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Experimental Theatre in France: 1945-1975

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Denoël, pp. 550 and 552.  
Editions du Griffon, p. 505.  
Martine Franck (Agence Viva, Paris), pp. 413 and 425.  
Le Grand Magic Circus, pp. 332, 339, 351 and 357.  
Dr. Dorothy Knowles and Michel Parent, p. 514.  
La Renaissance du Livre, p. 546.  
Le Théâtre du Soleil, pp. 408 and 444.

Some of the material on Le Grand Magic Circus has been used in an article to appear in the Journal of Popular Culture.

## ON THE FOOTNOTES

(1) The first reference to any work by one of the authors the thesis examines is footnoted with full bibliographical detail. Subsequent quotations from, and references to, works which have been published in collected form are noted in the text in parentheses using the roman numeral of the volume of the collected work followed by page numbers in arabic numerals.

Example — First reference is a footnote:

<sup>1</sup>Jean Genet, Le Balcon in Oeuvres Complètes IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 135.

Later references follow the quotation in the text:

" . . . préparer le vôtre" (IV:135).

(2) In the instance of plays not included in the complete works, or if no complete works have been published, a series of abbreviations to signal the play title is adopted. The abbreviation replaces the roman numeral of the example above, but the format is otherwise unchanged.

Example — First reference:

<sup>1</sup>Jean Genet, Les Nègres: "Pour jouer Les Nègres": clownerie (Décines: L'Arbalète, 1963 repr. 1967), p. 23.

Later references:

" . . . nous sommes aussi des comédiens" (N:23).

(3) Where it is necessary to distinguish between two editions of the same play, the abbreviation of the play title is followed by a date.

Example — First reference:

<sup>1</sup>Jean Genet, Les Bonnes: les deux versions précédées d'une Lettre de l'Auteur (Sceaux: J.-J. Pauvert, 1954), p. 139.

Later references:

" . . . , pour vous conserver vivante" (B54:139).

A full list of the abbreviations employed follows on the next page.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- ABC Jean Tardieu, L'A.B.C. de notre vie in Théâtre II: Poèmes à jouer (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).
- AG Armand Gatti, La Vie imaginaire de l'éboueur Auguste G. in Théâtre [III] (Paris: Seuil, 1962).
- B54 Jean Genet, Les Bonnes: les deux versions précédées d'une Lettre de l'Auteur (Sceaux: J.-J. Pauvert, 1954).
- BC Fernando Arrabal, Bella ciao: la guerre de mille ans (Paris: Bourgois, 1972).
- CB Armand Gatti, Le Crapaud-buffle (Paris: L'Arche, 1959).
- CP64 Armand Gatti, Chant public devant deux chaises électriques (Paris: Seuil, 1964).
- CP66 Armand Gatti, Chant public devant deux chaises électriques (Paris: Seuil, 1966).
- HoS Armand Gatti, Un homme seul (Paris: Seuil, 1969).
- HS49 Jean Genet, Haute Surveillance (Paris: Gallimard, 1949 repr. 1959).
- 1789 Théâtre du Soleil, 1789: La Révolution doit s'arrêter à la perfection du bonheur (Paris: Stock, 1971).
- 1793 Théâtre du Soleil, 1793: La Cité révolutionnaire est de ce monde (Paris: Stock, 1972).
- MJ Isidore Isou, La Marche des jongleurs in Oeuvres de spectacle (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).
- N Jean Genet, Les Nègres: "Pour jouer Les Nègres": clownerie (Décines: L'Arbalète, 1963 repr. 1967).
- P Jean Genet, Les Paravents: quelques indications (Décines: L'Arbalète, 1961).
- RC Grand Magic Circus, Les Derniers Jours de solitude de Robinson Crusoe, L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 496 (1 June 1972).
- VF Michel Butor and Henri Pousseur, Votre Faust: fantaisie variable, genre opéra, La Nouvelle Revue française  
no. 109 January 1962 pp. 65-86  
no. 110 February 1962 pp. 261-89  
no. 111 March 1962 pp. 461-82  
no. 112 April 1962 pp. 641-57.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

Theatre is a complex art. The word "theatre" itself can refer to the texts of a dramatist or the building in which these texts are performed. In these two meanings is to be found the unique feature of theatre as an artistic form: it can exist both as literary text and performance. This double nature distinguishes it from the other literary genres as well as from the other performed arts. For example, the novel exists only as a written text; its printed symbols are the sole medium of communication between author and reader. On the other hand, the choreographer's notes on which the dance performance is based do not have the intrinsic, artistic value of the play text; the art work can only be the dancer's movements. Music resembles theatre more closely since the written text, the score of the composer, is rehearsed and played by a group of performers for the benefit of an audience. However, as André Veinstein observes: "La lecture de la partition ne permet pas, comme celle de la pièce, de la classer dans un art ou un genre distinct."<sup>1</sup> It is the intricate nature of the text, of the performance and, more particularly, of their interrelationship that is explored by experimental theatre.

Experimentation rarely follows a single pattern. Each researcher pursues his own line of inquiry that may ultimately lead only to the confirmation of existing knowledge. Experimentation is also fragmentary. The significance of a single experiment can perhaps only be truly assessed in its relation with information from other experiments. Experimentation in the arts is no different. The works discussed in the thesis are the results of individual and collective efforts. They have no necessary relationship and

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<sup>1</sup> André Veinstein, La Mise en scène théâtrale et sa condition esthétique, 2nd ed. (Paris: Flammarion, 1955), p. 47.



no one experiment investigates the whole field. However, studied together, they reveal a common preoccupation with the re-examination, development or adaptation of the dramatic language, and of the human and spatial relationships implied in the theatrical process from incipient idea to final performance. It is in this sense that they are considered experimental.

By emphasizing the whole process of dramatic creation, experimental theatre stresses the interdependence of text and performance, and, in some cases, calls for their redefinition. It is thus a creative repudiation of the division into text and performance that has marked critical analyses of the genre, and a rejection of the debate concerning which form, text or performance, represents the authentic work.

Historically, dramatic criticism and theory has centred on just such a debate. In general, two main lines of argument have been pursued in order to invalidate the performance. The one concentrates on the imperfection of the human performer and his inadequacies in the light of the radiant beauty of the poet's work. Thus Louis Becq de Fouquières objected: "Au milieu d'une nature de carton peint, sous une lumière invraisemblable, s'accroissent alors des imperfections de toutes sortes, . . . qui sont autant d'outrages à la beauté poétique."<sup>1</sup> The conclusion to be drawn is that the human and the artistic are incompatible, as though belonging to two different realms of existence. Ionesco expresses a similar dissatisfaction with the intrusion of the human form onto the stage. For him, the actor's presence destroys the fantasy created by the painted scenery, the colour, and the lights:

Je crois comprendre maintenant que ce qui me gênait au théâtre, c'était la présence sur le plateau des personnages en chair et en os. Leur présence matérielle détruisait la fiction. Il y avait là comme deux plans de réalité, la réalité concrète, matérielle, appauvrie, vidée, limitée, de ces hommes vivants, quotidiens, bougeant et parlant sur scène, et celle de la réalité de l'imagination, toutes deux face à face, ne se recouvrant pas, irréductibles l'une à l'autre: deux univers antagonistes n'arrivant pas à s'unifier, à se confondre.<sup>2</sup>

From a different angle, Auguste Comte contended that the dramatic

<sup>1</sup>Louis Becq de Fouquières, L'Art de la mise en scène: essai d'esthétique théâtrale (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1884), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Eugène Ionesco, "Expérience du théâtre," La Nouvelle Revue Française, vol. 9, no. 62 (February 1958), p. 249.

performance was a secondary art form specifically because of its reliance on the art of the actor, comprised essentially of gesture and mimicry, both of which were inferior forms of expression. Furthermore, he maintained that the theatre had lost all association with the celebration of worship, and therefore the justification for the performance, which derived from public worship, ceased to be valid:

Le positivisme doit irrévocablement éteindre l'institution du théâtre, autant irrationnelle qu'immorale, en réorganisant l'éducation universelle, et fondant par la sociolâtrie un système de faits propres à faire dédaigner les vaines satisfactions. Depuis que la lecture est assez répandue pour qu'on puisse partout goûter isolément les chefs-d'oeuvres dramatiques, la protection accordé au jeu scénique ne profite qu'aux médiocrités et ce secours factice n'empêche pas d'apprécier la désuétude spontanée.<sup>1</sup>

The critic, Jean Hytier, argues a similar case from an assessment of the public at the theatre and from the evolution of the communal function of theatre. He maintains that the original nature of the performance relied essentially on the intense involvement of the audience in the stage action, possible only because of the communal beliefs held by both actor and spectator. With the passing of this homogeneous culture, the quasi-religious celebration of the dramatic performance is no longer possible. In his view, the theatrical participation desired can be based only on a "communauté de spectateurs . . . différenciée," not held together by communal beliefs but by "l'accord d'une multiplicité d'admiration particulières." The theatrical performance ceases to be worthwhile because the individual spectator stands to gain nothing from those around him with whom he shares nothing; it is better for him to read the play text in isolation: "Ainsi, se trouve fermé . . . le cercle de l'action qui, mise en scène dans l'imagination du dramaturge, finit par se jouer dans l'imagination du lecteur."<sup>2</sup>

Hytier's argument rejects the validity of the performance making theatre a branch of literature. Aristotle appears to lend some substance to this argument, for his account of the origin of drama implies that the genre

<sup>1</sup>Auguste Comte, Systeme de politique positive, vol. 4 (Paris: L. Mathias, 1854), pp. 441-42.

<sup>2</sup>Jean Hytier, Les Arts de littérature (Paris: Charlot, 1945), p. 101.

developed from a literary form: "But when Tragedy and Comedy came to light, the two classes of poets still followed their natural bent: the lampooners became writers of Comedy, and the Epic poets were succeeded by Tragedians, since the drama was a larger and higher form of art."<sup>1</sup>

This account strangely makes no mention of the possible religious derivation of the form.<sup>2</sup> The weight of evidence brought to light in this century suggests that drama developed from early religious practices, from ritual. For instance, Alfred Simon traces its origin back to an Egyptian fertility ritual and concludes that drama derives from an instinct in man.<sup>3</sup> Such a conclusion is supported by the discoveries of sociologists and ethnologists such as Jean Duvignaud. He draws a comparison between the trance and state of possession central to voodoo, Macumba, and candomblé, and the psychological situation of the modern actor: "Un peut, certes, comparer ces cérémonies de possession au théâtre, rechercher là une des voies sur lesquelles la tragédie et la comédie se sont engagées en Occident."<sup>4</sup> Yves Lorelle analyses the same aspect in more detail and his description has important similarities to Charles Dullin's own account of the stages through which an actor passes during the rehearsal of a role.<sup>5</sup>

The implication here is that primeval drama did not exist in the form of a text as we understand it today. There has no doubt always been a text if one defines it as any pre-existing outline of action. Thus, the canavaccio of the commedia dell'arte was a "text" which listed the entrances and exits

<sup>1</sup>Samuel H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1927), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>See George D. Thomson, Aeschylus and Athens: a Study in the Social Origins of Drama (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1941); and Arthur W. Pickard-Cambridge, Dramatic Festivals of Athens (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

<sup>3</sup>Alfred Simon, "Le Théâtre, le mythe et la psyché," Esprit, no. 5 (May 1965), pp. 818-23.

<sup>4</sup>Jean Duvignaud, "Existence et possession," Critique, no. 142 (March 1959), p. 262.

<sup>5</sup>Yves Lorelle, "Les Trances et le théâtre," Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, no. 38 (April 1962), pp. 67-86; Yves Lorelle, "L'Acteur chargé de message," Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, no. 38 (October 1962), pp. 111-25; and Charles Dullin, Souvenirs et notes de travail d'un acteur (Paris: Odette Lieutier, 1946), pp. 47-50.

of the characters and described summarily the type of scene to be played. Similarly, the customs and procedures of the ritual communicated either orally or pictorially from generation to generation can also be understood as a "text." In both cases, the essential aspect is that these "texts" demand an enactment in order that they should assume their full significance. Only with the invention of printing did the play text become the focal point of critical attention. The printed work had the appearance of a complete artistic work plus the advantage of permanence not enjoyed by the performance. Theatre came to be considered a specialized literary genre, and not an independent art. This attitude is exemplified by the criticism of the nineteenth-century critic, Ferdinand Brunetière.

In the early years of this century, the emphasis placed on the literary qualities of the play text was countered by a reaction in favour of the supremacy of the performance. The case for the performance is put forward in the writings of Edward Gordon Craig and Antonin Artaud. Craig traces the history of theatre back to dance and movement, and thus spatial articulation and not verbal expression constitutes the essence of his theatre. Performance is integral to dramatic creation.<sup>1</sup> In his work, Artaud is concerned to break "l'assujettissement . . . au texte" from which theatre suffered. His early ideas on the theatre crystallize around the performance of the Balinese dancers in Paris: "Nous assistons à une alchimie mentale qui d'un état d'esprit fait un geste et le geste sec, dépouillé, linéaire que tous nos actes pourraient avoir s'ils tendaient vers l'absolu." This authentic, gestural theatre is stifled, he argues, by the increasing stress placed on the word and the delineation of character. The dramatic language is reduced to words, and words "paralyser la pensée au lieu d'en permettre, et d'en favoriser le développement."<sup>2</sup> Artaud proposes the rehabilitation of the word inside the more complex vocabulary of gesture, lighting and movement that is

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Gordon Craig, On the Art of the Theatre (London: Heinemann, 1911, repr. Mercury Books, 1962).

<sup>2</sup>Antonin Artaud, Oeuvres Complètes IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 106, p. 80, and p. 132.

peculiar to the theatre. His aversion for the written word leads to his desire to banish the pre-existing text from the theatrical process:

Le dialogue lui-même pour le peu qu'il en restera ne sera pas rédigé, fixé a priori, mais sur la scène; il sera fait sur la scène, créé sur la scène. . . . La composition, la création, au lieu de se faire dans le cerveau d'un auteur, se feront dans la nature même, dans l'espace réel, et le résultat définitif demeurera aussi rigoureux et aussi déterminé que celui de n'importe quelle oeuvre écrite, avec une immense richesse objective en plus.<sup>1</sup>

Artaud is not here advocating the abolition of a pre-existing plan, but merely of the literary text. His "text" would fix the details of a performance that had been created through the use of the complex language of the theatre. This record would not, however, be expressed independently of its performance. As with the canavaccio or the outline of the ritual action, the written word would be a generative element.

The debate over the claims of text and performance is to a certain extent academic. For Hegel the argument is a false one that derives from the practice of reading works that are meant for performance: "But, unlike the Greeks, we are accustomed at times merely to read a drama as well as, at other times, to see it actually performed, and this fact has led dramatists themselves further astray by intending their work, to some extent, merely to be read, in the belief that this has no influence at all on the nature of the composition."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, there is no doubt in the mind of Diderot as to the true method of appreciating a play: "Une pièce est moins faite pour être lue, que pour être représentée."<sup>3</sup> Dramatists themselves most commonly see the act of writing in the light of a future performance or future actor. The very layout of the dramatic text on the page with speeches attributed to characters and with the reduction of physical description to the few lines of stage directions visually represents the emphasis on dialogue. Plays are not infrequently written with a particular actor or actors in view. Racine, for example, is reported to have created the role of Phèdre for La Champmeslé,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 133-34.

<sup>2</sup> Georg W. F. Hegel, Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, trans. T. M. Knox, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 1183.

<sup>3</sup> Denis Diderot, Oeuvres Complètes VII (Paris: Garnier, 1875), p. 86.

Arrabal that of Laïs in Le Jardin des délices for Delphine Seyrig. Giraudoux wrote in particular for the whole of Jouvet's company. A slight variation is the author who acts in his own plays, prominent examples being Molière and, more recently, Jean-Louis Barrault.

The creative process of the dramatic writer can be clearly influenced by the prospect of the future performance. From a survey conducted by Binet and Passy among dramatists of the last decade of the nineteenth century, it is possible to conclude that dramatic authors either see or hear their text performed as they write it. A typical reply is that of François de Curel to the effect that "pendant le travail de création ses rêveries sont surtout auditives."<sup>1</sup> The modern author, Gabriel Cousin, goes further; for him dramatic creation cannot begin until a space and a scenic arrangement have been imagined: "Je ne peux écrire une pièce que lorsque j'ai décidé moi-même de mon dispositif scénique. . . . Ce dispositif me sert pour que tout fonctionne, alors je peux écrire le dialogue."<sup>2</sup> In the seventeenth century, <sup>the</sup> Abbé d'Aubignac insisted that the duty of the poet was not just to produce a text but also to be acquainted with the technical aspects of performance in order to be able to assess the effectiveness of his text in the theatre:

Je sçay bien que le Poète ne travaille point sur l'Action comme véritable, sinon en tant qu'elle peut estre représentée; D'où l'on pourroit conclure qu'il y a quelque mélange de ces deux considérations, mais voicy comment il les doit démêler. Il examine tout ce qu'il veut et doit faire connoître aux spectateurs par l'oreille et par les yeux, et se resout de le leur faire reciter, ou de le leur faire voir; parce qu'il doit avoir soin d'eux, en considérant l'Action comme représentée: . . . Il faut faire voir un spectacle parce qu'il touchera les Assistants de douleur ou d'admiration. C'est travailler sur l'Action en tant que représentée, et cela est au devoir du Poète; mesme est-ce sa principale intention.<sup>3</sup>

It would appear that the separation of text and performance into distinct works is a critical practice rather than a creative procedure. That the performance is integral to the conception of the work is true of all theatre.

Alfred Simon defines the essence of theatre: "En bref toute l'essence

<sup>1</sup> Binet and Passy cited by Veinstein, Mise en scène théâtrale, p. 213.

<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Cousin, [Interview] Art et Education et Actuel '68 (Lyon), 1968.

<sup>3</sup> Abbé d'Aubignac, La Pratique du théâtre, ed. Pierre Martino, nouvelle éd. (Paris: Edouard Champion, 1927), p. 39.

du théâtre est contenue dans le rapport qui s'établit entre le personnage et l'acteur, entre le spectateur et l'acteur, et par la médiation de ce dernier, entre le personnage imaginaire et le spectateur réel."<sup>1</sup> This observation is valid if one considers only the situation that obtains in the theatre at the moment of performance. However, the production process as a whole involves more than just the actor and the spectator. Louis Jouvet refers to the "trinité parfaite"<sup>2</sup> of the author, the actor, and the spectator who are as one in the creation of the theatrical experience. Again, this description is not entirely adequate because of a failure to distinguish the differences between the three roles and to include the director at all.

The conventional process of dramatic composition is twofold: the preparation of a written text precedes the projection of that text into three-dimensional form on the stage. Jacques Copeau describes the transition as the passage from "une vie spirituelle et latente, celle du texte écrit, à une vie concrète et actuelle, celle de la scène."<sup>3</sup> In this process the author, actor, director and spectator have certain roles. Conventionally the author is a solitary individual, working at his text in physical isolation from the performance area although this task will generally be influenced by the imagined future performance. Next his text is presented to a production team or director. In extreme cases, the director then studies the text and writes a detailed plan of his intended production before presenting it to the cast; in other cases, the director inspires the actors and orientates their work along a general line of interpretation, often decided upon in conjunction with the author who may wish to alter his text accordingly. The actor's duty is to understand and incarnate a character portrayed in the text; it is his person which endows the performance with its specificity, its immediateness. The

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<sup>1</sup> Simon, "Le Théâtre, le mythe, et la psyché," pp. 820-21.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Jouvet, Réflexions du comédien (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1938), p. 167. It is rather surprising that Jouvet should mention the director only in the somewhat pejorative terms: "Le directeur est un supplément."

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Copeau, "La Mise en scène," Encyclopédie Française, vol. 17 (December 1935), p. 1.

spectator functions primarily as the witness of the live performance of the text; his involvement with the production process is demanded only at the moment of performance although his influence on that performance could have been present from the very beginning. For example, the dramatist Armand Salacrou calls the spectator "un collaborateur," and "la moitié de l'auteur dramatique,"<sup>1</sup> implying that the dramatic author is always conscious of the ultimate step in the creative process, the presentation of the work to the public. Therefore, despite the definition of roles, even in the conventional situation, collaboration is the overriding principle of organization as Jouvett's concept of the trinity suggests.

The performance demands the organization of a physical space as well. Conventionally this means the delineation of two areas, one for the actors and one for the spectators. The shape and form of these buildings have varied throughout the ages from the Greek amphitheatre to the Elizabethan booth stage, the Italianate stage, and even to the more recent theatre-in-the-round. However, in all these designs, provision is made for the two defined areas.

Finally, the performance demands a non-literary vocabulary. The printed or spoken word is not the sole medium of communication; the actor's movement in space, the use of gesture, as well as lighting and sound, compose an additional language of the senses, the "poésie dans l'espace"<sup>2</sup> of Artaud's essays.

This thesis studies some of the post-war forms of theatre that have directly confronted these complexities, and have consequently modified the nature of the theatrical process and experience. There is no attempt to claim absolute originality for the forms considered. Indeed, references to historical precedents reveal that modern forms often rejuvenate ideas <sup>from</sup> of the past. The approach to the subject-matter is aimed at the effect in performance of the dramatic experiments discussed. Thus, the critical approach reflects the same preoccupation that informs the creative process, namely the future

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<sup>1</sup>Armand Salacrou, Théâtre II (Paris: Gallimard, 1944), p. 223; and Armand Salacrou, "Entretien," Arts, no. 728 (24-30 June 1959), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Artaud, O.C. IV, p. 46.



performance of the work. The textual analysis that constitutes a major part of the early chapters is undertaken not to elucidate the thematic content of the works, although some consideration of theme is necessary, but rather to uncover the underlying structures which define the eventual performances. Such a method has been called "l'analyse dramaturgique," outlined by Michèle Piemme as follows: "Elle cherche à exploiter les potentialités d'un texte plus qu'à en dégager le sens pour le seul plaisir de le comprendre, se différenciant en cela de l'analyse de texte traditionnelle qui considère les moyens internes mis en oeuvre par le texte pour élaborer une signification cohérente."<sup>1</sup>

This type of analysis is supplemented by a scenographic study of the conditions of performance. This method becomes more prevalent in those chapters which deal specifically with innovations and experiments concerning the circumstances of the performance itself. Scenography, as it appeared in Pierre Sonrel's now classic study, was primarily a history of scenic and theatrical design.<sup>2</sup> However, its scope has been extended, notably by Denis Bablet, to describe the physical factors governing a performance and their interrelationship within the overall significance of the performance: "Si l'organisation spatiale contribue à instaurer certains types de rapports psycho-physiologiques entre l'action dramatique et le spectateur, ces rapports psycho-physiologiques sont naturellement fonction du spectacle."<sup>3</sup>

The combination of these two lines of inquiry into theatre, it is hoped, forms the basis of a critical method that respects the double nature of the genre. With this same end in view, Bablet and Jean Jacquot have directed studies at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. The fruits of this work are the volumes that have appeared since 1970 under the

<sup>1</sup> Michèle Piemme, "Les Espaces scéniques et dramaturgiques dans Les Nègres de Jean Genet," Marche romane, vol. 20, no. 3 (1970), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Sonrel, Traité de scénographie (Paris: Odette Lieutier, 1943).

<sup>3</sup> Denis Bablet, "Pour une méthode d'analyse du lieu théâtral," Interscaena (Prague), vol. 2-I (1971), p. 44, repr. Travail théâtral, no. 6 (January-March 1972).

general title, Les Voies de la création théâtrale. Their premise is that "la composition du texte, et la mise en oeuvre, en vue de la représentation, des moyens d'expression scéniques, seraient considérés comme des aspects complémentaires de la création, des éléments interdépendants du langage théâtral."<sup>1</sup>

Despite d'Aubignac's advice to authors and despite Francisque Sarcey's "Essai d'une esthétique de théâtre" of 1876, dramatic criticism has remained very largely a branch of literary criticism. The beginnings of a new approach are to be found in France in the studies of a number of aesthetic philosophers which began to appear during the Second World War. They concentrated on an inquiry into the nature of theatre and the philosophic and aesthetic problems that it posed. Henri Gouhier set out their aim clearly in the introductory remarks to his L'Essence du théâtre: "Définir ce qu'est le théâtre en précisant ce qu'il n'est pas, analyser sa structure, dire à quelles conditions il existe et dans quelles conditions il cesse d'exister, rapporter sa signification à l'homme qui le veut et qui le crée, tel est le programme."<sup>2</sup> Gouhier followed his initial study with two more investigations, Le Théâtre et l'existence (1952) and L'Oeuvre théâtrale (1958). André Villiers had a similar desire to uncover "les principes de l'art dramatique qui tiennent aux seules fonctions et conditions d'exercice du théâtre."<sup>3</sup> Etienne Souriau was specifically concerned with the relationship of the actor to his role and the question of the reality of the character, as well as with the mechanics of the dramatic situation.<sup>4</sup> The most important study for our purpose was produced by André Veinstein; La Mise en scène théâtrale et sa condition esthétique dealt exclusively and

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Jacquot, ed., Les Voies de la création théâtrale, vol. 1 (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1970), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Henri Gouhier, L'Essence du théâtre (Paris: Plon, 1943, repr. 1948), pp. ix-x.

<sup>3</sup>André Villiers, La Psychologie de l'art dramatique (Paris: Colin, 1951), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Etienne Souriau, Les Deux cent mille situations dramatiques (Paris: Flammarion, 1950); and Etienne Souriau, Les Grands Problèmes de l'esthétique théâtrale (Paris: Centre de Documentation Universitaire, 1956).

exhaustively with the relationship of the performance to the text. The general conclusions drawn by these philosophers held that the performance was an integral part of the theatrical genre although Veinstein attributed artistic validity to the non-performed play text. In particular, Gouhier endorsed the view that the quality of presence implied in performance was the essence of theatre: "Dans représentation, il y a présence et présent: ce double rapport à l'existence et au temps constitue l'essence du théâtre."<sup>1</sup> The work of these authors formed a theoretical basis on which dramatic criticism could have developed. For their own part, their comment remained at a generalized level without detailed discussion of plays in performance, and, apart from the two recent developments of dramaturgic and scenographic analysis, dramatic criticism has but rarely answered their challenge.<sup>2</sup>

The critical literature that pertains to the forms of drama discussed in this thesis generally takes little account of the performance aspects of theatre concentrating for the most part on thematic analyses. The exceptions are the studies in the volumes of Les Voies de la création théâtrale and the books that were published in the series "Théâtre de tous les temps."<sup>3</sup> Thus Odette Aslan in her study of Arrabal's Le Cimetière des voitures and her survey of Genet's theatre read the texts as pre-texts to a performance.<sup>4</sup> Bernard Gille's Fernando Arrabal<sup>5</sup> attempts to combine textual analysis and performance detail, but in fact the two aspects never cohere; the details of the performances are placed, sometimes awkwardly, at the end of each section. The major works on Genet by Richard N. Coe and Philip Thody deal with the

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<sup>1</sup> Gouhier, L'Essence du théâtre, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Notable exceptions are the following: Pierre Larthomas, Le Langage dramatique: sa nature, ses procédés (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972); and Maurice Descotes, Le Public de théâtre et son histoire (Paris: P.U.F., 1964). See also his series of works which began with Les Grands Rôles du théâtre de Jean Racine (Paris: P.U.F., 1957).

<sup>3</sup> The series, published in Paris by Seghers, is now Seghers-Théâtre.

<sup>4</sup> Odette Aslan, "Le Cimetière des voitures," in Les Voies de la création théâtrale, ed. Jacquot, vol. 1, pp. 311-40; and Odette Aslan, Jean Genet (Paris: Seghers, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Gille, Fernando Arrabal (Paris: Seghers, 1970).

theatre in the same manner as the novels, concentrating on theme.<sup>1</sup> Coe included an introduction to Genet's theatrical aesthetic, but the chapters on the plays that follow it do not draw on this knowledge to explain the plays in theatrical terms. The same bias is evident in an unpublished thesis by David W. Whitton.<sup>2</sup> The author devoted introductory chapters to the theory of Arrabal's drama in each of three sections, but the ensuing discussions of the plays do not refer back to the theory. His argument follows the thematic development in Arrabal's plays with little space given to their performance. Françoise Raymond-Mundschau was unequivocal about her position as a critic of Arrabal:

Nous voudrions signaler tout d'abord que la réflexion portera sur les pièces écrites, c'est-à-dire le théâtre lui-même et les indications scéniques personnelles d'Arrabal. . . . Que le théâtre soit avant tout spectacle, nous en sommes bien persuadée. Mais un spectacle est une fête de quelques heures pour ceux qui ont la chance d'y assister. Paroles, voix, musique, gestes et mouvements, poésie et hallucination ordonnent pour un moment une magie somptueuse ou dérisoire; mais qu'en reste-t-il après? Les paroles s'envolent, les écrits demeurent.<sup>3</sup>

The only full-length study of Gatti's work had a similar premise: "C'est à partir du texte écrit et de son noyau fondamental—écriture et structures—que nous avons cherché le sens de l'oeuvre."<sup>4</sup>

Raymond-Mundschau's comments highlight the difficulties implied in an approach that attempts to deal at all with the performance aspects of theatre. The performance is ephemeral, only existing in the present (as Gouhier observed). Each director can interpret a text in a different way leaving the critic to face a shifting reality. In order to study the performance of a play, the critic has to be involved in part in a reconstruction. The result will always be imperfect, but the difficulties should not prohibit the attempt to define and study what Bablet has called "les rapports intimes et complexes

<sup>1</sup>Richard N. Coe, The Vision of Jean Genet (London: Peter Owen, 1968); and Philip Thody, Jean Genet: a Study of His Novels and Plays (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>David W. Whitton, "The Theatre of Fernando Arrabal, 1952-1969" (Ph. D. thesis, Durham University, 1974).

<sup>3</sup>Françoise Raymond-Mundschau, Arrabal (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1972), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Gérard Gozlan and Jean-Louis Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 9.

qui lient deux modes d'existence de l'oeuvre dramatique, son existence littéraire et son existence scénique."<sup>1</sup> The materials that the critic has at his disposal are many: production notebooks, sketches of the set, technical diagrams, photographs, press reviews, recordings, and statements from those involved in a production. The present thesis makes considerable use of theatre reviews, studies of photographs and interviews as well as the author's personal experience of performances. Although the press review, in particular, can be suspect in that it reports an immediate, perhaps unreflective, response to a performance, this very immediacy is more useful to our purpose than an academic study. The reviewer often includes references to the reaction of the whole audience along with his own. A second criticism of the press review specifies the possibility of its being written from a certain standpoint for consumption by a certain kind of reader. It may reflect, for example, the political persuasion of the newspaper rather than give an assessment of a performance. Nevertheless, a wide enough reading of reviews will produce a generalized idea of the nature and effectiveness of the performance. This type of work has been undertaken by Coe in his study "Unbalanced Opinions" and in his edition The Theater of Jean Genet: a Casebook.<sup>2</sup>

Since the field of study of the thesis concentrates on post-war French theatre, the work of Antonin Artaud, which can be viewed as a precursor of much of the dramatic experimentation in modern France, is included only as a point of reference within each chapter. Another omission has been any detailed consideration of the absurdists—Adamov, Beckett, Ionesco, and Pinget—and the writers of the younger generation—Obaldia, Weingarten and Dubillard. All these dramatists demand greater efforts from the audience than the conventional theatre in that they present a universe of dream, perverse logic, or

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<sup>1</sup> Denis Bablet, ed., Les Voies de la création théâtrale, vol. 2 (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1970), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Richard N. Coe, "Unbalanced Opinions: a Study of Jean Genet and the French Critics, followed by a Checklist of Criticism in French," Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society: Literary and Historical Section, vol. 14, pt. 2 (June 1970), pp. 27-73; and Richard N. Coe, ed., The Theater of Jean Genet: a Casebook (New York: Grove Press, 1970).

dense metaphor, but their theatre is generally compatible with the conventional situation. No modification of the theatrical relationships or the performance space takes place to any great degree. The experimental tendency of absurdist writing is to examine the components of the conventional play as they exist in the imaginary world of the stage. In the programme notes to Identité Pinget described the significance of his own experimentation: "Une sorte de mise en accusation des moyens traditionnels du théâtre, une parodie qui doit par sa truculence même redonner foi en les possibilités du jeu dramatique et les multiplier."<sup>1</sup>

Pinget's play centres on the problem of the reality of the character and the nature of dramatic creation. His work recalls the toying with the real and the imaginary, the actor and the role, which has constantly preoccupied dramatists and which the play-within-a-play technique has further developed. Through this technique the dramatic illusion itself becomes the subject of the play. Introduced into modern France by Pirandello between the wars, up to the present day it has been a constant feature of serious drama: Ghelderode's Trois acteurs et un drame (1929) and Sortie de l'acteur (1942), Savoir's Le figurant de la gaîté (1930), Lenormand's Crépuscule du théâtre (1934), and Giraudoux's L'Impromptu de Paris (1937). Anouilh has repeatedly turned to this style of writing: La Répétition (1950), La Grotte (1961), Cher Antoine (1969), and Ne Réveillez pas Madame (1970). These plays and indeed the technique they illustrate have not been given any detailed consideration because, once again, they operate entirely within the conventions of the theatre.

On the contrary, the interest of Jean Genet's theatre lies precisely in its abuse of those conventions. His work distinguishes itself from the absurdist tradition and conventional theatre by a simultaneous exploitation of theatrical language and perversion of the situation of performance. His plays constitute a radical challenge to the notion of the dramatic experience as commonly understood through the misuse of the theatrical conventions

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<sup>1</sup>Programme note, Petit Odéon (Paris), November 1972.

themselves.

These same conventions are at first respected and then disregarded in Fernando Arrabal's quest for alternative dramatic forms which reflect the author's developing personality. Although constructed from private obsessions, his plays often adopt the procedures of contemporary experimentation. The most outrageous venture, l'éphémère panique, is his counterpart to the happening.

The happening, in theory, presents the most complete challenge to the conventions of the theatre. Text and authorship are redefined as the spectacle develops through chance occurrences often produced by improvised actions on an audience. The essential element becomes the spontaneous creation of the minute. Ephemeral by nature, the performances are seldom produced more than once.

On the destructuring occasioned by the happening is built an alternative approach to dramatic creation which rediscovers some of the procedures of traditional theatrical forms like the commedia dell'arte. Authorship becomes the responsibility of a group of actors. The performance results from collective activity and improvisation on stage which is controlled by a director. With this approach, as with happening, stage soon becomes stages. It is as though the redistribution of roles and responsibilities extends into the physical space of the performance area.

Indeed, the manipulation of the stage and the design of new scenic structures are constant features of the post-war period. Experimenters seek to develop a theatrical space that corresponds to the exploded space created by electronic media. Armand Gatti and Michel Parent strive to develop dramatic forms adapted for the demands of a twentieth-century public immersed in communications systems. Jacques Poliéri uses the media and electronic technology themselves to produce a kinetic, sculptural theatre in which audience, actor, architecture and stage machinery are combined.

Each chapter of the thesis is concerned with results of independent experimentation. The diversity of this work is taken into account in the

concluding chapter. A summary of the modifications of the theatrical genre suggested by the various experiments highlights the need for a redefinition of theatrical roles, space, and language. This need is related to the social changes and technological advances that have marked the years since the war. Furthermore, there is consideration of the wider implications for art in general of the willed suppression of aesthetic distance characteristic of the more extreme forms of theatrical experimentation. Experiments do not necessarily lead to the discovery of new forms. But, however fragmentary, their contribution is to influence, to a greater or lesser extent, the conventional procedures. The experiments examined in this thesis sketch a possible line of development for the theatre of the future.



## CHAPTER II

### JEAN GENET'S THEATRE OF REJECTION

#### (i) Genet's Concept of Theatre

Historically, Jean Genet is the original dramatist of the group of writers that Martin Esslin collects together under the general title "absurd."<sup>1</sup> His first play to be performed, Les Bonnes, was seen on the Paris stage some three years before the initial production of Ionesco's La Cantatrice chauve and some six years prior to the creation of Beckett's En attendant Godot.<sup>2</sup> However, it is indeed questionable whether Genet the dramatist should be classed in the same category as these two other writers. To be sure all three share certain common themes: the disappearance of universal values, the destruction of the stable personality and of the single identity, and the inability to communicate with one's fellows. But, whereas these themes constitute the central statement of Ionesco's and Beckett's plays, for Genet they form a thematic back-cloth against which is depicted a swirling vortex of the real and the imaginary, the être and paraître, "la 'réflexion' de comédie de comédie, de reflet de reflet."<sup>3</sup> This ~~very~~ existential problem could place Genet closer to Sartre, except that this discussion in Genet never leads on to the establishment of an effective ethical system nor to any defined political standpoint. Neither does such a comparison take into consideration the essentially non-discursive style of Genet's writing.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, 3rd revised updated ed., (London: Eyre and Methuen, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> Les Bonnes was first performed 19 April 1947 at Théâtre de l'Athénée, directed by Louis Jouvet; La Cantatrice chauve was first performed 11 May 1950 at Théâtre de Noctambules, directed by Nicolas Bataille; En attendant Godot was first performed 5 January 1953 at Théâtre de Babylone, directed by Roger Blin.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Genet, "Lettre à Pauvert," in Les Bonnes: les deux versions précédées d'une Lettre de l'Auteur (Sceaux: J.-J. Pauvert, 1954), p. 16, repr. Obliques 2 (1972).

The fundamental difference between Genet and these other playwrights is that for Genet theatre has become more than an artistic pursuit; the very nature of theatre, its essential ambivalence of reality and appearance makes it the metaphor of the human condition. This same ambivalence has been an integral part of Genet's own life. The description of his early reprobate life and development given in the autobiographical Journal du voleur is haunted by the idea of the reflected image: "Je conserverai en moi-même l'idée de moi-même mendiant"; "Mon imagination d'enfant, qui m'inventait."<sup>1</sup> The impression is given of life at second-hand, a Jean Genet living out an existence that is apart from a real Jean Genet, a character before the imagination of a creator. For Beckett and Ionesco, the theatre remains a form of expression, a work of art, which is the result of a world view.

This difference in the relationship of the author to his work is reflected in the choice of character and situation in the respective plays. Genet chooses the criminal, the maid, the prostitute, the Negro, and the Algerian—all types to be found in the earlier idiosyncratic novels and all outsiders who have no common interest with the essentially white, bourgeois audience for whom his plays are destined to be performed. In fact it is very arguable that outside of the context of Western society his plays would lose most, if not all, credibility, a point of view supported by Genet's refusal to allow Les Nègres to be performed in Poland and by his insistence on the presence in the audience of at least one white.<sup>2</sup> Genet's characters are very strictly socially defined and are deeply marked by the position that society has allocated to them. In comparison, Beckett's tramps exist on two levels at once: as the play progresses one ignores the fact that they are tramps as they are transmuted into symbols of alienated mankind. The opening, "Rien à faire,"<sup>3</sup> blatantly calls into question not only the dramatic situation of the

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Genet, Journal du voleur (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 29 and p. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Jean Genet, "To a Would-Be Producer . . ." Tulane Drama Review, vo. 7, no. 3 (Spring 1963), p. 81: "Except for miners, there are no Negroes in Poland. But this is not a play about miners."

<sup>3</sup>Samuel Beckett, En Attendant Godot (Paris: Minuit, 1952), p. 11.

two tramps on stage, but also the broader universal theme of human action. Similarly Ionesco's *Bérenger* almost develops into a porte-parole of the human condition, a bourgeois man facing a universe that appears out of control. The easy identification this allows between audience and dramatic action turns the play into a statement of Everyman proportions.

Of both Ionesco and Beckett it is true to say that the play is a statement of something which transcends it. The stage is a microcosm; beyond the play lies a universal condition. Consequently their effectiveness depends to some extent on the intellectual capacity of the audience to draw the analogy, although in the case of Beckett, the analogy is only to be drawn perhaps after the curtain has fallen: "The important thing about a Beckett audience is not how they react during performance, but what they feel after it."<sup>1</sup> For Genet, the play in performance is the total experience; its significance is found during the action on stage while the audience is confronted by the dramatic performance. It is indeed similar to a communion in observing the fundamental characteristic of the mass: there is no total, lasting liberation; the value of the ceremony lies in its repetition. The very moment of enactment is important: "Une représentation qui n'agirait pas sur mon âme est vaine. Elle est vaine si je ne crois pas à ce que je vois qui cessera—qui n'aura jamais été—quand le rideau tombera" (854:15).

Genet's theatre is experimental and pure owing to its concern with the very nature of the theatre. It studies the mechanisms of the performance in which its sole effectiveness is to be found. This experimental purity has led to comparisons with the work of Antonin Artaud. The superficial similarity is quite striking. For Artaud, too, the theatre was a visceral part of his own self. His world view was conceived in theatrical terms, in the coincidence of the worldly and the supernatural. This belief led him to Latin America and the west coast of Ireland in an attempt to discover a culture in which the two realms were fused into a single reality that informed everyday life. Yet a

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<sup>1</sup>Colin Duckworth, Angels of Darkness (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), p. 52.

basic distinction does exist between the two authors: Artaud's search was for a life style that coincided with his theatrical view of the world, whereas for Genet life presents itself as theatre, as performance.

Clearly the performance element of theatre has great importance for both dramatists. It constitutes that area in which the imaginary or supernatural (the character) and the real or worldly (the physical essence of the actor) coexist. Artaud's desire was to create a universe where this duality was permanently present. The theatrical performance represented a beatific moment when fusion with absolute truth was effected. On the other hand, Genet sees in the performance, not a celebration of truth and life, but a celebration of the illusoriness of life and the centrality of death. Artaud viewed the performance as a unique moment of truth, a singular experience. To Genet it implies repetition, and repetition is the hallmark of death. For the one, theatre is affirmation; for the other, it is negation.

Despite their dissimilar orientation their dramatic theories have a common source of inspiration. Both men turned toward the Orient in the pursuit of their goal. The performance of the Bali dancers in 1931 revealed to Artaud the potential of theatre and served as a crystallizing agent for his theories. The delight and jubilation he experienced he later attributed to the jeu of the actors, those "hiéroglyphes animés":<sup>1</sup>

Une espèce de terreur nous prend à considérer ces êtres mécanisés, à qui ni leurs joies ni leurs douleurs ne semblent appartenir en propre, mais obéir à des rites éprouvés et comme dictés par des intelligences supérieures. C'est bien en fin de compte cette impression de Vie supérieure et dictée, qui est ce qui nous frappe le plus dans ce spectacle pareil à un rite qu'on profanerait.<sup>2</sup>

Although without personal experience of Eastern dramatic forms, Genet's knowledge of them leads him to conclude that they constitute a purer form of dramatic art closer to his ideal "enchevêtrement profond des symboles actifs, capables de parler au public un langage où rien ne serait dit mais tout pressenti" (B54:11-12). Western theatre, he argues, is based on a premise that precludes this higher form, and that premise is psychological drama, the

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<sup>1</sup>Artaud, O.C. IV, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

identification of the actor and the role: "L'acteur occidental ne cherche pas à devenir un signe chargé de signes, simplement il veut s'identifier à un personnage de drame ou de comédie" (854:12).

Similarly Artaud had pleaded for a theatre liberated from "son piétinement psychologique et humain." To achieve such a theatre implied a redefinition of the actor's role. For Artaud the actor only constituted one element on a par with the lighting and the scenery. Although it was his acting in the final analysis that assured the success of the performance, Artaud reasoned that this should not mean that the actor was free to lapse into exhibitionism "puisque toute initiative personnelle lui est rigoureusement refusée."<sup>1</sup>

Exhibitionism is the very core of theatre in occidental society, argues Genet in "Lettre à Pauvert" (854:12). This aspect of self-display precludes the kind of theatre of symbol which Genet seeks. His reaction against this dilution of essential theatre takes the form of a drive towards overt stylization; it is a leitmotiv that runs through the notes he wrote for the performance of his plays in the series of essays entitled "Comment jouer Les Bonnes," "Comment jouer Le Balcon," "Pour jouer Les Nègres," and the Lettres à Roger Blin concerning the mise en scène of his last play Les Paravents.<sup>2</sup>

Les actrices ne doivent pas monter sur la scène avec leur érotisme naturel, imiter les dames de cinéma. L'érotisme individuel, au théâtre, ravale la représentation. Les actrices sont donc priées, comme disent les Grecs, de ne pas poser leur con sur la table. (IV:268)

The actor's jeu should reflect Genet's whole aesthetic system in which nothing is what it appears. The actors become "la métaphore de ce qu'ils devaient représenter" (854:13). Not only are they a representation (a level once removed from reality), but a metaphor of that representation making them twice removed.

<sup>1</sup> Artaud, O.C. IV, p. 107; and p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Genet, "Comment jouer Les Bonnes," in Les Bonnes (Décines: L'Arbalète, 1963), repr. Oeuvres Complètes IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), pp. 265-70; Jean Genet, "Comment jouer Le Balcon," in Le Balcon (Décines: L'Arbalète, 1962), repr. O.C. IV, pp. 271-76; Jean Genet, "Pour jouer Les Nègres," in Les Nègres (Décines: L'Arbalète, 1963 repr. 1967); Jean Genet, Lettres à Roger Blin (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), repr. O.C. IV, pp. 215-63; and Jean Genet, Les Paravents: quelques indications (Décines: L'Arbalète, 1961).

Genet of course realizes that in rehearsal it is the actor who searches for the exact gesture to express a certain sentiment or moment of the play; to this extent he allows a certain "initiative personnelle." But once this gesture is found it must be adhered to definitively; the actor in performance must not give the impression of having just arrived at the gesture, of adjusting the gesture:

Et que les comédiens, durant la représentation, ne se laissent pas aller aux gestes qu'ils ont chez eux ou dans d'autres pièces. Il est normal qu'ils cherchent avec vous les gestes qui leur conviennent en convenant au personnage, et puis qu'ils s'y tiennent. Mais en général ils sont si heureux de faire n'importe quoi pour paraître spontanés! (IV:227)

The logical conclusion of a process of gestural stylization would be the elimination of the actor in favour of the marionette or the mask, a direction which had already tempted Craig into the formulation of the concept of the "Über-marionette."<sup>1</sup> Genet himself leant towards this idea in his early theoretical essay: "Je le sais, des marionnettes feraient mieux qu'eux l'affaire. Déjà l'on songe à elles" (854:14). But apart from the puppets parodying the Court in Les Nègres<sup>2</sup> and the frightening figure of Warda in Les Paravents, he seems to have ignored the marionette and, instead, to have elected for extensive use of the mask. The mask limits the actor by its restriction of the expressive potential of the face. It forces a denial of the self in the actor pushing him from dilution to concentration.<sup>3</sup> Genet saw in the prevailing dramatic fashions the predominance of "dispersion" on the part of the actors, a fatuous parading of themselves in front of an adulatory audience "incapable de vivre en actes" (854:14; and 12). In Genet's drama the action is in the diametrically opposed direction towards self-communion and "recueillement" (854:14). As a result Genet's characters demand great efforts of concentration from the actors. The experience of working with Les Paravents prompted the director, Walter Donohue, to observe that the play demanded "an essential, pared-down precision of acting

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<sup>1</sup> Craig, On the Art of the Theatre, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> See Ernest Scheidegger's photographs attached to all editions of Les Nègres from 1960 onwards.

<sup>3</sup> As Dullin notes in his Souvenirs, p. 123: "L'usage du 'masque' entraîne une dépersonnalisation forcée de l'acteur."

style, a sense of readiness akin to judo and the martial arts."<sup>1</sup> The effect in performance is a similarly exacting experience for the audience. Donohue again:

Genet's characters are monumental: carved out of granite. They are laws unto themselves. As such, the actors must make no concessions to the audience; they must not seek or expect approval from it. The characters must be uncompromisingly themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Artaud and Genet can also be compared in the light of their attitudes toward the relationship between the audience and the spectacle. Artaud is remembered most for his plan of a theatre in which the distinction between scène and salle would be suppressed in favour of "une sorte de lieu unique, sans cloisonnement, ni barrière d'aucune sorte, et qui deviendra le théâtre même de l'action." Also well known is his belief in non-verbal communication, "un véritable langage physique à base de signes et non plus de mots" which "sert à coincer, à enserrer des organes."<sup>3</sup> The basis of Genet's concept of involvement does not lie in these physical considerations. Starting from the more classical approach of discovering a theme capable of unifying the actors and the audience, he turns the process on its head. In "Lettre à Pauvert" Genet describes two concrete examples of the kind of theatre he imagines. The first deals with an actual theatrical production described to him by Sartre which took place in a prisoner-of-war camp.<sup>4</sup> The actors on stage performed a play whose theme had some bearing on their situation as captives and prisoners in a foreign land. The effect of the performance on the audience is the crucial element in this account: "La Patrie lointaine fut tout à coup présente non sur la scène, mais dans la salle" (854:16). The second illustration is that of boys playing soldiers in the park. One of the boys is designated to be the Night: "A mesure de son approche, les autres, les Hommes, devenaient

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Donohue, "Genet's The Screens at Bristol," Theatre Quarterly, vol. 4, no. 13 (February-April 1974), p. 75. This article is a casebook of the production of The Screens at the New Vic Studio Theatre, Bristol on 20 March 1973.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Artaud, U.C. IV, pp. 114-15; p. 149; and p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> A text of this play entitled Sariona, ou le Fils du tonnerre is published in Les Ecrits de Sartre by Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 565-633.

nerveux, inquiets" (854:17). Although they all know that he is only a friend acting, what has happened is that he has become at one and the same time a reality and a symbol. In both cases that Genet cites, the emotion aroused in the audience is the essential; there is a communion of feeling created between the spectators. This feeling is not shared by those on the stage; the two realms are kept apart constituting a reversal of standard theatrical participation. As Duvignaud explains, the effect of a play and magic is to a large part dependent on attente in the audience: "Le spectateur attend . . . de transformer les signes que lui suggère le magicien en significations. Il attend aussi que l'officiant lui présente un Dieu sur lequel il projette toutes les forces du groupe."<sup>1</sup>

Genet himself notes that the effectiveness of the mass is really due to the will to believe on the part of the faithful; "Aux fidèles--non au public! --aux fidèles" he underlines (854:15). In the theatre situation the attente is precisely the willingness of the audience to accept the conventions of the theatre, to accept the suspension of disbelief. Traditionally this attente is satisfied by identification which in turn leads to the creation of a communion of sympathy between the stage and the auditorium. In modern drama, identification, Eva Metman argues, is rendered impossible:

This new form of drama forces the audience out of its familiar orientation. It creates a vacuum between the play and the audience . . . , the latter has no alternative but either to reject and turn away or to be drawn into the enigma of plays in which nothing reminds him of any of his purposes in and reactions to the world around him.<sup>2</sup>

In both Beckett and Ionesco, however, it would appear that because of the intellectual analogy to be drawn between the action on stage and a more universal statement, the audience can identify with a situation of universal significance. The end result is that a traditional communion is eventually set up between audience and stage.<sup>3</sup> André Villiers has even argued that Brecht

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Duvignaud, Sociologie du théâtre (Paris: P.U.F., 1965), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Eva Metman, "Reflections on Samuel Beckett's Plays," Journal of Analytical Psychology, vol. 5, no. 1 (January 1960), pp. 43-44.

<sup>3</sup>As far as Beckett is concerned it is necessary to examine this generalization more closely, especially in the light of the development of his work away from recognizable sets to abstract images culminating in





himself, despite his theory of distanciation, achieves his best theatrical moments at times when identification in the traditional sense is allowed to take place.<sup>1</sup> A recent production of Sainte Jeanne des abattoirs<sup>2</sup> was a good illustration: the play became more effective as the actress playing Jeanne identified more strongly with her character allowing the audience to participate, as it were, in the staged drama. Roger Blin in an interview with Bettina Knapp picks up the line of Villiers when he compares Genet with Brecht: "Brecht does not succeed in destroying audience credibility, nor the ever-present theatrical magic. In spite of all his attempts at anti-magic, he creates a continuous, theatrical universe." He implies that Genet does manage this rupture in style which increases "the extreme tension of the play."<sup>3</sup>

Genet's theatre in fact perverts the process of identification and involvement. The effect of his theatre lies in the attempt to reject the audience, achieved by a choice of character and subject-matter alien to the audience and the exploitation of the stage and the scenic space as an area strictly differentiated from that of the auditorium:

ARCHIBALD: (Au public.) Ce soir nous jouerons pour vous. Mais, afin que dans vos fauteuils vous demeuriez à votre aise en face du drame qui déjà se déroule ici, afin que vous soyez assurés qu'un tel drame ne risque pas de pénétrer dans vos vies précieuses, nous aurons encore la politesse, apprise parmi vous, de rendre la communication impossible. La distance qui nous sépare, originelle, nous l'augmenterons par nos fastes, nos manières, notre insolence—car nous sommes aussi des comédiens. (N:20-23)

Thus Archibald begins Les Nègres. Irma ends Le Balcon with a similar statement of the audience's position:

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Pas moi, his latest work, in which the spotlight is concentrated on the mouth of an actress speaking at an incomprehensible speed. This denies audience involvement and identification except perhaps on the subconscious level examined by Duckworth in Angels of Darkness. What distinguishes Beckett from Genet is that the former has no conception of the audience; he is interested in the completed work of art and not the effect it has. His work of art would apparently not include any contribution by reader or spectator; it exists per se.

<sup>1</sup> André Villiers, "D'Une Distance à l'autre," Revue d'esthétique, vo. 13, no. 1 (January-March 1960), pp. 42-57.

<sup>2</sup> Théâtre de l'Est Parisien, 11 October 1972, directed by Guy Rétoré.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Blin to Bettina Knapp, "An Interview with Roger Blin," Tulane Drama Review, vol. 7, no. 3 (Spring 1963), p. 117.

IRMA: Tout à l'heure, il va falloir recommencer . . . tout rallumer . . . s'habiller . . . (On entend le chant d'un coq.) s'habiller . . . ah, les déguisements! Redistribuer les rôles . . . endosser le mien . . . (Elle s'arrête au milieu de la scène, face au public.) . . . préparer le vôtre. (IV:135)

The audience is given a role in the drama, a very specific role which is dictated by the stage action; that is, instead of being allowed to indulge their willingness to believe in the stage action, the spectators are forced into a position where they are dictated to, kicked against, rejected.

The obvious reaction would be to walk out; having been rejected, one leaves. But Genet's theatre has a strange effect, almost that of peeping through a keyhole. It exploits curiosity and has a compelling fascination. Genet berates the circus performer in Le Funambule: "Non, non, encore une fois, non, tu ne viens pas divertir le public mais le fasciner."<sup>1</sup> Fascination is a central concept in both Artaud and Genet. Artaud saw the Bali dancers and their muscular, rhythmical movements almost as hallucination:

Un jeu de jointures, l'angle musical que le bras fait avec l'avant-bras, un pied qui tombe, un genou qui s'arque, des doigts qui paraissent se détacher de la main, tout cela est pour nous comme un perpétuel jeu de miroir où les membres humains semblent se renvoyer des échos, des musiques, où les notes de l'orchestre, où les souffles des instruments à vent évoquent l'idée d'une intense volière dont les acteurs eux-mêmes seraient le papillotement.<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately for Artaud fascination was transformed into a belief in another order of reality and the jeu of the actors became a reflection of a mystical godhead. The experience of the Bali dancers induced a total rejection, in theory, of the Western theatrical tradition.

Genet, on the other hand, despite the indications of the early "Lettre à Pauvert," takes a different course. Disappointed by the exhibitionism of the existing theatre, he turns back to the traditional and exploits it. He accepts the traditional means of expression but pushes them to exaggeration. It is "un théâtre doublement théâtral."<sup>3</sup> Genet constantly underlines the

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Genet, Le Funambule in L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti, Les Bonnes, L'Enfant criminel, Le Funambule (Décines: L'Arbalète, 1958), p. 188.

<sup>2</sup>Artaud, O.C. IV, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>Bernard Dort, "Genet ou le combat avec le théâtre," Les Temps Modernes 22 années, no. 247 (December 1966), p. 100.

sham and the artificiality of the stage action. He deliberately draws attention to the realm of the stage as a realm of the imaginary opposing the realm of the spectator. His plays contain frequent references to the notion of the performance. Genet glories in the idea of repeated performance and rehearsal. This would have been anathema to Artaud for such a self-conscious stage would have impeded the evolution from jeu to essential truth.

The stage is a world apart from the auditorium, a realm of scintillating, bright light. The cell of Haute Surveillance should be bathed in "le plus de lumière possible" and should avoid any illusory techniques: "Eviter les éclairages savants."<sup>1</sup> The lighting for Les Paravents, perhaps the most spectacular of Genet's plays, should have a similar harshness:

Si j'ai voulu le plein feu sur scène c'est afin que chaque acteur n'aille pas noyer une erreur, une faute passagère, son épuisement ou son indifférence, dans une salvatrice obscurité. Bien sûr, tant de lumière lui fera mal, mais d'être si fortement éclairé l'obligera peut-être. (IV:249)

For the performance of both Les Nègres and Les Paravents Genet requires that the auditorium should also be brightly lit, at least for part of the performance. The aim of this technique is not to unite auditorium and stage nor to immerse actor and spectator in a common experience, but rather to force the action on stage to become even more exaggerated, to highlight the artificiality of the world of the stage. In Les Nègres, Village reacts to the illumination of the house lights: "Village doit parler plus fort, éclater même, avoir des gestes plus visibles afin de reprendre sur lui une attention détournée un instant par le flot des lumières" (N:6).

The stage is a world of make-up and costume. These elements are introduced into the very action of the plays: the maids dress up as Madame in Les Bonnes; the notables of Le Balcon are shown being created from the small, everyday, clerk-type men who visit Irma's house of illusion:

Pendant toute la scène qui va suivre, la Fille va aider le Général à se déshabiller, puis à s'habiller en général. Lorsque celui-ci sera complètement habillé, l'on s'apercevra qu'il a pris des proportions gigantesques, grâce à un truquage de théâtre: patins invisibles, épaules élargies, visage maquillé à l'extrême. (IV:58)

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Genet, Haute Surveillance in O.C. IV, p. 181.

Similarly, Diouf in Les Nègres is dressed up as the white victim of Village's sacrificial murder: "Chaque acteur apporte cérémonieusement la perruque, le masque et les gants dont on orne Diouf" (N:84). The very brightness of these costumes helps to strengthen the impression of a brilliant jewel on display before us. Although the mask is used very sparingly in Genet's theatre, the author often demands very heavy, exaggerated make-up: the General of Le Balcon in the quotation above wears paint; Claire as Madame adds extra rouge (IV:140; and 165). Even in the earliest play, Haute Surveillance, great fun is made of Lefranc's painted tattoo (IV:210). Les Nègres shows Negroes on stage further blackening themselves with shoe polish (N:84). In Les Paravents the idea of obvious theatricality is pushed to the limit: the scenery of screens is brought on by actors, even painted by them. The whole effort is away from realism in the theatre towards a kind of realism of the theatre, a qualification reminiscent of Cocteau's famous distinction between "poésie de théâtre" and "poésie au théâtre."<sup>1</sup> This preoccupation with truquage is evident throughout Genet's work, from his first experience of it in a fight with a pimp in Barcelona,<sup>2</sup> throughout his novels to his last play: "Bref, traiter tout à la blague" (IV:235).

