

## The Principle of ‘Breath’: Towards a State of a Performer’s ‘Sincerity’

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### **Abstract**

*This thesis examines the term a performer’s sincerity taking into consideration issues of the bodily engagement and specifically addressing the place of a performer’s respiration. The main emphasis in this research will be on the tendency to a performer’s anticipation in contrast to a state of being in the moment on stage. Exploring and reconsidering the process of training the performer’s body reminds us the significance of rigorous training in an appropriate way(s) within which the performer’s body enables to meet the principles of acting with the nature of theatre as his/her body is responding and subordinating to the moment on stage. Here, this thesis argues that we need to acknowledge that initiating any bodily movement has to be understood and then inhabited by negating a performer’s active willingness where the source of energy, breathing roots, then transfers through the entire body rather than the mere use of the external forms or muscles. To be precise, maintaining the internal energy through the moment informs how the performer interrogates where and what s/he is in a state of whole body engagement preventing the performer’s self-doubt about what s/he is doing in the next moment(s). The process should be considered as a qualitative bodily shift gazing into his/her inner territory to reach behind a linguistic and/or an intellectual sense. The research finding suggests that a performer’s art is to allow the animating respiration in order to facilitate and enliven his/her entire body as oneness which in turn moves his/her scene partner(s) as well as the spectator in the here and now.*

**Keywords:** *A Performer’s Breathing, Ordinariness, Bodily Transition, A State of Sincerity, Being in the Moment*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This research explores the term, a state of a performer’s ‘sincerity’ in articulating a state of being in the here and now taking into consideration issues of bodily awareness and addressing the place of a performer’s breathing. As one of the key approaches, this research interrogates selected acting principles which is recurring prerequisite quality from those theatre practitioners’ concepts for performer training.

The overall objective of this research is derived from my working and teaching experiences that led me to ask:

- Why do performers tend to anticipate a moment in performance?
- What is the point of departure for a performer?
- What is the place of a performer’s respiration?
- How can a performer reach an ideal state of readiness?
- What is the meaning of internal energy, and how to adapt the principles of energy, one’s breathing *on* stage?

Among many, I select common resulting problems from those theatre artists' practical assumptions in which they have explored the question of how a performer's breath enralls or attract the spectator's attention by means of being in a state of the performer's whole bodily engagement, defined as an integrated oneness.

In this manner, a number of studies/practitioners have pointed out:

- it is "easy to see when those who are working in the space are planning the next move, not heeding the touch which is happening in the moment" [1].
- an awareness of "what you are receptive to is not about controlling what you do, but more to encourage an opening up, to increase your facility to work with your body to embody experience" [2].
- "without starting from zero and working *through* your own personality in the early stages of preparation, characterization could be so easily be superimposed rather than organically discovered" (sic) [3].
- a process of rehearsal and training can be seen as "brain modification" by means of a conscious effort to change neural patterns [4].

The aforementioned assumptions with the problematic issues among contemporary performers lead us to reconsider the necessity of exploring and articulating an alternative or effective way. The phenomenon of consciously displaying a character's behaviour connotes the fact that the performer's body is not being in the 'moment' but rather the performer is engaging in 'controlling' and/or 'modifying' his/her conscious effort (brain modification) to be superimposed. In such a moment, the performer often feels "blocked, unable to motivate the action," and as a consequence of this his/her body "becomes an inconsequential excess" [5]. That is, not to meet authenticate the character's existence on stage by means of rhetorical device.

Here, this thesis argues that a performer necessarily needs to interrogate the process of being in a state within which the performer's body is ready or the performer just thinks or assumes s/he is ready. As Amanda Brennan appropriately notes the "concept of liminality" which enhance a performer's body as to be "flux" by means of allowing his/her body "go through an unknown phase" [6].

The virtuality of a performer's body in this context suggests the necessary of a performer's bodily transition that for Amanda "highlights the changes and transitions within the body" before the performer tries and/or initiates his/her action [7]. In other words, the process of training and cultivating a performer's 'body' is dependence upon the development of rigorous training in an appropriate way as a basis that must 'meet' the demands for responding and subordinating to that moment within a specific context.

