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**USEFULNESS OF MASK TECHNIQUE FOR ACTORS  
FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS**



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## **Usefulness of mask technique for actors from different background**

My thesis is on the genesis of the usefulness of mask technique for drama actors and puppeteers.

It handles the following subjects: how are masks used on stage, why are masks used on stage, the limitations of movement while using a mask, what mask technique gives, usefulness of mask technique for puppeteers, usefulness of mask technique for drama actors and usefulness of masks for drama directors.

### **KEYWORDS:**

Mask, mask technique, energy levels, neutrality, neutral mask, mask exercises, gesture lines, expressive mask, benefits of mask, building up a character, the laws of motion and passing focus.

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### **Miten naamio tekniikka auttaa näyttelijää ja nukkenäyttelijää**

Työssäni otan esille tärkeimmät lähtökohdat miten naamiotekniikka auttaisi näyttelijää ja nukkenäyttelijää oman työnsä kehittämiseksi ja kehittämisessä taiteilijana.

Näyttelijälle konkreettisesti otan esille sanattoman ilmaisun ja kehollisen ilmaisun lisäämisen, joka tavallisesti jää näyttämötyössä tekstin varjoon. Yleensä kehotietoisuus sekä emotion että sanoman siirto on mahdollinen myös ilman tekstiä tai minimimoimalla tekstin määrän.

Kasvojen miimikka tuntuu usein helpolta ja varmalta ratkaisulta emotion aikaan saamiseksi, ja tässä useimmiten unohdetaan keho kokonaan. Naamiotekniikka auttaa hetkeksi unohtamaan kasvot ja suuntaa tunteet kehoon mikä on muutenkin tärkeä taito työskennellessä ilman maskia.

Näytämöllinen energia ja sen ylläpito on yksi tärkeimpiä taitoja näyttelijän työssä. Erilaiset naamiot muotoilevat näyttelijöiden kehon kieltä tarkoituksensa ja estetiikkansa mukaisiksi. Näyttelijältä se vaatii hyvää ihmistuntemusta sekä eri tyyppien seuraamista ja matkimista.

Nuken liikkeen tunteminen. Mistä liike saa alkunsa? Naamionnäyttelemisessä on tärkeää hahmottaa, mistä liike alkaa ja mihin se loppuu. Tämä on nukenkäsittelyssä ja naamionäyttelemisessä olennaista tietää, jotta hahmon liikkeet ovat luonnollisia ja uskottavia.

Ohjaajalle haluaisin muistuttaa maskitekniikan mahdollisuuksista kuvata ja kertoa moniulotteisesti sekä sisällöllisesti valitun tarinan ja henkilöhahmojen monia eri tasoja.

Asiasanat:

Neutraali asenne, neutraali naamio, kehon tiedostus, naamio, naamio tekniikka, nuken liikkeen tunnetys, fookuksen sirto, henkilöhahmon kehity, näytämöllinen energia.

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## **Introduction**

Mask theater and mask acting started to interest me in the first year of university during a mask workshop and performance with self-designed and hand-made masks. The style and the quality of movement intrigued me. Knowing that I will start working in Estonia after my graduation and knowing that mask acting is not that popular in Estonia as it could be.

So I knew that I could not use my knowledge of mask theater in my everyday life as an actor and puppeteer, so I started to think about how to use the thing mask technique has thought me in my work, without even putting mask on at all.

Singers warm up their voices and dancers their muscles. Actors have to do both and even more – warm up their energy and state of mind.

Some exercises from working with a mask are ideal for using as a warm up or everyday training to keep you fresh and ready.

In general I would like to see more masks on stage, either in drama, puppetry, dance or circus performances. A lot of directors have already found that combining different styles on stage is the way to move in modern theater so why not to use a mask? Masks have roots that are thousands of years old, so the tradition is in all of us, somewhere deep down. Even if they seem unfamiliar at first, they are a part of almost every religion and theatrical practices.

## 1. Why and How are Masks Used on Stage?

Acting with masks requires knowledge of some basic rules. It is forbidden to speak behind the mask. Except for *commedia dell'arte* masks in which case the mask is an half mask – the mask only covers the forehead, eyes and cheeks, leaving the mouth and chin open.

