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MASKS AND SARTRE'S *IMAGINARY*:  
MASKED PERFORMANCE AND THE IMAGING CONSCIOUSNESS

by

W. KEITH TIMS

Under the Direction of Greg Smith

ABSTRACT

The use of masks in performance and actor training is often linked to the imagination, but there is seldom discussion of the nature of this imaginary link. Using the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre (most especially his work *The Imaginary*) and the writings of modern mask theorists, this dissertation examines the relationship between masks and the imaging consciousness in both masked actors and the audiences who observe them. We discover that a mask is an *analogon* for an Other and that a mask authorizes games of identity which play out imaginatively in the performance milieu. In fact, generally speaking, a mask in performance is apprehended in a more imaginative way than a non-masked performance. Further than this, the mask illustrates the basic nature of the human consciousness and identity espoused by Sartre: that who we are is not a product of our psychology, but rather, the product of our imaginations and our choices. The dissertation concludes by suggesting that masks point to an alternative approach to character creation which likewise rejects psychology, and instead relies on physicality, abstraction, and ambiguity, all of which are essential to activating the imaging consciousness.

INDEX WORDS: Masks, Performance, Sartre, Imaginary, Movement, Ambiguity, Aesthetics, Consciousness, Imagination, Analogon, Identity

MASKS AND SARTRE'S *IMAGINARY*:  
MASKED PERFORMANCE AND THE IMAGING CONSCIOUSNESS

by

W. KEITH TIMS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

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in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2007

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2007

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MASKED PERFORMANCE AND THE IMAGING CONSCIOUSNESS

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

A recurring theme in the literature surrounding masks and their use in performance is that masks are tied to the imagination. Some authors discuss how masks affect their wearers, inspiring new ways of using the body and new personae from the image of the new face. Others discuss how masks invite the audience to imagine; the performances are as much about the audience's own ideas as those of the performers. But what does "imagination" mean in the context of performance? If masks indeed are tied to the imagination, what does this say about the nature of masks? And what do masks' imaginary ties have to say about the nature of the imagination itself?

The writings of Jean-Paul Sartre offer one perspective on the imagination in the context of performance. Sartre was an existentialist philosopher and dramatist who wrote extensively about the nature of consciousness and attempted to echo his philosophy in his plays, art critiques, and essays on the creative process. Sartre's best known work is *Being and Nothingness*, in which he outlines his ideas about the nature of human consciousness. However, an earlier, less well-known work of his titled *The Imaginary* deals with Sartre's conception of the imagination and its role in human consciousness. Coupled with Sartre's own



ideas on aesthetics and performance, Sartre offers a new perspective on mask theory.

By reading Sartre against existing major mask theorists one discovers new ideas about mask theory. The core assertion is this: Generally speaking, audiences and actors alike apprehend masked performances in a more imaginary way than non-masked performances. While there are many factors that influence the degree to which a particular performance can be described as “more” imaginary than another, and these factors make it admittedly difficult to directly compare one style of performance with another, there are certain elements of human imagination that Sartre defines which are called into greater play in the presence of a well-animated mask. As a result, we can observe how masks operate as objects that have connections to our imaginations and sense of identity and how these connections affect performances. In addition, masked performance can also offer a new perspective on Sartre’s concepts of the imagination in that masks illustrate the operations of consciousness.

Some questions arise: What would Sartrean philosophy have to say about the role of masks in character creation? What might Sartrean concepts have to say about how audiences apprehend a masked performer compared to an unmasked performer? What are the aesthetic qualities that make a particular mask/performance more effective from a Sartrean point of view? What is the relationship between existing mask theory and Sartrean ideas of the

imagination? How might Sartre's ideas of the imagination be used to construct an aesthetic for masked performance?

In an attempt to answer these questions, we will employ hermeneutics as a methodology, performing a close comparative reading of Sartrean philosophy against several texts on mask acting. Sartre's *The Imaginary* served as the main work in this project. Some of Sartre's other works (e.g. *Being and Nothingness*, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, "On Intentionality," etc.) as well as other authors' writings about Sartrean concepts of imagination, aesthetics, and consciousness are added to *Imaginary* to form a body of Sartrean thought. Also included are Kendall Walton's ideas of make-believe and the writings of select Gestalt aesthetic authors. This body of work becomes the primary text against which the role of the mask in performance was read as expressed in various 20th and 21st century mask acting texts.

### Sartre's Theories of the Imagination

It is important at the outset to lay out Sartre's philosophy which formed the core of the body of his thought, beginning with Sartre's work *The Imaginary*, since this line of thought will be referenced throughout the dissertation.

As its title suggests, *The Imaginary* outlines Sartre's ideas about imaginary objects, how they are understood by consciousness, and what is the nature of consciousness itself that humans can imagine at all. Sartre opens *The Imaginary* by identifying two different ways that an object can be given to us: via

perception or imagination. Perception comes from observation: our studying over time of an object in the “real” world. Perception is necessarily incomplete. If I look at a piano, for instance, I will only see the side at which I am looking. If the lid is closed, I do not see the strings inside. Where perception is incomplete, imagining is total. It is a synthetic act that links knowledge to elements “more properly imagined” (*Imaginary* 8-9). The piano in my imagination may have all sides of itself given to me, strings included, as well as sounds, memories, and emotions that I may have.

The synthetic act of creating an image does not rely on knowledge alone. Intentionality is another factor. By intentionality, Sartre means that feature of consciousness by which it aims at an other-than-consciousness; in other words, that characteristic by which consciousness focuses on an object. It is the “lens” by which we view that object, and it is a lens we create ourselves. Whatever object that appears to us in the imagination we already have an intention toward it – an expectation, idea, or determination – but in a properly imaginative way. This *is* my piano, or that *is* the house where I used to live, we might say, if the piano and house are absent. Sartre cites Husserl that a consciousness is a consciousness *of* something (*Imaginary* 11). “Consciousness and the world are given at one stroke: essentially external to consciousness, the world is nevertheless essentially relative to consciousness” (“Intentionality” 4). It is not only my knowledge of a piano that creates the imaginary piano for me, but my intention towards the imaginary piano itself. In my mind’s eye, the imaginary piano is given to me in a

“quasi-observation” attitude, but it teaches me nothing new. It is given to me as it is, and as I intend it to be, all at once. Objects never precede the intention, and consciousness never precedes the object (*Imaginary* 11).

By “quasi-observation,” Sartre means that imaginary objects may appear to us in a manner which *seems* to be like that of perception. It is an attitude of observation but is not observation itself. One can never learn anything new from an imagined object. If details in the object change, it is not because the imagined object had them all along; rather, it is because factors outside of the imagination have changed. New knowledge or new feelings may alter the imaginary object, but imaginary objects keep no secrets. With quasi-observation, we may somewhat deceive ourselves that the object in our imagination is before us, outside of ourselves, when in fact all that the object is comes from ourselves alone (*Imaginary* 10).

Because imaginary objects give everything that they have to us at once, poor, incomplete, or specialized images can have meaning for us without the need to decipher them. Perhaps I need only see a sketch of a few piano keys to synthesize a rich image of a piano within my imagination. I need only to see a few lines of sheet music (assuming I knew how to read them) to hear the piano playing in my imagination. Sartre discusses these in terms of caricature and schematic drawings. A caricature of a person certainly isn’t “realistic,” in terms of verisimilitude, yet a skillfully-drawn caricature can capture the “essence” of the personality in a way that a photograph cannot. The sheet music is no way

“sounds” like music, but for those who know how to read the schema of musical notation, the transformation from marks on a page to imagined audible sound is easy enough to accomplish (*Imaginary* 17-18).

Ultimately, what is necessary for the imaginary act to occur is what Sartre calls an *analogon*, that is, “an equivalent of perception.” It’s important to understand that ultimately, imagined objects are given to us as a “nothingness.” That is, though we may ignore the realization for a short time, any imagined object is given to us as not present, absent, somewhere else, or not existing at all. Thus, the synthesis of the imagination acts...

*... to “make present” an object. This object is not there, we know it is not there. We therefore find, in the first place, an intention directed at an absent object. But this intention is not empty: it directs itself through a content that must present some analog with the object in question. The analogon lose their own sense and acquire another. They are integrated into a new form without becoming absent (Imaginary, 19).*

Thus, the crude sketch of the piano keys is still a crude sketch of piano keys, even though in my imaging consciousness, I “see” a whole piano. I know that it is just a sketch; I do not suffer from a delusion. But the sketch no longer is “merely” the sketch. It is the analog for something larger, richer, more detailed, with meaning, which I realize within the image itself.

The world of the imaginary is constituted by objects given to our consciousness by a spontaneous synthetic act which unites knowledge and intention through the content of an *analogon* (*Imaginary* 52). But what is most

important for Sartre is that ultimately the objects of the world of perception and the world of the imagination are the *same*. It is only the attitude our consciousness takes towards the object that differs (*Imaginary* 20). The piano in my imagination and the piano in my living room may be different, but they are both *pianos* in every sense important to consciousness. And they may be one and the same piano though “intended” in the imaginative and perceptual modes respectively.

Imagination, therefore, is about making present something that is absent through a piece of knowledge, however small or degraded, that constitutes it. Imagination is an *act*, and an act that intends toward something with an expectation of what that thing should be. Imagined objects are what we *want* to represent to ourselves (*Imaginary* 57).

Sartre also finds a link between movement and the imaginary. He argues that our consciousness expects visual elements, and movement itself becomes an analog for visual form. This movement could be the movement of the external analogon, or it could be movements within our own bodies – even something as small as the movement of our eyes in our sockets. When the movement is completed, it is retained by our consciousness as a visual impression (*Imaginary* 77). In fact, Sartre suggests that there exists in us already a

*zone of semi-darkness where there glide around almost ungraspable states, empty pieces of imaging knowledge that are already images, symbolic apprehensions of movement. Let one of these pieces be fixed for a moment on one of these*

*movements and the imaging consciousness is born*  
(Imaginary 82).

Thus, not only can movement serve as an analog for an imaginary object, such as describing a figure 8 with one's finger in the air, but the act of moving itself with a kind of intentionality behind it can create an image out of the "zone of semi-darkness" within us. In fact, movement, Sartre says, constitutes the "very stuff" of the object. It is not a moving fist we imagine, but a movement that is "fist" (*Imaginary* 134). Make a conscious choice to walk about with one's shoulders hunched, head down, feet dragging, and in one's imagination one already feels "hints" of a change in personality or emotion: depression, weariness, or laziness. We have knowledge of how depression or weariness is expressed in the body. Simply moving in a manner that relates to that knowledge with intention behind it can cause the imagination to spring forth (*Imaginary* 137-138). It is not the movement that is a result of the emotional state. Rather, the movement is part of the state itself, the "very stuff." They come at the same time.

Sartre is also careful to warn us about what he terms the "illusion of immanence." That is, because we are given imaginary objects in a "quasi-observational" mode, we have a tendency to treat them as if they were "real" or perceived objects. We also have a tendency to transfer the characteristics of the thing to the analog that represents it (*Imaginary* 87). Thus, the sketch of the piano keys that reminds me of my real piano may, in turn, be endowed with all the various feelings I have associated with the real piano. If the piano is sentimental

to me, the sketch may also take on sentimental qualities. If I hate the piano, then I may hate the sketch. But in truth the imaginary object is a “mélange of all past impressions and recent knowledge” (*Imaginary* 90). That knowledge aims at the imaginary object through the content of the *analogon*.

*The image plays neither the role of illustration nor that of support for thought. It is not something heterogeneous with thought... What one generally calls thought is a consciousness that affirms this or that quality of its object but without realizing it on it. The image, on the other hand, is a consciousness that aims at producing its object. It is therefore constituted by a certain way of judging (deciding) and feeling of which we do not become conscious as such but which we apprehend on the intentional object as this or that of its qualities. The function of the image is symbolic (Imaginary 97).*

So, I may *think* that “my piano has a pleasant tone” without having to produce the piano or its tone in my consciousness. But when I *imagine* my piano its pleasant tone comes *with* the image, unbidden but realized then and there *and at the same time*. Again, the image can teach us nothing; therefore, comprehension of the object cannot come after the image is formed. It comes at the same time as the image does (*Imaginary* 103).

In fact, it is this notion of conception which is at the heart of the image/thought dyad. Sartre identifies two kinds of thought: reflective and prereflective thought. Reflective thought is self-aware; one is conscious that one is thinking. Prereflective thought is where one is not aware of oneself when one is thinking. Pure thought, i.e. “my piano has a pleasant tone,” comes to us on the reflective plane. But it is in the prereflective plane that the image comes to us.



Both of these attitudes bring us the “concept” of the object of our thought (*Imaginary* 114). But in the prereflective plane, thought is a kind of “possession.” We constitute our thoughts in “living reality” in order to possess them, to constitute them in a form, and to “consider this form to be their nature” (*Imaginary* 116). Thus imaginary acts are a way to make present as a thing the concepts of thought. “The act of imagination... is a magical act. It is an incantation destined to make the object of one’s thought, the thing it desires, appear in such a way that one can possess it” (*Imaginary* 125). This will have importance for us in the realm of performance as we see acting as a way to bring forth the presence of imaginary, absent Others in a performance context.

Sartre thus has identified a kind of continuum along the lines of imagination, from pure perception to pure imagination (a dream state). This has ramifications for the dramatic world as well. Sartre points out that there is a difference between the *analogon* of a portrait and the *analogon* of an actor. The actor is engaging in a kind of imitation. The portrait is a near-likeness of the person depicted thus the audience need not work very hard to see the subject of the portrait. The actor, on the other hand, must rely on her body, which is “rigid” and “resists” transformation into the subject of the imitation (*Imaginary* 26). The audience always has a choice of seeing the object imitated, or the actor “pulling faces.” Thus, in imitation, Sartre says that we cease to perceive and begin to *read* (*Imaginary* 26). He discusses the actress Franconay impersonating Chevalier. In no way does Franconay resemble Chevalier — she is a short woman, he a tall

man. But her imitation of him relies on particular signs which capture the “essence” of Chevalier. We begin to read these signs and synthesize the “presence” of Chevalier in the body of Franconay. Of course, we are not deceived into believing Chevalier is actually before us. But Franconay’s incomplete representation is enough for us to *imagine* that he is present. Franconay is the *analogon* for Chevalier (*Imaginary* 25-27).

Thus, watching a play, a kind of imitation, is already stepping away from pure perception along this continuum. If we read the signs the actors give us, we can imagine we are in the presence of the characters. The closer we are to a more imaginative state, the more “magical” the relations of the objects become. The viewer, “fascinated by the object, disengages himself further from the real” and can even form an *imaginary ego* to which the events of the imaginary world occur (Flynn 433). To some extent, we allow ourselves to cede our “being in the world.” We allow ourselves to be “bewitched” by the image. We can withdraw from the world in various degrees (Flynn 433). As we watch a play, for instance, there are times when we may be completely engrossed in the imaginary world it presents to us. There are other times when we may look at our watches, read the program notes or become annoyed with someone coughing next to us. It is at these latter moments when we have moved away from the imaginary state and closer to the perceptual state. We reclaim our “being in the world,” and we remember that it is a play we are watching. We *perceive* the theatre, the actors,

and the set and props as a theatre, actors, a set, and props. They no longer serve their function as *analogon*. They have reclaimed their own sense.

It is along this continuum of perception and imagination that the events of a play, novel, or even a symphony unfold. An imaginary object can be something as simple as an absent friend or as complex as an “entire derealized world.” But no matter the complexity, the image is still a “transcendent correlate” of a particular bit of knowledge and attitude of awareness. It appears to us as we wish it to appear, exactly as we expect it, and in a manner like we expect it to appear (Flynn 434).

Ultimately, Sartre argues that it is the capacity to imagine that gives us our freedom of consciousness. A consciousness that could not imagine, he points out, would be hopelessly mired in the “real,” incapable of any real freedom of thought or choice. In order to imagine, a consciousness must be able to posit an object as *irreal* – nonexistent, absent, somewhere else and it does so always *from a particular point of view*. That we can imagine, he argues, shows that we are, ontologically speaking, free (*Imaginary* 182-187).

For Sartre, human consciousness is a state of complete freedom of existence; existence precedes essence. Humanity’s “essence,” its nature, its purpose, its values, its reason for being, is not given by any force prior to a given individual’s existence. Instead, it is defined by the individual human being. “The essence of the human being is suspended in his freedom... Man does not exist *first* in order to be free *subsequently*; there is no difference between the being of

man and his being-free" (*Being and Nothingness*, 60). This free state is the primary characteristic of the human condition. In an early essay, Sartre describes in colorful, almost macho language how this freedom shapes our way of understanding the world:

*Imagine for a moment a connected series of bursts which tear us out of ourselves, which do not even allow an "ourselves" the leisure of composing ourselves behind them, but which instead throw us beyond them into the dry dust of the world, onto the plain earth, amidst things. Imagine us thus rejected and abandoned by our own nature in an indifferent, hostile, and restive world – you will then grasp the profound meaning of the discovery which Husserl expresses in his famous phrase, "All consciousness is consciousness of something." No more is necessary to dispose of the effeminate philosophy of immanence, where everything happens by compromise, by protoplasmic transformations, by a tepid cellular chemistry. The philosophy of transcendence throws us onto the highway, in the midst of dangers, under a dazzling light (Intentionality 5).*

This "philosophy of transcendence," where consciousness transcends itself to realize itself, is at the core of both Sartre's ideas of consciousness and imagination. Whatever it is we understand about an object, any object – a piano, a person, a virtue – our understanding of it comes solely from ourselves. It is true that we may have a bit of knowledge about the piano, person, or virtue; however, that knowledge is not "truth." It is but one part of the imaginative synthesis that we use to understand and make sense of the world. We project ourselves out into the world of objects in order to realize, understand, and possess them.

This is even true of our selves. Sartre writes, "The Ego is neither formally nor materially in the consciousness; it is outside, in the world (*Transcendence* 13)." Unlike Descartes, Sartre denies a "duality" of consciousness, a separation of psyche and body. To use Gestalt principles of "figure" and "ground," human consciousness is not a separate thing that is apart from its situation, but rather is an "embodied totality whose meaning [is] given relative to the ground in which" it finds itself (Mirvish, 415). We constantly invent and reinvent ourselves based upon our being-in-the-world. Sartre believes that man, lacking in a given essence, is a constantly unfinished project. We *imagine* what it is we are because we have nothing else to refer to. The imaginary process helps constitute consciousness. Our perceptions of the world are, by nature, incomplete. We can accumulate knowledge over time, but we will never be able to *perceive* a totality, an essence. We can only imagine it. Even then, the image of our selves comes from the synthesis of knowledge and intentionality. Any "essence" we may find for ourselves still comes to us from our intention toward it. We constantly project ourselves into the future, never fully finishing ourselves, and always moving beyond our past (Jarret-Kerr 41). Thus:

*For a consciousness to be able to imagine, it must be able to escape from the world by its very nature, it must be able to stand back from the world by its own efforts. In a word, it must be free. Thus the thesis of irreality has delivered us the possibility of negation as its condition (Imaginary 184).*

A consciousness that has negation as its condition is capable of placing things as absent, missing, somewhere else. It is a consciousness formed on vacancy and

indeterminacy. It is capable of transcending the real to include details which cannot be seen by perception alone. It is free (Fritz 21). Sartre sums up the relationship between the imaginary and consciousness thus:

*... Imagination is not an empirical power added to consciousness, but is the whole of consciousness as it realizes its freedom; every concrete and real situation of consciousness in the world is pregnant with the imaginary in so far as it is always presented as a surpassing of the real. It does not follow that all perception of the real must be reversed in imagination, but as consciousness is always 'in situation' because it is always free, there is always and at every moment the concrete possibility for it to produce the unreal (Imaginary 186).*

With freedom comes responsibility, and Sartre does not absolve humanity from its own. Though Sartre never completed his work on an existential ethics before his death (despite three attempts at formulating one), he very firmly believed that it is a part of the human condition not only to be free but also to be totally responsible. If there are no psychological, biological, or theological elements that hold sway over the vacant and indeterminate consciousness of a human being, then that human has only him or herself to blame – or credit – for his or her choices (Fritz 21).

Sartre does admit there are certain limits to man's freedom, but ultimately he identifies only two that are absolute: one's death and other people. He admits that one cannot choose to be tall if one is short (*Being and Nothingness* 561). But speaking about ontological freedom, such commonly perceived limitations as "my place," "my past," and "my environment" are dismissed by Sartre as, at their roots, being choices. One chooses the degree of influence or significance

which one's past has upon oneself (Fritz 38). Ultimately, though, it is others which are the primary limit on one's own freedom. As Maxine Klein wrote about Sartre's play *No Exit*, the play and existentialism are both about "the predicament of a being, deprived of general truths about his nature, forced to create himself through his activities in a world strange and dense, and in the company of Others whose projects will, of necessity, conflict with his" (59). We are born into a world of others, taught by them, defined by them, and come into conflict with them as we struggle to forge our own identities and purposes. Though others may limit us, Sartre is careful to point out that ontologically we are free and thus ultimately responsible for our existence.

Sometimes the responsibility of total freedom is too much, and Sartre says that we seek to avoid that responsibility by acting in "bad faith." That is, we lie to ourselves, though are unaware that we are lying to ourselves, shifting the responsibility for our choices and behaviors elsewhere. Bad faith is "A lie to oneself within the unity of a single consciousness... [it] rests on a vacillation between transcendence and facticity which refuses to recognize either one for what it really is or to synthesize them" (Barnes, 216). To act in "good faith," then, would be to accept one's own existential responsibilities for oneself and bear the consequences for the choices of one's life oneself. To act in bad faith is to refuse to acknowledge one's own intentionality in the imaginary process. One may say to oneself, "That man is evil," or "My piano is pleasant," as if these judgments were not functions of my way of intending the man or the piano. Bad faith is

removing oneself from the process of defining what “evil” and “pleasant” are. By pretending that the responsibility for the way things “are” lies outside oneself, one can in bad faith avoid one’s ultimate responsibilities of essence.

Thus, Sartre has laid out a theory of consciousness based upon freedom. He finds our freedom comes from the fact that we can imagine and that our imagination is a tool by which we attempt to possess the absent. We can both perceive and imagine. Perception gives us knowledge, and imagination synthesizes that knowledge with our own intentions. There is a continuum between the imaginary and the perceived, and all encounters with the world have the potential to activate the imaginary consciousness to a greater or lesser degree.

Sartre’s ideas of freedom are also expressed in his plays. Whereas much modern drama features characterizations that are consistent, rooted in psychological thought and shaped by external forces, Sartre’s plays often feature characters that dramatically change themselves, often without any seeming psychological reason for doing so. For example, in *Death Without Burial*, the character of Lucie spends most of the play refusing to give information to her captors – she would rather endure rape, torture, and death. Yet, abruptly and without a great deal of explanation, when Canoris makes a last-ditch attempt to change her mind, she agrees. This was Sartre’s reaction to what he believed was the “bad faith” of psychological determinism. If mankind is the product of “social forces, genes, political systems, Oedipus complexes, and the like,” he can



no longer act (Klein 42). But remove these forces, and mankind is once again free to act.

In fact, Sartre termed his theatre “Theatre of Situations.” That is, just as mankind’s freedom always comes from his situation in the face of the real, so, too, do his characters’ freedoms come from situations devised by the playwright (Fritz 53). Rather than a “theatre of characters” where the characters are psychological types, the “theatre of situations” focuses on moments when a particular character’s freedom is tested. For Sartre, the theatre of characters “entraps characters in a web of predicable psychology, while *le theatre de situations* leads the characters up to a defining moment in which they freely define themselves” (Fritz, 54).

Kathleen Fritz substituted the term “Theatre of Indeterminacy” for “theatre of situations” as more accurate for some of Sartre’s plays. Not only did these plays reflect the indeterminate nature of consciousness that Sartre espoused, but his plays often featured “radical conversion” scenes in which characters dramatically change their ideals or personalities. Often these conversions seem unmotivated; however, they reflect the character’s freedom to choose and reject psychologically determined limits (62).

Maxine Klein termed Sartre’s dramatic philosophy as “Theatre of Crisis.” For Sartre, “what a man is seen to be doing, or heard saying, where he is discovered to be living, whom he chooses to be loving, whom hating, all these appearances of a man and many more *must be the measure of him*” (47-48).

Humanity is thus shown in the present tense, free, and the audience approaches the character “to examine him in his acts of doing in order to discover what he would be” (49). The role of the playwright, then, is to place this man in moments of crisis. Like Fritz’s Theatre of Indeterminacy, what is compelling about this kind of drama is the discovery of how the character defines himself in situations where his freedom is tested. It is a theatre of “danger,” where the existential Other is the only real limit to freedom (55).

Thus, Sartre’s ideas of dramatic aesthetics are already founded on ideas which echo his philosophy of consciousness – indeterminacy and freedom. Sartre has other ideas about aesthetics as well, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this work. But for Sartre, the most aesthetically pleasing plays are those that shun predetermined ideas of identity.

### The Imagination and Mask Theory

Sartre’s ideas of imagination, consciousness, and dramatic aesthetics all have ramifications for mask theory. As we will see, a mask is an *analogon* for the imaginary object of the character. The notion of character identity in mask work is less about psychological exploration and more about imaginative synthesis. Masks also have a greater aesthetic value in Sartrean terms.

But what is meant by the term “mask?” A mask, at its most basic, is a facial disguise. There are many kinds of masking, from makeup to entire costumes that accompany the masks and headdresses. Masking can also refer to

more psychological states, such as the “mask” we present to the world. However, the more psychological aspects of the term “mask” will be avoided in this work. Sartre rejected most psychologically determined concepts of identity in the first place. Further, because this study is concerned with the imaginary nature of mask work, it is important that masks be viewed as an *analogon* – an object that is a correlate for something else. Thus, for the purposes of this work, a “mask” refers to a face covering used in performance designed to represent an “other;” someone else other than the person wearing it, be it a character, a divine being, or persona – in short, an *analogon*. Because performances can range from religious dances to formalized plays, the term “personage” will be used to mean the “Other” pointed to by the mask\*.

In the following chapters this dissertation will discuss how the imaginary process affects the masked actor and audience alike. The first part will focus on the relationship between the mask and the actor. First will be discussed the relationship between movement, mask, and the imagination in the actor. Next, the notion of “trance” in masked acting will be explored as an “imaginary state.” This will be followed by a discussion of how the use of masks and the imaginary process can be used as a form of character development for actors. The second part of this study will focus primarily on the relationship between the mask and the audience. We will begin with a discussion of Sartre’s aesthetic of *sens* and

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\* Though technically the term “personage” refers to a “person,” we will use the term to include characters which are not strictly people, such as animals, gods, ghosts, etc.

how it applies to masks. Then the section will conclude with a discussion of the idea of “purposeful ambiguity” as a means of engaging the audience through masks. The study will conclude with the suggestion that the use of masks in performance is a uniquely Sartrean approach to theatre.

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## Chapter 2 – Masks, Movement, and the Imagination

A cursory survey of most mask acting texts reveals several common threads, one of which is that for a mask to truly become effective it must be animated; that is, it must be brought into motion by a performer. There is a great deal of discussion by mask acting authors about various techniques by which a mask may be effectively animated. However, what is often left undiscussed is the relationship between movement and the mask and why masks must be animated in order to achieve their greatest effectiveness. A mask at rest becomes a piece of art, still pointing to an “Other” but in a passive, fixed way. A mask in motion often seems to come “alive” with varieties of expressions, taking on a life that it did not have previously. So in what way does “movement” add this “life?”

There is also discussion about the transformative power that masks seem to have upon their wearers. These discussions usually revolve around changes of both personality and body, with new postures, gestures, and kinesthetic qualities appearing in the body of the actor with the arrival of the mask upon the actor’s face. Where do such physical changes come from, and why are they essential to mask work? How is it that movement seems to add new qualities not only to the mask, but to the wearer as well? Why do so many mask exercises focus on

getting the actor to use his or her body in new ways? Why is *movement* so important to mask characterization?

Mask work is physical because mask work is imaginary in nature. That is, working with masks is working with the imaginary state that Sartre outlined in *The Imaginary*. For Sartre, movement is a part of the synthesis of the imaginary process. As a result, working imaginatively means working with movement. This chapter will examine the theoretical relationship between masks, movement, and the actor. What we find in this examination is that not only can movement itself can be a trigger to a more imaginary state, but movement is *essential* to the creation of character, especially so with masks. We also find, then, that movement and the body are essential to the formation of identity itself.

### Movement and the Analogon

As discussed in Chapter 1, imagination is a synthetic act. The imagined object that appears to us is given to us through an *analogon*, but the analog alone is not enough. Not only must there be a piece of knowledge, but there is also an intention towards the object. But in addition to this, Sartre finds that movement is a key part of the function of the *analogon* in this process. Thomas Flynn illustrates the process thus (434):

	cognitive element ( <i>savoir</i> , concept)	
CONTENT {	kinaesthetic	with sensible residue (external image)
analogue (matter) {	affective	without sensible residue (mental image)

Thus, the content of the image comes to us from the knowledge we have of it (the cognitive element) and its analog (the “matter”). There can be an analog with “sensible residue” such as a photograph, a painting, a sketch – something that remains behind after the image is formed – or there can be an analog that exists only in the mind of the imaginer: a mental picture. An object with “sensible residue,” logically has a stronger external character. Thus it tends to form a stronger image. However, in both cases, there are affective and kinesthetic dimensions to how the analog is apprehended by consciousness. The affective dimension “makes present the object in its deep nature (*Imaginary* 81).” It is our intention toward the object, our fundamental feelings and relations with it. But an imaginary object cannot exist without the kinesthetic element. Even if one relies solely on a mental image as the *analogon*, there is still movement involved: movement of the eyes, a tilt of the head, a small twitch of the fingers. Sartre describes a simple experiment: keep one’s gaze fixed on a page number in a book, and then imagine a moving swing. The eyes will move, even slightly, in order to constitute the image (*Imaginary* 81). The kinesthetic impression serves to “externalize” the image, giving it a kind of visual reality (Flynn 434-435).

Flynn further states that the kinesthetic impression is “superficial, a schematic, surface presence (Flynn 435).” The affective content, he and Sartre say, is synthesized with the kinesthetic in a “complete image.” The kinesthetic dimension is incomplete in and of itself; it is a “schematic” waiting to be decoded. This “schematic” is decoded into a complete image by synthesis with



knowledge (the cognitive element) and the affective dimension (the intention toward the object).

That is not to say that the movement predates the image: the movement, knowledge, and intention synthesize at the same time. But movement without knowledge or intention does not create the presence of the imaginary object. Nevertheless, the kinesthetic dimension of the imaging process is so essential that even small, absent, half-aware movements may trigger an imaging consciousness anyway. I may run my hand through my hair as I think, and the act of doing so may create a surface presence of something imaginary: a windy day at the beach, the feel of a loved one stroking my head, etc. Even though I may not have desired to conjure up these images, the act of movement may be enough to call them up – at least in a superficial way.

In fact, Sartre makes the point that when an image is recalled from memory, it is primarily constituted by kinesthetic impressions. A subject is asked to recall the painting, "Soldiers Returning from the Crimean War" and does so by recalling the image in kinesthetic terms: "I mainly reconstructed it in accordance with the movement of the lines" (*Imaginary* 82). Memory is recalled by movement; movement can call up memory, and memory is a form of knowledge which is a part of the imaging synthesis. Thus, movement and the image are linked. The image is a synthesis, but it is a spontaneous synthesis: movement, intention, and knowledge unite all at once to create the image (*Imaginary* 134).

### Training the Imagination

So it would be fair to say that all physical theatrical forms – dance, mime, even to some extent more traditional realism – have elements of the imaginary within them. All of these forms rely on physical choices to express the text of the performance, and thus all have the ability to activate the imaging consciousness in those who receive the text. This includes audiences who observe the performance, and actors who enact it. Mask work is no exception – in fact, many mask practitioners and theorists understand that an actor wearing a mask must rely on his or her body for expressivity since he or she can no longer rely on facial expression. In turn, this attention to the use of the body activates the imagination of the actor, playing with the “zone of semi-darkness” that Sartre described as explored in Chapter 1. That is, by having students/actors *move* – especially in ways to which they are unaccustomed – the mask teachers hope the students will find their imaginations activated through movement. Every movement has the potential to connect to a bit of knowledge which, if the actor further engages, can create new imaginary objects spontaneously.

Libby Appel is a mask teacher who sees a connection between masks, movement, and spontaneity in masked character creation. Appel recognizes that working with masks can stimulate a link between the body and the imagination in the consciousness of the actor. She states that working with masks results in

*stimulating the imagination, putting greater emphasis on physical actions, acting with the whole body, and ridding the actor of self-conscious mannerisms. (xii)*

Sartre would say this link between the physical and the imaginary already exists. Appel's training, then, is teaching the actor to allow the spontaneity of the movement in the mask work to trigger the imagination uncensored. By encouraging movement, Appel encourages the imaginary state as well. But more than just movement work alone, Appel chooses to use masks because they are the "perfect tool" for an actor (xiv). "Because of the tremendous safety behind the mask, the use of [the mask] impels the actor to create [a complete, fully dimensional] character (xii-xiv)." The idea of the mask as a means of circumventing fear in identity creation will be explored more in depth in a later chapter. However, it is clear from the nearly exclusive focus on the *physical* dimension in her methods that Appel finds the mask as a tool to liberate her students *physically*.

The results Appel cites above – a stimulated imagination, acting with the whole body, etc. – are a common theme among mask teachers. Appel's exercises are all very physical in nature, determined to make the actor step outside of his or her physical comfort zone. Her exercises are designed to simultaneously strip away "old personal limitations" and "create new layers of experience" (4). By using their bodies in different ways, Appel believes the actors will experience new imaginary connections. The actors, forced to move in ways with which they

are unfamiliar, find new images given to them – images which existed there all along, but with which they were not reflectively aware.

For example, Appel has actors explore a stage space while masked. The stage is set with ordinary objects: chairs, rehearsal cubes, simple props, etc. As the actors move about the space, she encourages them to “explore objects with other parts of your bodies besides your hands,” to move more quickly or more slowly than usual, to “hop, roll, or jump” to travel from one place to another, to approach objects in different directions, such as sideways or backwards. She concludes her list of sidecoaching suggestions for this exercise with the exhortation to the actors, “Keep your mind on your action!” (23). It is the act, not the thought, which is important. Appel’s exercise forces participants to move beyond their usual modes of movement. Exploring a broom with one’s hands can lead to familiar associations with the broom, such as what a broom is “for” or how it is to be held. But exploring a broom with one’s shoulder is a different experience. The exploration turns the experience of exploration into something unfamiliar. By doing so, the actor relies less on her own ideas about the physical nature of “exploration” and “broom,” and more on the immediate sensation of movement. It is not important that the broom be identified and used as a broom, but rather, that the actor’s body is used in ways that will activate his imagination.

Appel believes movement is the key for this opening of the imagination.

She writes:

*The involvement in the activities is a physical and sensory one; it is not an intellectual process... When the actor keeps moving, regardless of sore muscles or perspiration, there is no time or inclination to keep up or manipulate physical defenses. He truly gets past thinking. His body will submit to the image and take the risk with the movement, and he will suddenly find himself believing and doing things he has never considered before (25).*

In this way, the actors undergoing Appel's exercises almost seem to be *forced* into a connection with the imagination. By making strong and unusual physical choices, Appel believes the actors cannot help but discover new characterizations out of their own imaging consciousnesses.

