

THE NEW AMERICAN THEATRE AND MAJOR PERFORMANCE GROUPS

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The new American theatre movement has been given various appellations so far; experimental, avant-garde, absurd, surrealist, seminal and has been made up of various ensemble groups through whose works it became one whole, a multi-faceted movement unique in the diverse methods it employed in its various approaches to the American theatre. The headquarters of such controversial movement naturally is New York City and the groups which will be mentioned in this essay were in New York area. However there have been experimental groups all over the States that have contributed to the concept of a new theatre. The San Francisco Mime Group, The Actor's Workshop, The Fine Southern Theatre, The Firehouse Theatre of Minneapolis are just a few of the foremost regional theatres which applied various experimental methods just as successfully as those in New York and what is more helped to establish and spread the maxims of the experimentalists outside of the thin strip of cultural centers of the East coast.

By now it is almost impossible to separate various playwrights and their works from the performance groups with whose emergence theirs coincide. Still, the groups should have an entity and recognition if one is to evaluate and appreciate their contributions to the making of a new theatre and new names in the world of drama. Among the most prevalent of such groups still of great importance in their own rights can be mentioned The Living Theatre, Open Theatre, Performance Group and Bread and Puppet Theatre. The need for such groups naturally arose from the impatience of young and idealistic and most of the time, extremist intellectuals who, like the playwrights and artists of the period, wanted to show their discontent with the present state of decay and conformity in American theatre. Writing about the American theatre with its picture stage 'ossified under a concept of realism long discarded in other arts',¹ John Lahr applauds the efforts for new forms and predicts the reaction of a critical press:

In trying to find different kinds of images, to forge a new relationship between the stage object and the audience, the avant-garde theater work of La Mama Troupe, The Open Theater, The Performance Group, and even Jerzy Grotowsky's Polish Lab Theater, embodies the impulses of abstract expressionism and must bear the same initial hostility from a critical press whose values are threatened by their work.²

Labelled like Jackson Pollock, whose paintings were a source of inspiration to these people, as 'eccentric', this theatre reflected its own weird and 'personal' reconstruction.

tion of the world'.³ They wanted to go beyond and below the surface to find their specific drives and again they turned to artists like Pollack who had, long before their present time the 60's, expressed this need and dilemma of the artist in a mechanical world:

The modern artist is living in a mechanical age and we have a mechanical means of representing objects in nature such as the camera and the photograph. The modern artist, it seems to me, is working and expressing an inner world -in other words- expressing the energy, the motion, and the inner forces.⁴

As the new movement was inching its way to recognition with the support of young critics like Lahr, just to mention one, some of the older critics of the other camp as John Gassner showed discontent though barely tolerating their existence. Indeed Gassner sums up his side of the picture in his *Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama*:

... It is obvious that the modernist mechanists whether "futurist" or "constructivists" were also convinced that they served reality. When their plays and stage productions made automata of the characters and turned the acting into acrobatics or puppeteering, they were calling attention to the partial mechanization of their age and the total mechanization that they predicted for the future.⁵

It is not only an expression of discontent with what the 'modernists' were doing, it is also a reaction to the rapidly changing world that leaves no sense of faith, no sense of order in anything around the individual.

The part the performance groups played in the drama of the last two decades in America is, without any doubt, a very vital yet at the same time a very controversial one for they received glowing praise and scathing criticism at one breath, were prisoned, applauded, misunderstood and were sent into 'exile' and in spite of all, managed to survive, at least most of them, in the theatre world. While their ultimate aim was to search for an 'inner impulse', and to experiment with new forms, they tried to give the audience a sense of unity, to make them feel as intensely as the performers themselves, and to urge them to share the experiences that were being acted out for their benefit. Just as they were experimenting with theatrical techniques, so were they experimenting with the reactions of the audience and occasionally the audience seemed so eager to 'participate' they upset the delicate balance that had to be retained in performer-audience relationships so essential in the techniques of such groups. Very frequently, the members of the audience found themselves going through a sort of shock-treatment to rid themselves of middle class, old-fashioned norms and values by being subjected to spectacles of nakedness, drug addiction, orgies and obscenities directed at them. And after the initial shock of such unprecedented behaviour, they began to respond and voice either their disgust or their acceptance of it unquestioningly. The important point, however, was whether they really understood the statement beneath the performance. Just like the playgoer who found himself in a maze of 'culture shock', unable to come to a logical explanation; the critic too looked on wondering about the assets of the new or 'seminal' theatre as Brustein terms it in his *The Culture Watch*:

