

THE HUMAN ACTOR

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The theatre portrays man to himself. The actors act on behalf of the audience, to show them something of themselves. Even in the most bland entertainment, the audience is called into an unusual condition, far removed from ordinary life, in which their empathy has to be tempered with detachment, their identification with observation. If the theatre is to teach, then it has to touch and awaken what we have already seen in ourselves and in others, especially in observing ourselves in our dramatic existence, composed of the unexpected, of conflict and the burden and crisis of choice. The link between observation of ourselves and observation of others is the key to the significant character of the theatre. It is based on the uncertainties of communication and the awareness of a whole action. In the ordinary state of life, the uncertainties are obscured by emotion and the awareness of the whole is fragmented by thought. The theatre goes beyond the lonely perspective of a 'mind'; it touches us in the raw, because it takes place *now*. Now is the time of self-observation; there is no other.

Entertainment and teaching are not necessarily opposed, though the former is designed for 'losing oneself' and the latter for 'finding oneself': to find, we must first lose. That is why the 'framework' of a play needs to bypass the conditioned framework of the audience, to pose the mature members of the audience a problem they cannot resolve save by entering into what is shown to them and awakened in them. There is no intrinsic need of grossly dramatic devices such as the portrayal of hate, murder, treachery or supernatural events. The material of ordinary life can be enough if some central dilemma is activated in the audience, something strong enough to bring to the surface issues which have been buried in the realm of 'what is irrelevant and inexplicable'.

But, how can a play show forth something of the enigma of human life, depending as this does not only on the spoken word, the articulate thought or feeling, but also on the unspoken observation of a moment of consciousness? Has there ever been in the whole history of the theatre a scene in which a character has to proclaim: "I am awake! Now, I see what is going on. This is the truth." Perhaps some examples might be found; but in these, no doubt, we would simply experience the manifestation of an individual private realization bound by the same laws of relationship and limitation out of which the whole play is constructed. Otherwise, the play would *cease to exist* at that point. God would have spoken. In a sense, that is how it is at certain points in the Greek tragedies, in *Peer Gynt*, in *Faust* and so on. At such points, the play ceases to be a play. We may witness a metaphysical dialogue, but not a play. The archetypal consequence of a burst of consciousness on the stage is "The rest is silence" of Hamlet. The unspoken word of all plays is the awareness of the actors, the characters and the audience.

To stretch a point, we might say that 'what follows' on from the emergence of consciousness is the comic. Tragedy rests on lack of consciousness and, in its highest form, on consciousness been raised up through suffering. When the tragic is transcended, there is comedy. The traditional background for such a thought is obvious enough: in literature, with the 'Divine Comedy' of Dante and, in eastern religions with the *lila* or 'sport' of God. There is also a shift of psychological centre. In comedy, the opposites are shown together, the appeal is more to the intellect and laughter follows. As Rudolf Steiner explains, weeping comes from the feeling centre and laughter from the intellectual. [1] This is how it is in life, for when a man has some self-observation, typically, he learns to *laugh at himself*. This ability to laugh at oneself is rare, indeed, amongst the characters created for the stage. Even if proposed, such a character would demand a *tour de force* of acting to portray. Such a character would approximate to a *conscious man*, able to be aware of what he is doing and why; that is, someone energised and constantly awakened by his inner contradictions. Such a character could not be shown precisely because

consciousness cannot be shown. Stuart Holroyd made an attempt in his play around the character Gurdensky, modelled after Kenneth Walker's account of the mage Gurdjieff. Holroyd's device was to portray Gurdensky engaged in *improbable acts*. Another device might be to have the other characters show improbable responses to the conscious character. He himself would be unable to show anything of his essential content. There is no escaping the ultimate fact that *consciousness cannot be imitated*.

