

Chapter 4 Scenographic Approaches in Recent French Productions

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If one should close one's eyes for an instant to consider the actual state of scenography in France during the 80s and 90s of the last century, what would one see? The same sort of kaleidoscope as is the case with staging: a multitude of forms and colors, an infinite number of propositions, of confused spaces, an incomparable variety of realizations.. But one would also have to admit the impossibility of reducing this richness to any sort of system or to any sort of systematic review or anthology of all those scenic experiments which marked the century just past. Because—and this will be another revelation—we are presently in a baroque (or must we say postmodern) phase, in which old solutions are utilized again, perhaps excessively, and tested procedures are perfected. Of course there have certainly been some new scenographic forms invented, but the last ten or twenty years have seen rather a drawing up of accounts, of the completion, indeed of the apotheosis of previous experiments. Scenography is the faithful barometer of these variations, and space reveals this. Luc Boucris has rightly pointed this out: “Communication is formed by space. Everyone realizes this. Yes, but how? Theatrical space, and its transformations, might be the opening which best will allow us to undertake all such explorations (...The modeling of space is now the concern and the ambition of the contemporary man of the theatre.”

Scenography, in France and elsewhere, has become one of the most beautiful flowers of theatrical creation, the royal road for understanding the scenic project, for casting new light on the role of the actor and consequently for evaluating the changes in modern staging. As it would be impossible to describe these changes exhaustively or to enter into the technical details of scenic practice, we will consider a few concrete examples. These will not represent every current tendency, but they will nevertheless serve as typical examples from this abundance of production. Without seeking to be exhaustive, this quick overview hopes to show the relationship between these scenographies and the matters of staging and the body of the actor.. A remark of one of the most talented young French scenographers, Daniel Jeanneteau, provides support for this approach: “The theatrical space ought to be an emanation of the mind and body of the actor. I should not exist before he does. ». What we are looking at in a setting therefore will have no meaning except in relationship to the actor and the way in which he is placed on stage for a given public. This hypothesis moreover supports that of Jean-Marie Pardier, who speaks of an « ethnoscénologie » which views the stage as an “anthropological model of the body.” Such a hypothesis will help us to envisage scenography in its relationship to the actor and the staging, since, as Jouvett observed in his preface to the Treatise of Sabbattini, architecture, dramaturgy and staging “hang together.” To this trilogy must be added the body and the gaze of the spectator. In order to verify these very bold hypotheses, we will look in the six examples to follow at how space situates the actor at the center of the stage even before involving the body and the gaze of the spectator in it.

These various examples by no means comprise a typology of scenographies, nor even a representative sample. They provide only a preliminary orientation. It would be very dangerous to attempt any typology of this material. Indeed scenographers generally claim no single method either using in a particular style or a given esthetic, since they work with various directors or, even if they collaborated with the same artists, they are involved in extremely varied projects. Certainly there are constants from one setting to another by the same artist, but what engages our attention here is neither the style nor the career of the scenic artists, but rather the different ways of bringing life to space and its transmission to the actor and then to the spectator. Scenography—must we be reminded?—is not the search for spectacular effects, technique is not an end in itself and the magnificence of the setting is only an “infantile disease” of theatrical practice.

Our choice of our examples is to some extent arbitrary. Ironically, it has often been dictated by the photographic documentation that the theatres were willing to provide. From this material we have attempted to make the following spatial distinctions:

- (1) **The powers of scenic illusion** (Collet/Demarcy-Mota).
- (2) **Fantasy and reality** (Peduzzi/Chéreau).
- (3) **Thwarting the image** (Vigner/Vigner).
- (4) **The echos of space** (Timar/Timar).
- (5) **The migration of sub-spaces** (François/Mnouchkine)
- (6) **The silence of space** (Jeanneteau/Ollivier).

This selection makes to claim to be representative of the whole range of current practice, and less still of the types of theatrical architecture, matters which we must leave aside. It should only be noted that in five of the six examples, we are dealing with recovered spaces : a cartridge factory (5), a church (4), a warehouse (2), former theatres that have been « recovered » (1) or left as they are (6). Only of these examples, the maison de la Culture at Créteil (3), was built especially for contemporary performances.

