OPEN

Nous Pathetikos

Abstract: *Actors and the Art of Performance opens with a cascade of contradictory motives for becoming an actor. These motives converge in the particular fascination of theater, in which ethics are realized in the aesthetic.*

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Why do you want to be an actor?

This is a played-out, bland question, overused and much abused, a colorless, powerless, boring question of no worth. It is heard too often, posed too often, answered too often. Full of inescapable, preprogrammed clichés, not even productive stuttering provides a way out. It is a question best left unasked. Such is the crux of the matter.

Or is it not an indispensable, essential, exciting question? Is it not a question that begs to be asked again and again, a disturbing, disquieting question, one that turns up the heat, knows no answer and has many answers, none of which suffice, and yet which despite it all, naive or not, embarrassing or not, promising or not, sprout up like polyphonous weeds.

Why? For the love of playing the play. Because it is fun. Because it is thrilling, or for the love of the spectacle, for the love of mimicry, out of obsession. Because it just took hold of me. Out of curiosity. To play great roles, leading roles: Hamlet, Don Carlos, Antigone, Lady Bracknell. Not Emilia, but evil Iago, and then perhaps demented King Lear. Or Joan of Arc? Oh, definitely, and then wild Medea. To play the entire canon of the classics and, of course, what is in vogue now too. To be famous, to become a star. To change the world, not just interpret it. To give people something out of a passion for fantasy, for the imaginary, for imagination. For the love of abundance. For the love of lies, not those that make your nose grow longer, but the ones that play with truth. Out of a fascination for masquerade, a fascination for transformation, both of which are irresistible. To be someone else, to create another being, to be many. For it all never to end. To be free. To fly. Openness immemorial. Openness without ideologies or theologies, openness as possibility – as the vacant space within us, kept open not out of destructiveness, but as a form of affirmation.

“To make believe,” was the answer given by Kate Falk from the New York Wooster Group, when asked why she acts in the theater.¹

¹ “Theater morgen, Gespräche über die Kunst im Global Village.” *Treffpunkt Kultur* ORE. Production: GRENZ-film (production team Arno Böhler and Susanne Granzer), ORE, 1998. All translations by Laura Radosh unless stated otherwise.

Why? To remain true to that which disconcerts, to not become jaded. To not grovel, not conform. To keep your eye on the prize, even if it is blinding. No boorish posing whatever the form – neither the dramatic, nor the postdramatic kind. No getting all worked up about what you always knew. No matter how old or how young you are, not to adhere to any rules that cannot be thrown overboard. To hold disdain for conventionalists and conformists, whether their comfort zone is on the right or on the left, and to hold disdain for the poison of resentment and for every self-appointed lord, no matter what his kingdom. To maintain a deep-seated aversion to standardized utilitarianism. To resist ogling the acceptable. To oppose the dictatorship of the highest possible number. To be different and live differently. To maximize, not minimize, risk. To stand against the times, to be untimely, whatever that might mean. And above all to be neither a hamster in a wheel nor an administrator of being, nor a careerist, nor a singer of the swan song of a late culture.

Maybe to become a fabled creature of truth?

Calm down. Get a grip on yourself.

Why?

As G.W.F. Hegel says in the famous preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “The True is... the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk.”²

² G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 27.

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