

When nadine asked me to curate the upcoming issue of Dannie – Dannie.h – I took this as an opportunity to bring attention to a plea important for me and my work. This discourse started in 1810 by Heinrich Von Kleist in “On the Marionette Theatre,” and was continued in 1907 by Edward Gordon Craig with “The Actor and the Über-Marionette.”

Both write from a perspective of the performing arts, but it’s my belief it is universal for all the arts. They see the marionette as a symbol of humility and use it to talk about how it is absent in the arts, or how it is somehow unexpected by both the spectators as the artists to be a vital element

I expanded humility to empathy since it is a wider and more inclusive term, but the argument remains the same: empathy is often a forgotten and overlooked element of the arts.

Since they are not that well known, Von Kleist and Craig’s texts are included in this publication.

Read these texts with the zeitgeist in which they are written in mind (especially the latter which is clearly a document of another time). Then again, I have always read Craig’s words as deliberately boastful and exaggerated so he would be noticed and could make his point. A point that is far more nuanced than one would expect at first glance. So look for the message, not how he has phrased it.

These texts are the central part of this publication and they are flanked with writings of my own on fundamental themes of my work. They don’t form a consistent whole, but supplement each other.

enjoy,

Hans Andreas R.

“It was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.”

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1817.

The Sudden Manifestation of Belief

As a visual artist, I consider my artistic work as theatre. This is not just a provocation – it is a way of adding complexity to think and speak about it. It is a way of approaching things, to grow its own vocabulary.
As a visual artist, I consider my artistic work ephemeral. Objects are made, but these are merely contraptions to facilitate it. What is made or constructed has more in common with the scenography in which the spectators encounter the work: by encountering, they complete the story behind it.
The dynamics of the work correspond to that of the theatre, yet it is placed in the visual arts.v

*Physical places become a story when the spectator enters
The scenographies generate images that are subjective and personal.
A scene is set in support of this imagination.
Each scene, each installation is a new entry point,
in a world of endless stories,
with its own set of rules and rites.*

At the root of this writing is an earlier work, *The Optical Theatre of the Sinners*, where an optical theatre – a proto-cinema device – was used to tell a Faustian story. When the spectators entered, they saw the projectionist’s table on their left, and on the right, a spotlight marked *their place* in between the screen. As in conventional cinema and theatre, the spotlight faded and the film – or rather the projection – started. Due to technical imperfections, the projection was not as readable as intended. As a result, the spectators, attracted by what was happening behind the screen, left *their place* and came standing around the projectionist, observing what he was doing and trying to understand his actions.
By the end, the spectators were fascinated and reacted full of wonder, trying to figure out what they had just seen. The specific scenography made it possible to reach them, involve them and connect with them.

*The spectator enters the now.
Through interaction,
the situation can be activated.
And a story unfolds.
There and now.*

It is also around this time that the character of the “demiurge” entered my work – a character introduced to me by studying the work of Tadeusz Kantor.
The demiurge, meaning both god and craftsman, takes what is there and re-arranges through actions that reject the idea of originality, uniqueness and the genius artist. This is performed without need of explanation.
The demiurge as a puppeteer and scenographer sets the spectators in motion in scenes s/he has formed. The actual objects themselves are of no importance. The objects are not to be glorified the way they are in Western culture.



*There exists only a handful of stories that were all told a millennia ago.
All the stories told ever since are variations, of variations, on variations.
Artists retell the stories that are most dear to them, in their own way,
so they don't fade out or get lost, but are passed on and remembered.*

*Places and scenes created.
The stories one wants to be retold.
These stories don't have to be made up out of words,
– they refuse to explain –
they are temporary settings for imagination.*

Although functioning as individual pieces, the works made since *the Optical Theatre of the Sinners* complement each other in their interaction with the spectator.

The language created through the *objectified* stories can only be discovered through the collection of scenographies that serve as a complex labyrinth of scenes, each unveiling another perspective and focusing on another *story*. Generating the focus in collaboration with the spectators and giving them the ability to finish the work for themselves.

*The more situations you explore,
the more stories are created.
A story becomes a chapter,
The collection of chapters becomes a never-ending story.*

By finding different modes of engagement, an unconscious awareness is provoked within the spectator. This, in turn, makes them connect with the work and they allow themselves to be taken by the situation and to experience things that – supported by what surrounds them – blur the border between objectivity and subjectivity. It takes three elements for this to happen: a story (the demiurge wants to tell), a contraption (which the demiurge has created to transfer the story) and the spectator (to engage with and fulfill the work).

*All this is a matter of belief.
Belief, as in trusting.
Belief is what an artwork evokes.
The contraption (a collection of objects) that generates this belief is of no
importance.
Its mere existence is to transfer the belief.*

The works play in and with the now, and as such, circumvent time. When you find yourself in the work you are in control – but in actuality you are not. The setting is created to find yourself by losing yourself for a moment.

*That is where I reveal
– what I call –
The Sudden Manifestation of Belief.*



On my desk stands two heads.
Two wooden marionette heads.
One of death, one of the devil.

These puppets belonged to my mother and her siblings and could be found in the hallway with the weird azure blue patterned tiles, in a box on the bottom of the built-in wardrobe at my grandmother's place.

Everyone knew they were there but I can't remember anyone playing with them. It was hard to play with them – the box included a bunch of heads and bodies. To complicate things further, there were more heads than bodies. The attentive observer that studied the massacre up-close might have discovered there were as many wooden heads as there were cloth bodies and that there were two resin heads. One of them was quite a beautiful blonde princess or prince – I never was quite sure – with a chipped nose. The cloth bodies that you put over your hand, were close to disintegration. The heads, however, were in perfect condition. But just heads to play with were not the most satisfying toys.

So, after a close inspection and wondering why somebody went through the trouble of giving the bodies wooden feet dangling from the cloth bodies, the box was closed and put back in the wardrobe. When my grandmother passed away, the head of death and the devil came into my possession. The bodies were long beyond saving at that point. I believe my mother has the other heads, including the beautiful princess or prince with the chipped nose.

One night while sitting at my desk, I couldn't help but overhear a conversation between Death and the Devil.

There they stood, Death and the Devil, on top of my desk staring into the depths of my atelier.

When suddenly, somewhat out of character, Death broke the silence and said: "Tomorrow is my birthday."

Dazzled for the first time in a very, very long time, Devil didn't get much further than

- "Uh... what?!"

"I believe 'congratulations' is an appropriate reply," replied Death in an uncanny attempt to be witty.

- "Urgh, don't lecture me on birthday, I used to celebrate mine every day!"

- "What's the fun in that?"

- "Mhe, for a few centuries it was, but then it just became mundane."

Death shrugged. In the moment of silence that followed one could feel the Devil tried to wrap his head around this assertion.

- "So we roam the earth for eternity and you tell me only now that you have a birthday?"

- "Isn't it great that after all this time we can still surprise each other?" said Death.

- "But why do you tell me this now?" Devil went on trying not to get annoyed by death's poor attempts to be funny.

- "Better now before it is too late, don't you think?"

- "Hello? Hell to mister time! We are eternal beings. E T E R N A L! It doesn't matter!"

- "Hm, that's actually false. When these humans are gone, we are gone. They made us up, we'll go with them and if you see the current state of affairs..."

It is an understatement that the Devil wasn't prepared to face this truth and panic got the better of him.

- "WE GONNA DIE? That's not what I signed up for!"

- "You didn't sign up for anything Lucifer, people sign contracts with you. This is your free choice, you are the one that rebelled!"

- "Stop trying to be funny! I don't know what's worst: the fact that I'm dying, that you try to be funny or that my best friend never trusted me enough to even share his birthday!"

- "Well it's not that simple you know..."

- "What's not? It's just a birthday!"

- "Well I can't share it because it's not a fixed day..."

- "How do you mean not a fixed day???"

- "Well, every year when I celebrate my birthday, I take the date of the last human I accompanied to the other side on that day."

- "Uhu... And why exactly?"

- "I don't know when I was born... it's been centuries, humans didn't really care about calendars or time back then and it's not that I had a mom or a dad to tell me, let alone any other relatives..."

- "Oh, so now I have to pity you because you are an orphan?"

Death rolled his eyeholes, the Devil turned his head, and by that his whole being.

- "You know," the Devil said after a few moments of silence, "In certain cultures, its traditional that the person whose birthday it is treats those around to a party or a gift, not to depress them..."

- "I'm sorry, the last thing I wanted was to upset you Devil, but I thought you figured that out by now..."

- "Seems that I'm stuck with you till the end then, and don't worry I'll live..."

Death looked at the Devil with the intention of someone with a face that tries to comfort an old companion with sorrow and compassion. Death sighed deeply.

- "Well, happy birthday to you then I guess, old bones, and I sincerely hope many more may follow!"



