

THE THEATRE OF THE FUTURE

by

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I am quite sure that many of our contemporary actors and directors not infrequently ask themselves what the theatre of the future will be like and what the work in it will involve.

The future of the theatre and the theatre of the future are matters that seem to me of the utmost importance. I will, therefore, try in my talk this evening to impart to you some of my dreams and some of my thoughts on the theatre of the future and, more specifically, on the actor and the director of the future.

In what way will their work differ from ours? It will differ in more than one way.

In the first place, our colleagues of the future will be more conscious of the creative processes than the actors and directors of

today. They will be aware that the creative process must go through FOUR definite stages; every stage has its own purpose and every stage produces its own results, which are all indispensable to the wholesome completion of a creative work. To be aware of and to know the laws governing this process is to be able to apply it in order that it may bear fruit.

THE FOUR STAGES OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

WHAT ARE THEY?

In order to have an idea about the first of these stages, let us recollect what it was that lived in our souls when we were still very young and possibly dreamed of the stage only secretly.

You will probably agree with me if I say that what lived in our souls then was, first: an anticipation of something beautiful (though vague) that was to happen in the future. But our anticipation and longing were but signs - but outward indications - of what was going on in the hidden depths of our souls, in those depths which are closed to our everyday consciousness. Without our knowing it, a powerful creative process was already going on in us.

Our childish or adolescent souls blindly fell in love with life, with some certain aspects of life, and instinctively collected, eliminated, assorted and shaped the "material" offered by life itself. Our young souls did not as yet know life, and did not understand it consciously. All the precious finding of our souls dwelt in the hidden depths which are closed to everyday consciousness. It was there, in those depths, that the creative process of ^smastering life, the process of subconscious training for the coming conscious living, was taking place. The first stage of any creative process is nothing more and nothing less than the

same subconscious process that took place in our souls when we were children. The only difference is that now we are applying it in our labors over an artistic work of one kind or another.

Actors and directors of the future will make their first acquaintance with a play in a manner identical with the way in which the soul of a child receives the first impressions of life around it. Their first reading of a script will be similar to the way in which a child "reads" successive events of life. The actors and directors of the future, in approaching their creative tasks, will lay great stress on the impressions they receive from the very first reading of a play.

While reading the play (which is to be produced), they will consciously and purposely abandon themselves to the first impression, like to the vague but strong anticipation of the beauty of the coming production and performance. And with all their beings they will long for that production and performance.

And just as children do not react to the life that surrounds them with cold and calculating mentalities, so will they consciously and purposely wrest themselves free from cold and calculating mental reactions to plays. With all their beings, with all the powers of their will, with all their sensibilities, they will absorb the first impressions of a script. In the depths of their souls, life will occur, creation will begin.

They will be conscious of the condition that (as in the case of the child) it must take place in the subconscious, or shall I say in the super-conscious regions of their souls. They will know how not to meddle or tamper with the unfathomed processes of the sub- or super-conscious selves. They will abandon themselves to the first impression of the

play and will react to its spirit, to its atmosphere, as one reacts to music.

They will find themselves steeped in the tragic, lyrical, melodramatic or humorous world, depending on the kind of play they are to work upon.

In the first period the actors will feel - or rather, anticipate - but only in their general aspects, the destinies of their characters, their flights and downfalls, their happiness and misery. They will feel the evil and the good forces that influence the march of events in the play, and so on. They will experience the play like one well-integrated whole, still without details or nuances. They will know that this is characteristic of the first period, the period of the first impregnation of the soul, which will later give birth to a work of art in all its details. And just as the soul of a lad falls in love with the creative themes of life itself, so will the soul of the actor and director fall in love with the creative theme of the forthcoming work.

This first creative period is the period of first love, and woe to the artist who does not know this period. He will pay dearly for such an attitude. We, the actors and directors of today, are continuously paying the penalty for neglecting to wait patiently through the period of anticipation. We want to play our parts or produce our plays immediately, applying crude physical means and methods. We do not fall in love with the future; we take crudely of the present. We are afraid of spending time on the first period of love and anticipation. We must hurry. The circumstances of our daily life demand this of us and we ignore and skip this tender period. But this is not even what people call practical, because, as a result of skipping the first period, we invariably

lose more time during subsequent periods.

