Paradoxes of Acting

Dick McCaw, Royal Holloway, University of London
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ABSTRACT

While much has been written about Bakhtin's later writings, most notably *Rabelais and his World,* little attention has been paid to his early manuscripts written in the mid-1920s. In this article Bakhtin's early philosophical ideas about authorship are compared to Stanislavsky's theory about how an actor creates a character. Bakhtin argues that actors can only be authors when they remain outside the character. He agrees that there is a need for empathy, but that this moment of co-experiencing with the character is followed by a return to oneself. Although this would seem to fly in the face of Stanislavsky's demand for the actor's empathetic identification with their role the argument concludes that both men agreed that there was a necessary doubleness in the consciousness of the actor. This article develops ideas first stated in Dick McCaw's PhD *Bakhtin's Other Theatre* (Royal Holloway University of London, 2004) and now being worked on again for a book on Bakhtin and the theatre of his time. Dick McCaw is a Senior Lecturer at Royal Holloway, and has written *With an Eye for Movement* (2006) and edited the *Laban Sourcebook* (2011).

KEY TERMS
Character, Authorship, Empathy, Distance, Image, Aesthetics

INTRODUCTION

This article brings together two approaches to acting and creating a character which have not been previously compared. The first is found in the early philosophy of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 – 1975), the second in the writings of Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863 – 1938). Bakhtin first came to the notice of literary critics in Europe and the US in the 1980s with translations of his *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), *Rabelais and his World* (1984), and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984) and a Biography in English (1984). These works introduced the concepts which we now associate with Bakhtin – carnival, polyphony in the novel, dialogism, and heteroglossia – and which have had a considerable impact on Cultural Studies and thus Theatre Studies. At the same time three books by two members of the Bakhtin Circle (Valentin Volosinov and Pavel Medvedev) were translated, revealing a more sociological aspect of his and their work in the later 1920s[1]. Somewhat later two philosophical works were translated: *Art and Answerability* (1990) and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993), a hundred-page unfinished manuscript from the 1920s. *Art and Answerability* consists of Bakhtin's first published article (1919), a piece prepared for publication in 1924, and another unfinished manuscript called *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* also written in the 1920s. Because they appeared after a huge amount of critical attention had already been paid to Bakhtin and his Circle, and because they were written in a much more difficult philosophical idiom, these works have been relatively neglected.

Bakhtin's studies of the novel, of Rabelais and Dostoevsky are littered with references to plays and to characters from Atellan Farce to Medieval theatre and Commedia dell'Arte, but his early writings engage in questions surrounding the creation and playing of a character, with one short section of *Author and Hero*[2] devoted to the question of when an actor can be considered an author. This article will first examine Bakhtin's theory of authorship, its connection with theatre and then compare his approach to that of Stanislavsky.

THE ARTISTIC IMAGE

One concept which runs through Bakhtin writings from early to late is the artistic image (*obraz*). In the early writings the word 'image' is used in a literal, visual sense quite as much as in a metaphorical way. A note in *Author and Hero* explains that 'image' should be understood 'in the sense of a plastic (sculptural) as well as pictorial configuration or figure'[3]. The notion of character is certainly understood as a pictorial image, a visual entity that can be grasped in its totality with one look. This contrasts with his later use of the term 'image': in his Rabelais book he refers to 'popular-festive images'[4] which are encapsulations of folk wisdom. In *Discourse in the Novel* he writes about 'images

