

***Processes of Identification in Performing Artists:
A Transpersonal Perspective***

By Martie Steyn

Professional Development Foundation and University of Middlesex (London)

2015

ABSTRACT

Acting involves complex psychological processes. Performing artists often connect with varying degrees to the characters they portray, and the relationship between actor and character can be transformative and lasting. The dynamics involved in processes of identification for performing artists have not been widely researched and documented, and begs further inquiry for both for the benefit of the actor as well as those who work with performing artists.

As the author was intrigued by processes of identification, these were mapped through a research project. Existing ideas were compared with data collected from a group of performing artists, referencing existing literature from influential theatre figures such as Stanislavsky and Grotowski and psychological literature that examines identity aspects in performing artists. The data was analysed making use of Grounded Theory. First and second round interviews involved a group of students from a university who engaged with various questions to examine the underlying issues of identification. These experiences were mapped against the academic literature, and a third round of interviews was introduced, seeking to clarify concepts from the initial analysis.

It emerged there are distinct processes of identification that take place in performing artists, especially in instances where the actors were required to deliver emotional challenging characters or performances. These experiences can be recognised by their transformational and lasting effect on the actor. Such aspects of identification were observed primarily in four areas: identification of the actor with the character; identification of the actor with the audience; identification of the actor with the ensemble; and finally identification of the actor with the superconscious. These areas can also overlap or sometimes take place simultaneously. For the purpose of this study processes of identification were mapped and evaluated against how they impact the actor's ability to deliver a compelling and authentic performance.

INTRODUCTION

As a young actor studying towards a degree in the performing arts, I distinctly remember a time when I felt a growing concern for my own psychological wellbeing. With few limitations and even fewer inhibitions, I threw myself completely into every role I was given. At first with wild abandon, but as time progressed I also started thinking about my own experiences in the context of the characters I brought to life. I often pondered what happened to 'me' while I embodied the characters I played. Were the characters and their traits separate from me, or were they part of me; or perhaps an expression of something deeper and more universal?

In his famous work, *The Paradox of Acting*, (*Paradoxe sur le Comedien*), Denis Diderot (1783) argued that actors are not emotionally involved with their characters, but rather that they are cold and tranquil spectators to their own actions on stage. The paradox lies in the fact that the actor should always convincingly maintain the illusion, yet remain in complete control of his own emotions at all times. Diderot felt that the actor's performance could be more consistent, and more compelling if the performer, through aesthetic distance, managed control of his own feelings while evoking feelings from the audience. For Diderot, onstage character-emotions and the emotions experienced in daily life by the actor were fundamentally different.

Yet, there are also views that differ radically from that of Diderot. Stanislavsky, and his pioneering investigations into the art of the actor, is remarkable for their depth, breath, coherence and influence (Wain, 2005) and it is suggested that no other individual had such a profound impact on an art form as Stanislavsky had on theatre. Stanislavsky suggested that, rather than engage in mechanical representational acting, the actor should engage in the theatre of *experiencing* which implies the full embodiment of the human being. Grotowski, on the other hand, experimented with methods of acting that involved evoking images that are deeply rooted in the collective imagination and unconscious; ideas that originated from the thoughts of well-known psychologist Carl Jung.

While the journey of the actor is largely in pursuit of an emotionally moving, authentic performance, the work of the actor is also in many ways a journey of self-discovery. Actors seek to understand why people do the things they do. They study the range of human behaviour to unravel the hidden motivations behind people's actions. In this way, the very nature of the actor's work is a process of identification to a degree. Whether actors actually progress to identifying their self-concept with that of the character, or they merely represent a fictional character onstage, was the central theme of this study. In her work on Acting Emotions, Elly Konijn (1997) aptly articulates the dilemma of the actor: should the actor deliver his performance with the head – technique – or with heart – emotions and involvement? To what degree can the actor keep a distance between himself and the character as opposed to becoming involved and identifying with the character?

IDENTIFICATION FROM A TRANSPERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Transpersonal Psychology can be defined as *“An approach to psychology that 1) studies phenomena beyond the ego as context for 2) an integrative / holistic psychology; this provides the framework for 3) understanding and cultivating human transformation”* (Friedman & Hartelius, 2013). Identification on the other hand is a process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property, or attributes to other, and is transformed wholly or partially by the model the other provides (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). Seen from a transpersonal perspective, processes of identification become interesting when viewed through the lens of the self-concept as this relates closely to processes of identification for the performing artist.