Empathy

*Empathy: "One's ability to identify oneself with the feelings of an other."
"The ability to infuse an object with a subjective state."*

Empathy is the plain where artist & spectator meet.
This doesn't necessarily have to mean a physical meeting, although it is an option.
A plain of intentions where no one can hide.
So, there they stand, artist and spectator. Face to face, eye to eye.
The artist, being the artist, has the opening move and places his work in middle.
The spectator, being the spectator, observes.

This is where empathy enters.
On this plain the most important part is that both artist and spectator are present and that they acknowledge each other's presence so exchange can happen even without being there physically. (This is, after all, a metaphor....)
When they both step down from this plain their meeting reverberates within them.

The only problem is that this plain doesn't actually exist.
It is pulled from underneath us by the capitalistic and neoliberal reality where art is tolerated, but only if it stays within the preformed moulds.
This leads to a vicious circle of inbreeding and makes art slip out of orbit with society as a whole.
The result being that the spectator is estranged and submits to consuming.
Sitting in the dark.
Staying behind the line.

They are literarily lines!
While they should to be plains!

This isn't about breaking the moulds, it's about leaving them.
It's about making something that sparks something within the spectator.
That's the empathy I talk about: the necessary exchange of acknowledgement and respect.

Marionette theater is the perfect example. Marginalised, but created by some of the most skillful artists. They bring an object to life and make you see beyond the strings, even when you know they are there.

Theater

Etymologically spoken, theater means: "a place to see."
Not what you see. Not where you see it.
This implies that there is something to see and that somebody can come to see it.
It implies that somebody organises this exchange and there are guidelines that guide you to where the place to see it is.

If this can be a definition of theater,
I make theater.
Not that I do, but I do.
I'm a visual artist. The things I make are about seeing.
Quite literary, my work deals with the mechanics of how we see things and how we process that information.
Next, those things I've made are placed into a space.
Spaces that have one single purpose, to show what you should see
Places to see
Theater.

I know, this is simple proof.
But it's exactly the thing that makes one rethink their work from another perspective.
If you introduce theater conventions into the visual arts, one has many more rules to consider.
It's not that this brings more possibilities, but the choices made are more balanced.

Time

I used to wear watches.

When I was seven years old I got my first one, it was like a right of passage saying:
"Now you are old enough to read the clock! Now you can count down until the end."
Because that's what time tells, every minute is one less. Not just for you but for everything.

I was formed as a cineast. Time intrigued me, it stuck with me.
Film and theater have time in common which may explain why theater seduces me.

Time never comes alone.
Time frames a work. It states the beginning and the end.
It also dictates a place.
A work might begin and end but it is always somewhere.
Time implies the presence of the spectator
and empowers the importance of one.
If the spectator isn't in time, the work won't exist.

I don't wear watches anymore,
I don't like crocodiles.

Vanitas

Vanitas is not the reason why I work with photography and film techniques.
But I've always been aware of the connection.

Vanitas, a genre within the discipline of painting that depicts things like soap bubbles, smoke from extinguished candles, wilted flowers and broken instruments.
Capturing the transience of the moment as a form of proto-photography or visa-versa. At its core photography and by extension film are a post-vanitas.
Not so much the subjects they represent but the singularity of these media, that they are moments that have passed and carry the same message of temporality.

Since vanitas became present in my consciousness, it influenced me in how I see and approach the (art)object.

Vanitas is a delightful paradox. An artwork, an object created to communicate the message that
the world of objects, the world we live in, isn't what we should care about.
Rather we should focus on the afterlife. Deny the earthly delights so you can get into heaven.
Or is it a justification for painting a nice object?

Creating an object to communicate an idea, tell a story if you will
and by doing so the object renders itself redundant.
It seems quite pointless – that is where the beauty lies.

At the same time it is an object of emancipation.
Since it reminds us that in the end, we and our fates are all equal.

On the Marionette Theatre

by Heinrich von Kleist

Translated by Thomas G. Neumiller

While spending some time during the winter of 1801 in M., one evening in the public gardens I chanced upon Herr C., who had been recently engaged as the leading dancer at the opera house and who had found exceptional success with the public there. I mentioned how surprised I had been to notice him on several occasions attending a marionette theatre that had been set up in the local market place, which entertained the masses with short dramatic burlesques interspersed with song and dance. He assured me that the performance of these puppets was a source of great pleasure to him, and he made it quite clear that a dancer who wished to improve himself could learn a great deal from observing them.

Because his remarks were obviously not to be taken lightly, I sat down with him so that we might discuss his reasons for such a remarkable statement. He asked me if indeed I hadn't found some of the movements of the puppets, particularly the smaller ones, to be exceedingly graceful in the dances.

I could not refute this observation. In fact, one group of four peasant figures had danced a roundelay in such fashion that Teniers could not have painted anything more charming. I was curious about the mechanics of these figures and asked how it was possible to control parts of each limb according to the demands of the rhythm of the dance without having myriads of strings attached to the fingers. He informed me that I must not suppose that every single limb, during the various movements of the dance, was placed and controlled by the puppeteer. Each movement, he said, will have a center of gravity; it would suffice to direct this crucial point to the inside of the figure. The limbs that function as nothing more than a pendulum, swinging freely, will follow the movement in their own fashion without anyone's aid.

He further stated that this movement was really quite simple; that each time the center of gravity was moved in a direct line, the limbs would start to describe a curve; and that often when simply shaken in an arbitrary manner, the whole figure assumed a kind of rhythmic movement that was identical to dance. These remarks seemed to throw some light on the pleasure that he maintained he discovered in the marionette theater. However, I as yet had no idea of the consequences he would later draw from these observations. I asked him if he thought that the puppeteer who controlled these figures was himself a dancer, or at least if he did not have to possess an understanding of the aesthetic of the dance. He replied that though such a task might be simple from a purely mechanical viewpoint, it did not necessarily follow that it could be managed entirely without some feeling.

The line that the center of gravity must describe was, to be sure, very simple, and was, he felt, in most cases a straight line. In cases where that line is not straight, it appears that the law of the curvature is at least of the first or, at best, of the second rank, and additionally in this latter case only elliptical.

This form of movement of the human body's extremities is natural, because of the joints, and therefore would require no great skill on the part of the puppeteer to approximate it. But viewed in another way, this line is something very mysterious. For it is nothing other than the path of the soul of the dancer, and Herr C. doubted that it could be proven otherwise that through this line the puppeteer placed himself in the center of gravity of the marionette; that is to say, in other words, that the puppeteer danced.

I replied that a puppeteer's work had been suggested as something rather dull: somewhat like grinding the handle of a hurdy-gurdy. Not at all, he replied. Rather the movement of his fingers has a somewhat artificial relationship to those of the attached puppets, somewhat like the relationship of numbers to logarithms or the asymptote to the hyperbola.

Furthermore he stated the belief that this final trace of the intellect could eventually be removed from the marionettes, so that their dance could pass entirely over into the world of the mechanical and be operated by means of a handle, such as I had suggested. My astonishment now grew even greater, with the realization that he considered this entertainment of the masses worthy of a higher art. He smiled and replied that he dared to venture that a marionette constructed by a craftsman according to his requirements could perform a dance that neither he nor any other outstanding dancer of his time, not even Vestris himself, could equal. Have you, he asked while I gazed thoughtfully at the ground, ever heard of those mechanical legs that English craftsmen manufacture for unfortunate people who have lost their own limbs?

I replied that I had never seen such artifacts.

That's a shame, he replied, for when I tell you that these unfortunate people are able to dance with the use of them, you most certainly will not believe me. What do I mean by using the word dance? The span of their movements is quite limited, but those movements of which they are capable are accomplished with a composure, lightness, and grace that would amaze any sensitive observer.

I suggested somewhat jokingly that in this way he had found his man. For this same craftsman who would be capable of constructing such a strange limb would doubtless be able to construct an entire marionette according to his requirements. What then, I asked, as he for his part looked down at the ground somewhat embarrassed, are the requirements necessary to accomplish this technical skill?

Nothing, he replied, except what I have already observed here: symmetry, mobility, lightness; only all of that to a higher degree and particularly a more natural disposition of the centers of gravity.

And the advantage such a puppet would have over a living dancer?

The advantage? First a negative gain, my excellent friend, specifically this: that such a figure would never be affected. For affectation appears, as you know, when the soul (*vis motrix*) locates itself at any point other than the center of gravity of the movement. Because the puppeteer absolutely controls the wire or string, he controls and has power over no other point than this one: therefore all the other limbs are what they should be dead, pure pendulums following the simple law of gravity, an outstanding quality that we look for in vain in most dancers.

Take for example the dancer P., he continued. When she dances Daphne and is pursued by Apollo, she looks back at him--her soul is located in the vertebrae of the small of her back; she bends as if she were about to break in half, like a naiad from the school of Bernini. And look at the young dancer F. When he dances Paris and stands among the three goddesses and hands the apple to Venus, his soul is located precisely in his elbow, and it is a frightful thing to behold. Such mistakes, he mused, cutting himself short, are inevitable because we have eaten of the tree of knowledge. And Paradise is bolted, with the cherub behind us; we must journey around the world and determine if perhaps at the end somewhere there is an opening to be discovered again.

