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THEATRE CREDO (1977)

1. theatre is an immediate celebration of human relationships
an exploration
(through language and movement in a defined
space)
of the impulse given off
at the growing points of human development

however historical its momentary theme
theatre is present tense

however distantly placed
theatre is a local explosion

however outwardly projected
theatre invokes the inner worlds
of its makers and participants

the truths of these inner worlds
have to be established first
before the overt themes of each performance
can have their truths released

the theatrical process is fulfilled when
the inner states of its makers flower
(through word and action in a symbolic space)
in such a way that
its audiences reciprocally respond
from their own inner states

techniques or *improvements*
that block or colour the free-flow of that mutual
process
harm the nature of theatre
and compel a false interpretation
of the nature of life itself

2. theatre may exist at any level of concern
it draws its lifeblood
from the deepest pits of experience
it shrivels when it is allowed to exist only as
a peripheral social comment
an event of no internal significance
an entertainment for tired minds
however even such a shrivelling
cannot help but be deeply symbolic
of the nature of its society and its times
theatre cannot excuse itself from reflecting
the humanitarian condition of its age

3. theatre is form first and last

the relationship between its space and that of its audience
symbolically equals
the relationship between leaders and led
in the world that surrounds it

theatre form is a living organism
an architectural metaphor
for the spiritual assumptions that begat it
and continually modify its nature

(spiritual assumptions being
those views of the nature of people
and their obsessive relationships
around which accrue
the actions and events of an epoch)

when one set of spiritual assumptions dies
(outworn and discredited)
and another grows up to usurp it
one theatre form loses its reason for being
and others jostle to succeed

the in-fighting of these pretenders is confused
by nostalgia
and the irrelevancies of personal taste
but the nature of the form-to-come
is already determined
by the qualities of the usurping assumptions

4. the theatre may regenerate itself
as a living force
central to the time's personal and social revolutions

when it accepts
the nature of the form of any assembly
dictates the limits of the statement
that assembly can make

when it accepts
the proscenium theatre was not invented
by waves of theatre technicians
(by the developing intelligences of its experts)
but evolved
as that form best able to reflect
the evolving truths of the 'renaissance'

when it accepts
the 'renaissance' (with the proscenium)
is now in its last throes
its assumptions exhausted
its politics discredited
its view of human relationships
inadequate

when it accepts
a post-'renaissance' age
is in the process of asserting itself
with different basic assumptions
about the nature of people and their relationships

when it accepts
a new age that must find
a new institutional (theatrical) form
a fresh crystal ball
for imaging its 'renaissance'-attacking beliefs

5. western values are being challenged now
on a cyclonic scale
as the west itself teeters
at the edge of the greek ideal
the comforts of the christian church
the hierarchies of democracy
- undone in its belief
that god can eternally provide the
backcloth
(the fixed point against which
common people can make sense
of the actions and edicts of their betters)
- the fixed point is vanishing
leaving people's actions to be
judged
in an environment
of their own shifting selves
- no kind of hierarchy having proved able
to manage the fundamental human dilemmas
the possibilities of equality
have to be painfully tested
ordinary people are being forced
to come into their own
the meek are having to inherit the earth

6. the theatre has no choice
(if it must survive)
but to reflect this vast resurgence
(this ordinary revolution)
not through shapelessness
(the easiest of options)
not through a variety of forms
(offering symbolic confusions)
but through an ordinary and simple form
(imaging its fundamental cry)
- without freedom people cannot be equal
without equality people cannot be free

the only form that can begin to cope
 (in a simple and ordinary way)
with the involutions of such an age
 (and its infinite diversity)
where people are free to state themselves
 (locally and distinctly)
equally with all people
 (locally and distinctly elsewhere)
is theatre-in-the-round
 (the circle and mandala)
the symbolic hole
 (running through the middle of the body)

7. theatre-content is stilled life
 until it is passed through theatre-form

each time it is performed
 its meaning will fundamentally alter
 in accordance with the nature
 and symbolic significance of that form

 (because the butterfly is beautiful
 the chrysalis's role cannot be taken for granted)

the inbred statement of the form
 recreates itself in the content
 to such a degree
 there is nothing the content can say
 that the form hasn't dreamed of first

8. where the audience faces is significant space
 without that space
 and that significance
 theatre does not exist

actors enter that space
 to initiate an audience-communion
 displaying those meanings of their script
 their senses have been trained to apprehend

each movement
 gesture
 voice-inflection
 alters the script's effect

the flat words used in a text provoke
 not movement
 but movement in a space
 (heightened and defined by those who watch)

where the watchers are
 contracts the space
the nature of the space
 prescribes the movement

the limited patterns of movement
(available to any given space)
affects dramatically the choices of meaning
(available to any given words)

theatre-technique
(performers' tools
to shape and convey
the intrinsic directions of the words)
must re-generate itself
each time a different stage-shape is used

the meaning and purpose of the words
alter
in relation to the space
(and the techniques that space requires)
through which they are shaped and conveyed

the words of a play-script
are the seeds of the meanings
that will be trying to flower
in any performance of the play

those that successfully bloom
have to be nurtured
from the humus
the form in its time provides