We live through agonies, we lose time and energy during the subsequent periods of creation in quest of something that we are missing and cannot find. We do not realize that this something is our first love that died of neglect, the neglected first period of super-conscious creativeness.

Now let us ask ourselves: when does this first period of love and anticipation end and when does the second one begin?

There are no exact lines of demarcation between them. The advance from one stage into another is a matter of the actor's or director's inner tact. During a certain period both processes go on simultaneously, supplementing and helping each other.

The second period should include active and conscious searching, selection and elaboration of the material for details and nuances, for these, in the first period, did not exist. It should also include the shaping of the parts and, finally, the shaping of the entire production and performance as a whole - but only in the imagination, only as mobile, living images of the fancy. It is there, and not in the world of realities that the production and performance, with all details and nuances, must first ripen and be born.

They will reveal themselves gradually from that ~~integrated~~, consistent whole which was created during the first super-conscious period of anticipation.

Even in the beginning, during the first reading of a play, future participants in the performance must react to it through their imaginations and not through their intellects. In the second stage, their imaginations become more and more enriched. Now, when they are ready to advance from one stage to the next, their immediate problem is to bring to life all the images of their fancy.

How can they accomplish this? By letting the entire play, act after act, scene after scene, pass through their imaginations so often and for so long that the images will acquire independent life. These images will begin to appear before them, as it were, demonstrating themselves, their actions, their characters and characteristics. There will come a time when these images will begin to recite their monologues and play their scenes before them. Having thus given life to the images of their fancy, the actors and directors go into discussion with them. They continuously and systematically put questions to the living images of their fancies. They ask questions and get answers.

What does it mean to put a question to an image of one's fancy and get an answer? It means to be able to develop in one's soul such a strong desire to see the image in a certain position, state or action, that the image will actually begin to obey. It begins to change, to take on a new, well-defined, clear-cut form and a new content under the influence of this strong desire or of a question that is put to it. And then it will appear before the artist in just the countenance he wanted to see. And the more concrete the questions, the more concrete the answers. The actors will be able to use this marvellous ability of the images.

The actor will have no need to make up or evolve his image by artificial means. He will have to ask the product of his imagination: "How do you walk? How do you speak? How do you carry your hands, your head? How do you behave in anger, in joy? How do you love?" To these questions the actor will get concrete and definite replies from what seems to be the intangible world of images. He will be able to see not only the outward countenance and conduct of his image; he will exper-

ience and also see his emotions and his soul. In the world of creative fancy one can see and hear not only outward forms; one can also see and hear emotions, experiences, and ideas.

The idea of the play may also be conceived and seen in the form of an artistic image.

Day in, day out, the actors will contemplate their images, and they will change and improve them by questions.

This work of the second stage is carried on not only by each one of them separately: they also collaborate on it during rehearsals that are conducted by the director. The director puts a number of well-considered questions to the world of images and the actors contemplate the images that appear as answers to the questions of the director. The pertinent and well-systematized questions of the director stimulate the imagination of the actors in the direction of one all-embracing artistic goal: towards the creation of one whole, harmonious image of the performance and of each and every role as well. All this still takes place in the imagination.

The final goal of all this work is the concrete realization of the play in actual scenic forms in *mise-en-scènes*, sounds, colors, movement, lighting, and so on and so forth. In order to select the true colors, forms, and sounds and blend them into a performance, it is necessary to have a clear conception of what should be selected and how to go about the process of selection. It is necessary to have an image, a design, a pattern that is to be followed throughout the process of selection and the blending of the component elements. And the performance which has been created in the imagination is the very design and the very pattern that is to be followed. This is the essence of the creative work during the second stage.

If this work is followed through, the actor will invariably arrive at a point where he will begin to feel, "I cannot help giving actual life to the image of my fancy. I see and hear this image so clearly and so fully. I sympathize with its moods, I cry with its tears, I am happy with its joys, I ache with its pains. I have so much profound love for it that I cannot help giving expression to it through my own body, with the aid of my own voice, my own gestures, my own soul."

