Object Theatre: The Creative Eye!
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Abstract:
Imagination is the launch of creativity. The creative is the core of any progress. In our society, we need to build the advancement not only by developing children’s education, but also by freeing the soul of the grownups to let them create. Work and rhythm of modern society snatched away lots of our senses. We are becoming more and more the realistic person who lives in a materialistic world. We do not have time to use our imagination. We even passively watch movies and theatre performances. Although we sometimes interact with the immersive show we are attending, we still remain the passive perceiver of the richly designed characters and scenes. How can we liberate the child in us? Is it too late to enliven our imagination? How can we stimulate the audience’s imagination to let go of their inner creative potentials? Can we create a stage is a language to invoke their fantasy? Although a perfect designed figurative puppet suggests a character on stage, a simple object puppet is capable of reflecting time, space, character and more. This paper suggests the use of Object Theatre to call back the imagination of an exhausted, uncreative member of a hectic society.

Key words
Imagination, objects, puppets, performing object, creativity, Object Theatre, Post-dramatic Theatre, Synaesthesia, figurative puppet, object puppet.

Imagination is considered one of the essential characteristics of human kind to help it survive. One of the fundaments of survival is invention. Inventions are mostly originally science fictions introduced by the fantasy of imaginers through different media such as comics, movies, literatures, and performing arts. Young children are known to have a fruitful imagination. We can notice this while they are playing using a rod, placing it between both legs and galloping as if riding a horse. They also tend to imagine figures and funny creatures when seeing a crack in the ceiling or a shadow on the wall or even clouds in the sky. When they talk about it or get afraid of something they imagine, they are accused of lying, or inventing things. Sometimes the mother tells her child: “This is only your imagination”, unintentionally suggesting that imagination is something minor. By the time they grow up, they gradually lose a great value of their creative soul. J.M. Barrie portrays this in his story “Peter Pan” and confirms that we have to hold on to imagination and not lose it by growing up.

How can we, as adults, regain or rebuild this imagination? How can we stimulate the creativity of a grown up? Is there a way to recharge his inventive skills? How can we enliven his pureness and call back the emotions and naivety of his childhood? In theatre, audiences are engaged and transported to another realm through illusions created by special effects, costumes and sets, etc… Imagination is used to complete the picture, for example, when Shakespeare suggests ‘night’ by letting the actor sleep on the stage and through Metaphors used to express hidden meanings. We need to address the spectator’s imagination more and more. As the problem in our society is the lack of ingenuity and innovation, the aim of this paper is to free the inspiration of the grownups. Thus, we raise the question, how can we use Object Theatre to stimulate the imagination of the perceiver?

A Puppet Moment
We have noticed recently that there is a growing field of using puppets in theatrical performances. Although puppet performances are known to be directed towards children, nowadays adult puppetry productions are growing exceedingly. This can be found in several theatrical productions such as ‘The Lion King’, ‘War-horse’, and the Metropolitan Opera House’s ‘Madame Butterfly’ where a puppet is playing her son’s role and is the actor’s partner on stage. That’s why Posner suggests “such a preponderence of puppets, we find ourselves in what we might call ‘a puppet moment’ a juncture when cultural attention has turned forcefully towards the puppet object.” (2) But what is Object Theatre? What is a puppet, and what is the difference between a figurative puppet and an object puppet? Object Theatre is a genre which belongs to Post-Dramatic Theatre where the stage is transformed into a world of fantasy aiming the imagination of the audience using sound, experiences or even an object (3). In Object Theatre any object can be transformed into a character (be humanized), hence transformed into a puppet.
The puppet - can also be called a performing object - which is an animated object and could be a figurative puppet or an object puppet. The figurative puppet, is a designed puppet to depict a stage character such as a man, a horse or a woman, and the object puppet, is something in its raw state made with no intention to be used in a stage performance which could be anything, a found or everyday object, such as a toothbrush, a cake, a garden tool, a handkerchief, a paper, a fork, a pipe or trousers, etc. (see diagram) “A fork is not a puppet, but in Lasse Akerlund’s Macbeth, a fork plays Macduff.” (5) Thus this is transforming objects and trash into something beautiful. The performer manipulates the puppet; in addition, he uses his voice, body language and facial gestures to tell a story. Once the audience sees a glimpse of life in the puppet, he uses his imagination and completes the picture, after all, “if the audience thinks something is a puppet, then it is a puppet.” (6)

