

The Psychological Transition from Acting as “Myself” to “Himself”

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ABSTRACT

From “oneself” to “character”, the transition is an ineluctable process for an actor changing from fitting in to naturally performing. Adjusting oneself from having his own lifestyle to getting into the background confined by scripts is a fundamental benchmark for evaluating a sophisticated actor. This article mainly focuses on the summary of performances by outstanding actors and actresses and summarizes that the life span of acting is determined by one's ability of “acting as someone else” since one's finding out the spirit of a character necessitates the capacity to find out the spiritual connection with the character. Here 4 points are emphasized from the perspective of psychology. If an actor wants to play a vivid character, one needs to balance oneself between “oneself” and “someone else”.

Keywords: Actor, Performance, Characterization, Psychology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the reform and open-up, the film industry in China has developed with a rapid pace and drama, which was violated during Cultural Revolution, resurges as well. Based on the film market in recent years, the cultural expenditure in China has multiplied, posing more rigorous demands to directors and scriptwriters. Thus, during the process of learning proficiency and training, an actor should fulfill a demand of having a mindset of “being a good performer”. This article mainly discusses the psychological transition from “I act as myself” to “I act as someone else” is a basic standard to evaluate a sophisticated actor. Only when an accomplished actor can complete the transition so that one can not only enact a character with similar personalities but also a character that has multiple or different personalities, can one's life of art be elongated.

2. THE MEANING OF THE MEANING OF THE ABILITY OF “I ENACT HIM”

From ancient Greek dramas to modern films, actors and actresses revivify the stories, composing the most direct provenance of first impression of figments and characters for the audience. A good actor

could lead the emotions from the audience and render them immersing into the scenarios. On the other hand, a bad actor could violate the ambience and even fall into gag reel. Therefore, in cinematography, the performance of an actor has a predominant effect on the success of an artwork.

Sergei Eisenstein once said that any backdrop or costume will not possess an authentic outlook and coloration. Not a professional actor can act as a sailor or fishman as they gesticulate naturally [1]. As such, many directors would like to pick up a neophyte when choosing characters with similar backgrounds, since one can give a unadorned performance, acting as oneself---this is what we call “I act as myself”. The success of role playing relies on idiosyncrasies of an actor---the role that one enacts shares certain analogies is more likely to be successful, or there is more chance to fail.

Like Wang Baoqiang, based on his background, he often enacts a role with a personal image of being ingenuous, unaffected and innocent. These qualities are highly related to his personal experience---even his bit of nervous in front of the camera becomes fitting like a glove. From Shagen in “A World Without Thieves” to Niugeng in “Lost on Journey” and to Xu Sanduo in “Soldiers Sortie”, Wang enacted roles with

similar characteristics. However, when it comes to roleplay, the audience has an dominant impression of Wang himself instead of the characters he played in movies---even the impression on his outfit. In this case, with his strongly distinctive idiosyncrasies, the elasticity of appearance and outfit has been limited and once this kind of actors has a representative work, other directors will recommend characters with similar background to them. But one shall realize that once the style has been fixed, transforming will be challenging---especially for those having unsound repertoire of performance and playing roles with unidimensional traits, they will have extremely limited choice in their acting career.

Contrary to the type mentioned, another type of actors enacts with personalities---this is the type that is believed to succeed. Auguste Rodin, a French sculpturer, declared that artwork in which beauty exists contains personalities and that only the power of personalities can create the pulchritude of art [2]. The essence of performance is characterization, which means becoming the character instead. In other words, the process of enacting a character is based on one's personality adapted into characteristics demanded by the character in films, through which, personalization runs from the beginning to the end. For instance, Juri Ueno, a Japanese actress, is one of the most versatile, skillful and praised actresses. From her first effort "Swing Girls" to her first blockbuster "Nodame Cantabile", as well as in a stable period with her performance in "Last Friend" and "Hard To Say I Love You", there is no repetition of the personalities of the charactered she plays---Noda Megumi, a adorkable genius with savant syndrome; Ruka, a patient with gender identity disorder; Mizuno Asumi, a doctor with a vindictive mentality---making her so remarkably distinctive in different films. And this is the essential difference between "I act with my characteristic" and "I act as myself" ---acting as oneself is to let the character fit the actor, making these actors irreplaceable as well as menaced by limited future. However, those acting with their characteristic can have the ability of having an insightful understanding of the character and the ability of characterization, with which they conceive artistic ideas and grasp corresponding ways to present and thus create an accurate, vivid and distinctive character via their excellent performance. Juri Ueno, as mentioned above, from her outlook to even her countenance, even behaviors, can readjust herself to suit the need for different characters.