I laughed. Indeed, I thought, the spirit cannot err where it does not exist. Yet I noticed that he had still other things on his mind and invited him to continue. In addition, he went on, these puppets possess the virtue of being immune to gravity's force. They know nothing of the inertia of matter, that quality which above all is diametrically opposed to the dance, because the force that lifts them into the air is greater than the one that binds them to the earth. What wouldn't our good G. give to be sixty pounds lighter, or to use a force of this weight to assist her with her entrechats and pirouettes? Like elves, the puppets need only to touch upon the ground, and the soaring of their limbs is newly animated through this momentary hesitation; we dancers need the ground to rest upon and recover from the exertion of the dance; a moment that is certainly no kind of dance in itself and with which nothing further can be done except to at least make it seem to not exist.

I replied that although he handled his paradoxes with skill, he would never convince me that in a mechanical figure there could be more grace than in the structure of the human body.

He replied that it would be almost impossible for a man to attain even an approximation of a mechanical being. In such a realm only a God could measure up to this matter, and this is the point where both ends of the circular world would join one another.

I grew even more amazed and simply did not know how to reply to such strange statements.

It would seem, he continued while taking a pinch of snuff, that I had not read very carefully the third chapter of the first Book of Moses; and whoever was not acquainted with that first period of human civilization could not reasonably discuss the matters at hand and, even less so, the ultimate questions.

I told him that I understood only too well how consciousness creates disorder in the natural harmony of men. A young friend of mine had lost his innocence, and Paradise too, simply because of an observation he made that I witnessed at the same time- after that moment, in spite of all possible attempts, he never again regained it. However, I ventured, what conclusions can you draw from that?

He asked me to explain the incident to which I referred. About three years ago, I explained, I went swimming with a young man whose personality was possessed of a natural charm. He was probably about sixteen years old at the time, and only from a distance could one notice the first traces of vanity in him, a quality brought about by the attentions of women.

Now it happened that a short time before in Paris we had seen the statue of the youth pulling a splinter from his foot. Copies of that statue are well known and can be seen in most German collections. My friend was reminded of this statue when after our swim he placed his foot on the footstool to dry it and at the same time glanced into a large mirror; he smiled and told me what a discovery he had made. And indeed I had made the same observation at the same moment; but whether it was that I wanted to test the security of his natural charm, or whether I wanted to challenge his vanity, I laughed and replied that he was imagining things. He blushed and lifted his foot a second time to show me; as one could have easily predicted, the attempt failed. Confused, he lifted his foot a third, a fourth, even a tenth time: in vain! He was unable to duplicate the same movement. What can I say?--the movements he made became so comical I could hardly keep from laughing.

From that day on, from that very moment on, an inexplicable change took place in this young man. He began to stand in front of the mirror all day long, and one virtue after another dropped away from him. An invisible and inexplicable power like an iron net seemed to seize upon the spontaneity of his bearing, and after a year there was no trace of the charm that had so delighted those who knew him. There is only one other person alive today who witnessed that strange and unhappy incident, and who would confirm it for you word for word as I have related it.

Following this line of thought, Herr C. said kindly, I must in turn tell you another story, and you will easily understand why I tell it now. While traveling in Russia, I came upon the country estate of Herr von G., a Livonian nobleman, whose sons were at that time seriously engaged in learning to fence. The oldest boy, who had just returned from the university, in particular regarded himself as somewhat of a virtuoso and one morning while in his room he offered me a foil. We fenced, but as it turned out I was superior to him. The heat of anger further added to his confusion. Almost every blow I struck was successful and finally his foil was knocked into a corner of the room. As he picked up the foil he admitted, half jokingly, half angrily, that he had met his master;

but everything in this world meets its master and thereupon he proposed to conduct me to mine. The brothers laughed loudly and cried: Let's be off! Let's go! Down to the lumber yard! And with that they led the way to a bear that their father, Herr von G., was having trained in the open yard.

The bear stood, to my amazement, on his hind legs, his back leaning against a stake to which he was chained, with his right paw raised ready for combat, and looked me in the eye: this was his fencing position. It seemed to me that I was dreaming when I first faced this adversary; but-strike! strike!--cried Herr von G., and see if you can score a hit. Having recovered somewhat from my amazement, I went at him with my foil; the bear made a slight movement of his paw and parried the blow. I tried to throw him off guard by feints--the bear did not stir. I went at him again with a renewed burst of energy; without a doubt I would have struck the chest of a man. The bear made a slight movement of his paw and parried the blow. Now I found myself in almost the same circumstance as the young Herr von G. The single-mindedness of the bear served to reduce my self-assurance; as thrusts and feints followed each other, I was dripping with perspiration. But all was in vain!

Not only was the bear able to parry all my blows like some world champion fencer, but all the feints I attempted--and this no fencer in the world could duplicate--went unnoticed by the bear. Eye to eye, as if he could see into my very soul, he stood there, his paw raised ready for combat, and whenever my thrusts were not intended as strikes, he simply did not move.

Do you believe this story, he asked? Absolutely, I replied with encouraging approval; it is plausible enough that I would have believed it had any stranger told me, but it is even more plausible coming from you. Now, my excellent friend, said Herr C., you are in possession of everything that is necessary to comprehend what I am saying. We can see the degree to which contemplation becomes darker and weaker in the organic world, so that the grace that is there emerges all the more shining and triumphant. Just as the intersection of two lines from the same side of a point after passing through the infinite suddenly finds itself again on the other side--or as the image from a concave mirror, after having gone off into the infinite, suddenly appears before us again--so grace returns after knowledge has gone through the world of the infinite, in that it appears to best advantage in that human bodily structure that has no consciousness at all--or has infinite consciousness--that is, in the mechanical puppet, or in the God.



Therefore, I replied, somewhat at loose ends, we would have to eat again of the tree of knowledge to fall back again into a state of innocence? Most certainly, he replied: That is the last chapter of the history of the world.









(The essay "Über das Marionetten Theater" was first published in four installments in the daily Berliner Abendblätter from December 12 to 15, 1810. Kleist was editor of the newspaper.)












THE ACTOR AND THE ÜBER-MARIONETTE by Edward Gordon Craig.


INSCRIBED IN ALL AFFECTION TO MY GOOD FRIENDS, THE ACTORS DE VOS AND HEVESI.


"To save the Theatre, the Theatre must be destroyed, the actors and actresses must all die of the plague.... They make art impossible."   ELEONORA DUZE. "Studies in Seven Arts." Arthur Symons. (Constable).


It has always been a matter for argument whether or no Acting is an art, and therefore whether the actor is an Artist, or something quite different.  There is little to show us that this question disturbed the minds of the leaders of thought at any period, though there is much evidence to prove that had they chosen to approach this subject as one for their serious consideration, they would have applied to it the same method of enquiry as used when considering the arts of Music and Poetry, of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting.  On the other hand there have been many warm arguments in certain circles on this topic. Those taking part in it have seldom been actors, very rarely men of the theatre at all, and all have displayed any amount of illogical heat, and very little knowledge of the subject.  The arguments against acting being an art, and against the actor being an artist, are generally so unreasonable and so personal in their detestation of the actor, that I think it is for this reason the actors have taken no trouble to go into the matter.  So now regularly with each season comes the quarterly attack on the actor and on his jolly calling; the attack usually ending in the retirement of the enemy. As a rule it is the literary or private gentlemen who fill the enemy's rank. On the strength of having gone to see plays all their lives, or on the strength of never having gone to see a play in their lives, they attack for some reason best known to themselves. I have followed these regular attacks season by season, and they seem mostly to spring from irritability, personal enmity or conceit.... They are illogical from beginning to end.... There can be no such attack made on the actor or his calling. My intention here is not to join in any such attempt; I would merely place before you what seem to me to be the logical facts of a curious case, and I believe that these admit of no dispute whatever.    

Acting is not an art. It is therefore incorrect to speak of the actor as an artist.  For accident is an enemy of the artist.   Art is the exact antithesis of Pandimonium, and Pandimonium is created by the tumbling together of many accidents; Art arrives only by design. Therefore in order to make any work of art it is clear we may only work in those materials with which we can calculate. Man is not one of these materials.   The whole nature of man tends towards freedom; he therefore carries the proof in his own person, that as *material* for the theatre he is useless.  In the modern theatre, owing to the use of the bodies of men and women as *their material*, all which is presented there is of an accidental nature. The actions of the actor's body, the expression of his face, the sounds of his voice, all are at the mercy of the winds of his emotions; these winds which must blow for ever round the artist, moving without unbalancing him.  But with the actor, emotion possesses him; it seizes upon his limbs moving them whither it will. He is at its beck and call, he moves as one in a frantic dream or as one distraught, swaying here and there; his head, his arms, his feet, if not utterly beyond control, are so weak to stand against the torrent of his passions, that they are ready to play him false at any moment.  It is useless for him to attempt to reason with himself.... Hamlet's calm directions (the dreamer's not the logician's directions, by the way) are thrown to the winds. His limbs refuse, and refuse

Whether acting is an art. 