Further, these imaginary impulses which can generate characterizations can result in fully-developed personages. Appel's ultimate aim is to have the actors experience new personae from their work with the mask and movement.

She writes:

*[the] mask characterization process, akin to the role creation for a play, is a long journey in and out of the imagination to create a whole person, discovering and refining the behavior of that person in countless situations and periods of his life (4).*

Thus, for Appel, it is the engagement of the imagination over and over that creates the new personage, and for Appel, such engagement is primarily a *physical* one. Movement, while not the sole component to masked character creation, is essential. The use of masks in character creation will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. But Appel clearly sees movement as fundamental to mask work, and it is through movement that the "link" to the imagination is

stimulated. The imagination is engaged through movement; without movement, there is no imagination.

Improvisation and mask teacher Keith Johnstone also recognizes the importance of movement in character creation. Johnstone, in his work *Impro*, spends an entire chapter discussing the nature of “status.” Johnstone does not, here, refer to social or economic status, but rather “status” is a physical dimension that human beings employ prereflectively to establish a kind of “pecking order” with others. Status is a physical choice which employs variations of posture and eye contact. It is a kind of physical behavior and can be used with masked performance or without it. For instance, “high status” bodies stand erect, with the vulnerable parts of the body exposed, and high-status people tend to make direct eye contact. “Low status” bodies, on the other hand, tend to be hunched, shifting, arms crossed, protecting the vulnerable parts of the body, and low-status people tend to use sporadic eye contact. Johnstone’s status is not something one *is*, but rather, something one *does* (36). That is, status is *performed* and not a result of any particular accident of birth, wealth, position, or title. Johnstone also acknowledges that one can demonstrate higher or lower status – from a pecking order standpoint – through dialog, but as he points out, it is important to remember that there is a difference between the status you *play* and the status you *are*. That is, someone of a low *social* status could still have a high *physical* status. Thus, it is possible to have master/servant scenes with a

*physically* low status master and high status servant – often to great comic effect (36).

By choosing a particular “status” for a character, an actor can use the physicality of Johnstone’s status to create a character spontaneously. Johnstone points out that people usually have a “preferred” status they play in their everyday lives. He argues that status is a kind of “defense,” a way of protecting yourself, either by giving off non-verbal signals that read as “Don’t come near me, I bite,” (high status) or “Don’t bite me, I’m not worth the trouble,” (low status) (43). A person is likely to find a particular status that “works” as a defense and to become specialized in playing that status. The end result of this for actors is that when called upon to play a different status than what one is specialized in, the actor feels “wrong” or “undefended” (43). It is a “block” for the actors, a “boundary around the imagination” that Appel wrote about, above. The actor’s sense of security and self is tied up in his or her *body*.

By altering one’s status, one begins to feel “different.” But status is not the only physical change which an actor can undergo to create a new sense of personage. Johnstone’s dimension of status can be used with other physical choices – such as movement center, kinesphere size, and Laban qualities of movement – to sculpt new “bodies” which seem to have sketches of new “personae” in them.

The movement center is the place in the body where the individual’s movement has its root, where the lines of movement converge and radiate from,

where the impulse to move begins. Place the movement center in one's chest, and the body seems to be pulled forward from the torso, shoulders back and square, the body erect. Place the movement center in the feet, and the body seems to shuffle, to lean backwards through space, the energy falling downward toward the ground through the legs.

One can also change one's kinesphere size, or "intensity". The kinesphere is the amount of space that a person "takes up." This not only includes their physical body, but the space around them that they claim. A person with great intensity seems to take up a great deal of space around them. A person with a small kinesphere takes up little space. Physical energy, intensity, and speed all play a role in a person's kinesphere.

Likewise, one can change Laban qualities of movement in one's own body. The Laban qualities of movement effort were developed by Rudolf Laban and his students as a way to analyze dance. These qualities include dyads along scales of time (movements that are sudden or sustained), weight (movements that are light or heavy), direction (movements that are direct or indirect), and flow (movements that are free or restrained) ("*Laban Movement Analysis*" *Wikipedia*).

What we see through all of these physical dimensions is that as an actor makes a choice to alter her physicality, she begins to alter the familiar, "comfortable" choices she makes on a day-to-day basis and feels "different." The various physical changes activate the imaging consciousness and suggest new



patterns of behavior, new ways of interacting with the world, new feelings, all of which emerge spontaneously. By simply *moving* differently, the actor discovers a new personage – at least, the sketch of one.

I have used these various physical techniques with students in acting classes. For example, instruct an actor to move “with high status, high intensity, center in your chest, with sustained, light, and direct effort,” and the actor creates a new body that moves through space. A different set of instructions produces a different body. Usually, the actor reports that he “felt” different in the new body, with “hints” of a new characterization implicit in the movement choices. He didn’t have to “think up” the characterization, but the movement itself created the sense of characterization. Because the imaginative process is spontaneous, the characterization emerged spontaneously. This also shows us that at least on a superficial level, who we are, how we feel, how we relate to the world is a product of how we *move* within it.

What is at work here is the relationship between the kinesthetic dimension of the imaginary process and the content of the characterization. As one alters one’s own body, one begins to feel “suggestions” or “sketches” of new characterization – the “surface presences” that Flynn discussed above. As the actor alters her body, she engages with the “zone of semi-darkness” until the movement affixes on a piece of knowledge, and an image is created: this person is lazy, depressed, imperious, or wild. In practice, Appel and Johnstone encourage their students to further engage with the “sketches” or “surface

presences” to create full characterizations. Ultimately, this is an imaginary process.

The image is given at the same time the movement is given. Because the image is a spontaneous synthesis of movement, knowledge, and intention, the use of movement alone is a way to activate the imaginary consciousness. Of course, it is possible for a movement to have little meaning for an actor. Perhaps the particular actor does not have any strong knowledge or intention associated with a particular movement. In this case, the image formed may be weak or the imaging consciousness may not form at all. But overall, movement is essential to the imaginary process. There can be no image without movement. Because we apprehend much of the world imaginatively, movement plays a far greater part in how we understand the world than is often believed. For the actor, characterization need not be about intellectual or psychological analysis: characterization can be physical in nature. The relationship between physicality and character creation will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter. For now, let us remember that changes in movement can lead to changes in identity.

### Masks and Movement

Of course, the introduction of masks to the work adds a new dimension to the process. Masks provide a “sensible residue” to the analogon of the characterization. Certainly making physical choices alone can provide a link to the imaginary with the movement externalizing the visual image; however,

adding a concrete *analogon*, such as a mask, causes the external quality of the image to be heightened (Flynn 435). Sartre states that consciousness expects visual elements. Movement itself can become an analog for visual form: not visual sense, but visual *sensation* (*Imaginary* 77). But the addition of the mask, and its reflection in the mirror or the contemplation of its face by the actor, adds a visual sense to the *analogon* of the actor's body in motion. By unifying visual sensation and movement, the image pointed to by the *analogon* is stronger. The actor moves and the movements join with the image of the face presented in the mask. As a result, the mask presents a place where the movements can find a stronger external connection. When an actor stoops his shoulders forward, he may "feel" the sketch of a depressed person. Place a mask with a sad expression on his face, and now the "feel" of the stooped shoulders unites with an *analogon* that points to a "sad" personage. The image of the "depressed person" becomes stronger through this synthesis.

This unity between mask and body is often seen as essential to effective masking. In his mask work, Sears Eldredge uses the term "bodymind." It is a term for "speaking holistically about the unity of the physical, the emotional, the mental, and the psychological within the individual" (Eldredge 26). For Eldredge, the masking process is one of changing the bodymind. The body of the actor must be brought into "harmony" with that of the face of the mask; that is, the new face and new body must seem to "belong" together.

One of the first exercises that Eldredge has his students perform is “contemplation” of the mask. The actor, working alone, holds the mask before her and studies the face. She tilts it this way and that, animating it much like one might a puppet. “As they manipulate the mask,” Eldredge writes, “they should let the masks activate their imaginations, letting the masks come alive in their hands. They must be open to letting their imaginations play with all the sensory impressions” (44). Eldredge sees this process of contemplation as the actor seeking out life in the image of the mask, a sense of expressivity or personality within the “global impression” of the face before the actor. In this way, Eldredge begins to turn the mask from artifact into an *analogon* for a character in the consciousness of his actors. But what is important to note here is that the actor *moves* the mask while contemplating it in order to find its “life.” It is only through animation that a mask begins to take on the role of *analogon*, to lose its own sense and take on another.

Eldredge later has his students place the mask on their faces and look at themselves in a mirror. He wants the actors to discover their new reflection and to “let the shock of that discovery affect their bodyminds” (45). He encourages his actors to find a new way of breathing, moving, gesturing in a way that suits the mask. Again, we see here that the imagination of the actor is activated by movement—but it is not merely any movement. It is a search for movement which unites with the *analogon* of the mask.

Mask characterization comes not from psychological study, but rather from spontaneous movement in finding the “harmony” of the mask with the body. By looking at the mask, the actor spontaneously generates knowledge about the personage the mask represents. Even if she has never seen the mask before, the actor will still have some small ideas about who the mask represents, and these ideas form the knowledge component of the imaging synthesis. Sartre would say that the “harmony” Eldredge writes about is where the actor’s movements “fix” on a bit of that knowledge. If the movements and face “suit” each other, then the imaging consciousness is born. The actor will feel a kind of “unity” or “rightness” about face and body together. The bodymind will have changed through the imaginative process. If the movements an actor makes do not connect with any piece of knowledge or intention within her, then she will not form the imagining consciousness. The actor will feel uncertain, awkward, artificial, or false. The characterization “isn’t right” because the actor lacks a strong image to connect with. This “rightness” or “falseness” is tested in movement.

Character creation with masks, then, is about play: an engagement between the body and the face until the knowledge, intention, and *analogon* synthesize into an image. The image is, as stated before, an act attempting to make something absent as present so it can be possessed. Jacques LeCoq, mime and mask teacher, found this play to be essential in theatre. He writes, “For me, mime is central to theatre: being able to play at being someone else and

summoning illusory presences constitutes the very body of the theatre” (21). The way an actor summons these presences is through the use of the body to create a “universal poetic sense” (46) – paring away all that is physically non-essential to expression. It is not enough that an actor identify psychologically with his character. She must also “play” physically with the character, engaging her body and also, Sartre would say, her imaginary process. The concept of a “universal poetic sense” is problematic, but what is important is that LeCoq identifies clearly that in order to summon these presences, the actor must *physically* – not necessarily psychologically -- remove those excess traces of herself which do not belong.

For example, an exercise that LeCoq has his mime students perform involves responding to colors through movement, expressing the internal qualities of movement the student feels and associates with a particular color.

LeCoq observes:

*When the students are performing this kind of exercise I am particularly attentive to the quality of their movements. I can tell whether the movements arise from their own bodies, or from an external image, a sort of picture postcard which they are trying to illustrate, or again if they are doing a symbolic movement, giving an external representation of the color they are trying to describe to us. These movements have to be pruned and digressions restrained, so that the students may be taken gradually deeper into the body, closer to the true color (47-48).*

Leaving aside for the moment LeCoq's assertion that there is a "true" color that can be reached,\* we see that LeCoq is seeking to eliminate symbolic and illustrative movements and instead find "essential" movements. These "digressive" movements that LeCoq seeks to restrain are the result of the actor's *interpretation* of the color in the exercise. LeCoq understands that interpretation does not produce essence: it *shows* rather than *is*. LeCoq does not want his students to show "red" or "blue." He wants the qualities of "red" or "blue" to be made present in their bodies. Anything that does not belong – physically – interferes with making the presence of the qualities appear, be they intentional illustrations or unconscious mannerisms brought forth by the actor.

LeCoq's training technique acknowledges that there are historical forms that actors may know and have ideas about, and that an actor will bring something of those ideas to his performance. For instance, LeCoq does train actors in *pantomime blanche*, clowning, Commedia dell'Arte, etc. But LeCoq makes it very clear that whatever ideas actors have about these styles must be minimized.

*... there is always a danger that students will rely on the cultural references which comes with these dramatic territories... Beyond styles or genres, we seek to discover the motors of play which are at work in each territory, so that it may inspire creative work (LeCoq, 98).*

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\* LeCoq's belief in the "universal poetic sense" stems from his idea that all human beings have a common, shared experience with light, color, shapes, etc. Somewhat glibly, he dismisses the possibility of different understandings of these experiences: "Aside from differences of symbolism, everywhere in the world, the poetic sense is the same: blue is Blue!" (47). The essential problems with such a view and how LeCoq's view affects mask work will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter.

Again, LeCoq reinforces that it is not intellectual thought, but an understanding of physical play that creates meaning within the imagination of the student.

Whatever an actor believes about Commedia dell'Arte, for instance, is less important than understanding how to play physically within the territory of Commedia.

The term “motor” (in French: *moteur*) frequently arises in LeCoq’s work. It refers to the “dynamic principles underlying dramatic representation” (LeCoq, 166). It is an understanding of movement, scale, and motivation. LeCoq seeks to teach his students the fundamental “motor” of a situation, that which drives it. Unlike more traditional realism concepts such as psychological motivations, such motors are expressed *physically*. There is a rhythm to them, an intensity, and a scale. A particular scene might have a motor that could be described as slow, smooth, and quiet, while another might be rapid and exaggerated, with lots of vertical movement. For example, in the territory of everyday life, if a person is afraid, he may draw back; but in the territory of Commedia, if Arlecchino is afraid, he may hide under the carpet (LeCoq, 34). In the territory of Commedia, fear is not expressed by merely drawing back, but by large expressions of movement. The motor of the Commedia territory is different than the motor of everyday life. As a teaching technique, after an initial exercise, LeCoq and his students:

*... return to a stripped down version of the exercise. Ignoring its anecdotal interest, we turn the theme inside-out in order to discover the motor which drives it. In this way, other themes, images, situations, characters are introduced (33).*



Instead of trying to give the students a psychological background or identifying image around which to frame the exercise, LeCoq simply tries to find the dynamic structure of the scene as expressed through movement. The scene's physical dimensions form the frame of the scene. Once the actors begin to understand this motor and move within its framework, then their own imaginations will provide the new themes, images, and situations. "Reduced to this motor, psychological themes lose their anecdotal elements and reach a status of heightened play" (33). The body is the center of how the motor is expressed, and also the primary means of developing character, story, and mood.

It is in the play of movement that characterization and presence appear – not just any play, but movement which is essential and expressive. "My method aims to promote the emergence of a theatre where the actor is playful. It is a theatre of movement, but above all a theatre of the imagination" (LeCoq, 98). Clearly, LeCoq understands that movement and the imagination are linked. But for LeCoq, training the actor is not about merely activating this link, but seeking to find the *specific* movements which "work" with the imaginary concepts or personages attempting to be made present. With masks, the personages are constructed imaginatively, with the masks serving as *analogon* for the personage and movement as a means of discovering the details of the personage in harmony with the mask.

But more than simply relying on movement technique, LeCoq also finds masks are essential tools for creating an expressive body. He writes about character masks:

*The expressive mask shows a character in broad outlines. It structures and simplifies the playing style by delegating to the body the job of expressing attitudes. It purifies the performance, filtering out the complexities of psychological viewpoint and imposing pilot attitudes on the whole body (53).*

LeCoq's pilot attitudes form a "basic structure (53)," another frame around the performance. The mask's image dictates a certain attitude or personality and imposes these attitudes in the performance in a physical way. It is difficult to agree with LeCoq here that merely donning a mask automatically produces these results; there is a process to masking. But the "delegating" of "pilot attitudes" is another way of saying that the masker seeks harmony between the body and the mask. For LeCoq, expressive masks are a means to help point the actor in the right direction (i.e. "pilot" him) towards this harmony and eliminate all that does not belong. Like movement can serve as a surface presence of an image, so can a mask serve as a basic structure of a character, expressed physically. What is most notable about LeCoq's works examined above is his disinterest in the psychological elements of character creation. While he never outright dismisses psychology as part of the characterization process, for LeCoq, characters are expressed physically. This will become more important in Chapter 6, when we will discuss mask characterization in greater depth. However, for LeCoq, at least,

the physical dimension of character creation is enough for the actor to make present the personage she seeks.

### Subject and Situation

Indeed, for Sartre, the body is at the center of our consciousness; rather, the body and its relations to the world are the place where our consciousness is formed. Hourantier asserts that "the body is the locus in space where all planes of existence converge and all lived experiences are structured and registered" (135). But it is not a separate thing from consciousness. Sartre writes:

*I exist my body and know it through the world that encircles it... I am neither in my body nor at the back of it, nor am I my body, but neither am I something other than it – I exist it (Notebooks on an Ethics, 316).*

A pure consciousness cannot exist in the world; it would be "nowhere." But our bodies and perceptions always exist in "situation," in relation to the world around us. To say we "exist" our bodies is a way to say that our bodies are largely transparent (Mirvish, 416). Thus, there is a constant relationship between the subject – the consciousness-in-body – and the situation surrounding the subject. The subject is a particular consciousness and the situation is the environment, circumstances, and other objects in the world – real or imagined – that the subject encounters. But it is important to remember that the subject can *only* exist in a physical body. Thus, the subject experiences the situation through the body.

For the mask theorists discussed in this chapter, the exercises suggest a change in “situation.” The exercises suggest a change in the way that the subject—a particular consciousness—must deal with the world. But the introduction of the mask as *analogon* invites a change of *subject* as well. Because the subject must understand the world through his body, there is a direct relationship between the body and the world. The play of mask work is not only about playing with the physical form and imaginary impressions that alight on meanings, but playing with the very relationship between subject and situation. Our understanding of the world is not merely fixed in our attitudes, but understood through our particular physical form. Change the form, and change how we understand the world, from very small ways to large ones.

A good example is seen in one of Libby Appel’s exercises is “Riding a Subway Train.” In this exercise, the students, masked and in bodies appropriate to the mask, receive a series of instructions which involve waiting for a subway train to arrive, boarding it, then riding it through various usual and unusual situations (Appel 62-63). Most students have likely had to wait for a subway train before, or at least have waited for something in their lives. But the notion of “waiting” is tied up in the body. How one experiences waiting is determined through the body-subject. If one is late for an important appointment, one may pace, look repeatedly down the track, clench one’s fists, tap one’s foot, or sigh in frustration. But Sartre would say these movements are not a *result* of the impatience. They *are* the impatience (*Imaginary* 134).

The “situation” one finds oneself in – in a subway station, late, waiting – is experienced through a particular body. Two people tapping their feet would still have different experiences – their particular bodies would dictate different rhythms, intensities, variations, secondary gestures; even height and weight would have an effect. The movements of one particular body, a particular bit of knowledge, and a particular intention toward the objects of experience unite as one to constitute a particular world. Change one of these dimensions, and the world changes.

In a different body, the masked actor in Appel’s exercise finds herself in a familiar situation but with a different body-subject. Her center is different, her movements have radically different effort, and she may have a totally opposite status than she is used to. The body-subject with which she is experiencing the situation is different. The situation cannot be understood in the same way. But if she gives herself over to the imaginary process, allows her bodymind to change to fit the mask, then she need not “think about” how “her mask” would deal with the problem of waiting for a subway train. Because she has altered her body, she has already activated the imagination and experiences the situation of “waiting” in a totally new way. The new body changes how the situation is experienced for her. This is the play of mask acting. The actor changes the body and instantly changes the relationship between subject and situation.

Once again, we see how the physical body is integral to our consciousness. The subject – our sense of self, our identity, our consciousness – cannot be

separated from the body through which it understands the world. As we move, we activate our imagination, and in turn our imaginations create the world for us.

When one speaks of a mask being “animated,” then, one is speaking of bringing the mask into motion in order to activate the imaginary state. Ron J. Popenhagen states that a mask must be “activated” by a trained actor. This activation requires specific movement choices that suit the mask, but the end result is “neither a fully human body nor a fully constructed form” (68). He also discusses how when one wears a mask, one inhabits a “partial body” atop ones own. The mask is animated from within, like a hand puppet, not at a distance, like a marionette (68). Thus, even though the aim of much mask work is the alteration of the body, the actor must still experience these alterations in his or her own body. The play of mask acting is play, but it is *fundamental* play. By altering the body, the actor is altering the very subject by which he or she understands the world.

### Sartre’s Suppositions on Movement and the Image

Sartre in *The Imaginary* has four suppositions about the relationship between movement and the image. These suppositions have specific ramifications for mask work. They are:

1. *A succession of kinesthetic (or tactile) impressions can function as an analogon for a succession of visual impressions.*

2. *A movement (given as a kinesthetic series) can function as an analogon for the trajectory that the moving body describes or is supposed to describe, which means that a kinesthetic series can function as an analogical substitute for a visual form.*
3. *A very small phase of the movement (for example, a very slight muscular contraction) can suffice to represent the entire movement.*
4. *The muscle that contracts is not always the one that would come into play if the intended movement as imaged had really occurred (80).*

Sartre uses Supposition 1 as an explanation of how a blindfolded person can “see” shapes drawn on his palm with a finger. He “sees” the letter Z as it is traced on his skin. This is because the consciousness apprehending the image through touch has a more imaging quality, and less a perceptual one (*Imaginary* 77). But this supposition has ramifications for mask work as well. An actor placing the mask on his face is given tactile sensations as well as visual ones. The lines of sight change because the eyeholes restrict viewing. Breathing is altered. The mask makes contact with the skin at various places. Further, as the actor plays with his posture, effort, and center, the body experiences tactile changes within itself. The actor “feels” different. The body is weighted differently, balance is off, there may be limbs that twist or cling in ways the actor is not used to. All of these tactile impressions contribute to the forming of the *analogon* for the actor. The play of the masking actor can create the visual impression of the character in the imagination of the actor himself. The use of a mirror will make the visual image stronger, but the act of masking and changing the body alone is enough to serve.

Sartre uses Supposition 2 – that a series of movements and their trajectories can substitute for a visual *analogon* – to explain how one may draw a figure 8 in the air with one’s finger and have the movement be understood to be representative of “8” when there is no physical analog present. This is possible because the consciousness that apprehends movement is an imaging consciousness (*Imaginary* 80). It is a consciousness that processes protentions – predictions and expectations about where a movement is going – and retentions – retained impressions of where the movement has been – in order to synthesize them with knowledge and intention to create an image (*Imaginary* 75)\*. As before, movement becomes the *analogon* for form. The trajectories described by my finger become manifest in my imagination as the figure 8.

In the case of the masked actor, Supposition 2 demonstrates how the movements of the body can create trajectories of form in characterization. Let us take as an example a masked performance by Michael Hickey of Atlanta-based Gateway Performance Productions known as “The Hawk.” In this performance, Hickey portrays two characters: a hunter, and a hawk. Rather than switching masks, Hickey has a two-part mask which depicts the hunter’s face on the front, over Hickey’s face, and the face of a hawk on top, forming a helmet over the hunter’s face. The practical upshot of this design is that when Hickey bends forward at the waist, the face of the hunter is minimized and the face of the hawk

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\* Sartre borrowed the terms “Protentions” and “Retentions” from Husserl’s *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*.



becomes the focus. In addition to this, while performing Hickey carries a pair of wings. Held together, Hickey endows them with the quality of being a bow which the hunter uses to shoot at the hawk. Held apart and to the side, they become wings again.

In performance, Hickey bends forward to allow the Hawk's face to be on the visual plane with the audience. He extends his arms, holding the wings, and beats them downward as a bird in flight. He then seems to "coast" through the air. The tips of the wings seem to ripple in the breeze, though in actuality the effect is created by movements of his hands. Hickey's animation of the wings, his body, the mask, all create a sense of trajectory, a movement that stands in for the form of a hawk. Hickey selects a particular series of movements, and in accurately performing them, the presence of the hawk is brought to the stage. Just as an inaccurately sketched figure 8 would not create the presence of the figure 8, so precision and accuracy in movement is necessary if the trajectories of the movements are to bring forth the presence of the personage. While a mask is not required for this supposition to be effective, again, the mask heightens the external quality of the image. The mask, the wings, and the movement all synthesize to create a stronger presence of the hawk than would the absence of the objects with "physical residue." This supposition shows how movements point to something larger, something moving beyond the mundane objects of wooden mask and stage. This something larger is the image made manifest through the imaginary process and made stronger by the mask.

Supposition 3 – how a very small movement can represent a larger one – is best illustrated by the following example: Someone asks me where Jean is. In response, I make a small, quick, pointing movement with my finger over my shoulder in Jean’s general direction. I could have turned fully about and pointed exactly to Jean’s location. Instead, I use the “shortcut” gesture with a finger. But the finger gesture is understood to be a part of the entire arc of turning and pointing. The person observing me will not look exactly at where my finger was pointing, but understand that the gesture is representative of a larger arc of movement. The small movement is enough to represent the larger one.

If, instead of pointing with my finger, I tilt my head and give a little nod in Jean’s direction, then I have illustrated Supposition 4: that a part of the body can be used to express movements normally be expressed by a different part. In this case, the head movement stands in for the pointing gesture which would normally be accomplished with the arm and fingers.

For the masked actor, these last two Suppositions allow the actor to find characterization in the body through even the smallest of movements. A slight turn of a shoulder can suggest an entire arc of movement, which can, in turn, suggest a personality in the imaginative consciousness of the actor. The actor may see a drooping brow in the mask, which may prompt her to bow her head, which may, in turn, drop her movement center from her chest to her waist. The play of mask acting need not be writ large in the body. Even small movements can serve to create imaginative changes because the small movements suggest

larger patterns, even in parts of the body which are not immediately associated with the original movement intention. As stated above, such changes need not involve masks, but the mask, as *analogon*, serves to complete the imaginary process in a stronger, more externalized, way.

### Conclusion

Movement is essential to mask work. This is because mask work is imaginative work. By engaging the body, the actor engages his imagination. The mask forms a “sensible residue,” an *analogon* which heightens the external quality of this image. The actor then plays with his body-subject and within the exercises as situation in order to find the “harmony” of body and mask-face. It is in the play that masked characterization occurs. It is an imaginary process requiring movement. But more than merely being a part of the imaginative process, we see that movement is an integral part of how we, as human beings, understand the world and constitute it to ourselves.

As Sartre said, perception is necessarily incomplete. Imagination is total. It is an imaginative act to animate one’s body in a new way because we cannot completely perceive our own bodies. The bodies we inhabit, the “body-subjects,” are constituted to consciousness in an imaginary way. The totality of “me” as a body is an imaginary object. As stated in Chapter 1, Sartre believed that “identity” is indeterminate and ultimately an imaginary act (our “project” of ourselves); therefore, changes in physicality can lead to changes in identity – at

least “sketches” of new identities. Movement is part of the imaginary process, even the imaginary object which is our body-subjects.

We experience the world as subject, be we are also part of this world. Our sense of identity cannot be separated from our physical existence. Physicality, then, is part of identity; identity does not exist merely “in our heads.” In the case of mask acting, the changes in physicality which are essential to the masking process act upon this relationship. Change our faces, change our bodies, and we change ourselves.

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### Chapter 3 - Trance and the Imaginary

Many cultures often claim that masks have a kind of transformational power over those who wear them. John Emigh describes how in some Orissan performances of *Prahlada Nataka* he witnessed, actors wearing masks became so violently “possessed” by the spirits of the masks they wore that they had to be restrained and their masks removed before the performance could continue (Emigh, 60). He goes on to describe how in a performance of the Balinese *Barong Ket*, the traditional story of the performance is disrupted when the masks went “off script” and spontaneously rewrote the narrative so that Rangda, the evil witch, was the victor where she was not before. Those who witnessed the performance shrugged it off. “The Barong and Rangda needed to dance,” they said, speaking of the entities represented by the masks worn in the performance (Emigh, 64-66).

Emigh’s observations are not unique. The idea of “possession” by masks exists in many cultures. Even in American culture, the film *The Mask* starring Jim Carrey echoes the belief that masks have the “power” to transform. In the film, Carrey’s character transforms from a shy nebbish to a wildly flamboyant

supernatural entity when he puts on the mask, and even has to struggle at times to remove the mask to restore his original sense of self.

Not all cultures associate the supernatural with masks, but many do believe that the masks are conduits to spiritual beings. The wearer of the mask, for the duration of the performance, is no longer himself but *becomes* the other being. As an example, for the Hopi and Zuni nations the Kachina dancers are not pretending to be the Kachinas or imitating them; they *are* the Kachinas. Of course, this notion of “being” can be viewed in different ways. But by contrast, the *commedia dell’arte* tradition of masking generally views their masks as representing social “types” that are the subject of parody and ridicule. However, even an actor playing Pantalone of the *commedia* may report that when engaged with the mask, he finds that the mask informs his choices as much as he chooses them. The mask can be a source of imaginative inspiration rather than an object that obliterates and replaces identity. A performance can emerge from the actor’s engagement with the mask without the actor having active “control” over the performance. So, while the understanding of transformation can be different from mask culture to mask culture, common to most is a state of some loss of control, surrender of identity, or spontaneous, prereflective inspiration which comes from the masking process.

Called “possession” or “visitation” by some, this state—a “trance” state—appears frequently in modern mask acting literature. The authors describe in various degrees how a mask may seem to “take over” the body of the actor.



Often the actor seems to lose conscious control over the performance. Other times, the actor, once unmasked, has hazy or no memories of his or her actions while wearing the mask. That is not to say that working in masks always produces a trance state; however, it is generally acknowledged that when working with masks, trance states *may* occur.

What is it about mask work, then, that seem to have trance states associated with them? We have already explored how movement and masks work together to activate the imagination of the actor. Trance states, likewise, are *imaginary* states. They are states of consciousness where the actor surrenders some of her “being-in-the-world” and instead operates out of the spontaneous synthesis of her imagination. Terms such as “trance,” “possession,” and “visitation,” are admittedly loaded ones. But in truth, trance is nothing more than a basic operation of consciousness. We shall therefore keep the term “trance” because of its use in mask literature and to dispel some of the associations it carries.

In this chapter, we will examine the imaginary nature of trance states as they appear in the writings of Sears Eldredge, John Emigh, and Keith Johnstone. We will further discuss how trance states can be induced, created and maintained, and how these states are tied to masks and performance. What we will find is that trance in masked performance is a kind of imaginary state, a self-sustaining synthesis which uses the mask as a functional *analogon* to define an extended game of make-believe with identity. Such states are possible not only

because identity is constructed imaginatively, but also because the idea of “bad faith” in identity can be exploited to further these transformations.

### Bad Faith

The Sartrean concept of “bad faith” was briefly outlined in Chapter 1. Let us examine this concept in a little more detail, here, as a preface to the discussion. To act in bad faith is to act in deception of oneself, but to do so seemingly unaware of the deception. In truth, we may be *reflectively* unaware that we lie to ourselves, but we are very much aware of the lie *prereflectively*. Bad faith is the product of the basic ambiguity of consciousness that both “knows” and “does not know.” It “does not know” in that it is prereflectively aware of being satisfied with “insufficient evidence” but it “knows” is that despite this, it reflectively believes it as sufficient just the same (Santoni). This can apply to many facets of human consciousness, but frequently we may believe that we “are” brave or we “are not” socially adroit when, in fact, these qualities are not fixed in our natures, but are things we tell ourselves about ourselves. In fact, the very notion of an identity which is “absolute” is, in itself, an act of bad faith. I tell myself that I am who I am and have little choice in the matter; that I *am* this and I *am not* that. While I certainly do not have the freedom to change certain physiological particularities of myself, I *do* have the freedom to construct an identity in any way that I please, though I may not realize that it is so. My history, my choices, what I have been taught about the world by others, all of these things *may* have

an effect on me, but ultimately if they do it is because I *choose* to let them have an effect on me – even if I am reflectively unaware of the choice. I construct the sense of who I am based on what I believe I *should* be. This is because identity is constructed imaginatively, with my own intentions toward myself guiding the construction.

But bad faith is a common human condition for good reason. To acknowledge that one has complete freedom of identity is to also acknowledge complete *responsibility* for that identity. “And what is the goal of bad faith?” writes Sartre, “To cause me to be what I am, in the mode of ‘not being what one is,’ or not to be what I am in the mode of ‘being what one is.’ (*Being and Nothingness*, 110). Bad faith is a “game of mirrors” where we constantly, unaware, assign or remove qualities to ourselves to match our idea of what our “selves” are, and believe these qualities to be true instead of facing the reality that we *choose* these qualities.

Ultimately, Sartre wished for human beings to take full responsibility for themselves, to move beyond bad faith into a consciousness based on “candor” and “authenticity” (*Being and Nothingness*, 101). But such a goal is not necessarily useful for the performing actor. If the goal of the actor is to make present another being in the place where he or she stands, does that not, then, imply an absence of candor or authenticity on the part of the actor? One could say that the actor attempts to *deceive* the audience into believing he or she is a different person, but most actors would disagree. Acting as a process is not a conscious deception; it is

something else. As we will discuss later, despite this, the actor *can* find a way to behave *truthfully* in the fictional circumstances of the performance, and bad faith, then, instead of being a barrier to a candid consciousness, can be exploited as part of the acting process. In the case of mask acting, which is especially concerned with questions of identity, characterizations through bad faith can be remarkably transformative. For now, it is important to remember that bad faith is a part of the way that human beings create their sense of self, and, as such, play an important role in the actor's creation of other "selves" in performance.

### Trance as Dual Consciousness

Let us return to the notion of "trance" and its frequent appearance in masked performance. In his work with students and mask acting, Sears Eldredge talks about trance in mask work as a kind of dual consciousness; that is, the actor surrenders some of his ego to the character of the mask, allowing the spontaneity of that surrender to guide the actor's movements, actions, and speech. At the same time, the actor retains his or her own identity as an actor, although somewhat distanced or separated. (35) Eldredge discusses this separation using Yuasa Yasuo's terms of "bright consciousness" and "dark consciousness." The bright consciousness is equivalent to the reflective mind: one is aware that one is thinking. The dark consciousness is the prereflective mind. Thus, as Eldredge writes, "the spontaneous action of the character (the participant) operates out of the actor's 'dark consciousness' ... and the dark consciousness has been trained

by the 'bright consciousness' ... through the rehearsal process on what to do and say" (36).

