

## Embodiment: Reaching Inside Our Readers

How can we account for the body on the page? How do we allow the lyric to explore more of the subjective bodily world which we inhabit as poets, as humans, as actors on the stage and in our lives? In the poems in my manuscript, *Play*, I attempt to answer these questions by using the source text *An Actor Prepares* by Constantin Stanislavski as a kind of phrase bank, extracting a poetry with more diverse implications than actor training. *An Actor Prepares* is particularly fruitful for this sort of work because it is written as the fictionalized first person account of an actor going through Stanislavski's proposed training program.

If we can infuse our current poetics with our physical bodies, it may be possible for the work to become more active and, therefore, the possibility of activism in poetics could be more fully realized. It is for this reason that I push to align poetics with performance, not as "performance poetry" as it has been recently defined in slam poetry, but as the performance of the page itself in the reader's mind, enacting the event of the poem while simultaneously recreating a language embodied with both the speaker's and reader's physical lives. This embodied language could be a way to a more honest communication, as our bodies are what separate us, acknowledging the subjectivity of experience and tempering it with the physicality of the individual.

In this first piece, "Audition," the text is taken from the first chapter of *An Actor Prepares* where the actors in Stanislavski's book are given a preliminary test to show the acting skills with which they begin his training. In my poem, however, more implications arise, I think, which pertain to all our bodies acting in the stage of the world which is our home.

# Audition

*I am seized by a desire to act I stop  
desire is difficult to kill extremely easy*

*amid all this chaos I have nothing to put in its place  
counting on the effect of atmosphere I feel in my room freedom*

*long time's ahead my favorite places telegraph poles seen from a train  
the poet's thoughts foreign externals of greatest importance I stop*

*with the mirror in slightest hesitation a catastrophe is inevitable  
the words do not help me when I don't recognize my own voice*

*I become confused make myself believe begin someone calls  
stare into the awful hole I stop beyond our first rehearsal*

*the Director his explanation of the sorrow shocks the amazement  
a trusting man fixes an animal's walk perhaps a tiger the soul's injury*

*I do not control my methods they control me  
I improvise vice in lovely form*

*my general aspect the whole impression my inspiration I stop  
with abandon will it judge my legs arms hands face facial muscles*

*I feel the discrepancies less sharply why do I keep on repeating  
weep so sorry I assume indifference in a rack of lights*

*to free myself from the pull but I see nothing now  
yesterday stuck so exactly like today I stop tomorrow*

*why and who beat me into certain methods without noticing  
time only the inner aspect's interest to hold up the work of a whole*

*self I feel at home in this room find myself dimly lighted  
in a place cut loose the listeners strain forward with rage seized*

*a curtain of light between the auditorium and me  
filled with a complete indifference too long at one point forever repeating*

*at one point forever repeating quiet that order reigned quiet there  
mechanically to speak and act arriving early I continue*

*unnatural and fruitless to feel an obligation the audience  
my heart begins to pound I feel blinded nauseated I turn*

*myself inside out I declaim the text the best possible impression of it  
little changes my mood transformed unexpected*

*attention on what is going on around me I am making a failure  
in fear attraction of the public seems stronger*

*a different part of my room to speak my lines as softly as possible  
from fixed ideas to act the nature I cannot break every word*

*an entrance the feeling goes across  
a fear that turns my face and hands to stone*

*the beginning so swiftly moves along and then stop I stop why do I  
keep on repeating through the audience a murmur ran*

*praise brought back old confidences or would bring  
our rehearsal on the big stage people are walking around carrying things*

*hammering arguing with myself adjusting myself  
I start to pick up the nails to my new surroundings*

*inspiration the whole disappears from event  
in the great stage open a life bare I interfere with my own life*

*work I am oppressed by the position of the furniture by the size  
of the place I became oppressed but could recognize a certain similarity*

*to the culminating moment in my role the thought flashes in my mind  
all violent became full of savage energy in myself*

*words interfere with act and act with words*

*I long for my turn to get through with the thing that I am*

*fear set in the act hems protected from the public*

*more accustomed to the place where works play*

*I seem to put on an exhibition right in the most conspicuous place*

*it is my own affair on automatic delivery activity incessant*

*I try in oppression to play everything I have yet stop*

*I could not retain recognize the plan the first rehearsal is an if*

Following is a series taken from the second chapter of *An Actor Prepares*, two of which appeared in Wheelhouse last spring. This chapter in Stanislavski's book is spoken mostly by the Director, laying out the goals of his actor training system. However, from my perspective, issues of faith in the power of art and truth transcend the stage to all the arts, especially to my current artistic pursuit of poetic truth.

## Censure

1.

*above all*  
*you will not go astray*  
*to understand*  
*your hands*  
*your eyes*  
*your body*  
*throws itself*  
*forward to grasp something*  
*being carried away*  
*we do penetrate into*  
*the art of living*  
*regardless of will*  
*we do pour into it*  
*steam electricity*  
*wind water*  
*certain elements*  
*constructive elements*  
*considered essential*

*marvels nature brings forth  
genius exists  
you will be able  
to understand your mistakes  
without yourselves  
giving up completely  
becoming conscious and dying  
we cannot always analyze  
would you naïve  
lifeless give experience  
its spiritual life  
you should play  
truly the body on the soul  
a very Hercules*

2.

*I lived it each time  
to tell the truth  
    custom  
    manner  
    movements  
    voice  
I maintained  
I used my mirror  
I noticed my gait  
I saw my physiognomy  
I saw my own feelings  
unwise to feel the pattern  
accuracy in faith I saw a reflection  
a certain inner coldness  
no expenditure of nervous force  
the model epoch the country  
time the condition of background literature  
psychology of the social way of living  
speech is external appearance  
intonations he speaks with the same voice  
representation is  
aroused  
rather than your faith  
hand over to him  
your astonishment*



3.

*aristocrats play  
with their lorgnettes  
peasants spit on the floor  
wipe their noses  
on the skirts of their coats  
old ladies try to look young  
military men click their spurs  
an assortment of picturesque effects  
they “progress”  
plastic motion  
no sensations  
hysteria/ecstasy  
in prayer raising to heaven  
divide true art  
from the mechanical boundaries  
doors that open and close  
by themselves  
clichés will fill up  
every empty spot  
in art without living  
only the dead  
bar the road*

4.

*I do not have any  
use of stereotype  
worked the seeds of great danger  
    roar  
    show their teeth  
    roll their eyes  
to replace real feelings  
the muscles  
take advantage of ignorance  
the exploitation of art  
false success  
favoritism intrigues taste  
art  
by many other means  
shrivels  
a long time living truth will  
grow*

I am continuing to work on the performance of the page, that is, I hope this work transcends telling the story of someone else to implicate the reader as the actor in his or her own life. If I'm able to do this over the course of the book, and by the end the reader not only identifies with the speaker but becomes one with the speaker, the test of embodiment on the page will be passed. Perhaps then, our subjective bodies can live together in poetry.