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Timothy Harland April 2, 2013

Before the Gaze: A Historical and Performative Perspective of the Theatrical Mask

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Abstract

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As social beings, we present different aspects of ourselves to others depending upon whom they are and how we wished to be perceived by them. In a sense, we are constantly wearing a mask when interacting with others. Particularly in this age of technology where self-promotion and censorship run rampant in the Internet, I believe it is pertinent that the issue be addressed. I wish to find a way to illuminate this social precaution of social masking through the use of theatrical mask in performance. The theatrical mask helped define the entire art in its genesis and has continued to make revivals throughout its history, making it an integral piece of the form. By studying the mask from historical, developmental, and performative standpoints, I will create a presentational performance demonstrating the wide ability and application of the theatrical mask. Through this performance, I hope to make salient commentary not only on the theatrical mask, but also on the inner workings of the individual in society in order to draw the public's attention to them.

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CHAPTER 1

ORIGINS OF THE WESTERN THEATRICAL MASK

Ancient Greece

The Word

At the height of the dramatic age of Ancient Greece, the Greeks, who had no specifically dedicated word for "mask," instead relied on the approximate word *prosōpon*. The preposition *pros* is translated as "before, at;" the noun *ōps* is related to ideas such as eye or sight. Together, they create the idea of "before the gaze."[1] Due to the ambiguity of *pros*, the word *prosōpon* gains a dual meaning—the gaze might be either the seer's or that of the seen. *Prosōpon* was also used to describe both the face of a person and the mask. It wasn't until a century later that a new term, *prosōpeion*, whose suffix, *eion* meaing place or location, created a degree of separation between the object and the face, was created. Until the coining of *prosōpeion*, there was no linguistic distinction between a mask and a face; the mask wasn't a negative thing used to conceal true human identity beneath a false one, it was an altogether new one.[2] Interestingly, we experience a similar difficulty of separating identities when we attempt to look into the etymology of a term still in our vocabulary, "person." Many scholars look to its Latin roots of *persōna* (mask, character) or *persōnare* (to sound through). The "sounding through" could be referring to the vocal capabilities of a nose and mouth, but also the unique cavities in some masks

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[1] David Wiles, *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy: From Ancient Festival to Modern*

[2] Thanos Vovolis, *Prosopon: The Acoustical Mask in Greek Tragedy and in Contemporary Theatre*, (Stockholm: Per Lysander, 2009) http://www.academia.edu/1086294/Prosopon.The_Acoustical_Mask_in_Greek_Tragedy_and_in_Contemporary_Theatre [accessed November 23, 2012].

that alter the voice of the player who speaks through them. We could understand this as a person's voice through the mask or the voice of the mask itself. The mask seems to serve multiple purposes, but is its ultimate role one of amplification of the actor's identity through vocal and visual expressivity, or is it one of concealment of the actor's identity to create an altogether new one?

The Environment

The City Dionysia

The city-state of Athens was the capital of the Greek civilization and, along with Sparta, one of the two greatest cities in the Western world. In 450 BCE, after the Battle of Salamis, when Athens was evacuated and burnt to the ground by the Persians, the Greeks reclaimed the city and built it beyond its former glory; it grew rapidly as a center of the military, economy, politics, and arts. It is in this city in the midst of its renewal where Greek tragedy blooms.

The City Dionysia, the largest festival of Athens, was adopted from the countryside celebration of the cultivation of the grapevines and of the new wine. The city festival occurred in March, when the winter snows were over, as a celebration of spring. It is worthwhile to note that while Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and ecstasy, is a religious figure often connected to Greek theater, the City Dionysia was a state-sponsored program run by the archon (the governor of the city) rather than the religious sector of government, the baselius. While there is conjecture about the origin of theater and whether or not it came from the ritual worship of Dionysus, it can be seen that the festival played a greater

part in the city's culture than strictly religious occasion. The festival was all-inclusive; it was a moment in time where all who were within the city walls were admitted. It was a place where citizen, foreigner, resident alien, slave—and potentially even woman—could stand, side by side, enjoying the series of events of that day.[3]

Before the festival began, the wooden effigy of Dionysus Eleuthereus was brought from a temple in the theater district to bear witness to the contests soon to take place. The following day, the *proagōn*, taken literally as "before the contest," an announcement of the poets and performers along with the subject material of their plays, was given to the audience. On the second day of the festival, the *pompē*, or procession, took place. It was a grand parade of celebration where all are welcome to take part in the procession; some men carry giant phalluses while others carry ritual loaves of bread. An unmarried woman of high standing was designated to carry a golden basket full of offerings, particularly grapes. The procession led a bull to the shrine of Dionysus, who is part-bull himself, and sacrificed it in his name. All took part in a giant feast where the participants ate the sacrificial bull's meat, along with the other offerings given to Dionysus. Later that day, the *kōmos*, the revelry, occurred. While it is unclear if this is simply another name for the *pompē*, it appears as though this was a similar procession exalting Dionysus, but one that was less formal and more celebratory, full of wine, song, and dance. The line between audience and participants is heavily blurred in these events; the processions weren't necessarily for a specific set of viewers—they were much more a participatory event for all Athenians.

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[3] P E Easterling, *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), http://books.google.com/books?id=_kx9eeSJyeoC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false [accessed November 23, 2012].

Prior to the performances, there are announcements made within the theater while there was a large audience gathered. At this point, citizens that had performed duties that benefitted the state and soldiers who had died protecting it are honored for their actions. Manumission of slaves occurs in front of the large audience. Tributes from the various states of the Athens are presented and paraded about the theater.[4] After the thanks have been given, the plays are performed and judged. As can be seen, the festival is much more than simply a celebration of the arts; it is an occasion where people are treated as equals in order to better appreciate the various aspects of their city. The acknowledgement of civic duty encourages citizens to be upstanding; the freeing of slaves reinforces the social structure by suggesting the possibility of freedom through obedience; the military displays keep the states controlled and protected under the greater banner of Athens; the constant presence of Dionysus reminds everyone of their obligation to partake in the festivities. The plays and the crowning of their playwrights—who frequently acted in their own works—are the final event of the festival; they hold a great deal of power over the audience that has spent the last several days building itself into a collective whole.

Sophocles' Oedipus

Sophocles (497 BCE-406 BCE) was one of the ancient Greek playwrights whose plays have survived until now. He is perhaps most famous for the Oedipus plays, *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*, depicting the Greek myth of Oedipus, a king of Thebes who is fated to kill his father and marry his mother without knowing his crime.

[4] Easterling, *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*.

When he learns of this horrible truth, he blinds himself out of despair and goes into hiding. Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (429 BCE), with its use of a tragic hero and *catharsis* (a sudden release of overwhelming emotion from a spectator, resulting in a renewal of his spirit), is widely accepted as a classic example of tragedy, helping to set the basis of a form whose ideas would last for centuries.

The Attic Theater

The theaters were a union of the man-made and natural; the establishments were built directly into hillsides. The theaters were comprised of three parts: the orchestra and auditorium, and later, the *skene*. The auditorium was heavily raked following slope of the hill, giving the audience a clear view of the performance below. The orchestra (lit. "dancing place") was a circular space in which the chorus performed, designating the beginning of the performance space. In most reconstructions of the Attic theater, the middle of the orchestra was the *thymele*, the sacred altar. In early performances, it is said that the thymele was stood upon as a place from which the chorus leader would perform, separating him from the rest of the chorus.[5] If this is true, it would suggest that much of the physical acting of the time would have been strictly posture-based; there would have been little to no room to move on the altar, resulting in strictly gestural movement and body positions.

[5] J Michael Walton, *Greek Theater Practice* (London, UK: Methuen Drama: 1991), 86.

The Mask

Appearance

Within the context of the City Dionysia, the exact origin of Greek tragedy—and thus, the art of Western theater—is difficult to pin down. It is clear that it came into being somewhere between the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, and that the first dramatic competition was introduced into festivals in 534 BCE by Peisistratus.[6] By tradition, Thespis, who stepped out from the chorus in order to play an individual role, became the first actor on the stage and provided the basis for the new form. Aeschylus introduced the second actor, affording dialogue between two characters, and Sophocles introduced the third.

The evolution of the mask clearly parallels the growth of the art form of tragedy. It is agreed that the first masks created were made from linen, though there is some argument between whether the binding material was plaster or animal glue.[7] The masks were uncolored and uniform while there was but a single actor on the stage, but once Aeschylus created the second actor, many speculate that he added color and variation of features to the mask, most likely in order to help distinguish one character from the other.[8] Since theater was a new idea, the audience had to learn to separate the idea of the performer behind the mask and the character that he conveyed. In order to provide a new identity, the early masks covered the entirety of the head, not just the face; they fit the actor's head closely and lacked abstraction of any facial features, with eyeholes big enough for the pupil, and a small mouth opening, concealing much of the actor's face. As

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[6] Vovolis, *Prosopon: The Acoustical Mask in Greek Tragedy and in Contemporary Theatre*, 17.
[7] Wiles, 15.
[8] Wiles, 15.

the form continued to grow, so did the mask—in the Hellenistic period, a period of cultural wealth in Ancient Greece in the late fourth and early third century BCE, it began to recede from its imitative roots and towards more exaggerated features; the mouth and eye openings widened and an *onkos* (imitative hair) was introduced as the mask began to separate itself from the actor's face. With this separation, the mask became a more visible element of the performance to the audience, allowing the uglier expressions and features to play a part in the piece. In the fourth century BCE, Aristotle uses *prosōpon* to refer to the tragic mask specifically in *Problems, XXXI*.[9] We can see a clear intent to separate the mask from the face, though *prosōpeion* had not yet been coined as a separate term. One of the earliest documentations of that term is that of Theophrastus' work *Characters*, in a chapter entitled "The Ruffian", written c.300 BCE: "He is not ashamed, even while sober to exhibit himself in the lascivious dance, or to play a part in a comedy unmasked."[10] As the mask began to evolve to something beyond a depiction of a human face, the language surrounding it changed with it.

