

## Notes Toward an Integral Theater

What follows is a series of notes to help me start thinking about the notion of an Integral Theater, one that attempts to utilize the tools and techniques of Traditional, Modern, and Postmodern performance, yet transcend the limitations of each for a more holistic dramatic form. These notes are just a starting point. They are a place to collect a few thoughts before trying to implement ideas in the real world. They are posted here in the hopes that they will spark discussion with others who are interested in the same goals.

### **An Integral Theater must:**

- a) Address all four quadrants (Ken Wilber's Four Quadrants of Being)
- b) Address all levels of each quadrant
- c) Address past, present, and future

### **The Four Quadrants of Being are:**

<b>Interior Individual (Personal-Psychological)</b>	<b>Exterior Individual (Personal-Physical)</b>
<b>Interior Collective (Cultural)</b>	<b>Exterior Collective (Social-Environmental)</b>

- This All Quadrant All Level (AQAL) approach must be applied to text (play), acting, direction, set design, lighting design, costume design, make-up design, music direction/composition, and use of theater space.
- Each aspect (text, actor, direction, design, etc.) is contextually interdependent with all other aspects.
- If the progression of theater style/presentation has been directed by the goal to acquire and maintain the audience's attention by shocking them, or with spectacle, or by being "new" or "interesting" – the point of an Integral Theater would be to grab the audience's attention at every level and quadrant of their being (instinctual, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual).

- The means for accomplishing this will depend on the ideas, story, text, cast, etc.
- An Integral Theater needs to address content, structure, presentation, form, inter-personal dynamics, inter-group dynamics, experience, memory, imagination, etc.

### Four Quadrants of Theater I

<p><b>Interior Individual (Personal-Psychological)</b></p> <p>Actor Motivation</p> <p>Instinctual Level Emotional Level Intellectual Level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Archaic</li> <li>▪ Magic</li> <li>▪ Mythic</li> <li>▪ Rational</li> <li>▪ Post-Rational (Integral)</li> </ul> <p>Spiritual Level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Psychic</li> <li>▪ Subtle</li> <li>▪ Causal</li> <li>▪ Nondual</li> </ul>	<p><b>Exterior Individual (Personal-Physical)</b></p> <p>Costume Make-up Movement/Staging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Motivational</li> <li>▪ Emotive</li> <li>▪ Realistic</li> <li>▪ Representational</li> <li>▪ Expressionistic</li> </ul>
<p><b>Interior Collective (Cultural)</b></p> <p>Text/Play Secondary Texts</p> <p>Signs Symbols Concepts Language Text Myth Narrative Meta Narrative</p>	<p><b>Exterior Collective (Social-Environmental)</b></p> <p>Theater Space Set Lighting Music</p> <p>Presentational Realistic Representational Expressionistic Surreal Deconstructive Complexitive (complexity reflective)</p>

- What techniques can be used to create a text/play in an Integral fashion or to help and actor create a character, a director shape a scene, a designer create a look, etc. ?
- How do you simultaneously, or in sequence, approach the different levels (instinctual, emotional, intellectual, spiritual) of text, actor, scene, etc.

### **Possible Approaches to Levels of Being**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Actor</b>	<b>Direction/Design</b>
Physical	No. of characters Setting Action	Body work	Movement of actors
Instinctual	Themes (Death, Birth, Danger, etc.) Sexual tension Violence Movement	Physicalizing instinctual impulses	Light and shadow Signs
Emotional	Conflict between characters Identification w/ characters	Physicalizing emotional conflicts	Symbols Mythology
Intellectual	Concepts Ideas Presentation methods of text	Physicalizing intellectual conflicts Study of text Ancillary research	Concepts Discussion with actors, designers
Spiritual	Transcendence of theme and conflicts for unifying moments	Meditative practice Contemplation on story, text, character, etc.	Meditative contemplation

**The Following are from notes towards the *Sonnets* project I wrote in the winter of 1999. They deal primarily with how to approach the direction of the piece in dealing with the actors, but contain a good deal of groundwork toward an Integral approach.**