(1) **The powers of scenic illusion**

With the staging of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* [premiered October, 2001 at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris] Emmanuel Demarcy Mota and his designer Yves Collet contributed to the reconquest of the powers of the image ; they rediscovered the magic of staging in the Italian style. During the 60's and 70's the enclosed perspective of the Italianate stage became suspect, and the exodus of theatre from traditional spaces seemed to have sounded the knell of this beautiful fantasy image. The last two decades of the century however saw theatre return to the fold, and thus to the power of illusion. The setting and lighting of Collet permeated every nook and cranny of both stage and auditorium. They created a flexible space, especially when the performance was presented in a theatre like the Bouffes du Nord where the playing space penetrates into that of the public in the manner of the “thrust stage” of the

Elizabethans. Sometimes this space is very close to the spectators, and at others it extends all the way to the back of the stage, limited only by the wall of the building, creating by means of a transparent curtain shadows and objects in another, different space. Thus many types of space were mobilized one after another.: a nearby space when the actors were watching the rehearsals, a space in the middle distance on the playing platform, and a distant space for the evocation of the phantasms et les phantoms of the past captured so subtly by the photos of Guy Delahaye. The images are projected onto two panels: a frontal space of various scales and a multitude of secondary spaces representing various places. The Italianate stage is both recreated and deconstructed. Thanks to this mastery and malleability of space, the design and staging seem to have exhausted every possibility of Western staging. They denounce and dismantle bourgeois illusionistic representation even while pushing it to its limits and re-establishing it in all its attributes. This scenography with its variable geometry is an exercise in style demonstrating the powers of theatre. It reinforces the identity of the actor, and, through him, of the author. It draws up a record and inventory at the close of the century of all the stratagems and the possibilities of theatricality, bringing them to an absolute esthetic perfection, it restores to the actors their performing space, their spontaneity and their freedom, in particular the joy in improvisation and flirting with their character. They find themselves reconstituted before our eyes in respect to the body of the character, according to the Pirandellian metaphysics, the body of the actor charged with incarnating it : scenography places itself once more at their service, it presides over their creation, it plays with the confusion between the body and its shadow. By means of identification, that is by recognition and by empathy, the spectator « communicates, » in the proper and figurative sense, with these bodies ; he organizes his perception of space, he constructs the fiction drawing upon them and upon himself, mixing all the bodies together. Yves Collet exposes every possibility of scenographic art , and particularly in its whimsical and imaginative function at the moment when, as in the prologue of Goethe's *Faust*, theatrical shadows approach and become embodied in the figures of the actors. These phantasmagoric figures seem to invade the interior space of the spectators, giving rise to a sensation in which one can no longer distinguish between what is perceived objectively and what one feels subjectively.

Many of Yves Collet's images are inspired by the esthetics of those icy images of the 70s and 80s, like those of Chéreau, himself of the school of Strehler, but also the superb images of the productions of Richard Demarcy and Teresa Mota. And yet at the same time this phantasmagoria of images is called into question, or at least completed by a totally different concept of staging, that of deconstruction, of a « gentle rupture, » of an illusion which is broken and then restored. This ambivalent procedure is also found in the work of Chéreau and Peduzzi, although with a completely different atmosphere and a much more sombre emotional coloring.

