stage theatricality of the latter to make memorable audio-visual statements. Her work is multireferential and multilayered and there is a complexity of reference at the level of ideas. *O Superman* (1982) is dedicated to the French composer, Massenet, and pastiches lines in his opera *Le Cid*. In *Strange Angels* (1989) she paraphrases Walter Benjamin's (1940) *Theses on the Philosophy of History*—'history is an angel being blown backwards into the future'.

In this interview she talks about the use of narrative as polemic. The presentation of her work has been simplified, recalling her earlier work, before her large-scale tours. She discusses her place as a US artist and how she uses her position as an artist to comment on her country.

**Reader cross-references**

- Benjamin — on whom she draws, and to whom political comparison can be made
- Brown — with whom she collaborated
- Schlemmer — comparison with early visual theatre
- Wilson and Lepage — contemporary North American theatre directors who make visual theatre

**Further reading and listening**

... Light has an almost miraculous flexibility... it can create shadows, make them living, and spread the harmony of their vibrations in space just as music does. In light we possess a most powerful means of expression through space, if this space is placed in the service of the actor.

So here we have our normal established hierarchy:

the actor presenting the drama;
space in three dimensions, in the service of the actor's plastic form;
light giving life to each.

But – as you have inferred, there is a but – what about painting? What do we understand about painting in terms of scenic art?

A collection of painted backcloths and flats arranged vertically on the stage, more or less parallel to one another, and extending upstage. These are covered with painted light, painted shadow, painted forms, objects and architecture; all of it, of course, on a flat surface since that is the nature of painting...

Our staging practice has reversed the hierarchical order: on the pretext of providing us with elements which are difficult or impossible to realize in solid form, it has developed painted décor to an absurd degree, and disgracefully subordinated the living body of the actor to it. Thus light illuminates the backcloths (which have to be seen), without a care for the actor, who endures the ultimate humiliation of moving between painted flats, standing on a horizontal floor.

All modern attempts at scenic reform touch upon this essential problem; namely, on how to give to light its fullest power, and through it, integral plastic value to the actor and the scenic space.

Our stage directors have, for a long time, sacrificed the physical and living presence of the actor to the dead illusion of painting. Under such a tyranny, it is obvious that the human body could never develop in any normal way its means of expression. This marvellous instrument, instead of sounding in freedom, exists only under severe constraints.

Everyone knows today that the return to the human body as an expressive element of the first rank is an idea that captures the mind, stimulates the imagination, and opens the way for experiments which may be diverse and no doubt of unequal value, but are all directed towards the same reform... Yet our contemporary productions have forced us into such a despicably passive state that we conceal it carefully in the darkness of the house.

But now, with the current attempt by the human body to rediscover itself, our feeling almost leads to the beginning of fraternal collaboration; we wish that we were ourselves the body that we observe: the social instinct awakens within us, though in the past we coldly suppressed it, and the division separating the stage and the auditorium becomes simply a distressing barbarism arising from our selfishness.

We have arrived at the crucial point for dramatic reform... which must be boldly announced: the dramatic author will never liberate his vision so long as he believes it yoked by necessity to a barrier separating the action from the spectator... The inevitable conclusion is that the usual arrangement of our theatres must evolve gradually towards a more liberal conception of dramatic art...

We shall arrive, eventually, at what will simply be called the House: a sort of cathedral of the future, which in a vast, open and changeable space will welcome the most varied expressions of our social and artistic life, and will be the ideal place for dramatic art to flourish, with or without spectators.

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Source


Adolph Appia (1862-1928)

Swiss designer and philosopher of theatre; the first to write about theatre as a visual art form, where light and shadow, form and space, are as important, if not sometimes more so, than the physical performer. Appia's life was spent writing about, and experimenting with, the technical properties of light and shadow, primarily because of the profound influence of Richard Wagner's cycle of music dramas, Der Ring Des Nibelungen (The Ring of the Nibelung), for which he prepared detailed scenic and lighting scenarios which were summarily rejected by Wagner's family after the death of the composer in 1883. He wrote three books on theatre – Music and the Stage (1897), The Staging of Wagnerian Drama (1895), and The Work of Living Art (1921) – as well as numerous articles.

Appia's work has had a profound influence on modern stage design, and his stark blocks of shadow and light were instrumental in helping the creation of Wagner's grandson's work at the theatre in Bayreuth following the profound and damaging embarrassments of the Nazi canonisation of the composer in the Second World War. Appia's collaboration with the Swiss choreographer Jaques-Dalcroze at Hellerau in the 1910s produced and initiated...
ACTOR, SPACE, LIGHT, PAINTING

a whole new approach to movement and scenography, culminating in his production of Gluck's Orpheus and Eurydice (1913). This essay represents a good summary of his thinking, concentrating as it does on principles of staging which emphasise the actor within the stage space.

Reader cross-references

Craig – similar concerns and explorations in England and Russia
Meyerhold – a concern to see the actor within a scenic frame
Piscator – contemporary European view on the aesthetics of staging
Schlemmer – theatre spatial experiments at the Bauhaus
Wilson and Lepage – late twentieth-century examples of visual theatre

Further reading


Notes

1 Beacham (1993: 239): 'This is excerpted from an untitled manuscript Appia prepared for presentation on 3 April 1919 at the Olympic Institute in Lausanne, accompanied by slides illustrating his designs. The conference was entitled “the future of drama and stage production”; the title “Actor, space, light, painting” was given to an abbreviated version of Appia’s essay after his death.'
2 David Thomas, at Warwick University in 1991, produced a reconstruction of Appia’s work.

Chapter 3

ANTONIN ARTAUD

THEATRE AND CRUELTY

We have lost the idea of theatre. And in as much as theatre restricts itself to probing the intimacy of a few puppets, thereby transforming the audience into Peeping Toms, one understands why the elite have turned away from it or why the masses go to the cinema, music-hall and circus to find violent to gratification whose intention does not disappoint them.

Our sensibility has reached the point where we surely need theatre that wakes us up heart and nerves.

The damage wrought by psychological theatre, derived from Racine, has rendered us accustomed to the direct, violent action theatre must have. Cinema in its turn, murders us with reflected, filtered and projected images that no longer connect with our sensibility, and for ten years has maintained us and all our faculties in an intellectual stupor.

In the anguish, catastrophic times we live in, we feel an urgent need for theatre that is not overshadowed by events, but arouses deep echoes within us and predominates over our unsettled period.

Our longstanding habit of seeking diversions has made us forget the slightest idea of serious theatre which upsets all our preconceptions, inspiring us with fiery, magnetic imagery and finally reacting on us after the manner of unforgettable soul therapy.
THEATRE AND CRUELTY

ANTONIN ARTAUD

Everything that acts is cruelty. Theatre must rebuild itself on a concept of this drastic action pushed to the limit.

Infused with the idea that the masses think with their senses first and foremost and that it is ridiculous to appeal primarily to our understanding as we do in everyday psychological theatre, the Theatre of Cruelty proposes to resort to mass theatre, thereby rediscovering a little of the poetry in the ferment of great, agitated crowds hurled against one another, sensations only too rare nowadays, when masses of holiday crowds throng the streets.

If theatre wants to find itself needed once more, it must present everything in love, crime, war and madness.

Everyday love, personal ambition and daily worries are worthless except in relation to the kind of awful lyricism that exists in those Myths to which the great mass of men have consented.

This is why we will try to centre our show around famous personalities, horrible crimes and superhuman self-sacrifices, demonstrating that it can draw out the powers struggling within them, without resorting to the dead imagery of ancient Myths.

In a word, we believe there are living powers in what is called poetry, and that the picture of a crime presented in the right stage conditions is something infinitely more dangerous to the mind than if the same crime were committed in life.

We want to make theatre a believable reality inflicting this kind of tangible laceration, contained in all true feeling, on the heart and senses. In the same way as our dreams react on us and reality reacts on our dreams, so we believe ourselves able to associate mental pictures with dreams, effective in so far as they are projected with the required violence. And the audience will believe in the illusion of theatre on condition they really take it for a dream, nor for a servile imitation of reality. On condition it releases the magic freedom of daydreams, only recognisable when imprinted with terror and cruelty.

Hence this full scale invocation of cruelty and terror, its scope testing our entire vitality, confronting us with all our potential.

And in order to affect every facet of the spectator’s sensibility, we advocate a revolving show, which instead of making stage and auditorium into two closed worlds without any possible communication between them, will extend its visual and oral outbursts over the whole mass of spectators.