Eldredge uses the example of driving a car. When one first learns to drive a car, that person must concentrate very carefully on everything he does. For the novice, driving a car is very much a reflective act: coordinating foot pedals, watching the road, the mirrors, signaling, remembering traffic laws, etc., all require the new driver's full attention. There is little else that the person can do but concentrate on driving itself. Eventually, however, with practice, the driver begins to learn to do these many tasks automatically without thinking of them. It is possible to even drive a long distance and, upon arrival, have little or no memory of actually traveling. In this case, the bright, reflective consciousness has trained the dark, prereflective consciousness to drive. The prereflective consciousness is not unaware. If there is a sudden change to the routine, the dark consciousness "will respond to danger *before* the bright consciousness, the reflective mind, can take control again" (Eldredge, 36). Eldredge continues:

*In making an analogy with acting, we can say that the actor's bodymind in performance (memorized dialog, the pattern of the character's mental, motivational, and physical activity, etc.) which has become scored, and therefore imprinted, through rehearsals, is like our habitual bodymind driving the car. The actor's spontaneous, in-the-moment awareness of the nuances of change – in fellow actors and the audience – is the flow of his trained subtextual bodymind response, which conditions how he responds at any moment (36).*

Thus, if we equate, as Eldredge does, the bright consciousness with the reflective mind and the dark consciousness with the prereflective mind, we see that dark

consciousness is the source of spontaneity, but that it can be taught to be spontaneous *within* the parameters of the performance. Tapping into the dark consciousness is essential for vibrant performances. In fact, for mask work, and arguably for the performance process as a whole, an actor that operates completely out of his bright consciousness will not be able to respond to the spontaneous flow of the performance. For a mask actor, acting purely in the reflective mode is acting while constantly thinking about acting. The actor's "critical voice" which comes from self-awareness serves to inhibit the performer (36). Such performances are flat: the mask is not animated. The actor is attempting to dictate what the mask should do and say in an effort to remain in control. In such a case, the actor is failing to engage with the *analogon* and his imagination; rather, he is reflectively demonstrating the personage of the mask. Rather than "becoming" the character, the actor demonstrates or, to use the term from acting theory, "indicates" the character. Indicating in acting is where an actor shows or demonstrates how her character feels or behaves, rather than acting on the feelings or behaviors as if they were authentic. Without a willingness to surrender to the spontaneous synthesis of the imagination, the mask is merely an ornament worn on the actor's face. On the other hand, if the mask is incorporated into the imaginative synthesis, then its features unite with the actor's body and the personage seems to come alive: not indicated, but *present*.

Eldredge also points out that going to the opposite extreme is also undesirable in masked performance. Those who reside only in the dark consciousness have lost touch with reality. An actor in this state has no connection to the audience, to her lines, her blocking. She becomes an actor out of control.

What is ideal, Eldredge concludes, is a balance between the two states. This is similar to the acting theories of Stanislavski, who sought to create in actors a “creative state of mind” which was a simultaneous state of discovery and control in the moment of the performance, where the actor uses “conscious technique to tap the unconscious” (Daw 18). Eldredge further specifies how the presence of the mask-as-personage affects the approach of the actor. The actor should:

*be able to move freely back and forth between his multiple layers of consciousness. In this state he can allow himself to be led by the character without being overly aware of his participant-self... Conversely, when the actor becomes so aware of the divided consciousness that it begins to solidify into a barrier between his Self and the mask's self, he must use his imagination and will to choose to enter the bodymind of the mask. He must let go of his Self and commit to the mask by attending to, and living in, the present and presences of his physical actions (37).*

This state of moving freely back and forth between layers of consciousness is, I believe, the essence of the “trance state.” Just as a trance may be when one drives a familiar road while caught up in other thoughts so that one has no memory of actually driving it, so too is this state of balance between “control” and “out-of-control” a trance (37). In this state, the actor is letting his imagination synthesize

spontaneously and continuously, yet he is attending to the requirements of performance.

Of particular interest is what Eldredge says about willing and choosing to enter the bodymind of the mask. This is important because it indicates that a mask does not have power over the actor that wears it, but that it is a *choice* to transform. Eldredge's point speaks to another essential element of masking and the trance state I wish to raise: belief. In order to bring about the trance state, the actor must be *willing* to engage with the *analogon* of the mask-character and further, must *believe*. That is, she must, to a greater or lesser degree, accept the *analogon* as a real object. As with all *analoga*, the actor is not deluded: she knows it is still a mask. But her willingness to engage with the mask represents her willingness to accept the character it represents in her imagination as a real, albeit absent, object.

Turning again to Jean-Paul Sartre's ideas of the imaginary, we find that the trance state as outlined by Eldredge is related to the imaging consciousness. Eldredge's characters come from a spontaneous synthesis of knowledge (created by the "compelling image" of the mask), movement (finding a body to suit the mask), and a commitment to the imaginative consciousness. Remember that Sartre said that while real and unreal\* objects have differences, they are both *objects* in every sense important to consciousness. The illusion of immanence tells us that we tend to treat imaginary objects as if they were real even when we

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\* Sartre's term for the realm of the imaginary.



know they are unreal: we ascribe the qualities of the real, but absent, object to the *analogon* which represents it. But in order for those qualities to appear, we must first *believe* that the *analogon* represents something authentic, though absent.

Thus, an actor can transform into the character in the mask if she believes in it.

### Making Belief

What is meant by belief in this context is a kind of “make-believe” that Kendall Walton wrote about. Walton distinguishes make-believe from pretense: the latter is deliberate and intentionally deceptive. Make-believe behavior is *true* inasmuch as it intersects and plays within the fictional world that is being pretended. It is not the behavior that is fictional, it is the unreal world. In fact, certain kinds of behaviors – Walton calls them games – are “authorized” for a particular work (*Fictional Entities*, 404). That is, given a particular context of a fictional world, certain elements such as props and mental images are allowed and thus can be used to produce truthful behavior in this fictional world. For instance, a child playing with a doll may play with the doll in the context of “caring for baby.” As such, the child holding the fake plastic bottle to the inert lips of the doll is, on the surface, engaging in a fictional act; however, for the child, the action is true because the act of feeding the baby is authorized for the context of the game. To use Sartrean terms, the prop of the doll and bottle are *analoga* for a real baby and real bottle, and the game of feeding the baby is an *analogon* for the real act. The child may have no practical experience feeding a

child, but has an *imaginary* understanding of the act. As such, within the context of the child's imagination, the behavior is authentic. Again, it must be pointed out that the child knows that the game is a game and not reality. But because the child plays within authorized bounds of the game, the child's behaviors are truthful. The child believes – or makes belief.

Within the game of “caring for baby,” the plastic baby bottle can be fictionally used in certain ways: it can be filled with (fictional) milk, cleaned, held to the baby's lips, etc. It would not be authentic for the bottle to suddenly launch itself into the air and zoom around the room. This is because the former behavior examples are authorized for the game, where the latter example is not. But if the child is, instead, playing a game of “flying to the moon” then the child may choose the vaguely rocket ship-shaped bottle as the *analogon* for a real rocket ship. In this case, the behavior of flying around the room becomes authorized, and it would not be authorized for the bottle to be filled with milk until the game was changed again. If many children participate in the game, each is expected to play within authorized ways. As Walton wrote, “Appreciators are expected to play games of kinds authorized for the works they appreciate and, when they participate verbally, to make it fictional of themselves in such games that they speak the truth” (*Fictional Entities*, 407). If one group of children believes the bottle is a bottle, and a second group believes the bottle is a rocket ship, then conflict may ensue. Thus, belief in a fictional situation is about behaving *truthfully* in imaginary circumstances: the imaginary circumstances dictate the

context in which the behavior is authorized. It should be little surprise that a common definition of dramatic acting is “living truthfully in imaginary circumstances” (Daw, 12). But where mask acting and traditional acting differ is that the presence of the mask has a specific function to make fictional the personage within the mask. Writes Walton:

*A Japanese brush painting of a flower may be interesting not (or not merely) because of what makes it fictional, but because of how it makes it fictional, because of the manner in which the brush strokes work to generate fictional truths. To see how they do is to regard them in a special way, and regarding them in this special way is an important part of one’s aesthetic experience of the painting. It is the function of pictures such as the Japanese painting to serve as props in games of make-believe (Metaphor and Prop Oriented Make-Believe, 84).*

Like the painting, the mask has a specific function in generating the fictional world of the play and personage. How the mask is constructed and animated adds meaning and context to the game of play-acting, authorizing certain kinds of behaviors and disallowing others. We will discuss the aesthetics of masks in more detail in a later chapter; however, it is important to understand that a particular mask authorizes certain sorts of character games. As such, if an actor plays within the games authorized by the mask, then she makes-believe the personage of the mask. Playing outside of the authority of the game, and the mask does not behave as it “should”, much like the baby bottle full of milk abruptly taking off and zooming around the room without a proper change of game.

Thus, belief, here, does not necessarily mean religious faith, nor does it mean that the object must exist in the real world. Even though the satyr of Greek myth does not exist, the *idea* of a satyr exists. If the actor can *believe* in the idea of the saytr through, as Eldredge wrote, the “present and presences” of the *analogon* of the mask, then a satyr mask can stand in for the fictional being. Whatever knowledge the actor has about the idea of a satyr synthesizes with the mask and the actors movements to make present the character of the satyr, provided the actor believes. This ability of transformation through belief applies to all fictional characters, human or otherwise. Trance is an act of belief and imagination: a sustained game of a particular sort of make-believe.

### The Play of Trance

However, some forms of make-believe are very reflective, where one is quite conscious of the play and intellectually chooses behaviors that fit the situation of the game. Most accounts of “trance” behavior describe an prereflective state. What, then is the difference between trance and make-believe? Let us examine how the imagination and the prereflective consciousness are related.

We know the image is born on the prereflective plane, out of the dark consciousness. But the attitude of consciousness between perception and imagination is not a one-or-the-other proposition. As discussed in Chapter 1, there is a continuum between the two. Even though Eldredge’s language tends

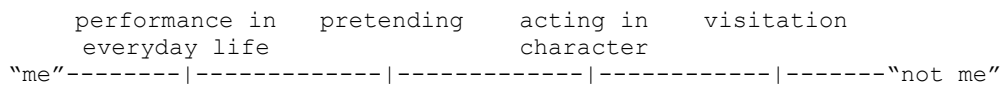
to suggest two “types” of consciousness, he states above that actors have “multiple layers of consciousness.” Sartre would say that there is only one consciousness, but there are differences in the attitude that consciousness takes. These attitudes are not layers, but rather, a continuum, a consciousness that takes different vantages to the object it apprehends with more or less perceptual or imaginary qualities. As the attitude of consciousness changes – moving along the continuum between perception and imagination – the subject surrenders some of his being-in-the-world. The dual-consciousness of trance, as Eldredge sees it, is less a “dual” consciousness, but a change in attitude from the real world of perception and an acceptance of the unreal world of the imaginary. Trance comes from the actor moving along the continuum away from perception and towards imagination. When Eldredge speaks of an actor being “between” the bright and dark consciousness, he speaks of an actor existing between reflective and prereflective states, between perception and imagination, to various degrees. This is significant because it is not *many* consciousnesses that we as humans possess (as implied by the “layers” terminology) but a single consciousness with different attitudes toward the world. We are capable of apprehending an object in many different ways. In fact, in order to constitute the object to us, we may play with it in various degrees of perception and imagination. The piano in my home is sometimes a piece of furniture on which I collect my mail; other times, it becomes a reminder of music lessons I took as a boy; another time I may evaluate it as a part of the color scheme of the room it is in; yet again, I may see it and

think of a song that used to move me and in turn ascribe the emotional feelings I have to that piano. Through all of these ways and many more, at different degrees of perception and imagination, do I make real the object that is “my piano.”

The trance state, then, is a kind of prereflective, spontaneous play: the actor plays with the *analogon* of the mask to create images with which he or she then engages. In Chapter 2, we discussed the playfulness of physicality in this process. But as discussed, relying on physicality alone merely creates “surface presences” in the imagination. These presences are only sketches of imaginary objects. In order to bring depth to these characterizations, the actor must *believe*. In this case, the play is the play of the willingness to accept the unreal as real, at least, on some level, which is further reinforced by the truthfulness of the behavior within the fictional situation.

John Emigh is a mask theorist who studied traditional Eastern mask cultures (unlike Eldredge who wrote primarily about modern Western mask improvisation). Emigh would say that the play of a masked actor is a two way process: the actor plays with the mask, but the mask also plays with the actor. This playfulness is a willingness to engage in illusion, to accept the image as perception (or, as Sartre would suggest, a willingness to accept the “pseudo-observation” of the imagination as true perception). For Emigh, trance occurs when illusion and perception invert – when a person plays with belief in the unreal to the point where it becomes real for a short time (29).

Emigh acknowledges that this sort of play happens in various degrees all the time. Sometimes a person plays a role in her job, so she may take on a different set of personality modes, posture, and methods of dealing with the world at work than she may at home by herself. Other times, she may actively choose to pretend to have a different personality than she usually does without fully relinquishing her sense of self. An actor playing a role is even further removed than this, and a masked dancer “visited” by the spirit of the mask may seem to have his personality completely obliterated during the experience. What Emigh proposes is a scale of “me” to “not me” – a “continuum of experiential states” (22). He diagrams it thus:



Emigh, like Eldredge, sees human consciousness as capable of maintaining “multiple selves”. For Emigh, who was attempting to describe the radical transformations he observed in certain Eastern masked performances, trance is a kind of “visitation” by an “Other” which pushes the identity of the performer more towards “not me” (22). The other could be a character or divine entity, but ultimately the performer gives up his sense of self – or in Sartrean terms, his “being-in-the-world” – in the process of the performance. In this way, points on the continuum of experiential states are roughly akin to points on the perception-

imagination continuum. Emigh does not specifically call trance states imaginary states, but he writes:

*Possession or, as I have preferred to call it, "visitation" ... takes the ambiguities inherent in the play frame and completes the inversion: ... for the kavat or tubuan dancer and for those believers in the audience, the "illusion" experientially becomes "the reality." Indeed, from the point of view of the entranced performer or convinced audience member, "illusion" is no longer an appropriate word. If character acting is ideally marked by "an awareness of one's actions, but not the awareness itself," then visitation involves a loss of "the awareness itself," too (29).*

Emigh hints, here, at the difference between the reflective and prereflective consciousness. As one becomes less and less aware of one's own actions, the more one moves into the prereflective plane. Note, too, that Emigh points out the function of belief in the trance process. Once again, the key to trance is belief, whether it is in the consciousness of the performer or the audience.

So, both Eldredge and Emigh state that humans are capable of multiple forms of consciousness, whether they are the "layers" between the bright and dark consciousness, or a continuum of "experiential states." But implicit in their arguments is the notion of a "me". Especially so in Emigh's case, there seems to be an assumption of a core identity which the masks alter, affect, or transform.

On the surface, this seems like a reasonable assumption. After all, we all believe we know who we are, what we are like, and certain personality traits that we believe constitutes "us." But this assumption tends to lead us into the realm of psychological determinism: that who we are is a sum of our past experiences and inner traits that influence us and over which we have only so much control.



If, as Husserl and Sartre assert, any consciousness is a consciousness *of* something, then personal identity does not exist in our heads, but in the world. Our sense of self is not created from within, but without, in our relationships with objects both real and unreal. In fact, our “self” is a consciousness *of* our “self.” Even that is not within, but without. Who we are is not a product of internal traits and tendencies but is the result of our knowledge and intention towards the idea of “self”. Our history, our choices and their consequences, the effects of others in the world on us over time, all of these shape our sense of self. But despite this, we still *choose* the degree to which these forces affect us. They are neither inescapable nor ordained. My concept of myself comes from what I imagine myself to be based on my choices, whether or not I acknowledge, consciously or unconsciously, my role in making those choices. In short, the concept of “me” is imaginary to begin with. We construct our own sense of identity based upon our knowledge of ourselves and intention towards ourselves.

Thus it should not be so surprising that the kinds of transformations of identity that occur with masks are possible. If the very notion of identity is constituted imaginatively, then it is quite possible for entire new identities to “inhabit” the body of the actor through the imaginary process of masking. The transformations often associated with mask work are not rooted in mysticism, but rather, are part of the basic operation of consciousness. The mask-wearer’s identity alters to the extent that he accepts the unreal character represented in the

*analogon* of the mask. This acceptance is dependent on knowledge, intention, belief, and the *analogon* itself. While traditional non-masked acting works similarly, masks have the function of defining the “game” of acting in a specific visual way, which allows for clearer definitions of what personages are authorized and which are not. By removing the face of the wearer and replacing it with a functional *analogon* – the mask – the actor is encouraged to stop playing the game of “being me” and begin playing the game of “being someone else.” The mask provides the actor a greater chance of *believing*: of behaving truthfully in a fictional game. Peruvian mask performer Gustavo Boada said in an interview that the image the masked actor has of the mask is more important than the mask itself (168). Boada’s point is that it is the *image* which has power, not the mask. The transformational power of a mask is a function of the imagination, not the mask itself.

It should not be inferred, however, that just because one’s sense of self is constituted imaginatively that there is no self to transform. Remember, an imaginary object, even one’s sense of self, is still an object in every sense important to consciousness. The “me” that I imagine myself to be is akin other people that I imagine, albeit the “me” personage has a greater amount of sensory data and history to draw on in its creation. I imagine my father and all the traits, feelings, memories, and associations I have about him appear to me all at once. In the same way, when I imagine myself, all the traits, feelings, memories, and associations I have about myself constitute the image of myself to myself.

Because of the illusion of immanence I have the tendency to declare that the imagined me is the “real” me. But this so-called “real me” is not real at all. It is a synthesis of memories, recent impressions and, most significantly, my intentions toward how I view myself. But even though it is not real, I tend to *believe* that it is real.

Thus, it is not entirely accurate to say, as in Emigh’s scale, that there is a fixed “me” which forms the base from which I can measure greater degrees of “not me.” On the other hand, it is not entirely inaccurate, either, as we all tend to consider the imaginary sense of self as a real “me.” Emigh’s scale is an effective means of categorizing various performative situations, but it fails to explain how these various degrees of experience come about. So, let us return to the more accurate idea of a single consciousness with various attitudes of perception and imagination.

### A Heightened Imaginary State

The world of perception is the world of the real. It is also the realm of the reflective consciousness. It is the world of present objects in concrete and limited forms: this table, this chair, this piano of which I can only see the outside. When we think about ourselves reflectively, we also assign ourselves to this realm of the real. I may think of myself that “I am a decent pianist.” However, asked to play some music and I may begin to move out of the reflective mode and into the imaginative mode. If the piece is new to me or I am a novice piano player, I may

be forced to remain in the reflective mode – in the bright consciousness – as I concentrate on the music and the keys. On the other hand, if the piece is familiar to me, I may be able to become “transported” by the music, and express the moods and aural images of the piece through my performance; however it is not likely that in such a state I am *reflectively* thinking about the nuances and artistic choices. It is more likely that such nuances come to me more *prereflectively*, born out of the imagination: out of the spontaneous synthesis of my knowledge of the music, my intention towards it, the movements of my body and fingers, and the *analogon* of the music which is created first by the composer and more immediately by my very performance. That is, I will integrate the subtleties and variations of a given performance as they arise, provided I am not distracted or too busy focusing on the mechanics of playing to notice the nuances. The performance itself becomes another *analogon* for the imaginary object it stands in for, in this case the emotions and moods pointed to by the music. As I leave the reflective plane – as I cede my self-awareness – I begin to perform, interpret, and create imaginatively. There is a spontaneous synthesis of creation that emerges from my willingness to engage with the imaginary and leave the “real” behind.

This creative synthesis applies to acting as well. There is an apocryphal story\* about Lawrence Olivier who, upon concluding a fantastic performance of *Hamlet*, is discovered by his co-star in his dressing room, despondent. She

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\* I originally heard this story, attributed to William Goldman, told among theatre practitioners; however, a version of it can be found at <http://www.thestorynet.com/archive/Olivier.htm> .

wonders why he is sad for his performance that night had been amazing. His answer: "Because I don't know how I did it." Olivier's supposed dilemma here is remarkably similar to descriptions of trance and of the dark consciousness. The actor (in our story, Olivier) surrenders himself to the imaginary synthesis through the *analogon* of Hamlet (presented in the script) and in moments of prereflective creativity he creates the presence of Hamlet in a remarkably real way: he is transformed. And yet, afterwards, the actor cannot clearly articulate what he did or how he did it. He may have hazy memories of the performance or his actions; or, he may only recall that he was aware of the performance but not any conscious thought that he had about executing it.

For instance, Eldredge describes a student in a mask workshop who became dramatically transformed by his mask. Interviewed by Eldredge, the character created through the mask, "Jake," related a story from "his" past where Jake accidentally killed a playmate as a child, the memory of which dramatically affected him. The actor playing Jake, whose name was Greg, found his body, mannerisms, and even personality changed. The story of the death of the playmate was not something Greg had thought up before; it came spontaneously with the characterization. Writes Eldredge:

*Greg, the actor in whom Jake became embodied, when quizzed afterward, had no idea where this personage came from. During the exercise Jake appeared to be in charge. No one was aware of Greg's secret presence behind the mask making the situation happen. My interview with Greg afterward demonstrated that Greg also knew that Jake was in charge (7-8).*

This begs the question of who is “Jake” that he should be in charge. The answer is that Jake is an imaginary object synthesized by Greg spontaneously. Of course, Greg entered this exercise with no previous knowledge of who “Jake” was – the character was brand new to him, and emerged from Greg’s engagement with the mask he had been given. If the imaginary process relies on knowledge, movement, and intention to synthesize the imaginary object, then Greg’s knowledge comes first from the *analogon* of the mask: his immediate impression of the expression and expressivity of the mask itself and his own personal assumptions about what those expressions mean. Subsequently as Greg plays with the mask he accepts the fruits of that play as “facts” about Jake: his name, his habit of tugging at his collar button, his vocal patterns – all become added to the knowledge of “Jake”. Further, the movement choices he makes in seeking to bring the mask into harmony with his body create other images that Greg integrates into the “reality” of Jake. So long as Greg is willing to play the game authorized by the mask, and so long as he *believes* in the images given to him, the creative synthesis – the trance – is self-sustaining. Each choice supports and adds to that which has gone before, giving more and more depth to the characterization as more and more knowledge accrues.

Eventually, Greg is fully committed to the imaginary process at work and gives up much of his “being-in-the-world,” and instead lets Jake “be in charge.” But Greg *is* Jake; or rather, Jake is an imaginary object constructed spontaneously by Greg and made present through the performance. Greg has not completely

given up his original identity. He still perceives the stage, the instructor, the audience, even his own actions. But his commitment to the imaginary is stronger. So long as he *believes*, and so long as he can remain in a more imaginary mode of consciousness, Jake's presence will endure. When Greg returns to a more perceptual mode, when he reclaims his being-in-the-world, when he finds himself once again in "his" body, then Jake will vanish.

Thus, trance is not something abstract and mystical. It is a heightened imaginary state, where the entranced willingly surrenders a degree of her being-in-the-world – her perceptive, reflective consciousness – and instead plays with and believes in a more imaginative attitude of consciousness. Emigh, in comparing *topeng* masked performance with others, states that in *topeng* trance is not a source of "possession" but a source of "inspiration" (116). This "inspiration" is really the flow of spontaneous, creative, prereflective thought which helps sustain the imaginative consciousness. The less the entranced *thinks about* her actions, the more likely it is that the trance will be sustained and the synthesis will continue.

### Permission

In fact, it is the self-aware, reflective, and perceptive consciousness which can be an outright barrier to the imagination. Improviser and mask teacher Keith Johnstone agrees with Emigh that working with a mask is a two-way process and asserts that a mask "dies" when it is completely subjected to the will of the

performer (Johnstone 172). Johnstone speaks metaphorically, here, but he means that as an actor exerts control over his performance and refuses to play imaginatively with the mask, much of the character presence that might be generated otherwise will fail. Johnstone's book *Impro* deals in many ways with his attempts to tear down imaginative blocks in his students. In particular, Johnstone sees the "critical voice" as a major block that actors encounter. Johnstone uses masks as another way to circumvent these blocks.

When Johnstone writes about trance states, he uses the term "possession." He does not offer an opinion about the nature of possession, but his techniques call for his actors to use a mirror and attempt a spontaneous engagement with the mask as it is worn. This does suggest a connection to the imagination, as the actor relies on the image of mask to serve as an *analogon* for the character it represents. It should be pointed out that Johnstone freely interchanges trance states with states of hypnosis and other "disassociated" states (155). Trances, for Johnstone, are moments when a person relinquishes his or her identity. Johnstone suggests that there is a "need" that we all have to maintain a sense of self. He also implies through his writing that included in this need for a sense of self is a need for a sense of decorum. Consequently, Johnstone spends much of his book and exercises discussing ways of circumventing this need for decorum.

One of the ways Johnstone gets around his students' resistant sense of self is by playing with trance. Here, Johnstone diverges from Emigh and Eldredge, who place emphasis on belief. Rather than viewing trance as a state that the actor



enters into somewhat voluntarily, Johnstone asserts that trances can be *induced* from outside forces, namely, through movement, rhythm, and social pressure (154). Johnstone acknowledges that to a certain degree a person must be *willing* to be entranced; however, a person with sufficient authority – a hypnotist, a teacher, a priest – can be the cause of trance states in others. In short, Johnstone believes a person can be placed in a heightened imaginary state by being given *permission* to do so. He writes:

*The type of trance I am concerned with ... is the 'controlled trance', in which permission to remain entranced is given by other people, either by an individual or a group. Such trances may be rare, or may pass unrecognised in [Western] culture, but we should consider them as a normal part of human behaviour. Researchers who have studied possession cults report that it is the better adjusted citizens who are more likely to become possessed. Many people regard 'trance' as a sign of madness, just as they assume madmen must be easy to hypnotise. The truth is that if madmen were capable of being under 'social control' they would never have revealed the behavior that categorised them as insane (156-157).*

So for Johnstone, those that are most susceptible to authority, to “social control,” are the most likely to enter trance states. If an authority figure grants permission for the trance, the trance is more likely to happen because the subject is used to submitting to outside control. A hypnotist uses high-status body language and an authoritative voice, for example, when hypnotizing her subject. Johnstone says that mask teachers and high priests in possession cults are similar in that they take a “high-status but indulgent” attitude toward those entranced by masks (157). That is, they remain in control but permit the entranced person a

degree of free rein. They do not contradict the entranced person or deny the trance, for that would end the trance by making the performer self-aware again.

Not only do singular authority figures have the ability to induce trance, but groups do as well. Johnstone, somewhat apocryphally, cites Voodoo cults who use drums and dancing, sometimes for hours before the ceremony, to help induce trances in the dancers. He theorizes that the repeated movements, the use of rhythm and music, the physical exhaustion of the event all play a part in altering the physicality of the dancer, which in turn invites a more imaginative state. Because the dancer is amid a crowd of like-minded people, it is easier to surrender his own identity. As Johnstone says, "Crowds are trance-inducing because the anonymity imposed by the crowd absolves you of the need to maintain your own identity" (156). Again, Johnstone asserts that we have a *need* to maintain a sense of identity, and that trance states are more likely to occur when a person is able to give up this need. Social pressure and authority figures can give the *permission* needed to surrender self-identity.

Where does this need come from? Sartre would say it comes from man's existential condition. Our existence precedes our essence; therefore, any question of who we are cannot be identified with any certainty. Our essence, our nature, our purpose, our very selves: these things come after we exist in the world. They are assembled piecemeal by our actions, as well as from what others teach us, what we learn ourselves, and what of the two we choose to believe and reject. The sense of self is further defined as a way to separate ourselves from the

Others in the world who are the only true limitations to our freedom. This is because an Other has his own projects for his own sense of self, his own point of view on the nature of the world, and his actions will eventually come into conflict with my own. Sartre tells us that our sense of Self is “alienated and refused” by the Others who refuse to “play along” with our own ideas of the world (*Being and Nothingness*, 380). So we construct our sense of Self as a separate object to differentiate from the Others. We are responsible for its creation. Although we create it from our own imaginations and intentions, it is nevertheless real. Sartre writes:

*Thus, my being-for-others – i.e. my Me-as-object – is not an image cut off from me and growing in a strange consciousness. It is a perfectly real being, my being as the condition of my selfness confronting the Other and of the Other’s selfness confronting me (Being and Nothingness, 380).*

So, even though our sense of self is constituted imaginatively we cling to it as if it were real.

In fact, it is this tenacity to which we cling to a sense of self that Johnstone believes is a primary obstacle to spontaneity and trance. For Johnstone, mask work is training the actor to move beyond his or her inhibitions and to allow creative thought and spontaneity to emerge freely and without censorship. “I can’t act silly,” might think a student, “because everyone will think I’m weird.” “That’s not a proper way to behave,” might think another. A third might believe, “I’m not creative. I can’t do this.” All of these statements reflect the kinds of fears that students faced with masked activity might think. As a result, they may let

these fears and thoughts control their actions. They may censor what they say, or refuse to follow an imaginary impulse, or “act” in a way which is comfortable to them but which is not grounded in an imaginary engagement with the mask.

### Exploiting Bad Faith

But these fears are another example of Sartrean “bad faith.” Johnstone’s approach to masks is to attempt to work around the bad faith which puts up resistances to the imaginative state. He sees authority figures as a way of “tricking” people into trances. It is still the subject who must be willing to be entranced, but an authority figure can give permission for the subject to make the change. It is another kind of bad faith: the subject still does not feel responsible for his identity because it “no longer matters” that he maintain it. Someone “in charge” has told him that it’s permissible for him to act silly, or behave differently, or do things he would not ordinarily do. Therefore, the resistance to these acts is circumvented.

Johnstone’s thoughts on trance paint a picture of consciousness as struggling to maintain a sense of decorum and control much of the time and only by the substitution of one kind of authority (social pressure) for another (an authority figure) can imaginative states be created. But despite Johnstone’s somewhat pessimistic views on authority figures, his ideas point to a root issue in the nature of human consciousness related to trance and masks. The sense of identity is not only constructed imaginatively, but it also represents a sense of

security in an ambiguous world. To surrender this security is to risk the *angst* of responsibility in the face of the uncertain. Before an actor can enter trance – before the actor can relinquish this sense of self – she must be willing to risk this sense of security. Johnstone tells us that this risk can be encouraged by permission from an authority. What we can take from this, though, is that the trance states which masks bring may *seem* to be strange, mystical, or even insane, but this is because we cling so tightly to the idea that the self is much more fixed and “out of our hands” than it really is. According to Sartre, the idea of self is quite mutable. Johnstone asks, “How do we stay in trance states? I would prefer to ask, ‘How do we stay out of them?’” (154). We stay out of them because we prefer the “bad faith” truth of our identity to the uncertainty and responsibility of our existence. We return to the world of perception, the world where we “exist,” but cannot “be.”

But if we look at the terminology expressed by Eldredge and Emigh, we also see how bad faith can be exploited to encourage or explain the functions of masked trance. Eldredge’s “dual consciousness” or “layers of consciousness” implies that at the core of human consciousness there is a “self” which can distance itself from the new “selves” being brought forth in performance. The account of “Jake” describes how the actor, Greg, claimed that the mask personage, Jake, was “in charge,” while Greg’s self was distanced from the events, watching and occasionally guiding, but otherwise staying out of Jake’s way. In this account, we see how Greg was ceding much control of the

performance to Jake, an “external” force; that is, because Jake is *not* Greg, it must be *external* to Greg. But this is fundamentally an act of bad faith. Jake is very much a creation of Greg’s, but because Jake emerges prereflectively and spontaneously, it seems as if it must come into being “on its own.” Just because Greg does not *reflectively* choose Jake’s behavior does not mean that Greg did not choose the behavior at all.

Similarly with Emigh, he describes a “me” from which various degrees of “not me” may emerge. For Emigh, trance states are highly “not me,” where another personage “visits” the body of the performer and obliterates his identity for the duration of the performance. But this terminology also cedes an external control of the situation – to the “being” which is doing the “visitation.” While it is true that those of that particular culture have a religious belief in the beings that performed the “visit,” if we look at trance phenomenon as a basic operation of consciousness we again see that the “visitor” is a product of the performer’s imagination. Nevertheless, Emigh is quick to point out that *belief* is essential to the trance state. Without belief, then the actor dancing in the masks is not behaving in an authentic or authorized manner. If Rangda appears to the crowd, it is only because the dancer and audience, on some level, believe that she has.

But while the ceding of control over the appearance of the mask’s personage to an external source is fundamentally an act of bad faith, it is an act which is often necessary to the trance state. Eldredge, Emigh, and Johnstone all agree that a reflective consciousness inhibits mask animation. But a reflective and

self-aware state is necessary for a person to acknowledge their own roles in identity creation. If one is *aware* that the responsibility for the creation of the masked personage is solely one's own, one is more likely to approach the creation of that personage reflectively, acting out of that awareness and choosing consciously the kinds of behaviors one believes the personage should manifest. As a result, the mask may fail to be animated in the spontaneous and imaginary way that is desired.

Thus, many mask practitioners and theorists are finding ways to exploit bad faith for character creation. Johnstone offers permission from an authority figure. Emigh and Eldredge offer the reassurance that there is a "me" and a "not me" and that it is possible for the "not me" to dictate or control its own actions while the "me" stays back and observes. Ceding control to a seemingly external source is an act of bad faith; however, it is a way to encourage performers to move away from a reflective consciousness and into a more imaginary state – the trance state. Bad faith is a fundamental part of our consciousness. Trance states exploit this.

### Conclusion

Sartre said that every encounter with the real world has the potential to activate the imaging consciousness. Trance states represent a very strong activation of the imaging consciousness. A mask is often used to effect these activations because it is a functional *analogon* for another identity. In a situation

where an actor *believes* in the identity pointed to by the mask and feels *permitted* to play with the mask, the actor may surrender his being-in-the-world and engage spontaneously with the mask to make present in his performance the personage of the mask. Belief, here, is a function of whether or not the mask and actor together can synthesize a strong image to which the actor can commit and play – an authorized game of make-believe. Permission is a measure of how willing the actor is to engage in this play at all. With strong enough belief and permission, the actor may enter an imaginary, self-sustaining, creative synthesis: a trance. Trance is neither something mystical nor aberrant in human behavior; rather, it is a basic function of consciousness. The idea of self is constituted imaginatively over time, even though we tend to assign it to the realm of perception. Therefore, changing identities is part of the human condition.

Masks have associations of “power” in them because of their associations with transformation. In truth, an *analogon*, such as a mask, has no “power” in and of itself. A mask’s ability to transform identity in the mind of a performer comes only from the imagination of the performer who wears it. It may be said that the “play” of masking is a two-way process; however, Sartre would say – in terms of character development and transformation of identity in the consciousness of the actor – the play is solely the responsibility of the performer. The character imagined is given to us as any other imagined object: in its totality, showing us everything that we expect it to be. If the actor believes in the image of the mask – that is, accepts the image as “real” -- then he or she is given a character



completely. But to “think about” a character is to fall into the psychological character analysis typical of modern realism with which Sartre disagreed.

Fundamentally, transforming identity as described in this dissertation is really substituting one sort of bad faith for another. Just as it is bad faith to assume that one’s identity is fixed, it is likewise another kind of bad faith to accept the game of masking and ascribe power to the masking process. While the transformations which occur can be remarkable and complete, ultimately it is still the actor’s responsibility. The actor engages with the mask and the same sorts of identity transactions that formed her identity occur to create the personage of the mask. Sartre would likely disapprove of a trade of one kind of bad faith for another, and the limitations of his ideas applied to performance will be discussed in greater detail at the end of this dissertation. But what we see is the masking process can exploit bad faith to performative ends. Masking takes a fundamental quality of consciousness and utilizes it to make transformations of identity in performance. In a sense, trance is a kind of surrender; a willingness to let go of the bad faith of “my” identity in order to allow another identity to emerge through the spontaneous imaginary process, albeit often through another kind of bad faith. Sometimes this surrender is very general, sometimes it is very deep. But the end result is a characterization that emerges from the imagination. Such a characterization would not, strictly speaking, be approved by Sartre, who wanted individuals to be reflectively aware of their responsibility for creating their identity. Nevertheless, the trance process in masking *illustrates* the kind of

freedom that the human condition possesses *because* it has the capacity to imagine.

