



The Exploration of the Dynamic Relationship and Strategies between Actor Traits and Character Development

Yuxi Gao

China Federation of Radio and Television Associations, Beijing 100000, China

DOI: 10.32629/asc.v5i6.3436

Abstract: This article aims to explore in depth the core position of actor traits in drama creation, focusing on how directors skillfully utilize and enhance the uniqueness of actors to develop vivid and profound character images, while ensuring the artistic integrity and harmonious unity of the entire performance process. Through a detailed analysis of the intrinsic relationship between the personal traits of actors and the needs of their characters, this study aims to reveal how directors balance the natural expressions of actors with the requirements of character development in the guidance process, thereby achieving the maximum effectiveness of artistic creation.

Keywords: Artistic characteristics of performance; The integrity of performance arts; The first self and the second self; Method acting and expressionism acting; Improvisational performance

1. Introduction

In the field of theatrical art, the importance of actor traits as a bridge connecting creators and audiences is self-evident. How to accurately capture and cleverly utilize the unique traits of actors to develop character images that are both in line with the script and full of vitality, while ensuring the artistic integrity and depth of the entire performance process, is a challenge and issue that every director must face. The paper structure is divided into three parts. In the first part, the author will first delve into the essential characteristics of performance arts, including their creativity, immediacy, and interaction between actors and audiences, in order to reveal the complexity and necessity that directors face when dealing with actor traits. The second part of the paper will focus on the complex relationship between actors and their characters that is both contradictory and unified. The author will explore how can actors find a balance between their first self (personal identity and experience) and their second self (character identity and context) to achieve deep integration and transformation between themselves and their roles from multiple dimensions such as psychology, sociology, and aesthetics. The third part is the practical chapter of this paper. It will elaborate on the practical operational issues that directors face when dealing with the relationship between actor traits and characters, including but not limited to strategies for actor selection and character allocation, communication and guidance skills during rehearsals, and finding the best balance between maintaining actor traits and character requirements.

2. The core task of directors in drama creation: Analyzing and harmonizing the inner relationship between actor traits and character setting

2.1 Performance arts: Exploring the core and soul of dramatic art

When you step into that creative and expectant rehearsal room, you will see a vivid scene from the early stages of drama creation: actors holding a new script, sitting in a circle, and following the simple director's role assignment, they begin to read the lines in the play. The director's gaze shuttles between each actor, carefully observing their image, emotional state when reading aloud, and the style they may display on the future stage. This scene is not only a routine part of selecting actors in the early stages of the production team, but also a preliminary demonstration of the director's profound understanding of the traits and character relationships of the actors.

At this stage, the director is like a skilled craftsman with discerning eyes, trying their best to find the most suitable actor for each character, creating subtle resonance between the characters and the actors. This process, although seemingly natural, actually contains profound artistic philosophy and practical wisdom. It is not only a director's keen capture of actor traits, but also a profound understanding of the core position of performance arts in drama.

The "centrality" and "obedience" of performance arts are particularly important in this context. The so-called "centrality" does not refer to the superiority of performance arts over scripts, but emphasizes that in the secondary creation of performance arts, actors transform the words in the script into vivid stage images through their own emotional expression and body

language, directly touching the hearts of the audience. As a direct manifestation of theatrical art, performance arts carry the responsibility of conveying the thoughts of creators, evoking emotional resonance and rational thinking among audiences.

In the “centrality” of performance arts, we have to mention its dual functions: firstly, on the emotional level, through the actors’ exquisite performances, the audience can feel the pleasure of sensory and aesthetic enjoyment. Whether laughter or tears, they are direct manifestations of emotional release; Secondly, at the rational level, performance arts not only touch the emotions of the audience, but also aim to stimulate deep reflection on the theme of the work, so that the audience can not only satisfy their emotions, but also gain spiritual enlightenment and sublimation[1].

The “obedience” of performance arts refers to the actor’s need to obey the overall concept of the script and the director’s artistic guidance during the performance, integrating personal traits and talents into the character, and serving the development of the character and the overall expression of the drama. This “obedience” is not simply a compromise or sacrifice, but a product of deep communication and understanding between actors and directors, actors and characters, and is a necessary condition for the common pursuit of perfect presentation in theatrical art.

2.2 The integrity of performance arts: The director’s exquisite handling of actor traits and character relationships

In the hall of theatrical art, the integrity of performance art is undoubtedly an important criterion for measuring the success or failure of a work. This completeness is not only reflected in the faithful reproduction of the script, but also in how the director skillfully handles the relationship between the actor’s traits and the character, achieving harmony and unity on stage. “Centrality” and “obedience” are the two major characteristics of performance arts, which directors must deeply understand and grasp in the creation guidance process.