9. the air is spirit
the body must in-breathe to be living
the mother is earth and world
transmitting social pressures
the womb is the acting-space
its shape belonging to the mother
(not to each play that fills it)
the egg carries the earth's messages
towards performance in the womb

when the egg is entered by ideas
(touched by the same air/spirit
by a contrasting process)
the union of word and action is made
the conceived drama has begun

performance is a womb-celebration
nourished and given meaning by the mother

the seed distinguishes the egg
the egg brings the seed to earth
and invests it with the rituals of living

however it otherwise pretends
theatre explores the womb's dilemmas
the harmonies and discords
of egg and seed
(form and idea)

a society that uses its theatre for other purposes
distorts its own womb
corrupts its own imaginations
trivialises its deepest moods
spells out its own decay

10. all performance being a celebration of form
(or its mourning)
the theatre's significance lives
in the total effect of its flowers
not in a few treasured hothouse blooms

its endurance
has little to do with
the pursuit of excellence
personal preference and taste
are as irrelevant a standard
as public consensus
dominant opinion
continually underwrites its own death

performance can be judged to be good
only within the context of the form
if the form is bad
(its truths outworn)
what good is a good performance

the more the (living) form
is cared about and known
the more
the performance will look after itself

a dead theatre is its own undertaker
hearsing and re-hearsing its plays
in its oedipal desire
for the perfect resurrection

rehearsal is the world's fear of dying
its unwillingness to trust itself
to its own natural resources

it is a pool
where the actors
(cut off from themselves)
vie to reflect
the fantasy-faces
of their director-narcissus

living theatre
needs as little rehearsal
as it can naturally get away with

and performances
as prolific as mushrooms

11. the 'renaissance' moved from a god's-world
into the world of man
an inner serfdom exchanged
for the taming of nature and space
- conception remained secret and pure
an unbodily act
meaningful life began
with the birth-pangs
- what went on inside a person
was irrelevant
to authorised (industrial) needs
- the proscenium has served its time in a model fashion
symbol of the triumph of outward endeavour
(stick on a nose
and the act of creation has begun)
a denial of self
essential to the conquests of space
- a thwarted form
parading spectacles for a thwarted world
nature there only to be improved on
the products of the womb - consumer-
fodder
- a painted scented form
its own gay asylum
from the colours and smells
of its own inversions
- to persist with it now
is to invite the death of all theatre
12. when one set of spiritual assumptions collapses
the forms it has built to sustain it
must also collapse
- when the forms collapse
the techniques they have accrued to uphold them
will lose their truths and die
- once the techniques are discredited
that content
(which the forms have bred
and the techniques interpreted)
will lose the confidence
of its own intrinsic styles
- if it cannot release
new styles within itself
it too will die
- (a critique

that shows no awareness of that fact
wastes its own time
and that of its followers)

when a new set of spiritual assumptions arrives
it must bring in its wake
(to sustain itself)
new forms
(symbolising its relationship
with its receivers)
new techniques
new inner styles to its content

if it cannot bring these with it
it cannot arrive

13. it was not enough for brecht to do
what he did
though it was all he could do
when he did it

he swung his rough axe
splitting actor from character
(symbolising the schizoid nature of the age)
pushing the form itself
into its death-throes

he failed to make the logical move
his theories demanded
he stayed in the form
his theories derided

the contradictions in his theatre
were the contradictions in brecht himself
contradictions he shared with his time
that he didn't have the time to resolve
(or the awareness)

it is not enough for his disciples to go
no further than he did
wallowing in contradictions
crucial to brecht's world view
but no longer crucial to
the world they are part of

(the biggest disservice
anyone can pay to brecht
is to stop where he did)

today's search for theatre
has to start from the possibility
that the theatre is dead

14. its ache to be reborn
amongst the people
it must naturally serve

cannot be satisfied until.....

it asserts a new norm
that can justly present
the new statements it is dying to make

it stops its professional lies
it closes its training schools
 where the old blind insights
 are comfortably propagated
it lets old theatres naturally die
 and seeks unencumbered spaces
 to seed and weed itself again
it resists reaching further and further away
 from the simple accounts of human
 endeavour
 for its startling and shocking
 resurrections
it accepts that revolution is an ordinary process

until.....