Following/reconsidering the aforementioned issues and examination of the principles used in performer training, this thesis will attempt to contextualize a performer's tendency to anticipate on stage and examine the practice of a performer's respiration by means of a point of departure. This thesis would then offer an additional perspective through which how the disciplines can be explored in order to facilitate an empowering effect within a performer training context ideally towards a state of a performer's 'sincerity' *on* stage.

## **2. THE POINT OF DEPARTURE AGAINST FROM HAVING A TENDENCY TO 'ANTICIPATE' OF A PERFORMER**

The issue of tending to anticipation is based on the idea that the self of a performer and the self of a character has a direct one to one relationship. This is resonating that a performer's individual/primacy of feeling is the touchstone of truth and/or believability in performance.

The reasons for a performer's anticipation can be categorized as a form of slavish mimicry. This includes pretending to listen, watch, feel, respond, and even 'act' on stage. The 'tendency,' a performer's intentional quality, rapid or tight mind undermines his/her receptiveness, and gives tense quality to performance. Here, the performer's 'body' and as a process of applying/adapting a specific training source does not correspond with each other regardless of that training source(s) and training session(s) that s/he has investigated.

Such a 'body,' mostly an "external use" with "physical prowess" for example is very evident before/during a performer enters/being on the stage in which the performer inevitably undertakes either his/her responsibility to do something, 'acting' or maintains in his/her daily body/attitude and/or emotional perspective for the

believability [8]. Maintaining such a set of a performer's ordinariness *on* stage is often assumed as his/her *naturalness* or inner *truth* particularly among many student-actors. These performers willingly accept the *truth* as his/her *sincerity* leads the performer to be as 's/he is' as an 'ordinary person' in 'ordinary time and space.' However, the process cannot arrive at a particular action which encompasses varied dramatic events embedded in a specific text that the performers must inhabit on stage.

From this point of view, one's body remains as an ordinary body in the field of everyday existence while one's mind is already somewhere where a performer or a director might previously want to reach: one's body is still 'here' whereas one's mind is already 'there,' the 'answer' or 'result.' Consequently, the performer is merely going through the motions that is meaningless, unable to be present with his/her partner. In this sense, it is important to note that as Sanford Meisner appropriately notes the "foundation of acting is the reality of doing" under imaginary circumstances [9]. The term 'reality of doing' from Meisner's notion implies what occurred in action always really happened in the present. That is, all roads for a performer is to animate others, his/her scene partner(s) as a vehicle of change which underlies the fact that the performer is not playing the past or future but rather s/he does *know* what to do plus s/he does *do* what s/he know.

A performer's being 'anticipation' therefore means his/her unfamiliarity or misunderstanding of a role/ place of his/her 'body' *on* stage that might be placed underneath his/her thought/perception rather than corporeal experience. In other words, the notion of obtaining a state of a performer's psychophysical readiness informs how a performer can encounter his/her body by means of the performer's internal readiness rather than expecting and determining the "right state" that is "no surety in repeatability" [10]. Specially, engaging in one's upper half body - thinking, hesitating or rationalizing, s/he can easily but irresponsibly initiate any bodily movement either s/he assume or more commonly 'do' in his/her unconscious level.

Holding one's breathing on upper half body leads having the performer's great 'effort' (thus, tensed chest, lips, nose, eyes and so on that the performer cannot sense or see) caused of tightening one's bodily awareness. Such inappropriate state of a performer's body, apparently initiates from a form, is not able to meet and thus respond to the stimuli in the moment on stage. Most importantly, such 'movement,' one's habitual or unnecessary movement is often assumed as 'natural' or 'real' action because the performer assumes the 'movement' is derived from his/her inner *truth*. Here the performer necessarily needs to acknowledge his/her own patterns of breathing which must be responsive to the full range of impulses of a role/character. The fundamental nature of the relationship between the in-breath (inhalation) and out-breath (exhalation) arises from the enabling us to conceive and at the same time to transitive expression.

