

**THE TEMPERAMENT MASKS OF MIKE CHASE:
THEORY AND PERFORMANCE**

Mike Chase'in Mizaç Maskeleri: Kuram ve Performans

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Abstract

The chief purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of the temperament masks of Mike Chase who is a renowned mask-maker and performer based in England. Chase's decades-long dedication to devising and performing with masks have resulted in a multi-layered engagement in mask performance with his mask forms ranging from *commedia dell'arte* masks to planetary masks. Focusing on the numerous strategies Chase utilises, this study employs a two-fold approach: after providing a general overview of Chase's methods regarding his mask practice, it presents my diary notes on a mask workshop held by Chase in Stroud on 13-15 January, 2017. By combining theoretical information with my personal observations on Chase's mask practice, this study aims to illustrate a thorough portrayal of Chase's professional approach to masks in his profession.

Keywords: Mask, Mike Chase, Four Temperaments, Mask Workshop.

Öz

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, İngiltere'de yaşayan tanınmış maske ustası ve sanatçısı Mike Chase'in mizaç maskeleri hakkında bir fikir oluşturmaktır. Chase'in kendini on yıllar boyunca maske tasarımına ve tiyatrosuna adanmış olması *commedia dell'arte* maskelerinden gezegen maskelerine kadar farklı biçimlerde çok katmanlı bir uğraş halini almıştır. Chase'in kullandığı muhtelif stratejilere odaklanarak bu çalışmada iki bölümlü bir yaklaşım kullanılmaktadır: Chase'in maske pratiğinde kullandığı yöntemlerin genel bir tanıtımı yapıldıktan sonra 13-15 Ocak 2017 tarihleri arasında Stroud'da Chase tarafından düzenlenen bir atölye çalışması üzerine almış olduğum notlar sunulacaktır. Kuramsal bilgi ile Chase'in maske pratiği üzerine kişisel gözlemlerimi bir araya getiren bu çalışma Chase'in uzmanı olarak maskeye yaklaşımının bütüncül bir resmini sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Maske, Mike Chase, Dört Mizaç, Maske Atölyesi.

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I. Introduction

This essay sets out to disclose and discuss the particular method Mike Chase – a leading mask maker and practitioner living in England – adopts in devising his temperament masks and using them in his performance practice. In unfolding his strategies, this study employs a two-layered approach: first, a general overview of Chase’s methods regarding his mask practice will be provided, and then this theoretical basis will be followed by my diary notes on a mask workshop held by Chase in early January, 2017. By combining theoretical information with my observations on Chase’s mask practice, this study aims to illustrate a thorough portrayal of Chase’s professional approach to his temperamental masks and mask practice. The style of writing in the first part of this study is informed by academic standards while the second part is written in a more casual tone in order to be able to reflect my immediate response to the workshop process, which also complies with the experiential and personal nature of any encounter with masks.

II. Contemporary Mask Practice in Europe

Before examining the temperamental masks of Mike Chase, it will be useful to give a brief survey of the historical context in which he has devised and developed his masks. Masks are ubiquitous: it is a well-known fact that they have been used by different cultures in not totally dissimilar ways to serve manifold purposes such as trance, protection, imitation and empowerment. From what has begun as being indispensable constituents of primitive rituals serving primarily the purpose of magic, masks have secured themselves a central place in many forms of traditional theatre in countries ranging from Japan, China, India, Korea, Nigeria, and Italy. In European theatre, masks have most famously been utilized in the Christian mystery plays of the medieval period as well as in the Italian popular theatre form, *commedia dell’arte*, which depends highly on leather masks in building its characters.

Beginning from the early 20th century, masks have re-emerged in the field of performance and theatre in Europe and reclaimed their place a couple of centuries after they had somewhat disappeared. While the initiative behind this return remains relatively uncertain, it seems to be at least partly related to the British actor and director Edward Gordon Craig’s call for a symbolic expression in theatre at the beginning of the 20th century, which, he thought, would be possible through a rigorous physical training for the actors. Criticizing actors as mere imitators who cannot attain the level of artistry required for their profession, Craig (1908) proposes a style of acting which studiously avoids getting under the skin of the part and is instead dedicated to getting out of the skin of the part (p. 5). One of the ways of achieving this acting goal, Craig suggests, is by means of donning masks. Underlining the extraordinary capacity of masks in effecting change, he describes them as “*that paramount means of dramatic expression, without which acting was bound to degenerate*” (Craig cited in Innes, 1998, p. 266). Craig’s vision of a reformed theatre defined exclusively by the creativity of actors who

