

On this first day of the year 2005, we declare the birth of a new theatre, and hereby present

The Manifesto for the *Theatre of Indeterminacy*

Whereas previously, the traditional Western theatre was based on, and thus solely reflected, the assumption that life was a dialectical struggle of opposing forces whose reality was eternal, immanent and unassailable, it must now concede the historical relativity and subjective origin of this world view. Representationalism and heroic individualism are not normative standards of drama, but particular manifestations of a theory of perception and a philosophy of life that no longer satisfy contemporary existential concerns.

What is commonly called truth is only a representation, and even as such is pluralistic. Insidiously, the antagonistic, deterministic (i.e. Aristotelian) mode of performance feeds back an atavistic, aggressive model of identity that is absorbed by and perpetuated in the audience.

Rather than debating its level of influence (or lack thereof) on social or political trends, the theatre must take ownership of its active complicity in shaping the cultural landscape that each of us, as consciousness, co-creates and inhabits. Instead of starting from a Cartesian position of dualism, we must therefore shift our base of inquiry and start with the postulate of the ultimate groundlessness of all existence.

Dynamic theatre does not merely engage in conflict-action to represent human struggle; instead, it synthesizes out of contradiction, multiplicity and simultaneity, a resonant situation in a process of kinesis and transformation. Thus arises the **Theatre of Indeterminacy**. The Theatre of Indeterminacy is anti-Aristotelian, anti-objectivist, but not anti-drama. It collapses structure and freedom, but not into anarchy, since it effects neither closure nor disintegration. Ironically, the Aristotelian Theatre of Closure perpetuates the gulf between text and action, while the Theatre of Indeterminacy reconciles text and action in the poetics of embodiment.

The **Theatre of Indeterminacy** operates much like a battery: it converts the tension of opposite polarities into energy. When it exhausts its difference, a battery is discharged. No more tension, no more energy. Therefore, the Theatre of Indeterminacy aims never to reconcile the polarities of existence.

The **Theatre of Indeterminacy** focuses first and foremost on questioning traditional assumptions about, and exploring the limits of, the human psyche and its relationship to the concepts of soul and meaning. It does so by confronting historical, literary and philosophical notions of the self with contemporary cultural skepticism and spiritual anxiety. Its modus is exploratory rather than didactic, it looks to question rather than to answer. It stirs up rather than placates. It undermines efforts of interpretation using either realist or formalist paradigms. Consequently it tends to reject two dearly held principles of theatre, those of ritualized communality and catharsis, offering in their stead a commonality of difference, which celebrates its freedom from the demands of hierarchy, completion and coherence.

The actor's task is not the representation or 'channeling' of the character and/or text, but the co-creation of the performance by means of her conscious involvement as enactor. She is the verb in a sentence whose subject and object have no independent meaning without the action that connects them. Theatre is the sensation of existential kinesis: an event-situation arises in the absolute present, that will, though re-created, never be duplicated, and participates in groundless becoming, then vanishes in the instant of its manifestation.

The purpose of rehearsals ought not to be the complete elimination of uncertainty in the acting score, but rather the evolution of a performance strategy of freedom-within-structure. A heightened level of self-awareness for the actor, in this context, becomes not only an aesthetic choice, but also a practical necessity. The actor, unable to assess her performance objectively, must develop a 'third eye' that observes and adjusts from within. The utmost investment of the performer's total organism, even physical suffering, is an essential element of theatricality. But the actor does not suffer from empathy for her character, she suffers because she is *acting*. On stage, the actor engages in a fight for her life, the outcome, unknown.

The **Theatre of Indeterminacy** is ambivalent but not indecisive. It is an expression of possibilities. It resonates with the dynamic tension of contrast, contradiction and multiplicity. The theatre of indeterminacy is not post-dramatic in the sense that it does not seek to emancipate itself from the text. It is not postmodern in the sense that it does not sever all except ironic ties to past models of meaning. Rather, it seeks to revive the profundity and texture of performed language; it opposes the notion that language is distinct from experience. It revels in the paradoxical suspension of human agency between signification and absence, structure and chaos. It believes in the power of performed language to express this dichotomous condition. The purpose of performance is the embodiment of both the potency and the ruptures inherent in the text. Language and performance crash into each other on stage. This collision is the expression of the struggle for meaning, a process without an end-state, a journey without destination. It thrusts open the gates of the imagination by exploding the fallacies of resolution and redemption. At the same time, it recognizes and exposes the fragility of the psychic construct and its powerful yearning for the absolute.

Six general **artistic principles** underly the Theatre of Indeterminacy:

1. a conviction in the importance of the speculative function of art, and a distrust of absolute truths.
2. a renewed interest in aesthetic experience and its relationship to the human soul.
3. an apolitical stance, and a professed interest in the individual consciousness.
4. a rejection of a rationalist, causal model of reality, particularly as it pertains to human behaviour.
5. an interest in formal synthesis, resulting from a dissatisfaction with mimetic representation.
6. the search for an authentic voice, and a refusal to pander to popular tastes and commercial considerations.

