

THESIS ?

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I have finally decided to put aside my struggle with books and apparently irrelevant historical facts dealing with the theatre. I will instead try and explain why I feel the thesis to be of little value to me now, and write a little about my real interests regarding the theatre. It is only a pity that having decided to do this, I have not more time in which to do it efficiently.

The reason for not having handed in a decent thesis by the set time (last Easter) are many. Firstly, my own laziness and lack of foresight in not having tackled it last October. I found it particularly difficult to lay aside a specific period for writing my thesis. I think this is as a result of an entire week being devoted to visual and usually practical work.

Every Monday for the past year it was like being in a totally different College and studying something entirely unrelated to Art. Why are Liberal Studies so completely unrelated to the rest of the course. Surely at this stage of our career we should be encouraged to express our views about our work and defend it if need be. We will be expected to do this when we leave. I think the Liberal Studies period would be a very suitable time for this.

Also, Liberal Studies is the only period in the week when the three faculties of Sculpture, Design and Fine Art come together. I think it is disgraceful that this should be so: the compartmentalisation leads to gross misconceptions.

about the various areas - fine art students tend to believe that the design students are all happily adding to the Capitalist society, and design students dismiss fine art students as a load of pot-smoking anarchists. Perhaps a little more discussion could get rid of these misconceptions. No facet of Art is unrelated to another. It is essential that there is an exchange of ideas between the faculties.

The staff in the Faculty of Liberal Studies should make it their duty to know every student's field of study. They should not confine their services to one day a week. They should see the students as often as they can throughout the week and help with the conceptual side of the work.

The nearest we ever got to discussion, was in the English Literature Class, and if these could have been developed into something more than an informal, all-embracing discussion it might have helped.

Do those involved with the Liberal Studies area, and in particular the History of Art realise the sheer agony of sitting in a dark stuffy room watching slides for over an hour, that, added to the fact of us having only an hour previously been in bed. I think the result is inevitable shadowy, slouched figures, sitting far down in their chairs forgetting that they had ever left bed! I think it is such a shame that the painting of Van Gogh, Cezanne etcetera were brought to such a low level.

Surely a group of final year art students had more to contribute but we were not asked! And if by chance someone did venture some information, the look of horror on everyone's face, including my own, at the thought of prolonging the agony was enough to deter them from ever trying anything so foolish again. No wonder the class dwindled down to about one-fifth its original number.

From the very outset the idea of the thesis was something completely aside from our "real work". We were told to hand in our titles. I still do not know for what reason! I gave in a few titles hoping to get some help in deciding which one to write about, but nothing more was said about it. The history of art lectures drearily continued, without anyone ever mentioning having received the titles. Aside from the fact that a lot of us would have need help in those initial stages, the staffs' apathetic feeling regarding the theses certainly did not make any kind of a start seem of great urgency. It is a ludicrous situation to think that we were told we would have to have a thesis as part of our final assessment last October. Nothing more was said about it until the arrival of Chris Godwin, after Christmas - our theses were to be handed in at Easter! Nobody asked us until then what we were writing about, why and more important, how we envisaged writing it. Easter came and went without anyone mentioning the fact, if nobody in authority was concerned about progress the theses begins to lose priority, in the face of mounting pressure about our practical work.

I believe that if a steady amount of pressure had been applied from the outset more work would have been done. There should have been discussions between staff and students continuously. When these discussions eventually happened, they were too late and still, even at that stage, little or no pressure was applied. The discussions too frequently went off the point, and the theses once again dropped. I suppose it is a debatable point whether or not these should be pressure from outside, in final year, third level students perhaps should be capable of generating their own pressure. Obviously some students were able to and did, and so have their theses finished now. But, none of the students had their theses finished for the given time and a lot had problems in getting them finished for the assessment. Also the lack of pressure in the liberal studies was not in keeping with the attitudes from the other faculties. The importance of the dip. show was continually being stressed we also had a series of "crits" and assessments throughout the year. I think a similar system in the faculty of liberal studies would have provided the necessary pressure.

I also doubt whether a written thesis compliments the type of study in an art school. Surely a visual presentation of the theses should be optional. I do not think an art student or artist lays any claim to be able to express himself in a literary manner the very nature of his work would suggest the contrary - what he feels, and what he wishes to express, he does in a purely visual way. As art students we go to art school to increase our aesthetic awareness and come to terms

with the practical problems of a visual presentation. If a written thesis is considered essential then the whole college structure should be redesigned. There should have been dates spaced out through the year when various stages of the theses would be handed in and checked, and advice given on how to continue from there.

I felt I had much to say about the theatre, my inability to express it through writing left me extremely frustrated. It seemed totally pointless skimming through books on the theatre, that at any other time would have made really enjoyable reading. Then, after skimming through them, writing a very abridged version of what the book had said in a far better way.

It is only in the last year that I started studying set design. My knowledge of the theatre is very limited and I am only beginning to work out now what my own attitudes to the theatre are. We should learn how to write, how to read books for the necessary information and how to get those books, instead of listening to lectures on fauvism, cubism etcetera, most of which any self-respecting art student would know already. I therefore find it very difficult to write a thesis on something I am only now beginning to grasp.

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what I have been writing up until now was intolerably boring and completely opposed to what I believe the theatre to be. The theatre is not boring. It is a dramatic happening. It is alive. It begins when the curtain goes up in the theatre and finishes when it comes down. It is a mixture of most art forms - music, mime, dance speech, colour, shape and texture. I enjoy putting colour on the human form and watch it dance, I enjoy listening to beautiful words. I am not the only one who enjoys these things, and so the theatre remains with us, and will continue as long as people still enjoy what goes to make a dramatic presentation. It is very difficult to try and explain why I enjoy these things. Why do I get excited when a hush falls over an audience and the curtain rises slowly? I do not really know. It is a feeling way down inside, I do not know why it is there, it just is. It is a whole different world provided for you on the stage, it only lasts for two hours, but those two hours can mean so much. The stage provides a platform for most forms of artistic expression. Perhaps it is something to do with so many individuals of incredibly varying talents, exchanging ideas, getting excited together, and producing one end result. I think the time that I best experienced this feeling of group activity, was when I worked with the Childrens' Theatre Company. An experimental drama group. Our ideas were to break the barriers that exist, to bring the theatre to a wider audience. It all sounds very noble and perhaps even a little condescending, but it worked. We had fun producing the shows. The kids adored it and not only because it meant a free period in school. When we brought it into the streets

the kinds stayed to see it right through and usually came back the next day.

The last time I went to see them, they were performing at the top of Stephen's Green. It was a really sunny day and there was a huge crowd sitting on the grass eating their lunches and enjoying the show. They were there completely through their own choice. Admittedly there were groups of skinheads etc. shouting remarks, but so what! They stayed until the end all the same and their comments were hilarious and added to the general feeling of entertainment.

In producing the shows we had very little money - £10. per show. So we really had to summon all our resources, to make pigs heads from balloons, suits of armour from cornflakes packets. In this situation your creative ability is really taxed. The script for the show was written by members of the group. They usually take classical stories and adapt them for children e.g. Homers Odyssey. In this instance we are introducing children to history to the classics in a way that makes it more interesting for them.

At this stage I would have liked to talk about the theatrical situation in Ireland and what I would hope my contribution will be, but I am only now beginning to understand what my abilities are and what my contribution to the theatre will be.

I realise this essay is inadequate, but I think it is a more honest effort than what I was writing before now. I have added an Appendix of the work I was doing up until now. I think it shows more clearly, than I can explain why I decided to drop it.

Thesis : Theatre as an outlet for Society's Expression

1. Introduction : What is meant by Theatre.
What is meant by Society.
Why I choose the subject.
Breakdown of various aspects covered in the thesis.