And what about seminal theatre? Can this be called a cultural asset? Continuously experimenting at the expense of the audience, maddening in its

process of trial and error, it is either mangling and mutating beloved classics, like a child pulling apart a precious heirloom to examine its works (say, the Perfonnaae Group's *Dionysus* in 1969), or fabricating strange hallucinations in which people just don't behave like normal human beings (say, the Open Theatre's *Mutation Show*). Too often, such experiments seem like ends in themselves, where the spectator is asked to sit still while the actors go through their preparation exercises; too often, the success of the venture seems to be measured by how deeply the audience has been offended. By now I am sure that just about everybody has had enough of those naked love gropes, those steamy bodies clasping each other in an ecstasy of passionless narcissism, those shouting matches and glowering abuses, those arrogant attitudes in regard to everything previously created.⁶

For a critic who has supported the new theatre and accepted that it had developed most of the significant new talents of the American stage—Sam Shepard, Jean-Claud van Itallie and David Babe among the playwrights; Robert Wilson, Joseph Chaikin, Ellen Stewart and Joseph Papp among ensemble and artistic directors,⁷ to mention a few—the above quotation indicates that he has grave doubts as to the artistic quality of the methods of the groups. What is more his uncertainty is rooted in his belief that the whole thing is another 'fad' in a series of various new movements:

The American theatre has always been peculiarly vulnerable to fashion, but it took the contemporary avant-garde to make it a victim of fads and cults... Stimulated by the nihilism of Pop Art, with its mischievous assault on standards and values, and cheered by the mass media, always ravenous for a new copy, the theatre has begun to announce its revolutions with all the mechanical frequency of a conductor calling stops on a commuter train, each new manifestation being hailed, before it fades from sight, as the final statement about theatre in our time.⁸

Indeed nobody would refute the relevancy of Brustein's statement, yet on the other hand one has to take into consideration that as long as the numerous fads and cults lasted, they did make their contributions, the residue of which will probably be effective in future works.

The Living Theatre:

The most influential and the one that is usually identified with the prevalent atmosphere of the 60's is The Living Theatre. One of the fore-runners of the new movement, they were established as 'the group' with their productions of Gelber's *The Connection*, and Kenneth Brown's *The Brig*, and their followers of liberals and radicals would support and applaud whatever they chose to produce following the double success of the two plays above. Julian Beck and Judith Malina, the famous husband and wife who started the group, acted as its artistic directors, actors and managers until they got into trouble with the tax office in 1964 and were forced into self-exile in Europe. Many of their admirers thought it a pity that they should be deprived of the Living Theatre's experimental, avant-garde productions. Michael Smith refers to it in *The Theatre Trip*, "its exile (is) leaving a hole in New York theatre. Without the Living Theatre, Off-Broadway had lost its focal point, and by comparison Off-Off Broadway too often seemed like a play."⁹ Until 1968 they toured in Europe making a name for themselves on the Continent as well with their 'cruelty' techniques which formed the center of a growing controversy. Invited to the States by Robert Brustein in 1968 to the Yale School of Drama, they kept true to their extended image by creating the most

provocative and controversial of their productions, inviting cheers and boos at the same time. Brustein refers to the time The Becks and some of the members of the Living Theatre participated in a symposium at Yale in a very colorful, vivid anecdote in *Revolution as Theatre*:

The Becks seemed amiable, though a little breathless... a number of Le Living (were) stationed in the balcony and the orchestra... This remark was the cue for pandemonium; the entire Living Theatre company proceeded to take over the Meeting House... actors began pounding on the railings and screaming at the top of their lungs. And now the audience began to scream back...

A woman in a fur stole pushed her way to the platform... shouting: "You're rude, You're stupid and you're vulgar. People paid money to come here and listen to a discussion... "I feel hate", said the woman... "Today I feel more hate than I have ever felt in my life..." Judith Maiina now had a mike and was walking back and forth... "I think what happened here tonight was beautiful and good", she said. "You've had an experience-like you've never had before... It's spontaneous... It's real. There seem to be two groups here.. those who think this is beautiful and those who think it's ugly. ... Stanley Kaufmann was on his feet,... the only time I had seen him angry. "There's a third group", he shouted, "those who think it was planned, rehearsed and phony, phony, phony."