The use of bright colour and light together with heavy make-up has reminded at least one critic of the Chinese opera.<sup>3</sup> The visual element of a Genet play is vital: "Au théâtre, tout se passe dans le monde visible et nulle part ailleurs" (B54:13). The emphasis he places on words like fulgurant and éclat is very striking in his essays or notes about the theatre.<sup>4</sup> For Les Paravents the stage is envisaged as "un lieu non où les reflets s'épuisent,

<sup>1</sup>Jean Cocteau, "Préface de 1922," Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel in Théâtre I (Paris: Grasset, 1957), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Genet, Journal, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup>Leonard C. Pronko, Theater East and West: Perspectives toward a Total Theater (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967). pp. 63-67.

<sup>4</sup>For example, see Jean Genet, "L'Etrange mot d' . . ." in O.C. IV, p. 12: "La politique, l'histoire, les démonstrations psychologiques classiques, le divertissement du soir lui-même devront céder la place à quelque chose de plus je ne sais comment dire mais peut-être de plus étincelant."

mais où des éclats s'entrechoquent" (IV:249). The effect on the audience of his use of light, colour, music (in Les Nègres), and stylized gesture is to have it hardly believing its own eyes:

L'acteur doit agir vite, même dans sa lenteur, mais sa vitesse, fulgurante, étonnera. Elle et son jeu le rendront si beau que lorsqu'il sera happé par le vide des coulisses, les spectateurs éprouveront une grande tristesse, une sorte de regret: ils auront vu surgir et passer un météore. Un pareil jeu fera vivre l'acteur et la pièce.

Donc: apparaître, scintiller, et comme mourir. (IV:248)

Any attempt to lessen the artificiality of his plays is vigorously denounced by the author. In the original Paris production of Le Balcon, Peter Brook used an intricate set with a great revolving stage so that in the first four scenes the spectator made an easy transition from one room to another in the brothel. Genet is adamant that the scenes should follow each other as described in the stage directions: "Le plateau tournant—Paris—était une sottise: je veux que les tableaux se succèdent, que les décors se déplacent de gauche à droite, comme s'ils allaient s'emboîter les uns dans les autres, sous les yeux du spectateur. Mon intention est pourtant claire" (IV:274). His intention is not to allow delusion on the part of the audience by underlining that they are at a theatrical performance and, as such, not in the world of so-called everyday reality. Just as he tries to prevent the confusion of appearance and reality in the minds of the audience, so he tries to enforce the distinction in the stage action. All realism is banished not only in the acting style of the performers but also in the gestures they make: "De la même façon, interdire au travailleur arabe d'allumer une cigarette: la flamme de l'allumette ne pouvant, sur la scène, être imitée: une flamme d'allumette, dans la salle ou ailleurs, est la même que sur la scène. A éviter" (IV:248).

Fascination of the eyes is accompanied by intellectual fascination in the sense of being present at an event or an action that lies just beyond one's comprehension without being totally incomprehensible. The effect of this fascination, the product of Genet's powerful imagination, is like that of a photographic negative: the shapes and subjects are recognizable but the colours are reversed. The characters on stage move in a pre-established order.

Identity is sacrificed to the pursuit of a certain ceremony; hence the maids turn into Madame, the bank clerk becomes the General. The author underscores this unreal element in his plays; he establishes a divorce between the theatre and life. At the beginning of Haute Surveillance one is introduced into a dream world: "Toute la pièce se déroulera comme dans un rêve" (IV:181). And Irma at the end of Le Balcon reminds the audience that the play that has been performed belonged to another world: "C'est déjà le matin" (IV:135). She is implying that it has all been a dream from which one now must wake.

Despite this gulf between life and theatre, a belief in what is happening on the stage is essential. This belief is stimulated by the technique of a play-within-a-play by which is shown, as it were, the play in the process of creation. It is a technique that, although apparent in Les Bonnes and Le Balcon, is only fully exploited in Les Nègres. For instance, it is by implication that one learns Claire and Solange are obeying the rules of a ceremony:

SOLANGE, l'aidant. D'un ton triste: C'est chaque fois pareil. Et par ta faute. Tu n'es jamais prête assez vite. Je ne peux pas t'achever.  
CLAIRE: Ce qui nous prend du temps, c'est les préparatifs. (IV:146)

But for Archibald, the ceremony is the only thing to be taken into consideration, the ceremony and its successful conclusion. He demands complete subservience to the established order of action: "Vous n'avez pas le droit de rien changer au cérémonial, sauf, naturellement, si vous découvrez quelque détail cruel qui en rehausserait l'ordonnance" (N:29).

This technique is not, of course, Genet's discovery. Shakespeare's The Tempest is constructed on a similar pattern. More recently Pirandello used the technique in a great number of plays. The use made of it by modern writers, including Genet, is not for the revelation of an ultimate truth as Alfred Simon explains:

Le théâtre baroque va au bout de l'illusion comique pour la dénoncer et tenter de dévaler l'être qui est au-delà des apparences, au-delà de l'art, au-delà du théâtre. Au contraire le théâtre moderne s'engloutit dans l'invisibilité avec l'illusion morte. C'est le théâtre du néant. Il n'explique rien, ne montre rien.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Simon, "Paravents et miroirs," Esprit, no. 11 (November 1966), p. 712.

Inside the "théâtre moderne" Genet stands out as using this technique in a unique fashion. In Beckett, for instance, there are many cases of "performances" during the performance of the play: Hamm and Nagg tell a story; Estragon and Vladimir play games and insult each other to pass the time; Pozzo holds court; Lucky performs his monologue.<sup>1</sup> But all these games are purely divertissement for the characters on stage in their long wait for the end. Unlike the characters in Les Nègres who perform for the audience, the characters of a Beckett play perform for each other or indeed themselves. For Genet, the structure of his drama derives from the very notion of playing for an audience. The condition of the theatrical performance—an audience watching an enactment—is integral to the stage action: "Genet's theatre lays bare the mechanism of projection and vicarious satisfaction which underlies theatrical make-believe. This mechanism becomes the play's dramatic theme and action, thereby making theatre once again an exercise in magic."<sup>2</sup>

Genet's plays develop as a series of dramatic statements whose validity is then questioned involving the audience in this way in a constant inquiry as to the nature of the reality that is being presented to them. Almost a constant in his technique is the reference to off-stage action which throws into relief the action on stage. In Haute Surveillance there is life outside the prison cell: Boule de Neige, Yeux-Verts's wife, the staff of the prison. In Les Bonnes there is the life Madame leads in high society with Monsieur. In Le Balcon the brothel is invaded by the noise of the street, the guns firing, the revolution. In Les Nègres there is reference to the black court presiding over the case of the black traitor. There is a development here in Genet's approach: in his first two plays the outside reality is brought onto the stage in a concrete credible form and is unquestioned in the characters of Madame and Le Surveillant. However, in Le Balcon the outside reality is presented in an ambiguous light; Roger and the revolutionaries are shown to be as subject to

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Beckett, Fin de partie suivi de Acte sans paroles I (Paris: Minuit, 1957); and Beckett, En attendant Godot.

<sup>2</sup>Susan Taubes, "The White Mask Falls," Tulane Drama Review, vol. 7, no. 3 (Spring 1963), p. 87.

illusion as the clients of the brothel. In Les Nègres the question of the reality of the off-stage action (taken as being historical fact, outside the realm of the ceremony enacted in the theatre by the black actors) is posed but never answered, and the spectator is left in a state of uneasy tension.

The role of the audience is to be the passive victim of ceremony; it is to be an onlooker unable to enter into or affect the course of the stage action. The audience is held in this position by the fascination of watching itself (in the form of its preconceptions) being mutilated and destroyed. Especially in Les Nègres, but similarly in the earlier plays, the norms of Western society are overturned in front of a gaping public.

This reversal of values brings the discussion back to the example of "théâtre clandestin" that Genet reports in the "Lettre à Pauvert" (854:16). In his criticism of the contemporary stage, Genet uses the catholic mass as an example of effective theatre in that it creates communion, whereas conventional theatre fails in this essential function: "Je ne connais pas de pièces qui lient, fût-ce pour une heure, les spectateurs. Au contraire, elles les isolent davantage" (854:15). The example given by Sartre appeals to him in that it creates a communion in the auditorium. However, he recognizes that the circumstances of that performance in the prisoner-of-war camp were extreme. Nevertheless a method can be deduced from it. What caused the intense feeling of togetherness in the audience was the awareness of being under attack by the Enemy. For Genet himself the concept of the Enemy has no significance: "Pour moi, l'Ennemi ne sera jamais nulle part" (854:16). But he will use the concept against the audience in the theatre; that is, the Enemy will be his play. His play will attack the spectators and thus link them together through hatred. The audience will not "commune" with the performance on stage but will react to it, perhaps angrily. In this way the effort of the audience is not outward toward the stage, but rather back on itself, and ideally produces self-questioning and doubt. The means by which he will make his play into the Enemy will be the reversal and rejection of accepted norms and values.

Genet's attack on aspects of life in Western society has led to



frequent misinterpretation of his theatre as pure social criticism, utterly nihilistic, and therefore dangerous and valueless. Genet has made consistent statements that this interpretation of his work is the wrong one. Like Artaud who rejected the idea of social theatre, Genet denies that Les Bonnes is concerned with the lot of servants: "Il ne s'agit pas d'un plaidoyer sur le sort des domestiques" (IV:269). Neither does "l'habituelle saloperie sociale" have a central role in Les Paravents (IV:225). The Negro cause has no importance in Les Nègres: "J'écris des pièces afin de cristalliser une émotion théâtrale, dramatique. Je ne m'inquiète pas si, par exemple Les Nègres peuvent être utiles aux Noirs. Du reste, je ne pense pas que ce soit le cas."<sup>1</sup>

Despite what would appear to be a disaffection with the theatre in favour of more direct political action in recent years,<sup>2</sup> Genet still maintains that the social has no place in his theatre: "La politique, les divertissements, la morale, etc., n'auront rien à voir dans notre préoccupation. Si, malgré nous, ils se glissent dans l'acte théâtral, qu'on les chasse jusqu'à ce que toutes traces soient effacées" (IV:13). All these rejections of social commitment do not, however, include any positive statement of what Genet himself thinks of his own theatre. There is a hint of his reading of his own work in the instructions entitled "Comment jouer Le Balcon": "Encore une chose: ne pas jouer cette pièce comme si elle était une satire de ceci ou de cela. Elle est—elle sera donc jouée comme—, la glorification de l'Image et du Reflet. Sa signification—satirique ou non—apparaîtra seulement dans ce cas" (IV:276). The play is concerned with the problem of reality which includes the relationship between theatrical reality and concrete reality, the appearance on stage and the being in life, but no strictly social message is included. The social value of theatre exists only on a secondary level:

Dès le début de l'événement théâtral, le temps qui va s'écouler n'appartient à aucun calendrier répertorié. Il échappe à l'ère chrétienne comme à l'ère révolutionnaire. Même si le temps, que l'on dit historique . . .

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Genet to Pierre Déméron, "Genet sort de la honte," Le Nouveau Candide, no. 261 (25 April 1966).

<sup>2</sup>See Michèle Manceaux, "Jean Genet chez les Panthères Noires," Le Nouvel Observateur, no. 289 (25 May 1970), pp. 38-41.

ne disparaît pas complètement de la conscience des spectateurs, un autre temps, que chaque spectateur vit pleinement, s'écoule alors, et n'ayant ni commencement ni fin, il fait sauter les conventions historiques nécessitées par la vie sociale, du coup il fait sauter aussi les conventions sociales et ce n'est pas au profit de n'importe quel désordre mais à celui d'une libération—l'événement dramatique étant suspendu, hors du temps historiquement compté, sur son propre temps dramatique—, c'est au profit d'une libération vertigineuse. (IV:10)

Genet rejects the temporal concepts (and by implication the values) both of the Christian world (to be interpreted as Western society) and the revolutionary world, in which must be included the Black Panthers and Algerian rebels to whom, according to certain critics, he lends support in his plays. The world of political sympathies and ideological battles is foreign to him, but he lives at a moment when such events are the staple diet of the media and the press: "Jamais je n'ai copié la vie—un événement ou un homme, Guerre d'Algérie ou Colons—mais la vie a tout naturellement fait éclore en moi"(IV:259). This is the author's view of his work as a work of art. Through it he gives form to his own revolt. His writing is timeless, self-denying, and impartial. It is, as Archibald says, "cette architecture de vide et de mots" (N:179). The revolutionary power of his drama springs from this timeless quality in an aesthetic world, a mythical world:

Il s'agit, bien sûr, d'un comportement théâtral, et j'ai pris soin de préciser que la scène s'oppose à la vie. Ma pièce n'est pas l'apologie de la trahison. Elle se passe dans un domaine où la morale est remplacée par l'esthétique de la scène. (IV:228)

Genet is trying to supplant religion and morality and establish a cult of beauty. In his view religious faith is no longer possible and beauty can be the only substitute. The contemplation of the object of beauty binds people together, the elementary root of all religion (der. religio, Lat., perhaps connected with religare, bind): "Sans doute une des fonctions de l'art est-elle de substituer à la foi religieuse l'efficace de la beauté" (854:15).

Despite his emphasis on the artificial in the theatre, Genet is not destroying the theatre but transforming it into a self-sufficient reality, an object of beauty. In so doing he is proposing the means as an end. This restricts theatre because it denies the human element; the spectator is not

with the stage:

This stage objectifies the work of art: admiration replaces assimilation. Deliberately, it shuns human concerns. The human presence that informs the object identifies itself and does not propose transmutation by the spectator. The stage mystery remains impenetrable to man and refuses his presence—the spectator is humbled. The stage belongs to the performing artificer.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Grossvogel defines the mechanism of ritual theatre. The definition is relevant to Genet's concern for the affirmation of the stage as its own reality, but it does not account for the effect of a Genet play, especially Les Nègres and Les Paravents. In these plays the human element is not denied in that both involve the spectator ultimately in a redefinition of his own position and situation, not only as an observer at a theatrical event but also as a person. The spectator does not himself enter into the action performed, yet the play is rendered meaningless without him.

The dramatic style outlined was not complete from the creation of the first play. It developed through Genet's experience in the theatre and his dealings with directors. The performance of his work highlighted the relationship between the play and its audience, and this relationship becomes increasingly important to an understanding of Genet's dramatic works. Three aspects, in particular, will be discussed in the context of this evolving appreciation of the position of the audience: singularization in Haute Surveillance; ritual in Les Bonnes; and rejection in Les Nègres. These three plays most clearly mark Genet's evolution as a dramatist.

#### (i) Haute Surveillance

Haute Surveillance, Genet's initial attempt at dramatic writing, is commonly placed in the same period of creation as the long, involved novels Notre-Dame-des-fleurs, Miracle de la rose, and Querelle de Brest.<sup>2</sup> As such,

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<sup>1</sup>David I. Grossvogel, The Blasphemers: the Theater of Brecht, Ionesco, Beckett, Genet (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965 c. 1962), p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>This first creative period ran from 1943-1947. Coe underlines the point by quoting copiously from Querelle de Brest in his examination of the theology of the play: see Coe, Vision of Jean Genet, pp. 220-35. Contemporary reviewers have also compared the play and the novels: see Robert Kaners, L'Express (21 September 1970), p. 92; N.B., Le Nouvel Observateur (21 September 1970), p. 45; and Matthieu Galey, Les Nouvelles littéraires (24 Sept. 1970), p.13.

it constitutes the first stage in a development away from the personal, idiosyncratic world of the imprisoned outcast writing solipsistic novels clandestinely on the brown paper provided by the prison authorities for the manufacture of bags.<sup>1</sup> In practice, Haute Surveillance was the second of Genet's plays to be produced on the stage, for although the first version appeared in the review La Nef in April and May 1947, it was not presented to the Parisian public until February 1949 at the Théâtre des Mathurins, some twenty-three months after Louis Jouvet's production of Les Bonnes at the Théâtre de l'Athénée.<sup>2</sup> The value of studying the development of Haute Surveillance lies in the fact that Genet, aided by Jean Marchat, produced this first performance himself, and so all the cuts can be directly attributed to Genet's reading of the play and his appraisal of the play in performance.<sup>3</sup> For Les Bonnes much of the alteration of the text was carried out at the insistence of Jouvet, who, Genet himself says, altered the character of the play extensively.<sup>4</sup>

Critical reception, however, to the creation both of Les Bonnes and of Haute Surveillance was very similar, for the most part hostile but with one or two critics very stolidly extolling their poetic virtues. To deal with Haute Surveillance, many still condemned the play as the product of an unsavoury mind unable even in the act of literary creation to leave behind the squalid details of prison life. In other words, Genet's attempt to translate his experience and world view into physical presences on the stage failed. This private world of cells and inmates might have been able to be expressed

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, Saint Genet: comédien et martyr, 14th ed., in Jean Genet, Oeuvres Complètes I (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p. 415.

<sup>2</sup>Details of subsequent editions of the play are to be found in Section II of the Bibliography. Details of performances are listed under the title of each play in Section IV: Reviews.

<sup>3</sup>Jean-Jacques Riniéri reports in La Nef, no. 52 (March 1949), p. 138: "Mais ici le passage de la rampe est une épreuve décisive: à voir l'auteur, comme je l'ai vu, diriger la mise en scène, en interprétant et en soulignant chaque intention, on comprend soudain ce qu'est le théâtre, et ce que peut être le théâtre aujourd'hui." Similarly Henri Spade in Paris-Pressa. L'Intransigeant 24 February 1949 quotes Genet's co-director Jean Marchat: "Il a des idées de mise en scène extraordinaires qui ont grandement facilité ma tâche. C'est véritablement un auteur dramatique."

<sup>4</sup>For discussion of Jouvet's influence on Genet's text, see below pp. 66-78.

in the novel form but the theatre showed up its incommunicability and even its undesirability. "Détestable," "cette inqualifiable sottise," "cet art n'est pas sympathique," "la monumentale erreur de Jean Genet"<sup>1</sup>—critics lambasted the play, or perhaps even worse, were quite indifferent: "une heure d'ennui," "on nous inflige, pendant plus d'une heure d'horloge, le très médiocre spectacle d'un moment de la vie de trois condamnés de droit commun."<sup>2</sup> The crucial point of most of the adverse criticism can be reduced to a simple statement: the play excluded the audience: "Elle envisage un monde étroit qui est celui des condamnés de droit commun. . . . Je défie qui que ce soit de me prouver que l'ouvrage dépasse les quatre murs d'une cellule et embrasse un problème général."<sup>3</sup>

Understandably the most vehement and committed opposition issued from those critics with well-defined religious and moral principles. Feeling almost personally assaulted, they reacted vituperatively. Among other deeper points he made, François Mauriac seized on the same point of incommunicability. He saw Genet as "un écrivain spécialiste qui déploie beaucoup de talent à l'intérieur de sa spécialité . . . [et qui] tourne en rond dans le cachot d'un vice dont la création littéraire ne l'aide pas à s'évader, car il ne conçoit rien qu'entre les barbelés de ce petit monde maudit."<sup>4</sup> Even following the 1970 production, Mauriac's line still finds support despite the generally accepted leading position of Genet's drama in the avant-garde hierarchy: "Jamais nous ne trouvons notre place dans leur univers singulier"; "Haute Surveillance , . . n'offre pourtant qu'un air confiné."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>L.E., La Croix, 6-7 March 1949; Francis Ambrière, Opéra, 9 March 1949; Robert Kemp, Le Monde, 4 March 1949; and Jacques Feu de la Rampe, La Casserole, 15 March-15 April 1949.

<sup>2</sup>Pierre Quemeneur, Réforme, 2 April 1949; and Bernard Simiot, Revue des hommes et des mondes, no. 33 (April 1949), p. 674.

<sup>3</sup>Jean-Jacques Gautier, Le Figaro, 14 March 1949.

<sup>4</sup>François Mauriac, Le Figaro littéraire, 26 March 1949, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Matthieu Galey, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 24 September 1970, p. 13; and Philippe Senart, Revue des deux mondes, no. 11 (November 1970), p. 436.

Another recurring angle of attack is typified by Gabriel Marcel's opposition to "la complaisance romantique qui s'étale dans cet ouvrage."<sup>1</sup> Almost in the same words L.E. in La Croix finds "la complaisance de l'auteur à remuer les larmes humaines" totally abhorrent: "C'est ce romantisme de mauvais aloi qui n'a même pas l'excuse de la naïveté."<sup>2</sup> The failure of the play proves for one critic at least that "le néo-romantisme de la chair faisandée a fait son temps."<sup>3</sup> The basic criticism is that Jean Genet is writing for his own morbid self-satisfaction or even self-stimulation. His preoccupations are alien to the average man:<sup>4</sup> "D'une telle leçon, il est certes peu de spectateurs qui pourrait faire leur profit."<sup>5</sup> A last quotation will suffice to demonstrate the extremes of hostility that the play aroused. The play demanded the sacrifice of all the comfortable passivity of the traditional theatre audience. It induced confrontation as opposed to genial agreement. The public reacted suitably emotionally through the columns of the popular press: "Les thèmes sont infects. Le ton est odieux. . . . Nous en avons assez de ces odeurs d'évier, de ces fétidités satisfaites, de ces latrines intellectuelles."<sup>6</sup>

In the face of the weight of this general disapproval, three critics stand out in support of Genet's play, each one taking a slightly different line. Marc Beigbeder was perhaps most free with his praise of the play, placing it by analogy in the mainstream of the poetic tradition of French drama, or perhaps more precisely, very close to its source: "[Genet] fait parler 'ses

<sup>1</sup>Gabriel Marcel, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 17 March 1949.

<sup>2</sup>L.E., La Croix, 6-7 March 1949.

<sup>3</sup>Simiot, Revue des hommes et des mondes, no. 33 (April 1949), p. 674.

<sup>4</sup>The actual width of Genet's appeal is illustrated by this quotation from an American article on the contemporary literary scene: "Jean Genet is a name and something of a legend in certain circles, but the circles do not extend to the larger or bourgeois French reading public." Eleanor Clark, "The World of Jean Genet," Partisan Review, 16 April 1949, p. 442. The creation of an anti-public, or an avant-garde snobism, was also diagnosed by Gautier and Ambrière in the reviews already quoted. It is a charge that has been laid against most of the writers in the absurd tradition, even down to Roland Dubillard.

<sup>5</sup>Guy Joly, L'Aurore-France Libre, 4 March 1949.

<sup>6</sup>Jean-Jacques Gautier, Le Figaro, 4 March 1949.

mauvais garçons' comme Racine faisait parler ses rois."<sup>1</sup> Beigbeder thus implies that Genet's criminals are special representatives of the human race, above normal preoccupations, who live out their lives in an essential world of passions, an argument that has been used equally appropriately in the case of Beckett's tramps. In the twentieth century the Racinian prince is an anachronism; the image of modern society is the tramp or the criminal—an outsider, an alienated being. Curiously Jacques Lemarchand also links Genet, although more tentatively, with the seventeenth century. For him *Yeux-Verts's* dance, *Lefranc's* murder of Maurice, and the final appeal to misfortune "incitent à penser qu'il y a tout autant de duperie, de vanité, de puerilité et de désespoir dans le monde spécialisé des criminels qu'il y en pouvait avoir à la cour de Louis XIV. Poussent à croire que les spécialistes quelle que soit leur spécialité ont mêmes tics, mêmes manies."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Lemarchand sees a general value in the play which can be communicated to the audience. Riniéri similarly sees an existential relevance in the action of the drama, "une extraordinaire autocréation": "L'homme même découvre avec stupeur que ses gestes, sa voix, son langage, sa douleur et son corps écrivent à leur façon, son histoire la plus authentique, et que sa dignité, la plus grande est d'assumer l'être fondamental qu'il fait surgir de l'éclatement de son moi dispersé aux quatre coins d'une scène obscure rendue visible."<sup>3</sup>

This duality of reactions to the play qualifies most strongly the premise that a work of art (and perhaps the theatre most of all since it is a communal art) must necessarily have a universal appeal, that the theme or character should act as a common bond with humanity, at any level, to facilitate the transfer of experience from the author to the perceiver, be he a reader or spectator. Great works of art, according to this principle, have a universal significance beyond pure form. Perhaps the most refined and extreme dramatic examples are the classical tragedies of Racine where all is reduced to the

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<sup>1</sup>Marc Beigbeder, Le Parisien libéré, 10 March 1949.

<sup>2</sup>Jacques Lemarchand, Combat, 4 March 1949.

<sup>3</sup>Riniéri, La Nef, no. 52 (March 1949), p. 138.

essential. The characters, for instance, are the embodiments of strong passions living in a quintessential universe. Nothing of the everyday detail of life is included. Personal idiosyncrasies are left aside. In the case of Genet, as the quotations above show, the process of universalization appears to be reversed with the detail of prison life blocking any transfer of common experience. As Gaëtan Picon points out, this "préoccupation de l'universalité" does not figure in Genet's aesthetic: "Ainsi cette oeuvre choisit de se construire sur un terrain entièrement particulier, défendu de tous côtés par des barrières protectrices—et je crois que l'on peut dire que la confiance de Genet est la première à se savoir et à se vouloir totalement exceptionnelle."<sup>1</sup> Georges Bataille contends that the process of literary (and more widely, artistic) communication demands the effacement of the particularity of the author and the reader before the art work. To draw attention to oneself in this process is to deny communication and, in fact, to deny the other in the two-way process. For Bataille this is exactly what Genet does: "Genet, qui écrit, n'a ni le pouvoir ni l'intention de communiquer avec ses lecteurs. L'élaboration de son oeuvre a le sens d'une négation de ceux qui la lisent."<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the rather jarring style of the drama with its mixture of "mots orduriers" and its incantatory power<sup>3</sup> it is perhaps this aspect of negation which most upset the critics. It is noteworthy that the play was first produced in a double bill with Feydeau's Léonie est en avance ou le mal joli, a play of truly conventional character. Almost unanimously the critics attributed soothing qualities to this slight farce in order to "rasséréner les spectateurs après la pièce de Jean Genet": Gautier found it "une compensation"; Marcel declared "après le poison, l'antidote"; Quemeneur rejoiced in "la gaieté réparatrice" of the second play.<sup>4</sup> However, more critical space was

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<sup>1</sup> Gaëtan Picon, Panorama de la nouvelle littérature française (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> Georges Bataille La Littérature et le mal (Paris: Gallimard, 1957) p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> Feu de la Rampe, La Casserole, 15 March–15 April 1949; and Georges Bataille, Critique, vol. 5, no. 35 (April 1949), p. 371.

<sup>4</sup> Interim, Papourage, 10 March 1949; Gautier, Le Figaro, 4 March 1949; Marcel, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 17 March 1949; Quemeneur, Réforme, 2 April '49.



devoted to Genet's play, perhaps a direct reflection of how great an impression the play had made. The hostility of the reaction is intentionally part of the play: "La réprobation et le haut-le-cœur qui répondent sans manquer à ce renversement, sont eux-mêmes partie dans l'incantation qui devient dans la nuit, ce spasme sans espoir, seul assez tordu pour exhaler la force du cœur."<sup>1</sup>

Haute Surveillance has been given very little attention as a piece of dramatic writing. Most of the critics reviewing the 1949 production contented themselves with a horrified refusal of the subject and passed no comment on the play in performance. A notable exception was Robert Kemp who, on the whole, found the play disappointing but nevertheless gave room in his review to two important points: "Le spectacle de cette déchéance muée, presque géométriquement, par un jeu de symétrie, en ascension, dérouté les esprits droits et écoëure les sensibles."<sup>2</sup> First of all he underlined the very hostile nature of the play which almost physically repels the audience, and secondly he observed that Genet achieves this "par un jeu de symétrie." The very classical structure of the play has gone for the most part unexamined. Although many of the critics were struck by the austerity of the work, noting in particular its "style violemment tendu" and its "dialogue classique," others felt almost overwhelmed by its baroque poetry: "L'abondance d'une phraséologie qui prend rapidement les allures d'une inondation charriant les mots et les idées comme des noyés."<sup>3</sup> This apparent contradiction is resolved if one realizes that the effect of the play lies partially in the tension created between the stringent structure and the almost romantic poetry which gushes forth in the long speeches.

Coe mentions the structure of the play, qualifying it as "almost

<sup>1</sup>Bataille, Critique, vol. 5, no. 35 (April 1949), p. 372.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Kemp, Le Monde français, vol. 15, no. 45 (June 1949), p. 488.

<sup>3</sup>Joly, L'Aurore-France Libre, 4 March 1949 whose words are almost duplicated by Gandrey-Rety (see details following): "un dialogue violemment tendu"; Kanters, L'Express, 21 September 1970, p. 92; and J. Gandrey-Rety, Le Soir, 4 March 1949.

perfect,"<sup>1</sup> but never discusses it. He chooses to follow a thematic line, dedicating his whole section on the play to a theological argument of the Jansenist and Molinist theories of grace and determinism firmly rooting the play amongst the novels. Joseph H. McMahon, for his part, does discuss the play in part in the light of the 1962 New York production implying that Haute Surveillance could be "more dramatically imposing"<sup>2</sup> than Les Bonnes.

Interestingly, Mc Mahon witnessed the play in its original form as published in La Nef and by Gallimard. This is a much less structured version than that used by Genet in the initial production. Indeed, it is through an examination of these two differing versions and a later version which appears in the fourth volume of his complete works that one can see a development in Genet's dramatic method.

Haute Surveillance is a good illustration of how Genet follows the principle of singularization in contrast to the universal principle of artistic creation. Despite the antithetical nature of these two words, a similar effect results from their operation: a reduction in the intimate relationship between the author and the character, and the latter's release from the creator's psyche. This is perhaps a more essential process in the theatre than it is in the novel, for as Gouhier states: "L'essence du théâtre . . . exige des hommes réels dans un monde artificiel."<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that Genet's process of singularization developed during the rehearsals when the true nature of the theatre began to emerge.

The scant treatment of the play from any other than the purely thematic angle is not altogether surprising if one accepts Genet's own opinion of the play. In a note prefacing the text of the play in the complete works, Genet states that it is only "comme une note ou comme un brouillon de pièce,"(IV:179), that he would prefer the play never to be performed again. Similarly he regards

<sup>1</sup> Coe, Vision of Jean Genet, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph H. McMahon, The Imagination of Jean Genet (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> Gouhier, L'Essence du théâtre, p. 41.

the period of its creation with grave suspicion. It is just something hurriedly scribbled out "dans l'ennui et par inadvertance. C'est cela: elle m'aura échappé" (IV:179).

The evidence would seem to suggest that Genet has not been absolutely truthful. The play has undergone one major refashioning and various minor textual alterations since 1947. Surely this care over the work indicates that it is more than a mere "brouillon de pièce." More difficult to understand is why Genet has subsequently allowed at least two performances of the play since writing the note above. Arcady, the director of the 1970 Paris production, explicitly states that he received permission from Genet himself.<sup>1</sup> It could well be that the early drafts of the play escaped "par inadvertance" but the text of the "édition définitive"<sup>2</sup> has been remodelled. In fact, it follows very closely the translation which appeared in 1954 and which, Bernard Frechtman tells us, "follows the acting version, which supersedes the published text."<sup>3</sup> The process of putting the play on the stage radically changed the text. In this respect Haute Surveillance is typical of the dramatic art of Genet; all his plays have been altered and adjusted during their creation for the stage.

The basic structural alteration developed in rehearsals is that Yeux-Verts no longer leaves his cellmates to visit his wife. This apparently simple reorganization has far-reaching effects on the play as a whole at the levels of characterization, dramatic structure and intensity. The interrelated trio of characters is never physically split and thus the tripartite tensions between them remain unrelaxed throughout the play. In the original version, most of the venom in the relationship between Maurice and Lefranc was left to be expressed in one long scene of confrontation which dominated the central section of the play during Yeux-Verts's absence.<sup>4</sup> In later versions, this long scene

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<sup>1</sup>Arcady to Emile Copfermann, Les Lettres françaises, 23-29 September 1970, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Jean Genet, Haute Surveillance: édition définitive (Paris: Gallimard, 1965 repr. 1970).

<sup>3</sup>Jean Genet, Deathwatch, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>The "original version" appeared in La Nef, nos. 28 and 29 (March and April 1947) repr. Gallimard, 1949. For the scene of confrontation see HS49:73-95, to be known as the Maurice-Lefranc scene.

is broken up and the fragments distributed throughout the rest of the play, now enacted always in the presence and under the gaze of a third person, Yeux-Verts. This is obviously more satisfactory on the purely thematic level as Coe points out: "The dominating structural feature (both metaphysical and technical) of Genet's plays and novels is a three-point relationship: a trio which, in one way or another, is destined to resolve itself into that unity which, at bottom, it always was—with this rider, that an absolute Unity may also be a néant, or a total Void."<sup>1</sup> It also adds more effect to Lefranc's outburst: "Je dis que j'en ai assez d'être entre vous deux, d'être traversé par les gestes de l'un qui cause avec l'autre" (IV:189).

Despite McMahon's enthusiasm for the New York production of the original version, the irreducible presence of the third person must add to the tension and, therefore, the success of the play. On the stage, this presence is made more dramatically evident by Yeux-Verts spending most of his time pacing round the cell, encircling Maurice and Lefranc, and periodically staring fixedly into the audience. Simiot described this in the 1949 production as "tournant comme des fauves dans leur cellule."<sup>2</sup> The London Young Vic production emphasized his movement even more with a set that projected three sides of the barred cell into the audience.<sup>3</sup> Yeux-Verts, therefore, constantly passed through the field of vision of the spectator, between him and the other characters, occasionally climbing up the bars to look down on the other two.

In our interest in the way in which Genet has re-organized the play to allow for a more intense dramatic structure, the basic points of similarity between the different versions must not be overlooked. In all versions Haute Surveillance is based on the relationships between Yeux-Verts, Lefranc and Maurice; it is from these that the tension of the play springs. Pressure is

<sup>1</sup> Coe, Vision of Jean Genet, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Simiot, Revue des hommes et des mondes, no. 33 (April 1949), p. 674. This idea of caged lions is specifically rejected by Genet in a footnote which appears solely in the Oeuvres Complètes: "Ici encore, comme Les Bonnes, il ne doit pas se promener au hasard, ni comme un 'lion en cage,' mais selon une géométrie prévue par le metteur en scène" (IV:183).

<sup>3</sup> April 1972, directed by Frank Dunlop.

exerted on the bonds between these three characters by external forces represented by Yeux-Verts's wife and the mysterious black convict, Boule de Neige, regarded as the king of the prison. The tension between Lefranc and Maurice results directly from Lefranc's scepticism regarding Yeux-Verts's strength of character and his championing of Boule de Neige; in contrast, Maurice shows unfailing devotion to, and faith in, Yeux-Verts. For his part, Yeux-Verts remains aloof only involving himself in the squabbles of Maurice and Lefranc to prevent violence. In fact, Lefranc aspires to the Christ-like position of Yeux-Verts and tries to obtain it by force at the end of the play.

Structurally, Genet has elected to use, even in the original version, the scène à deux to express this triangle of forces. This technique is made far more noticeable by the alterations effected during rehearsals. For example, there is a long sequence of exchanges that runs from Lefranc mistakenly taking down Yeux-Verts's jacket until Yeux-Verts re-asserts his authority over his wrangling cellmates. This sequence is about twice as long as the comparable sequence in the revised versions.<sup>1</sup> The rather rambling original in which the exchanges between Yeux-Verts and Maurice dominate, but not without five interruptions by Lefranc,<sup>2</sup> has been remodelled into two counterbalancing scènes à deux. The first is between Maurice and Yeux-Verts, the second between Lefranc and Maurice, the whole sequence being brought together with the more dramatic intervention of Yeux-Verts:

YEUX-VERTS: Ne vous disputez pas. Si vous tenez à descendre ma femme,  
tirez au sort.

LEFRANC ET MAURICE, ensemble: Pourquoi? Pas la peine! (IV:196)<sup>3</sup>

This is a more compact organization than the original terminating in a dramatic moment which underlines the basic difference, and distance, between Yeux-Verts

<sup>1</sup>A line count reveals 212 lines (HS49:36-52) and 115 lines (IV:193-96).

<sup>2</sup>In the 1949 edition, three interruptions are found on p. 39 and one each on p. 44 and p. 47 which add nothing to the development of the scene.

<sup>3</sup>This same quotation is found in the original version (HS49:52) after another altercation between Lefranc and Maurice concerning an attempted escape by Maurice in which Lefranc helped him; this personal detail in the past is omitted altogether from the revised versions.

and his two cellmates. It occurs prior to a more precise scene leading to Yeux-Verts's "dance of destiny."

However, the major re-organization concerns the long scene between Maurice and Lefranc, alone on stage, which disappears in the later editions. Instead of relying on this one long scene to build up tension between Lefranc and Maurice to such a height that it is dramatically acceptable for Lefranc finally to murder Maurice, Genet has reworked the relevant detail of this long scene into three already existing situations at three different points in the play.<sup>1</sup> The dramatic effect of this rewriting is that a crescendo of antagonism now mounts between Maurice and Lefranc throughout the whole length of the play with these three specific points as key scenes in this accelerating process.

For the organization of the original to be effective Genet needed extra dialogue in order that the themes of contention between Maurice and Lefranc, already touched on, could be re-introduced into the long scene. One example in particular shows that he relied on partial quotation:

MAURICE: Yeux-Verts te l'a expliqué: en prison il n'y a plus de rois, plus de vrai mecs. (HS49:77)

This refers back some sixty pages to the first few pages of the play:

YEUX-VERTS: A la forteresse, il n'y a plus de monarque. (HS49:17)

Obviously the lengthy use of dialogue in itself will tend towards a dissipation of the embryonic tension. It would appear that to counteract this weakening of the situation Genet resorted to a lot more personal invective, more spiteful to be sure, but less dramatically effective than the use of cross-reference to points of contention on which the scenes of the later editions draw for their power:

Tu m'écœures (HS49:76 twice)  
 Tu es jaloux (HS49:78)  
 Tais-toi (HS49:80)  
 Boucle-là, Maurice, tu me dégoûtes (HS49:81)  
 Ne bave pas, tu me dégoûtes (HS49:83)  
 Salope (HS49:85)  
 J'en ai marre de ta sale gueule (HS49:85)  
 Saleud (HS49: 87; 93; and 95)

A corollary to the necessity for reintroducing themes already touched

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<sup>1</sup>Genet, D.C. IV, pp. 187-91; pp. 194-96; and pp. 207-12.

on is that Genet must have wasted opportunities in the original to develop real dramatic situations from the germ inherent in the dialogue. This point can best be illustrated by direct references to the text and to that situation which develops after Yeux-Verts withdraws from the dialogue with an unanswered "Pourquoi?" (IV:187-91; HS49:25-32). In all versions a scène à deux ensues between Lefranc and Maurice and much the same material is used except that in the revised versions Genet has grafted passages from the Maurice-Lefranc scene onto the framework supplied by the original dialogue.

A first skirmish builds up to a flash point. Maurice boasts of his solidarity with Yeux-Verts in front of the solitary Lefranc whose earlier attempt to strangle Maurice was only prevented by Yeux-Verts's timely intervention. At this point Genet includes a passage from the Maurice-Lefranc scene:

MAURICE: Tu vois? Tu vois, Jules, je ne peux pas dire un mot. Tu voudrais nous réduire à zéro, Yeux-Verts et moi. Non, Jules Lefranc.  
LEFRANC: Je m'appelle Georges.  
MAURICE: On a l'habitude de t'appeler Jules. Tu devrais nous prévenir au lieu de te vexer. Tu cherches à nous réduire. (IV:187-88)<sup>1</sup>

The insertion of this passage between the repetition of "tu cherches à nous réduire" acts as a breathing space in the argument, almost a discursive element amongst the boiling tempers. Nevertheless it is far from gratuitous. The issue prior to this exchange is that of Lefranc's identity which the insertion questions again in a slightly different vein. The position of the passage in the original version is immediately after Yeux-Verts leaves the stage; it is the initial attack of the long scene. Its meaning is not quite so striking there as in its new position, and the point is very soon lost under the weight of argument that follows; it is just one small detail that adds another strand to the web of antipathy which exists between the two characters. In the new position the insertion still performs that function but does so more strongly as well as having a dramatic purpose, a brief hiatus in the flow of charge and counter-charge which helps to structure the scene.

Only two speeches later Genet makes another insertion from the Maurice-Lefranc scene which runs until another dramatic pause when Maurice flicks his

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<sup>1</sup>A lengthier statement is used in the 1949 version, pp. 73-74.

head affectedly, a gesture which is repeated throughout the play and always brings a renewed outburst from Lefranc. The interpolation primarily serves to add texture to the relationship between Lefranc and Maurice which up until this point has been very openly pure antagonism:

MAURICE: Tout à l'heure tu as cherché à me supprimer mais il y a des nuits que tu me refilles les couvertures. Tu as peur que j'aie froid. (IV:188; HS49:83-84)

Introducing this detail earlier in the play makes more sense dramatically; to introduce a new element in the relationship suddenly, much later on, tends to weaken the effect of the situation as is seen by the revealed identity which dispels all tension at the end of a Marivaux play or, more crudely, at the end of a melodrama. Here again, this new arrangement enriches the plethora of themes that run through the dialogue often at a secondary level. For instance, up to this stage in the action, Maurice has been lording it over Lefranc confident in his faith in Yeux-Verts, enough so to try and make Lefranc feel an outsider:

MAURICE: Mon amié avec Yeux-Verts, je me charge de la défendre.  
 . . . Sans Yeux-Verts, j'y passais. C'est à lui, c'est à Yeux-Verts que je dois la vie. . . . Tu voudrais nous réduire à zéro. (IV:187)

Lefranc is in total isolation:

MAURICE: Tu es tout seul, ne l'oublie pas. (IV:188)

Lefranc's caring for Maurice, revealed by the new version, is also used to reinforce more cruelly the division in the cell:

MAURICE: Je m'en suis aperçu il y a longtemps. Et Yeux-Verts aussi.  
 C'était encore une occasion pour nous foutre de ta gueule. (IV:188)

Additionally there is the undercurrent theme of the intruder which is strengthened by the new order of dialogue. Maurice taunts Lefranc: "Dans trois jours, heureusement, tu auras quitté la cellule," which echoes his earlier: "Heureusement que tu t'en vas. On sera tranquille" (IV:188; and 187). This theme is particularly double-edged since Lefranc, too, find<sup>s</sup> the presence of Maurice obtrusive and disruptive in what he considers a working relationship with Yeux-Verts: "Avant ton arrivées ici tout marchait bien. Avec Yeux-Verts on s'accordait comme deux hommes," a faithful echo of the same point already expressed: "Maurice, ne recommence pas à apporter des complications dans la



cellule" (IV:188; HS49:86; and IV:187).

The development of the situation from this point is explosive. From this firm base in which the antagonisms are sketched in all their complexity, the dialogue is suddenly intensified; the casual flaunting "geste de rejeter du front une impossible mèche de cheveux" exasperates Lefranc throwing him into a fit of temper (IV:188). This next section of the scene exactly follows a passage in the original version but is extended to include another detail of the relationship. Lefranc gives some of his soup to Maurice who in turn passes it on to Yeux-Verts—again a reinforcement of Lefranc's solitary position (IV:189; HS49:50).

A further stage of development is reached when a sardonic comment by Maurice induces Lefranc to fresh outbursts:

MAURICE; ironique: Sur la galère?

LEFRANC: Répète!

MAURICE: Je dis: sur la galère.

LEFRANC: Tu me défies? Tu veux me pousser au bord? Maurice, tu veux que je recommence? (IV:189)

This final section is fashioned out of material collected together from various parts of the original version, but the most important sequences derive from the original Maurice-Lefranc scene. The final combination of speeches leads to a violent outburst of enraged passion. It shows a reversal of the balance of power in their relationship, Lefranc effectively evolving from his position of solitary inferior to a position of domination over the weakening Maurice. Lefranc uses the emotive question of the relationship between Yeux-Verts and his wife declaring that he (Lefranc) has been trying to estrange them and will continue to do so. Maurice in the face of this assault turns instinctively to Yeux-Verts and calls on him twice:

MAURICE: Qu'est-ce que tu veux faire de lui? Où l'emmener? (A Yeux-Verts.) Yeux-Verts, tu l'écoutes?

LEFRANC: Cela ne te regarde pas. C'est entre nous deux, et même si je dois changer de cellule, je continuerai. Et même si je sors de forteresse.

MAURICE: Yeux-Verts! (IV:190)

These two calls for aid punctuate the growing assurance of Lefranc and throw the opposition of Maurice and Lefranc into sharper relief. Of course, the physical presence of Yeux-Verts on stage vastly enhances the effect of these

pleas, the impassioned Maurice turning to the impassive Yeux-Verts only to be met by his cold stares and singular detachment. This small detail of production visually marks the physical and spiritual gulf between Yeux-Verts and his cellmates and prepares the way for the final deception of Maurice who will realize that he (Maurice) has been betrayed by his god. In the original version this striking stage image was rendered impossible by the absence of Yeux-Verts, and the dialogue is subsequently weaker:

LEFRANC: Même si je dois changer de cellule je continuerai. Et dès qu'il sera rentré tu pourras l'avertir.

MAURICE: Je vais me gêner! (HS49:93)

The latest version also demonstrates a more telling use of repeated phrases to translate the increase in tension; the two pleas to Yeux-Verts are one example. A repeated "salaud," once at the beginning and once at the end, act as harsh expressions of anger enveloping the sequence (IV:190; and 191). The third instance is the interjection "ce n'est pas vrai"; just as the first appeal to Yeux-Verts is an interrogative which develops into the exclamation of the repetition, so the force of this phrase is increased at each repetition, the final one again being in the form of an exclamation (IV:190; and 191). This phrase also shows Genet revising the text after the so-called "édition définitive" of 1965. In the text of the Oeuvres Complètes, the passage reads:

MAURICE, les dents serrées: Ce n'est pas vrai.

LEFRANC, il imite Maurice: Ce n'est pas vrai? Tu ne t'entends pas le dire! (IV:190)

The mimicry of Maurice by Lefranc is an addition which reveals the complete swing of authority to Lefranc. The ensuing speech becomes even more cruel in its sadistic, almost sensual, torturing of Maurice; Lefranc plays on his privileged position at Yeux-Verts's side as his amanuensis.

This whole concluding section is built around the relationship between Yeux-Verts and his wife. More specifically it shows how that force, external to the cell, threatens the balance of relationships inside it. This theme is extremely important throughout the play and is a fitting one with which to close this scène à deux, being powerful enough to turn the anger into paroxysm. The bathos which could easily follow such a climax of tension is avoided by a

skillful switch in tone. The final speech by Maurice effects this transition.

It begins in anger, anger trying to combat Lefranc's domination:

MAURICE: Jaloux! Tu es jaloux! Tu aurais voulu qu'on parle de toi dans toute la France comme on a parlé de Yeux-Verts. C'était beau. (IV:191)

The last two words introduce the remembrance of Yeux-Verts's notoriety which concludes in something approaching a reverential hymn to his crime:

MAURICE: La terre, la terre entière était parfumée. Et les mains de Yeux-Verts? Ses mains pleines de sang pour écarter le rideau des fenêtres? Et secouer ses cheveux chargés de lilas. Comme il nous l'a raconté. (IV:191)<sup>1</sup>

At this point Yeux-Verts, "stupéfait," suddenly turns to rejoin the action. The scene is closed and the action moves off into setting the scene for Yeux-Verts's "dance of destiny."

Taken as a complete unit this scène à deux is skillfully constructed to allow for a controlled build-up to a powerful final moment of anger. The criss-crossing of the various currents of contention echoing each other give it a dense rich texture mottled with the swing in the balance of power between Lefranc and Maurice.

If this reworking of the play makes for a more solid dramatic structure, it also sharpens the antagonism between Maurice and Lefranc. They emerge much more clearly as adversaries from the final version than from the original edition. A case in point follows the previous illustration quite closely. The re-organized structure is best explained as follows: Genet has brought together two moments of confrontation between Maurice and Lefranc by suppressing a sequence of intervening dialogue and then adding a series of speeches from their original long scene. The marriage of these last speeches to the whole is particularly well effected inside the movement of one speech:

MAURICE: En fer-blanc! Après je n'aurais plus qu'à me transformer en rose pour me faire cueillir! En rose ou en marguerite. En marguerite ou en gueule-de-loup. Mais toi, jamais tu n'arriveras à un si beau résultat. Il suffit de te regarder. Tu n'es pas fait pour cela. Je ne dis pas que tu sois innocent, je ne dis pas non plus qu'en tant que cambrioleur tu ne vailles rien, mais pour un crime c'est autre chose. (IV:195)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Genet has held back this speech for use in a later situation. Originally it occurred in the first pages of the play (HS49:15).

<sup>2</sup>Originally the first half of this speech occurred HS49:59-60 and the concluding section, HS49:88.

Once more the theme of Maurice as the accepted member of the inner sanctum of criminals is established, and Lefranc is portrayed as the outsider, the petty burglar of no importance. Again this situation generates a very definite emotional clash between Maurice and Lefranc, imprinting on the memory the power of their rivalry which makes the final scene of confrontation and murder the more acceptable. This time, too, it is Yeux-Verts who calms the tempers:

YEUX-VERTS: Ne vous disputez pas. Si vous tenez à descendre ma femme, tirez au sort.

LEFRANC ET MAURICE, ensemble: Pourquoi? Pas la peine! (IV:196)

The last two direct quotations from the play also underline, in the middle of this scene of bitter antagonism, the distance between that squabble and the level that Yeux-Verts has attained by his crime which is "autre chose." Maurice and Lefranc, together, do not understand his motivations.

The final scene of murder is another illustration of the construction of a moment of tension bordering on the exploitation of the dramatic situation. In the original version the murder is almost rushed and is over seemingly before the tension has mounted sufficiently to justify it. In the later editions, the murder scene is strengthened particularly by a speech that verges on incantation, a speech modelled on lines originally in the Maurice-Lefranc scene:

MAURICE: Et c'est Yeux-Verts qui en fait les frais! C'est lui qui a payé. Lui qui a été choisi. Et moi, si j'attire le malheur, ce n'est pas en avalant les aventures des autres: c'est à cause de ma gueule. Je te l'ai dit. Je suis marqué, moi aussi, mais ma vraie marque, c'est ma gueule! Ma gueule, ma jolie petite gueule de voyou. Je me décide à me défendre. Tu empestes la cellule et je vais la débarrasser de tes ordures. Tu nous écoeures. Tu es faux. Faux jusqu'à la moelle. Fausses ton histoire de la galère et tes marques aux poignets, faux tes secrets avec notre femme, fausses tes complications à propos du nègre, faux tes tatouages, fausses tes colères, fausse . . .

LEFRANC: Arrête! (IV:211)<sup>1</sup>

This verbal deriding of Lefranc acts as the springboard into the beyond, a realm where anger is replaced by a relentless march towards death and murder. Lefranc passes beyond rage and the murder is completed.

Thus, there are three distinct periods of confrontation, all of which

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<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the speech (until "gueule de voyou") was found originally in the Maurice-Lefranc scene (HS49:91-92); the concluding passage is an addition to the revised versions.

build up to a fever pitch. The first two are stopped by the indirect or direct intervention of Yeux-Verts; the final sequence is carried through to its final conclusion. That Yeux-Verts has withdrawn from the world of the two other lesser convicts is dramatically and physically emphasized by a stage direction:

YEUX-VERTS, visage tendu: Vous m'épuisez, tous les deux. Vous m'obligez à plus d'efforts que vous. Faites vite qu'on n'en parle plus. (IV:212)

The reorganization around these three scenes as opposed to the one long central Maurice-Lefranc scene shows an obvious desire to structure their relationship, to bring its nature out more clearly. But this desire is even more obvious in small details. As late as 1968 and the appearance of the Oeuvres Complètes, Genet was altering small points in the Maurice-Lefranc relationship. In a quotation above, Maurice opens with an exclamatory "en fer-blanc"; this forms part of an insult-counter-insult:

LEFRANC: Ordures!  
MAURICE: En fer-blanc!

These lines only appear in the latest revision of the play. They are repeated twice in the first scene of confrontation, once midway through the play, and finally in the closing minutes of the play (IV:195; 198-99; and 210). They indicate throughout the play the antagonism between these two cellmates and, also, the essential flaw in Lefranc's conduct: he is and will remain false; he is almost predestined to fail in his attempt to reach the position of esteem occupied by Yeux-Verts. This failing of Lefranc is also expressed in a single line:

MAURICE: Tu ne connais pas grand-chose si tu n'en connais que le signe. (IV:209; HS49:118)

This line was spoken by Yeux-Verts in the versions prior to the 1965 édition définitive. Its transfer from him to Maurice reinforces the rivalry between Maurice and Lefranc.

There is another indication that the sharpening of the relationship between Maurice and Lefranc was a willed step by Genet. An examination of the stage directions of manner reveals a sustained increase in the emotion to be expressed:

1949 Gallimard Edition

exténué (p. 11)  
 No stage direction (p. 11)  
désignant Lefranc doucement (p. 12)  
doucement (p. 12)  
 No stage direction (p. 25)  
 No stage direction (p. 29)

Oeuvres Complètes IV, 1968

violent (p. 183)  
sec (p. 183)  
désignant Lefranc (p. 183)  
violent (p. 183)  
violent (p. 187)  
toujours plus violent (p. 188)

The last two examples are furthermore accompanied by a whole sequence of directions governing the performance of Maurice which are absent from the 1949 Gallimard text: first, he must be overcome by Lefranc's attack, "presque pâmé"; but then his recovery is marked by increasingly strong directions, "toujours pâmé, mais vraie petite salope"; and finally as he reaches authority, "de plus en plus provocant, mais débarrassé de saloperie" (IV:194-95). This process can be seen as a tightening up of attitudes inside the play; each character becomes more firmly what he represents which is achieved without proliferation of detail.

The amount of personal detail that we are given about the characters, in fact, varies from edition to edition. Originally Yeux-Verts was a big handsome twenty-two-year-old with his feet in chains, but by 1968 he is simply a chained twenty-two-year-old. Maurice and Lefranc both lose their physical attributes and the Surveillant becomes an ordinary "vingt-cinq ans" instead of "joli et beau."<sup>1</sup> The fading detail would suggest that Genet had a more definite picture of his protagonists in 1949, who were perhaps based on real acquaintances.

The transformation in the character of Yeux-Verts between the original version and subsequent editions seems to bear out this observation. Originally the relationship between Yeux-Verts and his wife is very ambivalent with Yeux-Verts alternating between calm serenity and sobbing panic, particularly in one extended passage:

YEUX-VERTS: C'est jeudi dernier qu'elle me disait adieu, tu as raison. Adieu pour toujours. Avec ses yeux chavirés, elle prenait congé. . . . Maurice! Garde-la! Retiens-la! Retiens-la par les chevilles! Retiens sa petite gueule! Retiens-la par le cou! Ma fille! . . . Ma petite femme! Elle me laisse tout seul au milieu du sable. Tu fous le camp! Tu t'envoles! Maurice, Maurice. (HS49:36-37)

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<sup>1</sup>Compare the lists of dramatis personae, HS49:9 and IV:181.

The fear that she will desert him to seek another is unbearable to him (HS49:38), yet at the end of the play he graciously offers her to the guard. The change in attitude takes place off stage; he return<sup>s</sup> from his visit to the parloir with a big smile revealing the "reconciliation between [himself] . . . and his wife."<sup>1</sup> In the revised version, the periods of weakness are severely muted if not suppressed entirely. Indeed, Yeux-Verts, although now on stage all the time, says less and remains as a kind of Nemesis haunting the cell. There remains the moment of hesitation when the guard announces the arrival of his wife:

YEUX-VERTS: C'est moi? Non? Elle est venue. (Il hésite.) Elle est venue? eh bien, va lui dire qu'elle s'en aille. (IV:200)<sup>2</sup>

The last clause expresses that the decision has already been taken; he no longer needs consultation with his wife to know that it is he who grants her her freedom. The increased self-reliance shown by this example is more in keeping with the position which Yeux-Verts occupies in the play: the superior criminal, almost a saint, who bears proudly the responsibility for his actions. Throughout the later version, he is always in command of the situation, existing in a world apart from his cellmates, firm and decisive. A clear instance is the offer of the opportunity for killing his wife to be decided by un tirage au sort:

YEUX-VERTS: Il faut tirer. Il faut tirer au sort. (IV:198)

Originally his decision is weakened by doubt and hesitation:

YEUX-VERTS: Alors, on va tirer. On va tirer au sort, mais avec quoi? (HS49:64)

The definitive Yeux-Verts is an extremely powerful figure on the stage, towering above the lesser personages of Maurice and Lefranc. In the 1949 production of the play, supervised by Genet himself, this aspect was very clearly underscored by the physical appearance and gestures of the actors.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>McMahon, Imagination of Jean Genet, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup>In the original version this quotation terminates after (Il hésite.) and is followed by the exit of Yeux-Verts (HS49:73).

<sup>3</sup>This information has been culled from close study of photographs of the original production available at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal (Paris), ref. no. 1961.3.462. Photos by Bernard.

Yeux-Verts is made to look more powerful and forceful by having more of his body exposed: the tightly fitting, horizontally barred prison shirt is ripped in a deep "V" down his chest; the sleeves are turned back above the elbow. The impression is that of a man bursting out of his costume, whereas both Lefranc and Maurice wear their sleeves down, apparently comfortable in their shirts. The majority of the time Yeux-Verts is spacially separated from his two cellmates who are often involved in some physical clinch. His stance is very solid, square, his hands forced positively into his pockets as opposed to the casual appearance of Maurice and Lefranc. His interaction with Maurice and Lefranc is confined to a stylized movement of the head towards them while his frame remains squarely turned in another direction. Even his voice is different; many of the critics in 1949 were struck by the "âpre accent."<sup>1</sup> The overall effect of Tony Taffin's performance as Yeux-Verts is best resumed by Robert Kemp: "visage pâle, les yeux stagnants . . . l'âpre voix qui gargouille dans sa gorge menacée."<sup>2</sup> Yeux-Verts has developed into the strong character pursuing his destiny, but a destiny that takes him further away from the ordinary man. Here is the process of singularization of the hero, the equivalent of universalization in a world whose values have been inverted.

In this connection, it is illuminating to observe the modifications to the character and portrayal of the guard. His inclusion in the play has an interest in itself in that he is the first representative of the Establishment in the plays of Genet and as such can be regarded as the prototype for the sham dignitaries of Le Balcon and the members of the Court in Les Nègres. Across the various versions there appears to be a concentration of relevant detail about the guard which makes him less un surveillant and more "Le Surveillant." Details of instances of past connivance with the criminals are omitted:

YEUX-VERTS: Je ne défends pas les gardiens mais celui-là est un brave type. Ce n'est pas la première fois qu'il rend des services. (MS49:103)

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<sup>1</sup>Joly, L'Aurore-France Libre, 4 March 1949.

<sup>2</sup>Kemp, Le Monde, 4 March 1949.



However, he does still remain special, "différent," and "chic" (IV:203).

There persists the intimation of a secret pact between him and Yeux-Verts, perhaps an echo of Querelle de Brest, but he gives far more the impression of a stereotyped prison guard snapping out questions with no regard for feelings:

LE SURVEILLANT, il sourit: Dépêche-toi. Ta femme t'attend au parloir.

YEUX-VERTS: Je ne descends pas.

LE SURVEILLANT, toujours calme: La raison?

YEUX-VERTS: Je dis: je ne descends pas. Va lui dire qu'elle s'en retourne.

LE SURVEILLANT: Définitif?

YEUX-VERTS: Tout ce qu'il y a de. Mademoiselle est morte.

LE SURVEILLANT: Ça te regarde. Je vais faire la commission. (Il examine la cellule.) Tout est en ordre ici?

LEFRANC: Tout est en ordre, vous le voyez bien.

