Soul and Emotion in the Elements of the Show

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Abstract: In the present material, I intend to bring light to somehow marginal elements that form the process of preparing a theatre show. These elements are not present in the show but they critically support it. I have also thought of recalling the importance of each detail which is related to theatre as an institution, starting with the entry into the building, the lobby in which the spectators are welcome and ending with the seconds at the end of the show and the first applauses. I didn’t intent to insist in the sphere of the analysis of the scenic arts by themselves (actor performance, music, dance, scenography and so on), but I wanted to present a redefinition of the attitude towards these marginal elements that support the show. Exactly in the same manner in which the secondary characters increase the value of action and, also, in the theatre there are a lot of people that work hard but, from time to time, their efforts are forgotten. In order for theatre to be a therapy for the souls, it is necessary that every cell that forms the artistic performance contain the premises of the healing.

Key words: theatre, public, soul, emotion, awareness

“Theatre does not occur only when the actors and the public meet in a space in order to share an experience; theatre is a way to escape from your ‘inner society’, to avoid the painful stresses or depressing energies, to

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rediscover yourself, to self-model, to let you invaded by awe, even temporarily, of the miracle of our existence”¹, stated Jerzy Grotowski.

Introduction

What is theatre? What is the show? What is the soul? Why are people coming to the theatre?

We cannot talk about theatre as a healing art without making a short analysis of all the elements that are related to this field. As in a living organism where each cell is very important, each person or constituent element has also its importance in the theatre.

We will start with the question: what is theatre?

From a physical perspective, theatre is, in most cases, a beautiful building with a particular architecture, different from other private or public institutions, usually surrounded by green spaces and, as we may have witnessed during the history of theatre, placed near a church or a religious building.

The theatre

How important is this physical aspect of the building, both for the actors who walk every day in this space and for the spectators? The architects who specialized in the design of such spaces have been, in the majority of cases, individuals who, besides the mastering of the secrets of their own job, have tried to induce in the space they were to build the expression of a superior meaning of the place. Each architectural detail that has been used, and we mean especially the case of the old theatre halls, has been taken into consideration in order to make the person who enters such a space aware that

he or she is entering a sacred space, which offers a space of security and inner entertainment.

George Bernard Shaw argued that “art is a magical mirror that we build in order to transform invisible dreams into visible images. In order to see the face, we use a mirror; we use the works of art in order to see our inner soul.”

The first step

The first step of healing should be the same as the first step that the spectator does in the building of a theatre. As Barba has argued, “the theatre may become a sanctuary, a shelter for those who are thirsty for justice, for freedom, a crypt with codified messages for the visiting spectator.” The door at the entrance, usually widely open at least thirty minutes before the show, may be perceived as a gate between the daily life and the artistic life. It is important that the spectator feels even from the beginning the difference between these two worlds, that’s why we do consider that the exterior of the institution, the form, colour and material from which the door is made, create the first sensory and visual impact for the spectator.

Once in the lobby, he or she is already part of a universe where he or she is looking for a sanctuary and relaxation. The lightness of this space is different than the pillars from the front of the theatre. Here, everything seems to wake up in us another way to perceive and see the world around us. In what regards the entrance hall, where spectators who come first may spend sometimes even more that thirty minutes before the performance starts, it should be a place of communication, of elegance, discretion and joy.

It is not recommended to introduce in this place elements of the consumerist age, which might transform the space into a space of marketing of food or beverages. We could offer the spectators, as sometimes it is, the possibility to enter into contact with, for example, books that may be related

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with the space in which they are presented or even with the show that is to be performed.

The Show Room

The next step is entering the show hall. After they pass the first door, there comes another test: entering the ritual area, where the “Encounter”, the “Passing”, the contact with another world has to be made. Even in this stage, the first visual, audio, olfactive and sensorial impact is very important.

As the scientific research shows, even a small, apparently banal smell or sound may awake, in the brain of a person, very powerful reactions that, in the moment they are transmitted further, may recall or associate with the soul of the person’s past traumas. Obviously, they may also be associated with pleasant memories, but what we want to underline is the fact that the organizers of the shows have to pay attention to the soul of the spectator who, by his or her presence in the show hall, awards them his or her trust.

The characters from the shadow

I would also like to point to the important role of the auxiliary personnel (and I am thinking about the ticket lady, or the assistants who welcome the spectators at the entrance and help them, when needed, to identify their seat in the room); their role is to make the passing from the daily space to the artistic one. Their open and welcoming attitude is very important in the preparation of the soul of the spectators for the performance.