Since the father of American psychology, William James (1842 – 1910), first developed a theory of self, the discipline of psychology has continued to actively pursue the dimensions of this elusive and evolving concept. According to James, the self can be divided into two categories – ‘Me’ and ‘I’. ‘Me’ refers to the aspects of someone that comes from that person's experiences. This is further broken down into the ‘Material Self’, The ‘Social Self’

and the 'Spiritual Self'. The Material Self consists of things we belong to, or things that belong to us such as family, our bodies and money. The Social Self refers to who we are in a given situation – a man may be one person at work, and another at home; or one could exhibit different behaviours depending on whether one is interacting with one's boss, or a co-worker. The Spiritual Self refers to who we are at our core, our most subjective and intimate self. The 'I' on the other hand is the thinking self – the soul of a person. This is the aspect of self that provides a thread of continuity between our past, present and future selves. The identity of 'I' arises from the continual stream of consciousness.

A contemporary of William James, Roberto Assagioli further developed the concept of self with the addition of the superconscious, the higher aspect of the unconscious. Assagioli (1993) argued that the existence of the superconscious does not need to be demonstrated; it is a direct experience like that of seeing a colour or hearing a sound. He believed that the superconscious can break through to the conscious mind in two ways – the first is 'descendant', which involves the bursting of superconscious elements into the conscious mind in the form of intuitive thoughts, sudden enlightenment or inspiration. Descendant experiences are often spontaneous or unexpected occurrences, but can also be as a result of deliberate invocation by the individual. Secondly, 'ascendant' experiences refer to the state where the individual deliberately raises his centre of consciousness (the 'I' that James referred to) to levels above the ordinary. It is the latter, this deliberate attempt to reach the superconscious, that is of interest when considering the processes actors engage in.

Assagioli believed to access the awareness of the superconscious one must first disidentify from feelings, thoughts, desires and sensations, and relinquish the sense of *being* any of them. This is different from suppressing the personality functions – disidentification implies detachment rather than disassociation. An experience of the superconscious can be characterised by the expansion or the enlargement of consciousness where the boundaries of the separate 'I' are transcended for a short while, and one has the feeling of being part of a greater consciousness; the feeling of being freed; empowerment; and finally awakening.

These feelings are also often accompanied by a lasting transformational effect and include feelings of bliss, joy, renewal, resurrection, or liberation.

THEATRE AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

The essential task of theatre is to give life to an archetype through the staging of a play. According to Wain (2005) archetypal experience is a strong thread in Western actor training and many acting schools use exercises drawn from spiritual traditions, humanistic psychology and the human potential movement. Stanislavsky was pioneering in this sense; he believed that development of the actor's capabilities also involves 'work on oneself'. From the onset, he saw theatre as a spiritual mission (Benedetti, 1999). He sought a theatre of *experiencing*. Stanislavsky lived during the Russian Silver Age, a time that was deeply influenced by western occult movements as well as the notion that the spiritually impoverished secular west could be nourished through eastern spirituality and mysticism. Stanislavsky cultivated the ideal of living in a state of simplicity and not charging for performances. Through the influence of Yogi Ramacharaka (Wain, 2005) in his theatre practice, Stanislavsky considered the connection between the unconscious, nature and the creative will. He believed that along with the mind and feelings, the actor must be able to develop his will; when an actor is able to achieve flow of creativity, this unseen energy can travel to and *infect* the audience. Stanislavsky believed the actor is in touch with life itself through his creative or expanded state, and he transmits energy to the audience by being in touch with all of his surroundings. This is the realm of the superconscious.

Grotowski (Schechner & Wolford, 1997) on the other hand looked at what he called 'essence'. Essence is not sociological – it does not come from an external source, nor can you learn it...it just *is*. It is that which sits behind the self-concept of the actor; the instinctive creative will. While Stanislavsky focused on the emotional state of the actor, and later on what he termed 'physical actions', Grotowski's work focused primarily on what he called the 'ripening' of the actor. Grotowski worked with his actors on the technique of the 'trance'

where the integration of the actor's psychic and bodily abilities take place so that his most intimate layers can emerge. For Grotowski, the word 'Performer' suggested a state of being. He made a literal link between tension in the actor's body and argued that intention is not just an emotional state, but rather it also exists at a muscular level in the body.