**Objects as Actors**

Using Objects as a symbol or as a character can be noticed in lots of performances where an object is used to express more than a performer himself. We can notice this in lots of performances, for example, in Sophocles’ Electra, there is a pot that’s early on described as “a bronze-ribbed” artifact; as soon as we come into physical touch with this object, Electra [...] imagines that she comes into physical touch with her partner (the performer). We use everyday objects, such as a toothbrush, a cake, a garden tool, a handkerchief, a paper, a fork, a pipe or trousers, etc. (see diagram) “A fork is not a puppet, but in Lasse Akerlund’s Macbeth, a fork plays Macduff.” (5)

However, the performer listens first to the object to bring its life out of it. He gives it the role according to signs reflected from it. A fork, for example, can express starvation. The artist may also just present the object regardless of its characteristics and the purpose it was made for and transforms it into a fictional character. That is what Posner proposes, that objects can reveal meanings, awaken sentiments, help one to correlate and produces a cognitive state. (10)

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actor. She had to oversee the iconic and functional meaning of the object and present it in a new way using facial and body gestures, sound, and movements. In the beginning it was difficult for her to understand how to use her imagination and how to transform an object without any facial features into a live creature – character. It was uncomfortable, but after some time, she could figure out how to loosen her mind and body and she could move the object and make sounds transforming it into the character she wanted. After she finished and put the object on the floor, she still could feel it breathing, as if it is now lying there, resting for a while. She was still connected to it.

Being difficult and new for the scholar as an amateur, she cannot consider the whole experience to be something easy. Using an object as a character on stage can be very difficult, not only for the audience but also for the performer. An object has no eyes like the figurative character. Eyes are very important for an object to become alive. Adding eyes on anything transforms it to a live character, which is called “eye bombing”. In Object Theatre the object puppet doesn’t have to have eyes to be transformed into a convincing living character on stage. Ordinary objects are just transformed into live characters by the talented performer. That is why Francis suggests that to convince the audience that an object is alive, transforming it into a character, a puppet, is very difficult for most puppet operators than manipulating a direct figure with the shape of a human or an animal. (11) This is because most of the time the figurative puppet is direct and obvious. The audience may accept a talkative horse or a talkative man. A puppet of a beautiful girl or princess is easily recognized than an everyday object which plays the same role such as a pipe talking or an iron flirting with a dress. The audience makes more effort to accept this love

To perceive a none figurative object as a character is difficult, and requires effort and lots of imagination.

Liberating the Spectator

Nowadays the audience can play a bigger role in the performance he attends. He can manipulate, control and choose some events in virtual reality shows and other immersive live events. That means that the spectator is now freed and can take part in the story he is watching. Why can’t we apply this to live puppet theatre performances? Why cannot an audience collaborate in the theatrical process, too? Introducing a richly designed and detailed puppet in a show, may be over imposing it onto the audience. But if the puppet is simple, abstract and non-figurative (does not reflect the features and description of a character), it can stimulate the audience’s imagination and let him use his own perspective, own design, and own point of view. The performer suggests a hammer to be an old man. This is only the first step, or a clue given to the audience who in return uses this clue and builds the details of the character. Now the character is more than one, because every audience perceives it differently than the other according to his potentials. The sky is the limit as they say.