Furthermore, leaving the field of analysable emotional feelings aside, we intend using the actor’s lyricism to reveal external powers, and by this means to bring the whole of nature into the kind of theatre we would like to evoke.

However extensive a programme of this kind may be, it does not overreach theatre itself, which all in all seems to us to be associated with ancient magic powers.

Practically speaking, we want to bring back the idea of total theatre, where theatre will recapture from cinema, music-hall, the circus and life itself, those things that always belonged to it. This division between analytical theatre and a world of movement seems stupid to us. One cannot separate body and mind, nor the senses from the intellect, particularly in a field where the unendingly repeated jading of our organs calls for sudden shocks to revive our understanding.

Thus on the one hand we have the magnitude and scale of a show aimed at the whole anatomy, and on the other an intensive mustering of objects, gestures and signs used in a new spirit. The reduced role given to understanding leads to drastic curtailment of the script, while the active role given to dark poetic feeling necessitates tangible signs. Words mean little to the mind; expanded areas and objects speak out. New imagery speaks, even if composed in words. But spatial, thundering images replete with sound also speak, if we become versed in arranging a sufficient interjection of spatial areas furnished with silence and stillness.

We expect to stage a show based on these principles, where these direct active means are wholly used. Therefore such a show, unafraid of exploring the limits of our nervous sensibility, uses rhythm, sound, words, resounding with song, whose nature and startling combinations are part of an unrevealed technique.

Moreover, to speak clearly, the imagery in some paintings by Grunewald or Hieronymus Bosch gives us a good enough idea of what a show can be, where things in outside nature appear as temptations just as they would in a Saint’s mind.

Theatre must rediscover its true meaning in this spectacle of a temptation, where life stands to lose everything and the mind to gain everything.

Besides we have put forward a programme which permits pure production methods discovered on the spot to be organised around historic or cosmic themes familiar to all.

And we insist that the first Theatre of Cruelty show will hinge on these mass concerns, more urgent and disturbing than any personal ones.

We must find out whether sufficient production means, financial or otherwise, can be found in Paris, before the cataclysm occurs, to allow such theatre (which must remain because it is the future) to come to life. Or whether real blood is needed right now to reveal this cruelty.
Source


Written in 1933, first published in 1938 in Le Théâtre et son double by Editions Gallimard and then in Antonin Artaud: Œuvres Complètes, Tome IV by Editions Gallimard (1964), from which text this 1970 English translation was made.¹

Antonin Artaud (1896–1948)

French actor and writer who, through his life experience, has had a profound influence on notions of theatre in our time. While not himself producing a tangible system he nevertheless, through the publication of the English translations of his collection of essays, The Theatre and Its Double (1958 and 1970), acted as a catalyst for generations of theatre makers by opening up new modes of perception. Artaud promoted a way of thinking which rejected logic and reason as 'the chains that bind us', and wanted the theatre, through its immediacy, to embrace the non-verbal elements of consciousness, and to arouse powerful therapeutic emotions in the audience. He wanted the theatre, through its power, to create a complete physical, mental and moral upheaval in the population, which would lead to enlarged and revolutionary perceptions, from which one can understand his attraction for the generation of the 1960s in Europe and the USA.

In this essay Artaud attacks psychological theatre, advocating instead a form of total theatre which will engage the spectator in creating his own power to change, not only himself, but society as whole. He thus, like many of the artists in this book, was constantly in conflict with established theatre forms, advocating instead the search for man's instinctive impulsive life. Much influenced by Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, Artaud's life became an emblem of man's search for consciousness, proposing in the process that the theatre abandon naturalistic set, space and language to create a new order.

