

HELLO. I AM A PLAYWRIGHT AND A DIRECTOR. I LIKE WORKING OUT HOW THINGS, BE IT WORDS OR ACTS, CAN WITHSTAND BEING REPEATED.

MY APPROACH CAME ABOUT BY NOTICING IN REHEARSAL A ROUGH AXIOM: THE LESS DRAMATIC INTERPRETING DONE BY THE ARTISTS, THE MORE INTERPRETING DONE BY THE VIEWER. THIS PIECE OF INFORMATION CAME TO ME EARLY ON IN THE MIDST OF MY OWN FAILURE AS A DIRECTOR AND WRITER. TRY AS I MIGHT, I ONLY SEEMED TO MANAGE TO MAKE THINGS THAT *RESEMBLED* PLAYS.

(ROLL TAPE: HOUSE AND DRUMMER WANTED)

THE FAILURE WAS HILARIOUS AND SERIOUS ENOUGH TO SPARK AN EXPLORATION INTO REALISM.

I THINK AS A SOCIETY WE OFTEN EQUATE TRUTH WITH REALISM, ART MIMICKING LIFE ETC. I SUSPECT, HAVING SPENT COUNTLESS HOURS IN A REHEARSAL ROOM, THAT IT IS OFTEN THE MIMICRY THAT WE ADMIRE AS AUDIENCE MEMBERS, NOT NECESSARILY ANY TRUTH. BEING IN A REHEARSAL ROOM HAS AFFORDED ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE THAT WHILE EXPRESSIONS MIGHT HAVE HAD VALUE AT ONE TIME, THE REPETITION OF THEM BETRAYS THEM AS SOMETHING ROTE. IF SOMETHING-- A TURN OF THE HEAD OR HAND, A FURROW OF THE BROW, A SMILE-- PASSES BY WITHOUT RUPTURING OUR AGREEMENT OF BELIEVABILITY, WE FIND IT PLEASANT. WE ALLOW IT. BUT ONCE YOU SEE THE REPEATED THING, YOU CAN SEE THE HALLMARKS OF A FAIRLY REDUCTIONIST METHODOLOGY WHICH HAS ITS OWN WHISPERED MESSAGE: *KEEP THE STATUS QUO!* I SEE IT BENDING UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS AND POTENT MESSAGES ALL THE TIME WITH ITS GENERAL AND IRONIC FINGERPRINT.

AS I SEE IT, YOU CAN GO TWO WAYS WITH REGARD TO THIS REPEATED THING. MAKE THE THING AND LOCK IT, FOR EFFECT. OR, MAKE THE THING AND KEEP IT OPEN, IN ORDER TO AVOID DETERMINING THE EFFECT. FOR THE ONE-TIME VIEWER, THIS DISTINCTION IS NOT THAT IMPORTANT. FOR ME, THE REPETITION IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO INTERROGATE STORYTELLING AND HOPEFULLY REDUCE THE LIST OF LOCKED-IN THINGS.

I THINK ONE SHOULD DEVELOP AN AESTHETIC OUT OF CONSIDERATION AND LOGIC RATHER THAN EASY CONCLUSIONS OR APPEARANCES. AND ONE THING THAT HELPS SHAPE MY AESTHETIC IS MY AUDIENCE. FROM THE BEGINNING OF MAKING WORK I WOULD READ OR HEAR WHAT PEOPLE WOULD SAY ABOUT IT, AND TWO WORDS KEPT COMING BACK TO ME: "NEUTRAL" AND "ROBOTIC".

WHILE I UNDERSTAND WHAT PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT, BOTH FEEL INCOMPLETE AS DESCRIPTORS.

WITH 'NEUTRAL HERO' I INVESTIGATED THE POSSIBILITY OF PORTRAYING NEUTRALITY ON STAGE.

