

The Innovation of Form and Language of the  
American Theatre in Nineteen-Sixties

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Hamlet describes the purpose of playing to the visiting players as follows:

“...the purpose of playing, whose end, both at first and now, was and is, to hold, as 't were, the mirror up to nature; to show virture her own feature, scorn her image, and the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure.”<sup>1</sup>

Hamlet's words have long been accepted by most of the theatre people as the core of what theatre is for. However, to the contemporary theatre people, Hamlet's concept of theatre appears rather irrelevant to what we know about the modern theatre. As Francis Fergusson aptly points out, “if he could ask the players to hold the mirror up to nature, it was because the Elizabethan theatre was itself a mirror which had been formed at the center of the culture of its time, at the center of the life and awareness of the community. We know now that such a mirror is rarely formed.”<sup>2</sup> Fergusson, touching upon the condition of the modern world and theatre, furthers his assent:

“We doubt that our time has an age, a body, a form, or a pressure; we are more apt to think of it as a wilderness which is without form. Human nature seems to us a hopelessly elusive and uncandid entity, and our playwrights (like hunters with camera and flashbulbs in the depths of the Belgian Congo) are lucky if they can fix it, at rare intervals, in one of its momentary postures, and in a single bright, exclusive angle of vision. Thus the very *idea* of a theatre, as Hamlet assumed it, gets lost; and the art of drama, having no place of its own in contemporary life, is confused with lyric poetry or pure music on one side, or with editorializing and gossip on the other.”<sup>3</sup>

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1) Hamlet. Act III Scene 2

2) Francis Fergusson: *The Idea of A Theatre*. Garden City, N.Y. 1949. p. 14

3) Francis Fergusson: *The Idea of A theatre*. p. 15

The above statement is contained in Fergusson's *The Idea of a Theatre* published in 1949. What he meant by contemporary society was the society in the thirties and the forties. Since then more than twenty years have elapsed. There was no Korean War yet, no head-on clash of ideologies, no serious racial problems and no Vietnam War. The society then was less segmented and the voices of the younger generation were less militant. At the threshold of the mid-century, every corner of society created its own problems which begat endless echelons of still more knotty problems. A moral and social value, if there were any, has been denied. Up to now nothing has stood still: everything moves towards nowhere. These were a general phenomenon of any society in the world, particularly the American society. There was no mirror to hold up and no concrete materials to be reflected in the mirror. If we agree to Fergusson's reasoning, it may be too hasty for us, at this point, to lament the absence of the great dramatists in the current American theatre.

In spite of her relatively short theatre history, America has produced in the past some memorable plays comparable to those of European playwrights. Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams were able to draw a keen attention and admiration of play-goers of the world. The American audience looked upon their plays as a picture of their own life and the characters in them as their own selves. When Miller's "*Death of A Salesman*" was performed in San Francisco, a man of elderly age was so moved that he drove all the way to a village in Connecticut to see Miller who happened to reside there. The man identified himself with Willy Loman, the hero of the play. He knocked on the door and asked Miller what he should do. The playwrights before and immediately after World War II believed in or at least tried to believe in the future of mankind and the dignity of individual human being. In their plays, universal feeling and empathy were shared and understood by all of us. While discussing the danger of the nuclear age, Miller asserted his firm belief as follows:

"the danger is that without our participation in the reorganization of the backward sections of the world, our central value, the dignity of the human being based upon a rule of law and civil liberty, will never become part of the movement of people striving to live better at any cost. For that and that alone ought to be our mission in this world. There are many mansions



not in heaven but on earth. We have or ought to have but one interest, if only for our safety's sake and it is to serve the rights of man. That ought to be our star and none other."<sup>4</sup>

Miller took a positive attitude towards reorganization of the world and preservation of human rights. He indicted social injustice and enhanced the dignity of individual person. In *Death of a Salesman*, Linda, Willy's wife, cries out:

"His name(her husband) was never in the paper. He's not a finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person."<sup>5</sup>

