

THE ART FORM

Theatre is an art form. It presents CHARACTERS involved in some sort of ACTION in some sort of SPACE/CONTEXT, whether its a theatre, a classroom or a street. Through a study of dramatic works and the reading of various theoreticians, I have isolated various elements which seem to comprise this form of art and which give depth to what would otherwise be superficial.

The Character

Before any character can be brought to life the actor/writer/director needs to have/discover/create all of the following in order to breathe life into the character:

PHYSIOLOGY– A character's age, gender, appearance, health, height.

BACKGROUND– A character's origins, upbringing, class, beliefs, education, employment etc.

PSYCHOLOGY– A character's thoughts, patterns of behaviour, dreams, fears, anxieties etc.

EMOTIONS– A character's feelings. These may be hidden. It is worth working out the predominant feeling at each moment of the play/project.

ATTITUDE– The way a character views and relates to other characters.

STATUS– A character's view and value judgement of him/herself.

OBJECTIVE– What the character is trying to achieve either at a particular moment or in a particular situation.

CONSTRAINT/S– The obstacle/s that prevent the character from meeting his/her objectives. This creates dramatic tension.

These are all expressed through:

- a)Language
- b)Voice
- c)Movement
- d)Body
- e)Facial Expression

The Action

The character/s find themselves in certain situations. This constitutes the action of the play/project. The action is communicated in scenes/episodes. It is the structure of these episodes/scenes that gives a focus and thus a meaning to the action.

This **action** should contain the following elements–

PLOT– The narrative of events beginning with the history of the situation and proceeding to its future.

CONTEXT– Where this action takes place.

MEANING– The ideas and concepts which are addressed by the action and which are communicated through the action.

DRAMATIC TENSION– Some sort of crisis that has either occurred or that will occur if certain action/s are not taken. This crisis needs to be resolved. The action is usually moved on through the character/s attempts to resolve or prevent a crisis/conflict. Often the crisis/conflict has occurred prior to the action and the action is concerned with the aftermath and consequences of the conflict/crisis.

INTERACTION– The way the characters relate to each other, creating the action.

SYMBOLS– The objects which appear or are referred to and which therefore become representative of certain characters, concepts or emotions.

SYMBOLIC ACTIONS– Actions which have a symbolic function and which are often the focus of a scene/episode.

SUBTEXT– The underlying meaning which is not necessarily evident to characters within the action.

MOOD– The predominant feeling of the action at a particular moment or in a particular situation.

The Context

The setting of the action be it in the play/project as a whole or in each individual scene/episode should be:

REPRESENTATIVE– The setting can either try to present the context as realistically as possible or it can be symbolic, representing an abstract concept which is predominant in the play or an 'internal landscape'. Alternatively objects can be used as signs, informing the viewer/participant of the location. Certain locations carry their own messages e.g. a church immediately denotes holiness.

ATMOSPHERIC– This is difficult to define as it is abstract, but it has to do with the mood and dominant emotion evoked by a place. A place is experienced through the senses, through sight, sound, smell and an atmosphere is therefore the way a setting effects the senses and the feeling this experience evokes. Atmosphere is created theatrically using light, sound, music, colour, texture.

All of the above are the necessary ingredients for good drama and theatre and they should be the teacher/director/playwright's mental checklist.