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THE PLAY

Actor-illusionist-inventor and NYTW Usual Suspect Geoff Sobelle's "virtuosic" New York Times Critics Pick *The Object Lesson* comes to NYTW for a strictly limited engagement.

This tactile installation turns the theatre into a storage facility of gargantuan proportion where audiences are free to roam and sift through the clutter. Sobelle transforms this makeshift attic into a space of reflection and wonder as he unpacks our relationship to everyday objects: breaking, buying, finding, fixing, giving, losing, winning, trading, selling, stealing, storing, collecting, cluttering, clearing, packing up, passing on, buried under... a world of things.

The Object Lesson is a meditation on the stuff we cling to and the crap we leave behind.

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Jan 31, 2017 -
March 19, 2017



THE OBJECT LESSON

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SCENIC INSTALLATION

When walking into the theatre you will notice that the space created for *The Object Lesson* looks different from a conventional theatrical set. The creative team describes the “set” in this case as a “scenic installation.” Designed to resemble that room, attic or closet that some of us have in our homes, this installation is filled with boxes of the types of objects we collect throughout our lifetimes. The scenic installation was designed by Steven Dufala. Some samples of Dufala’s other works:

Heap, 2011



Wood Pile House, 2015



Photos by Steven Dufala & Billy Blaise Dufala

The Object Lesson’s unique installation turns NYTW into a huge storage facility where audiences are free to roam and sift through the clutter. The interactive design creates the perfect space for an immersive experience. Upon entering the theatre you will be encouraged to explore, open boxes, and interact with others. Every box holds a new surprise that will appeal to your senses of touch, sight, and smell. As you explore, you will also notice that there are no traditional theatre chairs in the space. Discovering where and how to sit in the space will be part of your interaction and part of the fun!



Photos Joan Marcus

Finally, engaging with the scenic installation is just one of the many interactive and immersive qualities of this play. Throughout the show, Sobelle also includes the audience in elements of his performance. What does he do and how does he do it? You will find out during the show!

THEME SNAPSHOT: OBJECTS AND MEMORY

"It's a meditation on our relationship to things, and to objects and stuff." – Geoff Sobelle

Objects surround us at almost every moment of our lives: from the technology we use, to the furniture we sit on, to the clothes we wear. Their impact ranges from the practical to the sentimental, from the mundane to the decorative, and from the essential to the useless. *The Object Lesson* brings attention to our relationship with the stuff around us. We all own different things and develop unique relationships to them. For example, many of us own a cell phone. For some of us a cell phone is central to our way of life and to how we engage with the world, but for others cell phones are simply used to make and receive calls. Because of these unique relationships, many objects transcend their physical qualities and become rooted in our emotional experiences and memories. In *The Object Lesson* Sobelle asks us:

- Why do we keep some objects and discard others?
- What memories do we attach to our stuff?
- What value do we place on the items we have?

A LESSON IN OBJECTS



Observing objects with a fresh perspective—examining relationships with and between them, and imaginatively using and speaking about them—allows us to begin to unlock how they can enrich theatrical storytelling, both as points of inspiration and during the performance. Since Sobelle's performance hinges on how we interact with objects and how they can be used to tell stories, we thought it would be great for you to engage with these same questions before you see the show. The exercises below aim to engage you in active exploration of the physical and emotional properties of objects through performance and writing.



Photos Joan Marcus

Observing an Object

- Using an object of your choosing, observe the object as if you have had not seen it before – you have no idea what it is. Feel it, look at it, see if it makes any noise, etc. Examine the object's line, form, value, space, color and texture.
- How might you be able to use this object? Remember, you have no idea how this object is used.

Naming Objects

- Walking around the room, point to and name objects that you see (e.g., picture, frame, window, wall, etc.).
- Continue to walk around the room, but now give each object you point to a new name, the name of a different object (e.g., pencil --> chocolate; window --> flip-flop...).
- Continue to walk around the room, but now assign each object you point to with an emotional quality — the emotion or feeling that you associate with the object (e.g., pencil --> fear; window --> joy ...).

Transforming Objects

- Using an object of your choosing, think of creative ways in which you could transform the object. The ways in which you transform the object do not have to be realistic; think beyond actions normally associated with the object. For instance, a scarf could become a hat, a snake or a pool of water.
- Utilizing three or more different transformations of your object, create a 30-90 second performance piece.
- When everyone is finished creating their pieces, share them with the class.

The Life of an Object

- Find an object that does not belong to you.
- Begin to ask questions of the object, imagining how the object might answer. For example: Who may have owned it? What was it used for? When did it live? How did it speak? What is it worth?
- Write a profile of this object.

Imagined Object Story

- Choose an object that has personal significance to you.
- Get into pairs.
- Switch objects with a partner.
- Come up a fictional story about your partner's object and tell it to them.
- Switch objects again and tell the actual story of your own object.
- What differences and similarities did you encounter in your stories about the objects?

Object Monologue

- Choose an object that has personal significance to you.
- Find a partner and interview each other. Ask questions like: What's the story of your object? Why is it important to you? Are there any specific memories attached to it?
- Write a monologue from the point of view of your partner's object using the information your partner provided. In the monologue, the object should be speaking to your partner and have a specific want or need.
- When you are both finished, share your monologues with each other.

