

I am writing an essay entitled "A Meeting with Dürer's Rhinoceros," which is the starting point for my search for the reality which I named the Reality of the Lowest Rank.

1962. My last experiments in the professional theatre:

Musset's "Chandelier."

Objects accidentally compressed.

I am preparing a lot of realistically made objects (almost real ones), which appear or may appear in the production, which have or may have their roles on the stage; there is a whole mass of them, a great quantity;

I multiply them, I collect various other objects – "Lost Property" – completely useless and unjustified;

I combine everything together, I press, squeeze and nearly compress the objects in an absurd and illogical way; a NEW kind of REALITY is created in accordance with the new order stemming from the ACCIDENTAL.

On the empty stage the atmosphere becomes condensed to the highest possible degree so that the objects lose their function and the features that make them objects; they become matter.

At the same time in CRICOT 2 Theatre I follow the credo of the informel art; I call this period the INFORMEL THEATRE.

I put into practice my idea of the REALITY of the LOWEST RANK; I use DESTRUCTION;

I use the ACCIDENTAL (without restriction);

I use my definition of the POOR OBJECT and POOR PLACE.

FURTHER READING

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SOURCE

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VISUAL COMPOSITION, MOSTLY

Richard Foreman

Richard Foreman is founder and director of the Ontological-Hysteric Theater, which he set up in New York in 1968. Along with Richard Schechner he was part of the avant-garde in American performance that set out to "reveal" the processes of production and engage the audience consciously in the act of looking. Here he explains the principles behind his scenography in which every area of the stage becomes part of his visual composition and the eye of audience is free to roam across a range of images and actions.

The playing space is an environment for the text to explore, a gymnasium for a psychic, spiritual, and physical workout. It's an exercise room, a factory, an examination room, and a laboratory. If the *mise-en-scène* does not pay homage to all this, it castrates the full body of the theater.

All the materials we find available in the theater should be thrown together in full polymorphous play. Curtains, scenery, moving platforms, lights, noises, bodies – all add complexity to the stage space. In the same way, we find in the text a multitude of psychic materials with which to play. The text should be an open file system, so distributed in its references that all aspects of the world seem connected to it. The complexity of the lived world should be made available to the spectator by the text, setting, and articulated production; never fall prey to using this wealth of materials to convince the audience that they are seeing something "real," other than the dance of the accumulated riches of your artistic resonances in concrete, articulated form. As in music, a structural, rhythmical articulation of all the elements.

I like to assume that the spectator is watching the entire stage at all moments of the play, so I try to make a stage picture in which every inch of the stage dynamically participates in the moment-by-moment composition of the piece. I might carefully adjust the tiniest detail, far away from what seems to be the focus of attention in a scene, because I want to maintain the compositional tension across the entire panorama of the stage. Then the experience of watching one of my plays is not one of identifying with a character and attending his progression through a series of adventures, but rather savoring the multitude of composed tensions in a given moment of the play, registering that moment of multiple tensions as it is usurped by another, and then another, and another, and allowing yourself to be buffeted by the kinetic sensations that result from that rapid succession of compositional moments.

[. . .]

As the texts of my plays became increasingly fragmented in order to echo the truth of psychic life, I wanted the scenery to do the same. I wanted it to make reference to the various locales suggested on the page, but without my having to make set changes every three minutes. I wanted scenery that was in many places at once, like the mind. The spectator should ask: Am I in a living room, or in a bizarre factory where art (this play) is being produced? In all of my sets, I try to create a space which suggests something is being manufactured; it could be a laboratory, a factory, a meditation chamber, or a kitchen. The sets are not dreamy, poetic landscapes, but they become evocative because they give concrete form to the tension between different levels of reality. How can you be in something that seems like a factory and yet, at the same time, seems to be like your living room? Where are you really? It should make your head spin, because it echoes your real situation in life: you are in your living room relaxing, but at the same time your living room is a kind of factory where, even when relaxing, you are in the process of manufacturing your life. Moreover, the actions performed on the set should echo this same kind of tension. For instance, the performer's elbows might be askew, as if at work making something in a factory, while the rest of his body is balanced in a pseudo-relaxed position, semiprone against a pillow, which suggests the couch he rests upon in his living room.

The complexity of the scenery is a major resource that enables me to suggest the jump from one level of meaning to another during the moment-by-moment action of the play. For example, if an actor is at the back of the stage sitting in a chair against a suitably painted wall, the scene may seem to be realistically domestic. But if he then runs downstage to grab a handle at the end of a pole that rises from the floor and starts to spin it madly, since that pole is not something you would expect to find in a living room, it suggests that he must have left that domestic situation. Perhaps that action, which took place in *What Did He See?*, suggested a regression to childhood, but beyond that it suggests the wider notion of operating in a world gone mad. Had there been no bizarre pole in that living room set, and the actor had instead spun wildly around the post of a normal banister, it would not have referred to this wider level of meaning. It was only when the actor ran to manipulate the pole that he seemed to be entering another level of the set, one that subliminally evoked a demonic factory whose pole was strategically placed on the axis of the world. The next thing that character did in *What Did He See?* was to run to the top step of a platform and sit upon a throne, which invoked a third locale, added to the factory and living room. From that throne he looked down on the other characters, evoking overtones of manipulative power relationships. The physical resources of the set made possible the specific actions that enabled me to jump from psychological level to political level to metaphysical level, and so on.

In *Penguin Touquet* I used rolling boxes that functioned like booths in a restaurant. Yet giant checked walls in the rear evoked an abstract "mental space," and random letters glued to the walls formed word fragments suggesting the inside of a book. The side walls were covered with enlarged ruffled curtains that superimposed a child-like domestic atmosphere on the restaurant, which related to the fact that one of the characters seemed to be a psychoanalyst who would naturally regress patients, and by implication the play, to childhood states. At the same time, the overall design of the set suggested a factory or laboratory

in which something was being produced – perhaps, even, the play itself, or a different mode of consciousness.

For *Film Is Evil*, the set appeared to be a radio broadcasting studio, but, at the same time, there was an excess of tables and desks, which made it appear not to be a real radio studio. It looked like a schoolroom or furniture showroom *invading* a radio studio. Also, the decorative style suggested that the play did not take place in the present. I love old-fashioned radio, and I find photographs of early broadcasting studios very evocative. I wanted the set to have the feel of that earlier era. The set also suggested an environment similar to a hotel lobby you might have seen in Paris at the time of the First World War – which, rather than being a workplace, like a radio studio, is a public meeting place.

The objects I build and incorporate into the set are meant to suggest, through their design, different ways that the performer can manipulate his body. All of the props and scenic elements are occasions for the exteriorization of internal impulse. They are a field within which impulse can express itself. For instance, if a table is propped at an unnatural angle, something about it should invite you to put your hand on it. In making the set and props, I would like to invoke impulses which say, "Look how that couch squats invitingly on the carpet, so why the hell not sprawl on that couch?"

Sometimes I build objects which suggest a combination of two separate objects as props or scenic elements for my plays. For instance, in *The Cure* I built tables with funny padded backs that made them appear to be half couches and half tables. It was a table upon which to work, but it somehow suggested comfort. Personally, I have a fondness for things that suggest you can lean on them, be supported by them. I want my plays themselves to be things upon which I can lean my ideas. Which can gently support my obsessive manias.

At times I have considered working without sets and props, in an empty theatrical space without the burden of an elaborate physical production. But then I realize that such a naked space does not allow the text to ricochet between levels of meaning, which is my obsession. I am interested in showing how the spiritual, psychological, material, political, social, and magical interpenetrate and are present to human experience all at once.

FURTHER READING

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SOURCE

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