

## **International Theatre Institute ITI**

### **World Organization for the Performing Arts**

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### **Martin Esslin 1989**

In the theatre where an audience is confronted with performers who are physically present in the same space and able to react to the audience's own reactions to them, a society, a human community, experiences itself in a unique way : not only are the actors holding a mirror up to that society's way of life and problems, the audience, which, as a collective entity becomes representative of the whole community, can express its reaction, its approval or disapproval, its acceptance or rejection, of the image offered to it of itself.

That is why the theatre plays such an important part in the formation of a society's, a culture's, a country's self-image, its sense of identity and uniqueness: more so perhaps than any other manifestation of that society's mode of being.

The self-image embodied in a country's dramatic literature and its performance styles not only strengthen that society's sense of identity, this image also is an essential element in its visibility to the world at large: hence the immense importance of establishing a regular pattern of intercommunication: by translation and performance of plays from other countries and other cultures, and, above all, also by a lively traffic of theatrical companies and productions visiting other countries and contributing not only to an increased mutual understanding between them, but also to the cross-fertilization of artistic ideas and techniques.

In an age where the world is flooded by a deluge of cheap commercially motivated material on television, the live theatre, the guardian of the traditions and individuality of cultures threatened by this avalanche of homogenized triviality, has become more vital to the continued richness and variety of human culture than ever before in the history of humankind.