

International Theatre Institute ITI

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Maurice Béjart 1972

For me, the word "Theatre" is synonymous with Union.

Much has been said about this union, this "communion" between actor and spectator, and one of the major problems which has faced men of the theatre in recent decades has been the need to abolish this barrier, this pit, these footlights, whether they be real or imaginary, which separates the "one who looks" from the "one who is looked at."

Which actor has not at one time deeply suffered from this form of racialism, which separates the man sitting there in the dark, clad in his everyday clothes from himself, disguised, and bathed in light.

How can this be abolished, how can this union be found and achieved?

I believe the solution of the problem is to be found elsewhere.

One day, when I was miserable and the whole of humanity seemed remote and hostile, a friend to whom I confided my troubles said to me, "How can you expect to be at peace with others, when you are not in peace with yourself?"

How then, is it possible for the actor to establish this union with the audience if the various parts of his being that intimate fusion of heart and body, mind and muscles, that total language where the hand is a sign, where the torso dances and speech remains one of the instruments of that full orchestra which is a human being. The actor whose thought is reflected in the tip of his toes and whose breath passes through his spine whose vocal cords once again become a harp serving his whole body, which no longer knows division.

At the beginning of the century, Serge Diaghilev, whose centenary we are celebrating at the present time, caused an upheaval in the world of theatre by presenting works which brought together the greatest painters, writers, choreographers and composers in a common effort; and, following his example, we have all sought after that famous "total theatre" where song is an extension of dance, where sculpture rivals the kinematics arts, where the whole spectrum of existing technical means is summoned for one great presentation.

Are we not mistaken?

To bring together is necessarily to unite. The essence of theatre is the actor, because everything else decor, costumes, even the text can be done away with, everything except the actor.

So, let him stop being a talking machine. Let him remember that in our villages the round dances formerly expressed the union of song and dance, let him be the sculptor of his body, the painter of his emotions, the priest at his sacrifice, let him forget "Doing" in favor of "Being."

When like the new Zarathustra he shall be ready to dance off into the air, stripped to the essentials, he will then become "he who looks at him," the spectator and, as interpreter of his aspirations he will translate the movements of his inner life.

This frontier which separates us from the audience will not be broken down as long as barriers still exist in our own house, and as long as we talk about different sorts of theatre when, obviously, everything leads us towards unity.