Physical Evidence

Some of the strongest physical evidence of the Greek mask can be found depicted on the vases of the time. As wine is strongly affiliated with Dionysus, many *kraters* and *oinochoe*—Greek wine-mixers and bowls—have images of masks on them. There is an immediate parallel that may be drawn between the etymology of *prosōpon* and these

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[9] Jean Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Crestwood (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1985), http://books.google.com/books?id=l4yaKM9SRQ8C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=XXXI&f=false [accessed November 24, 2012].

[10] Theophrastus, *Characters*, trans. Francis Howell (London: Architectural Library, 1824) 22, , http://ia700500.us.archive.org/4/items/charactersoftheo00theoiala/charactersoftheo00theoiala.pdf [accessed November 24, 2012].

images: there are no immediate depictions of a masked performance. The face and the mask combine into a single feature in a process that archaeologists refer to as 'melting.' Because there is no distinction between mask and face on these images, we do not have any definitive images of actors acting or of dramatic performances.[11] The only true documentation relevant to this study is a handful of depictions of figures holding masks.

The earliest image that we have discovered of a mask separate from its wearer is a fragment of a krater from 470-460 BCE. In one of the fragments, we can see the mask held by a string. While the eyes themselves are vacant, it is apparent, especially in the left eye, that the artist drew in the pupils initially and later covered them over, ensuring that the mask was looking out directly from the vase. David Wiles' analysis also notes that the axes of the eyes and the nose/mouth are slightly off from perpendicular, giving it the illusion of swinging from the wearer's hand. It should also be noted that the empty eyes are rather the exception than the rule, as nearly all masks that are separate from their wearers include the whites of their eyes. The exception seems to be masks resting on their wearers' heads.

Perhaps the most famous depiction of a mask on a vase is the Pronomos vase from c.400 BCE. It is widely regarded as the most important surviving work of Greek theater on a vase. Depicted in its frieze, we see a scene of thirty-one figures, including Dionysus, who appear to be the cast of a satyr play. Most importantly to this research, there are a great number of disembodied masks that look either into the viewer or into the actor; the one of Silenus, the satyr, is highly indicative of how the mask began to take on greater

[11] Wiles, 22.

expression as the artform progressed. The raised brow and agape mouth show the traditional countenance of passion and terror.

The expressiveness of the masks greatly outweighs that of the humans, depicting how full of life the Greeks saw these objects. To us, they appear to be vessels of the Dionysian passions that transport the actors to a new plane of existence. However, if we are to look at the sculptural evidence, we see just the opposite of this Dionysian wildness. They find in the masks the control, precision, symmetry, serenity. While the mask thrived in Greece and was an integral part of the theater, an exact understanding of it seems to lie beyond our reach.

Italy

Ancient Rome

To follow the path of the mask, we look to the power shift from Greece to Rome. In this shift, we see a change from tragic to comic that the mask comes to embody. When Athens fell to the Spartans in 404 BCE, so did its citizens' freedom of speech. Under Spartan occupation, playwrights' bodies of work greatly diminished out of fear of being persecuted.[12] The primary role of the Greek tragic chorus had been to debate and bring light to injustices of the play, which frequently reflected upon current political and social issues. Diminishing the chorus meant a complete revision of the art form of theater, as the chorus was inextricable, if not central to the performance of ancient Greek tragedy. The most satirical dramatic form of the time, the Aristophanic Old Comedy, gave way to a

[12] Erich Segal. *The Death of Comedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 110.

milder, more domestic New Comedy of Menander. Then, as power shifted from the Greeks to the Romans, we see a furtherance of dramatic subject matter from political to personal; one of the first Roman playwrights to develop the new genre was Titus Maccius Plautus. While older playwrights essentially translated the Greek plays into Latin and called them their own, Plautus was one of the first to use the material in a satirical way, creating a commentary on the Greeks by writing greatly exaggerated characters with moral depravities whose 'happily ever after' is a prepaid year with—or better the outright purchase of—a concubine."[13] These caricatures most likely had some influence from the Atellan Farce, a situational, improvised comedy native to Rome that relied on stock characters. It may be inferred that these two forms provided a basis from which the *Commedia dell'Arte* was born.

The Commedia dell'Arte

In order to gain better knowledge of the mask, we must examine why it disappeared, and in order to understand why the mask disappeared, we must examine the environment from which it did so. We turn to Renaissance Italy, where we find the *Commedia dell'Arte*. It was an art that drew together the elements of mask, improvisation, dance, and music, creating a combinatory form.

By modern inference, the *Commedia dell'Arte* was born out of the Italian piazza, where the markets were set up; vendors used spectacle in order to garner attention from the customers in the marketplace, continuing to try and outdo the others, until an improvisational actor became the center of attention. As the marketplace was not a

[13] Segal, 189.

particularly quiet space, the actor would rely heavily on his wild, sweeping gestures in order to arrest those too far for the reach of his voice. As this mode of attraction grew, these improvisational actors began to appear across the various states of Italy. Given that the Renaissance was the era of established craftsmen organizing as guilds (or *arte*), the popularity of the improvisational actor naturally gave rise to the first theatrical guilds or troupes. As these troupes toured the countryside, they would put on shows and receive payment for their work.[14]

Due to the highly improvisational nature of the art, a Commedia actor dedicated his entire career to the development a single stock character, ingraining the character so deeply into his body that his character's physical life would come naturally as he improvised his lines. With a small number of members playing a single character each, the form was very much based on situational comedy. The nature of their art necessitated that the set be extremely simple. As a travelling show, the company could only carry so many things. In order to accommodate this handicap, the characters' signature props grew to have multiple lives beyond their intended one; for example, Arlecchino's slapstick could be a phallus, a ruler, a sword, or any number of other things. The limit of a prop's uses was only that of the actor's imagination. Perhaps the only other object with which we will concern ourselves is that of the *scena*, the scene. This was a piece of paper, tacked up backstage, where characters in the waiting in the wings, that outlined the basis of the plot on hand; it would cover moments that were essential to the forwarding of the plot as well as any *lazzi* (physical or verbal humor) that may be executed along the way.

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[14] John Rudlin, *Commedia dell'Arte: An Actor's Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) http://www.questia.com/read/103630851/commedia-dell-arte-an-actor-s-handbook [accessed December 15, 2012].

Beyond these moments and several memorized speeches/dialogues, everything was sheer character improvisation. It is because the artists worked so long at the development of character that this became second nature, and the scenes were able to grow more and more complex and thorough. The *scena*, *lazzi*, and any special character developments were always trade secrets of every company, and were frequently passed down from father to son and mother to daughter. The characters themselves, however, branched out over all of the troupes and continued to grow in number as the art form progressed.

Carlo Goldoni

Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793) has come to be known by some as the man who killed Commedia while others consider him the one who tamed it. In either case, his presence is inextricable from the art form's history. Goldoni was, in fact, the one to give the name Commedia dell'Arte to the old genre in order to distinguish it from his new form of Italian comedy that was based heavily in script and away from the improvisational nature of its predecessor.[15]

He was born in early eighteenth-century Venice and learned to love theater from his grandfather; the man frequently commissioned plays and operas put on by great actors of the time, which drew people from all over to their property. Amid all the splendor, Goldoni found his calling early in his life. Instead of playing with children his age, he would steal himself away into his father's library, reading all of the books he had at his disposal. He was a prodigy and wrote his first play at eight.

[15] Rudlin, *Commedia dell'Arte: An Actor's Handbook*

While Goldoni had a thirst for knowledge, he disliked the institution of the school; he dropped out of one due to boredom and was kicked out of another for writing a slanderous satire about the local girls. He only returned to it on behalf of his late father, but once he had joined the bar as a lawyer, he found that he could not find any clients. He ended his legal career and wrote an opera in 1732, *Amalasunte*, which he then presented to Count Prata and a number of others. It failed miserably, but Prata gave him an invaluable lesson of working towards the satisfaction of the artists rather than the public.[16] Goldoni promptly burnt up the script and soon after met Giuseppe Imer, the director of the Teatro San Samuele, who agreed to read a new script of his.

From that moment forward, Goldoni's career in theater was set. He went on to write well over 200 works in his lifetime through several theaters, over half of which were comedies, the most frequently-produced being *Il Servitore di due Padroni*, or *The Servant of Two Masters* (1745), which has found its way on to today's stage in its original and many adapted forms. In addition to his artistic triumphs as a playwright, Goldoni authored an important work of theater criticism, *Il Teatro Comico* (*The Comic Theater*) that changed the entire course of Italy's theater.

