

## International Theatre Institute ITI

World Organization for the Performing Arts

UNESCO, 1 Rue Miollis, FR-75732 Paris Cedex 15

info@iti-worldwide.org / www.iti-worldwide.org



### Edward Albee 1993

Does the world become a stranger and stranger place as time goes on? I think it does, and I know it appears so to me. All I must figure out is if there is an absolute at work here or simply my altering perception—glimpses of wisdom in tandem with hints of decline. And I daresay that come the time the answers begin to move into focus I will no longer be aware of why I care.

Still, the question nags.

What are we to do, for example to counter stasis, to move us from the still center of two steps forward being the proper response to two steps back? Every time some totalitarianism falls of its own dead weight some burgeoning democracy proves illusory. Each selfless act seems balanced by an equivalent ruthlessness or greed. Have we—(will we ever?)—answer the question of man's real nature: joyous self-master, or willing (even eager,) slave?

We have invented the arts—evolved them if you like—to explain ourselves to ourselves, to bring order and clarity and perhaps even direction to our consciousness. We have also found—discovered that art, to earn the name, must be useful and not merely decorative, must, in its helplessness {art changes nothing?) change everything.

We can banish all government by edict from the planet—well, we can try to, we can rid ourselves of all imposed-from-without thought control—well, we can try to—and still we will be left with the most crushing censorship of all—the self-censorship of people unwilling (or too uncertain) to take the awesome steps towards full self-awareness.

The arts are with us to aid us in this march, and our refusal to let them buoy us and push us keeps the blinders and the shackles on us.

I have been in totalitarian societies where people have been imprisoned, have died for access to the arts, and I live in a society where the self-censorship is as ruthless as any imposed from without. The paradox is uglier than we should have to consider.

The theatre is, in its immediacy, in its present-tense happening (as opposed to film which has always happened—which is what makes its excesses seem so safe) the theatre is in a unique position to make everything happen, to turn us into a civilization dissatisfied with the safe, the predictable, with that which does not alter our perceptions. Let us remind ourselves of this on World Theatre Day. Let us remind ourselves that the limits of theatre are merely the limits we put on it... the limits we put on ourselves.