upstage wall of a Noh stage consists of “a simple panel with a painting of a green pine tree,” the stage’s only real ornamentation (114). Kunio Komparu writes that this may be a representation of “the famed Yogo Pine at the Kasuga Shrine in Nara, where Noh has been performed for centuries” (115). The pine, then, is a reminder of Noh’s relatively recent history, while the roof over it recalls the much older spiritual pedigree of the art. Before a

Noh performance has even begun, its audience is aware of their entrance into a sacred space, an architectural archetype and reminder of the theater's mythic origins.

In addition to its archetypal and symbolic significance, the Noh stage also possesses an extremely crucial theatrical function. Forgoing both the massive expanse of the Greek amphitheater and the unrestrained bustle of the Commedia's original markets, it arrives at a compromise between the two. While it does not approach the Greek stage's size, the Noh drama exists in a similarly neutral space lacking any detailed scenography. With the exception of the painted pine, the stage is made "completely of unfinished *hinoki*, a Japanese cypress" (Komparu 114). In a similar vein as the Greek system of designating one offstage wing as "towards the city" and one as "into the house," Noh actors demonstrate their position and intention in the frame of the plot by moving in certain recognizable patterns. Free from the demands of realism, the stage itself is a representational space able to serve an infinite number of dramatic functions. While integral to this highly stylized mode of performance, the structure of the Noh stage also worked to engender a connection between audience and actors. The audience is seated on two sides of a square stage that is completely open to them. This image of the stage "in full view" is intended to force the audience "to cast off internal ordinariness as well." The arrangement "permits no separation of self and other," gives the audience no opportunity to pull away (111). The audience is engaged both in a potently ritualistic experience and a transparently theatrical event. As such, the Noh stage mirrors the dual symbolic and practical requirements of the mask.

These practical demands of Noh performance are no less rooted in tradition than the shrine-theaters, thanks to the centuries-long stewardship of the five Noh households. Both Commedia and Noh were based upon schools of hereditary education, as I have mentioned, but in the latter system this process seems to have been quite literally life-long. In *The Flowering Spirit*, Zeami writes that “generally, we consider age seven the time to begin this art [of Noh training].” Apparently, this is when a child “will naturally demonstrate a certain inborn presence” and should begin his education in “chanting, movement and dance” (63). David Griffiths relates an anecdote of a time spent with the Kanze family when he witnessed a lesson in Noh being taught to a boy of only three years old. The lesson was brief, only fifteen minutes long, but the boy practiced both chanting—in a traditional Noh posture, with fan in hand—and “a short movement pattern which circumnavigated the down stage area and led him back to his starting position” (Griffiths, *Noh* 33). The lesson was led by “a forty-year-old Shite, at the height of his career,” and was characterized by equal measures of “self-discipline” and “fun in learning and achieving” (35). This process of training is carefully laid out for the entire career of an actor, reaching “its ultimate height” in his mid-thirties, and steadily declining from that point on (Zeami 68). By the time he turns fifty, even if an actor is only taking on the simplest and least demanding of masks, “his merits in those roles will decline” (70). The work of a Noh actor clearly could not be a part-time pursuit. He was required to dedicate his life to the art in order to be worthy of donning the mask, making even the process of his training an expression of confronting the culture’s historical ego.

The role of the mask itself in creating Noh drama's characters lies somewhere between the methods of Greek tragedy and the Commedia dell'Arte. While the theater worked from scripts based largely on Japanese mythology, characters were not entirely unique to any given piece. Though Noh performances could contain any number of characters, nearly every play had two primary crucial players. First was the primary character, the *shite*. The translation of this word is literally "the person who does," and so it is not surprising that this was the character around which the action revolved. While the *shite* could be any sort of figure—"young or old, male or female," "human being" or "vengeful spirit" (Komparu 45)—its dramatic function as chief actor and focus of the plot was iconic and unchanging. Second to the *shite* was the *waki*, translated as "side." This was the *shite*'s foil, as well as a sort of narrator who "introduce[d] sequences of action setting the scene." And crucially, the *waki* figure was universally "unmasked" (Griffiths, *Noh* 9). The mask was not simply Noh's unifying aesthetic; it was a crucially symbolic component of the performance, and not all actors or characters held a claim to its use.