were, in their turn, physically trained to rid themselves of imitation, was put into practice for the first time by Jacques Copeau, a contemporary of Craig. Despite their harsh criticism of each other, it was Copeau who actually put into practice what Craig proposed as an ideal form of theatre (Chamberlain and Yarrow, 2001, pp.7-9). In his physical training for actors, just as Craig suggested, masks have a central importance, which is underlined when Copeau talks about the relation between the actor and the mask:

“No sooner has he put it on than he feels an unknown being spread into his veins of whose existence he had no suspicion. It is not only his face which is modified, it is his entire being, the very nature of his reflexes where feelings are already performing themselves that he was equally incapable of feeling or feigning when bare-faced...even the tone of his voice will be dictated by his mask.” (as cited in Rudlin, 1994, p. 36).

Copeau’s approach to masks is one which involves a process wherein the actor can reach beyond the inhibitions that prevent her/him from a true transformation. In realising this process, the mask was extensively used by Copeau in improvisations making it an indispensable tool for actor training.

Another leading mask practitioner, Jacques Lecoq, acknowledges the influence of Jacques Copeau to whose work he was introduced by Copeau’s son-in-law, Jean Dasté (Lecoq, 2000, p.5). Lecoq borrowed from Copeau his noble mask among other aspects and renamed it as neutral mask which is used to *“enable one to experience the state of neutrality prior to action, a state of receptiveness to everything around us, with no inner conflict”* (Lecoq, 2000, p. 177). The use of neutral mask in actor training and improvisations is today one common element shared by most mask practitioners, and it was Lecoq who popularised its use in theatre circles via his school, École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq, founded in 1956. Lecoq’s school has been operational for more than 60 years now and many actors and theatre practitioners, who graduated from there, have spread around Lecoq’s acting theories in which masks occupy an integral place.

III. Mike Chase as a Mask-maker and Practitioner

While Jacques Lecoq’s influence is the most acknowledged factor on the re-emergence of mask all around Europe and beyond today, nuances in the forms and styles of masks created and used in performance by many mask practitioners should also be noted. For instance, there are mask practitioners such as the British performer and trainer Olly Crick whose mask practice principally draws on *commedia dell’arte*. Mike Chase’s mask practice is quite eclectic, taking from varying mask traditions in the world. He is one of the most renowned mask makers in England today and a mask practitioner with a special interest in psychodrama and self-development.

Through a chance meeting with a mime artist, Chase took an interest in masks starting from the early 1980s when he performed as a flute player in the

streets of Florence. Since then, he has worked for or founded several mask theatre companies such as The Unfortunati, The Mask Studio and The Mask Academy. He also served as the artistic director of the Glasshouse Art Centre for fifteen years where he devised masks to use in therapy for young adults with complex needs. Recently, he has been using masks and psychodrama with violent offenders at a high-security democratic therapeutic prison.

Chase's interest in masks is rooted in an unceasing fascination with the human faces which, for instance, served as sources for his drawing exercises in his teenage years (Chase, 2017, p. 2). "*In the context of theatre,*" he explains, "*I have used masks to enhance theatrical performance by going beyond the style of psychological realism and into the realm of folk types, archetypes and spontaneous improvised theatre.*" (Chase, 2017, pp. 2-3). This agenda of exploring different styles in countering the dominance of forms of realism is, in fact, a common trigger that has initiated the journey into masks for many mask practitioners. As Sears A. Eldredge (1996) points out, various mask practitioners today have devoted themselves "to 'retheatricalize the theatre,' and the mask became symbolic of this antirealist movement (p. 12). Mike Chase, like many others, have explored and experimented with the mask in order to invite back theatricality—one vital aspect that defines what theatre is.