1

of language'[5] where one language represents or comments upon another language, 'if there is not a second representing consciousness, if there is no second representing language-intention, then what results is not an image (*obraz*) of language but merely a sample (*obrazec*) of some other person's language, whether authentic or fabricated.'[6] In his later thinking an image is a representation of a language, an encapsulation of a philosophy; in his early aesthetics an image is the form in which a character is authored. Rose Whyman comments on how 'Chekhov, like Vakhtantgov and Meyerhold, preferred to use the word *obraz*, or image, instead of the words for character and role, preferred by Stanislavsky'[7]. 'Character' and 'role' correspond to the Russian *xarakter* and *rol.* Bakhtin uses the word 'geroi', which is a literary term for 'hero'. Although Stanislavsky doesn't use the word *obraz* for 'character', he does use it in connection with the actor's creative process. The word frequently occurs in transcripts of him at work in rehearsal: working with an opera singer he advises, 'Carry out all your planned actions correctly, you are on the stage, analyze your attitude towards Tatiana. As the result of all that, you will achieve an image.'[8] Or again, in an address to opera singers, 'we must learn not only to understand, but also to transmute into living images, and reflect in truthful and correct physical action.'[9] This ability to create 'living images' is central to the actor's communication with the audience: 'To capture any kind of consciousness in the orbit of your creativity you must present your visual images to another man in such a way that he will not only understand them but also be swept away and fired by them.'[10] For Stanislavsky it is not the character, but the character's actions which are the images, and he asks the actor to think of the work on a role as 'an endless uninterrupted series of visual images, a sort of reel of a film. While the actor's creative work goes on, it continues to unwind itself, reflecting the illustrated given circumstances of the play among which the actor – the performer of the part – lives on the stage.'[11]

Bakhtin's early theory of the creation of a character involves an observer who needs to stand back in order to create the finished visual image. The completion of the image is judged from this outside or distanced perspective. This contrasts with Stanislavsky's approach to the image of the character which is based on empathy, a coming towards, indeed a merging with the character. Here we have two theories of characterisation which hinge upon the degree to which the author (or actor) empathises with or takes a distance from the character, which, in essence is the Actor's Paradox as described by Diderot. It would be too reductive to pit Bakhtin's insistence upon aesthetic distance against Stanislavsky's demand for an empathetic identification and this article will argue that a comparison of both men's approaches to authorship will yield a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics and motivations behind the creation of characters.

BAKHTIN'S AUTHORING – FROM I AND OTHER TO AUTHOR AND HERO
Bakhtin's theory of authorship begins with a real-life exchange between what he calls 'I and other'. This is not another way of saying 'I and s/he', that is, a means of distinguishing first and third person experience. For Bakhtin the Other is the form in which I see the rest of humanity - as possible addressees and possible characters – and in which I can understand myself as a member of the human race. He explains that 'it is about the other that all the stories have been composed, all the books have been written, all the tears have been shed', and concludes 'it is only others who are known, remembered, and recreated by productive memory, so that my own memory, of objects, of the world, and of life could also become an artistic memory.'[12] In short, the other is the form in which a real person's life can 'become an artistic memory'. This process of understanding oneself through dialogue with others begins at birth: 'The child receives all initial determinations of himself and of his body from his mother's lips and from the lips of those who are close to him.'[13] In a few words, 'this love gives value to his inner body'[14] – an affirmation not simply of the body but of one's self. Only love, as he states below, is 'capable of being aesthetically productive':

> Lovelessness, indifference, will never be able to generate sufficient power to slow down and linger intently over an object, to hold and sculpt every detail and particular in it, however minute. Only love is capable of being aesthetically productive; only in correlation with the loved is fullness of the manifold possible.[15]

Bakhtin states that 'In aesthetic seeing you love a human being not because he is good, but rather, a human being is good because you love him. This is what constitutes the specific character of aesthetic seeing.'[16] Stanislavsky-Tortsov advises his students: 'You love *yourself* in the role more than the *role* in you. [...] 'Learn to love the *role* in yourselves.'[17] Love is at the heart of both men's conception of character and aesthetic creation.