In this manner, a performer's mind, specifically active willingness or ego often comes from his/her doubt about 'what s/he is doing' consequently impact on what s/he is going to do in the 'next.' Therefore, s/he attempts to find the 'answer,' not to be in the moment but it is 'unbearable moment' for both the performer and the spectator. I argue here that the point of departure must underlie to develop his/her impulse, 'inhalation.' As Meade Andrews appropriately emphasizes on a performer's "authentic impulses" and maintaining the energy moment-by-moment implies that how the performer can learn to "wait, listen, and allow" the next moment/action without his/her judgement [11].

Waiting and listening to the medium in this context means apart from expressing his/her determination, willfulness and/or rationalization. In other word, a performer's *sincerity* begins from his/her inside where the invisible would be triggered by means of internal stimuli to be visible, to make something 'happen.' Here, the place and role of a performer's breathing as an optimal point of departure is allowing unknowable and/or unpredictable territory by negating habitual responses.

Since a performer lost his/her 'body's acceptance' s/he might be asked to do unnecessary things being judged through the moment. This suggests that engaging in the initial moment of one's personal/emotional perspective is not face value. Rather, a performer necessarily needs to assure that the embodiment of his/her mental and physical action is complementary in any layers of human being thus immediacy as his 'psychophysical breathing.' Enhancing the foundation for experiencing the whole bodily engagement is underlying how a performer listens and observes through his/her body by allowing the next moment which as the most fundamental level reinforces to make event 'happen,' not forcing it do something.

### 3. THE PLACE OF A PERFORMER'S RESPIRATION TO BE IN A STATE OF 'SINCERITY' ON STAGE

Arming the principles and practical assumptions mentioned above, achieving a performer's sincerity on stage informs letting the body to initiate aside from being in a state of psychophysical pressure. From a practical perspective, it is important to note that arising a series of unknowable or unpredictable moment means maintaining the smallest details of inner movement/breathing in which a performer's body naturally begin to initiate or challenge to be in the moment by means of necessary action or economic movement.

Here, we acknowledge that a performer's inner movement, impulse and/or more specifically the source of energy, breathing is capable of being open to his/her source, a scene partner(s). Namely, as one performer moves another while their bodies are occupied with the immediate bodily responses. In other words, a performer's sincerity can be found answering the question of what makes the path/engine of his/her character go and how does that manifest psychophysically? That is, a process of interrogating what moves each other which forces the spectator to focus their attention on the performers "without feeling overwhelmed and perceive it as a source of energy" [12].

By the qualitative bodily transition, the performer's body would *newly* explore the unknowable territory by listening, sensing and therefore 'moving' even when the performer's body is being in a state of motionless; his/her body is outwardly stop but inside no stop. No matter how slight the bodily action, the role/place of a performer's breathing accompanies (the body's) immediate act and response by means of 'inevitable' movement and/or "not moving" (being-moved) by means of the performer's "receptivity" which intensify subtlety of awareness to be encoded into the artistic purpose of the moment designed by a playwright [13]. In this manner, Hugh O'Gorman discusses an exchange of energy within pursuit of change each other is to obtain what his/her character wants to achieve in the 'here' and 'now.'

Doing is energy, and energy is action. Actors play action, and action is 'action.' Actors do *not* play 'intentions'; they do not play 'tactics'; even worse, they do not play 'objectives' or any other such inaccurate approximation of 'doing.' 'Intention' implies the future. One cannot play the future in the present. If a character 'intends' to do something, they are not actually doing it. It is something they *will* do, and they will do it when they eventually perform it, in action. One hears other inexact terms bandied about with frequency in acting classes such as 'tactics' and 'strategies.' The use of these terms, by actor and teacher alike, has the effect of creating interference in the performer, putting the actor 'in their head,' pulling attention back onto the self, and creating self-consciousness [14].