While Chase both devises and utilizes masks ranging from Greek, neutral, *commedia dell'arte* and Bali masks, his relatively more authentic ideas about masks can be grouped in two main categories: planetary masks and temperament masks. His planetary masks are based on the seven planetary seals designed by the Austrian founder of Anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner, in the form of columns that illustrate the influence of planets on the earth. Rooted in the theories of Empedocles, Hermes Trismegistus and Hippocrates, the temperament theory is based on the theory of four humours which suggests that there are four fluids – blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile – that determine one's personality traits. Unless the very rare perfect balance of these fluids in the human body is achieved, a person will suffer from an excessive amount of one of these fluids, which then results in imperfections in personality. The excessive amount of each fluid brings about a different personality type grouped in ancient times under the theory of four temperaments: choleric, melancholic, sanguine and phlegmatic.

The temperament theory's emphasis on personality types renders it useful for any approach that focuses on human personality. To Chase (2017), the temperament theory may be used as "*a tool to understand the self, relationships and behaviour, managing a classroom, training actors for the stage, mask makers for the theatre and design, mask using as a professional development process in education, business, therapy and theatre performance*" (pp. 8-9). The theory, as Chase's words suggest, may be used as a point of departure or basis for analysing and exploring the human character in varying fields of life.

Chase goes on to conclude that the exchange between masks and the theory of four temperaments is a mutually useful one:

“The four temperaments are an ordered whole offering on the one hand a cosmology that could benefit the making and using of masks, as they offer such clear descriptions of human nature. On the other hand, the activity of creating and using masks offers many opportunities to gain practical insights about the temperaments outside of a theoretical framework. The human body architecture, gesture and rhythm are clearly differentiated in the one-sidedness of each temperament.” (p. 12).

In theory, Chase’s ideas around using masks are promising in terms of developing a better understanding of the human personality and more importantly in improving or transforming the socially undesired or offensive behaviours. However, his idea of using the temperament theory in therapy and training remains somewhat floating and elusive without seeing it in practice. Accordingly, the next part of this study gives a detailed account of how Chase relates to practice by employing his ideas on the four temperaments.

IV. A Diary of a Weekend of Workshop: Mike Chase’s Temperament Masks

The workshop I have attended to have a better understanding of Chases’s approach to masks is exclusively about his temperament masks and the methods he has developed around them. Chase chooses as his workshop base the Hawkwood College in Stroud, England, and calls his workshop ‘An Exploration of Masks: The Four Temperaments’ which takes place on January 13-15, 2017. What follows is an account of my personal experience of partaking in this workshop in an attempt to highlight the most striking moments during the exercises with temperament masks.

January 13, 2017-Friday

(5.00 pm): Today I have arrived in Stroud to attend a weekend-long mask workshop at an adult education center—the legendary Hawkwood College. As the participants are expected to arrive by 4 pm, we will only have time for an introductory session today. The most intense training will be offered tomorrow over 4 sessions, 2 in the morning and 2 in the afternoon. On Sunday, we will have 3 sessions, by the end of which I am hoping I will have developed a clearer idea on Mike Chase’s temperament masks.

(9.30 pm): Following an all-organic supper with six others (one other will join us tomorrow) and Mike, we move to the building that houses the workshop gallery, take our seats in the lounge and introduce ourselves. There may only be a handful of us but we form quite a diverse group of actors, directors, academics, and drama therapists. After the brief introductory exchange, Mike invites us to move over to the room opposite which is where the workshop will be held for the next couple of days. We walk in and form a circle after which Mike invites us to clear or

neutralize our energy by sweeping it off our bodies using our hands. Then we start by trying a number of simple exercises: first we focus on imitating a yawn and then we try to make ourselves really yawn. The transition from imitating something to actually doing it is rather sudden and odd as my body responds before my mind, reminding me of Stanislavski's Torstov and how "*his inner faculties responded to the external image he had created.*" (Stanislavski, 2013, p. 4). This is an exercise that moves us closer to the sphere of acting by charging our bodies with a different streak of energy. More importantly, it also serves an educational purpose, giving a clue to mask acting: the mask is relational as yawning is contagious. As Mike reminds us through the philosophical question, 'if a tree falls in a forest and there is nobody around to hear it, does it make a sound?', one of the essential elements related to masks – as it is with any form of performance – is the audience. As others around me yawn, some very successfully, I feel more and more like yawning, which reinforces the key point of this session: we all exist in and are defined by a social and cultural context – both bodily and mentally – from which there is no escape.

