

Chapter Two: An Analysis and Model of Performance

*For Stanislavski, to be alive is to sense.³³
A dull or lazy actor relies on old bits of acting that he
has done before – it contains no life.³⁴*

Falsity of expression, of emotion, of action is the non-malicious yield of the unwitting performer. This performer is, in all other ways, sincere, believing, trustworthy, charitable; cast into an alien mold, he is impotent. Not being able to grasp his purpose in performance, he retreats unavoidably to caricature, which is ultimately insulting, boring and fruitless. However, insofar as such action is unwitting or innocent, which it too often is, all is forgiven and such action is tolerated. Yet this action is illusory; it appears to be ‘what is so’ but is, in fact, not ‘what is so.’

Truth in performance is lacking; what appears to be so *and* what is so are not evident. It is to that condition that Stanislavski concerns himself: how may the unwitting performer cease to provide illusion and begin to communicate in truth? The ability to do such a thing is, for Stanislavski, a state of mind in the performer, the inner creative state. It is the existence of this particular mode of being which offers the possibilities of truthful performance. In a sense, this state of mind is an attempt to be ‘perfectly natural.’ When one is found to be in an ordinary situation, one is acting in the way which is in accord with one's being in the world. On stage, however, such an ordinary situation vanishes and it remains to rebuild the ‘perfectly natural.’

This state of mind is not a description of the content of any experience but only of the conditions in which one experiences the world. Normally, one experiences the world in an always correct but chosen manner. This is not a value judgment but an attempt to state the difference between spontaneous day-to-day living and ‘forced’ or ‘staged’

33. C.f., Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 22.

34. C.f., Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1952), 263.

living. Thus, on the stage, one is not immediately conscious of the 'staged' world but usually is conscious of oneself being in an uncomfortable and 'staged' situation. In this discomfort, the performer is conscious of himself as alien to the staged world. If the performer acts in this manner then he is not acting according to the reality that is to be portrayed but according to his alienation to, and consequent misappropriation of, the portrayable reality. The inner creative state is meant to alleviate that alienation. This does not in any way hamper the actor's critical faculties; he is not gathered up into a dream life of a multiform order. On the contrary, in this state, the actor is free to explore, to experience and re-experience a reality in a natural way. Thus the performer, in a sense, really lives the reality with critical possibilities. The stage ceases to be forced and becomes an 'environment' within which life may truly be lived. In a very practical sense, one's attention is tuned to the 'staged' reality in a way that it is in everyday life.

For the young and inexperienced performer of any age and in any medium, there are many performative dangers which will lead to illusion and mechanics, both for the actor and the audience. One great danger is inattention to what one is, or should be, doing on stage. Inattention breeds ham acting. Ham-acting focuses action on and attention to the actor rather than to the situation being portrayed. It is a fine line distinguishing the two. For instance, when an untrained or ungifted actor is required to portray a character, two things will invariably occur. On the one hand, a great and monstrous variety of bodily disabilities and defects will be displayed. On the other hand, incredible varieties of accents (usually poorly done) will spew forth. In each of these two cases, the performer is asking us to see a particular reality, a particular response to a situation. Yet, more often than not, we are unable to connect with the actor. The disability, the dialect, makes no sense; no reason is supplied for his or her experience. An old man being presented looks like a very young person slouched over with a pronounced limp - has this person not been properly trained in the practice of aging