THE ACTOR AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

Carl Jung's (1959) thoughts on ego-identity are particularly relevant in relation to processes of identification for performers. Jung suggested that people identify almost entirely with aspects of themselves they deem acceptable – he called this the persona. This also implies that there are aspects to each individual that they deny – the shadow. Actors are required to acknowledge both the persona and shadow qualities of the characters they inhabit. It is very rare that a character will only exhibit one aspect – persona or shadow – during a single performance; usually characters exhibit a range of emotions. Thus, the actor must acknowledge and portray the character's persona and shadow qualities to deliver an authentic performance. W.E.B Du Bois (1903) first coined the term 'double consciousness' to describe the feeling as though one's identity is divided into several parts, making it difficult or impossible to have a unified identity. While he created the terms to describe race relations in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, the idea has profound implications for ego-states in performing artists.

In her book, *Acting Emotions*, Konijn (1997) investigates the notion of double consciousness in terms of three main acting styles by specifically looking at the actor and his emotions. The first is the style of involvement. The style of involvement strives for realism in the actor's portrayal of the character, and thus the actor himself must not be visible. In this style it is considered ideal that the actor is carried away by the piece, transcends his own will, and lives the part without noticing how he himself feels. Lee Strasberg, who developed 'The Method' from the work of Stanislavsky, demands immersion of the actor in the emotions of the character. While this approach may lead to a more believable performance, it also raises

questions of repeatability for the actor – how can the actor continue to experience the intensity of these emotions as new for every performance? The style of involvement is frequently referred to as ‘identification’ and suggests that the lines between the self-concept of the actor and that of the character become blurred.

The second style investigated by Konijn (1997) is the style of detachment. This style rejects the principle of identification of the actor with the character, and is most strongly associated with the work of Bertolt Brecht. This approach does not require emotional involvement of the actor with the character; rather the emphasis is on technical mastery over the portrayal of emotions, situations and motives. There is no suggestion that the actor is at one with the character, and both are explicitly shown.

Lastly, in the style of self-expression, the actor’s own authentic emotions take centre stage. This approach is most associated with the methods of Grotowski, and is often referred to as the ‘trance’. It suggests integration of the actor’s psychic and physical powers which emerge from his most instinctive self. The character becomes almost obsolete, and is used as an instrument to explore what is behind the everyday mask of the actor in order to expose it. However, while the actor makes use of his own emotions for the performance, he is still always distinguished from the audience in some way, suggesting that even this extreme form of identification there is still an experience of double consciousness – the actor as performer consciousness, and the actor as person consciousness.

USING GROUNDED THEORY AS A METHODOLOGY

The goal of any research study is the acquisition of new knowledge or information which benefits the field of inquiry (Braud, 1998). This research study aimed to explore processes of identification in performing artists for the purpose of understanding these processes, and to provide further insight for actors to engage more deliberately in these processes as part of their work.

To facilitate the study, Grounded Theory was selected as the methodology. Grounded Theory is a general qualitative research methodology that aims to arrive at a theoretical understanding of phenomena that is *grounded* in the data collected and analysed. It aims to seek out and conceptualise the latent social patterns and structures through the process of constant comparison. Grounded Theory was initially developed in response to the positivist approach that confined research data to information derived from sensory experience interpreted through rational, logical or mathematical treatments. It involves both the generation of theory, and doing social research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and the goal is to arrive at substantive theory, rather than grand theory (Gordon-Finlayson, 2009). While grand theory speculates on universal laws that govern human behaviour, substantive theory applies within the context it was generated. Sources of data for Grounded Theory are varied, and can include data collection from interviews, field observations, as well as documents such as diaries, letters, historical accounts and newspapers or media.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The initial research sample consisted of actors who were cast to perform in a student theatre production. The theatre production was an original immersive theatre experience that looked at the institution of marriage through exploring the ritualistic elements of a wedding. Some of the themes explored included the wedding ceremony, the wedding dress, veil, rings and bouquet; the couple's first dance, cutting the cake and throwing the garter; the meaning of the bride standing on the left; kissing the bride; the bridesmaids and best man tradition, and the need for couples to showcase the entire wedding ceremony in a big, elaborate manner. The spectator was invited to participate in the wedding as a proverbial guest. As a guest, the spectator was expected to be engaged with the action, or to partake in the aforementioned wedding rituals where appropriate. The work aimed to blur and reconstruct the boundaries between life and art, and was designed to leave the spectator with a lasting emotional and intellectual impact.