LE SURVEILLANT, à LeFranc: Oui? Et ça? (Il désigne le lit défait.) Répondez? (Silence.) Vous ne voulez pas répondre? Je vous demande pourquoi le lit est défait. (IV:201)

In all versions he equates himself with the Universal Guard and thus anticipates characters of the later plays, especially the Judge in Le Balcon and the Governor in Les Nègres who also express the connection between the criminal and the judge:

LE SURVEILLANT: Vous ne savez pas ce qu'il faut voir, endurer pour être gardien de prison. Vous ne savez pas qu'il faut être juste le contraire des voyous. Je dis bien: juste le contraire. (IV:202)

The development of Haute Surveillance reveals a movement away from a very private, intimate world expressed "par inadvertance" towards a world nonetheless alienated from everyday society but polished into a structured form. The reorganization of the play has been effected mainly by a technique of transfer and insertion, but there are, however, certain details that have been omitted altogether. Primarily, the dedication which appeared at the head of the La Nef edition and the original 1949 Gallimard edition has vanished in Frechtman's translation and all later editions. The dedication was to a criminal friend of Genet, Lucien Sénemaud. In the text of the play, references to women following their criminal men to Siberia are written out (HS49:41-42). This appears to be a preoccupation with Genet as it is mentioned in both Les Bonnes and Journal du voleur. References to the inhabitants of the criminal underworld are reduced: the extra tattoo adorning Yeux-Verts's torso, "en souvenir de Papillon," is omitted (HS49:44); the long list of criminals

cited in a kind of ritual by Lefranc and Yeux-Verts is greatly curtailed (IV:208-9; HS49:116-19). Finally, an overt reference to Saint Vincent de Paul is not included after the first production (HS49:81). Significantly, that saint is considered "one of the more problematic figures in Genet's hagiological hierarchy." The original text quite clearly links Lefranc and the story of the saint allowing great insight into the position of Lefranc; it seems to underline why he does not attain the glory of Yeux-Verts. For Genet it is not enough to assume the punishment due to others, one also has to commit the crimes: "The punishment has significance only in terms of the crime."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, to go freely to the guillotine (which Lefranc does by murdering Maurice) is meaningless without a crime which is gratuitous.

The movement away from personal detail in the text is paralleled by a movement away from strict naturalism in the setting of the play. The original directions for the construction of the set in the 1949 version imply that the set envisaged should be a faithful representation of a prison cell: a door in one wall, piles of mattresses, the toilets, a grilled fanlight, a "planchette écriteiro," a table and wooden chair chained to the wall, an iron bed with blankets, and even the prison regulations on the wall (HS49:9-10). All these properties can only be justified by a realist aesthetic since there is only one mention of any of them (with the exception of the door, point of access and departure for the parloir), and this mention is of no dramatic importance.<sup>2</sup> The whole emphasis is directly stated: "Nous sommes en prison" (HS49:10). In the later editions this statement disappears together with much of the detail; only the fanlight and a block of granite as a bed remain. The stress is now much more on suggestion: "L'intérieur de la cellule en maçonnerie, dont les pierres taillées sont apparentes, doit faire supposer à la prison une architecture très compliquée" (IV:181). This is not an attempt to universalize the play; the convicts are still very much en situation. Indeed, Genet

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<sup>1</sup>Coe, Vision of Jean Genet, p. 187 and p. 188.

<sup>2</sup>The one mention is: "MAURICE, touchant la table: Ne cause pas de malheur, grand" (HS49:33).

describes the bars on the fanlight "dont les pointes sont dirigées vers l'intérieur" (IV:181). The effectiveness of the play depends on the setting to evoke the claustrophobic atmosphere, the intensity of emotion contained in the cell. This explains in part why Yeux-Verts's departure in the original text is a weakness; it releases tension. The mysterious forces that oppress the cell (Yeux-Verts's wife, Boule de Neige) and that are expressed verbally are given real existence by his going to his wife; this reality detracts from their power and their obsessive hold over Maurice and Lefranc.

The two major productions of Haute Surveillance in Paris illustrate the role of the setting. Genet's 1949 production still retained a very prison-like atmosphere. The set was constructed in such a way as to give the impression that the cell was hewn out of great granite blocks. The acting area was completely dominated by the huge barred prison door elevated by three solid granite steps, the whole dwarfing the actors. The lighting was dark and simple; the costumes were almost realistic. What brought a note of discord into the production was the use of colours and stylized acting. A fine balance had to be struck between the cadre which was realistic and the jeu which was not: "Elle est difficile évidemment à mettre en scène, car elle contraint, comme dans une tragédie, à des poses stylisées, voire mécanisées, que seule de grands acteurs peuvent supporter."<sup>1</sup>

In 1970, Arcady tried to universalize the play. On a completely open stage against a white backdrop, he constructed "un décor de barres parallèles et d'échafaudages de tubes métalliques."<sup>2</sup> Costumes were non-existent with Yeux-Verts performing his dance in the nude. The lighting was far from simple, "une pénombre balayée savamment par des projecteurs giratoires et des lumières décomposantes."<sup>3</sup> Arcady also introduced elements of his own: dancing, "projections d'ambiance lumineuses,"<sup>4</sup> films, and amplification. The final

<sup>1</sup> Beigbeder, Le Parisien libéré, 10 March 1949.

<sup>2</sup> Senart, Revue des deux mondes, no. 11 (November 1970), p. 436.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Mercier, Paris-Théâtre: Paris-Spectacles, no. 270 (1970), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Copfermann, Les Lettres françaises, 23-29 September 1970, p. 14.

tableau depicted Yeux-Verts "au sommet d'une échelle [éclairée] d'une lumière dorée pour lui permettre d'affirmer . . . qu'il est l'appelé, l'élu du Malheur."<sup>1</sup>

The attempt was to give the text a dimension it does not possess. Arcady explained the rationale behind the production to Emile Copfermann: "J'ai cherché à créer un environnement mais en jouant le théâtre, sans chercher à aller vers le public, plutôt à l'attirer vers nous."<sup>2</sup> This obviously runs counter-current to Genet's intention and, indeed, the sense and direction of the work. The force of the play derives from the vehemence of the relationships between the three characters inside the cell. The outside world does exert an influence inside the four walls but to open the cell to the world destroys the play: "Qu'il néglige à peu près complètement les indications de l'auteur passe, mais quand une oeuvre tire une partie de sa violence du huis clos, n'est-ce pas un contre-sens de briser les murs par des projections et des bruitages insistants?"<sup>3</sup>

Not only does the success of the play depend on the tensions of a closed world, but also most markedly on the physical presence of the individual actors. A certain amount has already been said about the acting of Yeux-Verts, but a precise example taken from the text of the play illustrates how Genet has become aware of the basic medium of the stage—the human presence:

LEFRANC, à Yeux-Verts: Yeux-Verts? Boule de Neige, il t'écrase.  
 MAURICE: Tu recommences? C'est parce que ce matin, en rentrant de la promenade, dans le couloir il t'a envoyé un sourire.  
 LEFRANC: A moi? Ça m'étonnerait.  
(Yeux-Verts se retourne, s'arrête et fixe tour à tour Lefranc et Maurice.) (IV:184)

The mere gaze of Yeux-Verts, a deliberate action, is enough to imply his knowledge of the real destination of Boule de Neige's smile. The episode becomes more dramatic if one takes note of the extra stage direction added to the Oeuvres Complètes edition: "Il ne doit pas se promener au hasard, . . . mais selon une géométrie prévue par le metteur en scène" (IV:183). Yeux-Verts's

<sup>1</sup>Jacques Lemarchand, Le Figaro littéraire, 28 September 1970, pp. 33-34.

<sup>2</sup>Arcady to Copfermann, Les Lettres françaises, 23-29 September 1970, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Kanters, L'Express, 21 September 1970, p. 92.

action interrupts the stylized movement around the cell, a sudden break in the rhythm to which one was growing accustomed.

Haute Surveillance has always been considered Genet's weakest play and therefore has often been dismissed with very little commentary. Its subject is too esoteric, the treatment too self-complacent, the style too personal for the audience to enter into its realm. The play does have weaknesses in this direction as witnessed by the extreme knowledge of Genet's universe that Coe seems to imply is necessary to understand the theme. For Grossvogel, however, the significance of Haute Surveillance in the overall consideration of Genet's theatre is: "In the baroque drama of Genet Deathwatch is strangely stylized and relies on an espousal by the spectator of the characters."<sup>1</sup>

Our contention is that the alterations and additions to the original text can be interpreted as an attempt to move away from this traditional form of drama. They bear witness to the development of an uncompromising style of theatre. The characters have been made more inscrutable, more irreducible as they declaim their own existence. The staging reveals a nascent trend away from naturalism. The method of acting approaches a stylization, especially of movement, that runs contrary to convention. The exclusion of some of the personal prison detail in the relationships between the convicts, considered together with the more severe functional treatment of Le Surveillant would seem to suggest a more symbolic form developing through a process verging on caricature:

Il ne s'agit pas de peupler la scène de caricatures. . . . Jamais il ne diminue sciemment tel ou tel personnage: s'il le réduit à sa fonction, ce n'est pour le rapetisser, c'est au contraire pour le grandir à travers cette fonction. Son théâtre est d'abord célébration.<sup>2</sup>

The increasing of the tension between Maurice and Lefranc, and especially the addition of the "en fer-blanc" interjection, is echoed in the Lettres à Roger Blin: "La scène serait donc un lieu non où les reflets s'épuisent, mais où des éclats s'entrechoquent" (IV:249). Non-verbal means of expression are

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<sup>1</sup>Grossvogel, Blasphème, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup>Dort, "Genet ou le combat," pp. 1102-3.

evident in Yeux-Verts's dance, the constant circling of the stage, and the use of the vertical space of the acting area (also seen in Les Nègres and Les Paravents and present metaphorically as le balcon in Les Bonnes and in Le Balcon itself), revealing a dissatisfaction with the traditional.

The development of Haute Surveillance from printed text to staged performance begins the emergence of a unique dramatic style which culminates in Les Paravents. Where Haute Surveillance differs from Genet's later work is in the position accorded to the audience. Although the stage is kept apart from the auditorium, the audience is respected; it is not threatened nor menaced by the action on stage which it can accept or reject as it wishes. In later plays, Genet shows a greater awareness of the role of the audience in the theatrical performance. The theatrical situation is used as a spring for the dramatic action. With Les Bonnes Genet begins his attack on the audience and on the conventions that govern traditional theatre.

### (iii) Les Bonnes

As was the case for Haute Surveillance, the date of composition of Les Bonnes is buried in the confusion of Genet's criminal and reformatory life. It is generally agreed by critical opinion that Les Bonnes followed Haute Surveillance, but that both plays derive from the same period as the novels, the early 1940s. This viewpoint is often supported by the stylistic and thematic similarities of both plays and the novels. Philip Thody believes that the verbal parallels "indicate that he was carrying the atmosphere of his early work into his second play."<sup>1</sup> Bettina Knapp compares Madame to Madame Lysiane of Querelle de Brest.<sup>2</sup> In his own study of the derivation of the play, Coe looks to the underlying thematic structure of the play to support the hypothesis that Les Bonnes was written after Haute Surveillance. In effect he posits that the fact that the play was inspired by the historical

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<sup>1</sup>Thody, Jean Genet, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>Bettina Knapp, Jean Genet, (New York: Twayne, 1968), p. 110.

case of the Papin sisters implies a movement away from strict autobiographical detail towards greater objectivity.<sup>1</sup> In his argument, objectivity is understood as a sign of a more mature dramatist.

This order of composition is refuted by McMahon who claims that Les Bonnes antedates Haute Surveillance.<sup>2</sup> However, his case is weakened by the fact that he puts forward no substantiating proof for his opinion. Possibly this author is simply taking Sartre's pronouncement as the unquestionable truth, for one reads in Saint Genet Sartre's comparison of Genet's first two plays:

La preuve en est que sa seconde pièce, Haute Surveillance, dont les personnages sont des hommes reprend très exactement le sujet des Bonnes; même hiérarchie: le mâle absent, dans un cas Monsieur, dans l'autre Boule-de-Neige; la divinité intermédiaire, Madame ou Yeux-Verts; et les deux adolescents, qui rêvent au meurtre, ne parviennent pas à le commettre, qui s'aiment et se haïssent et dont chacun est la mauvaise odeur de l'autre, Solange et Claire, Maurice et Lefranc.<sup>3</sup>

The consensus of critical opinion rejects Sartre's order, but totally accepts his analysis of a common structure and a common origin.<sup>4</sup> However, while asserting the structural homogeneity of the two plays, Sartre's comments highlight the bibliographical problems concerning Genet's early work. Sartre states that Genet gave him a copy of the play, making it feasible to assume that this is the text on which his analysis is based.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately no date can be given to this study, but from a footnote it appears to precede Jouvett's production of Les Bonnes in April 1947.<sup>6</sup> It is very interesting to note that Sartre refers to Genet's wish to cast actors in the female parts in accordance with the observations he makes in Notre-Dame-des-fleurs: "S'il me fallait faire représenter une pièce théâtrale, où des femmes auraient un rôle, j'exigerais que ce rôle fût tenu par des adolescents, et j'en avertirais le public, grâce

<sup>1</sup>Coe, Vision of Jean Genet, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup>McMahon, Imagination of Jean Genet, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup>Sartre, Saint Genet, p. 564.

<sup>4</sup>Ruby H. Cohn, Currents in Contemporary Drama (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 63; and Wallace Fowlie, Dionysus in Paris (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), p. 220.

<sup>5</sup>Sartre, Saint Genet, p. 561.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., n. 1.

à une pancarte qui resterait clouée à droite ou à gauche des décors durant toute la représentation."<sup>1</sup> In no extant published or unpublished version of the play is reference made to this desire. On the contrary, examination of the different reworked texts used in rehearsals at the Athénée<sup>2</sup> suggests that Genet wanted, not young males nor the nubile young girls whom Jovet in fact cast, but old women for the parts of Solange and Claire. If Sartre is giving here an exact account of the play as he read it, one must assume that his text constitutes a lost version; this version could be the four-act text which Genet is reported to have presented to Jovet in Marseilles.<sup>3</sup> Such a neat resolution is nevertheless rendered suspect by the mere fact that Sartre's analysis seems to refer to a play with a single act. This sort of doubt and confusion concerning the genesis and development of the play will remain as long as Genet refuses to discuss his work.

The few statements that Genet has made about this period of composition are no more conclusive. He has intimated that Les Bonnes was a product of his prison days, of "un monde et un climat sans grandeur" (854:11). Yet in the same place he states that the play was "commandée par un acteur célèbre en son temps" (854:13). Assuming that this refers to Louis Jovet, as many critics

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Genet, Notre-Dame-des-fleurs in Oeuvres Complètes II (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 140.

<sup>2</sup>Several typescript versions of Les Bonnes are held in the Collection Louis Jovet (Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, Paris). The first text presented by Genet to Jovet (who later returned it) has been lost.

- a : "Première version reçue" (the first retained by Jovet)
- b : "Version jouée" (the reworked text, personal copy of réquiseur, R. Besson)
- c : "Texte du souffleur" (with alterations for performance)
- d : Dossier on Madame scene (including extracts of play text)
- e : Dossier on Solange-Claire scene after Madame's departure
- f : "Avant-dernière version précédant le texte définitif de la représentation" (bears the name of Louis Jovet)
- g : "Texte pour Mlle. Marthe Merlin de la part de J. Genet"
- h : Dossier of extracts rejected during rehearsals
- i : "Relevé de la mise en scène" subtitled La Tragédie des confidentes

These titles in quotation marks are to be found on the library's folders; others are the author's. Reference to these typescripts will be made by the key letters. Quotations will be identified in the text by first the letter, then the page number in parentheses.

<sup>3</sup>See Maxime Belliard, France-Libre, 19 April 1947.



believe,<sup>1</sup> one must conclude that Jovet was an acquaintance of the criminal Genet. A possible explanation is that Jovet had a reforming influence on an existing Genet text, and instead of "commissioned" one should understand "reworked in collaboration with." This would seem to correspond to Genet's qualification: "Je signalerai seulement que la seconde—la plus bavarde—fut en fait la première. De longues répétitions l'élaguèrent, l'allégeant" (B54:11).

More recently, Genet has reaffirmed that it was Jovet who directly caused the creation of Les Bonnes.<sup>2</sup> This contradicts his statements made to Hélène Tournaire in 1949; asked whether the idea for the play was his own, Genet answered: "Oui, mais elle me fut inspirée par Simone Renaut un jour qu'elle me parlait de ses domestiques. J'avais d'ailleurs écrit le rôle de la jeune femme pour elle et je pensais à deux actrices âgées et flétries pour les bonnes."<sup>3</sup> Indeed Simone Renaut might provide the link between Genet and Jovet since she was working with the latter in 1947 on the film Quai des Orfèvres. In this explanation of the genesis of the play, Jovet appeared after an initial draft; he encouraged Genet who rewrote the play: "Les Bonnes étaient informés quand je les ai données à Jovet. Je les ai reprises sur son conseil et c'est Cocteau qui a trouvé la chute."<sup>4</sup> It would seem reasonable to identify this seminal, unstructured text with the four-act version already mentioned, or perhaps even with Sartre's copy of the play. It must have been at this early stage that Genet had the action situated not in the mistress's apartment, but on the staircase between the apartment and the maids' room.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Kanters, "Le Cri terrible de Genet," L'Express, 25 April 1966, p. 62; Jacques Lemarchand, Le Figaro littéraire, 20 April 1970, p. 33; and Claude Bonnefoy, Genet (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1965), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> José Monleon, "La Visita de un escritor maldito: San Genet," Triunfo (Madrid), 8 November 1969, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Hélène Tournaire, ["Entretien avec Jean Genet."] An extract of this untraceable interview is found in Jean Genet: articles biographiques et critiques: 1947-1962, an unpaginated recueil factice compiled and held at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal (Paris). Catalogue no. 8° SW 1334.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> This setting was first mentioned in Dort, "Genet ou le combat," p. 1095 and has since been confirmed in Genet's interview with Monleon, p. 21.

This scenic arrangement suits the early subtitle to the play, La Tragédie des confidentes found on typescript i, but which disappears from all other versions. This typescript also bears "Acte 1" at the head of its title page implying that it once formed part of a larger play with more than a single act. The rejected subtitle does reappear in a revised form in Jouvét's programme notes describing the play as "la tragédie des adolescents et des confidentes."<sup>1</sup>

Although far from conclusive, this speculation does reveal the central role of Jouvét in the creation of the play. Its confused origin also helps to explain the appearance of two published texts that vary considerably but yet share the title Les Bonnes. Neither of these two texts constitutes Genet's original. The earliest text to which one can make reference is the typescript accepted by Jouvét following an initial consultation. This text (a) is very brief and served, with one notable exception, as the basis for elaboration during the rehearsals. The published text which appeared in the review L'Arbalète and which served both Balachova in her 1954 production and Fréchtman in his 1953 translation represents the state of the play quite early in Jouvét's rehearsals.<sup>2</sup> It is the published equivalent of typescript f to which penned alterations have been made transforming it into the text of the Jouvét production. It could be argued that the earlier L'Arbalète text is the more authentic being both closer to Genet's original conception and freer from Jouvét's influence. Nevertheless, the early text has been republished only once (in Pauvert's 1954 edition) while the Jouvét text has found its way (with only minor alterations) into four subsequent editions.<sup>3</sup> Genet would surely not have allowed this if he considers the text a travesty of his intentions. On the contrary, Genet admitted: "Jouvét a changé l'esprit de la pièce, en modifiant la distribution, mais je lui garde tout de même une grande reconnaissance."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Théâtre de l'Athénée, 19 April 1947.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Genet, Les Bonnes, L'Arbalète, no. 12 (May 1947), pp. 47-92.

<sup>3</sup> See the Bibliography, p. 581.

<sup>4</sup> Genet to Tournaire, "Entretien".

The sheer quantity of the variations and metamorphoses makes it very difficult to assess how much of Les Bonnes is due to Louis Jouvet and how much to Genet. With so much material it is impossible to follow a simple line through the versions attributing certain modifications to the author and others to the director. It is perhaps safest to declare that the 1947 production resulted from the collaboration of a poet and a man of the theatre. This collaboration led to a refinement of the text which was to be paralleled in 1949; the tightening of structure and dialogue worked in the direction of singularization as it would for Haute Surveillance.

There are certain areas in which text a differs from all following versions; these changes reveal a development and improvement in dramatic terms. For example, the final version in the Oeuvres Complètes portrays a greater antagonism and a more striking atmosphere of hatred pervading the confrontations between Claire and Solange. The opening sequence assumed a more cruel nature only after text a had been submitted to Jouvet:

CLAIRE: Ah! tu veux parler . . . Parfait. Menace-moi. Insulte ta maîtresse. Solange, tu veux parler, n'est-ce pas, des malheurs de Monsieur. Sotte. Ce n'est pas l'instant de le rappeler, mais de cette indication je vais tirer un parti magnifique. Tu souris? Tu en doutes? <sup>1</sup>

The extra emphasis put on the acerbic rivalry of Claire and Solange is typified by the later line:

SOLANGE: De nous deux, qui menace l'autre? Hein? Tu hésites? (IV:150)

In both these instances, it is the unseen character of the young milkman who visits them at night who causes the final, vituperative outbursts. After text a, the dramatic potential of this character-catalyst is more fully realized as reference to him is made more frequently:

CLAIRE: Et là, la fameuse lucarne, par où le laitier demi-nu saute jusqu'à votre lit! (IV:142)

This allusion adds an exotic sexual element to their argument just as the religious element of their fascination is more overtly described:

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Genet, Les Bonnes in O.C. IV, p. 141.

CLAIRE: Là, la commode en pitchpin avec le petit autel à la Sainte Vierge. . . . Passons sur nos dévotions à la Sainte Vierge en plâtre, sur nos agenouillements. Nous ne parlerons même des fleurs en papier . . . (Elle rit.) En papier! Et la branche de buis bénit! (IV:142)

Indeed, the fusion of the erotic and the religious in an atmosphere of increased hatred was worked on throughout the rehearsals and was made to explode into moments of reproach:

CLAIRE: Je vois où tu veux en venir. J'écoute bourdonner déjà tes accusations, depuis le début tu m'injures, tu cherches l'instant de me cracher à la face.  
SOLANGE, pitoyable: Madame, Madame, nous n'en sommes pas encore là. Si Monsieur . . . (IV:141)

This speech confirms the notion of a ceremony in progress by referring to a planned course of action. This ceremony is one of erotic self-glorification and elevation achieved not through adoration but through hostility. All the foregoing elements were reinforced through textual modifications during rehearsal. Indeed, in revising the text for the 1968 edition, Genet added a stage direction which confirms that the relationship between Solange and Claire should be played in an atmosphere of uncompromising enmity: "Le dire ainsi: Tu souris = tu en doutes" (IV:141). The implication is that the speech should be delivered without a trace of sympathy for the other.

Self-glorification in crime is another theme which was developed through the rehearsal process. During the opening sequence, Claire-Madame embellishes the idea of following her criminal lover "de bague en bague": "Je partagerai sa gloire. Tu parles de veuvage. La robe blanche est le deuil des reines, Claire, tu l'ignores. Tu me refuses la robe blanche!" (IV:142) This idea recurs later when Claire is attacking Solange for her intoxication with the idea of exile with a criminal. In the early editions she reproaches Solange for desiring to be "la prostituée soumise au voleur" and for wanting to carry "la croix du mauvais larron" (854:105). Together with these exhortations are made specific references to the penal colonies of Devil's Island and Guiana. By the time of the performance, these sentiments had been made more grandiose: "Une prostituée de haut vol, une hétaïre" (IV:150).

That these elements were added to the text during rehearsals reveals that Jouvet did not attempt to eradicate all the scandalous aspects of Genet's

imagination, nor indeed all reference to physical contact:

SOLANGE: Mais vous ne l'emporterez pas en paradis. J'aimerais mieux vous y suivre que de lâcher ma haine à la porte. Riez un peu, riez et priez vite, très vite! Vous êtes au bout du rouleau ma chère! (Elle tape sur les mains de Claire qui protège sa gorge.) Bas les pattes et découvrez ce cou fragile. Allez, ne tremblez pas, ne frissonnez pas, j'opère vite et en silence. (IV:145-46)

This version implies a degree of sensuality that is lacking in the neutral stage direction, "elle avance sur Claire, menaçante," of the early edition (854:98). Nevertheless, certain passages revised by Genet did not find their way into the final performance text nor into the early editions. Their irreverent and unseemly tone was judged unsuitable for performance. A case in point is a blasphemous ceremony held by Solange and Claire after Madame has distributed her fine clothing to them. In the revised version Madame leaves the stage:

SOLANGE, à voix haute, regardant sa soeur: Chérie. (Elle prend la robe rouge et la serre contre soi.)

CLAIRE, elle fait le geste: L'eau va couler trois minutes. Nous avons trois minutes de solitude, trois minutes de grandeur! (Les deux soeurs se regardent immobiles. Solange s'agenouille devant Claire qui porte le plateau.)

SOLANGE: Essayez d'y parvenir Madame.

CLAIRE: J'essaierai.

SOLANGE: Claire!

CLAIRE: J'essaierai. (Solange baise le bas de sa robe.)

(Text f:40 bis-40 ter)

At another point during Madame's presence on stage, Claire engages Madame in a description of her lover:

MADAME: C'est une nature. Et je te jure qu'il m'aurait trouvé à la hauteur de l'événement. J'étais décidée à lui prouver ma fidélité et ma force de caractère. J'aurais vu des ministres, des généraux, des juges, jamais supplié, jamais pleuré, menacé mais réussi. En tout cas cette alerte m'aura prouvé que je suis encore amoureuse comme une jeune fille. Tu sais qu'il a un crâne magnifique?

CLAIRE: Monsieur a un crâne admirable.

MADAME: Un crâne? Tu parles d'un crâne.

CLAIRE: Que Madame y songe.

MADAME, rêveuse: C'est vrai! Comme tu sais voir. Une fois tondu, il sera très beau, que dis-je, il sera? Il aurait été très beau. La forme de son crâne est belle. Monsieur était taillé dans le bois dont on fait les forçats. Tout en lui était prédestiné à la prison.

(Text f:43-44)

All that remains in the final version is a neutral "c'est une nature" (IV:165).

The details of prison life, the re-emphasis on the notion of the glorious pursuit of an outlaw, and the romantic discussion of the skull with its occult

implications are all written out before the performance. Similarly, Madame's entrance once included references to the perverse practices of a prison cell:

MADAME: Il faut être réaliste. N'empêche que les prisons sont pleines de criminels, et que ce doit être horrible pour Monsieur, de vivre au milieu de cette racaille. Enfin, tu songes un peu à la promiscuité? C'est exactement infernal. (Text d: extract 3)

These suppressions have in common an avoidance of the type of autobiographical element that was common in the novels and Journal du voleur. As such they represent a move towards objectivity. Indeed, it is the same process that Haute Surveillance underwent; in order for the dramatic character to be able to have presence on stage, he has to be more detached from his creator than a character in a novel. This practice is most marked in the eradication from later versions of all mention of the Assistance Publique in the description of the maids' early life.<sup>1</sup> It was this same institution that supported the young Genet.

The disappearance of anecdotal and autobiographical detail is paralleled by an elimination of excess conversational dialogue to produce more staccato and stark altercations. Long speeches are broken up especially in argumentative sequences. Solange twice interrupts an outburst of Claire with a distracted "je vous écoute," and later it is Claire who berates Solange with "doucement, mon petit, doucement . . ." (IV:144). This technique of interruption serves to bring the crisis to a more vitriolic climax.

The early versions of the play tend to be prolix, weighed down by a style that sounds in places like the Sartrean analysis of the play. Claire-Madame's ruminations on the relative positions of the maid and the mistress are expressed:

CLAIRE: . . . que la vengeance et la bonne, je les contiens l'une et l'autre et leur donne chance de vie, chance de salut. Claire, c'est lourd, affreusement pénible d'être une maîtresse, de contenir toutes les ressources de la haine, d'être le fumier d'où tu surgiras. Tu veux me voir nue tous les jours. Je suis belle, n'est-ce pas? Mon désespoir d'amante m'embellit encore, mais tu ne sais pas qu'elle force il me faut. (854:95)

The final version of this speech is a more direct, angry, and emotional outburst:

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<sup>1</sup>Text d:extract 4, pp. 13-14.

CLAIRE, elle hurle: C'est grâce à moi que tu es, et tu me nargues! Tu ne peux savoir comme il est pénible d'être Madame, Claire, d'être le prétexte à vos simagrées! Il me suffirait de si peu et tu n'existerais plus. Mais je suis bonne, mais je suis belle et je te défie. Mon désespoir d'amante m'embellit encore! (IV:144)

The speech has become less abstract in that it is used as a means of confrontation by Claire; it advances the rivalry between the two sisters while adding in an elliptical fashion to the thematic texture of the play. When Haute Surveillance was put on the stage, Genet altered the structure in order that just such a direct treatment was forthcoming.

Although the contraction of the dialogue and the elimination of the autobiographical material could be termed improvements of the existing play, the rehearsals also led to suppressions that affected the nature of the play, especially concerning the relationships between the three characters. The position of Madame in regard to her servants is ambiguous. One has only to compare the Madame sequence of the published texts and of the typescripts to see that even Genet was confused by, or dissatisfied with, the mistress figure. In one version Madame is made part of the Lesbian affair which, it is suggested, forms the basis of the Solange-Claire relationship. Madame strokes and carresses Claire while Solange is away looking for a taxi.<sup>1</sup> This reading of the relationship was not accepted by Jouvét who was instrumental in the removal of all such sexual references in the play. In the early versions, Claire describes in detail the maids' room: "Et de ces lits jumeaux où deux soeurs s'endorment en rêvant l'une de l'autre" (854:92). There is an evident overtone of Lesbianism and incest which was pencilled out at the pre-production stage. Moreover, the erotic elevation of Claire-Madame during the opening sequence was underplayed in the performances since the emotive stage directions "comme en adoration" and "extasiée" were omitted (854:93 and 94). The most obvious example of Jouvét's muting the sexual violence of Genet's text is the deletion after text a of an erotic act of domination by Solange over Claire-Madame. Solange sits astride Claire-Madame:

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<sup>1</sup>Text d: extract 4, pp. 11-12; and p. 14.

SOLANGE: Belle monture, ma vive haquenée, filez, filez en flèche!  
Filez dans l'azur.

CLAIRE: Assez.

SOLANGE, elle la tire par les cheveux: Escaladez les murs! Escaladez le papier des murs! Rampez jusqu'au plafond! Portez-moi! Claire, Madame, Mesdames et Messieurs, nous allons sortir dans la nuit, perdre nos étoiles, frapper nos blancs sabots, parcourir le ciel et nous, les jumelles, et nous (elle hoquète) et nous, les soeurs jumelles, nous chevauchant jusqu'à la fin du monde, prendre la place des Gémeaux. (Text a:38)

In the early text, this speech has been completely reworked to present a less emphatic alternative. Although Solange takes down a riding whip and forces Claire into a servile kneeling position, there is no suggestion of mounting (B54:136). By the time of the performance all reference to the original scene has been omitted; the riding whip and the physical contact have both disappeared to leave just Solange's command: "A genoux!" (IV:172) Genet replaced some of the force of the original by an additional stage direction in the 1968 edition: "C'est un ordre" but this clearly lacks the eroticism of the first scene (IV:173).

Strictly dramatic reasons could well account for the alteration of this extract in rehearsal. It is probably true that direct physical action on the stage is not the best way to communicate aggression. Seen in the light of the other alterations, it would appear nonetheless that respectability was not far from Jouvet's mind. Indeed, sex and sexual allusions were cut out of the production wherever possible. The Solange-Claire relationship is founded in sexual fantasies whether homo- or heterosexual; their antagonism is kept at a high pitch during the opening sequence by references to the milkman who visits their garret at night; throughout these exchanges there is a strong sexual undercurrent, and yet Jouvet saw fit to suppress the explicit:

CLAIRE: Ah! ce n'est pas assez? Assez d'être violée par ce laitier traversant nos mansardes en riant? (B54:112)

Any element that could give rise to shock appears to have been written out. In the early versions, Solange's insistent domination and her frenzy bring on a bilious attack in Claire, but this detail is absent from the reworked versions (B54:139). Similarly any strong and obscene verbal images are excluded. For example, Claire describes their relationship:

CLAIRE: Où crois-tu que je m'aventure? D'abord, ne mêle pas tes épingles à cheveux aux miennes! Tu . . . Oh! Et puis si, mêle ta crasse à



ma crasse. Mêle! Mêle! Mêle tes haillons douteux à mes loques! Mêlons tout cela. Cela donnera une bonne odeur de bonnes. (B54:110)

Solange's frenetic ravings before her long soliloquy include the following abortional image:

SOLANGE: N'appellez pas! inutile. La mort est présente et vous guette. N'appellez pas! moi qui t'ai conservée comme on conserve des petits chats pour la noyade, moi, moi encore, qui garnissais mon ventre d'épingles pour crever tant de foetus que j'ai jétés dans les caniveaux! Et pour vous garder, pour vous conserver vivante.

(B54:138-39)

The revised version for Jouvot's production omits the obscene elements of this speech only retaining: "La mort est présente et nous guette!" (IV:172)

These alterations and omissions seem to derive from a single purpose, namely to render Genet's text less violent and less scabrous. By so doing, Jouvot was attempting to lessen the divorce between Genet's world and the world of the theatrical audience. Indeed, considering that Genet's work was intended to form the second half of a bill with Giraudoux's L'Appollon de Bellac,<sup>1</sup> it is not surprising that Genet's abusive, strident drama of incestuous relationships and mirrored identities was toned down.

Jouvot's view of the play, or rather the resultant production, is summarized in his programme notes:

Orphelines et dépendantes, elles sont douces, humbles et tendres. Elles sont aussi orgueilleuses, exaltées, violentes. Dans ce petit appartement où elles sont confinées dans l'atmosphère capiteuse de "Madame" elles mêlent à leur vie réelle l'imagination de l'enfance avec son besoin de l'absolu, sa perversité et aussi sa cruauté. Elles forceront toutes les frontières.<sup>2</sup>

This interpretation differs considerably from the implications of Genet's account of its genesis. The production and the casting followed Jouvot's line rather than the author's. Yvette Etiévant (Claire) and Monique Mélinard (Solange) were attractive, youthful maids clad in simple black tunic dresses with decorative small white lace aprons. The costumes were fitted to reveal the shapeliness of their figures, emphasizing their femininity. During the ceremony the maids bedecked themselves in Madame's clothes becoming elegant young ladies with all trace of their humble origin covered with resplendent

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<sup>1</sup>For the performance, the title was changed to L'Appollon de Marsac.

<sup>2</sup>Théâtre de l'Athénée, 19 April 1947.

finery. Claire-Madame's "robe de velours écarlate" was a full length evening dress worn off the shoulders which tapered delicately to a short frilled train (IV:141). Her hair gathered into a bun secured with a rose and bedecked with jewels, rings and bracelets, Claire became the complete bourgeoisie of the early years of this century. Similarly the white dress of the final sequence was no less an adornment; edged with frills and falling to the floor in a long train, it wrapped around Claire, once again emphasizing the elegance of her figure. The delicacy in the treatment of the physical appearance of the two maids meant that the audience was sympathetic to them confined in their servile prison. Riniéri's reaction was that the accessories "ont juste ce qu'il faut de pathétique pour incarner ces soeurs maudites."<sup>1</sup>

It was not Jouvet's intention to observe Genet's wish for unattractive, battered maids. There is some evidence to suggest that the text was amended in order to accommodate the presence of more youthful servants. In text f there is the following alteration:

MADAME: Si depuis ~~14~~ <sup>sept</sup> ans vous n'étiez pas à mon service, je dirais que ces lettres sont l'oeuvre d'une servante jetée à la porte.  
(Text f:48)

And the idea is reinforced by the emphatic addition: "Sept ans! Sept ans chez moi!" (Text f:48) Very early in the rehearsals, elements that hinted at the aging of the servants were omitted. Originally, the play was to open with Claire in her underwear, "avec corset rose," implying a mature woman with a tendency towards fatness which clearly did not coincide with Jouvet's casting (Text a:1).

The physical nature of the set matched the costuming in every way. Heavily ornate, it was buried in a profusion of accessories. However, it avoided giving the impression of a cluttered enclosed hell of oppressive elegance by an emphasis on glass and light materials. Mirrors and windows reflected light around the stage; jewels glinted and delicate laces added a frail evanescent quality to the decoration. One critic described the effect

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Jacques Riniéri, La Nef, no. 30 (May 1947), p. 160. Dossiers of photographs for this and subsequent productions are held at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

as the curtain was raised: "Le spectacle s'ouvre sur une chambre décorée et illuminée par C. Bérard qui compose une surprenante vitrine de la rue Jacob, à dominante rose."<sup>1</sup> Tardieu believed that the set, "cette sorte d'écoeurant aquarium irisé,"<sup>2</sup> was deliberately exaggerated to reflect a servant's distorted view of the finery of her mistress's living conditions. If this were indeed the case, surely similar excesses would be apparent in the maids' appearance as Madame. The lightness and airiness of Bérard's set corresponded to the intentionally non-claustrophobic atmosphere that Juvet tried to create. For instance, the set and Juvet's direction encouraged far more coming and going in and out of the room than was present in the earlier versions; Madame goes into the bathroom twice while talking to Claire and even goes out to the balcony.<sup>3</sup>

Deliberate and straightforward in his direction Juvet attempted a direct, almost anecdotal reading of the play rendering it perhaps more accessible to the theatre-going public. He tried to unravel "ces tourniquets . . . d'imaginaire et de réalité"<sup>4</sup> which Sartre saw as the basis of the play. His programme note indicated a psychological approach to the play. This interpretation is reflected in the use made of lighting effects. The production called for only six changes of lighting, all of them intended to mark clearly the stages of the play. The opening sequence was bathed in light from chandeliers, bedside table lamps, and fluorescent tubes in the wardrobe. The interruption by the alarm clock precipitated two rapid lighting changes. The set was immediately plunged into darkness and shadow with the extinction of the overhead lights, the footlights, and many of the stage lights. To compensate, the lampe solaire which hung above a screen was illuminated. This lamp was associated with the more intimate details of the maids' private lives and fantasies. It was mounted in an orange<sup>9</sup> metal frame that resembled a bat; it cast dappled shadows about the room introducing a mysterious, almost melodramatic, atmosphere. The end of the exposition of the maids' wretched

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<sup>1</sup>E.H., Le Parisien libéré, 24 April 1947.      <sup>2</sup>Jean Tardieu, Action, 2 May '47.

<sup>3</sup>This scene appears in O.C., IV, pp. 166-67 without the additional stage business described in text c.

<sup>4</sup>Sartre, Saint Genet, p. 561.

condition was marked by a gradual brightening of the set until a moment just prior to Madame's entry when the stage had regained the lighting intensity of the beginning. After her exit and as the final ceremony commenced, the lights were once more dimmed. Solange's soliloquy was delivered from behind the glass screen with the lampe solaire alone illuminating the set spreading its lugubrious shadows. The lighting effects corresponded to the public and private lives of the maids; their lives were separated from Madame through the lights. The lighting changes structured the play into compartments of reality and fantasy avoiding the giddy passage from imagination to fact analysed by Sartre.

With its profusion of properties and fine costuming, the production aimed at a dated realism which tended to anchor the play in an identifiable milieu, more acceptable than an abstract nowhere to the traditional theatre goer. Despite the attractive treatment by Jouvot, the dark power of the play still overwhelmed certain critics. Guy Joly described it as "un drame de l'hystérie et du refoulement—riche en trouvailles sordides."<sup>1</sup> Tardieu was himself sensitive to the mysterious, perverse drive that motivated the action: "Ce refoulement dont l'origine est une erreur sociale, ce refoulement avec tout ce qu'il implique de quasi folie, de lumière glauque, de demi-sommeil infernal et de vapeur méphétique, est le sujet même de la pièce."<sup>2</sup> This aspect of the play was too much for Gabriel Marcel and Hervé Lauwick who condemned it as pure perversity.<sup>3</sup> A common criticism was that the play was artificial, that maids would never express themselves in such language. The cause in part could have been the realism of Jouvot's staging; it underplayed the singularity of these maids to such an extent that they were accepted as ordinary domestics, and consequently their language startled the audience.

To judge from the diversity of critical reaction,<sup>4</sup> the play in

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Joly, L'Aurore, 24 April 1947.

<sup>2</sup> Tardieu, Action, 2 May 1947, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Gabriel Marcel, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 1 May 1947, p. 10; and Hervé Lauwick, Noir et Blanc, 4 May 1947.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed discussion see Coe, "Unbalanced opinions."

performance produced, if not open hostility, at least incomprehension. Riniéri indicated the lost feeling of the house during the performance: "Car ce n'est pas une pièce facile à diriger pour un public non prévenu, et celui de l'Athénée ne l'a pas accueilli sans une résistance."<sup>1</sup> More explicitly, Joly pointed to a more fundamental aspect of the play and one which is revelatory of Genet's attitude towards his public; Joly characterized him as "un auteur qui dédaigne d'accorder à la pudeur ou à la paresse du public la moindre concession."<sup>2</sup>

In the reconstruction of the text, in the casting of the actresses and in the design of the set, Jovet exerted an influence against the sordid or autobiographical detail and the explicitly erotic and Lesbian connotations of the relationships in the play. Also, the piece was given a dated setting. Yet all these attempts to bring the play more into line with the theatrical fashion of the time failed. The general critical reaction appears to have been "one of slightly nauseated puzzlement."<sup>3</sup> Genet's play attacked the sensibilities of the critical audience despite Jovet's scenic palliatives. This sense of rejection has been a regular feature of critical reaction to the play in spite of differing treatments.

In 1954, Paris was offered an alternative version of Les Bonnes directed by Tania Balachova. How alternative is summed up by the anonymous critic of L'Express: "Tania Balachova a repris les Bonnes de Jean Genet dans leur version originale et non dans celle soigneusement émondée que nous <sup>ait</sup>avons présentée Louis Jovet."<sup>4</sup> In fact, Balachova used the text released to L'Arbalète by Genet for publication in May 1947. The text was more harsh and more direct, and Balachova's production was correspondingly more provoking than Jovet's. Gone were the frills and gratuitousness of Bérard's set. The audience were no longer protected by the historical distancing of the play. Balachova chose the more functional steel-framed furniture of 1954, the shining

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<sup>1</sup>Riniéri, La Nef, no. 30 (May 1947), p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>Joly, L'Aurore, 24 April 1947.

<sup>3</sup>Coe, "Unbalanced Opinions," p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>L'Express, 23 January 1954.

frames contrasting starkly with the predominantly dark set. Claustrophobic shadows pervaded the acting area. Indeed, there was only a single place of entry on to the stage which helped to create a cramped, suffocating atmosphere, especially when all three characters were on stage at the same time. Furthermore, Balachova (Solange) and Tatiana Moukhine or Anne Reiberg (Claire) were not presented as prim, neat, youthful maids. Their uniform was shapeless black material falling to ankle length gathered loosely at the waist, neck and wrists. The dainty aprons of the refined 1947 production became the plain tabloid aprons of the kitchen. It is consistent with this interpretation that the homeliness of the maids should not be forgotten in the ceremony of impersonation; the fine white dress of 1947 was replaced by a ragged white shawl just draped around Claire's shoulders.

This new production, more faithful to Genet's original conception, aroused hostile reactions. Jean-Jacques Gautier (who had previously seen some merit in the play) was angered:

Je ne sais si Jovet avait ouvert des fenêtres dans le manuscrit qui lui avait été apporté, ou si, avec sa science consommée du théâtre, il avait indiqué à l'auteur ce qu'il devait faire pour que son oeuvre fût jouable et tolérable. . . . M. Genet a préféré l'actuel magma au texte éclairé par Louis Jovet.<sup>1</sup>

André Ransan's disappointment was even more total:

Ce qui nous avait paru, il y a sept ans, rare, exceptionnel, nous semble aujourd'hui d'une puérité stupéfiante et d'un conventionnel désarmant. Derrière chaque réplique, on sent la volupté diabolique de l'auteur de provoquer, de choquer, d'épater.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike Jovet who had to some extent catered for the tastes of his audience, Balachova remained strictly faithful to the play. Indeed, the stage became a realm independent of the auditorium, as J.S. complained: "L'expression a toujours été au-dessous des nécessités de communication au public."<sup>3</sup> Even the very favourable review of Jacques Lemarchand implied a divorce between the spectator and the action; by comparing the play to "un joyau noir auquel le

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Jacques Gautier, Le Figaro, 15 January 1954.

<sup>2</sup> André Ransan, L'Aurore, 15 January 1954.

<sup>3</sup> J.S., Paris-Presse. L'Intransigeant, 15 January 1954.

dépouillement et la rigueur de la mise en scène de Mme. Balachova donnent tout son rayonnement,"<sup>1</sup> he was admitting that one was fascinated by the performance rather than that one comprehended it. Indeed, Georges Lerminier found it impossible to like the play but yet he could not deny its power.<sup>2</sup> The stage was in opposition to the spectators' emotions. Marc Beigbeder was sensitive to this enclosed world of the stage and applauded Balachova for succeeding in creating "une allure calme, détendue, naturelle, finalement plus étrange et infiniment plus forte, en se rencontrant, sans éluder pourtant l'éclat des mots, avec l'intériorité analytique et sourdement passionnée de l'ouvrage."<sup>3</sup>

A third approach to the play was provided by Jean-Marie Serreau's two Parisian productions in 1961 and 1963. Serreau steered a central course avoiding the aestheticism of Jouvet and Bérard and the harshness of Balachova. His set was in the line of Bérard. The bed was adorned with a hanging lace canopy bedecked with flowers; embroidered lace pelmets embellished the doors and the windows. The set, however, did not have the lightness of Bérard's, and much of the time the upper area of the stage was in shadow. The maids themselves were more soberly dressed in long black uniforms buttoning up the front; their hair was tied back severely into buns. Serreau's new angle was to have the actresses perform exaggeratedly; Yvonne Cleck as Madame was dressed in a blonde wig that hinted of transvesticism. The critics berated the 1961 production. Confusing because of its mixture of realism and non-realism, its style escaped easy classification. Guy Dumur could not distinguish whether the production was "'parodie' voulue" or a "spectacle mal interprété," but was unhappy with the amalgam, "un spectacle assez boiteux."<sup>4</sup>

Despite this type of reaction, Serreau used the same set for a revival with an all black cast in 1963. In this version, however, the director underlined the similarity between the maids and the mistress. The latter was

<sup>1</sup>Jacques Lemarchand, Le Figaro littéraire, 23 January 1954.

<sup>2</sup>Georges Lerminier, Le Parisien libéré, 16 January 1954.

<sup>3</sup>Marc Beigbeder, Les Lettres françaises, 21 January 1954.

<sup>4</sup>Guy Dumur, Théâtre Populaire, no. 42 (1961), pp. 104-5.

dressed in a split-sided dress sporting a long string of pearls. A buxom, sensual woman she ~~slunk~~<sup>slunk</sup> around the stage and assumed highly suggestive poses. The sexuality of the maids' relationship found a counterbalance in their mistress. The transformation of Claire into Madame was accomplished by her donning of a blonde wig, a frilly Charleston-style dress and making herself up to excess. The exaggeration of the ceremony prohibited the smooth metamorphosis of the maid into a pretty society girl as suggested by Jouvet. Similarly it emphasized the theatricality of the play for the first time. The revival was no more popular than the initial production. Generally the critics could not see any reason for using an all black cast and thought that the sensuality was overdone. Lemarchand, for example, objected: "L'aspect rituel, magique de l'incantation des furieuses jeunes personnes est un peu inutilement souligné."<sup>1</sup>

The productions reveal the diversity of interpretation and treatment that Les Bonnes has received, and also the antagonism it has provoked. Genet has himself attempted three times to express his own vision of the play,<sup>2</sup> but generally speaking has added to the confusion through difficult and elliptical language. Nevertheless, from his "Lettre à Pauvert" there emerge three pointers to the type of theatre he is trying to write. Primarily he sees theatre as a kind of mystery in which understanding is felt but not expressed. The actors should consequently not attempt psychological portrayals but rather should be symbols in the mystery. The third aspect stressed is that his theatre should not be treated realistically in order that the spectator can be drawn into the play by a facile suspension of disbelief. Theatre is not a fictitious copy of life but a hermetically enclosed action:

Toutefois . . . déjà ému par la morne tristesse d'un théâtre qui reflète trop exactement le monde visible, les actions des hommes, et non les Dieux, je tâchai d'obtenir un décalage qui, permettant un ton déclamatoire, porterait le théâtre sur le théâtre. (854:13)

The theatrical potential of the play was exploited only by Serreau; that he was not betraying the nature of the play can be seen by Genet's later comment:

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<sup>1</sup>Jacques Lemarchand, Le Figaro littéraire, 14 September 1963, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>See Jean Genet, "Lettre à Pauvert"; Jean Genet, "Comment jouer Les Bonnes"; and Jean Genet, O.C. IV, pp. 137-76 (footnotes and additional stage directions).



"Que les comédiennes jouent. Excessivement" (IV:158).

In 1958, Genet added to his comments in "Lettre à Pauvert" by the publication of his notes, "Comment jouer Les Bonnes." These notes can be read as an attack on Jovet's treatment of the play. For example, Genet specifically states: "Ces deux bonnes ne sont pas des garces: elles ont vieilli, elles ont maigri dans la douceur de Madame" (IV:267). The beauty and fairness of the maids should not be apparent in their physical appearance but should be suggested through their actions in the play as they liberate themselves from the imprisoning influence of Madame. This co-existence of beauty and ugliness is central to the play. Genet expresses this dialectic by reference to the purity of the maids' eyes, born of the fact that "tous les soirs elles se masturbent et déchargent en vrac, l'une dans l'autre, leur haine de Madame" (IV:267). Purity is achieved through impurity; moreover, it is necessary for Genet's aesthetic that both be simultaneously present. Therefore, the complete transformation of maid into mistress of Jovet was not true to this belief. It is clear from an addition made to the text in 1968 that this point is capital. The opening stage direction ends: "L'actrice qui joue Solange est vêtue d'une petite robe noire, de domestique. Sur une chaise, une autre petite robe noire, des bas de fil noirs, une paire de souliers noirs à talons plats" (IV:139). The last sentence is new. The presence of another maid's uniform on stage implies that the Madame on stage is not an authentic Madame but a maid dressed up. Previously the audience would no doubt have taken the Madame they saw as the true Madame and not as Claire-Madame. Thus the servant and the mistress coincide, as they must, before our eyes. Later in the play Claire again puts on Madame's dresses. In previous editions this was accomplished by Claire disappearing behind a screen only to emerge transformed. In his 1968 revisions, Genet emphasized by a stage direction that this should take place in front of the audience: "Elle met sa robe blanche face au public, par-dessus sa petite robe noire" (IV:170). The maid's uniform is not totally covered by the dress, but rather both uniform and dress are apparent symbolizing the dual nature of Claire-Madame. The necessary juxtaposition of real and imaginary in a single image is what Genet was stressing in his insistence:

"La chambre doit être la copie à peu près exacte d'une chambre féminine, les fleurs vraies, mais les robes monstrueuses et le jeu des actrices un peu titubant"(IV:269-70). That the confrontation of opposites is central to Genet's dramatic style can be judged by his notes concerning the set of Les Paravents: "Se confrontant aux objets dessinés en trompe-l'oeil sur chaque paravent, il devra toujours y avoir sur scène un ou plusieurs objets réels" (P:9). Gestures in Les Bonnes should be light and stylized to counteract "une phraséologie trop pesante"; the fine poetic passages should be said "comme une évidence, comme lorsqu'un chauffeur de taxi parisien invente sur-le-champ une métaphore argotique" (IV:267; and 268).

The ambivalence of the situation in Genet's drama puts the spectator in an uncomfortable position. Wishing to believe in the stage action through his suspension of disbelief, he finds this natural desire is undermined and destroyed as it is being formulated. Genet states: "Il faut à la fois y croire et refuser d'y croire" (IV:268). This is the situation during the mass; the faithful believe in the veracity of the event (transubstantiation) while simultaneously being aware of the physical worldly reality of the wafer, the chalice and the priest. The difficulty in performance of Les Bonnes has arisen because there is nothing with the power to fuse the two elements, as faith does for the celebrants; Dumur found himself not knowing what to believe during Serreau's production.

Les Bonnes has been performed regularly since Genet's comments and insights have become available, but it still poses problems in performance. In the early 1970s, Les Bonnes was produced by three different directors. All of them avoided the psychological and social interpretations that Genet had refused and dwelt more on the idea of the ceremony with an emphasis on gesture and movement. Genet himself had stressed in 1968 that the movement about the stage should not be haphazard nor naturalistic: "Les metteurs en scène doivent s'appliquer à mettre au point une déambulation qui ne sera pas laissée au hasard: les Bonnes et Madame se rendent d'un point à un autre de la scène, en dessinant une géométrie qui ait un sens" (IV:147). The sense of this movement is not made explicit by Genet, but it seems to attempt the construction

of a mysterious, hieratic system. For the spectator, the movement stimulates a fascination with the scenic space.

In March 1971 at the Comédie de Saint Etienne, Roland Monod used one man and two women in his production. He introduced the performance with a strange gestural ceremony accompanied by plainsong: two figures (one male and one female) entered from below each side of the stage: "Ils se rejoignent lentement, sans s'atteindre, au centre du proscenium, et dessinent des gestes compliqués par lesquels ils s'attirent et se repoussent sans s'effleurer, puis se tournent, bras écartés, dans une attitude contemplative vers la 'chapelle'."<sup>1</sup> Monod abandoned the realistic set that Genet had insisted on. His interpretation of the play was as a black mass or inverted religious ceremony. His set appears to have been inspired by the use of vertical space in the medieval mysteries. Three levels were utilized: the highest was the chapel or the realm of the godhead—Madame; stage level represented the neutral space in which the maids wrangle and argue, linked to the chapel by a staircase; the lowest level was the below-stage from which the maids issued, their infernal home. The religiosity of the production was overpowering. It enveloped the audience in "un climat pesant et grave."<sup>2</sup> The audience was absorbed into the production; the essential ambivalence was lost.

The underlying religious symbolism of the play attracted Jean-Marie Patte. In April 1971 at Théâtre de la Cité Internationale (Paris), Patte used three male actors who alternated in the three roles. Like Monod, Patte dispensed with any semblance of realism in staging and acting. The stage was a neutral white space devoid of properties; it was situated at the same level as the audience who surrounded the action. The characters were played by bald-headed men wearing body stockings, work trousers and hobnail boots. At certain points in the play they adorned themselves with boleros and shawls. Despite the physical proximity of the actors and the common lighting for stage and auditorium, the audience was kept outside the action by stylized gestures.

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<sup>1</sup>Emile Copfermann, Les Lettres françaises, 24 March 1971, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Colette Godard, Le Monde, 7-8 March 1971, p. 14.

The power generated by the stylization was intended to overcome the inconsistencies between the text and action: references to stockings that had been transformed into boots, stroking of the hair that no longer existed on the maids' heads. It was clearly an attempt to realize the fusion of real and imaginary which is at the heart of Genet's drama. However, the experience of this performance was non-dramatic. The action of the play did not communicate itself to an audience that felt excluded: "On a l'impression d'assister, en voyeur, aux jeux interdits de deux êtres plus nus que s'ils étaient dévêtus, plus obscènes que s'ils se livraient devant nous à des pratiques sexuelles." The notion of a communion in the theatre was destroyed: "Pour un peu, on se dit que ces trois comédiens pourraient jouer seuls, sans spectateurs, tant ils sont habitués. C'est presque une faveur d'être admis à les voir."<sup>1</sup> It would seem that mere symbolic gesturing did not have the force to work dramatically.

A third production was directed by Victor Garcia in Spanish at Théâtre de la Cité Internationale in April 1970. Garcia renounced even the realistic framework for the play. The mistress's bedroom was replaced by a deserted black stage. The bed was transformed into a gravelike ditch, and the area was surrounded by tall, shining, tin panels that reflected the lights in a cold, stark manner. The costumes of the maids were shapeless knee-length smocks. The maids crawled around the floor on shabby knee-pads or moved awkwardly on built-up boots with tinkling bells. Unkempt hair hanging bedraggled around their shoulders, they presented a picture of extreme degradation and squalour. The transformation into Claire-Madame was effected through the mere addition of bits of rag.<sup>2</sup> The ceremony was acted at a feverish pitch with great physical exertion; the maids pursued one another around the stage, torturing each other with beating and whipping: "Dans le jeu, même parti-pris de stylisation intemporelle: les comédiennes se livrent à un rituel où elles vont jusqu'au bout d'elles-mêmes, sans rien feutrer ni filtrer."<sup>3</sup> The movement

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<sup>1</sup> Matthieu Galey, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 29 April 1971, p. 13; and p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Matthieu Galey, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 16 April 1970, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Abirached, La Nouvelle Revue Française, no. 210 (June 1970), 940.

of the production was conceived in vertical terms to correspond to the text's references to crawling and elevation. Claire was portrayed as a dog on all fours;<sup>1</sup> Madame entered from the flies descending, as it were, into the hell of the maids' depravity. As with Monod the spatial organization had religious connotations of paradise and the inferno.

Garcia's production was received with great enthusiasm by the Paris critics. The question to be raised, though, is whether the production was really a production of Genet's Les Bonnes. For André Camp the success of the production was entirely due to the performances of the lead actresses: "Nuria Espert et Julieta Serrano sont proprement fantastiques de tension et de vérité. Leur jeu est tellement tendu, leur débit volontairement monocorde, halluciné, que le texte apparaît, presque, comme superflu."<sup>2</sup> Garcia's method of production is to destructure a text and then reinterpret its essence in theatrical terms. Garcia used Genet's script to produce a ritual or ceremony. The play was successful because Garcia had changed its nature: "The effect is to translate Genet's abstract glorification of the criminal and the beggar into a physical reality . . . [that] enlarges the text into dance and incantation."<sup>3</sup> Garcia, in fact, expanded the text with extra details. The maids were seen passing a night on their beds and immediately running to try on Madame's red and black gowns. They were often huddled in the corner of the stage whispering about Madame as the faithful whisper from their pews. Indeed, the tea-cup of the final act was replaced by a ritualistic goblet. As was the case with Monod, the audience was drawn into the mystery of the play. Lemarchand spoke of "les signes, les métaphores . . . à la fois lisibles immédiatement" which created a "unique et vrai lien entre l'auteur et le spectateur."<sup>4</sup> Les Bonnes became significant for the audience because Garcia exploded Genet's isolated world

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<sup>1</sup>This is suggested by a stage direction: "C'est presque dans un abolement" (IV:149).

<sup>2</sup>André Camp, L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 450 (1 June 1970), p. 51.

<sup>3</sup>Irving Wardle, The Times, 18 May 1971, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Lemarchand, Le Figaro littéraire, 20 April 1970, p. 33.

by drawing on the more general sense of impending death for the force of the play.

For the most part those performances that attempt to remain loyal to the spirit of the original text reject the audience, either totally or partially. The stage and auditorium are kept as two separate realms sometimes in direct confrontation. Nevertheless, the play has been described by the critics as "une espèce de furieuse messe noire," "rituel macabre et sacrilège," "ritual approaches to the liberation from the self," and "a theatre of ritual and ceremonial."<sup>1</sup> The bases for these assessments derive generally from an imperfect understanding of ritual.

