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Vaclav Havel 1994

For the first time in the history of man, the planet he inhabits is encompassed by a single civilization. Because of this, anything that happens anywhere has consequences, both good and ill, for everyone everywhere. This civilization, however, is composed of an enormous number of peoples or ethnic groups with widely diverse customs and traditions and of many cultures, or cultural spheres, both large and small, many religious worlds, and many different kinds of political culture. It seems that the more tightly this variegated community is crowded together by contemporary civilization and compelled to accept common values and modes of behavior, the more powerfully will various groups feel the need to defend their national, racial, cultural autonomy and identity. Many dangerous conflicts in the world today can be explained by the simple fact that the closer we are to each other, the more we notice our differences. Moreover, we are living at a time when various artificial orders have collapsed, whether these orders have been formed by the colonial system, or the bipolar system dominated by two superpowers. The world is becoming genuinely multicultural and multipolar and is only now beginning to seek a new, genuinely just order, one that meets the needs of the present.

All of this makes the modern world an especially dramatic place, with so many peoples in so many places resisting coexistence with each another. And yet its only chance for survival is precisely such coexistence.

It is not true that because of television, film, video, and the other great achievements of this era, theatre is dwindling in importance. I would say that exactly the opposite is true, that theatre is better suited than any other medium to reveal, in genuinely compelling and challenging ways, not only all the dark forces that are dragging the world down, but also everything bright and luminous, in which its hopes are contained.

In today's dehumanizing technological civilization theatre is one of the important islands of human authenticity. That is, it is precisely what if this world is not to end up badly—must be protected and cultivated. After all, the return to the irreplaceable human subjectivity, the concrete human personality and its concrete human conscience is precisely what this world of mega machinery and anonymous mega bureaucracies needs. Only man is capable of confronting all the dangers that face the world. His renewed responsibility, his awareness of connections—in other words, precisely that within him which not even the best network of modern computers can replace. The hope of the world lies in the rehabilitation of the living human being.

Yes, theatre is not just another genre, one among many. It is the only genre in which, today and every day, now and always, living human beings address and speak to other human beings. Because of that, theatre is more than just the performance of stories or tales. It is a place for human encounter, a space for authentic human existence, above all the kind of existence that transcends itself in order to give an account of the world and of itself. It is a

place of living, specific, inimitable conversation about society and its tragedies, about man, his love and anger and hatred. Theatre is a point at which the intellectual and spiritual life of the human community crystallizes. It is a space in which it can exercise its freedom and come to understanding.

In the global technical civilization created by so many autonomous cultures and threatened by conflicts between them, theatre is—I firmly believe—a telescope into the future and a means of giving a concrete shape to our hope. Not because its purpose is to describe a world better than the one that exists, or to construct a vision of a better future, but because it embodies the main hope of humanity today, which is the rebirth of a living humanity. For, if theatre is free conversation, free dialogue, among free people about the mysteries of the world, then it is precisely what will show humankind the way toward tolerance, mutual respect, respect for the miracle of being.

I appeal to you, people of the theatre to remember your colleagues in Sarajevo. They are doing precisely what I have been talking about; through the exercise of freedom of the spirit, through the cultivation of dialogue and the creation of a space for real human communication, they are confronting the terrible war in their country. Ethnic fanatics and thugs are casting the world back into its darkest past. People of the theatre who engage their audiences in dialogue about the dramas of the world of today and the dramas of the human spirit point the way to the future. There is another war going on in Sarajevo beside the one we see on television. It is an unarmed conflict between those who hate and kill others only because they are different, and people of the theatre who bring the uniqueness of human beings alive and make dialogue possible. In this war the people of theatre must win. They are the ones who point towards the future as a peaceful conversation between all human beings and societies about the mysteries of the world and Being.

These people of the theatre are serving peace and they remind us that theatre still has meaning.