

An Exploration of a Performer's Organic Action

¹BongHee Son

¹Associate Professor, Department of Acting Art, Gachon University, Korea
sbh4340@daum.net

Abstract

This thesis explores the principle of a performer's organic action by means of his/her bodily responses on stage. This research has been developed to define the nature of a performer's central task in order to constitute empirical understanding of acting and the purpose of training in addressing the question of what sort of qualitative bodily training is necessary to be in a state of the full body involvement. This study investigates to articulate a performer's fundamental task at the most rudimentary level by utilizing those theatre artists' concepts with practical assumptions. In particular, the key terms, happen and change signifies the quality of a performer's body that has to fit into the given environment in which the performer's body can be subordinated through the moment on stage. Here, we argue that a performer's essential task parallel to make the following moment to happen and change by means of progressing a set of the next moment. In this manner, we also argue that a moment of displaying the performer's conscious effort, forceful and externalizing the visible elements under the use of erroneous language leads his/her body not to function on stage, a state of disengagement from his/her body. Finally, we provide a way to facilitate a performer's organic action by focused on his/her lived experience to create the functional moment which is opposite to the predominance of a representation, maintaining the performer's intellectual sense.

Keywords: *A Performer's Organic Action, A Performer's Task, Happen, Change, Progress*

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates a way for discovering and articulating the process of a performer's organic action by means of a way to facilitate and enhance his/her psychophysical readiness in order to being *on stage*. The notion of a performer's preparation/readiness specifically implies that a performer's body necessarily need to be transformed and/or cultivated from a state of his/her daily body, "shaped by the accretions of a lifetime" to extra-daily where the performer's body is defined as the integrity and/or corporeality [1]. In this sense, a performer's bodily action/response as the primary element to be in the moment suggests his/her body is *ready* to be sincere in the given circumstance that Stanislavski observes as an "organic action" representing "its psychic nature" [2].

Above all, the performer's 'action' here means that his/her body evidently acknowledges how to use then channel the source of energy and/or breathing through an 'appropriate' way in the 'right' moment, not to disperse and/or dissipate. These key terms with the state of a performer connote that the performer's own

responsibility to make the scene/story/moment 'happen' as his/her body completely pay attention to play action(s) at all times. Naturally, the 'happen' is embedded in what the performer's body 'interacts' in-between his/her action under an imaginary circumstance(s). As Hugh O'Gorman precisely notes that being in such a moment (using/channeling/appropriate/right) the performer is "*living the life*" of his/her task/role/character within which the work is integrated "in a state of flow" and "effortless", consequently it is "simply *happening to you*" [3].

From the point above, it is important to note that the central concept with the practical approaches of bodily training does not mean learning or inhabiting a technical skill(s) nor pursuing an effective way(s). But rather, this returns us the discussion about a performer's whole bodily engagement as a point of departure which informs that one's bodily awareness and sense *is* a complementary unite, they *are* not independently function, where any bodily movement either visible or invisible arises from a state of listening and encountering his/her body. In other words, what the performer's body is doing inevitably meets according to what the body want to achieve *on stage*.

This remind us of the fundamental principle of acting that is experiencing and exploring the subtle/invisible relationship between the performer's body and mind or more specifically his/her inner and outer territory within which his/her body can also be merged into the contemporary theatrical code. Likewise, the principles and practical assumptions also resonate what the previous century theatre practitioners/directors would pursuit emphasizing on their own aesthetic methods or approaches towards "attaining the truth of life" [4].

Regarding the above, this thesis will explore the platform for a practical investigation of the organic action/response of a performer. Also, expanding the lens through which this research examines related key terms and practical assumptions from those theatre practitioners' concepts and approaches for contemporary performer training. In this manner, a major question to be addressed in this research is the nature of what is experience and marked by the performer's (organic) action/response, and the use of the key terms/state through the performer's training/studio work. The issues and practical notions will be discussed by analyzing a way(s) to facilitate and heighten a performer's bodily awareness.