Unreasonable attacks. 

Acting is not an art. 

Hamlet's directions disregarded. 

again, to obey his mind the instant emotion warms, while the mind is all the time creating the heat which shall set these emotions afire. As with his movement, so is it with the expression of his face. The mind struggling and succeeding for a moment, in moving the eyes, or the muscles of the face whither it will;... the mind bringing the face for a few moments into thorough subjection, is suddenly swept aside by the emotion which has grown hot through the action of the mind. Instantly, like lightning, and before the mind has time to cry out and protest, the hot passion has mastered the actor's expression. It shifts and changes, sways and turns, it is chased by emotion from the actor's forehead between his eyes and down to his mouth; now he is entirely at the mercy of emotion, and crying out to it: "Do with me what you will!" his expression runs a mad riot hither and thither, and lo! "nothing is coming of nothing." It is the same with his voice as it is with his movements. Emotion cracks the voice of the actor. It sways his voice to join in the conspiracy against his mind. Emotion works upon the voice of the actor, and he produces.... the impression of discordant emotion. It is of no avail to say that emotion is the spirit of the gods and is precisely what the artist aims to produce; first of all this is not true, and even if it were quite true, every stray emotion, every casual feeling, cannot be of value. Therefore the mind of the actor, we see, is less powerful than his emotion, for emotion is able to win over the mind to assist in the destruction of that which the mind would produce; and as the mind becomes the slave of the emotion it follows that accident upon accident must be continually occurring. So then, we have arrived to this point;... that emotion is the cause which first of all creates, and secondly destroys. Art as we have said, can admit of no accidents. That then which the actor gives us, is not a work of art; it is a series of accidental confessions. In the beginning the human body was not used as material in the art of the theatre. In the beginning the emotions of men and women were not considered as a fit exhibition for the multitude. An elephant and a tiger in an arena suited the taste better, when the desire was to excite. The passionate tussle between the elephant and the tiger gives us all the excitement that we can get from the modern stage, and can give it us unalloyed. Such an exhibition is not more brutal, it is more delicate; it is more humane; for there is nothing more outrageous than that men and women should be let loose on a platform, so that they may expose that which artists refuse to show except veiled, in the form which their minds create. How it was that man was ever persuaded to take the place which until that time animals had held is not difficult to surmise. The man with the greater learning comes across the man with the greater temperament. He addresses him in something like the following terms: "You have a most superb countenance; what magnificent movements you make! Your voice, it is like the singing of birds; and how your eye flashes! What a noble impression you give! You almost resemble a god! I think all people should have pointed out to them this wonder which is contained in you. I will write a few words which you shall address to the people. You shall stand before them, and you shall speak my lines just as you will. It is sure to be perfectly right." And the man of temperament replies; "Is that really so? Do I strike you as appearing as a god? It is the very first time I have ever thought of it. And do you think that by appearing in front of the people I could make an impression which might benefit them, and would fill them with enthusiasm?" "No, no, no," says the intelligent man; "by no means only by appearing; but if you have something to say you will indeed create a great impression." The other answers, "I think I shall have some difficulty in speaking your lines. I could easier just appear, and say, something instinctive, such as 'Salutation to all men'; I feel perhaps that I should be able to be more myself if I acted in that way." "That is an excellent idea," replies the tempter, "that idea of yours, 'Salutation to all men.' On that theme I will compose say one hundred or two hundred lines; you'll be the very man to speak those lines. You have yourself suggested it to me. Salutation! Is it agreed then, that you will do this?" "If you wish it," replies the other, with a good-natured lack of reason, and flattered beyond measure. And so the comedy of author and actor commences. The young man appears before the multitude and speaks the lines, and the speaking of them is a superb advertisement for the art of literature. After the applause the young man is swiftly forgotten; they even forgive the way he has spoken the lines; but as it was an original and new idea at the time, the author found it profitable, and shortly afterwards other authors found it an excellent thing

to use handsome and buoyant men as instruments. It mattered nothing to them that the instrument was a human creature. Although they knew not the stops of the instrument, they could play rudely upon him and they found him useful. And so to-day we have the strange picture of a man content to give forth the thoughts of another, which that other has given form to, while at the same time he exhibits his person to the public view. He does it because he is flattered,—and vanity—will not reason. But all the time, and however long the world may last, the nature in man will fight for freedom, and will revolt against being made a slave or medium for the expression of another's thoughts. The whole thing is a very grave matter indeed, and it is no good to push it aside and protest that the actor is not the medium for another's thoughts, and that he invests with Life the dead words of an author; because even if this were true (true it cannot be) and even if the actor was to present none but the ideas which he himself should compose, his nature would still be in servitude; his body would have to become the slave of his mind; and that as I have shown is what the healthy body utterly refuses to do. Therefore the body of man, for the reason which I have given, is by nature utterly useless as a material for an art. I am fully aware of the sweeping character of this statement, and as it concerns men and women who are alive and who as a class are ever to be loved, more must be said lest I give unintentional offence. I know perfectly well that what I have said here is not yet going to create an exodus of all the actors from all the theatres in the world, driving them into sad monasteries where they will laugh out the rest of their lives, with the Art of the Theatre as the main topic for amusing conversation. As I have written elsewhere, the theatre will continue its growth and actors will continue for some years to hinder its development. But I see a loop-hole by which in time the actors can escape from the bondage they are in. They must create for themselves a new form of acting, consisting for the main part of symbolical gesture. To-day they impersonate and interpret; to-morrow they must represent and interpret; and the third day they must create. By this means style may return. To-day the actor impersonates a certain being. He cries to the audience "Watch me; I am now pretending to be so and so, and I am now pretending to do so and so;" and then he proceeds to imitate as exactly as possible, that which he has announced he will indicate. For instance, he is Romeo. He tells the audience that he is in love, and he proceeds to show it, by kissing Juliet. This, it is claimed is a work of Art: it is claimed for this that it is an intelligent way of suggesting thought. Why.... why, that is just as if a painter were to draw upon the wall a picture of an animal with long ears, and then write under it 'This is a donkey.' The long ears made it plain enough one would think, without the inscription, and any child of ten does as much. The difference between the child of ten and the artist is, that the artist is he who by drawing certain signs and shapes creates the impression of a donkey; and the greater artist is he who creates the impression of the whole genus of donkey, the spirit of the thing. The actor looks upon life as a photo-machine looks upon life; and he attempts to make a picture to rival a photograph. He never dreams of his art as being an art such for instance as music. He tries to reproduce nature; he seldom thinks to invent with the aid of nature, and he never dreams of creating. As I have said, the best he can do when he wants to catch and convey the poetry of a kiss, the heat of a fight, or the calm of death, is to copy slavishly, photographically.... he kisses.... he fights.... he lies back and mimics death.... and when you think of it, is not all this dreadfully stupid? Is it not a poor art and a poor cleverness, which cannot convey the spirit and essence of an idea to an audience, but can only show an artless copy, a facsimile of the thing itself. This is to be an imitator not an Artist. This is to claim kinship with the Ventriloquist. (1) There is a stage expression of the actor "getting under the skin of the part." A better one would be getting "out of the skin of the part altogether." "What then," cries the red-blooded and flashing actor, "is there to be no flesh and blood in this same art of the theatre of yours?... No life?" It depends what you call life, signor, when you use the word

(1) "And therefore when any one of these pantomimic gentlemen, who are so clever that they can imitate anything comes to us, and makes a proposal to exhibit himself and his poetry, we will fall down and worship him as a sweet and holy and wonderful being; but we must also inform him that in our State such as he are not permitted to exist; the law will not allow them. And so, when we have annotated him with myrrh, and set a garland of wool upon his head, we shall lead him away to another city. For we mean to employ for our soul's health the rougher and severer poet or story-teller, who will imitate the style of the virtuous only, and will follow those models which we prescribed at first when we began the education of our soldiers." Plato, (The whole passage being too long to print here, we refer to reader to The Republic, Book III. 395).