"No, no", cried Judith Maiina. "we allow our people to do just what they want to do. Everybody should be allowed to do what he wants. That's what's so beautiful about freedom."¹⁰

One of the relevant criticisms of their mode of acting would be to the apparently loose, haphazard way the productions seemed and the way the directors insisted that the actors were free to do whatever they wished to do. This statement creates ambiguity for it is true partly and not true for the other part. Basically the company was very well trained and orchestrated into the state of spontaneous and apparent casual behaviour which perplexed and led the audience into similar and in most cases more violent action. The freedom Judith Maiina talks about, came afterwards, if the actor wanted to use his initiative to get out of an embarrassing situation during his act. But in most instances, the audience was taken in by the group's unusual protest against the Establishment which took form in leading the playgoers out into the streets naked like themselves, in arousing them to the point of assualting the performers, in insulting them and getting similar if not more violent reactions in return. Arrest was quite frequent for the company and one time it was Brustein and the Cartoonist Feiffer who came to their rescue when they were on their memorable trip to Yale. Getting arrested was almost a point of honor because they believed that they were getting their message through to great masses of people who were witnessing such proceedings. The company believed that in adopting the 'cruelty' techniques of Artaud, and by giving native touches to their productions they contributed to the passive resistance movement which was very popular in the 60's. Just as being arrested was a part of the Living Theatre's anti-establishment tactics; so were drugs as a means of expanding consciousness an important factor. During a performance where most of the actors and many of the participants of the audience were 'high', rumors of unorthodox behaviour such as urination, defecation and even rape were never denied by the Becks,¹¹ who themselves had openly admitted

to using drugs to get impetus. Naturally they were highly criticised by the established press and its critics because of their unethical behaviour both on and off stage, though most of these writers acknowledge to some degree, their importance in the new movement. Allan Lewis, accusing the Becks of alienating the audience with their artistic, or rather the non-existence of artistic styles, calls them 'needed gadflies to complacency':

Contemptuous of other theatres and dogmatic about their own, the Becks' overconscious desire to be avant-garde may keep them running so far ahead that they trail behind, a development of style without substance, a theatre to shock rather than to reveal, a rebellion unfocused. Opposition to what is, becomes an obsession: ... Their irrational contempt for conformity grew into a special conformity of their own, something precious rather than provocative, a cult rather than a challenge. Though their holy crusade became too private, their insistence on the new is admirable. They are needed gadflies to complacency.¹²

Another writer, James Roose-Evans points out to this contradictory trait of the group, that is their weaknesses in their armour of non-conformity:

A unique phenomenon of the American scene is the Living Theatre, a nomadic community of actors, their wives and children, led by Julian Beck and his wife Judith Malina, numbering at the last count some forty souls, ... sharing everything in common... The irony is that while attacking the bourgeois capitalist system they still exist off and get their living from it.¹³

Whatever was said by way of negative criticism about the company carries logical arguments, yet for all its tendencies to a private cult, they were sincere in the overall message they wanted to convey to their audiences be it through getting high, orgies or naked protest marches. Of the relatively few critics supporting them, Margaret Croyden tries to clarify their standpoint and their involvement with the theatre of cruelty:

Emulating Artaud, their pieces were spectacles rather than literary dramas... Words were replaced by sounds, grunts, groans, screams and chants counterpoised by deliberate silences and ritual signaling. The company adopted Artaud's credo, 'Between life and theatre there will be no distinct division but instead a continuity'. Even their name, the Living, was appropriate, signifying their commitment to abolishing the separation between what's happening on the stage and what is happening in life. The living event, the existential response, was as important to them as a rehearsed play, and therefore an important consideration was the immediate reaction of the audience. The Living provoked audiences into 'acting' instead of only watching, and thus the theatrical event molded into a real one and vice-versa.¹⁴

Through the strong waves of criticism, the group managed to remain true to their mode of behaviour simply because they sincerely believed that they were progressive and were taking big steps in avant-garde drama. It was through their presentations that they produced the important question of whether to combine the theatrical act based on illusion with the real living event, or to do away with the illusion totally. They offered clues, gave the sort of answers they thought right but the final decision whether to take up their challenge or completely ignore it is left for the others.