Proof of the mask's elevated status is evident after a brief foray into the technical nomenclature of Noh. In Japan, the typical word for "mask" is *kamen*, or "temporary face." This is used to refer to casual costumes, "the masks of ancient Greek drama," and various forms of Chinese masked art introduced to Japan in the seventh century (Komparu 226). In other words, *kamen* refers to forms that have no particular cultural significance, and do not reflect the mythology of Japan. In Noh, the mask is called *nohmen*, and the distinction "reflects an important conceptual difference" (226). The verb used to describe donning the *kamen* is shared by actions

as casual as putting on a hat or scarf. When donning the *nohmen*, an actor “affixes... the *omote*,” linguistically speaking, the actor attaches a new face. According to Kunio Komparu, it does not go too far to suggest that this linguistic distinction effectively represents the theater’s philosophy of the mask. Any “transformation of appearance” has always been a secondary event; a result of the “transformation of consciousness” the mask initiates (227-8). The dual-consciousness attained by the *nohmen* is that of living on stage both in the present and the past, and through this activating the state of living archetype. The practiced *shite*, having affixed his new countenance and treading the bare cypress boards of the stage, is one with every player of his role who has come before.

For centuries, wherever the mask has appeared it has been a symbol not only for the stories of those who wore it, but for the history of masked theater itself. Even when used as a tool of the most disciplined physical training, it is impossible for the living archetype not to shine through. Despite an obvious belief in the paramount importance of physical dedication to Noh, Zeami seems to have known that there was something more at work in the ideal performance than technical mastery alone. He has the following to say regarding Noh:

As regards the two Ways of Being and Non-Being, Being is what is visible, and Non-Being is the vessel. That which manifests Being is Non-Being. A crystal, for example, is clear and transparent in essence, and though its essential voidness has nothing to do with either color or patterns, it can give birth to both fire and water. (qtd. in Wilson 16-7)

Non-Being, the vessel, is the body of the actor in performance; a perfectly clear crystal, cut and honed to perfection by a life of training. Non-Being is in a sense what Meyerhold strove for in his Biomechanics, and what Stanislavski believed was not enough. What is summoned, then, from the prism of the actor must be something paradoxically both a part of him and utterly alien. Something inextricable from his status as a product of his society and history, and yet always just barely obscured and out of reach. The actor embodying the crystal's "voidness" is able to create "both fire and water," and only through the mask. This symbiosis of actor and mask is Being, a state of life in full communion with both the present moment and the ancient past. It is the ideal state, Zeami's own word for what I have named the living archetype. And yet with the exception of having Zeami's poetry to explain and expound upon it, the Noh theater is no different from either Commedia dell'Arte or the drama of ancient Greece. In these three radically different times and places, connected only by the slightest threads, an actor glints like Zeami's crystal and tells the full story of the theater and its masks.

Chapter 3 – Creon, and the Mask Today

In a sense, it is not a daunting task to assert the presence of a mytho-centric worldview in eras and philosophies of the theater that are, at this point, mythologies themselves. There is little at stake in highlighting the mythical status of any art form that has already become so canonically entrenched. It is a more difficult task to translate the significance of mask and archetype into the climate of the present day; particularly present-day America, my own cultural background. These days there is no longer any “dim, unrecorded past in the American memory: no Achilles and Hector, no David and Goliath” (Knox 12). While there are certain American myths that have a prominent place in the cultural imagination, they are all subject to widespread deconstruction and revision. “The modern historical myth,” writes Bernard Knox, “is choked at birth by the modern historical sensibility,” because belief in an objective truth at this point is simply too great for the former to survive (13). Parallel to this historical phenomenon is the development of acting theory over the past century. Stanislavski, Meyerhold, and Grotowski were not American, but the systems of their work—Meyerhold’s in particular—were driven by the same modern desire for objectivity that characterizes the American historical perspective. This begs the question of what exactly it is that my own work is attempting to assert. A pseudo-mystical attempt to “connect with the past” through acting seems no more tenable than the emotion-reliant performance Denis Diderot maligned centuries ago. The answer lies in the fact that even today the mask can straddle this divide between the indistinct image of archetype and the clear reality of physical training. As the latter is

cultivated and explored within the specific constraints of the mask, the former comes into startling focus.

I was recently fortunate enough to work extensively with masks in Yuriy Kordonskiy's production of *Oedipus Rex*. Because that experience remains so strongly with me, only several months afterwards, I would like to take this opportunity to engage in the study of modern mask technique partially through the lens of my own experience. This is not to say that it will be an account of my "personal journey," but rather a critical examination of mask work supported by my own experience with certain exercises and techniques. I realize that portions of this chapter will therefore be anecdotal, but the theory and textual instruction of mask that I have read cannot at this point be separated from my own experience of the work. Moreover, I believe that any discussion of modern acting without some reference point to its physical reality is dishonest. Entirely objective or not, my own experience is what I truly know. I will use *Oedipus* to illustrate how an actor in the present time can imbue his or her work with the qualities of the living archetype.