(2) Fantasy and reality

Chéreau and Peduzzi, who have been collaborating some thirty years, have remained faithful to an esthetic refinement of the Strehler-like image, which has taken on a great architectural plasticity in their work. They are not contented with a mimetic representation of reality, they create a crisis in reality by an excess of theatricality, by a monumentality of setting and by the exaggerated performance of the actors. This contradiction of both realism and fantasy, cet oxymoron, could be seen in the staging of Racine's *Phèdre* at the Ateliers Berthier, the temporary home of the théâtre de l'Europe [January-April, 2003]. In a voluminous industrial space rearranged as a bipolar stage and auditorium, the public was seated rather uncomfortably on bleachers overhanging a narrow, extended area, stretching between the very imposing façade of Phèdre's palace on one side and on the other the open space of the shops with its former elevator and contemporary chairs, probably used during the rehearsals. Thus were placed in confrontation the archeological reconstruction of a palace and a prosaic and contemporary "found space." The contrast between the tragic fiction and prosaic reality, between monumental artificiality and everyday reality inevitably disturbed the spectators, pulled between the imaginary elsewhere of another time (« aimable Trézène ») and the presence of bodies and objects. In the same way, the actors were split between the tragic immobility and the passionate transports of their characters. Their shifting between these two poles of the fictional tragedy and their physical presence lead the actors to a double performance, now formal, that is to say cold and now psychological, that is to say hysterical. The entire production follows the same principle: it created the distressing atmosphere of *chiaroscuro* yet it sometimes provides a blunt emphasis by following an action with a projector, as as the circus or music hall, breaking the ambiance in order better to emphasize some decisive physical action. Thanks to this double perspective of the scenography and the staging, the body of the actress (that of Dominique Blanc, who plays Phèdre, for example) conveys that harrowing impression so characteristic of Racine. The impossibility of a direct, framed, stable gaze creates in the spectator a feeling of watching a tragic struggle in which he does not fully understand the stakes. The scenography of Peduzzi, the *chiaroscuro* lighting (André Diot noted that « the diminished lighting makes the audience more attentive than if they could see clearly »), Chéreau's direction, and the « double performance » of the actors, all relate to this principle of a doubled space: sometimes presenting a distant fantasy image, and sometimes a near and immediate action. The distant fantasy image and the shock of the real are the two basic principles of this dramaturgy, and, by extension, of the whole production. The spectator feels them in his body with the same splitting, the same oscillation between the dream-like distant perspective and a close and painful rupture. The «schizophrenic » body thus does not know where to take refuge : in the absence when one awakens from a dream or in the painful presence of the suffering body ? The scenography is sometimes ruled by contradictory principles which only the production as a whole posses the art to reconcile.

(3) Thwarting the image

Sometimes directors feel the need to design their own scenery in order to make it conform as closely as possible to their dramatic vision. And conversely, some designers come sooner or later to move on to directing: Yannis Kokkos, Daniel Jeanneteau, Alain Timar, Eric Vigner, especially, have come from the plastic arts or scenic design to direct, at present, their own productions, as if they feared being absorbed by the staging. One could call it the imbrication and the convergence of the two arts and the two practices.

In staging Marguerite Duras's play, *La Bête dans la jungle* [opening] Eric Vigner treated plastically the scenic adaptation by James Lord which Duras herself revised for the stage. In view of this series of reworkings, it would be impossible, and moreover of little interest, to recover the origin of the narrative, to evaluate the « authority » of the successive adaptations or to establish clearly the story. The scenography takes into account this entanglement of texts, their superimposition and their relative unreadability. It employs an analogous device: an image repeats itself upon another image, so that a series of appearances always open up onto new appearances. Each voice opens into another void. The setting vaguely suggests a medieval château and a virgin forest, though one can hardly say which is in the other. From time to time a translucent curtain separates the stage from the house by means of a lighting change, encouraging the spectator-voyeur to pierce through this mysterious separation, in order to penetrate this forbidden universe. The male hero seems to give way to the taboo, to the forbidding to articulate the source of his trouble and exactly what this beast hidden in the jungle represents. Does it involve some shameful illness, homosexuality, some consuming passion, indecision, or some other defect? This taboo is in any case represented plastically by the impossibility of seizing upon an image or to stop the constant flux. Vigner's solution consists of playing with the scenic box as if it were an open space magically changing as soon as when one's gaze approach it, as soon as one attempts to pierce the mystery of its series of images. The musical settings evoked by the sound track and the lighting design subtly alter the nature and the fictional status of the locations, the staging generates a series of immaterial settings and curtains, scenic images in constant flight. Thus the scenography, in perfect mastery of this operation, works with the means of illusion and suggestion more than with real materials. Within this quasi-virtual or hologrammatic image, the very real bodies of two actors can be perceived, but they are in to some extent absorbed, made unreal by this visual phantasmagoria. Vigner has created for these real bodies a disturbed and vague setting, a place of entrapment which is more readily guessed, desired, imagined than truly perceived and identified. The scenography and what Vigner has called the « artists' bodies » are more fantastic than real and they correspond perfectly. The scenic decoration is a mask and a hiding place designed to make a voice here, to stimulate the imagination and the fantasy of the spectator, instead of soaking up images and mental representations.