As soon as they reached their seats, in the physical way, the spectators attempt to identify a favorable and relaxing position that will allow them to watch the show. At an emotional level, we could feel, from our own experience as spectators, the opening of the inner gates of the soul as a process through which the useless items are abandoned, while useful and healing items are taken instead.
Such a process is of an essential importance for all those who, through their work, give birth to shows, as they have to be aware that the spectator should not be aggressed against by none of the tools or equipment used in the show, from the voices to the lights, from the physical actions to those that are related to the emotional side of the spectators. In a potential training program of conscience and awakening, so much needed in the contemporary theatre, an aspect related to the power to empathize of the actor or of the producer with the spectator should be included. Both the actors and the producers should be made responsible for the impact in the room of what they put on the scene.

**Conscience and responsibility**

Despite the ideas according to which the actors and the producers could offer to the audience anything that comes to their mind, I want to stress that such issues may have dramatic consequences for the mental state of both the artistic personnel and the public.

As research in the field suggests, a significant number of studies that measure the impact of the dramatic performance on the spectator have been made in the world. For example, some of them measure the level of oxytocin and cortisol in the spectator, before and after the performance. If such studies allow a better approach for the quality of shows, it remains to be seen.

Till then, however, we could make an appeal to actors or directors to exploit the existence of a large number of courses and workshops on personal development and also to read psychology books in order to understand how important is their work for the health of the society in which we live.

**The spectator**

After they comfortably seat in the armchairs, the spectators start to watch around them, to admire the pictures, the architecture of the room, also with the objective to feel more secure. As the performance nears, the lights of
the room are reduced in intensity, while such a process may create, for some, a state of anxiety and lack of confidence.

This is why we do consider that the way in which the show starts is very important. If there is a curtain, as it gives way to the scene, the spectators will notice the space in which their soul will be present for two or three hours. This is the reason why the path towards this level should be made with quietness, with patience, and gradually. If the curtain is already open, the spectators can notice such things even from the moment they enter the room of the theatre where he or she will “travel”.

While the spectator waits for the start of the performance, he or she will start to see the details of the background that are to be animated.

It is not recommended, and it may even be damaging, the choice of some directors of the variant that starts the show “in full force”. They do not allow the spectators the chance to get familiar with the atmosphere of the show. We want to recall the role of the gong that, in Antiquity, had the role to inform the gods that a sacred act is to begin and that it is for them. The importance of the gong has remained till our days, as it has the effect to bring more focus in the audience, it prepares the begining of the performance and, on an emotional level, the beginning of a journey towards another world.

We want to underline the difference that the philosophy of art does between the coordinates of space-time in our daily living (cronos) and the space and time in the show (kairos).

Cronos is the dimension of the time which ties us to the daily living, while Kairos is seen as an exit from the normal time and a passing into another type of time, which has been presented by the great philosophers of our time as the time of God, or the time of art creation.

Soul and emotion

We could ask ourselves how does man deal with such a “Passing”, both from a physical and emotional way? It is apparently a natural one, but if we think that the spectator leaves the daily life and accepts entering a new,
different reality in which the time he is relating at in an usual manner changes its quality and length, we meet a pretty complex process that encompasses multiple transformations, imposed, we could argue, by the scenic conventions. And we think it is even more.

Why is such a “passing” made as a necessity of the soul? Why does any person need such “journeys” from time to time, as such person wants to feel them as chances for joy, for liberating some forces that make him or her a prisoner in their own being?

Such observations are not related to the field of imagination, but they reveal what spectators have sensed that they are experiencing inside their souls. These experiences are very hard to prove or to quantify from a scientific perspective. This aspect is even more valid, as Goleman suggests “people’s emotions are rarely put into words, far more often they are expressed through other cues. The key to intuiting another’s feelings is in the ability to read nonverbal channels, tone of voice, gesture, facial expression and the like.”\(^4\) I plead, in turn, for an attempt of the art to pass over the limit that science cannot deal with.

The show

The lights from the room are fading away and the performance starts. We won’t insist on the stages of the performances as we have already talked about them, but we want to insist on the importance of the choice of the script. Before including any play in the repertory of a theatre, it is recommended that a commission, that includes also representatives of the spectators, sociologies, psychologies and psychotherapists, who should quantify in what degree the choice of a play will be useful for increasing the welfare of the society. To choose a play in the repertory by hazard, without taking into account such considerations, may be a form of lack of respect and responsibility from a social point of view, besides being, most probably, a financial waste.