For Peter Brook, ritual amounts simply to "repetitive patterns."<sup>2</sup> The maids themselves refer more rightly to their actions as forming part of "la cérémonie" (IV:148; and 152) and of "le jeu" (IV:149). The idea that what is being performed is a repeated unchanging sequence is reinforced by the characters' references to a pre-existing order of performance: "Nous avons le temps" (IV:139); "Nous n'en sommes pas encore là" (IV:141); "Mais dépêche-toi, nous n'aurons pas le temps" (IV:143); "Passez sur les formalités au début" (IV:171). That the same ceremony has been conducted before by the maids is clear in Claire's reproach to Solange: "Hier soir, quand tu faisais Madame dans la robe blanche, tu jubilais, tu jubilais, tu te voyais déjà montant en cachette sur le bateau des déportés, sur le . . ." (IV:150). However, these repetitions only have real significance to the characters in the play; they form part of the history of those characters, and they possess only verbal meaning for the audience.

What the audience can experience are the recurring sequences and gestures internal to a single performance. Generally speaking, these repetitions occur during the parallel actions of Claire-Madame and Madame. For example,

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Jacques Gautier, Le Figaro, 20-21 April 1947; André Camp, L'Avent-Scène: Théâtre, no. 450 (1 June 1970), p. 51; R. A. Zimbardo, "Genet's Black Mass," Modern Drama, vol. 8, no. 3 (December 1965), p. 247; and Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Brook, The Empty Space (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968), p. 52.

Claire's reaction to Monsieur's imprisonment corresponds to Madame's own speech.<sup>1</sup> The dress that Madame gives to Claire is the one that Solange had earlier forced her to wear.<sup>2</sup> Madame reacts to her tea being served in the best tea service just as does Claire in her last words: "Et tu l'as versé dans le service le plus riche, le plus précieux" (IV:176).<sup>3</sup> Both Madame and Claire-Madame share a fascination with flowers, jewels, dresses, hand mirrors, and minute adjustments to their hair.

Although ritual implies repetition, repetition is only the formal element of a deeper experience. Coe goes further than Brook to define ritual as "a sacred and immutable series of ceremonial gestures,"<sup>4</sup> that is to say, the repetition serves a religious end. Again there is evidence from the play to confirm the religious nature of the ceremony that the maids enact. There is a fascination with white and red, the purity of the Virgin and the blood of Christ. Claire declares at one point: "Je suis une Vierge plus belle" (IV:142). The ingestion of the godhead through the wine and wafer is obliquely referred to in Claire's last substantial speech:

CLAIRE: Il te faudra beaucoup de force. Personne ne saura au bague que je t'accompagne en cachette. Et surtout, quand tu seras condamnée, n'oublie pas que tu me portes en toi. Précieusement. Nous serons belles, libres et joyeuses. (IV:176)

R. A. Zimbaro has carefully traced the close similarity of the elevation, consecration, and communion of the mass and the stages of the maids' ceremony.<sup>5</sup> Their reaction to the ceremony even corresponds to the reaction of the possessed dancer of tribal ritual. After the impersonation of Madame (the godhead?) Claire collapses with exhaustion, which she again suffers after her ordeal with Madame (IV:147; 170; and 173). This exhaustion is caused by the effort to deny one's own identity in readiness for possession. Ann Jellicoe

<sup>1</sup> Compare Genet, O.C. IV, p. 142 and p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Genet, O.C. IV, p. 141 and p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> Compare with Genet, O.C. IV, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> Coe, Vision of Jean Genet, p. 274.

<sup>5</sup> Zimbaro, "Genet's Black Mass," pp. 247-58.

has put it simply: "A ritual generally takes the form of repeating a pattern of words and gestures which tend to excite us above a normal state of mind; at the climax of the rite the essential nature of something is changed."<sup>1</sup>

It is true that these ritual overtones are experienced by the audience during the performance along with the characters. They are lived in the unreal world born of the suspension of disbelief. However, they can only be efficacious even in that marginal world if the audience believe they are part of an ongoing tradition. In other words, the audience must consider the performance as a single enactment of a ritual that continues in an imagined sphere. For this to be the case it is necessary that Claire's suicide is sham and that the ceremony shall be repeated.<sup>2</sup> Yet this interpretation becomes untenable if one listens to the air of finality in Claire's closing speeches:

CLAIRE: C'est à moi de disposer en ces dernières minutes. . . . Nous sommes tout au bord, Solange. Nous irons jusqu'à la fin. Tu seras seule pour vivre nos deux existences. (IV:175-76)

The critics have been content with a superficial definition of ritual. They have concentrated on the events of the play and generally on just those parts in which the maids are enacting their ceremony. They have not looked at the wider application of the term ritual to the real situation that obtains during a theatrical performance. Those present are divided into at least two camps: the actors and the spectators. The actors know beforehand what is going to happen and those in the audience do not. True ritual does not separate people into groups, but is rather a celebration of communal values by all present and with all present aware through tradition of the stages of the rite. Emile Durkheim established four functions of ritual:

- I. A disciplinary and preparatory function: ritual as preparation of the individual for social living through the inculcation of self-discipline
- II. A cohesive function: ritual as a reaffirmation of communal values
- III. A revitalizing function: ritual as perpetration of traditions with a view to the future health of the community

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<sup>1</sup>Ann Jellicoe, Preface to The Sport of My Mad Mother (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>This case is argued by Grossvogel, Blasphemers, p. 151.



IV. A euphoric function: ritual as the creator of a pleasant feeling of social euphoria <sup>1</sup>

The action on stage in Les Bonnes is a rejection, even a reversal, of the standard behaviour of the audience. Lesbianism and orgiastic immolation do not form part of the mores of conventional theatre audiences. Furthermore, the language used by the servants is exceptional rather than normal. Indeed, the structure of the play is such that it undermines rather than confirms the spectator's position.

Conventional theatre is dependent on the audience accepting the reality of the actor-character and the situation depicted on stage. In Les Bonnes another level of reality-non-reality is introduced. The actresses perform roles which demand the acting of further roles; the actress acts Solange who acts Claire, or the actress acts Claire who acts Madame. If the opening sequence of the play is examined, the way in which the action proceeds falteringly along a line between the real and the non-real becomes apparent. The audience will accept as real the opening situation of Madame (really Claire) and Claire (really Solange), but this belief is being constantly challenged. The vocabulary of the mistress has a coarseness that does not correspond to her position in society:

CLAIRE: Et ces gants! Ces éternels gants! Je t'ai dit souvent de les laisser à la cuisine. C'est avec ça, sans doute, que tu espères séduire le laitier. . . . Quand comprendras-tu que cette chambre ne doit pas être souillée? Tout, mais tout! ce qui vient de la cuisine est crachat. (IV:139)

The audience is, however, reassured by the mistress assuming a more normal attitude towards her domestic; she asks to be dressed and demands that her jewels be laid out (IV:140). Nevertheless, the coarseness of the opening remarks is repeated in a more overtly sexual reference to the laitier:

CLAIRE: Avouez qu'il vous a séduite! Que vous êtes grosses! Avouez-le!  
(IV:140)

With the heightened tension of this outburst, the supposed Madame reverts to ejaculatory imagery:

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<sup>1</sup> See Harry Alpert, Emile Durkheim and His Sociology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), pp. 199-203.

(Solange s'accroupit sur la tapis et, crachant dessus, cire des escarpins vernis.)

CLAIRE: Je vous ai dit, Claire, d'éviter les crachats. Qu'ils dorment en vous, ma fille, qu'ils y croupissent. Ah! ah! vous êtes hideuse, ma belle. . . . Pensez-vous qu'il me soit agréable de me savoir le pied enveloppé par les voiles de votre salive? Par la brume de vos marécages? (IV:140)

The unease caused by this opening exchange derives from a disparity between the roles of the actresses and their words and actions. The audience through habit associates a mode of conduct and a register of vocabulary with certain social functions. In this initial sequence this association is questioned, if not dislocated. As though this were not enough the names themselves begin to slip. The audience is thrown into confusion also at the level of the action of the play. The maid has been referred to as Claire throughout, and then all of a sudden the Madame threatens:

CLAIRE: Ah! tu veux parler . . . Parfait. Menace-moi. Insulte ta maîtresse. Solange, tu veux parler, n'est-ce pas, des malheurs de Monsieur. Sotte. (IV:141)

The spectators' consternation must be complete when faced with the following exchange:

SOLANGE: . . . Car Solange vous emmerde!  
 CLAIRE, affolée: Claire! Claire!  
 SOLANGE: Hein?  
 CLAIRE, dans un murmure: Claire, Solange, Claire.  
 SOLANGE: Ah! oui, Claire. Claire vous emmerde! (IV:144-45)

The work prohibits the audience from fulfilling its customary role in the performance. By undermining the belief in the second level of characterization (actress as Solange as Claire), doubt is necessarily cast on the primary level (actress as Solange) which is the very basis of the theatrical illusion.

Here again we are faced with Genet's dualistic universe: "Il faut à la fois y croire et refuser d'y croire, mais afin qu'on y puisse croire il faut que les actrices ne jouent pas selon un mode réaliste" (IV:268-69). Genet's model is the mass which he is convinced is effective because the belief is not in what one perceives physically but in the faith that informs the ceremony. The dual nature of the priest as a man and as God's envoy is overcome through a will to believe which is encouraged by the execution of certain prescribed gestures and actions. The congregation at the mass are

confirmed in their beliefs which they share with the officiant whose double nature they willingly accept. The theatre can have superficially similar functions: the actor has the dual nature of a physical man and the embodiment of a character from an imagined world; the willingness to believe becomes the suspension of disbelief. If the suspension of disbelief is working the actor-character becomes a symbol of this non-real world.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, the theatre is a lay religion. The difference lies in that the spectator at the theatre does not necessarily share a body of beliefs with the author or character, but rather accepts a convention. The belief in the action on the part of the audience will last as long as the convention is respected. In Les Bonnes Genet relies on the principles of this convention in that he requires the acceptance of the primary level of characterization (actress as Solange) and the identification with the action. However, the simultaneous undermining of this convention by the confusion of roles leaves the spectator rejected and abandoned outside the play. Indeed, Genet has no respect for the conventional means through which identification operates, namely characterization. The characters of Les Bonnes do not have stable individual identities, and thus Solange can say, referring only to Claire physically: "Les deux bonnes sont là—les dévouées servantes!" (IV:145). One maid implies the other; Madame and the audience cannot keep them apart:

CLAIRE: . . . Madame a soigné Claire ou Solange, car Madame nous confondait toujours. (IV:167)

The denial of individual identities (and correlatively the frustration of the audience's desire to believe in them) is so complete that the entry of Madame causes a definite relaxation in the auditorium.<sup>2</sup> A possible explanation is that Madame is a highly credible type with whom one can identify. Genet had great difficulty with this part because he wanted to avoid creating a

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<sup>1</sup>The existence of the character independent of the actor's incarnation of it, has been discussed at length by Etienne Souriau and Henri Gouhier. See Souriau, Les Grands Problèmes de l'esthétique théâtrale, p. 16: "Le grand succès du génie théâtral est de réussir à donner une existence véritable aux personnages, indépendamment de leur incarnation par l'acteur"; and Gouhier, Le Théâtre et l'existence (Paris: Aubier, 1952), Chapter 4.

<sup>2</sup>This reaction could be distinctly sensed in Frank Dunlop's production of The Maids (London, Young Vic, 15 April 1972).

caricature.<sup>1</sup> The final result obviously dissatisfied him to judge from the note he appended to the 1968 revision at the point when Madame enters:

Il est possible que la pièce paraisse réduite à un squelette de pièce. En effet, tout y est trop vite dit, et trop explicite, je suggère donc que les metteurs en scène éventuels remplacent les expressions trop précises, celles qui rendent la situation trop explicite, par d'autres plus ambiguës. (IV:158)

Genet consciously divorces the spectator from the stage by denying the conventional means through which the spectator enters into the action. The confrontation that results from this willed separation could be overcome by the galvanizing power of some shared fundamental conviction. Although such a technique would make Genet's theatre different, it would be incompatible with the whole movement of the plays towards an aesthetic of rejection. For example, the world of the stage in Les Bonnes is exceptional. It is not intended to reflect the world of the audience. The action of the play works to reject the normal world:

CLAIRE: Fini. C'est fini. Ah! J'oubliais! ferme le robinet! C'est fini. Je disposerai du monde. (IV:156)

It is a withdrawal into a singular realm of self-reflecting images:

CLAIRE: Solange, à nous deux, nous serons ce couple éternel, du criminel et de la sainte. Nous serons sauvées, Solange, je te le jure, sauvées! (IV:156)

The metaphorical infrastructure of the play describes a realm that is cut off from the auditorium and everyday reality. The mistress's room and the relationships that exist inside it are referred to as barricades against the attack of the outside world:

SOLANGE: Madame se croyait protégée par ses barricades de fleurs, sauvée par un exceptionnel destin, par le sacrifice. (IV:145)

. . . . .

MADAME: Je me croyais si bien protégée de la vie, si bien protégée par votre dévouement. Si bien protégée par Monsieur. Et toute cette coalition d'amitiés n'aura pas réussi une barricade assez haute contre le désespoir. (IV:164)

The implication of a barricade is that while keeping others out, it also

<sup>1</sup>This point was made by Mme Marthe Besson (née Herlin) in conversations with the author during December 1972 at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. Mme Besson was assistant to Louis Jouvet during the rehearsals of the play. Indeed text q bears her maiden name written in the hand of Genet.

imprisons those inside; a means of defence becomes an oppressive limitation. Thus, agents of protection cited by Solange and Madame are simultaneously the means of extinction for Claire-Madame:

CLAIRE: Vous m'écrasez sous vos prévenances, sous votre humilité, sous les glaïeuls et le réséda. (Elle se lève et d'un ton plus bas.) On s'encombre inutilement. Il y a trop de fleurs. C'est mortel. (IV:140)

The flowers which are present ostensibly for adornment become agents of death; their presence is suffocating:

MADAME: Chaque fois que je rentrerai mon coeur battra avec cette violence terrible et un beau jour je m'écroulerai, morte sous vos fleurs. Puisque c'est mon tombeau que vous préparez, puisque depuis quelques jours vous accumulez dans ma chambre des fleurs funèbres! (IV:159)

Flowers can celebrate both a marriage and a death, but it is surely death that permeates Genet's world:

MADAME: Votre gentillesse m'agace. Elle m'accable. Elle m'étouffe. . . . Et ces fleurs qui sont là pour fêter juste le contraire d'une noce! (IV:161)

It is therefore consistent that life and escape should be associated with the removal of flowers:

MADAME: Enlevez ces fleurs. Emportez-les chez vous. . . . Madame s'échappe! Emportez-moi ces fleurs! (IV:167)

The oppressive and stifling atmosphere of the room imprisons the maids as well and threatens them with death:

SOLANGE: Il fait lourd, ce soir. Il a fait lourd toute la journée.  
CLAIRE: Oui.  
SOLANGE: Et cela nous tue, Claire. (IV:146)

Their realm is a world of cloying vaporous fumes symbolized by Solange's saliva, "la brume de vos marécages," a dense impenetrable fog of mysterious formations:

SOLANGE: Nous sommes enveloppées, confondues dans nos exhalaisons, dans nos fastes, dans notre haine pour vous. Nous prenons forme, madame. (IV:145)

Those existing in this unhealthy region turned in on itself, constantly run the danger of asphyxiation and poisoning from their own ejaculations:

SOLANGE: Pourrons-nous même le continuer, le jeu. Et moi, si je n'ai plus à cracher sur quelqu'un qui m'appelle Claire, mes crachats vont m'étouffer! (IV:149)

Their lot is made worse by the fascination with the mirrors that reflect this world back into itself. The sets of the productions have laid great emphasis

on the mirrors. Serreau underlined the reflective function of the mirrors by positioning one at the front right of the stage; this mirror came between the audience and the characters, reflecting the maids' images back onto the stage and into their private realm. Claire and Solange are likened to mirror images of each other, thus rendering their circumstances even more claustrophobic:

CLAIRE: Mais, j'en ai assez de ce miroir effrayant qui me renvoie mon image comme une mauvaise odeur. (IV:156)

This dark lugubrious world of the maids is contrasted with the radiance and joy of the elevation to which they aspire. Madame's jewels and glistening appearance <sup>are</sup> the object of envy. Although it is the realm of light and brilliance that is the focus of their devotions they feel threatened by it; they are children of the darkness:

CLAIRE, se mirant avec complaisance: J'y suis plus belle! Le danger m'aurole, Claire, et toi tu n'es que ténèbres . . .

SOLANGE: . . . infernales! (IV:145)

The milkman who visits them is a source of danger because his youth and "fraîcheur" represent an alien world (IV:145). The maids are always anxious about that world and try to hide their existence from it. Claire complains: "Je suis à bout. La lumière m'assomme. Tu crois que les gens d'en face . . ." (IV:147). The curtains and windows that protect them from their neighbours' gaze are given great attention. The opening of a window appears to have portentous consequences for the maids:

CLAIRE: Tais-toi. Tu m'étouffes. J'étouffe. (Elle veut entrouvrir la fenêtre.) Ah! laisser entrer un peu d'air ici!

SOLANGE, inquiète: Que veux-tu faire?

CLAIRE: Ouvrir. . . .

SOLANGE: Laisse la fenêtre. Ouvre les portes de l'antichambre et de la cuisine. (IV:153)

The closing stages of the play are characterized by the maids breaking out of their confinement. However, this escape also means their annihilation. Claire is aware of this and tries to prevent Solange's actions:

SOLANGE: Laissez-moi sortir. Nous allons parler au monde. Qu'il se mette aux fenêtres pour nous voir, il faut qu'il nous écoute.

(Elle ouvre la fenêtre, mais Claire la tire dans la chambre.)

CLAIRE: Les gens d'en face vont nous voir.

SOLANGE, déjà sur le balcon: J'espère bien. Il fait bon. Le vent m'exalte!

CLAIRE: Solange! Solange! Reste avec moi, rentre! (IV:172)

The only way that Claire and Solange can withstand the impact of light and witnesses is through a secret compact struck in the darkness of their room: "Personne ne saura au bain que je t'accompagne en cachette" (IV:176).

The stage action is introverted; the imagery of the play describes a world locked away from everyday reality. The action is concluded in a feat of destruction through self-negation and self-immolation; the triumph of Claire leaves Solange in complete isolation. The play shrinks away from the audience. For the audience, the values expressed in the play represent an alternative culture in which it cannot participate. Ritual, according to Durkheim, involves a preparation for social living and a maintenance of the health of the society. Genet's play sabotages the values of the audience and spreads decay: "J'ai pris soin de préciser que la scène s'oppose à la vie" (IV:228). The play does not create any euphoric feeling in the audience; its intention is rather "d'établir une espèce de malaise dans la salle" (IV:268). The diversity of critical reaction underscores the uneasiness that the play has caused. Genet's theatre is deliberately alternative: "Si mon théâtre pue c'est parce que l'autre sent bon" (IV:13).

The ritual element of Genet's theatre is formal. Judged by the categories of Durkheim, which concentrate on the effect and function of ritual in society, Genet's theatre is anti-ritual. Jan Kott acknowledges Genet's debt to the practices of the Catholic Church but explains the author's use of them: "As such the performance is not a ritual, but a profanation of the ritual, and this seems to be the real function of liturgy in the theatre of Genet."<sup>1</sup> In Les Bonnes the ritual element is denied on three levels: the inability to effect the necessary fusion of opposites that is central to Genet's imagery; the simultaneous dependence on, and rejection of, the theatrical convention; the setting of the stage against the audience.

The technique of the play is an uneasy compromise between convention and revolution. The play relies on an initial identification of audience with

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<sup>1</sup>Jan Kott, Theatre Notebook: 1947-1967, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 253.

character, and yet the events of the play work against this very sympathy. The force of the drama lies in the coexistence of the real and the imaginary, but the indispensable fusion of realms is lacking. The stage action remains imaginary, and the audience is not truly caused to question itself. Les Nègres overcomes these shortcomings. The audience is confronted by an action which attacks it. The action is fired by the emotive power of racialism which creates a communion in the audience, a communion borne not of sympathy but of open hostility between audience and stage. The tension between actor and spectator is exploded. Racialism generates the force by which real and imaginary become fused. Violence and hatred, and not love and belief as in the mass, bring about the conditions proper for the realization of Genet's theatre in performance.

#### (iv) Les Nègres

The scandal and debate that postponed Peter Brook's production of Le Balcon<sup>1</sup> meant that Les Nègres, although written after that play, became the third of Genet's plays to be seen on the Parisian stage.<sup>2</sup> Why those who insisted on finding, and objecting to, a direct political message in Genet's drama singled out Le Balcon, when it would seem that Les Nègres raised a much more overtly social issue is strange indeed. After all the title itself suggests obvious racist connotations. In performance the play received the customary ambivalent critical reception. Marcel and Gautier were still unshaken in their opposition to Genet's work, more in principle than through any artistic consideration it would appear. "C'est un corrupteur et ce n'est rien d'autre" constituted the final words of Marcel's review; Genet appeared to be rejecting in the play "tout ce qui a fait l'honneur et la dignité de l'occident chrétien."<sup>3</sup> The social overtones of the play (the basic social

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<sup>1</sup>For details of the difficulties Brook faced after his production was banned in November 1957, see Le Figaro, 1, 13, 14, 20, 21, 23 and 31 November 1957 and Combat, 13 and 23-24 November 1957.

<sup>2</sup>Les Nègres was first performed 28 October 1959 at Théâtre de Lutèce by La Troupe des Griots, directed by Roger Blin.

<sup>3</sup>Gabriel Marcel, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 17 December 1959; and Jean-Jacques Gautier, Le Figaro, 4 November 1959.



situation that Genet exploits as the mainspring) are again erected into the main theme and sole significance of the work by the critics in the daily papers. For Gouhier the setting used by Genet had an inherent "troisième dimension" since it could have expressed the tragic misunderstanding born of prejudice, but under Genet's pen the whole was reduced to "une vulgaire pièce à thèse."<sup>1</sup> Claude Olivier placed it squarely in a similar category as "un vibrant réquisitoire contre le racisme."<sup>2</sup> Andrée Clair was sensitive to the possible harm that the play could do to the cause of black people because it crystallized opinion so ruthlessly.<sup>3</sup> Even with time to peruse the printed text, John Cruickshank confidently stated: "Clearly, this play is an attack on white people."<sup>4</sup> There were those critics who did not limit themselves to the single black-against-white interpretation. Paul Morelle universalized the import by seeing the blacks as symbols "de la domestication, de l'exploitation, du servage, et, dans une plus large mesure, de la mise à l'index en quarantaine de la méfiance originelle";<sup>5</sup> thus he questions whether there are not "blacks" in every race. Pierre Duret passed from the strictly social to the existential with his interpretation that the play treated "l'ambiguïté de nos rapports avec les Autres" and Jacques Bauchère saw it as an attack on the very nature of man.<sup>6</sup>

The different levels of interpretation do tend to highlight the difficulty of the play and of coping with its structural and thematic complexity; an all-englobing statement of theme is virtually impossible. Those, for example, who interpret the play as anti-colonialist and anti-repressive obviously see in the action of the play a triumph for the black cause, a

<sup>1</sup> Henri Gouhier, La Table ronde, no. 146 (February 1960), p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Olivier, Les Lettres françaises, 12 November 1959, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Andrée Clair, Présence africaine, no. 30 (February-March 1960), pp. 118-19.

<sup>4</sup> John Cruickshank, "Jean Genet: The Aesthetics of Crime," Critical Quarterly, vol. 6, no. 3 (Autumn 1964), p. 208.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Morelle, Libération, 4 November 1959.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Duret, Le Temps des hommes, no. 9 (January-March 1960), p. 102; and Jacques Bauchère, Confluent, no. 9 (September-October 1960), p. 609.

statement of black self-determination. The final act of the play when Village and Vertu turn their backs on the audience constitutes for these critics the liberation of the Negroes from the nigger image and a discovery of their own identity. Similarly they must believe in the veracity of the off-stage trial, in the execution of the black traitor, and subsequently in the real existence of "un autre" who is "en route. . . . [qui] va là-bas organiser et continuer la lutte" (N:161). However, the very construction of Les Nègres precludes any definite judgement of this sort. Roger Blin explains the mechanism behind the play:

Ici, la comédie que jouent les acteurs, la possession qu'ils miment, doivent être sans cesse brisées: si le public adhère physiquement à la pièce, il faut ménager des ruptures dans cette adhésion et que la crédibilité soit interrompue afin qu'on lui rappelle sans cesse qu'il s'agit de treize comédiens qui s'amuse entre eux! Tout cela commande une mise en scène visible. . . . Aussi toute la pièce doit-elle rester sur un plan théâtral, dans la convention d'un temps et avec un décor-échauffaudage qui serve à tout.<sup>1</sup>

Blin tried to effect this "visibility" by a very intricate use of stage lighting and by an orchestration of the text using different acting techniques and tones: masks, stylized movement, vocal pitch, the poetic passages juxtaposed with the crude, the sombre tone suddenly destroyed by a joke. Even the reader is very much aware of this structuring of the play, almost a modelling of the situation using the conventions of the theatre as basic materials. André Camp, among others, became lost in this vast, amorphous structure: "Dans le tohu-bohu des images et des éclats de voix, le fil conducteur de l'action reste obscur."<sup>2</sup> Despite Blin's effort, to judge from the contemporary reviews of the performance, very few critics were aware of this conscious use, this "willed multiplicity,"<sup>3</sup> of the theatrical conventions, the toying with belief and disbelief, the real and the imaginary. Michel Zérafra perceived the true dimension of the play: "Ce n'est pas une pièce politique, ni même polémique. . . . Au lieu de passionner pour les Blancs ou pour les Nègres, on

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Blin cited by Jean Duvignaud, Les Lettres nouvelles, no. 27 (28 October 1959), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> André Camp, L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 208 (15 November 1959), p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Knapp, "An Interview with Roger Blin," p. 116.

aurait mieux fait d'analyser l'esthétique du drame."<sup>1</sup> The sacrificial "murder" of the Court has no meaning beyond the theatrical representation "qui ne renvoie à aucune réalité."<sup>2</sup> It is made abundantly clear throughout the play that the events enacted on stage are really only a performance:

VILLE DE SAINT-NAZAIRE: Vous, vous n'étiez là que pour la parade.  
Derrière . . .

CELUI QUI TENAIT LE RÔLE DU VALET sec: Nous savons. Grâce à nous on n'a rien deviné du drame qui se passe ailleurs. (N:161)

What the critics have attempted for the most part is an interpretation of the action which is not portrayed before them, that which happens "ailleurs" performed by "eux"—an action outside the play. Coe summarizes the plan of Les Nègres:

And so the play develops for over half its length, working out permutations and combinations with the elusive material of dimensions of plays within plays and audiences within audiences, until suddenly the dramatic entry of Ville de Saint Nazaire, the whole delicate structure collapses with the revelation of a new dimension still: this time, a play outside the play.<sup>3</sup>

The character of Ville de Saint-Nazaire is crucial in the evaluation of the off-stage action; the actuality of that action is dependent on the audience's belief that he really does go elsewhere to the place it occurs. In the quotation above he obviously classes himself apart from the Negroes on stage, Archibald's troupe of actors, who never leave the box of the stage. However, his position is quite ambiguous. He is marked as not belonging to the troupe. He is not really a nègre, that is, the black in the imagination of the white. He is not adorned in the exaggerated garb of the other Negroes, but rather he appears "pieds nus et en chandail de laine" (N:15). This visual alienation from the troupe is soon underlined by verbal excommunication: "Et vous, monsieur, vous êtes de trop. Tout, étant secret, il faut foutre le camp," Archibald tells him (N:26). His role is to be a messenger between the two actions, the visible one before us and the invisible one happening in other parts:

<sup>1</sup> Michel Zérafra, Europe, no. 369 (January 1960), p.147.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Dort, "Le Jeu de Genet," Les Temps modernes, no. 171 (June 1960), p. 1878.

<sup>3</sup> Coe, ed., Theater of Jean Genet, p. 138.

ARCHIBALD: Allez, mais allez donc les prévenir. Dites-leur bien que nous avons commencé. Qu'ils fassent leur travail comme nous allons faire le nôtre. Tout se passera comme à l'accoutumée. Je l'espère.  
(N:26)

Dismissed, his exit from the acting area further underlines his status as an outsider to the on-stage ceremony, or at least is intended to give such an impression:

VILLAGE: Pas par là, malheureux. On vous avait dit de ne plus venir, vous gêchez tout. (N:26)

But at the same time as the outsider aspect of Ville de Saint-Nazaire is being developed, another side of his character is similarly being sketched: Ville de Saint-Nazaire, the member of the acting troupe. He does take part in the initial stylized Mozart minuet sequence with all its staged theatricality;<sup>1</sup> he is named by Archibald as "Monsieur Edgar-Hélas Ville de Saint-Nazaire" (later Archibald will tell us that this name is false), and he does bow to the audience and the Court (N:18). The exit from stage, as unrehearsed as it may first appear, soon is revealed as another instance of stage-craft and just one more detail in the construction of the performance of the ceremony. When such a "spontaneous" stage action is repeated, it passes immediately from the unrehearsed to the stylized. Indeed, it is his customary manner of leaving the stage (N:45-46). In fact the tone of the dialogue while he is on stage at the beginning implies that all his actions are known in advance by the actors; Archibald cut him off abruptly with "plus tard" obviously knowing that Ville de Saint-Nazaire will be returning (N:27). Everything is part of a rehearsed, well-known ceremony: "Tout se passera comme à l'accoutumée" (N:26).

The subsequent appearances of Ville de Saint-Nazaire all tend to confirm the first theme of the outsider. It is he who announces the significance of the fireworks off-stage and he who draws back the white sheet to reveal the sham of the coffin that has occupied centre stage throughout the performance (N:159-60 and 140). He challenges Archibald's intentions in observing the order of the rite:

VILLE DE SAINT-NAZAIRE, avec colère: Vous voulez donc la continuer à l'infini? La perpétuer jusqu'à la mort de la race? Tant que

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<sup>1</sup>Genet, Les Nègres, see the photograph p. 12.

la Terre tournera autour du soleil, lui-même emporté en ligne directe jusqu'aux limites de Dieu, dans une chambre secrète, des Nègres . . . (N:124)

The implication is that the blacks should break out from the confines of the "chambre secrète" into a world of real action. But even for Ville de Saint-Nazaire the essential seems to be happening on the stage before us: he refers to the off-stage action as "cette comédie que nous jouons, pour vous" (N:116). Perhaps it is just another play while the action on the visible stage has the only real validity:

VILLE DE SAINT-NAZAIRE: J'ai besoin d'être ici. De toutes façons, c'est trop tard. Laissez-moi aller jusqu'au bout. Ici. (N:116)

Indeed, the information we are given about the off-stage occurrences is vague and for an audience "unreal." Despite Archibald's vivid description "d'un sang vivant, chaud, souple, fumant, d'un sang qui saigne" the man to be judged remains secret, non-existent for the audience, an entity made of words (N:116). The details that Ville de Saint-Nazaire gives of the "autre" who has departed "là-bas" to continue the struggle remain unsubstantiated and ill-defined, so much so that Bobo suspiciously asks: "Mais . . . est-il noir, au moins?" (N:162), a question which casts doubt on the interpretation of the play as a politically revolutionary tract supporting black liberation. The only non-verbal evidence that there is an off-stage action is the sound effects of the fireworks and then the "reflets d'un feu d'artifice," two representations of something that is by nature artificial (N:159). This is not conclusive proof.

What is the nature of the area where this other court is meeting?

Archibald leaves no doubt: "Partez! Rentrez dans la coulisse. Emportez le revolver, et allez faire votre besogne" (N:45). As though this in itself is not emphatic enough, when questioned by Le Valet, Archibald is unequivocal:

LE VALET: Où est allé Le Nègre avec son colt, tout à l'heure?  
ARCHIBALD: Dans la coulisse. (N:51)

The wings of the stage are not a place of action. It is where those on stage lose their stage personality. It is the reverse of the illusion. For instance, when Village disappears behind the screen with the disguised Diouf, for all intents and purposes to perform the sacrificial murder (according to the

theatrical illusion), we are told what "really" happened:

NEIGE: Il ne s'est rien passé, n'est-ce pas?

VILLAGE: Rien. Ou, si vous voulez, tout s'est passé comme d'habitude, et très proprement. Quand il est entré derrière le paravent, Diouf m'a aimablement aidé à m'asseoir.

NEIGE: Et ensuite?

VILLE DE SAINT-NAZAIRE: Rien d'autre. Ils ont attendu sur un banc, dans la coulisse, en échangeant un sourire amusé. (N:123)

A great amount of stress is placed upon this very same incident. Bobo and Vertu discuss:

VERTU, timidement: Il ne revient pas.

BOBO, à mi-voix: Il n'a pas eu le temps. D'abord c'est très loin.

VERTU: Comment, très loin? C'est derrière le paravent.

BOBO, à mi-voix, toujours, et légèrement agacé: Bien sûr. Mais en même temps ils doivent aller ailleurs. Traverser la chambre, passer par le jardin. (N:121-22)

"Ailleurs" proves to be the dimension of the imagination. Vertu and Bobo are here questioning the whole basis of theatre and theatrical illusion. For theatre to work in Genet's terms, both what Bobo and Vertu say must be simultaneously true. The wafer of the mass, "est-ce Dieu lui-même ou une simple pastille blanche qu'il tient au bout de ses quatre doigts?" (854:15).

The off-stage action hinted at throughout the ceremony has precisely this function; it emphasizes that what is being performed is both simultaneously real (in that there are flesh-and-blood actors on stage) and imaginary (in that the action is fictitious). What is clear is that Ville de Saint-Nazaire's entry is very far from being "sudden" (as Coe would have it); the two areas of action have been implied from the beginning of the play as existing contemporaneously and interdependently. The question of the reality of the off-stage trial is not really crucial to the understanding of the play: "Scène et coulisse mutuellement s'irréalisent."<sup>1</sup> Even the description of the murder which produced the "corpse" in the catafalque is so confused that this event prior to the performance tends towards the realm of the imaginary. Village recounts the murder of an old lady tramp whom they bundle in the back of the Cadillac (N:32-34). Neige reproaches him for killing a white woman out of love and not "afin de devenir avec plus d'éclat un nègre balafre, puant

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<sup>1</sup>Maurice Regnaut, Théâtre populaire, no. 36 (1959), p. 51.

lippu, camus, mangeur, bouffeur, bâfreur de Blancs" (N:42). When the second murder is re-enacted, Diouf impersonates a well-behaved, reverent, white girl identified in a brief analogy with Jeanne d'Arc, a bastion of white, Christian society (N:101-2). As if this confusion were not sufficient, Ville de Saint-Nazaire then reveals that there is no body in the catafalque and that the catafalque is really only the two chairs that have been missing from the beginning of the performance (N:140).

All action concurrent with the performance (the off-stage trial) and prior to the performance (the murder) is made unreal. Archibald as metteur en scène for the troupe of actors also tries to ensure that the performance remains divorced from everyday reality. The action is to follow exactly that prescribed by a text and rehearsals; nothing is to be allowed to compromise the smooth development of the ceremony: "Vous n'avez pas le droit de rien changer au cérémonial, sauf, naturellement, si vous découvrez quelque détail cruel qui en rehausserait l'ordonnance" (N:29). The greatest danger to the performance would appear to be an intrusion of the private life of the actor (or the character) into the order of service. Archibald has to keep very close control over Village when the latter professes his love for Vertu and describes the attraction of the black prostitute: "Attention, Village, n'allez pas évoquer votre vie hors d'ici" quickly followed by "Prenez garde, Village!" and "N'évoquez pas votre vie" (N:53; 55; and 56). Archibald is not demanding complete suppression of personality but rather its subordination to the unfolding of the ceremony. Neige at the beginning is too violent for that point in the proceedings, "les préparatifs," and is continually being brought into line (N:24); she is made to bow against her will in the introduction, made to stop eating the flowers on the catafalque ("Elles sont là pour le jeu" - N:25), and is reprimanded by both Archibald and Bobo: "Vous faites intervenir votre tempérament, vos colères, vos humeurs, vos indispositions, et vous n'en avez pas le droit" (N:27). However, as the play progresses this anger finds its place in the ceremony: Neige is used to precipitate Village's fury needed for the sacrificial killing of Diouf; her own ire and venom are

used to elevate Village into a symbolic officiant in the murder which is overtly treated in the same terms as the mass, following the three stages of consecration, elevation and communion. All the levels of action—the ceremony on the floor of the stage, the Tribunal on the balcony of the set, the off-stage action and even the use of the natural antipathy of black actor confronting white audience—are together involved in a single process:

VILLE DE SAINT-NAZAIRE: Mais . . . vous avez bien fait d'accomplir le rite, comme chaque soir. Ce sera à moi de parachever la représentation.  
 ARCHIBALD: Il n'y a rien de nouveau, au moins, dans la cérémonie. (N:124)

In Les Nègres, as in all Genet's plays to a greater or lesser extent, the stage constitutes a world apart with its own reality. In both the previous plays examined, there still remains a vestige of identification with the performance through which the stage is accepted as everyday reality. Les Nègres, however, is much more audacious as it isolates itself from the audience. No elements are brought on stage; all the properties are present from the moment the curtain is drawn, including the missing chairs which portray the catafalque. Archibald and his troupe never leave the stage; only the outsider, Ville de Saint-Nazaire, can claim to have any experience independent of the stage.

In the Roger Blin production, accepted by Genet as "de l'ordre de la perfection," the stage was clearly defined as having a separate nature (N:5). From the beginning the "perruque blonde; un masque grossier de carnaval, en carton, . . . des gants blancs" which are to disguise Diouf as the virginal white victim are displayed in full view and not behind a paravent as Genet suggests (N:82). When these are absorbed into the action, they are replaced by the puppets of the Court to which Diouf gives birth which are hung from the balcony where the Court are seated. Genet underlines the necessity for their presence on stage although he suggests an alternative position: "Les poupées représentant la Cour resteront jusqu'au baisser du rideau sur une sorte de socle à gauche de la scène" (N:140).<sup>1</sup> The reality of the stage is its very imposture, and it is a falsification of the genre to hide its very nature.

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<sup>1</sup>See also photographie pp. 148-50.



Genet emphasizes this point of view throughout Les Nègres. The curtain at the beginning of the play is not to be mysteriously raised by some silent mechanism, thus letting us intrude unnoticed into a world beyond; rather it is to be drawn back as Genet insists: "Le rideau est tiré. Non levé: tiré" (N:15). The distance between the auditorium and the stage, the barrier constituted by the "fourth wall," is not to be dissolved and magically spirited away, but is to be stressed, stated as a constituent element of drama. The world on one side of the curtain is different from that on the other. The auditorium is generally swathed in shadow and darkness whereas the stage is flooded with light, "une lumière de néon, très violente" (N:15). The actors appear in bright, exaggerated costumes. Evening suits are all very proper but accompanied by "chaussures jaunes" pushing the effect towards pastiche (N:16). The women's costumes, "très pailletées," are supposed to evoke "de fausses élégances, le plus grand mauvais goût" (N:16). The whole technique is one of the denial of ordinary reality through creation of an over-reality. Just as the title implies the white man's image of the Negro, so the costumes are the white man's concept of black taste—not a reality but an imagined reality. Make-up is not to be so cleverly applied that it is taken as real, but should be exaggerated and made apparent. Archibald refers directly to it: "Pour vous servir nous utiliserons nos fards d'un beau noir luisant" (N:18). Bobo even makes Village up on stage as a preparatory step to the enactment of the ceremony: "Elle court à la boîte de cirage et revient maquiller de noir le visage et les mains de Village, sur lesquels elle crache et frotte" (N:84).<sup>1</sup> Bobo's actions are to be made as theatrical as possible; Genet adds details of this jeu in "Pour jouer Les Nègres":

Quand Bobo enduit de cirage la figure de Village, elle doit le faire avec beaucoup de soins. Elle peut utiliser des cirages noirs, jaunes, rouges et blancs afin de réussir un maquillage assez sauvage. Elle applique les couleurs comme le fait un peintre sur sa toile, en se reculant pour apprécier. Les autres Nègres, comme les visiteurs d'un musée, apprécient aussi, la tête penchée. (N:5)

Similarly there is the scene of Diouf being disguised and costumed as the

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<sup>1</sup>Make-up is also mentioned on p. 18, p. 25 and p. 84.

white victim; no illusion is created. During the "récit déclamé" of Village (N:38), the troupe all assume parts to facilitate its development: Felicité becomes the infirm mother; Bob, the baker's wife; Neige becomes Suzanne, the sister; and Archibald, the approaching husband. Even the masking of the Court is effected in such a way that one is made aware of the false nature of the mask; never completely depersonalizing the actor, the mask is positioned to assure that "les cheveux crépus" are always visible (N:16).

The play is devoid of all mechanical wizardry. Except for the Mozart minuet and the rich African rhythm which open and close the play, the sound effects are all manufactured on stage. Le Gouverneur imitates an alarm clock when trying to wake La Reine (N:63). Both Le Valet and Archibald crow "cocorico" to greet the morn (N:138-39). The blacks as a group become the noises of the forest: "Très doucement d'abord, puis de plus en plus fort, les Nègres, presque invisibles sous le balcon, font entendre les bruits de la Forêt Vierge: le crepaud, le hibou, un sifflement, rugissements très doux, bruits de bois cassé et de vent" (N:134). Even the stylized laugh, "très aigu, mais très bien orchestré," which recurs time and time again in the play is obviously a rehearsed, coordinated element, contrary to the very nature of natural laughter which is a spontaneous and almost chaotic response to an event (N:17).<sup>1</sup> The closing gunshots are executed in a similar fashion:

Village tire un coup de revolver, mais aucun bruit n'explose. Le Gouverneur tombe sur place. . . . Archibald, avec son talon, fait éclater une petite capsule comme celles dont se servent pour jouer les gosses. Le Gouverneur qui s'est relevé, vient tomber au milieu de la scène. (N:171)

The greatly varied tones of the play to which Blin referred obviously draw attention to the actor and his jeu which again highlights the essential artificiality of the stage. One critic has likened the development of the play to the improvisation of a jazz orchestra because of its mosaic of moods: "Dances, duets of love and jealousy, lyrical exaltation, sarcastic remarks, farcical scenes."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This laugh occurs pp. 18-19, 25, 45, 88, 92, 95, 135, 137, and 176.

<sup>2</sup>Nicola Chiaromonte, "Jean Genet: White and Black," Partisan Review vol. 28, nos. 5-6 (1961), p. 666.

These visual and auditory elements are obvious enough, but Genet accentuates the non-reality of theatre further by constant textual references to the theatrical situation of two sets of people face to face—the audience watching the actors perform: "Mon discours terminé, tout, ici— (Il frappe du pied avec une rage excessive, presque comme un cheval et il hennit comme un cheval.) ici! se passera dans le monde délicat de la réprobation" (N:23). Thus Archibald ends his prologue, and the small adverb of place, "ici," is uttered repeatedly throughout the work making sure once again that the illusion of the theatre does not deceive the audience.<sup>1</sup>

"Ici" is a limited area bounded by the proscenium arch, the apron of the stage and the wings. It is also the floor of the stage as opposed to the elevated levels provided by the structure of the set:

Quelques gradins avec paliers de différents plans, à droite et à gauche. L'un d'eux, très au fond vers la droite, est plus élevé. Un autre allant jusqu'aux cintres, et semblable plutôt à une galerie, fait le tour de la scène. C'est là qu'apparaîtra la Cour. (N:15)

It is a space governed by its own laws of perspective which have nothing to do with those prevailing in the outside world:

ARCHIBALD: Non, non, inutile. Puisque nous sommes sur la scène, où tout est relatif, il suffira que je m'en aille à reculons pour réussir l'illusion théâtrale de vous écarter de moi. (N:60)

We are not dealing with an imitation of life but with a situation and an action which exists independently of everyday reality. Nevertheless, having asserted the independence of the stage action, it must be made clear that Genet draws on a real-life situation to add the emotional power to the action and thus effect his ideal theatre, a fusion of the real and the unreal. What Genet is attempting is very much in the same line as those dramatists, like Claudel, who have striven to add a religious dimension to the drama. They have tried to use faith as the emotional ingredient to transmute the illusion inherent in drama into symbol. As Coe pointed out, they fail because religious faith is no longer strong enough nor sufficiently universal.<sup>2</sup> In Les Nègres Genet has taken a situation to which nearly everybody has a reaction.

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<sup>1</sup>"Ici" appears on pp. 23, 26, 52, 75, and 116.

<sup>2</sup>Coe, Vision of Jean Genet, p. 222.

The emotional power is not derived from human love and fraternity but from hatred. He exploits the emotive question of racialism and discrimination. The use of this political or racial theme, however, does not mean that the stage and auditorium are made as one, that is to say, that the audience enters the world of the stage. Rather, the use of black actors and a white audience in connection with racialism effects a greater polarization or divorce of stage and auditorium. Racial hostility is the basis of the relationship between actor and spectator. Genet has inverted the traditional theatrical situation. Belief in the stage action here results not from sympathy but hostility.

"Ayez l'habileté de ne choisir que des raisons de haine" Archibald advises Village at the beginning of the play (N:41). The only details which can be added to the ceremony are those that heighten the atmosphere of enmity. Inside the mechanism of the play this opposition is the motive force. The blacks acting out a crime for the "white" Court in order to be judged guilty is truly ritualistic in that it serves to confirm the status quo; it is reaffirmation of the society. However, ritual does break down when it is realized that the action on stage is also a challenge thrown in the face of the audience. The play as ritual is not destroyed by the proposed off-stage action but rather by the fact that the players are conscious that they are playing for an audience on the other side of the footlights, a sedentary collection of spectators who cannot participate in the ceremony on stage. They are barred from this positive involvement not solely because they are spectators, but also because they are white. This level of the real opposition underlies the whole structure of levels created inside the play, and so when these levels are finally dissolved and shown to be imaginary there still remains the rudimentary opposition of black versus white:

VILLAGE, à Archibald: Ils vont venir, monsieur? Ils vont venir nous juger, nous peser? (Village est tremblant.)

ARCHIBALD, posant sa main sur l'épaule de Village: Ne crains rien, il s'agit d'une comédie. (N:127)

As the poor trembling victim, Village portrays a character in need of sympathy. The white audience might condescendingly sympathize with him only to be told straight away that their compassion is misplaced; they are lending too much

importance to the situation; they are shown up and made self-conscious.

The underlying level of the play is not purely an invention of the critics; it alone can explain the feeling put into the acting by the cast. Paul Morelle in his review of the play was aware of this aspect of the performance:

Quant à l'interprétation, elle donne le sentiment, non de jouer, mais de vivre ses rôles. Ce qui peut apparaître comme un compliment banal à l'occasion d'une pièce quelconque prend ici tout son relief, du seul fait que les comédiens, jouent véritablement le drame ou la tragédie de leur condition originelle.<sup>1</sup>

The dual nature of this performance—the black actor acting himself and a character—is brilliantly captured in a stage image. The white catapulte at the front of the stage is the symbol of the ceremony that is to take place on stage; it belongs to the level of characterization. Next to it is the "boîte de cirneur des rues," the black condition (N:15).

Interviews given by Roger Blin and the actors throw a great deal of light on this area of the play and to a certain extent reveal how adept Genet has been in his adaptation of the social situation to a theatrical end. Blin explained that he had a certain amount of difficulty both recruiting the cast and then making them perform the play. The reason was that they were afraid to act and speak as Negroes, that is, as racial prejudice cast them in society:

They were all brought up Negroes, assimilated Negroes who were shocked by Genet's language. They did not want to be taken for savages. And yet, one did not have to scratch too deeply to discover that they had suffered the tortures of racism and persecution, the immense pain of being considered inferior.<sup>2</sup>

The actors, themselves, further clarify the deep identification of the role and the actor. Perhaps to term it a reversed distanciation is a better description since there is a constant battle between the actor and the role for life and reality, but all the while the audience is aware that the actor is playing a part in a play. Kaners expressed this complicated idea very neatly in his review of the play: "Les comédiens noirs . . . semblent eux aussi jouer au-delà du jeu. C'est une sorte de distanciation mais une

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<sup>1</sup> Morelle, Liberation, 4 November 1959.

<sup>2</sup> Knapp, "An Interview with Roger Blin," p. 115.

distanciation vers l'intérieur du comédien."<sup>1</sup> Sarah Maldoror in an interview early during rehearsals told M. Duras that the play for the black cast was a means of extricating themselves from their own psychological position of inferiority in face of the white society:

Pour une fois nous allons être des Nègres, en être fiers, nous n'allons pas nous demander si nous sommes complexés ou non. Nous allons être des Nègres avec ce que ça compte de grandeur, d'être des Nègres . . . . Nous n'avons qu'un moyen de surmonter notre passé, déterminé pour nous. C'est de nous jouer de ce passé. De nous moquer des Nègres tels qu'ils sont vus par des Blancs.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Liensol, just a week before the first performance, reaffirmed the profound psychological effect the play has on a black actor: "Oui, c'est un peu ça pour nous, un immense défoulement. Pensez, pouvoir jouer jusqu'à la grimace sur une scène, aux yeux de tous, tout ce qui fait nos complexes. . . . C'est une occasion inespérée."<sup>3</sup> The words of these two actors are very close to the actual words of the text spoken by Archibald at the beginning of the enactment of Diouf's murder: "Que les Nègres se nègrent. Qu'ils s'obstinent jusqu'à la folie dans ce qu'on les condamne à être, dans leur ébène, dans leur odeur, dans l'oeil jaune, dans leurs goûts cannibales" (N:76).

The paradox of the black actor playing his role has a metaphorical equivalent in the position of Village vis-à-vis the ceremony that Archibald wants him to enact. Village wishes to go beyond the ceremony ("Il se passera du nouveau" - N:29), but thwarted in this he still retains the power to pace his own performance: "Mais je reste libre d'aller vite ou lentement dans mon récit et dans mon jeu. Je peux me mouvoir au ralenti? Je peux multiplier ou allonger les soupirs?" (N:30). On an anecdotal level, Blin, in another interview, pointed out that there was a strange parallel between the real names of the actors and those of the characters in the play; for example, *Félicité Gueuse-Pardon* was played by *Darling Legitimus*, "peut-être qu'il

<sup>1</sup> Robert Kanters, L'Express, 5 November 1959, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Maldoror to M. Duras as reported in M. Alliens, France-Observateur, 20 February 1958.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Liensol (who played *Ville de Saint-Nazaire* in the Blin production) to M. Craipeau, France-Observateur, 22 October 1959.

s'agit là d'une peinture véritable."<sup>1</sup> Andrée Clair summed up this ambiguous relationship between the black actor as a person and as an impersonation of a character: "On n'a du reste pas l'impression de les voir jouer, mais de les voir vivre devant nous."<sup>2</sup>

This ambiguity finds its reflection on the level of the stage metaphor just as the paradoxical position of the actor was reflected in *Village*. The confusion caused by the play-within-a-play, actor playing a character playing a role, needs to be elucidated from time to time, and real sentiments have to be explained as such, otherwise they are destined to be taken as part of the rehearsed ceremony. Archibald explodes in face of Diouf's soft-hearted liberalism: "Pas de mais, ou sortez! Ma colère n'est pas jouée" (N:52). Diouf's hesitancy at the end of the play to rejoin the group of blacks after having ascended to the realm of the Court provokes a similar confusion: "Mais, il joue encore ou il parle en son nom?" (N:164).

The question of identity in the play is similarly revealing. Archibald deliberately manipulates the relationship between noir and comédien. At the outset he introduces the actors as characters in the play but then compromises the theatrical veracity of these names by affirming that these names apply to Negroes who exist outside the play as a "cuisinier," "lingère," "vicaire" and a student of medicine (N:24). Finally this whole equivocal relationship is reduced to nothing by a blatant contradiction at the end of the same speech: "Menteurs, les noms que je vous ai livrés sont faux" (N:25). H. D. Swander observes that this position of the actor is the very definition of the actor as "la métaphore de ce qu'ils devaient représenter" (B54:13) and not the traditional psychological imitation: "The Blacks directly attacks this kind of acting by making ordinary theatrical identification impossible for the paradoxical reason that, in the depths of themselves and at real moments, the actors are the characters, and this identification is not only real but

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<sup>1</sup>Roger Blin to Noelle Greffe, Combat, 7 September 1959.

<sup>2</sup>Clair, Présence africaine, no. 30 (February-March 1960), p.118.

is one of the symbols with which they are laden."<sup>1</sup> In like fashion in the first part of the play Archibald affirms: "Tu es un nègre et un comédien. Ni l'un ni l'autre ne connaîtront l'amour. Or ce soir—mais ce soir seulement—nous cessons d'être des comédiens, étant des Nègres" (N:58). But later he denies this very statement: "Nous sommes des comédiens, et nous avons organisé une soirée pour vous divertir" (N:143).

The juxtaposition of these two quotations reveals a very subtle underlying truth about the theatrical situation that actually exists during a performance of Les Nègres. The first quotation is spoken by Archibald to Village. Both are characters that exist on the same level inside the play. The quotation comes at a time when Village is an integrated character-actor unit and hence at a time when audience-actor identification is possible. Consequently it will be taken as truth by the audience in the theatre. The second quotation is addressed by Archibald to Le Juge and really describes the situation of the ceremony acted out before the Court. It is therefore referring to the level of artifice and is only true for the closed world of the stage. For the Negroes of the Court, although disguised as whites, the show put on by Archibald and his troupe will be purely a spectacle, and the actors will be regarded as comédiens since blackness has no emotive power for other blacks; it will go unnoticed. The level of blackness as opposed to whiteness only has significance in a situation where black is opposed to white, that is, in the actual situation of a black cast before a white audience. In fact, there is a total divorce between the tone of the play for the blacks on stage (including the Court) and for the audience outside the play. Sarah Maldoror explained:

Même si pour vous autres, Blancs, la pièce de Genet est une tragédie; elle sera une farce pour nous. Notre tragédie c'est la pièce de Césaire. . . . Genet s'amuse de la bêtise humaine, qu'elle soit blanche ou noire. Césaire attaque la bêtise humaine de couleur blanche. Césaire est un Nègre. Rien à faire contre cette différence.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Homer D. Swander, "Shakespeare and the Harlem Clowns: Illusion and Comic Form in Genet's The Blacks," Yale Review, vol. 55, no. 2 (December 1965), p. 213.

<sup>2</sup>Maldoror to Duras in Alliens, France-Observateur, 20 February 1958.



Martin Esslin in his The Theatre of the Absurd fails to appreciate this aspect of the dramatic performance, and it is obviously only in the performance that the physical confrontation, beyond the words, of black and white can exist. Esslin observes the apparent symmetry of the performance, an audience in the auditorium watching Archibald's spectacle and an audience on the balcony watching the same spectacle, and hence draws the conclusion that the "white" Court represents the audience.<sup>1</sup> He supports this observation by reference to Archibald's opening lines addressed "tantôt au public, tantôt à la Cour" (N:17). His hypothesis is, however, untenable. As early as the second half of the same interrupted speech, Archibald is making a distinction between the "white" Court and the audience in the theatre: "Silence. (Au public.) Ce soir nous jouerons pour vous . . ." (N:20). "Silence" is addressed to the whole company of actors over whom Archibald has a measure of control as metteur en scène of the play-within-a-play. He has, however, no control over the reactions of the audience.

The vantage points of these two publics are radically different. Apart from the opening speech the two are never linked as sharing a single identity. The public in the theatre is impotent when faced by the ceremony that transpires before their eyes, whereas the members of the Court direct the players and the speed of the performance. For example, the justice, impatient no doubt to execute the guilty party, twice asks for the enactment to be accelerated:

LE JUGE, à Archibald: C'est vous qui n'en finissez pas de lanterner. Vous nous avez promis la représentation du crime afin de mériter votre condamnation. La Reine attend. Dépêchez-vous.  
 ARCHIBALD, au Juge: Personne n'y met du sien. Sauf Vertu.  
 LE JUGE: Eh bien, faites donner Vertu, faites donner Village. (N:37)

Some fifteen pages later Le Gouverneur breaks abruptly into the play:

LE GOUVERNEUR, soudain: On vous l'a dit: faites donner Village, faites donner Vertu! (Les Nègres se regardent un instant, interloqués puis se résignent.) (N:52)

In addition, during the murder, as roles are distributed to each of the characters, Le Missionnaire<sup>n</sup> urges Archibald to assume the role of the sister Suzanne: "A vous, Archibald" (N:97).

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<sup>1</sup>Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, p. 188.

The actors of the Court are part of the performance, active participants in the central ceremony. As members of the Tribunal inside that ceremony their belief in the corpse in the catafalque has to be total, whereas for the audience it exists only in the theatrical illusion. A real corpse would shatter the illusion and life would break into the realm of make-believe and destroy the work of art. The ceremony is enjoyed by both Archibald's actors and the Court as one group, but cannot be appreciated by the audience: "Tous commencent à danser sur place,--même Bobo regardant la coulisse, même la Cour, mais non le Masque-- et à battre très doucement des mains" (N:94).

It is clear that the white, Christian audience in the theatre cannot participate in the ceremony in the same way as the black actors on stage. For the one it is a personal liberation from injustice; for the other it is their own condemnation. Le Juge makes this clear: "Il a tué par haine. Haine de la couleur blanche. C'était tuer toute notre race et nous tuer jusqu'à la fin du monde" (N:142). Theirs might be a reaction of outrage like Gabriel Marcel's, but it will not be a joyous celebration of freedom. Neige implies that the white audience is not able to enter into the spirit of the ceremony: "En tous les cas, celle qui pourrit dans la caisse n'aura jamais été à pareille fête" (N:104). The corpse in the coffin is, after all, the symbol of the white race for the black imagination.

The division between the world of the audience and that of the stage is firmly established as one of the central themes of the play by un coup de théâtre much more surprising than Ville de Saint-Nazaire's "dramatic entry." As the actors work themselves into a state of excitement in expectation of the murder of Diouf (disguised as the white victim), Village stops the account. Up until this point Village has painstakingly tried to explain his actions to the audience by continual asides addressed to them. But now, the whole ceremony is going to move beyond the comprehension of the audience as narrative is replaced by symbol: Diouf is going to give birth to the Court. In order that Diouf can symbolically become the white mother by performing good Christian actions (playing "une mélodie de Charles Gounod," knitting "des passe-montagnes,

pour les petits ramoneurs," singing "à l'harmonium," and praying on Sundays), she has to put down her knitting. Village turns to the audience:

VILLAGE: (Au public.) Elle sait jouer du piano. Très, très bien. Si quelqu'un veut tenir un instant son tricot?  
 (Il s'adresse directement au public, jusqu'à ce qu'un spectateur monte sur la scène et prenne le crochet des mains du Masque.)  
 (Au spectateur.) Merci, monsieur (ou madame). (N:101)

Throughout Diouf's recitals the Court show themselves to be very much part of, and involved in, the ceremony. They applaud and laugh at the mimed gestures as though they were real. Which of course they are for the Court. Meanwhile the white spectator isolated on stage, his hands occupied in holding the knitting, can do nothing but look on. His physical presence on stage, however, emphasizes the difference between the Court and the audience more strongly than any subtle word-play or textual reference. He is truly white and the actors are truly black; the gulf between them is undeniable. Swander describes how, in the New York production, at the end of this sequence when the spectator is free to return to his seat, the actors stared harshly at him until he was finally settled.<sup>1</sup> This incident precedes the statement that those on stage differ fundamentally from those in the stalls which occurs when the Court have removed their masks (N:165). The black actors who were always present behind the masks are finally and indisputably revealed.