it does away with craig
 (whom it should have done away with
 in the first place)
it moves beyond
 stanislavski and the actors' school
 brecht artaud and grotowski
 the generations of british non-thinkers
 who cry themselves sick
 believing in the health
 of the british theatre

15. until.....

actors shift
 from being mouthpieces of the gods
and become folk-mediums
 drawing their energies and insights
 from the people

they do away with
 professional mystique and equity rules
 the excuses of
 aesthetic distance
 maximum point of eye-control
illusion and dressed-up magic
 complicated switchboards and other
 machines
 and all other aids to acting
 that eat the ability to act
naturalism and realism
 (and their inability
 to be natural or real)
camp and homosexual norms
 (which cramp homosexuals)

and heterosexuals alike)
their desire to manipulate
and their refusal to trust
their need to make an exhibition of
themselves

16. the uber-marionette has evolved to a dalek
a shrivelled self
encased in armouring
intelligent and thick

some of the daleks pretend to be clowns
going amongst the people
anxious to be on their side
but they terrify me

their bathos
their incompetence
their hatred
put them in another (dying) world
from the people
they are trying to make love to

some of the daleks are braver
they tell the people what to think
and how to act against the dalek-world
their messages are all proletarian

but the form they use
(unquestioningly)
belongs
(unquestionably)
to the ideas they want to destroy

they do what brecht did
because he did it
not picking up
from where he left off
because he's dead
and they're meant to be alive

17. living theatre
(like all living art)
advances a society's view of itself
even as it reflects it

a sick theatre
reflects without advancing
or advances without reflecting

theatre is the playing-out
(in secure circumstances)
of dangerous decisions
any society must take
in order to survive

it is at the growing-point
not the dismissible edge
of the society
it has no choice but to serve

it has to live
in that society's blood first
before it can take to the streets

even if its subject is the cosmos
its territory is dreams

its magic is of the imagination
(a blood-spirit)
not of fantasy
(a wisp of thin air)

18. the proscenium manufactures its dreams
sl(e)ighting its audience
by a series of colourful technical tricks

it symbolises a world
where decision-making
has been put on to platforms and pedestals
lifted up out of reach of the people

19. the round represents
a practical symbolic development
from the failures of hierarchy
to the possibilities of equality

it prescribes a world
where the human spirit
reconnects with its roots

where people deliberately choose
not to be dominated
by the things they themselves have created

where they feel free
(equally and differently)
to be able to respond to
(and share responsibility for)
all issues that affect their own lives

20. the round offers no panacea
it can release a new content
not give it an anodyne

it cannot wish or wash away
its millions of tragedies-yet-to-come
(equality is a terrible condition
to have to struggle unequally towards)

but the hole in the middle of an audience
is a living space
a passageway for what is
not for what is pretended
a means of inhaling the human spirit
and radiating its energies outwards
to the four corners of everyone's earth

21. the round
accepts
shares
integrates
unites

is concerned with
fulfilment
(the fulfilment of the group
being dependent on
the fulfilment of each
individual in it)

not ambition
(where each individual
is at odds in some way
with the group
and each individual in it)
22. its own evolution will allow
the death of the director
the passing of the cry for historical accuracy
the release of poetry and ritual
the re-humanising of the actor
a more imaginatively-involved audience
(and therefore more demanding)
audience-controlling forms of audience-
participation
fresh play-structures
in which a play's truth
lives in its dialogue solely
(never in its stage-directions)
the resurgence of folk-theatre
at its deepest and most popular
the whittling away of theatre's pathological props
(that capitalist theatre dare not do
without)
an increased reliance on word and action
(wherein the spirit of theatre resides)
23. only through the round
can theatre (and society)
submerge itself
in search of its own nature
and (at the same time)

reach outwards towards the
sun

can inner and outer space
be celebrated
(and fused)
in the one image

can decision-making
be returned to where it belongs
in an ordinary space
in the middle of ordinary
people

(the only honest place left
for it to go)

24. none of this is theory alone
i have seen it grow in practice
in a number of places
over twenty-five or more years

not only in the theatre
in education also

this is a credo
details of the practice
will help
but will prove nothing

it will be bound to offend
(if they bother to read it)
those who are sure
they know most about theatre

their hurt
even their scathing remarks
will not mean
it cannot be true

if you can believe it
then find what ways you like
to apply it

if you can't
find your own eye of the needle
to squeeze through

theatre being in the state it is
(all tied up in its own innards)
if you don't find one now
you'll have to get down
to the indignity and pain of it

sooner or later

*dalek: authoritarian machine from another planet
that terrorised the earth in early
episodes of 'Dr Who' - a science-
fiction series (originally for children)
on BBC TV; inside the outer casing of
the machine was a blob of living jelly.*

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