Though the play clearly revealed Willy's fatal failure within the terms of American society and his moral failure, Miller strongly demanded an acceptance of the full meanings of human nature and dignity of human being. In this, American audience stood on the side of him. Nevertheless, after *Death of a Salesman*, Miller kept silent for nearly ten years. If he was not a great dramatist, he was then considered a central figure in a line of legitimate tradition in the American theatre. Around him enthusiasm and direction of the American theatre were being fermented. During his absence from the American theatre scene, a tremendous wave of the European theatre virtually flooded the American playhouses. Bertolt Brecht and Eugene Ionesco dominated the American theatre, and the works of young British playwrights kept coming to overwhelm Broadway, off-Broadway and university theatres. Theatre people as well as theatre-goers had to discuss Brecht and Ionesco. They were to praise the higher quality of the young British writers' works at the expense of American playwrights. Edward Albee wrote *The Zoo Story* which rocketed him to international fame later on, but no producers were interested in his work simply because he was young and not known to the public. Albee had to take his play to Europe. The play was produced in Germany in 1959. It soon attracted attention in academic, intellectual and off-Broadway avant-garde theatre circles. The young American playwrights like Albee were given a slim chance to see their plays being staged. In 1958, Mary McCarthy wrote in *Sights and Spectacles* that "the

4) Robert Corrigan: *Theatre in the Twentieth Century*. N.Y. 1965. p. 47

5) Arthur Miller: *Death of Salesman*. Act I



American theatre was not only bad, it was very bad” and that “most American plays were horribly badly written.”<sup>6</sup> By this time the Kazan-Miller-Williams era had gone and foreign plays were seen everywhere. It made Albee discard “a theatre in which London *hits* are, willy-nilly, in a kind of reverse of chauvinism, greeted in a manner not unlike a colony’s obeisance to the Crown; a theatre in which real estate owners and theatre-party managements predetermine the success of unknown quantities.”<sup>7</sup> The American theatre was being preoccupied with selling out Ionesco and Brecht, and the playwrights were busy imitating anti-plays and epic plays. Even Albee was very much influenced by Ionesco as is shown in *American Dream*. No playwrights were safe from their influence.

Discussing the situation of the American Theatre since World War II, Martin Gottfried says:

“The American theatre has been split by two natural forces. ... These forces—one tugging toward change, the other pulling toward tradition—have become so polarized that they have ceased to work as countervailing powers. The theatre that they should shape has been divided. Instead of the whole properly thriving on the influence of each, the theatre’s two halves are flying apart.”<sup>8</sup>

Gottfried refers to conservative theatre as the right and liberal theatre as the left. The right tries to remain within its boundaries established by past gains whereas the left, alienated and restless, tries to move towards radical changes. The left wing takes indifferent attitude towards what the right wing produces and is antagonistic to the norm preconditioned. The left wing is divided into two groups: the moderate left and the extreme left. Of course, the term Gottfried coins does not have any political implications, it is so named merely for the sake of convenience. Where theatre exists, there are always two streams: traditional theatre vs. new theatre. It is not solely characteristic of the American theatre for the opposite forces to scratch and yell for billing.

In 1959, the off-Broadway or the left wing theatre, presented two most dynamic

6) Mary McCarthy: *Sights and Spectacles 1937-1958*. London, 1959. p. XV

7) Edward Albee: “Which Theatre is the Absurd One?” *The Modern American Theatre*. Prentice-Hall Inc. 1967. p. 171

8) Martin Gottfried: *A Theatre Divided*, Boston 1967. p. 3

playwrights: Edward Albee and Jack Gelber. And two years later Arthur Kopit appeared to stand by them with a fantastic play called *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You In the Closet And I'm Feelin' So Sad*. In content and form, their plays are conspicuously different from those of their predecessors. *The Zoo Story*, Albee's first play, was greeted by *The Villagers* as "the finest play, written by an American, that can be seen for love or money."<sup>9</sup> Certainly Albee was the one who successively dominated the American theatre in the early sixties. *The Zoo Story* is a one-act play which is short and yet more mystifying because it is simple. Martin Esslin categorize Albee as a writer of the Theatre of the Absurd. Like Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett, Albee deals with a man in a state of alienation. The man is astounded by the insuperable difficulty of communicating with each other. We have to accept loneliness as the norm of existence. Albee, like Ionesco who is no doubt his literary progenitor, does not solve the problem: he merely presents the man and the situation. And yet, at the end of the play the man immolates himself by driving his own knife into his stomach. This is a sense of martyr. His characters, as shown in his other plays, do not sit still helplessly but try to face the shattered reality. His characters are not "waiting for Godot" from outside to save them. Even in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, his most talked-about play, the couple had to come out of their illusory world and face the cold reality. In *A Delicate Balance*, the characters try to escape a monstrous reality through drinking but they are bound to realize in the end that it is impossible to live in illusion for ever. A character utters:

"What I find most astonishing—aside from my belief that I will, oneday... lose my mind—but when?

Never, I begin to think, as the years go by, or that I'll not know if it happens, or maybe even has... what I find most astonishing, I think, is the wonder of daylight, of the sun. All the centuries, millenniums—all the history—I wonder if that's why we sleep at night, because the darkness still... frightens us?

They say we sleep to let the demons out—to let the mind to raving mad, our dreams and nightmares all our logic gone away, the dark side of our reason. And when the daylight comes again... comes order with it."<sup>10</sup>

9) C.W. Bigsby: *Confrontation and Commitment*. Univ. of Missouri Press, 1967. p. 71

10) Edward Albee: *Delicate Balance*, Atheneum, New York. p. 170

In this, Albee is distinguished from Ionesco, Beckett and Harold Pinter who expose a picture of unbearable ugliness of human conduct and leave it as it is.

*The Connection* by Jack Gelber is, as Kenneth Tynan put it, "the most exciting new American play that off-Broadway has produced since the war. It explores a frightening territory with clear, unprejudiced eyes, and a gift of words that makes its vision ours."<sup>11</sup> Gelber's characters are heroin addicts. Their lives are spent in expectation of the next "fix," transient reconciliation with the world and with themselves. While waiting for their dope supplier, the connection, they talk nonsense and without purpose. Gelber tries to tell the audience that they are not actors playing addicts, but real addicts. A producer tells the audience that he has asked a writer to collect addicts to improvise the dialogue which the author has previously laid down. Two camera men start filming them before the audience. Gelber employs a device of a play within a play, a device already adapted by Luigi Pirandello to depict a human being travelling between reality and illusion. A sensible use of jazz music livens the audience: the individual sololists make tunes improvising on a general theme. The audience becomes aware of the loneliness of addicts, but they are horrified to listen to one of them:

"I used to think that the people who walk the street, the people who work everyday, the people who worry so much about the next dollar, the next coat, the chlorophyll addicts, the aspirin addicts, the vitamin addicts, those people are hooked worse than me."<sup>12</sup>

Though the play depicts our life in a naturalistic frame, it voices a felt need for a breakaway from illusion and from the picture stage acknowledged as a legitimate form of the modern theatre.

Arthur Kopit landed on the bare scene of the American theatre with his funny play called *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet, and I'm Feelin' So Sad*, subtitled "A Pseudo-classical Tragic-Farce in a bastard French tradition." The play is a grotesque, macabre humorous and surrealistic one. Madame Rosepettle's obsession to "possess" her husband is so great that she murders him. "Mine, all mine to love, mine to live with, mine to kill; my husband my lover my own...my very own." She carries his

11) Kenneth Tynan: Preface of *The Connection*. Grove Press, New York, 1960. p. 11

12) Jack Gelber: *The Connection*. Grove Press, N.Y. 1960. p. 31



corpse around as a physical symbol of her triumph. Not contented with murdering her husband, she drags her son around at her command. The play is tricky. When a young girl is about to seduce the son, the corpse pops out of the closet and falls between them. The play deals with an impossibly possessive mother, modern female as a whole, and her dominated son's ineffectual attempts at rebellion. Kopit was to have his one-act play entitled *The Day the Whores Came Out to Play Tennis* staged at the University of Minnesota, but it was withdrawn because it was branded obscene. His more recent play, *Indians*, teaches the audience a lesson from history. Kopit's choice of the Indian Massacre for the theme of the play is meant to arouse an anti-Vietnam War sentiment in the audience. Its structure is moulded after an epic form of the Brechtian theatre.