ARCHIBALD: (Au public.) Ce soir nous jouerons pour vous. Mais, afin que dans vos fauteuils vous demeuriez à votre aise en face du drame qui déjà se déroule ici, afin que vous soyez assurés qu'un tel drame ne risque pas de pénétrer dans vos vies précieuses, nous aurons encore la politesse, apprise parmi vous, de rendre la communication impossible. La distance qui nous sépare, originelle, nous l'augmenterons par nos fastes, nos manières, notre insolence. (N:20-23)

Thus Archibald begins the play stressing the very gulf that separates stage and auditorium not only as defined zones inside the theatre building, but also as distinct ethnic groups (that is the meaning of "originelle"). The audience is not the unobserved spectator, as in Le Balcon; it has a definite role. It is to be the object against which the play is enacted. Without the audience the play would have no meaning. In fact, without a white, Christian audience the play would lose much of its significance. Genet, himself, in a statement

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<sup>1</sup>Swander, "Harlem Clowns," p. 220.

that originally appeared as a programme note, imposes certain conditions on the performance of the play, among them the nature of the audience: "Cette pièce, je le répète, écrite par un Blanc, est destinée à un public de Blancs" (N:13). And in the case of only one white person being present: "On jouera pour lui. Sur ce Blanc symbolique un projecteur sera dirigé durant tout le spectacle" (N:13). Restrictions are also placed on the cast. Since the dramatic effectiveness of the play depends on the interaction of two opposing groups, both groups necessarily have to be well defined. Genet, in a letter to the Polish translators of the play, refuses them the performing rights emphasizing that the effectiveness of the play lies in the very fact that the actors are Negroes:

Any Negro performer can act in my play, anywhere, without my permission: to that extent, it no longer belongs to me. But you must certainly realize that the drama would cease to exist in the hall if white actors, made up as blacks, appeared on the stage instead of real blacks speaking out their real miseries.<sup>1</sup>

Swander has argued convincingly that the stage metaphor is an exact description of the position of the black in contemporary American society.<sup>2</sup> For him the play is very much the social drama of black liberation and civil rights. Without entirely agreeing with the specific social interpretation, the present writer accepts that the effectiveness of the play springs from the use made of this social situation. The feeling generated by the confrontation of black and white transforms the conventional technique of the play-within-a-play into a tool of recrimination against the audience in the theatre. The aside, the "clin d'oeil au public," to which Blin alludes is a central feature of that technique.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, it creates a bond of connivance between a character and the public and confirms the spectators' involvement with the stage action. In Genet's play, such intimations are used at the expense of the audience:

<sup>1</sup>Genet, "To a Would-Be Producer," p. 80.

<sup>2</sup>Swander, "Harlem Clowns."

<sup>3</sup>Duvignaud, Les Lettres nouvelles, no. 27 (28 October 1959), p. 25. Blin states that he does not like the play-within-a-play technique generally, but that Genet manages, unlike Brecht, to break the illusion with his more ferocious "clins d'oeil au public."

ARCHIBALD: A nous aussi. On nous l'a dit, nous sommes de grands enfants. Mais alors, quel domaine nous reste! Le Théâtre! Nous jouerons à nous y réfléchir et lentement nous nous verrons, grand narcissé noir, disparaître dans son eau. (N:57)

The actor's words on the theatrical situation refer not only to an artistic form but also to life—the life that the actors as blacks are forced to act in society. The constant references back to social positions make the white audience feel guilty as they are forced consciously to be judges who condemn the actions of the blacks. Archibald reflects: "Nous sommes sur cette scène semblables à des coupables qui, en prison, joueraient à être des coupables" (N:58).

Genet himself explains the full significance of this image in the same letter to the Polish translators: "You can well understand that if, a few days before their execution, men under sentence of death—real ones—could, in the presence of their judges and executioners, perform, in the prison yard, a play dealing with the perfidious relations between themselves and their judges and executioners, the dramatic emotion arising out of such a performance would have nothing in common with what usually happens in the theatre."<sup>1</sup> The position in Les Nègres is exactly that described. The Negroes are similar to the condemned men; the whites are the Tribunal, not only the spectators, but also the judges. Through the action of the play the audience is shown the truth of its position outside the theatre. This aspect is what distinguishes the play and makes it ~~so very~~ unique.

Bobo explains to Vertu why the murder of Diouf by Village cannot be shown on stage: "Tragédie grecque et pudique, ma chère: le geste définitif s'achève dans la coulisse" (N:122). In fact, this is just so much deception. The "geste définitif" of the play takes place in the confrontation between the stage and the auditorium. Traditionally in tragedy the mechanism that prevails is the involvement of the audience in the stage action. The mechanism involved in Les Nègres, and in Genet's drama in general, is the deliberate exclusion of the spectator from the stage action. Grossevoegel sees this as a characteristic of all modern drama:

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<sup>1</sup>Genet, "To a Would-Be Producer," p. 80.

Modern authors have been reluctant to impose upon the spectator the stringency of tragedy. They have been wary of its vulnerable heroes; they have questioned the existence of a candid spectator. Having measured the distance between proscenium and public and satisfied themselves that the modern spectator is sedate and sedentary, they have not sought to draw him onto the stage.<sup>1</sup>

In Genet's theatre, however, the exclusion of the spectator is not the end result of the play. The exclusion sets up a tension between the auditorium and stage, and in Les Nègres, the undercurrent of the real social situation means that this tension passes beyond the purely aesthetic. Rather, it creates a more forceful aesthetic experience by forcing a prise de conscience, the necessity to evaluate one's own position. The series of repercussions instigated by the play means that "le jeu théâtral ne se limite plus à la scène. . . . C'est entre la scène et la salle qu'il se produit, mais il ne s'épuise pas dans cette enceinte, il renvoie au monde, à la réalité du dehors."<sup>2</sup> This position is consistent with earlier ideas expressed in "Lettre à Pauvert" in which Genet criticizes the passive nature of the audience who, "incapable de vivre en actes," live vicariously through identification with the actor-character unit (B54:12). This type of audience cannot exist at a Genet play whose very nature will provoke responses and prises de conscience, in short the acts Genet seeks.

Clearly, the total effect of Les Nègres can only be experienced if the underlying social tensions pre-exist the performance. It is limited in its cast and in the audiences in front of which it can be performed in order for it to be effective on all levels. The defined situation restricts its universal, eternal appeal, and therefore is not a product of classical pre-occupations. As such it constitutes a new departure, a reform in the relationship between the work of art and the audience:

Une telle oeuvre théâtrale ne saurait non plus demeurer close, fermée jalousement sur ces propres significations. Elle n'existe que par ce

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<sup>1</sup>Grosevogel, Blasphemers, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup>Bernard Dort, "Le Jeu du théâtre et de la réalité," Les Temps Modernes, no. 263 (April 1968), p. 1875.

qu'elle signifie pour un public donné dans un lieu et à un moment précis.<sup>1</sup>

Like Brecht, Genet has been conscious of the audience, the particular audience, for whom the play will be performed. It is written for them and is meaningless without them. While it is impossible to deny the social content of Les Nègres, to see only this facet without appreciating the aesthetics of the play and the manipulation of the dramatic form is to deny the full experience of the play in performance.

#### (v) Conclusion

In some areas Genet's work remains traditional. The performance evolves from the collaboration of the author and a director around a very highly elaborated pre-existing text. Despite the increasingly predominant role of stage business and spectacle, the plays are still very strongly verbal. All were created within the framework of the conventional proscenium stage. They have demanded a growing complexity in the use of scenic space, but Genet has remained content with the orthodox spatial arrangement inside the theatre. Indeed, his few remarks on the possible open-air staging of Les Nègres and Les Paravents reveal that his attitudes are closer to the classical canons than the more audacious experiments of recent years. The description of an ideal theatre that he gives in L'Etrange mot d' . . . is very close to an ancient theatre discovered at Syracuse: "L'architecture du théâtre est à découvrir, mais elle doit être fixe, immobilisée" (IV:11).

The revolutionary aspect of Genet's work lies in the manipulation of the psychological situation of the theatrical performance. The development in the style of his drama can be resumed as the growing awareness of the relationship between stage action and the audience. By convention the stage action is made "real" by the spectators' belief, a belief founded on sympathy and a tacit understanding. Genet's work represents the perversion of this

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 1876.

situation. The stage is in opposition to the auditorium. The action is given reality through the hostility of the spectators' response to it. No concessions are made. The stage action forces the audience to accept it as it is, on Genet's terms.

Le public—qui te permet d'exister, sans lui tu n'auras jamais cette solitude dont je t'ai parlé—le public est la bête que finalement tu viens poignarder. Ta perfection, avec ton audace vont, pour le temps que tu apparais, l'anéantir.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Genet, L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti, Les Bonnes, L'Enfant criminel, Le Funambule, p. 201.



## CHAPTER III

### FERNANDO ARRABAL AND THE THEATRE OF ASSAULT

#### (1) The Creative Process

The violence of Genet's theatre lies in the perversion of the conventional theatrical situation. Shock techniques such as physical assaults on the audience, nudity, sexual displays and pornography find little place in his theatre. Verbal obscenities and moral outrages may be present, but violence is generally suggested, made to be felt, not overtly expressed. For instance, the suicide of Claire is accomplished in the form of a very genteel taking of tea; the murder of the victim in Les Nègres is described in lurid terms but remains off-stage in the tradition of the classical theatre.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, Arrabal's theatre distinguishes itself from the mainstream of modern drama by the emphasis put on the violent and scabrous act:

Arrabal's theater in which exhibitionism, chamber pots, and urination are frequent images, continues this scatological form of revolt, though in a less symbolic manner. For in his theater, Arrabal's revolt becomes a ritual of assault that attacks with unmediated directness.<sup>2</sup>

Violence is enacted, not merely stated, in Arrabal's plays; beatings, flagellations, and tortures are prevalent throughout his work. For Arrabal, the human condition is characterized by aggressiveness and domination, repression and frustration. These properties are revealed in violent actions which relieve the psychic tensions that build up in man. His theatre does not describe a situation; it does not seek to encapsulate the human condition either figuratively or metaphorically; rather, it is revelatory, actively piercing into the subconscious:

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<sup>1</sup>The castration of Roger in Le Balcon and the insult over the dead officer's body in Les Paravents are the most notable exceptions to this observation.

<sup>2</sup>Allen Thiher, "Fernando Arrabal and the New Theater of Obsession," Modern Drama, vol. 13, no. 2 (September 1970), p. 175.

The most important thing in man is his obsessions with erotic fantasy. Man is like an iceberg, we see only his exterior logical self; the real interior he keeps hidden in the water. I want to expose his interior self.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the theatre becomes the tool with which the author delves into these submerged regions of the self. It is this almost psychoanalytical aspect of his work that distinguishes Arrabal from the other writers in the modern theatre: "Malgré mon admiration pour le théâtre dit d'avant-garde, je crois que mes pièces viennent d'horizons plus sauvages, moins spéculatifs, et visent d'autres fins plus exemplaires . . . plus spectaculaires, moins satiriques." The audience, then, is not confronted by a logical plot nor by a description but by visions and images: "Je crois qu'au théâtre, le choc doit être sauvage. Mais ce choc provient de la situation, non des mots. Non pas seulement des mots."<sup>2</sup> The end in view is, however, not just shock for shock's sake, but the revelation of the obsessions of the inner self. For Arrabal, this inner self is part of man's reality and it should be naturally expressed on the stage: "Plus généralement, je pense qu'il faut utiliser tous nos fantasmes, ne pas se limiter à l'enveloppe extérieure de notre vie pour être vrai. C'est ce que je recherche: non de provoquer, non de choquer."<sup>3</sup>

Despite Arrabal's objections, his theatre has been consistently included under the broad banner of absurdist theatre. The reasons for this seem to be chronological rather than critical. The early plays do resemble the bare-staged, metaphorical dramas of Beckett superficially, and were, in fact, written at the time when Ionesco and Beckett were beginning to be staged. Nevertheless, Arrabal was working independently in Spain oblivious of what was happening in Paris (which he did not visit until 1956).<sup>4</sup> More significantly

<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to Margaret Croydon, "Here Nothing is Forbidden," New York Times, 9 August 1970, section II, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Alain Schifres, Entretiens avec Arrabal (Paris: Belfond, 1969), p. 38; and p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> Arrabal to Paul-Louis Mignon, "Fernando Arrabal," L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 443, (15 February 1970), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Arrabal tells the story of a dramatic prize that was denied him because the jury thought that his play, Le Tricycle, was too close to Beckett's work. When this was reported to him by a friend, the name Beckett was so unfamiliar that he took it for the Spanish writer, Becquer. See Schifres, Entretiens, pp. 34-35.

his association with Jean-Marie Serreau situated his work in the mainstream of that director's experiments with the absurdist dramas in the 1950s. Although Arrabal acknowledges his debt to Serreau, he also suffered from the absurdist treatment of his plays when they were first performed in France in 1959:

Il était difficile à l'époque de monter mes pièces: Serreau voyait en elles de l'anti-théâtre, proche de celui de Ionesco. Alors que c'est tout autre chose. Mes pièces n'ont aucun rapport avec l'absurde. . . . Le malentendu se creusait, beaucoup de metteurs en scène, d'acteurs et de critiques m'interprétant à contre sens.<sup>1</sup>

If not with absurdism, then it is with surrealism and more particularly with Antonin Artaud, that Arrabal is connected. John Killinger lists points of coincidence between Arrabal and the surrealists;<sup>2</sup> however, many of the comparisons rely on superficial observations matching, for example, the surrealists' fascination for the completeness of childhood and Arrabal's use of child heroes. Arrabal's early theatre is concerned with innocence and childhood, but it in no way glorifies these stages as superior. In fact, Arrabal's theatre can be seen as a means by which Arrabal leaves childhood and reaches maturity. A more valid comparison is drawn between Arrabal's concern for the total man and the surrealists' attempts to cut through dogma and convention to reintegrate man's subconscious. This tenuous thematic connection has been underscored by Arrabal's links with the surviving surrealist movement. Arrabal met André Breton in the early 1960s and contributed to his review La Brèche in which episodes from La Pierre de la folie and La Communion solennelle were published.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, one play was directly inspired by this association with the surrealist group: "Le Couronnement date de la période où je fréquentais André Breton. Il part d'une anecdote personnelle, mais enrichie par l'univers de Breton, par le surréalisme."<sup>4</sup> However, Arrabal soon

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<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to Schiffres, Entretiens, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> John Killinger, "Arrabal and Surrealism," Modern Drama, vol 14, no. 2 (September 1971), pp. 210-23.

<sup>3</sup> Fernando Arrabal, "La Pierre de la folie, 5 récits paniques," La Brèche no. 3 (September 1962), pp. 9-12; and Fernando Arrabal, "La Communion solennelle," La Brèche, no. 4 (February 1963), pp. 54-59.

<sup>4</sup> Arrabal to P.-L. Mignon, "Fernando Arrabal," p. 10.

freed himself from the movement, afraid that his personality and work would suffer from the imperious nature of Breton and the exclusive nature of the surrealists in general. For example, he objected to the firm adherence to the principle of the rejection of morality which he believed led only to "une super-morale."<sup>1</sup>

Comparisons with Antonin Artaud are generally made not on account of Arrabal's work but because of the manner in which it has been staged. Especially significant were Victor Garcia's two productions of Le Cimetière des voitures (Dijon, 1965; Paris, 1967). The director used a circular scenic design that encompassed the audience and emphasized spectacular stage effects, often of great violence. Another line is pursued by Franco Tonelli who sees structural elements common to Le Cimetière des voitures and Artaud's theory of cruelty; nevertheless Tonelli is careful to point out that he is not seeking to prove the influence of Artaud on Arrabal.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Arrabal himself goes no further than to admit to certain parallels:

Pourtant Artaud a tout prévu. Il a parlé de L'Empereur d'Assyrie. Il a parlé de panique. Il a décrit à l'avance la mise en scène du Cimetière des voitures, avec fauteuils tournants et environnement du spectateur.<sup>3</sup>

He denies any knowledge of Artaud's works and, thus, denies any direct influence: "I don't know Artaud's work at all. Perhaps my plays are cruel in the Artaudian sense. I don't know. . . . But I still have not read Artaud's work."<sup>4</sup>

However interesting these comparative studies are, more central to our purpose is Arrabal's stance vis-à-vis the changes in dramatic form and the theatrical experimentation of the post-war period. Charles Lyons describes Arrabal as a "post-Absurdist" because he combines the "overt perversity, violence, and cruelty" of Artaud with the "metaphoric density" of Ionesco and Beckett in a theatrical ritual close to Genet's theatre but still distinct

<sup>1</sup>Arrabal to Rémy Lillet, "Arrabal: 'Je suis un clown de cette société,'" Les Nouvelles littéraires, 6 March 1972, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Franco Tonelli, L'Esthétique de la cruauté, (Paris: Nizet, 1972).

<sup>3</sup>Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup>Arrabal to Bettina Knapp, "Interview with Fernando Arrabal," First Stage, vol 6, no. 4 (Winter 1967-68), p. 199.

from it since the ritual is a "subjectively determined experience" rather than the socially imposed behavioural patterns of frightened individuals.<sup>1</sup> Compelling as this argument is, it fails to define its terms and what is more, it implies that there existed an archetypal Arrabal play or dramatic method. It lacks any consideration of the proliferation of the author's work and the development in his dramatic technique. His work is contained in numerous volumes of collected theatre and many other theatrical experiments have remained unpublished. His output includes: abstract dramas (Les quatre Cubes, L'Orchestration théâtrale); ritual or ceremonial theatre (the bulk of his work); éphémères paniques, a form of happening; and latterly a collective creation (Bella ciao).

These approaches have all, at one time or another, expressed Arrabal's world view. For, Arrabal is not just a manipulator of dramatic form, but also an individual with a complex personality searching to find expression. Arrabal's work reveals the coming together of an emergent individual and dramatic form. His career as a dramatist is a quest for knowledge both of himself and of his medium. This quest divides itself neatly into three periods. The early period comes to an end with Arrabal's appearance as a dramatist of note in Paris, symbolized by the contract signed with the publisher Julliard (October 1957) and the first productions of his plays (Madrid, January 1958; Paris, April 1959). The second period comprises the fringe involvement with the surrealists and his founding of the panique movement with his fellow artists, Alexandro Jodorowsky and Roland Topor. The third begins with his imprisonment in Spain (July 1967) and his experience of the events of May 1968 in France. It is noteworthy that the divisions are linked to events that personally affected the author rather than to certain productions or dramatic styles. For Arrabal personal experience is the motivating force of his drama and the style and technique of the drama follows from the experience: "Chaque pièce correspond d'ailleurs à mon état d'esprit, à mes préoccupations, lorsque je la compose."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Charles R. Lyons, "The Psychological Base of Arrabal's L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie," French Review, vol 45, no. 4 (Spring 1972), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup>Arrabal to P.-L. Mignon, "Fernando Arrabal," pp. 9-10.

Not that the composition of the play should be regarded only as a conscious cerebral act. On the contrary, Arrabal has maintained consistently that his work results from an unconscious process. As early as 1958, he affirmed just this in interview with Geneviève Serreau:

Je ne comprends pas ce que j'écris. Je pars dans une histoire comme si on me poussait par derrière, et que je file sur l'eau dans une barque. Et je me sens heureux. Je ne souffre pas du tout quand j'écris. Au contraire, je me sens bien, je voyage dans la barque et tout s'ordonne et s'arrange devant moi.<sup>1</sup>

Writing appears to offer solace; it implies a relief from tension. The release of these tensions provides a liberation of the subconscious, the revelation of the hidden depths of the inner self.

Je pourrais dire comme Robbe-Grillet que j'écris pour savoir pourquoi j'écris. J'écris sous la dictée comme les romantiques, en laissant s'exprimer la partie la plus secrète de moi-même. Souvent mes textes me surprennent . . . parfois je ne les comprends pas. . . . De toute façon, ils me permettent de vivre intensément pendant que je les écris.<sup>2</sup>

Periodically throughout his career, Arrabal has reaffirmed the sense of unconscious self-discovery and of incomprehension that the writing process inspires in him. In 1967, he stated in a broadcast interview: "J'écris tout ce qui me passe par la tête, presque en état second. J'écris pour moi, comme pour me droguer. . . . C'est un jeu, une exaltation."<sup>3</sup> In 1969, he echoed: "Je suis dans la banlieue de mes phantasmes. Je l'explore lorsque j'écris."<sup>4</sup> Even in 1972, during the third phase of his career, Arrabal still held to the same view of composition:

C'est le grand moment de ma vie. Une sorte de délivrance. Je me sens utile à moi-même. Je suis dans une autre vie, dans un autre monde. C'est pour moi une grande surprise de voir le lendemain les textes que j'ai écrits la veille. Quand j'écris cela me fait rire, pleurer, cela m'excite ou m'attriste.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to Geneviève Serreau, "Arrabal, ou quand le jeu devient sérieux," L'Observateur littéraire, 20 November 1958.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Monique Bouyer, "Entretien avec Arrabal," Les Langues Modernes, 59th year, no. 2 (March-April 1965), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Arrabal to Michel Abadie, "Entretien avec Arrabal," Images et Visages du théâtre d'aujourd'hui, O.R.T.F., 15 May 1967 cited in Les Voies de la création théâtrale, vol 1, ed. Jacquot, p. 311.

<sup>4</sup> Arrabal to R. B., "Entretien avec Arrabal," Elle, 24 September 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Arrabal to Lillet, "Je suis un clown," p. 24.

Clearly, these bold statements suggest the automatic processes favoured by surrealist writers as well as their trust in the subconscious as a creative force. However, Arrabal tends to overstate his case. For, while he affirms the spontaneous nature of his creative process, he also describes the composition of Le Labyrinthe in conscious terms. Compare these statements:

Mais en écrivant, je ne me propose rien de précis. Simplement, j'essaie d'écrire quelque chose qui va me surprendre quand je me relirai, qui va me faire rire ou pleurer, m'exciter, me déplaire, me rendre heureux.

Au départ, il y a cette idée, dictée par mon inconscient. Et progressivement l'histoire s'étoffe, se développe, se construit. Je lui donne une progression dramatique, un "suspense", un rythme, j'y introduis des répétitions à certains endroits, des recommencements. Quand tout est achevé, c'est une pièce.<sup>1</sup>

Apparently, composition is a double process: the initial donnée is supplied by an unconscious vision or nightmare; but then this vision is carefully and consciously modelled to produce a play.

While these quotations reveal an unvarying attitude, there is some evidence of an evolution in the creative process which parallels the development in dramatic technique through the periods of creation. In 1964, the author looked back on the early period in Madrid and stated that he wrote "pour me consoler"<sup>2</sup> in face of the repression suffered at the hands of his mother, the Church, and the State. In 1967, in the broadcast interview, he added a rider to his statement: "Mais je commence à me dire que c'est peut-être grave."<sup>3</sup> By 1967, there is a suggestion that the playwright, not content with automatic creation, is beginning to ask questions about the creative process and the position of the writer.

Despite this development Arrabal is still the central figure in the plays: "Il faut bien l'avouer . . . que je suis presque toujours le personnage principal de mes pièces."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, his plays offer the possibility of a second existence, an existence in which his desires and obsessions can be expressed:

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<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 10; and p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Jean Chalon, "Arrabal: 'Je suis un auteur panique,'" Le Figaro littéraire, 7 May 1964, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Arrabal to Abadie, "Entretien," p. 311.

<sup>4</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 107.

"I identify with all my characters. I see myself as a reflection. My plays exalt me like the exaltation of orgasm. . . . I write plays in order to live more intensely."<sup>1</sup> The value of writing for Arrabal is not in the production of a written text but in the immediate satisfaction afforded by the experience of creating. He often expresses the delight at writing in terms of sexual excitement, emphasizing the intense psychological and physical pleasure that it gives him:

C'est un plaisir physique. Je retarde cet instant d'écrire pour en jouir mieux. C'est une satisfaction immédiate.

Lorsqu'il y a véritable excitation sexuelle en fin de parcours, je sais que j'ai réussi.<sup>2</sup>

Arrabal's position in the centre of his work and his view of creation as auto-satisfaction pose problems for the consideration of his output as authentic theatre. Theatre, by its nature, is not a private act; it involves others in its creation on the stage. It would appear that performance is unimportant to Arrabal. In his process of creation he does not look beyond his own preoccupations: "Le pouvoir de communiquer ou non la fascination que je ressens pour l'art est la tâche exaltante qui incombe à mes éditeurs."<sup>3</sup> Nor is he concerned in the slightest with the reception of his works: "Si le public aime, tant mieux, sinon, tant pis."<sup>4</sup> Seen only in this light, Arrabal could be called an exponent of anti-theatre. He claims the whole process of creating the play on stage, and the factors that govern that process, such as theatrical architecture, are of no interest to him. He even stays away from the rehearsals of his own plays.<sup>5</sup>

Arrabal's propensity for overstatement makes it advisable to look beyond the quotations. In his conversations with Alain Schifres, Arrabal bemoans the way in which the traditional production technique concentrates on the

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<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to Croydon, "Here Nothing is Forbidden," p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 10; and Arrabal to Hortense Chabrier, "Arrabal," Arts-Loisirs, no. 80 (5 April 1967), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Arrabal to Bouyer, "Entretien," p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Arrabal to Abadie, "Entretien," p. 311.

<sup>5</sup> Arrabal to Knapp, "Interview" p. 201.



written and spoken word and the other elements such as lights and music are added to the rehearsals at a later stage.<sup>1</sup> In 1965, Arrabal even collaborated as designer and composer on the creation of Le Couronnement. Furthermore, after 1967, Arrabal took personal charge of the productions of Et Ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs in Paris, New York and London. This paradox is partly resolved when it is realized that for Arrabal the creation of the text has satisfactions in its own right, but also that the production is another creation with its own attendant satisfactions and criteria of success.

Une fois que j'ai aligné sur le papier les dernières répliques, je ne me sens plus responsable. J'avoue même que je ne déteste pas être trahi par un metteur en scène. Une trahison est révélatrice et provocante; elle peut être à l'origine d'une nouvelle pièce: le théâtre est une course de relais entre les metteurs en scène, les comédiens et l'auteur.<sup>2</sup>

For example, the initial ceremony of Et Ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs is a transcription of a technique used by Joseph H. Dunn in the New York production of Le Cimetière des voitures (April 1966). Dunn had the audience met by the actors at the door of the theatre, and they were led in darkness to the seats they were going to occupy.<sup>3</sup>

Arrabal's emphasis on the two different processes--creation and production--sounds very conventional. He seems to replace Jouvet's image of the trinity by that of a relay race. This image, however, stresses the sequential nature of the relationship, whereas Jouvet emphasized collaboration. The unconventional aspect of Arrabal is his granting of total freedom to the director. Even among modern writers this is an unusual attitude: Beckett is usually present at rehearsals, and in Lettres à Roger Blin Genet is quick to suggest approaches and to criticize those with which he disagrees. If his words are not heeded, Genet is liable to confront the director physically as happened with Peter Zadek's production of Le Balcon.

Nevertheless, Arrabal does have his own ideas about the production of his plays. Indeed, his first theatrical ventures were marionette shows created

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<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to R. B., "Entretien."

<sup>3</sup> Michael Smith, The Village Voice, 21 April 1966.

directly on a cardboard stage with either his sister or himself speaking the lines.<sup>1</sup> As a dramatist, he does visualize his plays: "Car ces pièces, j'en fais moi-même la mise en scène. Mentalement je les 'représente,' avec une précision absolue." However, this personal vision is not important and should remain secret. Even the text and structure of the play have no real importance: "Je crois que cette construction ne peut intéresser que moi-même ou peut-être des spécialistes. C'est une satisfaction toute personnelle."<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Arrabal did not stop Victor Garcia interpolating three other plays into the text of Le Cimetière des voitures. Arrabal views the director as a second creator who has as much right to do what he thinks fit with the text as the author himself: "Une fois que ma pièce est écrite, je voudrais qu'un metteur en scène génial, délirant, s'en empare, sans aucun respect, et la considère comme le prétexte de son spectacle." The only obligation under which the director operates is that he should create a performance equal in scenic terms to Arrabal's written text:

Je ne veux pas qu'on respecte la moindre de mes virgules, je préfère qu'on fasse des coupures plutôt que de respecter mon texte d'une façon plate. Il faut laisser toute liberté à chaque metteur en scène, et qu'il déclenche le délire.<sup>3</sup>

Only at this stage is the audience given any consideration. The délire elicited by the director is aimed at the spectator; it is he who becomes the subject of the délire. The performance recreates, not the fruits of Arrabal's creative process, but rather that process itself and the conditions that govern it. The spectator is made to suffer the same experience of exaltation and excitement, frustration and repression suffered already by the author:

Théâtre de la passion et de la catastrophe, de la confusion précise. Théâtre qui vient vers nous en un envol, comme le cheval des cauchemars dont nous attendons tout: l'acier outragé, l'émotion et le sanglot, les testicules, la cuillère de sang, les derniers jours et l'origine.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Fernando Arrabal, Baal Babylone, 2nd ed. (Paris: Bourgois, 1971), pp. 161-62.

<sup>2</sup>Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 77; and p. 85.

<sup>3</sup>Odette Aslan, Interview, 21 June 1966 cited in "Le Cimetière des voitures, un spectacle de Victor Garcia à partir de quatre pièces d'Arrabal," p.313; and p. 319.

<sup>4</sup>Fernando Arrabal, "Renaissance du théâtre," Le Théâtre, 1968, no. 1, p. 9.

These observations on the theatrical process date from the panique period. Arrabal, however, regards them as principles that should govern even the earlier plays, an interpretation borne out by the preface to the second volume of plays, all of which date from the first period: "Si une pièce est conçue comme une fête démesurée, le spectateur peut recevoir des lumières sur la part la plus mystérieuse ou la moins accessible de lui-même, grâce aux rites grotesques et sublimes, sordides et poétiques, qui se déroulent sous ses yeux."<sup>1</sup>

(ii) The Private Dramas, 1952-1958

Upon examination of the plays of this first period, it becomes apparent that they reflect not an extroverted world of hysterical celebration, but an enclosed, personal world. The plays were written as consolation, private affairs not destined for performance. They are the hesitant offerings of an adolescent to a sole spectator, his mother:

Ni Elisa, ni tante Clara, ni grand-père, ni grand-mère n'assistaient aux représentations. Il n'y avait que toi qui y assistais. A présent, comme tu n'es pas ici, j'en fais pour moi tout seul.<sup>2</sup>

Structurally and thematically, the early plays reveal themselves as products of an idiosyncratic imagination. Rich in autobiographical detail, and pregnant with fantasies and obsessions written out without reflection, the plays turn in circles on themselves, impenetrable to the outsider. Their rawness is underlined by the author's reaction to their performance: "Toutes ces pièces de la première époque sont très proches de moi et elles me troublent beaucoup quand elles sont bien représentées."<sup>3</sup>

The work of the early period is informed by a private universe built on the historical facts of his "biographie riche en phénomènes bizarres, en événements marquants"<sup>4</sup> and his psychological relation to them. The central images of this world—father, mother, religion, guilt, eroticism and death—haunt the young Arrabal. These preoccupations often combine in a bewildering

<sup>1</sup>Fernando Arrabal, Théâtre II (Paris: Bourgois, 1968), follows title page.

<sup>2</sup>Arrabal, Baal Babylone, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup>Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

fashion leading to total confusion which emphasizes further the fragility of Arrabal's understanding of reality. The vengeful mother is associated with the Church by their repressive barbarism:

Le curé est venu voir ma mère et lui a dit que j'étais fou. Alors ma mère m'a attaché à ma chaise. Le curé m'a fait un trou dans la nuque avec un bistouri et il m'a extrait la pierre de la folie.<sup>1</sup>  
 Puis ils m'ont porté, pieds et poings liés, jusqu'à la nef des fous.

Religion and eroticism become entangled in the character of his mother's sister:

Je suppose qu'elle n'entendait rien à la sexualité, mais elle ressentait, elle exprimait par tout son corps le désir de la souffrance. Chez elle, le mélange du sexe et de la religion s'est réalisé dans toute sa "pureté", hors de toute connaissance.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, there is confusion concerning the double nature of the central figures: the father who is absent physically, but is ever present in Arrabal's constant search for him; the mother who can be loving and yet who can betray her husband to the authorities. She is portrayed, both caring and vengeful, throughout all the periods of Arrabal's writing, from Les Deux Bourreaux through Le Grand Cérémonial to L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, and even in a caricatured form in L'Aurore rouge et noire. The dual mother figure finds its counterpart in all the women of Arrabal's theatre who are simultaneously initiators and temptresses, allies and mortal enemies, victims and torturers. Lis is alternately Fando's victim and initiator of her own torture; Micaela is at one time Etienne's comforter and at another his betrayer.

The major themes of the work could have universal significance, but they are too tightly enmeshed in the web of the author's personal experience. The central image of Le Tricycle seems arbitrary until its autobiographical origin is known: "Le Tricycle existait réellement. Il y avait à Madrid sur la place de Oriente, un homme qui transportait les enfants sur son tricycle."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arrabal, "La Pierre de la folie," p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 29. The same preoccupation with eroticism and religion is to be found in the work of Arrabal's countryman, Luis Buñuel, especially in films such as Viridiana and Angel Exterminador. Buñuel was also subjected to the rigours of a strict Catholic upbringing and a Jesuit education.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

Le Labyrinthe is the transposition of a dream that Arrabal experienced while recovering from an operation. Indeed, he felt forced to defend himself against critical reactions to the 1967 production in the following terms:

On va m'accuser de faire de provocation parce que mes deux héros sont prisonniers dans des latrines. On pourrait tout aussi bien les mettre dans une douche. Mais dans mon cauchemar, c'est dans les latrines qu'ils se trouvent.<sup>1</sup>

His plays also express childhood obsessions. In La Bicyclette du condamné, Viloro is persecuted by Paso and his accomplices. His persecution is a reflection of the young Arrabal's disturbed mental state: "Longtemps j'ai cru que tous étaient ligués contre moi. . . . Cette croyance s'est exacerbé pendant mon enfance qui s'est écoulée au sein d'une société régie par la tyrannie."<sup>2</sup> Heavily marked by Arrabal's reaction against the severity of his upbringing, the plays served as a form of escape from a stringent domestic and cultural environment. Of the composition of Oraison, Arrabal has stated: "A l'époque, je crois que mon acharnement contre l'opposition du Bien et du Mal répondait à une sorte de fanatisme de ma part: je réagissais violemment contre une éducation."<sup>3</sup>

Genet's Haute Surveillance was seen to be the product of an exceptional experience, but in revision, Genet attempted to eradicate the incidents contingent on an actual prison experience. In Arrabal's early plays, personal details litter the action suggesting that they were written for a restricted audience familiar with the intimate life of the author. Fando is attracted by the purity of Lis's knees; in Le Tricycle it is Mita's knees that Climando will miss if she commits suicide. In the autobiographical novel, Baal Babylone, one reads: "Aucune, maman, n'était comme toi. . . . Aucune n'avait la langue humide ni les genoux blancs comme toi, maman. Aucune."<sup>4</sup> Arrabal's memory of his father is a strongly visual image of a man burying the child's feet on the brilliantly sun-lit beach at Melilla, the author's birthplace; Baal Babylone

<sup>1</sup> Arrabal cited by Nicole Zand, Le Monde, 7 January 1967, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, pp. 35-36.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>4</sup> Arrabal, Baal Babylone, p. 146.

begins with this description. In Le Labyrinthe Micaela describes to Etienne the games she played with Bruno "depuis ma plus tendre enfance": "Il me regardait tout joyeux. Ensuite nous jouions, j'apportais du sable dans les seaux et il m'enterrait les pieds."<sup>1</sup> The same play contains another echo of the author's adolescence: "Micaela is fascinated by Bruno's suffering when bound in the lavatory, and she goes repeatedly to peer at him over the wall. During his stay at the Colegio de Getafe, the fathers used to punish the students by locking them in a small room: "Je me souviens qu'on a enfermé mon frère dans une pièce minuscule. Il avait douze ans. Les Pères l'observaient par un trou."<sup>2</sup> Voyeurism is very common in all these early plays: Milos and the inhabitants of the car cemetery take a sly interest in the love-making of Emanou and Dila; Jérôme and Vincent in Cérémonie pour un Noir assassiné are the unsuspected spectators of Luce's sleep and to her conversations with François d'Assise; in Concert dans un oeuf, both the older man and the older woman peep at each other as they change into their bathing-costumes.<sup>3</sup>

Invested with details from Arrabal's own life, the plays present an infantile but not pure world. For example, the bodily functions hold a great attraction for the characters, as though they are just becoming aware of their own physical presence in the world. Climando orders Mita to return quickly to the bench after having returned the tricycle to the garage: "Et ne t'amuse pas derrière les arbres à regarder les hommes pisser."<sup>4</sup> The same combination of voyeurism and urination attracted the young Bruno, and Micaela complied: "Si, au début, je venais ici tous les matins et je faisais pipi devant lui pour lui faire plaisir" (II:84). Indeed half the set of Le Labyrinthe is comprised of a functioning lavatory which is activated several times during the performance.

<sup>1</sup> Fernando Arrabal, Le Labyrinthe in Théâtre II, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Fernando Arrabal, Le Cimetière des voitures in Théâtre I (Paris: Bourgois, 1968), pp. 149-50; Fernando Arrabal, Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné in Théâtre III (Paris: Bourgois, 1969), p. 201; and Fernando Arrabal, Concert dans un oeuf in Théâtre IV (Paris: Bourgois, 1969), pp. 252-53.

<sup>4</sup> Fernando Arrabal, Le Tricycle in Théâtre II, p. 120.

The same image recurs in diminished form in the other plays: the chamber-pot is an object of great esteem and importance. For Vincent and Jérôme it is the best possible gift for Luce:

VINCENT: Un pot de chambre. Ça c'est magnifique. Et puis, c'est si joli!

JEROME, ennuyé: Oui, vraiment. (Un temps.) Mais il me plaît beaucoup. Je n'aimerais pas perdre le pot de chambre. (III:190)

It is exchanged with great delight by Tasla and Viloro in La Bicyclette du condamné:

TASLA: Si, Viloro, je pense toujours à toi, à ta forêt d'eau et à ton bleu-vert, je t'ai apporté un pot de chambre.

VILORO, tout content: Un pot de chambre pour pisser?<sup>1</sup>

The period of childhood is marked by a bizarre combination of cruelty and innocence, a period of ingenuous viciousness. A characteristic of the heroes of the early plays is their ability to be both gentle and callous: Climando and Apal, who spends most of his time in docile slumber, kill the gentleman; Fando tortures and kills his lover, Lis; Emanou, the benign Christ figure, has committed murder; Fidio and Lilbé have murdered their baby; Etienne leaves Bruno to die of thirst. The role-playing and acting of Jérôme and Vincent lead to the bloody murder of François d'Assise just as they had led to the murder of Marie. The combination of brutality and affection is captured concisely in Viloro's request that Tasla should throw him a kiss every time she lashes her prisoner.

Morality as understood by adults does not exist for these characters. Motivation and the subsequent responsibility for an action remain at a purely verbal level. In Le Cimetière des voitures Emanou reproaches Topé for forgetting to act as a good man. However, the basis of Emanou's morality resides in a hastily rehearsed dictum:

EMANOU: N'oublie pas qu'il faut être bon.

TOPE: Mais à quoi ça va-t-il nous servir?

EMANOU: Eh bien, quand on est bon (il récite comme s'il avait appris une leçon par coeur) on ressent une grande joie intérieure née de la paix de l'esprit dont on jouit lorsqu'on se voit semblable à l'image idéale de l'homme.

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<sup>1</sup>Fernando Arrabal, La Bicyclette du condamné in Théâtre II, pp. 214-15; the gift is reciprocated pp. 230-31.

TOPE, enthousiaste: Tu es formidable! Tu ne trompes jamais d'un iota!  
 Et puis tu dis tout sans respirer, c'est encore plus difficile.  
 EMANOU: Bien sûr, puisque je l'ai appris par coeur. (I:141-42)

Emanou and Topé are moved not by the sentiments expressed, but by the perfect recital of those sentiments. The same performance has a parallel effect on Dila when she questions his motives. Indeed, Emanou's downfall, represented by his arrest and capture, is preceded by an inability to reproduce this dictum. Similarly the triumph of Emanou, his resurrection, is accompanied by a muted restatement of the passage.<sup>1</sup> The implication is that if the words fail, then the ethos crumbles. Fidio and Lilbé in Oraison show a similar faith in words:

FIDIO: Il disait qu'il fallait être bon.  
 LILBE: Alors nous serons bons.<sup>2</sup>

There is no difficulty about making this statement, and believing wholeheartedly in it. Their new morality will be the negation of their previous behaviour. The principles are unknown, but that presents no difficulty either: "Mais j'ai le livre, comme ça je saurai" (I:24). A momentous event of Christian belief, the birth of the Messiah, is reduced to naive games with words:

FIDIO: C'est arrivé il y a très longtemps. Il est né dans une crèche très pauvre de Bethléem et comme il n'avait pas d'argent pour se chauffer, une vache et un âne le réchauffaient de leur haleine. Et comme la vache était toute contente de servir Dieu elle faisait meuh-meuh. Et l'âne brayait. Et la maman de l'enfant, qui était la mère de Dieu, pleurait, et son mari la consolait. (I:29)

The gifts of the Magi become "beaucoup de jouets et de bonbons et aussi du chocolat" (I:29). This account is repeated to describe the birth of Emanou whose Last Supper becomes a feast of confectionery paralleling the chocolate offered to him at his birth (I:154; and 204).

This morality is not based on any ultimate truths. It seems to result from the necessity to continue to act:

TOPE: Alors, il n'y a pas de solution?  
 EMANOU: Nous, nous ne la connaissons pas encore. Il faudra continuer à jouer toutes les nuits. (I:142)

<sup>1</sup>Arrabal, Théâtre I, pp. 152-53; p. 200; and p. 216.

<sup>2</sup>Fernando Arrabal, Oraison in Théâtre I, p. 25.



Indeed, for the couple of Oraison the pursuit of goodness is just another quest for an answer that is ultimately undiscoverable:

LILBE: Ça va être ennuyeux.  
 (Silence. Fidio est découragé.)  
 LILBE: Ça va être comme le reste.  
 (Silence.)  
 LILBE: On va s'en lasser aussi.  
 (Silence.)  
 FIDIO: On essaiera. (I:33)

Traditional, Bible-based morality will in fact be no more than an amusement just as the immoral acts had been: killing the baby, sleeping together and sleeping around (I:28; and 23). There is a suggestion that morality is based simply on the evasion of boredom. Actions are committed to avoid a stultifying routine:

MICAELA: Je m'ennuyais. Quand j'étais avec lui je souffrais beaucoup mais, au moins, je ne m'ennuyais pas. (II:84-85)

Filtos, the hero of Concert dans un oeuf, sees goodness as a diversion, and a diversion is of no value unless it is novel and spontaneous:

FILTOS, résigné: C'est bien. Et la bonté? (Il réfléchit.) Ça me rappelle quelque chose. Oui, être bon comme les anges. (Il réfléchit.) Ça ne serait pas une mauvaise idée. Mais ça me rappelle quelque chose. Et à toi, ça ne te rappelle rien? (Plus fort.) Ça ne te rappelle rien, Li?

LI: Mmm . . .

FILTOS, résigné: Oui, bien sûr, ça a déjà été fait par ceux du cercueil du petit. Ceux d'Oraison. (Un temps.) Pour ce que ça leur a servi. (IV:202-3)

As for Lilbé and Fidio, goodness would only be one pastime among others thought of by Filtos: urinating on the tomb of the unknown soldier, masturbating on an altar, or laughing at funerals (IV:202)

Evil, like goodness, has no stable basis. It might be purely a matter of fashion; Filtos scolds Li for her immoral behaviour because it is not "chic" (IV:188). If not fashion, it is perhaps appearance that is the basis of morality; that which is pleasing to the eye is good:

FIDIO: Dieu marque avec des lettres d'or dans un très grand livre tout ce que tu fais de bien et dans un livre très vilain avec une écriture très laide tous tes péchés.  
 LILBE: Je serai bonne. Je veux qu'il écrive toujours avec des lettres d'or. (I:27)

With no absolute criteria for judging actions, resolutions made to respect a law have no stability. Despite feeling guilt at his immoral conduct,

Filtos does not desist. Even when the decision affects the loved one, it appears to be no more binding. Promises are immediately broken:

FILTOS: (Tendrement.) Tu sais? Si tu veux, pour te faire plaisir, je te ferai un tableau . . . à l'huile, de toutes les couleurs. A moins que tu ne préfères un poème? (Un temps.) Tu n'aimes pas les poèmes? (Un temps.) Li, pourquoi ne me réponds-tu pas? (Un temps.) Parce que tu sais que je ne sais pas faire de poèmes, ni de tableaux?  
(IV:206)

Similarly, Emanou deceives Dila concerning his motives for wanting to make love to her (I:152).

If there are no criteria by which to assess a good action, the one thing in which Arrabal's heroes can have faith is the power of words:

DILA: Démontre-moi que les girafes montent en ascenseur.  
EMANOU: Les girafes montent en ascenseur parce qu'elles montent en ascenseur.  
DILA, enthousiaste: Comme c'est clair!  
EMANOU: Je démontre tout aussi aisément. (I:153-54)

By shuffling and grouping words, everything becomes possible. When faced by the possibility of arrest, Climando resorts to the omnipotence of the story:

MITA: Non, Climando. (Pause.) Alors tu devrais trouver quelque chose pour t'évader de la prison.  
CLIMANDO: C'est très difficile.  
MITA: En voilà des embêtements.  
CLIMANDO: J'ai de très grandes jambes, je pourrais courir.  
MITA: Et s'ils ne savent pas, eux, que tu es de grandes jambes?  
CLIMANDO: Je le leur dirai.  
MITA: Et s'ils t'attrapent?  
CLIMANDO: Je n'y avais pas pensé. Il vaudra mieux que je leur raconte des histoires.  
MITA: Oui, oui tu connais de très jolis contes.  
CLIMANDO: C'est ça, s'ils me prennent, je leur raconte une histoire.  
(II:157)

Conventional morality offers no solace, and no new basis for a workable morality is discovered. The early hero is on the outside of an inscrutable system; he is befuddled by its complexity. On the personal level he fares no better. The people he meets, the relationships he forms are prone to abrupt unannounced changes of human personality. Arrabal has stated:

Nous sommes une interrogation pour nous-mêmes. Cette ambivalence de mes mensonges dont vous parlez tout à l'heure, ces êtres qui brusquement deviennent autres, c'est un aspect de cette interrogation. Notre nature est imprécise. Elle change avec le milieu, l'interlocuteur, l'environnement, l'habit.<sup>1</sup>

In the plays, tenderness vies with cruelty, respect with violence: Fando can

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<sup>1</sup>Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 118.

show the most caring affection for Lis, but can as quickly throw her to the ground; Li does not like disappointing Filtos but she becomes the willing lover of the man; Micaela is Etienne's friend and the accomplice of her father in his brutal treatment of his prisoner. The plays advance through these changes with no explanation. The characters accept these mutations without question, trying to make do as best they can in a world "où rien n'est tranché, où rien n'est sûr, ni le Bien ni le Mal. Aussi mes personnages s'appliquent-ils à être sincères, bons, fidèles avec une précision mécanique, inhumaine."<sup>1</sup>

Geneviève Serreau describes Arrabal's characters as "ces perpétuels inadaptés."<sup>2</sup> Their lack of adaptation results from the ever-changing reality facing them. This reality has no roots; it exists in the continuous present of the characters' utterances. The stage is divorced from the everyday reality of social life. Fando and Lis struggle along the interminable road which brings them back to their starting-point; their movement is rendered pointless as they remain separated from their objective, Tar. When the outside world does penetrate into their lives, it is not a structure on which to depend. Rather it is a form of persecution the more vicious because the less comprehensible. The police break onto the stage at the end of Le Tricycle:

L'AGENT: Caracatchitcho, caracotchotchitchi, tchoutcha, caracatchi.

MITA, au Vieux: Qu'est-ce qu'il a dit?

LE VIEUX: Quelque chose en tcha, tché, tcho.

MITA: Comme c'est bizarre.

LE VIEUX: C'est incompréhensible. (II:149-50)<sup>3</sup>

The policeman and his society are repressive forces that rip apart the delicate web of naive dream and fantasy that the characters spin around themselves. Jérôme and Vincent manage to incorporate both Luce and François d'Assise into their world of make-believe, but it collapses in the face of the mounting external pressures. Similarly, the verbal games of Climando and the

<sup>1</sup>Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup>Geneviève Serreau, Preface to Théâtre II, by Arrabal, p. ii.

<sup>3</sup>Arrabal here uses the dislocation of language in much the same way as Ionesco does in La Cantatrice chauve and Les Chaises. The meaningless of the utterances reflects the shallowness of life in contemporary society.

old man come to a close on the stultifying repetition of "des billets" (II:138). Money is the symbol of the outside world; it is the man with the money whose entry disturbs their world at the end of the first act, and it is money that precipitates the murder and subsequently the arrival of the police.

In Le Labyrinthe, Etienne is the victim of a Kafkaesque judicial procedure which remains impenetrable to the victim but at the same time implicates him more and more. Etienne is confronted by the powerful Justin who manipulates all the characters in order to condemn Etienne. The workings of this process remain a mystery to the participants in it; they just accept it:

MICHAELA: Comme je vous le disais, voilà pourquoi les choses ici peuvent offrir l'apparence du désordre, ce qui ne fait que mettre en relief l'existence d'un ordre supérieur beaucoup plus complexe et exigeant que celui que nous pouvons imaginer. Mon père dirige tout avec une adresse d'une rare efficacité. (II:56)

The logic of legal procedure is a matter of some concern for Topé in Le Cimetière des voitures:

TOPE: Et comment font-ils pour savoir que c'est mal?

EMANOU: Ils sont très malins.

TOPE, étonné: Il faut qu'ils le soient. (Un temps.) Mais écoute, ils savent toujours, toujours, toujours si c'est mal?

EMANOU: Oui, toujours, toujours, toujours. Je t'ai déjà dit qu'ils sont très malins et puis ils font beaucoup d'études, ils ont au moins le bac et tout ce qui s'ensuit. (I:139)

There is a clear difference of treatment of external fact in these two plays as compared to the rest of the first period work. Arrabal consistently chooses a scenic element as a concrete symbol of a play's action: the wheelchair in Fando et Lis, the tricycle in Le Tricycle, the bicycle and cage in La Bicyclette du condamné. In all three cases the object chosen derives from the childhood world of the characters. In Le Labyrinthe and Le Cimetière des voitures, the stage is dominated by a scenic image from the outside world: the maze of old blankets or the pile of old car bodies. To a certain extent, this represents a breach in the all-encompassing shell of personal fantasy of the early period. However, it is to be remembered that in the case of Le Labyrinthe the image was suggested by a dream, and that the blankets are balanced by the idiosyncratic element of the flushing lavatory.

Arrabal has stated that "mes personnages sont en situation de rupture

permanente devant un monde plein de nuances inexplicables."<sup>1</sup> The dramatic potential of the confrontation of individuals and society has been drawn upon since classical times. In Arrabal's work, however, the creative inspiration derives from experiences that have too firm a grip of the author's imagination. The sources of Arrabal's confusion are too personal and these are passed on to the heroes with little interpretation. The world that Arrabal projects onto the stage is the converse to our world; the world with which his characters have so little contact is our world. The staged actions remain impenetrable for us, just as our world proves inscrutable to both Arrabal and his characters. The redeeming feature of this period lies in those moments when the particular detail is transcended and a poetry of innocence rings out clear.

Arrabal has stressed that this innocence is all-important in his theatre, and that generally this quality has been disregarded by his directors: "Ce caractère enfantin de beaucoup de mes pièces explique d'ailleurs la difficulté qu'on éprouve à les monter. Il faut découvrir une telle innocence, pour que ça ne devienne pas n'importe quoi."<sup>2</sup> Betrayed by his directors, Arrabal also feels he has been treated unfairly by the critics. He does not take offence at their charges of obscenity or puerility, but at their lack of regard for the structures of the plays:

Je regrette seulement que personne ne remarque la construction de mes pièces, qui est très élaborée, très rigoureuse, car je suis un joueur d'échecs. Une composition parfaitement minutieuse est indispensable pour exprimer dans tous les détours de sa démarche le chaos, la confusion de la vie.<sup>3</sup>

An examination of the early plays reveals a preoccupation with the circle. The plays are structured cyclically around recurring actions, repetitive phrases, and reappearing objects. Reference has been made to the reciprocal gifts of La Bicyclette du condamné. Apal in Le Tricycle twice awakens from his sloth to indulge in sudden, frantic activity; Micaela frequently crosses the

<sup>1</sup>Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>3</sup>Arrabal to Colette Godard, "Le Mystère Arrabal," Les Nouvelles littéraires, 2 March 1967, p. 13. This concern about the structure of his work contradicts the disinterest already reported. It is another example of the ambivalence of Arrabal's attitudes towards the theatre.

stage to pull the chain in the lavatory; Guernica, Le Cimetière des voitures, and La Bicyclette du condamné are all punctuated by passages across the stage.

Verbal repetitions serve to add texture to the recurrent nature of the action. Climando's catchphrase is "je n'ai pas pensé à ça" (II:114); Fando and Lis exhort each other to make an effort twenty-seven times, and express the idea of departing fifteen times; similarly, Fanchou and Lira in Guernica goad each other into final efforts. Inside a single dialogue, verbal repetitions are the means of advance; however, the advance is illusory as it leads back to the starting-point in a fashion not dissimilar to Beckett's dialogues:

FANDO: Mais tu trouves des solutions à tout.

LIS: Non, je ne trouve jamais de solutions, ce qui se passe, c'est que je mène en disant que j'en ai trouvé.

FANDO: Mais ce n'est plus du jeu.

LIS: Je sais que ce n'est plus du jeu. Mais comme on me demande jamais rien, c'est la même chose. Et puis ça fait très joli.

FANDO: Oui, c'est vrai, ça fait très joli. Mais si quelqu'un te demande quelque chose?

LIS: Il n'y a pas de danger. Personne ne demande rien.<sup>1</sup>

Repetition highlights visually and aurally the essentially circular structure of the first period plays. Lis despairingly laments: "Encore une fois nous nous retrouvons au même endroit. Nous n'avons pas avancé du tout" (I:104). Tar remains an unreachable goal. The three strange men reveal that Tar is, by essence, that which is unattainable:

NAMUR: Voilà de nombreuses années que nous avons entrepris de le faire.

FANDO: J'ai entendu dire qu'il est impossible d'arriver.

NAMUR: Non, ce n'est pas que ce soit impossible. Tout simplement personne n'est arrivé et jamais personne ne pense y arriver. (I:85)

Tar represents a desired ideal that is destined to remain unfulfilled. What Tar is for Fando and Lis, so escape is for Vilorio and Tasla, theatre for Jérôme and Vincent, and "goodness" for Emanou. The early theatre is characterized by the frustration of desires and by impotence in the face of oppression. Etienne echoes this predicament: "Je ne trouve pas d'issue. Je fais des tours et des tours dans le parc entre les couvertures et, quand je crois avoir trouver, me revoilà au même endroit" (II:50).

This statement is underscored scenically by Etienne's two attempts at escape. The first immediately precedes the verbal expression of his situation.

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<sup>1</sup>Fernando Arrabal, Fando et Lis in Théâtre I, pp. 66-67.

He leaves Bruno three times only to be brought back to the lavatory; on each return his reaction to his plight becomes more extreme, "épouvanté," "horrifié," and finally "hors d'haleine" (II:49). One has the impression that this futile action would continue forever if it were not for the appearance of Micaela. Yet Etienne's second attempt is not brought to an end by Micaela; it is the final image of the play; Etienne is repeatedly brought back to face the spectre of his dead companion, Bruno. Again his reactions show a progressive anxiety ("essoufflé," "rempli d'angoisse"), exacerbated by the beating of the drums of law and order (II:101-2). From the imprisonment locked to Bruno in the latrine, Etienne has escaped only as far as the labyrinth drawn relentlessly back to the image of Bruno. However, the desire for freedom will force him to continue his vain efforts to escape, thus ensuring a continuation of the circular structure.

His downfall is implied in this repetition as it is in the detail of the development of the play as a whole. At the outset, Etienne is bound to Bruno, but is attempting to escape. Freedom is to be his joyful reward: "Ça y est presque. (Avec joie.) Un dernier effort et je suis libre" (II:48). Freedom brings a new form of imprisonment, but Micaela's arrival renews his faith in liberation: "Mais vous, vous allez me dire comment on peut sortir d'ici" (II:50). But this hope is gradually eroded, and he becomes a prisoner of the powers that control the maze: "(Angoissé) Laissez-moi m'échapper. Laissez-moi" (II:66). Despite his fears, Etienne again rebuilds his confidence and faith. Justin, at first, comforts him by rejecting Micaela's testimony, but this new confidence is soon shattered by Micaela: "Oui, on ne sait jamais à coup sûr s'il reviendra aussitôt ou bien longtemps après" (II:78).

Evasion of one's plight through compassion for one's fellow beings is no more successful. By going outside himself, by comforting Micaela as she reveals the hardships of her life, Etienne exposes himself to another rebuttal. He is just one man in many who has suffered the same fate (implying a spiraling structure into the past):

MICAELA: Ils étaient tous très sympathiques. (Un temps.) Ils me prenaient en pitié et me promettaient de me faire sortir d'ici.

(Silence.) Toujours remplis d'espoir. C'était un plaisir de bavarder avec eux. (II:86)

The court case follows a similar pattern of momentary hope followed by crushing defeat. After an initial favourable response by Justin, the mechanism of oppression is activated. Past events are recalled and turned against him: his imprisonment by Justin, his treatment of Bruno, the disappearance of Bruno. Even his attempt to prove his truthfulness serves only to discredit his own credibility; Micaela's back is no longer scarred (II:98-99). All Etienne's attempts to clear himself are turned into self-accusations. Ironically, his efforts only force him into deeper trouble, just as his initial escape led him into the even more impenetrable maze. Indeed, the nature of the maze is to obstruct, but at the same time to inveigle the victim further into its grasp. The image of the maze dominates the play visually and structurally.

In Fando et Lis, it is a structure of circles that predominates. The eponymous couple locked in their own vicious circle of love and cruelty depart and return without reaching their goal, Tar. Namur, Toso and Mitaro are involved in the same quest, but independently of Fando and Lis. Tar, and the motivation to go there, inform all the actions of the play, and represent an outer, encompassing circle. These three circular movements touch but do not interpenetrate. Tar remains aloof and the three strange men "forment un seul bloc" which barely tolerates Fando's guarded advances and which remains intact at the end of the play (I:77). As in Le Labyrinthe, the circular structure does allow for development; Etienne becomes increasingly implicated, and the relationship between Fando and Lis grows more cruel and vicious. But decisively the final images are of the recuperation of the circular structure.

After the suggestion of two defined scenic areas in Le Labyrinthe and the implied segregation of two actions in Fando et Lis, a spatial concept of dramatic writing is developed further in Le Cimetière des voitures. While still maintaining an overall circularity, the action of this play operates on various levels that have only tenuous interconnections. The setting is against the dominant image of the rusting scrap-heap with its inhabitants and their keepers, Milos and Dila. Lasca and Tioesido pass energetically to and fro



before them, pursuing their record. Off-stage, both the police and the crowd suggest another realm of action, which is linked to the stage action by the musical trio, Emanou, Topé, and Fodère. A final level is the relationship between Dila and Emanou. On the surface these levels of action would appear to be linked through various characters. For example, Dila is present in her relationship with Emanou, but also as the maid to the cemetery. However, Dila, daughter of Milos, is a different person to Dila, lover of Emanou. Indeed, the play offers the best examples of Arrabal's concept of polymorphous characters.