“Whether the actor in a mask and /or costume is to be considered a puppet. While objects of mask /costume can be given movement, they are not and, and can not be, given speech, in that any speech associated with them is simply the speech of the actor or dancer who wears them. Again, their animation is so limited that one can wonder whether it exists at all, for the movement given them is but the performance movement of the actor or dancer who wears them, and is accorded to the performer, and not the object.”<sup>1</sup>

When we take out speech we actually give more freedom. They say that people who lose one of their senses gain something extra for the other senses. So in mask performances I believe that when the opportunity to hear the characters speak is taken away from you, the more you pay attention to their character because movement can not lie as easy as words can.

“And the characters had different voices, since we were listening to our own vocabulary, interpreting the movements and gestures of the characters in our own voices.”<sup>2</sup>

An exercise to develop your movements without using words. You are in a book store looking at different books. Reading them, looking at different covers, smelling them. Every book brings a different emotion, reminds you of some event in your life. One person should be looking at what you are doing and giving comments at what he is seeing. Then repeat the exercise with speaking out your inner monologue. Observe what movements changed and what were

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1 Tillis, Steve. *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992, 78.

2 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 2.

more specific, what you did more and what less. Do the exercise again without words taking the results of the observation into account.

The second rule is about how to treat a mask when it is not worn. A mask should not be put down facing the surface it is stored on. It can not be stored on the floor at any point. A mask should be hold properly, certainly not from the ribbon or elastic which holds it on the face. It is more easy for it to drop and brake that way. It is all about respecting the mask. Some masks are hundreds of years old and if they break they are ruined and irreplaceable.

Mask can not be taken off on stage facing the audience. If it is necessary to remove the mask on stage, the actor should turn his back to the audience and remove the mask then. Mask acting is all about creating an illusion by using the mask, actors body, its movement and costume. Taking off the mask in front of the audience brakes the sweet illusion in a second and disappoints everyone who had been attracted by the show.

“In mask/costume acting, the actor neither makes a pretense of being a naturalistic dramatic character, nor desires to be acknowledged as a person or as an actor who happens to be playing a role. Rather, as Malkin writes, “something is interposed between (the actor) and the audience (that) partakes of mystery, ritual, symbol, and the intellect” (1975: 7) Although the actor is most certainly alive, the performance is transformed by the mask/costume object he or she wears.

The object nature of mask/costume is not perceived to inhere in the living being who wears it, but in the mask/costume itself.”<sup>3</sup>

Actor wearing a mask creates something unbelievable. We forget that there is an actor behind the mask and let ourselves follow the path of a character on stage. Human but not exactly like us. The thing that we see and feel is indescribable.

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3 Tillis, Steve. *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992, 82.

“Masks play the essential game of theatre, and are an antidote to the technological excess of film or the bland realism of television. They require the audience to watch as they did when they were children, wide-eyed and believing, to suspend their disbelief, their adult sensibilities and their twenty-first-century cynicism. In an age far removed from the belief in miracles and transformation, masks allow us to enter into a mind state where we witness performers creation an otherness, a complete world that is somehow not this world and yet that is recognizable and believable.”<sup>4</sup>

“But the beauty of a mask work is the way that the audience perceive the mask to undergo many changes.”<sup>5</sup>

In visual theater as in mask theater we are playing with symbols and gestures, leaving a big space for the audience’s imagination. If there is no speech on stage, the audience is forced to tell the story in their heads themselves - making the peaces fit and finding the logic to the whole show. The show can be completely different to everyone in the audience due to their different background, knowledge and experience in life.

“You can present a situation as an action, letting the audience provide the moral judgements, or rise the questions that are pertinent to them personally... There are no soliloquies, no theories propounded, no answers. There are just actions, reactions and emotions.”<sup>6</sup>

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4 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 7.

5 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 29.

6 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 40.



## 2. The Limitations of Movement While Using a Mask

Mask does not have eyes, so the movement of eyes should be done a lot bigger – with the whole head.

“The mask displaces the principal communication methods. So in mask the whole face becomes the eye, the part that sees things, and the body becomes the expressive face, which registers the relations.”<sup>7</sup>

It could be confusing to show all the emotions only through the body for an actor who has not worked with masks before. The face and eyes of the actor are covered from the audience when working with whole and neutral masks, so it is impossible to use them in order to express emotions. All the communication comes forward through body language and gesture.

The movements are a bit different than in drama acting.

“Gesture lines:

Gestures that happen below the waist are usually offhand gestures, not important as they are far away from the center of intellect, the brain. But if these gestures are strong gestures then they become very earthy and animalistic – very sexual.

Gestures from the stomach area are truthful gestures – the gut reaction. They are warm and embracing, soft and motherly. But if you harden them up they become desperate for the truth, with a yearning or desperate quality.

