

The Quest for the Unprogrammed Human Being

Extracts from a paper by John Schranz.

Fragment 1

“In the Human Being, this passing from Intention to Action, this ‘dance’ – infinitesimally short or infinitely long – that engages him in accommodating in his own mind the mind of an other or others and then trying to weigh the potential consequences of possible lines of action upon oneself and upon others, this ‘dance’ with otherness, then, can (and does) assume a supreme beauty – if the æsthetic truly emerges from an ethic committed to the Human; if, that is, it is truly engaged in with honesty, openness, sincerity. It can make relations thrive in joy, in the fulfilment of wishes and hopes, in the construction of what can be. Or it could, if the rhythms and tempos and energies are not well harnessed and orchestrated, result in the very opposite.

It is this ‘dance’, between Intention and Action, that is at the foundation of all. And it truly is a dance – as memories and the present dance to the rhythm of feelings, of inner feelings: of the retention or application of energy, of the tightening or relaxing of muscles, of the holding or releasing of breath, the stilling and voicing of sound. ‘Listen to your muscle tones’, Stanislavski advises, and elsewhere: ‘in our language, to understand is to feel!’ It is this dance that is at the very foundations of every decision we take, whether they are taken knowingly or not. And it is this dance, appropriately translated, that is at the foundation of the noise we generate and of its organisation via dynamics into the musicality of sound, and then (by further extrapolation and elaboration) into the superb, symbolic tool we call speech. Performance orchestrates all this – with Action perseveringly as the roots and foundations of it.

Performance, in the human being, is a category of thought. Just as mathematics is.

Not being able to handle any one of the two is tantamount to not being what we have in mind when we say, of a living being, that he is ‘human’.

If one did not have at least a very basic grasp of what arithmetic is, then one would not be able to cook – one would lack a sense of quantity and proportion, one would not be able to say, for instance, whether to put one part of salt to 200 parts of meat or vice versa; one would not know for how long a time to cook something. Similarly, one would not have a sense of distance. Arithmetic is a category of thought in the human being, and without at least a basic grasp of it, one would be markedly unable to execute many tasks we consider fundamental to being human.

It is in this way that Performance is here being said to be a category of thought in the human being. If, for instance, one were to speak in a flat monotone, not varying the pitch of one’s voice, not putting in inflections, not altering the volume of sound generated, not putting in pauses or silences, if one were to speak at one tempo, at one rhythm, in a continuous legato or in a continuous staccato, without, that is, a performance quality to one’s verbal utterances, without seeking to impart a form to it, then one would quickly lose all attention. Those are arithmetical measurables, but the same would happen were one to speak without altering the visible aspects of one’s presence, without moving, without altering the direction of one’s gaze, without moving one’s hands in some pattern or other. One would quickly lose all attention – perhaps because one would not be allowing one’s feelings to be manifest, one’s Humanity to be accessible to perception. The human being cannot not perform. Even to demonstrate ‘not performing’, one would have to perform – one would have to perform a non-Performer. What is important is not the well known fact that we perform our reactions to each other, but that the reason why we do perform our presence is that it is in no way possible for us to not perform it. Even the way one walks, is a performance. It is a construct. One could walk in one way, or in another. The way one walks is something one chooses – one may cultivate one’s unique manner of walking... another may adopt a manner of walking prevalent in a culture. If, for instance, the ‘loose’ manner of walking prevalent today were to have somehow been adopted

by somebody 40 or 50 years ago, that person would have been regarded quite strangely. Performance is a category of thought in the human being.

Theatre making has chosen to place its emphasis upon the highly sophisticated dance between Intention and Action that makes the Human Being's response to stimuli and impulses so unique. By doing so it has, I propose, appropriated the very fact that the Human Being is a performative being – and it is then carrying that performative nature to a further level of reflectivity. It is thus making of itself an instrument which is, uniquely, refining that performativity in a way that is enabling the Human Being qua Performer to potentiate many of the capabilities that are his qua Human Being. It is doing this by a sophisticated discipline comprehending a structured grammar and a structured syntax designed and researched knowingly for the organisation of Intention and Action processes – Craig's positing that 'human flesh cannot be disciplined' stands challenged."