The Performance Group:

Richard Schechner and his Performance Group have taken over from where the Living Theatre left the scene. Although the latter group still functions, it has lost its novelty since other companies took up the methods and techniques they introduced to the American theatre. Schechner and his small group of actors started to make themselves known in the late 60's with their presentations of campus violence in the form of guerilla street theatre but since 1969 they have turned to environmental theatre and have been performing in a garage converted into an environmental theatre in New York. Influenced by Jerzy Grotowski, John Cage, Marshall McLuhan, happenings, the Living Theatre and later by anthropological studies of primitive ritual,¹⁵ Schechner was also against the concept of the fourth wall that separated the audience from the stage and the actors, and thus formed his idea of uniting the two in his Performing Garage where there are no regular seats. The audience may stand or sit on boxes, benches, chairs, on the floor, wherever he likes. In short, Schechner's environmental theatre cancels out the existence of theatre 'architecture' which blocks the merging of the actor with the audience. With his belief and observations that once the breakdown of space was accomplished he could hold ritual-like presentations anywhere, in the streets, in a square or in a temple, which could last for days with the observers participating as well, he formed his ritual-based theatre in a contemporary environmental theatre. Brooks McNamara links the emergence of the environmental theatre as a necessary solution in the urbanization of modern and mechanical society to a need for more space to perform:

The environmental approach to space almost certainly first developed out of the need to adapt sites, not originally conceived of as theatres, for various kinds of performances- rituals, festivals, processions and plays... Associated with all of the variations is the idea that a single performance space may contain both actors and spectators. This kind of 'environmental' performance space stands in clear contrast to that of the formal theatre structures.. The result... has been not only close contact but often an intermingling of the actor and the audience.¹⁶

Probably the production that drew all attention to Schechner and his group was *Dionysus* in '69, loosely based on Euripides' *The Bacchae*, the text of which combined myth, ritual rites and celebration, the audiences were really involved, some even went as far as kidnapping the actor playing Pentheus to prevent his being sacrificed to Dionysus, one volunteered for the part of Pentheus and improvised his lines as well as the professional actors themselves. Schechner, writing of audience participation, says, "I was elated that 'something real' had happened."¹⁷ However, the performers were not so elated for the participation of the members of the audience were often more passionate than the performer had bargained for, since the performances were mostly in the nude as part of the ritual and the audience, though familiar with the naked from the days of the Living, still found it too tempting. Schechner sees nakedness as an extension of social conditions and the environment in some ways the extension of the body,¹⁸ it is his rejection of the system and an affirmation of the body, in the tradition of the rock-tribal musical *Hair*. Though the group gradually disciplined itself to partly naked performances and the occasional eagerness of their audiences to join in, they could not extend it to some the critics who looked down on the Performance Group as phonies without real talent. Stanley Kauffmann who expressed similar ideas on the Living is quite disparaging about the group:

Schechner's Group,... plays in New York at a place called the Performing Garage - a big bare floor, ... with a narrow gallery running around all four walls... The audience is invited to sit or stand where it will and is warned in advance that it will have to follow the action around... Schechner's work, as I have seen it is absolutely devoid of any recognition of the concept of talent... They (the cast) too have no talent; they are simply willing and committed, inflated with a kind of confidence in the venture.¹⁹

In any case, in the Group's version of the text, actors are characters in the play and deliver the textual lines but they also address one another by their names and depart from the text to allude to contemporary issues that presumably are similar to those in the narrative.²⁰ As characters in the play and as themselves, they challenge the audience to participate in the Dionysian revels. As part of his desire to create 'actuals', a wish Schechner shares with the other environmentalists, during the performances the actors could walk out or act as themselves if the notion hit them. Schechner refers to such an incident that changed the flow of the action in *Dionysus* in '69:

In *Dionysus* in '69 there is a scene... when Dionysus offers Pentheus 'any woman in this room' ... Pentheus is left alone... Almost every night some woman comes to him and offers help. The scene plays privately between them, and ends with the woman going back to her place. The performance resumes, and Pentheus defeated, is sacrificed. Once it did not happen that way. In the words of (the actor) who played Pentheus:

The one time the sequence was completed was when Katherine came out into the room,... The confrontation between us was irrational. Her concern for me was not based on the play... I recognized in one moment that the emotional energy Katharine was spending on me literally lifted me out of the play... The play fell away... and I walked out of the door.