Where Stanislavsky insists that the actor love the role, Bakhtin's creative process begins with the author's love of a real person, who is then transformed into a character. The exchange between I and Other already has an aesthetic dimension since the relationship is predicated on the future activity of authorship, that one will undertake to author the other as a hero. At the outset the person whom we intend to author as a hero is only 'the *possible* hero, that is, the one that has not yet become a hero, has not yet been shaped aesthetically'[18]. Bakhtin describes the creation of a Hero as a three-stage process. The first is the establishment of a connection, whereby one person observes another. The second stage is where one person 'enters into' the life (*vzhivanie* – literally, 'living into') of the other in order to experience it from the inside. *Vzhivanie*[19] is most probably a literal translation of the German term *einfülung* (literally 'feeling into') coined by philosopher Theodor Lipps (1851 – 1914) and translated into English as 'empathy'. Lipps states that 'One empathises when one puts oneself in the place of - and even to some extent imitates - someone or something else.'[20] (Below we will see Stanislavsky used Tolstoy's term *perezhivanie* –literally, 'to live through' - to describe how the actor can experience the life of the character.) After this empathetic stage, the author returns to his or her place outside the hero-to-be in order to create the artistic image. It is this third stage, the return, which distinguishes Bakhtin's approach to characterisation from Stanislavsky's.

Brian Poole explains that Bakhtin's three-part aesthetic theory was adapted from philosopher Nicolai Hartmann (1882 – 1950) who argued that while it was possible to put ourselves in someone else's place, to co-experience with them, it was only possible to *understand* our experiences of that person once we have returned to the circle of our own thought. Poole explains:

> In Hartmann's language: 'The subject thus cannot "grip" the object without leaving itself (transcending itself); but it cannot be conscious of what has been grasped without being back again in its own sphere. Thus the cognitive function may be represented in a tripartite act: as a *going outside,* a *being outside the self* and *a return* of the subject to itself.'[21]

Poole points out the critical importance of this 'return' to the subject's own place, adding that 'distance is an integral part of the author's design, for it alone guarantees genuine objectivity in the representation of a character'.[22] Bakhtin expresses the author's *return* thus:

> Aesthetic activity proper actually begins at the point when we *return* into ourselves, when we *return* to our own place outside the suffering person, and start to form and consummate the material we derived from projecting ourselves into the other and experiencing him from within himself.[23]

Bakhtin argues that it is neither possible nor desirable to create a character whilst still being in a state of empathetic projection. An author who continues to identify with the hero would run the risk of *playing at* being a hero rather than *authoring* a hero. The aesthetic process has to be lifted out of the day-to-day negotiations between these two people otherwise their exchange would begin 'to degenerate into self-interested disputations in which the centre of value is located in the problems debated'.[24] The centre of value in an aesthetic image is the life of the hero as viewed from outside by the author. Out of love for another person, the author lifts their activities and struggles out from an everyday world where meanings are always contingent upon an unforeseeable future to an aesthetic realm of images where the meaning is fixed forever. The motivation for such authoring is love and the result is an act of aesthetic redemption.

The aesthetic work that follows the moment of empathising is fraught with difficulties: Bakhtin warns that at first 'the hero is going to exhibit a great many grimaces, random masks, wrong gestures, and unexpected actions' and this is because of the shifts in the author's attitudes toward the hero. He continues,

> In order to see the true and integral countenance of someone close to us, someone we apparently know very well – think how many masking layers must first be removed from his face, layers that were sedimented upon his face by our own fortuitous reactions and attitudes and by fortuitous life situations. The artist's struggle to achieve a determinate and stable image of the hero is to a considerable extent a struggle with himself.[25]

He describes the author's struggle with 'fortuitous reactions and attitudes' which inevitably come from wanting to see things from the person's perspective (ethical empathising) rather than that of a character who has a finished meaning. To make this critique clearer Bakhtin invents the term 'transgredient' to explain those elements that are essential for the aesthetic image (the character) but of which the living person would be unaware. Vadim Liapunov explains that while *ingredients* are immanent constituents of consciousness, *transgredient* elements 'are external to it but nonetheless

3

absolutely necessary for its completion, for its achievement of totalisation'[26]. For example, an actor is not being creative when he 'experiences the hero's life as his own life' that is 'when his consciousness includes nothing that would be transgredient to the consciousness of the hero he is playing. …the actor is aesthetically creative only when he is an author.'[27]

That, in brief, is Bakhtin's theory of authorship. But for all his insistence that he is describing a theory of literary creation, he admits that his interest is 'more oriented to general philosophical aesthetics'[28] than to practical questions of fictional portrayal. This could be said of many of his later writings which are a blend of literary analysis and philosophical reflection. And throughout his career theatre is used as a field of reference (almost of metaphor) to set off the superiority of the novel as a means of understanding the representation of human consciousness.

