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Sparks

When I still had an office beyond a corner of my bedroom, there was a quote tacked to the wall over my desk. Jig Cook. 1918. Several of the Provincetown Players were fighting the war in Europe, and he mused on the necessity of theater. “One faculty,” he says, “is going to be of vast importance to the half-destroyed world—indispensable for its rebuilding—the faculty of creative imagination...The social justification which we feel to be valid now for makers and players of plays is that they shall keep alive in the world the light of imagination. Without it the wreck of the world that was cannot be cleared away and the new world shaped.”

I love excavating history through the lens of theater because it's never really about rehashing the facts so much as it is about asking us who we are today and challenging us to measure ourselves against the people who came before us. Or our choices against theirs. Now I drift along through the days and days, and days and days. And days and days. But what is fascinating to me is that time hasn't seemed to move. We are stuck in a present. I find that one great difficulty I am having in this loop is that we don't know how or when it will end. Or how many times it will happen again. Our work as dramaturgs involves demanding a better future, but we are adrift in a constant present. I will stand and scream to the wind or my cat or my kid that the not-for-profit, inhumane, uncollaborative, racist, patriarchal theater making model has been in a death spiral for years. But does that matter now? How can we focus on the future when we are stuck in the present? And when so many current artistic leaders and boards and presidents and conservatives and and and think the past is worth trying to recreate? Let it be cleared away.

I can't focus, but I can dream. I can dream that the timid steps we had been making towards inclusion and equity will become leaps over the wreck. I can dream that people like us who ask questions will rise and that we will break out of the mire of declarative leadership we were in. I can dream that those of us whose live by the principles of observation and collaboration will be heard. I can dream that it will be joyous to be in rooms together again when we feel safe. I can dream that it will be joyous.

When the new world is shaped, our relationship to the past and present and future will be changed. We won't know where we are yet. We will have to find new bearings. But I hope we will emerge looking for joy, and then we will create joy. And then we will rest. And then we will create more joy.