The dramatic art requires the portrayal of *lack* of consciousness, working through the forms of ignorance, self-deception, emotional identification and the like. It is not surprising that John Osborne at one point made a passionate defence of Tennessee Williams, pointing out that his 'neurotic' and 'emotionally crippled' characters were really the *norm* of human life. The audience is given a pseudo elevation to a conscious role; but they are liable to miss the point unless they are able to enter into the stress of actual involvement in the course of events. Observation without involvement is a false detachment. That is why the dramatist plays with the audience, allows a partial awakening in his characters (usually just one of them) which throws out of gear the mechanical expectations of the passive audience and enables these more in touch with themselves to see something of how things are in man. The course of events *deviates* from the predictable line established by the framework. There is something inexplicable, unknown at work. The Void peers through the drama at the audience and suggests that they do not know how to live or what their existence is about. [2]

Both audience and playwright take this play of deviations as far as they can within the limits of their cultural conditioning. For the most powerful working of the central action of awakening, audience and writer have to be in intimate relation and also dissolve their roles into the actors'. For the ultimate condition is that of *metatheatre* [3], theatre actually in life in the moment, directed by consciousness. Metatheatre is the prerogative of the spiritual master, the teacher of consciousness (and conscience). It is totally dissimilar from random events or 'happenings'. It is an ancient method. It is an inevitable method considering the nature of man and his life.

For ordinary man is already an actor in life and the whole artifice of the drama is inspired by nothing less than the aim to transcend the unconscious state of pretence to attain a real existence. We weep and we laugh as we learn to sympathise more deeply and see more clearly. The various modern theatrical cults - of the 'absurd', the 'cruel', 'alienation', etc. - are the only to be expected fall-out of the primary aim, attempts to imitate the real thing! The primary aim is a conscious one, which cannot be imitated. In so far as we are conscious, or touched by consciousness - though usually in a fragmented and not-graspable way - thus far we will have the aim of awakening consciousness in our dramatic art. And thus we can easily see that all the aims proposed for the theatre are to some degree dishonest, proposals made for the lack of consciousness.

All this puts the actor into an unenviable situation (if he is not a sleeper entertaining sleeping people). He has little basis for understanding what might be implied in his art. He is pulled into a transition stage, from the ordinary life of pretence to the authentic life of a conscious being, in which his own self pretence may *grow worse*. He has to take risks. He may well grow more deceitful, more fragmented, more at variance with his own purpose rather than less. At the very least, he has to find a way of *assimilating* the experiences generated through acting so that they may enhance his learning of the lesson that life brings. The theatre is a laboratory for investigating life that is out of control and dangerous for the technicians (the actors) who are drawn to it.

Why act? Is it not something to do with the following thoughts: "There is, of course, the amazing pull of the response of an audience, of actually being successful at making a communication even though it is not really my own, of overcoming the pain of speech and the

loneliness of my mind. But acting also gives me a chance of creating myself by beginning to enable me to be free of myself, by enabling me to learn how to direct my manifestations as / *intend*."? That many actors act badly and others who do not often suffer trauma and disintegration do not vitiate this promise. But, it is only a promise. The way is strewn with obstacles and perversions, the greatest of which is the lack of any real aim capable of transcending what might be possible in the public domain of theatre, hide-bound as this must be by the frameworks of the general culture with all its limitations and distortions.

The actor also has to face the dilemma that a truly 'conscious theatre' is not possible in the public space and yet it is just this that he needs. There have been attempts, such as that of Peter Brook in Africa, to create a kind of metatheatre through an extraordinary encounter between actors and audience that cuts across the cultural frameworks; but the conscious theatre requires a more conscious audience, one more prepared to take the risks of a deeper involvement in the action and more capable of registering what they observe in the place of their own self-observation. [4] An unprepared 'audience' taking part in true metatheatre might well be traumatized to the point of madness (or they would flee the 'stage'). Conscious theatre cannot be a matter of public display, but of private participation. Effective observation nearly always requires crisis. Indeed, the spiritual teacher teaches by way of crises which he directs.