But how can we get the spectator to use his imagination? How can he accept to see the talking hammer or the talking plastic bag? The experience is completely dependent on the spectator, his culture, notion, state of mind and his ability to imagine and use his creativity to indulge himself in the performance and develop a relationship with the object through the performer. That is to imagine the object talking although his features are sometimes not connected to the character. He must free himself from the burdens of everyday life, to let go of all inner constraints which hinder him from becoming young again. If he can do this, he will be able to get used to the process and let go of his imagination. According to the previous stated Francis confirms that the more infant-like the audience experience, the more the spectator uses his imagination to relate. Accordingly, Josephine confirms that

Object Theatre and Synaesthesia

To stimulate one’s imagination we must let him use it. This is possible if we minimize what we are offering him to see. As if we supply him with a white paper and let him express himself instead of giving him a paper already full of drawings. We use our imagination when we know that there is something hidden. Like in the ancient Egyptian era, when priests used to perform secret rituals in the sanctum, letting the rest for spectators’ imagination. The same can be applied in Object Theatre. When the figure is simple or lacking details, the audience uses his imagination to complete it. Confirming the previously mentioned, Lehman says that “The play with low density of signs aims to provoke the spectator’s own imagination to become active on basis of little raw material to work with” (13) The audience uses more imagination to deal with a hammer that is fighting with a nail. That means, the more the input is complicated, the more the perceiver uses his imagination. The more the object is indirect, the more the spectator uses his imagination to connect it with the character proposed. This phenomenon is called “Synaesthesia” (*). Concerning Synaesthesia, Lehman states the following: “The human sensory apparatus does not easily tolerate disconnectedness. When deprived of connections, it seeks out its own, becomes active, and its imagination goes wild.” (14) Synaesthesia forms an apparatus that is fighting with a nail. That means, the more the input is complicated, the more the perceiver uses his imagination. The more the object is indirect, the more the spectator uses his imagination to connect it with the character proposed. This phenomenon is called “Synaesthesia” (*). Concerning Synaesthesia, Lehman states the following: “The human sensory apparatus does not easily tolerate disconnectedness. When deprived of connections, it seeks out its own, becomes active, and its imagination goes wild.” (13) The audience uses more imagination to deal with a hammer that is fighting with a nail. That means, the more the input is complicated, the more the perceiver uses his imagination. The more the object is indirect, the more the spectator uses his imagination to connect it with the character proposed. This phenomenon is called “Synaesthesia” (*).

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(11) Francis, Penny, Puppetry, p.18.
(12) Francis, Penny, Puppetry p.22.
(13) Lehman, Hans-Thies, Post-Dramatic Theatre, p.90 (*a condition, a perceptual phenomenon, in which someone experiences things through their senses in an unusual way, for example by experiencing a colour as a sound, or a number as a position in space.
(14) Lehman, Hans-Thies, Post-Dramatic Theatre, p.94.
“Synaesthetic performance practice is always imaginative in form and usually interdisciplinary in execution” (15) That means that Synaesthesia is not only a part of the scenography, but it is also a part of the communication process.

Conclusion:
Synaesthesia is the tool we use in the Object Theatre communication process. As if reality is consisted of puzzle pieces. The parts which are missing are those which stimulate our imagination. We must imagine the missing parts. That is what happens when we see an object puppet. What are missing here are the clues which indicate the character features or any other information the object symbolizes. The more these clues are missing, the more the imagination will be stimulated. The perceiver fills in the gaps in the figure he sees.

Furthermore, using puppets, e.g. object puppets to address spectators in a performance, touches the child in us and revives its spirit. This is another aspect in the process. “The animated figure touches our collective memory of innocence, the simple acceptance of a fiction, such as normal children enjoy” (16)

Besides, each person of the audiences perceives differently than the other. He can now imagine the features of the character on stage and give it an identity. The object is now a source of inspiration for him. No more perfect detailed, ready designed characters. The spectator can now imagine the character according to his notion. He is free to receive whatever he wants and to interpret it according to his culture, beliefs and education, which is another act of liberating his creativity, as the already designed details in figurative puppet may limit his imagination. Setting free the imagination of an adult can be a fruitful process if we just let him enjoy an Object Theatre performance.

References

(16)Francis, Penny, Puppetry, p.22.