in relation with the idea of art. The painter means something rather different to actuality when he speaks of life in his art, and the other artists generally mean something essentially spiritual; it is only the actor the ventriloquist or the animal-stuffer who, when they speak of putting life into their work, mean some actual and lifelike reproduction, something blatant in its appeal, that it is for this reason I say that it would be better if the actor should get out of the skin of the part altogether. ☞ If there is any actor who is reading this, is there not some way by which I can make him realise the preposterous absurdity of this delusion of his, this belief that he should aim to make an actual copy, a reproduction? I am going to suppose that such an actor is here with me as I talk; and I invite a musician and a painter to join us. Let them speak. I have had enough of seeming to decry the work of the actor from trivial motives. I have spoken this way because of my love of the theatre, and because of my hopes and belief that before long an extraordinary development is to raise and revive that which is falling in the theatre, and my hope and belief that the actor will bring the force of his courage to assist in this revival. ☞ My attitude towards the whole matter is misunderstood by many in the Theatre. It is considered to be *my* attitude, mine alone; a stray quarreller I seem to be in their eyes, a pessimist, grumbling; one who is tired of a thing and who attempts to break it. Therefore let the other artists speak with the actor, and let the actor support his own case as best he may, and let him listen to their opinion on matters of art. ☞ We sit here conversing, the actor, the musician, the painter and myself. I who represent an art distinct from all these, shall remain silent. ☞ As we sit here, the talk first turns upon Nature. We are surrounded by beautiful curving hills, trees, vast and towering mountains in the distance covered with snow; around us innumerable delicate sounds of nature stirring... Life. ☞ "How beautiful," says the painter, "how beautiful the sense of all this!" ☞ He is dreaming of the almost impossibility of conveying the full earthly and spiritual value of that which is around him on to his canvas, yet he faces the thing as man generally faces that which is most dangerous. ☞ The musician gazes upon the ground. The actor's is an inward and personal gaze at himself. He is unconsciously enjoying the sense of himself, as representing the main and central figure in a really good scene. He strides across the space between us and the view, sweeping in a half circle, and he regards the superb panorama without seeing it, conscious of one thing only, himself and his attitude. ☞ Of course an actress would stand there meek in the presence of nature. She is but a little thing, a little picturesque atom;... for picturesque we know she is in every movement, in the sigh which, almost unheard by the rest of us, she conveys to her audience and to herself, that she is there "*little me*," in the presence of the God that made her!! and all the rest of the sentimental nonsense. ☞ So we are all collected here, and having taken the attitudes natural to us, we proceed to question each other. ☞ And let us imagine that for once we are all really interested in finding out all about the other's interests, and the other's work. (I grant that this is very unusual, and that mind-selfishness, the highest form of stupidity, encloses many a professed artist somewhat tightly in a little square box.) ☞ But let us take it for granted that there is a general interest; that the actor and the musician wish to learn something about the art of painting; and that the painter and the musician wish to understand from the actor what his work consists of and whether and why he considers it an art. For here they shall not mince matters, but shall speak that which they believe. As they are looking only for the truth, they have nothing to fear; they are all good fellows, all good friends; not thin skinned, and can give and take blows. ☞ "Tell us," asks the painter, "is it true that before you can act a part properly you must feel the emotions of the character you are representing?" ☞ Oh well, yes and no; it depends what you mean," answers the actor. "We have first to be able to feel and sympathise and also criticise the emotions of a character; we look at it from a distance before we close with it: we gather as much as we can from the text and we call to mind all the emotions suitable for this character to exhibit. After having many times rearranged and selected those emotions which we consider of importance we then practice to reproduce them before the audience; and in order to do so we must feel as little as is necessary; in fact the less we feel, the firmer will our hold be upon our facial and bodily expression." ☞ With a gesture of genial impatience, the artist rises to his feet and paces to and fro. He had expected his friend to say that it had nothing whatever to do with emotions, and that he could control his face, features, voice and all,

☞ *Conversation between Actor, Artist and Musician.* ☞

Their different attitudes. ☞

The actress. ☞

They shall speak the truth. ☞

Just as if his body were an instrument. The musician sinks down deeper into his chair. ☞ "But has there never been an actor," asks the artist, "who has so trained his body from head to foot that it would answer to the workings of his mind without permitting the emotions even so much as to awaken? Surely there must have been one actor, say one out of ten million, who has done this?" ☞ "No," says the actor emphatically, "never, never; there never has been an actor who reached such a state of mechanical perfection that his body was *absolutely* the slave of his mind. Edmund Kean of England, Salvini of Italy, Rachel, Eleonora Duse, I call them all to mind and I repeat there never was an actor or actress such as you describe." ☞ The artist here asks, "Then you admit that it would be a state of perfection?" ☞ "Why of course! But it is impossible; will always be impossible," cries the actor; and he rises.... almost with a sense of relief. ☞ "That is as much as to say, there never was a perfect actor, there has never been an actor who has not spoiled his performance once, twice, ten times, sometimes a hundred times during the evening? There never has been a piece of acting which could be called even almost perfect and there never will be?" ☞ For answer the actor asks quickly, "But has there been ever a painting, or a piece of architecture, or a piece of music which may be called perfect?" ☞ "Undoubtedly," they reply, "The laws which control our arts make such a thing possible." ☞ "A picture for instance," continues the artist, "may consist of four lines, or four hundred lines, placed in certain positions; it may be as simple as possible, but it is possible to make it perfect. That is to say, I can first choose that which is to make the lines; I can choose that on which I am to place the lines; I can consider this as long as I like; I can alter it; then in a state which is both free from excitement, haste, trouble, nervousness, in fact in any state I choose, (and of course I prepare, wait and select that also) I can put these lines together.... so.... now they are in their place. Having my material nothing except my own will can move or alter these; and as I have said my own will is entirely under my control. The line can be straight or it can wave; it can be round if I choose, and there is no fear that when I wish to make a straight line I shall make a curved one, or that when I wish to make a curved there will be square parts about it. And when it is ready.... finished.... it undergoes no change but that which Time, who finally destroys it, wills." ☞ "That is rather an extraordinary thing," replied the actor. "I wish it was possible in my work." ☞ "Yes," replies the artist, "*it is a very extraordinary thing*, and it is that which I hold makes the difference between an intelligent statement and a casual or haphazard statement. The most intelligent statement, that is a work of art. The haphazard statement, that is a work of chance. When the intelligent statement reaches its highest possible form it becomes a work of fine art. And therefore I have always held, though I may be mistaken, that your work has not the nature of an art. That is to say (and you have said it yourself) each statement that you make in your work is subject to every conceivable change which emotion chooses to bring about. That which you conceive in your mind, your body is not permitted by nature to complete. In fact, your body, gaining the better of your intelligence, has in many instances on the stage driven out the intelligence altogether. Some actors seem to say, "What value lies in having beautiful ideas. To what end shall my mind conceive a fine idea, a fine thought, for my body which is so entirely beyond my control to spoil? I will throw my mind overboard, let my body pull me and the play through;" and there seems to me to be some wisdom in the standpoint of such an actor. He does not dilly dally between the two things which are contending in him, the one against the other. He is not a bit afraid of the result. He goes at it like a man, sometimes a trifle too like a centaur; he flings away all science.... all caution.... all reason and the result is good spirits in the audience,.... and for that they pay willingly. ☞ But we are here talking about other things than excellent spirits, and though we applaud the actor who exhibits such a personality as this, I feel that we must not forget that we are applauding his personality... *he* it is we applaud, not what he is doing or how he is doing it; nothing to do with art at all, absolutely nothing to do with art, with calculation, or design. ☞ "You're a nice friendly creature," laughs the actor gaily, "telling me my art's no art! But I believe I see what you mean. You mean to say that before I appear on the stage and before my body commences to come into the question, I am an artist." ☞ "Well yes, *you* are, you happen to be, because you are a very bad actor; you're abominable on the stage, but you have ideas, you have imagination; you are rather an exception I should say.

Perfect acting impossible. ☞

The will of the the Artist. ☞

Work of art. Work of chance.

The brave actor.

Some "IFS."

Laws of the Art
of the Theatre.Acting less exact
than Photography.