There is a pure theatre of contemplation in which the presentation alone of certain human phenomena and events suffices to enable the conscious observer to realize certain facts and laws. [5] Such are hinted at in religious rituals which are themselves failed or transitional modes of theatre strung between ordinary and conscious life. The great Epics and their attendant rituals are merely relics of an attempt to educate local cultures in *universal ideas* about the condition of man; usually, with time, perverted into an indoctrination to reinforce local prejudice when it descends into a crude identification with partial ideals. Just as individual men and women play out their pretences, encountering inevitable suffering and failure or the absurdities of good fortune, so it is with cultures, peoples and nations. The presence of these collectivities in human life is carried by myths and symbols, profane and sacred; images of the hero, the leader and the traitor through which the collective life is portrayed in a dramatically intelligible form. In other words, history is dramatic and the playwright is always something of an historian whether his mind is set in the ways of providence, the dialectic or contingency. The framework of a play is usually historical and such a framework is required for the action of the individual characters. [6]

The 'historical framework' is the framework of the *collective* whole within which the protagonists are embedded even when the action of the play is but a matter of days or even hours. The protagonists have an option of transcendence; otherwise they will appear as mere puppets - unless, that is, the author intends to show his characters are mere puppets *in spite of what they feel and think*, as could be argued in the case of the Greeks.

The stage, then, is a symbol of the world in which we exist and challenges every member of the theatre (the audience included) by its vast potential, all to be realized in a few hours on a few square metres of board. The meagre quantity of physical space should not over-occupy our attention, however, since the audience brings into the theatre its mind, full of the doings of the world, which is rejected by their *concentration* into an enhanced kind of space. Martin Buber speaks of the higher space of the theatre and how *what is not shown* can become vividly present. The actors and the audience meet in the penumbral space around the stage (or, even in the action *hidden* on the stage) that is, in the implicit space of the world. This is something often caricatured by actors mingling with the audience in the bar of the theatre.

The Actor on the Stage

The actor has to make the character 'work'. Is this entirely a matter of making the character appear believable? The character also needs to be interesting and revealing in spite of the fact that the majority of people as they are experienced by us in life are neither. We need to consider the fact that if an average person were realistically portrayed on the stage we might not believe in them! What would such a being be doing in a play?

There are some inherent requirements of 'characters' such as being portrayed in a condition of near-exposure, of being forced to reveal some unresolved contradiction or absurdity, of being near the edge of some shift in identity, and the like. (Needless to say, all this might apply only to the central character, the others acting as reference points of 'normality'). All this might be called the condition of 'enhanced perturbation' where the fact that they are not what they appear to be is about to be seen. Of course, it is never truly seen once and for all. As we have said, consciousness can come in only so far otherwise the play will collapse and the actor break down in *his role as an actor*. Whatever disclosures are made, they must be of the nature to veil a deeper deception. This is strongly indicated by the 'play within a play' staged by Hamlet to bring things to a head and disclose the murderer. It makes Hamlet the more enigmatic.

The actor, then, is portraying a man or woman who enters crisis, who is being forced to reveal something previously hidden. The forcing out of the revelation is accompanied by suffering and the act of disclosure itself *releases energy*. Both suffering and energy (and suffering is a kind of energy) are minimised in life where crisis is treated as abnormal. We do not want what we hide to be shown, precisely because we have been committed to hiding it. Psychological frameworks are almost irrelevant here; what are important are the psychological facts. The state of crisis is a perturbation outside the norm. Hence we can say that actors are concerned with portraying the 'abnormal state' - as we like to consider it - in which 'control' of life fails. Thus Oedipus, Hamlet, Brand, Blanche, and so on.

The crisis, the breakdown, reveals something to us about what is going on all the time, in that interval of 'failure' we can see what has been hidden by success. We can observe how we are *divided against ourselves*. [7]

Thus, we think one way and act another. Our thoughts do not penetrate where our feelings go. Even when a crisis comes through ignorance, this is ultimately revealed as due to a lack of enquiry, a holding to assumptions which we were never compelled to do. The character who says, "I never knew. He never told me." is, essentially, deceiving himself. He requires of the other what he himself is incapable of.