Regarding the visual impact on the spectator, we have in mind all the details that impact the appearance, like scenery, props, the way in which the characters are dressed, and also the lights. It is said that the clothing has to express the state of mind of the person. From this perspective, the scenography, one of the important elements of a theatre production, should take into account the choice of the scenery and of the costumes, of the emotional life of the character who will be dressed. The elements of the scenery have to be a reflection of the way in which the character lives emotionally.

What happens at the end of the show? How does the spectator go back towards the daily space and world? How does he or she feel emotionally? How do they go home? What makes them come back?

Applauses

From my experience as a spectator and taking notice of those around us, we can say that those few seconds that emerge between the end of the show and the applauses are one of the most highly charged moments in theatre. There is a comeback of the soul to its “home”, marked by a silence in which everybody seems to hold their breath. This is the creation of a magical space in which in both sides of the scene there is a moment of catharsis. The scientific demonstrations tell that this moment, followed by the applauses, prepares the release of a fluid of oxytocin that, sent through cells towards the brain, makes the latter feel joy.

Some studies conducted by researchers in the medical field proved that, in the intrauterine period, from the heart which is the first organ that is formed in the development of the new body, some wires are developed. These wires will form, later, the hands. So, by keeping this in mind, we can argue that through applauses, a person expresses the joy that is felt in the heart. The hands meet, hit each other, having among them an invisible heart that formed them and this relation is revived by the artistic act.
Tudor Vianu once said that “When every mortal will acquire the conscience of an artist, the face of the world will change.” How important is for any artist the awareness of the fact that what he or she is doing can change the world in which he or she lives? Why do we need to recall that the artist should remember the role he or she has not only on the stage but also in society? If the work of art is “the synthesis of the infinite” or the “eternal and the ephemeral”, how can he or she offer to the public the encounter between “the ultimate reality and hope?”

Emotion and healing

The actors take down the masks of the characters and reemerge on the stage by themselves in order to thank those who are present for the chance to play and be their own doctors. On both sides of the stage, people laugh or cry, feel freer and more confident. This is what we wish every spectator feels at the end of the play so that theatre remains a form of healing, of making the soul whole again and of bettering the social life.

“Theatre is not just mirroring. Theatre is not the art of the image. Theatre is something else” confirmed the same Jerzy Grotowski when trying to discover, beyond the questions that distressed him, that dimension of the art which is less visible. If theatre is neither a “mirroring”, nor an “art of the image”, that “something else” could be its healing dimension that passes over the space of the stage and is, practically, the bridge between the public and the artists. The miracle is in the space between them. None of them can manifest himself or herself without the other.

Levy Jacob Moreno, the founder of psychodrama, talked about the “religion of the encounter”, arguing that theatre can facilitate that type of interaction at a subtle level. As he argued, “a meeting of two: eye to eye, face to face. And when you are near, I will tear your eyes out and place them instead

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of mine, and you will tear my eyes out and will place them instead of yours, then I will look at me with mine.”

The concept of “encounter” is also met in the discussion about the syncretism of the arts of the spectacle. We can talk about the syncretism of intentions or of the way in which the director chooses to give live to a story on the stage. Syncretism can be a glue that helps the artistic expression on several levels, but it can also be a way to tear down the fluidity of the state if, in their combination, the arts do not converge to the stylistic unity of the spectacle.

In order to accomplish this unity, a clear communication of intentions to all those involved in the making of the show is needed, together with a reassessment of the attitudes towards the audience. “If each one of the three hundred people who make up the personnel of the institution brings healthy feelings in the theatre, they will be able to cure the gloomiest melancholy.”

In the arts of the show, I would include also the Art of the Public. If we were asked about the impact that the quality of the public has on the performance, the majority of the artists would answer that the audience is the main “character” of any show, even if they do not walk on the stage, do not talk and rest in the darkness, during the show.

Conclusions

As conclusions, we will recall some of the key concepts that speak for themselves about the importance of every part of the show, however insignificant they could seem at first sight: the scene, the lights, the scenery, the costumers, the colours, the music, the technical staff, the directors, the assistants, the doormen, the ticket sellers, the poster, the artistic directors, the managers, the critics, the hairdressers, the tailors, the shoemakers, the carpenters, the organizers, the collaborators, the employees, the repertoire, the

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surveys, the public, the feedback, the festivals, the premieres, the contests, the students, the selections, the curricula, the faculty.

Bibliography: