

3 July 2021, Venice

I'd like to thank Artistic Directors Stefano Ricci and Gianni Forte, Biennale President Roberto Cicutto, and the entire Board of La Biennale di Venezia. Thank you for this wonderful award on behalf of the whole team I've been working with for many years now. Without them, I would not be receiving this Golden Lion today.

This honour comes at a special time for our theatre – and at an unprecedented time for theatre in general. A few weeks ago, we premiered our production of *The Odyssey*. Sadly, the oldest member of our company, Zygmunt Malanowicz, who had been cast as Ulysses, died of Covid before opening night. Zygmunt, this award goes out to you as well.

I've been asking myself what else has “died of Covid” – how much we have irretrievably lost. For one thing, the realm of memory is becoming less and less accessible to us. We live only in the present; and the younger we are, the more immersed we become in a virtual version of that present. It's not just that things are becoming unreal nowadays. We seem to care less about the past, too – about all the things that have shaped our culture, our thoughts, our traumas, and our dreams. We are forgetting how important it once was to seek out the things that cannot be seen and try to record the brief glimpses of them that were given to us – imperfectly, perhaps, but believing that it absolutely needs to be done. Yet if we cut ourselves off from our memory, we will no longer be able to understand the world we live in, which will become a random collection of chaotic events, constructs, works, and sensations. “Will you know what you've lived through?”

I don't know how much we will be able to rebuild after Covid – if it ever goes away, that is. But I do know how much freedom we've all surrendered, and not for the first time, in exchange for an illusion of security. I know, too, that we have a duty to fight for our memory, especially as there are so many people out there who want us to forget. The characters in my *Odyssey* know the meaning of memory, and they know that the only way to preserve it is by telling stories.

For me, this award does not round off a life's work. I see it, instead, as an obligation to continue on the journey.