With this work by Vigner, scenographic art seems to have come to the end of its long trajectory in the West : to the final stage (which however symbolist staging had already achieved), that of the dissolution of the bodies of the actors in the image and the reality of fantasy. The actors for all that are not transformed into marionettes, they preserve their flesh and blood body, but their presence is unobtrusive, untemporal, closer to the ideal than to the material, it is what Pierre Quillard in 1891 called «outside of all time and all event.” The actors’ bodies however remain at the heart of the scenography as well as of theatrical architecture. Like most of theatre people today, Vigner conceives these as at the service of the actor. “There is no ideal architecture, “ he proclaimed in an article on this subject in 1999, “There are only individual projects. . . . and as many theatres as there are bodies of actors.”

The golden rule of scenography : to put oneself at the disposition of the actor, and not the other way around. This is perfectly verified in the apatial creation of Vigner and the majority of his colleagues. But even while remaining in the service of the scenic concept, scenography has found a new place in the contemporary theatre, more challenging, particularly in its relationship to the text. It is no longer a matter of illustrating or explicating, but of producing a visual imaginary, part real and part fantasy, which also grafts itself onto abstract and sound elements. This particularly calls into question the traditional hierarchies among text, the performance of the actor, and the general interpretation of the staging.

This “dehierarchizing” is very clear in the the spatial and scenography creations of Alain Timar.

(4) The Echos of space

The « dehierarchizing » of the elements of staging goes along with an original use of space, which which extends into dialogue and sound. In his adaptation of the autobiographical text by Albert Cohen, *Le Livre de ma mère*, Alain Timar offers a subtle montage of this filial story evoking the memory of a mother [premiered at the Avignon Théâtre des Halles, December, 2003]. He has not put together a dramatic fable nor a dialogue between the son and the mother, since, even though they are written in the first person, the words are more lyric and obsessive than dramatic. To avoid the monotony of a long monologue, Timar has thought of new means of speaking. He has dramatized the text by splitting the voice of the narrator into two parts: that of the protagonist and author of the story, and that of the musician/composer, who begins the story by the contrabass, that is by the narration. This arrangement of the narration is completed by a scenography which moves and shifts large abstract panels, about two meters square, canvases turned around at the beginning and placed on three sides of a rather deep frontal scene. These panels come progressively to block off the large horizon, to close off the space , to suggest fallen stones or an unbreachable wall. Timar does not put canvases on sage as painters sometimes do when they work for the theatre, his canvases are not frozen as if for contemplation in a museum, they are integrated into the narration of the young man and into the devices that result from it. This

