

THE EMPTY SPACE AWARDS SPEECH 5/11/13

How often have I had to answer to some idiotic question – ‘We can’t change the world’. Today, I would like to say – ‘Yes, we can change the world.’ But not in the old way that politicians, ideologists or militants try to make us believe. Their business is to tell lies. Theatre is, occasionally, capable of moments of truth.

If we are supremely ambitious and supremely modest, we see that an enormous amount is possible. There is a law of numbers. A tiny group in a tiny space can create something unforgettable. When there are more people, there is more vitality; there can be a vibrant energy. Up to how many are there here today?

Let’s do it! Let’s change the world!

The tribes, the herds of human animals are made to work together.

And yet, as my father told me when I was very young: If there were two people shipwrecked on a desert island, one would be on the right and the other on the left.

In the tiny world of theatre, there are rivalries, hatreds, meanness, fights, but it is perfectly possible to go against the tide. Through a shared aim, shared needs, shared love of a shared result in theatre, from the creation of space.... the coming together of an endlessly repeated climax of shared performance, again and again, something special can appear. Being together, working together, bringing a higgledy-piggledy assortment of haphazardly mixed spectators into a unity called ‘an audience’ makes it possible, for however short a time, for individuals who more than ever are each one in a confused, chaotic world of their own – these worlds can be changed.

Nina found the other day a scrap of paper on which I’d written: ‘Every form of theatre has something in common with a visit to a doctor. On the way out, one must always feel better than on the way in.’

To make a tiny world more hopeful, its courage and confidence renewed is always possible. But only if we return to the struggle together to foresee and transcend division. Every aspect of theatre is collaborative. ‘Co-operation’ is Blanche’s word for today.

If ants, bees and birds can do it, why can’t we?

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