Gestures from the chest are heartfelt and personal, pleading, often emotional.

Gestures from the face are sensual and sensuous, immediate and tactile. Think of the Italian gesture from the mouth.

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7 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 31.

Gestures from above the eyes to above the head are mad, wild, uncomprehending or exasperated. They are often jubilant or tragic.”<sup>8</sup>

Delarte has its own theory. It divides the body into separate zones, so that every part of the body represents either the mental, moral or vital zone. This dividing helps the actor to have control over his body knowing exactly what part of it he should use in which situation to give the right emotion.

“Delarte, a contemporary of Darwin, examined the minute details of human gesture and classified them. His system divided the body into three zones: the mental or intellectual zone, the moral or spiritual zone, and the vital or physical zone. In the body the abdomen and legs represent the vital zone. The head, hands, and feet represent the mental zone, and the chest and arms represent the moral zone in the body. In the mask of the face, the forehead and eyes are the mental zone, the nose and cheeks are the moral zone, and the mouth and chin are the vital zone.”<sup>9</sup>

A good exercise to train different body parts and to separate their activity. It helps you to move different parts of the body separately.

In the first position the legs are separated and bent. In this position try to move your weight to right, middle and left. This is the first zone - the pelvis. It can be moved by body weight to right, left and kept in the middle. Doing this try to keep your body straight.

The second zone is the chest, it can all so be moved right left and kept in front.

The third zone is the head.

The exercise itself goes like this: everyone takes the first position; legs bent weight in the middle, body and head in the middle. The exercise leader gives the tasks. For example: head right, chest left, pelvis left, chest middle, head left, weight middle.

The second step is for everyone to do it themselves, separating movements, moving one part at a time. The third step is to do it with breathing. In one movement breathing in and in second out and altering tempos while doing it.

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8 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 50.

9 Potter, Nicole. *Movement for Actors*. Canada, 2002,100.

This exercise can be done as an etude with two or three people standing side by side and making one move at a time. It creates situations, actions and reactions between players.

The audience tends to be visually more engaged with mask pieces than drama ones because there is no speech on stage, only symbols and pictures played out by only using movement and gestures. So it makes it more difficult to follow the piece, therefore the audience is more focused on what they see on stage and not so much on what they hear.

“The human eye can focus on only a very small area at one time - about a centimeter. Everything around it is out of focus. Therefore the eye flickers about taking in small amounts of detail. An audience will always focus their attention on the face of the performer, and in detail they will try and focus on his or her eyes. But in a mask the human eye is not seen, so our brain readjusts and takes in a slightly larger area of interest- the whole face. This widening of focus therefore makes the brain more aware of the neck and torso, and it is this awareness that leads the audience to connect directly with the masked actor, since it is principally the relationship between the head and torso that expresses the most in mask theatre.”<sup>100</sup>

The body of the actor is modulated by the forms of the mask when working with it. For example, if the mask has a lot of round forms then the body and movement of the actor should support and increase the forms of the mask to form a whole, so the movements of the actor should be round, soft and big. Actor's movements are always inspired by the looks of the mask.

Characteristics of the mask (as well as the movement quality) are written in the mask as well. Is the mask intelligent (it is shown by high forehead), fast or slow (a faster character usually has angular and sharp shapes in the face).

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10 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 31.

Mask dictates the essence of the character. So who ever wears the mask should adjust their body according to the mask, so the character of the mask stays the same no matter who is behind the mask. The height and the weight of an actor are never a problem. Quality of movement says more about the character than the appearance of an actor without a mask. From here we come to the point of being neutral on the stage, which is one of the most important keys to build a character. Neutrality is the basis of all acting. You can not really be anyone before you are no-one.

An exercise to find different characters. Imagine that the center of your character is located in a different part of your body. How does this affect your movement, speed and rhythm? It does not mean that one part of the body is always leading, but the movement starts from an impulse from that body part. It could be the right hand, left foot, the chin, the head, the nose, right knee and so on. An advanced version would be to place the center outside the body, such as between the legs, in front of the nose, behind the head, under the hands.

One of the limitations of acting with masks is the angle of actor's head facing the audience. Every mask dies when the audience sees the connection of the mask to the head. The blending between a mask and an actor is usually covered with hats or hair, but it is still discernible by the audience. Actor should always be aware of the mask's working and dead angles (right-left and up-down). There are masks that are made like helmets, so they cover the actor's whole head, then it is not so important to pay so much attention to the connection between the actor and the mask.