manipulation by the protagonist is by no means the only action and it takes place only during certain interruptions in the dialogue. This spatial arrangement depends upon the enunciation of the text and the accompaniment of the contrabass. The complaints of the son, the penetrating evocations of his memories are given rhythm by the insertion of music. The musical composition is, however, much more than a simple accompaniment or a continual bass, it makes up a work in itself. It is not restricted to a commentary or a questioning of the son's elevated language, it penetrates that language, it creates a musical space, it gives the spectators the opportunity to perceive the panels against the sonorous background of music, more factious than tragic, it makes one hear the space of memory in a manner still unheard of. And yet the spectator/hearer has little time to contemplate each of these revealed panels. He is not in a museum where he is the master of the visual and temporal rhythm, neither during the performance nor afterward. He finds himself embarked in a dramatic action which makes use of musical, scenic, pictorial, and gestural spaces according to the needs of the discourse of the staging. Scenography in the broad sense is a gathering of elements deployed in space and time, but these chronotopes do not form synthetic or kinesthetic units; there is neither fusion nor correspondence among them. Instead of a total work of art or, conversely, a reciprocal distancing of the arts, the staging sets up a play of echoes among the visual and auditory signs, of bridges between time and space. Time and space, music and text, the present and the past are reunited and melded. Staging involves the search for the other in the text, making the series of signs of representation work together in such a way as to produce a chain reaction and an effect on the spectator. This effect and this chain reaction are manifested in the son's lyric complaint, they are extended and intensified in the vibration of strings, but also in the chromatic and plastic vibration of the panels and of space. Creating a scenography involves predicting these chain reactions in empty space, transforming into time and narrative arises from spatiality and music.

With Timar, as with the other artists considered in this survey, scenography can be seen as culminating in a global practice which cannot be practically distinguished from the art of directing. In this way of proceeding, which is common today, « scenography », means stage composition utilizing actors with attention to the body and mind of the spectator. The vibrant body of the actor reaches out to the spectator ; this sensitive plate vibrates with every wind and on all its faces, involving all levels simultaneously: vision, hearing, thought. At that point, scenography, music and text can no longer be separated.

(5) The Migration of sub-spaces.

In this way scenography extends its power while losing its specificity. This is the sign of its integration into the spectacle as a whole. If the greatest loyalties are artistic ones, the alliances between directors and scenographers seem particularly durable. That of Ariane Mnouchkine and Guy-Claude François extends back to 1975 and the creation of *L'âge d'or*. In that heroic era, the task of the scenographer consisted primarily of remodeling the interior architectural space of the

Cartoucherie, of transforming the spatial relationships between the stage and auditorium. But since the stagings of Shakespeare during the 1980s, the public space has remained the same : sitting on benches which are rather uncomfortable and yet convivial due to their encouragement of promiscuity, the public faces a very large stage which it overlooks from rather high up. It can also admire the musical instruments of Jean-Jacques Lemètre, set up stage right. For *Le dernier Caravansérail(Odyssée)*, Mnouchkine has kept this same open, frontal space, but the various episodes unfold in small constructions on wheels pushed in and out by stage hands who move them about unceasingly, as if to suggest that everything is in unstable motion, that the world (the stage) is vast, but that the refugees have only a narrow part of it. The obvious theatricality of these manipulations works against the brutal material of the situations. Each sequence is preceded by projections of letters written on the rear curtain, while the voice of Mnouchkine reads these letters in French after they have been registered in their original language. Like a number of rapidly sketched little vignettes, the small two or three character scenes reconstruct typical situations of underground immigration, with the damned of the earth always sharing the same obsession : to leave their country and flee to England. For the spectator standing outside these events, the world is put together anew as an incessant combining of the same miserable elements. On these “mansions » cast about at the whim of migratory flows, bodies are narrowly confined, even though there remains plenty of space in the vast world. Each « mansion » contains a foreign world, limited to a miserable shanty, a telephone booth, a small post for customs or the police. Yet it is all the same a world unto itself, a universe evoked by a few gestures and mutters. The space is not mimetic, and yet the details of costume and movement are realistic, the attitudes are correct, the gestures of violence are exact. These odd “mansions,” seemingly hastily constructed, yet contain concentrated worlds, cultural universes that are distinct if unstable, tiny islands of microsocieties set adrift.

The fourth wall of the stage is nothing other than the frontier that these unhappy souls are trying to cross to join us. We understand their misery and the violence that creates it. Soon we no longer know with whom we should identify spatially : do we fear their invasion or rather do we stand beside them in their attempt to break through the frontier and share our own space ? We waver between the two worlds, and the scenography produces the same effect of constriction, of agony, as if we also began to feel the earth giving away beneath our feet. Once again, we experience the close connection between dramaturgy, scenography, the performance of the actors and the physical sensations of the spectators.