3. INTEGRATION OF "MYSELF" AND "HIMSELF"

3.1. Diving into "Himself"

An actor acting with characters can excellently balance his idiosyncrasies and the qualities of the character and easily conceals oneself but presents the coherence of enacting a character, making the character and the actor himself run in the same line and different from each other. As such, an actor can be more flexible and adaptive. Lin Hongtong opines that an actor should not only emphasize the personal charisma, the charm of personalities of the character, as well as expressing himself freely. The creating process of an actor is a convergent as well as reciprocal experience, so that the actor can integral into the character and conversely as well [3]. So, during the process of enacting, to see how to fit in the character, we shall take Huang Zhicheng and Chen yongren escaping from a balcony in "Infernal Affairs" as an instance. In this scene, they try to escape from a balcony, when Huang suddenly called out his name, Chen replied confoundingly with a "What?", then Huang waved his hand with a "Nothing". When Chen hustled downstairs, Huang fell from the top of the building and died right in front of Chen.

This plot was not written on the script, so when Huang Qiusheng called out Liang Chaowei, Liang's looking back with nonplus is a natural reaction. This impromptu changes this scene from a turning point of the plot to a contemplative moment of thinking about life and death. Added that this basically originates from Akira Kurosawa's autography called "Toad's oil".

It is not clear that this impromptu is premeditated or not, but one thing can be extracted---Huang, as an actor, since he has some sensibility of top in form in philosophy, even in given circumstances, he does not have to keep the script strictly to create a fancied character but with his own experience and value he saturates the character. With Huang's experience and his vicissitudinous personal life, with the improvisation he made, he endowed the character Huang zhicheng with anima.

3.2. Discovering Spiritual Connections

In some creation of scripts, the personality and value of anyone in the movie is embodied by the specific plot---different choices given in different circumstances, which represent the personality, followed by the personality putting effect on the plot, these are the first creation by the director when it comes to depiction of a character. Actors, as the second creator of that, should comprehend the motives of figures in advance from a logical perspective and

should complete a figure with their own accumulation, observation of other people as well as their understanding of sentiments. The scene on the balcony only lasts for less than two minutes, but it does sublimate the personal image of Huang as well as the whole movie into a higher scale.

Take "The Graduate" as another example. There is a plot where Hoffman and Mrs. Robison have their first adultery. According to the script, after taking off the lady's clothes, Hoffman should continue his dialogue but due to his shyness he returned and evaded, hitting the wall with his head in the corner. He was expecting there would be a NG. However, the director didn't stop, followed by Mrs. Robison offhand reply---"You feel better in darkness, don't you?" It is this impromptu scene that accurately depicts Hoffman as a shy, innocent, immature, and muddleheaded figure.

Laurence Olivier declares that the character should fit in the actor [4]. To some extent, besides actors enacting roles, the roles can become actors. Hoffman's reaction perfectly fits the image of being immature and it is an action having highly consonance with the character when the actor immerses himself into the scenario, which is quite different from the circumstance that Huang has. Hoffman highly immersed into the character and found the connection, blurring the boundary between himself and the fancied role, which leads to a reaction both reasonable for both the character and Hoffman himself. But for Huang, while not linked to the character, he put himself into the scenario, by saturating the role with his own reaction, and thus making the character's behavior more natural. Although these two ways are not identical, they do result in the same effect, which integrate the actors, characters and also scenarios, so the imaginary world on the screen becomes more realistic, with the reconciliation among the logics inside as well as among people living in that fancied world, uniformly and harmoniously.

Thus, acting as oneself and acting as someone else, though seemed dichotomous, via the brilliant scenarios mentioned, it is clear that they are integrated. A charismatic actor, in a set scenario, though enacting, is not controlled by the character---because of this integration, the character is eventually enriched with spirits and sophistication.

4. GRASPING THE ESSENCE BY PSYCHOLOGY

4.1. A Display of Four Psychological Types

The pivot of characterization is to clarify the predilection of roles. This relies on the judgement of the actors when they read the scripts. In psychology,

people are categorized into four types: choler, melancholy, phlegm and plethora.

Cholers are usually talkative and have grandiose body languages. When they confront a set conflict, they behave with moodiness. A typical example is Xiaoyanzi in "Princess of China". When Zhao Wei enacted this role, she caught this feature and she used loud voice, exaggerated body movements, and behaved with a unpredictable mood. In front of a conflict, she would firstly adopt violence, which is quite different from Ziwei and thus leaving a great sense of comparison and identification for the audience.

Ziwei, as a melancholy, contrary to Xiaoyanzi, she is sensitive, introverted, squeamish and cautious, regarded as a "Lin Daiyu" type of girls in China. Delicate body languages, stable tone, insightful judgement but indecisiveness, behaving with weakness when facing trouble, these are features of a pessimist. A pessimist shall be composed and lugubrious---once the actor finds out the character is a melancholy; they should realize and readjust their body languages. Not everyone has the attractive countenance to scowl and grimace and the performance can be natural only when the actor finds out their behavior as he is low-spirited.