The process of rehearsing *Oedipus Rex* presented the student company with a unique opportunity, as neither Professor Kordonskiy nor the cast had any substantial experience with masks. A handful of company members had performed with masks in temporary workshop settings, but even these students were not proficient in their use. For the majority of us, and Professor Kordonskiy himself, the idea of mask work constituted an entirely new theatrical venture. Our collective status as neophytes to this particular work is significant because it forced us as a company to find our own particular way into the mask. Professor Kordonskiy's direction did not lead us step-

by-step through any singular system of training, but rather created our own historical relationship with the mask through the tenets of various traditions. We began with exercises devised and inspired by Jacques Lecoq.

The cornerstone of the work developed by Lecoq is the neutral mask. The mask is just what it sounds like, an image of complete neutrality. Neutral masks are full-face, closed-mouth masks designed to carry as little expression as possible. The ideal mask is not only “perfectly balanced” in its features, but produces in its wearer “a physical sensation of calm” (Lecoq 36). The neutral mask, in fact, has a strong connection to Noh. Komparu writes that the ideal Noh mask, though in a sense “expressionless” in its stillness, “should be interpreted not as a passive ‘neutral’ but as an active ‘infinite’” (229). It is intended to mute the performer’s “personality” entirely, placing him “in a state of discovery, of openness, of freedom to receive.” The practical purpose of this balanced state is to lead the actor to complete physical economy, creating within them a blank slate for the possibility of truthful action. The sensation and maintenance of “perfect balance” leaves an actor “better equipped to express a character’s imbalance or conflictual [sic] states,” ideally without any of the personal tics and habits that actors so frequently bring to bear when first confronting a character (Lecoq 38). The neutral mask is, in a way, the first step of Lecoq’s solution to the problem with acting that Diderot recognized so long ago. By removing from oneself all biases and associations, an actor can then begin to construct a truthful character upon a foundation of precise physical action. And yet, the neutral mask is more than an instrument of physical training. It is the essence of the archetype: a form containing the possibilities of all content. Lecoq calls it “a reference point” and a

“fulcrum,” the entity that lies beneath all other masks and supports every one of them (36). The neutral mask epitomizes the archetype’s relationship to acting, existing simultaneously as both concrete theatrical tool and symbol of the shared history of performance.

The company first began its work with neutral mask according to the guidelines set by Lecoq, with an exercise he names ‘Waking Up.’ Although the exercise is intended to introduce a group of actors to the concept of the neutral mask and to a free exploration of space, Lecoq does not necessarily make this clear to his students. Instead, he gives it as little preamble as possible. This is his description of how the exercise is conducted:

In a state of repose, relaxed, lying on the ground, I ask the students to ‘wake up for the first time.’ Once the mask is awake, what can it do? How can it move? (39)

By recommending that the director provide so little guidance, I submit that Lecoq does not simply trust in the power of the mask itself to act upon the performer. Nor is the presence of the “physical sensation of calm” mentioned in his first description of the neutral mask a guaranteed phenomenon. An actor’s ability to accept the exercise at face value and simply *play* without extensive preamble is a prerequisite for the “perfect balance” that is the work’s ultimate goal.

The *Oedipus* company’s foray into ‘Waking Up’ proved an interesting experience, particularly in how it went unaffected by what Lecoq deems one of the most problematic traps of early neutral mask play. He warns against the tendency in some actors to attribute “a mystic or philosophical dimension” to the mask. More

specifically, these actors “would like to see [the masked actor] as neither man nor woman,” which Lecoq finds utterly preposterous. He suggests rather flippantly that such actors “be sent back to physical observation” in order to remind them that men and women do differ in a few crucial ways. While these comments may seem to refute my own assertion of the neutral mask as an archetypal image, they are tempered by Lecoq’s following thoughts:

The idea that everyone is alike is both true and totally false.

Universality is not the same as uniformity. (40)

The key is for the actors to realize that although they share the space and a common circumstance, the way in which they receive and accept these factors will necessarily be unique. Lecoq does not deny the universality of certain aspects of the human experience; he simply asserts the primacy of individual discovery over a shared “mystic” endeavor. As the company “awoke” upon the stage of the Center for the Arts, the actors showed no sign of tending towards the “philosophical dimension” of the mask. The variations with which different actors opened themselves to the space were in fact quite striking. I clearly recall one colleague who seemed terrified either of her surroundings or her own ability to perceive them, and yet she continued to push forward and make new connections with the space. Another displayed such a zeal for exploration that he sprinted up stairways and across galleries, in what seemed almost to be his attempt to imprint *himself* upon the space. Throughout the entire company the seeds of proto-personas developed as every actor was opened to their surroundings, creating an ever-shifting army of masks that expanded, contracted, and transformed the bounds of the CFA Theater.

