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She's Lost Control

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In a world that frequently values the arts as a formulaic and profitable commodity, the roots of drama as a dangerous expression of the sacred can be obscured. After many years as an actor, it is only now that I am able to evaluate and utilise the effect of prolonged training and experience in relation to magical practice. Out of that process one concern takes centre stage. Control.

While technique and discipline are an actor's principal tools, the finer embroidery of the craft itself is more complex. The transformation of a body into a vessel for the brief channelling of another is engendered by word and made flesh by imagination. Some choose to answer Stanislavski's five

questions, some score their scripts like a military campaign. Breathe here. Raise the inflection there. I never could obey the prescriptive, preferring madness over method. I discovered early on that my own personality was not so easily divided from its biology or environment, and I questioned the nature of the identities I was encouraged to create from the inside out as bastions of purity, responsive but fundamentally unaffected by externals. Such limitations contradicted the idea of interconnectivity that binds both my stagecraft and magical work.

I used to believe that the body never lies. But it does. We can trick it, rebel-rouse it, shift its kinetic centre. Shoes shape posture, clothes manipulate confidence, geography modifies dialect, accent alters the shape of the face, the weather one's mood, hormones one's personality. Drawing down my characters, I can control most of these choices. The process of creating Other, however, presents temptations for the ego to exert its power, for the embedded actor is desperate to be liked and lauded in equal parts. The genuine practitioner seeks truth, but too often there is a projection of natural insecurity that mitigates undesirable qualities and nudges the role towards acceptable elegance. This process reaches its apex during performances where everything meshes, group harmonics are perfect, cues, placement, resonances, responses seem to possess a unique and heightened energy. We come off-stage riding a smug, high-fiving unity only to make the devastating discovery that the audience has been left cold by our efforts.

Conversely, there are those performances where one feels out of joint, timings are askew, words emerge like a mouthful of mistakes, the body feels tense, struggling, gasping, and heavy meanings tumble to the floor as the audience sits in stony silence. We wrestle with control but it slips through our fingers like love. On those rare, miserable occasions, we are always astounded to find that everyone thought it the best performance ever. "It was magic", they say.

Self-consciousness is the ego at its most disingenuous and sheer indulgence of our own talents can obfuscate truth. Struggle against the self is uncomfortable but it is through this process that authenticity is dragged kicking and screaming into the light, captivating those who are privy to its painful and exceptional appearance.

In my early esoteric training, I expected to feel something tremendous during every ritual and exercise. It could be ecstasy or rage, but I wanted the strength of its purpose and colour to induce satisfaction that all the parameters of preparation had been met. Instead, the frequent blunders, confusion and lack of connectivity produced the gruel of sadness and a profound sense that I had been cheated out of my calculated joy. If all acts of love and pleasure are Her rituals, I made the assumption that its effects were lessened because I felt less.

I have rarely had much time for regularisation, either in Shakespeare or magic, but there does seem to be a creeping obsession with maintaining permanent states of happiness, as well as a belief that the relationship between mind and the material is weighted towards a psychological will wholly independent from its surroundings.

That spontaneous discomfort can be the midwife of magic presents difficult questions for both the solitary and group practitioner – why are we doing this, for whom, and how much control is good? Even ritualistic pain or lucid dreaming tend to be carefully managed, but if used constantly there is little space for the still, unexpected voice. Pulling over allows us to experience the thrill and requirement of heavy traffic. Falling over reminds us that the Earth exists outside of the abstract of shoes.

In order to create Other (however defined), we must subjugate the ego peeping through the curtains. In a group, that can take the shape of a deliberate, temporary conformity where the danger of singularisation, either through reticence or over-assertion, can destroy the corporate tonal unity. It is not always about ease and sweetness, but the minutiae of surrender creating overtones. Once the individual sinks into the work of the body (singular or several), once we can trust our craft and training to sustain us, a new voice crystallises. It is the gift to spirit. It is no longer ours.

That is my lightning flash, the cybernetic torque between will and relinquishment, a shifting segue of correspondences and my equally explosive and diverse range of responses to them. Sometimes the weave is too tight and the creation of beauty and ecstasy is pushed outwards at a personal price. To let go, to ride the storm of failure, not planning for the effects but struggling with them, is to finally surrender to the knowledge that mastery needs no fight. I seek not to know it, nor transcend it, but to live with it, feel it, and rejoice in its aberrations and miracles.

For sometimes, drowning in my own discomfort, my ego scattered and shattered like so many shards of glass, I am sure I can sense, from across the psychic landscape, the unanticipated, faint ripples of astounded applause.