BAKHTIN'S CRITIQUE OF THE ACTOR AS AUTHOR – PLAYING NOT IMAGING

Bakhtin's critique of the actor rehearses the basic principles in his theory of authorship: the necessity for outsideness and not empathy and thus the difference between imaging and playing a character. An actor is an author depending on the degree to which

> he produces and shapes *from outside* the image of the hero into whom he will later "reincarnate" himself, that is, when he creates the hero as a distinct whole and creates this whole not in isolation, but as a constituent in the whole of a drama. In other words, the actor is aesthetically creative when only when he is an author – or to be exact: a co-author, a stage director, and an active spectator of the portrayed hero and of the whole play …[29]

The critical part of this argument is in the last two lines where he admits 'to be exact' that the actor is a 'co-author, a stage director and an active spectator of the portrayed hero'. Later we shall see that Bakhtin finds it difficult to distinguish between the active spectator and the actor.

Another central distinction in Bakhtin's theory of authoring is between an actor playing at the hero (empathy) and imaging the hero (aesthetic activity): playing at someone's life where you 'assume, like a mask, the flesh of another', and 'the aesthetic answerability of the actor and the whole human being' whose 'playing of a role as a whole is an answerable deed performed by *the one playing*'.[30] To play is simply to copy: 'There is no aesthetic constituent that is immanent to play itself'.[31]

> Play *images* nothing – it merely imagines. … it is only in art that life is *imaged forth*, whereas in play it is imagined … this *imagined* life becomes an image of life only in the active and creative contemplation of a spectator. [Play] is not an active aesthetic relationship to life.[32]

(This looks forward to his later distinction between *obraz* and *obrazec,* image and sample, cited above.) Here he makes a revealing distinction between image and imagining, the one being the result of aesthetic action, the other being the equivalent of day-dreaming.

Not only the actor but also the spectator has to refrain from sustained empathy with the character. For a response to be aesthetic the spectator must maintain 'his place *outside* and *over against* the imaged life event of the dramatic personae', otherwise he 'experiences the life of one of the characters inside and from inside that character – seeing the stage through his eyes, hearing other *dramatis personae* through his ears, co-experiencing all his actors from within him.'[33] Bakhtin here conflates and thus confuses the actor's experience with that of the character, the theatrical means of representation with the fictional world being represented. It is the *actor* who sees the staging and hears the other actors, and the *character* who lives in the world and the time being represented. In any case, the spectator would be more likely to identify with the world being represented rather than the theatrical of representation. Nonetheless his argument does look forward to Brecht's critique of *verfremdung,* which also warns against both the actor and the spectator from losing themselves in the stage action.

Bakhtin's distinction between playing and imaging is yet another means by which he seeks to identify the nature of aesthetic activity. He argues that 'what radically distinguishes play from art is the absence in principle of spectator and author'[34] and takes the example of a child playing:

> Playing begins really to approach art – namely, dramatic action – only when a new, non-participating participant makes his appearance, namely a spectator who begins to admire the children's playing from the standpoint of the whole event of a life represented by their playing, a spectator who contemplates this life event in an aesthetically active manner and, in part, *creates* it (as an aesthetically valid whole, by transposing it to a new plane – the aesthetic plane).[35]

4

Several categories are blurred here. Although they share the same verb (in Russian as well as in English), there is a world of difference between the 'playing' of a child and an actor, irrespective of the presence of a spectator. And it is here that we start to see Bakhtin's theory of the aesthetic image founder. Although he seems to be writing about an actor's relation to a role, in fact he is returning to his central preoccupation: how an author creates an image of a life based on a living human being. Bakhtin is no longer writing about an actor's playing but how a child's playing can become the subject of another person's aesthetic activity. Once again, his overriding philosophical interest occludes the specific detail of aesthetic creation.