Beside the aforementioned three young playwrights, there are dramatists who contributed worthy plays to the off-Broadway theatre. Jack Richardson and Kenneth Brown should be mentioned. What is conspicuous in the works of the new playwrights in the late fifties and early sixties is that, although a naturalistic treatment is still present in their plays, the appearance of life on stage produces no plain clue which may lead us to the essential meaning of their world. What they unfold is not an objective picture but a mask. Their works are in a sense surrealistic.

The modern French writers were original surrealists. Surrealists "conceived of the unconscious as the source of truth and acknowledged the superior reality of the dream." However, "the American new surrealism,"<sup>13</sup> if such a term is appropriate, "places less emphasis on the autonomy of the unconscious than on a faith in the need to accept the irrational and the fantastic as valid means of revelation."<sup>14</sup> Saul Bellow is one of the few novelists who have tried their hand at playwriting. Bellow's *The Last Analysis* is a short-lived play but in it surrealistic undertone is substantially perceived. A comedian, whose past fame has waned, devises a closed-circuit television demonstration to examine himself and to see how he is tortured by humanities for the benefit of the world's psychiatrists. He keeps experimenting eventually to found "a theatre of the soul in which individuals are to be taught to face the reality of their lives."<sup>15</sup>

13) C. W. Bigsby: *Confrontation and Commitment*. p. 93

14) *Ibid.* p.93

15) C. W. Bigsby: *Confrontation and Commitment*. p. 94

Along with the surrealist idea, what perturbed the young theatre people most was Antonin Artaud's drastic idea of "The Theatre of Cruelty." Artaud became involved in the surrealist movement in 1925. Artaud urged us to stand for a theatre of myth and magic, casting aside narrative and the so-called psychological realism. He insists that the function of the theatre is to liberate forces in the audience's subconsciousness—a reflection of his surrealist background—by giving direct expression to their dreams and obsessions. For this, the theatre should relegate dialogue to a minor role, and rely instead upon gesture and movement. The primary purpose of the theatre is to express things which cannot be put into words and the role of words in drama should be purely ritual and incantatory. "Instead of continuing to rely upon texts considered definitive and sacred, it is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theatre to the text, and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought."<sup>16</sup> Backing Artaud's proposal, Julian Beck, the founder of the Living Theatre, who successfully staged *The Connection* and *The Zoo Story*, had something to say even about Shakespeare's works.

"We don't need Shakespeare's objective wisdom, his sense of tragedy reserved only for the experience of the high-born. His ignorance of collective joy makes him useless to our time. It is important not to be seduced by the poetry. That is why Artaud says *burn the texts*."<sup>17</sup>

Conventionally, a play written by a dramatist takes its language as the core of all the theatrical elements whereas the school of Artaud believes that the words should be absorbed in the context of physical movement, and improvised episodes. Artaud pounds in his *Theatre and Its Double* the necessity of the Theatre of the Cruelty. However, "Cruelty" here simply means intensity. He states:

"This Cruelty is a matter of neither sadism nor bloodshed, at least not in any exclusive way ...Cruelty signifies rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determination."<sup>18</sup>

Artaud formulated a plan for the abolition of art: he insists that "art must be an affair of the streets, and above all, of the organism, the body, of nature. Thus it moves men,

16) Antonin Artaud: *The Theatre and Its Double*. Grove Press, N.Y. 1958. p. 89

17) Julian Beck: *Evergreen*. May, 1968. p. 15

18) Artaud: *Theatre and Its Double*, p. 101



would move things.”<sup>19</sup> According to him, the action of the theatre, like that of the plague, is beneficial for pushing men into seeing themselves as they are, it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the moral inertia, baseness and hypocrisy of our world. He believes that the theatre of the cruelty can repudiate the consolation of bourgeois drama in order to shock the spectator into new awareness through ritual, violence, extreme acts and the shattering of taboos.