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#### Chapter 4 – Character Development through Masks and the Imaginary

Since the writings of Konstantin Stanislavski and Sigmund Freud in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the predominant approach to character development in Western drama has been psychologically based. The basic assumptions of how a character is created by an actor begin with identifying *who* this character is, *what* forces are at play in that character's life, and *why* the character behaves as he or she does. For example, one of the most basic exercises described by Stanislavski is identifying the "given circumstances" of the character; that is, the various forces which affect the character's life. Of Hamlet, we might say that his given circumstances at the start of the play include: he is a man in his early 20s, he is a prince of Denmark and used to a life of privilege and wealth, he is educated, his father has recently died under mysterious circumstances, his mother has married his uncle merely 6 months after his father's death, and so on.

This psychological approach positions the actor in a particular relationship to the character. Nancy Kindelan writes:

*When Stanislavsky developed a process that aided the actor in systematically and logically developing characterizations, he positions the actor and director as interpretive artists capable of perceiving, organizing,*

*and physically projecting the complex psychological nature of the human condition (19).*

The actor and director, then, see character creation as a contemplative act.

Characterization is a process that is based in perception and the organization and projection of those perceptions. Stanislavski's ideas about the role of logic in character creation would change later in his life to encompass a more balanced and imaginative approach. However, such was Stanislavski's influence (and perhaps more so those that followed him, basing their work on his early thoughts) that the assumptions of the acting process as reflective and logical became dominant.

The theory behind this process asserts that if the actor can properly analyze the clues left by the author in the text of the play, that the very nature of the character can be discovered. The role of the actor under this methodology is to embody this character by finding the various facts of the character's life that make her *who* she is. "Who," in this case, is a product of the character's history, birth, life experiences, and recent events. All of these things add up to determine who the character *is*. The actor is encouraged to find the *psychology* of the character in order to embody her. All of the forces that have shaped a person's life – biological, geographical, social – are believed to be who she is and a reliable compass by which to predict future behavior. To know the *mind* of the character is to know the character herself.

There is an assumption with this line of thought: the various forces at work in the psyche of the individual are to a certain degree inescapable. Hamlet does what he does because of *who he is*; he could not do otherwise. He is intelligent and educated, therefore, he hatches schemes to discover the truth about his father's death. He confronts his mother (some would say) in the throes of an Oedipal crisis. The actions Hamlet takes in the play are believed to have *psychological* causes and as such are unavoidable. They come from the core of who Hamlet *is*, and Hamlet is not merely a victim of his own desire for revenge, but a victim of forces over which he has no real control – his own psychology. If *who I am* is a product of the forces that shape my life, then I cannot act. I simply respond to the world as my condition dictates.

Let us recall Sartre's *theatre de situations* that we outlined in Chapter 1. Sartre, in his dramatic writings, sought to free the character from this status of passive reaction. Sartre believed that human beings were free to act and that an individual defines him- or herself by his or her choices, always moving beyond his or her past towards an unfinished future. Rejecting psychological motivations as the essence of the human condition, Sartre sought to restore freedom and choice to his characters. Sartre would write characters not as the product of the forces that shape them, but as the product of their *choices*. For Sartre, there were only two forces over which an individual had no control: one's death, and the actions of others. Everything else – family, culture, geography, history – was a choice. One could say that a man behaves a certain way because that person's

culture taught him to behave that way; however, the man still has the *choice* to behave that way. Family, culture, etc. – traditionally viewed psychological forces – *may* influence how a character behaves, but only to the degree that the person *chooses* to allow them to do so. Consider what Sartre says about motivation and deliberation:

*... voluntary deliberation is always a deception. How can I evaluate causes and motives on which I myself confer their value before all deliberation and by the very choice which I make of myself? The illusion here stems from the fact that we endeavor to take causes and motives for entirely transcendent things which I balance in my hands like weights and which possess a weight as a permanent property. Yet, at the same time, we try to view them as contents of consciousness, and this is self-contradictory. Actually causes and motives have only the weight which my project – i.e. the free production of the end and of the known act to be realized – confers upon them (Being and Nothingness, 581).*

To search for my motivation about a particular action as if it were something permanent (a weight held in the hand) is to miss the point: my motive does have weight, but only as much as I decide it does beforehand. My own intentions and desires affect that weight. How can a motivation be outside of me (transcendent forces which I have no control over) and inside of me (traits that make up “me”) at the same time? To “step outside” oneself to deliberate on possible choices or motivations is to do anything but: the deliberations are completely “inside” because one weighs the choices and determines what the choices are in the first place. Not only do I choose which of the actions I will take, I choose how I set up the deliberation to begin with. We discussed in the previous chapter how the nature of identity is plastic, formed in the imagination from my own intentions

toward myself. So, too, are my motivations are my own. Identity is not something fixed and unavoidable, written in the psyche. Identity is mutable, determined by choice, and found in the objects of the world as one encounters and relates to them. A person – or character – defines him- or herself by his or her choices.

If we are to side with Sartre and reject psychology as a methodology for defining identity, how then does an actor find the identity and motivations of a character apart from psychology? If not through the forces that shape her life, how can a sense of self be constituted? The answer is simply the same way that identity is constructed in ourselves: through the imagination. Masks, in particular, both demonstrate and encourage this sort of imaginary transformation. The use of masks to create characters point to an alternative method of character creation which is more in line with Sartrean thought, and more like the way our own identity is formed.

This chapter will discuss how actors can engage with masks and, using an “outside-in” approach to character development, can use movement, ambiguity, and their imaginations to develop characters in a more imaginative way than more traditional “inside-out” methods. By “more imaginative” we mean that the characterization emerges more from the imaginary process than reflective, psychological analysis, which tends to produce more “perceptive” attitude of consciousness. Mask theorists such as Libby Appel, Sears Eldredge, Jacque LeCoq, and John Emigh explore this alternative way of character creation



through masks in their writings. We will discuss their ideas in light of the physical dimension of the imagination discussed in Chapter 2 and the imaginary synthesis of trance discussed in Chapter 3, and we will discover that mask characterization achieves transformation of identity not through psychology, but through ambiguity, physicality, and imagination.

### Outside-In & The Neutral Mask

Psychologically-based approaches to acting generally work from the “inside-out.” That is, the actor attempts to find the interior life of the character first and then bring that life to the outside, in the body and voice. To know a character’s mind – his thoughts, circumstances, motivations, and psychology – is to be able to give form or presence to that character. The actor then may attempt to find a body to suit the mind: posture, a certain way of walking, gestures and mannerisms, etc. The mind comes first, the body after.

However, it is also possible to work “outside-in.” By this we mean that an actor can begin with making physical choices and let those choices inform her about the interior life of the character. A choice of posture might suggest an attitude or mood, a particular gesture might suggest an internal conflict, a mannerism might suggest something in the character’s past. As the actor plays with kinesthetic elements, she constructs the “who” of the character imaginatively. This sort of characterization is possible because, as we discussed in Chapter 2, movement is an integral part of the imaginative synthesis. As the

actor moves with intention, she gives birth to dozens of kinesthetic impressions which synthesize with her knowledge to create a character – at least, a “sketch” of a character – in her imagination. If the actor is able to engage with this sketch imaginatively through additional play, she can expand the characterization, fill in the gaps, synthesize a personage all from simply allowing her imagination to operate. This, then, is what is meant by working “outside-in”. “Outside-in” does not assume that the “mind” of the character is something which is essential to characterization. Rather, it is the imagination which constitutes the essence of the character through movement.

“Outside-in” approaches are typically associated with primarily physical performances such as mime and dance or in such theatrical approaches such as Grotowski or Meyerhold. We have already discussed the work of Jacques LeCoq and its reliance on the physical earlier in this dissertation. Another example would be mime artist Jacques Copeau, who sought to avoid character creation through the traditionally “linear” process: beginning with a text, moving to interpretation of that text, then creating an overall performance concept, and finally execution of the performance. Such a straight line heavily weighted the text as the primary source of the performance and Copeau believed that as a result the artistic result was more about “predetermined agendas” and less about artistic collaboration (Whitmore, 85). Copeau’s solution was to give equal weight to the text, the *mise-en-scene* and the actor’s expressive movement as an expression of the overall “rhythm” of the performance. In this way, the

physicality of the actor is informed by the text and mise-en-scene, the mise-en-scene is informed by the movement and text, and the text could be informed by the movement and mise-en-scene. Thus, the way to avoid the “agendas” of the text is to instead focus on the physical elements of the text – the rhythm – and allow a free play of actor, author, and director around this rhythm (Whitmore, 85). Of course, Sartre would say that “agendas” are unavoidable as author, actor, and director each bring their own personal points of view to the performance process. However, Copeau was attempting to find way to express a more collaborative performance style which relied on physicality to express the artistry in the performance rather than a slavish devotion to the understanding and interpretation of the text.

Similarly, Jerzy Grotowski saw the practice of characters which are formed first in the mind and expressed later with the body as risking an accumulation of “clichés,” where the actor merely performs certain habitual physical and emotional responses to her intellectual understanding of the character. “As soon as one enters into the details,” he writes, “it must no longer be asked for, at the very moment of formulating it, one begins to create stereotypes and clichés” (Grotowski, 175). Instead, Grotowski relies on the actor stripping away all her artifice and instead baring her “soul” to the audience in a physical and emotional encounter with the text of the performance. The assumption that there is a “soul” which the actor can be reduced to is problematic from a Sartrean perspective, but what is important for Grotowski is

that the actor's performance is not generated from an intellectual "formulation," but from a "catalytic effect" that is expressed physically and emotionally from an "unencumbered encounter with the text" (Whitmore, 162).

But beyond the form of mime or Grotowski's "poor" theatre – which frequently sacrificed the text for the actor's experience – working "outside-in" can be used in conjunction with more traditional forms of theatrical performance. In his book *The Invisible Actor*, Yoshi Oida highlights the importance of physical work in all forms of performance – including more traditional approaches to character creation. Doing extended physical exercises prior to performance and during training is not merely to "warm up" or to teach the body to "move well," but he believes the act of moving will teach the actor something beyond the act itself: a fundamental understanding of processes (29). Oida writes:

*One of my masters said, "As an actor, you shouldn't be a theorist. Don't be too logical or rely on intellectual understanding. Learn through the body."*

*Maybe even writing this book is a bad idea, since it is an intellectual exercise. The main thing to remember is that you need to understand acting with your body, not your brain. The act of performing is not the same as intellectual understanding or theory (28).*

Oida believes, though perhaps not in these terms, that the best performances come not from an intellectual understanding of the character, but from a physical expression of the character which is learned intuitively; characterization thrives not on reflective contemplation, but on prereflective imagination.

That is not to say that intellectual components such as script analysis are not useful to outside-in work. Script analysis provides *knowledge*, which is part of

the imaginative synthesis. We will discuss the role of script analysis in more detail later in this chapter; however, working outside-in does not consider the *psychology* of the character as essential, nor does it place strong emphasis on the reflective character analysis associated with “inside-out” approaches.

As discussed in Chapter 2, implicit in Sartre’s assertion that movement constitutes imagination is that our own *bodies* play a part in constituting our own sense of identity. The idea of who we are is tied up in the body we exist within. Sartre writes, “... the body is the contingent form which is taken up by the necessity of my contingency... we are a choice, and for us, to be is to choose ourselves” (*Being and Nothingness*, 432). So, not only is my sense of identity tied up in my body, but my body is the *form* of my identity. I choose the way I constitute my projects and I constitute my projects through my body. Not only does my body affect the point of view from which I view the world, but I *express* that point of view through my body as well.

However, we are often reflectively unaware of this relationship between body and identity. We sometimes take our own bodies for granted. We are often unaware of the everyday movements, postures, gestures, and mannerisms that we habitually use. For an actor, being unaware of these physical choices can become a block to transformational characterization. After all, if identity is constituted physically, then any lingering physical signs of the *actor* in the performance may be in conflict with the physical presence of the *character* the actor attempts to embody. In the worst case, the actor fails to transform at all,

and instead is very near to being “himself” saying preordained lines – the same person with a few extra trappings, not a transformed persona. If the aim of acting is making present another personage in the body of the actor, then the body of that actor must change to make the personage present. Before this can happen, though, the actor must be aware of his own physical tendencies – his own choices which express his own identity.

One way to accomplish this awareness is through the use of a “neutral mask.” Sears Eldredge and Jacque LeCoq, discussed earlier in this dissertation, use the “neutral mask” as an actor training tool. A “neutral” mask is one that projects a face with “no” expression or at least, one of profound calm and balance. One must ask whether a mask can truly be neutral. After all, do facial features carry with them ethnic identity associations and as such, can there be a singular human face that is “neutral?” Is it even possible for a face to have *no* expression at all? Apathy, calmness, serenity, detachment are all possible interpretations of a “neutral” face. Generally speaking, though, the concept of “neutrality” should be considered an ideal state, not truly obtainable. Writes Le Coq about the neutral mask:

*The neutral mask is an object with its own special characteristics. It is a face which we call neutral, a perfectly balanced mask which produces a physical sensation of calm. This object, when placed on the face, should enable one to experience the state of neutrality prior to action, a state of receptiveness to everything around us, with no inner conflict... When a student has experienced this neutral starting point his body will be freed, like a blank page on which drama can be inscribed (36).*

Why does LeCoq assert that a neutral mask “frees” the body? Or that it makes the actor “receptive” to the environment? Certainly it is not because the mask has some innate power. Simply donning the mask is not enough. What must occur is an engagement with the face of the mask. If the actor can bring his body into harmony with the mask itself, then like his face, the actor’s body will be in a state “prior to action.” It is a body of *potential*. It is a body which is not engaged in action, but exists in the moment just before action. If the actor removes the many unconscious movements present in his everyday body in order to bring them into harmony with the calm, balanced face of the neutral mask, then he is, in essence, removing those physical traces of *himself* from the body.

Eldredge, following LeCoq’s work, expands further on the concept of neutrality. He asserts that a neutral body has at least six characteristics: a neutral body is symmetrical, centered, integrated and focused, energized, relaxed, and involved in *being*, not *doing* (53). It is a body that is in balance, not engaged but not disengaged either. All of these characteristics seek to bring the actor’s body into harmony with the neutral mask, and in doing so, remove any traces of “self” from the body of the actor and bring them into a place where they can “become” nearly anything. An actor moving towards neutral not only eliminates her own bodily mannerisms, but also can subsequently transform into another body.

Eldredge concludes:

*... it is easier to characterize the concept of neutral by describing what it is not. If any descriptive quality can be attached to a person’s stance, such as “imposing,” “empty,” or “stiff,” then the stance is not neutral. These*

*terms describe a physicalization that is not at the balance point of the seesaw, but already tilted to one side or the other. They are the beginnings of a characterization (54).*

Eldredge thus points out that it is the *body* which begins characterization. A physical choice is all that is necessary to make present a character, even if it a “sketch” of one. If a neutral body is “no” character, then any choice outside of neutral becomes a characterization choice.

Of course it is a choice to “be neutral,” and Eldredge acknowledges this.

*Paradoxically... at the same time the Neutral Mask depersonalizes the wearer it also essentializes the wearer. You discover more of what is uniquely “you.” On each wearer, in fact, the Neutral Mask adapts itself to that wearer. Therefore, what is elicited is actually your individual neutral (50).*

So again we should view the neutral state as an ideal state and one which, as an acting tool, helps the actor discover what personal physical attributes she brings to her own personal presence. Both Eldredge and LeCoq see the neutral mask as a way for the actor to “depersonalize” him or herself, to pare away the unconscious physical choices of the self in order to find a neutral body that suits the neutral mask. This is important: moving the body towards neutral is a way of *removing* the presence of identity. That is not to say that an actor in a neutral state loses all sense of self—the neutral mask is still *individually* neutral. But the *presence* of that actor is diminished, even eliminated. In this body, the actor may begin to feel her relationship with the world change. She may begin to feel the “sketch” of the calm, balanced, potential character implied by the neutral mask. Once she reaches this state, she will be free to transform herself *out* of neutral



into a body that makes present the new character without any traces of the actor remaining. This is the essence of the relationship between the body and identity: that physicality *creates* presence.

The neutral mask illustrates how our identity can be constructed from physical choices by effectively removing those choices from our bodies and thus removing the presence of our self. Thus engaging with the imagination through different physical choices than one is familiar with can remove the “self” of the actor and allow another personage to “appear.” As Sartre has identified, the very nature of our “self” is tied into the imagination, which is in turn partly constructed physically. This is why working outside-in can produce the presence of characters for audiences and actors alike. A character must be made present *physically*.<sup>\*</sup> An ideally neutral actor with a neutral mask has *no* identity, no characterization which can be identified, no traits which are made present – at least to the degree that actor and audience synthesize the image of the actor imaginatively. Without the body, there is no identity. Conversely, there can only be identity with physicality: our sense of self and expression of that self cannot exist apart from a particular body that both informs and expresses the choices of that identity.

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<sup>\*</sup> In the cases of characters that speak but do not appear (such as a voice-over narrator), the physical “presence” is found in the use of the vocal apparatus in the production of speech. The relationship between sound and the imagination cannot be covered in depth in this document; however, sound can operate as an *analogon* as well as an image.

### Bad Faith & Limitations

While the neutral mask aims at *removing* a sense of character from the body of the actor wearing it, character masks seek to *transform* the wearer into a different personage. Unlike neutral masks, which aim at “no” expression, a character mask is constructed with features that suggest a particular characterization or emotion. As discussed in Chapter 2, in performance the actor engages with the character mask imaginatively and attempts to find a body that suits the face. Thus, the characterization is made present physically first, and on further engagement, the characterization is expanded and given deeper, interior life.

But this begs the question: if our identity is mutable, based in physicality, why then do we retain any sense of self at all? Why do we not change day to day, moment to moment? Certainly, we do change, over time, and certainly, our encounters with the objects of the world can create changes within us at various levels. Yet, the sense of “self” persists. I may be a different person than I was ten years ago, but barring a major life event, catastrophe, or grand epiphany, I tend to think of myself as *generally* the same person from one day to the next. What causes our sense of identity to persist are two factors: knowledge, and Sartrean “bad faith,” which was discussed in depth in Chapter 3. These factors, especially the latter, not only serve to retain a sense of self, but also can become obstacles to changing a sense of identity – an obstacle to the acting process.

Let us remember that knowledge is an integral part of the imaginary process. What we know about a particular thing plays a part in how that thing is constituted imaginatively. This knowledge comes from many possible sources. Perception is one major source, but memory/experience/history is another. As we move forward through time, we *remember* some of the encounters we have with the world. The unreal objects of our imagination are retained and even given perception-like facticity because of the illusion of immanence. As we encounter the objects of the world again, our memory constitutes part of the knowledge, which means that our *intention* toward the object is likely to be colored by our knowledge of it. Each encounter with the object may add new layers of knowledge to it, which in turn affects our intention toward it further. Thus, over time, we come to “know” a particular object, even though a great deal of how we know this object is comprised of imaginative elements that are a reflection not of any empirical facts about the object, but a reflection of what we *intend* the object to be.

For example, every morning as I leave my apartment, I may pass by a large rose bush. Over time, I come to notice the roses more and more, smell the scent of their blooms, admire their colors. I may come to associate the rosebush with pleasant thoughts, with starting the day off happily. For me, the rosebush *is* a happy thing, something to be cherished, a reminder of good mornings past. But compare that experience with a neighbor in the same apartment building. One morning, on leaving the apartment building, her coat gets caught in the thorns of

the bush and tears. Now she begins to associate the rosebush with ruining her coat. She may come to loathe the rosebush, make sure to avoid it every time she leaves her apartment, contemplate digging it up. For her, the rosebush *is* a nuisance, something dangerous, and to be avoided. In this way, the *same* rosebush can come to *be* different things to different people.

It is the same process for the sense of self. Our identity is constituted imaginatively as well. Over time, we learn about ourselves through our interactions with the world. Each encounter adds another layer of knowledge and intention about ourselves. Eventually, we come know who we *are* by the results of knowledge and intention synthesized imaginatively. And because movement is a part of the imaginary process, it must be remembered that we develop our sense of self through the body that we inhabit. The world comes to us *through* our body. A mix of memory and intention is retained through the particular point of view that is our body from day to day and serves as the basis for our next encounter with the world. We come to believe our sense of self is fixed – or at least, something that is “within” us and part of our essence. In fact, our self is mutable and exists not in ourselves, but in our relationship to the objects around us. But we retain our “self” because we constitute that self over time, remember it, and use it as knowledge for further encounters with the world.

For actors, this continual retention of the self can become a barrier to character creation. Because we tend to treat our imaginary sense of self as “real,”

we have a tendency to assume that there are things which we “are” and things which we “are not”. Of course, this assertion does not refer to immutable biological elements. But in questions of identity, character, and *essence* as we encounter the world, we tend to believe that there are things we can and cannot do. We place limits upon ourselves, often unaware that these limits are self-imposed. We may attribute other causes to these limits and behaviors: “I am this way because I am an only child,” “My family has always done it this way,” “I’m just wired to think this way.” But these statements, and others like them, are really attempts to avoid the responsibility that comes with freedom of self. It is “bad faith”\*.

For an actor, bad faith can serve as an obstacle to character creation. It can limit perspective: an actor may only be able to approach a role from a limited point of view because other points of view do not occur to him. An actor may believe she “can” or “can’t” play a particular role because of how similar or dissimilar the role is to her own “nature.” But bad faith can serve as an obstacle physically as well. Because we tend to think of our *bodies* as fixed as our identities, we tend to apply bad faith to our movements as well. We may not even think about how we use our bodies, but we have certain ways which we habitually do things. If one were instructed to “sit down,” one would probably sit down in a manner to which one were accustomed. There is certainly room for some variations, but generally when we think of the act of “sitting,” we assume

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\* See my discussion of bad faith in Chapter 3.

we know what the *essence* of that act is. We sit as we have grown accustomed to sitting, in the body we have developed for ourselves, in the manner, tempo, and weight that we believe *is* sitting. In truth, there are thousands of different ways that one can “sit,” each with its own particular physical qualities; each, in turn, with its own attendant imaginary components; and each with its own physical *presence* associated with it. If one wishes to create the presence of Hamlet, one must sit as Hamlet sits, among other things. It is bad faith to assume that one knows the essence of “sitting,” inasmuch as one ignores *how* one sits plays a part in constitution of how one understands “sitting.”

The bad faith of physicality is generally understood by mask theorists and teachers, though perhaps not in Sartrean terms. In her mask training text, Libby Appel says that actors often “respond to stimuli in set behavioral patterns.” These are what she calls “boundaries around the imagination” (xiii). She writes:

*When faced with creation of a character outside his immediate source of experience, the actor’s body may remain stiff and ungiuing, his behavioral choices trite, stereotyped, or simply dull. This repetition of old patterns results in “personality acting” or just plain bad work (xiii).*

Appel clearly identifies the connection between the body and the imagination: a body that does not change limits the imagination. This is because movement and the imaginary are linked. The repetitive everyday body movements we assume are “us,” – often even unaware of their existence – can leave us hemmed in imaginatively. Appel sees mask work as a way to prevent what she calls this “atrophy of the imagination” (xiii). I would argue that the imagination does not

truly atrophy: it is always there, a constant part of how we create the world and ourselves. Rather, what Appel truly aims at doing is breaking down the “bad faith” which has restricted the actor into a particular body. Appel is more correct when she speaks of “boundaries around the imagination.” It is the assumptions which the actor clings to that restrict her. She may so thoroughly believe in the fixity of her ontological position relative to the objects of the world that she is unable to express anything outside of it, emotionally, intellectually, or physically.

For Appel, working with masks frees the actor to make choices beyond him- or herself. In the first place, Appel believes masks provide a kind of “safety” for the actor:

*The masked actor represents someone other than himself, and this anonymity produces a miraculous sensation of freedom. With the mask acting as a “permission giver,” the actor can do anything, be anyone. He can plumb deep into his resources and tap his soul, imagination, and experiences (xiv).*

Donning the mask allows the actor to relinquish some of his anxiety about stepping outside his “boundaries” which hem in his imagination. After all, it is no longer *him* performing, it is the *mask*. This shift of responsibility is really just substituting one sort of bad faith for another: putting responsibility for the actions of the character on the mask. As an acting technique, this can be useful as a means to “open up” an actor and begin to remove the boundaries around imagination—exploiting the operation of bad faith for performance purposes. Ultimately, though, the actor must come to acknowledge his own role in the creation of the character *through* the mask. I believe this is what Appel means

when she speaks of the actor “plumbing” his resources – that the actor understands on some level that she brings her own knowledge and intentions to bear on the creation process. However, again, one must be cautious. To suggest that an actor has “resources” is treading close to the idea that there are things an actor *can* do (things within his resources) and things an actor *cannot* do (things outside his resources) – at least, from a character creation standpoint. Certainly, our experiences and histories may have an influence on us, but only to the degree that we *choose* to allow them to affect us. If mask training’s aim is to remove “boundaries around the imagination,” then its ideal aim is training actors who can truly create *any* character through their engagement with the imagination, not merely ones that come from the individual actor’s experience.

Appel also seeks to train her actors by pushing them to experience the world in a different *physical* way. Her exercises are often physically demanding, not so much from the tasks she assigns, but the duration of the exercises themselves – 30 or 45 minutes – and her admonition that actors always stay focused on task and never rest. For example, her exercise “Digging Stones and Feathers with a Shovel,” Appel asks the masked actors, who have already discovered a rudimentary character to go with their masks, to:

*...imagine you are standing on a mound of earth. In front of you is a shovel. Pick the shovel up and begin to dig in the ground. Adjust your body to the weight of the earth. Use different parts of your body to exert pressure on your arms. Push with your shoulders, your back, your stomach, etc. (30).*



Over the next 30-45 minutes, the actors “dig.” Periodically, Appel sidecoaches changes in situation such as the earth getting heavier or turning into large stones. The actors are told to use a different part of their body to dig with to give their arms a rest. At one point, the stones turn into feathers and the actors must keep them from blowing away as they dig. Appel uses such varied and intensely physical exercises for several reasons:

*From the duration of hard physical labor and the necessity to get past the feelings of exhaustion, comes a sense of stamina and renewed confidence in the body's power. The constant urgency to use the body fully and economically, in hitherto unimagined ways, triggers the sense of discovery of physical resources. The reliance upon and the specification of imagery enriches the sensory imagination. The actor no longer “indicates” inner and environmental sensory conditions. He has allowed the image to be set in motion and to simply respond to it (37).*

What Appel's methods accomplish is a gradual wearing away of resistance to transformation. The long exercises eventually cause the routine movements of the actor to fall away as fatigue takes away her ability to maintain them. Instead, she moves with economy, using muscles in ways that she was unaware of previously. It is a systematic wearing away of the habitual and a means of expanding the possibilities of physical choices. Eventually, the actor stops *thinking* about her performance, and simply *performs*. She engages with the mask and her body and the character emerges from her imagination – from her response to the image. But such an emergence would not be fully possible if she remained trapped in the physical boundaries of the imagination.

There is a relationship between an actor creating a character and our consciousness creating a “self.” The problems that Appel identifies in actors – the boundaries around the imagination – speak to Sartre’s point about the nature of consciousness: we often assume certain ‘facts’ about ourselves, saying that certain patterns of behavior are in our “nature.” A person may attempt to sincerely confess to himself that he has a particular quality, but in fact, this confession is based on an assumption: that he is already what he has to be (*Being and Nothingness*, 110). But human consciousness is a never-finished project. To confess, even in apparent sincerity that “I am brave,” or “I am cowardly,” is to make an assumption that such a quality is already present. Our qualities come from our choices, not from our boundaries. In fact, these boundaries around our imagination with which Appel wrestles are changeable. Our consciousness is free, our identity is free, it is only we who put limits around it. Working with masks can create a character that is based in the freedom of imagination, not in the “bad faith” of psychological determinism. Admittedly, ceding external control of the character to “the mask” is another form of bad faith; however, because of the imaginary nature of the engagement with the mask, the personage is created more like we create our own identities. It is a *more* imaginary process, and less reflective and perceptual. The blocks that actors encounter are their own responsibilities. Engaging in the imaginary process is a way to transcend those blocks, just as the imagination is a consciousness that transcends itself to realize itself. The use of masks heightens this imaginative process as they provide a

physical, external *analogon* to trigger the imaginative synthesis. They define games of identity, and as such, the actor is encouraged to play prereflectively.

### Mask as Text

Working with masks in performance introduces many elements that do not exist in traditional, psychologically based, non-masked acting. One of the most significant of these is the implicit character created by the *analogon* of the mask. While good masks can have many varied modes of expression, no mask can be *any* character. A mask's particular construction and appearance points to a particular character or range of characters. A mask which "works" for the character of Hamlet would probably not work for Polonius or Ophelia. By "work" we mean the mask successfully serves as an *analogon* for the character: the face of the mask is in harmony with the essence of the character being portrayed. To put it into Kendall Walton's terms, a mask that "works" authorizes a specific game of identity that is also authorized by the performance text. The mask and the text play the similar games. If the actor and audience successfully synthesize the actor's movements, the mask's face, and their knowledge of the character, then the presence of the character appears, and the mask "works." If these elements do not align, such as the face of the mask not being in harmony with our knowledge of the character (a young handsome face on old Polonius, for example), then the synthesis fails, the presence of the character does not

appear, and the audience is only aware of an actor wearing a mask. In such a case, the mask and text will seem to be playing different games.

This particular issue with mask work points to a broader issue within “outside-in” work: what elements of the performance serve as the “text” for the actor? If traditional, Western, psychologically-based realism places emphasis on knowing the mind of the character, then it stands to reason that the inside-out approach supports this emphasis. Outside-in work may require a different perspective to character creation and performance creation: using the *character* as the text, rather than the script. Like Copeau who gave scripts equal importance to movement characterization and mise-en-scene in the entire performance, often in outside-in work, the idea of a “script” becomes much more fluid, where the creative synthesis of the mask process may greatly change or influence the script itself. In fact, some forms of masked performance may have no need for a written text at all and are completely improvised. While this change in approach to character creation presents specific problems with texts written for psychologically-based characters, the character as text approach is more imaginative in nature than the traditional way.

In his studies of the masked performances of Bali, India, and similar cultures, John Emigh discovered a kind of inversion of methodology compared to traditional Western performance techniques. Emigh noticed that masked performance often inverts the typical psychological approach to script creation. He identified a triad of elements that play a part in character creation: actor,

character, and text. In most Western theatre, the acting process begins with the actor engaging with the text and mining it for details in order to create the character. However, in the cultures he studied, Emigh noted that the process begins with the actor engaging with the mask – the character – *first* and the text coming after. Rather than script-based characterization, it is character-based scripting. The performance evolves from the “encounter” between the actor and the mask:

*The text and mise-en-scene – the specific patterns of words and actions that emerge [in the performance] – will be shaped by this encounter and will often be improvised within the boundaries established by aesthetic form and social occasion. The ordering of the triad is different, but the essential process of finding a meeting ground for self and other remains the same; so does the need to negotiate playfully (and rigorously) the demands of experience, character, and text.(xix).*

This is a much more imaginative approach to character development. By this, we mean that the process of characterization occurs in a more imaginary way than a perceptual way. Certainly, imagination is called for in psychologically-based character development. The famous Stanislavski tool, the “Magic If,” is an imaginative exercise. In it, actors find the given circumstances of the character they are about to portray and ask themselves, “If I were *this* person *in* these circumstances, how would I act?” It requires the actor to *imagine* not only the circumstances, but the personality of the character being portrayed. Acting teachers since Stanislavski have thus placed the focus upon understanding the psychology of the character in order to understand the personality. However, the

process Emigh describes above operates in a *more imaginative* way because of its approach. Let us examine how.

We know an imaginary object gives everything it has to us instantly. Objects that are given to us via perception are incomplete. When an actor delves into the script searching for clues to the character's psychology, he does so in a more *perceptive* attitude. He is more reflective. While his imagination may be engaged (as any encounter with the real world can trigger the imagination), he is nevertheless *thinking* about his character. If his objective is to find the essence of the character so that he can make it present in performance, then a more *perceptive* attitude of consciousness as it assembles the character from the "facts" will result only in a limited characterization. Perception is necessarily incomplete. However, if the character is realized in a more *imaginative* way, then more of the essence of the character is given all at once, prereflectively.

For example, if I were to describe my friend's traits to you, I might start with physical traits: he is about 5'10", with blue eyes, short sandy-blonde hair, very pale skin. I may go on to talk about other qualities he has: he went to college, he enjoys reading, he works as a computer programmer, he collects Civil War memorabilia. I could even get into personality quirks and obscure trivia about my friend: one of his arms is slightly longer than the other, he laughs through his nose, he grinds his teeth when he is angry, etc. I could list many things about my friend, and you could attempt to assemble an understanding of *who* my friend is from these facts. Such an assemblage would be an admittedly

*imaginary* process. However, it would be *less* imaginary than other possible means of making my friend present in your consciousness, such as a photograph. This is because the information is given to you primarily through a perceptual mode. The facts listed are descriptions of perceptions. Even with an exhaustive list, one could not feel one knew my friend from hearing the facts alone. One would construct an image of the person from these perceptions but that image would be weak, incomplete, and greatly influenced by your intentions toward these perceptions. Without my friend present, or a picture of him to refer to, so much about your sense of his identity will be created by your own expectations and assumptions.

Let us say instead of listing my friend's qualities, I show you a photograph of him. A photo, as an *analogon*, stands in for my absent friend. You view the photo and your imagination is instantly activated. You will immediately and unavoidably create a sense of who my friend is without having to think about him. Rather than having to assemble incomplete perceptions, everything that my friend *is*, for the moment, exists in your consciousness. Of course your own intentions still play a part here. You will immediately assign certain properties to him—or more precisely, the properties are already there as soon as you look at the picture. But those properties are the product of your own intentions toward the image of my friend. The photograph is a *stronger analogon* than the list of properties I may give to you. As a result, your image of my friend does not require *as much* of your own intentions to fill in the gaps of my friend's

identity. Of course, looking at the photograph will not tell you about his computer programming career or his interest in the Civil War. In fact, it is very likely that your immediate image of my friend from the photograph will be very different from who he “is” in actuality – at least, who *I* believe he “is.” But at this point, what is important here is not accuracy, but process. Viewing a photograph invites a more imaginary state and in so doing the image created is stronger, more complete, and instantly formed. The saying “a picture is worth a thousand words” holds true here: the *analogon* of the photograph points to an overflow of data that is created through the imaginary process in a way that no listing of perceptions can approach. The question of accuracy is still at issue – and we will discuss it further below – but the process leads to complete characterizations *without* reflective thought.

