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THEA 3050

18 Oct. 2016

*Analysis on The Dramatic Imagination*

One of the foremost designers of theatre, Robert Edmond Jones, wrote a book giving a chance for theatre practitioners to read into his concepts of how theatre design should be handled. This book is titled *The Dramatic Imagination*. In his first chapter entitled, "Art in the Theatre," he states that a set on stage should not be merely a background, but should be an environment. The actors act in this setting and live in the environment created by the designer (20). As a designer, I believe this whole heartedly. The design of a show is supposed to support a story and not inhibit the show from moving forward. The designers are really co-conspirators to the director's overall vision and Jones goes into how a director should treat the actors in the same chapter. After all, theatre is nothing but art. Jones says the director should not impose his ideas on the actors, but make sure to energize them to do their best work onstage (36). I feel this also relates to the designers of a show as well. Jones does not state this, but the same notion of energizing a show's designers should be enacted. If a director has no true vision of what they want, then the show's designers have no fuel for their designs. There is no reason for the magic because it has not been truly asked for. One of the things I did not enjoy about the book were some of the outdated opinions of people and theatre. Jones mentions in the chapter, "The Theatre as It Was and as It Is," that people do not believe in ghosts anymore or they say they do not (53). This statement seems so vague and untrue because theatre utilizes

ghosts so much to tell stories. Think of the classic, *A Christmas Carol*, which utilizes ghosts to tell the entire story. Also, he mentions that people do not go to the theatre to hear a beautiful voice, but they go to the opera instead for this satisfaction (56). I can think of many good voices in musical theatre that people would go just to hear their voices. Jones does finally redeem himself by saying, "Truth in the Theatre, as the masters of the theatre have always known, stands above and beyond mere accuracy to fact" (82). Being a designer, I believe this statement truly relates to design as we might want to portray true events or a true setting. Theatre acts as close to fact as it can in regards to setting and gives an environment for people to live in. Robert Edmond Jones goes through all elements of design including costuming, and his main point in costuming is how the costume is a creation of the theatre and does not have a life outside of the theatre. The costume would "die as a plant dies when uprooted" (90). As a lighting designer myself, I felt Jones chapter on lighting was quite vague and danced around how we use lighting to support the story and add to the magic of a show. In regards to how we handle lighting, he says, "There are no arbitrary rules. There is only a goal and a promise" (130). This is true when it comes to expressing a design to a director because a lighting designer never truly knows how something will work until they are in the space. They have their goals in mind and can only hope to achieve it.

Work Cited

Jones, Robert Edmond. *The Dramatic Imagination: Reflections and Speculations on the Art of the Theatre*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.