The second stage of neutral mask play devised by Lecoq—and performed by the *Oedipus* cast—is a more structured exercise entitled ‘The Fundamental Journey.’ Called the work’s “great guiding theme,” the ‘Fundamental Journey’ is a sojourn through an imagined landscape spanning ocean, forest, mountain, desert, river and plain. This particular version of the natural world is designed to reflect the neutral mask itself. Like the mask, it is characterized by “calm, neutrality, [and] balance” (Lecoq 41). In reflecting the form and balance of the actor, the landscape invites the actor to become reciprocally reflective: “When I walk through the forest,” writes Lecoq, “I *am* the forest.” The exercise “enables [the actor] to take the first steps towards identification,” or the process of playing at being observable creatures and phenomena (41). The ‘Fundamental Journey’ begins to coax the masked actor away from *reaction* and towards *interaction*, building from a neutral foundation the first impulses of a character other than the self.

The ‘Journey’ goes beyond simply preparing performers for the approach to character. The journey is fundamental not only because it is basic and elemental for the actor’s training, but because it is the symbolic and archetypal core of all possible journeys. The ocean in which the actors awake is the combined image of every ocean, the mountain climbed is all mountains, and the desert is comprised of every imaginable barren waste. Lecoq himself writes that, when undertaking the exercise,

[actors] evoke Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, Brecht’s *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*. The crossing of the river can be compared to passing through adolescence to adult life, with all the movements finding their reflection in emotional feeling. (42)

This is precisely why the journey is the neutral mask's "great guiding theme." Just as a neutral mask lies beneath every character, beneath nearly every story—and it is notable that the three Lecoq chooses to name are not overwhelmingly similar—rests the archetypal form of the 'Fundamental Journey.' While creating an objective and overwhelmingly physical method of actor training, Jacques Lecoq nonetheless has managed to devise a system that continually confirms the theories of Joseph Campbell. As an actor dons the mask and undergoes the journey, he takes a crucial step towards working effectively with the mask. Moreover, he walks the same fundamental paths trod by all those who have come before.

It is worth noting at this point that the neutral masks used by the *Oedipus* company could hardly be considered ideal. The creation of a mask is a delicate art, and is itself one of the skills eventually learned by Lecoq's students (Lecoq 53). The neutral mask, precisely because of its measured quality of balance, is "very difficult to create." Although it is of a neutral color it "has nothing in common with white masks used in carnival processions or demonstrations," those precursors of the Commedia that Lecoq refers to as "dead masks" and antithetical to neutrality. In addition, it "should not adhere closely to the face," but sit apart from the actor in order to create the "distance which makes it possible for the actor to play" (36). The company's neutral masks were far from the artistic paragons created by Jacques Lecoq and Amleto Sartori. They were made of hard plastic and seemed immediately to evoke the "dead" white masks of carnivals that Lecoq saw as unfit for this brand of neutral work. This reminiscence arose from their being blinding white and clearly mass-produced. While there were two designs, one male and one female, within a

gender group there was no way whatsoever of telling two masks apart. While a neutral mask is not intended to possess personality *per se*, these lacked distinction to the point of sterility. Finally, the masks rested particularly close upon our faces. They were rigid and close enough that they allowed for hardly any movement apart from that of the eyes and eyelids. While it is true that one's face should be still beneath the neutral mask, there is a stark difference between relaxation and forced immobilization. The latter all but precludes an actor from exhibiting Lecoq's mark of successful neutral mask play:

When the actor takes off the mask, if he has worn it well, his face is relaxed. I hardly need to watch what he does; it is enough to observe his face at the end to know he wore it truthfully. [...] His face will be beautiful, free. (38)

I should make clear that the primary reason for choosing these neutral masks was simply an economic one. To supply the full company with professionally-crafted neutral masks would have been financially impossible for the production. Moreover, I do not mean to suggest that the style or quality of our masks was detrimental to the rehearsal process for the *Oedipus* cast. The company found this stage of the work extremely beneficial and artistically fulfilling. Primarily, I wish to begin characterizing the nature of the dramatic shift that occurred in our work once we laid down our neutral facades, and took up the expressive masks of our characters.