The show itself challenged many boundaries for the spectator. The spectators were placed on the stage area of the theatre, and most of the action either took place at the front end of the stage, or in the traditional audience space of the theatre among the chairs. The performers used a combination of traditional scripted dialogue, sound and movement to illustrate the themes. Interesting visual displays included a scene where large wire frames dressed in wedding suits and dresses were suspended from the ceiling, and lowered onto the audience tables for the performers to perform the first dance of the wedding. Other approaches included frames that were attached to the faces of the performers that contorted their faces into a permanent smile, exaggerating the constant smiling one generally has to do at a wedding. More scenes explored the relationship between man and wife through movement and sound, family dynamics through traditional dialogue, and the ritualistic setting up of table décor and flowers. The audience were also expected to participate, which each table having a unique wedding duty to perform.

Interviews with the cast members were conducted throughout the process. The first-round semi-structured interviews took place as the rehearsal period commenced. While the cast was rather large, only 14 students opted to participate in the first-round interviews. Of these 14 interviews, five were selected for analysis on the basis of being representative of the age, gender and level of experience of the students. Second-round semi-structured interviews were conducted approximately one month after the theatre production had concluded. For the second-round interviews, five students participated and all the interviews were used for analysis. Once analysis of both sets of interviews had taken in place, a third round of interviews was introduced. In accordance with the principle of Grounded Theory, subsequent data collection is always informed by the analysis of initial data sets, and that was the case in this regard. For the third and final round of interviews, three professional actors were selected to participate via written questionnaires based on their increased level of experience as well as their age and emotional and intellectual maturity.

RESULTS

The following diagram illustrates the core concepts as well as the axial codes that emerged from the analysis. (perhaps define what an axial code is here to assist the reader?)

PROCESSES OF IDENTIFICATION AND DISIDENTIFICATION

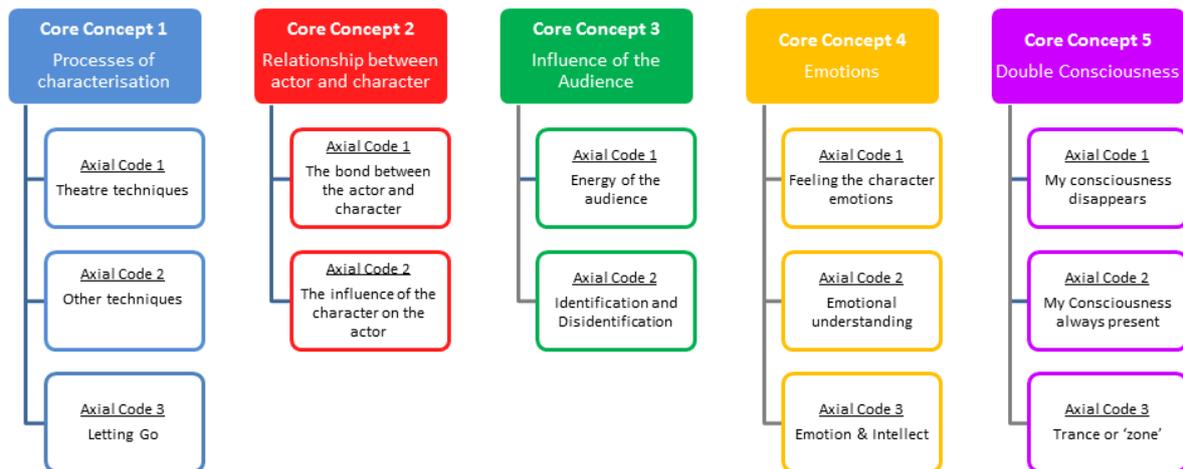


Figure 1: Core Concepts and Axial Codes

CORE CONCEPT 1: PROCESSES OF CHARACTERISATION

The first concept that emerged was around processes that actors follow to create their characters, and two distinct axial codes emerged. The first was termed theatre techniques, and refer to specific known techniques actors used to create their characters. Although the approaches of Stanislavsky, Grotowski and Artaud were mentioned frequently, it emerged that the techniques used by actors are varied. A definite distinction could be made between actors who begin the process of characterisation from an external perspective – first creating the physicality of the character before turning to inner processes; and actors who begin the process of characterisation from an internal perspective.