After experiencing the contagious nature of yawning, we experiment with tiny facial alterations and movements such as raising eyebrows, moving our jaws forwards or back. We play with the impressions we create; and, to my surprise, the impressions each person makes are different as we naturally use our own repertory (of impressions). Speech is introduced afterwards. Creating facial movements, we speak about daily matters such as the type of transportation we used to get to Hawkwood College and what we had for breakfast in the morning. These exercises are followed by one of the participants putting on a full mask without having a chance to see the mask. She puts on the melancholic mask and, directed by Mike, starts to survey the response that she gets from each one of us. It is a mask that immediately arouses mixed feelings of pity and hostility in me when she turns to face me. The masked performer takes a moment to face each one of us, focusing directly on our faces. This is a widely-used technique in mask performances called 'clocking', "*a very specific style where the mask plays off the audience for its timing, almost as if the audience were a camera.*" (Wilsher, 2007, p. 132). The truth of the mix of disgust and aggression I feel is disturbing but it is very intriguing at the same time, as I am fully aware that it is a triggered emotion. The mask serves as a portal that engrosses my mind on the one hand and keeps me on the periphery on the other, producing a response of being both an insider and an outsider at the same time. The mask wearer captures the impression of the mask solely by observing the responses her mask evokes in us. Soon, her entire body language changes turning her into a crook-backed, endlessly contriving figure. Next, another group member puts on a rather happy-looking full-mask (the sanguine mask). At the sight of this mask, our postures and faces relax; the threatening effect of the previous mask vanishes at once. Soon the person in this mask also captures the personality of the mask simply by observing us responding

to him. This is a further step from the yawning exercise and one that establishes the mutual relation that is always at work between the environment and the individual.

We then experiment with half masks. As soon as the characters arise through the half-masked performers, we offer short sounds that would ideally match the characters of the masks. One syllable sounds are simultaneously hurled at the performers who repeat them in their own individual ways. At that point, Mike warns one of the masked persons not to come too close to the half circle we have formed; for the masks to achieve their full potential, we are informed, at least six feet of distance is needed between them and the audience. We then share our thoughts about this session. The overriding sense I have after this first session is that masks teach us about human communication. We respond to the facial impressions of the people around us because they secretly force out emotional responses; and even if this may not be a conscious response that we formulate by analysing others in depth, it is one that is most truthful as it is very prompt, almost instinctual.

January 14, 2017-Saturday

(12.30 pm): The purpose of the earlier session today is twofold: discovering the other and exploring the connection between our bodies and space. In moving toward this terrain, we initially engage in exercises through which we connect with each other, by holding hands, leaning on to each other and so on. Then we are introduced to neutral masks, both full and half versions, and explore them by using several strategies that entail connecting with the unmasked others or establishing connections between persons wearing neutral masks. With the neutral mask, it is a challenge to find the right rhythm and mood. The dominant feeling is one that could, perhaps, best be explained as feeling like an existence hanging in space because the neutral mask, at least in Lecoq's approach, starts by completely erasing past experience and is more focused on discovering the present or what is immediately presented to it. While the unmasked attendants remain seated in a line, I and another masked person are instructed to touch and feel the walls in front of us and then to become the walls, which leads us closer to ridding ourselves of any preconception or contemplation of how we should act with our neutral masks. It also suggests that we are an integral part of the space that surrounds us. Immediately after that, we are asked to gaze at the line of people that, Mike informs us, represent the external world. On absorbing the energy they channel to us, we face each other again. For a mask to produce an effect, the mask wearer has to establish connection with the audience annihilating the fourth wall to a certain extent. Through this act, we also revisit the way we interact, in the most basic form possible, within the world surrounding us.

In the following sessions, we learn about the temperament masks, primarily following Mike's slogans for each one of them and then experimenting with them. While, for instance, for the sanguine mask the defining statement is 'Wow! Look at that!', reflecting the enthusiasm the sanguine type feels for life, for the choleric, the

mantra is ‘This way! Follow me!’, because choleric is supposed to be a natural-born leader. In order to prepare us to get into character, Mike suggests physical exercises. For the melancholic, for instance, he describes an old lady carrying shopping bags. Firstly, he creates a visual image by telling us that she is passing through Gloucester with her bags, which look too heavy for her weak body. He then asks two people from the group to lie down on their backs beside him and stretch their hands to him. When they do, he grabs their hands firmly, trying to drag them along in the manner of how that old lady would carry her shopping bags. He then asks someone else to try and prevent him from walking by holding his ankles, which makes the bag carrying even more difficult for him. One last exercise, he informs us, could be to lower his head by pushing it down, a task another one of us takes on. At this point, it is extremely challenging for him to walk with the bags, and this is how the old lady would struggle with her shopping bags. He then asks us to work in two groups of 4 and to explore how we would walk like the old lady with shopping bags. It is extremely challenging of course, the imposed weight reinforcing the gravitational effect and making it impossible for one to keep positive. With the implementation of force from a number of directions, the mouth line too gives in to gravity and suddenly I feel negativity in full throttle rushing on to me. Hence, the melancholic inside is forced out.