As O'Gorman further notes that the performer's sincerity is to be found in his/her 'action' which informs neither 'intentions' putting the performer in his/her 'head' nor is it the great causes of interference with the given text. Particularly, the use of inexact or impractical terms including 'tactics' and 'strategies' among a trainer and trainee becomes to embrace uncertainty, inextricably intertwined. In other words, O'Gorman's concept does not aim to show a performer's subjective feelings or maintaining that of visible effect (e.g., approximation of doing) arising from his/her intensity of intention. Rather the process of a performer's rationalization before a specific practice/action leads to 'pulling attention back onto the self' by means of intellectual knowledge and/or a self-justification while forcing the performer's sense of responsibility to do something, namely the inaccurate or unnecessary action(s).

Since such a moment is initiated, the performer might feel great distress and therefore willingly use abundant effort to rationalize about how to *do* in the following moment(s). Such a state, the performer's self-generating undermines not only the development sensitized awareness of his/her breathing/body but also most importantly allowing the series of next moments to 'happen.' As a result, the performer's breathing/body exploits as unnecessary traits which discard listening/encountering his/her breathing/body and interacting with others. Thus, the performer is getting involved with unnecessary action and looking for a pretext, not to being fit into the moment/environment.

In this manner, the central foundation of O’Gorman’s note is the two key aspects a performer necessarily needs to acknowledge: the principle and nature of acting has to begin with exploring/moving his/her breathing/body in order to wake up the body and opening the performer’s body to atmosphere. Because as we have explored that as a point of departure a performer’s breathing offers a psychophysical pathway to the attunement of the body “towards an optimal state of body-mind awareness and readiness” [15]. Second, the connection of breathing-body as a complement to the performer’s oneness to enter *on* stage facilitates to avoid disengagement from his/her breathing/body and the environment where s/he is working on. Engaging the senses as the performer move and explore with his/her breathing/body in a “purely physical way” enables every part of the body becomes available in the here and now which in turn reinforce a state of maintaining the necessary quality/action [16]. As a consequence, the performer’s bodily experience is connected with a process of subordinating him/herself to the moment within which the body accompanied his/her sense of being inward-looking rather than exploiting, showing and/or merely doing.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

We have examined the place of a performer’s respiration in articulating the term a performer’s sincerity by addressing a process of the whole bodily engagement in the moment on stage. This thesis argues that a performer’s bodily transition mainly focused on his/her internal readiness, the source of energy, breathing is a way to being in the moment while minimizing his/her interrogation of such impractical or intellectual knowledge including tactics and strategies.

Specifically, a performer’s tendency, to anticipate thus exploit unnecessary action or that kind of movement centered on his/her psychophysical pressure interrupts not only the nature/principle of acting displaying self-generating but also unable to meet the demands of subordinating to that moment which the performer necessarily needs to experiment through his/her bodily experience. That is, s/he does *not do* what s/he *know* in the series of moment as the performer is working on a specific structural context.

Here, the physical experience of ‘inevitable’ movement by means of ‘necessary’ action informs that the performer thoroughly listens to his/her body/breathing towards responding the smallest stimulation from in/outside within which his/her body as unity or oneness begins to initiate and enable to move his/her scene partner(s). As an optimal state, this signifies that the performer’s body is being in a state of listening, responding and therefore following the moment as s/he encounters in the here and now rather than leading in the manner of intellectual sense.

In terms of performer training and acting this thesis would suggest that any approach and/or studio work should provide insight into a performer’s internal readiness with ethical attitude in a positive sense. This work might be a practical way to experience an appropriate pathway according to what each performer’s body needs, not compelling the next or result. In addition to this, the two groups, a trainee and a trainer also allow and then make more instinctive processes, in contrast to prescriptive and/or normative directions. I hope this process would have value alongside the disciplines and deliberating intellectual processes accessing to a broader range of styles, materials and texts for twenty-first century theatre.

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