A final passage from *Author and Hero* further complicates the question of the audience's relationship with the character. Bakhtin's argument turns to Dostoevsky about whom he wrote throughout his career. Despite his huge affection for Dostoevsky's stories and novels, he seems to present him as an example of unaesthetic creation, because the characters are allowed to speak for themselves, rather than being positioned and finished by the author. Thus reader only knows the world of Dostoevsky's characters as *they* experience it: the author offers no outside position from which we can grasp or evaluate these characters as finished images with fixed meanings. Bakhtin then argues that for this reason his novels cannot be adapted for the stage.

> Dostoevsky involves us in the world of the hero, and we do not see the hero from outside. […] That is why Dostoevsky's heroes on stage produce an entirely different impression from one they produce when we are reading. It is in principle impossible to represent the specificity of Dostoevsky's world on stage …. There is no independent and neutral place for us; an objective seeing of the hero is impossible. That is why the footlights destroy a proper apprehension of Dostoevsky's works. Their theatrical effect is – a dark stage with voices, and nothing more.[36]

Because the reader cannot see the heroes 'from outside', as images, *therefore* the novels cannot be adapted for the stage because an audience would only not be able to hear their voices. (This preoccupation with the voice of the character will later form the basis of what he calls the polyphony of Dostoevsky's novels.) This is to suggest that the image of a character is not simply an aesthetic but also a visual form, which is a *reductio ad absurdam* of his argument and which the facts of Russian theatre flatly contradict. He must surely have been aware of the Moscow Art Theatre's adaptations from Dostoevsky: the *Village of Stepanchikovo* (1917) or *The Possessed* (1913). How is it that Bakhtin, who had had at least one experience of producing a play (*Oedipus at Colonnus* 1918[37]) and in 1919 gave 'two lecture series on theatrical production'[38], could write something that makes so little sense in terms of theatrical production? Must we ascribe this to the fact that his argument is not really about theatre or literature, but rather a philosophical enquiry into the relation between people when understood as authors and heroes? This highlights an important difference between Bakhtin and Stanislavsky – one was interested in philosophical issues arising from artistic practices, whereas the other was interested in arguing for and establishing acting as an art.

STANISLAVSKY: BEING NOT PLAYING
In order to explain when an actor is an author Bakhtin distinguished between imaging and playing; Stanislavsky's guiding distinction to identify truthful acting was that between doing and playing. For their different reasons both men rejected play-acting. Rose Whyman noted that Stanislavsky 'tended not to use the most common word for acting in Russian (*igrat'*), which can have the connotation of 'play-acting' or pretending, but preferred the word (*destvovat'*), which means to take action, to behave'[39]. This distinction between playing and doing opens onto a further distinction between the actor as a human being (who does) or as a play-actor (who pretends to do). An actor can be the character by putting him- or herself in their shoes, by acting in the given circumstances. When the Moscow Art Theatre performed in St Petersburg Stanislavsky was delighted to report a comment from a local critic that read, 'There are no actors and actresses in the company. There are only people who feel deeply.'[40] This emphasis upon the actor as a human being recurs throughout his writings with such statement as: 'You made the entrance like an actor but I want a human being.'[41]

Paradoxically, in order for actors to be considered artists, and acting an art, they must try to act as any human being would do when in the situation created by the playwright. The actor must 'be' the character. In *The Actor's Work* Tortsov elucidates the phrase 'I am being': 'That means, I am, I live, I feel, I think as one with the role.' Thus 'Where truth, belief and "I am being" are, inevitably you have genuine, human (and not theatrical) experiencing.'[42] (Whyman explains that in the Russian original he uses the 'Church Slavonic "*ia esm*"' (literally 'I am') which 'indicates the highest apogee of the actor's art – a spiritual state'[43].) The challenge to be human rather than to play-act suggests an ethical rather
5

than an aesthetic task. When describing his portrayal of Old Uncle in his adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Village of Stepanchikovo* he uses the word 'become'*:*

> In a word, I became him for the duration of the play. To try to understand the magic of that word for the actor, *become,* Gogol said that any second-rate actor can 'play at and capture the walk, the movements' and give 'flesh and clothing' to a character, but only someone of genuine talent can 'capture the very heart of a role, *become* the character. If that is so, it means I have talent, because in that role I *became* Old Uncle whereas I more or less 'played at' other roles, copied, mimicked other people's or my own versions.[44]

The opposition is between the creating a character through external imitation (drawn from outside observation) and a more internal process of becoming or being the character.