In each of the four sessions today, we explore one temperament by experimenting with facial and bodily movements, gradually building the core feeling that matches the temperament; then we put on the full and half masks of that temperament and, on Mike’s instruction which offers a context for our actions, we slide into role. We also explore the counter-mask, which is acting against the core feeling of the mask. For instance, I wear the phlegmatic mask, the corresponding temperament being soft, positive and balanced but I am instructed to punish my dog with an imaginary stick because it has chewed my newly bought sofa. Inside the phlegmatic mask, I feel quite content and happy but, on Mike’s instruction, I manage to find a dormant punitive element in myself. On accessing that part of me, I become aware of the fact that there are layers of emotions within the core impression of a mask even though it may be overridingly defined by a single energy. To bring out the counter-mask is a challenge that expands the range of feelings symbolized by a mask, endowing it with a more lifelike quality.

January 15, 2017-Sunday

(11.30 am): Today we start off with warm-up exercises in the morning. We form a circle and assume there is warm water running in front of us so we wash our hands and bodies. We have, in fact, repeatedly used this exercise during these couple of days to get rid of the energy that already defines our body posture and movements, hindering the transition into new characters to explore new temperaments. Once the body is symbolically cleansed, there is a feeling that many possibilities lie ahead. Then Mike informs us that we are going to exercise with the dominant energies of all four temperaments. We work in pairs, charging each other

up with the strategies we have learned, to allow for a full experience of the temperaments. For instance, to drive out the choleric temperament, we face each other, standing like wrestlers trying to push at each other, which charges us with the core feeling of the mask.

The most important exercise of today is the last one, for which we are instructed to work in pairs, pull up a chair and take turns in discovering how we would ideally position the temperament masks around us. Knowing that this is a final confrontation with each mask, I want exactitude in my positioning of the masks: do I want this mask closer to me, at the side, at the front or at the back, facing me or the outside world? Once we have placed them the way we think they operate within our psyches, we are asked to step out and have a look at the layout from outside and make alterations if we feel like it. As strange as it is, this exercise gives me a picture of how I think my psyche is structured though, very possibly, that is just a wishful projection in reality. This exercise also provides closure for the workshop, offering us a practical outcome of the temperament masks in helping unfold – or at least come closer to – a deeper layer within the human psyche. Yet, it should also be noted that one vital element that is missing in this workshop on temperament masks is a sound theoretical approach. We are not given any historical or theoretical basis for the temperament masks. The lack of a psychoanalytical or educational purpose behind Mike's use of the temperament masks risks bringing out uncertainty and incomprehension. It is not very clear how to use this set of temperament masks in therapy, for instance, or how to make assessments based on the strategies we have exploited.

V. Conclusion

The exercises and strategies we have used during the workshop in forcing out personality traits certainly help with self-discovery to a certain extent but, without a clear schema, it would be hard to utilize these exercises in others' education or therapy. Nevertheless, considered in a wider arena, Mike Chase's set of temperament masks still offers a different perspective through which masks may be exploited and, therefore, is a contribution to the many possible uses of masks. It is possible to suggest that there is a certain resemblance between the temperament masks and the commedia masks, but there is arguably more scope for enhancement of characters with temperament masks compared to the masks of the classical *commedia dell'arte* tradition as the scope of a temperament may be extended further to include more complex feelings. Despite the suspicion that "*the number of 'personality types' that emerge in Mask work is pretty limited*" (Johnstone, 2007, p. 158), Chase's workshop has been helpful and thought-provoking in its implication that a temperament should not be limited to a single line of development. This suggests that there is still a lot of potential entailed in mask work that remains undiscovered and could enhance the limits of the personality types known to us, introducing the intricacies of the human personality to the humans.

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