A new hope.

have heard you tell me how you would play Richard III; what you would do; what strange atmosphere you would spread over the whole thing; and that which you have told me you have seen in the play, and that which you have invented and added to it, is so remarkable, so consecutive in its thought, so distinct and clear in form, that if you could make your body into a machine, or into a dead piece of material such as clay, and if it could obey you in every movement for the entire space of time it was before the audience, and if you could put aside Shakespeare's Poem, you would be able to make a work of art out of what which is in you. For you would not only have dreamt, you would have executed to perfection; and that which you had executed could be repeated time after time without so much difference as between two farthings. "Ah," sighs the actor, "you place a terrible picture before me. You would prove to me that it is impossible for us ever to think of ourselves as artists. You take away our finest dream and you give us nothing in its place." "No, no, that's not for me to give you. That's for you to find. Surely there must be laws at the roots of the Art of the Theatre, just as there are Laws at the roots of all true Arts, which if found and mastered, would bring you all you desire?" "Yes, the search would bring the actors to a wall." "Leap it, then!" "Too high!" "Scale it, then!" "How do we know where it would lead?" "Why, up and over." "Yes, but that's talking wildly, talking in the air." "Well, that's the direction you fellows have to go; ...fly in the air, live in the air. Something will follow when some of you begin to. I suppose," continued he, "you will get at the root of the matter in time, and then what a splendid future opens before you! In fact I envy you. I am not sure I do not wish that photography had been discovered before painting, so that we of this generation might have had the intense joy of advancing, showing that photography was pretty well in its way, but there was something better!" "Do you hold that our work is on a level with photography?" "No, indeed, it is not half as exact. It is less of an art even than photography. In fact you and I who have been talking all this time while the musician has sat silent, sinking deeper and deeper into his chair, our arts by the side of his art, are jokes, games, absurdities." At which the musician must go and spoil the whole thing by getting up and given vent to some foolish remark. The actor immediately cries out, "But I don't see that that's such a wonderful remark for a representative of the only art in the world to make" at which they all laughed, the musician in a sort of crest-fallen, conscious manner. "My dear fellow, that is just because he is a musician. He is nothing except in his music. He is, in fact, somewhat unintelligent, except when he speaks in notes, in tones, and in the rest of it. He hardly knows our language, he hardly knows our world, and the greater the musician, the more is this noticeable; indeed it is rather a bad sign when you meet a composer who is intelligent. And as for the intellectual musician, why that means another....; but we mustn't whisper that name here.... he is so popular to-day. What an actor this man would have been, and what a personality he has. I understand that all his life he had yearnings towards being an actor, and I believe he would have been an excellent comedian, whereas he became a musician.... or was it a playwright? Anyhow, it all turned out a great success.... a success of personality." "Was it not a success of art?" asks the musician. "Well, which art do you mean?" "Oh, all the arts combined," he replies, blunderingly but placidly. "How can that be? How can all arts combine and make one art? It can only make one joke.... one theatre. Things which slowly, by a natural law join together, may have some right in the course of many years or many centuries to ask nature to bestow a new name on their product. Only by this means can a new art be born. I do not believe that the old mother approves of the forcing process; and if she ever winks at it, she soon has her revenge; and so is it with the arts. You cannot co-mingle them and cry out that you have created a new art. If you can find in nature, then you can say that you are on the high road towards creating a new art. For you have found that by which you can create it. It then only remains for you to begin. The theatre, as I see it, has yet to find that material." "As so their conversation ended. For my part I am with the artist's last statement. My pleasure shall not be to compete with the strenuous photographer and I shall ever aim to get something entirely opposed to life as we see it. This flesh and blood life, lovely as it is to us all is for me not a thing made to search into, or to give out again to the world, even conventionalized.

A mysterious
Beauty.The bubbling
personality.Personality
never Wasted.

Flaubert.

I think that my aim shall rather be to catch some far off glimpse of that spirit which we call death.... to recall beautiful things from the imaginary world;... they say they are cold, these dead things,... I do not know.... they often seem warmer and more living than that which parades as life. Shades.... spirits seem to me to be more beautiful, and filled with more vitality than men and women; cities of men and women packed with pettiness, creatures in-human, secret.... coldest cold.... hardest humanity. For looking too long upon life, may one not find all this to be not the beautiful, nor the mysterious nor the tragic, but the dull, the melodramatic, and the silly: the conspiracy against vitality.... against both red heat and white heat; and from such things which lack the sun of life it is not possible to draw inspiration. But from that mysterious, joyous, and superbly complete life which is called Death.... that life of shadow and of unknown shapes, where all can not be blackness and fog as is supposed, but vivid colour, vivid light, sharp cut form, and which one finds peopled with strange, fierce and solemn figures, pretty figures and calm figures, and those figures impelled to some wonderous harmony of movement, all this is something more than a mere matter of fact; from this idea of death which seems a kind of spring, a blossoming—from this land and from this idea can come so vast an inspiration, that with unhesitating exultation I leap forward to it and behold, in an instant, I find my arms full of flowers.... I advance but a pace or two and again plenty is around me.... I pass at ease on a sea of beauty I sail whither the winds take me—there, there is no danger. So much for my own personal wish;... but the entire theatre of the world is not represented in me, nor in a hundred artists or actors, but in something far different. Therefore what my personal aim may be is of very little importance. Yet the aim of the theatre as a whole is to restore its art and it should commence by banishing from the theatre this idea of impersonation, this idea of reproducing nature; for while impersonation is in the Theatre, the Theatre can never become free. The performers should train under the influence of an earlier teaching (if the very earliest and finest principles are too stern to commence with) and they will have to avoid that frantic desire to put "Life" into their work; for three thousand times against one time, it means the bringing of excessive gesture, swift mimicry, speech which bellows and scene which dazzles, on to the stage, in the wild and vain belief that by such means vitality can be conjured there. And in a few instances, to prove the rule, all this partially succeeds. It succeeds partially with the bubbling personalities of the stage, with them it is a case of sheer triumph in spite of the rules, in the very teeth of the rules, and we who look on, throw our hats into the air,... cheer, and cheer again. We have to; we don't want to consider or to question;—we go with the tide through admiration and suggestion.... That we are hypnotised, our taste cares not a rap.... We are delighted to be so moved, and we literally jump for joy. The great personality has triumphed both over us and the art. But personalities such as these are extremely rare, and if we wish to see a personality assert itself in the theatre and entirely triumph as an actor we must at the same time be quite indifferent about the play, the other actors, and Beauty. Those who do not think with me in this whole matter are the worshippers, or respectful admirers, of the personalities of the stage. It is intolerable to them that I should assert that the stage must be cleared of all its actors and actresses before it will again revive. How could they agree with me? That would include the removal of their favourites.... the two or three beings who transform the stage for them from a vulgar joke into an ideal land. But what should they fear? No danger threatens their favourites—for were it possible to put an act into force to prohibit all men and women from appearing before the public upon the stage of a theatre, this would not in the least affect these favourites—these men and women of personality whom the playgoers crown. Consider any one of these personalities born at a period when the stage was unknown; would it in any way have lessened their power.... hindered their expression? Not a whit. Personality invents the means and ways by which it shall express itself; and acting is but one, (the very least) of the means at the commands of a great personality: and these men and women would have been famous at any time, and in any calling. But if there are many to whom it is intolerable that I should propose to clear the stage of ALL the actors and actresses in order to revive the Art of the Theatre, there are others to whom it seems agreeable. "The artist," says Flaubert, "should be in his work like God in creation, invisible and all-powerful; he should be felt everywhere and seen nowhere. Art should be raised above

"personal affection and nervous susceptibility. It is time to give it the perfection of the physical sciences by means of a pitiless method." He is thinking mainly of the Art of Literature; but if he feel this so strongly of the writer, one who is never actually seen, but merely stands half revealed behind his work, how totally opposed must he have been to the actual appearance of the actor—personality or no personality.

Charles Lamb.

Charles Lamb says; "To see Lear acted.... to see an old man tottering about with a stick, turned out of doors by his daughters on a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. We want to take him into shelter, that is all the feeling the acting of Lear ever produced in me. The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm which he goes out in, is not more inadequate to represent the horror of the real elements than any actor can be to represent Lear. They might more easily propose to personate the Satan of Milton upon a stage, or one of Michaelangelo's terrible figures.... Lear is essentially impossible to be represented on the stage."

William Hazlitt.

Dante.

"Hamlet himself seems hardly capable of being acted," says William Hazlitt. Dante in "La Vita Nuova" tells us that in dream Love in the figure of a youth appeared to him. Discoursing of Beatrice, Dante is told by Love "to compose certain things in rhyme, in the which thou shalt set forth how strong a mastership I have obtained over thee, through her.... And so write these things that they shall seem rather to be spoken by a third person, and not directly by thee to her, which is scarce fitting. And again "There came upon me a great desire to say somewhat in rhyme: but when I began thinking how I should say it, methought that to speak of her were unseemly, unless I spoke to other ladies in the second person." We see then that to these men it is wrong that the living person should advance into the frame and display himself upon his own canvas. They hold it as unseemly.... "scarce fitting."

We have here witnesses against the whole business of the modern stage. Collectively they pass the following sentence:.... That it is bad art, or no art, to make so personal, so emotional an appeal that the beholder forgets the thing itself while swamped by the personality, the emotion, of its maker. And now for the testimony of an actress.

Eleonora Duse.

Eleonora Duse has said: (1) "To save the theatre, the theatre must be destroyed, the actors and actresses must all die of the plague. They poison the air, they make art impossible." We may believe her. She means what Flaubert and Dante mean, even if she words it differently. And there are many more witnesses to testify for me, if this is held to be insufficient evidence. There are the people who never go to theatres, the millions of men against the thousands who do go. Then, we have the support of most of the managers of the theatre of to-day. The modern theatre manager thinks the stage should have its plays gorgeously decorated. He will say that no pains should be spared to bring every assistance towards cheating the audience into a sense of reality; he will never cease telling us how important all these decorations are; he urges all this for several reasons and the following reason is not the least.... He scents a grave danger in simple and good work; he sees that there is a body of people who are opposed to these lavish decorations; he knows that there has been a distinct movement, in Europe, against this display, it having been claimed that the great plays gained when represented in front of the plainest background. This movement can be proved to be a powerful one—it has spread from Krakau to Moscow, from Paris to Rome, from London to Berlin and Vienna. The managers see this danger ahead of them; they see that if once people came to realise this fact, if once the audience tasted of the delight which a sceneless play brings, they would then go further and desire the play which was presented without actors; and finally they would go on and on and on until they, and not the managers, had positively reformed the Art.

