

introduction

- Art is large and it enlarges you and me. To a shrunk-up world its vistas are shocking. Art is the burning bush that both shelters and makes visible our profounder longings.

(Jeanette Winterson)

I regard the theatre as an art form because I believe in its transformative power. I work in the theatre because I want the challenge of decisiveness and articulation in my daily life. Directing chose me as much as I chose it. We found one another. I like to watch. I like to study. I like to meet people in the charged atmosphere of a rehearsal room or in a theatre.

The theatre has been good to me. It has produced great friendships, love, travel, hard work, fun, terror and pleasure. It has also offered an entire life of study. Study is a full-time engagement which includes reading books, reading people, reading situations, reading about the past and

reading the present. To study, you enter into a situation with your whole being, you listen and then begin to move around inside it with your imagination. You can study every situation you are in. You can learn to read life while life is happening.

A scuba diver lies first in the water and waits until the entire ocean floor below starts to teem with life. Then the swimmer begins to move. This is how I study. I listen until there is movement and then I begin to swim.

I wanted to approach the theatre as an artist does, so I began to study the tools we have inherited and the procedures we use to make work in the theatre. I also studied how artists in other fields do what they do – how they think and how they create. I looked for helpful allies in the artistic process. How do we approach one another in the arena of a rehearsal or on a stage? How do we begin and then how do we go on?

As a director in the theatre I have encountered certain consistent problems that just do not go away. I have found myself repeatedly face to face with issues about violence, memory, terror, eroticism, stereotype, embarrassment and resistance. Rather than avoiding these problems I have found it fruitful to study them. And this study has changed the way I approach all my work in the theatre. The problems became allies.

This book is an articulation of this study.

Artists are individuals willing to articulate in the face of flux and transformation. And the successful artist finds new shapes for our present ambiguities and uncertainties.

The artist becomes the creator of the future through the violent act of articulation. I say violent because articulation is a forceful act. It demands an aggressiveness and an ability to enter into the fray and translate that experience into expression. In the articulation begins a new organization of the inherited landscape.

My good friend the writer Charles L. Mee, Jr helped me to recognize the relationship between art and the way societies are structured. He suggested that, as societies develop, it is the artists who articulate the necessary myths that embody our experience of life and provide parameters for ethics and values. Every so often the inherited myths lose their value because they become too small and confined to contain the complexities of the ever-transforming and expanding societies. In that moment new myths are needed to encompass who we are becoming. These new constructs do not eliminate anything already in the mix; rather, they include fresh influences and engender new formations. The new mythologies always include ideas, cultures and people formerly excluded from the previous mythologies. So, deduces Mee, the history of art is the history of inclusion.

National and international cultures as well as artistic communities are currently undergoing gigantic shifts in mythology. Technological and corporate revolutions have already changed the way we communicate, interact, live, make art and articulate our ethics and values. The myths of the last century are now inadequate to encompass these new experiences. We are living in the space between mythologies. It is a very creative moment, brimming with

possibilities of new social structures, alternate paradigms and for the inclusion of disparate cultural influences.

I believe that the new mythologies will be created and articulated in art, in literature, architecture, painting and poetry. It is the artists who will create a livable future through their ability to articulate in the face of flux and change.

And yet, to succeed in this fast-changing world requires action, speed, decisiveness and hard work. To survive, to keep up, to feed a family, to ensure a roof over our heads, it is necessary to act from a very particular personal impulse: the survival instinct. And there is always the danger that this survival mode will dominate the artistic process. Most of the choices that we make in the survival mode issue from a need for security and advancement. But the instinct for security gives access only to a small part of our creative abilities. If we limit our impulses to the survival instinct, our scope and range of artistic work will be limited.

Lewis Hyde in his book entitled *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* suggests that humans always take action and make decisions from two possible sources: the survival instinct or the gift-giving impulse.

The gift-giving impulse, like the survival instinct, also demands action and decisiveness, but the results differ because the intention that provokes the action has nothing to do with security. The action originates in the impulse to give someone a gift and the urge to create a journey for others outside of their daily experience. This instinct requires generosity, interest in others, and empathy.

Imagine planning a surprise birthday party for a friend. You make decisions about whom to invite and how to astonish and when to reveal, all with a sense of vicarious pleasure and excitement. You are structuring a journey for another person through direct empathy and feeling. The creative action and choices spring from the gift-giving impetus. This kind of impulse also determines how we compose a song, develop a story, design a house and, ideally, how we rehearse a play. We create journeys for others to be received in the spirit of a gift.

To approach the theatre as an art form we must be able to act in this empathetic spirit. But in our new global environment we find ourselves immersed in commerce, in the marketplace and, perhaps because of it, we find ourselves in conflict. In a world of commodities, we are not solely artists, but producers as well. Each of us is a producer and an artist in one and we must take care that one does not overwhelm the other. The producer in us must protect the gift giver and know when and how to give it space and freedom. The gift giver must step aside for the survival instinct in the right moments. The two must have their range and autonomy. How can we survive in the marketplace and still make art? How can we live in this fast and competitive environment and still walk into a rehearsal able to call upon the wild, violent child in us that makes the art poetic and magnificent and dangerous and terrifying? How can we, in a climate racing for survival, generate gifts with presence and generosity?

The study of violence, memory, terror, eroticism, stereotype, embarrassment and resistance has helped me to treat

●●● INTRODUCTION

each one as an ally in the creative process. It has been a journey outward towards other cultures, ideas and people. It has given me the courage to welcome the imbalance of our present uncertainties and attempt the violence of articulation in order to actualize the new mythologies of our time.