A good mask plays itself. With different face angles and light it is possible to change the emotion on the mask by changing the emotion of a fixed form, making it alive and giving it feelings and soul.

“A good expressive mask must be able to transform, to be sad, happy, exited, without ultimately becoming fixed in the expression of a single moment. This is one of the main difficulties in its construction.”<sup>111</sup>

Seeing and breathing is limited with a mask. The actor behind the mask sees a lot less than without a mask and gets less oxygen. The actor needs to be in good physical shape to deal with the deprivation of oxygen while moving on stage. The lack of vision demands the actor to feel and listen to the partners and situations on stage. As silly as it seems, the actor has to feel and see everything that is going on while being almost blind at the worst case scenario.

Mask acting is a technique with certain movements, energy and symbols that you should be aware of all of the time, therefore you can not be as free on the stage as a drama actor. Mask acting follows the path of puppetry in a sense that one character is moving at a time and every action requires a reaction from a partner. The focus is given by looking at your partner and not moving at the same time as he does. In acting without masks it is not as important because the actor's own spaces are a lot smaller than of masked characters, who usually have the space three times bigger, so the energy is three times bigger as well, so you can imagine 2 drama actors on the space moving and 2 masked actors moving at the same time. Masked actors just make a chaos and a visual noise if their movements are not well- thought and timed. In order to improvise with masks the first things that one should do is to lose the tempo, feel comfortable behind the mask and forget to vary the speed of movements. Depending on the character on stage, we have different opportunities to make it more colourful and surprise the audience and ourselves.

An exercise to train giving focus. A group of four to seven is escaping from the prison. The prison is highly secured, so one person can move at a time and others have to look at him and support him. Actors make their own paths with walls, lasers and guards. No words are used and if two people move at the same time they are caught and have to start from the beginning.

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11 Lecoq, Jacques. *The Moving Body*. Methuen Drama, 2009, 57.

### **3. Mask Technique Givers**

Actor who works with masks should forget facial expressions and start working with the whole body to show emotions and relations – everything goes through body. It is a useful knowledge even without a mask. Being aware of what angles, movements, tempo and movement quality to use in what emotion and situation is crucial. Actors often try to find the easy way out by using the text and face expressions and at the same time tend to forget their body and the possibilities it brings.

For example, if we divide different tempos into 1 to 10, where 1 is the slowest and 10 the fastest, then we can say that 5 is the normal tempo that we use in our everyday life. We tend to bring the same number 5 tempo to the stage forgetting all about the range of tempos that we really have. We engage the audience more when we use different tempos and it does not mean that we always have to use the minimum and maximum, but it is even more interesting to use 4s and 6es instead of 5s from time to time. Audience does not really see the difference between tempo 4 and 5 but if we use 4 then they can feel that something is different and it draws them easier to the performance than using tempo 5 all of the time.

There are many exercises to train your sense of rhythm and to see how different tempos work. One of them shows us the difference between acting an emotion and acting plain different tempos. First divide the tempos into 10, which means that 1 is the slowest and 10 is the fastest. So number 4 is the tempo of your heart, the most common tempo of all. We usually walk and move in that tempo. So you can divide the tempos considering that number 4 is the middle, the usual one. Now find 5 movements, simple ones. For example opening a door or sitting down. Put a different tempo to a different movement and you will get a simple etude. I will give you an example: walking in tempo 2, seeing a door and walking towards it in tempo 7, knocking on the door in tempo 10, waiting for an answer by the door in tempo 1, opening the door in tempo 3.

Now show it to someone and ask them what do they read out from the etude. While doing it try to keep the different tempos very precise. Keep in mind that you have ten different tempos.

The observer saw, for example, a person who was lost and scared trying to find a place to spend the night and finally finding a house and seeing that no one is at home, still enters the house.

Now try to act this scene, forgetting about the tempos that you just had.

It seems illogical, but usually the first scene works better than the second one. In the first one where you only think of the tempos, it is more clean, there is nothing extra, so it is more readable to the audience as well. The second scene where you act usually turns out faster and is full of unnecessary movements and actions. It includes unnecessary gestures with hands and face.

Less is more. As drama actors we forget the simplicity of small details when putting too much work into our face and mimicry and some times doing nothing at all shows so much more than thoughtless movements on stage.

“Sir Peter Hall’s comment: It is more intriguing seeing a character trying not to express an emotion than one constantly demanding our attention. The silent child with the trembling lip is more interesting to us than bawling one. These moments of emotional self-confrontation in a mask are without a doubt the most powerful.”<sup>122</sup>

We are forgetting how much even the smallest angle of head, neck or even a finger can give out information. Using it on purpose and acknowledging its every detail gives so many new layers to the performance and its characters.