Categorizing Objects

- As a group, gather a number of objects of different sizes, shapes, colors, etc.
- Discuss the different ways in which you could categorize the objects. For instance, maybe they can be sorted by color, shape, and function. Perhaps they could be sorted by something suggested rather than factual, such as the objects' apparent use, year of invention, country of origin or how old they might be.

Physical and Verbal Storytelling Inspired by Objects

- Choose an object that has personal significance to you.
- Create a minute-long movement piece that tells the story of why that object is important to you without using any words. You could act out a memory that you associate with the object, the story of how you got it, or anything that comes to mind when you think of the object's significance for you.
- In a variation, you could add words to your story or interact with others to add characters.
- When everyone is finished creating their pieces, share them with the class.

GLOSSARY

Actor neutral (*term*) - a base state for actors in which they have no physical or emotional pretense.

Amalgamation (*noun*) - the action, process, or result of combining or uniting.

Burlesque (*noun*) - an absurd or comically exaggerated imitation of something, especially in a literary or dramatic work; a parody.

Commedia dell'arte (*noun*) - a style that first emerged in the 1500s in Italy and remained popular until the 1700s, featuring stock characters who wore masks. They were highly physical and also had a knack for improvisation.

Devised (*verb*) - invented, imagined, or conceived; formed from new combinations and uses of ideas and principles.

Immersive theatre (*term*) - a form of theatre in which the audience members are not merely passive bystanders; they are part of the story, however small their role may be, and they are in the middle of the action.

Installation (*noun*) - a work of art that usually consists of multiple components, often in mixed media, and that is exhibited in a large space in an arrangement specified by the artist.

Interactive theatre (*term*) - a form of theatre characterized by an active, physical relationship between audience and production; it often times incorporates a site-specific venue around which the audience is free to roam.

Jeu (*noun*) - a French word that translates to game, play, or acting.

Meditation (*noun*) - a written or spoken discourse expressing considered thoughts on a subject.

Monologue (*noun*) - a long speech of text performed by one actor.

Object lesson (*term*) - an example from real life that teaches a lesson or explains something (typically a principle or abstract idea).

Renegade (*noun*) - a person who rejects tradition.

GLOSSARY CONTINUED

Site-specific theatre (*term*) - theatre work created to exist in a certain place; typically, the artist takes the location into account while planning and creating the work.

Sublime (*adjective*) - of such excellence, grandeur, or beauty as to inspire great admiration or awe.

Transcend (*verb*) - to be or go beyond the range or limits of; usually refers to something abstract, typically a conceptual field or division.

Vaudeville (*noun*) - a type of entertainment popular chiefly in the US in the early 20th century, featuring a mixture of specialty acts such as burlesque comedy and song and dance.

Virtuosic (*adjective*) - relating to a person who has special knowledge or skill in a field.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS



1. How does who we are shape what we have? Vice versa, how does what we have shape who we are?
2. How do memories influence your relationship to objects? Vice Versa, do objects influence your memories?
3. How does immersive and interactive theatre shape our understanding of stories? In what ways is it different or similar from traditional theatre?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



On the Web

- NYTW's The Brief: briefnytw.tumblr.com
- Geoff Sobelle's Website: <http://www.geoffsobelle.com>
- The Dufala Brothers' Website: <http://www.dufalabrothers.com>
- Ecolé de Jacques Lecoq Website: <http://www.ecole-jacqueslecoq.com/en>

Books/Articles

- *Out of 'The Object Lesson,' an Education in the Power of Kept Things* (NPR) by Arun Rath (2015)
- *In a Jungle of Boxes, Terrors of a Psychic Spring Cleaning* by Ben Brantley (2014)
- *It Chooses You* by Miranda July (2012)
- *Theatre of Movement and Gesture* by Jacques Lecoq (2006)
- *The Moving Body* by Jacques Lecoq (2000)

THEATRE ETIQUETTE

We look forward to having you at NYTW. During the show you'll be playing the role of an audience member. Remember that you're important! Although you don't have any written lines, you are just as much a part of the play as the actors or crew. The actors can see and hear you just as you can see and hear them. In order to make the performance the best it can be remember the following:

- Punctuality** Arrive twenty minutes early. As soon as you enter the space the show has begun and this will give you plenty of time to explore.
- Restrooms** Go before the show. There is no intermission. **There's no re-entry if you leave during the performance** and you don't want to miss out!
- Technology** Turn off all electronics, including your cell phone. **ABSOLUTELY NO PHOTOS OR VIDEOS CAN BE TAKEN IN THE THEATRE.** Production photos from the show will be on our website! Also, be sure to connect with us through social media after the play!
- Refreshments** Food and drinks are not allowed in the theatre. Make sure you eat before the show. Stay hydrated and healthy but remember that your job during the performance is to stay focused.
- During the show** We invite you to look, touch and explore the space. Feel free to move around during the performance, and follow the action as it unfolds around you, but please be mindful of other people. There will be no designated, individual reserved seats. Don't worry, there will be plenty of seating in a variety of different shapes and sizes.
- Etiquette** Walk, don't run in the theatre. Try not to talk, whisper, sing or hum. Keep your hands and feet to yourself. Focus on the play - listen and watch – that way no one will be distracted listening to and watching you. We don't want anyone to miss any of the action!

We're so glad that you will be part of our audience! Enjoy the show!

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