The complexity of the play's structure is emphasized by the multiplication of stage actions:

Tandis qu'ils s'embrassent, Fodère, Topé et Emanou traversent rapidement la scène de droite à gauche tout recroquevillés sur eux-mêmes. . . . Topé s'arrête et saute pour essayer de voir ce qui se passe au fond derrière les voitures. Horrifié il fait un geste à ses amis pour leur signaler que le danger est derrière les voitures. En effet, on entend parfaitement les coups de sifflet derrière les voitures au fond. Topé Fodère et Emanou, toujours à croupetons, traversent la scène et sortent à gauche. Les coups de sifflet de la police s'éloignent au contraire vers la droite.

Lasca et Tiossido finissent de s'embrasser. (I:163-64)

Here, three levels of action are simultaneously presented without interaction. The actions are introduced without explanation. The scene is similar to a collage, a juxtaposition of different surfaces without a great deal of attention devoted to synthesis. In the same way the passages of Lasca and Tiossido go unnoticed: "Milos n'a même pas remarqué leur présence. Il continue, infatigable, à nettoyer les chaussures, sans se départir un seul moment de ses bonnes manières" (I:132). Although aware of the life of the cemetery, the three musicians are unaffected by it. That Milos should supply Dila as a concubine to the occupant of car number 2 does not surprise them: "Emanou, Topé et Fodère ont contemplé la scène avec curiosité, mais sans la moindre surprise" (I:140). A reaction from Dila's lover, Emanou, might be expected but that would not be in keeping with the stratification of the dramatic action. The only link between the realm of action is one of voyeurism. For example, Milos and the car dwellers only look on in amusement at the love making of Emanou and Dila:

VOIX D'HOMME, "voiture 3": Quel spectacle! Comme ils sont drôles tous les deux. (I:150)

The separation of the levels of action is acoustically underlined when the passage of Lasca and TioSSIDo interrupts the general amusement: "Pendant qu'ils ont traversé la scène les rires ont cessé. Milos est resté immobile. Ils reprennent sans aucune retenue" (I:151).

The principal division of action isolates Emanou and Dila from the rest of the proceedings. In the second edition of the play this primary segregation is emphasized by the addition of poetic passages that distinguish the Emanou-Dila dialogues from the others in the play. For instance: "Nous serons ensemble, invisibles comme la nuit et les pensées, et nous tournoierons, enlacés comme deux écureuils sous-marins" (I:148). As with Fando et Lis the development of the play advances through the principal relationship, but eventually the circularity of the play reasserts itself despite this disruptive element. The revised edition of the play begins and ends with the same action: Dila awakens the car dwellers, and Lasca and TioSSIDo resume their athletics. Indeed, the association of Emanou with Christ has meant that from the beginning his disappearance is presaged. Throughout the action, the inevitable downfall has been anticipated.<sup>1</sup>

Emanou represents a challenge to the social structure. His naivety and his ingenuous quest for goodness threaten to upset the mores of the car cemetery and the society which produces such ghettos. Indeed, from an economic viewpoint, Emanou is the enemy of the consumer society. His stealing and his free concerts to the poor are not governed by the principles of profit, and they disrupt the law of supply and demand. On another plane, his love for Dila threatens the stability of the car cemetery. The first scene between Emanou and Dila reveals the revolutionary power of love; for, after Emanou has left, Dila, formerly browbeaten by Milos and the car dwellers, suddenly begins to dominate them (I:156). Furthermore, the smooth exercise of Lasca and TioSSIDo is suddenly struck by indecision and by the next circuit grinds to

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<sup>1</sup>References to this unhappy ending occur in Arrabal, Théâtre I, p.141; and p. 200.

a halt (I:161). As though wary of these disruptive symptoms, the police make their presence more obvious:

Pendant ce temps la musique s'est arrêtée. On entend des cris de panique et des bruits de courses à droite. A gauche les coups de sifflet de la police qui s'approche de plus en plus de la scène. (I:162)

The second act exposes a consolidation of forces against Emanou: Lasca and Tiossido become his pursuers; the car dwellers turn their binoculars on him recriminatingly; and in the end, Topé betrays him. The action of the play works to eradicate the revolutionary element. Franco Tonelli has summarized the action as "une répétition cyclique et simultanée d'actes, tels une série de cercles concentriques, ne se touchant jamais, n'ayant rien en commun et pourtant créant un tout par leur propre mouvement."<sup>1</sup>

Verbal repetitions, recurrent actions and repetitive structures all reinforce the circular movement of the plays. This circularity emphasizes not the joy of rebirth but rather the imprisonment of the hero in an inextricable situation. Death, and not rebirth, reigns over the play; Emanou is crucified on a bicycle and ignominiously pushed off stage.

A study of the properties brought on-stage, in addition to their visual impact as symbols of repetition reveals a significant point. A dominant image in the early period is the wheeled vehicle: the wheelchair in Fando et Lis; the cage on wheels in La Bicyclette du condamné. Ironically, vehicles originally created for transport and travel, they imprison Arrabal's characters, returning the would-be traveller to his point of departure. The extreme is reached in Le Cimetière des voitures where the wheeled vehicle has lost its power of locomotion and encases the traveller who lives out a larval existence in its interior. The great black umbrella and bowler hats of Mitaro, Toso and Namur seem to present the same encapsulating image; their existence is a cul-de-sac.

The most developed use of stage properties is to be found in La Bicyclette du condamné. In this play, they orchestrate the essentially circular structure of the action. Viloro attempts to play a perfect C scale

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<sup>1</sup>Tonelli, L'Esthétique de la cruauté, p. 143.

but is interrupted by Tasla's transportation of a condemned Paso, by the threats of a liberated Paso and his companions, and by the erotic games played by Tasla with Paso. Letting scenes in which Paso is either condemned or ridiculed be represented by A and scenes in which Viloro is punished or killed by B, Beverley Delong-Tonelli finds the following structure: AB AB AB AA BA/B.<sup>1</sup> This suggests that inside the overall structure, the blocks of action follow a circular pattern. The final A/B represents the merging of Paso's imprisonment and Viloro's murder in the image of Viloro's body being transported in Paso's cage. Inside the blocks of action, there is a studied use of objects and sounds. The musical scale itself corresponds to the general structure of the play in its repetitive return to the beginning. The gifts of the balloon and the chamber-pots as well as the infantile song that Tasla and Viloro dedicate to each other reaffirm circularity both visually and acoustically.

The circle is the organizing principle on which Arrabal's early theatre is constructed. As a symbol it is fundamental to all mythologies, tending to represent man's most complex concepts. The circular structures to be found in Arrabal's work have led at least one critic to proclaim a mythical dimension to his work.<sup>2</sup> Similarly the repetitions have encouraged other critics to qualify his plays as ritual. Both myth and ritual are functions of man's desire for comprehensible order and structure. Thematically, Arrabal's plays do not satisfy this condition. The heroes are left unassured to continue their search. An example is Fando joining the three men:

NAMUR: Il nous faut d'abord l'accompagner. Ensuite nous nous mettrons en route tous les quatre.  
MITARO: Oui, tous ensemble. (I:122)

The circle which should symbolize perfection and homogeneity becomes in Arrabal's work a source of disquiet and unease, representing the never-ending quest. The drum with which Fando entertains Lis is broken; the perfect union is not possible. The spherical properties imprison the characters and do not

<sup>1</sup>Beverley Delong-Tonelli, "Bicycles and Balloons in Arrabal's Dramatic Structure," Modern Drama, vol. 14, no. 2 (September 1971), pp. 205-9.

<sup>2</sup>Tonelli, L'Esthétique de la cruauté, chapter 4: "La Structure circulaire du mythe," pp. 126-45.

point to liberation.<sup>1</sup> They assume a secondary meaning of the circle symbol, protection. However, the protection afforded is not positive but restraining. The protective meaning of the circle is summarized as follows:

En tant que forme enveloppante, tel un circuit fermé, le cercle est un symbole de protection, d'une protection assurée dans ses limites. . . .  
Le cercle protecteur prend la forme, pour l'individu, de la bague, du bracelet, du collier, de la ceinture, de la couronne.<sup>2</sup>

It is in keeping with the frustration of liberation in Arrabal's plays that the bracelets and bells of positive protection should become the chain and manacles of inhibiting repression.

Myth and ritual depend on the understanding of their processes by a community; their efficacy springs from shared belief. Although using the forms of myth, Arrabal's plays fail to perform its function because of their incomprehensibility. In her analysis of the cyclic form of La Bicyclette du condamné, Delong-Tonelli concludes that the form is an integral part of the universal theme expressed by the play: "The play, then, reflects human chaos as it pertains to the dilemma<sup>m</sup> of freedom and condemnation, yet that reflection is constructed upon an intricately precise labyrinth of concentric circles extending from purely physical appearances and objects, through acoustical realms, until finally it comprises the very human condition itself."<sup>3</sup> It seems that this conclusion springs from an overzealous analysis of the forms of the play to the exclusion of consideration of its expression. For example, the very objects that Delong-Tonelli cites in order to clinch her argument derive from an idiosyncratic experience. The objects have no meaning for the audience because it is excluded from that experience. The particular detail untransposed in composition emphasizes this exceptional life. The objects do

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<sup>1</sup> It could be objected that the final stage image of La Bicyclette du condamné suggests liberation. However, it has been observed by Whitton that the final pages of the published version date from the second period of Arrabal's writings. See David W. Whitton, "A Critical Edition of the MS of the First Version of Arrabal's Bicyclette du condamné," Forum for Modern Language Studies, vol. 9, no. 3 (July 1973), pp. 253-68.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, Dictionnaire des symboles, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Paris: Seghers, 1973), p. 308.

<sup>3</sup> Delong-Tonelli, "Bicycles and Ballons," p. 209.

not become mythical. In En attendant Godot, Beckett employs circular structure and repetitions; but in that play the stage action has such metaphorical power that the audience is able to identify with the total situation and the dramatic structures lend weight to the theme. In the early plays the audience has no point of reference inside Arrabal's universe and in this case the circles and repetitions serve only to keep the audience at bay. The only relationship possible between play and audience is one of voyeur.

In performance, the plays of the early period have been subjected to many styles of production. Fando et Lis, for example, was given an absurdist treatment by Paul Andrieu at Liège in 1959: "Froideur glaciale du plateau nu avec l'arbre mort, une ligne verticale, et une grosse pierre noire lisse."<sup>1</sup> Claude Cyriaque in 1964 (Paris) employed a similarly bare stage. The central area alone was lit by a vertical spotlight. Lis was dressed in a loose-fitting dress and black shawl, Fando in a dirty jacket and trousers, while the three men had a very strange appearance in spotless dinner jackets. Apart from Gilles Sandier who praised the quality of the acting, critical reaction was uniform—the play failed to communicate: "Verbiage, insoutenable d'ennui," "une sarabande d'idées plus ou moins rapiécées."<sup>2</sup> The critic and the audience were alienated by the style, "une grande impression d'ennui, d'infantilisme. . . . Le dialogue tourne à la logomachie."<sup>3</sup>

The tone of the play cannot support a metaphorical interpretation. The naturalistic approach of the fait divers adopted by Olivier Hussenot in Paris 1964 for Le Tricycle on the other hand ignored the poetry in that play altogether. A very geometric production of Fando et Lis by Gisèle Tavet (Lyon, 1965) stressed an intellectuality reducing the play to an occult ceremony which did no more than fascinate, "un décor où la géométrie rejoignait par la rigueur de ses lignes et le magnétisme de ses couleurs, les arcanes les plus

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<sup>1</sup> Gille, Fernando Arrabal, p. 31. The similarity between this set and that for Beckett's En attendant Godot is particularly striking.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Sandier, Arts, 13 May 1964; Gilbert Guillemainault, L'Aurore, 8 May 1964; and Pierre Marcabru, Paris-Presses. L'Intransigeant, 11 May 1964.

<sup>3</sup> Marc Bernard, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 28 May 1964.

secrètes de la magie et nous faisait entrer de plan-pied dans un monde imaginaire où le triangle, le motif central, le mobile et la fleur fanée sous globe, le paravent rouge, devenaient autant de symboles évoquant la recherche de l'Infini."<sup>1</sup> Robert Benoît tried to recreate the infantile atmosphere that Arrabal had referred to in his conversations with Schifres. His 1969 set at Théâtre de l'Athénée (Paris) was painted in primitive fashion with grass and trees bearing bright red apples. The push-chair was covered with the same pattern. Nevertheless this production fared no better than the previous ones: "Le jeu d'Arrabal consiste à prolonger indéfiniment un palabre futile qui ne tient aucun compte du dramatique de la situation." Claude Baignarès went on to stress the incommunicability inherent in the work of Arrabal, "prisonnier de ses élucubrations licencieuses."<sup>2</sup>

The essentially private nature of Arrabal's early plays proves an obstacle to successful production. Despite varied treatment on the French stage the plays have remained for the most part divorced from the audience. Robert Marrast, in a combined review of Fando et Lis and Le Tricycle, reflects the general reaction to early performances:

Nous ne pénétrons jamais dans leur humanité véritable; nous les entendons parler, nous ne les voyons jamais agir. La dénonciation de l'état de choses qui les écrase n'a lieu que par référence au monde où ils s'efforcent de se réfugier: jeux enfantins, joutes verbales qui déroutent le spectateur comme une plaisanterie d'initiés dont il ne posséderait pas la clé. Le résultat est qu'on s'ennuie un peu, et que, de temps à autre seulement, une scène, un échange de répliques ranime notre attention.<sup>3</sup>

However, several notable exceptions merit examination. The only productions that have received any approval from the critics are those that started, not from the position of serving a text, but from that of subjecting the audience to the same sense of loss and chaos that the author had suffered during the original period of composition. This could account for Alexandre Jodorowsky's success with Fando et Lis (Mexico, 1961) which Gille has described:

<sup>1</sup>Hélène Cingria, Les Lettres françaises, 23 December 1965.

<sup>2</sup>Claude Baignarès, Le Figaro, 7 May 1969.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Marrast, Théâtre Populaire, no. 54 (1964), pp. 104-5.

"A la voiture est accrochée une chaîne noire et luisante. Elle nous relie au cauchemar dans lequel les jeux de la lumière sur la palissade nous plongent lentement au cours des scènes de violence."<sup>1</sup> If with Jodorowsky the text was illustrated by the lighting, with Jérôme Savary's production of Le Labyrinthe (Paris, 1967), it was the performance details that submerged the text which became a pre-text for an orgy of light and noise. The director's approach was to create a joyful mayhem:

Pour moi, l'oeuvre d'Arrabal n'est pas malsaine, elle est merveilleuse, elle est magique; il y a chez lui un côté Alice au pays des merveilles. Le cérémonial, c'est la fête. J'ai voulu que les comédiens soient joyeux, je les fais chanter à tue-tête, je leur donne des tambours pour qu'ils tapent dessus. Il faut avant tout, qu'ils n'aient pas l'air de mimer la démente à l'extérieur. . . . Je voudrais qu'ils atteignent à la démente sans oublier l'humour, qu'ils sachent être tragiques sans se prendre au sérieux.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the production still had its detractors, which was only to be expected, as it magnified the scatological, erotic, and violent aspects of the play: "C'est une dégénérescence recouverte de grands mots, une pente vers toutes les abdications et un esthétisme malade."<sup>3</sup> Savary attempted an explosion of Arrabal's universe, a rupture of its circularity in order to involve the audience in the dramatic act. His production put an increasing emphasis on the delirium of the performance to such an extent that in London (1968), the text was replaced by the ravings of unrehearsed actors.<sup>4</sup>

This explosive line of approach had been adopted with greater calculation by Victor Garcia in his two productions of Le Cimetière des voitures. Garcia not only extended the play by the interpolation of other Arrabal texts (Oraison, Les Deux Bourreaux, La Communion solennelle), but also projected it onto a multiscentic space, which corresponded to the complex structure of the text. He stated that: "Pour moi, dans le monde moderne, le grand problème est de mélanger totalement les spectateurs et le spectacle. Le Cimetière des voitures est une pièce qui demande plusieurs lieux scéniques tout en gardant

<sup>1</sup>Gille, Fernando Arrabal, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Jérôme Savary to Zand, Le Monde, 7 January 1967, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Georges Sion, Revue générale belge, no. 2 (February 1968), p. 115.

<sup>4</sup>Details of the London production are discussed in Chap. V; see pp. 324-26.



sa continuité."<sup>1</sup>

Garcia's production was very influential in the light not only of Arrabal's work but also of experiments in staging. The first Garcia production was during the Festival des Nuits de Bourgogne in Dijon, 1966. Under the directorship of Michel Parent, this festival concentrated on the problems of alternative stage designs. Parent explained in the programme note to the 1967 Paris revival:

Le théâtre expérimental a consisté, à Dijon, . . . à disposer d'un espace vacant que nous refusent les structures héritées et contraignantes qu'elles soient architecturales, ou, par voie des conséquences, psychologiques, administratives, commerciales et sociales.

Et c'est une nouvelle liturgie du théâtre qui naît dès lors que dans cette vacuité chaque pièce se voit, non point confrontée à une architecture ou prolongée par elle, mais se voit réaliser l'architecture que son texte recèle.<sup>2</sup>

The theatrical space that Garcia devised was dominated by car bodies. The spectators were surrounded by acting areas which could only be viewed by moving round on the pivoting chairs on which they were seated. Again, this was part of a theatrical experiment rather than part of Arrabal's play.

Although refusing to rewrite any of the dialogues, Arrabal identified himself with the production procedures. However, he appears to have misunderstood their aim:

Le spectateur est entouré de tous côtés et son fauteuil pivotant lui permet de regarder où bon lui semble, car je ne veux pas l'obliger à participer. Il faut qu'il se sente tranquille comme l'enfant dans le ventre de sa mère.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, Garcia was reported:

Nous voulons donner au public tant de perceptions et de sensations qu'il sera obligé de faire un choix personnel. Il portera les yeux où bon lui semblera et devra de ce fait "participer." Nous ne voulons pas d'une assistance passive.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the text became a pre-text once more. This time it was the basis for

<sup>1</sup>Victor Garcia cited by Colette Godard, Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 14 December 1967, p. 13. For a detailed study of different European productions of this play, see Aslan, "Le Cimetière des voitures, un spectacle de Victor Garcia."

<sup>2</sup>Théâtre des Arts, 20 December 1967.

<sup>3</sup>Arrabal cited by Pierre Julien, L'Aurore, 18 December 1967.

<sup>4</sup>Victor Garcia cited by Françoise Varenne, Le Figaro, 13 December 1967.

experimentation with the relationships between actors and spectators inside the performance. Bertrand Poirot-Delpech was sensitive to the true orientation of this venture: "Le Cimetière des voitures n'est pas, en effet, une oeuvre de théâtre au sens traditionnel et même le plus moderne, c'est-à-dire l'incarnation d'un dialogue; c'est d'abord du spectacle pour le spectacle, un grouillement de formes et la recherche, au-delà des paroles, d'un découpage visuel entièrement nouveau du temps et de l'espace."<sup>1</sup> The emphasis of the production was no longer on the word of the text but on the action around the spectator on the "scène multiple, où la primauté reviendrait à l'expression plastique et où le spectateur serait agressé de toutes parts par une explosion de bruits, de gestes, et de formes."<sup>2</sup> At Dijon, motor-bikes roared around the audience, enclosing it in an acoustical environment. The total effect of the production was not the warm comfort of the maternal womb, but the sensual ravaging of the spectator:

Le public s'en va nerfs et viscères remués. La révélation apparaît à certains malgré leurs quatre siècles d'habitude à observer dans un fauteuil, ils ont été violés. On leur a arraché leur participation. Ils viennent de vivre dans l'événement.<sup>3</sup>

That Garcia succeeded in producing the delirium desired by Arrabal can be judged by Eric Westphal's description of "un délire collectif-sado-masochisto-blasphématoire."<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the experiment was based on a misunderstanding. Certain critics observed that the techniques of the production did not suit the play: "Paradoxalement . . . Garcia, en voulant faire éclater ces textes, les désamorce, ramenant le spectateur à un esthétisme pur dont il connaît tous les détours, et qui, le réduisant au rôle du voyeur, le rassure et l'apaise."<sup>5</sup> Arrabal's plays are thematically and structurally introverted. They are not suited to this type of exposure. The extent of this misunderstanding is exposed by

<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, Le Monde, 21 December 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Abirached, Le Nouvel Observateur, 29 June 1966, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Serge Batigne, Le Théâtre Amateur, no. 60 (March 1968), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Westphal, Réforme, 13 January 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Marcabru, Paris-Presses. L'Intransigeant, 27 December 1967.

Garcia's introducing a triumphal procession around the auditorium at the end of the play. No doubt, for the director this moment was to be the climax of the performance when actors and spectators would be united in the celebration of the sacrifice and resurrection. Yet clearly, the explicit performance of the resurrection runs contrary to the circularity of the play. Furthermore, the idea of fusing audience and cast into a unity does not take into consideration the extremely personal vision of the playwright. Bernard Dort reported the effect of the final ceremony: "Loin de sceller l'unité des spectateurs et des acteurs célébrant le même rite cruel, . . . [la cérémonie] ne faisait que souligner, dans son ample déroulement de presque se déployant tout autour de la salle, combien les uns et les autres restent étrangers."<sup>1</sup> Even the actors expressed some reservations about the production: "Lors de sa création à Dijon, la pièce a été refusée par les spectateurs. Je pense que le parti pris d'agresser que nous avons choisi y est pour beaucoup."<sup>2</sup>

The difficulty that Garcia failed to overcome was the use of Arrabal's texts in their complete form as part of a performance that did not respect their spirit. In Savary's production, the performance developed from the text, but evolved according to its own spirit and so avoided the contradiction of performance and text. As a consequence of Arrabal's wish to allow the director total freedom, one production emerges as an unhappy marriage and the other appears as a new spectacle that had little to do with the original text.

Within a discussion of the general aspects of the first period works, there is the danger of overlooking developments that suggest evolution. That the plays can be treated as a unity is confirmed by the resonances between plays. Garcia marked this common feature not only by including the other texts, but also by casting one actor in the similar roles from the different plays. For example, Jean-Claude Drouot who played Emanou, also acted Fidio in the opening Oraison and Maurice in Les Deux Bourreaux; Michèle Oppenot was both

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Dort, Théâtre réel: 1967-1970 (Paris: Seuil, 1971), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> Marcel Bozonnet who acted Emanou at Dijon cited by J.-P. B., Le Bien public, 15 January 1968.

Lilbé and Dila; R. Onhignian acted the dutiful servant Milos and the obedient son Benoît. Furthermore, overt textual references are made to plays of the same period. In Concert dans un oeuf, Filtos's quest for a worthwhile exploit on which to spend his time leads him to consider the pursuit of goodness:

FILTOS: Ça ne serait pas une mauvaise idée. Mais ça me rappelle quelque chose. Et à toi, ça ne te rappelle rien? (Plus fort.) Ça ne te rappelle rien, Li?

LI: Mmm . . .

FILTOS, résigné: Oui, bien sûr, ça a déjà été fait par ceux du cercueil du petit. Ceux d'Oraison. (IV:202-3)

In the same manner, the end of Fando et Lis situates the action of that play in the context of the other first period compositions. Namur confuses Fando and Lis with the characters of Le Tricycle only to be corrected by Mitaro. Mitaro, however, soon unwittingly slips back into the story of Le Tricycle. In turn, Namur tries to correct him, but begins to recite the action of Le Cimetière des voitures. This type of internal reference can only be of interest to the initiated with its implication of a closed world. For the spectator of Fando et Lis, the ending will bring only confusion and an increased feeling of alienation from the action.

The overlapping of the plays does add credence to Poirot-Delpech's criticism that "il pourrait très bien n'exister qu'une seule pièce d'Arrabal avec intermèdes interchangeable, une sorte de menu à la carte."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Whitton discovered a manuscript entitled Cementerio de autobuses from which both La Bicyclette du condamné and Le Cimetière des voitures evolved.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless developments are discernible. A more complex structure emerges in Le Cimetière des voitures; Arrabal attempts to universalize his obsessions by grafting them onto the Christian tradition through the identification of Emanou and Christ. The settings of both Le Labyrinthe and Le Cimetière des voitures make clearer social references than the waste lands or park benches of the earliest plays. In 1967, Arrabal looked back on the image of Le Cimetière des voitures:

<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, Le Monde, 6 January 1970, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Whitton, "Theatre of Fernando Arrabal," pp. 368-69.

Cette pièce n'est pas seulement le lieu géométrique de toute population vivante en milieu concentrationnaire, bidonville ou favela. C'est aussi l'Espagne vingt-cinq ans après Guernica. Guernica est reconstruit, certes, mais c'est un cimetière. On croit que c'est riche, que c'est neuf, que c'est beau, mais c'est fait pour des animaux, pas pour des hommes. Le Cimetière, c'est la trace du souvenir, le H.L.M. bombardé, neuf mais en ruine, dans un lieu où il est impossible de reconstruire.<sup>1</sup>

Arrabal is trying to situate his work in a wider tradition, perhaps to duplicate Picasso's achievement of making Guernica a symbol of man's hostility and destructiveness. This appears to be the case with Concert dans un oeuf (a title borrowed from a painting by Bosch) which dates from 1958, the end of the first period and a time when Arrabal was emerging from his isolated existence. The private world is fragmented by the inclusion of projections taken from the work of Brueghel and Bosch and of references to Cervantes.

Brueghel's Jeux d'enfants is a visual counterpart to Arrabal's world peopled by characters who are simultaneously adult in their eroticism and childlike in their cruelty. Like Arrabal's play, the painting is dominated by the circular form; a large hoop occupies a central position in the foreground while barrels and drums are all over the canvas. Indeed, the hoop is picked up by Arrabal for the play; it is one of the playthings with which the two licentious girl-women tempt Filtos. Another Brueghel projection, Carême, is represented in the play by the juxtaposition of the profligacy of the two temptresses and the religion of the Old Woman.

Bosch's Jardin des délices (to be used as a title by Arrabal in 1967) provides similar points of reference. If Filtos represents innocence surrounded by a parade of mankind's excesses, especially sexual, then the play reflects the central image of the painter's garden. The games of the two girl-women which become more erotic parallel the increasing carnal passion and excitement of Bosch's central panel. Equally, Filtos's relationship with the women follows an increasingly physical course:

FILTOS: La dernière ne voulait pas danser et j'ai eu beau lui dire qu'elle devait le faire pour moi, voilà pourquoi je lui ai demandé d'apporter un fouet et un tambourin, elle ne voulait pas et j'ai dû la battre, et elle ne disait rien et elle me baisait les pieds. (IV:201)

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<sup>1</sup>Arrabal cited by Guy Dumur, Gazette de Lausanne, 30 December 1967, p. 15.

Despite the cultural references, the images still spring from Arrabal's own imagination and experience. The marriage of the autobiographical and the cultural is captured in the image of the boat, suggestive of Bosch's painting of Hell, aground on the sun-lit beach, the opening description of Baal Babylone.

Concert dans un oeuf is also a new departure in its attention to a formal alternating structure. Its very formality implies an attempt at the conscious arrangement of experience rather than a spontaneous description of it. As such, it suggests a gradual mastery of the author over his experience, an emergence from the dictates of his fantasies. Concert dans un oeuf was written at the same time as the ending of La Bicyclette du condamné.<sup>1</sup> The ascension of the balloons in the latter would seem to confirm the germination of a more positive attitude in the author, a liberation from the nightmares of persecution. This positive attitude characterizes the plays of the second period and coincides with a period of reflection on experience. As early as 1956, in Cérémonie pour un Noir assassiné, Arrabal appears to be commenting on the position of the dramatist, and not merely writing down his personal obsessions. It is interesting to note that the title refers to a theatrical form that was to become central to his second period writing, ceremony.

### (iii) The 'Panique' Ceremonies, 1958-1967

In 1967, Arrabal declared that it was the ceremonial quality of his writing that distinguished him from other modern authors: "On a dit que j'étais un auteur d'avant-garde. Rien de plus faux: je fais du théâtre rituel. En cela je reviens à la genèse. La première et la seule voie du théâtre, c'est la cérémonie."<sup>2</sup> Arrabal never states clearly his definitions of ritual and ceremonial theatre. However, the plays of this period do possess a ritual quality in that they deal broadly with the themes of initiation and of self-knowledge: in La Communion solennelle the young girl is simultaneously instructed by the mother in the ways of good housekeeping and initiated into the dark secrets of erotic sensibility revealed in puberty; Giafar in Le Couronnement

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<sup>1</sup>Whitton, "Critical Edition of the Bicyclette," pp. 253-68.

<sup>2</sup>Arrabal cited by Varenne, Le Figaro, 13 December 1967.

is at first bemused by the strange events in the attic, only later to experience himself the initiatory ordeal he has witnessed; Le Grand Cérémonial presents a hero, Cavanosa, escaping both from an attic and morbid fantasies. Of these plays, Le Grand Cérémonial indeed affords a clear example of the appearance of ritual structures in Arrabal's plays. Analysis reveals that the action develops along the lines of the generalized description of initiatory ceremonies given in Mircea Eliade's Rites and Symbols of Initiation.

The play is divided into a prologue and two acts. The action of the prologue takes place near a park bench, and then it moves into Cavanosa's room. Both areas are characterized by darkness. In general outline, these settings correspond to the circular ring of earth and the sacred enclosure which serve the two phases of the tribal initiatory ordeal.<sup>1</sup>

The park bench of the prologue suggests spatially a pre-initiatory state. Its characteristics are those of the child who has not yet passed into manhood, who has not yet been instructed in the secrets of existence. Cavanosa's world is one of reverie, the reverie of a child who can invent people and places and play in isolation from the outside world:

CAVANOSA: Je mens et je ne mens pas. A vrai dire, j'ai une "vie intérieure" très agitée. Et je m'imagine que je soutiens une conversation avec une femme et je vis la scène. Ce n'est qu'un personnage fictif à qui j'ai tenu des propos tout aussi chimériques.<sup>2</sup>

He evades demands; he fails to answer Sil's questions about his names; he weaves a web of lies and half-truths concerning the murder of his mother and his attempts to befriend older women in church. However, unlike a child, Cavanosa is conscious of his imaginings. He is in limbo between infancy and adulthood. His refusal to use a name underlines his unstable identity. (In initiation rites initiands do not use names as they prepare for the ceremony which marks the emergence of a new personality.) The lover describes Cavanosa as "pas très équilibré" (III:46). Cavanosa for his own part is very aware of his fragility in this state. He shrinks from the threat of physical contact:

<sup>1</sup>Mircea Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Fernando Arrabal, Le Grand Cérémonial in Théâtre III, p. 32.

the kiss that Sil offers him is violently rejected; her striptease is stopped by him; the final attempt at an embrace is met with uncontrolled rage:

SIL: Je vous en prie . . .

(Elle le caresse.)

(Immédiatement, Cavanosa se redresse, pris d'une crise de folie furieuse.)

(Il lui donne un violent coup de pied qui la jette à terre.)

CAVANOSA: Comment? Oser me toucher, moi?

(Cris de fureur démente.)

(Il va vers elle qui est étendue sur le sol.)

(Il la piétine "sauvagement" tout en disant:

CAVANOSA: Putain! Trainée! Roulure! Tiens, tiens! (III:53)

This event breaks the balance of his world; it takes him beyond his experience. The umbilical cord that has tied him to his mother and his childhood world is momentarily broken and he is stunned:

(Cavanosa fait de grands efforts pour parler. Elle est pleine d'impatience et ne dit rien, attendant qu'il parle.

Enfin, il consent à dire "comme s'il revenait d'un autre monde":

CAVANOSA: Pourquoi partez-vous? (III:55)

The secrets from which Cavanosa is excluded are not social (as in the case of true ritual) but sexual. Cavanosa is enclosed in a mother-dominated world from which he wishes to escape (hence his return to the park each night), but from which he is afraid to escape. He realizes the threat presented by Sil: "Vous êtes en train de me faire perdre ma virginité, vous m'obligez à changer de personnalité" (III:40). The challenge of Sil can only be withstood if Cavanosa can incorporate their confrontation into his world of dreams. Rather than Cavanosa's liberation, the early action describes Sil's transformation into yet another chimera:

CAVANOSA, ton de sincérité: Je n'aurai plus à imaginer les conversations que j'aurais pu avoir avec une femme. Je pourrai penser et repenser à celle que j'ai eue cette nuit, avec vous, comme si au-dessous des rouges horizons la peine se plissait dans la broche et dans l'outrage. (III:39)

The closed world of Cavanosa does not open up but is reaffirmed by its sole occupant: "Je passe ma vie dans ma chambre et dans ce parc. Il vous faut renoncer à me faire quitter mon univers. Je ne pourrai pas en sortir" (III:51). Sil will serve his fantasies, not dissipate them. With some enthusiasm, Cavanosa elaborates a ceremony in which she can take part for his delectation: "A présent, j'ai d'autres délires qui grimpent, s'échappent, montent, volent au-dessus de mes rêveries, mi-temps, mi-chemin: je pense intensément à une



femme que je torturerais" (III:40).

A change in behaviour was suggested by his sudden moment of awareness, "jusqu'ici j'ai rêvé ma vie," but this insight is turned back on itself to become a desire for a richer dream life: "Laissez-moi rêver, croire que tout ce qui m'arrive est vrai" (III:55). Nevertheless, a change is detectable; the power of the mother is weakening. The action of the prologue takes place inside the aural parentheses, as it were, of Cavanosa's cries of "maman, maman" and their social counterpart, the police sirens. However, if the first scene is encased by these sounds, the second only ends with them and, significantly, the third is completed without their awesome repetition. The prologue serves only as a preparation for change: Cavanosa experiences a brief moment of transcendence; his present condition is described, and the power from which he is trying to escape, the mother figure, is outlined.

In primitive rituals of initiation the mother figure is central since it is separation from the mother that directly precedes the initiation ceremonies. The initiand breaks with his former state of dependence in order to face the revelation of the godhead. The idea of death and spiritual rebirth into adulthood is symbolically enacted by the initiand being swallowed up and regurgitated, for instance, "by darkness, cosmic night, by the telluric womb, the hut, the belly of a monster."<sup>1</sup> The clearest example of such an enactment in Arrabal's theatre comes in the later Une Tortue nommée Dostoïevsky in which Malik is swallowed by a giant tortoise, and then travels back through her past life to emerge as a new personality. This stage of the ritual sees the locus move from the circle to the enclosed secret space.

The comparison of ritual and Le Grand Cérémonial poses certain difficulties which arise from the nature of the mother figure. In Arrabal's early experience and work, the mother figure was the hub of his universe, the godhead. Therefore, this play has a mother figure who is simultaneously the mother from whom the initiand must break loose, but also the godhead whose secrets have to be learned. Independence has to result from the double action of

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<sup>1</sup>Eliade, Rites and Symbols, p. xiv.

confrontation with the repressive force and comprehension of it. It is this journey that the hero of Fêtes et rites de la confusion travels through the belly of the giant female status.<sup>1</sup>

In Le Grand Cérémonial the first act presents Cavanosa returned to his small room, "ce repaire de fous," over which the mother figure holds sway (III:117). The first sequence of this act defines the complex nature of the mother figure and Cavanosa's attitude towards her. The mother emerges as the mother of Baal Babylone and Les Deux Bourreaux, quick to torture in her possessiveness:

CAVANOSA: Regarde. Tu m'as mordu. Tu m'as fait saigner. Tu ne voulais pas m'embrasser, mais seulement me faire mal.

LA MERE: Je te mets du sel et du vinaigre? (III:77)

Her devotion knows no bounds and encompasses the child leaving him no freedom:

LA MERE, sur un autre ton, avec douceur: Mon pauvre chéri! Toujours à chercher au dehors ce que tu as chez toi! Une mère est une martyre, elle ne vit que pour son fils. Laisse-moi aimer et aime-moi. Toi et moi, nous pouvons former le couple le plus heureux du monde. Moi, je te soigne, je te nourris, je fais tout. . . . Mon chéri, viens ici. Assieds-toi sur moi comme lorsque tu étais gentil. Allons, ne sois pas rancunier. Laisse-moi te bercer, te gâter. (III:67-68)

The child is enveloped by the mother's words and finally physically absorbed, a maternal Charybdis. Indeed, the mother is invested with certain godlike qualities. She is associated with the institution of the Church, but she also has the more primitive aura of one of the Fates shrouded in darkness and mystery dealing out her cards on the circular table. The mother is the weight of the past. She tries to debilitate Cavanosa by entangling him in a series of memories:

LA MERE: Tu te souviens comme nous étions heureux, jadis? Tu étais un enfant docile et je t'emmenais au parc, le soir, lorsque tous les autres enfants étaient partis, pour qu'ils ne te lancent pas des injures. Et tu trottais. T'en souviens-tu? (III:60-61)

The association of the mother with the past is consistent both with Arrabal's experience and the practice of ancient ritual. Indeed, the efficacy of the rite of passage according to Eliade is in that "it participates in the completeness of the sacred primordial Time."<sup>2</sup> This act gives meaning to the

<sup>1</sup>Arrabal, Fêtes et rites de la confusion (Paris: Loesfeld, 1967), pp. 183-5.

<sup>2</sup>Eliade, Rites and Symbols, p. 6.

present; it reinvigorates the life of the community. The ritual passes beyond historical time into a sacred cosmos so that the past is incorporated into the present. Arrabal's play, on the other hand, shows the rejection of the past for a liberated future. It is precisely the limitations of the past from which Cavanosa is striving to free himself.

The process of liberation is not easy. It is exacting both temporally and physically. The mother hints that the process started when she first let her son go to school, thus relinquishing some control over him. Later, Cavanosa began to fill his room with mannequins, and these grew more powerful and absorbing to the exclusion of the mother:

LA MERE: Tout a commencé, crois-moi, avec les poupées. Je n'aurais jamais dû accepter. Au début, il t'a fallu des poupées normales, puis, chaque fois, plus grandes, toujours plus grandes, jusqu'à ce qu'elles atteignent la taille d'une femme. Tu n'acceptais que celles-là. Fini le tour du monde dans une voiture d'enfant! Je suis donc trop vieille? (III:61-62)

The action of the play covers the period when the dolls are being replaced by human beings. The critical period that this represents is given direct expression in the tensions between mother and son.

LA MERE: Maintenant, tu ne sors plus jamais avec moi, le soir.

CAVANOSA: Ce n'est plus pareil.

LA MERE: Tu es déjà "un homme", n'est-ce pas?

CAVANOSA: Je ne suis plus un petit garçon. (III:61)

It is implied that while Cavanosa has developed from infancy, as yet he is not fully adult. His progress can be gauged by the continuing pervasiveness of the mother's influence. It is her attitude towards women that Cavanosa cites to Sil.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the impression is that Sil and the dolls are no more than substitutes for the mother, but substitutes that Cavanosa can dominate. For example, the wheelchair was the vehicle promised to the mother by the infant Cavanosa, but he offers the same vehicle to Sil. The fact that something has changed is emphasized by Cavanosa's repeated statements: "ce n'est plus pareil," "ce n'est plus possible," "ce n'était pas pareil," and "maintenant, c'est autre chose" (III:61; 62; 64; and 69). These crackle throughout the dialogue, the aftershocks of a thudding denial of the mother and her world:

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<sup>1</sup>Compare Arrabal, Théâtre III, p. 30 and p. 79.

CAVANOSA: Oui, maman, et je sais que je ne retrouverai jamais plus cet amour. Tu vois que je suis sincère. Mais je tiens aussi à te dire que je ne veux plus vivre avec toi. Je rêve de voyager, de partir . . . (III:82)

The altercations between mother and son, god and neophyte, are marked by rapidly altering moods. Attraction is countered by repulsion. The mother beseeches the son to return to her lap; Cavanosa succumbs only to restate his desire for independence. He withstands her most prolonged verbal attacks which draw on his debt to her for her sacrifices, his deformity and his likeness to his father. Her vampire teeth and clawing hands are not enough to stop his pursuit of liberation (III:70-73; and 75-77).

At the outset the mother explained her reason for asking so many questions: "Parce que je sais que, ce soir, tu veux me tuer" (III:61). During the course of the act her death is announced symbolically; she leaves the room.

(La mère se dirige vers la porte.)

LA MERE: Adieu, mon chéri, sois très heureux. Je vais me coucher. Je ne veux pas être le témoin de ta perte. (III:85-86)

Her defeat is secure from this point, but she tries constantly to reassert her lost authority. In effect, Sil's entry into his domain does not signify an immediate victory, an immediate rebirth. Sil is nothing more than a mother substitute, an implement through which Cavanosa can vent his feelings of frustration, and also rediscover the idyllic love of infancy. The transformation of Sil into a Christ figure could be the son's way of attacking his mother's ideology.<sup>1</sup>

Despite Cavanosa's efforts, the ceremony is not effective. Sil is not a puppet, and she resists total assimilation into the mother figure:

SIL: Je peux sortir de la voiture?  
CAVANOSA: Vous êtes mal.  
SIL: Je suis un peu à l'étroit.  
CAVANOSA, las: Sortez. (III:93)

From this moment on, Cavanosa loses all interest in the ceremony. It is Sil's drive for self-humiliation and self-victimization that motivates the action. She shows the neophyte's enthusiasm for the initiatory ordeal. If the action

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<sup>1</sup>For the identification of Sil with the mother see Arrabal, Théâtre III p. 55 and p. 96 as well as p. 69 and p. 91.

of the play for Cavanosa represents a process of liberation, for Sil it appears to be a descent into serfdom:

L'AMANT: Mais cet homme est fou! Comment le laisses-tu dire ces choses?  
 SIL: Il ne dit que la vérité. Je suis son esclave.  
 CAVANOSA, irrité: Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire, pouffiassé? Vous n'êtes pas mon esclave. (III:44)

This early exchange reveals the incompatibility of Sil and Cavanosa. He is striving to go beyond relationships of dominance and subjection to find harmonious, mutual relationships. However, domination still pervades his room. As the ceremony breaks down, the sirens of the forces of repression are heard. Sil takes command and forcefully pursues her inverted Calvary. Her demands for "une dernière humiliation" are physically fulfilled (III:58):

SIL: Laissez-moi baiser les mains qui vont me tuer.  
 (Elle lui baise les mains. Il les pose.)  
 SIL: Serrez, faites-moi mal. Plus fort, faites-moi mal. (Elle cris.)  
 Oui, oui, plus fort, plus fort. Tuez-moi, tuez-moi, tuez-moi.  
 (III:102)

A loud knock at the door interrupts the murder and produces Cavanosa's defensive cries for his mother. Although progress has been made, liberation is not yet at hand.

Eliade explains that the resurrection of the initiand has to be preceded by ritual death. This death is often represented by a return to chaos, a pre-creation state. The knock at the door precipitates a confusion of roles and a regression in Cavanosa's behaviour. The entry of the lover sends him into another world: "Cavanosa se trouve dans la situation de quelqu'un qui serait en marge de tout. Il rêve à demi. Il s'humilie et ne veut pas prendre part à une 'conversation de société'. Il semble las" (III:104). Just as Genet's maids are exhausted by their ceremony, so Cavanosa lapses into a comatose state. The characters of the mother and Sil become entwined; the voice of the mother is interpreted by Cavanosa as that of "l'une quelconque de mes maîtresses" (III:105). Similarly, Sil provides the answers to questions directed at the mother:

CAVANOSA: Maman, tu me laisses toujours seul.  
 SIL: Vous n'êtes pas seul. (III:106)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also Arrabal, Théâtre III, p. 108.

The room has become a place of mysterious transformations unsuitable for the uninitiated. The lover complains: "J'étouffe dans votre monde, j'étouffe!" (III:107). It repels the gaze of the outside world. Sil tries to explain the ceremony to her lover but all the signs have disappeared, the body of the previous victim, the sandals and even the wheelchair.

Cavanosa's behaviour becomes infantile. He offers himself as a donkey to the lover and tries to perform headstands, an exercise that is consistent with the high centre of balance in pre-pubescent youth. This relapse into childish pranks parallels Eliade's description of the significance of the cabin: "The initiatory cabin represents not only the belly of the devouring monster but also the womb. The novice's death signifies a return to the embryonic state."<sup>1</sup> It is equally significant that Cavanosa's headstand prompts the following exchange:

L'AMANT: Vois comme il est grotesque.  
 VOIX DE LA MERE: Mon chéri, ne te laisse pas insulter.  
 SIL: Il est admirable.  
 L'AMANT: Il est fou.  
 SIL: Il est libre. (III:107-8)

From the regressive acts of childhood springs the liberation of the self. Evidence of Cavanosa's impending freedom is represented in his balking of the lover who had previously demanded an obsequious respect. Cavanosa's attempt to analyse his dream is another step forward. In Le Labyrinthe, dream forms the basis of the action but without explanation. In Le Grand Cérémonial, the mechanism of dream is to receive attention suggesting reflection on sub-conscious experience:

L'AMANT: Les rêves sont toujours incompréhensibles. L'imagination de chacun vagabonde.  
 CAVANOSA: Mais, dans ce cas, ce n'est pas la mienne qui vagabonde. Je rêve que les gens rient et savent que je vais me tuer. Mais moi, j'ignore pourquoi. Je ne l'apprends qu'à la fin du rêve. Et par conséquent ceux qui riaient n'étaient pas une création de mon esprit puisqu'ils connaissaient quelque chose que je n'ai deviné que plus tard! (III:112)

Liberation means that when the mother does reappear, she readily accepts her new position in relation to her son: "Ne m'embrasse pas, mon chéri. Je ne

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<sup>1</sup>Eliade, Rites and Symbols, p. 36.

suis rien ni personne" (III:114). The mother and her substitute, Sil, are discarded together. The final moment of separation is underscored by a mock marriage service for Cavanosa and one of the dolls. The wedding marks the social and spiritual independence of the son from his mother.

The first act ends on an equivocal note; is Cavanosa still enamoured of his dolls? The rest of the action reveals that he has passed through his initiation. Ultimately he accepts, albeit with hesitation, the epithet of man:

LYS: Parce que c'est la première fois que je parle à un homme.

CAVANOSA: C'est moi "l'homme"?

LYS: Vous n'êtes pas une femme, n'est-ce pas?

CAVANOSA: Vous ne croyez pas que cela suffit? (III:130)

The scenes with Lys recall those with Sil at the beginning of the play. However, they are not an example of the eternal return, the impasse of earlier plays. Lys does not close the circle of the action, but rather points to a future liberation in the image of the ascension of a balloon:

LYS: Il était une fois une petite fille qui était toujours enfermée chez elle et sa mère, pour qu'elle ne s'échappe pas la nuit, l'attachait au mur avec une chaîne. Une nuit, la fille s'évade, elle va dans un parc et rencontre un homme. Ils prennent place tous les deux dans un ballon vert, et ils montent vers le soleil, comme s'ils étaient une forêt sur la forêt. (III:134)

Lys and Cavanosa live out this dream. Their relationship is based on a mutual respect, not domination. Whereas Sil was attracted by Cavanosa's deformity, Lys does not recognize it. They depart in the wheelchair, not unlike Fando and Lis, but yet they will not be forced to return to their point of departure. The final image is of the mother left alone; the ties with which she bound her son to her have been torn asunder.

Despite the structural similarities of Arrabal's play and initiatory rituals, it needs to be reaffirmed that Arrabal's use of ritual remains purely formal. The ritual described in Le Grand Cérémonial differs in major areas from traditional ritual. For example, ritual has a primary function of social conservatism; it effects a reintegration of the community with its mythical past. In Le Grand Cérémonial, the past is historical. Cavanosa's effort is aimed at breaking with this past. As such, the ritual in Arrabal's play assumes a revolutionary, not a conservative note: "Je crois que notre vie normale,

naturelle, est très éloignée du rite. Donc très éloignée de la révolte. La vie que nous menons habituellement est artificielle."<sup>1</sup> Arrabal's rituals allow the reintegration of instinct and action which has been frustrated in the past. The ascending balloon enclosing the man and woman described by Lys is the symbol of this new unity. It recurs throughout the plays of the second period. Cavanosa himself reflects this new spirit of freedom. In Guernica and La Bicyclette du condamné, the only previous plays in which this positive symbolism occurs, the balloons come as almost dei ex machina. In Le Grand Cérémonial Cavanosa works his own way to freedom. In so doing, he is also describing another area of disparity between his initiation and traditional initiation. Eliade explains that "initiation introduces the candidate into the human community and the world of spiritual and cultural values."<sup>2</sup> In effect, initiation is a learning process which integrates the individual into the life of the community under the direction of the tribal elders. Cavanosa's ritual is a solitary ordeal; it is he alone who discovers his road to liberation. Furthermore, he is more concerned with personal fulfillment than social integration.

Le Grand Cérémonial is a new departure in its use of ritual structures and its expression of freedom. It is also novel in its treatment of the basic material. As always with Arrabal, the material derives from his own experience. There are three interesting echoes in the play of a 1960 interview with Anne Morrissett. The atmosphere of many of the dialogues with Sil is close to that of the cut and thrust of that interview. In both places Arrabal-Cavanosa is quick to introduce references to his reproductive organs. Similarly, in the interview he states that it was the practice of his mother to bind him to his bed, and this position is now symbolic of love. In the play one reads:

CAVANOSA: Si quelqu'un vous avait aimée avec l'intensité de l'eau, du sable et de l'heure profonde, il vous aurait attachée aux barreaux d'un lit et il vous aurait fouettée jusqu'à ce que votre corps ne fût plus qu'une plaie. (III:40)

More significantly still is the common concern of Arrabal and Cavanosa about

<sup>1</sup>Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup>Eliade, Rites and Symbols, p. x.



their virginity. For Cavanosa, virginity is associated with the pre-initiatory state, and so the sexual act is regarded with fear as it leads to the unknown. In the interview, Arrabal expresses very similar fears.

ARRABAL: My friend Labite is Lesbian, but she also sleeps with men.

That's not good.

INTERVIEWER: Does it make you jealous?

ARRABAL: No, I am afraid I will lose my virginity! If I am not a virgin my life as a poet is finished.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe your life as a child would be finished. Another kind of poet might begin.

ARRABAL: You are wise, but you are too serious.<sup>1</sup>

The play is centred, like this exchange, on the problem of growing up. It also treats many of the themes of the early period: the cruelty of love, eroticism and violence, the mother. It uses the same images of wheelchairs and chains, and expresses the same macabre fascination with death. Nevertheless, it shares with Cérémonie pour un Noir assassiné a certain distance in its treatment. The seriousness, if naive, of the early period has given way to a complex mixture of styles ranging from the mysteries of the ritual to the blatant parody of the lover. But, the play is marred by excess in its treatment, perhaps the major weakness. And yet, this excessive style reveals that Arrabal is now able to stand back from his experience in order to begin his mastery of it. The heavy melodrama of Sil's arrival by a secret stairway recalls Hernani's scandalous entry of 1829. Indeed, the play has certain aspects of black romanticism: the mother's vampire kiss and the overt reference in the first edition to Quasimodo.<sup>2</sup>

Le Grand Cérémonial represents a transitional phase; still autobiographical in inspiration, it employs new techniques. If the production of the early plays cause Arrabal pain because of their proximity to his own experience, this play presents a more generalized experience: "Maintenant, je voudrais faire une petite défense du Grand Cérémonial. C'est une pièce qui m'attendrit

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Morrissett, "Dialogue with Arrabal," Evergreen Review, vol. 4, no. 15 (November-December 1960), pp. 74-75.

<sup>2</sup> Fernando Arrabal, Le Grand Cérémonial in Théâtre III (Paris: Julliard, 1965), p. 196. The re-edition saw the exclusion of this reference; the broadening of Arrabal's theatre meant that precise historico-cultural moments should be omitted.

beaucoup. . . . Pour moi, Cavanosa est un être qui souffre comme nous souffrons tous."<sup>1</sup>

The threefold change--structural, thematic and creative--represents a major re-orientation of Arrabal's theatre, the reasons for which can be related to Arrabal's biography. Le Grand Cérémonial dates from 1963; it is the period after Arrabal's recovery from illness, his first contract with Julliard, and the first performances. All these factors could explain the growing confidence on the part of the author. More importantly still, it coincides with his collaboration with other artists of similar outlook and temperament. This collaboration did not threaten the individual's identity as was the case with Breton's surrealist movement, but rather encouraged the development of each artist's own style and work:

Nous avons pensé que si notre manière de concevoir l'art offrait certains points communs elle n'avait rien à voir avec les écoles du jour, il fallait lui donner un autre nom. C'est le seul mouvement littéraire qui n'a pour définition que celle-ci: l'ensemble de toutes les oeuvres de ceux qui se disent paniques, additionnées les unes aux autres.<sup>2</sup>

The panique movement was founded by Arrabal, the Mexican director Alexandro Jodorowsky, and the graphic artist Roland Topor. In a letter dated 13 April 1962 to José Monleon, Arrabal states that the movement came into being some six months before.<sup>3</sup> The meeting place was the Café de la Paix in Paris. The epithet panique was chosen no doubt because of its ambiguity. Arrabal frequently explained that panique derives from "pan" meaning all and also from the Greek god Pan who was originally a clown figure, but later became a source of fear.<sup>4</sup> However, the definition given by the panicists in their writings is "une 'manière d'être' régie par la confusion, l'humour, la terreur, le hasard et l'euphorie."<sup>5</sup> This is further refined by Arrabal in his dialogues

<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Fernando Arrabal, Teatro, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Taurus, 1968), p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Arrabal to Bouyer, "Entretien," p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> Fernando Arrabal, "L'Homme panique," in Le Panique, ed. Arrabal (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1973), p. 52.

with Schifres: "Quand nous avons fondé le mouvement panique autour de l'idée de confusion, nous avons songé à définir une morale au pluriel."<sup>1</sup> The movement was not simply artistic, but reflected an outlook on life. Jodorowsky was probably the most active in pursuing this life style:

The panicist is pro-everything. He's sadist and masochist at the same time he's anti-sadist and anti-masochist. Counsel: Stop imposing formalities. Define no more. There are no solutions because there are no problems. All is found in all.<sup>2</sup>

By living all the possibilities, the panicist celebrates life in all its confusion. He accepts what he finds, but often not without a sardonic smile, a quality that might well have appealed to Arrabal at this period of his life:

J'ai trouvé mon équilibre: il me faut à tout prix éviter la folie et, pourtant, pratiquer quelques pseudo-manières de folie. Je cultive l'ironie de moi-même. Je ris de moi, je me veux grotesque en face d'un monde organisé.<sup>3</sup>

Panique provided a way out of morbid self-contemplation. As a pseudo-philosophy, it emphasized not solitude but communal rejoicing. In a rather trite way, Jodorowsky sees it as the successor to existentialism: "Avant le panique, la pensée produisait l'ANGOISSE et conduisait à la SOLITUDE. En échange, le panique produit l'EUPHORIE et conduit à la FETE COLLECTIVE."<sup>4</sup> He opposes the panicist to the auguste, someone like the lover in Le Grand Cérémonial. The auguste obeys the rules of society without question and lives in a linear fashion, insensitive to the possibilities around him. The way to avoid this myopic condition is through euphorie panique: "L'homme panique, . . . sachant qu'il est né dans une grande cocotte en papier appelée civilisation, dans un monde aux normes dictées par des augustes, dans des familles de 'personnages', tente de se libérer de cette éducation conditionnée et cherche l'euphorie comme un moyen de sortir de la prison où l'ont enfermé

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<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Jodorowsky to Sergio Guzik, "A Mass Changes Me More, an Interview with Alexandro Jodorowsky," The Drama Review, vol. 14, no. 2 (Winter 1970), p.76.

<sup>3</sup> Arrabal cited by Alain Schifres, Preface to Théâtre I, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Alexandro Jodorowsky, "Vers l'éphémère panique ou sortir le théâtre du théâtre," in Le Panique, ed. Arrabal, p. 79.

ses parents."<sup>1</sup>

A vague concept of freedom pervades the panique philosophy. Freedom is the liberation of the total self, the rejection of any dualistic interpretation of human nature:

Je suis absolument convaincu qu'il n'existe pas deux mondes séparés, l'un réel et l'autre imaginaire. C'est une vision de schizophrène, digne du siècle.

Au contraire les deux univers se complètent en s'interpénétrant et même finissent par se rencontrer complètement.<sup>2</sup>

Panique freedom is also an ability to change one's view or to hold contrary views at the same time. As such, panique philosophy is always ambivalent and revels in a lack of definition:

Tout le monde peut se dire panique, se proclamer créateur du mouvement, écrire "la" théorie panique.  
Chacun peut affirmer qu'il fut le premier à avoir l'idée de panique, à en inventer le nom,  
à créer une académie panique  
ou à se nommer président du mouvement.<sup>3</sup>

In its all-embracing nature, the panique movement resembles Tzara's definitions of Dada earlier in the century. Like Dada, the movement avoided the threat of institutionalization: "Nous ne voulions pas de hiérarchie, pas de pape, pas d'exclusion. Tout le monde peut être Panique ou ne plus l'être. Nous ne voulions pas une morale mais toutes les morales."<sup>4</sup> The memory of repressive regimes is too vivid for Arrabal to accept any form of organization that is not founded on this sort of freedom:

—Morales au pluriel: Rejet d'une morale unique, de la pureté et autres formules policières qui, à la longue, ont abouti à la condamnation (par exemple à l'extermination lorsqu'il s'agit d'une morale politique) de celui qui ne les pratiquait pas.<sup>5</sup>

In a lecture given in 1963, Arrabal attempted to describe the philosophical system of panique based on the concepts of confusion, chance and

<sup>1</sup> Alexandro Jodorowsky, "Panique et poulet rôti," in Le Panique, ed. Arrabal, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> Arrabal, "L'Homme panique," p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Arrabal cited by Colette Godard, "Comment peut-on être panique," Le Monde, 29 June 1973, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Arrabal, "L'Homme panique," p. 51.

memory.<sup>1</sup> The details of this lecture are abstruse and do little to elucidate the meaning of panique. Indeed, the theory of panique has little direct influence on Arrabal's theatre. The single exception is the 1964 play, Le Couronnement in which one finds overt references to the lecture:

SYLDA: Vous devez imaginer, par exemple, dans une première hypothèse, que l'avenir crée le monde, que l'avenir est le fruit du hasard, ainsi vous découvrez les lois qui régissent le hasard. Grâce à les lois, en vous appuyant sur la confusion, vous jetez les bases d'un système.<sup>2</sup>

However, Arrabal has since rejected the play as being too influenced by the theory and has even observed that the whole idea of the philosophical system based on panique was no more than a joke.<sup>3</sup> The importance of this joke is Arrabal's attempt at an analysis of a world view. He tried to go beyond the immediate experience in order to examine causes and forces.

The second, more strictly theatrical, influence on Arrabal at that time was an influx of young directors into Paris under the auspices of the Université du Théâtre des Nations. Many of these directors came from South America—Victor Garcia, Jorge Lavelli, Alexandro Jodorowsky, Alberto Rody, and Ramon Lamede—and others like Jérôme Savary had spent periods in that subcontinent. They mixed and exchanged ideas with young French directors of the new wave like Jean-Marie Patte. Clearly heterogeneous in origin and in style, these directors all revealed a common interest in the ceremonial possibilities of theatrical production. As early as 1963 the Peruvian Rafael Rodriguez had stunned the experimental theatrical world with a wildly provocative production of Jean Rotrou's baroque drama, Saint Genest. The mixture of fantasy, violence and anarchy prompted the theatre director to close down the production. Patte introduced Artaud's Jet de sang into the debate emphasizing the interest shown

<sup>1</sup>The lecture was delivered in Spanish at the University of Sydney in August, 1963. The Spanish text entitled "El Hombre pánico," is printed in Indice (Madrid), vol. 21, no. 205 (1966), pp. 20-22. A French translation appears in Le Panique, ed. Arrabal, pp. 37-53.

