

I

Are you here?
Really here?
So, we can begin.

I am an actor – that is why I improvise.
I am a dancer – that is why I improvise.
I perform, so I must improvise.

I rehearse, sometime a little, sometimes a lot. Then I improvise.
I learn my choreography. I become perfect. Then I improvise.

I have no choice.
To perform is to improvise, for performance happens now.
Here. Now.
I have never been here before, never now.
This is my first time.

Stanislavski – the Great Master Stanislavski – asked that his performers should act familiar scenes ‘as if for the first time’.

But how can I do otherwise? However much I may rehearse, I have never been here before, never now. It is not ‘as if’ for the first time, it is the first time. It is this time. It’s now.

Performance is improvisation and improvisation requires that I start from now.

If I am not here in this room with you right now...

... if I think it is good enough that I show you something I practiced yesterday while I am, in my mind, somewhere else, thinking about my next job, thinking about my friend, my lovers, the beer I will drink when all this is over....

.... then I will not be sharing with you my live performance. I will simply be allowing you to hear the echoes, see the shadows, giving you the chance to imagine how my art was when it was first born and fresh.

II

Sometimes I perform without rehearsal.
No script. No choreography. No great idea. No message
to give you.

Just me, here with you, making something.

Making what?

Making the most of being here with you.

Where to begin? Where to begin?

There is only one place I can begin – here, now in this
room with you.

In this room.

Maybe in my imagination in this room.

Maybe in a sound in this room.

Maybe in a smile that passes between us in this room.

Maybe in the angle of the light or the passing of a car.

I'll try to start with something that we share.

or

If I find myself inspired by something coming out from me
- a memory, a dream, a question – I'll try to let you see
me catch that passing moment so that you and I,
together, will know that whatever it is that I make really
did grow out from a moment that we shared.

After all, there are more moments, more ideas, in this
room right now than I shall ever have time to use.

III

And if, while I'm here with you, I find something, some passing moment, what then?

I must do something with the things I find. It's not enough that I should simply notice, notice, notice. You expect a little more of me than that.

A story maybe
Characters
A joke or two
A little dance perhaps.

I'm a performer and performance means 'ART'. It needs me to structure, build, interrogate, develop, shape, conclude.

In short – I want to give you a show.
A show that starts and ends here and now.

I want to make with you a live performance. For that I need to take the moment that I find and give it life, give it shape, give it a journey and bring it eventually to an end.

IV

At the heart of growing from the moment to the performance, the fuel of the journey we will travel on together, is my attention.

My performance is based on WHAT I choose to pay attention to and HOW I choose to pay attention to it.

If I find something perhaps I might repeat it
and repeat it
and repeat it
and develop it
until it becomes something else.

further and further.

Finding that I am in danger of boring myself,
I might change what I am doing.

Do something else

Perhaps I'll return to the first thing.

Develop the second.

Perhaps I'll see if the different things I have found want to talk to each other.

Repeat. Develop. Change.

Knowing that every action has a shape, I might pay attention to how that action starts, how it develops, how it decays, how ends.

Perhaps, as my dear friend and teacher Al Wunder pointed out, I'll play with the four different ways that I can actually BE as I stand here in front of you:

Pedestrian – just being me, or at least a believable version of me.

Character – being someone else (or a version of me that you do not recognise)

Caricature – being a grotesque, and exaggeration which surely isn't anything like me is it?

Abstract – giving up on meaning and searching for essence.

If I learn to pay attention to the shifts between these modes of being, a simple moment that we shared can fill this stage with endless possibility and I'll no longer feel quite so terribly alone.

Perhaps (and again as my dear friend Al would often say)

I'll realise that up here I am always in relationship – never truly alone – but that there are only four places that I can really talk to:

Me

You
Them
or the Universe (who maybe is the same as God)

Learn to play with those, and I shall never be alone
again.

Most of all, I can learn to pay attention to my pleasure.
Pay attention to what interests me. Pay attention to the
possibility that I will start to bore myself.

(And forgive me if this sounds a little rude – I really hope
that you like what I like. I really hope that you will find the
same things funny and sad and beautiful. But I cannot
really tell what you will like – at least not until it's too late
- and if I spend too much worrying about it and trying to
guess what you like, then I'll no longer be here and now
with you. So all I can really do is try to entertain myself
and hope, as I do so, that you have a good time too.

If not, then I am not your artist and you are not my
audience. And I hope we'll go our separate ways with
mutual respect.)

But I hope that doesn't happen. I hope, in entertaining
myself, I entertain you and that together we can share a
journey that starts from now and goes somewhere that,
in this moment, none of us can yet guess.....