Reader cross-references

Beck – later, messianic claims for the purpose of theatre
Brook – who acknowledges him as an early influence
Grofowski – for a similar, contemporary, messianic role for theatre
Hijikata – for later Japanese celebrations of the irrational
Jarry and Richter – who wished theatre would stir audiences from their apathy

Marinetti – who wished to sweep away logic and embrace physicality and sensuality
Soyinka – a West African perspective on ritual
Stanislavski – a contemporary, contrasting view of theatre
Wigman – a contemporary, modern dance viewpoint

Further reading


Note

Edward Gordon Craig

THE ACTOR AND THE ÜBER-MARIONETTE

Napoleon is reported to have said: 'In life there is much that is unworthy which in art should be omitted; much of doubt and vacillation; and all should disappear in the representation of the hero. We should see him as a statue in which the weakness and the tremors of the flesh are no longer perceptible.' And not only Napoleon, but Ben Jonson, Lessing, Edmund Scherer, Hans Christian Andersen, Lamb, Goethe, George Sand, Coleridge, Anatole France, Ruskin, Pater, and I suppose all the intelligent men and women of Europe—one does not speak of Asia, for even the unintelligent in Asia fail to comprehend photographs while understanding art as a simple and clear manifestation—have protested against this reproduction of Nature, and with it photographic and weak actuality. They have protested against all this, and the theatrical managers have argued against them energetically, and so we look for the truth to emerge in due time. It is a reasonable conclusion. Do away with the real tree, do away with the reality of delivery, do away with the reality of action, and you tend towards the doing away with the actor. This is what must come to pass in time, and I like to see the managers supporting the idea already. Do away with the actor, and you do away with the means by which a debased stage-realism is produced and flourishes. No longer would there be a living figure to confuse us into connecting actuality and art; no longer a living figure in which the weakness and tremors of the flesh were perceptible.

The actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure—the Über-marionette we may call him, until he has won for himself a better name. Much has been written about the puppet, or marionette. There are some excellent volumes upon him, and he has also inspired several works of art. To-day in his least happy period many people come to regard him as rather a superior doll—and to think he has developed from the doll. This is incorrect. He is a descendant of the stone images of the old temple—he is to-day a rather degenerate form of a god. Always the close friend of children, he still knows how to select and attract his devotees.

When any one designs a puppet on paper, he draws a stiff and comic-looking thing. Such a one has not even perceived what is contained in the idea which we now call the marionette. He mistakes gravity of face and calmness of body for blank stupidity and angular deformity. Yet even modern puppets are extraordinary things. The applause may thunder or dribble, their hearts beat no faster, no slower, their signals do not grow hurried or confused; and, though drenched in a torrent of bouquets and love, the face of the leading lady remains as solemn, as beautiful and as remote as ever. There is something more than a flash of genius in the marionette, and there is something in him more than the flashiness of displayed personality. The marionette appears to me to be the last echo of some noble and beautiful art of a past civilization. But as with all art which has passed into fat or vulgar hands, the puppet has become a reproach. All puppets are now but low comedians.

They imitate the comedians of the larger and fuller blooded stage. They enter only to fall on their back. They drink only to reel, and make love only to raise a laugh. They have forgotten the counsel of their mother the Sphinx. Their bodies have lost their grave grace, they have become stiff. Their eyes have lost that infinite subltety of seeming to see; now they only stare. They display and jingle their wares and are cocksure in their wooden wisdom. They have failed to remember that their art should carry on it the same stamp of reserve that we see at times on the work of other artists, and that the highest art is that which conceals the craft and forgets the craftsman. Am I mistaken, or is it not the old Greek Traveller of 800 B.C. who, describing a visit to the temple-theatre in 'Thebes, tells us that he was won to their beauty by their 'noble artificiality'? 'Coming into the House of Visions I saw afar off the fair brown Queen seated upon her throne—her tomb—for both it seemed
The Actor and the Über-Marionette

