

play) is a blueprint, not the thing itself. We return continually to see certain plays in the hope of discovering something new about them. This can only mean that each time we revisit a classic, we expect the actors to provide us with something fresh about the text, characters and situations; for no one else but the actors can do that: invest the basic *what* with a fresh *how*. Directors can – and do, with their designers – fill the stage with visual clues as to how we might look anew at a text and, of course, point the actors in certain interpretive directions; but *only the actor can play the specific, detailed, moment-to-moment choices*, choices which are frequently too subtle, too instinctive, too fleeting and too complex for verbal explication and are therefore, in a sense, *beyond the director's reach and exclusively the business of the actor*.

Any scene and any line of text can be played in an infinite number of ways; we know there's no such thing as a definitive performance. So if the text is always legitimately open to interpretation and if the interpretation can vary from production to production (in fact we expect it), why shouldn't it vary from performance to performance *within* one particular production. What law of theatre dictates that each production is allowed only one choice of interpretation per line or per moment!

Stanislavsky's work supports this flexibility. It's based on the simple perception that in life we're driven by WANTS – needs and intentions that motivate us to carry out a range of actions in an attempt to fulfil those WANTS. As in life, so in the theatre: the actor-character functions in exactly the same way. This way of playing is based on intention rather than result. Actors working this way ask a different question from that asked by actors who fix their performances: '*What does my character want at this moment?*' as opposed to '*How shall I play this moment?*'; process versus result; open versus closed. The former *allow the how to reveal itself from moment to moment*; the latter *decide in advance on the how for the foreseeable future of the production*, either by choosing from several options that emerged in rehearsal, or by discussion (i.e. negotiating) with the director and other actors in the scene ('If you play your line like that, then I can play mine like this!'). Such a choice often depends on the determination of the person with the highest status rather than on the requirements of the text. This is a reductive option; a denial of the actor's full creative potential (a potential that even some actors deny themselves) or a refusal to accept it. Moments pregnant with who-knows-how-many rich possibilities are reduced by ego and fear to the false security of one.

Process and Results in Practice

Process-led actors build an internal structure of intentions and actions that liberates them dynamically through time and space. Result-led actors build an external structure of moves, business and line-readings that imprisons them in time and space; what feels to them like security is actually constraint. Process-led

actors pursue objectives through actions that spontaneously release whatever feelings are aroused in them by those actions and by their partners' reactions to them. Result-led actors repeat predetermined patterns and try to inject planned simulations of emotions into them. (Emotion is a can of worms I'll open up in due course.) Process-led actors think in character. Result-led actors think about themselves (how they're doing). Actors who play results may give performances that are intelligent (well analysed and well shaped), but incomplete (unfulfilled and unembodied). The external form, devoid of the inner life that created it, becomes a repeated formula, life-like but actually life-less.* What you get is what you see and what you hear. Such performances tend to lack dimension or subtext. They're exclusively linear. They offer the top line of the score, without any harmonics, any counterpoint, any orchestral richness. You get the simplistic, the obvious, the predictable, the cliché, rarely the revelation or the surprise. One reason why theatre so often seems dull is because the audience is ahead of the actor; they know what the actor is going to play before the actor plays it. At a head-based level of experience, they're as familiar as the actor with the conventionally accepted clichés of how people behave in particular situations. But we're all different, complicated and unpredictable. The actor who works through process is likely to produce an unpredictable choice, one that is revelatory and yet inevitable – because *it's true to that moment and that performance and that performer*.

Sarah and Eleonora

George Bernard Shaw, who wrote about acting with great perspicacity, describes these two sorts of actors by comparing and contrasting the performances of Eleonora Duse and Sarah Bernhardt in the title role of *Magda* (the English title of Hermann Sudermann's *Heimat*), both of whose productions of that play were fortuitously playing in London at the same time: Duse – process, spontaneity, experiencing the role; and Bernhardt – result, calculation, displaying herself in the role. I quote at length from his review in *The Saturday Review* for 15 June, 1895.

The contrast between the two Magdas is as extreme as any contrast could be between artists who have finished their twenty years apprenticeship** to the same profession under closely similar conditions.

Madame Bernhardt has the charm of jolly maturity, rather spoilt and petulant, perhaps, but always ready with a sunshine-through-the-clouds smile if only she is made much of . . . her complexion shews (*sic*) that she has not studied modern art in vain. Those charming roseate effects which French painters produce by giving flesh the pretty colour of

* Again, this is the Deadly Theatre that Peter Brook identified and defined in *The Empty Space*.

** I doubt there are now many actors who would consider even the first three years of their professional work as an apprenticeship or ever think of themselves as apprentices.