Thus the Living Theatre has been formed to practice Artaud's theory in the American theatre. Artaud's theory is best fit for the younger dramatists who take theatre as a means of social protest. In the sixties, after Albee and Gelber, numerous young theatre people rushed in groups to the theatre scene with the idea of the theatre of the cruelty in their minds. Though Artaud's influence has been strong on the contemporary drama, the American theatre has never felt its impact until German-born Peter Weiss and well-talented director Peter Brook staged *Marat/Sade* in New York. "Through song, dance, mime, declamation and the key device of bizarre play within a play, Weiss and Brook have sought to overthrow conventional notions of what makes a drama dramatic and what, in fact, drama is for."<sup>20</sup> The importance of the role of dancing in the theatre has been discussed. Until then dancing was a simple tool for the production of musical comedies. Expression through physical movement and gesture has been considered a vital element in the theatre. As Robert Corrigan puts it, "the gesture of pantomime are the theatre's most appropriate and valuable means of expression: the insistence that the mimetic gesture precedes the spoken word and that the gesture is the true expression of what we feel, while words only describe what we feel."<sup>21</sup> It is no wonder that the show of nudity such as *Oh, Calcutta* and *The Hair* has been performed.

One of the characteristics of the American theatre in the sixties is a young playwrights' strong reaction to the intolerable Vietnam War and to the appalling future of American society. The Kennedy assassination and the ever-growing racial problems were the young theatre people's main concern. They refused to accept the preconditioned

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19) Artaud: "Art and Revolution" by Herbert Marcuse, *Partisan Review*, Spring 1972. p. 175

20) Richard Gilman: *Common and Uncommon Masks*. Vintage Book, 1971. p. 167

21) Robert Corrigan: *Theatre in the Twentieth Century*. p. 20



value of their society. They wanted to cry out, to stab into the fraudulent moral of the older generation. The use of dirty words are frequent in their plays. "Dirty words are employed both in defiance and in joyous confrontation with reality. ... Nudity, obscenity, even pornography are exultant battle cries against the false face of the society."<sup>22</sup>

In the early sixties, The Living Theatre and the other group presented three memorable plays: Megan Terry's *Viet Rock*, Barbara Garson's *MacBird* and *Dynamite Tonite* by Arnold Winstein and William Bolcom. *Viet Rock* is a ruthless attack on the Vietnam War. The action takes place through disjointed episodes, and vigorous rock music and dance. *MacBird* is a merciless parody of Macbeth. Lyndon Johnson is the central character, John Kennedy is a modern Duncan, and Bobby Kennedy is Macduff. *Dynamite Tonite* is an actor's opera, using the tango and the waltz. It deals with a stark truth of how belligerent nations resolve their quarrels with human lives. The plays created controversy among the critics but they were enthusiastically received by the young people. Robert Brustein acclaimed them as a sign of the formation of "the third theatre." The plays by no means please the spectators: they disturb the people while they please the disciples of Artaud. Their message is not conveyed through verbal but through physical movement, dancing and sound.

Joseph Chaikin's "The Open Theatre" presented Jean-Claude van Itallie's most controversial work called *America Hurrah!* which consists of three one-act plays. *Motel*, a part of *America Hurrah*, was originally produced at the Cafe La Mama in 1965. In a motel room a Mother-Keeper doll comes up. Like the other two dolls in this play, she is larger than human life-size, and, of course, she is worked by an actor inside. She walks like a doll or rather like a machine. The Mother-Keeper doll's voice is heard in a continuous monologue and is being tape-recorded. She speaks alone in a tape-recorded voice:

"I am old, I am an old idea: the wall; that from which it springs forth...I have been rooms of marble and rooms of cork, all letting forth an avalanche.  
Rooms of mud and rooms of silk...I am this room."<sup>23</sup>

Here, the doll indicates that the room represents the preconditioned society of America.