The project for the actor is implicitly terrifying. It is that of entering into a mode of disintegration. This is often obscured in acting technique by over-concentration on *emotion* - which is like dealing in the symptoms and avoiding the question of the disease itself. Someone has to burst into an angry attack on another, but the other is not the cause of the anger, which is coming out of an inner breakdown of previously separated mental states, *inner antagonism*. Does the actor have to get himself into a similar breakdown to be 'authentic'? The answer is 'yes' if he is stuck at the level of emotion. But, if he can enter the 'logic' of the situation more consciously he can go in a quite different way and observe in himself dispassionately the very same phenomenon in a spirit of *integration*. If the anger is created from a deeper level than the anger is *felt*, then there is freedom and the anger is even an aid to consciousness. After all, a very common characteristic of the spiritual masters capable of metatheatre is their power of 'conscious anger', more convincing and compelling than the most masterly stage performance can ever be. Gurdjieff, for example, was renowned for outbursts of rage capable of chilling his victims to the bone; but, in a moment, it could be 'switched-off' to be replaced by a state of gentle cordiality. Mastery of emotions in this sense is no mere 'acting' but an enrichment of the

range of experience. The main distinguishing characteristic is *purposefulness* - ordinary anger is merely a reaction. There is in mastered emotion an intent over and above any emotional state. True detachment is, in fact, not to be found in a life of bland and neutral communication but in a highly charged and complex emotional manifestation which can be used as naturally as we use our tone of voice.

The poor actor who leaves the stage to row with his director or wife may, on the contrary be suffering a double disorder. His temptation, an awesome one, is to fall into believing that his ability to show emotional states is the same as mastering them.

Levels of Existence

It is a dilemma of human existence that everything we do can be seen as merely the functioning of a mechanism, the result of a programming interacting with an environment in time and space, in spite of any conviction we might feel that we are free and 'original' in our actions. The dilemma has been for millennia but no final conclusions can be reached since *the dilemma itself is real* and argument is incapable of dissolving it away. There is a line of approach which can give us a provisional basis for further enquiry. Very simply, what can be seen or observed *has* to be programmed; but, what sees or observes *cannot*. The two poles are inextricably bound up together and are essential in their unbroken linkage for our existence as potentially conscious beings. Our conscious flows out of the fire of the realization of the central dilemma. Our existence is on many levels and there is a recognized law that a higher level is capable of observing a lower just because the higher level is not programmed to the same degree as the lower one. [8]

Also, the higher the range in which the levels are brought into experiential juncture, the more sharp and *urgent* is the experience of the dual reality, until some most central confrontation is reached, the point of explosive separation, the primal energy of *shakti*.

Our primitive sense of the dualism of mind and body is a weak and vague version of the primary experience, but allows us to gain some understanding and is crucial for our force to live. The old theme of mind and body which has dominated philosophy for so long in the West does become a real personal issue once we do realize that what we think and what we say are not the same even when we want to say what we think. In ordinary life, this elementary fact is obscured through the very programming of social behaviour which is strongly permeated by hypocrisy. More to the point, our speech is in the world of others and, we feel, determined by them. Our minds appear to us as private and concealed. Vast absurdities of human life stem from this. Nearly all human misunderstanding is based, as J. G. Bennett pointed out [9] on judging others by what they say (and do) and ourselves by what we *intend*. Does not every play rest on this misunderstanding?

The endless frustration of speech in life creates in us a tremendous poignancy when we are enabled to be aware of the hidden thought of a character on the stage - of what he cannot, or will not, say but which gives the meaning to what he is in fact saying. [10] The hidden, private 'speech' of a character is a central concern of every mature actor (simply in terms of, "What is he thinking when he says that?") He cannot only speak the written words; because the character is observing others and has a potential for self-observation in his presence to himself. The failure to 'speak the mind' amounts to living in a world of dreams, a state that has the power to wreck havoc in dealings with others. The act of communication between significant characters always borders or crosses into the condition of crisis. The positive drama revolves around the question of whether the communication will create a meaning, a mutual disclosure.