Edward Gordon Craig

to me. I sank back upon my couch and watched her symbolic movements. With so much ease did her rhythms alter as with her movements they passed from limb to limb; with such a show of calm did she unloose for us the thoughts of her breast; so gravely and so beautifully did she linger on the statement of her sorrow, that with us it seemed as if no sorrow could harm her; no distortion of body or feature allowed us to dream that she was conquered; the passion and the pain were continually being caught by her hands, held gently, and viewed calmly. Her arms and hands seemed at one moment like a thin warm fountain of water which rose, then broke and fell with all those sweet pale fingers like spray into her lap. It would have been as a revelation of art to us had I not already seen that the same spirit dwelt in the other examples of the art of these Egyptians. This 'Art of Showing and Veiling,' as they call it, is so great a spiritual force in the land that it plays the larger part in their religion. We may learn from it somewhat of the power and the grace of courage, for it is impossible to witness a performance without a sense of physical and spiritual refreshment.' This in 800 B.C. And who knows whether the puppet shall not once again become the faithful medium for the beautiful thoughts of the artist. May we not look forward with hope to that day which shall bring back to us once more the figure, or symbolic creature, made also by the cunning of the artist, so that we can gain once more the 'noble artificiality' which the old writer speaks of? Then shall we no longer be under the cruel influence of the emotional confessions of weakness which are nightly witnessed by the people and which in their turn create in the beholders the very weaknesses which are exhibited. To that end we must study to remake these images — no longer content with a puppet, we must create an über-marionette. The über-marionette will not compete with life — rather will it go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in trance — it will aim to clothe itself with a death-like beauty while exhaling a living spirit. Several times in the course of this essay has a word or two about Death found its way on to the paper — called there by the incessant clamouring of 'Life! Life! Life!' which the realists keep up. And this might be easily mistaken for an affectation, especially by those who have no sympathy or delight in the power and the mysterious joyousness which is in all passionless works of art. If the famous Rubens and the celebrated Raphael made none but passionate and exuberant statements, there were many artists before them and since to whom moderation in their art was the most precious of all their aims, and these more than all others exhibit the true masculine manner. The other flamboyant or drooping artists whose works and names catch the eye of to-day do not so much speak like men as bawl like animals, or lip like women.

The wise, the moderate masters, strong because of the laws to which they swore to remain ever faithful — their names unknown for the most part — a fine family — the creators of the great and tiny gods of the East and the West, the guardians of those larger times: these all bent their thoughts forward towards the unknown, searching for sights and sounds in that peaceful and joyous country, that they might raise a figure of stone or sing a verse, investing it with that same peace and joy seen from afar, so as to balance all the grief and turmoil here.

In America we can picture these brothers of that family of masters, living in their superb ancient cities, colossal cities, which I ever think of as able to be moved in a single day; cities of spacious tents of silk and canopies of gold under which dwelt their gods; dwellings which contained all the requirements of the most fastidious; those moving cities which, as they travelled from height to plain, over rivers and down valleys, seemed like some vast advancing army of peace. And in each city not one or two men called 'artists' whom the rest of the city looked upon as ne'er-do-well idlers, but many men chosen by the community because of their higher powers of perception — artists. For that is what the title of artist means; one who perceives more than his fellows, and who records more than he has seen. And not the least among those artists was the artist of the ceremonies, the creator of the visions, the minister whose duty it was to celebrate their guiding spirit — the spirit of Motion.

In Asia, too, the forgotten masters of the temples and all that those temples contained have permeated every thought, every mark, in their work with this sense of calm motion resembling death — glorifying and greeting it. In Africa (which some of us think we are but now to civilize) this spirit dwelt, the essence of the perfect civilization. There, too, dwelt the great masters, not individuals obsessed with the idea of each asserting his personality as if it were a valuable and mighty thing, but content because of a kind of holy patience to move their brains and their fingers only in that direction permitted by the law — in the service of the simple truths.

How stern the law was, and how little the artist of that day permitted himself to make an exhibition of his personal feelings, can be discovered by looking at any example of Egyptian art. Look at any limb ever carved by the Egyptians, search into all those carved eyes, they will deny you until the crack of doom. Their attitude is so silent that it is death-like. Yet tenderness is there, and charm is there; prettiness is even there side by side with the force; and love bathes each single work; but gush, emotion, swaggering personality of the artist — not one single breath of it. Fierce doubts of hope? — not one hint of such a thing. Strenuous determination? — not a sign of it has escaped the artist; none of these confessions — stupidities. Nor pride, nor fear, nor the comic, nor any indication that the artist's mind or hand was for the thousandth part of a moment out of the command of the laws which ruled him. How superb! This it is to be a great artist; and the amount
of emotional outpourings of today and of yesterday are no signs of supreme intelligence, that is to say, no signs of supreme art. To Europe came this spirit, hovered over Greece, could hardly be driven out of Italy, but finally fled, leaving a little stream of tears — pearls — before us. And we, having crushed most of them, munching them along with the acorns of our food, have gone farther and fared worse, and have prostrated ourselves before the so-called 'great masters,' and have worshiped these dangerous and flamboyant personalities. On an evil day we thought in our ignorance that it was us they were sent to draw; that it was our thoughts they were sent to express; that it was something to do with us that they were putting into their architecture, their music. And so it was we came to demand that we should be able to recognize ourselves in all that they put hand to; that is to say, in their architecture, in their sculpture, in their music, in their painting, and in their poetry we were to figure — and we also reminded them to invite us with the familiar words: 'Come as you are.'