The “centrality” endows the performance arts with a central position in drama, requiring actors’ performances to convey the theme and ideas of the script intuitively and vividly, and touch the hearts of the audience. However, this “centrality” does not exist in isolation, but is built on the foundation of “obedience”. During the performance, actors must obey the overall concept of the script and the artistic guidance of the director, integrating their personal traits and talents into the character, serving the development of the character and the overall expression of the drama. The “obedience” is not only a respect for the script and director, but also an adherence to the natures of theatrical art.

Taking the heroic act of rehearsing Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar* with convicted criminals in the Italian theater industry as an example, actors are better able to communicate with their inner selves and characters in a long-term closed environment, thus exhibiting unimaginable artistic sensitivity. After keenly capturing this brand new performance, the director preserved it and achieved great success. This case vividly illustrates that under the premise of “obedience” to the script, the deep integration between actor traits and characters can create stunning artistic effects.

Of course, the integrity of performance arts also requires actors to maintain a relatively fixed form of expression and stage rhythm on stage to ensure the integrity and coherence of the performance. On this basis, actors can engage in appropriate improvisation and collaborate with their stage opponents to create vivid character images. However, improvisation is not a free expression, but requires the director to clarify the quality and control it to ensure that it does not affect the overall effect of the performance.

The contradiction between actors and characters is an eternal focus and focal point in theatrical art.[2] Each actor has their own unique traits and experiences, and each character also has their own specific personality and background. When dealing with this contradiction, the director needs to have a deep understanding of the intrinsic connection between the actor and the character, find the point of fit between the two, and enable the actor to perfectly integrate into the character while maintaining their own traits. This process not only tests the director’s keen insight and profound artistic skills, but also poses an ultimate challenge to the actor’s performance ability.

The integrity of performance arts requires directors to respect the “centrality” of performance arts and give actors sufficient freedom and vitality when dealing with the relationship between actor traits and roles; Emphasis should also be placed on “obedience” to ensure that the actors’ performances conform to the overall concept of the script and the director’s artistic guidance. At the same time, directors also need to have a deep understanding of the contradictions between actors and characters, find a balance point between the two, and enable actors to create vivid and lively character images on stage. Only in this way can we ensure the integrity of the performance arts and present a wonderful and unparalleled theatrical feast to the audience.

3. The tension between actor traits and role development: Exploring the eternal contradictions and fusion strategies in dramatic performance

3.1 The creative characteristics of actors: The artistic charm of personalized performance and the unity of time and space

In the practice of theatrical performance, we often encounter situations where the same character is performed by different actors, which triggers the audience's comparison and discussion of different performance versions. The root of this phenomenon lies in the uniqueness of actors' creative characteristics, especially the special features of actors in performance arts where creators, creative tools and materials, and works are all integrated into one actor. This characteristic constitutes the fundamental contradiction between actors and characters, allowing each actor to create a unique stage character image when playing the same role.

The creative personality of an actor is the unique performance style and artistic concept formed through long-term artistic practice. This personality is not only reflected in the actor's understanding and interpretation of the character, but also in their performance skills and emotional expression. Therefore, when different actors play the same role, they will shape and interpret the character differently according to their own creative personality, thus presenting diverse stage images. This diversity is precisely the charm of theatrical art, which enables every audience to find their own "king" in theatrical performance.

In addition to the uniqueness of their creative personalities, actors' creative characteristics are also reflected in the temporal and spatial unity of their theatrical character images. The images of stage characters gradually appear in the stage's time and space, directly attracting the audience's visual and auditory senses, and having a vivid and intuitive artistic effect. The creative process of actors is based on the life logic and imagination of their characters during rehearsal, and is objectively tested by the live audience during the performance. Any reaction from the audience can affect the actor's performance, and this feedback indicates that the audience is also involved in the process of shaping the stage image.

It is precisely because of the changes in time and space and the changes in audience reactions that different types of actors will have different performances on stage, and the roles they develop will also change accordingly. This change is not only reflected in the actor's grasp and expression of the character's emotions, but also in the communication and interaction between the actor and the audience. Actors must have the ability to communicate directly or indirectly with the audience to adapt to various theater conditions and audience needs. At the same time, actors also need to improvise and adjust their performance appropriately according to the audience's feedback, in order to ensure the integrity and artistic effect of the stage image.

During the performance, the actor will wander between the first self (actors themselves) and the second self (characters). This state of detachment is another manifestation of the creative characteristics of actors. Actors need to fully integrate into their characters while maintaining their own traits, making them a part of themselves. However, this integration is not simply imitation or replication, but requires actors to creatively interpret based on a deep understanding of the character's personality and background, combined with their own creative personality and performance skills.

Directors should respect the creative personality of actors and give them ample freedom and room for expression; At the same time, the director also needs to guide the actors to deeply research the characters, grasp their personality traits and emotional changes, in order to ensure the accuracy and vividness of the stage image. Only in this way can they create character images that meet the requirements of the script and have unique artistic charm, presenting a wonderful and diverse theatrical feast for the audience.