The expressive mask was used by Jacques Lecoq in just one of the many stages of actor training; the *Oedipus* company's use of it naturally differed, as the expressive masks we received would be our partners through the rest of our rehearsals

and performances. Nevertheless, the basic function of the mask as defined by Lecoq was certainly our starting point. The expressive mask, he writes, “purifies the performance, filtering out the complexities of the psychological viewpoint,” and “delegating to the body the job of expressing essential attitudes” (53). While the *Oedipus* company had spent a great deal of time on textual analysis of both our characters and the arc of the play as a whole, the introduction of the expressive mask allowed us to leave our heads and enter our bodies. This new, phenomenological approach to our characters was evident as soon as we held the physical form of the masks.

The material chosen for constructing an expressive mask determines its most essential physical qualities. Japanese Noh has always favored wood—specifically cypress—as the basis of its *nohmen*. In this way, an actor’s mask is elementally linked to the untreated cypress stage beneath him. Even more crucially, the wooden masks of Noh can potentially have extremely long careers of use. David Griffiths, while visiting the Kanze family in Tokyo, was lucky enough to examine masks that were “hundreds of years old,” bearing myriad distinctive “scratches, stains, discolouration of the pigments,” and many other signs of the “natural ageing processes” (*Noh* 19). These mature masks reflect the literal, physical history of the actors who have worn them just as much as they do the ancient stories that inspired their first crafting. Even more fascinating is the fact that when crafting new masks, Noh carvers do not work from a neutral template. Instead they derive the new work from the model of an old one, “reproducing to the last hairline scratch, the detail of the original” (20). In Noh’s wooden mask tradition, even the most recently-finished

product is archetypal in every sense of the word. Beginning in the very instant of the mask's completion, its history can be traced back through both the timeless myths of its creation and the immediate history of its use on the stage.

Despite the obvious archetypal significance and potential of the wooden mask even in contemporary use, for *Oedipus* the choice was made to craft the characters' masks from leather. In a sense, this was a practical decision. Wood is a necessarily rigid material, unyielding to an actor's breath and sweat; and wearing any mask under stage lights will create the latter in copious amounts. A new leather mask, conversely, "is like a new glove," able to "take on the identity of its wearer and become something comfortable rather than alien to wear" (Rudlin 39). It absorbs one's exertions and is ever so subtly transmuted into a functional extension of the actor's face. The freedom in breath and circulation allowed by the leather in comparison to our neutral masks was staggering. And yet, the decision was not simply a matter of choosing one material's physical comfort over the archetypal significance of another. In fact, working with leather created enormous opportunities for the entire company to work more deeply in activating the unique potential of their masks.

The *Oedipus* company members were presented with early, unpainted versions of their expressive masks at least a month and a half before the performance, and the changes they underwent before opening night were astounding. As Leslie Weinberg, our costume and mask designer, watched our rehearsal process, she began to alter the masks based upon what she witnessed in our action. One actor's style of motion would require certain adjustments in the mask's point of focus; another's long speech from the back of the stage would call for a wider mouth to better allow the

voice to travel. The Jocasta mask in particular saw numerous massive adjustments even in the week before our performance, as its color and the style of its mouth were altered to what Professor Weinberg believed would more faithfully suit the actress's performance. As opposed to bearing indelible theatrical archetypes, as with the Japanese *nohmen*, our masks grew and changed as we did. Both mask and actor continually influenced the other as together they searched for how to represent the characters of *Oedipus Rex*, and activate through them the living archetype.

My personal experience with the mask in this way is that it was indispensable in discovering the character of Creon. When I received the first "draft" of the Creon mask, it was fairly indistinct. Without the detailed color or shading it would later receive, its large asymmetrical eyes and squat nose did not yet seem to tell a comprehensible story. At this early stage only one element stood out, but by itself it began to define the newly-crafted facade: a leathern lock of hair that swept all the way across the mask's enormous forehead. This hair fascinated me. It was both full of personality and sparsely representational enough to embody any number of character traits. Was it simply slicked back, a sign of smooth confidence? Combed over in order to hide the character's physical insecurities? Coiffed into a bizarre mythological pompadour? The symbolic, two-dimensional nature of the mask created the effects of all these possibilities in one, and I was immediately drawn to it. Moreover, as I began to incorporate it into my physical work it came to inform and define both the physical and psychological nature of my Creon.



Fig. 2: Myself in the completed Creon mask. Photograph by Christian Milik, November 2007.