“The gimbal that is the neck joint, with its myriad of possible positions, enables the head- torso relationship to have a vast vocabulary at its disposal, in

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12 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 37.

relation to the speed and rhythm of its movement, and in its spatial positioning.

„133

Delarte having his own theory about dividing the body into separate zones, has a theory of “body thermometers”.

“Delsarte speaks of “body thermometers” telling the emotional temperature. He speaks of the shoulders and hips as thermometers of passion, the elbows and knees as thermometers of will, and the ankles and wrists as thermometers of vitality.”<sup>144</sup>

Working with neutral masks shows us the mechanic postures of an actor. Some of these are subconscious and the actor does not even notice them in their everyday work. With a neutral mask we see the face neutral, so it is far more easy to see extra movements and poses.

If the 0 position of the actor is not neutral, it can bring unwanted characteristics and send mixed information to the audience.

Building up a character starts from the neutrality of the actor. It is far more easy to paint on a white paper than to cover the colourful one which leads you to a mess.

„With an actor wearing the neutral mask, you look at the whole body. The look is the mask, so the face becomes the whole body. Every movement is revealed as powerfully expressive. When the actor takes off the mask, if he has worn it well, his face is relaxed.”

“The neutral mask, in the end, unmaskes.”<sup>155</sup>

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13 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 31.

14 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 100.

15 Lecoq, Jacques. *The Moving Body*. Methuen Drama, 2009, 39.



An exercise to see yourself walking. It is done with partners A and B. A is walking in the space as normal as possible and B is following A, at first just observing. If B has noticed specifics in A-s walk he can then try to copy it by pushing it to its limits. Particular features can be the posture, speed of the walk, feet position. If B has got the walk of A, exaggerating everything that is not neutral to the maximum, it is time to show A. Now A sees his personal walk and from here it is possible to train towards the neutral walk, leaving out everything personal.

While having the mask on it is almost impossible to forget your character once you have found and mastered it. The same should be without a mask. While being on stage, even without a certain action, text or movement you should be and breath your character.

“A writer may structure the work, but it is the actor who must fill the minutes, seconds and nano-seconds of a character’s life on-stage.”<sup>166</sup>

The same is with energy on stage. A masked character just dies without energy. The actor does not necessarily die but he loses a lot. Lack of energy is all about not being present on stage and letting your thoughts wonder and this also leads to lack of concentration and belief in what you are doing.

Good exercise to acknowledge energy on stage is the exercise of 7 energy levels:

Level 1 – lying on the floor, having some impulses in your muscles.

Level 2 – impulses grow bigger, wanting to bring yourself up from the floor one impulse at a time, so you can not come all the way up to a standing position.

Level 3 – bigger impulses arise, they lift you up, impulses continue while you are standing.

Level 4 – active walking and being aware of everything in the room.

Level 5 – moving through space and making different actions in different parts of the space. For example, the movement can be some action involved with

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16 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 35.

invisible objects (taking a shower, drinking coffee) or it can be something physical like clapping hands, jumping or reading a poem. All the actions should be different and done in a different place in the space.

Level 6 – repeat level 5, but five times faster (as fast as possible).

Level 7 – freeze, because your movements have gotten so fast that all the muscles in your body are flexed (from over working).

The normal energy for working with a mask on stage should be at level 4. Even if you are standing still, the energy should remain inside you.

An exercise to try out different energy levels. It can be done with and without a mask. Actors are in a shopping mall. They are just walking, not really paying attention to anything specific. They are looking at different things without an opinion about the products. They are forced to buy something, but they do not really fancy anything. They are looking for a particular product or a piece of clothing that they really love. The shops are closing and they have to find the thing before that. Two minutes until closing time. Then comes the announcement that the shops are closed and they did not find what they were looking for.

There are thousands of opportunities to play with these different energy levels. The exercise subjects can be from everyday life or a fiction, if you have more imagination.

The key is to start slow and calm and grow to a total panic.

Mask limits the vision, so the actor is more open and more ready to feel and react with the whole body. The actor has to see with the whole body. So listening and rhythm are really important. The actors are breathing together during the whole show.

Mask makes the actor unrecognizable as a person, it can give somehow more freedom to create different characters. Losing your personality in improvisation and experiments tends to be more rewarding and creative – you feel invisible behind the mask. The knowing that you can not express yourself through face expressions makes you work hard to move your body!