3.2 The first self and the second self: The guiding role of directors in the relationship between actor traits and characters

In theatrical art, the director's handling of the relationship between actor traits and roles is essentially dealing with the complex relationship between the first self (actors themselves) and the second self (characters). This relationship is not only related to the actor's performance concept, but also directly affects how the actor creates and develops the character images. Therefore, when guiding actors, directors must clarify two basic points in order to construct the correct performance concept.

Firstly, the correct performance is not completely immersed in the second self, although this state can bring great pleasure, it is often short-lived and difficult to sustain. As described in *An Actor's Work*, the state of being completely captured by the script and living within the character is idealized, which even great artists find difficult to achieve at all times. Therefore, the correct performance should be one where the actor maintains a clear grasp and control while fully immersing themselves in emotions during the creative process. Actors need to showcase their similarities with their characters while suppressing

their contradictions, refining and processing them to ultimately meet the roles' requirements[3].

In theatrical performance, the contradiction between the first self and the second self is inevitable. However, it is precisely the existence of these contradictions that drives actors to constantly explore and grow in their performances. When dealing with this contradiction, the director should unify it within the character that the actor wants to play, so that the actor can perfectly integrate into the role while maintaining their own characteristics, creating a vivid stage character image.

In addition, the method acting and expressionism acting approaches in theatrical performance are also important factors in dealing with the relationship between the first self and the second self. The method acting approach emphasizes that actors should deeply experience the emotions and inner world of their characters in order to achieve a high degree of unity with them; On the other hand, the expressionism acting approach focuses more on the actor's grasp and expression of the characters' external characteristics. Although these two acting approaches focus differently, their common goal is to help actors better shape their characters and achieve a harmonious unity between their first and second selves.

3.3 The debate between method acting and expressionism acting: An analysis of the two major acting approaches of theatrical performance

Stanislavski provided an in-depth exposition of method acting and expressionism acting in his works, providing important theoretical basis for our understanding of these two major theatrical performance approaches. As an important genre in theatrical performance, the core concept of method acting is that actors achieve a subconscious creative state of nature through conscious psychological techniques. It emphasizes that actors should think, hope, aspire, and act on stage just like the characters themselves, in order to create the spiritual life of the characters and convey it in the form of art on stage. The method acting approach pursues a deep integration between actors and characters, requiring actors to re-experience the emotions of their characters every time they perform, in order to achieve a realistic and vivid performance effect.

Relatively speaking, the expressionism acting approach focuses more on the actor's grasp and expression of the character's external form. It believes that actors should discover the external form of emotions naturally expressed through one or several experiences of the character, and learn to mechanically repeat this form through well-trained muscles. Expressionism acting emphasizes the accurate portrayal of character images and exquisite artistic presentation by actors. It requires actors to maintain a certain distance during performance and observe and portray their characters objectively.

However, whether it is method acting or expressionism acting, experience is an indispensable part of the performance process. Actors must deeply experience the emotions and inner world of their characters when creating them, in order to accurately grasp their personality traits and emotional changes.

In the theatrical education, attention more be paid to cultivating method acting, hoping that students can maintain a devout experiential state and deeply explore the inner world of their characters. This educational approach helps cultivate students' emotional expression and role development abilities, enabling them to authentically reproduce the emotions and lives of their characters in performances. However, this does not mean that the importance of expressionism acting has been overlooked. In practice, actors often need to integrate method acting and expressionism acting approaches to achieve the best performance stages[4].

4. Director's artistic regulation: Strategy and methodology - exploring the path of effectively integrating actor traits and character setting

4.1 The basis for directors to balance actor traits and character requirements: deep exploration and practical wisdom

The author believes that the main basis for directors to balance the contradiction between actor traits and character requirements is rooted in the "obedience" characteristic of performance arts. "Obedience" is like the need for commanders to clarify regulations and powers in military camps, is the cornerstone of ensuring the integrity of performance arts. When directors practicing, how to maintain a clear overall perspective is crucial, and the harmony and unity of the whole performance should not be influenced by the local excellence brought by the actor's traits. The director needs to be like a helmsman, leading the entire creative team while respecting the characteristics of the actors and ensuring that the performance does not deviate from the artistic path.

The director's job is based on the re-creation of the script, so when dealing with the relationship between actors and characters, the script must be the guiding principle. The script is the soul of theatrical creation, providing the basic framework for character personality, plot development, and background setting. In the book *Hollywood's Golden Age*, Quentin's collaboration with Jimmy Fox vividly demonstrated how the director uses the script as a basis to guide actors to deeply

understand the characters. Quentin, through the description of specific situations and analysis of character psychology, helped Jimmy break free from his self-centered performance and more accurately grasp the growth process and inner world of Django as a character.