Il Teatro Comico, the Death of the Mask

Goldoni's dramatic work *Il Teatro Comico* was written as his understanding of how plays should be viewed and understood. Though it was written in the form of a play, it has often been viewed more as a work of theater criticism. In his memoir (1787), he wrote:

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[16] Carlo Goldoni, *The Memoirs of Carlo Goldoni*, eds. John Black, William A. Drake (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1926), 124.

> It was my intention, in composing this work, to place it at the head of a new edition of my plays; but I was pleased to have also an opportunity of instructing those who are not fond of reading, and engaging them to listen to maxims and corrections from the stage, which would have wearied them in a book. (Goldoni 1787, 251-252.)

And while this may suggest that this was a manifesto to change the theater itself, it was, as he states in the foreword to *Il Teatro Comico*, only intended for his own works:

> This work which I entitle *The Comic Theater* should be called less a Comedy in itself than a Foreword to all my Comedies. . . It is not my intention to provide new rules for others, but to let it be known that, with long observation and nearly continuous practice, I have reached the point where I could open a road for myself on which I could walk with some greater certitude . . . (Goldoni 1750, 3-4.)

There is certainly an air of self-confidence and belief that his way is right within the above passage, but he clearly states that it is intended as a foreword to *his* comedies, not anyone else's. However, as his works became more and more reputable, many of his lesser contemporaries began to follow him, those who opposed him spoke out against him, and a theatrical movement was started.

At the time, Giuseppe Baretti and Count Carlo Gozzi were among those who claimed that Goldoni was tarnishing the honor of the Italian comedy by scripting it, and now, many scholars seemed to have followed suit in their analysis of his stance. In H.C. Chatfield-Taylor's biography of Goldoni, he refers to Goldoni's writings as "critical warfare" and cites a passage of Michele Scherillo that claims that Goldoni "took upon

himself the mission of dethroning [commedia dell'arte]."[17] While Carlo Goldoni did, in fact, influence the direction of Italian comedy with his writings, it should be understood that he did not give the prior movement an early demise; the Commedia had been in existence for over two centuries by the time that he came into the picture. By this point Goldoni found that the once-brilliant art form that required the utmost devotion by the greatest artists had now been reduced to exhausted repetition of past ideas. No longer was it a show that travelled the countryside that made social commentary; it simply was a vehicle for the actors of the time to further their own careers. Donald Cheney's introduction of *Il Teatro Comico* explains this succinctly:

> The inevitable drift of the *commedia dell'arte* was therefore toward a burlesque or music hall entertainment in which the comic plot was taken for granted and the interest of the audience directed toward the individual performances of its favorite comedians. The comedians, in turn, were driven by the poverty of their roles to ever increasing grossness of gesture and dialogue in their search for novelty and variation. (Cheney1969, x.)

As for the text of *Il Teatro* Comico itself, it reflects a sentiment similar to the one expressed in the introduction; the premise is of a director attempting to stage a production, who cannot escape from self-indulgent actors and repetitive playwrights who cannot escape from creating *lazzi*. They all eventually come around by applying themselves to the rules that Orazio, Goldoni's voice in the play, has laid out for them, which demand a fully written and memorized script based on everyday life portrayed through non-stock characters.

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[17] H C Chatfield-Taylor, *Goldoni: A Biography*, (New York: Duffield, 1913), 89.

Seeing this problem in front of him, Goldoni sought to find a way to stimulate the audiences, and naturally had to take the form in a new direction. However, this was not to say that he desired to devalue the Commedia; he acknowledged this in *Il Teatro Comico*: "Characters that are credible and true to life will never lose their popularity, and though their number may be limited, the ways of interpreting them are not, because every virtue, every vice, every mannerism, every defect takes on different airs from different circumstances"[18]. It is not that he was unhappy with the elements of the Commedia, he simply thought that the vehicle in which they were delivered was past its time and required a rebirth. The passing down of role from father to son inevitably led to a dilution of raw talent in the field, creating nothing but a shadow of its former self in a society where these symbols no longer meant what they once did. The half-masks of the characters had grown so well-known and were so understood that audience knew what the characters would say before the words were out of their mouths. To Goldoni, the mask was now a limitation to his actors and an impediment to the direction in which he wished to push the theater.

[18] Goldoni, *Memoirs*, 75.

CHAPTER 2

THE MASK'S RETURN

Revivalists

Jacques Copeau

Frenchman Jacques Copeau (1879-1949) was one of the visionaries behind the theatrical mask's revival in the 20th century. Though there were several who predated him in thought, he was among the first to realize the aesthetic on the stage. Copeau was greatly influenced by theater theorist, designer, and director Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966), whose concept of the Über-marionette interested him; it was Craig's ideal actor. Craig's writings were more poetic than instructive, resulting several hypotheses surrounding his intentions ranging from a human-sized puppet controlled by multiple manipulators to a highly trained actor in a mask and padded costume.[19] In any case, it is clear that there was a general dissatisfaction with the physical capabilities and self-control of the actor on the stage.

Copeau held on to the idea of the Über-marionette when he established the École du Vieux-Columbier in 1913. It was a theater/school system where his students also worked as performers in the theater's shows. The work focused heavily on gymnastic exercises while also providing general theatrical knowledge through the studying of plays and playwrights. However, Copeau came to realize that, even with bodies fully disciplined by

[19] Patrick Le Bœuf, "On the Nature of Edward Gordon Craig's Uber-Marionette," New Theatre Quarterly, no. 26 (May 2010), http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X10000242 [accessed March 11, 2013].

constant exercise, his students failed to provide substantive work during improvisations. He realizes that:

> These fresh and supple organisms revealed, in the mime exercises, a veritable corporeal impotence. So, I observed them and looked for the reason: it was modesty. Indeed, the actor, in tending to become unnatural while embodying a character, also tends to distort himself: thus arises his inner resistance as a human being.

Copeau believed that his age of theater lacked direction and meaning, and that these could only be found through the rediscovery of the theater's original function.[20] For these answers, he turned to the Ancient Greek and Japanese Noh traditions and returned with the mask.

> …So, in order to loosen up my people at the School, I masked them. Immediately, I was able to observe a transformation of the young actor. You understand that the face, for us, is tormenting: the mask saves our dignity, our freedom. The mask protects the soul from grimaces. Thence, by a series of very explainable consequences, the wearer of the mask acutely feels his possibilities of corporeal expression. (Copeau 1990, 50.)

He insisted that his students make their own masks, as the first Noh actors did. They built masks specifically for their own faces and worked towards removal of all expression from them. In doing so, they gained a greater understanding of the physical structure of the human face while also discovering the significant changes caused by the slightest alterations to it. These masks came to be known as the 'noble' mask.

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[20] Jacques Copeau, *Texts on Theatre*, ed. and trans. by John Rudlin and Norman H. Paul (London: Routledge, 1990), 53.

Copeau's Legacy

Copeau's students came to find that the popular aesthetic of realistic acting—of reproducing actions and behaviors of daily life onstage—was unsatisfactory; instead of relying on life to provide inspiration on the stage, the masks that they now used provided a greater reality[21] of more intense, more vivid images and ideas to impose upon life. *À la rencontre de la mime et des mimes* (1958), a work authored by two of Copeau's pupils, Jean Dorcy and Etienne Decroux, details the process of putting on a mask.

> (a) Well-seated in the middle of the chair, your back not leaning against the back of the chair. Legs are just enough separated to ensure good balance. The foot is flat on the floor.
> (b) Extend the right arm shoulder-high in front of you, horizontally; it holds the mask, hanging from its elastic band. The left hand, equally extended, helps putting on the mask, the thumb holding the chin, the index finger and the middle finger grip the space between the lips.

The explanation goes on in great detail until the mask is physically on the player's face, where the crucial process of vacating the body to make room for the character occurs:

> (f) It's here, in this pose, that one clears the thought. Repeat mentally or audibly if it helps, and this for as long as necessary (two, five, ten, twenty-five seconds), 'I am thinking of nothing, I am thinking of nothing, I am thinking of nothing…'
>
> If, because of nervousness, or because the heart is beating too fast, the 'I am thinking of nothing' is useless, focus on the blackish grey, steel, saffron, blue or otherwise coloured shadows on the inside of the eyelids and continue this in thought indefinitely; almost always this focus stops the workings of the mind.

[21] Rudlin, 273.

> (g) Simultaneously breathe in, sit up, and then breathe out and open the eyes. Here, the masked actor, sufficiently collected, may be possessed by characters, objects, thoughts; he is able to act dramatically. (Dorcy et al., 1958)

These instructions explain a great deal of the sentiment of the times surrounding the mask. There is an emphasis on the precision and deliberateness of movement in order to free the self of its ego and make way for character; rigorous exercise and instruction is necessary to reach this level of self-control. The mantra of "I am thinking of nothing" seems to be, as corporeal mime expert Thomas Leabhart suggests, not terribly far off from meditation[22], giving the mask more of a spiritual connotation. By imbuing the mask with an otherworldly presence, the player who wears it is asked to move towards its plane of existence as well and remove himself from the external world, allowing him complete freedom.