<sup>2</sup>Fernando Arrabal, [Le Couronnement] Le Lai de Barabbas in Théâtre IV (Paris: Bourgois, 1969), p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>See Schifres, Entretiens, p. 98; and Amando C. Isasi Angulo, "Diálogo con Fernando Arrabal," in Diálogos del teatro español de la postguerra (Madrid: Ayuso, 1974), p. 227.

by these directors in Artaud's use of a spatial and not purely verbal poetry. All the directors manifested a predilection for involving the audience in a totally imaginary theatrical universe. The world of the stage invaded the auditorium through a complex collage of styles derived from the diverse cultural heritages. Very often the theatrical space was filled with violence created at the expense of the text.<sup>1</sup>

Arrabal's connections with these directors developed throughout the post-1963 period: Garcia produced Le Cimetière des voitures (Dijon, 1966; Paris, 1968) and The Architect and Emperor of Assyria (London, 1971); Lavelli directed two short Arrabal plays under the title La Princesse et la communiant (Paris, 1966) and created L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie (Paris, 1967); Savary became famous following his production of Le Labyrinthe (Paris, 1967). Arrabal pays homage to these directors in his essay, "Le Théâtre comme cérémonie 'panique'":

Le jeune théâtre français compte plusieurs prestigieux maîtres de cérémonies: Victor Garcia, Lavelli et Savary. Tous trois s'imposent à nous par la démesure de leur univers baroque qui illumine un monde délirant, plein d'eau claire et de médiums, un monde où les costumes, les décors et la musique et ses instruments jaillissent d'un même ventre; comme les combinaisons d'un unique kaléidoscope sauvage.<sup>2</sup>

Arrabal's admiration for these directors springs from their freedom in regard to conventional theatrical language. It is in terms of freedom that Arrabal defines his panique theatre: "L'erreur, ce serait de penser que nous faisons un théâtre nouveau, un théâtre d'avant-garde, un théâtre de l'absurde. Non, nous cherchons un théâtre infiniment libre et, j'espère, meilleur."<sup>3</sup>

Arrabal's attitude to his directors should be set in this context. The

<sup>1</sup> An example of violence achieved through stylized gestures is provided by Patte's production of Les Bonnes. See above, pp. 84-85.

<sup>2</sup> Fernando Arrabal, "Le Théâtre comme cérémonie 'panique'," in Théâtre V (Paris: Bourgois, 1967), p. 190. There is some confusion concerning this volume of plays. When originally published in 1967 by Bourgois the volume was Théâtre IV (Théâtre panique; L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie). However in 1969, there appeared another Théâtre IV (Le Lai de Barabbas; Concert dans un oeuf). A Théâtre V has since appeared, although both Gille and Whitton call the 1967 Théâtre IV, Théâtre V. For consistency, Théâtre V in this thesis will refer to the volume containing Théâtre panique and L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie.

<sup>3</sup> Arrabal to Zand, Le Monde, 7 January 1967, p. 12.

written play becomes secondary to the performance. The performance in turn should be directed not by artistic standards but rather by the end result of the effect upon the audience. The director should produce a performance which by its reckless freedom of technique and style might generate freedom formed of self-knowledge and revelation in the spectator.

Such an outlook reveals an important progression in Arrabal's attitude to his work. In the first period, the plays were seen as private notes, not destined for performance. His attitude then did not include any consideration of performance nor audience. Statements from the second period show a concern for the techniques of performance, a knowledge of the developments in modern theatre, and a desire to influence and affect an outside audience. Arrabal, thus, emerges from his own introversion; the artist becomes a social figure: "Si la confusion de l'artiste rappelle la confusion sauvage de la nature ou de la vie, nous nous trouvons en présence du seul être sur terre qui éclaire la part la plus obscure de nous-mêmes." He has the defined role "d'illuminer la nuit, d'éclairer ces régions secrètes de nous-mêmes, de prévoir le mystère de l'avenir."<sup>1</sup>

This definition encompasses two roles for panique theatre: first, the exploration of the subconscious through euphoria; second, the understanding of the structure of human experience. These two functions produced two different forms of panique expression: the éphémère panique and théâtre panique. The former, pioneered by Jodorowsky, relates more closely to the developments in experimental theatre in the 1960s, particularly to happening. The théâtre panique is more relevant to the effect of the panique movement on Arrabal's own work.

The theory of the éphémère is based on the concept of metamorphosis and is shaped by the basic outlook on life of the panicist. Jodorowsky argues that the auguste concept of time is duration, a half-veiled desire for immortality; art for the auguste becomes the quest for an object or work that will last forever. For the panicist, time is change. He has no desire to participate in

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<sup>1</sup>Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 42; and p. 116.

eternity. Consequently the art forms that he prefers are ephemeral:

Après le Panique (ap. P), on construira et l'on détruira les objets que l'on recommencera à fabriquer différents. Et comme l'homme panique ne fait pas d'économie ni de projets, il produira une architecture instable . . . des oeuvres d'art inconservables et des théories en constante transformation, toute sa théorie se fondant sur une métamorphose continue de lui-même et des objets qui l'entourent.<sup>1</sup>

The theatre is the art form which best suits this outlook since by the very nature of a performance even a conventional play is subject to the vicissitudes of the moment. Nevertheless, whereas the conventional theatrical process works in the direction of the elimination of chance occurrences (by the rehearsal), the éphémère cultivates just such chance happenings: "L'expression panique est a posteriori et surgit des actions improvisées et non préméditées. Expression non conceptuelle mais opérationnelle que chaque personne peut interpréter d'une manière différente."<sup>2</sup>

The importance of chance, the emphasis on change and the resultant non-repeatable nature of the éphémère bring it close to the theory of happening. Like happening, much of the theory of the éphémère is elaborated in a negative fashion as a reaction against the practice of conventional theatre. For example, the theatre building itself is criticized:

Du point de vue architectural, qu'ils prennent la forme qu'ils prennent, les théâtres sont conçus pour des acteurs et des spectateurs; ils obéissent à la loi primordiale du jeu qui est de délimiter un espace, c'est-à-dire d'isoler la scène de la réalité, et imposent (principal facteur anti-panique), une conception a priori des relations de l'acteur et de l'espace.<sup>3</sup>

Neither is the concept of an actor acting a role compatible with the authentic person which it is the function of the éphémère to discover. It is the pre-existing text and fully rehearsed action which demands this type of identification with a role, and so the text, too, is to be discarded: "L'acteur panique partira, comme dans le jazz, d'un schéma organisateur et ensuite, au cours de la fête-spectacle, improvisera, en se plongeant dans ce qui est périssable."<sup>4</sup>

The spoken word becomes just one ingredient among others, almost a plastic

<sup>1</sup>Jodorowsky, "Panique et poulet rôti," pp. 57-58.

<sup>2</sup>Jodorowsky, "Vers l'éphémère panique," p. 88.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 86.



element. The set will not be there to decorate an action, but rather to be part of the action:

On substituera l'emploi de décors et de costumes par des objets actifs, aussi éphémères que l'éphémère euphorie de l'ex-acteur. Ces objets seront là en tant que matériel destructible et constructible. La manifestation panique sera le résultat d'une relation passionnée avec lesdits objets.<sup>1</sup>

Jodorowsky envisages marvelous consequences of this type of performance-spectacle: "L'euphorie de l' 'éphémère' conduit à la totalité, à la libération des forces supérieures, à l'état de grâce."<sup>2</sup>

The theory was put into practice in May 1965 at the Centre Américain in Paris. The spectacle comprised three plays: Topor's Cérémonie de la femme nouvelle, Jodorowsky's Autosacramental, and Arrabal's Les Amours impossibles. Although only Arrabal's text has appeared in published form, the very fact that texts can be listed seems to reveal a compromise with conventional theatrical practice. Furthermore, Arrabal admitted to Schifres that the spectacle was rehearsed forty times during the day.<sup>3</sup> The event received very little critical coverage; only Lucien Attoun confirmed the violent nature of the éphémère: "Jodorowsky avait su retrouver toute la violence des fantasmes de chacun, une manière d'exorcisme collectif, par telle image scénique fulgurante, géniale, même si le spectacle pâtissait de longueurs et de redites."<sup>4</sup> Arrabal himself recalls three moments that impressed him greatly during the performance. The first involved the savage beating of Jodorowsky by a girl and his unexpectedly violent reaction. The second concerned his violent response to a girl's hesitancy to strip naked as was expected; he tore off her dress ferociously. Finally Arrabal described the concluding scene:

Le spectacle s'est terminé d'une façon grandiose. Jodorowsky et une fille se tenaient embrassés tout en se versant sur le corps de l'huile, du vinaigre, du pétrole, du sirop, etc. Ils étaient dégoulinants de crasse. Pendant ce temps, on entendait une musique de noce juive, très mélodramatique.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> See Schifres, Entretiens, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Lucien Attoun, "L'Ecole argentine de Paris," Europe, no. 480 (April 1969), p. 380.

<sup>5</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 82.

These recollections reveal the desire for scandal, the predilection for perishable materials, for violent action, and the use of the chance happening. Apparently Arrabal's satisfaction sprang mainly from the surprise occasioned by unexpected events. However, he makes no reference to the effect of these on the uninformed public. Indeed, the kind of thrill that Arrabal experienced could have been experienced only by those who knew that the action was spontaneous, in short by members of the production team. Furthermore, the actions themselves seem to expose the character of the principal participant rather than to prompt any real illumination in the audience. Despite claims that the éphémère should liberate the totality of the spectator, it would appear to be a mainly actor-centred event, with the actors alone experiencing any sense of liberation.

The éphémère differs notably from the happening in the one important aspect of its attitude towards the audience. The happening, especially Lebel's work, demands that the spectator becomes actively involved working on the principle that physical action will lead to psychic liberation. This demand runs contrary to the freedom which is the corner-stone of the panique theory: "Je ne crois pas aux invitations à monter sur la scène, à allumer un feu, etc. D'ailleurs, si le public est vraiment pris, il participe de lui-même et le théâtre devient volcan et les spectateurs des éléments clairvoyants."<sup>1</sup> The éphémère should encourage this participation by its violent action on the senses thus relieving the tensions in the audience. This technique approaches the classical concept of catharsis except that vicarious experience is expected to lead to physical action rather than to expiated quiescence.

In spite of an obsession with freedom, the creation of the éphémère was not left totally to chance:

On dispose au départ d'une sorte de scénario sur lequel on travaille comme sur une pièce, mais en permettant constamment à notre inconscient de s'exprimer ainsi qu'aux parties de notre "âme" réprimées par la société. Il y a un certain nombre de lignes définies. La représentation peut être très éloignée de cette conception, car elle dépend beaucoup de la magie du moment.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-80.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 81-82.

In this approach there is a mixture of rigour and confusion, two poles central to Arrabal's world view in the 1960s. The panicist seeks his stability in the balancing of opposites. Arrabal's interests in this period combine precision and chance: chess, mathematics, and dramatic composition. It is from this combination that a joyful sense of freedom results. Arrabal describes the discipline of modern mathematics as "l'apprentissage de l'infinie liberté," and he develops this idea: "C'est ce que j'aime dans les mathématiques: elle renvoient toujours au hasard mais en donnant la possibilité d'intervenir dans le hasard. Un reste totalement libre."<sup>1</sup> Arrabal tackles the whole problem of the nature of experience from the same angle. By the acceptance of the arbitrary, experience becomes comprehensible. Arrabal compares life with a game of chess:

Pour moi, les échecs, c'est aussi et d'abord un jeu de hasard. Victoire et défaite sont extérieures à nous. Les échecs, c'est la vie même. Un combat de boxe où le plus accrocheur va gagner mais aussi le plus chanceux. On n'y échappe pas. Ce qu'on a appris est aussi très important. Hasard, ténacité, mémoire; tout comme dans la vie.<sup>2</sup>

Dramatic composition represents another opportunity for Arrabal to master the two extremes and remain free. Dramatic creation functions as a catharsis for the author, but rather than the mere expression of experience it is the method of expression that is paramount:

Mes pièces se construisent d'elles-mêmes. Tout comme lorsque je construis un problème d'échecs: je dispose mes pièces et je ne sais pas ce que cela va devenir. Et je suis irrité, fasciné. Cela se met en branle, cela m'échappe. Et je suis écoeuré, fatigué. Et soudain, c'est la lumière. Tout se met en marche. C'est fini.<sup>3</sup>

From the innumerable possibilities of development that exist potentially in the disposition of the pieces a sudden order begins to impose itself. The problem is resolved according to a seemingly inevitable plan, although there is no absolute justification for the plan. The mathematical hypothesis works in a similar fashion; the hypothesis precedes the proof. Arrabal is attracted by the possibility of applying modern mathematical theory to the problem of dramatic composition:

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 143; and p. 145.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

Imaginons que l'on construise une pièce comme un ensemble ou des ensembles qui se confondent. On peut alors établir des relations à l'intérieur d'un ensemble et entre les différents ensembles. Et alors 1 construire un monde très précis en partant d'un univers complètement fou.

He envisages the possibility of "une pièce-jeu avec pour partenaires les spectateurs"<sup>2</sup> which would be self-generating from a given point of departure through the establishment of every renewing relationship. This extreme of Arrabal's mathematical ideas produced the minute details of the abstract plays and the contrived structure of the short panique plays Une Chèvre sur un image, Dieu est-il devenu fou? and Strip-tease de la jalousie.

Arrabal's full-length plays of this period attempt to steer a middle course between rigour (mathematics) and confusion (éphémère):

J'écris donc mes pièces, comme on ordonne une cérémonie, avec la précision d'un joueur d'échecs et, en même temps je préfère une éphémère panique où le théâtre s'exprimerait par un délire sans rapport avec la technique. C'est pourquoi dans mes pièces non publiées, j'incorpore souvent des happenings, les construisant comme une série de lignes, dont chacune peut recevoir des acteurs l'intensité, le mouvement qu'ils désirent.<sup>3</sup>

The most striking example of this manner of composition in his published texts is to be found in the ceremonies and recitals of Le Couronnement. A celebration involving several actions is described: the father puts on a record to which he dances disguised as a blind man; the mother makes a paper windmill rotate while she pulls one fish after another from the bed; Kardo performs balancing tricks and rings bells on top of the table; Malderic covers himself in a sheet and pushes a wheelchair around the stage. All this activity is accompanied by loud, frenetic percussion instruments (IV:94-95).

While éphémère is opposed to mathematics, both ceremony (or ritual) and mathematics create order out of disorder. Françoise Raymond-Mun<sup>d</sup>schau explains Arrabal's attraction towards ceremonial form and mathematics in terms of his need for order. On the one hand, mathematics meets this need on the level of the discursive intelligence; the hypothesis leads to probable concrete proofs. On the other, ritual fulfills the unconscious desire for order in that the acts performed structure chaos. She concludes: "Il apparaît donc qu'à deux pôles

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> Arrabal cited by Schifres, Preface to Théâtre I, p. 16.

opposés de l'esprit, la structure mythique et rituelle de l'inconscient et la rigueur de l'hypothèse mathématique permettent une égale libération de l'artiste face à la confusion qui l'entoure et à laquelle il tente d'imposer sa marque par la création."<sup>1</sup>

The second period plays reveal a neo-baroque tendency defined as "une profusion qui cache une ordonnance très rigoureuse, une solide charpente architecturale."<sup>2</sup> For Arrabal, the ideal theatrical form is the cérémonie panique:

Je rêve d'un théâtre où humour et poésie, panique et amour ne feraient qu'un. Le rite théâtral se changerait alors en un opéra mundi comme les fantasmes de Don Quichotte, les cauchemars d'Alice, le délire de K., voire les songes humanoïdes qui hanteraient les nuits d'une machine IBM.

Mais pour atteindre ce but le spectacle doit être régi par une idée théâtrale rigoureuse, ou, s'il s'agit d'une pièce, la composition en sera parfaite, tout en reflétant le chaos et la confusion de la vie.<sup>3</sup>

Le Grand Cérémonial is a formative play; a strict structure based on rites of initiation is present below the elaborate surface action. Le Couronnement is a move toward proliferating incidents coupled with progress toward the discovery of knowledge by the hero, Giafar. The incidents have strong, surrealist overtones and sometimes appear to be borrowed directly from Cocteau: the episode of the ostrich recalls the birdie of Cocteau's camera in Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel, and the passage through the mirrors, a similar jeu de scène in Orphée.

Le Couronnement is unique in Arrabal's work due to the multiplicity of themes and dramatic devices and the rational interventions of the author. He interrupts to insert passages from his philosophy and references to the panique activity of chess and mathematics along with other games of chance (IV:88). It is Sylde's role to initiate Giafar into the secrets of the arcane world view of chance and memory. Giafar is a kind of Everyman figure, and the play assumes allegorical significance as the personification of knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond-Mundschau, Arrabal, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Arrabal, "Le Théâtre comme cérémonie 'panique'," p. 189.

suggests:

GIAFAR, effrayé: . . . mais qui êtes-vous?

SYLDA: Moi?

VOIX DE MALDERIC, comme s'il appelait quelqu'un: Con-nais-sance!  
Con-nais-sance! (IV:36)

The plot consists of Giafar's experience of events that parody the important moments of human life: birth and death; sickness and healing; sacrifice and resurrection. This allegorical treatment of the subject can be viewed in the same light as the melodramatic style of Le Grand Cérémonial. Arrabal has developed from the expression of nightmares to the controlled celebration of confusion. Giafar at first is unable to accept this situation:

GIAFAR: Depuis hier il m'arrive vraiment des aventures que je ne parviens pas à comprendre. (IV:72)

Later he becomes able to accept confusion:

GIAFAR: Alors, il faudrait supposer que nous rêvons tous et toujours!  
ARLYS: C'est une conjecture rassurante. (IV:80)

Through the ceremony he progresses to mastery of his situation. Like Cavanosa, Giafar is urged by the desire for love to take charge of his destiny and master his environment. The difference between the two heroes is that Cavanosa's freedom is gained through revolt and positive action whereas Giafar's liberation is passive depending on knowledge conferred rather than gained.

The play's weakness is its overt didacticism. While depending on a presentation of confusion, it is weighed down by verbal descriptions of confusion couched in the convoluted language of "l'homme panique." The freshness and spontaneity of the early period are lacking; they are superseded by self-consciousness:

LE PERE: Vous êtes tout excusé. Inutile de faire tant de cérémonies avec moi. Je déteste les cérémonies et leurs rites baroques, grotesques et sublimes jusqu'à la fascination et l'écoeurement. Dites, dites ce qui vous préoccupe. (IV:102)

The confusion of the play is contrived. The surrealist borrowings are coupled with superficial allegorical figures who participate in weird rituals and paranormal happenings. The play lacks the solidity of the underlying ritualistic structure of Le Grand Cérémonial and is dramatically less satisfying.

It is to the stricter organization of the earlier play that the author

returns in his most celebrated work of this period, L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie. The play, in fact, bears a resemblance to Le Grand Cérémonial on a number of levels. The universe described is that of an individual striving to free himself from the spectre of his mother, but yet desirous of the comforting nature of maternal embraces. Cavanosa's pleas, "ce n'est plus pareil," are echoed by the Emperor's complaints: "Quand j'étais petit c'était différent."<sup>1</sup> The youth invoked by the Emperor was, like Cavanosa's, dreamed and not really experienced. It is as though the Emperor is Cavanosa a few years on, dependent despite his work-experience and marriage. He yearns for freedom from the mother, but cannot accept any deep relationship from another. He shrinks back into the past at the threat of a deep commitment:

L'ARCHITECTE: Moi . . . (Sincèrement.) Je t'aime . . .  
 L'EMPEREUR, très ému, au bord des larmes: Tu te moques de moi.  
 L'ARCHITECTE: Non.  
 L'EMPEREUR, il se mouche, il pivote sur lui-même et dit, d'un ton nouveau, très emphatique: Tu ne peux imaginer: tous les matins la télévision d'Assyrie transmettait mon réveil. (V:101-2)<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, he is unable to be alone; he needs the presence of another to give himself an identity:

L'EMPEREUR: Architecte! Architecte! Viens. Ne me laisse pas seul.  
 Ne me laisse pas seul. Je me sens trop seul! Architecte!  
 Archi . . . Je devrais l'appeler Archi . . . Ça fait plus chic. (V:112)

The action of the play can be summarized as the efforts of the Emperor to gain his identity through the confrontation of the mother-god. Although never present (in fact, she has been killed by the Emperor) the mother figure dominates the actions of the Emperor and his savage accomplice, the Architect. It is the cry of "maman, maman" that once more cuts through the games and fiction of the couple:

L'EMPEREUR: N'entrons pas dans les détails. Et ma fiancée . . . et  
 ma mère . . .  
 L'ARCHITECTE: Maman, maman, maman.  
 L'EMPEREUR, épouvanté: Où as-tu entendu ce mot? (V:71)

The ever-present nature of the mother is revealed by the way the Emperor

<sup>1</sup>Fernando Arrabal, L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, in Théâtre V, p. 113; and p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>A repetition occurs Arrabal, Théâtre V, p. 144.

easily relapses into the submissive role of the milksop child:

L'EMPEREUR: Tu es le fils d'une sirène et d'un centaure. L'union parfaite! (Très triste.) Maman, maman.  
(Il fait quelques pas pour la chercher sous son trône.)  
Maman, où es-tu? C'est moi, je suis seul ici, tous m'ont oublié, mais toi . . . (V:79)

The omniscient mother figure, "un grand oeil de femme," that surveys their actions is present in all the games and imaginings of the Emperor (V:146). Indeed, his descriptions of the maids that greet his awakening suggest that they perform a maternal role:

L'EMPEREUR: Mes femmes aveugles qui m'enseignaient la philosophie vêtues seulement d'une serviette de bain rose! Quelle mémoire que la mienne! Je m'en souviens comme si c'était hier. Comme elles caressaient mon divin corps, comme elles en nettoyaient les recoins les plus souillés tels que . . . A cheval! (V:73)

This description gives way to a game in which the Architect rides the Emperor whipping him. The sexual connotations of this act are clear. However, the game comes to an abrupt end when the Architect mentions Babylon:

L'EMPEREUR: Comment veux-tu que nous arrivions à . . .  
L'ARCHITECTE: A Babylone.  
L'EMPEREUR, effrayé: D'où sors-tu ce mot? Qui te l'a appris? Qui vient te voir pendant mon sommeil?  
(Il se jette sur lui et l'étrangle à demi.) (V:74)

The reaction of the Emperor here echoes his terror at the word "maman." The explanation of this phenomenon has been offered by Charles Lyons in a reference to Jung's Symbols of Transformation:

The city [Babylon] is a maternal symbol, a woman who harbours the inhabitants in herself like children. . . . Babylon is the symbol of the Terrible Mother, who leads the peoples into whoredom with her devilish temptations and makes them drunk with her wine.<sup>1</sup>

This insight helps to explain the title of the play; Babylon is the principle city of Assyria. The realm of Assyria, it becomes clear during the course of the play, is nothing more than the Emperor's imagination. The native on the island is made part of that world as he is nominated as the Architect. As architect, he gives structure to the Emperor's imagination. Through his relationship with the Architect, the Emperor will free himself from the mother figure.

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<sup>1</sup>Cited by Lyons, "Psychological Base of L'Architecte," p. 128.



The process by which this liberation is effected is similar to that used by Cavanosa: a regression through the stages of his dependence into chaos, followed by a rebirth symbolized by ingestion through the godhead. The process is twofold: a meandering soliloquy that provokes an unconscious return to the past supplemented by a conscious restructuring of that descent by a trial which leads to liberating self-knowledge.

The soliloquy is prompted by the Emperor finding himself alone. His initial reaction is to try and create a measured world of routine in order to defeat the anxiety of his solitude:

L'EMPEREUR: Ah! Enchaîné! Et enfin seul! Personne ne me contredira plus, personne ne se moquera plus de moi, personne ne sera témoin de mes faiblesses. Enchaîné! Quel bonheur! Viva Los Cadenas! Mon univers: une circonférence qui a pour rayon la longueur de la chaîne.  
(V:108)

Inside this confine, he would protect himself by busying himself with the minutiae of existence, a barricade in the face of loneliness:

L'EMPEREUR: Il faudra que je m'organise. Pas de négligence. Réveil à neuf heures du matin. Un brin de toilette. Méditation. Penser à la quadrature du cercle, peut-être écrire des sonnets. Et la matinée passera sans que je m'en aperçoive. (V:108-9)

However, he is very quickly made aware of the vacuity of this routine. As he speaks he undoes the comforting chain beseeching the Architect to return. The Emperor fashions a substitute witness for his words in his own likeness in order to maintain his sanity. This ploy encourages the Emperor to confront the nullity of his own life. He casts off the illusions of Assyria:

L'EMPEREUR: Oh! non, ma vie n'a pas d'importance. (Un temps.)  
Non, je ne me fais pas prier, mais ma vie ne présente aucun intérêt.  
(V:110)

The narrative that gushes from his lips is characterized at every turn by frustration. His life was comprised of a low administrative post that did not allow him to use the main lift and of a wife who was unfaithful in front of his eyes. His dream world offered no more happiness and satisfaction: his poetic aspirations were underscored by physical constipation; his desire to be a clockmaker ended in a doleful sob. Even the tale of the half reality of his first love terminates in tearful self-delusions (V:113; and 114). The erosion of the pillars of his life is punctuated by painful cries for the Architect:

"Ah! si l'Architect était là, nous construirions encore Babylone et ses jardins suspendus" (V:117-18).

The account of his social ineptitude is accompanied by his transformation into a hermaphrodite figure dressed in a skirt. This grotesque transformation gathers speed as another reference point proves unstable: the Emperor's attempt to prove the existence of god on the pinball machine is foiled by an old man jamming the mechanism. The experiment would have given order to confusion, but confusion triumphs. The Emperor's own state is similarly reduced to a series of confused supplications. The scene is completed with the masculinity of the Emperor transformed into the femininity of a pregnant nun. It is interesting to note that bisexuality is an attribute of the gods in many primitive religions and that the initiand sometimes undergoes an operation (subincision) in order to replicate the original androgyne of the pre-creation state.

At this point in the process, the Emperor's identity becomes multiple. He can now play two roles at once, the doctor and the female patient; his confinement is a parody of the creation according to the myth of Gaea who gave birth without copulation and of the birth of Jesus Christ. He has reached the realm of naked life-forces, a chaotic state in which the rational no longer holds sway. This is dramatically underlined by the staccato rhythm of the speech:

L'EMPEREUR: 999 points . . . Sans l'ivrogne, je marquais automatiquement dix points de plus. La partie, Dieu. Les anges. Le ciel et l'enfer. Les bons et les méchants. Le saint prépuce et ses miracles. (V:128)

Only when he has regressed this far can the Emperor begin to assess the qualities of the Architect. He has been troubled by the Architect's control over nature but has always countered it by violent outbursts. He now disowns the education which had been his source of strength when faced by the Architect's magical powers: "L'éducation moderne. Le progrès. La société protectrice des animaux! Tout va à vau-l'eau. Un jour les soucoupes volantes descendront sur terre" (V:128-29). The Architect assumes the identity of a mythical figure of everlasting youth and eternal innocence in front of whom

the Emperor stands accused.

Stripped almost naked by his own words, the Emperor has yet to be decorticated. Throughout the soliloquy, he has avoided direct reference to his mother and her murder. The court scene will expose a remaining level of reality in the Emperor, a level that has to be confronted for liberation to be effective. All the witnesses are again to be enacted by the Emperor but at the call of the Architect-Judge.

The Emperor is forced to reveal that his relationship with his wife was not as he had previously described it. Rather she was purely a mother substitute.

L'EMPEREUR, épouse: Il n'avait pas besoin d'une femme mais d'une mère.  
 Quand il la haïssait, il faisait n'importe quoi pour lui être  
 désagréable, même se marier. J'ai été la victime de cette vengeance.  
 (V:141)

His relationship with his mother was based on an unbalanced mixture of love and hatred. His past is littered with acts of outrage against both his mother and brother. He demanded that "elle le masturbe avec 'sa bouche maternelle'" (V:155). This desire to have sex with his mother can be seen as a wish to be reassimilated with the mother figure.

The inexorable course of the inquiry culminates in the Emperor's acceptance of the responsibility for the matricide. Significantly this point is reached immediately after an enactment which has seen the Emperor resting in the lap of his Architect-Mother (V:170). His independence springs from a moment of assimilation with the mother figure.

The ending of the play poses certain problems of interpretation. It is our contention that the ingestion of the Emperor by the Architect should be viewed optimistically as the Emperor's transcendence of his mother. The opposite case is argued by Lyons. Following a critical approach based on a comparison of Jung's description of the individuation process and the action of the play, Lyons detects a similar action to that which we have discovered, the attempt of the individual to disconnect himself from an all-pervasive mother. However, Lyons concludes that the regressive behaviour of the Emperor did not result in the generation of enough libidinal energy to allow

him to "move forward to some kind of symbolic rebirth of the self."<sup>1</sup> It is true that the physical murder of the mother did not lead to the liberation of the Emperor, but rather to the ambiguous image of a serpent (a female metaphor) with the head of the son. Physical action, though, cannot be the basis of escape from a psychological situation in Arrabal's work. Cavanosa's murder of his mother was symbolic; his release resulted from the destruction of the mother image by his unification with another, Lys. Similarly, the Emperor proclaims to the Architect: "Je veux que tu sois à la fois toi et moi. Tu me mangeras entièrement, Architecte, tu m'entends?" (V:175). This is the Emperor's principal wish; the desire that the Architect should be dressed as his mother is an afterthought.

By again referring to the practice of initiation rituals, clearly the ingestion by a mother symbol in Arrabal's work corresponds to ingestion by the symbolic god. This act is considered a preparation for rebirth. Indeed, the mother is only a visual image; the Architect, although dressed as the mother, assumes neither her gestures nor her voice, as was the previous practice in the games. That the moment of consumption should be viewed as preparatory to a new life is confirmed by the Architect's good humour and enthusiasm:

L'ARCHITECTE: Tu permets? Je vais d'abord aspirer ton acide nucléique. Grâce à lui . . . Mais je comprends . . . l'eau de Javel, c'était pour sa mère . . . Pour sa mère . . . (Il rit.) Grâce à ton acide nucléique, je vais être le maître de ta mémoire, de tes rêves . . . de tes pensées donc. (V:182)

The moment of rebirth comes with the re-emergence of the Emperor in the Architect's shape: "Une nouvelle vie commence pour moi. J'oublie tout le passé" (V:185). The intellectual comprehension of his new state is accompanied by the celebration of his body's sensitivity as his hand scratches his knee. He has become able to accept solitude and to discover independence:

L'EMPEREUR: . . . (Fou de joie.) Vive moi! Vive moi! Vive moi! Et merde pour les autres! Vive moi! Vive moi! Vive moi! (V:187)

The repetition of the opening scene with the roles reversed, Lyons argues, casts more doubt on the advance made through the Emperor's regressive

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

behaviour. However, the reappearance of the initial situation does not destroy the process by which the Emperor gained his independence. The final scene emphasizes the need for one's independence to be continually reasserted through action.

If the evidence from within the play is not sufficient, factors concerning its genesis and composition tend to confirm an optimistic interpretation. Arrabal's mood at the time of composition influences the meaning of his plays. Thus, Le Labyrinthe was the product of a nightmare and it was also a depressing and claustrophobic work. At the time of the composition of L'Architecte et L'Empereur d'Assyrie, Arrabal was very optimistic: "J'ai écrit cette pièce avec un grand bonheur mêlé de souffrance et beaucoup de gaieté. Je l'ai écrite le matin, contrairement à mon habitude. Et à la campagne."<sup>1</sup> Stylistically, the second act marks an advance on the first. To start, the ritual game playing is carried on almost unconsciously in an attempt to fuse illusion and reality, a characteristic of the early period. In the second act, the role playing becomes conscious in the context of the trial; reflection is a result of the self-knowledge of the second period. Inside the play, progress from one form of acting to another implies a growing mastery of the situation. Indeed, it would be out of step with the development of Arrabal's work and personality to have the play end in defeat.

The outline of the ritual structure may suggest a linear development. However, the action progresses only through a profusion of themes and details. All the major themes of Arrabal's work are re-introduced: the mother-child relationship; the question of identity; the nature of love, guilt, freedom; Catholicism; the interconnection of the past and memory, reality and fantasy. These themes are interwoven into a shifting pattern of reality, for the play presents several levels of reality through a play-within-a-play technique. Each reality presented to the audience is gradually eroded and replaced by yet another. The initial situation is taken as genuine, the Emperor as the Emperor and the games treated as play. The Emperor's soliloquy introduces

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<sup>1</sup>Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 99.

another version of his life which reveals the falsity of his original pose. The court-room scene takes this version as its basis, but a more fundamental reality begins to emerge. This technique was used by Genet in Les Bonnes and more subtly in Les Nègres. All three plays leave the audience in a state of confusion. Arrabal, in particular, seems to relish the idea of a perplexed audience: "On peut dire aussi que tout cela, c'est un jeu de solitaire que s'est inventé l'Empereur, et que l'Architecte n'a jamais existé. A moins que ce soit l'inverse."<sup>1</sup> Not only the spectators but also the characters themselves are unsure of the boundaries between the levels of reality. Twice in the course of the action the Architect is left wondering what is happening. It is hardly surprising that after the games of the first act we should think that the Emperor's withdrawal into the hut is yet another variation:

L'ARCHITECTE: C'est un nouveau jeu.

L'EMPEREUR: Non, c'est la vérité. En outre, il faut m'habituer au moment où tu partiras à la pirogue. (V:104)

This sudden break in the fiction marks the beginning of the Emperor's soliloquy. The final decision by the Emperor to have himself killed is similarly met by the Architect's disbelief. Both moments are important in the development of the play; both mark the stripping off of another level of reality.

The play adds to the bemusement of the audience by the multiplicity of bizarre incidents and impersonations that bedeck these levels of reality. The Emperor and the Architect assume various roles that illustrate the major theme of dominance and submission: mother and son, torturer and tortured, bearer and borne. Each character is capable of acting two further characters at once: the Architect can be himself and a lascivious temptress; the Emperor is both the confessor and supplicant, doctor and patient. Amid this kaleidoscope of appearances, strange transformations happen: stones become cigars; people become asses, elephants, monkeys and bulls. Strange scenes evolve: the world at war, a summit telephone call, the invasion of the Martians. The play would seem to have realized Arrabal's definition of a panique play as an opera mundi to judge from Jean-Jacques Gautier's reaction:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

Rhapsodie démentielle coupée à intervalles réguliers, de plaisanteries, de guignolades et de singeries, mais aussi agrémentée de maintes allusions aux fouets, aux cravaches, aux fustigations, aux chaînes, qui en disent long sur les tendances érotico-sadiques de l'auteur, tant qu'en contre-point se multiplient les chants de l'église défigurés, les prières avilies, les représentations caricaturales des grands symboles religieux.<sup>1</sup>

Compare with this, Gilles Sandier's review of the same production:

Arrabal nous donne une image exemplaire d'un théâtre contemporain où l'homme, dans un climat de cauchemar et dans un jeu étrange avec lui-même, qui prend souvent la forme d'un rituel, joue à expérimenter sa propre condition--condition métaphysique et situation historique--en quête peut-être d'une nouvelle morale.<sup>2</sup>

The two critics have seized on the different poles of panique theatre.

Gautier's appreciation stopped at the proliferation of images where Sandier felt the underlying structure and movement below all this surface action. In his definition of panique theatre, Arrabal insists on the necessary marriage of structure and profusion.

L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie has had two major productions: Jorgé Lavelli's 1967 creation in Paris and Victor Garcia's English creation, London 1971. These productions are distinguishable by the different emphasis each placed on the two basic elements of panique theatre. Lavelli's approach to the play was dictated by the direction of his work in 1967:

Je place l'acteur--créateur, l'acteur--communicateur, l'acteur--officiant au centre même du spectacle. . . . J'ai essayé depuis des années, de concentrer mes travaux sur l'élocution au théâtre, car elle conditionne la forme et le fond de la liturgie, le geste et la grimace: elle dicte le mouvement dans l'espace, elle mène donc la cérémonie rituelle.<sup>3</sup>

Lavelli concentrated on the actor on the stage. His work aimed at precise, essential action, emphasizing the ritual quality of the performance.

Consequently the alterations made to the Arrabal text were reductions.<sup>4</sup>

Passages were reworked to allow more rapid and concise build-up of situations. Working under the obligation to cut the performance to two hours, Lavelli deleted details as well as whole scenes. For example, the war scene and the

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Jacques Gautier, Le Figaro, 17 March 1967.

<sup>2</sup>Gilles Sandier, Arts-Loisirs, no. 79, 29 March 1967, pp. 24-25.

<sup>3</sup>Jorgé Lavelli cited by Gilles Sandier and Claude Morand, "Fontaine de Jouvence en Avignon," Arts-Loisirs, no. 88 (July 1967), p. 59.

<sup>4</sup>See Gille, Fernando Arrabal, pp. 137-41.

Martian invasion were omitted. By concentrating on the strict control of the flowing speeches, Lavelli was able to master "une pièce foisonnante, tout à la fois mystique et sacrilège, simple et baroque, passionnante."<sup>1</sup> He maintained a balance between the profusion of scenic images and the development of a ceremony.

Garcia's production, on the contrary, centred on the creation of a total theatrical space physically incorporating the audience. The spectators were forcibly injected into the action by scenic technology. Benedict Nightingale described the production: "He turns the play into a garish, haunted dream. Whistling seizes the ears, violent flashes hurt the eyes, searchlights sweep the auditorium; and on the stage, which is bare, trundles a red forklift truck."<sup>2</sup> The effect of this approach was to produce "a superbly arrogant magnification of the play, aiming to break down audience indifference by physical assault."<sup>3</sup> Its shortcoming was that the play itself was not suited to the explosion into the audience any more than was Le Cimetière des voitures.

It is interesting to compare the reviews of the Paris and London productions. In Paris very little adverse comment was made concerning the text. The only reservation was expressed by Gilles Sandier who thought that playing to the audience was not consistent with the work: "Le jeu n'aurait-il pas été plus terrible encore s'il s'était opéré en champ clos comme sans spectateurs, et sans chercher à les provoquer ou à les faire complices?"<sup>4</sup> In London, the critics were unanimous in condemning the incommunicable, esoteric nature of the play. Garcia's attempts to open up the play to the audience only revealed the essentially private nature of Arrabal's drama, even that of the second period.

His plays do strike me as very private affairs; a settling of grievances with the past, and no more related to general experience than the average masturbation fantasy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> André Alter, Témoignage chrétien, 23 March 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 12 February 1971, p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> Irving Wardle, The Times, 4 February 1971, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Sandier, Arts-Loisirs, no. 79, 29 March 1967

<sup>5</sup> Wardle, The Times, 4 February 1971, p. 12.



I have no doubt that the acting out of Señor Arrabal's nightmare fantasies and obsessions is of therapeutic value to him, but I found the result adolescent, sentimental, and banal—and also quite extraordinarily pretentious.

In theory it [the play-within-a-play technique] should be a superb device for revealing the truth about our common, unadorned human nature. In practice, Arrabal has no universal vision to impart, only a gallery of private obsessions.<sup>1</sup>

Possibly the play was ruined in London by "the incoherent babbling of an excited electrician with unlimited financial resources."<sup>2</sup> The more stringent treatment of Lavelli was perhaps better suited to the play. A study of the Parisian critics reveals a common description of the play as a psychodrama. The implication of this description returns us to the incommunicability of the play so unwaveringly criticized by the London reviewers. For, the distinction between psychodrama and theatre lies precisely in the area of universal relevance: "Le drame du malade est un spectacle, mais un spectacle qui ne peut être perçu et vécu authentiquement que pour lui seul, c'est pourquoi ce "spectacle" n'est pas d'"art," il n'est pas montrable en tant que tel."<sup>3</sup> The doubt as to the effectiveness in performance of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie must raise the question of the effectiveness of all Arrabal's panique plays in performance. This is especially relevant in the light of Arrabal's statements dating from this period which suggest a social role for his theatre through its potential to reintegrate modern man with his subconscious.

The reception of all the panique plays has been marked by reservations concerning the relevance of Arrabal's universe for social man. Le Grand Cérémonial suffered from a naturalistic treatment by Georges Vitaly which rendered it more a morbid fait divers than a ceremony: "Dénué de toute magie, ce cérémonial est tout sauf cérémonial. Rituel absent, on cherche en vain la cérémonie."<sup>4</sup> The response of the public, reported by André Camp, was not

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Marcus, Sunday Telegraph, 7 February 1971, p. 10; and Ronald Bryden, The Observer, 7 February 1971, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 7 February 1971.

<sup>3</sup>René Diatkine and Jean Gillibert, "Psychodrame et théâtre," Esprit, no. 5 (May 1965), p. 941.

<sup>4</sup>Gilles Sandier, Arts et Loisirs, no. 27 (30 March 1966), p. 19.

involvement, nor terror, but disbelieving laughter. He continued: "Devant ce drame psycho-pathologique, . . . le spectateur ne se sent jamais concerné."<sup>1</sup> Reporting the same production, Jacqueline Cartier anticipated the London reaction to L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie: "J'ai peur qu'Arrabal, ficelé dans son cordon ombilical, ne porte guère son regard au-delà."<sup>2</sup> The failure of Arrabal's play cannot be attributable solely to Vitaly's treatment. Productions by Guy Jacquet at the Biennale de Paris (1967), by Berten de Bels in Brussels (1970), and by Theatre 84 in England (1972) received comparable notices. For example, Charles Lewson reported this last production:

The Grand Ceremonial seems the product of an imagination of intensity which can only intermittently express itself in words. Moreover this imagination is totally self-centred. . . . This obsessional quality robs the play of texture; it has no environment other than the author's own brain.<sup>3</sup>

Bertrand Poirot-Delpech had predicted the unsuccessful career of this play as early as 1966:

Il est probable que d'autres partis plus baroques n'auraient pas réussi à rendre théâtral ce cas de psycho-pathologie élémentaire. La vérité est que des manies aussi cataloguées ne sont pas dramatiques—ou comiques—qu'aux yeux de celui qui les a vécues et les raconte.<sup>4</sup>

It is a quirk of the Parisian theatre that a play so universally damned and then taken off after a two-week run should be awarded the Prix des Jeunes Auteurs Dramatiques.

The production of Le Couronnement on which Arrabal himself collaborated had bemused the public a year earlier. The confusion of the events and the secrecy of the ceremony made the play accessible only to "des initiés qui possèdent la clé de son enfer poétique."<sup>5</sup> Jacques Lemarchand expressed the feelings of the spectators: "Le Couronnement, par son abondance verbale, sa durée, décourage, puis noie la meilleure volonté des catéchumènes. Comme eux

<sup>1</sup> André Camp, L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 357 (15 May 1966), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Jacqueline Cartier, France-Soir, 29 March 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Lewson, The Times, 21 April 1972, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, Le Monde, 26 March 1966, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Claude Baignarès, Le Figaro, 13 January 1965.

tristement, je suis demeuré à la porte du lieu saint, sans pouvoir y pénétrer."<sup>1</sup> Le Jardin des délices, the last play of the panique period, was treated to a magnificent set by Claude Régy and interpreted by Delphine Seyrig for whom it was written. But, despite these advantages, the same criticism recurs: "On regrette que ce triomphe de la scène ne descende pas dans la salle."<sup>2</sup>

In trying to characterize this period of Arrabal's drama, Allen Thiher notes the growing complexity of the structures "in which ritual and ceremony are used to give more stylized expression to his obsessions."<sup>3</sup> It has been stressed that during this period a more reflective position is taken by the author towards his own experience, but the plays in performance still refuse to stand independently of the author. Genet's Les Bonnes was described as anti-ritual because its structures prevented the integration of stage and auditorium. In Arrabal's panique plays ritual structures are used but the plays cannot be effective as ritual because of the barrier of the author's personality and experience. Esslin has aptly summarized the shortcoming of these plays: "To be effective as rituals they lack what must be at the centre of all ritual, a general human concern; these inventions seem rather the compulsion rituals of a private neurosis."<sup>4</sup>

#### (iv) Towards a Political Theatre, 1967-1975

The post-panique period of Arrabal's work is marked by a further step away from composition totally dominated by personal obsession. He turns towards situations that reflect the preoccupations of his fellow men. Indeed, Arrabal has subsequently denied the importance of the panique period: "D'ailleurs, je refuse maintenant le Panique totalement. Ça ne m'intéresse pas du tout. Je l'ai créé, maintenant je crée autre chose."<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless the panique

<sup>1</sup>Jacques Lemarchand, Le Figaro littéraire, 21 January 1965.

<sup>2</sup>François-Régis Bastide, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 13 November 1969, p.13.

<sup>3</sup>Thiher, "New Theater of Obsession," p. 175.

<sup>4</sup>Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, p. 222.

<sup>5</sup>Arrabal cited by Raymond-Mundschauf, Arrabal, p. 23.

period did generate a new style in his work. The insignificance to which he condemns this period results from the experiences he suffered at the end of the 1960s. It was at this time that external reality broke into Arrabal's personal experience. The author began to realize his place in the contemporary world.

In July 1967 Arrabal was arrested and imprisoned by Franco's regime. After autographing a copy of Arrabal celebrando la ceremonia de la confusion in a Madrid bookshop, he had added a dedication that was taken as an insult to the government. The nature of the charge and the conduct of the trial need not concern us here. What is important is that Arrabal was a political victim and suffered the same fate as other opponents of the regime. The effect on his dramatic creation was immediate; the introversion of all the previous plays was seen to be inadequate:

Mais à l'apogée de cette aventure introspective survint mon emprisonnement par la tyrannie franquiste, ce qui suppose un retour spirituel dans le ventre de ma mère. Les cachots dans lesquels on m'a enfermé, la terreur qu'ils m'ont causée sont peut-être mon retour à la naissance, ma renaissance. Et cette renaissance a été une première naissance au monde du conscient, au monde de mes contemporains.<sup>1</sup>

The plays of the second period are the imaginative ceremonies through which the hero is restored to consciousness. This initiation involves a behavioural regression to a pre-natal state before a spiritual rebirth. The Spanish gaol was the physical reality of Arrabal's imaginative journey.

The world to which he awoke was the world of political reality, a world "de l'injustice, de la torture, de l'intolérance."<sup>2</sup> This world immediately found its way into the dramatic compositions. The writing of Le Jardin des délices spanned this turbulent period. In it, the introspective and political worlds are expressed side by side. Laís's progress to self-knowledge is interrupted by thinly disguised episodes from Arrabal's prison experience. Examples are the prison scene, the flashback to the workings of justice, "cette époque où l'on me persécutait," and the confrontation with the lawyer.<sup>3</sup> Spain

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<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Françoise Espinasse, "Entretien avec Arrabal," Plexus, no. 19 (Dec. 1968), p. 104; repr. Arrabal, Théâtre III, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Fernando Arrabal, Le Jardin des délices in Théâtre VI (Paris: Bourgois, 1969), pp. 63-65; p. 86; and pp. 118-19.

had always been the context for Arrabal's writing, but it had been the cultural Spain of Goya and Cervantes. After 1967, it was the political Spain of torture and repression that emerged. The breaking up of Garcia's set for Les Deux Bourreaux by the Madrid police in February 1969 prompted an unequivocal outburst from the author:

Malgré la modestie de mon théâtre, cet incident montre le caractère de la dictature que subit le peuple espagnol. Les organes officiels de la dictature ont lancé une nouvelle campagne de calomnies contre moi, sans me permettre la moindre déclaration. La censure et la prison sont les seules distinctions que peut donner le gouvernement de Madrid à un artiste, sans le salir.<sup>1</sup>

If his contacts with Franco's Spain woke Arrabal up to the inquisitorial nature of contemporary political life, it was the events of May 1968 that showed him the possible power of freedom. The events of May, with the rioters parading in the costumes taken from the Odéon, approximated to an unscripted éphémère panique. Within a year of his imprisonment Arrabal witnessed what he felt was a physical revolt against repression. As a champion of freedom the author responded:

En mai '68, je suis rentré chez moi pour écrire aussitôt une pièce sur les barricades, L'Aurore rouge et noire. Non pas en tête politique. Je ne suis pas un homme politique. Je n'ai pas de leçon à donner. Je suis un petit homme aussi libre qu'il le peut.<sup>2</sup>

It would be inaccurate to assume that the outside world had never entered his dramatic universe prior to 1967: Le Labyrinthe presents a critical view of the legal system; the consumer society and the modern marketing practice of in-built obsolescence are ironically portrayed in the set of Le Cimetière des voitures and extolled in Laïs's catechism invoking "mon frère, le frigidaire," "mon frère le thermostat" (VI:31); the whole of Western civilization based on learning and progress is shown to be inferior to the Architect's instinctive command over the natural world. Furthermore, three plays from the early period have political overtones: Pique-nique en campagne (1952), Les Deux Bourreaux (1956), and Guernica (1959). These three plays result from Arrabal's own experience of war and in particular of the Spanish Civil War. The Civil

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<sup>1</sup> Fernando Arrabal, "Déclaration," L'Humanité, 20 February 1969, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to P.-L. Mignon, "Fernando Arrabal," p. 10.

War for Arrabal was not primarily a political event but a domestic, emotional occurrence which caused the disappearance of his father and his distrust of his mother. He admitted to Bettina Knapp that "the political civil war was not only waged in the battlefield, but in my home and above all in my heart."<sup>1</sup>

Pique-nique en campagne was stimulated not by the events in Korea but by his fear of war. Les Deux Bourreaux describes the domestic situation of Arrabal, and Guernica was written from a personal viewpoint: "Pour moi, il ne s'agit pas de l'Histoire, il s'agit du quotidien, du merveilleux et de l'humour dans le quotidien."<sup>2</sup>

The concept of "le quotidien" is central to Arrabal's concept of committed theatre; it is used to criticize both surrealist dream theatre and epic political theatre. For Arrabal, dramatic action must have its roots in everyday experience:

Je refuserai toujours une pure situation de rêve, . . . Je ne pourrais pas placer sur scène une situation que je ne verrais pas quotidienne, réaliste. A partir de là, surgissent la folie, la démesure, le cauchemar. Mais il me faut cet élément premier.<sup>3</sup>

Arrabal's dissatisfaction with Le Couronnement derives in part from its purely oneiric quality. Nevertheless the everyday experience must not be exemplary to the extent that the result is allegorical abstraction. This is the criticism he lays at Brecht's door:

Ce n'est donc pas une boutade, à mes yeux, quand je dis: "Je fais du théâtre réaliste et c'est M. Bertolt Brecht qui fait du théâtre fantastique." Car ce théâtre-ci ne montre pas ce qui est fondamental dans la vie d'un homme, ces moments de démesure où les instants pèsent si lourd.<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere, he calls Brecht a writer of science fiction because his characters are ideas, not human beings.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to Knapp, "Interview," p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 97-98.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> See Lillet, "Je suis un clown," p. 24. It will be seen that Armand Gatti also uses the concept of "le quotidien" to include the dreams and aspirations of the individual. In Gatti's case, however, these dreams are fashioned by the constraints of a defined socio-political situation and so become those of an oppressed class. In Arrabal, the dreams are those of the repressed individual and are often those of the author himself.

It is measure of the effect on the author of the events 1967-1969 that he describes the action of Les Deux Bourreaux in the following terms: "Comme l'a très bien compris la censure franquiste, cette terre déchirée est l'Espagne. Le fanatisme et l'intolérance sont la dictature."<sup>1</sup> An atypical account in that it attributes overt political motives to the composition of a play, it is also perhaps an overstatement made in anger after the political violence directed against his play. For the politics of the third-period plays will still be largely based on the lived experience and not the national event. However, the lived experience will include the sufferings and frustrations of his fellow men, wherein lies the innovation of the period.

Arrabal does not assume a defined political stance. This is consistent with his denial of any political affiliation throughout his career. In 1965, he stated his political independence to Monique Bouyer:

Je ne m'adresse à aucun secteur déterminé du public ou des lecteurs, et je ne crois pas que l'art "puisse être compris ou ne pas être compris" selon que l'on appartient à telle ou telle autre classe sociale, mais selon le degré d'intérêt que l'on porte à cette part de la vie. . . . Je ne peux écrire sur commande, même pour défendre l'idée la plus noble. Je ne suis ni à acheter ni à vendre.<sup>2</sup>

After his release Arrabal continued to deny resolutely any political views: "Je ne connais rien de la politique."<sup>3</sup> He pursued this line throughout his dialogues with Schifres describing his work as having "aucune résonance politique immédiate."<sup>4</sup>

Where one must look for Arrabal's commitment is not in the overt statement, nor in the spontaneous political act, but in his desire for freedom. His freedom is not understood in any direct political sense but rather at the level of the individual. It is the wish that man should be able to exist without constraints and repression. As such, Arrabal's outlook is politically naive. Its true origin lies in the instinctual freedom expressed in the panique plays:

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<sup>1</sup> Arrabal, "Déclaration," p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Bouyer, "Entretien," p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Arrabal to R. Goffaux, "Arrabal," La Tribune de Genève, 3 November 1967.

<sup>4</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 45.

Je n'appartiens à personne ni à rien. Je souhaite modestement que règne la liberté et que l'injustice n'accable pas les autres. J'aimerais pouvoir croire que tout ce que je viens d'exposer est faux, que je me suis trompé, que ce que j'ai vu et lu cet été en Espagne n'est qu'un cauchemar.<sup>1</sup>

His politics are those of opposition to all forms of oppression. Just as the panique movement was based on the freedom of the individual artist, so Arrabal insists on the same freedom for social man: "Je ne crois qu'à un appétit de liberté, au sens pur, loin des dogmes."<sup>2</sup> Arrabal views this detached independence as a position of strength in the fight against oppression. As politically central, a radical humanist, his criticisms, he hopes, will be seen as truth untainted by dogma: "Je pensais qu'il fallait que l'Espagne sorte de la nuit—là je suis peut-être prétentieux—que le meilleur document c'était moi qui pourrait l'écrire. Parce que je suis en dehors de tout parti politique, de toute religion."<sup>3</sup> Although Arrabal again reveals his complete ignorance of the nature of political power, his depth of feeling and compassion for his fellow men are unquestionable:

Je me souviens des paroles d'un prisonnier, condamné à quatre ans de détention: "Je préfère qu'on m'arrache un oeil que de rester quatre ans ici." C'est contre cela que je veux lutter. Je ne veux pas m'enrôler dans un parti. Je ne sais vraiment pas ce qu'on peut faire pour mériter quelque chose de pire que de s'arracher un oeil. . . . Pour mériter d'être enterré vivant.<sup>4</sup>

His dramatic work is to reflect this new orientation. Nevertheless, it is important to point out the continuity of Arrabal's attitude. His work is always directly inspired by experience. In this respect, the Spanish gaol does not differ greatly from the sanatorium in which he wrote Le Labyrinthe. What is new is that the plays like Le Labyrinthe were written for personal reasons, in response to his own suffering; the plays after his imprisonment are written for others or in response to shared suffering:

<sup>1</sup> Fernando Arrabal, "Lettre à propos de mon procès," Le Monde, 31 October 1967, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Fernando Arrabal, Lettre au Général Franco (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1972), p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 53.



Le Labyrinthe . . . est un cauchemar que j'ai vécu après une opération. Je l'ai transcrit tel quel sur papier. . . . Maintenant j'ai changé: avec tous les événements qui sont arrivés depuis le mois de mai 1968, les contestations, tout ça.<sup>1</sup>

L'Aurore rouge et noire was composed in response to the events of May 1968. The title reflects the euphoric but childish idealism of Arrabal's politics. It expresses the desired but impossible union of the red flag of communism and the black flag of the anarchists. In its original published form it was dedicated specifically to the freedom-fighters in Spain: "L'auteur—qui, ici, tient à conserver l'anonymat—dédie cette pièce aux étudiants ibériques en lutte contre la violence de la dictature."<sup>2</sup> This dedication is omitted from the revised edition, but even there Arrabal's alignment with all those who oppose dictatorship the world over is made clear: "Dans les pays où sévit la dictature, j'autorise la représentation de ces pièces par des troupes clandestines, sans les formalités d'usage."<sup>3</sup> Et Ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs treats Arrabal's prison experience directly. However, the motive for its creation was not personal but communal:

Lorsque je suis sorti de la prison de Carabanchel (près de Madrid), les détenus m'ont demandé avec beaucoup de dignité de parler d'eux, de porter témoignage sur les geôles franquistes. C'est ainsi que surgit Et Ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs qui n'est pas une pièce, mais plutôt un cri.<sup>4</sup>

A recently published play, Sur le fil (performed at Avignon, 1974) deals with the problems of another group of outsiders, the Spanish exiles. The play is constructed around three characters who reflect three different attitudes to their situation: an old, quibbling, tight-rope walker, a republican, and a radical. The style is strictly controlled unlike the previous plays, almost suggesting Arrabal's desire to communicate the reality of the problem without his personal intervention: "On dirait qu'il a eu peur de se lancer,

<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to J. Weiner, "Arrabal," France-Soir, 30 December 1969.

<sup>2</sup> L'Aurore rouge et noire, published anonymously in Le Théâtre, 1969, no. 1, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Fernando Arrabal, L'Aurore rouge et noire in Théâtre VII (Paris: Bourgois, 1969), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> pamphlet distributed at the Parisian revival of the play at Le Palace, 19 October 1972.

qu'il a voulu se garantir, se protéger du vertige, ou d'on ne sait quoi, en ajustant ses thèmes très solidement."<sup>1</sup> In 1973, Arrabal announced a play, La Marche royale, to be performed by Le Grand Magic Circus at a fund-raising evening for the fight against Spanish fascism. A written reaction to an incident reported in Le Monde "sur l'imbroglie des luttes dans la dynastie espagnole,"<sup>2</sup> La Marche royale constitutes a further departure from introversion. This overt historical dimension is in the line of the unperformed La Grande Revue du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Arrabal's theatre was changing not only in its subject-matter but also in its creative approach. Matthieu Galey implies that the composition of Sur le fil was a collaborative effort on the part of Arrabal and Pierre Constant.<sup>3</sup> The mere fact that this could be suggested is a consequence of Arrabal's escape from the particular. Indeed, he had already taken part in a collective venture, Bella ciao. In 1972, this was a novel experiment for the author:

Quelle expérience passionnante que Bella ciao! J'ai écrit entouré d'amis qui ont des idées précises sur la politique et sur la solution à nos misères. Je n'ai eu comme mission que de traduire en images dramatiques les débats de tous. . . . et cela depuis près de trois ans de remises en question incessantes et fructueuses.<sup>4</sup>

Arrabal here has become the secretary to a group author, much in the same way as Gatti was the amanuensis to the inhabitants of the 20th arrondissement for the play Les 13 Soleils de la rue Saint-Blaise.<sup>5</sup> In both these plays the concern of the author is to bear witness against or for the contemporary world from a point of view that is not solely his own.

The opening up of the Arrabalian universe to historical event, the more committed stance of the author, has produced a concomitant change of dramatic forms in the later plays. Indeed, the periodical edited by him since

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Cournot, Le Monde, 8 August 1974, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Colette Godard, Le Monde, 13 April 1973, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Matthieu Galey, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 12 August 1974, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Fernando Arrabal, Bella ciao: la guerre de mille ans (Paris: Bourgeois, 1972), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> See below, pp. 477-78.