The separation of mind and behaviour, the contrast of actual dialogue with the pseudo 'inner' dialogue, is only the lowest form of the dualism that marks human existence. What is called 'the mind' has a range of meanings from the banality of inner dialogue to the most subtle feelings and images. Basically, it is the world of dreams. It, in its turn can be observed. Confusion arises when the mind is considered to be conscious. No traditional psychology considers it so, attributing consciousness to a higher level still, to the realm which includes, in contemporary terms, the 'unconscious' and the sources of motivation which arise from within the person himself. Compared with this higher level, the mind is inert, programmed and unconscious. From the higher level, the mind can be seen as the dream body in which our thoughts and feelings flow. It is really out of this perception that the power of acting comes. The inner states of our private world are programmes of response. Only from the perspective of the higher - the 'soul', the 'intellect' or the 'ego' according the aspect we select - can the vagaries of the mind and its dreams be understood and realized to be no more private than the body is. Mind is manifest not only in words but also in tone of voice and gesture and in patterns of response to others. For those who can observe there is no need of any mysterious telepathy - as every profound actor learns - to realize and transmit mental content. The mind has one of its main centres in *reaction to others*.

Above the mind is the centre of the *search* for oneself. This search takes on many forms and extends right down to the drives impelling us to achieve ideals, ambitions to be realized in the world around us amongst others, as well as attaining the higher, the Void. Again, we refer to the concept of the *divided self*. The seeking of this 'self' is both 'up' and 'down', inwards and outwards. This expresses the central characteristic of the core perturbation, the nexus of contradiction which is the axis of our existence in the world with its concerns and dilemmas. Of all dramatists, Shakespeare was the master observer of the divided self. Emotional representation is totally inadequate for the portrayal of his characters.

The Divided Self is the Human Actor.

At the level of the divided self, the actor passes beyond the separation of imitation and reality and enters into his own, natural acting state by which he plays himself.

However, the question of the divided self first arises for the actor when he asks, "How did this character arrive at this point?" This is to ask for far more than an imaginary history up to the point at which the play begins. It is to ask after the events of a higher dimension or level from which the particular, visible, existential dilemma came and through which he is *to experience himself*. The victim of circumstance has made himself vulnerable to circumstance because he needs to go through that. The character is his own friend, communicant and enemy.

The actor, of course has not to follow any particular doctrine about the reasons for the existentialist crises of any of his characters - or even of himself. But, he does have to face the issue in his own way. Standing in front of (or within) a character who is in a condition of breakdown (from the standpoint of the lower levels of programming) he must ask: "What does this mean? How is this possible in reality? How do I confront this possibility in myself?" For one actor, this may result in a welling up of a deep mythic sense -since the divided self exists in a world of archetypes and patterns more than in a world of people and things - and, for another, in an existentialist crisis of the pain of choice. The existentialist and the essentialist (the mythologist) are equally in confrontation and need not be in exclusion of each other.

The question arises of the authentic performance when, whatever is written by the author cannot determine how the character is to be played or even what he means. This is given over to 'interpretation'. The actor has this to create and he creates it *out of his own meaning*. When

the actor's meaning does not grow by his acting, the actor is diminished and trivialized in himself and is borne inexorably to his own crisis to be taught the lesson in an extreme form. The lesson is simply to face the question, take it seriously, bear with the issue.

The levels beyond the divided self hardly concern us here since they are beyond the scope of theatre. They involve questions to do with our very planetary existence and how consciousness is shaped into specific life-forms.

The drama of the theatre is therefore more than the drama that is written for the theatre. It is a drama for the actors - who are at risk. Unsurprisingly, at certain periods actors were socially avoided as undesirable people, perverted by their self inflicted debasement of meaning. Of course, the societies of these periods were also themselves hypocritical, debased in their own meaning by a collective pretence; but the point should be registered. The actor is faced with an issue of sincerity which, if he avoids it, will worsen his condition. Acting, the profession of pretence, can corrupt or liberate depending on whether it is pretending to pretend or learning to see. In this light, we can say that the real actor is one who no longer acts; he simply performs according to his observation for an audience capable of self-observation. He expresses human existence through consciousness of contradiction on all levels at once. His consciousness and his manifestations are whole and undivided.