Rehearsals are a joyful necessity to him and not a burdensome duty as they are to most actors today who come equipped only with a few type-written pages of their lines, and nothing more. Without any kind of image in his mind, without knowing what to do and how to do it, why and how to be happy or angry, why and how to love or to hate, the actor again and again makes determined efforts to evolve something. But he does not know what he is searching for; he does not know whom to personify because he has no image, he has no pattern. He lacks the joyful urge to give expression to his image because he actually has none.

This concludes the second period of the creative work of the actor.

The third stage arrives organically, as if of itself. It springs from the urge of the actor to put his entire being at the disposal of the image of his fancy. The third period is the period of the impersonation of the image.

How will the actor go about accomplishing the work of this period? Looking into the world of his imagination, he will receive from it impulses for the impersonation of the image of his part. It will of necessity begin coming in fragments. He will cautiously begin

to act as if he were imitating the image of his own fancy. He will imitate the gestures of his hands, his movements, his figure, his walk, his voice. He will imitate his worries and his joys; that is, he will sympathize with them to the fullest extent, so that sympathy will gradually take on the aspects of that particular emotion which we would call the artistic emotion of the stage.

At this point permit me to say in passing, that the emotions of the personal reality of one's everyday life will always make an inartistic impression on the stage. The reality of the stage, just like reality in all art, is quite different from the reality of everyday life. The real and truly artistic impression will be achieved only by projecting those emotions which spring from compassion, born out of living in sympathy with the artistic image (created during the second stage).

After imitating one's own image only in parts, the actor will gradually begin to imitate larger and larger portions of his role. Gradually the time will come when he will be able to imitate, easily, freely, heartily, and ardently the full image of his role.

And just as in the second period of the work the participants would come together to rehearse, now too, during this period of work on the impersonation of the images of fancy, the director will conduct and direct the trend of the rehearsal.

In his presence and in the presence of all the participants, the actors imitate their images freely, selecting such moments and episodes of the life of their image as they feel like. In such a manner they acquaint one another and their director with the character and line of their individual creative powers. But the director not only familiarizes himself with the character of the creative powers of his actors;

as in the second period of the work, he puts questions to the images of the actors' fancy. In the third stage, however, the actors must see the answers not only in the world of images, but must also impersonate and imitate with warmth these answers in the presence of the director and all the other actors. The director also imitates before the actors the images of his own fancy. He gives, thereby, to the entire work one general track and direction. Thus, gradually, a comradely artistic contact among all the participants of the performance is established and the actors come closer and closer to the director's ideal of the coming performance.

It is obvious that under this method of work the director is not a despot who would squelch the free will of the actor, but his friend and guide.

Under such a method of work the director will not inject anything that is alien to the actor's soul and his creative impulses. He will guide the actor in keeping with the actor's own creative urges. The director will continually receive his impressions of the actor's work and will respect and endeavor to make the best possible use of them for the good of the performance as a whole.

Thus, day in, day out, scene after scene and act after act will emerge.

Then the solemn triumphant moment will come - the moment when the entire play is impersonated and when it can be rehearsed in proper sequence from the beginning to the end.

But even then the actors continue to keep before their inner eye the image which they followed faithfully through their preceding labors. By now this image is so clear-cut, so concrete and strong, so luminous,

that the actor cannot part with it even if he wants to. His creation, the image of his fancy, will stay with him continually and will guide him throughout the rehearsals as the fixed object of his imitations.

And, in the course of the third period, the image gradually masters the body and soul of the actor. The images take possession of them, as it were. It descends into them and uses them in order to reveal itself through them.

The third part of this creative work makes obvious the importance of the actor developing and training all his outward and inward powers.

The image that the actor created in his imagination may very well be a perfect and beautiful expression of what he wanted to convey through it, but it will remain in the world of fancy, without ever finding real expression on the stage, if the actor has an undeveloped, rigid body and uncultivated outward means of expression.

The theatrical pedagogy of the future will emphatically reject the mechanical means (employed today) in the development of actors.

In developing its exercises for the warning of actors, the new theatrical pedagogy will always bear in mind one very important principle. It will bear in mind that the essence of the actor's art is: to convey, with the aid of his body and all his outer means of expression, the inner spiritual facts and events; to give expression to the author's idea, to the director's idea, and to the idea of his own self.

