

How are performances put together? A question that could be answered in an infinite variety of ways, there can't be a right answer. Is there a right answer for each individual though? Perhaps. I'm inclined to believe we lean into our preferences more than anything else, unless practicing a specific approach we may not have considered on our own. We've discussed the influence of personal tastes in the course already, and whether or not it creates a signature style. In my experience, I say it does. Unless somebody's approach is to always take a different approach and challenge what they know, given enough time and space to reflect on a collective body of work, a style emerges. Certain elements even remind us of specific works, hence why we can compare by saying things like 'This feels like a Kubrick film.' There must be value in analyzing our personal preferences, as then we can be more objective in our biases, and understand what makes things work for us comprehensively. That being said, I should try to deconstruct some of my own taste.

In general, I appreciate a piece that is cohesive with a purely chronological narrative from start to finish, but it's also nice to have something more reflective, with moments that time stands still in, and plot taking a back seat to mood. However, even more satisfying than a work that guides you 100% of the way, is something more segmented, that unifies itself at some other point, or in some other way. It could be through characters that cross paths only briefly going through stories that intersect, akin to Pulp Fiction. Or perhaps we could be met with a collective theme that unifies an ensemble, focal points taking turns center stage. I'm struggling to think of good examples, but maybe plays like Cats are similar, with many characters being introduced and given time to shine throughout.

When meeting new characters, I like it done without fanfare. Showing us what someone does will always be more important than telling us who someone is, so I'd rather have them simply appear and play into the story. For me, it also creates more engagement, as it's not spelled out for you. Just like in real life, we should be met with the questions that face us when we see others' actions. Why are they doing this? What do they want? Motive should be a driving force for any character-centric plot, so in my opinion, leaving room for nuance in the storyline by letting us interpret what's going on is a more interesting way to tell a story.

I also believe the sets around performances are a character of their own, and a main character at that, as they surround the entire production the whole time. They should be treated with the same level of thought and care as any other character, of course that doesn't mean they should be a focal point at all times, fancy and ornate, nor a minimal blank canvas for performers to act within. The set should serve to tell the story in the best possible way,

whether it's giving the story elevated context through intricate backgrounds that tell a story on their own, or getting out of the way with sparse designs that pull you into the act itself, and lessen the barrier between set and audience.

How much barrier between the audience do I want anyways? With the setting of audiences, I am fairly traditional in my preference. To me, having a well lit stage/screen and a room full of onlookers in the dark creates a more captivating atmosphere for performance. You can feel yourself as part of a collective whole, without necessarily the distraction of being in a normal room with as many people. If audience participation is called for, having stage lights in the opposite direction seems the most engaging to me, as the stark contrast of a searchlight beaming into a crowd feels exciting, and generates a spectacle on its own as it cuts through audience members and turns the crowd into a flash of colors and faces. Having something more meta and tongue-in-cheek, with audiences being acknowledged by characters can be fun too, but I feel like those types of acts are more suited to comedic performance. Being a part of the reality a performance engages with can be exciting, but it comes with the chance of people giving up investment in the story, depending on the level of disbelief required or expected.

Speaking of reality, where do I draw the line between realism and fantasy? While fantasy is all fun and games, and serves an important role in escapist stories that would never be told in our reality, I find being able to relate to a character that lives in a similar way to ourselves is more engaging since there's never necessarily a disconnect between what is happening and what we know about. That being said, what I prefer is probably somewhere in between, in the magical realism genre. Something that's grounded in the mundanity of our world, only to be met with fantastical elements that can exaggerate things, without characters being all that fazed. My exposure to the genre is mostly through Japanese authors like Haruki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto, where characters end up in strange liminal spaces or somehow communicate to the deceased without a fuss. It still has an effect on the characters, but not because of a 'Why is this happening?' but a 'What does this mean?' Being given the ability to throw normal people into less than normal scenarios without their perception being blown apart is an intriguing concept that almost always draws me in. A great example of this on screen is also *Maniac* (Netflix, 2018). In which, the characters are able to go through fictional scenarios that affect them in very real ways, and the subconscious itself becomes a prominent element of the show.

Obviously, the idea of magical realism involves fiction. Of course there's nothing wrong with fiction, although I do believe even in fiction, the most compelling aspects stem from autobiographical experience anyways. Whether that's a performer that's reacting to a scene as if they were reliving a past experience, or a writer who calls upon their memories to draw a story from, the most guaranteed way to ensure a story feels human, is to have a genuine human experience behind it.

Acting comes in many forms, all of them equally valid, but of course what affects one, may not do much for another. In my opinion the style of acting on display does not matter, as long as it's unified in some way. You could have all the cheese and campiness of an older film throughout an entire piece to a wonderful degree, keep it down-to-earth and whole-hearted to try and connect in a more relatable context, or subdue the entire thing to create a sort of uncanny effect, something that might be unnerving or work to create a reality that works through a different lens. Also viable is the contrast that can be used in these approaches within the same work. There has to be a "straight-man" for there to be a wild card.

*"When it comes to art, most of the world clings to Aristotelian ideas because they promise that there's logic and sense, and indirectly promises that everything will work out in the end. Even if there's evidence to the contrary."*

I find the tradition of Aristotle's ideas to be off-putting when they are expected without question. For people to be baffled by art that makes them ask 'What's the point?' misses the mark altogether. While universal values make sense on a conceptual level, in practice it falls apart. Aristotelian ideas cling on even today due to the human tendency of assigning meaning and logic to a nature that frankly doesn't give a damn what we think. Being in the middle of an unanswerable, unassignable reality is the existential crisis we all have to face everyday. I feel that resigning to the notion that there is one inherent truth within any one thing is absurd, albeit a necessity for some. We can see how fast the notion of universality crumbles when we apply the same ideology to the root question underlying it all, What is the meaning of life? Under any external answer, there can be no one-size-fits-all. The meaning of life is to be alive, whatever that means to you.

*Are we watching it or are we part of it?*

*It depends on where you are, in time and space...*

*Art and all the systems it contains reflects our relative truth.*

The separation and/or integration of art and experience remains hard to clarify, even in the most lucid of explanations. One of the more existential ideas to clarify this might be the age-old question 'If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?' And while the answer may be initially clear as an objective Yes, the important takeaway lies in the fact that subjectively it is No. Without our perception of the art around us, there is none, at least in our mind, as we cannot know anything to exist without having observed it. In this way we are intrinsically linked to any performance itself. A paradigm shift with the power to change our view of life, what we experience is and always will be an extension of us.