2. THE MEANING AND PRINCIPLES OF A PERFORMER'S ORGANIC ACTION

First of all, as we have well aware that a performer's ultimate task *on stage* necessarily need to meet the demand of a specific 'change' which any character would want to achieve though the moment on stage. Here, a performer's central task equivalent with shifting and/or moving the action (fundamental task) forward/against counter-action which a character inevitably has to meet then overcome toward the accomplishment. At the most rudimentary level, these key terms including a performer's central 'task' and the 'change' is "possible only when it is directed towards overcoming the obstacles" (counter-action) [5]. In this sense, forwarding and accelerating the selected action signifies *progressing* a series of following moment which directly interrelated to the question of how to "land the action" within the text/role/character where the performer is working on in the here and now [6].

The precise moment, more explicitly an organic action/response as a result of a performer's progress (action) can be defined how the performer's body initiate invisible action since the invisible precede the visible form/state. Particularly, the process demands the disciplines of thorough listening and encountering his/her body rather than the performer attempts to forcing to do something so that the performer can see then experience what happens within his/her body.

As Nick Moseley provides that allowing the selected action through a performer's body is "corresponding thought-change as something visceral and real, as opposed to something head-based and conjectural [7]. That is, maintaining a performer's intellectual territory suggests that his/her body distances from the moment due

to the body is not being involved in the progress/action thus no one can experience and expect the next or responses.

Let us consider how many performers often tend to do, show and/or expose the latter, visible on stage, and why this phenomenon would be happening primarily in a process of rehearsal? To examine this tendency further, we need to reconsider what O'Gorman notes by concerning the dominant framework:

[...] The all-too-frequent use of erroneous language they use is not about what is actually happening in the moment. They are usually talking about a plan for the moment rather than the moment itself. This never goes well, just as trying to make football match go a certain way never works. You can't do it. You can only respond to what is actually happening in the moment. You have to *react* to the stimuli in the now, for that is where all energy exists, and action is energy. [...] then you activate it via reactions to what happens in real time. [...] action should be talked about as such by all involved [8].

From the notion above, we can apparently see that the heart of any moment/happen on stage is what a performer's body is *doing within it* (moment/happen). Plus, the performer's any bodily movement must be firmly rooted in the interpretative choices which is purposefully directed towards the possibility of 'task' and the 'change' simultaneously. This means that the performer's task is not answering for him/herself. Rather, the task with the process of shift/transformation (change) asks us to answer someone else's thought, perception and so on remaining and/or being within the playwright's intention. Here, the performer has to hold the ability to sense and release into action for which the materials, elements and/or choices must be fully participated and involved in the process of his/her creative work. Otherwise, it is a sort of self-generating including unnecessary, superfluous and/or non-functional moment where the performer's body is isolated or disconnected from a specific action that a specific author intentionally put on the text.

This understanding is based on the practical assumption that an appropriate action can arise only in interactive behaviors of one's psych-physical environment systems. Again, as O'Gorman underlies the significance of *all involved* providing an example of how the purpose and meaning of training/preparation is going to be *mystical* as it takes place within a performer's mental or intellectual space, *talking about a plan*.

What is more, the bigger point is that a number of 'erroneous language,' namely a 'plan' signifies and therefore leads the performer's body to the "approximation of doing or the imitation of doing or the demonstration of doing" that for O'Gorman is not reality of doing nor does a performer reach at a level of being in the moment [9]. Subsequently, maintaining in such a state, planning, leads the performer's body as to unrelated and/or very often contradictory which cannot be fused into a single and/or specific action, the moment/happen. To act organically is being in such scenic action where the performer's task is resolved into a series of fundamental acts.

Directly relevant to this argument is Declan Donnellan's additional observation that is "what I am playing" which "must come from the target and not from 'me'" [10]. As we have outlined and articulated a performer's action in relation to his/her fundamental task and change, the transition from a state of daily or sophisticated mundane pattern to imaginary circumstance establishes a sense of performer-in-action (target) mode where the interpretative/fictional data can be physicalized into a state of playing action.