(6) The Silence of space

Basically, there is nothing surprising in the fact that scenography should be perfectly integrated with the actual practice of theatre, since its scope coincides with the appearance of the staging. Today, however, scenographers conceive it more as a place dedicated to words and silence. With Daniel Jeanneteau , and with

many others, scenography is at the heart of the arrangement of the staging, but it must know how to efface itself, not to impose on the work of the author, to server the text or the subject by remaining silent. As Jeanneteau as said: “in order to welcome the word, space should avoid making sense, should introduce a certain confirmation of sense but not sense itself. It is only afterward, under the effect of the sense given by the word, that space can offer to change itself and to be filled with meaning.” Régy, for his part, has sought to maintain the unconscious aggregate which is bound to the text and to make it join with the unconscious of the spectators. In order for this encounter to take place, the staging must be done very discreetly, must let pass all that wishes to pass, so that the spectators can allow themselves to be invaded by the living matter of the writing, to discover and respond directly to the author himself. The public cannot receive this word and create its own fiction unless it is fully receptive with its senses alert. Régy has suggested that speaking in a low tone or plunging the performance into darkness are methods of encouraging this consciousness raising, of raising the threshold of perception, and perhaps, of encouraging an alternate way of understanding. One can see that scenography and staging are perfectly in harmony in working toward their goals. A similar interest in silence and the void has guided both Jeanneteau and Régy in their scenographic and ludic choices: they require an open, unmarked, neutral space to facilitate the most direct possible hearing of the text, as if one wished to realize the old dream of putting the author and spectator in direct contact. As Jeanneteau has said: « The space of theatre is located in the border region located between speaking and hearing. » It is thus not a question here of the empty space of Peter Brook, a very real space which must be conquered by ridding it of the trappings of the bourgeois theatre, but rather of a symbolic space, that of a text which is not removed at the outside from its signification. Régy and Jeanneteau are less concerned with a scenic image conceived as a backdrop against which the actors perform than with an interior vision, their own and that of a future spectator. In their collaboration for Maeterlinck’s *La Mort de Tintagiles* [premiered February of 1997] or for Jon Fosse’s *Quelqu’un va venir* and *Melancholia* [premiered January of 2001], they began by clearing as much space as possible around the actor, concentrating their attention and ours on the speaking body of the actor. It is not so much a matter for the scenography to realize the visual idea of the play as to slow down the trajectory of the actor and allow the meaning to emerge slowly for the spectators. In the space emptied by Jeanneteau for Régy’s actors to grasp their words, the staging stimulates in the spectator a physical and psychic relaxation similar indeed to that of the actors, who appear to be in a state of hibernation. In the work of these two associated deconstructers, fascinated by slowness and the void, as well as in that of many of their colleagues, scenography eliminates all superfluous decoration, all striking blocking, in order to create and abstract space. This space is no longer tied to the dramatic action except in an allusive, but not metaphoric manner. With Jeanneteau, as with many other contemporary artists, we witness a privatization of scenography : not in the financial sense, but in the sense of a dematerialization, an interiorizing of the spaces presented by the spectator.

His work consists of what Jeanneteau calls « guiding the gaze toward new spaces of consciousness, interiorizing the high stakes weighing upon the characters by spinning out the subtle relationships between these beings and their environment, evoking spaces whose emotional power and beauty do not exist prior to the performance, perhaps inadequate from a realistic point of view, but developed according to the economy of an imaginary which tends to locate the real ground of appearance in the mind of the spectator.”

When he designs for other directors, Jeanneteau seeks a more figurative and symbolic image, as he did for the *Pélléas et Mélisande* staged by Alain Ollivier. Once again the movement was slowed down and stylized, the vocal delivery willfully artificial and hypercorrect, but the scenic representation, the reflection of the water for example, went back to the enchantments of Strehler or Chéreau, to the aesthetic and atmospheric beauty of Maeterlinck's theatre of the unexpressed. And yet this dedication to a finely wrought fantasy image, placed at a distance, accessible only to fantasy, did not prevent the utilisation downstage of a footbridge extending all the way across the stage where groups appeared in conversation in the foreground. Thus, scenography played both with proximity and distance. In the background, the image created an atmosphere by means of obscurity, shadows, and the reflections of the water, while downstage, on the footbridge, actions were isolated and placed in exergue. The actors and their characters seemed tangible, tactile, physically present, and the spectator is invited to construct mentally these sub-spaces and to combine them according to the needs of the production.