In order to accomplish this, the outer means of expression of the actor must be permeated by the power of a living spirit. By this I mean that they must be trained through the kind of exercises that will cultivate the body of the actor simultaneously with the developing of his soul. This means that each physical exercise must be an exercise for the soul as well.

As the actor of the future will begin the development of his outward means, he will at the same time develop his soul. He will find means for this. He will open his soul to those qualities found in the works of the great masters, to the high qualities of compassion and love. He will not be ashamed to seek the knowledge of spiritual truths, facts, and beings; he will know that as long as one remains on the earth and on the earth only, one can create nothing that is of significance and value. Day in, day out, he will only repeat and copy - in the same colors, forms, gestures, and sounds-the facts of life surrounding him.

Without spiritual cognizance he will not be able to produce originality, he will have nothing new to say as an artist; it will be his lot to portray crude naturalism, which, in truth, is not very far removed from plain photography.

The fourth and last period of creativeness comes of itself. It cannot be brought about forcibly; it must be waited for. And it will come soon enough if the work of the first three periods was rightly done. The fourth period is that of inspiration. A miracle happens. The image of fancy, so carefully and lovingly created by the artist, disappears. The picture he imagined is no more; the actor does not see it any more and cannot imitate it any longer. Instead, the image entered him, became one with him! And he does not have to imitate it any more. It lives and works by itself in the soul of the actor. It moves with his hands and feet - speaks with his voice - laughs and cries with him. It creates itself within him. This is a moment of greatest happiness to the actor; through his labors he reaches inspiration! The image he created entered him and lives within him, inspiring his every

movement , his every step on the stage. The actor does not do anything himself. He makes no effort to perform or to play - it all happens of itself

He is free. He feels a certain ease and freedom because he does not act himself, but that image within him, which he created during the first three periods of creation. A miracle came to pass: the image created became one with its actor-creator.

But this is only one side of the miracle. There is another side. When the created image became one with the actor, a new self-realization was born within him. It is the height of bliss for the actor living through this new self-realization, this new "I" that burst within him.

His creative individuality frees itself in the moment of inspiration from the bonds of his body. The actor is aware of the presence in him of his own creative spirit. His creative spirit, his creative "I," freeing itself, becomes the observer, spectator, and witness of his own playing on the stage. He is able to observe his own playing. He can tranquilly and clearly see, feel, and realize all that is taking place within himself, as well as in his surroundings. He sees his acting. He watches it eagerly, as with a thousand eyes. He is on the stage, at the same time he is backstage, he is in the auditorium, in the orchestra, on the gallery; he is everywhere. His creative "I" is free to observe his own creation.

It is a great untruth when actors say that in a moment of inspiration they forget themselves: that they do not know what they are doing; that they can break the furniture, choke their partners on the boards. They disclaim responsibility for their actions because they were visited by inspiration. No, this is not inspiration. This is

obsession. This is a dangerous, sickly condition. This is the path to hysteria, to a nervous breakdown.

True inspiration makes the actor free and more conscious and responsible than ever for his doings. True inspiration is the way to freedom, to moral elevation, to a purer soul, to an enrichment of his own and the other's soul with values of a purely spiritual order.

All that we have said we may formulate as follows:

The First Stage: The soul falls in love with a creative theme. The super-conscious depths, heights, of the soul make this theme their own and rework it. Consciously the actor lives through longing and anticipation. The actor is active, as one who perceives.

The Second Stage: From the depths of his soul rise images of his fancy. The actor gives them life, re-shapes and perfects them by the method of questions and answers. The actor gives all his powers to the world of his imagination.

The Third Stage: The image of his fancy wants to embody itself in the soul and body of the actor. The actor transforms himself, preparing to conceive within him the picture of his imagination. He imitates it.

The Fourth Stage: Inspiration flares up. The actor becomes one with the image and experiences himself as a threefold creature:

First - As a free, creative individuality with a heightened and cleansed awareness;

Second - As a being of body and soul left under the spell of the image of his fancy;

Third - As an image of fancy created by himself, living and acting within his body and soul.