(ROLL TAPE: NEUTRAL HERO)

WITH 'JOE' I LOOKED INTO "ROBOTIC"

(ROLL TAPE: JOE)

RECENTLY I COMMISSIONED THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW ROBOT, TO AGAIN TRY TO GET TO THE HEART OF WHAT IT MEANS TO PERFORM, AND TO PERFORM CONVINCINGLY. 'SPEAK LINES', 'DO BLOCKING', 'THINK' AND 'LISTEN' BECAME WRITTEN CODE TO ALLOW THE ROBOT TO ACCOMPLISH THE PRIMARY FUNCTIONS OF AN ACTOR-- HIGHLIGHTING AN AMUSING GAP BETWEEN "ROBOTIC ACTING" AND ACTUAL ROBOT. THE ROBOT PROVIDES A KIND OF STRESS TEST FOR WHAT MIGHT BE REQUIRED TO GET BEYOND MIMICRY.

THIS UPDATED ROBOT HAS A NEW FEATURE...

I HAD AN ACTING PROFESSOR DEFINE TALENT BY THE "QUALITY OF THE THINKING." I THINK IT HOLDS UP AS A THEORY. SHE CAME FROM A STRASBERG / STANSILAVSKY SCHOOL WHERE AN ACTOR IS TAUGHT TO THINK ABOUT SUBTEXT AND CHARACTER OBJECTIVES/DESIRES.

SO I ASKED ZACK TO COME UP WITH A WAY FOR THE ROBOT TO DO THAT. HE WROTE AN ALGORITHM TO TROLL THROUGH A TROVE OF ALL MY SCRIPTS, EVERYTHING FROM THE VERY BEGINNING. AND I THREW IN AN APPLEBEE'S MENU TO HELP ROUND IT OUT. AFTER EACH PERFORMANCE THE 'SUBTEXT' WAS PRINTED OUT.

(ROLL TAPE: DOWNLOADS)

ROBOTS MAKE THE NEWS WHEN THEY DO SOMETHING SPECTACULAR, BUT I AM INTERESTED IN WHAT THE ROBOT CANNOT DO. LUCKY FOR ME THIS BECAUSE, DUE TO BUDGET LIMITATIONS, MY ROBOTS WILL ALWAYS BE BEHIND THE TIMES.

I AM DRAWN TO THE AMATEUR, WHAT IS AMATEUR IN ALL OF US, WHAT ARE OUR LIMITATIONS AS PEOPLE. SO YES, THE ROBOT IS CONFINED TO CERTAIN BEHAVIOR. THE ROBOT CAN'T DO A LOT. BUT THIS IS WHERE VIEWER EMPATHY COMES INTO PLAY. I THINK WE RELATE TO INADEQUACY.

(ROLL TAPE: PARADISO)

AS MUCH AS MY ROBOT IS CONNECTED TO MY WORK, IT IS CONNECTED TO THE MAINSTREAM INDUSTRIAL TYPE OF ACTING. A MEASUREMENT OF GOOD PERFORMANCE IS TYPICALLY HOW MUCH NEWNESS OR ENERGY IS BROUGHT TO THE STAGE EACH TIME. AN ACTOR ONCE TOLD ME HIS JOB WAS TO *MAKE* IT NEW EACH TIME. THIS WAS PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR TO HIM.

MY ROBOT'S FIRST PERFORMANCE WILL *ALSO* BE EVERY BIT AS STRONG AS HIS LAST. THE SAME PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE AND ENERGY WILL BE BROUGHT TO IT.

OF COURSE, IT IS ALSO NEW EACH TIME, HELPLESSLY NEW, BECAUSE OF A NEW TIME AND AUDIENCE, ET AL. THE NEWNESS IS THERE IF YOU'RE OPEN TO PERCEIVE IT. AND THAT TO ME IS THE CRITICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HUMAN ACTOR AND ROBOT. UNLIKE THE HUMAN ACTOR, THE ROBOT IS CONFINED TO IDENTICAL REPEATED BEHAVIOR; IF A LINE GETS DROPPED, AN AUDIENCE MEMBER LAUGHS, A PHONE GOES OFF-- MY ROBOT CANNOT DECIDE WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT. WHEN YOU TAKE AWAY THE POWER TO DECIDE, YOU ELIMINATE A VAST LANDSCAPE; WITH HUMAN BEINGS THERE IS POTENTIAL ENERGY CONTAINED WITHIN AND WITHOUT AND AVAILABLE ON STAGE AT ALL TIMES; POSSIBILITY PERVADES AND GETS SHOWN THROUGH THE EYES OF THE PERFORMERS AND IN BETWEEN THE LINES THAT THEY SPEAK, TRANSCENDING MIMICRY. PART OF THE DIFFICULTY FOR THE HUMAN ACTOR IS MAKING THEMSELVES EXPOSED TO AND ACCEPTING A WHOLE HOST OF INTERPRETATIONS THAT THEY CANNOT CONTROL.