Continuing with this example, suppose instead of a photograph I showed you a skillfully drawn caricature of my friend. The caricature abstracts my friend’s features in an attempt to capture a sense of his personality. Something in the way he is depicted standing, folding his overly-gangly arms, turning up his too-long nose, slyly looking askance, and so on, speaks to the artist’s understanding of the “who” of my friend. As you look upon the caricature your imagination is activated, just as with the photograph. However, there is more *knowledge* available in this abstract depiction of my friend. This knowledge comes from the artist’s choices in the depiction. In your imaginary process, this knowledge is added to the imaginative synthesis and shapes your image of my



friend. Again, this is not a process you have to think about – it happens on the prereflective plane. Further, the caricature is *abstract*. Abstractions are processed imaginatively, as Sartre pointed out. Even though the caricature of my friend is clearly not a realistic depiction of him, its capturing of the “sense” of him allows us to recreate him imaginatively. If we could not imagine, we would not be able to recognize abstractions at all, such as caricature and schema. So, we find that generally speaking, to view a caricature of my friend is to form an image of him in a more imaginative way than with a photograph, and in turn in an even more imaginative way than a list of perceptions about him.

So we then turn to masks. Certainly a mask is an *analogon*. Like the photograph, the image of an animated mask can generate a wealth of data which is given instantly to the person viewing it. Whether it is an actor viewing the mask or the audience watching it animated, a sense of “who” is instantly created in their consciousness – at least to the extent that the image successfully synthesizes in the imagination. Masks are also *abstracted*. There are some masks which are very realistic – such as life masks – and some which eschew dramatic abstraction for understated simplicity – such as some Japanese Noh masks. But even these masks cannot avoid being seen as *masks*, and this brings to them a level of abstraction. Ron Popenhagen asserts that a mask’s most theatrical feature is its mutable nature (74). “... mask presentations place an ambiguous object (the mask) upon an ambivalent thing (the body) within the paradoxical space of the theatre...” (73). Popenhagen’s term “theatrical” here is somewhat uncertain in

meaning; however, his point is clear: the presence of an abstract or ambiguous object within a performance context invites the sort of imaginative identity associations associated with theatricality. Ambiguity invites the imagination. The role of abstraction in masks will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, but it is important to note that this quality of abstraction means that, generally speaking, masks *tend* to be apprehended in a more imaginary way. Like a caricature or schema, the skillfully abstracted mask conveys its sense to the viewer in a more imaginative way.

Thus, we find that when an actor approaches characterization with a mask, the truths of the character are given instantly, at the same time as the mask is given. The mask is a conduit to an instant, seemingly intuitive characterization. If the actor is able to commit to the imaginary process, to surpass her blocks and bad faith, to allow the imagination to express and create freely, then the actor can completely transform herself by negating the “reality” of her own persona and replacing it with the persona of the mask – the persona which the actor herself constructs out of her engagement with the *analogon* that is the mask. Perhaps this is why mask-maker Gustavo Boada stated that masks reject thought, but not spontaneity and freedom (168). Boada means that an actor who attempts to *think about* how a particular mask would act is not truly engaging with the mask. The mask must be animated through the imaginary process on the prereflective plane. The instant synthesis of character from the mask is the benefit of the more imaginative, outside-in approach to characterization.

### Reconciling Imagination and Psychology

Despite the benefits of the imaginative characterization process of masks, there remains the issue of “accuracy” in characterization. The method described so far is well-suited for performance environments such as Emigh discussed – improvisation within a well-known framework. This method could also be completely open-ended, where entire performances could evolve spontaneously from the engagement between actors and masks. This would partially be successful because there would be no requirement to adhere to a script. The characters could be anything – at least, within the imaginative synthesis between the actor and the particular mask – therefore, any imaginative synthesis of a mask could suit the situation. Because there is no text in script form, the actors are free to use the masks as their text.

But suppose an actor is called upon to play Hamlet? How does one reconcile the specific characterization which exists within the text Shakespeare wrote with the huge range of possibilities offered in the engagement with the mask? How can an actor ensure his performance of Hamlet recreates the characterization in the text of the script in a Waltonian “authorized” way, when he begins with the text of the mask?

There are several possibilities here. The first seems simple enough: create a mask for Hamlet. That is, the mask-maker uses his or her skill to create a mask that is a suitable *analogon* for the character of Hamlet. This technique is used

frequently in cultures that have long masking traditions. For instance, in the *Barong Ket*, the character of Rangda has long been established. Rangda masks tend to have the same basic appearance, the curving fangs, the long hanging tongue, etc. There is room for individual variation, but the character of Rangda is implicit in each one. But in this process, the mask-maker must still have some *knowledge* of the character in order to depict that character in the mask. Just as a skilled caricature requires the “sense” of the person depicted within it, so too does the mask require the “sense” of the personage which is to be portrayed. We will discuss the aesthetics of masks in greater detail in Chapter 5; however, before there can be a mask for Rangda or Hamlet, there must be an understanding of the personage of Rangda or Hamlet. That knowledge comes from many sources: tradition, history, previous encounters with the characters, and, in the case of Hamlet, study of the script. In this case, the mask-maker must rely on some reflective perception to build up the knowledge required to make a mask that she believes will play in an authorized way in the performance game of “*Hamlet*.” If a mask-maker sets out to make a mask for a particular personage, then the mask-maker becomes a contributing *author* to the performance. In this manner, if a mask is accurately and purposely created for a particular characterization, then the actor’s imagination will more likely synthesize with the character in an authorized way. Of course, as with all imaging, the actor’s intention toward the character and mask will play a part in the synthesis. But if the actor has both script and mask to serve as texts, and if those two texts convey

similar information – if both play the same game – it is more likely that the ultimate synthesis will be authorized and “work.” However, custom-building a mask for each role would be problematic at best. Over a lifetime, an actor can play hundreds of roles. Designing (or paying a mask-maker to design and build) a mask for all of them would be time-consuming and expensive. There are other possible solutions for integrating masks into script-based work.

Mask teacher Keith Johnstone approaches this problem by further extending the imaginary state of the masked actors. When he wants the Masks\* to work from a script, he tells the Masks that they will be participating in a play. In other words, the actors becomes characters, and the *characters* in turn become a new set of actors. He developed this technique to combat a particular problem:

*Masks don't fit so well into "normal" theatre... The technique of "blocking" the moves has to be abandoned because the Masks move where they want to, and it's no use getting the designer to work out which Masks are to represent which characters. The biggest problem is that Masks refuse to repeat scenes. Even when you tell them they are going to take part in a play they insist on being spontaneous. If you force them to act in plays, then they switch off, and you are left with the actors pretending to be Masks (181).*

What Johnstone is wrestling with is attempting to keep a state of trance in his actors. That is, to encourage the imaginary state in the actors, as far to the imagination side of the scale as possible. To help with this, Johnstone rehearses in two separate sessions: one with the actors as actors, working on their lines.

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\*The term Mask with the capital letter is Johnstone's term for the personage of a particular mask made present by the actor in a trance state. He refers not to the actors, here, but to the characters. This means that when Johnstone gives direction to the Masks, he is speaking to the characters, not to the actors playing them. His assumption is that the Masks are separate entities from the actors and require separate instruction.

The second sessions involve work with the Mask, simply developing the character. From these second sessions, Johnstone attempt to work out which Masks will best suit which roles. When it comes time to integrate the two – spontaneous character and trained actor – Johnstone helps the actor to become the Mask, then feeds the Mask their first line (the line the actor playing the Mask has already learned at an earlier rehearsal) and the Mask usually cues off of the prompt and continues with his lines as normal. Key to this process, says Johnstone, is to tell the Masks that the scene has “never happened before” (181). Once a Mask can accept this, Johnstone says, then the problem of the reckless spontaneity of the Masks ignoring the script is solved.

What is at work here is that the knowledge of the lines possessed by the actor passes to the personage of the mask. This personage is another kind of knowledge which is created in the first rehearsal sessions. When Johnstone brings them together, the combined knowledge synthesizes with the imaginative state through the mask and a characterization that follows a particular script is born. Johnstone’s technique does address a particular problem with masks and acting in general: even though an actor has rehearsed and performed a particular scene dozens of times previously, saying the same lines over and over, at each performance he must say the lines as if the character has never said them before\*. Likewise, Johnstone is attempting to ensure that the imaginary state is kept in his actors. A mask that is “switched off” for Johnstone is a mask which is no longer

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\* Unless the production aims at a style where the memorization of lines needs to be made apparent.

authentically “in character,” but rather, the actor is performing what he *thinks* the character should be. It is a movement away from the imaginative state into a more reflective, perceptual state. Instead of the characterization coming out of the spontaneous, effortless synthesis of the imagination, it comes through the forced and preplanned construction of the actor’s perceptive consciousness. For mask work, at least, being more imaginative is better.

However, Johnstone’s pains are unnecessary. His error lies in the implicit duality of his term “switched off.” The imaginative and perceptual states of mind do not exist in an on/off relationship. Our consciousness is rarely just one or the other: there is a continuum between the two. Because of this, the integration of the imaged character and the lines of the script need not require such specific union. A division of time may be useful – most actors will spend time just memorizing lines without concern for character. But the fact of the matter is that because an actor (or anyone’s) consciousness can be more or less imaginative at a given time, it is to be expected that a masked actor may be more or less “inhabited” by the character she plays. Ideally, the actor’s consciousness will be *more* imaginative than perceptive because it is then that the synthesis of character comes at its easiest and most intuitive. However, there are often demands upon the actor that require her to have access to the perceptive attitude of consciousness: line cues, entrances and exits, stage movements, voice volume and articulation, awareness of the audience, etc. Johnstone dismisses these more technical elements or ignores them altogether. This dismissal demonstrates an

erroneous understanding of both the needs of performance and the nature of the imaging consciousness. Johnstone's categorical placing of an actor that is either "inhabited" or not limits the possibility of an actor meeting the perceptual demands of the stage and meeting the imaging demands of characterization.

Perhaps Johnstone's observations about his masked actor's behavior comes from his own teachings of the masking process: actor's were taught, either directly or indirectly, that they could not be "inhabited" and also maintain a degree of perceptive consciousness. As a result, this teaching shaped and guided the actor's intention toward the process.

I assert that we can avoid Johnstone's pains and still arrive at a performance style that encourages in the actor a more imaginative consciousness yet still meets the perceptual demands of performance, e.g. with a script. One possible solution to the problem of authorized characterization is to create a stock "company" of masks: a variety of personages represented in a variety of masks. Each mask would, ideally, be constructed in such a way as to provide certain "types" of characters with enough ambiguity in them to allow subtle changes or variations of characterization. As the actor or group of actors began to work on the production, they could then choose appropriate masks for each role based on their knowledge of the characters obtained from script analysis and their knowledge of the character potential within the masks. Traditional mask forms such as the *commedia dell'arte* and the *Noh* used such techniques: the former had types identified by name — such as Capitano the cowardly soldier and



Arlecchino the insubordinate servant – who would be recurring characters in most productions; the latter had specific mask styles for types of roles, like the *onna* mask for young women roles. It should be pointed out, however, that those authors writing for *commedia* or *Noh* were familiar with the form and characters available in the masks, and thus, likely tailored their texts to suit. The *commedia* especially relied on these stock characters and improvisation, with the scripts often being little more than a central idea and a series of comic gags that frame the narrative. However, despite the historical tendency to write specifically for the mask\*, a stock of masks can still be useful in approaching masked performance for scripts that were not necessarily written with masks in mind. Each mask in the stock has the potential to “work” for a particular range of characters, and can thus serve as an *analogon* for a particular character as presented in the script.

An initial concern is that a mask would be limiting to characterization. After all, if a mask is chosen to play both Hamlet and, say, Biff from *Death of a Salesman*, does that not mean that whatever personage is pointed to in the mask will appear in both roles? Hamlet and Biff are very different characters. How can the same personage play both roles? In truth, though, is that even though the mask as *analogon* points to a different persona, the mask is only *one* component of the process that creates that persona. Whatever the actor *knows* about the

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\* Writing specifically for the mask is still worthy of consideration. However, due to the broad scope of this topic, I will not attempt to discuss it in this dissertation, instead focusing on how to integrate masks and more traditional text forms.

character will shape and guide the synthesis of that character through the mask. Whatever the actor expects or *intends* about that character will be made present in the actor's imagination as she engages with the mask. A mask suggests a particular interpretation in its appearance, but the actor is not slavishly bound to that appearance. Rather, the actor synthesizes all the elements at her disposal through the mask to create the persona. The mask that could be chosen for Hamlet and Biff has elements within it which *could* suggest either Hamlet or Biff: a young man, light skin, with melancholia and anger that are present in both characters, etc. As the actor engages with the mask, those elements guide the synthesis of the character. The actor, having studied the script, bring the knowledge of the character to bear, as well as whatever intention he has about the nature of Hamlet or Biff: Hamlet *is* this or that; Biff *is* this sort of person. As a result, the final characterization is not as fixed as the features of the mask. Rather, the character that emerges is different from other characterizations because the overall imaginative synthesis is different. A given mask cannot be any character at any time, but there is certainly room for a particular well-made mask to express a range of characterizations. This range allows a stock of masks to be used for a variety of characters.

As we see, then, knowledge is key to the creation of the character with a mask. Whether that knowledge comes from a mask-maker designing a mask for a particular role, or from an actor studying a script in preparation for the role, it is a key part in how the character is created. What makes masked

characterization different from traditional, psychologically-based characterization is that it relies less on reflective, perceptive knowledge and more on prereflective, imaginative synthesis. Script analysis is important to the masked actor. But script analysis is not the prime source of the characterization. Rather, the knowledge serves as a guide, along with the mask and other imaginative elements, to create a character intuitively and completely. Rather than attempt to cobble together a character from pieces of psychology and knowledge, the actor committed to the imaginary process of masking transforms into the character in a more prereflective, spontaneous, and intuitive way.

It is possible to approach script-based performance with masks. What is required is the understanding that the consciousness can be both perceptive and imaging at the same time. As a result, the knowledge of the actor and the awareness she has of her “being-in-the-world” as she performs is not annihilated; nor is it the primary basis for the creation of the character. Instead, the reflective consciousness is reduced, surrendered to and used by the imaging consciousness that synthesizes the personage of the character anew. It is a *more* imaginary process. As a result it is more intuitive, complete, and transformative.

### Conclusion

Thus far, this chapter has attempted to lay out an approach to acting technique that is an alternative to more traditional, psychologically-based methods, usually associated with the realistic style and the theories of

Stanislavski and, to a greater extent, his followers. However, it is important to point out that even though the methods are different, the desired outcomes are similar.

Stanislavski sought nothing less than the transformation of the actor. In *Building a Character*, the actor Kostya, applying cold cream to his face, suddenly notices a smear of colors that inspire him to transform his whole face and hair with makeup. Thus “masked,” Kostya finds himself quite certain of this new character, physically and internally.

*I glanced in the mirror and did not recognize myself. Since I had looked into it the last time a fresh transformation had taken place in me. “It is he! It is he!” I exclaimed... Quite unexpectedly my twisted leg came out in advance of me and threw my body more to the right. I removed my top hat with careful exaggeration and executed a polite bow... Can I really say this creature is not part of me? I derived him from my own nature. I divided myself, as it were, into two personalities. One continued as an actor, the other as an observer (qtd. in Johnstone, 146).*

This is an example of the masked state that Johnstone and others have witnessed, even though the “mask” in this case was smeared makeup and cold cream. But the elements are there: an *analogon* which points to an “other,” a spontaneous understanding of that other, expressed physically and intuitively. What Stanislavski, through his character Kostya, expresses as “two personalities” is really the divided attitude of consciousness: one perceiving, one imaging. In this example, Stanislavski expresses the “creative state” which he sought as the core of his acting system: the ability to use “conscious technique to tap the unconscious” (Daw, 18). Though Stanislavski uses the psychoanalytical terms of

his time – conscious and unconscious – Sartre’s assertion that consciousness instead takes on attitudes of perception or imagination more accurately describes the “creative state.” One might say instead that actors use perception to tap the imagination. But the *process* of acting is not in the perception, but in the imagination. Actors may use perception to teach them the ‘facts’ – the authorized truths of the game. But the playing of the game is imaginary even if the behavior in that game is truthful. An actor beholds the mask and *perceives*. But the “who” of the face – the knowledge – is already caught up in the imagination before the actor has time to reflect upon it. The mask *analogon* invites through ambiguity; it authorizes games of identity and sets certain “fictional truths” on the playing field. The actor does not need to think about these things. Already, the actor “knows” this character through her imagination – at least, the beginnings of this character. What remains is the playing of the game and the physical expression of the presence of the personage. By allowing one’s imagination to create the characterization freely through the knowledge provided by text and technique, a complete intuitive physical transformation is possible. This, I would argue, is what Stanislavski wished: not that a character be brought to life in a psychologically valid way on the stage, but rather, the truthful “sense” of the personage appears before the audience. Such a sense can only be found in the imagination and be brought to existence physically in the body of the actor. From an audience’s perspective, the psychology of a character is irrelevant: what is important is the physical presence of the internal life of the character. From an

actor's perspective, the psychology of the character need not be the focus of the characterization process. It can provide needed knowledge to shape and guide the characterization, but the *essence* of the character is in the imagination.

The goals of transformation are the same for outside-in work and inside-out work. What differs are the core assumptions. Those that favor psychological realism tend to believe that a character has psychologically determined traits that determine who he "is," and that they can be teased out by the actor through script analysis to create a characterization. But for Sartre, character is indeterminate, rooted in the imaginary. There is no "truth" to be found within a person, be it a real person or a fictional character. There is only a collection of facts which only have any relevance if the person chooses to allow those facts to affect their free will. We are what we choose to be, and even then, we are never a complete project. A more imaginative method of constructing identity in acting technique will allow an actor to create a character in the same manner that he constructs himself: intuitively, imaginatively, and intentionally.

Working with masks is not primarily about working with facts and suppositions, boundaries and determinations, but with ambiguity. Ambiguity invites imagination, for both the actor and the audience. Thus, while the end result of the masked characterization process – transformation – is like that of more traditional, psychologically-based processes, the use of the mask in character development is fundamentally a more imaginative process. It is, according to Sartre, more like how we form our own identities.

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## Chapter 5 - The Mask and Sens

So far in this dissertation we have discussed the imaginary nature of identity and how this nature informs and affects the acting process. In particular, we have examined how masks and masked work illustrate or heighten this imaginary quality. We have identified two properties of masks that make this so: a mask is an *analogon* in the Sartrean sense, and it is a functional object of play in the Waltonian sense. That is, masks point to another, absent identity and invite playing certain kinds of games with that identity. But all masks are not created equal. The kinds of identities and games which can be played vary from one mask to the next and one context to the next.

It is generally acknowledged in the mask literature that some masks are better than others. By “better,” the authors usually mean that the mask is more expressive, better constructed, with a greater range of characterization—in short, with a better sense of “presence” that makes the mask seem alive when animated. On the other hand, some masks are “dead.” They are unable to project much of a sense of presence, or the performer may have a hard time identifying a character of any depth within them. For example, LeCoq advised that his masks should always be larger than the face to give the actor “room” to play with

characterization (36-37) (Fig. 1). For LeCoq, the play of the actor with the character is essential to his sort of work. Yet, one could argue that a small half-mask could be as playful in a different style of work, or that a large helmet-style mask, such as Rangda (Fig. 2) from the *Barong Ket*, would not play very well in LeCoq's exercises. There are many possible differences between masks which seem to defy any sort of aesthetic codification.



Fig. 1: LeCoq's "Jesuit" Mask (57).



Fig. 2: A Rangda mask (Hartley Film Foundation).

One can, of course, point to certain elements in masks that are obvious marks of quality. A skilled carver may be able to make a far more expressive mask than a novice, or a particular mask may be ill-fitting, causing issues in performance. But beyond these technical elements, one mask can still be "better" than another. A master carver may create a mask which is very valuable as a piece of art, but ineffective in a performance. An untrained artist may create a simple, primitive mask out of papier-mâché that can end up being wonderfully expressive in performance. So, how does one articulate what makes a mask effective or ineffective?

Further complicating this aesthetic question about masks is the notion of personal taste. Not everyone will react to a given mask the same way, and what is a “living presence” in performance for one person may be merely a performer in a mask for another. But rather than dismissing mask effectiveness as a “matter of taste,” it is possible to discuss an overall aesthetics of the mask which can account for the variations in effectiveness beyond subjective opinion. Such a discussion must be framed not only by examining qualities of the mask itself, but also by the performance context in which the mask appears.

Part of the question of context can be examined through Waltonian terms: what games are authorized by the mask, what games are authorized by the performance situation, and who is playing the game. But because a mask serves to encourage the imaginary state in the consciousness of its viewers, any aesthetic discussion of masks should include the nature of how the imagination contributes to the overall impression of the mask in the consciousness of the viewer. For that, we will turn once again to Jean-Paul Sartre who wrote about aesthetics using the term *sens* (translated from French as “sense” or “meaning”).

In this chapter we will discuss how the idea of “belief” in masks introduced in Chapter 3 will extend to the audience as well. As such, we will see that part of a mask’s effectiveness is the context of its use in performance and how the total synthesis of mask, movement, and performance contribute to a particular mask’s aesthetic quality. We will explore the Sartrean notion of *sens* (or “totality”) and how it can be applied to masks. We will also discuss how a

mask's aesthetic value improves the better it, as an *analogon*, invites and plays with the imagination. What we find is that in masks, *expression* is more important than *mimesis*, and that elements of ambiguity and abstraction are essential to mask aesthetics.

### A Game of Performance

Some masks *are* better than others, but great deal of what makes a *particular* mask better in performance than another has to do with the context in which that particular mask is used in performance. That is to say that a mask with a particular style, a particular construction, and certain aesthetic qualities might be quite effective in one performance mode and yet fail to be effective in another. But that is not to say that the performance makes the mask, either. I would argue that there are some masks which would fail to “work” in almost *any* performance circumstance. By “work” here we mean that the mask successfully fulfils its partial role in the whole of the imaginary synthesis as a functional *analogon* which creates the presence of an otherwise absent character. A mask which works is part of the process that creates a believable presence in performance. There may be certain performance styles which intentionally draw attention to the artificiality of the performance itself (e.g. Brecht) but even so, there are some masks which would serve this purpose *better* than others.

In Chapter 3, we discussed how an actor can enter into a “trance” state when working with masks: a self-sustaining imaginative synthesis. Required of a

trance is belief: the actor must be willing to *believe* that her actions in the fictional circumstances of the performance are, nevertheless, truthful. While this trance state is useful for the actor, it is likely irrelevant for the audience\*. However, *belief* is very much relevant. Just as an actor plays a “game” of identity which is authorized by the performative elements of the acting process (e.g. script, mask, mis-en-scene, movement, etc.), so, too, does the audience play a game with the entire performance. In fact, ideally, the audience and actors are playing the *same* game, though each has different roles and perspectives on the game as a whole. It is what Kendall Walton called a “collective imagining,” an experience where

*... not only do the various participants imagine many of the same things; each of them realizes that the others are imagining what he is, and each realizes that the others realize this. Moreover, steps are taken to see that the correspondence obtains. And each participant has reasonable expectations and can make justified predictions about what others will imagine given certain turns of events (Mimesis as Make-Believe, 18).*

Of course, not everyone in the experience imagines all things in the same way.

Nevertheless, there are commonly shared imaginings which are similar in at least some fundamental ways. It is in this context that we will examine the relationship between audience, performance, and props such as masks.

Before looking at masks in particular, let us return to the example I put forth in Chapter 3 about the toy baby bottle which is used alternatively in a game

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\* One could argue that moments when the audience becomes “caught up” or “entranced” in the story and surrenders their being-in-the-world to the fiction of the performance as a kind of trance. This has relevance inasmuch as the audience participates imaginatively in the constitution of the performance, and this will be explored in more depth in the next chapter. However, the use of “trance” terminology in the mask literature is generally restricted to the acting process upon which trance has a much more direct impact.

of “caring for baby” and “flying to the moon.”\* Let us assume a child, Chris, is using the bottle as a prop for a game of “caring for baby.” Chris picks up the bottle and approaches the doll. Chris speaks in a soothing voice, saying to the doll, “Are you hungry?” Chris’ body movements might be described as careful, concerned, or parental. Chris picks up the doll with care, mimicking how one might pick up a real infant, and places the bottle to the doll’s lips. Chris, we know, is playing the game “caring for baby.” We know this without having to ask Chris for an explanation of the events: we believe them, and we do so spontaneously. Chris, in playing the game of “caring for baby” has certain behaviors and choices which are “authorized” for the game, and certain behaviors which are not authorized. Chris makes physical self-alterations to reflect parental concern. The props are treated as they would be were this not a game, i.e., the bottle is held to the lips, not the foot. In fact, the bottle is held like a *bottle*, even though it is only a plastic toy replica. Chris’ vocal choices are also those permissible within the “game” of “caring for baby.” In short, Chris *performs* the game of “caring for baby,” and Chris’ actions are *truthful* within the context of that game.

But suppose instead of a toy baby bottle and doll, Chris only had a pillow and crayon with which to play. Chris could still play the game of “caring for baby” by endowing the pillow with the qualities of being a baby and the crayon with the qualities of being a baby bottle. This is accomplished in the same

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\* Examining children at play is also fundamental to Walton’s approach to make believe. See Walton, 11.

manner as described above by treating the props of the game as if they were real. That the baby doll *looks* like a baby and the toy bottle *looks* like a real bottle may make it easier for Chris (and us, watching) to identify what the doll and toy are standing in for; however, the *process* is still the same. After all, the toys are *also* not the things they stand in for. Chris could hold up the crayon and tell us “This is the baby bottle, okay?” However, such a revelation may not be necessary. As Chris plays the game, we can see how the pillow is held as if it were a baby and the crayon is held as if it were a bottle. That the pillow is close in size and texture to a baby and the crayon is cylindrical like a bottle suggest their analogs. This may be why our Chris chose these two objects to be *analoga* for the baby and bottle in the absence of a toy which more definitively captures the sense of “baby” and “bottle.” If we were to observe Chris bring the tip of a crayon to the surface of a pillow, we might be confused – what is Chris doing? But if Chris continues to play the game with all of its elements including physical choices and speech, we can likely make the imaginative connection that Chris has already made: the pillow is a baby, the crayon is a bottle. This is because in an ambiguous setting (an absence of more “realistic” representation of the play items) we rely on the *imagination*. Chris’s movements and words are knowledge which is used to spark the imaginative synthesis for us. Chris need not give us this knowledge explicitly. We overcome the ambiguity of the pillow-as-baby because we can synthesize the transformation imaginatively.

But suppose we encountered Chris bringing a legal pad of paper to the metal face of a red wagon? Would we then, know, what game is being played? “Are you hungry?” Chris asks the wagon, and carefully brings the corner of the pad of paper to the surface of the wagon. We may figure out from the other play elements what the game is, but we are more likely tempted to ask, “Chris, what are you doing?” Chris could then answer that the wagon is a baby and the legal pad is a bottle, and then we would have the knowledge we need to complete the imaginary synthesis and understand the game. But it is unlikely that we would discover such knowledge without explicit assistance from Chris. This is because even if Chris’ movements and words are authorized for the game of “caring for baby,” a wagon and pad of paper are not – at least, it is *difficult* to authorize them as such because they make a poor baby and bottle. This situation is *too* ambiguous; or, there are elements of the *analoga* which are in conflict with the objects they represent. A wagon is hard, cold, metal, and painted red; babies are soft, warm, fragile, and flesh-colored. A pad of paper is flat, rectangular, and can be awkward to manage if held so the pages fall open; a baby bottle is cylindrical, smaller, and self-contained. Given a choice, one *might* choose a pillow to be an *analogon* for a baby because the *analogon* and the object have at least certain things in common. It is less likely that one would choose a wagon to stand in for a baby because the aesthetic qualities of a wagon are too dissimilar to the aesthetic qualities of a baby. While it is *possible* that we could discover Chris’



game with the wagon and legal pad, it is much less likely than in the previous examples.

Does this mean, then, that in the third example, that Chris is “bad” at playing the game? I doubt Chris believes so, especially if Chris doesn’t consider the involvement of others in the game. For Chris, the imaginary transformation is already made. However, if it is important to Chris that we *watch* and *understand* (and thus, *participate* in) the game, then it behooves Chris to select game props – *analoga* – that will more accurately point to their objects. Barring that, Chris may feel compelled to present us with the knowledge we need beforehand: “The wagon is the baby and the pad is the bottle, okay?” Chris’ verbalization prior to play is an expectation that we will “play along;” that we will play the same game that Chris plays, and the utterance is made to ensure that the nature of the game (and its attendant authorized behaviors) are understood.

But Walton points out that when Chris does seek to coordinate our collective imaginings by making plain the props and their representations, we have sacrificed the spontaneous quality of the imagining. We must *decide* to imagine that the wagon is a baby. As a result, we must start from a more reflective attitude of consciousness, sacrificing the “vivacity” of a more spontaneous (and thus, more imaginative) game (*Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 18-19).

But even if Chris does not verbally provide the “rules” of the game, all of the other games actions are *also* an invitation to “play along.” That Chris moves and speaks in a certain way in relation to the props, space, and others, is an

implicit (and possibly even prereflective) invitation to participate or appreciate the game which authorizes those movements and speech. We become “participant-observers;” we observe, but we are not separated from the game. By observing the game, we participate in it, as part of the collective imagining. And as we are invited, our role as participant-observers is to, like Chris, imaginatively transform the doll into a baby (and Chris as a caregiver) within the context of the game. As Walton said, those who participate or appreciate a particular game are expected to behave in a manner which is authorized for that game (“Fictional Entities,” 407). In order for this behavior to happen, the game must be understood. Without this knowledge, then we are confused – is the wagon a baby? What is the legal pad supposed to be? In short, lacking knowledge or being presented with ambiguity or contradiction which we cannot overcome imaginatively we fail to join in the game.

It should be pointed out that when we speak of knowledge, we do not necessarily mean information which is processed reflectively. Chris carefully brings the crayon to the pillow with a posture of parental concern and we may reflectively think to ourselves, “Oh, Chris is feeding a baby.” But it is possible that awareness of the game will come to us intuitively. This is because our imaginations are activated and imaginary syntheses occur on the prereflective plane. Where we are likely to find ourselves resuming a more reflective (and perceptive) attitude is where we are given ambiguity which our imagination cannot overcome.

But choice of game props is not the only factor in constituting the believable behavior that is the game. Say instead that Chris does not handle the props with particular care. If Chris handles the doll roughly or recklessly, then the idea that the doll is an *analogon* for a real baby may be diminished or lost. Chris may “shorthand” the play, picking up the doll like it were a *doll*, not a baby (and thus, capable of withstanding a good deal more careless and rough handling), doing likewise with the toy bottle, and then briefly and perfunctorily touch the bottle to the doll’s lips. In such a case, Chris’ behavior, while authorized for the game, is not *truthful*. Chris indicates that the fictional baby is being fed fictionally, but does not do so in a manner in which suggests that the behavior is authentic. Admittedly, Chris may not have ever fed a real baby and thus, Chris’ imagination may be limited because of a lack of knowledge. But there is still a difference between *indicating* the behavior in a fictional situation and *behaving truthfully* in a fictional situation. If Chris engages with the props in a strongly imaginative way, Chris will *act* in an authentic way despite any lapses in knowledge which we, as more experienced observers, might have to constitute our understanding of the act. This is *Chris’ “caring for baby,”* and it is authentic inasmuch as Chris behaves in an authorized and truthful manner within the fictional game.

If, on the other hand, the play is approached in a more reflective mode – more aware of the game being played – Chris may “go through the motions” of the game. Chris may reduce the act of feeding the child to certain (and somewhat

arbitrary and personal) basics and *indicate* to those playing the game (Chris and us) that the doll is a baby, the toy bottle is real, and the baby is being fed by simply hitting these basics. In this case, Chris plays in a fictional situation, in an authorized manner, but not in a truthful way. We watch, and we may understand reflectively Chris' actions, but it is unlikely that we *believe* in them as co-participants in the game. The actions are fictional because Chris *indicates* them, but does not *do* them.

That the doll and toy bottle look very much like their analogs makes it easier for us to *understand* the actions of the game, even if we don't *believe* in them. But consider the example of pillow and crayon, above. If Chris indicates the actions of the game with these more ambiguous *analoga*, will we then understand the game? Chris picks up a pillow as a pillow, picks up a crayon as a crayon, and briefly touches the tip of the crayon to the pillow. What has happened? Chris knows, of course. But it is unlikely that we understand the nature of the game and as participants, we may feel confusion and uncertainty about our part in the game. It's even less likely with props of a wagon and a legal pad. We have no frame of reference to imagine a wagon as a baby. We don't *know* the rules as Chris does, therefore, we cannot *imagine* as Chris does, the transformations that occur. We must fall back on perception and observe.

Of course, a prop that suits one game may not suit another. Suppose a second child, Pat, wants to play a game of "flying to the moon." The toy baby bottle bears a slight resemblance in basic shape to a rocket ship; Pat may elect to

use it for the game in the absence of a more “realistic” toy. Pat then can launch the bottle, which is now imaginatively a rocket and fly it about the room while held in the hand. In this case, the toy bottle has enough aesthetic similarity to a “real” rocket ship that will allow us, along with Pat’s other game behaviors (the zooming movement of the rocket, Pat’s accompanying sound effects, etc.) to make the imaginative leap along with Pat as we participate-observe the game. But suppose it becomes time for the rocket ship to land? A wagon can make a serviceable *analogon* to the surface of the moon: it’s flat and wide and hard. The same could not be said of “landing” the rocket on the doll: we see again the problem of too much ambiguity for us to make the imaginative transformation. Thus, while a wagon may be a terrible *analogon* for the game of “caring for baby,” it suits the game of “flying to the moon.” A doll makes an exceptional *analogon* for a baby, but is difficult to accept as standing in for the surface of the moon upon which a rocket may land.

It may be easy to conclude from these various examples that the more *realistic* an *analogon* is the better. That is, the more an *analogon* looks like the real thing—mimesis or verisimilitude—the less confusion we will have about what the *analogon* represents. Certainly, a wagon is not a baby where a doll is almost always understood to be a baby. But consider that Chris’ doll is very lifelike. The skin has a particular tone, the cheeks are particularly chubby, the fingers curled in an angelic gesture, while the doll’s clothing is very detailed, with buttons and shoes and a particular pattern on the clothes. There is little question that this doll

stands in for a baby; however, this doll is also standing in for *this* particular baby. This baby has so much detail that it would be difficult to imagine this baby as anything but *this* plump-cheeked, cherubic child which it so carefully represents. It is not impossible, as Walton points out, just as is it is possible to imagine a steamy exotic jungle while in the midst of the city looking at tall buildings and cars. “What is not so easy is imagining this vividly while glaring evidences of civilization dominate one’s consciousness” (*Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 15). So if we are to see Chris’ highly-detailed doll as, say, a penniless orphan child, we may be able to do so – but only by once again sacrificing the spontaneous and vivid quality of the imagining.

