

## **WES WARING**

### **INTERNATIONAL TIMES IT/52 March 1969 - *APPLE THEATRE SEEKS WAY TO BEWILDERMENT***

There are no absolutes in theatre. Stasis occurs when creativity has stopped: the thing that happens then is no longer art. Art is a continuous process, a process of exploration: working in isolation the actor can only examine himself, but when he can elicit responses and establish a direct emotional communication with someone else, the creative and exploratory process is complete.

In the long history of western art, compartmental thinking has steadily separated art from life. The art-object becomes a talisman, becomes 'precious', is glass-cased and labelled. This process of removal has by degrees raised 'art' into a monstrous edifice over whose awesome door glares the word 'culture'.

The pedants defend their edifice (for on it rests their authority), in it lies their power, not by ignoring the emotional elements of creation and perception, but by examining and analysing them, reflectively draining them of all passion and immediacy, thus depriving the creative process of its reality. The unreal remains can no longer function as part of a real communicative process but forever after can only serve to provoke thought about the artists' aims and methods.

The over-emphasis of the intellectual approach to the appreciation of art is a direct result of this 'un-realisation', the spectator no longer needs to be committed, no longer needs to become involved with the artist's original experience, is no longer expected to react emotionally, or in any other way but intellectually. This state of inertia offers two comforts to the spectator: first in his role as informed connoisseur, he can assume affinity

with the art from which he is separated - he understands what the artist is 'trying to do' and can 'admire' the techniques which the artist uses. Second, because of his assumed detachment, he can feel no personal threat, because there is no personal involvement. The whole business of art has thus been reduced to an exercise.

Ultimately the 'observer' will understand everything and feel nothing, because he will only give his mind, not himself. The wheel still turns, and the personal threat does approach: because of his detachment he feels he has no control over the theatre to which he submits himself, no chance to dictate what should happen next, but must accept what is presented to him, or nothing at all. Thus art remains in the hands of the few, but it has long since ceased to be art, and has become instead the motions of a creative process, without the substance; there is no longer an I-you relationship between the actor and his audience, because the person with whom the actor might be talking is no longer there, only a critical machine remains in his place.

To establish a communication between artist and observer, actor and audience, so that the categories ultimately cease to exist, the means has to be found to break the autonomy of the reflective process. So far the only movements in this direction have been through:

- various forms of physical contact with the observer, designed to produce a physical reaction; exploitation of optical mechanics and visual phenomena in painting, the construction of tactile environments, the use of sound at great amplification to produce an overall imposed physical sensation
- ideological assault; Peter Brook's *US*, the Mothers of Invention, and Cesar's smiling and undetected chafing of the Tate Gallery dilettantes
- attempts at contact on an emotional level, where, as in the previous two instances, shock tactics are most often used, because it is assumed that the passiveness of the audience is induced solely by indifference.

It is an amazing demonstration of the power of the reflective process that, as in the case of Cesar, the attacks are assimilated immediately, and as soon as the reflective status quo has returned, there is a sporadic crop of imitations, 'avant-garde' but now quite unshocking, quite acceptable.

Estimating by the partial failure of past attempts, the next step towards dissolving the reflective attitude is to combine those elements which have achieved some success into a programme which can be used to explore the full possibilities of soliciting commitment from an audience.

Shock methods have so far just shown the universal ineffectuality of force. The process must be self-critical, not over-riding. It must also be prepared to grow out of reflectiveness, moving from the known to the unknown.

We have had actors whom we forgot were actors and saw as the people they were acting; then, thanks to Brecht, we had actors we weren't allowed to forget about. One of the needs now is for bewilderment for only the actors to know who they are, and even then to sometimes forget; to disperse rather than focus attention, to deal with the black dice and uncertainty. The twisting out of shape has been done and continues; now we can start to make new shapes, hearing with eyes, seeing with bellies, letting nipples laugh for us, crying in our thighs. Soon we may even lay a smile with our hands on a stranger's shoulder.

The Beatles Theatre Company, Apple Theatre, is a subsidiary of Apple Corps and has received continuing support from Apple since it was first set up in 1968 as resident company at the Brighton Combination. It is one of the aims of the company to establish a real popular theatre, taking its outer directives not only from the work of the leading artists on the popular entertainment scene, but also exploring and assimilating new developments in all the contemporary arts.

As popular theatre, the company has adopted the policy of touring its work, in much the

same way as a group of musicians will tour a series of one-night stands, but to a much wider audience, since the backing of Apple Corps enables the company to subsidise performances given to smaller colleges and theatres. The company's current programme uses the present situation in Czechoslovakia, not only for political comment on the events, but also as a form for the ideas and emotions it needs to use, and as a basis for the contact and understanding it wants to see created.

There is some physical contact with the audience, made through sound, light and movement, as well as by the actors, and handled in such a way as to emphasise similarities, first of appearance, then of capacity for feeling, rather than underlining any temporal difference between actor and audience. The company aims to establish an empathy among the people at the performance, so that the work is the result of everyone's contribution, active or silent, and not merely the effect of illusion.