The background and facts provided by the script are valuable materials that have been tested by life, and they are the capable assistants of the directors and actors. Respecting the script means respecting the laws of artistic creation and also respecting the audience's expectations for the theatre. Under this premise, directors and actors can be more sincere and authentic in their creative work, thus achieving artistic goals with half the effort. However, the information provided by the script is limited, and a good director will provide more guidance to the actors based on the script, helping them achieve a deeper level of unity with the characters.

Quentin's inspiration for Jimmy lies in his creative wisdom that extends infinitely from the script. He not only used language descriptions, but also visual methods such as drawing to help Jimmy better understand the character's position and growth trajectory in the script. This method of inspiration based on the script not only respects the authority of the script, but also fully utilizes the director's creativity and imagination[5].

Of course, when dealing with the actor traits, directors should also remember that actors are the "microphones" that convey their artistic ideas. The performance of an actor is a concrete manifestation of the director's artistic conception, so the director needs to always keep in mind the thoughts and emotions they want to express, and accurately convey them to the audience through the actor's performance.

The basis for directors to balance the actor traits and the roles requirements includes a profound understanding of the characteristics of performance arts, respect and exploration of scripts, and respect and guidance for the actor traits.

4.2 How to develop characters and protect and inspire their creativity by using actor traits

In theater and film creation, directors should uphold a respectful and protective attitude when dealing with the relationship between actor traits and roles, cleverly utilizing actor traits to create diverse character images. The actor traits, as their innate personality features and accumulated life experiences, are invaluable resources in developing characters. Directors should not make hasty evaluations of actor traits or simply assess the likelihood of a certain actor successfully portraying a certain character. Instead, they should delve deeper and fully utilize these traits to inject unique vitality into the character.

Actors' performances on set stage and in theater stage are not just a skillful display, but also a process of experiencing and development their characters with their lives. Therefore, directors need to have a high degree of sensitivity and empathy, constantly paying attention to the psychological state of actors and creating a safe and comfortable creative environment for them. Any subtle movement can have a subtle impact on an actor's psyche, which in turn affects their performance. Directors should help actors overcome psychological barriers and fully unleash their creativity through active communication, patient guidance, and timely encouragement[6].

When shaping characters by using actor traits, directors need to have keen insight and rich imagination. They should delve into the inner actor traits, such as personality, temperament, experiences, etc., and cleverly combine these traits with character needs to create character images that meet the requirements of the script and have unique charm. For example, for an introverted and emotionally sensitive actor, the director can guide him/her to shape a character with a complex inner world and rich emotions, showcasing the character's inner world through delicate performances.

At the same time, directors should also pay attention to protecting the creativity of actors. During rehearsals and performances, the director should encourage actors to boldly try and innovate, and not overly adhere to the script or the director's predetermined framework. When actors propose new ideas or creativity, the director should give them full attention and consideration, and integrate them into the creation where possible. This open and inclusive creative atmosphere helps to stimulate actors' creativity, making them more confident and brilliant in their performances.

When dealing with the relationship between actor traits and characters, directors should respect and protect the actor traits, and cleverly create rich and diverse character images by using these traits.

5. Conclusion

At the end of this paper, it is necessary to emphasize a crucial point that in theatre creation, the director's use of actor traits should be based on sincerity and respect. Theatre, as a profound and complex artistic form, its charm lies in its ability to explore and showcase the multifaceted human natures, rather than simply associate actor traits with creature images or stereotypes. Positioning lively actors as "monkeys" or letting dull actors imitate "bears" not only ignores the uniqueness and creativity of actors as individuals, but also devalues the value of theatrical art itself, turning it into a tool to cater to the audience's low-level tastes. In the current era of rampant materialism and profit-driven development, the theater industry is also facing various challenges and temptations. However, as theater workers, we should adhere to the purity of art, uphold

the belief that “theatrical art is the most sublime and supreme”, and not be influenced by the complex world.

References

- [1] Liang Bolong, Li Yue. *Fundamentals of Drama Performance* [M] Beijing: Culture and Arts Publishing House, 2002.
- [2] He Xiaoxue. An Analysis of the Relationship between Actors and Characters “Drama House” Issue 08, 2017.
- [3] *Stanislavsky’s Complete Works*, Stanislavsky, Volume 3, China Film Publishing House.
- [4] Li Meiyong. A Brief Discussion on the Shaping of Character Images in Drama Performance [J] *Popular literature and art*, 2015, (05): 28.
- [5] Li Yandong. A Brief Discussion on the Role Creation of Drama Actors [J]. *Mass Literature*, 2014, (22): 188-189.
- [6] Liu Sheng, Dai Qiaoling. A Brief Discussion on the Creative Consciousness of Drama Actors [J] *Theatre House*, 2017, (24): 34.