

The 13 Levels of Awareness

Awareness is a matter of how much the performer knows, how much the audience knows, and how much this is actually addressed through performance. There exists a power imbalance between the audience, performer, and the performance itself, which informs the way it is interpreted.

I break this down into 13 levels of awareness:

- 1. Everyday Performance** — people perform without thinking for an audience that interprets their performance (both largely unaware that any performance is taking place)
- 2. Unaware Codified Performance** — both parties are still unaware of their roles, however a third party would not understand the communication (a courtroom for example)
- 3. Invisible Realism** — the actor is aware of themselves as a performer or performing while the audience is not aware at all, however the performance is not strained
- 4. Heightened Invisible Realism** — same as #3 but the performance is strained and the performer is not entirely within the performance (hence the performer is hyper-aware of their actions, which causes the performance to be estranged, but only to the performer)
- 5. Unaware Performativity** — the performer is unaware that they are performing or behaving performatively, while the audience is aware.
- 6. Suspension of Disbelief** — the realist theatre, the audience pretends it is not performance (although they know it is), the actor tries to become the character
- 7. Interloping Audience** — the actor does not hide that they are aware of the performance, they do not address it either (it is as if the audience is watching a conversation between two people who are aware of the third person, but choosing not to address them)
- 8. Soft Fourth Wall** — as above, but the performer no longer completely ignores the audience, they may glance at them or make faces, but there is no direct addressing of the audience
- 9. Permeable the Fourth Wall** — the fourth wall is still somewhat in place, but it may be broken, the audience is now directly addressed
- 10. Abstracted Performance** — the use of masks, puppets, and caricatures (there is a playing off reality without an attempt to depict it “authentically”) the audience and actor are aware of the performance, there is less separation, although some remains (there is also inherent codification through due to the abstraction)
 - The actor performs via some other medium, which creates an added layer of separation
 - We can also draw a distinction between the use of half masks (layered reality) and full masks (a complete obstruction), painted faces (as mask) vs a physical object, or showing the puppeteers vs. hiding them. These things generally do not change the level of awareness, but do provide different nuances.
- 11. Complete Awareness / Direct Communication** — both actor and audience are aware of the performance and are choosing to be aware of it, the actor may now address the audience at length, and there is no pretense of a fourth wall (e.g. stand-up comedy and dance)
- 12. Estranged Performance** — the performance is not only aware of itself, but goes further by calling attention to itself as performance
- 13. Simultaneous Dramaturgy and Immersion** — the performer becomes part of the performance (in this case sometimes there is a loss of awareness of the performance, as a result of the complete elimination of any separation between the performer and spectator)