

World Theatre Day Polish Message on 27 March 2022

This is a message for the time of war which is now and a time for peace which will come.

A message for the theatre we know and the theatre we will create.

A message for the world which we must change in order to save it.

A message for life.

When we think “theatre” today, an image of the Donetsk Academic Regional Drama Theatre in Mariupol shattered by missiles flashes before our eyes, with ДЕТИ written in enormous letters outside the building. An image of a theatre-shelter which has not been spared by the atrocity of Putin’s war. Then, we see images of the stage and auditorium of the Maria Zankovetska Dramatic Theatre in Lviv turned into a refugee home. Next, there are images from Polish theatres where people who have escaped violence now live and where intensive action for real help to Ukraine is taking place. Collections, transportation, classes for children, legal and psychological aid, jobs and residencies are being organized. When we think “theatre” today, we also see actors who come out for curtain call holding Ukrainian flags, thus enabling us to express our solidarity, our pain and anger together. We see people gathered in auditoria all over Poland joining us in donation collections every night, and responding with applause to our expressions of solidarity with Ukrainians. We see solemnity, concentration, emotion. We see how intensely the meanings conveyed from the stage transform, how the theatrical experience of community materializes in a real meeting of bodies – here and now.

War allows us to palpably feel that the theatre is a gathering of vulnerable bodies which recognize their interdependence and the strength that comes from their relationship. And vulnerability is what ignites a revolution. Today, in the midst of a most profound crisis, an unbridled desire for change is rising within us.

War is a radical manifestation of the patriarchy. Therefore, the patriarchy must end in order to end wars waged against life. This will happen if we can transcend the logic of domination, power and subjection. When we free ourselves from the vicious spiral of production-consumption-exploitation, when we go beyond the logic of productivity and competition, beyond capitalist-imperialist fantasies of unlimited growth, conquest and violence. War will end when working together for life on Earth becomes the principle of our societies.

It is in the theatre that we can imagine worlds to which we cannot yet give shape in the social reality. It is here that we can project utopias embodied – as long as we do it together. Collaboration is the theatre’s guiding principle, and today the significance of working together is thrown into sharp relief.

The Polish theatre has spontaneously become part of a new model of self-organization – a grassroots network of mindfully practiced interdependency. A new way of welcoming displaced persons, a new kind of neighbourliness. It has become part of a great workshop in the craft of living-together which must include all refugees – those from our railway stations and those from our forests. Questions on the shape of the theatrical institution, on its democratization, subjectification and socialization thus become all the more urgent. War does not nullify earlier problems – rather, it magnifies them and poses new ones.

The theatre as an institution and as an imagined community must become fully open to multitudes: of languages, needs, cultures, bodies, desires. We need to have the courage to think about it in new categories. The theatre at a time of the great movement of peoples and genres is a postnational theatre, a living and direct laboratory of language for a society of the future, for a coming community. It is also a theatre of new rituals. Of mourning and jubilation, anger and joy. The celebration of life.

We need the theatre as a shelter, as a home for us and those who will move in with us.

A shelter for imagination which brings the alternative and creates new languages.

A shelter for values.

A shelter for human and non-human beings – when they want to be together, near, close, body to body, breath to breath, intimate though foreign, here and now – together.

A shelter which is deep under the surface, under the ground which emanates life; a shelter where the earth’s pulse can be heard.

A shelter, that is: a place where people share resources and emotions.

A shelter for humour, which we cannot lose because that would mean we have believed in death.

The theatre in Mariupol has been ruined. We need to rebuild it. Before that happens, let us show Putin and those who follow his orders that the world can see each of their crimes and will judge each one. Let us send a message to the Russian society which must acknowledge the truth and oppose the violence of its state.

Let us place the word ДЕТИ in front of every theatre in Poland and in the world.

Let the cry reverberate across the world: ДЕТИ ДЕТИ ДЕТИ...

Let the criminal hear and understand that he is hurting all of us.

Let Ukraine hear and know that we all stand with her.

Let the world hear and start working on a new future.

Dramatyczny Kolektyw:

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