An example of phlegm is Chen Daoming, composed, thoughtful, but passive when facing decisions. The role he plays can be categorized into two types---one is the emperor in Qing dynasty, similarly, characters in "Black Hole" and "My 1919". In this type of roles, Chen constrains the passiveness of phlegm, turning into a person with great sagacity, which makes him suitable for enacting characters like leaders and emperors in history. As for other type however, for characters in "Fortress Besieged" and "Chinese-style Divorce", he grasps the feature of indecisiveness and passiveness and amplifies them, so that the enaction is natural.

Most performers are plethora, who is outgoing, enthusiastic, impulsive, sharing some common features with choler. In this case, enact a lively character can be seldom regarded as a demanding job since most actors have this feature in their real life. When facing phlegm and choler, a plethora should balance himself in case of being too reserved as pretentious or being hyperactive as crabbed and unnatural. It is needed to know how to express the repressed part of the body language, so one can enact various types of characters.

4.2. Using Body Languages to Display Mentality

There is no existence of characters without one's distinctive personalities. Any gesture and gait are

significant for characterization. But how to unify the actor and the character? This does necessitate a insightful comprehension of the character when the actor reads the script. An actor should fathom the motive of every single behavior and accentuate them throughout the whole scene within a moderate and effective way. It is easy to get into a pitfall if actors abuse the body movement. Adopting body movement appropriately to sufficiently clarify a character's personality can help the actor get closer to the character but too many natural as well as unnecessary movements can overreach this target.

Take "A Story of Yonosuke" as an example. Yonosuke takes the quailing stance and keeps his shoulder bowed throughout the whole play, which is orchestrated by Kengo Kora to present the self-consciousness of the character. And Kengo did find a motive for this movement---his body odor---a motive that can endow the movement two explanations. For one thing, Yonosuke successfully displays his timidity and awkwardness and shows his intention to conceal the odor for another. Idiosyncratic behaviors not only reflect personalities, but they are also much too significant standards for the audience to discern different characters. Movements should be in accord with the mentality and mentality usually stems from experience. The bowed shoulders are really well-designed since it depicts the personality precisely and account for the originality of this characteristic, making the logic clear and understandable and thus a natural and harmonious scene provided on the screen.

For a sophisticated actor, after successfully created a character, if he cannot timely forgo the body languages of that, he might get lost in the shadow of the role, making the audience somehow always sense something familiar from the actor. Zhaowei, after "Princess of China", worried by the audience that she might never get out of the identity of Xiaoyanzi, she chose to enact a morose role in "Roman in the Rain" to get rid of the previous persona which is believed to be so successful. Therefore, a mature performer is able to create unique body movement, countenance as well as outfit for different characters so that he can enact a character flexibly.

Traditional performance mostly emphasizes the charm of the character---how actor give up themselves and immerse into the roles. Recently, there is another point of view: when creating a character, people should know how to show their charms. Jin Shijie, a actor from Taiwan once said "the character might grow from inside my heart and integrate myself. Should I become the character or instead? I prefer the latter" [5]. In fact, there is a compromise between the two choices. To some extent, the performance helps to discover the "self" and emancipate it. Usually, an actor should endow the character with spirit which is

found in himself and finds himself in the character, which is followed by the research of movements, countenances and expressions. But what is needed on the screen is still himself, so actors should balance themselves between the settings of characters and their own idiosyncrasies as well as unify them.

Zhengyu, a Korean actor, in "Wish", adapted from his experience, depicted the role with a rebellious heart, timidity but kindheartedness with gripping performance. This role shares a similar character. After that, he enacted a role with kindness, concentration and a sense of responsibility, magnifying his positiveness, as a junkman. And these virtues finally allowed him to become a successful man. When having this character, he balanced his own idiosyncrasies and magnified the positiveness and the naughtiness and rebelliousness had been dwindled but not totally evaded---this, with a tinge of naughtiness, successfully made the character more charming. It is because he grasp a good poise between the character and himself, the enaction could be seemed natural, soft and successful.

5. CONCLUSION

A change from "I act as myself" to "I enact him" is a milestone for a actor being mature. If a actor wants to be seemed natural on stage, a analysis from the perspective of psychology is necessitated. Also, actors should read the script carefully, scrutinize all the information about the characters, and consider the difference between the characters and themselves, and so they can get rid of the constraint of "I act as myself". During the process of "I act as himself", actors should search the corresponding body languages, expressions and countenance in their brain, and they should approach the characters by categorizing the psychological types so that they can find the connections with the characters and bring their feelings to the audience naturally. A change from "I act as myself" to "I enact him" is the biggest breakthrough for an actor.

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