Copeau's son-in-law, Jean Dasté, introduced Jacques Lecoq to theater[23], who went on to develop a school of physical theater in France that built itself on the discoveries and teachings of Lecoq's predecessors. While his school taught many variants of the theatrical mask, one of its most notable contributions was the development of the noble mask into its more recognizable form of the neutral mask as the central pillar of teaching.

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[22] Thomas Leabhart, "Jacques Copeau, Etienne Decroux, and the 'Flower of Noh'," New Theatre Quarterly, no. 20 (November 2004), http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X04000211 [accessed March 11, 2013].
[23] Franc Chamberlain and Ralph Yarrow, *Jacques Lecoq and the British Theatre*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 9, http://books.google.com/books?id=p_E630wOHwYC&pg=PA9&lpg=PA9&dq=jacques+lecoq+jean+daste&source=bl&ots=NNR6XPKd9Q&sig=QCfD8aR96ec9c19uM9fcltdsPp8&hl=en&sa=X&ei=_BdqUevCJYar2AWWlIH4CQ&ved=0CD0Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=jacques%20lecoq%20jean%20daste&f=false [accessed April 13, 2013].

The neutral mask isn't neutral in the sense of it being devoid of everything; it still must contain life. It is better to think of it as containing everything instead of nothing – the neutral mask is a responsive mask that must be able to reshape itself according to any situation. It is not intended to be a performative mask, but rather, a rehearsal tool. It is the first mask that students at the Lecoq school encounter and is used for self-discovery. Much like Copeau's initial discoveries with mask work, Lecoq's neutral mask is intended to free the body of inhibitions and unmask the player; he must be stripped of his own identity in order to become a blank canvas whose capabilities become limitless. Since the times of Goldoni, views on the mask had completely inverted; while it was previously thought of as a limiter of an actor's freedom, it had now become a symbol of complete liberation of body, spirit, and identity.

Eugene O'Neill

O'Neill (1888-1953) was an American playwright who, on occasion, adopted the thoughts of early 20th century theater theorists like Copeau and Craig and applied them to his own work. After a successful Broadway run of *The Great God Brown* (1926), his most important work in relation to the theatrical mask, O'Neill wrote a short essay about his thoughts on the reemerging aesthetic entitled "Memoranda on Masks" (1932).

He acknowledges in this essay that masks are not something that could be applied to all theatrical works, but that they "will be discovered eventually to be the freest solution of the modern dramatist's problem as to how—with the greatest possible dramatic clarity and economy of means—he can express those profound hidden conflicts of the mind." Echoing the beliefs of his predecessors, O'Neill saw humans as ultimately

inadequate in expressing and conveying the human condition themselves, so some other vehicle is necessary. Masks also eliminate a certain commercial aspect of theater; no longer will audiences be forced to fixate upon which actor is portraying which part. Roles and plays that were formerly star vehicles would be given new life and could be appreciated beyond who is starring in them.

Drawing connections beyond the theater, he sees that the current psychological practices of the time, studies of the unconscious, are entirely analogous, if not identical: while Freud and his contemporaries sought to get beyond the limits of the conscious mind, O'Neill looked to cut through the current aesthetic of realism and portraying human life accurately on a superficial level – he sought "a drama of souls." O'Neill's views vary slightly from other theorists'. In his works, we see an interest in using the mask not to free the actor but rather to pit his different levels of existence against each other in the arena of the theater; the mask becomes a symbol of a man's social, shallow exterior, while the unmasked counterpart is a representation of his deeper, truer self.

O'Neill's Collaborators and Contemporaries

Robert Edmond Jones

Robert Edmond Jones (1887-1954) was one of the most influential American theater designers of his time. He worked along side of O'Neill as scenic designer for several of O'Neill's plays and directed *The Great God Brown*, O'Neill's signature mask-related work. In *The Dramatic Imagination* (1941), Jones reflects upon his countless collaborations with artists from all aspects of the theater over the span of his career. His

sensibilities about the actor were not unlike those of the revivalists of the mask. Jones argues that the actor's greatest duty is to reveal the greater drama beyond his character's own sphere. In order to do so, they must let the character inhabit them:

> You are to play Hamlet, let us say – not narrate Hamlet, but *play* Hamlet. Then you become his host. You invite him into yourself. You lend him your body, your voice, your nerves; but it is Hamlet's voice that speaks, Hamlet's impulses that move you.
>
> . . .Hamlet is as real as you or I. To watch a character develop from the first flashes of contact in the actor's mind to the final moment when the character steps on the stage in full possession of the actor, whose personal self looks on from somewhere in the background, it is to be present at a great mystery. No wonder the ancient dramas were initiation-ceremonies; all acting is an initiation. . . (Jones 1941, 32.)

It is this evocation of a greater presence through the conduit of the actor that fascinates Jones and Copeau alike. Jones is more interested in a setting that evokes rather than depicts; a set should not be a picture, it should "be made so powerful, so expressive, so dramatic, that the actors have nothing to do after the curtain rises but to embroider variations on the theme the scene has already given away."[24]

Jones acknowledges the rise of the motion picture and its draining effects on the theater, but he sees this as an easily solved problem; there is only conflict between the two because they fill the same niche. The theater that is currently developed is highly realistic, which is all that the motion pictures produce. Between the two, it is clear that audiences are more interested in the cinematic than the theatrical depictions of life. Jones refuses to see this as a problem, but rather an opportunity for theater to change; it is an art

[24] Robert Edmond Jones, *The Dramatic Imagination* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1941), 26.

form that is constantly dying out and being reborn, and it now stands at the edge of its life again. Instead of trying to fight motion pictures for the rights to produce realistic, literal work, the theater should surrender itself into the world of imagination and dreams.[25] The product of the theater should not be something that can immediately be observed; it must live within the mind of each member of the audience who witnesses it.

Kenneth Macgowan

O'Neill had a close working relationship with Kenneth Macgowan, who operated as artistic director of the Provincetown Players until the founder of the theater passed away. As a product of friction caused by the change in management, O'Neill, Macgowan, and Jones took their work across the street to the Greenwich Village Theater to stage O'Neill's plays on their own. Macgowan, an established producer-director-critic, took great interest in O'Neill, who in 1920 was only just beginning to hit his stride as a playwright. Undoubtedly, "Macgowan's varied interests in theater aesthetics, in anthropology, in masks, and in psychiatry were able to help shape the course of O'Neill's playwriting for the next fifteen years."[26] In a collection of letters between O'Neill and Macgowan[27], it is documented that the two stayed in close touch for the next two decades. Though this collection is comprised mainly of O'Neill's writings to Macgowan, it is apparent that the two were artistic equals who shared similar interests, and that the two would go on to be remarkable partners in the business.

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[25] Jones, 132-4.
[26] Eugene O'Neill, *"The Theater We Worked For": The Letters of Eugene O'Neill to Kenneth Macgowan*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 3.
[27] Ibid, entire work.

Considering that the two worked so closely in a theatrical setting, it was only natural that O'Neill's and Macgowan's para-theatrical interests would come to cross paths as well. Just two years after their friendship began, Macgowan published his work *Masks and Demons*, a text devoted to the history and philosophy behind the mask in all aspects, not solely theatrical. In it, he explains the origin of the mask nearly coinciding with the origin of man. The mask originated out of a necessity; if a hunter could approach his prey under the guise of one of the herd, he would have a better chance of killing it. This notion continued to develop into a ritual as man began to concern himself with spirituality through the concept of Totem, the housing of the human soul within an animal.

Macgowan continues to outline its progression through history, particularly paying attention to its religious capabilities in not only revering the deities and the dead but also chasing away the demons and disasters in specialized ceremonies of cultures throughout time. To Macgowan, the mask acts as a conduit, through which man and god may interact, be it through the totem masks of early man or the idols of the Aztec culture. He continues to draw on this sentiment while also addressing the sonic capabilities of the Greek mask that granted the user "a kind of megaphone to throw the theater voice across the great spaces of the open air theaters."[28] Macgowan also takes care to acknowledge that while Western history and culture has frequently rewritten itself, the Eastern cultures frequently stayed true to form. And though the Japanese Noh has changed very little since its conception and the original performances of Greek tragedy have long since

[28] Kenneth Macgowan and Herman Rosse, *Masks and Demons* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1923) 109.

disappeared, he draws a strong connection to the two, highlighting their religious themes presented through lyric, dramatic dialogue, and dance.

> They share the chorus, and the human actions and sorrows in [music and dance] are lifted up into a healing understanding by its interpretation. Both draw upon heroes and beings of the spiritual world for people and stories. Both put forward a simple ethical lesson. They have rich costumes and characterizing masks in common. The Greek, like the No drama, was given in the open air upon a bare and formalized stage. The resemblances are so many that certain reckless scholars are tempted to trace these features of No back to Greece via the conquests of Alexander. . . (Magowan and Rosse 1923, 109.)

The elements that unified Greek and Noh theater, specifically the idea of the masked chorus, greatly intrigued O'Neill. In fact, it was only two years after the publication of *Masks and Demons* that two of his plays greatly influenced by mask, *Great God Brown* and *Lazarus Laughed*, were written.