ACTING IN THE DROLL INDUSTRIAL REALISM THAT WE SEE CONSTANTLY BEFORE US...ALL THIS DEMONSTRATION OF "KNOWING" AND THEN POINTING TO IT -- I WEARY OF IT. THINK OF THE ACTOR WHO CAREFULLY SCULPTS THE MOVEMENTS HE MAKES, OR THE WAY HE THINKS ABOUT 'CHARACTER.' IT'S ANSWERING QUESTIONS FOR THE AUDIENCE IN ADVANCE. AND THE EARMARKS ARE SHOWING.

THIS EXPLORATION OF CHARACTER IN "THE EVENING" EMBRACES THESE EARMARKS AND THEN UNDOES THEM, IN A GRAPHIC WAY.

(ROLL TAPE: THE EVENING)

IT'S THIS SPIRIT OF 'UNKNOWING' THAT WAS BROUGHT TO MAKING A CATALOG OF MY COMPANY'S WORK. FIRST, PLEASE CONSIDER THE PRODUCTION STILL: IT'S COMPOSED TO BEGIN WITH, IN THAT IT IS SHOWING WHAT IT WANTS YOU TO SEE, AND TYPICALLY IT IS IN LOCKSTEP WITH THE PRODUCTION IN DETERMINING WHAT IS IMPORTANT.

(ROBERT WILSON, ROMEO CASTELUCCI, TWG ARTCENTER PICS - )

IN MAKING A CATALOG, WHICH ROBERT SNOWDEN WAS A PART OF, WE CHOSE TO USE THE VIDEO GRAB INSTEAD, EXCLUSIVELY

(DOWNLOADS PDF)

FOR ME THE VIDEO GRAB, THE SCREENSHOT, COMES CLOSER TO EMBODYING WHAT THEATER PROVIDES, AND IN PARTICULAR WHAT I THINK MY THEATER PROVIDES, WHICH IS BLANK SPACE FOR THE VIEWER'S MIND.

THE TEXT IS A PRIMARY COMPONENT IN MY PLAYS, SO IT WAS HARD TO MAKE A BOOK WITHOUT IT. BUT THE MECHANICS OF LOOKING AT A BOOK AND HOW A BOOK OPERATES HAD TO COME FIRST. SO THE IMAGES CHOSEN INCLUDE A PAGE-TURNING NARRATIVE, TOLD ONLY IN IMAGES, THAT ALSO INCLUDE FRACTAL, OR, PERIPHERAL, "INCONSEQUENTIAL", PUT IN AS CUTAWAYS; THE HAND HOLDING A PLASTIC SHOPPING BAG FOR EXAMPLE...

SO THIS IS A STRANGE OBJECT THAT TRIES TO EMULATE WHAT IT MEANS TO WATCH THESE PLAYS, A DEEMPHASIZING OF WHAT WAS CONSIDERED IMPORTANT IN THE STAGING OF THE PLAYS BY THE LIMITATIONS OF THE DOCUMENTATIONAL VIDEO. TO DISLodge THE TO IN ORDER DISLodge THE TWO FORMS PRODUCTION AND STILL, WHICH, LIKE THE ROBOT, IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR UNKNOWING, OR LIBERATING THE VIEWER.

I CLING TO THIS HOPE THAT THE HUMAN PERFORMER, THE SELF, ON STAGE, WITH THEIR HIGHLY FORMAL AND INDEPENDENT DECISION-MAKING SHAPE, CAN OPEN UP A NEW PLANE OF EXPRESSION. TO ME THIS IS *EMBODIED* ACTIVISM AND CAN INFINITELY GROW, AND HAS, WITH ITS POWER TO DECIDE, COMPLEXITY TO SPARE.

LET ME CLOSE WITH -

(ROLL TAPE: ADS)