On the other hand, consider that Chris had a featureless rag doll: abstract arms and legs but no hands or feet, no face, a baby’s size and shape, a simple dress, colored in a neutral tan. Such a doll lacks the detail of the first example, but it is still understood to be a *baby*. In fact, it could be *many* babies, imaginatively speaking, inasmuch as because it does not make a definitive choice about certain qualities, the ambiguity which is left by these absences invites the imagination to fill in the gaps in a manner appropriate to the intention we have towards the doll at a given moment. We will discuss in greater detail the role of ambiguity in *analogia* shortly; however, it is important to note that a *more* realistic doll does not necessarily mean that doll is superior in all game situations. If the baby is to be a penniless orphan, then the richly-clothed doll may not be authorized for the game. Chris may make this authorization, but if we are

participant-observers in the game, the fine clothes may seem out of bounds, and the cost of this violation of the rules is the vivacity of the image. The rag doll, however, could be authorized. And so long as the rag doll is not shabby, but simple and ambiguous, it *could* stand in for that orphan child *or* a rich baby – at least, such a transformation would be easier without aesthetic elements in conflict with the rules of the game.

Thus, we see that from a participant-observer's vantage in a game of make-believe a particular *analogon* can be better or worse not only depending on the game being played, but also on how the *analogon* is used in the game, and certain aesthetic qualities the *analogon* shares with the object it stands in for. Of course, each of us comes to the game with our own particular point of view. Chris' version of the game will be *different* on many levels from our individual games. However, Chris' *performance* of the game will provide the knowledge that will spark our own personal imaginative syntheses. The performance and its apprehension define the game. Further, with the right props, the right context, and the right behaviors, Chris' performance of the game can invite us to participate in an imaginary, prereflective, and spontaneous way.

Our act of observing Chris and Pat play with toys is, of course, very much like our role as spectators watching a play. The play is a game of make-believe, there are certain behaviors which are authorized and certain which are not, and we, as participant-observers, are expected to "play along." In the case of masked performances, the mask *analogon* takes on similar sorts of properties as the toys

used in the previous examples. We know a mask stands in for another personage. We also know that how a mask is used by the actor, i.e. “animating” it, plays a part in how the performance game is understood. We can also begin to see that how a mask is constructed will impact the believability of the actions in the game, and we can surmise that certain masks will be better in certain performances and worse in others.

But what is meant by the “Other” of the mask? We know that the other is an imaginary object, a personage, which is meant to be made present in the game of the performance. Does this mean, then, that masks should be very realistic, bringing as much detail as they can to the face in order to recreate this “other?” Like the rag doll example, detail can be limiting. Too much ambiguity, though, and we fail to imagine as we fall back on perception to find the knowledge we need. What is needed in a mask, then, is neither an exact replica of the face of the other nor a blank slate devoid of expression. Rather, a mask should capture the “sense” of the personage being made present. To further explore this idea of “sense,” we will turn to Sartre’s aesthetic, *sens*.

### *Sens, Mimesis, and Expression*

Masks, like other works of art, are more effective the better they capture the *sens* of the character which they represent. *Sens* is the ability of an analogon to capture the “totality” of the object it represents (Flynn, 436). Sartre aligns himself with gestalt theory in that he believes a given object has properties that



cannot be found in the sum of its individual parts (Wertheimer). A piano has a certain shape, a certain color of wood, a certain tone, certain memories associated with it, and thousands of other details that constitute the object of the piano; and yet, none of these things individually or in combination can capture the wholeness that is the piano. This wholeness is the piano's *sens*.

*Sens* captures for the viewer the *essence* of a particular thing. This essence or totality can only be possessed in the imagination. Totality here cannot be a perception, because perception is by its very nature limited. Totality then is a quality more properly imagined. Thomas Flynn writes:

*The bond between object, sens, and image is intrinsic. They are co-constituting. So the production of a work of art, though Sartre calls it a generous act, retains a certain narcissistic character owing to its imaginative rather than signifying form. For the relations between means and ends in art is the reverse of what it is in communication via signs: it is the audience which acts as means for recreating the aesthetic object through its sens (436).*

The viewer's intention, here, plays a significant part in the constituting the *sens* of the object, though it is not the *only* part – i.e. it is not merely a matter of taste. A photograph of a sunflower may not be as effective in capturing the *sens* of “sunflower-ness” as Van Gogh's paintings (Fig. 3). Perhaps there is, for the viewer, something about Van Gogh's paintings which are a more accurate *analogon* for the “essence” of the idea of “sunflowers” in his imagination. The paintings are not “realistic,” but they may, in the imagination of the viewer, be more *truthful* about the nature of sunflowers.

When we discuss the aesthetics of an object, especially an art object, we tend to think of such a discussion in terms of “beauty.” But the *sens* of sunflowers is not merely a question of their beauty. Likewise, Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* have more qualities than beauty which constitute their nature in our consciousness. It is easy to say that *Sunflowers*



“is” or “is not beautiful.” This is a statement on the painting with the assumption (not uncommon for aesthetic discussions) that its role of the artist is to present a beautiful object, a role which is less and less held as important among artists and aestheticians (Behrens, 318). Rather than simply ask if a work of art (such as a mask) is beautiful, we will consider, as Sartre does, *beauty* as a property of the object. And more than beauty, other properties which we can say an object “has” – including emotional states – are placed there by our consciousness through the imaginative constitution of that object. We look at the painting and may find the flowers to be *beautiful*, the color to be *hot*, the brushstrokes to be *feverish*. These properties are placed there by our consciousness from our own knowledge and intention, but are not done so arbitrarily. The properties are also constituted through the *analogon* itself. For Sartre, then, the apprehension of beauty, hotness, loneliness, sadness, horror, or any other aesthetic quality is ultimately an imaginative act in the consciousness

Figure 3: *Sunflowers*, Van Gogh.

of the viewer. Beauty is, truly, in the eye of the beholder, but it is not a completely subjective process. Because aesthetic appreciation is an imaginary act, it therefore shares the qualities of spontaneous synthesis of other imaginary acts, i.e., any appreciation comes from a simultaneous synthesis of knowledge and intention (which assign certain aesthetic qualities to the object), and the *analogon* that carries the *sens* of the object itself. Thus, when we discuss the aesthetics of an object, we are discussing all properties of that object which appear through the



Figure 4: *The Thinker*, Rodin.

imaging synthesis. We have mentioned that these aesthetic properties include emotion. An expanded discussion of Sartre's notion of emotion will appear in the next chapter. For now, it is important only to remember that an emotion *vis-a-vis* an object is a property of that object. (Emotional *behavior*, on the other hand, is a related but different matter.) We can say that Rodin's *The Thinker* (Fig. 4) appears to be

"brooding," and such a statement is an aesthetic evaluation of the imaginary object of *The Thinker* of which the actual statue is an *analogon*. The shaped bronze statue does not literally "brood." But the shaped bronze statue points to an overall totality which only exists in the imagination and it is *this* totality which can be said to "brood." When we look at the statue itself, we can then discuss how Rodin's technique skillfully guides us to discover

this brooding quality as we apprehend the statue. But Rodin's technique is the means by which the "brooding" is *expressed*. Expression, then, is a different aim than replicating an object as it appears in life, which is termed *mimesis*.

The difference between *mimesis* and *expression* is important for any discussion of aesthetic "wholes," such as *sens*. Tomonobu Imamichi argues that the idea of *mimesis* has been the traditionally valued aesthetic of Western (his term: Occidental) cultures, while in Eastern (Oriental) cultures, traditionally expression is more valued, though in modern times the values have reversed (145). In the West, *mimesis* emerged from the writings of Plato and Aristotle, with the ideal goal of art as "imitative representation" (141). Imamichi points out that the goal of *mimesis* is not, as many misinterpret Plato to mean, to represent a "concrete thing" which is already one step removed from the ideal thing, presenting the "shadow of a shadow" of the thing; rather, *mimesis* is a representation of the ideal thing itself. The role of the artist, if he is talented, is to *imitate* the "divine truth through his imitative, representative skill" (142). For the less talented artist, he must do his best to imitate the object itself, which is already one step away from the divine, ideal totality. Nevertheless, the emphasis is on *imitation*, presenting as closely as possible, the ideal thing being represented in art.

Compare this to expression, which Imamichi finds as the root of Eastern aesthetic tradition. Imamichi cites Sheh Hua, an 8<sup>th</sup> century Chinese aesthetician, who outlined, in order of importance, six qualities of painting (144). Hua's first,

most important quality of painting was that the painting expresses “the spirit of nature.” This means an attempt, by the artist, to express the ultimate, transcendent nature of the thing itself. For instance, capturing correct color is not as important to the artist as other elements because the color of, say, a landscape, only occurs at a given time, for a moment. “If the art of painting wishes to reach the essence of the universe,” writes Imamichi, “we may not cling to its phenomenal, limited appearance. Hence, colour must be negated in order to approach the reality of nature” (144). This means that if one wishes to *express* the totality of the thing itself, one must *diminish* the mimetic details (e.g. color) so that the transcendent quality can emerge. This diminishment will prove instrumental as we continue to discuss *sens*.

There are, of course, parallels between Eastern and Western mask traditions and these ideas of mimesis and expression. However, because mask cultures are far too varied to classify as merely “Eastern” or “Western” and because of the enormous differences in the assumptions and uses of masks within these discreet cultures, we will not attempt to draw specific parallels here. We can acknowledge that in modern Western theatre, specifically, despite the work of theorists such as Brecht, Grotowski, and Brook, the majority of acting theory and performance today continues to rely on mimesis as the core aesthetic value: representing on the stage or screen that which is like life as it appears to us. But as we see from the idea of expression in Eastern thought, can the ideal whole of a thing be expressed through mimetic elements? Sartre believed it could

not, and found that through ambiguity and abstraction, a object's *sens* could be revealed.

### Ambiguity, Abstraction and *Sens*

In his book *Sartre and the Artist*, George Howard Bauer discusses Sartre's ideas on art, aesthetics, and art criticism as they appeared in Sartre's writings over the years. Bauer describes Sartre's aesthetic approach in terms of "being" and "existence." To exist is to have consciousness of the world: to have a body that intersects and interacts with the real objects of the world. One need no reason to "exist;" one simply does. But, by contrast, "being" is a purposeful state; to exist for a reason and to know that reason. Man has a body which "exists" but existentially cannot "be." For example, a piano both *exists* and *is*. It has a purpose which was defined by its creator: a reason for being. It is itself and nothing more. But because Sartre believes that the essential state of man is one "suspended in his freedom," (*Being and Nothingness*, 25) he has no purpose other than that which he creates for himself. Man certainly exists, but he cannot "be." Consequently, there is a void in man which must be filled (Bauer, 4). An aesthetic property, such as beauty, then, "is a being which cannot be given to perception and that, in its very nature, is isolated from the universe" (*Imaginary* 189). We look at Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* and we find there qualities which do not exist in perception. As Gestalt theory would point out, we could look at Van Gogh's choice of color palette, the missing petals, the arrangement of shapes in the

picture, and on and on. Yet, while such an examination might help us understand how Van Gogh created the painting he did, we would still not be able to account for the overall “sense” of the painting which only exists in our imagination. Each of these elements (the gestalt “figure”) becomes the object of our perception one at a time, but we still only *imagine* the whole (the gestalt “ground”). For Sartre, works of art hold great attraction for us because they point to, or *express*, the essential nature, the “being”, which does not exist in perception. We want to fill the void caused by our lack of “being,” and we sometimes try to fill that void with the “being” of aesthetic objects.

This essential being, this idea of being what one “is” as a fundamental nature, is expressed in the idea of *sens*. A person views Van Gogh’s sunflowers and perhaps she sees in the painting the true essence of what sunflowers “are”. The *sens* of “sunflower-ness” is present in Van Gogh’s painting. Our viewer may be tempted to confuse the real and unreal. She may transfer the idea of “sunflower-ness” as aesthetic object to real sunflowers in the real world. But aesthetic appreciation is an imaginary act, and as such, her own intention and knowledge play a part in constituting the object through its *sens*.

Sartre says that all works of art are unreal (*Imaginary* 188). By this, he does not mean the *analogon* itself, but rather, the imaged object the *analogon* points to. While a sculpture is real, in the imaging process, the *analogon* loses its own sense (as a piece of shaped bronze called *The Thinker*) and acquires the sense of the object which it represents (a totality given all at once which is *The Thinker*),

which, in turn, exists only in the imagination—and as a *specific* object which is particular to the individual consciousness apprehending it (my *Thinker* will be different than your *Thinker*, though it is likely there will be things in common to both *Thinkers*). But if a continuum between perception and imagination exists it follows that a particular *analogon* may be apprehended more or less imaginatively than another. We have already outlined how a prop in children's play can be more or less effective given the prop's aesthetic elements, context, and use in play. But Sartre believed, as we will discuss below, that even in a broad variety of contexts, *abstraction* was more aesthetically pleasing than *realism*. Sartre had a particular set of biases which influenced his ideas on the purpose and beauty of art; these will become more apparent as we discuss them. However, his observations will have specific ramifications for masks and their uses.

Let us assume a photographer is going to take a picture of a sunflower. We might consider a photograph to be "realistic;" at least, more "realistic" than an abstract painting. By realism we mean the *analogon* carries with it a high degree of verisimilitude to the object it represents as it would appear in perception. I stand in front of a (real) sunflower, raise a camera to my eye and take a picture of, more or less, what exists for me in my field of perception. My aim is to capture a photograph which is visually similar to how I see the sunflower in reality. Admittedly, there is much that is missing from the resultant photo compared to the perceptive experience that just preceded it—sound, visual



elements which are beyond the frame of the camera, movement caused by the wind, etc. Nevertheless, this photograph could be said to be “realistic” inasmuch as it represents the perceptive experience within the limitations of the medium. It is taken from my eye level, the lighting is natural, and filmic representations usually have a high degree of detail which is very much like life. It is a *mimetic* attempt to present the sunflower.

There is, however, more than one way to take a picture. The photographer could use different camera angles, lighting, photo effects, etc. to manipulate the final photo; however, in each of these choices, the photographer as artist is making choices which move the *analogon* away from perception and towards imagination. Instead of taking the photo from my standing eye level straight on, I might, instead, crouch down and take the photo from a vantage below the blossom, with the sun brightly illuminating the petals from behind. While the photograph still has the high level of detail that is typical of film, my choices as a photographer have changed the resulting *analogon*. The colors are brighter, the background is nothing but the sky streaked with sunlight from a lens flare caused by my positioning. I have, in some sense, *abstracted* the image of the sunflower. If we compare the simple, perception-like photo with the more abstracted, artistic choices, we may find both to be beautiful; however, the abstract second photograph is more likely to invite us to imagine and in doing so, we are more likely to synthesize the totality of “sunflower-ness” though the *analogon* and our own intentions. We *look* at the first photo, we *imagine* through

the second. The closer an object is to the “perception” side of the perception-  
imagination scale, the more difficult it is to be “beautiful,” because one cannot  
*perceive* beauty. One can only imagine beauty.

This is not to say that a photograph or “realistic” *analogon* is incapable of  
carrying the *sens* of beauty. A photograph of a sunflower is still an *analogon* and  
as a result, it carries with it the potential to activate the imaging consciousness. A  
particular person may find a photograph of a sunflower to carry the *sens* of  
sunflowers more than Van Gogh’s paintings. As Flynn wrote above, it is the  
*viewer* that creates the imaginary object out of its *sens*. But consider Imamichi,  
here writing about the value shift from mimesis to expression which occurred in  
the Western visual art world with the advent of the camera:

*Even a photographic machine of the best quality cannot have insight into  
the human being. Art concentrates on exposing this inner landscape of  
human feeling. To bring out the human feeling from its secret interiority  
into the domain of visual form, to express the inner man which is invisible  
to the outside world, became the modern principle of art (143).*

One might take issue with Imamichi’s implication that *no* photo can capture “the  
interior landscape of human feeling.” But I think we can agree that such hidden  
interiors, essences, and truths about the human condition can only be  
apprehended imaginatively. So, it is fair to conclude that generally speaking, the  
further an *analogon* is from representing its object in a realistic way, the more the  
imaginary state is invited. As a result, Sartre believed that abstraction was more  
aesthetically pleasing than realism.

This abstraction will prove important to masks as sculpted forms, which Bauer also discusses from Sartre's aesthetic viewpoint. Sartre disliked traditional sculptural forms because of their realistic nature and their choice of "sacred" materials such as marble and gold (95). He felt that they froze the image of man in such a way as to make a definitive statement about man's nature (93). Thus, they failed to capture the ambiguous nature of man's existence. They are "corpses," dead bodies. They represent an attempt to give man a "being" essence. As Bauer observes, "In [Sartre's] creative works, the art object – particularly those that are anthropomorphic in character – represents a continual attraction for those who confuse the real and imaginary" (4). Abstract forms were more appealing to Sartre, partly because they denied the "fixed" or "realistic" mode he detested. As Sartre said, "Beauty is a value that can only be applied to the imaginary and carries with it the nihilation of the world in its essential structure. This is why it is stupid to confuse the moral and the aesthetic" (*Imaginary*, 193). This last point indicates that Sartre also approved of abstraction in art because abstract aesthetic forms were more imaginative in nature. After all, if it is because we can imagine that we are free, then more abstract art is more reflective of the nature of mankind as it encourages imagination and denies a fixed "being" or "nature."

Sartre likes David Hare's sculpture (Fig. 5), for example, because Hare can express the human form without turning it into a 'corpse.' He does this by removing the human form from the space within which the viewer exists. By

abstraction, a different reality or representation of movement, the sculpture steps outside the world with which the viewer is familiar (Bauer, 101-102). This is moving away from a perceptual mode of apprehension and toward an imaginary mode. Just as caricature is not realistic but can capture the “essence” of a person better than a photograph, so, too, can abstraction capture the *sens* of a subject in a more imaginary way.

If we look at a mask as a sculptural form whose aim is to serve as a functional *analogon* of a particular personage in a performance play situation, it would seem *prima facie* evidence to suggest that more abstracted masks will work better than realistic ones. However, it is possible to go “too far.” Hare, in Bauer, talks about how if a piece of sculpture has strong elements of symbolism in it, the

piece risks the viewer turning it into an “anecdote” – a piece about the symbol, not about the work itself (100). In this case, the work of art is drawing attention to itself *as* a work of art. The viewer no longer apprehends the work as an *analogon*, but as a means of communication. This change in attitude brings the viewer out of the imaging consciousness and into a perceptual one – a reflective consciousness where the work of art is studied and analyzed. For Sartre, a work of art should not be a symbol: it should not have communication as its aim. “The colors of painting and the sounds of music, in Sartre’s opinion, are not used as



Figure 5: Hare's  
*Moon Cage.*

language” (Bauer 7). Rather, the function of the art object is to transform an essence into an object. It is not a question of morality – of the artist making a statement – but beauty (and other aesthetic elements). Artists use their skills, imaginations, and insights into creating an aesthetic object which stands in for an absent object. The skilled artist learns how to capture the *sens* of the absent object within the *analogon* she creates. The artist should not “talk about” his subject within his art, she should *present* it. Sartre valued this “uncommunicative” style of art because when an artist attempts to spell out or define something about her subject, she denies the inherent ambiguity of that object and attempts to affix it with a “purpose.” Such a denial removes the life from the subject by removing its freedom.

Sartre’s personal agenda about the role and function of art aside, his ideas on aesthetics have very useful things to say about masks in performance. If a given mask is to make present a particular personage, then it behooves the mask-maker to attempt to capture the *sens* of the personage in the form of the mask. Often it is tempting for the artist to use deliberate signs to indicate the personality of the personage in the mask. But while very ornate construction, decoration, or design can heighten the initial impact of a mask’s appearance, the audience will have a tendency to tire of watching it sooner (Popenhagen, 21). I believe this is because choices of symbolism or ornate-ness deny the ambiguity of the masks, which is, as Popenhagen said, their most theatrical feature. Such choices are attempts at creating symbols rather than *sens*, and thus invite a

perceptive attitude rather than an imaginative one. Masks which have a very strong choice end up being solely about that choice.

For example, a performer wearing a mask that is exaggeratedly angry in its facial construction will have a difficult time finding any other traits in the character outside of “angry.” Likewise, an audience that observes such a mask will find it hard to find any other *sens* in the performance than “very angry”. Of course, the performer could attempt to perform other emotions, like melancholy; but if the face is too specific in its anger, the *sens* of melancholy will not appear. This is because the behavior of melancholy is not authorized for the game of identity which is suggested by the mask. The angry face is so strong that *only* anger seems authorized by the mask. The very angry mask cannot be an *analogon* for a melancholy character in this example. Masks with very strong, symbolic choices are more limited and run the risk of pushing the audience out of an imaginative attitude into a more perceptive one.

On the other hand, masks which suggest, rather than make plain, emotional states or characterization, invite the imagination. A mask that only hints at anger in its expression may also hint at other emotions, qualities, or ideas. As the actor animates the mask with her body, the audience synthesizes the various signs of the performance imaginatively. If there is ambiguity in these signs, then the performance gives the audience room to synthesize *sens* in ways that their imaginations intend. The mask can appear angry at one moment, melancholy another, and pensive a third because the construction of the mask is

not so specific as to limit the imaginative possibilities. Without this ambiguity the mask loses its potential for variety.

It is also possible to be *too* ambiguous. Neutral masks, for example, attempt to deny any character at all. Without some choice of characterization, style, or emotion, there is no *sens* for the imagination to synthesize. However, it is important to remember that neutrality is an ideal condition, and not one which can be achieved in a mask (Eldredge, 54). As discussed in Chapter 4, most neutral masks do have some sort of character in them, even if it is merely a sense of profound calm. However, like a mask that is too strongly constructed, a too ambiguous mask limits imaginary choices as well.

Masks cannot be purely realistic, in any case, even if one wanted to construct a mask that was. Even the most carefully constructed and lifelike mask (a life mask, for instance) cannot avoid being seen as a *mask*; at least, not for long. A mask's reality does not come from how lifelike it is; rather, a mask's verisimilitude comes from its "presence in moments of play" (Popenhagen, 21). The play is a part of the imaginative process: the actor plays with the mask to create the character, the audience plays with the observed performance to create the presence of the character through its *sens*. Evaluating a mask's aesthetic value then is evaluating how well the mask embodies the *sens* of the character. *Sens* is synthesized in the imagination, and masks that are abstracted and ambiguous invite the imaginary state. The best masks seem to make suggestions of character without completely illustrating them. A mask that is too ambiguous gives little

*sens* for the audience's knowledge to fix upon. A mask that is too strongly constructed ends up being too limited and risks drawing attention to itself as a mask, pulling the viewer out of the imaginary state and into a perceptual one (Popenhagen, 106).

The choice of expression, generally speaking, is a stronger aesthetic choice than mimesis by Sartrean standards. The imagination is stronger than perception: stronger because it is complete, though degraded; stronger because the image carries with it everything that we expect it to carry; and stronger because only in the imagination can we find *sens*. Thus, aesthetic objects which are apprehended in a more imaginary way are stronger than those that are apprehended in a perceptual way.

### Ambiguity in Practice



Figure 6: An Appel mask (111).

Several mask theorists have explored this dynamic of ambiguity and the imaginary in their work. We have already mentioned the actor training programs of Libby Appel and her use of masks to help break down “boundaries around the imagination” in her students. Appel has designed her own masks for such a purpose (Figs. 6, 7, 8). They are intentionally contradictory and ambiguous. They are somewhat grotesque, but their inherent contradictions



allow for more possibilities of expression. They “provide the maximum inspiration while imposing few limitations” (Appel 4).

Appel’s masks cover the entire face and are larger than life-sized. This largeness creates “an immediate need for the actor to meet the size and depth of the mask, and decipher the ambiguity of

personality” (Appel 5). Appel wants the actors to make large choices in their encounter with the masks. That the masks are larger than a normal face encourages broader, larger

characterizations. Further, she is careful to make sure there are contradictions built into the

expression of the mask: “... one side of the mouth may droop, while the other moves upward, the brow is worried and the chin is defiant, etc.” (Appel 4). In



Figure 7: Another Appel mask (87).



Figure 8: Many Appel masks (95).

this way, Appel’s masks take on an ambiguity in their contradictions which allows “a great width in interpretation for the actor and prevents the development of character “types” or “stereotypes” (Appel 4).

Appel states that each mask she uses in her classes is different but is crafted in the same style as the others. This, she says,

ensures that the masks feel like they belong “to the same world” (5). By this, she

is finding a common *sens* for all the masks to share. That is not to say that all the masks have the same sense, but rather, there are elements that each of the masks shares with the others, and in this manner the masks as a group authorize similar sorts of games of identity. In this way, the students using the masks in exercises are less likely to be drawn from their imaginary state by the presence of a being who “doesn’t belong,” aesthetically speaking. In addition, the common style provides a unity of characterization among the masks. They belong to the same fictional world. As we watch them, we feel they belong together because of their shared elements of *sens*.

Appel’s masks use contradiction as ambiguity. Instead of a “hinted at” characterization, Appel’s masks are made with large, grotesque choices. However, it is their inherent contradictions which keep them from becoming too limited in expression. The end result is a mask whose *sens* is larger-than-life, primitive, sometimes brutal, sometimes naïve. They are characterizations painted with broad strokes, but no particular mask is limited to a particular emotional state. These masks provide particular personalities when animated, and because of their inherent contradictions, these personalities can develop into three-dimensional characters.

Appel’s masks illustrate well how ambiguity allows for variety in characterization. Nevertheless, Appel’s masks are designed for the context in which she uses them: students performing exercises which are personal and physically demanding, designed at stripping away pretense and manner and

encouraging a more primal and raw state. To this end, Appel's masks are effective. To other ends, though, the masks may or may not "work." But her masks are an example of capturing a particular *sens* for a particular context and for making aesthetic choices which authorize a particular kind of game that is shared by all the participants.

Appel shows us that ambiguity is important. But that does not mean to say that a fixed-choice mask cannot provide transformation—it is more a question of the depth of the character produced. Sears Eldredge has found that even simple line-drawing masks (Figs. 9 & 10) can have transformative effects on the actors (180-189). Eldredge uses these line-drawing masks—he calls them "beginning character masks" – as part of his exercises to get students to play with transformation. Many of these masks have strong emotional choices in their expressions. As a result, students who first put on these masks will likely find themselves responding to this very basic and limited *sens*: a character 'type'.

However, these masks have a simplicity to them which works in their favor. Unlike, say, a fearsome latex Halloween mask which may be baroque in its expression of terror, Eldredge's paper and marker masks in their plainness find a different sort of ambiguity: ambiguity of detail. Just as in caricature



Figure 9: Eldredge's "simple character mask" (86).

where a few lines can capture the "essence" of its subject, these masks distill the

*sens* of the character down to the minimum. This ambiguity of detail invites the imagination to play with the initial, strong choice.

Admittedly, even with this ambiguity, some of the caricature masks are limited in their expressivity. Still, it is often possible to find variety where there is ambiguity. So, while students will, most likely, identify with the obvious, strong choice in the caricature masks, Eldredge encourages them to engage with the masks further to find depth beyond this initial impression. He instructs the students to play a “counter-mask,” that is, visually fix in their minds the image of a mask face which is completely opposite in personality from their main mask. The student can then switch back and forth between one visual identification and another. Eldredge has students think of these as inner and outer faces of the characters (indeed, he recommends students wear two of the paper masks at once!) and use the identifications as inner and outer lives of the character

(Eldredge 97-98).



Figure 10: More “simple character” masks (86).

The problem with this approach is that the *sens* of the inner mask as expressed in the body may not connect with the *sens* of the outer mask. It is possible that it will, but this inner mask is an identification with an *analogon* which only the actor can see. There is a real possibility that any audience observing this character will not find unity between

the body of the actor and the face which *they* can see. This is fine for exercise

purposes but would be less likely to work for performances where an audience-participant is expected to “play along” in an authorized game.

Still it is possible to find a counter-mask within the *same* mask. In my own exercises with caricature masks (based on Eldredge’s designs), I have had students find the obvious identification of the masks, then asked them to play with the masks further and find a second or even third body that is in harmony with the same mask. For instance, a very sad mask initially inspires a very “sad” body which is in harmony with the mask: shoulders slumped, head bowed, a loss of energy, etc. However, on further prompting, an actor may discover that a body that is “pensive” also is in harmony with the mask: the mask authorizes this sort of play as well. Other characteristics, often expressed as emotional states, might be found through experimentation with the body, movement, and the image of the mask. This is physical play, finding the boundaries of the game. The students engage with their bodies and their imaginations to find a *sens* beyond the obvious, initial one. As expected, some caricature masks are better than others at creating this depth. But the end results are characters that can have a second or third “personality” which comes from the *sens* of the same mask. In performance, the actors will have found different postures, physical energies, and movement efforts that reflect the different moods of the mask and which are in harmony with its *sens*. Even with a simple mask, this admittedly sketchy depth allows the masked actor to express different attitudes and feelings as part of the same persona in an authentic manner: arising from the *sens* of the mask.

Of course, there are masks which look very realistic that can be very expressive. Illustrator and mask-maker W.T. Benda made masks of papier-mâché that could be startlingly realistic. His masks tended to fall into three categories: beautiful women, caricatures, and grotesques. While all of Benda's masks reflect the maker's great skill, not all of them are suitable for a performance which seeks character depth.

Benda's beautiful women masks (Fig. 11) resemble the Japanese Noh masks of the various *onna* styles. That is, they are comparatively realistic in their representation of the human female face and painted in human skin tones. Their expressions, at first, seem somewhat neutral, but there are small hints of characterization that, upon animation, are capable of expressing a range of emotive qualities. Benda's



Figure 11: Benda's "Golden Beauty" mask (72).

women, like the Noh masks, find ambiguity not in abstraction or caricature, but in subtlety. In performance, these masks *suggest*. These suggestions are brought into a larger *sens* with the movement of the actor. But it is not merely the performance that creates meaning in the mind of the audience. Like all imaginary acts, the audience's knowledge, intentions and expectations recreate the character through its *sens* as presented by the actor. These subtle masks provide just enough knowledge for the audience to connect with and then invite the

imagination to fill in the gaps. True for all masks, these masks especially illustrate how the audience sees what it *intends* to see in the face of the mask.

Benda's caricature masks are similar in function to the Beginning Character masks of Eldredge, discussed above. That is, the *sens* is writ large. As a



Figure 12: Benda's "Beelzebub" mask (75).

result, the masks tend to express more limited possibilities. These limitations become more and more restrictive the more ornate or strong the mask. Some of his grotesques are too fixed in their expression to be useful in a performance which requires their personae to behave beyond one or two manners. For instance, Benda's "Beelzebub" mask (Fig. 12), while striking in its initial impact, is so strongly characterized that when

the mask is brought into motion, i.e. transformed from a static art object into an *analogon* for a personage, the mask cannot "do" but so much\*. It expresses a sense of a particular brutish anger, which authorizes a game of brutish, angry behavior. But it is unlike "Golden Beauty" not only in overall *sens*, but "Golden Beauty's" more ambiguous or subtle expression authorizes games ranging from coquettish flirtation, embarrassment, serenity, wistfulness, and so on. Golden Beauty could not "do" brutish anger. No mask can carry every *sens*. But we find that masks which have very strong characterizations become more limited. Like

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\* A very rare and very short film of Benda wearing the Beelzebub mask exists and was shown by Sears Eldredge at the 2005 "Masks of Transformation" conference at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Having seen this film, it is my personal feeling that seeing the mask in motion, albeit briefly and in only one manner, supports my claim that the mask, while striking, is limited in its expressive possibility.

masks which are made to hang on a wall, they become more sculptural forms – interesting to look at, but incapable of allowing the imagination to give them a deep life. Thus fixed, they lack a sense of dynamism as part of their *sens*.

Sartre responds aesthetically to an event: to the suggestion of motion (Bauer 95). Fixed forms, art objects that express “being” do not interest him. A sense of movement and abstraction in the form was pleasing to him. This is not surprising considering the ties between imagination and movement that Sartre saw (See Chapter 2). Benda himself suggested that masks should have “rhythmic continuity,” a repetitive theme or lines of movement throughout (Benda 22). For example, if there was a sharp “V” shape in the chin then that same shape should be echoed in the forehead, cheeks, nose, etc. This rhythmic continuity is to lend a sense of “movement” to the fixed face that serves to externalize the imaging form. Benda’s technique creates masks that have a very expressive and harmonious *sens*. It is easy to find the personality in these masks because their *sens* is given external form by Benda’s use of line and rhythm. This is one of the reasons Benda’s masks are critically admired: their appearance is infused with the *sens* of their respective character. By comparison, Appel’s masks, with their misshapen and contradictory lines, lack this sense of harmony. However, within the contexts of their respective uses, Appel’s masks have a greater range of expressive possibilities, while Benda’s caricatures and grotesques remain limited.

Thus for Sartre it seems that the two elements which create deep, expressive *sens* are ambiguity and abstraction. Ambiguity leaves “spaces” in the



appearance of the aesthetic object which invite the imagination to fill in the gaps according to the viewer's intention. Abstraction removes the aesthetic object from the world of the viewer and keeps the object from becoming a "being," fixed, dead, and false.

### Performance and Mask Aesthetics

It is true that a mask, as an *analogon*, is already one step abstracted from a real face. However, one cannot create *sens* by merely constructing a mask and putting it on. A mask, no matter how skillfully made, must still be animated. This brings the mask into motion, which more strongly links it to the imaginary state. Ron J. Popenhagen says that masks do not "talk about" emotions but "project and evoke" them (130). He means that effective masks do not "show" emotion, but rather the mask transmits its emotive qualities (one part of *sens*) to the audience. This is not entirely accurate. As Sartre has identified, it is not that we see the mask and respond to it subsequently. Nor does the mask have an innate power of some sort. Rather, we respond instantly to the animated mask – mask and performer together – through the synthesis of the imaginary process. The mask does not truly "project" as Popenhagen claims. The emotions which are "evoked" through the mask come when an audience member reconstructs the character through the *sens* as expressed in the mask's construction and the actor's performance. The better the mask and performance, the stronger the *sens*. But it is not the mask which projects emotions, it is the actor that animates it to

bring out its *sens* and it is the audience which constructs the emotions from the performance.

But Popenhagen is correct to say that masks do not “talk about” emotion. Consider the masks of comedy and tragedy often associated as symbols of the theatre. As a static image, these masks are illustrations of mirth and anguish. They do “show” emotion – we perceive their expressions and think “happiness” and “sadness.” In this case, we are operating on the reflective plane, the plane of perception and self-aware thought. But a well-constructed mask animated by an actor in performance does not operate purely on a perceptive level. As an *analogon*, it operates in a more imaginative way. We, as the audience, no longer “think about” the emotions, but instead, have them given to us as an image, already filled with meanings and properties.

Boada says that masks are always in action, always suggesting something to the audience, including emotions (169). But of course, a mask, even an animated one, is merely an *analogon*. But the suggestions of which Boada speaks come not from the masks, but from the imagination. The ambiguous nature of the masks invite the audience to imagine these “suggestions” which come from their own knowledge. Part of the mask performing process is for the actor to find the *sens* of the character of the mask and then bring that *sens* into his or her body for the audience. Once there, in the spontaneous synthesis of the imagination, the *sens* is reconstructed by the audience and the mask comes alive with a life that they give to it.