Works

Lazarus Laughed

Written in 1925, *Lazarus Laughed* was the first of O'Neill's plays to directly request use of a mask within the text itself. The structure of the play was based on O'Neill's understanding of the Greek tragedy; all players with the exception of Lazarus wore a mask corresponding to their ages and character types. Between seven different stages of life and seven character traits, O'Neill created a base of forty-nine unique masks, from which he could assign his characters. He was interested in the possibilities of

the sonic capabilities of the full masks, particularly for the chorus that he included in the play.[29] Along with *Great God Brown*, O'Neill believed that he had begun creating a new theatrical aesthetic that would eventually become a movement.[30]

Great God Brown

Perhaps his most definitive work involving the mask, O'Neill staged *The Great God Brown* (1926) in the Greenwich Players Theater under the direction of Jones. O'Neill sat on the show for a while, as he refused to cast the play until he was certain that it was done right; he knew that it was one of the most important pieces that he had ever written.[31] The play is driven by the themes of social identity versus inner self and relies on the emerging concept of Expressionism, the exploration of the extremities of emotion materialized visually, to realize the concept; though the mask can now used directly by the character as a means of altering their own social identity, these characters are still incapable of changing the face—and soul—that lies beneath it.

The Hairy Ape

The Hairy Ape (1922) is a work of O'Neill's not directly involved with mask, but it is important to consider in the context of his mask-related works. He describes it as a play that "seems to run the whole gamut from extreme naturalism to extreme expressionism—with more of the latter than the former."[32] He foresaw *The Hairy Ape* either flopping or causing riots, and his prediction was proved true when the NYPD attempted to close the

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[29] O'Neill, "*The Theater We Worked For": The Letters of Eugene O'Neill to Kenneth Macgowan*, 148.
[30] Ibid, 112.
[31] Ibid, 101.
[32] O'Neill, "*The Theater We Worked For": The Letters of Eugene O'Neill to Kenneth Macgowan*, 31.

play when it made its debut on Broadway.[33] The play is a bitter depiction of the industrialization of WWI America, whose protagonist Yank, a ship stoker, ends up finding more solace in the companionship of an ape at the zoo than he does with any facet of humanity.

It is in Robert Edmond Jones's design for *The Hairy Ape* that the connection with mask is made. Yank experiences alienation from society when he is confronted with the elite of society on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Jones emphasizes this by placing identical masks over all of the passersby, externalizing Yank's experience for the audience to witness with him.[34] Having been on a steel vessel for most of his life with only those like him, his encounter with the upper crust is undoubtedly a disorienting experience. This incorporation of the emotions into the visual world is characteristic of the Expressionist movement which O'Neill helped usher in through the success of *The Hairy Ape*.

Yank, the unmasked protagonist, is trapped in a world of exaggerated behavior and is trying desperately to disappear into its machinery. The actor's challenge lies within this relationship: how can an unmasked actor reach (or just nearly) the plane of existence on which the mask resides? He must find a way to capture the intensity and succinctness that the mask bestows on its wearer without using one in performance. In order to understand the effects of a mask, the actor must work from both ends of the spectrum – with and without one, working towards the middle to find the mask's essence.

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[33] Ibid, 86.
[34] Walter Prichard Eaton, "The Hairy Ape," review of *The Hairy Ape*, by Eugene O'Neill, *The Freeman*, (1922), http://www.eoneill.com/artifacts/reviews/ha1_freeman.htm [accessed March 11, 2013].

Observations

When we examine the theatrical mask through history, we can see that there is tension between the different roles it has filled. The ancient Greeks and Romans relied on it to distinguish performer from character; the mask could be seen both as a restriction and a magnification of the actor's spirit. Goldoni saw it as a limitation of the actor that prevents him from expressing his individuality effectively and forces him into outdated character types. Copeau and his contemporaries used it as a tool of liberation, freeing the actor from societal impositions and expectations and allowing him to become a vessel into which he may channel his character. O'Neill was fascinated with the contrast between the masked and unmasked face, exploring the ideas of corporeal self and the expansive soul. In order to form my own opinions on the mask, its purpose, and its potential, I needed to explore it from a more holistic, performative standpoint.

CHAPTER 3

PERSONAL JOURNEY THROUGH MASK

The Exploratory Process

I don't believe that my understanding of the mask could have possibly been completed with historical research alone. I could have read my fill of the mystical, higher powers of the mask, but as an actor, until I worked in one myself, I would never fully grasp what these texts were attempting to convey. I needed to see a mask through from its conception to performance. This chapter serves as a sort of formalized rehearsal journal, addressing my thoughts throughout the process and the conclusions to which I came through them.

Building the mask

Having made an effective and aesthetically pleasing *Commedia dell'Arte* mask before, I went into the mask process with my expectations rather high. What I failed to realize was how different these two processes would be. To begin, I lacked an armature to build the masks on. This may have been a blessing in disguise, as I was forced to form my own and examine the proportions of the human face, gaining a better understanding of physiognomy. What I also failed to realize about my process was that my Commedia character's mask already had a general shape that I mostly had to alter, while these character masks for Oedipus had to be entirely inspired through my own devices. Instead of doing visual research for images that struck me, I decided to search for inspiration strictly through the text. I began to write down any language that stuck out as important

until I had a sizeable list from which to pull inspiration for the mask's design. Initially, I attempted to incorporate all of these elements into the mask in their own distinct way, but I ended up with many different finished possibilities, all of which were unsatisfying to me. I found that deliberately stretching the mask in many directions resulted in an unfocused look rather than a sort of expressive neutrality – the mask needed a focus. I decided to pursue the idea of human and animalistic sides of Oedipus with the full and half masks, respectively.

Self-Direction

The theatrical work that I devised for the presentation was the first that I had done entirely on my own. Unsurprisingly, the process was difficult to initiate; without any director who had a clearer image of what they wanted to present, I was left without much impetus to push one way or another. I "cheated" the first rehearsal or two by focusing on memorizing the text and pushing off any actual artistic decisions that had to be made. I believe that this occurred because I felt that the mask was such a daunting process, which it undoubtedly was. I had had minimal experience with it before, and by no means was that experience conventional; the work that I had done in Italy was primarily peer-exploration with minor guidance from an instructor specifically in *Commedia dell'Arte*. With an almost entirely unknown art form in front of me to develop for an audience, I felt some hesitation to start the project.

Once I began the work, I was forced to utilize mirrors to analyze the efficacy of my movement. I was worried about this aspect, as I knew that I had trouble in the past when attempting to give self-criticism, but I found that both working in the mirror and

watching recordings of rehearsals was significantly easier due to the mask on my face. When viewing these recordings, I did not immediately see myself on the screen, but some other figure unrelated to me. The mask granted me the ability to separate myself from character not only as an actor but also as a spectator, which I did not anticipate experiencing through this process. It is this ability within a mask to detach itself from our perceptions of reality in which I am interested.

Location

The distinction between performance outdoors and indoors is one that needs to be made. In my rehearsals, I had the opportunity to work in both settings and found them to be vastly different. When I was at work with the full mask outdoors, though my peripheral vision was cut off due to the small size of the eyeholes, my foveal vision was in tact. Once I moved to an indoor space, however, I could see next to nothing through the eyeholes; the edges of the mask blurred into my remaining field of vision. I suspect that this is due to the unidirectional lighting of a theater. Because the stage light shines directly on the mask and the audience is in the dark, the contrast makes it far more difficult to see through the mask. An outdoor arena would have multi-directional, ambient lighting that would be fairly even, allowing for players to have better sight from within a mask. At the same time though, stage lighting provides significant amounts of shadow, allowing the mask's features to be highlighted further, while ambient outdoor lighting would diminish these effects slightly.

With an outdoor venue, there are inevitable distractions. With the ambient light, the audience that is currently kept in the dark is now exposed, as are any other dark spots in

the theater used to hide pieces of machinery or off-stage actors. With these as well as natural elements such as animals, the landscape, and the weather, there is a significant amount of stimuli vying for an audience's attention, which is one of the reasons why the theatrical mask is so effective in an outdoor space. Surrounding it are things that are either completely static or active, but the mask finds the space in between. Through the body of a player, the mask achieves both stillness and movement at the same time, something rarely found in life. Because of this, the audience is forced to observe it in order to make sense of it and fit it in with the rest of their understanding of the world.

Within the Mask

The masks that I built proved to be a challenge. Because I sculpted the mold of my face by using photographs rather than making a cast or using specific measuring tools, the proportions of the armature weren't perfect, resulting in a couple of ill-fitting masks. The initial version of the full mask was to have the lips closer together, but once I got into the mask and began working with it, I found my own lips constantly hitting against it. While working with mirrors, I noticed that not only did it distract me, it also broke the entire illusion of a new identity; as I spoke, the mask moved quite unnaturally all over my face. I was taught by a mask teacher to never touch the mask, as it would "break the spell" of its validity and shatter any illusion of character that I had developed around it, and this explanation suddenly made sense to me; not only could I not use my hands to touch the mask, but in addition, my face within the mask itself could not disturb its placement.

This was the first time that a mask felt like an imposition to me. I became aware of how it was weighing down my face; my acting felt false and exaggerated. In order to create a space between my own face and the mask itself, I installed several pads where the highest points of my face would land and cut off parts of the lips. When I began playing in it again, I still experienced residual emotion from the previous work with it until I worked with the mirrors again and saw a distinct difference; the mask now commanded authority and felt like a character. However, after all of my research pointing to the idea of a mask as a liberating tool, I wanted to return to this idea of the mask as imposition, so I decided that this spectrum would be the focus of my own developed mask.