22) Harold Clurman: "Performing Arts" in *Harper's* Feb. 1971. p. 34

23) Jean-Claude van Itallie: *Motel* included in *The Best Plays of 1966-1967*. Dodd, Mead & Co. N. Y. 1967

Doors at the back room open, and the man and woman dolls are passing through. Eventually they enter. The man doll enters carrying a suitcase. They are perhaps newlyweds on their honeymoon. The couple start tearing everything apart. The man doll casually tears pages out of the Bible. Meanwhile, objects keep flying in from the bathroom. The couple speak nothing throughout the play. The man pulls off her negligee and hugs and kisses her, a mechanic love-making. The couple knock off the head of the Mother Doll. The dolls scribble men's-room-type obscenities on the wall, then the male sex organ. As they proceed with the destructive spree, blinding lights coruscate in the audience's faces, and a shrill siren and deafening and discordant sound, obviously the symbol of the American civilization, fills the auditorium. *Motel* is an exposure of the American environment. It is a terrific experience through the aural and visual assault on our senses. Spoken words, though they are uttered in tape-recorded voice, are only meaningful in relation to that particular experience.

Gerzy Grotowski, director of the Polish Laboratory Theatre, landed on the American scene with his peculiar method of directing and training. He was only an eight-year-old boy during the Nazi occupation of his country. He learned the world of concentration camp as much as Jan Kott did. The prosecutors and the captives are tied together in mutual horror. Either side is cruel: all are guilty as they are innocent. Human salvation is wrought from suffering. Grotowski states that "we found that the theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costumes and scenography, without a separate performance art, without lighting and sound effects, etc. . . . This synthetic theatre is the contemporary theatre. . . . the one thing the stage cannot live without is the actor-spectator relationship of perpetual, direct, live communion."<sup>24</sup> By saying so, Grotowski clearly indicates the emergence of "Total Theatre". The Classic Greek Theatre was the total theatre and so is Japanese Kabuki and No drama. The traditional Korean folk and mask drama was in a sense a total theatre. Many of the American stage directors were interested in his view and have participated in his teaching class. As for acting, he says that the actor has to struggle against his impulses to act as he thinks he should, to do what he believes is natural.

24) Richard Gilman: *Common and Uncommon Masks*. p. 167

*The Serpent*, directed by Joseph Chaikin and Robert Sklar, with a “scenario” by Jean-Claude van Itallie, is a starting point from which “the new theatre”, armed with the principle of the total theatre, the final goal for both Artaud and Grotowski, can emerge. The serpent is not one but many. The story is based on the book of Genesis, the story of the Garden of Eden and the man’s first murder involving of Cain and Abel. At first a writhing thicket of knees and elbows, producing apples in large and seductive arcs of the arm, it transforms into a pyramid of bodies. Legs and elbows sway; tongues flicker in counterpoint to words etched in silence.

Serpent 1 : It may be.

Serpent 2 : It may be that no garden.

Serpent 5 : Is better than this one.

Serpent 5 : This garden.

Serpent 4 : It may be.

Serpent 2 : But you won’t know.

Serpent 1 : You can’t know until you eat.

Serpent 2 : How could you know.<sup>25</sup>

Actors perform with sounds that are not words. The sensation of *The Serpent* lies in its consistency as primitive ritual. The actors spent eight long months to experiment, to act as they thought they should, without following the dialogue pre-suggested in the text.

Van Itallie describes the scene of ritual in *The Serpent* :

“After a few minutes the actors begin to move around the theatre in a procession . . . . The players don’t use their voices, but they explore every other sound that can be made by the human body—slapping oneself, pounding one’s chest, etc. The procession appears to be one of the medieval mummers, and sounds like skeletons on the move. All at once all stop in a freeze. This happens three times during the procession.

During a freeze each actor portrays one of the various motifs from the play such as : the sheep, the serpent, the president’s wife’s reaching gesture, Adam’s movement, Cain’s waiting for movement, Eve’s movement, the heron, and the old people.”<sup>26</sup>

This description of the scene was written after a long talk with actors and after watching their experiment. It was not prearranged: it was a cooperative work among the

25) John Lahn: “The Open Theatre: Beyond the Absurd.” *Evergreen*, May 1969. p. 63

26) *Ibid.*



actors, the director and the playwright. As for the minor role of language, van Itallie had this to say:

“In *The Serpent* there is a great deal of incantation, because there is no confrontation between one human being and another in a direct way. The problem with Adam and Eve was, how do you get them to speak. The moment you have actor and actress open their mouths in a naturalistic fashion, you’ve lost their mythic potential. How do godlike figures speak. How do images which are larger than life speak. The sound has to carry a lot of grandeur or extend a stage image.”<sup>27</sup>