Gurdjieff's Babylonian Saturdays

Two of this century's instructors in consciousness, people taking on the role of bridging between some more conscious state and ordinary life, were experts of the theatre. In all visible respects however they were poles apart - and this exemplifies the principle that the higher, the more individual and unique the man. Only the relatively awakened people Gurdjieff caricatured as 'stupid saints' are boringly alike - and that only in terms of public propaganda. The two 'instructors' were Rudolf Steiner and George Gurdjieff. Their interest for us lies in their claim to know the *original purpose* of theatre, to understand its modern distortions and also the way in which an actor can work consciously. Whereas Steiner spent several years as a theatre director, Gurdjieff's own 'performances' were directed in life, as the various accounts of his pupils show. It was Gurdjieff who, in his outlandish 'science-fiction' novel depicting human life from a cosmic perspective, gave an account of conscious acting that strikes to the core of the dilemma of the human actor.

The novel, called *All and Everything* (or 'Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson') spans more than two millennia of earth history, and in the chapter on 'Art', he describes the work of a special society in Babylon concerned with researching into the transmission of significant insights to future generations in times of increasing degeneration. On Saturdays, the society met to create and witness performances which could be produced and understood only by people capable of knowing their own inner states and able to concentrate on specific sequences in their own flow of experiencing. They were experts in the fusion of observation and self-observation, with the *will* to manifest along chosen lines. Gurdjieff digresses to deliver various diatribes against the state of contemporary man in general and contemporary actors and writers in particular. His standpoint is similar to the one we have adopted in pointing out how the performance (in the form of the sequences) arises out of the inner contradictions which prevent our lives being purposeful and direct, coherent and developmental.

"... there just proceeds in them that particularity of their common presence which is that with one part of their essence they always intend to wish one thing; at the same time with another part they definitely wish something else; and thanks to a third part, they already do something quite the contrary." p.487

This state of ordinary contemporary man is contrasted with that of the ancient Babylonian actors. The real actor is able to generate a performance from within himself. He has first to listen to the totality of his various flows of experiencing all-at-once. There is no quietening of the mind in the ordinary sense of blanking out. It is attentiveness with no suppression that makes available to the actor a movement within himself. The second stage is to create a framework for action, which requires the exercise of Reason, a term used by Gurdjieff for the intellect that is above the medley of thoughts and the mechanisms of calculation, an instrument that is capable of an almost instantaneous grasping of a logic and its implications. The third stage requires the ability to concentrate on a certain unfolding of subjective experiencings. [11]

We need not suppose that these three stages are necessarily consecutive. We have to grasp that Gurdjieff is bringing up directly the issue of freedom and mechanicality. He recognizes that anything 'proceeding in us' is programmed but that there is an option of freedom in how we manifest. In more familiar guise, we could present the issue as one of *the deliberate act of spontaneity*; in which, of course, the actor is to *participate* with both his feeling (second level) and his consciousness (third level), his states and his Reason, as well as by exercise of the bodily powers. As a further element in this mysterious process, the members of the society were able to deviate deliberately from the mechanical flow of psychic events so that, in the intervals of the unexpected, something could be 'inserted' which conveys a truth. This is the practical equivalent to our supposed 'moment of truth' in which we imagined a character who awoke and told us (in the form of the other characters) what was going on in reality. In our speculation, we saw that this would mean the ending of the play. In Gurdjieff's method, the play continues along the mechanical line and consciousness is conveyed indirectly. What it is like is suggested by the unexpected modulation in a symphonic work. Subtly and instantaneously, we are lifted into an unspecified degree of freedom which just as quickly gives way to the new order, the new key (or framework). It is experiencing this kind of thing in ourselves that teaches us, for the teaching here is not of merely external information.

