Understading Robert Edmond Jones’ Towards A New Theater Essay, Research Paper

In the second chapter of his book “Towards a New Theatre”, Robert Edmond Jones explains the loss of art in American theatre. Although American theatre puts on the best show, has beautiful sets, and can do a good job “faking it”, what we [as American actors] are practicing is far from what theatre should be. Drama is all around us, Jones comments, but not in the theatre. Today’s theatre is missing life and is terribly out of date, years behind our times. He attributes this lack of zest partially to our clinging to the realistic approach to the theatre that has kept us backward and shows our lack of vitality and creativity. Jones stresses that today’s theatre needs to get back to creating life. The problem with this, he points out, is that “it takes life to create life in the theatre,” and people today do not experience anything in life, they only learn about them and mimic. He emphasizes that to do theatre “correctly” we must use our hearts not our heads, our emotions and not our reason for there is not logic in the theatre. Another contributor to downfall of theatre today is that today’s plays are not public art, they are remaining anyone but the audiences business. Theatre is for the audience, performed to please the biggest and most important critics. The theatre of the future will arouse and dominate the audience. Jones last thought called us to dream big, to follow those dreams, and to fall back in love with the art of theatre.

Maybe I have not seen enough productions or been involved with the theatre long enough to pinpoint all these “problems” that Jones makes known. As far as American theatre losing its’ “life” and being behind the times, I cannot see how theatre can possibly keep up with the times. Yes, the plot lines will change, the forms might change, but the emotions and behavior will remain the same because human nature remains the same. Of course certain actors portray those emotions in different ways, for example grief would be shown differently depending on the play, but the emotion itself will remain the same. So when Jones says that today’s theatre has not changed and we must start anew, I cannot see where he is coming from. Perhaps its’ just my shortsightedness and fear to let go of realism that makes me feel this way; I think Jones would agree. I do empathize with Jones’ statement that today’s theatre has lost its’ focus on its biggest critics and the reason to why theatre has survived, the audience. I do believe that sometimes today’s theatre tries to be so clever and different that audiences just do not understand. So instead of playing for the audience actors and actresses, directors and playwrights play for themselves and keep what should be a public art private from the audience. If the audience does not understand or has not felt then what is the purpose? The solution to this problem, Jones suggests, is to use your heart and emotions in the theatre, not logic and reason. I would love to just accept this for what it is worth, but this statement is so unrealistic. I believe we should use our logic and reason to tap into our hearts and emotions so that what the audience sees is not our cleverness, but our sincerity and passion. Without the two, an actor can have neither. The heart and head must work together, to bridge that already fine line between the two. For example, one cannot accurately portray the playwright’s intent without reasoning what exactly the author’s intent is. Nor can one communicate that to the audience without emotion, a heart-link between the two participants. Overall Jones’ overall theme challenged me not to just accept what is going on in theatre, but to dream big and aim to transform it.