To explain this internal process we need to understand the term perezhivanie more fully. Chapter Five of Sharon Carnicke's *Stanislavsky in Focus* is called 'Stanislavsky's Lost Term'*.* This term is *perezhivanie* which 'invokes the experiential nature of acting' and results in actors being 'fully present on stage'[45]. Tolstoy argued that it was important that readers understood human nature not through analysis but co-experiencing it through characters.

> This elusive, subjective concept serves a highly practical function within the System. It gives actors a way to evaluate their work in an art form which precludes the artist from seeing objectively his or her own creation. Actors, after all, literally cannot watch themselves while they perform; even film denies the actor this experience during the process of working.[46]

The first thing to note about the above passage is that while Stanislavsky may be drawing on theory, it is in the service of a practical endeavour: to find the best means by which an actor can act truthfully. Secondly, where Bakhtin's theory is very much about seeing, Stanislavsky acknowledges that the actor cannot see him- or herself, and therefore needs to rely on feeling and experiencing. *Perezhivanie* is the actor's means of being aware of what they are doing. Stanislavsky argues repeatedly that in the field of acting, knowing is feeling: 'It is no accident that in our terminology "to know" means "to feel". The desired result is not achieved by cold, intellectual analysis but by the workings of creative nature.'[47] Later he develops this argument by adding: 'Artistic analysis is, above all, the analysis of feelings conducted by feeling'.[48] Ivan Lapshin (1870 – 1952), a philosopher-friend of Stanislavsky's develops the theme:

> Stanislavsky demonstrated it is possible to train oneself in the 'art of *experiencing*' and to 'get accustomed to a role' so that it is possible to perform it in a 'much more lifelike way thanks to the actor's constant experimentation on him/herself, and getting into the feelings of (*vchuvstvovanie*) the role'. (This is also a term used by Tolstoy.)[49]

There is another dimension to acting (and the Actor's Paradox) that Bakhtin ignored: the fact that an actor's representation of a character has to be performed many times, but that it must not be a repetition. It is one thing to create a character in rehearsal, quite another to sustain it in repertoire for a number of years. Stanislavsky argues that experiencing is a means of repeatedly realising a character and keeping it alive in each performance: Carnicke quotes an unpublished manuscript where he notes that 'it is necessary to experience the role, that is, to have the sensation (*obschushchat'*) of its feelings, every time and on every repetition of creativity'[50]. While Bakhtin wrote of finished moments of artistic creation, Stanislavsky was describing a process.

All these terms (*perezhivanie, vchuvstvovanie, obschushchat'*) centre upon a distinction between intellectual abstraction and personal, concrete engagement in the life of the character. 'In a word, you must make sure you do not approach a new role in the abstract, as to a third person, but concretely, as to yourself, your own life.'[51] Stanislavsky advises that it is essential to 'define, that is, feel what you, as a human being, would do in real life if you found yourself in the character's situation, given circumstances. You will be guided by your own human feelings, your own life-experience.'[52] As the passage below indicates, the actor is being asked not to imitate a role in the third person, but to experience it in the first person.

> As yourself you experience a role, as someone else you imitate it. As yourself, you understand the role with your intelligence, wants, and all the elements of your mind, but as someone else, in the majority of cases, only with your intelligence. We do not need exclusively rational analysis and understanding.[53]

6

Does this mean that there is a complete identification with the character? In several passages Stanislavsky argued that the actor had to merge with the character. When playing Stockman in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People,* 'Stockman's mind and body and Stanislavski's mind and body came together as one being'[54]. Stanislavsky used the Russian word *slianie* (meaning fusion or merging) and his literary amanuensis Lybova Gurevich added that 'the main attraction and quality of art is in such *fusion* with others', adding that this too was 'a Tolstoyan concept'[55]. Jean Benedetti's translation of *An Actor's Work* also uses the word 'merging': 'Understand that you must behave like the character in the given circumstances and according to his social standing. We call this merging with the role *the sense of oneself in the role and the role in oneself.*'[56] Clearly, this merging or co-experiencing distinguishes truthful acting from external imitation. But is there no aesthetic distance between the actor and the role in the sense that Bakhtin described?