In the public theatre, we find that the dramatist and the actor, each in their own way, instinctively find themselves introducing 'inconsistencies' in the line of a character. Without this, the play is dead. It is both taking account of the self contradictions of a human existence and also conveying the essential truth of our freedom in mechanicality; just as the sudden transition in our own line of thinking signifies a moment of insight even/the line remains recognizably 'the same', as 'ours'? So, too, the character on the stage fractures the seam of his type at the critical moments without which he would appear as entirely a robot or puppet.

The perturbations in the unfolding of our lines of manifestation - our 'lives' -are the opportunities of awakening. These are the psychological source of the dramatic not, as it appears, the clash of emotions which is already a 'decayed state of the dramatic', an aftermath, a mere semblance of authentic crisis. Gurdjieff himself devoted a great deal of attention to the question of the cosmic origin of the human drama of psychology with its attendant questions of Reality and God.

In conscious acting, the actor puts his mechanicality to work, allowing to manifest what it is intended to manifest, the teaching of the 'unseen', the 'other', that which sustains human life and informs it, the source of meanings.

The Psychological Theatre

There are surprising resonances between the practical techniques of Stanislavsky for actors and those of Gurdjieff for some of the training of his pupils. Further, Stanislavsky once spoke like this: "Only the actor whose development proceeds along harmonious lines can, quite

independently and through his own acquired experience, raise himself step by step to a wider consciousness".

This has suggested to some a debt of Stanislavsky to Gurdjieff and, to others, the reverse. James Webb in *The Harmonious Circle* points out other possible points of contact between Gurdjieff's ideas and those of other eastern Europeans such as Moreno (who wrote *The Theatre of Spontaneity*) and Evreimoff (who wrote *The Theatre of Life*) the inventor of monodrama in which the conflicting impulses of a single character are played out on the stage. Interestingly enough, Moreno's starting point was the conflict experienced by actors between their interpretation of a character and the one fixed in the dramatic text by the author; and, in particular, he took as his example the actress Eleanora Duse.

Gurdjieff's greatest contribution to the theatre, however, was the performance of his own life. His self-avowed approach to life was "Outwardly play role; inwardly not identify." In other words, he lived life intentionally as he chose to live it and not as the ordinary man, compelled to act out some pretence obscure even to himself. The very nexus of social relationships is an artificial construct in which it is all too easy to become a blind protagonist. Three people meeting together will create a situation that is unknown to any of them. It is on this that the theatre relies for its material. Yet, at the same time, the actor must play his part *knowing* that this is so. This knowing of his is the element that can ruin everything. If the actor is to attain a wholeness, the energy and quality of his knowing must enter into the performance; it cannot be annihilated by some crude 'dulling out' of knowledge by drowning in the movements and the emotions of the character. Yet, how can an actor, an ordinary man who in his life continues to be a slave of circumstances and relationships, a slave blind to the mechanics of his own psyche, realize with effect the simple knowledge he has on the stage that he is 'playing a part'? The actor who is shocked in his essence by this realization is becoming conscious through his acting.

There is an ancient teaching that often put forth by those who believe in reincarnation that a man lives life after life playing different roles until he reaches the point at which it begins to dawn on him that he is doing just that, he is simply playing a role, that is, acting or pretending. Then he is on the way to discovering what is in the core of his existence, what is driving him again and again to repeat performances of being human. If the ordinary man has to wake up to the fact that he is playing a role, the actor has to wake up to the fact that what he can do on the stage can never be more than what he can do in life. [12] In a certain sense, the actor is imitating and performing himself and his own situation. It may seem that he plays the character through himself but, equally, he plays himself through the characters. The only distinguishing characteristic throughout is the degree of consciousness of the performance, in life or on the stage. Can the actor see that in his life he also has a script and a character to play almost as fixed as the one he might study to play a part on the stage?

This extraordinary issue is rarely energized to the point at which it matters to the actor. Actors can be so concerned with the results of their performances - approval and applause - or with their repertoire of techniques that the issue need never arise in them. Then, they can 'sleep' on the stage, cushioned by the play of emotions engendered by habits of imitation life.