Joan Macintosh was playing Dionysus that night. Her reactions were different.

(He) got up and left with the woman. I announced that the play was over. 'Ladies and gentlemen, tonight for the first time since the play has been running, Pentheus, a man, has won over Dionysus, the god...' Cheers and... celebrations... I felt betrayed. I was hurt and angry...²¹

The actor who left the play and thus changed the final scene where Pentheus is torn apart by the Bacchanals, behaved according to the rules of the environmentalists in Schechner's words yet a fellow actress and Schechner's wife Joan Macintosh tells of her anger when the performance was changed from its rehearsed path. Was it because she was too involved in her role of Dionysus, or was it because the regular pattern was broken when she least expected it? Would she have walked out herself if a similar 'awakening' had come her way? Interestingly enough, there is no straight answer to these questions; possibly she saw it as an individualistic breaking away from the rituals of the group and resented such action.

It may be said that Schechner has not been wholly successful but certainly he has become one of the most prolific writers in his field and his Performance Group for all the controversy of opinions around it still functions at the Performing Garage, experimenting with the works of the masters like Genet and Artaud and offering new specta-

cles by the other members of the Group like Elizabeth LeCompte, and Spalding Cray to mention just two.

Bread and Puppet Theatre:

The most common point that the majority of environmentalists seem to share is their interest in primitive rituals, cults, the oriental mystiques, especially Zen Buddhism, and their loose adaptation of such to modern-day situations. Schumann's Bread and Puppet theatre, which managed to survive and flourish while others faded away, has created a cult of its own. Unlike some of the experimentalists Schumann and his group do not deal with the contemporary aspects of problems like love, nudity and drugs. His main sources of inspiration are the Bible, fables and children's literature. His pieces are simple and direct and the decor is like that of folk art. His puppets are the only outstanding aspect of his productions, the most famous of them being the 'Gray Ladies' over ten and fifteen feet tall, representing eternal womanhood.²² Schumann rejected the idea that the audiences needed to be shocked—a general tendency of most avant-garde groups—and the idea of the traditional theatre as space to perform. Regarding the stage too comfortable and too conditioning, Schumann prefers any space be it a street, barn or church for his productions. His theory about good theatre is simply put:

He feels that too many of the avant-garde groups are more concerned with insulting the audience than with communicating. 'You can't simply shock an audience', he says. 'That will only disgust them... It may be that the best theatre—if it comes—will develop from the most traditional forms. A theatre is good when it makes sense to people.'²³

Totally outside of the establishment, and unknown in the commercial world, he remains confident that his puppets will be exemplary. Unlike Schechner's flamboyant taste for 'ritual', Schumann bases his belief in the simplicity of 'breaking bread'. Bread is his pass word to mutual communication with his audience. Whenever there is a performance, the audience is offered a loaf of bread that is passed around after each person breaks off a piece and it is only after everybody eats bread that the play begins. Starting this way, the audience has participated in an instantly recognizable religious ritual: eating bread—communion—is sharing the staff of life.²⁴ By going back to Christian rituals and very basic ones at that, the Bread and Puppet Theatre seems to be gently preaching faith through the modernized versions of what may be called as 'mysteries', for nearly all the shows resemble the mystery plays of the Middle Ages.

Margaret Croyden refers to the group's association of bread and theatre as a way of life strongly linked with baking bread and creating puppets.

The power of bread is obvious. People are hungry. The job of bread-making involves baking the loaves well for chewing and digestion and making them available for everyone... We want to join the breadbakers, make good bread and give it out free... Our mind is hungry and Jesus says: man does not live from bread alone, but from puppet shows as well... What is the purpose of a puppet show? To make the world plain, I guess, to speak simple language that everybody can understand. To seize the listener, to persuade him to the new world, To spark the movement of the listeners.²⁵

As is quite clear from Schumann's statements that though involved with experimental forms and though his work is often an expression of outrage and disgust of war of poverty, of mechanization and of loss of faith, he is basically compassionate and as a result, piety, humility and love - as elements of Christian religious rituals - underline his work; quite incongruous and very rare in a violent society with its equally violent outbursts of new expressions in art and theatre.