Discovery

The Oedipus masks, while my own creation, were based upon past ideas and aesthetics, and I still consider them as part of my historical exploration of the theatrical mask. With my mask for the character of Yank, the protagonist in *The Hairy Ape*, attempting to build another leather mask felt untrue to his nature; he was a man who thought of himself as made of steel. I also needed to address this issue of mask as liberator/imposition as well, so I decided that I needed to have a mask that didn't read as a mask immediately within the audience's mind. In earlier notes to myself, I had written, "Why should the mask not also exist on our plane of existence? I seek a way to make the mask a choice, not a force to rule over me and dictate my actions." I had this particular struggle in mind while conducting visual research on stokers of the time, and my choice became readily apparent – my mask was to be an occupational one. Theater already has

been working with the idea of costume as character, so an extension of the concept on to the face as mask made perfect sense.

The problem with an actor touching his mask during performance was due to the fact that the audience perceived it as something from outside not only their own reality but even the reality of the theater. The mask demands attention because it appears as though it were from another world far-removed from our own. It is because of this that the audience must come to an uneasy truce with the mask, permitting it to exist as part of the world of the play; the more attention is drawn to the mask, the more the fact that the audience has to confront their acceptance of this alien object. If Yank's mask was something that the audience read as a natural object, the actor would suddenly be free to manipulate it at his will! It would still have the ability and purpose of a typical mask, but it would be free from its otherworldly shackles.

Performance

Development

My experience studying the history, building, and performance of the mask culminated in a presentational performance. The piece revolved around demonstrating the different masks, their capabilities/limitations, and the history surrounding them. The initial intent was to hold the performance in a space that was reminiscent of the Greek theaters, but inclement weather forced the performance indoors. I do I feel that I lost from moving the performance space was the opportunity to see how the audience would have reacted to the stimuli of an outdoor space with regard to the mask, but the performance

and its other intentions remained intact. I was still able to ground my main argument of mask as impediment and liberator through history and performance, as well as my approach to finding my own ideal mask in Yank.

I opened the presentation with a theory of the origin of mask, that it grew out of a necessity through hunting; the first hunters began to wear the skins of their prey while mimicking their movement in order to draw closer and kill them more effectively. Through the hunters' storytelling, man began to appreciate the mask's power to grant a being a new spirit, to change a person's appearance. This spiritual connotation of the mask became more grounded as it found its way into religious ritual, specifically the Dionysian ritual with which the birth of theater is closely related. From there, the presentation painted a quick picture of theater and mask in ancient Greece in order to provide a basis for the full Oedipus mask. After a monologue, I spoke about the progression of Greek into Roman/Italian theater, moving to the *Commedia dell'Arte* and the expressive mask. In order to highlight the differences between the two types of mask, I performed a second monologue from the Oedipus text with the expressive Oedipus mask that I had developed. The presentation continued to follow my research to the revivalists and O'Neill, as well as my own ideas of what a mask could be. I performed a monologue from *The Hairy Ape* after an introduction of my concept and a second one after explaining my entire thought process and giving the audience specific ideas to consider while viewing the performance.

Thoughts

The reason that I chose to use these three masks in this order was to illuminate the argument of mask as a liberator. My full Oedipus mask was particularly restricted and grounded to the point where I didn't move from my spot through the entirety of the monologue. In my rehearsal, I found that I had a certain expectation of this mask to be almost statuesque due to its human-like appearance. Speaking to a friend who attended the performance, she recalled, "I had trouble looking at the first Oedipus mask; there was something about it that seemed too emotionally charged even though it appeared so blank when it wasn't on your face." The human qualities created such potent expressions through performance that any additional movement would only dilute its power. Because of this, the mask, while effective, proved to be highly restrictive to me as an actor. The expressive Oedipus mask was far more of an abstraction of the human face with its distinct contours and coloration. Because of this, I felt less of an expectation to honor the mask's "humanity" and felt that I gained the license to move. The emotional capacity of the mask wasn't diminished due to its animalistic/alien nature, but because it was something more foreign, I believe that the audience would be more willing to follow the character into different realm through its movement.

Following the line of thinking here, the removal of mask and exposure of face seems to suggest that an unmasked performance would provide the most liberation for an actor, but this was not what I wished to explain with my thesis. This thought was very similar to the revivalists, that the mask was a fantastic rehearsal tool to shed the actor of his notions of self and create a blank canvas on which to develop a character, but it was not my own; I wished to extend this opportunity beyond myself and to the audience as

well. This is the reason why I turned to Yank's occupational mask. I was able to synthesize the desirable qualities of both masks into this single one; I could pull in the intensity of the human face while still inviting the opportunity for unnatural movement and behavior by adjusting the mask at will. Through the character's (un)conscious decisions to put on or remove the mask, I was able to achieve the theatrical effects when I wanted to, and in addition, illuminate the issue of masking ones self in society. As social beings, we naturally put forward an idealized image of ourselves that we wish others to perceive us as, and we alter that image depending upon our audience; how we conduct ourselves at a meeting is greatly different than we would at home with family or out with friends. In essence, we are putting on different masks in order to fit into the societal situations presented to us. My character's choice to mask or unmask himself mirrored this behavior of ours, presenting my audience with the occasion to become aware of their own masking habits. I believe that this is the ultimate liberation of the mask; if I had chosen to unmask myself and perform, it would have been a selfish decision, but I chose to extend this opportunity to the audience, inviting a sort of communal unmasking.

During the presentation itself, I found myself more nervous when speaking about the masks than performing in them. I don't believe that there was a single reason for this; part of it may have been because I have had a great deal more experience with acting than with public speaking, but I believe the distancing effect of a mask for a performer absolutely played into the calmness with which I approached the performance. I experienced a feeling of playing to an empty room, especially in Oedipus's full mask; my eyesight was so limited that I couldn't see much of anything. I was aware that a great deal of attention was focused on me, but I couldn't make true eye contact with anyone in the

audience. It was a strange sensation to know that my eyes became Oedipus's, and anyone who looked into them was looking into his and not mine. I was immediately reminded of the revivalists' notion of the actor's spirit as spectator as his body was possessed by the character; I didn't feel like I had surrendered myself to another being, but I was certainly far more conscious of the fact that in the moment of performance, the audience had no interest in me – they were solely focused on Oedipus.

Feedback

At the end of the piece, I conducted a question and answer session with the audience. I began by asking questions of my own, but allowed the train of thought to progress on its own, should the audience be interested in other aspects of the performance. The questions I had sought to have answered were:

1. Did any masks feel imposed?
2. Did any masks feel natural or necessary to the character?
3. Was there ever a moment when you forgot about the mask?
4. Did you feel that the presentation helped inform the performance?
5. Was the performance adhering to the information provided by the presentation?
6. What specifically in the piece interested you the most?

I began by asking the initial two questions, but only ended up asking the third question later, as the dialogue that followed eventually addressed the other points. In the spur of the moment, I decided to pass the masks around to the audience for them to

examine. As the session went on, whenever I glanced over at a person who was handling a mask, they were almost always tilting it in the light towards themselves or holding it up to their face; giving them the opportunity to see the opposite side of the mask provided a more holistic experience to the piece. One person described the experience as though the mask had a life of its own, that it began to move itself in his hands and play with the light cast on it without him intentionally altering it. This examination of the masks allowed the audience to make more informed observations and questions, as they were able to begin to grasp the performer's understanding of the mask as well.

Something that I particularly was delighted to find was how similar their own observations were to my own after heavy research and rehearsal. One noted how important it must have been to have built the mask myself in order to deepen my understanding of the character. Another realized how quickly my identity as Tim disappeared behind the mask. As the discussion went on, the questions became those that I was asking myself! What did working in masks revealed to me about myself? How small can a mask be to still be considered a mask? Can you make a mask of your own face? Can you make a mask to cover something other than your face? To know that my work was able to essentially take my audience on an accelerated version of my own journey was deeply gratifying. In just over a half hour of discussion, they had poked and prodded their way through my entire creative process and had already caught up with me in my own thoughts.

The People's Voice

One thing that I find particularly interesting is the way that the mask has been treated by those who have attempted to revive it. Until this point, it has been understood that the actor must surrender himself to the mask, that it has some sort of sacred, otherworldly power that the actor must learn to channel through himself. Intuitively, it seems natural that the actor would take up the role of the servant to the mask much as he would to the director or the text of a performance, but we should also consider that the actor has the license to make artistic choices when developing his character; why can it not be the same for the mask? I believe that the mask's remarkable power on the stage is not to transport an actor to another realm of existence, but to draw him into the innermost depths of our own.