The artists after many centuries have given in, that which we asked them for they have supplied. And so it came about that when this ignorance had driven off the fair spirit which once controlled the mind and hand of the artist, a dark spirit took its place; the happy-go-lucky hooligan in the seat of the law — that is to say, a stupid spirit reigning; and everybody began to shout about Renaissance! while all the time the painters, musicians, sculptors, architects, vied one with the other to supply the demand — that all these things should be so made that all people could recognize them as having something to do with themselves.

Up sprang portraits with flushed faces, eyes which bulged, mouths which leered, fingers itching to come out of their frames, wrists which exposed the pulse; all the colours higgledy-piggledy; all the lines in hubbub, like the ravings of lunacy. Form breaks into panic; the calm and cool whisper of life in trance which once had breathed out such an ineffable hope is heated, fired into a blaze and destroyed, and in its place — realism, the blunt statement of life, something everybody misunderstands while recognizing. And all far from the purpose of art; for its purpose is not to reflect the actual facts of this life, because it is not the custom of the artist to walk behind things, having won it as his privilege to walk in front of them — to lead. Rather should life reflect the likeness of the spirit, for it was the spirit which first chose the artist to chronicle its beauty.1 And in that picture, if the form be that of the living, on account of its beauty and tenderness, the colour for it must be sought from that unknown land of the imagination, and what is that but the land where dwells that which we call Death? So it is not lightly and flippantly that I speak of puppets and their power to retain the beautiful and remote expressions in form and face even when subjected to a patter of praise, a torrent of applause. There are persons who have made a jest of these puppets. 'Puppet' is a term of contempt, though there still remain some who find beauty in these little figures, degenerate though they have become.

To speak of a puppet with most men and women is to cause them to giggle. They think at once of the wires; they think of the stiff hands and the jerky movements; they tell me it is 'a funny little doll.' But let me tell them a few things about these puppets. Let me again repeat that they are the descendants of a great and noble family of images, images which were indeed made 'in the likeness of God'; and that many centuries ago these figures had a rhythmic movement and not a jerky one; had no need for wires to support them, nor did they speak through the nose of the hidden manipulator. [Poor Punch, I mean no slight to you! You stand alone, dignified in your despair, as you look back across the centuries with painted tears still wet upon your ancient cheeks, and you seem to cry out appealingly to your dog: 'Sister Anne, Sister Anne, is nobody coming?'] And then with that superb bravado of yours, you turn the force of our laughter (and my tears) upon yourself with the heartrending shriek of 'Oh my nose! Oh my nose! Oh my nose!' Did you think, ladies and gentlemen, that these puppets were always little things of but a foot high?

Indeed, no! The puppet had once a more generous form than yourselves.

Do you think that he kicked his feet about on a little platform six feet square, made to resemble a little old-fashioned theatre, so that his head almost touched the top of the proscenium? and do you think that he always lived in a little house where the door and windows were as small as a doll's house, with painted window blinds parted in the centre, and where the flowers of his little garden had courageous petals as big as his head? Try and dispel this idea altogether from your minds, and let me tell you something of his habitation.

In Asia lay his first kingdom. On the banks of the Ganges they built him his home, a vast palace springing from column to column into the air and pouring from column to column down again into the water. Surrounded by gardens spread warm and rich with flowers and cooled by fountains; gardens into which no sounds entered, in which hardly anything stirred. Only in the cool and private chambers of this palace the swift minds of his attendants stirred incessantly. Something they were making which should become him, something to honour the spirit which had given him birth. And then, one day, the ceremony.