The wary than-
ger.

Napoleon.

Napoleon is reported to have said. "In life there is much that is unworthy which in art should be omitted; much of doubt and vacillation; and all should disappear in the representation of the hero. We should see him as a statue in which the weakness and tremors of the flesh are no longer perceptible." (2) And not only Napoleon, but Ben Jonson, Lessing, Edmund Scherer, Hans Christian Andersen, Lamb, Goethe,

(1) Studies in Seven Arts;... Arthur Symons; Constable; 1906.

(2) Of sculpture Pater writes.

"Its white light, purged from the angry, bloodlike stains of action and passion, reveals, not what is accidental in man, but the god in him, as opposed to man's restless movement."

Again, "The base of all artistic genius is the power of conceiving humanity in a new striking rejoicing way, of putting

George Sand, Coleridge, Ruskin, Pater and I suppose all the intelligent men and women of Europe (one does not speak of Asia for even the unintelligent in Asia fail to comprehend Photographs while understanding Art as a simple and clear manifestation) have protested against this reproduction of Nature, and with it photographic and weak actuality; they have protested against all this, and the theatrical managers have argued against them energetically, and so we look for the truth to emerge in due time. It is a reasonable conclusion. Do away with the real tree, do away with the reality of delivery, do away with the reality of action, and you tend towards the doing away with the actor. This is what must come to pass in time, and I like to see the managers supporting the idea already. Do away with the actor, and you do away with the means by which a debased stage-realism is produced and flourishes. No longer would there be a living figure to confuse us into connecting actuality and art; no longer a living figure in which the weakness and tremors of the flesh were perceptible.

The actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure—the über-marionette we may call him, until he has won for himself a better name. Much has been written about the puppet—or marionette. There are some excellent volumes upon him, and he has also inspired several works of Art. To-day in his least happy period many people have come to regard him as rather a superior doll—and to think he has developed from the doll. This is incorrect. He is a descendant of the stone images of the old Temples—he is to-day a rather degenerate form of a God. Always the close friend of children he still knows how to select and attract his devotees. When anyone designs a puppet on paper, he draws a stiff and comic looking thing. Such a one has not even perceived what is contained in the idea which we now call the Marionette. He mistakes gravity of face and calmness of body for blank stupidity and angular deformity. Yet even Modern Puppets are extraordinary things. The applause may thunder or dribble, their hearts beat no faster, no slower, their signals do not grow hurried or confused; and, though drenched in a torrent of bouquets and love, the face of the leading lady remains as solemn, as beautiful and as remote as ever. There is something more than a flash of genius in the Marionette, and there is something in him more than the flashiness of displayed personality. The Marionette.... appears to me to be the last echo of some noble and beautiful art of a past civilization. But as with all art which has passed into fat or vulgar hands, the Puppet has become a reproach. All puppets are now but low comedians. They imitate the comedians of the larger and fuller blooded stage. They enter only to fall on their back. They drink only to reel, and make love only to raise a laugh. They have forgotten the counsel of their Mother, the Sphinx. Their bodies have lost their grave grace, they have become stiff. Their eyes have lost that infinite subtlety of seeming to see; now they only stare. They display and jingle their wires and are cock-sure in their wooden wisdom. They have failed to remember that their art should carry on it the same stamp of reserve that we see at times on the work of other artists, and that the highest art is that which conceals the craft and forgets the craftsman. Am I mistaken, or is it not the old Greek Traveller of 800 B. C. who, describing a visit to the Temple-Theatre in Thebes, tells us that he was won to their beauty by their "noble artificiality." "Coming into the House of Visions I saw afar off the fair brown Queen seated upon her throne.... her tomb.... for both it seemed to me. I sank back upon my couch and watched her symbolic movements. With so much ease did her rhythms alter as with her movements they passed from limb to limb; with such a show of calm did she unloose for us the thoughts of her breast; so gravely and so beautifully did she linger on the statement of her sorrow, that with us it seemed as if no sorrow could harm her; no distortion of body or feature allowed us to dream that she was conquered; the passion and the pain were continually being caught by her hands, held gently, and viewed calmly. Her arms and hands seemed at one moment like a thin warm fountain of water which rose, then broke and fell with all those sweet pale fingers like spray into her lap. It would have been as a revelation of art to us had I not already seen that the same spirit dwelt in the other examples of the art of these Egyptians. This 'Art of Showing and Veiling' as

The Marionette.

800: B. C.

a happy world of its own construction in place of the meaner world of common days, of generating around itself an atmosphere with a novel power of refraction, selecting, transforming, recombining the images it transmits, according to the choice of the Imaginative Intellect."

And again; "All that is accidental, all that distracts the simple effect upon us of the supreme types of humanity, all traces in them of the commonness of the world, it gradually purges away."

"they call it, is so great a spiritual force in the land that it plays the larger part in their religion. We may learn from it somewhat of the power and the grace of courage, "for it is impossible to witness a performance without a sense of physical and spiritual "refreshment." ☞ This in 800 B. C. And who knows whether the Puppet shall not once again become the faithful medium for the beautiful thoughts of the artist. ☞ May we not look forward with hope to that day which shall bring back to us once more the figure, or symbolic creature, made also by the cunning of the artist, so that we can regain once more the "noble artificiality" which the old writer speaks of. ☞ Then shall we no longer be under the cruel influence of the emotional confessions of weakness which are nightly witnessed by the people and which in their turn create in the beholders the very weaknesses which are exhibited. ☞ To that end we must study to remake these images—no longer content with a puppet, we must create an über-marionette. ☞ The über-marionette will not compete with Life—but will rather go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in Trance—it will aim to clothe itself with a death-like Beauty while exhaling a living spirit. ☞ Several times in the course of this essay has a word or two about Death found its way on to the paper... called there by the incessant clamouring of "Life! Life! Life!" which the Realists keep up. And this might be easily mistaken for an affectation especially by those who have no sympathy or delight in the power and the mysterious joyousness which is in all passionless works of art. If the famous Rubens and the celebrated Raphael made none but passionate and exuberant statements, there were many artists before them and since to whom moderation in their art was the most precious of all their aims, and these more than all others exhibit the true masculine manner. The other flamboyant or drooping artists whose works and names catch the eye of to-day do not so much speak like men as bawl like animals, or lisp like women. ☞ The wise, the moderate masters, strong because of the laws to which they swore to remain ever faithful... their names unknown for the most part... a fine family... the creators of the great and tiny gods of the East and the West, the guardians of those larger times,... these all bent their thoughts forward towards the unknown, searching for sights and sounds in that peaceful and joyous country, that they might raise a figure of stone or sing a verse, investing it with that same peace and joy seen from afar, so as to balance all the grief and turmoil here. ☞ In America we can picture these brothers of that family of masters, living in their superb ancient cities, colossal cities which I ever think of as able to be moved in a single day; cities of spacious tents of silk and canopies of gold under which dwelt their gods; dwellings which contained all the requirements of the most fastidious; those moving cities which, as they travelled from height to plain, over rivers and down valleys, seemed like some vast advancing army of peace. And in each city not one or two men called "artists" whom the rest of the city looked upon as ne'er do well idlers, but many men chosen by the community because of their higher powers of perception.... artists; for that is what the title of artist means, one who perceives more than his fellows, and who records more than he has seen. And not the least among those artists was the artist of the ceremonies, the creator of the visions, the minister whose duty it was to celebrate their guiding spirit... the spirit of Motion. ☞ In Asia, too, the forgotten masters of the temples and all that those temples contained, have permeated every thought, every mark in their work with this sense of calm motion resembling death.... glorifying and greeting it. ☞ In Africa, (which some of us think we are but now to civilize) this spirit dwelt,... the essence of the perfect civilization. There too dwelt the great masters, not individuals obsessed with the idea of each asserting his personality as if it was a valuable and mighty thing, but content because of a kind of holy patience to move their brains and their fingers only in that direction permitted by the law—in the service of the simple truths. ☞ How stern the law was, and how little the artist of that day permitted himself to make an exhibition of his personal feelings can be discovered by looking at any example of Egyptian art. Look at any limb ever carved by the Egyptians, search into all those carved eyes, they will deny you until the crack of doom. Their attitude is so silent that it is death like. Yet tenderness is there, and charm is there; prettiness is even there side by side with the force; and love bathes each single work; but gush, emotion, swaggering personality of the artist?... not one single breath of it. Fierce doubts or hopes?... not one hint of such a thing. Strenuous determination?... not a sign of it has escaped the artist; none of these confessions.... stupidities. Nor pride, nor fear, nor the comic, nor any indication that the artist's mind or hand was

☞ The über-marionette not to compete with Life. ☞ ☞

The wise masters of Art. ☞ ☞

In America.