'DOUBLE LIFE' IN STANISLAVSKY AND BAKHTIN
Carnicke stated above that experiencing allows the actor to 'evaluate' their performance, and Whyman makes the same point that actors can '*experience* and observe themselves at the same time'[57]. Stanislavsky quotes his hero, the Italian actor Tomasso Salvini (1829 – 1915), on how the actor observes their performance: 'The actor loves, weeps, laughs onstage but weeping or laughing he observes his laughter and tears. And it is in that double life, that balance between life and the role that art lies.'[58] Stanislavsky himself noted how an actor when in the correct creative state 'has no difficulty in splitting himself in two, i.e. on the one hand he corrects something which is wrong and, on the other, continues to live his role'[59].

Although it appeared that Stanislavsky was against any form of analysis, he quotes Salvini's description of how he monitors his own performance: 'When I am acting, I live a double life, I laugh and weep and at the same time analyse my laughter and tears, so that they can touch the hearts of those I wish to move deeply'[60]. So, while there was discussion of the actor merging with the character, Carnicke also points out that this can also be interpreted as a doubling: 'He uses hyphens to yoke the "human being" with the "actor" (*chelovek-akter*) and the "actor" with the character (*artist-rol*) typographically connecting the experience of the performing actor with that of the person and role.'[61] Two quotations make quite clear that Stanislavsky did demand that the actor maintain some distance from the role:

> This does not mean that while he is on stage the actor must be subject to some kind of hallucination, that he must lose, while he is acting, the consciousness of surrounding reality, accept the canvas as real trees, etc. On the contrary, a part of his consciousness must remain free from the trammels of the play in order that it exercise some supervision over whatever he is feeling and doing as he plays out the part of his character.[62]

The crucial part of the argument is that a part of the actor's 'consciousness must remain free' to 'exercise some supervision over whatever he is feeling and doing'. Another example of this double consciousness is when Stanislavsky was acting Stockman and had to draw on 'my double, the actor and stage director that resided in me', because, 'I wanted all the more to say my speech as sincerely as it was given me so that the spectator might be more excited than he was, that he might be all the angrier at Stockman and love Stockman all the more for his childlike truthfulness.[63] A degree of outside-ness is necessary since a total identification would be aesthetically (and psychologically) catastrophic for both actor and audience. Stanislavsky points out that the actor must not break down physically when conveying powerful emotions - this should be left to the audience, and then 'the spectator is more upset than the artist and the artist preserves his powers to direct them where he most needs them to convey *the life of the human spirit.*[64]

The actor experiences two times on stage, the fictional time represented (if the play is in the realist tradition) and the performance time of the representation, the 'two hours' traffic of our stage'. The performing of the role is guided by the interplay between these two temporal perspectives, a process that Stanislavsky describes in Chapter 20 of *The Actor's Work, '*Perspective of the Actor and the Role'.

> The character knows nothing about perspective, or his future, while the artist must always have it in view, that he must bear in mind the perspective. […] Hamlet must not know his fate and the end of his life, but the artist must see the whole perspective the whole time, otherwise he will not be able to order, colour, shade and shape the different parts.[65]

There is a long passage in *Author and Hero* devoted to Rhythm where Bakhtin defines this phenomenon of double time. He describes rhythm as being 'not an emotional-volitional reaction to an object and to meaning, but a reaction to that reaction.'[66] To explain this rather cryptic statement, let us take the example of playing Hamlet: the actor must decide how he will play Hamlet's 'emotional-volitional reaction' to his father's death and his mother's over-swift re-marriage. The actor's decision about how to pitch the emotional arc of Hamlet is what Bakhtin means by a 'reaction to a reaction'; it is the actor/author's reaction to the character's reaction. Bakhtin explains that 'the author-contemplator always encompasses the whole temporally, that is, he is always later, and not just temporally later, but later in meaning.'[67] Once again, the distance is necessary for the author-contemplator to understand what they have experienced. The time of the author and actor is a time in which they make sense of the life of the character. For Bakhtin this about the production of meaning, for Stanislavsky, as ever, this is about the practicalities of a theatre performance, how to create an 'entire plan for the role'. When playing Othello