As we received these early drafts of our masks, Professor Kordonskiy began leading us in exercises designed to aid us in finding the physical life and form of our characters. These exercises were largely influenced by Michael Chekhov’s concept of the “Psychological Gesture” although they did not conform directly to it. Professor Kordonskiy, for instance, never stipulated that the gestures discovered be used only within rehearsals, but rather encouraged us to develop exaggerated physical vocabularies that could extend to the performance of our characters. The desired result was an “inner participation in the life conjured behind the printed words of the author’s script,” and an understanding of character that was not simply cerebral, but physically “spread over [the] whole actor’s being” (Chekhov 62). What is striking about the Psychological Gesture, both as described in *On the Technique of Acting* and

as witnessed in our rehearsal process, is how recognizable each gesture's character and intention is despite its abstract nature. Chekhov has no difficulty assigning a certain gesture such descriptors as "egotistical," or "low and base," despite the fact that it has no contemporarily realistic indicators of these adjectives (70). The effective Psychological Gesture is in essence an archetypal image. Because the human body and its kinetic potential "exist objectively," each movement contains a certain set of qualities and meanings that need no temporal or cultural contextualization (*Ibid* 76). It is an actor's task to shape and color these fundamental actions, imbuing form with content in actualization of the living archetype.

The Psychological Gesture that epitomized my interpretation of Creon was an act of stroking the mask's aforementioned tuft of hair. With my left arm immobilized at my side, my legs rigid and my neck cocked slightly to the left, the first and second fingers of my right hand would slowly run along the length of the forehead's leathern swirl. Despite certain realistically recognizable of this action, the exaggerated care and deliberate tempo with which it was performed kept it from becoming a simple "tic" of the character. I deliberately relegated it to only three specific points within the play. By limiting its use in this way, the gesture became an effective tool instead of an obligatory crutch. Another moment of growth through adversity was the realization that to actually touch the "hair" of the mask was untenable. That physical contact immediately destroyed the illusion inherent in the seamless connection between natural and grotesque. Dario Fo writes that once an actor lays a hand on the mask "it vanishes, or appears contaminated or nauseating;" such a casual meeting of flesh and mask is "damaging and unbearable" (27). I was forced to stroke just beyond

the hair, half an inch of air between it and my fingers. Without the physical sensation and associations of touch, the gesture became more of an idea than an individual action. It was whole and understandable both to myself and to our audiences not because of its psychological character, but because of its relationship to the archetype embodied within my mask. The demands of the mask catapulted a simple physical movement into the realm of the archetypal image, creating in it a blueprint for all like acts.

Finally, in addition to existing as a dynamic archetypal gesture in a textual vacuum, the act of stroking my hair began to illuminate Creon as written by Sophocles. This physical response to the mask's stimuli evoked and emphasized Creon's languorous opulency, and the privileged station he values so highly. A haughty, exaggerated version of the gesture served to bolster my cool assurance in rebutting Oedipus's charges of treason:

Consider, first, if you think any one
 would choose to rule and fear rather than rule
 and sleep untroubled by a fear if power
 were equal in both cases. [...] As it stands now,
 the prizes are all mine—and without fear. (Sophocles, l. 584-7, 89-90)

This was the primary impulse behind both this gesture and my general physicality as Creon, but the act stroking my hair was given versatility by its archetypal nature. It was equally able to invoke what Lecoq refers to as the “*counter-mask*,” a depth of character revealing “the opposite of what the mask appears to suggest” (59). When Oedipus proclaimed his intention to execute Creon, the gesture returned as a

timorous, shattered reflection of its former self. Suddenly, the “fear” which I had dismissed moments before was all that Creon and the mask could feel, and this was demonstrated by a purely physical effort on my part. Through working with the mask, this interpretation of Creon remained rooted to the text of Sophocles even as it was uniquely mine. The character was driven by both my individual action and the larger archetypal nature of that action in relation to an ancient text. This is the living archetype in action, no longer historical theory but practicable fact. And all of it issued, slowly and methodically, from an actor’s working dialogue with a curled strip of leather.

Once this work of discovery had been completed, both for the actors and for Leslie Weinberg in perfecting our facades, the donning of the mask became the single most important moment before a performance. The question of how properly to enact this simple and yet crucial task was for me a perplexing one. In Japanese Noh, directly before the stage’s entrance is a room containing a large wall-length mirror. In it, performers would take time before their entrances simply to observe themselves in their new forms, to take in the physical reality of their masked and costumed selves. It is a “hallowed” chamber, “the most important part of the daily ritual” of preparing to perform (Griffiths, *Noh* 43). It is known simply as the “Mirror Room.” Of course, the CFA Theater lacks any such designated Mirror Room; its construction is far from the specific ritualized function of a Noh stage. As such, when the cast collectively realized the worth of that initial mirrored donning, other venues had to be pursued. It seems inappropriate, at first, to think of the dressing room mirrors, situated as they are in the bustle of actors’ preparation, as sharing any sacred significance with the

Mirror Room of Noh. Yet Kunio Komparu asserts that “the space is not defined or governed by the physical object,” but rather “for the activity engendered by or related to the object” (126). Much like the properties of a mask itself, the Mirror Room is imbued with meaning not just by virtue of its existence, but by the actions of a performer in relationship with it.