The Subject

In thought we have the thought of the object and so on, but in consciousness we have the object. Sometimes we express this by saying that we are conscious of the 'existence' of the object, meaning that the primary experience is not of any particular mode of apprehension, simply that it is 'there'. Consciousness gives us the purest objectivity.

The question of the subject has not been broached, even. The reason for this is that the subject appears in this discussion *only if he chooses to*. We have looked at perception, thought and consciousness; communication and common sense; intelligibility and opacity - but in none of these will the subject appear unless he decides to. The subject does not exist unless he says that he does or shows that he does; and, any such moves make him appear rather like an object. It is this that has led certain philosophers such as Husserl to start talking about the 'transcendental subject', meaning the subject behind the appearances of the object. It is even questionable whether or not the subject can appear authentically to himself. Certainly, he cannot in intentional consciousness. Yet, the fact of his reality can be ascertained by any subject who decides. He cannot be made to appear - although all the psychological apparatus, the complex of mental objects, say, can be roused to action by external pressure -but he can agree to appear. The subject first of all appears to himself in himself without reference to any order of object. Since this is independent of intentional consciousness, such an appearance is not an event of knowledge in any sense of the term that involves objects.

A 'naked subject' is as impossible in this world as a point singularity in physics: it would mean unlimited energy. It is something like this; the instant the subject appears, he disappears. He does nothing, changes nothing, is nothing objective; endures not. He is not subject to the rules of existence as objects are. In certain ancient metaphysics the recognition of these features led to the notion of a passive 'witness consciousness' as a definition of the subject. But this entangles us with intentional consciousness; or, at least, asks of us that we speak of a consciousness behind empirical consciousness (consciousness-of). The subject is not divided from the world; he is always implicit in every object. He is commanded by nothing but, since he changes nothing, his freedom breaks no laws.

Notes

[1] Rudolf Steiner, *Speech and Drama*, p. 247

[2] The science or study of 'deviations' was a particular strength of Gurdjieff as we will touch on once more at later point. For those of theoretical bent, J. G. Bennett's books *Hazard* and *Enneagram Studies* are useful.

[3] The idea of metatheatre was popularised by John Fowles in his novel *The Magus*. This book has been interpreted as an indication of the actual methods by Sufi brotherhoods at present working in the West: see C. Scott *People of the Secret*.

[4] Peter Brook, himself, is a kind of follower of the ideas of G. I. Gurdjieff as was brought out by his involvement in the making of the film *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, a portrayal of the early life of Gurdjieff, a testament, however, to the problems of portraying conscious men producing, in the end, a caricature.

[5] Francis Yates in her book *The Art of Memory* discusses the metaphysical symbolism of the theatre in Renaissance times as a device for the contemplation of ideas.

[6] One might be tempted to say that there are no 'timeless plays' but Samuel Beckett has approached very near.

[7] R. D. Laing and J.G. Bennett have both recognized the significance of the 'divided self' though from utterly different standpoints.

[8] Lilly's important work on levels of programming does not address itself to the central issue here, which he himself was trying to resolve.

[9] Reported in Schumacher's *Guide to the Perplexed*

[10] The director Peter Brook and the poet Ted Hughes have explored some of the issues here in terms of a scale of expression in which overt and covert speech are only the two most superficial levels.

[11] Throughout, in the original text, Gurdjieff uses bizarre neologisms such as 'Darthehlustnian state' to both irritate and bypass the common tendency, on the other hand, of unconscious indoctrination. Having the word is not the same as having the concept and having the concept is not the same as having the realization of it for oneself. Whether one 'understands' these terms in the ordinary sense is irrelevant. Reason, or conscious thinking requires consciousness.

[12] In his book *Transformation*, J. G. Bennett recounts his own experience at role playing in life, during the process of putting into practice the indications of Gurdjieff concerning conscious life. For him, the experience was traumatic.