Thus, we have returned to the idea that audiences must *believe* in the mask and this belief cannot be excluded from the aesthetic evaluation of the mask itself. Just as it is difficult for the audience to spontaneously *believe* that Chris' wagon is a baby, the wrong mask in the wrong context makes it difficult for the audience to spontaneously synthesize the *sens* of the character. If, for instance, Benda's "Golden Beauty" mask appeared in the midst of Appel's rough and primal faces, we might be jolted from our imaginary synthesis at the jarring difference between them. Benda's mask carries a very different *sens* from Appel's masks. We might feel she "doesn't belong" with the others. We might take pause and try to reconcile the differences between them, looking for clues in performance context or explanation from the text. Such a pause would be more perceptive in nature, and sacrificing the imaginary attitude which is required for spontaneous, prereflective synthesis. That is not to say it is impossible to construct a performance context where Benda's and Appel's masks could not appear side by side without sacrificing spontaneity; however, the choices made by their respective mask-makers place the masks in different performance "worlds," or better, different *games*. The performers must understand that to throw together masks of very different styles— that do not share common *sens* elements— threatens to disrupt the imaginative synthesis of the audience. Taken to a more perceptive attitude of consciousness, the audience *thinks about* the masks, the actors playing them, who they represent. It is a symbolic understanding.

The role of the audience in the constitution of the personage of the mask will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. However, no discussion of mask aesthetics can neglect the audience's contributory role in the effectiveness of a given mask in a given performance. The audience participates in the collective game of the performance and is invited to "play along." An effective mask, effectively animated, makes this collaborative play easy.

### Conclusion

A mask is a prop in a game of performance. Whether or not the mask "works" for the game depends on at least three factors: the context in which the particular mask is used (performance circumstance, performance text, etc.), the manner in which the mask is animated (actor movement and characterization), and the capacity of the mask to carry the *sens* of the personage made present (mask construction and appearance). While this does allow for a wide variety of possibility in whether or not a particular mask is effective, we can come to the following conclusions:

(1) Even though Sartre had his own personal ideas about what makes art effective, and this bias is reflected in his evaluations of art, we nevertheless agree with him that a mask which aims at verisimilitude or mimesis is less likely to be aesthetically valuable than a mask which abstracts form to express *sens*. This is because realism invites a more perceptive attitude of consciousness, whereas abstraction relies on the imagination to synthesize the *sens* of the personage in

the consciousness of the audience member. It is only through the imagination that the totality – the *sens* – of the personage can be brought to consciousness. That is not to say that *all* realistic masks are poor in *all* circumstances; however, abstraction *expresses* the character while a realistic *analogon* tends to *show* the character.

(2) In addition to abstraction, aesthetically effective masks tend to employ ambiguity. That is, there is a certain poverty of detail which is used in their construction. This poverty can be expressed as a poverty of expression (such as facial expressions which “hint” at emotional states or personality, but do not express them boldly) or as a poverty of facial detail (such as Eldredge’s simple character masks). This ambiguity makes a mask more aesthetically valuable because it invites the imagination to fill in the gaps left by the absence of detail. Further, this allows the mask to have a greater range of possible expression and greater possibility for deeper characterization or *sens*.

Ambiguity and abstraction, as qualities which invite and act upon the imagination, are fundamental to the aesthetics of masks. But they are also fundamental qualities to how masks behave in performance. It is to that end that we will turn our discussion in the next chapter.

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## Chapter 6 - Masks, Audiences, and the Imaginary

In the small town of Arisaig in Scotland, a woman known as “Mrs. Cardigan” appeared before a small group of people. Mrs. Cardigan did not speak. At times she was aware that there were people watching her; at other times, she appeared lost in her own thoughts. She did not do much except dance with a broom and sway to some music, but she provoked in those watching an emotional response before she left. Mrs. Cardigan was, in fact, a Mask: a character brought to life by an actor animating a mask.

The “Mrs. Cardigan” mask was made by Michael Hickey of Gateway Performance Productions. Carved from bass wood and then painted, it was made as part of a pair, dubbed “Mr. and Mrs. Cardigan” because the initial impression of the masks reminded the performers of 1950s personae that should be “sitting at home in their cardigans.” In truth, Hickey was relying on 1940s film as the inspiration for the masks (Hickey, Personal Interview 2004). Like most of Hickey’s masks, Mrs. Cardigan has a largely neutral expression with hints of characterizations in certain directions. She has a quietly wistful expression, with a small smile, painted pale colors to suggest a classic film glow.



The actor was Sandra Hughes, also of Gateway. The performance of “Mrs. Cardigan” was developed as part of a tour that Gateway did with musicians Heather Innes and Ciaran Dorris in a tour through Scotland. As part of the performance, Innes and Dorris performed the song “Old Fashioned Saturday Night,” written by Mike Silver. To this music (which recounts how life’s troubles seem to fade away when one is home and safe) Hughes, wearing the “Mrs. Cardigan” mask and a simple coat, appears on the stage with a broom. She sweeps, then dances to the sweetly melancholic music with the broom, imagining it is a handsome dance partner. As the song progresses, she turns to the audience and reaches out her hand to some of the men in the room, inviting them to join her and fulfill her wish of a dancing partner. Most times one of the audience was willing to oblige, and when the dancing was over, “Mrs. Cardigan” would seem to blush and fan herself as she led the man back to the audience, often to the amusement and laughter of the audience.

However, the Arisaig performance was particularly memorable: no man came up. At her failure to find a dancing partner, “Mrs. Cardigan” slumped, crestfallen, and such was the sadness that she projected that many of the audience made an audible sympathetic “Awww...” How could a mask with a fixed facial expression seemingly project a range of emotions from wistfulness to giddiness to melancholy?

Thus, we see illustrated one of the wonders of working with masks: how is it that audiences apprehend a fixed wooden object attached to the face of a

moving body, and yet find themselves responding in emotionally varied ways? Conventional wisdom tells us that the face is one of the most expressive parts of our bodies. Yet, a masked actor seems to be able to communicate a variety of emotional moods and expressions without the plasticity of the face. How is this so?

We have previously discussed that mask has the potential to capture the “totality” or *sens* of a character through particular construction and abstraction. We have also discussed how an actor may engage with a mask to create a character imaginatively and spontaneously, avoiding reflective thought. But the imaginative synthesis is not limited to the actor. Let us pick up where we left off last chapter and remind ourselves that audiences, too, apprehend characterizations on stage imaginatively. In fact, speaking generally, the presence of a mask causes an audience to apprehend the characterizations in a *more* imaginative way. As a result, audiences read their own intentions into the characterizations presented by the actors. Audiences see what they intend to see – which is not the same as saying audiences see what they *want* to see. Characterizations that are disturbing, shocking, unpleasant – unwanted – still come, unbidden, in the synthesis of the imagination. But just as the particular brush strokes and color choices of a painter unite with the intentions of the viewer of her painting to create the *image* of the subject of that painting, so, too does the audience’s intentions synthesize spontaneously with the mask and movements of the actor to make present the character. The seemingly miraculous

transformations of the inflexible face of the mask are a result of a more imaginary state of apprehension in the audience.

In this chapter, we will revisit the Sartrean idea of a continuum between perception and imagination and how masks encourage a more imaginative state in the audience. We will examine the writings of Benda, Emigh, and LeCoq as they explore the relationship between masks and the imagination and how these explorations intersect with Sartre's philosophy. We will find that in masked performance the imaginative state pulls, ontologically, on the audience, who in turn make real the personages of the mask through the elements of the performance. Finally, I will suggest a particular aesthetic style – purposeful ambiguity – that exploits this imaginative pull through the use of masks.

### Perception/Imagination

We have discussed that in Sartrean thought there exists continuum between a consciousness that perceives and a consciousness that imagines. To briefly review, a perceptive consciousness attends to the “real” world; it is reflective and self-aware. Imagination, on the other hand, is complete and prereflective. It dwells in the realm of the unreal: the absent, missing, elsewhere, or non-existent.

Thus, perception is about *existing*, while imagination is about *being*. Perception is about how we exist in the world: The tabletop is two feet before me, the pen in my hand has a certain weight, the letters I am writing have a

particular shape and appearance on the page. Imagination is about how we attempt to understand the nature of those things we encounter in the world – from furniture to people to emotions and ideas. Such understanding comes to us seemingly intuitively, spontaneously and prereflectively. The tabletop is before me, but I can imagine the legs of the table even though I don't see them. I can imagine the entire room around me, and I have feelings about this particular place where I do my work. I don't particularly think about the pen as I am writing; instead, it is an extension of my hand which realizes ("makes real") the ideas that come to me as I write. The letters and words and sentences that appear on the page are not directly thought of as letters, words, or sentences in my imagination. They are instead synthesized into ideas, feelings, emotions. I could take a moment and take note of the style of the letters, the color of the ink, the smudges or heavy lines. In this case, I am perceiving. But when I actually read the words, they point to something more than themselves. This something is brought forth in my imagination in an object which is complete and total based on my knowledge and intention toward it. It is this totality which is the quality of *being* which imaginary objects possess, and the quality that we humans lack as part of our existential condition. To *be* is to have a "completeness", and such completeness can only exist in the imagination. We will explore the human existential lack of "completeness" in greater detail later in this chapter as it plays a part in how masks are apprehended by audiences.

We know one does not have to be either perceiving or imagining; one can be doing both. We constantly move along this continuum, now more imaginative when engrossed in our writing, now more perceptive when the phone rings and interrupts us or when fatigue sets in and our fingers begin to ache.

This also applies to watching a theatrical performance. When involved in the action, the audience surrenders some perception and begins to imagine. The actors on the stage become *analoga* for the characters depicted and their performances make present these absent objects (people). But such imaginative apprehension occurs whether the actors are masked or not. What is it about the presence of the mask that, as I assert, causes a more imaginative synthesis to occur?

Masked performance generally falls further on the imaginary side of the perception/imagination continuum than non-masked work because the presence of the mask as a functional *analogon* invites the imaginary state. Further, masks carry with them associations of identity and emotion in more immediate ways because such associations are, fundamentally, imaginary in nature. The presence of the mask points to an "other." More than other kinds of *analoga*, masks specifically deal with *identity*. That a mask simultaneously removes some of the presence of the actor that wears it and points to the presence of an "Other" is what invites the audience to imagine.

## The Index of Identity

Mask maker W.T. Benda believes masks are effective because human beings rely on faces so much as indicators of personality. Benda writes:

*In our inter-human relations, the faces of our fellow men are of paramount importance to us. We depend on them to give us the information we need about the souls of those with whom we come in contact. It is by his face that we know a person – it is his face that can reveal to us much of what we want to learn about his character, his moods, and his attitude towards us, as well as toward the world... we have such implicit trust in their correctness, and respond to them so spontaneously, that when a living face is replaced by a mask – when a false index is substituted for a true one – we still let ourselves be guided by it (2).*

Faces, for Benda, are special for humans because they contain the *who* of the person. Cover a person's face with a hood, and we know very little about him. Replace his face with a mask, and you replace his "soul." Implied in Benda's ideas is that this idea of "soul" is apprehended from the point of view of those who observe a particular person's face. A face is an "index" by which we can extrapolate the personality, emotions, and even the very nature of the face's owner. Benda says this reliance on faces as indicators of identity is so strong that in the eyes of the observer the mask-wearer will often seem to change bodies to suit their new face\*. Benda also says that masks can sometimes seem to change expression and emotions through movement:

*We do not realize how little we actually see of the facial expressions of an actor when we are sitting in the last row of the theatre. What our physical eye really sees is the actor's movements that express certain moods and feelings, and it is our subconscious mind that*

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\* Masked performers would likely point out that such transformations of body are not necessarily automatic, but often require skill to execute.

*fills the gap, knowing from experience what facial changes accompany these movements. It is in the same way that we see the changing expressions of a mask (4).*

Benda thus implies that we have a “mental eye” in contrast to our physical eye which gives meaning to perceived data based on our knowledge. But when perceptions are outside our expectation, or when data is missing from one source, we tend to “overlook” inconsistencies to bring our perceptions more in line with expectations, relying on other sources. Benda cites movement as one possible source. But there is also the knowledge and intentionality of the person apprehending the mask that are other sources. Sartre would take issue with the term “subconscious.” Rather, it is the imagination which fills in the gaps missing from perception to effect the facial transformations indicated, though admittedly the imaging consciousness is intuitive and prereflective, which is what I believe Benda intends. Sartre would say that we are not “adjusting perceptions;” rather, we are imagining.

But Benda has presented us with a kind of paradox. On the one hand, he says that for human beings, faces are the “paramount index” we rely on for determining the identity of another human being. But on the other hand, he says that often we don’t really need to see the face at all, that we see bits of movement and “fill in the gap” where we lack information. How can we rely on a face to tell us personality, but ultimately not need that face at all to determine identity?

While Benda does not explicitly resolve this paradox, the answer lies in his intuitive understanding of the imaginary operation of the mask, suggested in

his writings though not expressed in Sartrean terms. The face is indeed an “index” for identity. It is not the *only* reference to identity, but it is a primary one. It is the primary way we differentiate between one person and the next; which is why portraits – works of art designed to represent a particular person – usually feature that person’s face prominently. As such, the face carries with it powerful associations of identity. Such is the power of this association that where the necessary data to establish identity is missing, consciousness will complete the missing data imaginatively using whatever data it has available. Often this is movement and posture, physical shape and color, but the imaginary synthesis is always done from the particular point of view of the consciousness that apprehends the other person. As a result, the viewer’s own expectations, associations, history, and knowledge provide the filter through which the “gaps” are filled.

An actor wearing gloves is unlikely to draw much attention from the audience, depending on the gloves and the context of their appearance. But while costume choices play a part in creating the *analogon* of the actor, our hands are not a primary index of personality. Cover the hands, and we will still look to the face as the primary means for determining who this person is. Cover the face, and things change dramatically. In the case of a well-animated mask that captures the *sens* of the personage represented, the audience is drawn to the face to try to determine the identity of the person appearing before them. Confronted with a mask, the audience knows that the mask is artificial. But because the mask



replaces the *face*, it immediately suggests an identity through its construction and animation. But because a mask *abstracts* the appearance of the face, the spectator is not given the same level of information as with a real face. This abstraction thus invites the imagination to fill in the gaps. So, while we do use faces as an index of personality, it is our own knowledge, expectation, and imagination which constitutes our understanding of this personality.

*All faces, to a certain extent, are analoga* pointing to a complete object of identity. We constantly accumulate new knowledge which changes the imaginative synthesis that apprehends the face. For example, when I see someone for the first time, the image of their face provides the primary index by which I “realize” (make real) their personality. Even though I may know nothing of them, I nevertheless prereflectively create an image of them in my imagination. For me, that is who they *are*, in their total being. However, if I begin to talk with them, and to know them better, I begin to accumulate knowledge about them and form different intentions toward them. Their face still serves as the primary index by which I know “them,” but now the “them” has changed because of the new knowledge and different intentions.

But that is not to say that a real face and a mask operate in the same manner. The real, physical face is not an *analogon* in the sense of “an equivalent of perception.” As a real object, a face is primarily apprehended in a perceptual mode: it is an object of perception which has the potential to activate the imaging consciousness in the same way that any interaction with the real can activate the

imaging consciousness. But a mask, as a physical *analogon* of identity, invites the viewer to imagine. The abstraction of the mask *pulls* the viewer into a more imaginative state as the viewer attempts to make real the personage it represents. The mask loses its sense as an object of the real world – a piece of carved wood – and instead takes on the qualities of identity which the spectator synthesizes imaginatively.

### The Pull of the Imaginary

What is it that causes this “pull” toward the imaginary? Why does our consciousness seem to need to “fill in the gaps” presented by an abstracted face? We watch Mrs. Cardigan and feel her melancholy. How does this happen? We have discussed in general terms how such qualities as personality, identity, even emotion are created through the imaginative synthesis. But why does a mask seem to evoke melancholy at all? Before we can understand how masks invite the imagination, we must understand how masks can come to have the properties and emotional qualities that we imagine they do.

The truth is masks do not *provoke* emotional or affective responses at all. Remember that an imaged object gives all it has – emotional quality included – when it is given to consciousness and at the same time. Sartre, using a mask as an example, writes,

*It is **things** which abruptly unveil themselves to us as hateful, sympathetic, horrible, lovable. Being dreadful is a property of this Japanese mask, an inexhaustible and*

*irreducible property which constitutes its very nature – and not the sum of our subjective reactions to a piece of sculptured wood (Intentionality, 5). (Emphasis added.)*

Sartre does not mean that every person will see the mask as dreadful in the same way. Rather, he means we do not view the mask first and decide it is dreadful subsequently. We view the mask, and the dreadfulness is already there, as well as all other properties the mask may possess for us. If at one moment the Japanese mask appears dreadful and the next pensive, it does not mean that the mask had the property of pensiveness all along. Rather, we synthesize anew the pensive quality based upon changes with our experience with the mask: knowledge of it, events that have transpired, changes in the movement of the actor animating the mask, changes in the way light and shadow fall across the mask, etc. We can *perceive* the appearance of the mask, but we *imagine* the qualities we ascribe to it.

That is not to say that these qualities are somehow limited to an individual's interpretation. In fact, this process is not *interpretation* at all; nor is it solipsism. Interpretation implies a thoughtfulness which does not exist in the prereflective plane: a kind of cause and effect. Certainly our intentions toward the object play a key part of the imaginative synthesis that constitutes the object for us. Likewise, one person's image of the mask may be different than another's. But imagination *cannot* teach us anything new. We cannot "discover" anything new in an image; there cannot be an interpretation. Therefore the imagination synthesizes the properties of the object which it has available. The properties of

the mask exist *in the mask*, not in our minds. This is an important distinction because even though it is our own personal intention that guides the synthesis of imaginary objects, it still puts the properties we ascribe to those objects in the objects themselves. Thus it is fair to say, as Sartre does, that the hypothetical Japanese mask *is* dreadful because the dreadfulness a person imagines is in the mask itself.

And so we have a tendency to transfer our feelings about the object to the *analogon*. Writes Sartre, "The emotional subject and the object of the emotion are united in an indissoluble synthesis" (*Sketch 35*). The Japanese mask *is* dreadful. A photograph of a lost loved one *is* sad. We are aware, of course, that the mask and photograph are merely standing in for the absent objects they represent. But nevertheless, the emotions we feel for these objects is transferred at some level to the *analogon* themselves.

Because our feelings appear to reside in *objects*, objects themselves seem to have a kind of transformational power. This is why an *analogon* can stand in for something else: it points to the other, absent object, and our imaginations conjure up all the properties we associate with that object and place some of those properties in the *analogon* itself. So it is not the *analogon* which has power; rather, the *analogon* invites the imaging consciousness in which this transformational power resides.

Emotional behavior itself is also transformational in nature. Emotional behavior, according to Sartre, seeks to add new qualities to the objects of the

emotion (*Sketch 41*). It is a changing of the world: making the object “magically” different in order for us to deal with it (*Sketch 39*). Because we cannot truly change the nature of the object (save by altering it physically, which would change it into a different object,) emotional behavior changes our bodies so that our relationship to the object and the rest of the world changes (*Sketch 40*).

For Sartre, emotional behavior is a kind of baser, lesser behavior which is called up when we face a situation which we have no normal or immediate means of resolving. For example: Someone acts rudely to me. In my imagination, the person *is* rude. The quality of rudeness resides in the person himself. I may take offense, but find my recourse limited by social pressures, time and place, or the fact that the other person may be stronger than I. Whatever resolution I seek is blocked to me. So, Sartre would say that I will resort to emotional behavior in order to seek resolution. I will elevate my posture, intensify my breathing, tighten my fists. I cannot transform my enemy, but I can transform myself – the bodily aspect of my emotive consciousness – so that my relationship to him is different. In my new body, I feel strong, aggressive, and powerful. My relationship with him and the rest of the world is no longer the same because I am apprehending it through a new body. In this way, because I am prohibited from a resolution, I transform *him* by transforming *myself*.

It is important to note that emotional behavior is prereflective. It is *imaginative* behavior, in that it happens at the directive of the consciousness but one need not be aware that one is engaging in it to do it. Like the “dark

consciousness” of which Eldredge wrote, emotional behavior often happens spontaneously with the engagement of the imagination. One *can* be aware of it, just as an actor can be aware of elements of his performance apart from his characterization; however, such awareness is not necessary.

What this tells us is that emotions are like any other property of an object which is imagined. They exist in the object themselves, given to us spontaneously with the object themselves, and are a way by which we attempt to understand and deal with the nature of the object itself. I view the Japanese mask, and through my own knowledge and intention toward it, I find it horrible. In my attempt to deal with this horrible quality, I may change my own body: cringe, look away, increase my heart rate, etc. But again, this is not a *reaction* to the mask. There is no cause and effect. A mask has no power in and of itself; therefore, it has no means to “cause” any “effect” in me. Rather, the mask *is*: I view the mask and in my imagination, I transform the sculptured wood so that it *is horrible at the same time* that I view it. This is important for understanding masks in performance, for we must accept while the *choices* the masked performer makes affect the imaginary synthesis, ultimately the imaginary synthesis belongs to the consciousness of the individual audience member. A performer cannot *affect* an audience member by her performance.\* A performer can, however, by means of her performance choices, more easily and readily

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\* We will exclude more extreme forms of performance where the artist *physically* affects the audience member, e.g. throwing water on them, hitting them, etc.

encourage the audience member into a more imaginary state and thus strengthen the vivacity of the collective imagining of the performance. A discussion of these choices will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter. For now, we understand that consciousness *transforms* the world to realize it.

Why does consciousness operate this way? Sartre suggests that driving this imaginary process is a *need* we have to realize the objects in our world. Sartre writes of the objects in our world appearing to us incomplete and mysterious. These objects “pull” on us because we seek to make them real and complete. “... in a normal and well-adapted activity,” writes Sartre, “the objects ‘to be realized’ present themselves as needing to be realized in specific ways” (*Sketch*, 38) So we realize them with whatever tools we have at hand, namely the knowledge, intention, and movement components of the imaginary process. This is not necessarily a reflective process; it can happen without our being aware that we are doing it. Still, a mask appears to us in perception, and we feel it pull on our consciousness, seeking realization. Not only this, but the mask presents itself to us as *needing* to be realized in a specific way, and that way is as a *face*, an index of a “whole” identity.

Sartre says our world is “difficult” (*Sketch* 39). It is a world we are cast into without any guidance but that which we choose to accept or reject from the other people in it. It is a world where we *want* to understand the essences of the objects around us, yet our perceptions are limited and incomplete. Thus we rely on the other tool at our disposal: the imagination. As Sartre has said, the imagination is

not something *added* to consciousness; rather, it is a fundamental ability that is part of our basic ontological state.

Thus, returning to masks, we find that a mask is more than a mere *analogon*: it points the way to the realization of the character it represents. The mask appears, animated, and the audience feels the pull of its presence and seeks to make real the character it represents. It can, of course, be said that this pull can seem to come from any object – this is why any encounter with the real has the potential to activate the imaging consciousness. But masks are a special kind of *analogon*: one that has specific ties to identity. A pen *could* be an *analogon* if it has special significance to me, but it could also simply be a pen and its existence remains in a more utilitarian mode. I could animate the pen, moving it through space in a long horizontal trajectory, and the pen could then become an *analogon* for, say, an airplane. Children frequently make this sort of transformation in their play. But it is the abstract resemblance of a pen to an airplane, the movement of the pen, and shift in the attitude of my consciousness that transforms the pen into the *analogon*, pointing to the airplane. And for as long as I play the game, the pen itself soars, banks, turns, and defies gravity in the same way that I imagine a plane does; not literally, but the qualities of soaring, turning, and flying are given to the pen through my imagination.

Masks, like the pen, do require certain visual qualities, particular movement, and a shift in the attitude of consciousness toward the imaginary. However, masks are more *readily* apprehended in imaginary ways. When the



mask appears we already understand that it represents an “Other” by virtue of its associations with identity. Unlike the pen, which we first apprehend in a more perceptual manner as a *pen* when it appears and then apprehend in a more imaginative manner as an *airplane* as it is animated to give it new qualities, the mask appears to us immediately pointing to someone else. Certainly we perceive the mask as it appears, but the qualities of personality which come with the mask invite the attitude of consciousness to shift to a more imaginary mode as it attempts to realize the object represented by the mask. This object, this “someone else,” must be realized in the audience’s imagination through the *analogon* presented by the masked performer. As a functional *analogon*, masks in performance are already inviting the audience to imagine.

### The “Power” of the Mask

But more than other *analogia*, masks seem to have a kind of “power.” There is something compelling in them that draws the eye of the audience. Well-animated masks seem to take on a life which other *analogia* do not always have. Because of these seeming qualities of masks, let us discuss how consciousness comes to give masks this “power.”

One might, as Ron J. Popenhagen does, call masks “instruments of imagination” (23). This is another way of calling a mask an *analogon*. But Popenhagen’s intent is also to show that masks seem to have the ability to project and enclose space within which the persona of the mask is made present: “A

mask exists outside the limitations of its own physical form; its essence is in the space it projects and not in its solid, tangible form." (23). Popenhagen finds something mystical and compelling about the nature of masks:

*Great masks surpass the ordinary, becoming magic, powerful objects. They are more than theatrical properties, costumes, or maquillage. They are more than ceremonial objects or fine art objects. Yet, they are almost all of these things. Their interest and their poetry, in fact, rests in their "almost-ness..." (23).*

"Almost-ness" here refers to what seems to be a mask's multiple levels of existence: as a sculpted piece of wood, as an *analogon* for an absent personage, and even as the personage itself. It is not quite any of these things – not by virtue of its existential condition, but by the kinds of imaginary transformations we make with it, often prereflectively. When Popenhagen discusses a mask's "almost-ness," what he identifies as multiple levels of existence is more accurately identified as a more *imaginary* attitudes of consciousness. The mask appears and the movements, shapes, expressions, and lines are already pointing us at something "more" or "beyond" the mask itself. This "more" is really our attempt to realize the character of the mask through its *analogon*. Popenhagen is correct, in a sense, that a mask is "almost," but it would be better to say that a mask is apprehended somewhere between perception and imagination.

Thus, Popenhagen is correct in stating that masks are "instruments of the imagination" in the sense that they are objects that invite the imaginary state. We can forgive Popenhagen's desire to place the "power" of masks in the masks

themselves because, as discussed, we place our feelings about an object in the object itself. It is easy to feel that masks have a kind of greater existence than other objects because of the kinds of transformations that seem to occur with their use. But this seeming power is only partly about the mask itself. Just as important, if not more so, the power comes from how the mask is *used*.

Performance masks typically are used in specific performance contexts, with the actors uniting their bodies with the face of the mask to make present new personae. When a mask appears, it is a replacement face on a body, an *analogon* that moves, breathes, and may even speak. This gives the mask an immediacy and lifelike quality that is often missing in other *analogia*, such as a painting or photograph. Masked performers make present the personage of the mask, and this seems to make the masks “powerful.”

To call masks “almost” hints at this “between” nature that masks (and other *analogia*) possess: being apprehended between perception and imagination. In fact, John Emigh defines masks not as “almost” but as “transitional” objects (3). They are between states, faces but not faces, objects but animated; we know there is an actor behind the mask, but we do not always sense the identity of that actor. It is this “transitional” quality, Emigh argues, that gives masks their special status and power.

But “between” what, exactly? Emigh cites the work of psychologist D.W. Winnicott and his work with infants playing “peek-a-boo.” As the adult hides her face, the infant experiences a gap in the continuity of his perception: the adult

was present, and now is absent. This gap in continuity produces anxiety, which is relieved when the adult's face reappears. Eventually the infant learns this game can be played over and over, with pleasure in the play replacing the anxiety of the absences. Further still, the child learns "to employ 'illusion' in order to sustain pleasure through longer periods of discontinuity – longer absences on the part of the attending adult" (2). That is, the child invests imaginary qualities into objects of her environment – toys, for example – and plays with them to fill the gap in the periods of discontinuity. Emigh concludes:

*Thus the child's capacity for imaginative creation and play are called into being at times when a developing sense of continuity is threatened; but what begins in apprehension and anxiety is transformed into a pleasurable and highly charged activity, eagerly sought after, involving the presence, animation, and "participation" of chosen objects (2).*

So Emigh sees the "transitional" nature of masks, like children's toys, as an investment of imagination into an object which is used to bridge the gap between moments of continuity in one's experience. Emigh believed, as did Victor Turner, who believed that moments of ceremony and performance such as weddings, funerals, religious observances, etc. (and at which masks are likely to appear in some cultures) occur "between" (Turner's term: "liminal", meaning "on the threshold") the everyday moments that form the continuum of the life of a culture (Emigh, 1). In short, part of what makes masks "powerful" is that they are present at transitional times in our lives and carry with them an investment of imagination that helps bridge the gaps in these transitional times.

However, to say that a mask has power because it appears at “liminal” times in a culture’s continuum is to deny masks affective power outside of these events. It also begs the question of what qualifies as a “liminal” moment and what is the “everyday,” and what makes “liminal” moments special from others. I do not dispute Turner’s observation that ceremonial performances tend to occur around times of change: on the threshold (Qtd. in Emigh, 1). But again, we return to Sartre who said that *any* engagement with the real world has the potential to activate the imaging consciousness. A liminal event – a wedding or religious dance – may affect the imaging synthesis as the individual may have certain knowledge about the event or expectations toward it. The mask appearing at a special ceremony may make it *easier* for the individual to activate the imaging consciousness when the mask appears; likewise, the image may be different within the circumstances of the ceremony than outside of it. However, the imaging consciousness created by the mask is not *limited* to being activated only at such times.

Nevertheless, to call masks transitional *objects* is another way of explaining how they function as an *analogon*. A mask does carry with it an investment of the imagination. If a person has a great deal of knowledge about the personage represented by the mask, then his image of that mask will be shaped by that knowledge. If the mask is unknown to the viewer, then the viewer will take what knowledge she has available to her – facial expression, color, movement, features, etc. – and synthesize the persona from that. In either

case, there is an investment of imagination in the mask that realizes the personage to which it points. Masks are transitional, but not as a transition between gaps in continuity, but as a transition between *perception* and *imagination*. All the factors of a particular mask's appearance at a particular moment will affect to what degree the imaging consciousness is activated.

So, in a certain sense, masks are "between." That is to say they have the qualities of any *analogon* by being one thing and simultaneously pointing to something else. They are perceived and understood to be masks: carved wood, an object of the real world, an adornment. But because they are also an "equivalent of perception" they are gifted with emotions, feelings, personality and identity. We never fully believe them to *become* the personage they point to; some part of us is always resists the delusion. But likewise, we can easily let the masks take on the qualities we imagine them to have and forget for a while their utilitarian, perceptive qualities.

In fact, it may even seem difficult to resist the process. Mask teacher Sears Eldredge even uses the term "compelling image" to describe what it is that masks do. Eldredge cites Ariane Mnouchkine as she says that any actor's role is to "show the inside;" to "give form to a passion" and "to exteriorize without falling into exteriority" (Mnouchkine qtd. in Eldredge 18). For Mnouchkine and Eldredge alike, this process of "showing the inside" represents a kind of mystery. Eldredge places the resolution to the mystery in the imagination:

*What resolves this mystery between the inside and the outside is the metamorphosis effected through the actor's identification with an image: the compelling image of the mask (18).*

What is compelling about the image of the mask? The answer must lie in the *image* of the mask, not the mask itself; that is, the imaged apprehension of the mask as opposed to the perceived apprehension. Certainly some masks are better than others as we discussed in Chapter 5. However, Eldredge is correct that it is the *actor's* identification with the *image* of the mask and not the mask itself. The physical mask, the *analogon*, points to the personage it represents. The personage appears in the imagination of the actor. But this same engagement occurs for the audience as well. Moreover, the "mystery," caused by the presence of the mask may be difficult for the audience to resist.

For example: A man walks out onto the stage before an audience. Is the man an actor? A stagehand? Someone making an announcement? Perhaps some context clues could answer this question, but ultimately, the man is apprehended first as a *man*. From there, elements such as costuming, lighting changes, etc. could identify the man as a *character*, at which point the audience will begin to read the signs of his performance to identify the personage which he represents. To be sure, they do enter a more imaginary state. However, generally speaking, they are still likely to be closer to the perceptive side of the continuum, especially if the performance is representational in style. The audience *watches*; that is, while the audience is certainly using their imaginations to some degree, their

engagement with the action on the stage is more passive than active, more observational than participatory.

A man walks out onto the stage before an audience wearing a mask. Who is this man? We likely do not know for certain, but the presence of the mask already is inviting us to imagine. We know it is a man in a mask, but we also begin to feel the pull to make real the personage which is represented in the *analogon* of the mask. We know he is an “other.” If the mask is properly animated, we are already making present the character of the mask because our consciousness has changed to a more imaginative attitude. The audience reads themselves *into* the masked performance because their own intentions and knowledge create the characters. Because the mask is associated with identity, the characterizations become a kind of prereflective collaboration between the actor and the audience: the actor brings forth the presence of the personage, and the audience “fills in the gaps” of this presence with their own intentions.

But beyond the initial appearance of a man on stage, the masks continue to invite the audience into a more imaginative state. This is because masks not only place a new identity index on the actor wearing it, but they also *remove* the identity index of the actor herself. Stripped of this basic index, the personage of the actor becomes even more enigmatic, even more of a mystery. In a skilled performance, the *sens* of the actor vanishes and is replaced by the *sens* of the personage. In a non-masked play, once the play is underway the audience no longer has any confusion about whether or not the man on the stage is a



character or not. And yet, the audience is likely to continue to be closer to the perceptive side of the continuum. The fact remains that an unmasked actor still wears his or her own face. While the actor may be highly skilled, the audience still apprehends the actor *as* an actor first – a real person, in the real world, albeit performing in artificial circumstances. Without the mask, the pull of the imaginary is not as strong because the events shown to the audience are grounded in the real, and the real is the domain of perception. But with a mask, suddenly the person before us might not seem like a *person* at all. The abstraction of the mask and the *sens* of the character created by the movement of the actor creates an ambiguous form: something which we recognize as human, or, to borrow Popenhagen's term, "almost" human. Further, with the mask on her face and a body in harmony with it, the actor has removed her presence from the stage, leaving behind the presence of the personage of the mask. This ambiguous form pulls on the audience, and they seek to complete it imaginatively.

So, although masks are, in some sense, "instruments of imagination," in another sense "transitional objects" and do present a "compelling image," it is important to remember that masks do not have power *per se*. Rather, the seeming power comes from how our consciousness *needs* to process and understand identity, even when presented with such identity in an abstract and ambiguous way.

But Sartre's philosophy points to an even stronger reason why masks, in particular, have such a strong pull upon us. That reason is that masks are *analoga*

for the existential Other: another consciousness with its own projects that represent the only true limitation to my own ontological freedom. Sartre's classic example is of being in a park, alone. In such a case, the world is organized and arranged with myself as its center. This comfortable position means that I am surrounded with the objects of the world which have no true limits on me – at least, no limits which I do not impose myself. But suppose in this world there is a man who is seated on a bench in the park, reading a paper. This man is an object, true, but I also recognize him as the Other, a consciousness with its own transcendent free will. Suddenly, all relations in the park have changed. The objects in the world are now *his* objects as they relate to him as well as my objects as I relate to them. He has come between me and my world, and "I cannot put myself at the center of it" (*Being and Nothingness*, 342). Sartre calls the presence of the Other an element of "disintegration" of the relations I have with the objects of my world. But the man on the bench is not a man in the same sense that the bench is an object. The man is also a subject in that he has a consciousness that perceives and judges the world. The presence of the Other turns *me* into an object where I was once a transcendence.