The Open Theatre:

Founded by the actor-director Joseph Chaikin in 1963 as a workshop, the Open Theatre was another ensemble that contributed to the experimental theatre of the 60's. Like the Bread and Puppet Theatre, it was distinguished from the other radical departures in stage form (The Living Theatre and The Performance Group) by its sense of the audience. There was gentility and humility in their pieces, arrived at in the confrontation with death - again a motif which goes back to the Medieval theatre to morality plays, to the certainty of death and man's final acceptance of it - as sum total of Chaikin's vision, a belief that one must acknowledge death in order to attest to a new life. John Lahr neatly sums up Chaikin's ideas:

"The thing about theater - more than anything else - is that the people are actually there. You can't confront being alive without confronting that you're mortal. This is what theater is about."²⁶ With his interest in allegorical theatre and allegorical acting, Chaikin has taken a positive stand against the 'kitchen realism' of 'method' acting of the traditional theatre. In an interview, he told The New York Times, "In the new theatre the actor keeps up his awareness that he's an actor on a stage. Instead of portraying the individual, he's a universal man."²⁷ He also believed that theatres should be used as laboratories where the actors could carry on with their research and then coming back and reporting their discoveries. Since the structure of the established theatre did not afford such freedom, he encouraged his followers into founding the Open Theatre where they could do the kind of work they had the impulse of doing.²⁸ With his rejection of the 'method' acting which he thought crippled the actor and the star system of the commercial theatre, he formed a creative ensemble of promising writers, actors and directors around him. Writers like Megan Terry, Maria Irene Fomes, Jean-Claude van Itallie, Sam Shepard, critics like Richard Gilman and Gordon Rogoff were among those 'failures' in the commercial theatre, unable to put up with its restrictions and ready to try their hands in something new. Under Chaikin's successful direction they are now some of the important names of the experimental theatre. Unfortunately the group disbanded in the early 70's each going his way; however the contribution of Chaikin to the new movement is probably one of the most positive ones with their distinctive and cohesive style along with Chaikin's artistry and his genuine poetic sensibilities. Margaret Croyden pays an important tribute to his achievement when she says that 'the work of the Open Theatre remains haunting, gentle, sad and funny even depressing at times, the work was always fresh and always beautiful. And this is by no means a small achievement'.²⁹

The groups mentioned so far are not the only contributors to the new theatre movement. Doubtlessly there have been others, some failures and some successes besides the four major groups. Charles Ludlam's Theatre of the Ridiculous, for example, influenced by the Dadaists and entirely nihilistic, looks on life as ridiculous and expresses this view through savage humor and grotesque nightmare. The content of their plays is composed of fantasies that are primarily based on homosexuality and transvestism, Hollywood star-world and bitter parodies of the straight society. Anti-intellectual in the extreme,

the Ridiculous presents a decadent demi monde, obscenities and smutty humor.³⁰ Where as the Theatre of the Ridiculous supports the theory of the 'ugly' for its own sake, Robert Wilson, a young architect from Texas, working with brain-damaged children in his spare time, developed his theory of the 'beautiful' also for its own sake. Realizing that the brain-damaged children responded to dance and movement therapy, he devoted himself to dance and theatre and in a short time produced his first works. Most of his pieces are very long to sit through - from seven to nine hours - but since he has made a name for himself among the 'chic' and the 'avant-garde' in a very short time, he has no problems in getting patient audiences who sit through so that they in turn could boast of their own merit of "being with it". Probably the most interesting aspect of his productions is the fact that he uses some of the children undergoing therapy. One such boy seems to have become Wilson's leading actor for he has been in at least three of the productions. Clarissa K. Wittenberg comments on this aspect of Wilson's Group, the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds in a review of one of Wilson's productions:

Gradually the boy became the focus of attention. Awareness grew that there was something wrong with him. He was injured in some way; his movements were fluid, his speech unusual. One thought- and then dismissed the thought- that he was retarded. One wondered if an actor were assuming the role of a madman or idiot... Then, inexplicably, the play was over... I stopped a man who appeared to be a friend of young Christopher Knowles and said how moved I was. He answered, "You know he is brain-damaged". When I said that I knew, that I had a daughter with brain-damage, he wanted me to meet Robert Wilson, who explained that the length of the play depended on the rapport he and young Christopher, who is fifteen, achieve in any interaction. When it ceases to "work", they stop... Wilson's collaboration in developing this play with young Christopher was an exploration from many angles of the world of the injured.