In Asia & Africa.

Love instead of gush. ☞ ☞

for the thousandth part of a moment out of the command of the laws which ruled him. How superb! This it is to be a great artist; and the amount of emotional outpourings of to-day and of yesterday are no signs of supreme intelligence,... that is to say, are no signs of supreme art. ☞ To Europe came this spirit, hovered over Greece, could hardly be driven out of Italy, but finally fled, leaving a little stream of tears,... pearls.... before us. And we, having crushed most of them, munching them along with the acorns of our food, have gone further and fared worse and have prostrated ourselves before the so-called "great masters," and have worshipped these dangerous and flamboyant personalities. ☞ On an evil day we thought in our ignorance that it was us they were sent to draw, that it was our thoughts they were sent to express; that it was something to do with us that they were putting into their architecture, their music, and so it was we came to demand that we should be able to recognize ourselves in all that they put hand to; that is to say, in their architecture, in their sculpture, in their music, in their painting, and in their poetry we were to figure... and we also reminded them to invite us with the familiar words "come as you are." ☞ The artists after many centuries have given in, that which we asked them for they have supplied. And so it came about that when this ignorance had driven off the fair spirit which once controlled the mind and hand of the artist, a dark spirit took its place; the happy-go-lucky Hooligan in the seat of the Law, that is to say, a stupid spirit reigning; and everybody began to shout about Renaissance! while all the time the painters, musicians, sculptors, architects, vied one with the other to supply the demand... that all these things should be so made that all people could recognize them as having something to do with themselves. ☞ Up sprang portraits with flushed faces, eyes which bulged, mouths which leered, fingers itching to come out of their frame, wrists which exposed the pulse; all the colours higgledy piggledy; all the lines in hubbub, like the ravings of lunacy. Form breaks into panic; the calm and cool whisper of life in trance which once had breathed out such an ineffable hope is heated, fired into a blaze and destroyed, and in its place.... realism, the blunt statement of Life, something everybody misunderstands while recognizing. And all far from the purpose of art. For its purpose is not to reflect the actual facts of this life, because it is not the custom of the artist to walk behind things, having won it as his privilege to walk in front of them—to lead. Rather should life reflect the likeness of the spirit, for it was the spirit which first chose the artist to chronicle its Beauty. (1) ☞ And in that picture, if the form be that of the living, on account of its beauty and tenderness, the colour for it must be sought from that unknown land of the imagination,... and what is that but the land where dwells that which we call Death. ☞ So it is not lightly and flippantly that I speak of Puppets and their power to retain the beautiful and remote expressions in form and face even when subjected to a patter of praise, a torrent of applause. ☞ There are persons who have made a jest of these Puppets. "Puppet" is a term of contempt, though there still remain some who find beauty in these little figures, degenerate though they have become. ☞ To speak of a Puppet with most men and women is to cause them to giggle. They think at once of the wires; they think of the stiff hands and the jerky movements; they tell me it is "a funny little doll." But let me tell them a few things about these Puppets. Let me again repeat that they are the descendants of a great and noble family of Images, Images which were made in the likeness of God; and that many centuries ago these figures had a rhythmical movement and not a jerky one; had no need for wires to support them, nor did they speak through the nose of the hidden manipulator. ☞ (Poor Punch, I mean no slight to you! You stand alone, dignified in your despair, as you look back across the centuries with painted tears still wet upon your ancient cheeks, and you seem to cry out appealingly to your dog, "Sister Anne, sister Anne, is nobody coming?" ☞ And then with that superb bravado of yours, you turn the force of our laughter (and my tears) upon yourself with the heartrending shriek of "Oh my nose! Oh, my nose! Oh my nose!) ☞ Did you think, ladies and gentlemen, that these puppets were always little things of but a foot high? ☞ Indeed, no! The Puppet had once a more generous form than yourselves. ☞ ☞ Do you think that he kicked his feet about on a little platform six foot square, made to resemble a little old fashioned theatre; so that his head almost touched the top of the proscenium; and do you think that he always lived in a little house where the door and

The Hooligan reigns. ☞

The privilege of the Artist. ☞

Punch. ☞

(1) "All forms are perfect in the poet's mind: But these are not abstracted or compounded from nature; they are from Imagination," William Blake.

windows were as small as a doll's house, with painted window blinds parted in the centre, and where the flowers of his little garden had courageous petals as big as his head? Try and dispel this idea altogether from your minds, and let me tell you something of his habitation.

On the banks of the Ganges.

In Asia lay his first Kingdom. On the banks of the Ganges they built him his home,... a vast palace springing from column to column into the air and pouring from column to column down again into the water. Surrounded by gardens spread warm and rich with flowers and cooled by fountains; gardens into which no sounds entered, in which hardly anything stirred. Only in the cool and private chambers of this palace the swift minds of his attendants stirred incessantly. Something they were making which should become him, something to honour the spirit which had given him birth. And then, one day, the ceremony.

The thanksgiving Ceremony.

In this ceremony he took part; a celebration once more in praise of the Creation; the old thanksgiving, the hurrah for existence, and with it the sterner hurrah for the privilege of the existence to come, which is veiled by the word Death. And during this ceremony there appeared before the eyes of the brown worshippers the symbols of all things on earth and in Nirvana. The symbol of the beautiful tree, the symbol of the hills, the symbols of those rich ores which the hills contained; the symbol of the cloud, of the wind, and of all swift moving things; the symbol of the quickest of moving things, of Thought, of Remembrance; the symbol of the Animal, the symbol of Buddha and of Man... and here he comes, the figure, the Puppet at whom you all laugh so much. You laugh at him to-day because none but his weaknesses are left to him. He reflects these from you; but you would not have laughed had you seen him in his prime, in that age when he was called upon to be the symbol of man in the great ceremony, and, stepping forward, was the beautiful figure of our heart's delight. If we should laugh at and insult the memory of the Puppet, we should be laughing at the fall that we have brought about in ourselves... laughing at the Beliefs and Images we have broken. A few centuries later, and we find his home a little the worse for wear. From a temple it has become, I will not say a theatre, but something between a temple and a theatre, and he is losing his health in it. Something is in the air; his doctors tell him he must be careful. "And what am I to fear the most?" he asks them. They answer him; "Fear most the vanity of men." He thinks, "But that is what I myself have always taught; that we who celebrated in joy this our existence, should have this one great fear. Is it possible that I, one who has ever revealed this truth, should be one to lose sight of it and should myself be one of the first to fall? Clearly some subtle attack is to be made on me. I will keep my eyes upon the Heavens." And he dismisses his doctors and ponders upon it.

The Fall.

And now let me tell you who it was that came to disturb the calm air which surrounded this curiously perfect thing. It is on record that somewhat later he took up his abode on the far Eastern Coast, and there came two women to look upon him. And at the ceremony to which they came he glowed with such earthly splendour and yet such unearthly simplicity, that though he proved an inspiration to the thousand nine hundred and ninety eight souls who participated in the festival, an inspiration which cleared the mind even as it intoxicated, yet to these two women it proved an intoxication only. He did not see them, his eyes were fixed on the heavens: but he charged them full of a desire too great to be quenched; the desire to stand as the direct symbol of the Divinity in Man. No sooner thought than done; and arraying themselves as best they could in garments ("like his," they thought) moving with gestures ("like his" they said) and being able to cause wonderment in the minds of the beholders ("even as he does," they cried) they built themselves a temple ("like his" "like his"), and supplied the demand of the vulgar,... the whole thing a poor parody. This is on record. It is the first record in the East of the actor.... The actor springs from the foolish vanity of two women who are not strong enough to look upon the symbol of godhead without desiring to tamper with it; and the parody proved profitable. In fifty or a hundred years, places for such parodies were to be found in all parts of the land. Weeds, they say, grow quickly, and that wilderness of weeds, the modern theatre, soon sprang up. The figure of the Divine Puppet, attracted fewer and fewer lovers, and the women were quite the latest thing. With the fading of the Puppet and the advance of these women who exhibited themselves on the stage in his place, came that darker spirit which is called Chaos, and in its wake the triumph of the riotous Personality. Do you see then, what has made me love and learn to value that which to-day we call the puppet

Gush not Love.

and to detest that which we call life in art? I pray earnestly for the return of the Image... the uber-marionette, to the Theatre; and when he comes again and is but seen, he will be loved so well that once more will it be possible for the people to return to their ancient joy in ceremonies ...once more will Creation be celebrated.... homage rendered to existence.... and divine and happy intercession made to Death.

Florence, March 1907.

Dannie.h

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