As Grotowski urged, there are no costumes in this play. The characters are barefoot. Percussive and sometimes flutelike sounds are used. The play, though the Kennedy assassination is vehemently indicted, moves towards ritual. The intention of *The Serpent*, if we quote from John Lahr’s words, “is the dynamic of myth, to let go the past, with its truths, its goals, its dogmas of meaning and its gifts: to die to the world and to come to birth from within.”<sup>28</sup>

It is apparent that the American theatre in sixties was moving towards formation of “the new theatre” nurtured by a violent and yet mythic idea of the total theatre. The output of the new plays was enormous in number and form. And most of these plays were written and produced by the young theatre people. The off-off-Broadway came into being to accommodate the ever-increasing number of the productions. As part of her cultural heritage, the American theatre cherishes diversity as its distinctive trace. Allan Kaprow invented the word “happening” to insist a new form of theatrical experimentation. While plays are still prearranged, a Happening is generated in action. A group of young players pop up in the street of New York and draw street walkers as their audience. Everywhere can be their stage. It is a guerrilla theatre. Some players, notably the members of The Performance Group under the direction of Richard Scheckner break down the line which separates between stage and auditorium. Audience in the sort of performance is bound to participate in action together with the players. Scheckner calls his theatre the environment theatre. All in all, they are trying to find out and fix a new kind of theatre.

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27) Ibid. p. 65

28) Ibid. p. 68

Story-telling, which has been thought the primary human instinct, is gone. The young artists were eager to grapple a new kind of theatre form which pictures their particular society and nurtures people's dream. Never before has the American theatre embraced such a vast number of playhouses and theatre people as now. Edward Albee had this to say:

"I think every other person I see in Greenwich Village is a playwright: they all have play scripts under their arms. They may have always been around, but perhaps the environment of the past five or ten years has been such that they have suddenly emerged: perhaps the good soil produced them automatically."<sup>29</sup>

In the good soil, there are hundreds of playhouses which intend to cultivate all sorts of plants in the theatre. In the past, the audience of the American theatre was well regimented: the audience were to share everything together so far as the theatre was concerned. However, it's audience have become gradually segmented as the society itself becomes rapidly segmented. The audience make it a habit to visit their own theatre. In a line of the experimental theatre, there were also a special theatre whose main concern is directed to produce protest plays, or to voice the black experience. Le Roi Jones bluntly declares:

"We will scream and cry, murder, run through the streets in agony, if it means some soul will be moved, moved to actual life of what the world is and what it ought to be."<sup>30</sup>

A considerable number of the black theatres came into sight and started drawing the black people. Nevertheless, such a politically oriented theatre, which once seemed daring and creative, now often seems tiresome. As Robert Brustein points out, "stereotyped political assertions, encouraged by easy audience acceptance, have replaced instinctive, individualized dissent; and the complex moral and metaphysical issues of great art are being obliterated by a simple-minded nihilism that reduces everything to zero."<sup>31</sup> The American theatre has the danger Brustein refers to. The works of most of the young playwrights were comparatively short though they had plausible insights. They have

29) Edward Albee: "Interview", *The American Theatre Forum Lectures*, 1967 p.129

30) Le Roi Jones: "Black Theatre", *Evergreen* Aug. 1969. p. 55

31) Robert Brustein: *The Third Theatre*, Simon Schuster, 1970. xii

short breath and flash momentarily. However, in spite of many worries and potential dangers, a strong current towards the formation of the new theatre was visible through the Open Theatre, Richard Schechner's performance Group which produced a sensational play called *Dionysus in '69*, and some play in Ellen Stewart's *Cafe La Mama Theatre*. They have moved away a great distance from the traditional "picture stage," and they try to find different kinds of images, to forge a new relationship between the stage object and the audience. A new form of theatre, which might fix not only the American theatre but also human theatre in its place, was in the stage of experimentation. The young American theatre artists were determined to change the theatre of the past, and to grasp the new theatre which eventually would give them the most universal form of human communication, whether it was called the total theatre or the environmental theatre.

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