In the end, this event within the Mirror Room—or in front of the dressing room mirror—is simply one more aspect of an actor’s rigorous technical preparation. This process of witnessing oneself don the mask in front of the mirror is not, despite what Komparu refers to as its “magicality,” an sacred act linked unalterably to the Noh stage’s specific architecture (126). It is a matter of great technical practicality, as the mask requires a keen external eye and outward perception in its use. An actor gazing into a mirror in preparation is “externalis[ing] the character’s inner psyche,” not engaging in a mystical awakening of the mask itself (Griffiths, *Noh* 44). Meyerhold calls this the act of “mirrorizing” even when it does not involve a physical mirror. It is the only process by which an actor’s self-awareness can reach its peak, and their performance be graceful and “free of all extraneous elements” (Gordon and Law 96). This purity of performance has always been the mask’s *raison d’être*. Even in traditions that are centuries old, there are systems of action and perception that are just as relevant to contemporary performance as the twentieth-century practices of Michael Chekhov and Jacques Lecoq. Using this symbiosis of old and new technique, present experience and relationship to ancient icons, an actor has all the tools required to activate the mask and bring the archetype to life.

Conclusion

The Venetian playwright Carlo Goldoni wrote in his memoirs of his disdain for masked theater. “The soul under a mask,” he wrote, “is like a fire under ashes” (249). He saw the mask as a stifling force, and in his attempt to infuse the eighteenth-century European theater with some of the Commedia’s characteristics, it was notably absent. Peter Brook, one of the most esteemed directors of the twentieth century, despises the mask in theater (Griffiths, *Acting* 21). When Brook has utilized the mask, particularly in *The Mahabharata*, it has been without a sense of its unique dramatic potential. It has been used only “to illustrate,” or “to provide a simple ‘environment,’” rather than to transmute an actor’s presence and perception (22). Even Dario Fo, perhaps the most famous scholar and player of the Commedia alive today, gives his expertly-crafted Arlecchino performances unmasked (Rudlin 229). In his book *The Tricks of the Trade*, Fo writes both of the neophyte’s difficulty in adjusting to the mask, and of his own established personal response to it.

A singular sensation afflicts you when you take off the mask—this at least, is my reaction—the fear that part of my face has remained stuck to it, or the fear that the face has gone with the mask. When you remove the mask after having had it on for two or three hours, you have the impression of annihilating yourself. (26)

This is the fear that drives many artists away from the mask: a belief in its power not only to enhance and magnify an actor, but to consume one.

My own fear in writing this paper has been that I have tacitly promoted the fears and prejudices held by Goldoni, Brook, and Fo. There is a tendency in many

scholarly analyses of the mask, after all, to attribute similar power to it even while singing its praises. John Rudlin writes that “a real mask will gaze immediately” as soon as it is donned, that it is “a possessing spirit” which does not wish to return to stillness (40). Kunio Komparu bestows the mask not only with “spiritual, mystical significance,” but the capability of literally connecting an actor to “the spirit of the character assumed” (224). These authors’ attempts to demand respect for a faltering theatrical tradition are noble, but they are also indicative of the greatest trap facing an actor in mask. Actors today who wait for the mask to act upon themselves, who treat their bodies simply as vessels for the mask’s historical or spiritual cachet, have turned back the clock to a time before Diderot’s *Paradox of Acting*. An insouciant or entitled approach to the mask can reveal nothing to actor or audience.

Living an archetype is not a means to an end; it is the end in and of itself. Despite even my obvious admiration and wonder for the potential of masked theater, the process of embodying what I have named the living archetype is not a mystical one. The cultural significance of this breed of performance comes from the mask’s status as archetype and primordial image. Each mask is a physical incarnation of one of these images, the elemental fragments which Campbell shows us tell the story of humanity both within the realm of theater and without. But, as Jung says, it is only a “form,” lacking “content” until the moment it is brought into action by a performer. This can be witnessed clearly in our records of masked theaters throughout history. Commedia dell’Arte was crucially informed by the Italian social climate of its time; Noh is rooted so deeply in Japanese culture and mythology that it is nearly as much a ritual display as a theatrical one. Despite these roots, both arts relied upon systems of

