

## The Rough Theatre

IT IS always the popular theatre that saves the day. Through the ages it has taken many forms, and there is only one factor that they all have in common – a roughness. Salt, sweat, noise, smell: the theatre that's not in a theatre, the theatre on carts, on wagons, on trestles, audiences standing, drinking, sitting round tables, audiences joining in, answering back; theatre in back rooms, upstairs rooms, barns; the one-night stands, the torn sheet pinned up across the hall, the battered screen to conceal the quick changes – that one generic term, *theatre*, covers all this and the sparkling chandeliers too. I have had many abortive discussions with architects building new theatres – trying vainly to find words with which to communicate my own conviction that it is not a question of good buildings and bad: a beautiful place may never bring about explosion of life, while a haphazard hall may be a tremendous meeting place; this is the mystery of the theatre, but in the understanding of this mystery lies the only possibility of ordering it into a science. In other forms of architecture there is a relationship between conscious, articulate design and good functioning: a well-designed hospital may be more efficacious than a higgledy-piggledy one; but as for theatres, the problem of design cannot start logically. It is not a matter of saying analytically what are the requirements, how best they can be organized – this will usually bring into existence a tame, conventional, often cold hall. The science of theatre-building must come from studying what it is that brings about the most vivid relationship between people – and is this best served by asymmetry, even by disorder? If so, what can be the rule of this disorder? An architect is better off if he works like a scene designer, moving scraps of cardboard