While most actors believe that the process of characterisation is primarily informed by the script, as well as the approach of the director, actors also felt their specific interpretation of the character is what gives the performance meaning. Imitation of real-life people and

©Copyright All Rights Reserved

emotional recall were most often cited as techniques for characterisation. Emotional recall, or emotional memory, is a technique that was developed by Stanislavsky and requires the actor to recreate an event from the past to recall the feelings from that experience (Gordon, 1987). Thus, the feelings generated from the past experience are used for a current situation to colour the character sketch with human depth and personal involvement. Another technique often used by Grotowski (Schechner, 1997) was meditation and breathing and focusing exercises.

The second axial code that emerged refers to what was termed 'other' techniques. These techniques are personalised, unique approaches, and not techniques widely documented in theatre literature. To illustrate, one participant mentioned visions as a source of inspiration for his characters. A parallel can be drawn to this type of experience and what Assagioli believed to be the superconscious breaking through to the conscious mind. Assagioli (1993) believed when this happens in a 'descendant' manner, elements of the superconscious burst into the conscious mind in the form of intuitive thoughts, sudden enlightenment or inspiration.

The final axial code that emerged was around processes of letting go of a character. Most of the participants described an established process of letting go of their characters at the end of a performance or production. The need to keep the character separate from the actor's self-concept is an idea that emerged strongly from the data. Participants described feeling a sense of completion at the end of a performance when they engage in a ritual of letting go of the character. Other participants described the character-identity lingering for a period of time after a show. The fact that some performers find it difficult to let go of their characters points to identification of the actor with the character; lingering character-identity also points to an unfolding process of transformation for the actor on a personal level. The process of letting go of the character-identity is largely a process of disidentification, and while actors may not actively be aware of such a process, some actors did mention that they look to friends and family to help them remain focused on who they are.

CORE CONCEPT 2: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACTOR AND CHARACTER

The interview questions focused on documenting the experiences of actors when they felt they delivered their most authentic and memorable performances. From the data it emerged that there exists a deep and intimate bond between the actor and his character. Actors often referred to the experience of portraying characters with a sense of nostalgia.

The first axial code looked at the bond that actors have with their most memorable characters. Participants were transformed by these characters as they identified on a personal level with the character. When considering identification as a psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other, and is transformed, one can distinguish this from instances where actors merely associate certain aspects of their self-concept with that of the character. The defining aspect of identification is transformation – either wholly or partially. Certain actors also reported ‘missing’ the character once the production concluded. While it is certainly possible that what the actor is actually missing is the nurturing environment of the ensemble cast, or the acclaim that came with delivering a particularly memorable performance, it is also possible that all the aforementioned elements contribute to a broader sense of identification of the actor with the character.

The second axial code looked at the influence of the character on the actor. While this can refer to the lasting impact of the character, this idea also extends to the personal self-concept of the actor. When asked whether they learn anything from the characters they play on a personal level, almost all the participants answered ‘yes’. This particular line of questioning also led to more philosophical discussions about the actor’s life path, and how this intersects with the choice of characters throughout the actor’s lifetime. Most actors feel they are destined to play certain characters, and that the lessons and insights they gain from these characters are perfectly timed with lessons for their own life path.

CORE CONCEPT 3: INFLUENCE OF THE AUDIENCE

The third concept that emerged from the data was the influence of the audience on the participants, specifically the experiences of the actor while onstage as the character. The first axial code looks at the energy of the audience. Most actors feel that there is a sense of shared energy with the audience during a performance. Participants also described shared energy among members of the cast, which also includes the technical theatre personnel. Most participants felt that this shared energy is a vital ingredient for the success of a performance as it allows the members of the cast to tap into shared understanding that can then be transferred to the audience. In theatre, the actor takes his creative energy and puts it into the work on stage; this energy is transferred to the audience when the work is performed, who react and release energy back to the actor on stage (Baumbach, 2015). This transference of energy can either be good for the actor while in character, or it can be distracting, depending on the influence of the audience.