And, each scene will be dependent on a few simple aspects to work. Relationship of the char/actors, the circumstances of the scene, and the complications that are placed on them, whether complication of relationship, or circumstance. I will need to keep in mind the setting, time and place of each

scene as we are working on it. The more information I can give the actors, the better they can imagine the scene and react to it or each other. They need to know what the character wants. And they need to know what tactics are at their disposal to achieve their objectives. Tactics will fall into the five stages; physical, instinctual, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. They also need to be aware of the other char/actors. How can they help or hurt their chances of achieving their objectives, goals, dreams, desires, wants, needs, etc.? And stakes, though I hate that word, are important as well. The complications that make the scene more vital and interesting. Risk. Another over used word. Metaphor and the five stages. Explain things in terms of the physical, and instincts, emotions, and such. Intellectual concepts are harder and should be avoided initially, as should the spiritual. These are things that need to be explained through metaphor at later stages of the exercises.

But for now, the five stage and their manifestations:

### **The Physical-**

What physical perceptions/reactions are there?

- Heart beat/heart rate
- Breathing
- Sweating
- Muscle tension/sensation
- Sensation in the joints
- Sensation in the internal organs
- Pheromones
- Bio-electric current
- Chi
- Sensations of balance
- Sensations of gravity
- Sensations of body temperature
- Reflexes based on the above

That seems like good start. They may be more, but I'll have to think about it. Now I need to see how these things play out in the four manifestations.

- The Individual Interior (Personal/Psychological):
  - The actor will need to be aware of how their role/character affects them.
- The Collective Interior (Cultural) :
  - They need to be aware how they are reacting to the other char/actors.
- The Individual Exterior (Physical):
  - Awareness of their body, costume, make-up, etc.

- The Collective Exterior (Social-Environmental):
  - They need to be aware of how the environment is affecting them. The imaginary environment as well as the physical one they are in.
  - Awareness of how the presence (physical, emotional etc.) of the Others affects them.

For exercises at this stage, it might be a good idea to remove the five senses as much as possible. Have the actors close their eyes, give them ear plugs, avoid touch each other directly, etc.

### **The Instinctual**

What kinds of instinctual perceptions/reactions are their?

- All those that are perceived through the five senses.
  - Sight- color, shade, hue, depth, texture, etc.
  - Hearing- volume, pitch, rhythm, tone, etc.
  - Smell- intensity, acidity, baseness, pleasantness, etc.
  - Touch- texture, pressure, temperature, etc.
  - Taste- intensity, acidity, baseness, pleasantness, etc.
- The sex drive
- Fear of pain or death
- Fight or flight
- The need for food
- The need for sleep
- The need for shelter
- The desire of physical comfort
- The need for love, affection, companionship, etc.
- Fear of the new or unknown
- Fear of danger
- Fear of the other
- Fear of the environment
- Defensive rage/anger
- Protection of mates, children, loved ones
- Nurturing response child and mate
- Instinct for destructive behavior to the self and others
- Curiosity and exploration
- Reflexes based on the five senses

### **Now for the manifestations:**

- The Individual Interior (Personal/Psychological):
  - The actors needs to be aware of how the role/character is affecting them on this level.
- The Collective Interior (Cultural) :

- How the other char/actors are affecting them instinctually. How are they reacting to the other char/actors? How are the relationships affecting them? The relation with the other?
- The Individual Exterior (Physical):
  - How are they responding to the environment? The setting and place? The actual room?
- The Collective Exterior (Social- Environmental):
  - Still rolled into the IE at this stage.

## **The Emotional**

The emotional perceptions/responses cannot be an exhaustive list, but merely a starting point.

- Love- always changing depending on the relationship.
- Hate/repulsion- varying based on situation
- Fear- varying in intensity and type. Fear of physical or emotional pain.
- Desire- for food, or sex, or money, or gratification of some sort.
- Satisfaction
- Joy/elation- in varying degrees
- Equanimity/peace-
- Agitation
- Aggression
- Anger/rage
- Grief
- Respect/disrespect
- Depression
- Numbness
- Shock
- Belonging/community/tribe membership

That list will grow, I'm sure. But the Manifestations:

- The Individual Interior (Personal/Psychological):
  - What are the emotional responses the character/role elicits? What emotions does the situation create? What emotions are created by the complications?
- The Collective Interior (Cultural) :
  - What emotions come into play with the other char/actors? What emotions are created by these situations? What emotions result from the cultural setting? What archetypical responses take place.
- The Individual Exterior (Physical):

- What are the emotions generated by the movement of the actor's body, the costume, make-up, etc.?
- The Collective Exterior (Social Structures):
  - What emotions are generated by the social environment of the story/setting and the physical and imaginary environments?