In this ceremony he took part; a celebration once more in praise of the Creation; the old thanksgiving, the hurrah for existence, and with it the stern hurrah for the privilege of the existence to come, which is veiled by the word Death. And during this ceremony there appeared before the eyes
of the brown worshippers the symbols of all things on earth and in Nirvana. The symbol of the beautiful tree, the symbol of the hills, the symbols of those rich ores which the hills contained; the symbol of the cloud, of the wind, and of all swift moving things; the symbol of the quickest of moving things, of thought, of remembrance; the symbol of the animal, the symbol of Buddha and of Man—here he comes, the puppet, at whom you all laugh so much. You laugh at him to-day because none but his weaknesses are left to him. He reflects these from you; but you would not have laughed had you seen him in his prime, in that age when he was called upon to be the symbol of man in the great ceremony, and, stepping forward, was the beautiful figure of our heart's delight. If we should laugh at and insult the memory of the puppet, we should be laughing at the fall that we have brought about in ourselves—laughing at the beliefs and images we have broken. A few centuries later, and we find his home a little the worse for wear. From a temple, it has become, I will not say a theatre, but something between a temple and a theatre, and he is losing his health in it. Something is in the air; his doctors tell him he must be careful. 'And what am I to fear most?' he asks them. They answer him: 'Fear most the vanity of men.' He thinks: 'But that is what I myself have always taught, that we who celebrated in joy this our existence, should have this one great fear. Is it possible that I, one who has ever revealed this truth, should be one to lose sight of it and should myself be one of the first to fall? Clearly some subtle attack is to be made on me. I will keep my eyes upon the heavens.' And he dismisses his doctors and ponders upon it.

And now let me tell you who it was that came to disturb the calm air which surrounded this curiously perfect thing. It is on record that somewhat later he took up his abode on the Far Eastern coast, and there came two women to look upon him. And at the ceremony to which they came he glowed with such earthly splendour and yet such unearthly simplicity, that though he proved an inspiration to the thousand nine hundred and ninety-eight souls who participated in the festival, an inspiration which cleared the mind even as it intoxicated, yet to these two women it proved an intoxication only. He did not see them, his eyes were fixed on the heavens; but he charged them full of a desire too great to be quenched; the desire to stand as the direct symbol of the divinity in man. No sooner thought than done; and arraying themselves as best they could in garments ('like his' they thought), moving with gestures ('like his' they said) and being able to cause wonderment in the minds of the beholders ('even as he does' they cried), they built themselves a temple ('like his', 'like his'), and supplied the demand of the vulgar, the whole thing a poor parody.

This is on record. It is the first record in the East of the actor. The actor springs from the foolish vanity of two women who were not strong enough to look upon the symbol of godhead without desiring to tamper with it; and the parody proved profitable. In fifty or a hundred years places for such parodies were to be found in all parts of the land.

Weeds, they say, grow quickly, and that wilderness of weeds, the modern theatre, soon sprang up. The figure of the divine puppet attracted fewer and fewer lovers, and the women were quite the latest thing. With the fading of the puppet and the advance of these women who exhibited themselves on the stage in his place, came that darker spirit which is called Chaos, and in its wake the triumph of the riotous personality. Do you see, then, what has made me love and learn to value that which to-day we call the 'puppet' and to detest that which we call 'life' in art? I pray earnestly for the return of the image—the über-marionette to the Theatre; and when he comes again and is but seen, he will be loved so well that once more will it be possible for the people to return to their ancient joy in ceremonies—once more will Creation be celebrated—homage rendered to existence—and divine and happy intercession made to Death.

Florence: March 1907

Notes

1 Of sculpture Pater writes: 'Its white light, purged from the angry, bloodlike stains of action and passion, reveals, not what is accidental in man, but the god in him, as opposed to man's restless movement.' Again: 'The base of all artistic genius is the power of conceiving humanity in a new, striking, rejoicing way, of putting a happy world of its own construction in place of the meaner world of common days, of generating around itself an atmosphere with a novel power of refraction, selecting, transforming, recombining the images it transmits, according to the choice of the imaginative intellect.' And again: 'All that is accidental, all that distracts the simple effect upon us of the supreme types of humanity, all traces in them of the commonness of the world, it gradually purges away.'

2 From another point of view, and one not lightly to be either overlooked or discussed, Cardinal Manning, the Englishman, is particularly emphatic when he speaks of the actor's business as necessitating 'the prostitution of a body purified by baptism.'

3 'All forms are perfect in the poet's mind; but these are not abstracted or compounded from Nature; they are from Imagination.'—William Blake.

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