Fragment 2

"That difference is crucial. In our daily life, unlike the Performer, we blunder our way about in what is very nearly a blind hope, making our plans and forecasts, indeed, but each time they fail (and it does not happen too rarely...) we have no processes to review as control, no instruments to truly check how we would have executed our actions, no trained gauges with which to evaluate the dynamics of action. We do not double back on our action to try it out all over again. Consider what happens if we chance to drop a cup, for example. We would never try out the action again with another cup, breaking it too, in an analytic effort aimed at finding out what may have gone wrong the first time round. We merely pick up another cup and – we hope for the best. And so we go about our lives – hoping never to drop and break another cup, never to tear a jacket on a nail again, never to let another glass fall, never to make another tear fall, never to break another relationship, another heart, another human being.

Certainly, in such situations we often struggle hard to allow the other person to gain access to the reading we would have made of his action, or to the truth of the intention we believe to have been behind our own action, to the truth of the meaning we believe was behind the words we said and the way we said them... but the best we can do is to try to review those actions, those phrases we would have uttered, protesting that 'what I meant was...' or 'what you said was not that, but...' or 'but the tone of your voice was...' We don't have, however, the technique the Performer strives for all his life – the technique whereby he can, with beauty, allow intentions to be manifest. And that is what the masters worked for. In asking himself 'how can I refine my humanity in order to play my humanity?', the Performer arrives at knowingly asking questions that gain in depth and importance exponentially, and which fuse his aesthetic and his ethic. He arrives at asking 'How can I learn that which I am and that which I may become, the potential that is open to me, to this system-in-life?' 'How can I learn this 'I'?' Asking such questions opens the flood gates, poisoning us on more than one frontier. It leads us to ask: how may one accelerate the reflective process so as to be able to arrive faster at the optimal alternative for the just action in relation to the other and, consequently, in relation to oneself?

And to ask that is to ask a question of immense proportions and profound import."

Fragment 3

"In the case of the Human-Being-Performer, it is a remarkable event of supreme reflectivity and action, iterative beyond what normally is considered possible – beyond what for millennia one considered as remotely possible, in fact.

That second state is one that defies definition.

It marks a supreme attainment of consciousness, where, at the same time (no – rather, where 'time' is of no meaning), one is the fulfilment of intention in action as well as the assessment

of that action's nature. Not the result – that would be infinitely less difficult. That would be a matter of hindsight, bringing 'time' back into the reckoning. Nor is it a matter of judgement (though to a certain extent it also is a constant evaluation). It is, rather, a supreme act of Faith. It is a belief that the desired, the yearned for, can truly come about. It is a Faith that all that has been honed and enabled by the 'other' state of the Performer (the one mentioned first) can now bear fruit. It is that attainment of consciousness where all arbitrary frontiers – such as those between object and subject, for instance, or between form and content – cease to hold. It is a manner of being and becoming where space permeates and is permeated, where beginnings and ends flow to the point of losing definition.”

Fragment 4

“The concept of Director posited itself merely as an interim – a function to help bridge the void which necessarily had to occur between the rejection of the security the author's text used to provide and the generation of opuses by the Performer. Which is the gap between one state of consciousness and a higher one. Which is the gap between one stage of the Human Being... and the next...

The question we posited earlier presents itself once more for our consideration: How can I accelerate the reflective process so as to be able to arrive faster at the optimal alternative for the just action in relation to the other... and, consequently, in relation to myself? It is a question asked at the level of doing theatre: for each action the Performer does and its effects on the performative actions of his colleagues, and therefore, by rebound, also on all his own work. It is, also, a question asked at the level of living life: for each action I choose to do in relation to all my encounters, with the same spiral of consequences and effects, on others, and back upon my self.

By the shift often referred to as 'collective creativity', which saw the Performer placing himself both inside and outside of the creative forces he generates, the foundations of 'The Art of Man' finally came to root their sense where they simply have to – in the reflective and iterative 'dance' of Intention and Action. As an inevitable consequence, and in view of the way our brain is structured and of its stupendous plasticity, this is resulting in the human being raising his very beingness to the level of a work of Art. As its medium is alive – the living Performer – each manifestation of it simply has to remain in a state of constant, creative re-forming if it truly is to be a work of Art. Truly – 'the Studio is for Life', as Stanislavski tells us. It is 'for life': in the sense that it is a work upon oneself that has to be lifelong. It is 'for life': in the sense that it is not for death, not for stasis, not for the deadly fixity of repetition, not for 'coquetry and narcissism', as Stanislavski labelled sterility, in his times. It is 'for life': in the same sense as the Commedia dell'Arte's revolution was 'for life'.”