*... if the Other-as-object is defined in connection with the world as the object which sees what I see, then my fundamental connections with the Other-as-subject must be able to be referred back to my permanent possibility of being seen by the Other* (*Being and Nothingness*, 344).

And if I can be seen, then I know that I, too, am an object for this Other. And as the Other looks at me, the essential nothingness of my existence is made plain

(prereflectively) to me. “I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other” (*Being and Nothingness*, 349).

Sartre uses this notion of the Other and his gaze to discuss the Other as the only true limitation to freedom as well as a source of ontological shame which affects us in our interactions with others. For our purposes, however, it is important to note that the Other is apprehended *differently* by consciousness than other objects. The Other appears to us and disintegrates our relations to the world; as a result, it removes us from a placid, self-created and self-determined place in the center of the world to an uncertain, conflicted position with the same world. As the only real limit to our freedom, the Other is *important* to our consciousness. I look at a piano and I create it as I intend it to be in a passive, objective relationship. I look at an Other, and the Other *looks back*.

It is thus that the appearance of the Other in performance circumstances can also trigger this ontological change. That masks represent people makes them *important* to consciousness, because they point to the Other. As Popenhagen observed, the mask is capable of returning the spectator’s gaze. “Once face to face with the human body – confronted by it, accepted by it, and activated by it – the eyes [of the mask] begin to look and see” (63). This means that a mask in performance has greater potential for affecting the consciousness of the viewer than, say, a Van Gogh painting of sunflowers. Of course, one need not wear a mask to create this change; unmasked actors represent Others as well. But the key difference here lies in how the Other-objects are apprehended in relation to

whether or not I am being watched in return. Sartre uses the example of a man peeking through a keyhole. Even though the people on the other side of the door are Others, since I am alone and unobserved, those people lose their Other-as-subject quality and instead are Others-as-objects which I can *watch* and arrange as the center of my world (*Being and Nothingness*, 348). But suppose I hear footsteps in the hall as someone approaches me. Suddenly, I am no longer alone. I am *seen* and the disintegration of my world begins.

One can imagine a non-masked, realistic style performance where the audience sits in a darkened theatre watching the events unfold on the stage. They are alone in their perspective with the events on stage, much like the man looking through the keyhole. In such a case, it is easy to transform the actors on stage into Others-as-objects, for the actors do not direct their actions to the audience. There are, of course, some styles of performance, masked and unmasked, where the actors directly address (or look) at the audience. Mrs. Cardigan reaches out to the audience, her gaze meeting the men she asks to dance with her. But there is more than this involved with masks. Because masks invite the imaginary state, audiences place their own intentions into the abstract faces they see. They are *involved* in the realization of the personage of the mask — at least, more involved than they would be with a non-masked actor. And the greater the involvement, the greater is the difficulty of reducing the masked figure to an Other-as-object. The mask carries with it my intentions: I make it real. And since I make it real, it is difficult for me to avoid the realization of its

status as Other-as-subject. I look at the mask and the mask looks back, even if its eyes do not turn to me.

The audience is “startled” when initially confronted with the mask, much like the man discovered peering through the keyhole. Subsequently, depending on the style of the performance and the events on the stage, the audience may be able to “reposition” themselves behind the metaphorical keyhole to a greater degree. But because they constantly read themselves into the performance, the audience will find it difficult to become completely complacent thus returning to a mostly perceptive and passive point of view, so long as the performance continues to support the synthesis of the shared imagining. Masks seem to have power not only because they are objects seeking realization, but they are also Others who, once realized in performance, look back at us, shaking us from our passive position watching through the keyhole and interpose themselves between us and the rest of the world.

### The Audience in the Performance

Thus it would seem that masked theatre, generally speaking, is more imaginary than non-masked – at least, the presence of the mask *analogon* invites the imaginary state, while the unmasked actor may be apprehended in a more perceptual manner. Let us clarify and in doing so, admit to certain biases as to the style and type of masked theatre we seek to explore.

It is true that all acting requires imaginary acts. To say that a particular mask in performance *always* induces a more imaginary state when compared with a particular non-masked figure would be incorrect. An excellent performance by a non-masked actor will be superior to a poor performance by a masked actor and more imaginary as well. But what we find is that masks, when used in a context which supports their imaginary natures, create shared imaginings of great vivacity and spontaneity. We are particularly interested in performances of these types where masks shine. We will discuss the particulars of this context in greater detail shortly; however, that masks “work well” in particular contexts can also teach us about the contexts in which they may work not as well. The fundamental dynamic between these contexts is, as expected, between attitudes of perception or imagination; but it is also along the aesthetic divide of mimesis and expression\*.

If the aim of psychological realism is *mimesis*, then that choice moves the actors and the audience toward the “perception” side of the continuum. In this case, the attitude of the consciousness of the viewers is more like that of observation and thought. It is a more passive position. In masked acting, which relies on *expression* instead of mimesis, the audience is moved closer to the “imagination” side of the continuum by the presence of the mask *analogon*, the specific movement choices made by the actors, and the imaginary state of the characterizations. We can say that mask acting at least partly relies on expression

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\* See my discussion about Imamichi, Chapter 5.

instead of mimesis because the use of the mask itself is a means of expressing a personage. In this way, the audience uses their imagination to complete the personage through the expression of the character's *sens* (see last chapter); thus, they understand the action of the scene through a synthesis of knowledge and intention. Imagination is not passive; it is an act. The audience puts themselves into the performance. The rigid mask cannot weep, smile, and frown: it can only show what it was carved to be. But the mask can *seem* to do these things. Mrs. Cardigan can seem wistful, thoughtful, giddy, and crestfallen all because the *analogon* of mask and actor unites with the knowledge and intention of the audience. The actor provides the *sens*, and the audience transforms the mask.

The presence of a new character is not accomplished merely by putting on a mask, even though wearing a mask generally invites a more imaginary mode of apprehension. Ultimately, the audience must *believe* in the presence that they see. Observe Joachin Phoenix playing Johnny Cash, and some may be so convinced by his performance they fleetingly feel they are in the presence of Cash himself; others may find nothing of Cash in Phoenix's portrayal. Perhaps the disagreeing audience has seen Cash in person or grown up with Cash's songs and heard about his life in the media. If the signs the performer uses do not match the knowledge in the mind of the spectator, then the *analogon* fails on some level to create the imaginative consciousness. Belief comes not just from knowledge, however, but also from intentionality. A member of the audience has an expectation, however small or degraded, toward the imaginary object

presented by the *analogon*. If the performance signs synthesize with the knowledge and intention, then the image in the spectator's consciousness appears and is believed. The presence of actor fades and the presence of the character appears. We *believe* that Joachin Phoenix is Johnny Cash. We *believe* that Sandra Hughes is Mrs. Cardigan – or more precisely, we believe that Mrs. Cardigan is real *despite* her false face. Failing this, then we see only an actor pretending to be Johnny Cash or an actor in a wooden mask dancing with a broom. As Popenhagen says, "Through the mask, the spectator sees every person who bears the merest resemblance to the character" (81). The skilled actor brings out the "signs" of the character, which unite with the *analogon* of the mask – the "harmony" that Eldredge discusses – and the presence of the character is realized in the consciousness of the audience through the synthesis of the imagination. In as much as the mask actor must "animate" the mask, the audience also "animates" the mask in their own imaging consciousness.

### Purposeful Ambiguity

Of course, it is impossible to build a performance which attempts to meet every possible expectation of the audience. LeCoq believed that there was such a thing as the "universal poetic sense" (46). That is, a kind of immediate expressivity in the moving body that was understood on some level by the audience. It would be difficult to argue that a particular gesture or mask means the same thing to everyone that might see it. But LeCoq was aiming at trying to



find a way of moving that conveyed the essence (similar to *sens*) of the thing being depicted in movement. This process was distilling the movement of the actor to just its essence without being illustrative. LeCoq identifies a difference between “Mimism,” (his term) which is the search for internal dynamics of meaning, and mimicry, which is just representation of form (22). In other words, LeCoq was more interested in movement that expresses than movement that is mimetic. The universal poetic sense, then, would be about finding the “meaning” of particular movement qualities which register, at some level, with everyone, then paring away excess movement elements until just the “essence” of the movement remained.

But is such a universal aesthetic possible? In his *The Critique of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant argued that it was. Kant differentiated between objects that are deemed “pleasant,” “good,” and “beautiful” (45-58). That which is “pleasant” is deemed so by my own self-interest; therefore, I do not have an expectation that others will necessarily share my judgment. For example, I find this sort of wine to be pleasant, but I don’t expect everyone to feel the same way. That which is “good” is likewise tied to self-interest, but it also has a mode of “utility” which the pleasant does not. To be called “good” I must have a *concept* of what that object is so that it can be *used*. I can say “this piano is good” because I have made a judgment about what I believe the nature and use of pianos is. This is contrasted to a simple enjoyment of a glass of wine, which does not require I make a cognitive evaluation of the wine itself. If I were a sommelier, I may say a

particular wine is “good” in my logical consideration of the function and utility of wine. But while objects “pleasant” and “good” share a common bond of self-interest, that which is “good” is a cognitive judgment, while that which is pleasant is a more sensory, thus, prereflective judgment which does not require cognition.

But Kant found that judgments of “beauty” (and we will continue to argue that “beauty” is but one of many possible aesthetic qualities an object can possess) were *not* motivated by self-interest. We may enjoy the taste of this kind of wine, or may wish to own this brand of piano because of its quality – such judgments are motivated by self-interest. But what benefit does admiring Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* afford me? Certainly there may be some “pleasure” involved in the viewing, the colors and lines may appeal to my senses, and if that is the limit of my appreciation of *Sunflowers*, then the painting is only “pleasant.” In order to be “beautiful,” argued Kant, then I must find in the painting some qualities which are beyond my own personal self-interest. “*Taste*,” he wrote, “is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an *entirely disinterested* satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called *beautiful*” (55). Neither does the beautiful object require a *cognition*, such as object that are “good.” One need not make a cognitive (i.e. reflective) judgment about the nature of sunflowers to find *Sunflowers* beautiful (or ugly, or angry, or hot, etc.) In fact, because we are disinterested in the object, and because we make

beauty judgments prereflectively, we expect others to share our evaluation.

Beauty becomes *universal*. Kant writes:

*Consequently, the judgment of taste, accompanied with the consciousness of separation from all interest, must claim validity for every man, without this universality depending on Objects. That is, there must be bound up with it a title to subjective universality (56).*

For Kant, judgments of beauty were not the results of individual taste. After all, to judge something as beautiful is not a judgment made from self-interest or objective utility. Further, we “demand” that others share our view of the beautiful where we do not require such agreement with things that are merely pleasant (58). Thus, Kant seeks to find what this universal aesthetic is.

Ultimately, Kant turns to a fourth category, the “Sublime,” which is an object that “pleases immediately through its opposition to the interest of sense” (134). The sublime has ties to nature, implying that there is a natural and *moral* harmony in the world and it is this which provides the basis for a universal aesthetic. However, we will not follow Kant here, for it on this fundamental point that Sartre and Kant have strong disagreement. Sartre writes:

*We shall, however, find little help from the Kantians. In fact they, preoccupied with establishing the universal laws of subjectivity which are the same for all, never dealt with the question of persons (Being and Nothingness, 306).*

Sartre rightly points out that no universal law can define an individual person. Intentionality is *different* than self-interest. The individual’s intentions forever shape and color how he apprehends an object. Self-interest is but one of the components of intentionality, one of many factors, but certainly not the only one,

that define the world for a given man. Thus, we must agree with Sartre and conclude that the *universal* poetic sense sought by LeCoq is not possible. Such a universal sense is cannot be codified, for everyone has different knowledge and intentions about particular movements and the context of their use.

But need we completely abandon LeCoq's attempts? Perhaps we need only consider them in a different light. It is impossible to create a performance style that captures *all* audiences in its aesthetic net; however, that does not mean that it is impossible to construct a *wide* net, capturing as many as possible. If we know that intentionality will always influence and affect aesthetic appreciation, then we know that no one can create a mask that points to a *particular* personage *in the same way* for everyone viewing it. But as we discussed in Chapter 5, a mask that is ambiguous and abstract becomes more effective at a wider range of expressions and personage possibilities. This is so because by inviting the imaginations, we *exploit* intentionality so that the audience sees the character they intend to see. We sacrifice, as LeCoq did, *mimesis* for *expression*, and the audience's imagination fills in the missing details.

So we can also speak about presenting *performances* in such a way that audiences can read more of themselves into the performance itself, and thus, respond to the performance because of this involvement. We cannot quantify such an aesthetic style as a particular code of movement or gesture style. We have already seen that the performance context greatly changes the value of an aesthetic object in that context, and to attempt to codify a specific quality of

movement or speech will affix the effectiveness of that code within the context in which it was created. The lessons of the masks do not lead us to seek a *particular* style, rather, it is an overall aesthetic style which can be used in *different* contexts which aims at encouraging the audience to *strongly* imagine. We again acknowledge that there is no single style which ensures universal understanding and aesthetic appreciation. But perhaps it may be possible to use intentionality to our own aims.

Here is what we know: We are seeking a style that both invites and sustains the imaginary state. The style would employ masks, for their ability to remove the presence of the actor and bring out the presence of the “Other” suggested by the mask. It would rely on movement, for, as discussed, movement is tied to the imaginary. Ambiguity would also play an integral part in this style, for ambiguity invites the imagination. These elements would have to be brought into a kind of balance: too much ambiguity, and the audience has too little knowledge to activate the imaging consciousness; not enough ambiguity, and the audience will slip further from the imaging consciousness and rely on more passive perception.

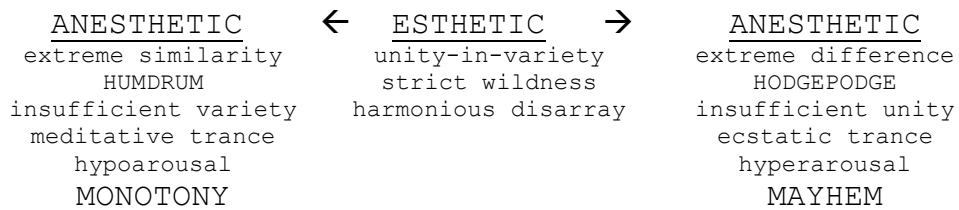
But how do we define this balance? Roy Behrens sought to express this sort of balance in print when he compared concepts of the “esthetic” versus the “anesthetic.” Returning to the roots of the words, he writes, “Any experience could be regarded as esthetic if provocative, striking, and stirringly felt, whereas anesthetic experiences were benumbing or stupefying” (Behrens). Behrens

acknowledges the modern, common meaning of “anesthetic” in a medical and chemical sense. But, he points out, an anesthetic experience could also be

*...a non-chemical loss of sensation, as when, for example a person experiences a meditative trance, brought on by exposure to extreme similarity (or humdrum), such as monotonous chanting, resulting in “hypoarousal”; or an ecstatic trance, brought on by sustained exposure to extreme diversity (or hodgepodge), such as spasmodic song and dance, resulting in “hyperarousal.” (Behrens).*

Thus the anesthetic is a state of sensory loss, or more particularly, for our purposes, a *failure to feel*, which is brought on by extreme levels of sensory data (information). This failure to feel translates into a failure to *imagine*, for sensory data provide the knowledge required to initiate the imaginative synthesis. We will return to this point, shortly.

Behrens proposes a continuum or spectrum of sensory experience which can produce various degrees of esthetic or anesthetic experience:



Thus, we see anesthetic experiences are ones that are “too repetitive” or “too diverse” (Behrens). Where does one draw the line, though, between “harmonious disarray” and “mayhem,” for example? We understand that that line is different for different people. Behrens does likewise, calling his esthetic zone a

“fluctuating” area, with no fixed point where esthetic patterns reside. In fact, he states that “some of the most inventive art tends to drift precariously toward the edges” (Behrens). Ultimately, these visual patterns are tied to ideas of Gestalt: too little or too much information and patterns fail to emerge. Esthetic objects are ones which allow the Gestalt syntheses to manifest.

But let us return to the idea that a failure to sense produces a failure to imagine. If we organize the world according to Gestalt principles (e.g. reification, multistability, etc.) then these organizations of information are what provide us with the knowledge we require for the imaginative synthesis. But we know that complete sensation is unnecessary – in fact, it is impossible. We only need a little bit of knowledge to trigger the imaginative synthesis. But the question is to *what degree* is the imagination triggered, and the answer cannot be categorical.

However, we can, like Behrens, understand that an effective esthetic object resides in the “fluctuating” zone between “too much” or “too little” detail. The artist must make a determination herself about the level of sensory data constitutes “too much” or “too little” if she aims to create an esthetic object. Even so, she has no assurances that her choice will produce an esthetic object for *all*. But if she (intuitively or otherwise) understands that there is a balance between *removing* sensory data (and thus moving away from hyperarousal) and *adding* sensory data (and moving away from hypoarousal), then in attempting to find that balance, she can create an esthetic object which can serve as an *analogon* for an imaginary synthesis in a wider selection of individual consciousnesses.

In terms of masked performance and the aesthetic style we seek to describe, we therefore see again how an *ambiguity* of form is essential to the imaginary process. But we cannot completely sacrifice information for ambiguity. We must use ambiguity in specific ways. Because masks in particular exploit ambiguity in performance, rather than rely on one of Behren's terms for this balanced aesthetic style (e.g. unity-in-variety, strict wildness, etc.) I prefer to use the term *purposeful ambiguity*.

Purposeful ambiguity, as its name implies, employs ambiguity in a specific way. The goal would be to present the audience with just enough specifics so that an audience member can orient his knowledge toward the events on stage, but then allow enough ambiguity so that he fills in the rest with his own knowledge and intention. It is important to remember that context is a key part of the aesthetic experience. Therefore, the artist must consider how the performative objects are presented in that context as part of determining the degree of ambiguity. It is also important to remember that this is not a rejection of specifics and detail: ambiguity need not be chaotic or random. On the contrary, such a style would rely on a poverty of carefully chosen and specific signs designed to present the essential elements needed to present and engage the knowledge of the spectator. The essential poverty of such signs, however, invites the audience to imagine what is missing.

Take, for example, the performance of Mrs. Cardigan. Certainly, the mask is limited: it can only present one expression. But Sandra Hughes' performance



choices are also essential. When she reaches out her hand toward the various men in the audience, she carefully eliminates all other extraneous movement from her performance. She steps toward a man, and extends her hand to him, palm up, invitingly. But of course, the characterization “invitingly” is one assigned to the gesture by the observer. Because the performance is essentialized, to borrow from LeCoq, the audience is not distracted from the lines and patterns of movement by other movements which do not belong. The movement of the actress, the face of the mask, the context of the performance, and the knowledge of the spectators are presented in enough detail that an audience member can imagine that Mrs. Cardigan is inviting him to dance with her. They may imagine they see some eagerness, some hope in her expression, they may imagine her eyebrows go up, or even that she smiles at them. But because the events presented to them are done so with a degree of ambiguity, they do not merely *watch* the proceedings: they are invited to imagine and they read themselves into the performance. Each audience member’s image is likely to be different from each other’s due to differences in knowledge and intention, but the audience still places the qualities of the *imagined* Mrs. Cardigan in the *analogon* of Mrs. Cardigan presented by Hughes. Mrs. Cardigan is made present, not solely by the purposeful choices of the actor, nor solely by the ambiguity of the performance, but through a synthesis of the two, actor and audience collaborating imaginatively in an prereflective way.

Of course, even purposeful ambiguity is not necessarily “universal.” Mrs. Cardigan’s gesture may not always seem to be an invitation. The specific elements of each audience member’s knowledge and intention could cause that person to interpret a particular movement differently than the actor intended, or even to fail to understand what the movement meant. In such a case, the confusion—a lack of knowledge—would cause the imaginative state to fail to synthesize and the audience member would fall back to a more perceptive state, seeking to “figure out” what the gesture meant by gleaning more knowledge from the performance.

However, what purposeful ambiguity does allow for is the possibility of imagination. The ambiguity of the performance leaves room for the audience to read themselves into it, whatever the image may be for a particular person. It may not be universal, but it has the potential to create a performance style which, for the audience, is prereflectively participatory, with characterizations that seem intuitively complete, compelling to watch because of the “pull” of ambiguity, and above all, imaginary in nature. Certainly, a style of “purposeful ambiguity” is desirable for masked performance. But more than this, masks show us that the creation of the aesthetic object *depends* on a certain level of ambiguity, and that the aesthetic, like *sens*, is the domain of the imagination.

## Conclusion

The relationship between the masked actor and the audience is collaborative. The ambiguity of the mask in the performance invites the imaginary state more so than an unmasked actor, all else being equal. In this imaginative state, the audience completes the characterization with their own knowledge and intention. Properly animated and performed, the masked actor is compelling to watch. The strange, ambiguous “Other” of the mask pulls on the audience’s consciousness, seeking realization, and the audience gives it such to the extent it can imagine. Such is the pull that an audience member will even transform the image of the mask to see what she intends to see. Mrs. Cardigan is sad because we *see* her sadness in the image we have of her, and we place that sadness in the *analogon* of the actor/mask before us. We respond with a sympathetic “Awww...” because the emotion we feel is genuine. We do not need to *see* the sadness in Mrs. Cardigan’s face. We only need to imagine it.

Sartre’s ideas of consciousness are based on ambiguity and uncertainty. Only through our imaginations can we find a complete and total object, which means, of course, that our own point of view is an inextricable part of that totality. This is true for how we process identity, in our selves and others. We imagine who we are and who the people around us are. Masks take advantage of this particular part of human consciousness. They invite us to imagine, and we make them real. As a result, masks seem to have this power which has given them special status among primal cultures and modern mask teachers alike. But

we give them the life they seem to have. In truth, masks operate like most any other *analogon*, with one exception. Masks seem to have power because they play effortlessly with one thing we traditionally hold to be fundamental: identity. But transformation of identity – even transformation of the world – is how our consciousness operates. We imagine the world and transform it over and over as we engage with it. Transformation is an imaginative act – the more imaginative a particular object appears to us on the perception/imagination continuum, the more likely it is to have emotional and identity-related transformations.

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## Chapter 7 - Conclusion

We began this dissertation curious about the relationship between masks and the imagination. We discovered that not only do masks encourage and sustain imaginary states in actor and audience alike, but masks as authorized props in performance games make plain and illustrate the operation of consciousness itself. In order to better understand how masks in performance are apprehended by consciousness, we turned to Sartrean thought, and asked some particular questions. Let us conclude by answering these questions in summation:

What would Sartrean philosophy have to say about the role of masks in character creation? If we apply the imaginary synthesis to masks, we see that a mask is an *analogon*. It stands in for the absent character. Because faces are the key index by which we reference qualities such as personality and identity, masks have specific associations with those qualities – more so than most other objects. Certainly, photographs and portraits are other identity-related *analoga*; however, masks take on special significance because they are animated with a body and because they are abstract. The mask, worn and animated, removes the presence of the actor and brings out the presence of the personage to which it

points. This removal of the presence of the actor can manifest itself as what is referred to as “trance” by mask scholars and performers: a kind of committed imaginary state where the actor spontaneously synthesizes the personage of the character out of her imagination.

What might Sartrean concepts have to say about how audiences apprehend a masked performer compared to an unmasked performer? Like the actor, the audience contributes to the presence of the personage inasmuch as their own intentions and knowledge synthesize with the choices of the actor to realize the absent character. If this personage appears to us in a manner more like perception – as a “real” person with a real face – then audiences are more likely to apprehend the personage in a more perceptive way. But the appearance of the mask invites the audience to imagine. The strange and ambiguous figure in the mask pulls on the audience’s consciousness, shocking them from a vantage where they objectify and merely watch the events on the stage. The audience realizes the personage of the mask themselves in a more imaginary way than they would with a non-masked actor.

What are the aesthetic qualities that make a particular mask/performance more effective from a Sartrean point of view? How might Sartre’s ideas of the imagination be used to construct an aesthetic for masked performance? Some masks are better than others, and masks which capture the *sens* – the totality – of the personage tend to be stronger than those who do not. But *sens* does not come from lifelikeness. Rather, *sens* comes through abstraction and ambiguity,

sacrificing some mimetic choices for expressive ones. This is because we can only apprehend something in its totality in our imaginations. Ambiguity invites the imagination, which in turn completes the ambiguous object. This is why a more imaginative apprehension of events in performance is stronger than a more perceptive mode: imagination is an act, pulling the consciousness into the performance, actively realizing the events. The audience does not merely watch; it participates. But neither is complete abstraction useful in the imaginative synthesis. Without some knowledge about the object, the imaginative synthesis fails. That is why the most effective masks and masked performances employ purposeful ambiguity: enough knowledge to engage the imaginative synthesis, and enough ambiguity to allow the audience to imagine the rest.

### Masks and Faces

Sartre's writings about the imagination shed specific light on how audiences and actors approach the process of acting itself. Because acting is essentially about the play of identity, then the question of *how* identity is formed becomes important. We know that Sartre believed our identity was constructed imaginatively. For the actor, if *identity* can likewise be constructed freely through the imagination, then *characterizations* can likewise be freely constructed.

However, the actor must always be aware of how his own intentions and knowledge affect the characterizations so constructed. If the imaginative process is the basis for identity, then actor training must include training of the



imagination, including circumventing the “bad faith” that would keep the actor from recognizing his own intentions and assumptions in his understanding of identity. The moment an actor believes she perceptually understands who her character *is*, she risks falling into the trap of bad faith: Mrs. Cardigan *is* sad or melancholy or hopeful or wistful. The character has been reduced to traits, fundamental “qualities” which “define” her, limit her, and for the actor, make her unplayable. One cannot “be sad” as an actor except in a superficial or illustrative way. Rather, the sadness is a result of the character’s choices and how she deals with the consequences of those choices. To say a character “is” such and such a person or “has” certain qualities is to remove that character from action: to remove choice. This is so because a character can no longer choose her actions, only respond as her traits dictate. For Sartre, a character, like any human, is defined not by who she is, but by how she chooses. It was for this reason that Sartre created his *theatre de situations* to show characters in action, not in the passive grip of forces beyond their control. Sartre believed this freedom was a part of human identity, and his characters reflected this belief.

We admit that such choices can apply to non-masked acting as well. But masks in particular illustrate this fundamental working of identity. It is a mask’s ambiguity which points out how we assign qualities of identity and personality to others around us. A mask is quite clearly *not* a face. And yet, whether we are an actor contemplating a mask to find the personage it points to, or an audience member witnessing the face in motion, we bring our perceptions, ideas,

memories, and expectations to bear on this false face seeking to discover *who* is there. Consider the conversation between mime performer Andres Bossard of the group Mummenschanz and interviewer Bari Rolf about working with masks:

**BR:** *You make me think of a paradox of the mask: it hides in order to reveal. People often feel safe hiding behind a mask, thinking that the face, that most expressive feature, is well-covered. But then the mask directs expression into the body.*

**Andres:** *The face – okay, it’s the most important feature but it’s not absolutely the most truthful. It’s very cheating; we can always cheat with our faces. But with the body, we cannot cheat. So we should look more at bodies when we are meeting people, we would learn more.*

**BR:** *The mask hides the lie and shows the truth (Rolf, 30).*

What is the “truth” of which Rolf speaks? It is implied through the conversation that the “truth” here means one’s inner feelings or beliefs – that masks affect the wearer and somehow coerce the wearer into directing the facial expression into the body. While it may be true that some *actors*, on donning a mask, may feel the need to indicate their character’s inner feelings physically since they are deprived of facial expression, I do not think that we can say that masks have a special ability that causes this to be so. Still, I believe Rolf’s assertion that masks hide lies and show “truths” has merit for other reasons.

Rather than questions of internal versus external honesty, consider instead that the “truth” can be defined, in this case, as the character represented in the mask: the truth which we constitute in our imaginations, the “totality” of the personage. If an actor is to appear believable while wearing a mask, the actor

must remove her sense of self from the performance and instead focus on the sense of self pointed to by the mask. A “truthful” performance is one in which the *sens* of the character is made present without breaking the imaginative synthesis either by unauthorized behavior within the context of the game being played, or too much/too little sensory data. The human face can put on expressions of all sorts. The fixed mask can only be what it “is,” and the actor’s responsibility is to create imaginatively the personage of the mask: the “is” which only exists in the imagination. A mask *is* horrible or lively or melancholy not merely because it was sculpted that way, but because we place those qualities in the mask when we view it. Rolf’s observation shows us that the mutable face we show to the world, the face we associate with “us,” is ripe with possibilities for deception, even to ourselves. We may even lie to ourselves about who we are, or we may play different roles at different times of our lives, show different sides of ourselves to different people. But the mask is what it is, i.e. it cannot pretend to be anything other than how it was sculpted. It cannot be otherwise. We gift the mask with its identity, even as it seems to change. Identity is created not in the psyche, but in the imagination for both the actor and the audience.

### Making Presence

In the last chapter, we attempted to briefly outline a performance style which not only is beneficial when using masks, but uses masks to illustrate the

operation of aesthetics in performance. But I believe that from these lessons we can ask a more fundamental question in the light of the mask: what is acting? Such an enormous question will not receive a complete answer in this dissertation; we leave that for another time. However, there are some ideas which our examination has brought to light that should be mentioned as possible realms of further scholarship.

There have been many definitions of acting, of course, so long as there have been theories of acting. Stanislavski – here paraphrased by Sanford Meisner – said that a major component of acting is “living truthfully in imaginary circumstances” (Daw, 78). By this, Stanislavski (and Meisner) wanted actors to react as if they were real people to the imaginary conditions on the stage. “Truthfully” here means authentic and believable, not mannered or artificial – engaging one’s imagination on the stage to the point where the imaginary stimuli of the play create authentic-seeming reactions. It is like Walton’s ideas of communal imagining, with certain behaviors authorized within the context of the game of make-believe that is the performance. While this idea certainly suited Stanislavski’s aims, this definition leaves certain holes. For instance, what about certain stylized performance modes where the aim is not realistic characterization but something more mannered or presentational? Or what if the character is not strictly speaking a human being, instead being a god, animal, spirit, ghost, and so on? While Stanislavski’s definition recognizes the fundamentally imaginary nature of the acting process, I prefer to think of

acting in more basic terms: acting is making presence. That is, the function of the actor is to “make present” the “other,” the character, god, animal, spirit, personage which is called for in the circumstances of the performance.

In order to make presence, the actor must first remove her own sense of presence from the performance space. Presence is *physical* to begin with. She must change her body so that all traces of her vanish, and replacing them with those appropriate to the personage she is to play. From there, the actor uses her imagination to synthesize the character in a way that sustains the presence. Even if the character is mannered or unrealistic (stylistically speaking), there are still qualities which can be made present by the actor. At its most basic, acting is bringing forth someone or something else in the place where the actor was previously. Obviously this is not a literal transfiguration. However, because identity is created imaginatively, the transformation becomes possible in an imaginary way. Acting is possible because we do not construct identity solely through perception. Whether I am an actor playing a role or simply thinking about my own identity, it is my imagination that constitutes my understanding of that identity. Whether it is an actor on a stage or a person we meet on the street, it is our imaginations that tell us who they are.

Masks facilitate the imaginary transformation of acting. They remove the face of the actor, and thus the primary index of his presence. As indicated by the mask theorists we have reviewed here, mask work is physical work, transforming the body to suit the new face. Masks invite the imagination. If

acting is making presence, then masked acting is a way to more intuitively make present the “Other” in a more imaginative mode. When Rolf says masks hide the lie and show the truth, she may not have realized the full scope of what she meant. Masks hide the lie of innate properties that determine who we are, and instead reveal the truth that we *are* our masks.

### Towards Sartrean Theatre

Sartre rarely used masks himself\*. Neither are his plays particularly abstract in their dialog and construction as, say, the Absurdist who followed him. As such, they are often performed in a more traditionally realistic style suitable for the text. This choice seems at odds with his preferred aesthetic choices of visual art. But then, Sartre did not approve of all activities of the imagination. In fact the very name “bad faith” Sartre applies to this particular operation of the imagination speaks to his disapproval of its ends. Sartre preferred, instead, that human beings should adopt “candor” and “authenticity” as values (*Being and Nothingness*, 101).

However, his plays did attempt to illustrate the ambiguous nature of consciousness. His *theatre de situations* attempted to show human beings at moments when their choices, not some fundamental properties, define who they

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\* Sartre’s initial production of *The Flies* (*Les Mouches*) used masks designed by Henri-Georges Adam, though there is little scholarship on the production directly pertaining to the masks themselves. Images of the masks can be found in *Album Jean-Paul Sartre*, Bibliotheque de la Pleiade, Paris: Gallimard, pp 76-77.

are. This, he believed, was common to the human existence: outside of certain biological factors, we are who we choose to be.

Roger Callois identified another artifact common to the human condition: masks. He writes:

*It is a fact that all mankind wears or has worn a mask. This enigmatic accessory, with no obvious utility, is commoner than the lever, the bow, the harpoon, or the plough. Whole peoples have been ignorant of the most ordinary tools. They knew the mask. Complete civilizations, some of them most remarkable, have prospered without having conceived of the wheel, or what is worse, without using it even though it was known to them. But they were familiar with the mask... There is no tool, no invention, no belief, custom, or institution which unites mankind so much as does the habit of wearing a mask (qtd. in Eldredge 3).*

Callois' observation wants to find something universal about the mask and the human condition. Callois' does not mean that masks serve the same purpose in every culture and are used the same way. Rather, the construction of masks and their use – masking – seems to be an expression of something innately human. We have already found that a universal mask sense is not possible. But if, as Sartre suggests, our ontological freedom is due to our capacity to imagine, then one of the ways we can exercise that freedom is to change our identity – our imagined natures, our imagined selves. Using a mask is simply employing an *analogon* to effect that change. Perhaps this explains Callois' observation – masks are a common human artifact because they so plainly illustrate how humans create their sense of identity. Masks are a tool to change the world and change ourselves. If there is something fundamentally human about masks, it is not merely something culturally expressed: it is ontologically expressed.

Though Sartre may not have utilized masks extensively in his own dramas, I believe that masks are a uniquely Sartrean approach to theatre: a theatre that is rooted in the imagination of both actor and audience, and one that truly reflects the indeterminate nature of mankind's consciousness. One must wonder if Sartre would have approved of the techniques used by the mask theorists discussed herein. After all, these techniques *exploit* the imaginative process to their own ends, often substituting one sort of bad faith for another. But if acting is "making presence" then the use of a mask is an excellent tool toward that end.

Sartre's *theatre de situations* sought to illustrate his ideas, to depict human beings making choices that define their natures, to give examples of the freedom of humanity. A performance where masks are a primary part of the characterization cannot be stylistically realistic: masks are rarely mistaken for real faces. But just as Sartre found value in abstraction, in that it invites the imagination, so too do masks abstract the characterizations and invite imagination. Sartre's *theatre de situations* illustrated Sartre's philosophy. Masked theatre, on the other hand, is Sartre's philosophy in action – though perhaps not to the ends he would have desired. But in masks we see clearly how Sartre himself outlined the functioning of consciousness. Non-masked theatre shows these functions as well, but the presence of the mask, the "instrument of the imagination," shows in detail how humanity creates and understands itself and others: imaginatively.



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