> …the artist must remember that he has to play many similar, ever mounting moments of passion right through to the end of the play. It is dangerous to play the first scene too intensively, and not hold back for his growing jealousy. Wasting mental energy ruins the entire plan for the role. We need to be economical and sparing and never forget the climax of the play. Artistic emotion is measured in ounces not in pounds.[68]

Of course this is only one half of the actor's consciousness, the other being taken up with experiencing the ethical and act-performing life of Othello as an embodied hero.

Although there is a deal of common ground between Bakhtin and Stanislavsky when it comes to understanding the temporal relation of the actor/author and the character, there remain major differences. In his early philosophy Bakhtin's 'double' time consists of the contingent time of the living person-who-will-be-hero and the finished time of the image of the hero's life. He has not yet included the reader as that interpretative and therefore dynamic figure who will carry on and carry off the meaning of a work into areas unthought of by the author. This will come in his writings about the novel in the 1930s. Bakhtin's seemingly poor grasp of stage production means that he would not recognise that an actor has to be doubly creative: firstly in bringing a character to life in rehearsal, then in sustaining that life throughout each successive performance.

CONCLUSION: IMAGE AND HUMAN BEING

Although Bakhtin and Stanislavsky might disagree as to why and how one creates a character, both agree on the importance of the notion of character itself. And there are other points of agreement: that the process is about a dialogue between the actor/author and the character, and that it is 'a struggle with himself'; that truth of the characterisation lies in its being rooted in reality rather than fiction; and, as a corollary to this last point, that empathy has a central role in creating a character. Meaning and value are experienced through the vehicle of a character, are focused on particular (images of) human beings, and this embodied truth has nothing to do with the general truths and meanings arrived at through thinking.

One difference in their approaches lies in their points of departure. Bakhtin's is a theory of authoring rather than authorship. Authoring is about the relationship between I and other where one person authors another as a hero and thus redeems them from the contingency of everyday life. Bakhtin is concerned to create an image which in its totality renders a person's life intelligible. He insists that 'Once you annihilate the moment constituted by the life of a mortal human being, the axiological light of all rhythmic and formal moments will be extinguished.'[69] Put more simply, if an author removes 'the life of a mortal being' from a character then it loses all value and life. Stanislavsky described the actor's work as the 'creation of the life of the human spirit in a role and the communication of that life onstage in an artistic form'[70]. The end of the actor's work is the creation of what Bakhtin calls 'the life of a mortal being'. There is a cross-wise movement in both men's approach to character: Bakhtin begins with a living being and ends with a verbal image of a hero; Stanislavsky begins with a verbal image of a role and ends with a human being. Both theories include a living moment: for Bakhtin it is that past 'life of a mortal being', for Stanislavsky it is in the present moment of embodying 'that life onstage'. Stanislavsky's character is a construct that unfolds over time, while Bakhtin's is protected from any temporal contingency. There are other differences, the first of which lies in why they wrote their books. Bakhtin's was an attempt at creating a phenomenological philosophy focused upon ways

of accounting for the meaning of living experience. Stanislavsky was trying to understand how acting could be considered a legitimate artform. For Bakhtin the actor – and theatre more generally - was a source of metaphor for understanding relations between author and role.

For all that Bakhtin's primary interest was not theatre his early writings could make a valuable contribution to our understanding of characterisation. He makes us re-examine the question of empathy in the creation of a character: to what degree is the moment of empathy separate or separable from the moment of aesthetic creation? Is (as Stanislavsky seems to suggest) empathy already a form of understanding? Both men understand the necessary difference between the time and space of the actor and the time and space of the role. Bakhtin's comments about character make us return again to the ever-productive Actor's Paradox.

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