The second axial code focused on issues of identification in relation to the audience. Some of the participants mentioned that they found it difficult to engage with the audience on nights where family and friends would be present as part of their immediate storylines. Actors found it easier to identify with the audience, and deliver authentic performances around improvised storylines when the actor had a degree of anonymity. When the audience does not challenge the actor's self-concept – as would often happen with friends or family – he can immerse himself in the character-identity and deliver a more authentic performance.

CORE CONCEPT 4: EMOTIONS

The first axial code under Emotions examined the ability of the actor to feel the actual emotions of the character. When asked the question, most actors were certain that they could indeed feel the emotions from the character. The participants also felt this was necessary for a truthful and believable delivery. However, this is not always the case – actors only made reference to feeling the character's emotions for emotionally intense

characters. For characters that are comical, or where the storyline carries a lighter tone, actors did not make reference to feeling character emotions. The ability to feel character emotions was most accurately described by the work of Stanislavsky and Lee Strasberg with emotional recall or memory. Konijn (1997) referred to emotional memory in the context of the style of involvement. The style of involvement strives for realism and it is considered ideal when the actor is carried away by the piece, transcending his own will without noticing his own emotions. This type of immersion into the character leads actors to identify with the character emotions to such a degree that they are directly experienced.

The second axial code explored the actor's understanding of the character's emotions. In the context of this study, older and more experienced actors felt that, although there is always a distinct difference between the actor's self-concept and that of the character, there are also many similarities. These actors, through emotions and mannerisms, often recognise the similarities as representations of their own self-concept. One actor mentioned a specific example where he started taking on the emotional aspects of the character that were initially grounded in his own self-concept, but eventually became so amplified through the portrayal of the character that it was no longer recognisable as his own. The more experienced actors also mentioned that their emotional understanding of the character intensifies with age, which adds emotional depth and leads to a more authentic performance. When asked whether participants thought their characters were part of or separate from their own identity, the responses were varied. While the younger actors felt strongly that they always maintain distinct separation between their self-concept and that of the character, the more experienced actors felt that complete separation between the performer and the character is not necessarily possible. These participants articulated that their own identity is often transferred to that of the character:

The third axial code looked at Emotions and Intellect. Some actors expressed that they thought intellect and technique are synonymous in terms of character development. In the context of the questions posed, whenever an actor applied cognitive processes for character

development, this was associated with known acting techniques for processes of characterisation. However, most actors feel that this is only one dimension of character development – while it is important to understand the thought-processes of the character, without the emotional depth of a character, the delivery would not be authentic. Almost all of the actors interviewed use emotional memory to develop this dimension of the character.

CORE CONCEPT 5: DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

Three axial codes emerged for the concept of double consciousness. The question “What do you think happens to ‘you’ when you are on stage?” resulted in feedback that could be grouped into those actors who thought their own consciousness disappears to make room for the consciousness of the character; those who thought that the actor’s consciousness always remains present, albeit in a reduced or limited capacity; and those who described entering a state of trance.

In terms of the actors who thought their own consciousness disappears, one actor mentioned that she is so unaware of herself at times that she will often come offstage after a scene and feel a certain ache in her body, completely unaware while on stage of the particular character physicality that could have produced the awkward stiffness she feels once she returns to her own awareness. The participants who described these experiences were also quick to mention that the loss of self is not always the case with every character. Most often when performers experience a loss of self they portrayed emotionally challenging characters or the tone of the play was of such a nature that a degree of disidentification with the actor’s self-concept was necessary to accommodate the character identity. For an emotionally challenging or grotesque character to emerge, the actor must disidentify to a degree with his self-representations if there is conflict.

On the other hand, some actors have a distinct awareness of self: One actor described the awareness of self as well an awareness of the character as having two brains – the brain of the actor and the brain of the character. Konijn (1997) extensively discussed the notion of

double consciousness in her work, and related this to the three styles of acting – the style of involvement, the style of detachment and the style of self-expression. The experiences of the participants as grouped under the second axial code, does not seem to fit with the acting styles of Konijn. While actors can become immersed in the emotional experiences of their character, the experiences described here suggest the participants retained a degree of awareness of self. However, the experience is not merely mechanical or technical mastery; the participants still describe a degree of emotional involvement with the character, even if it is not as intense as with the style of involvement or self-expression.

