

A 33 Point Manifesto of Not Theatre

Thirty three declarations on theatre, ethics, storytelling and community

as explored in The Book of Not Theatre by Anton Bonnici

1. The purpose of theatre and the quality of theatre are intertwined and cannot be separated.
2. Before story, spectacle or commentary, there are people meeting each other. Theatre begins with the live encounter. We do theatre to meet each other, to see each other, to hear each other, and to experience something together. Theatre gathers people together to have an embodied creative experience. This gathering is its most radical possibility.
3. When the experience is split with the expert on one side and the non-experts on the other, theatre loses its transformative and connective opportunity. A theatre that criticises hierarchy while reproducing hierarchy in its own structures risks practising the very world it claims to oppose.
4. Theatre has become the Theatre in Everything, reproducing as set of 7 misbeliefs that give rise to the Competition Algorithm. The Competition Algorithm has entered every facet of our lives; we are trained to compete for value, recognition and the stage in every environment and for every essential need.
5. Reject the lie that we need privileged leaders who must be winners.
6. Reject the lie that everyone else is a loser and must be a follower or a threat.
7. Reject the lie that love and kindness are a private panacea that give meaning to the lives of losers.
8. Reject the lie that only facts and knowledge are strength, whereas faith and doubt, are weaknesses.
9. Reject the lie that the winners deserve to own the planet with everything and everyone on it.
10. Reject the lie that we are all inherently free to think and decide and all our actions are willful, thus all of this is justified and legitimate.
11. Reject the final lie that all of this is natural and thus since ever and forever and maybe even 'good'.
12. These misbeliefs survive because we keep performing them into being. What is performed into being can be performed otherwise. We need to recognize that the world we are living in is a world we are performing into existence, and we can perform another one if we organize ourselves enough.
13. As artists we cannot work for success and recognition in an unethical world whilst also hoping to dismantle it. We need to get over the dream of 'making it' in this world if we are to lead an ethical existence.
14. The 'good' in a good work of art is only an aesthetic 'good', it is not, in any way, a moral 'good'. Our aesthetics are completely dissociated from our ethics.
15. Our action must be ethical before it becomes an aesthetic. Ethics must begin to determine what we call beautiful, successful and good. Ethics before Aesthetics.
16. Ask of every work: What was destroyed for you to be entertained? Places? Lives? Worlds? A masterpiece cannot justify the suffering required to make it, no matter its beauty, grandeur or technical achievement.
17. This is not about individual blame. This isn't even about intentions. This is about the core values of the structures we operate in. We need to move from operating in the Competition Algorithm to the Collaborative Algorithm.
18. We need 7 ethical beliefs to counter the 7 misbeliefs; a set of beliefs that are not founded on how true or not these beliefs could be but on how ethical the world would become if we all practiced them. These are the ethical beliefs that form the core of the Collaborative Algorithm.
19. Ethical Belief 1: We do not need privileged leaders who are winners. We need humble leaders that lead off stage.
20. Ethical Belief 2: There are no losers. Everyone finds dignity and purpose in community.

21. Ethical Belief 3: Romantic Love is not the most important love. Love shared in community is the real foundation of human life and meaning.
22. Ethical Belief 4: Doubt and faith are as important as certainty and knowledge. We must defeat the fear of saying "I don't know."
23. Ethical Belief 5: The planet is never a prize, it cannot be owned, exploited and destroyed. Its fruits must remain for future generations.
24. Ethical Belief 6: We must accept that we are not as in control of ourselves as much as we think we are, becoming more forgiving and more aware.
25. Ethical Belief 7: Everything in existence is natural including change. All human behaviour is natural and all human behaviour can change.
26. These ethical beliefs need to be transmitted, explored and turned into practice to change our reality. This is why we need community and why we need storytellers in community. A different reality requires conditions we create together that emerge from new stories.
27. The focus needs to be on the storyteller and their presence in community instead of on the story. The right story emerges from the storyteller already doing the work.
28. The ethical storyteller has Faith in the possibility of a safe Community that strives perpetually for the growth of our shared Awareness, Love and Freedom. What if community, love, awareness, freedom are all only possible if we have faith in them? Sometimes only a leap of faith makes another way of living imaginable.
29. We cannot start living in a new world if we keep writing the stories of the old one. Stories must stop reproducing without criticism the misbeliefs we wish to escape. To be an ethical storyteller means to know what not to write about even more than what to write about - and this also means to struggle to live an ethical life on paper as much as in their everyday activities.
30. We need to overcome our cowardice and convert the rich. We need to stop being afraid of living in contradiction, embrace the complexity of our situation and wave our idealistic flags without hesitation. This involves building relationships and converting to our cause the rich amongst us. We need the courage to show the billionaires and millionaires their significance in all of this and how the only possible ethical future might be the one where they give up their privilege and wealth for the sake of community.
31. We need to strive for awareness, freedom and love as never-ending struggles that push us forward through the collapse of the current civilization into the next.
32. We need to replace the theatre company with the Not Theatre Community, making collaboration and compassion its central truths instead of competition and exploitation. In a Not Theatre Community everyone is the artist, the storyteller, the performer and the audience all at once. The objective remains the life of the community itself.
33. And maybe, someday, we may move away from the stage, break the cycle of competition for the spotlight, dissolve the dichotomy and dance around the fire at the dawn of a new world - with faith in community, awareness, freedom and love.

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