The **Theatre of Indeterminacy** exploits the creative power of ambivalence. An attitude of ambivalence is neither vague nor defeatist, but rather is compatible with, and can in fact point us towards, a decisive and passionate renewal of theatrical practice. Its preoccupation with indeterminacy is indicative not of superficiality or hesitancy, but of its profound engagement with the concerns of the human soul and its refusal to settle for easy answers. It is not deceived by the lure of platitudes that promise to cover the fissures of existence with a comforting veil, but instead has the courage not to answer its own most disconcerting questions, to promulgate an aesthetic of non-knowing.

Performing Difference

As an **Art of Enactment**, performance situates itself at the point of convergence of self and other, subject and object in a way that mirrors precisely the conscious aspect of human perception. The process of theatre is identical to the process of cognitive awareness. Theatre is nothing more or less than manifest thought. Like cognition, theatre is neither the recreation nor the projection of a pre-existing outer or inner world, but the cocreation of an ephemeral but tangible presence among actors and audience. Cognitive science and Buddhist philosophy demonstrate that there is no such a thing as the thinking 'self', there is only thinking. For the same reason, in the theatre-as-cognition, there is no such a thing as character, only kinesis. 'Character' is a representational fallacy, conjured by a spectator anxious for closure and certainty. It is never the result of an actor's efforts.

When we must nevertheless speak of dramatic character, in order to make ourselves understood, we explain that *dialogue speaks character*. Whereas realism views character as fixed and primary (generative), dialogue as subservient to action, and action as originating from character, we consider dialogue to be primary (generative), and 'character' to be fluid and subject to action. Moreover, all signification is relational and intertwined. Body is sign, language is space, meaning is motion. There can thus be no such thing as a character's fixed identity, except in the grasping mind of the spectator.

The **Performer of Difference** is implicated in three parallel and interpenetrating struggles: his own as actor, that of embodying the role, and that of the spectator. Together, they participate in exploding structure into process (kinesis), thereby destabilizing identity and questioning the immutability of those foundational assumptions that elsewhere, outside the theatre, determine how we relate to ourselves and the world. In order to be able to fulfill his task, the performer must embody both structure and possibility, must both be contained by and transcend his material, must comprehend how to be both the match and the flame. Like any authentic explorer, the actor must embrace his fear of uncertainty as a creative principle. This is his revolt against the representational theatre: the actor's sacrifice, his spiritual nakedness, his fight for survival, his act of becoming, depends on his willingness to embody an action with utter conviction that he simultaneously knows to be unjustifiable and thus absurd. Through his integration of performed (planned) with lived (open) experience the actor manages to be confidently and meaningfully *alive* in a state of uncertainty.

The aim of this theatre is not to evoke catharsis or empathy, but rather the open-ended wonderment of someone - a child, an artist, or anyone - who has not yet locked his perceptions into an objectivist straightjacket. As a result of seeing theatre in terms of enacted thought, meaning shifts from the (neo-humanist) representation of the dialectics of crisis and recognition to the cocreation, among all participants of an autonomous, mutually significant experience.

Furthermore, the Theatre of Indeterminacy -

... recognizes as its muse **Kaos**, the principle of self-creation, of quantum dynamics and emergent properties.
... is oppositional but not dualistic, not antagonistic but mercurial.
... is alchemical and intermedial.
... is not 'about' anything.
... suspends differences: here and there, inside and outside, subject and object.
... deplores indifference and the ideological apathy of psychological realism.
... welcomes incongruity and contradiction, but may screen paradoxes on entry.
... recognizes three stages of play analysis: ur-text-ure.
... gives the artist room to move, license to err, to become *errant*.
... considers the performer much more than 'an actor'. Or an act. *Enactor*.
... is alive but not life-like, emotional but not empathetic, irrational but not arbitrary.
... champions spiritual atheism, ethical unaccountability and aesthetic perversion.
... risks everything to say nothing.
... is unknowable yet somehow familiar, ineffably tangible, like a forgotten scent.
... can't read signs, never could tell a post- from a pole or a 'fier from a 'fied.
... severely confounds reality, illusion, actuality and representation.
... undermines foundations; steals identities; travels by night in submerged fluidities.
... becomes more elusive, the more it is wanted. Spiritual hero to some, aesthetic terrorist to others.
... is self-conscious but by no means shy, often brash but never willful, and frequently causes tense silences at certain gatherings.
... believes that the dogma of 'plausible behaviour' is realism's greatest fallacy and its ultimate disservice to art.
... declares itself to be '**greater than the difference of its parts.**'

... wishes to acknowledge the mostly unwitting **contributions** of the following individuals: Tristan Tzara, Alexandr Tairov, Vsevolod Meyerhold, André Breton, Antonin Artaud, Marcel Duchamp, Jerzy Grotowski, Tadashi Suzuki, Eugène Ionesco, Michael Kirby, Tadeusz Kantor, John Cage, Heiner Müller, Peter Handke, Bertolt Brecht, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Robert Lepage, Robert Wilson, Charles Marowitz, Richard Schechner, Martin Esslin, and especially Nagarjuna, Gao Xingjian, Howard Barker and Hans-Thies Lehmann.

... does not believe in manifestos.

signed, *G. Struve-Dencher* (other signatories to follow)