2. Short History : 3. Ethnic Theatre : Japanese Kabuki
African Tribal Dances
Music Hall

4. Theatre - Communication : Passion Plays
Shakespeare - Brecht
Modern Pop Groups

5. Theatre for Pleasure : Broadway Extravaganzas
Puppet Shows
Ballet
Street Shows

6. Modern Theatre : Brecht)
Beckett) their views
Genet)

7. Bibliography :

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A P P E N D I X

Introduction :

To-night as every night hundreds of thousands of people all over the world will take part in a theatrical experience. This theatrical experience is age old. In fact the first recorded dramatic event is the cave paintings at Lascaux. The persistent existance of theatre through war, famine and persecution right up to the present day, would suggest that it is an essential part of our cultural expression.

What is Theatre then? Why has it survived until now?
Why are we so sure that it will continue?

Firstly, it is the staging of the spoken word. The literary school of dramatics say that this is the essence of theatre - the spoken word.

"What is eternal about the Theatre, is the tradition of the script of the dramatic poet".

Surely the script is only one important element of the theatre. The real essence of the theatre is something more than that - it is an expression of truth.

In the case of theatre truths are not revealed in print between the covers of a book, or by means of speech at a lecture or by means of a demonstration in a laboratory, or by means of a picture recorded with canvas and paint. In the theatre truths are revealed on a stage platform with

with the help of actors, dramatist, director, designer setting lights sound affects and all the rest of the personnel and apparatus of the stage. There are many ways in which truths are revealed to people. The stage provides one of these ways.

Each age has used the medium of the theatre to express its idea of truth. In England restoration drama used wing settings, tallow candles and chamber music, to try and convince us of the divine right of Kings. Three hundred years later in Soviet Russia, highly mechanised stages, plus new modes of acting convinced us that life must be explained in terms of economic struggle.

There is also sense of magic and mystery exclusive to the theatre.

"The stage is a magic mirror to reflect life closer to our hearts desire."

It is this magic that explains the popularity of the theatre. When the theatre loses this magic it breaks contact with its audience it loses its freshness and as a result is bad theatre

The inundation of the spirit in beauty and clarity towards which the art of the theatre gropes, and, this, in a world from which divinity and mystery have been unsparingly shorn. This is as near as we are likely to come to the divine and the spiritual. It is the Dianysian experience, our estatic participation in the divine.

Theatre is also an attempt to gratify our own creative urges. This has always played a large part in mans existence. This artistic gratification is manifested through painting, sculpture and literature. I think this artistic gratification is reason enough to justify the existence of theatre. But theatre is much more than that, it is a valiant practical effort to understand and influence life.

Morecai Gonelik has summed up the hundreds of years of experiment and change in the theatre as follows:-

"An attempt to influence life by theatrical means "

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Short history of the theatre.

as I have mentioned before, the earliest drama we know about comes from the cave paintings of Lascaux. The painting is of a pretended hunt. This hunting mime was an attempt to establish a pattern, that paleolithic man hoped would be re-established in actuality. As man changed from hunter into farmer, so did his dramatic activities, and instead of the ritual of the hunting drama, we have the sowing of the seed and the reaping of the harvest. The mimes were performed for the welfare of the tribe — the women should remain fertile the rains should come, etc — This would suggest that drama is man's response to his environment, and therefore it would include not only his environment but the powers that environment. And so drama spans the whole of human experience.

"all over the world there are tribes which bring man into a profitable relationship with his environment, establish rhythms of custom and behaviour, and pattern the life attitudes, providing a dynamic way to communal fulfillment"

These rituals begin with mime and move on into dance, or drama. Primitive tribes still existing to-day provide us with examples of stages in the evolution of drama.

But theatre as we know it to-day comprises of three essential elements

- independent actors speaking or singing,
- an element of conflict conveyed in dialogue,
- an audience emotionally involved but not taking part.

Therefore the first real development in the theatre as we know it to-day, can be attributed to the Greeks in the 5th century B.C.

These dramas were performed by special actors, not priests or worshippers. They were performed in buildings specifically designed for the event. Though these buildings were venerated, they were not temples.

A significant development now takes place — up till now the Greek drama was still a form of liturgy, in that their plays were directly related to the worshipping of Dionysius.