Thus different principles of scenography can coexist perfectly well, provided that the spectator plays an important role in their utilization. The important thing remains the coherence of the dramaturgical project and the harmony in the production between the setting and the staging. As Valentin Fabre and Jean Perrottet wrote in 1999 : « Once the curtain rises, it is the production---and only the production---which matters, based certainly on its appropriateness with the place and the manner in which it is produced.”

The conclusion of this survey was predictable from the beginning. There does not exist in France, or elsewhere, **one** style of scenography, but many different scenographic approaches. Even if our conclusions reveal a number of points in common, no typology of scenography can be imagined. Let us therefore rejoice in the richness of plastic creation and of its ever increasing closeness to the art of staging.

In opposition to the 1960s, the theatre is no longer conceived as what René Allio called « a machine for seeing, » but is rather a point of exchange between the previously separated components of the production (actor, sound, text). The spectator is now invited to integrate the design choices with the staging, to consider space with all its ramifications at the heart of the production. In particular, scenographers have learned to integrate the temporal dimension into their

creations. As Yannis Kokkos has observed, « the duration of the theatrical action is also the duration of a space. Space should be marked by time.»

Thus there is not, at least in France, any standardization of scenography, and this unexpected bit of good news is grafted onto another : contemporary theatre architecture has rejected the flexible spaces that economic and ignorant authorities imposed upon us during the 1950s and 1960s. After the « maisons du peuple » of the 1930s, the « maisons de la culture » of the 1960s and 1970s, and the flexible spaces of the 1980s and 1990s, will the theatre end by coming back to its buildings, giving up these other shelters, to reintegrate with the old Italianate arrangements? This is the general tendency : the theatre is coming back, in the (rare) new constructions, to halls conceived from the outset exclusively for theatre, since both artists and spectators at the present time accept the idea that there is no ideal position from which to see the performance and they can only, as Joel Hourbeight has suggested « verify at what point the perception of a performance alters according to how the place of observation in the auditorium changes.» In an analogous way, scenography and directing also accept as relative the idea of a central point of view which is optimal for the spectator and his analysis. They encourage a personal trajectory and individual discovery. Although the setting has often become frontal, or « Italianate » once again, the public is invited to pass from one place or one zone to another, their placement is often open, and the « client » is free to construct for himself the temporal, spatial, and causal sequence of the scenes (Cf. the Mnouchkine *Odyssées*). This is far from the extreme scenic experimentation of the avant-garde of the 1920s or the 1960s, from the « environmental » theatre of Richard Schechner, from the free circulation of « Promenade Performance »), from distracting alternative spaces. Still, current scenographic experiments, at present more modest and less confrontational, are still as exacting as those of the old avant-garde. They no longer attempt to impress the public, filling its vision with a shameless display of chic material, a very *high tech* or *high class* deconstructionism, or technological monstrosities worthy of Broadway or Hollywood. They rely much more than formerly upon the imagination of the spectator.

If we pursue our inquiry into domains other than the text and research of theatre, into, for example, the plastic arts, film, installations and multimedia work, we would doubtless discover that diversity and funding have been turned toward these new places. Still the theatre of text, art, and research, which is here largely out of concern, concentrates no less on the essentiality of scenographic research, and the theoretical radicalism of a Jeanneteau or of a Braunschweig is not at all exceptional in contemporary scenic research. By dint of extending his field of action, the scenography has grown so close to the direction that they can no longer always be distinguished. This is perhaps the sign of its maturity, but also of its culmination, of its achievement. Therefore, we can now return to the theatre with eyes closed.

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