THIRD THEATRE

Here Eugenio Barba formulates the idea of a Third Theatre. Marginality, auto-didactism, the existential and ethical dimension of the craft and a new social vocation seem for him to be the fundamental characteristics of a reality composed of groups who associate themselves neither with traditional nor with avant-guard theatre.

This brief text was intended as an internal document for the participants of the International Encounter on Theatre Research, directed by Barba, during BITEF/Theatre of Nations, Belgrade 1976. However, it quickly assumed the value of a manifesto, becoming a reference point for many groups in Europe and Latin America.

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A theatrical archipelago has been forming during the past few years in several countries. Almost unknown, it is rarely subject to reflection, it is not presented at festivals and critics do not write about it.

It seems to constitute the anonymous extreme of the theatres recognised by the world of culture: on the one hand, the institutionalised theatre, protected and subsidised because of the cultural values that it seems to transmit, appearing as a living image of a creative confrontation with the texts of the past and the present, or even as a "noble" version of the entertainment business; on the other hand, the avant-garde theatre, experimenting, researching, arduous or iconoclastic, a theatre of changes, in search of a new originality, defended in the name of the necessity to transcend tradition, and open to novelty in the artistic field and within society.

The Third Theatre lives on the fringe, often outside or on the outskirts of the centres and capitals of culture. It is a theatre created by people who define themselves as actors, directors, theatre workers, although they have seldom undergone a traditional theatrical education and therefore are not recognised as professionals.

But they are not amateurs. Their entire day is filled with theatrical experience, sometimes by what they call training, or by the preparation of performances for which they must fight to find spectators.

According to traditional theatre standards, the phenomenon might seem insignificant. But from a sociological point of view, the Third Theatre provides food for thought.

Like islands without contact between themselves, young people in Europe, North and South America, Australia and Asia gather to form theatre groups, determined to survive.

But these groups can only survive on one of two conditions: either by entering the circle of established theatre, accepting the laws of supply and demand, conforming to fashionable tastes, giving way to the preferences of political and
cultural ideologists, and adapting themselves to the latest acclaimed results; or by succeeding through continuous work to find their own space, seeking what for them is essential and trying to oblige others to respect this diversity.

Perhaps it is here, in this Third Theatre, that, beyond the \textit{a posteriori} motivations, one can see what constitutes the living matter of the theatre, a remote meaning which attracts new energies to it and which, in spite of everything, keeps it alive in our society.

Different people, in different parts of the world, experience theatre as a bridge, constantly threatened, between the affirmation of their personal needs, and the necessity of extending them into the surrounding reality.

Why do they choose the theatre in particular as a means of change, when we are well aware that other factors determine the reality in which we live? Is it a question of blindness, of self-delusion?

Perhaps for them, theatre is a means to find their own way of being present - which the critics would call "new expressive forms" - and seeking more human relationships with the purpose of creating a social cell in which intentions, aspirations and personal needs begin to be transformed into actions.

The abstract divisions, made arbitrarily and instituted from on high - various schools, styles, tendencies and other labels which bring order to the recognised theatres - can be of no use here. It is not the styles or the expressive tendencies that count. What seems to characterise the Third Theatre, what appears as a common denominator among such different groups and experiences, is a tension that is difficult to define. It is as if the personal needs - ideals, fears, multiple impulses which would otherwise remain more or less obscure - wanted to be transformed into work, according to an attitude which from the outside is justified as an ethical imperative, not limited to the profession only, but extending through the whole of daily life. But, in the end, these groups are the first to pay the price for their choice.

One cannot dream only in the future, waiting for a total change which seems farther away at each step we take, and which nevertheless gives free rein to alibis and compromises, and to the impotence of waiting.

One wants a new cell to be formed immediately, but without isolating oneself in it.

This is the paradox of the Third Theatre: to submerge oneself, as a group, in the universe of fiction in order to find the courage not to pretend.