The last axial code refers to the group of actors who described their experiences in terms of being in a trance, or being in the zone. This describes both processes of identification and disidentification and also suggests that the actor can be a conduit or a channel for the character. Konijn (1997) described the style of self-expression as a technique where the actor relies on own authentic emotions and the character becomes almost obsolete – the technique is often referred to as the ‘trance’, and is most often associated with the work of Grotowski. If one assumes there is a link between Grotowski and the state of trance as Almaas (1988) described it – an integration of psychic and physical powers that emerge from instinct – then the context of the participant responses becomes clearer. Most of the participants mentioned training in Grotowski techniques, or being heavily influenced by Grotowski, thus one would expect self-expression to play a role in the trance state for these actors.

DISCUSSION

From the analysis it becomes evident that there are distinct processes of identification that takes place between the actor and his character. Aspects of transformation can be identified by their lasting impact; however, it appears that this is mostly the case for emotionally challenging characters, or performances. Identification was observed in four areas: identification of the performer with his character; identification of the performer with the

audience; identification of the performer with the ensemble; and identification with the superconscious. Processes of disidentification did not appear to play a prominent role, or add much value for the processes of characterisation for the actor.

It is clear that, for the actor, the journey is in creating the character, and then to deliver his performance in an engaging and authentic manner.. While the data shows that actors do not always identify with their characters on a personal level, all participants could cite at least one example where portraying a specific character transformed them in some way. The very nature of characterisation is a process of identification, and actors have to be acutely aware of their self-representations and continuously evaluate these against that of the character.

The relationship between the audience and the performer is both complex and intimate. Intimate as it represents the potential for transformation, but also complex due to the transference and processes of identification that take place between the audience and the performer. Without the audience, the performer's message remains one-way conversation, and any exploration becomes indulgence for the benefit of performer only. However, when the audience bears witness, the communication can become a two-way dialogue where the message, tone and energy of the performance are transferred between audience and performers. While there may be processes of identification that take place when the audience is transformed by a performance, or disidentification when an audience needs to create distance from a particularly grotesque or shocking character, the primary process that takes place between audience and performer is one of transference.

The emotional involvement of the actor with his character is highly personal and depends both on the views of the performer as well as the nature of the character. One common thread that emerged from the data is that emotionally challenging characters demand far more emotional involvement from the actor than comical characters. While some actors felt that technique and intellect are closely associated, cognitive processes and emotion are also closely interlinked in the creation and delivery of a character. The actor engages all his

dimensions as a human being – physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual – to deliver a believable three-dimensional performance.

Lastly, the notion of double consciousness emerged prominently from the data. At its core this concept is central to the dilemma of the actor. While Diderot (1883) felt that onstage character-emotions and the emotions experienced in daily life by the performer were fundamentally different, there is direct identification of the actor with the identity of the character. The participants regularly mentioned this as a key ingredient to evaluate the success of their performance – the ability to truthfully feel the emotions of the character, and for those authentic emotions to be transferred to the audience so the audience may be moved and transformed. For this to happen, losing oneself in the character, albeit momentarily on stage, is considered the best way to achieve this. Yet, this is not to say that actors don't retain a sense of their own identity while on stage – many do.

CONCLUSION

The initial data collection process was aimed at mapping processes of identification in performing artists. Yet, as the analysis progressed it became apparent that the emerging concepts had reached a point of saturation. The general age and level of experience of the initial research samples became a factor, and additional research participants had to be recruited and questions were devised to further probe the concepts that emerged from the initial analysis. This process was successful as the third-round interviews added the anticipated dimension to the emerging concepts. However, if the study was ever repeated, the recruitment and selection process would be revised to include a bigger sample and more experienced actors.

Actors, through their work, cultivate the ability to raise their consciousness and provoke ascendant elements from the superconscious into their conscious mind. Too often one is reminded of the plight of the creative who lacks inspiration, but what if inspiration can be deliberately unlocked from the superconscious as part of the actor's normal work? In terms

of options for possible future study directions, one could devise a study to only focus on probing aspects of the superconscious and how these relate to the work of the actor in a more deliberate manner.