concretely detailed regimens of training and performance passed on from one generation to the next. Even the tragedy of ancient Greek theater, relatively unknown to us as it is, must have had its own specific style of action to utilize its enormous amplified masks. The performance of masked theater has always been characterized by a unique technical precision and dramatic physical engagement. The actor's hidden face and eyes make sure of that. Yet this is only the mask's immediately apparent effect. The Meyerholdian technical demands of the mask must intersect the personal inspiration and involvement demanded by Stanislavski at the converging point of our "historical ego," the cultural self-reflection identified by Jerzy Grotowski. As with all meaningful art, the theater of mask is a powerful struggle. It demands that the performer grapple with the reality of himself as both actor and human being, incorporating both aspects into the performance of something both timeless and completely new. It is only at the peak of this experience that an archetype truly comes alive.

However much the "modern historical sensibility" identified by Bernard Knox may wish to deny the mask the power and significance it draws from archetypes, I believe that it does just the opposite. After all, it is the world's increasing centralization and global communication that has lit a fire of perspective in our once darkened past, allowing so many masked traditions to finally come together. The theatrical texts of ancient Greece can now work in conjunction with the leather masks of the *Commedia dell'Arte* and the mirrored introspection of Japanese Noh. In their unity these disparate forms are able to create art that is both fully of the moment and intrinsically packed with the span of theater's history. This, finally, is the living

archetype: the melding of present, past and future in a great cyclical story that both bends to the unique nature of an actor's performance and yet stays always fundamentally the same. It has always been within reach of the actor's open hand and mind, and perhaps never more so than it is today.

Works Cited

- Bahn, Paul G. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Prehistoric Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc., 1949.
- Chekhov, Michael. *On the Technique of Acting*. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
- Diderot, Denis. "The Paradox of Acting." Trans. Walter Herries Pollock. *Theatre/Theory/Theatre: The Major Critical Texts from Aristotle and Zeami to Soyinka and Havel*. Ed. Daniel Gerould. New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2000. 198-201.
- Fo, Dario. *The Tricks of the Trade*. Ed. Stuart Hood. Trans. Joe Farrell. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Goldoni, Carlo. "Memoirs of M. Goldoni." Trans. Barrett H. Clark. *European Theories of the Drama*. Ed. Barrett H. Clark. New York: Crown, 1947. 249.
- Gordon, Mel, and Alma Law. *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics: Actor Training in Revolutionary Russia*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 1996.
- Griffiths, David. *Mask: A Release of Acting Resources. Volume One, Acting Through Mask*. United Kingdom: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998.
- . *Mask: A Release of Acting Resources. Volume Two, the Training of Noh Actors and "The Dove."* United Kingdom: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998.
- . *Mask: A Release of Acting Resources. Volume Three, the Italian Commedia and "Please be Gentle."* United Kingdom: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998.

- Grotowski, Jerzy. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Ed. Eugenio Barba. Holstebro: Odin Teatrets Forlag, 1968.
- Jacobi, Jolande. *Complex/Archetype/Symbol in the Psychology of C.G. Jung*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc., 1959.
- Jones, Raya A. *Jung, Psychology, Posmodernity*. Ed. Stephen C. Foster. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Knox, Bernard. *Word and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.
- Komparu, Kunio. *The Noh Theater: Principles and Perspectives*. Trans. Jane Corddry. New York: Weatherhill/Tankosha, 1983.
- Lecoq, Jacques. *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre*. Trans. David Bradby. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Ley, Graham. *A Short Introduction to the Ancient Theater, Revised Edition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Meyerhold, Vsevolod Emilievich. *Meyerhold on Theatre*. Ed. and Trans. Edward Braun. London: Methuen & Co LTD, 1969.
- Rudlin, John. *Commedia dell'Arte: An Actor's Handbook*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Singer, June. *Boundaries of the Soul: The Practice of Jung's Psychology*. New York: Doubleday, 1972.
- Sophocles. *Oedipus the King*. Ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. Trans. David Grene. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942.
- Stanislavski, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. Trans. Elizabeth R. Hapgood. New York: Routledge, 1936.

---. *Building a Character*. Trans. Elizabeth R. Hapgood. New York: Routledge, 1949.

Wilson, William Scott. Introduction. *The Flowering Spirit: Classic Teachings on the Art of Noh*. Trans. William Scott Wilson. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2006. 13-57.

Zeami. *The Flowering Spirit: Classic Teachings on the Art of Noh*. Trans. William Scott Wilson. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2006.