The mask is the messenger of the voice of the people. If we look back at history, we can see this quite clearly. The mask truly became a theatrical convention once it had taken its place on the faces of players in the great citywide festivals of Ancient Greece. These festivals were a celebration of the nation and of the community; they were something greater than the theater alone to the public. The masks continued to exist until the rise of the professional actor, when those watching became audiences intent on attending the theater. Until the ticketed performance, the mask thrived. However, with the introduction of theater houses we can see that the mask's power began to wane; with the uprising of the middle class, there comes a desire for the individual, for the value of self *above* society rather than finding oneself a part of it. The mask is incapable of telling a single person's story; by forcing the audience to accept it as part of their own reality, it is also promoting the idea of inclusion, of the everyman. It speaks to the common traits of

man – his dreams, his fears, his beliefs. By stripping a player of his face, it removes his identity, his defining features, and provides him with a new set; he is now liberated from judgment of others and is free to demonstrate to them the full range of the human spirit. As soon as the audience ceases to find the commonalities between an individual and society and begins to look for a way to distinguish the two, the mask's power is stripped away, and it becomes nothing more than an obstruction of a person's face. The goal of the mask is not to set others apart or to show how much we seek to distance ourselves from others; it is hell-bent on drawing us all together. We must be willing to follow the mask past our own inhibitions of self and preconceptions of society to find a state of unity with the rest of humanity. I find myself returning to the definition of "before the gaze"; maybe it isn't that the mask exemplifies the outward gaze of the actor or the audience, but rather the mask puts society before its own gaze.

APPENDIX A: MASK-MAKING TECHNIQUES[35]

I was taught this method of leather mask-making at the Accademia dell'Arte in Arezzo, Italy by Torbjörn Alström. He was highly regarded at the school as a genius, as the mask-making process for leather masks typically takes one to three months at a rapid pace, but he had developed a way that cut the entire process down to one to two weeks.

CLAY

Materials required:

- Baseboard
- Clay
- Sculpting tools

In this phase of the mask-making process, a positive mold of the mask is created out of clay. A face must be sculpted out of the clay if a mold is not available in order to properly seat the mask. The more accurate the dimensions of the face, the better the mask will fit on the user's face. This was addressed by creating a rough sketch of my face based on typical facial proportions. Ideally, a positive mold would be made of a different material (plastic, Plexiglas) resistant to cracking, warping, or otherwise distorting. This would provide a permanent base to build upon for the clay phase of the mask-making process.

[35] Atlanta. Personal photographs by author. 2013.

When creating the mask, there should be no sharp edges; the plaster strips that will later be placed over the clay will not capture the edges perfectly, and they will then look sloppy and imperfect. It is preferable to bevel all edges slightly.

If work is ever paused for an extended period of time, it is recommended to seal the clay underneath a layer of saran wrap to lock in moisture. If the clay is left uncovered for too long, it will dry out and crack, rendering the mold useless.

Plaster

Materials required:

- Vaseline
- Plaster strips
- Plaster powder
- Water

The clay mask is too malleable to work leather over, so something more stable is necessary to form the mask. Plaster is a simple solution to this problem. In order to create a second positive mold out of plaster, a negative mold must first be made. Vaseline must be applied to all non-clay materials to prevent the plaster from adhering to them. Plaster strips are then wet and applied to the clay mold in at least three layers. They should be thoroughly soaked, and the holes should be filled as much as possible with water to ensure a smoother mold. The initial layer should be comprised of smaller strips in order to better capture the detail of the clay mold while following layers' strips should be larger in order to provide support. These should cover the entirety of the mask as well as ¼" - ½" around it.

After several hours of drying, the plaster strips should be dry enough to remove. At this point, the clay may be recycled. There will most likely be some clay stuck to the inside of the mask, so remove as much as possible. Once the negative mold has been removed and cleaned, a clay base should be created in order to support it. Walls should be built around the negative mold as well as structures to support weak spots in the mold that will otherwise bear a lot of weight. The entire inside of the negative mold should be coated in Vaseline in order to prevent the plaster from adhering to it. Special attention should be paid to crevices that are otherwise hard to reach – use a brush or some other tool in order to apply Vaseline in these spaces.

Once the Vaseline has been applied, mix the plaster powder with water to create a liquid plaster. Fill the negative mold with the liquid plaster slowly in order to prevent bubbles from forming and distorting the surface of the mold. Leave it for several hours in order to allow it to dry.

Leather

Materials required:

- Vegetable-tanned calfskin, 5-6 oz.
- Water
- Brass hammer
- Brass nails
- Smoothing tools
- Elastic string
- X-ACTO knife
- Adhesive
- Shellac

The liquid plaster will dry into a more stable positive mold to work the leather. It is important to have a vegetable-tanned leather because other leathers are treated with heavy metals such as chrome, which are unhealthy when in direct contact with the skin for extended periods of time. Calfskin is ideal due to its generally unmarked skin and malleability. First, cut out an appropriate amount of leather that will cover the entirety of the mask. Then soak it for several minutes in a tub of water, working and stretching it underwater to ensure that it has absorbed a decent amount.

After soaking the leather, drape it over the plaster mold. The leather will not drape perfectly, so situate it so that the main fold runs from the tip of the nose to the chin. Use brass nails to affix the leather to the plaster mold, placing one in each eye, nostril, and on the border surrounding the mask beginning at the top. Brass nails are ideal because they do not stain the leather like other metals will. Using a brass hammer as well will eliminate the chance for metal staining the leather altogether. Wrap elastic string around the nails on the border of the mask to keep them situated; the leather will likely shift as it is worked with, and this will better keep them in place. Make a cut down that line and remove the excess, leaving roughly a ¼" flap on either side. This is the shortest path for the crease to take and is the least invasive. Then shave off the inside of one flap and the outside of the other to about half of the original width in order to create the smallest notable seam on the mask. Affix it with an adhesive.

Once the mask is completely secured, begin to work the leather, smoothing it out with your tools. Moderate pressure will be required in order to force the moisture back out of the leather, but not so much as to distort the plaster underneath. This step will require many hours of work over the course of several days. The leather will slowly shrink in its width and darken slightly as the work is done. Like the clay mold, it is best to store the leather while not working with it in order to prevent it from losing moisture before it is fit to the plaster mold. The leather will dry completely, and the nails securing it may be removed. Use an X-ACTO knife to cut the excess leather and eyeholes from the mask. Use a leather punch to create small holes on both sides of the mask for the elastic string that secures the mask to the player's face. The plaster mold may be saved if further masks will be made from it. The inside of the mask will most likely have a slight bit of moisture from the plaster mold itself, so allow it to dry for several hours before proceeding. Once it is dry, Begin to paint shellac on to the inside of the mask. Use very light layers and allow each to dry fully before continuing to the next one. Paint the inside until a nice amber color is achieved. This is done in order to seal the inside of the mask and prevent it

from taking on too much moisture from the actor's face. This may require 15-20 layers of shellac.

If desired, paint the outside of the mask. Be aware of how your paints interact with worked leather, so it is recommended that you save the excess strips from your mask so that you may test the paints. When painting, it is easiest to simply remount the mask on the plaster mold to have a solid base. Once the desired paint is put on the mask, it is best to seal it with something such as beeswax or wood sealer to retain its color and give it a slight sheen.

APPENDIX B: MONOLOGUES

Excerpts from *Oedipus the King*[36]

p.32

OEDIPUS:

Wealth and a king's power,

the skill that wins every time –

how much envy, what malice they provoke!

To rob me of power – power I didn't ask for,

but which this city thrust into my hands –

my oldest friend here, loyal Kreon, worked

quietly against me, aching to steal my throne.

He hired for the purpose this fortune-teller –

conniving bogus beggar-priest! – a man

who knows what he wants but cannot seize it,

being but a blind groper in his art.

Tell us now, when or where did you ever

prove you had the power of a seer?

Why – when the Sphinx who barked black songs

was hounding us – why didn't you speak up

and free the city? Her riddle wasn't the sort

[36] Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, trans. Robert Bagg (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012).

just anyone who happened by could solve:

prophetic skill was needed. But the kind

you learned from birds or gods failed you. It took

Oedipus, the know-nothing, to silence her.

I needed no help from the birds.

I used my wits to find the answer.

I solved it – the same man for whom you plot

disgrace and exile, so you can

maneuver close to Kreon's throne.

But your scheme to rid Thebes of its plague

will destroy both you and the man who planned it.

Were you not so frail, I'd make you

suffer exactly what you planned for me.

p.56

OEDIPUS:

I traveled to the Pythian oracle.

But the god would not honor me

with the knowledge I craved.

Instead,

his words flashed other things –

horrible, wretched things – at me;

I would be my mother's lover.
I would show the world children
no one could bear to look at. I
would murder the father whose seed I am.
When I heard that, and ever after,
I traced the road back to Korinth
only by looking at the stars. I fled
to somewhere I'd never see outrages,
like those the god promised, happen to me.
But my flight carried me to just the place
where, you tell me, the king was killed.
Oh, woman, here is the truth. As I approached
The place where three roads joined,
a herald, a colt-drawn wagon, and a man
like the one you describe, met me head-on.
The man out front and the old man himself
began to crowd me off the road.
The driver, who's forcing me aside,
I smash in anger.
The old man watches me,
he measures my approach, then leans out
lunging with his two-spiked goad
dead at my skull. He's more than repaid;

I hit him so fast with the staff

this hand holds, he's knocked back

rolling off the cart. Where he lies, face up.

And then I kill them all.

But if this stranger and Laios…were the same blood,

whose triumph could be worse than mine?

Is there a man alive the gods hate more?

Nobody, no Theban, no foreigner,

can take me to his home.

No one can speak with me.

They all must drive me out.

I am the man – no one else –

who laid this curse on myself.