... Most often, those around the disabled try to force, contrive and structure to make the person seem normal. In this play, all were equal; there were no limitations.³¹

Robert Wilson is not the first or the last to use a disabled person in his works. There is many an artist and director who base their pieces on their therapy cases and their responses and use such valuable experience on the training of young acting students and there are play wrights like Mark Medoff who write plays specially put together for actual deaf-mute characters and cast the same person in their play. However, Wilson's experimentations are multi-faceted; he has combined dance, therapy, painting, music and his background as an architect which gives his work an extra dimension.

Naturally in a rapidly changing society such as the American society, there has to be new voices, new trends along with what Robert Brustein calls 'fads' and 'cults'; on the other hand, it will not be a healthy society without the various controversial aspects presented by different schools and the function of the new theatre and of the performance groups was to provoke the majority of the mass media into an awareness of themselves, of the world, of people; each with unique methods of its own. With the Living as 'the mother of them all', a phrase coined by Croydon, and The Performing Group following in its wake with more or less the same aims, similar opportunism, the same flamboyancy and 'sincerity' that does not ring true all the time, with Ludlam and

Foreman with their extremist, and nihilist approaches; with Chaikin and his Lyricism and poetry and with Schumann and his mysteries and Christian humility that does not evince any of the violence of most of the other groups, the new theatre movement has definitely been the means of opening a colorful, multi-dimensional period in the American theatre, the fruits of which manifest themselves in playwrights like Sam Shepard, Robert Wilson and Megan Terry just to name a few. And one can predict -though too early- that the aftermath of this movement so very influential in the last two decades will continue to renew and launch itself with more awareness into the 80's.

- 1- John Lahr, *Up Against the Fourth Wall*, Grove press, Inc., New York, 1970, p. 214.
- 2- Lahr, p. 214
- 3- Lahr, p. 215
- 4- Quoted from Francis V. Connor's *Jackson Pollack*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1967, p. 80, in Lahr, p. 215.
- 5- John Gassner, *Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., New York, 1966, p. 111.
- 6- Robert Brustein, *The Culture Watch, Essays on Theatre and Society, 1969 - 1974*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1975, p. 155.
- 7- Brustein, p. 156.
- 8- Brustein, p. 4.
- 9- Michael Smith, *Theatre Trip*, The Bobbs-Merrill Co., New York, 1969, p. 14.
- 10- Robert Brustein, *Revolution as Theatre*, Liveright, New York, 1971, pp. 33 - 47.
- 11- Margaret Croyden, *Lunatics, Lovers and Poets*, Dell Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1974, p. 114.
- 12- Allan Lewis, *American Plays and Playwrights of the Contemporary Theatre*, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1970, p. 232.
- 13- James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre*, Avon Books, New York, 1970, p. 141.
- 14- Croyden, p. 95.
- 15- Croyden, p. 194.
- 16- Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo and Richard Schechner, *Theatres, Spaces, Environments*, Drama Book Specialists, New York, 1975, p. 3.
- 17- Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theater*, Hawthorn Books, Inc., New York, 1973, p. 41.
- 18- Schechner, p. 91.
- 19- Stanley Kauffmann, *Persons of the Drama*, Harper and Row, Publishers, New York, 1976, p.41.
- 20- Croyden, p. 201.
- 21- Richard Schechner, *Essays on Performance Theory 1970 - 1976*, Drama Book Specialists, New York, 1977, pp. 23 - 24.
- 22- Croyden, p. 221.
- 23- James Roose - Evans, p. 121.
- 24- Croyden, p. 219.
- 25- Quoted from Peter Schumann, "The World Has to be Demonstrated Anew", *Poland*, March 1970, p. 4. in Croyden, p. 220.
- 26- Lahr, p. 171.

- 27- Donald M. Kaplan, "Character and Theatre: Psychoanalytic Notes on Modern Realism", *Tulane Drama Review*, Volume 10, No. 4, Summer 1966, p. 96.
- 28- Quoted by Joseph Chaikin in "Fragments of the TDR Theatre Conference, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vo. 10, No. 4, Summer 1966, p. 113.
- 29- Croyden, p. 191.
- 30- Croyden, p. 209.
- 31- Clarissa K. Wittenberg, "Wilson at Art Now", *The Drama Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3, September, 1974, p. 128.

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