

ABSTRACT:

From Theatre Anthropology to the Science of Performative Creativity

Theatre-making is the only art form of which one can say any one of the following two statements to the artist engaged in it:

- “That action is true – that is how you would do it in life.”
- “That action is not true – that is not how you would do it in life.”

One cannot meaningfully tell a violinist, for example, “that is (or is not) how you would do that action in everyday life”; nor can one meaningfully tell an artist painting a picture “that is (or is not) how you would paint in life”; nor can one meaningfully say to a dancer “that is (or is not) how you would move about in life” – and neither can one say that to a sportsman; nor can one say to a singer “that is (or is not) how you make vocal sound in life.” All such statements would be meaningless, pointless and absurd.

In the case of the theatre-maker, however, each and every action that he makes would appear to correspond, precisely, to actions s/he does in life... and so, one feels that one can say to the theatre-maker that his or her actions are true to life or that they are not true to life.

Patrice Pavis, (Professor of Theatre at the University of Paris VIII and one of France’s most brilliant academics) has this to say: “A performer is someone who speaks and acts on his own behalf (as an artist and as a person) and thus addresses the audience, while the actor represents his character and pretends not to know he is only a theatre actor”, and he goes on to say: “The performer stages his own self, while the actor plays the role of another.” (Pavis, P., *Dictionary of the Theatre – Terms, Concepts and Analysis*, University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1998, p. 262)

Considering the performer’s artistic actions as being true (or not true) to life, it thus appears correct to say that the theatre-maker dissects, analyses, deconstructs, fragments, breaks down and studies with intense scientific care and rigour all those very actions which each and every human being continually executes in each moment of his everyday life.

The implication is clear: the theatre-maker’s work emerges as being an endless study and research into how we Human Beings do all that we do. It does not stop there however, for the theatre-maker must moreover organise all that in a way in which he¹ arrives at judging it to be aesthetic... beautiful, full of beauty.... such that the act of (say) filling a glass with water² could end up judged to be a work of art.

If we truly stop to think of it, we should find it amazing that the Human Being could come to the improbable conclusion that it is indeed possible for him to set up such judgmental criteria. While observing the act of filling a glass with water, what criteria could one adopt if one wishes to decide whether or not that mundane act deserves to be called “a work of art”... or whether, instead, it fails? If a French horn player hit one disastrous note during an execution of Beethoven’s 5th symphony there is no doubt that it would irrevocably haunt us right through it, making it impossible for us to consider the execution of that symphony as having succeeded in its aim. The pouring of a glass of water in a theatre performance cannot be considered differently.

This presentation will look at that which, it suggests, is a unique phenomenon – how the theatre-maker studies and researches the foundations of Human action. It will moreover propose that harnessing the power which today’s science puts at our disposal and employing it to study and research that phenomenon could shed important light on what it means to be Human

¹ Even his audience need to arrive there – by extension and by consent.

² Or the act of killing someone, or of speaking to someone, or of eating something, or of walking, or of picking up a rose... or any of the myriad small actions we carry out in our everyday life.