Theatre is a phenomenon that exists in every society around the world and through the ages of history. It helps us to understand what it means to be human and develops our ability to communicate and express the most pressing social issues of the age to broader society. For the actors who make theatre, it is also a tool for self-discovery. Theatre acts as a mirror where we can study the problems that confront society, and help us develop our creativity.

“The question of what art is, has occupied humanity since the dawn of recorded history. For Tolstoy, the purpose of art was to provide a bridge of empathy between us and others, and for Anaïs Nin, a way to exorcise our emotional excess. But the highest achievement of art might be something that reconciles the two: a channel of empathy into our own psychology that lets us both exorcise and better understand our emotions – a form of therapy.”

– Maria Popova, a quote from her blog “Brain Pickings”

REFERENCES

- Almaas, A.H. 1988. *The Pearl Beyond Price: Integration of Personality inot Being: An Object Relations Approach* (Diamond Mind Series, No 2). Diamond Books. Pennsylvania State University.
- Anderson, R. Braud, W. 2011. *Transforming Self and Others Through Research: Transpersonal Research Methods and Skills for the Human Sciences and Humanities*. State University of New York Press. Albany.
- Assagioli, R. 1971. *Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques*. Viking. New York.
- Assagioli, R. 1993 (posthumously). *Transpersonal Development: The Dimension Beyond Psychosynthesis*. Inner Way Productions.
- Barba, E. 1965. *Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedów*. Tulane Drama Review. Vol 9 Nr 3. New Orleans.
- Baumbach, S. 2015. *Literature and Fascination*. Palgrave MacMillan. UK.
- Benedetti, J. 1999. *Stanislavsky: His Life and Art*. Methuen. London.
- Braud, W. 1998. *Can Research be Transpersonal?* *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, Vol 2 Nr 3.
- Clements, J. 2004. *Organic Inquiry: Toward Research in Partnership with Spirit*. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. Vol 36, Nr.1
- Corbin, J. Strauss, A. 1990. *Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons and Evaluative Criteria*. *Journal for Sociology*, Vol 19, Nr6.
- Diderot, D. 1883. *The Paradox of Acting*. Edited by Pollock, W.H. Chatto & Windus.
- Douglas, B. Moustakas, C. 1985. *Heuristic Inquiry: The Internal Search to Know*. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. Vol 25, Nr3.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays & Sketches*. A. C. McClukg & Co. U.S.A.
- Erikson, E. H. 1950. *Childhood and Society*. Norton. New York.
- Friedman, H. Hartelius, G. 2013. *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology*. John Wiley & Sons. West Sussex.
- Glaser, B. Strauss, A.L. 1967. *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine. Chicago.

- Gordon, M. 1987. *The Stanislavsky Technique: Russia: A Workbook for Actors*. Applause Theatre Book Publishers. New York.
- Grof, S. 1985. *Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death and Transcendence in Psychotherapy*. State University of New York Press. Albany, New York.
- Richards, T. 1995. *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*. (Grotowski, J. Preface: From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle). Routledge. London.
- Jung, C.G. 1959. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton University Press. Princeton.
- Konijn, E. 1997. *Acting Emotions* (original title *Acteren en Emoties*). Meppel Boom. Amsterdam.
- Laplanche, J. Pontalis, J.B. 1973. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis. London.
- Maslow, A. H. 1968. *Toward a Psychology of Being*. Van Norstrand. New York.
- Richards, T. 1995. *At Work with Grotowski*. Routeledge. London.
- Schechner, R. Wolford, L. 1997. *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. Routeledge. Abingdon.
- Stanislavsky, K. 1988. *Building a Character*. Methuen Drama. London.
- Strauss, A. Corbin, J. 1975. *Strategies of Inquiry: Grounded Theory Methodology, an Overview*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Wain, A. 2005. *Acting and Essence: Experiencing Essence, Presence and Archetype in the Acting Traditions of Stanislavsky and Copeau*. University of Western Sydney.
- Zukav, G. 1989. *The Seat of the Soul*. Simon & Schuster. New York.