It is also important to keep in mind that emotional states can exist simultaneously. That they can work to amplify one another, or they can work to diminish each other.

### **The Intellectual**

There is a lot going on at this level. Not simply perceptions/reactions, but stages of consciousness through which they take place. Magic, mythic, rational and complex-rational. This is also the stage where the text really begins to be brought into the exercises. In general magic can be thought of as faith, mythic as belief, and rationality as knowledge, each stage being based on experience, but each stage having a wider grasp of perception, and hence a broader range of possible reactions.

- Magic: The beginning of symbols and concepts. The very basic meaning of the text.
- Mythic: The Archetypes. This is where the shadow and personae play out. The trickster and the divine child. The anima and the animus. These archetypes may lurk in the subtext.
- Rationality: Here the text begins to take on extended meaning. More than the words, more than the ideas, but the subtext as well. The more conceptual ideas. The relation of the text, scene and char/actors to the world of ideas; the noosphere.
- Complex Rationality: The relation of the text and scene to everything else; physiosphere, biosphere and noosphere.

Each of these will actually have some effect in the four manifestations, but for the most part, I think we'll want to investigate this stage as a whole.

- The Individual Interior (Personal/Psychological):
  - What symbols and concepts emerge? What are the reactions to them? What images come forth that are archetypal? What reactions based on the interior archetypes? How does the shadow or personae of the char/actor manifest itself? How does the char/actor respond to the ideas and concepts of the text? What reactions/impulses do the complex connective aspects elicit?

- The Collective Interior (Cultural) :
  - How is the char/actor responding to the other char/actors? How symbolically? What archetypes and archetypical relationships are being created? What are the archetypical reactions? What are the conceptual reactions between char/actors?
- The Individual Exterior (Physical):
  - What are the effects on the body?
- The Collective Exterior (Social Structures):
  - How do the social structures of the scene, and the physical space of the set/theater affect the char/actor, and the group?

## The Spiritual

Again, there are four stages within this stage. The Psychic, the Subtle, the Causal and the Non-dual. But I'm not sure if I can really attempt to work with more than just peak experiences of these stages, because I think they will require that the actor actually be living from these stages. Now, it is possible to induce a transformative condition in which the actor attains a particular level of consciousness, say the Subtle (deity-mysticism) for instance, and then returns to rationality later. This is not uncommon in spiritual work. I think the best that can be hoped for is that an actor is encouraged by peak experiences to begin a regular practice, which could lead to sustained transformation. The same is true of the audience. No one will ever be enlightened by watching a play. But, they may have a transformative experience, which might lead them to take up an integrated spiritual practice.

The four stages:

- Psychic: Nature mysticism. The awareness of unity with the Other. The other actors and the environment. The beginnings of the transcendence of attachments to the physical, emotional and mental. The apprehension of the Witness.
  - Subtle: Deity mysticism. The union with the personal God, or the personal archetype. The presence of the Witness.
  - Casual: Formless Void/Unity mysticism. Union beyond archetypes. Union with the essential suchness of the universe. The union with the Witness.
  - Non-dual: Supreme unity mysticism. The ultimate union with All, beyond the Witness.
- The Individual Interior (Personal/Psychological):
    - The passage beyond the personal, beyond desires and attachments to the self.

- The Collective Interior (Cultural) :
  - The passage beyond individual love to universal love.
- The Individual Exterior (Physical):
  - Transcendence of the personal physical, attachment to the body and fear of death.
- The Collective Exterior (Social Structures):
  - Transcendence of the exterior physical, the world of matter and social structures.

The manifestations will be very similar at each stage. The I, the We and the It. At the emotional stage, the It will break apart into the Personal and Collective of the Exterior. But really, what I'm talking about is the role/character for the I. The self. Then the other char/actors for the We. And awareness of the environment, the setting and place for the It. And at the emotional stage this becomes not simply the physical environment, but the emotional, and intellectual environment as well.