Unrecognizability makes it easier for female actors to play male characters and vice versa. Young actors can play old characters as well as skinny actors fat characters. Quick transformation makes it easy for the actors to play many different roles in one performance and no one will ever notice that they are all played by the same actor.

“A small cast can play many characters convincingly, crossing the age and sex barriers without the audience being aware of the number of performers involved. Mixing masked and unmasked actors can be used to delineate clearly between reality and fantasy, present and flashback, or between different worlds. Their highly visual nature makes them ideal for use in street theatre, when it is impossible to be heard above the noise of the traffic.”<sup>177</sup>

“Benefits of mask:

Multi-roles – many characters, few actors.

Cross-dressing – boys become women, girls become men.

Cross-ageing – a good actor should be able to portray any age in a mask, from infant to great age.”<sup>188</sup>

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17 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 39–40.

18 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 44.

#### **4.1. Usefulness of the Mask Technique for Puppeteers**

Mask theater is part of physical and puppet theater. Both masks and puppets come from shamanism and both hold ancient traditions.

“The earlier rituals saw the mask wearer becoming the mask, whatever it represented.”<sup>199</sup>

“The true function of mask is to engage and entertain an audience through the apparent transformation of actor into character- and has confused the theatrical mask with the masks studied by anthropologists.”<sup>200</sup>

Using words is secondary in puppetry as well as in mask theater. In the cases where the puppet has a mouth that is not possible to open the speech is faked by rhythm and head movement, but it is still seen that it is not the puppet who is speaking, because the mouth is literally not moving. It is more realistic to use movements to explain the story.

“Unlike the half-masks of the *commedia dell’arte*, expressive masks are full masks, in which the actor does not speak. The characters they present are often drawn from everyday life.”<sup>211</sup>

Without words the performance is somehow full of more potential, everyone from the audience can read out things that really touch them personally, making the show their own.

“It becomes very personal to each individual member of the audience. It also means that the work can play to a broad range of people, with different experience of theatre, of different languages and culture.”<sup>222</sup>

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19 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 20.  
20 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 1–2.  
21 Lecoq, Jacques. *The Moving Body*. Methuen Drama, 2009, 57.  
22 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 32.

Replacing words with movements on stage is always really effective.

„When Dr. Mehrabian declared that 56 per cent of the impact of communication is through body language, it is precisely through this simple understanding and playing of gesture that the bulk of communication happens.“<sup>233</sup>

In all forms of acting it is really important to listen to your partners even without looking at them. Being aware of what is going on around you on stage and what your partners are doing is very vital.

The individual space of a masked character or a puppet is three times bigger than of humans, so it is easier for a masked actor to cover the stage than it is for a drama actor. The space between two masked characters or two puppets should be bigger than of two drama actors as well. Bigger distance makes it easier for the audience to see the actions and reactions of different characters.

In mask acting as in puppetry there is one movement on the stage at a time. You move, then your partner moves and after that it is your turn again. One of you acts and the other one reacts.

“The laws of motion:

- There is no action without reaction.
- Motion is continuous, it never stops.
- Motion always originates in a state of disequilibrium tending towards equilibrium.
- Equilibrium is itself in motion.
- There is no motion without a fixed point.
- Motion highlights the fixed point.
- The fixed point, too, is in motion.“<sup>244</sup>

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23 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 35.  
24 Lecoq, Jacques. *The Moving Body*. Methuen Drama, 2009, 94.

It is always useful for a puppeteer to try out movements, tempos and emotions that the puppet is using on stage. Therefore it is good to use a mask and to let the puppeteer be the puppet.

At first it seems silly to rehearse how to sit down or stand up. Even when we use this kind of movement hundreds of times every day we are still puzzled with them on stage. But these are the basics to make the puppet alive and to create the illusion of puppetry.

“These principles can be elaborated by examining the results of the ceaseless play between forces in equilibrium and in disequilibrium: oppositions (in order to stand upright, man must oppose gravity), alternations (day alternates with night as laughter with tears), compensations (carrying a suitcase in the left hand forces one to compensate by lifting the other arm). These notions may appear abstract, but they are, physically, very concrete on the stage, and are central to my teaching.”<sup>255</sup>

As in mask, puppeteers can not play with the movements of eyes and face muscles.

With mask acting high energy on stage is always there. The same should be with puppeteers ,they should have a lot of inner energy, to be ready to act, react and project energy through a puppet. A puppet without energy on stage is a dead puppet.