As Donnellan further notes that the "more energy the actor can locate in the target, the greater the actor's freedom" [11]. This suggests that being able to sense and interact with the target underlies the performer could find a state of emotional equilibrium. At the same time his/her body initiates to move/act freeing from his/her intellectual anticipation while reducing his/her unnecessary movement which in turn transfigure the performer's body as to be thoroughly correspond to the moment by means of organic action within a specific context.

Parallel with the concept discussed above, specifically the notion of a performer's organic action which has to be emerged from the target, it is significant to note that "there is no character in any objective sense, there is only the process and behavior of a particular individual in a particular context" [12]. From a perspective of a performer's task (key source for changing/happening), this quality/state embrace the idea of that a performer can exclusively identify with his/her character or role by answering the question of what the compulsory behavior is including what a performer needs to 'discover,' how to 'survive' through moment-to-moment, what 'needs' to 'prevent' from counter-action, and what "must determine to be won" and/or obtain in the final [13].

Here, we can acknowledge the fact that the practical meaning of an organic action is directed and defined by whether the performer is being fully involved in the given circumstances, performer-in-action mode. In other words, the term/state of organic action comes from how the performer intensely and/or severely interrogate the behavior within his/her body. Seeking another way(s), for example pursuing and/or engaging in a performer's emotional and/or intellectual level, therefore merely lead the performer's body/action/task to the abstract, apart from the given circumstance. In this manner, the term organic can be substitute for a genuine and/or a state of sincerity where the ability of his/her bodymind does not function *independently* but rather mutually interact.

3. A WAY FOR ENHANCING A PERFORMER'S ORGANIC ACTION

Regarding the principles of a performer's action with the related key terms discussed above, this section would interrogate a practical way in order to facilitate a performer's organic action by answering the question of how a performer's body can be in a state of functional moment. Also, this enquiry takes us back to the question of what is experienced by the performer's organic action and response, and the place/role of training in the performer's work. In other words, the conceptualization of the performer's embodiment is still broadly perceived in many acting/theatre schools or institutions primarily focused on the process of a representation of a specific character rather than a dynamic and lived experience through the performer's body. Therefore, the emphasis here should be pursuing and clarifying a way to heightening a performer's bodily awareness through a dynamic integration between his/her bodymind in a sense of mutuality and/or oneness.

Among a widespread interpretation of the performer's organic action (functional moment), this thesis mainly embraces the term/state, a foundation of continuity and a state of continual regeneration from the performer's in-depth inner source. That is, for example the process of 'invisible to visible' to reach the 'pre-expressive level' from Eugenio Barba's notion and 'internal invisible, mental communication' for Stanislavski's exploration of a performer's bodily experience [14] [15].

he two terms with the discourses of a performer's embodiment from those theatre directors' and/or practitioners' concept highlights continuity and regeneration which is a complementary unity defined as the balance of body and mind in phenomenon. The point stressed by the practitioners inspires that the need for interrogating and experiencing what are the performer's bodily qualities which define and articulate the organic moment/happen in performance. The particular quality of a performer's body necessarily needs to meet the degree of his/her bodily involvement in space and time, the here and now shaped by performative state/shift.

As we can clearly see that being in a state of bodily involvement connotes the performer's body is being in spontaneity and hence to being in a level of immediacy where his/her body begins to initiate and/or move in *relation* to space and time. That is, the performer's organic action by means of having spontaneity and immediacy is depended upon how the body is to be "capable of experiencing flow" for which the performer pay fully attention to the details of the given circumstance [16]. The dimension of performer's presence in-between the world (the given circumstance) as the performer's body is now working which in turn facilitates

a series of dynamic process, namely change and/or happen by means of unpredictable moment. Again, the use of erroneous language, O’Gorman’s claim discussed above indicates an important point about the misunderstanding of a point of departure apart from the discourses and practices of a performer’s lived experiences.