I make love to his wife with hands

Repulsive from her husband's blood.

Can't you see that I'm evil?

My whole nature, utter filth?

Look, I must be banished. I must

never set eyes on my people, never

set foot in my homeland, because…

I'll marry my own mother,

kill Polybus, my father,

who brought me up and gave me birth.

If someone said things like these

must be the work of a savage god,

he'd be speaking the truth. O you

pure and majestic gods! Never,

never, let the day such things happen

arrive for me. Let me never see it.

Let me vanish from men's eyes

before that doom comes down on me.

Excerpts from *The Hairy Ape*[37]

p.25

YANK:

[*He approaches a lady – with a vicious grin and a smirking wink*] Hello, Kiddo. How's every little ting? Got anyting on for to-night? I know an old boiler down to de dock we kin crawl into. [*YANK turns to others – insultingly*] Holy smoke, what mug! Go hide yuhself before horses shy at yuh. Gee, pipe de heinie on dat one! Say, youse, yuh look like de stoin of a ferryboat. Paint and powder. All dolled up to kill. Yuh look like stiffs laid out for de boneyard! Aw, g'wan, de lot of youse! Yuh give me de eye-ache. Yuh don't belong, get! Look at me, why don't youse dare? I belong, dat's me! [*Pointing to a skyscraper across the street which is in process of construction – with bravado*] See dat building goin' up dere? See de steel work? Steel, dat's me! Youse guys live on it and tink yuh're somp'n. But I'm IN it, see! I'm de hoistin' engine dat makes it go up! I'm it – de inside and bottom of it! Sure! I'm steel and steam and smoke and de rest of it! It moves – speed – twenty-five stories up – and me at de top and bottom – movin'! Youse simps don't. Yuh're on'y dolls I winds up to see 'm spin. Yoh're de garbage, get me – de leavins – de ashes we dump over side! Now whata yuh gotto say? [*But as they seem neither to see nor hear him, he flies into a fury*] Bums! Pigs! Tarts! Bitches! [*He turns in a rage on the men, bumping viciously into them but not jarring them the least bit. Rather it is he who recoils after each collision. He keeps growling.*] Git off de oith! G'wan, yuh

[37] Eugene O'Neill, *The Hairy Ape*

bum! Look where yuh're goin', can't yuh? Git outa here! Fight, why don't yuh? Put up yer mits! Don't be a dog! Fight or I'll knock yuh dead!

p.28

YANK:

Sure, I'll tell youse. Sure! Why de hell not? On'y – youse won't get me. Nobody gets me but me, see? I started to tell de Judge and all he says was: "Toity days to tink it over." Tink it over! Christ, dat's all I been doin' for weeks! [*After a pause*] I was tryin' to git even wit someone, see? – someone dat done me doit.

[*Unheeding – groping in his thoughts*] Her hands – dey was skinny and white like dey wasn't real but painted on somep'n. Dere was a million miles from me to her – twenty-five knots an hour. She was like some dead ting de cat brung in. Sure, dat's what. She didn't belong. She belonged in de window of a toy store, or on de top of a garbage can, see! Sure! [*He breaks out angrily*] But would yuh believe it, she had de noive to de me doit. She lamped me like she was seein' somep'n broke loose from de menagerie. Christ, yuh'd oughter seen her eyes! [*He rattles the bars of his cell furiously*] But I'll get back at her yet, you watch! And if I can't find her I'll take it out on de gang she runs wit. I'm wise to where dey hangs out now. I'll show her who belongs! I'll show her who's in de move and who ain't. You watch my smoke!

Sure – her old man – president of de Steel Trust – makes half de steel in de world – steel – where I tought I belonged – drivin' trou – movin' – in dat – to make HER – and cage me in for her to spit on! Christ [*He shakes the bars of his cell door till the whole tier*

trembles. Irritated, protesting exclamations from those awaked or trying to get to sleep] He made dis – dis cage! Steel! IT don't belong, dat's what! Cages cells, locks, bolts, bars – dat's what it means! – holdin' me down wit him at de top! But I'll drive trou! Fire, dat melts it! I'll be fire – under de heap – fire dat never goes out

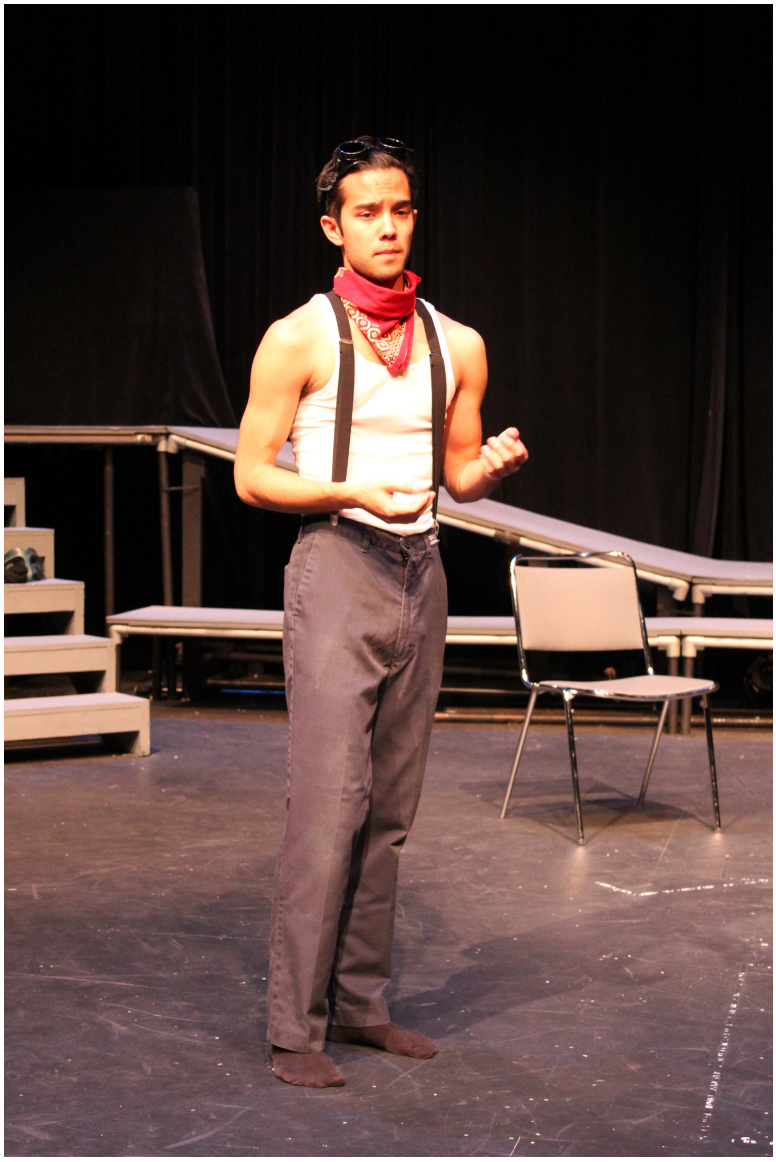
APPENDIX C: PRODUCTION PHOTOS[38]

[38] Photographs by Daniel Ledford.

(Oedipus, Full Mask)

(Oedipus, Half Mask)

(Yank, Full Mask)



(Yank, Unmasked)

APPENDIX D: PARAPHRASED PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

The feedback given after the performance was discussion-based and unrecorded; a note-taker gave brief summaries of the points brought up through questions asked to the audience for my later reference when reflecting upon the performance.

- It was remarkable how human like the mask became on your face. (Gus Cook)
- The mask's range of emotion was greatly highlighted by the use of lighting and shadow. (Emily Kleypas)
- There was so little movement in the initial monologue, but each one carried such meaning; you looked like a moving sculpture (Jake Krakovsky)
- Looking at the eyes of the full mask, it seems like you would have to be apprehensive to move with so little eyesight; what was that experience like? (Michael Evenden)
- The full and half mask seem to represent the youth and age in Oedipus, and it's interesting that they should come in that order, since even though Greek theater typically followed real time, but it was as though the weight of his sins were weighing him down. (Donald McManus)
- The progression from the Oedipal masks to Yank's made a lot of sense in the liberation of the actor. (Cody Read)
- The pointed bandana and goggles were almost like a plague mask on your face, as though Yank was trying to keep the plague of humanity out. (JD Penn)
- The putting on and taking off of the mask read as very fluid and natural to the character; the blending of theatrical styles worked effectively. (Travis Draper)

- The final moment of Yank's second monologue when he throws down the mask is both his strongest and most vulnerable moment; he has freed himself from this mask, but is also now naked to the world. (Phil Rauscher)
- Do you think that it is beneficial for an actor to make his own mask for a given character? How would you feel being given a mask made by someone else to perform in? (Jenni Seale)
- Was there any pattern to the movement that came out of the mask? (Sally Radell)
- Over the course of the performance, it was as though your body disappeared and it was a disembodied mask, floating through space and performing. (Madeline Teissler)
- How did each mask enlighten you about yourself? (Greg Matteson)
- Subtlety, specificity, and posture really stood out after your face was taken away by the mask. (Emily Hammond)
- What would happen if you wore a mask made to look exactly like your face? (Kelsey Bohlke)
- How small can a mask be? Can you envision a mask that doesn't cover your face? (Jenni Seale)

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