Passing focus is one of the key features of a mask and a puppet performance, without it the performance would be impossible to watch because if the audience loses one action (or a reaction) of a puppet the succession of actions and reactions do not make any sense any more and the audience loses the succession of the story.

„Passing focus:

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25 Lecoq, Jacques. *The Moving Body*. Methuen Drama, 2009, 94.

- Looking at them- giving them the focus
- Playing with a lower level of energy
- Doing nothing to distract the audience
- The major person passes it with eye contact – as if giving “permission”
- The person in minor takes it – increases energy or interest.”<sup>266</sup>

#### ***4.2. Usefulness of the Mask Technique for Drama Actors***

A drama actor who has worked with masks certainly has a better knowledge of their body and movements, they know how to use it in their work on stage even if they work with text. It is good to know how certain movements help the audience to understand things happening on stage better, even if the movement is minimal.

Here is a good exercise to see how different gestures and playing angles work on stage between two actors:

Begging forgiveness. One of the partners is begging for forgiveness and the other is reacting to the poses of the first one. The begging and forgiving should both be understandable, but not mimic. If one of the partners thinks that the pose of the other partner was not believable enough, it should be replaced with a new, stronger one. No words are used.

Every movement on stage means something and gives information to the audience. Actors should be really aware of how they are using their body and what is the body saying to the audience. Working with mask, you have only your body to work with. Explaining all of your emotions and feeling through actions and body positions. A Good drama actor should be able to do the same, even if he is using text. Body language gives the believability to the text. So even if the play is in a foreign language and the audience can not understand the text, they will follow the story through the guide of actors body language and the tone of his voice.

Movements on stage should be possible to put into words and emotions and vice versa.



“An interesting exercise to do in the latter stage of rehearsal is to remove the mask from the performers, and get them to run through the work, talking their internal monologue out loud.”<sup>277</sup>

Stage energy and adeptness to react and awareness of everything going on around and inside you, partner cognition, being open and present on stage – these all effect the actor’s appearance on stage.

Theater is an art that happens here and now, at least it should be like this. That is why it is really important for the actor to be present and active in every performance that he gives even if it is his 14th, 40th or 140th . It should be as if your character comes to the stage for the very first time during every performance.

“Essentially, the neutral mask opens up the actor to the space around him. It puts him in a state of discovery, of openness, of freedom to receive. It allows him to watch, to hear, to feel, to touch elementary things with the freshness of beginnings.”<sup>288</sup>

He who has worked with masks knows that a big and interesting part of mask acting is creating the character. It is done by looking at the mask and reading the characteristics from the lines of its face. Are they sharp, round, angular or soft and so on. From the forms it is possible to read if the character is old or young, rich or poor, smart or dumb and so on. From there you can start to try different movements and tempos that suit him. Even the smallest details can change a lot. For example, what it says about a character if he walks with feet turned in, what about feet that are turned out, what if the steps are short and quick, or long and slow. There are so many different opportunities to build a character. It can be transferred to stage as well.

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27 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 33.  
28 Lecoq, Jacques. *The Moving Body*. Methuen Drama, 2009, 38.

“The stock types used in Greek theatre- . There existed about 30 in total in tragic theatre, and about 44 in comedies.”<sup>299</sup>

There are different qualities of movement in different characters. In mask technique they are divided as such: air, water, fire and stone. For example the fire is unpredictable and sharp in its movements, but constantly moving. It is rare that a character is only one element, usually it is a mixture of two or more elements put together. Again these elements can be used in drama characters as well in their being, emotions or speech.

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29 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 21.

### **4.3. Usefulness of the Mask Technique for Drama Theatre Directors**

A big question that rises every day for directors, is how to make theater interesting and how to make it speak to the audience. What is good and what is bad theater is not in my power to say.

“What is the mainstream? Is it the theatre for the keen but nervous- keen to go to the theatre, but nervous of something untoward happening to them while they are there? Is it the theatre that is safe, that take no risks? The worst that can be said about visiting the theatre is that when you leave, your mood hasn't changed.”<sup>300</sup>

I myself would recommend using more objects (including puppets and masks) and the knowledge of an actor's body and its movements on stage.

I agree with Toby Wilsher:

“What theatre needs, I would argue, now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, are more masks and more puppets.”<sup>311</sup>

Using them properly and correctly makes the theater experience more powerful for the audience.