Supporting this argument, current discoveries in the field of performer training show that the necessity of reinforcing the performer’s bodily awareness toward the relationship in-between the *rest* of the body. In the way, the performer could apparently explore not only the process of what experienced then emerged from his/her body but also how to maintain his/her bodily awareness without losing the connection and/or engagement with action/task on stage. In this sense, we need to acknowledge the prerequisite quality that the whole bodily engagement is fundamentally considered as a point of departure by means of being in the “moments of change or new findings” [17]. Since we, as human being is directly confront with the world, embodied being-in-the-world, then immediately response or move in an appropriate way and in the precise moment. Rather than any other *effective* approaches, methods and/or assumptions particularly in a sense of seeking and/or adhering to the erroneous language for example, investigating the principles with dynamic mechanism of acting/organic action enable us to experience and facilitate knowledge of the given circumstance/world.

This would mean that a large number of performer training programs and/or institutions are still stuck in the performer’s perception rather than the progress, change and happen. Since the purpose of performer training is developing and embodying the potential qualities a performer has to inhabit through his/her sensorial experience, the patterns/approaches of training has also to meet the way of perceiving the given circumstance and responding to it in a level of a performer’s whole bodily involvement.

4. CONCLUSION

First, we have examined the principle of a performer’s organic action in reconsidering and evaluating the way to being in the moment on stage. We have strived to articulate practical assumptions from those theatre practitioners’ concepts and related key terms to answer the question of how the performer’s body to be fully involved in the given circumstances. Second, we have argued that a performer’s essential task on stage need to be understood as to create each moment to happen through his/her bodily engagement. Being in a state of the ‘happen’ signifies arising the precise moment that is the performer’s body initiate from the invisible by means of thorough listening his/her body. Specifically, this state reminds us of the performer’s body and mind is progressively incorporated and is derived from an appropriate use of bodily awareness which in turn enable the performer to interact in-between the world as his/her action attempt to overwhelm counter-action. Third, we also argued that the next moment and/or more explicitly the change equivalent with embodying a specific action for the achievement. This suggests that the performer’s body in condensed to the circumstance, whereas failure to this process lead his/her body to not land the action *within* a specific context. From this point of view, the principle of a performer’s organic action is guided by the relationship between his/her body and mind in which the performer’s body activates in an appropriate moment as corporeality.

REFERENCES

- [1] Vladimir Mirodan, *The Actor and the Character: Explorations in the Psychology of Transformative Acting*, London, New York, Routledge, p. 52, 2019.
- [2] Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, (trans. E. Hapgood), London, Methuen, pp. 11-12, 1986.
- [3] Hugh O’Gorman, *Acting Action: A Primer for Actors*, London, New York, Rowman & Littlefield, p. 48,

- 2021.
- [4] Dila Okuş, “Eugenio Barba and Extra-Daily Scenic Behaviour: Influences of Stanislavski, Meyerhold and Grotowski”, *Tiyatro Eleştirmenliği ve Dramaturji Bölümü Dergisi* 31, <https://doi.org/10.26650/jtcd.809806>, p. 25, 2020.
- [5] Toby Cole, *Acting: A Hand Book of the Stanislavski Method*, New York, Martino Publishing, p. 53, 2014.
- [6] Nick Moseley, *Actioning and How to Do It*, London, Nick Hern Books. p. 49, 2016.
- [7] *ibid.*, p. 51.
- [8] Hugh O’Gorman, pp. 34-35, 2021.
- [9] *ibid.*, p. 67.
- [10] Declan Donnellan, *The Actor and the Target*, London, Nick Hern Books, p. 209, 2005.
- [11] *ibid.*, p. 25.
- [12] Vladimir Mirodan, p. 14, 2019.
- [13] Declan Donnellan, p. 209, 2005.
- [14] Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*, (trans. R. Fowler), London, New York, Routledge, pp. 104-105, 1995.
- [15] Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work on a Role*, (trans. J. Benedetti), London, New York, Routledge, p. 245, 2010.
- [16] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, p. 3, 2008.
- [17] Christina Kapadocha, “The Development of Somatic Acting Process in UK-based Actor Training”, *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, Vol. 9, No. 2, https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.9.2.213_1, p. 217, 2017.