“So while I would advocate an increased use of the mask and puppet theatre in twenty-first- century theatre, it has to be good, otherwise it will be dismissed very quickly.”<sup>322</sup>

Puppetry and mask theater is something incredible and mind blowing if it is done well. It takes you away from reality and you find yourself in a wonderland, seeing and believing in human characters who seem more touching and convincing to you than a person on stage. That is the magic in puppetry and in

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30 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 7.

31 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 7.

32 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 8.

mask theater. Knowing that it is hard to achieve I believe that it is worth every hour of the actor's rehearsal and fanaticism to make the heroes live on stage.

Director is a person who creates something new, something that has never been put on stage ever before. There is a saying that everything has been done before. So nowadays one of the opportunities to create something new is to combine different things into one performance and combining different styles on stage.

“Mainstream directors too often consider the script as being the last part of the process, a sacrosanct item not to be tempted with. The result is Peter Brook's “Dead Theatre”, what I call “Tribute Theatre” which, like the ubiquitous tribute bands, aims to reproduce the authors' initial intentions to the letter, irrespective of when and for whom it was written.”<sup>333</sup>

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33 Wilsher, Toby. *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2007, 6.

## **Peroration**

Mask theatre is very dear to me and has helped me in my everyday work. The profession of an actor and a puppeteer stands for constant development - improving through literature, human observation, advancement of voice and body and overall openness. Since one can not practice all the different kinds of fields and techniques in the world, one must make a choice and then progress through that. I am grateful that I have found mask technique for myself and I would suggest it to every actor and puppeteer. In my paper I have educed all my most important aspects how mask technique helps actors and puppeteers to improve their work and evolve as artists.

For actors I suggest the abandoning of speech or accompanying it with body movement, which tends to be forgotten while on stage. Body cognition and conveying emotions or ideas is also possible without text or with little of it if the body moves along.

Neutral state on stage. All of us have a specific posture and gait but this is not necessarily a good thing to have on stage. Without the actor's direct intention the audience might already reference it as a vital part of the character. The neutral state is also a better basis for creating new attributes and conditions for the character. It is always better to paint on an empty canvas rather than a grimy one.

A simple and certain way to convey emotions is to use facial expressions, while the body can be forgotten completely. The mask technique helps to forget about the face for a moment and to channel the emotions into the body, which is also a vital skill when working without a mask.

At the same time, one must never use body movement or mimicry too excessively. A balance between these two should be found. Everything seems more realistic when it is expressed through movement that is little and perceived.

Stage energy is one of the key elements in the work of actors and also the skill of preserving it. The energy level while wearing a mask must be even higher but after taking the mask off we tend to lose the energy and slide through the rest of the performance with low energy unless we have something specific to say or do.

All masks are different and shape our bodies according to their look: this calls for a good knowledge of human behaviour and perception and imitation of various characters. This requires us to move around with an open mind and see different types of people.

The conscious movement of the puppet is of utmost importance for me as a puppeteer who has practiced mask technique. Where specific movements begin, how to stand, walk and so on. These seem as such elementary skills but still somehow fade when picking up a puppet. A masked actor is in a way a puppet, his movements have to be very precise and fixed. A mask that you wear gives you a good cognition how to move the puppet so that it looks as real and believable as possible. From where to start a movement, where its center should be and where to finish it.

One of the main principles of a puppet performance is the transmission of focus. Two puppets or masks should never move at the same time on stage since their personal space is much more larger than of a human being. They take up more attention from the audience than general actors therefore it is vital to address all focus only to the one that is moving.

Expressing emotions and thoughts without words. Puppet theatre uses a lot more movement and less text compared to drama theatre therefore it is very important to learn the meaning of different poses and movements and to express various emotions by using alternative tempos and pauses.

The communication of puppets on stage consists of actions and reactions; transmission of focus and conveying emotions. An action can be followed by a reaction which is only expressed by an emotion.

Having a lot of energy and projecting it is very vital for a puppeteer. The actor gives life to the puppet, he makes it move and function.

I would also like to remind the mask to all directors because it can give very good solutions to depicting different worlds or it can be used to play a lot of various characters among small troupes. The actor turns into the character of the mask and his appearance, height or age does no longer matter. All can play with different masks because after putting the mask on you adapt your body and movement to the mask's appearance.

Even though I do not work with masks every day, I still feel that practicing the mask technique has helped me to develop and improve all the skills that have been mentioned in this paper. I wish that more actors, students and teachers would find a way to the mask technique and acquire useful methods from it. In addition, I have pointed out some of my favourite exercises to train stage energy, partner cognition, self-expression without words, character creation, focus direction and neutral state.

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