1968, Le Théâtre, has concentrated on contemporary experimentation in dramatic procedures. The first number included articles by Jérôme Savary, Ariane Mnouchkine of Le Théâtre du Soleil, and Victor Garcia as well as features on Latin American popular theatre, the Living Theater and the happenings of John Cage, Ben and Alexandro Jodorowsky. Later numbers were dedicated to "La Contestation" (1969, no. 1), to "Le Théâtre marginal" (1970, no. 1) and to "Les Monstres révolutionnaires" (1971, no. 1). The periodical carries articles on many of the new developments in theatrical composition and staging especially in the area of political theatre. Whether the review had a formative effect on Arrabal's later writing cannot be assessed, but its content shows that the editor was becoming interested in, or at least aware of, alternative forms of theatre.

The first form with which Arrabal experimented is the théâtre de guérilla. Guerrilla theatre is characterized by direct, forceful statements on topical issues often presented in a rough, stark manner to a public which it has actively sought out. It is a cultural by-product of subversive political activity meant to undermine the system it is attacking. The initial play in this form is really a series of four short plays collectively entitled L'Aurore rouge et noire. These playlets alternate between on the one hand, scenes of the formation of a groupuscule and its first political actions, and on the other situations of oppression against which the revolution is fighting. The alternating structure is reminiscent of Concert dans un oeuf, and the oneiric sequences interpolated into the political debate owe something to the panique plays.

In Groupuscule de mon coeur, the first playlet, there is an alternation of political debate and symbolic rituals of oppression. Through this technique is expressed the necessary collusion of art and politics in the revolution. It is the character of L'Enragé who fuses these two realms of action. Initially he is an outsider in the group putting forward a vision of the future couched in poetic flights of fancy:

L'ENRAGE: Parfois je rêve que je rêve . . . et je pense qu'une reine de coeur horrible hurle avec un chardon. Mais en ces jours-là, je sentais que je volais nu et, d'en haut, la Terre me semblait être un cul de femme rond et joli. (VII:120-21)

This approach is opposed by those out for immediate political action: "Faisons de la politique et non de la poésie" (VII:125). However, it is L'Enragé who announces the end of repression significantly by reference to another poet, García Lorca (VII:126). At the end of the scene, it is his arguments that win the day in the debate on money. A problem that had previously caused consternation and hesitancy is brushed aside:

L'ENRAGE: Je propose que nous fassons une fête, chacun de nous avec l'argent qui lui revient, et cet acte sera le plus bel exemple que donnera la Révolution. Nous déboutonnerons notre cerveau aussi souvent que notre braguette. Nous oublierons tout ce que nous avons appris. Nous commencerons par rêver. (VII:131)

The action of the playlet represents the integration of the poet into the vanguard of the revolutionary movement. This, in turn, confirms the progress of the revolutionary ideal voiced by a spectator early on in the action: "Nous pensons que l'émancipation de l'homme sera totale ou ne sera pas" (VII:121).

This ideal echoes the writings of Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse posits that the capitalist system maintains itself through the perversion of libidinal energy.<sup>1</sup> The revolution can only become a reality, therefore, if man liberates this energy. The revolution needs be erotic as well as economic. The artist has a function to perform in the revolution since it is he who can unlock the subconscious. In this respect Arrabal's ideas of theatre and art as liberators of the subconscious can be seen to pass into the forefront of revolutionary activity. The interpenetration of art and the revolution is articulated by the orator:

L'ORATEUR: La Révolution se fera sans sacrifier personne. Ce sera notre fête panique, notre orgie démesurée et pure. La poésie a non seulement sa place dans la Révolution mais encore celle-ci n'existe pas sans elle. La liberté d'auteur, la liberté de la poésie étend la mienne à l'infini. (VII:125)

The mimed sequences show the repressed libidinal energy at work in the

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilisation: a Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956). Marcuse's thought will be referred to in more detail in the discussion of happening, see Chapter IV, p. 250 and p. 275.

system, the mouse-wheel carefully supervised by the guard. The final triumph of the couple over the guard looks forward to the triumph of the revolution of the total man: "En réalité, les réserves imposées au plaisir excitent le plaisir de vivre sans réserve" (VII:121).

Arrabal's desire to situate this debate at a communicable level is manifested by the adoption of a slogan style during the political episodes. Indeed, the slogans used are those from the walls and banners of the 1968 events themselves:

Je crois que ceux qui ont le coeur à gauche ne doivent pas avoir le portefeuille à droite. (VII:121)

Examens = répression = servilité = promotion sociale = société hiérarchisée. (VII:124)

Furthermore, thematic development is replaced by speed of action. The scenes are introduced using the format of the circus ring-master or the traditional bonimenteur.<sup>1</sup> However, Arrabal does not use this figure for gaiety, rather he is a sad, undemonstrative figure. Possibly Arrabal is criticizing the procedures of popular theatre which tend towards social conservatism; for, the opening sequence contains references to the nature of art and the conventional position of the spectator. Art has become the lackey of the bourgeoisie, the Orator claims:

L'ORATEUR, d'une voix calme: Cette réunion, sous forme de pièce de théâtre . . . a été autorisée. Les exploiters nous donnent la permission de divulguer nos idées révolutionnaires par des livres ou des spectacles, du moment qu'ils en tirent aussitôt de l'argent. Pour assister à une réunion ou à des spectacles comme celui-ci, on paie pour entrer, même s'ils se figurent qu'avec cet argent nous fabriquerons des bombes ou des tracts, puisqu'ils croient, eux, que la Révolution est impossible. Aux spectateurs de les détromper.  
(VII:120)

The spectators must not sit passively but act. This idea is scenically enacted by the staged uprising of the spectators who scrawl slogans on the walls of the theatrical space.

Although <sup>it is</sup> a staged uprising which does not escape the Orator's criticisms the spectator in the theatre is exposed to physical involvement in the play. For the first time, Arrabal has given details concerning the position of the

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<sup>1</sup>These techniques are used by both Le Théâtre du Soleil and Le Grand Magic Circus; see Chapter V.

spectator; for the first time, Arrabal is concerned with the conditions for the communication of his work. The theatrical space is treated as an environment:

Si l'action a lieu dans un théâtre, les photos couvriront tous les murs. Il y aura des espaces en blanc. Le public est assis partout. L'action se déroulera dans un espace libre réduit, au milieu du local.  
(VII:117)

In fact, Pierre-Alain Jolivet's production of the play in Brussels (1968) emphasized "l'intégration quasi obligée du spectateur à l'équipe des comédiens"<sup>1</sup> by breaking down the physical barriers between audience and actor. The action was not restricted to the single central area, but exploded along a walkway projecting well into the public, among and even above the spectators. The photographs demanded by Arrabal were augmented by a whole barrage of filmed sequences and slides depicting contemporary events. The audience were snatched from passivity by the exploded action and the ruptures of acting style and expressive means. The individual spectator was put into a situation in which he could not escape the questions being asked.

Identical techniques are used during the third playlet, Sous les pavés, la plage. The audience are positioned as the revolutionaries on the barricades enveloped by noise and lights as well as by the action; similarly they suffer physically in the scenes depicting repression.

In Tous les parfums d'Arabie, the second playlet, the audience is presented with a portrayal of the brutality of dictatorship: scenes of tender love between a wife and an accused man are contrasted cruelly with the indifference of the authorities to her pleas. Throughout, the inevitable fate of the condemned man is thrust visually before, or rather over, the audience:

Un grand drap taché de sang s'étend d'un côté à l'autre du lieu scénique, au-dessus de la tête des spectateurs. La tache s'étale au centre. Il n'y a pas de spectateurs au-dessous de la tache, mais une sorte de cuve. Le sang s'écoule de la tache, goutte à goutte, au-dessus de la cuve, pendant toute la pièce. (VII:135)

The playlet terminates in a ritualized murder of the condemned man involving multiple simultaneous actions including the burning of incense and a sacrificial

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<sup>1</sup>J. Gx., La Dernière Heure (Brussels), 27 December 1968, repr. Arrabal, Théâtre VII, pp. 109-10.

cross.

The final playlet, Les Fillettes, depends equally for its effectiveness on the use of both horizontal and vertical space in, around, and over the spectator. The scene depicts rather impressionistically the situation of gaoled immigrants by suspending them in cages from the ceiling all around the theatrical space. Their helplessness is thus thrust at the audience.

The unequivocal position assumed by art in the revolution and the use of bold staging techniques implies a directness and assurance that are new in Arrabal's theatre. However, the playlets are still pregnant with references to Arrabal's childhood world: Ybar and Maida's love scenes take place on a brightly lit beach; "Enterre mes jambes dans le sable!" cries Maida (VII:139). This marital relationship is the first to be positive in Arrabal's theatre. It also marks the first appearance of the missing, but much-adored, father figure and of the ideal, devoted wife and mother. It is as though the positive commitment of the author is being reflected back onto his previous experience.

Underlining the continuity of Arrabal's imagination, the dream of the imprisoned Greek exploits episodes from previous plays: an exhibitionist dance for another is performed by Cavanosa; the reference to the veil of Saint Veronica is made in Le Cimetière des voitures; the bestiality of Lia and Karin's love recalls Les Amours impossibles; the image of the fish as a sexual symbol derives directly from Bosch's Jardin des délices; and the breaking of the eggs over each other suggests Malderic's pouring milk over the father in Le Grand Cérémonial, just as the oil poured over the embracing couple in the initial dream sequence of Groupuscule de mon coeur would appear to match the action of Jodorowsky's 1966 éphémère panique.

These echoes of previous plays seem to contradict the new orientation of Arrabal's work. Indeed, the interpretation of the mimed sequences is not totally consistent with the positive political message. The strange ceremony enacted by the two mature women and the young man in counterpoint to the revolutionary activity during Sous les pavés, la plage appears paradoxical in meaning. The action is threefold: initially the young man is bound and blinded

by the women who perform an erotic ceremony around him; he revolts against his imprisonment at which time he is fed an ear and the breasts of one of the women; finally, he is transported off-stage encased in a giant, transparent egg on the shoulders of the women whose appendages he is still gluttonously engorging. This ceremony has the ingredients of the shorter panique plays (such as Strip-tease de la jalousie) and the violence of an éphémère panique. Could it be a parody of those by the more mature, committed author? Is the final image, accompanied by the marching boots, to be interpreted as the containment of revolt by the women? Or could the egg be the symbol of liberation and integration just as the circular imagery of the panique plays had a positive meaning? After all the passage of the sedia gestatoria does put a stop to the marching boots, and the crying of a young girl might represent a rebirth.

L'Aurore rouge et noire represents the integration of Arrabal's previous styles inside a new socio-political orientation. His material derives from private obsession and public demonstration. He attempts to give the play a broader historical perspective and a more universal validity by relating the upheaval of May 1968 to the age-old struggle against oppression. The Roman wheel of torture and the medieval cages appear amidst references to the French Revolution, the Commune, the October Revolution, and the freedom fighters in Spain.

This universalizing is common to both the guerrilla plays. The composition of Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs was only possible "à l'aide de livres, de récits de documents authentiques" as well as to "confidences recueillies à la prison de Carabanchel" (VII:9). Among the authentic documents was the account of life in a Spanish gaol by Melqueridez Rodriguez Chaos; extracts from his Veinte Años en las cárceles españolas (1968) are read over a loudspeaker throughout the performance. Arrabal takes incidents from the history of the Civil War and incorporates them into his plot. Thus, the binding and castrating of the priest might portray the treatment of Don Alicia León Descalzo reported by Hugh Thomas in The Spanish Civil War (1961).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Whitton, "Theatre of Fernando Arrabal," pp. 345-48.



The character of Tosan bears a resemblance to Julien Grimau, the Spanish revolutionary tried and convicted by Franco for seditious activities. Indeed, Tosan resembles Grimau even more than his dramatic predecessor, Ybar in L'Aurore rouge et noire. During his interrogation, Tosan is assaulted and pushed handcuffed from a window; Grimau claimed at his trial that he had been exposed to similar violence.

The play was influenced not only by these historical references, but also by the psychological effects of imprisonment on human beings. Arrabal wants these experiences to be considered not as artistic material but as living proof of the perversion of Spanish justice: "Il ne s'agit pas d'"art," de "théâtre" mais il importe de donner avec grande intensité une idée de la vie menée par les détenus dans une prison fasciste avec leurs rêves insensés, leurs visions singulières, leurs souvenirs survoltés par la douleur et par l'espoir."<sup>1</sup> The varied material used by Arrabal was fused around a single realization: "Et Ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs est né du choc que j'ai eu à apprendre que des hommes étaient sur la lune. J'ai cherché ce que les prisonniers qui avaient été mes compagnons pouvaient en penser."<sup>2</sup>

The dreams and nightmares of the prisoners set the tone of the play. In these visions Arrabal's own preoccupations found room for expression and produced "un festival de violences scatologiques et sexuelles d'une audace d'expression tout à fait rare."<sup>3</sup> This includes fascination with the excretory functions and sexual organs, the sadistic joy of flagellation, the pleasures of perverted and homosexual acts, as well as the bloody delight of emasculating a priest and minister<sup>20</sup> sexually to Jesus Christ.

Up to this point, the play is a more violent version of the campaign against oppression and torture begun in L'Aurore rouge et noire. Indeed, the Les Parfums d'Arabie sequence was expanded into a major part of the later play. However, the two plays differ in their treatment of the audience. Et Ils

<sup>1</sup> Pamphlet from Le Palace, 19 October 1972.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to P.-L. Mignon, "Fernando Arrabal," p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> R. Maria, L'Humanité, 18 November 1972.

passèrent des menottes aux fleurs was written not purely as a pièce-document on the condition of Spanish prisoners, but as a means of liberating the spectator from his own privations. The importance of this function was such that Arrabal himself put aside his disinterest in staging techniques to direct the play not only at its creation in Paris, but also at its revivals in London and New York and latterly again in Paris. He was involved with the play from its composition in 1969 until its Paris revival in 1972. The extent of this involvement contrasts sharply with the spontaneous composition followed by immediate disinterest of the early period:

La seule raison pour laquelle je tente cette mise en scène, c'est l'espoir d'expérimenter une nouvelle conception du théâtre. Ne serait-ce que pour permettre aux acteurs d'abord de se libérer, et par là même d'amener le public à le faire.<sup>1</sup>

The spectator becomes the virtual centre of the dramatic action. He is the subject of an elaborate initiation into the theatrical event. As Arrabal states in the preliminary stage direction: "La pièce commence avant le début de l'action . . . avant que les spectateurs prennent place."<sup>2</sup> Met at the door of the theatre, the spectator is introduced into a darkened room by the master of ceremonies (in 1969 by the author himself) who grasps him by the wrists and whispers gently into his ear. From the darkened room he is led by an actor who is to strike up some kind of physical relationship with the spectator, "soit en le tirant par la main, soit en le poussant d'une main posée sur le derrière et l'autre sur le cou, ou bien en le transportant sur son dos comme un âne" (VII:13). If the spectators are female the actors are instructed to guide them "en les empoignant avec la plus grande énergie" (VII:13). The author stresses that couples must be separated at the door so that each spectator should experience this preparation alone without the comfort of any pre-existing relationship. The darkness in which this ceremony takes place emphasizes the isolation; the visual deprivation wipes out previous experience,

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<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to Colette Godard, "Arrabal saute le pas," Les Nouvelles littéraires, 11 September 1969, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Fernando Arrabal, Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs in Théâtre VII, p. 11.

disorientates the spectator. New relationships are to be forged in the context of the performance; actors and spectators will experience the new situation together, not as two different classes of people but as fellow celebrants. Aided by the restricted number of spectators (only one hundred at the creation) this idea is reinforced by the introduction of the actors as people before the performance and by their actions during the play: "Les acteurs, lorsqu'ils ne 'jouent' pas, se tiendront parmi le public, les actrices pourront peut-être appuyer leur tête sur le genou d'un spectateur" (VII:15). The change in emphasis with this play is now clear; no longer is it Arrabal himself or his hero who suffers a rite de passage, but the spectator himself. It is the spectator who is led into an inner sanctum where secrets are to be communicated. The theatrical space will be the revelatory space for the spectator, as the darkened room has been for Cavanosa and the Spanish gaol for Arrabal.

Inside the theatrical space proper, the distribution of the spectators is important for the effectiveness of exchange: "Or, pour établir le rapport entre le rêve, l'amour, d'une part, et d'autre part la réalité, il est nécessaire que la disposition des lieux permette aux spectateurs d'être mêlés aux comédiens; ils auront la possibilité de se trouver à l'intérieur même du jeu, mais rien ne les y forcera."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the acting areas are to be disseminated around and above the public creating an environment. This environment is to resemble a prison, and the spectators are to suffer the experiences of imprisonment. At the New York production, the audience was surrounded by bars and the spectators supplied with cowls and penitents' hoods to isolate them even more. Inside the prison, the spectators are subjected to a variety of sensual attacks: eyes are stunned by flashes of light which mark the end of each sequence; different coloured spotlights delineate the different acting areas; the ears are stimulated by a mixture of musical styles, harsh whistling and vocal distortions. Arrabal states his aim: "Les spectateurs, pris dans ce tourbillon devront intervenir dans une atmosphère de tension extrême. Je

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<sup>1</sup>Arrabal to Godard, "Arrabal saute le pas," p. 11.

les pousserai dans un état proche de la folie."<sup>1</sup>

Although thorough in its attempts to include the spectator in the action, the play marks just one significant advance on the techniques of L'Aurore rouge et noire. The innovation lies in the provision of two major moments "destinés à recevoir une improvisation collective. La durée de chacun dépendra de la qualité et de l'humeur du public car c'est lui qui, par ses réactions, dirigera le mouvement."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Arrabal implies that in those moments reside the significance and value of the play: "J'attends beaucoup des réactions du public. C'est lui qui fera, en définitive, ma pièce."<sup>3</sup> Midway through the play, Amiel halts the action:

AMIEL: Tous les soirs lorsque ce moment arrive, notre groupe improvise.  
(Tous les acteurs et les actrices épaillés dans la salle disent à l'oreille au spectateur "Si tu veux raconter un passage de ta vie, fais-le" ou quelque chose de ce genre. (VII:57)

The actors lead these public confessions, but the individual spectator is free to intervene. Collective action is exploited more fully in the epilogue to the play. Those who accept the invitation to stay at the end of the performance are first blindfolded and then guided through a ceremony of gentle tactile experiences: "Tout doit être fait avec simplicité et amour" (VII:104). After the initial rubbing, confessions are begun by the actors while the recumbent spectators are fed with segments of orange, and caressed. As the spectators become freer in their statements, the actors withdraw. Ultimately the author wishes that the spectators will continue their exchanges unprompted by the company (VII:106).

R. L. Farmer considers that the action of the play should be viewed merely as a preparation for "this final stage of ritual happening" to which the audience have to be brought "through the maze of ceremonial blasphemies"<sup>4</sup> of the play. The success of this procedure is unequivocally proclaimed by

<sup>1</sup> Arrabal cited by Patrice de Nussac, France-Soir, 2 September 1969.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal cited by Françoise Varenne, Le Figaro, 11 September 1969, p.30.

<sup>3</sup> Arrabal cited by André Bercoff, L'Express, 29 September 1969, p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> R. L. Farmer, "Fernando Arrabal's Guerrilla Theatre," Yale French Studies, no. 46 (1971), p. 161.

Arrabal's statement at the end of the published text:

Au moment où ce livre est publié, le spectacle se joue avec succès et ferveur: tous les soirs, plus de la moitié des spectateurs prennent part à l'épilogue, suivent une à une les différentes étapes du rituel et suscitent des expériences fascinantes. (VII:106)

There would appear to be few critics, however, who agreed with this optimism. When he experienced the play, Eric Shorter observed that only a small number of the audience remained behind to take part in the ceremony.<sup>1</sup> For his part, Matthieu Galey participated in the ceremony but was sceptical about its success: "Tant d'ingénuité confond et nul ne s'étonnera que la 'cérémonie' se solde par un total fiasco. Il faut croire que nous ne sommes pas mûrs pour les libérations collectives à l'américaine."<sup>2</sup>

The confessional elements of the play are doomed to failure by a contradiction between the methods used and the ends in view. In all his pre-production interviews, Arrabal stressed the importance of avoiding any forms of constraint that might embarrass the spectator:

Il ne faut pas confondre: nous ne sommes pas Le Living Théâtre. Nous ne provoquons pas le public, nous ne l'injurons pas, nous ne lui imposons aucune violence. Lors de l'improvisation finale (qui peut prolonger le spectacle à l'infini), ceux qui ne supportent pas ce système seront libres de partir.<sup>3</sup>

He was careful to explain to Nicole Zand that he disagreed with the procedures used by such groups as the Living Theater and the Open Theater: "Ces expériences américaines ont pour moi l'inconvénient d'avoir un côté militaire, avec des disciplines de fer; on arrive à faire des gestes, n'importe quel geste, où le rêve et la tendresse n'ont aucune place."<sup>4</sup> His play, he stated, was to be based on tenderness and cooperation: "Mon véritable thème, c'est la tendresse."<sup>5</sup> The participation of the audience in the performance should be a free, not exacted, contribution, a view clearly in accordance with the

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<sup>1</sup>Eric Shorter, "Plays in Performance: Arrabal," Drama, no. 96 (Spring 1970), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup>Matthieu Galey, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 2 October 1969, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Arrabal cited by Varenne, Le Figaro, 11 September 1969, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Arrabal cited by Nicole Zand, Le Monde, 28-29 September 1969, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup>Arrabal cited by Bercoff, L'Express, 29 September 1969, p. 94.

principles of freedom that have governed his work since the panique period:

Leur participation est souhaitée et non extorquée. Le public réagira-t-il? Telle est la question essentielle. S'il ne réagit pas le spectacle ne sera pas estropié, il sera autre chose. Ma pièce est axée sur la liberté, donc sur la liberté du spectateur.<sup>1</sup>

Confrontation is to be avoided at all costs, and hence the actors are instructed to be gentle with the audience: "Jamais, à aucun moment, leur attitude n'est agressive; au contraire, ils sont amour et entraînent les spectateurs à l'intérieur des rêves pour que le rêve enveloppe la salle entière."<sup>2</sup>

There is an evident opposition between these statements and the stage directions. Furthermore, critical reaction in both France and America to the acting style and initiation would appear to confirm that Arrabal misjudged the willingness to accept the play on his terms. Clive Barnes clearly reacted negatively to his treatment by the actors: "You are seized by an usher and led, forced to your seat by an usher, as if by a prison guard. I was peremptorily moved and told to sit on the floor. I resented it. . . . It makes one wonder just who is putting handcuffs on the flowers!"<sup>3</sup> At the *Epée de Bois*, Eric Shorter felt harassed by the action that was carried on all around him: "The threat of having actors at your elbow or shoulders or feet proved unavoidably distracting."<sup>4</sup> The harshness of the production techniques appears to irritate an audience's sense of justice, producing an anger which prohibits the type of gentle confessions aimed at by the author. Indeed, by the end of a performance in November 1972, we were pleased to be able to escape from the battering that our decency as well as our senses had experienced.

It is noteworthy that by the time of this revival, Arrabal had suppressed the participatory moments of the play and had attenuated the initial ceremony. The initiation was then no more than an introduction to the repressive nature of the Spanish regime through propaganda tracts, artists' impressions,

<sup>1</sup> Arrabal cited by Jean-Jacques Olivier, Combat, 10 September 1969.

<sup>2</sup> Arrabal to Godard, "Arrabal saute le pas," p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Clive Barnes, The Times, 4 December 1971, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Shorter, "Plays in Performance," p. 36.

photographs, and cartoons. This alteration in the ultimate aim of the play from spectator participation to spectator instruction implies Arrabal's dissatisfaction with the initial format. Questioned by Ronald Hayman about the production techniques of the original mise en scène, Arrabal explained:

Afterwards, I invited them to tell the story of parts of their lives that were particularly bad, particularly unpleasant. And each evening I had delirious confessions. It was terrible because in the end they applauded. They didn't have the right to applaud because it was too painful.<sup>1</sup>

Arrabal was confronted by the inevitable limitations of the theatre. He did not want his play to be artistic or theatrical, but a cry of desperation. However, the conventions of the theatre are so deeply ingrained that the audience treats any performance as entertainment. The experience is dissipated by the almost automatic applause that greets the falling of the curtain.

Et Ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs remains unsatisfactory even when performed without the ceremonial beginning and ending. The combination of Arrabal's sexual and brutal preoccupations and the concern for the lot of the Spanish prisoners is unsuccessful. The Parisian critics, inured to the scatological content of Arrabal's drama, praised the new departure into contemporary politics as a step forward.<sup>2</sup> However, the London critics were disappointed that Arrabal should still express so many of his own obsessions in this new and very grave context. Michael Billington condemned it as "an indulgent sensationalist work"<sup>3</sup> which did not recreate the prison experience. Irving Wardle took Arrabal to task for not being faithful to his promise to write of his fellow prisoners' situation: "Faced with that demand, a writer has a duty to something beyond personal fantasy, and Arrabal has not met it." For him, the play was no better than L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, "yet another puny, masturbatory drama."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Arrabal to Ronald Hayman, "Fernando Arrabal and the Hidden Depths," The Times, 12 January 1971, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>See Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, Le Monde, 8 October 1969, p. 21; and Olivier, Combat, 10 September 1969.

<sup>3</sup>Michael Billington, The Guardian, 13 September 1973, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Irving Wardle, The Times, 13 September 1973, p. 14.

Arrabal, according to certain critics, fails to bear adequate testimony to the plight of political prisoners. The new orientation of his work both thematically and formally is jeopardized by his idiosyncratic imagination. The plays still fail to communicate themselves convincingly to a theatre audience. The guerrilla form itself could be a partial explanation for this continued failing. Ruby Cohn outlines the main reservations about this form in her review of the published volume of guerrilla plays:

As a weapon, guerrilla theater is defensive rather than offensive. Instead of harming the establishment, guerrilla plays boost the morale of the anti-establishment forces. . . . For all the interplay of actor and audience, guerrilla theater remains an art form and not a life style.<sup>1</sup>

Arrabal became aware of this last shortcoming after the disappointing reactions of the audience. For the revival in Paris, he is further guilty of being unworried by the general appeal of his play and his production and of accepting the approbation of his friends as the supreme justification of the work: "Ma mise en scène n'a pas une grande importance: le moment le plus utile pour nous tous a été celui où le poète Marcos Ana, qui a passé 23 ans de sa vie en prison (de 17 à 40 ans) et Angela Grimau (la veuve du militant assassiné), se sont adressés à nous au cours d'une répétition."<sup>2</sup> Matthieu Galey's following observation on the composition of the audience suggests that the play was retreating from the general public to become the property of a revolutionary élite. This is no more than an equally limited counterpart to the bourgeois control of the conventional theatre:

Les spectateurs, jeunes pour la plupart, écoutent la pièce comme s'ils étaient à la messe. . . . Toutefois qu'entendent ces jeunes gens, que voient-ils dans cette pièce? Un acte politique, un réquisitoire; le reste ne les intéresse pas. Ils vont au Palace comme ils iraient à la Mutualité: pour manifester leur opposition à un régime honni.<sup>3</sup>

Arrabal's unperformed play, Le Ciel et la merde, shares certain of these shortcomings. Although he now disowns the play, it is a homily on the

<sup>1</sup>Ruby Cohn, "Arrabal: Théâtre de quérilla," French Review, vol. 45, no. 1 (October 1971), p. 183.

<sup>2</sup>Fernando Arrabal, "Témoigner dignement," Les Nouvelles littéraires, 6-12 November 1972, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Matthieu Galey, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 13 November 1972, p. 19.



alternative life style symbolized by Charles Manson's family. The unhappy mixture of gratuitously scatological and erotic passages and statements on racial prejudice competes with attempts to subject the audience physically to the persecution that is the theme of the play. Arrabal goes as far as to suggest locking some of the spectators in cages for the duration of the performance:

Tous les incidents qui peuvent survenir au cours de la représentation (crises d'hystérie, rires gênés, ricanements moqueurs, plaintes véhémentes des suppliciés, chutes, interruptions, etc.) seront mis à profit par les acteurs qui les intégreront à la pièce.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the play, the audience is invited to the same type of ceremony that concluded Et Ils passèrent les menottes aux fleurs:

On couvrira tous ceux qui sont couchés avec un grand drap, les musiciens continueront à jouer et on laissera se former des relations spirituelles entre les couples (unis par le hasard) sans aucune parole ni motif rationnel. (IX:96)

This play is indelibly marked by Arrabal's experiences in America (where, in fact, he wrote Et Ils passèrent les menottes aux fleurs); its content and form follow in the line of productions such as Paradise Now in which the Living Theater try to fuse an art form and a life style, to bridge the gap between aesthetic and lived experience.

The nature of the theatrical experience in relation to the political reality of society links most of Arrabal's post-1967 work. In Bella ciao the high ideals of the theatre are expressed almost as a preface to the dramatic action in quotations from Valéry and Vilar. They stress the role of theatre in the formation of public consciousness and the necessity for the great works of the theatre to be performed to all citizens so that the whole nation can share in its cultural heritage. However, the action of the play undermines these principles; it depicts theatre as one of the pillars of a repressive élitist culture that maintains the majority in a state of subjection:

CULTURE: Toutes les guerres  
toutes les misères  
sont éternelles  
on ne peut rien y changer.

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<sup>1</sup>Fernando Arrabal, Le Ciel et la merde in Théâtre IX (Paris: Bourgois, 1972), p. 24.

Mes rideaux rouges  
et mes flonflons  
sont des barrières  
contre la sédition.

Mes vieux ménages à trois  
et tous mes quiproquos  
sont 10.000 fois plus drôles  
que la révolution. (BC:25)

Indeed, all writing whether creative or critical is in the pay of an all-powerful state. The writer sings:

ECRIVAIN: Cette merde que je l'aime  
et pour un fauteuil académique  
je nagerais dans la colique  
j'suis scribouillard d'Etat. (BC:29)

Arrabal is now claiming that revolution through the theatre is impossible, that the idea of a guerrilla theatre in the vanguard of the fight against repression is nothing short of illusory:

C'est une belle utopie. J'ai voulu faire un théâtre pour qu'il soit joué d'une manière sauvage, dans les rues, sous un chapiteau. Mais cela a été très difficile car dans le plus petit des villages il y a déjà des circuits de distribution, et des problèmes financiers.<sup>1</sup>

Hand in hand with the financial and commercial worlds that control the production go the roles of the passive spectator, the consumer who pays to be entertained, and the actor, the producer who makes the entertainment. The frustration of operating in this rigid system is expressed by outbursts against the conventional theatrical situation. Unable to alter the system, the author at least wants to make its limitations clear to the public. The closing refrain of La Grande Revue du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle attacks the passivity of the audience. It is a verbal counterpart to the Living Theater's rush to the front of the stage at the end of Antigone or Peter Brook's cast returning the audience's applause at the end of the Marat-Sade:

TOUS: On pourrait vous tenir  
tous ces propos sincères  
mais comme on sait y faire  
on préfère vous dire:

—Que vous êtes charmants  
chics et intelligents  
que cette revue bâtarde  
c'est de l'art d'avant-garde.

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<sup>1</sup>Arrabal to Lillet, "Je suis un clown," p. 24.

C'est la meilleure façon  
pour que le spectacle tienne  
que vos copains y viennent  
en rangs disciplinés.

Adieu, adieu, vous tous  
et bonne fin de soirée  
et pas de rêves dégueulasses  
sur Marie Satanas.<sup>1</sup>

Thematically, the author's campaign against repression is continued. In Bella ciao, there is a passing reference to the tearing out of political prisoners' eyes, the very image that affected Arrabal so deeply during his own imprisonment. In that play the social criticism is the most far-reaching through its questioning of the dualist culture of the oppressors and the oppressed in all its facets: the arts, journalism, television, education and sport:

CULTURE: Pour l'élite?  
TOUS: L'hermétisme! (bis)  
CULTURE: Pour le peuple?  
TOUS: La télé! (bis)  
CULTURE: Pour l'élite?  
TOUS: Le bon goût! (bis)  
CULTURE: Pour le peuple?  
TOUS: Le tiercé! (bis)  
CULTURE: Pour l'élite?  
TOUS: L'esthétisme! (bis)  
CULTURE: Pour le peuple?  
TOUS: La merde! (bis) (BC:23)

The case is argued from the point of view, not of the author, but of the oppressed classes throughout the world embodied in the roll-call of the heroes and political movements dedicated to the revolution which directly precedes the communal singing of the Italian revolutionary song, "Bella ciao," at the end of the play. The most overtly political of Arrabal's plays, it again poses the problem of the validity of revolutionary activity expressed in theatrical form. François-Régis Bastide's reaction to the performance reaffirms Arrabal's inability to combat the system:

On est devant cette utilisation artistique de la Révolution, devant cette liste de victimes les plus célèbres de l'Ordre, devant cette joie populaire à chanter le combat le plus pur, on est devant tout ça comme devant un beau travail. On salue, on remercie et on sort. On n'est même pas fatigué. Ni heureux. Ni courageux. . . . On a consommé cet art consommé. Tout est consommé. C'est navrant.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Fernando Arrabal, La Grande Revue du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle in Théâtre IX, p.180.

<sup>2</sup>François-Régis Bastide, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 13 March '72, p.24.

In La Grande Revue du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle and Le Ciel et la merde, it is not a class but an individual or group who constitutes the threat to order either by innocence or by opposition. In both, the troublesome element is eliminated by the authorities: Ribla, Erasme, Cleaver, Judas, and Grouchenka are shot down; Maria Satanas is taken away in the helicopter by the policemen who have observed her every move. Emanou suffers the same fate at the hands of the people in Le Cimetière des voitures. However, in the later plays, the action does not operate on the mythical level nor inside the author's private universe but in the contemporary world. If L'Aurore rouge et noire and Et Ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs describe repression in terms of the events of May 1968 and the Spanish political situation, the action of the latest published plays is situated in the history of the counter culture, and the contemporary world. They are given a free-flowing geographical and historical perspective lacking in his previous work.

Structurally the plays resemble each other by their episodic development. In Bella ciao the first tableau is constructed around the crippled figure of Culture calling on his attendants to account for their activities; the second tableau is given its structure by a Speaker commenting on the bullfight and the rugby match; the final tableau is a series of illustrations of statements by political figures. The technique of using a central figure who introduces each action is first seen with the tambourinaire in L'Aurore rouge et noire and is continued with Erasme in Le Ciel et la merde. Arrabal adapts it to La Grande Revue du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle; Maria Satanas turns the pages of a giant picture history of the modern world with each page beginning a new action.

The picture-book technique gives the play a structure akin to the strip cartoon. This approximation to a form of popular culture on the part of the author implies a further progression away from idiosyncrasy and toward general appeal. Indeed, Bella ciao is based on the techniques of the music hall:

Bella ciao est une nouvelle tentative de théâtre musical. Avec les moyens spécifiques du théâtre, elle réunit dans un même but expressif, des acteurs, des musiciens et des chanteurs jouant ensemble un scénario, où la musique, le texte et l'action scénique se placent sur un même plan.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jorge Lavelli in Bella ciao by Arrabal, p. 87.

Furthermore, the images used to convey the political message are derived from popular pastimes, the bullfight and the rugby match. At the bullfight it is the working class that is the bull just as it is the passive spectator whose fortunes are played with by the rugby teams of oppressors.

In L'Aurore rouge et noire the political debate is articulated either through slogans or suggestively through the mimed sequences. In the subsequent plays, Arrabal's position is made clear through the juxtaposition or simultaneous staging of two or more actions. A complex example in La Grande Revue du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle is the tableau, "La Tragédie du Titanic, Freud et la révolution sexuelle." Three actions intertwine: the ball on the Titanic the evening in 1912 that the ship hits the iceberg, Freud and his wife at a party in 1910 Vienna, and a happening dating from the 1967 period. The continuity of theme between these actions is based on the simile used by Arrabal in which man's consciousness is compared to an iceberg: four-fifths of both are submerged. The iceberg halts the formality of the ball at which point Freud in Vienna dedicates his life to psychoanalytic research while the happening exemplifies the free forms of art that have resulted from the liberation of the subconscious. Political points are made in the same manner, the rugby game in Bella ciao being a notable example: as the teams play with the golden ball, the miners at the back of the stage are shown toiling to extract the gold out of which the ball is fashioned; thus, the exploitation of the miners by the capitalist faction is presented in a single composite stage image. It is the one image that Bastide savoured during the whole performance:

Pendant ce temps, les ouvriers travaillent, et c'est là un moment sonore et visuel extraordinaire. Il suffit de quelques comédiens, armés de couteaux, de marteaux et de barres de fer pour que le puissant raclement, pour que le grincement, le martèlement, pour que le halètement du travail en usine soit dressé devant nous, comme jamais, à ma connaissance, il n'a été donné. C'est tout simplement formidable, inoubliable. . . . C'est à la fois vrai et beau, modeste et excessif.<sup>1</sup>

In theme, structure and technique, Arrabal is moving away from the hermetically enclosed universe of his earlier work. The desire to bear witness has developed into a desire to communicate his testimony to the public.

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<sup>1</sup> Bastide, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 13 March 1972, p. 24.

To this end, he has adopted the procedures of experimental forms of dramatic creation, especially those of collective creation.

#### (v) Conclusion

Arrabal's dramatic work has been treated in three periods, each period corresponding to a change in the experience of the author. His widening knowledge of the world prompted different attitudes to theme as well as <sup>to</sup> dramatic form. The overall development can be summarized as a move towards more positive views of more social themes coupled with more free dramatic technique. The claustrophobic themes and structures of the early period give way to the ceremony of the panique period in which Arrabal's theatre assumes the external forms of archetypal theatre, ritual. In the latest period, the author experiments with exploded stage productions that encompass the audience, or with plays of freer construction in the manner of popular comic strips. In short, the author has gone towards his public; he has assumed the role of spokesman for modern man and has become increasingly aware of his duty to communicate his vision of the human condition.

Nevertheless as this development has taken place, reception of the author's work in performance has remained consistently hostile. Whatever the dramatic form employed, the plays are accused of not communicating easily with the audience. Arrabal's experience and imagination are so strongly idiosyncratic as to be insurmountable obstacles to comprehension by the general public. In the early plays, the exceptional childhood experience makes the plays unviable dramatically; in the panique period the use of ritual form cannot overcome the obsessive detail of the author's life; the personal treatment of more universal themes in the latest period invalidates these themes. Indeed, the later period supplies instances in which Arrabal's dramatic method clearly contrasts with the ends in view. The plays in performance have generally failed to concern their audiences.

In Genet's theatre the audience is despised. He uses the conventions of the theatrical situation to produce a conscious anti-ritual in which the audience is called sharply into question. Genet's anti-rituals are constructed

to produce this chasm between stage and auditorium while keeping interest alive through fascination. Arrabal's theatre is unconsciously anti-ritual. The fascination can only be that of the voyeur observing weird and perverted behaviour. In Genet fascination derives from dramatic means—costume, action, lighting, and mask—whereas the fascination in Arrabal is with the unseemly.

With the possible exception of Lavelli's production of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, Arrabal's work in performance has suffered from a paradoxical situation, a text that is personal treated to public display. This type of paradox is inevitable up to the latest period, given Arrabal's two-process approach to dramatic creation. Arrabal considers the text as an independent entity. The freedom he gives to the directors works only when they almost totally disregard the text itself and produce a performance based on a mood rather than a prescribed action. This procedure is probably best exemplified by the éphémère panique. As a means of creation, it points to the process by which the theatre collectives will construct their spectacles and performances. However, in the majority of cases, the director attempts to communicate Arrabal's play by staging methods that open up the closed universe (Garcia's productions for example). When this is done, the critics often remark on the unhappy marriage of text and performance.

If the technical experimentation is considered independently of its unsuccessful pairing with the texts, Arrabal's work has interest because it is representative of the mainstream of theatrical experimentation in modern French theatre especially since 1967. It questions the roles of the author, director, actor, and spectator as well as examining the nature of the theatrical experience itself. Clearly, the most radical experiments were the éphémères paniques; certain of their techniques have been used in more structured pieces.

The author has become less and less an artist at work in isolation. The onus of creation has been spread among the directors, actors, and spectators. Arrabal has evolved from the solitary figure at work towards a recorder of others' experiences. This approach culminates in the collective work,

Bella ciao; the author was used to shape and structure the thoughts and ideas of a group into a dramatic work; the work resulted from a collaborative effort over a period of time. Gatti's development followed a similar course to Arrabal's in this respect leaving the quasi-surrealist pieces to join in the group work at the Institut des Arts de Diffusion, Louvain, where he acts as a coordinator for large scale student works. The same method of interaction between members of a group has been adopted by Le Théâtre du Soleil with Ariane Mnouchkine being the critical eye that gives structure to the actors' improvisations.

Arrabal's theatre has allowed the directors the freedom to create performances almost on stage. In many modern performances, the author has become a director-author working from his direct experience of the stage, for example, Roger Planchon. The actor, in turn, has assumed a new position with Arrabal's work. In the later plays he is not just the learner of a part but an innovatory force. For Bella ciao he was part of the creative team; in a performance of Le Ciel et la merde, he is expected to improvise around the chance happenings of the performance (a legacy from the éphémère panique); indeed, in Et Ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs, the cast have the crucial role of eliciting responses from the audience, responses which were originally considered the meaning of the play. Even in the more conventional situation of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, the actors' resourcefulness is fully extended. In fact, Gabriel Marcel saw this play as an example of the trend away from the text towards "la primauté absolue de l'acteur."<sup>1</sup> Le Grand Magic Circus regard this resourcefulness as the basic material of their work. The actor does not retreat behind a character but exposes himself to the public: "Il m'est arrivé d'envisager un théâtre où l'acteur ne tente jamais de se mettre dans la peau d'un personnage mais, au contraire, de se placer devant la glace et de devenir soi-même."<sup>2</sup> Jean-Claude Drouot attested to the complete mental and physical commitment that playing Emanou demanded: "Je deviens une sorte de

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<sup>1</sup>Gabriel Marcel, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 30 March 1967, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 104.



Christ à mon insu. Je vis la Passion avec la flagellation chère à Arrabal.  
 . . . On finira dans la sueur et la rouille."<sup>1</sup> He concluded: "On ne fait pas  
 ici appel à l'expérience du comédien, mais à la sensibilité de l'homme.  
 Excellente occasion de se débarrasser de ses préjugés."<sup>2</sup>

The experiments of the Polish director, Jerzy Grotowski, concentrate on the physical and psychological preparation of the actor. Equally, the happening calls ~~an~~ <sup>for</sup> commitment on the part of the participant. The happening differs from Grotowski's work in that the audience as well as the actors offer themselves for this public self-sacrifice. Arrabal views his own theatre as a locus for just such a public service: "Le public assiste à un événement religieux. . . . On dit que mon théâtre est profane et sacrilège, alors qu'il s'agit de cérémonies. Le public assiste au spectacle comme à un sacrifice."<sup>3</sup> Grotowski's sets, like Arrabal's later ones, included the audience physically in the action, for example, as fellow diners at Faust's feast. Arrabal experimented further in the original production of Et Ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs by calling for contributions from the audience towards the collective ceremony. By altering the conditions of perception of the audience, by placing the spectator in an environment, the author is trying to open up new possibilities for the relationship between the work and the spectator. It is in precisely this field that the happeners of the mid-1960s were experimenting.

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Claude Drouot cited by Jacqueline Cartier, France-Soir, 12 December 1967.

<sup>2</sup>Drouot cited by Varenne, Le Figaro, 13 December 1967.

<sup>3</sup>Arrabal to Goffaux, "Arrabal."

## CHAPTER IV

### HAPPENING AND THE EXPLOSION OF THEATRE

#### (1) Towards a Definition of Happening

The definition and description of any artistic movement pose a problem for the critic in that the appearance of a new genre or manifestation can be seen as a modified continuation of a preceding genre or a reaction to an existing movement. Happening constitutes a particularly complex phenomenon in this respect since its origins have been variously attributed to a modern re-emergence of the Dada manifestations and surrealist eccentricities, to a development of Cubist painting and the technique of collage, to the extension of sculpture, action painting and environmental art into the performing arts, or finally to a violent reaction against convention in the arts, and especially the concept of art as a consumer product. Furthermore, there have been many instances of events, either unscripted or unexpected, that have contained elements of happening before the word was ever used. The Roman circus, the medieval fête des fous, or even the commedia dell'arte--all relied for their effect on spontaneous action. Precursory events of this type are omitted from the present discussion because they were not produced in the spirit of happening proper, a spirit deriving not purely from artistic roots but also from the intellectual climate of the contemporary period. An examination of this climate is an alternative route by which to arrive at an adequate description of the phenomenon. A third and simpler method is to approach the genre from a purely historical angle defining the movement by date based on the usage of the word itself.

Historically, the first instance of happening was John Cage's 1952 production of a mixed media performance at Black Mountain College (North Carolina) which "involved the paintings of Bob Rauschenberg, the dancing of

Merce Cunningham, films, slides, phonograph records, radios, the poetries of Charles Olson and M. C. Richards recited from the tops of ladders, and the pianism of David Tudor, together with my Julliard lecture."<sup>1</sup> The seating arrangement was similarly unconventional: "A square composed of four triangles with the apexes of the triangles merging towards the center, but not meeting. The center was a larger space that could take movement, and the aisles between these four triangles also admitted of movement. The audience could see itself. . . . The larger part of the action took place outside of that square."<sup>2</sup> Although this performance was untitled, the practitioners of happening acknowledge it as a formative influence. The use of many different types of art, recitation, and recital, the vertical as well as horizontal use of space, and the implied freedom of action around and through the seating area are all elements of what was later to be called happening.<sup>3</sup> The word itself apparently owes its conception to an article by Allan Kaprow in a 1959 issue of the Anthologist where he described: "Something to take place: a happening."<sup>3</sup> It was first used in practice by the same author later that year in a performance piece entitled 18 Happenings in 6 Parts (New York, 1959).<sup>4</sup> Since 1959, happenings have continued to be performed and invented reaching a peak of creativity in the mid-1960s when a parallel critical interest was also at its height. In France, the development and practice of happening is very much enmeshed with the artistic career of a single man, Jean-Jacques Lebel.

Lebel was originally a member of the surrealist group associated with Breton's Le Surréalisme, Môme and later edited his own surrealist review,

<sup>1</sup> John Cage, Silence (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1961), p. x.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, "An Interview with John Cage," Tulane Drama Review, vol. 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965), p. 52. Cage's classes in contemporary music at Black Mountain College proved to be a focal point for young artists who later became happeners, for example, Jackson MacLow, George Brecht, Allan Kaprow, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins. For details of these classes see Martin B. Duberman, Black Mountain: an Exploration in Community (New York: Dutton, 1972), pp. 348-58.

<sup>3</sup> Allan Kaprow, "The Demiurge," Anthologist, vol. 30, no. 4 (1959), pp. 5-16.

<sup>4</sup> Allan Kaprow, 18 Happenings in 6 Parts in Happenings by Michael Kirby (London: Sedgewick and Jackson, 1965), pp. 53-83.

Front unique. Lebel moved towards the happening form with an Anti-Procès movement which produced happening-style events in Paris, Venice, and Milan in 1961-62. This type of happening enacted a ritualized funeral involving a group of informed collaborators; the public were admitted only in the final stages as the coffin was transported through the streets, and in Venice, onto the canals.<sup>1</sup> Next he spent a period in America and associated with Claes Oldenburg and Kaprow in New York, both of whom were very active in happening experimentation at that time. Lebel returned to France with renewed inspiration.<sup>2</sup> He created happenings between 1962 and 1967 beginning with Pour conjurer l'esprit de catastrophe (Paris) and ending with a production of Picasso's Le Désir attrapé par la queue (Ramatuelle, Var).<sup>3</sup> The most fervent happening activity was grouped around the four Festivals de la Libre Expression that Lebel organized between 1964 and 1967.

In France as in America, however, the emergence of happening had been preceded by developments in the plastic arts. Georges Mathieu, the French counterpart to Jackson Pollock, had executed an action painting on a twelve-foot canvas in the presence of a large audience at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt as early as 1956. Yves Klein experimented (until his death in 1962) with the processes of artistic creation, with the reality of the art object, and with the nature of artistic perception. His most famous public experiment took place on 9 March 1960 at the Galerie Internationale d'Art Contemporain: Klein directed three nude models as they rolled in paint and then across a canvas

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<sup>1</sup>See Jean-Jacques Lebel, Funeral Ceremony of the Anti-Procès in Kaprow, Assemblage, Environments and Happenings (New York: Harry Abrams, 1966), pp. 228-32; Alain Jouffroy, "Pour un dépassement de l'Anti-Procès par lui-même," Anti-Procès (Milan), no. 3 (June 1961), pp. 2-7; and Jean-Jacques Lebel, "L'Anti-Procès," Front unique (Milan), no. 2 (Autumn 1960), pp. 1-4 and pp. 36-39.

<sup>2</sup>E. C. Nimmo states that Lebel took part in Oldenburg's work while in New York; see E. C. Nimmo, "Catastrophe in Paris," in New Writers IV: Plays and Happenings (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967), p. 49. Lebel himself admits that he was impressed by Oldenburg's happening, The Shadows, in Jean-Jacques Lebel, "Notes sur les Happenings," Le Théâtre dans le monde, vol. 14, no. 6 (November-December 1965), p. 570.

<sup>3</sup>See Nimmo, "Catastrophe in Paris," pp. 49-53; and Jean-Jacques Lebel, Le Happening (Paris: Denoel, 1966), pp. 86-87. Pablo Picasso, Le Désir attrapé par la queue in L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 500 (August 1972), pp. 1-20.

while an orchestra played his composition, "Symphonie monotone"; the impressions made by the nude bodies became the art work. This line of research he called anthropométries. Later works were created by the scorch and burn marks of flames (fire paintings) and by the action of weather on exposed canvases (cosmogonies). Klein's work shows the preoccupation with art in progress and the position of the artist as a collaborator with others or the elements that became central to the happening aesthetic.

Historically outlined, the question remains as to what exactly the term happening means. Definitions and descriptions abound in the articles and reviews on happening that proliferated in the mid-1960s. Kaprow's "something to take place" is as vague as Salvador Dali's similarly etymological definition: "Réaliser un happening, c'est créer une situation qui ne peut pas se répéter deux fois."<sup>1</sup> Although these evaluations give very little insight into the type of performance that is happening, they do highlight an essential element, non-repeatability. Not that the script or scenario of a happening is used only once: Lebel's Pour conjurer l'esprit de catastrophe was repeated in Paris (1962) and Boulogne (1963), and Oldenburg's Snapshots from the City formed part of an exhibition of contemporary art which ran for several months at the Judson Gallery, New York (1961). Nevertheless, each performance will vary because of its total dependence on chance elements, the reactions of an audience and performers gathered in a particular place at a particular time. The juxtaposition of these arbitrary elements ensures non-repeatability.

E. T. Kirby is representative of an attempt to define the phenomenon by reference to the vocabulary of the theatrical genre: "Happenings in effect were a spontaneous approach to the necessity for a non-representational total theatre."<sup>2</sup> Susan Sontag argues conversely from the same premise; for her, happening is the negation of theatre in that it has no stage, no actors, no language, no text, and ultimately no communication.<sup>3</sup> Sontag's view coincides

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<sup>1</sup> Salvador Dali, "Happening," Le Nouvel Observateur, 25 May 1966, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> E. T. Kirby, ed., Total Theatre (New York: Dutton, 1969), p. xxvi.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation and Other Essays (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967), pp. 263-74.

with the almost universal misconception of happening as a free, formless event which, by overcoming inhibitions, promotes uncontrolled self-expression as the end in itself of the work. This view of happening can only possibly be applied to the French and European forms in which free improvisation of the actor and the spectator is a central element. The director, Jorge Lavelli, who explored the form at the Bilboquet (Paris) in 1966, outlines the experiment: "Une suite d'improvisations sur un thème donné, où se mêlent d'une manière insolite, mais fixée, différents moyens d'expression."<sup>1</sup> In this description, however, an amount of control over the form is implied; the theme pre-exists the improvisations and the different means of expression are also ordered in a precise fashion. Otto Hahn follows a similar line in his early examination of happening and pop art: "Il s'agit d'une manifestation groupant une trentaine de spectateurs qui, parfois, sont eux-mêmes participants: sur un thème donné et dans un cadre créé de toutes pièces, chacun se laisse aller à l'improvisation."<sup>2</sup> Hahn introduces here the position of the spectator; another hallmark of happening is the attempt to reform the passive observer of traditional theatre (in terms of physical activity) into an active participant.

American critics approach the problem of definition from the formal aspect of happening. Richard Kostelanetz treats happening in a work entitled The Theatre of Mixed Means elaborating what he calls "pure happening": "A thoroughly discontinuous collage of several sections" which "insists upon the unfettered exploration of space and time."<sup>3</sup> Al Hansen similarly links happening and the experimentation with space and time in the work A Primer of Happenings and Time/Space Art.<sup>4</sup> As for Michael Kirby, he develops a more detailed description based on an observation of the most common elements in American

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<sup>1</sup>Dominique Nores and Colette Godard, Lavelli (Paris: Bourgois, 1971), p. 146.

<sup>2</sup>Otto Hahn, "Pop art et happening," Les Temps Modernes, 19<sup>e</sup> année, no. 212 (January 1964), p. 1328.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Kostelanetz, The Theatre of Mixed Means (New York: Dial Press, 1968), p. 8; and pp. 4-5.

<sup>4</sup>Al Hansen, A Primer of Happenings and Time/Space Art (New York: Something Else Press, 1965).

happenings: "A performance using a variety of materials (films, dance, readings, music, etc.) in a compartmented structure, and making use of essentially non-matrixed performance, is a Happening."<sup>1</sup> For Kaprow the characteristic elements of happening are the non-discursive use of words with the performance preferably in an existing environment (a street, a car park) rather than in a created, stage-centred venue; there should be no single defined time nor space for this performance which is unrehearsed and uses non-professional actors and whose aim is to integrate actors and spectators into a unity and so to eliminate the concept of the audience altogether. The scope and variety of happenings, and indeed the differences of definition, defeat the French critic, Gilbert Tarrab who simply admits: "Ce phénomène échappe à toute tentative de définition systématique."<sup>2</sup>

By collating all the elements mentioned by the various critics and commentators of happenings, a formulation of an overall description of the phenomenon is possible. Such a description would read: Happening is a unique performance in a non-theatrical venue of a form of total, mixed means, non-representational theatre arranged as a collage of events in a compartmental structure which calls for varying degrees of improvisation and activity from the actor as well as the spectator and which is not limited to a single space or time. This hypothetical description comes very close in spirit to Hansen's own definition of his work and of the work of others who practice happening in New York:

I would accept as a concise definition of happenings the fact that they are theater pieces in the manner of collage and that each action or situation or event that occurs within their framework is related in the same way as each part of an abstract expressionist painting; i.e. . . . that this paint is doing this at this time at this place. The happening is a collage of situations and events occurring over a period of time in space.<sup>3</sup>

Kaprow makes an important addendum in a later statement: the dividing line

<sup>1</sup>Michael Kirby, "The New Theatre," Tulane Drama Review, vol. 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Gilbert Tarrab, "Le Happening: analyse psycho-sociologique," Revue d'histoire du théâtre, 20<sup>e</sup> année, no. 1 (January-March 1968), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Hansen, Primer, p. 24.

between art and life should be kept as fluid as possible.<sup>1</sup> It is this concept of art's interpenetration with life that affords a first consideration of happening in the context of art history.

(ii) Happening and the Contemporary World

An essential aspect of happening is the attempt to alter man's perception of the world. Beyond its situation as an artistic phenomenon, it strives after a perceptual revolution which would in turn lead to radical change<sup>s</sup> in man's condition. This function of happening is stressed particularly in Europe and above all by Jean-Jacques Lebel who defines his own work in exactly these terms:

Je ne fais pas du théâtre, je tente des expériences sensorielles.  
Je cherche à provoquer des mutations fonctionnelles de la perception;  
tous les moyens sont bons pour sortir l'homme de son trou, du  
conditionnement et de sa nullité.<sup>2</sup>

With Lebel the happening surpasses the role of aesthetic form in order to constitute a mode of consciousness, "une mentalité spéciale," "un état d'esprit libertaire."<sup>3</sup> The notion of the creative process as a liberation of repressed instincts betrays Lebel's contacts with the surrealist belief in automatic writing as revelation of the subconscious: "Tout événement perçu et vécu par plusieurs personnes comme un dépassement des limites du réel et de l'imaginaire, du psychique et du social, pourrait être qualifié de happening."<sup>4</sup> Whereas automatic writing is generally a solitary experience, the happening is a communion between a number of people. Lebel emphasizes that happening is fundamentally a subconscious communication between individuals:

Le happening est la concrétisation du songe collectif et le véhicule d'une intercommunication.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Allan Kaprow, "Letter to the Editor," Le Théâtre dans le monde, vol. 15, no. 1 (1966), p. 33 and Kaprow, Assemblage, pp. 188-89.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Jacques Lebel, "Parler du happening," Cité-panorama (Villeurbanne) no. 10 (1967), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Lebel, "Notes sur les happenings," p. 569.

<sup>4</sup> Lebel, Le Happening, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 36.



Le happening est avant tout un moyen de communication intérieure, ensuite, incidemment, un spectacle.<sup>1</sup>

Lebel's view of art as a means of psychic communication relates to a central tenet of twentieth-century, avant-garde theatre and particularly to the work of Antonin Artaud: "Nous ne sommes pas des philosophes, des reconstructeurs. Nous sommes des hommes qui cherchons à vibrer et à faire vibrer, vibrer en chœur."<sup>2</sup> The comparison of Lebel's theoretical essay, Le Happening, and Artaud's plans for the redefinition of the theatre as represented in his project Le Théâtre Alfred Jarry provides an interesting example of the continuity of thought among French avant-garde dramatic theorists of this century. In the 1928 statement of intent for his theatre, Artaud elucidates the type of effect at which his productions were to aim:

Le Théâtre Jarry ne triche pas avec la vie, ne la singe pas, ne l'illustre pas, il vise à la continuer, à être une sorte d'opération magique, sujette à toutes les évolutions. C'est en cela qu'il obéit à une nécessité spirituelle que le spectateur sent cachée au plus profond de lui-même. Ce n'est pas le moment de faire un cours de magie actuelle ni pratique, mais c'est pourtant bien de magie qu'il s'agit.<sup>3</sup>

The terminology of magic is to be found throughout Lebel's essay. For him theatre and the arts have lost the function of profound communion with the world and the transcendental; happening is a means to rediscover these lost areas of experience. Art has become just another commodity in the economic system: "Il s'agit de reconquérir la fonction magique dont l'art a été chassé par la civilisation technocratique et l'industrialisation de la culture."<sup>4</sup> Artaud understands theatre as an action that responds to a deep (therefore unconscious) need in man, an action that is revelatory and that gives a fuller understanding of life to those who experience it. Lebel ascribes a parallel role to his own work, not just in the domain of "un effort collectif de sacralisation,"<sup>5</sup> but in that of a more individual revelation of one's own self

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Antonin Artaud, Oeuvres Complètes II (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Lebel, Le Happening, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

hidden in the subconscious: "La fonction de l'art par rapport à la société devient claire: exprimer coûte que coûte ce qui est caché derrière le mur."<sup>1</sup> Artaud's theatre would become action; that is, the performance would not be an illusion, just an aesthetic reality, but a lived reality, an act that would produce a concomitant real action on the part of the audience. In this way, it would break with the conventional theatre which is defined by its lack of action and its total passivity: "A partir du Théâtre Jarry, le théâtre ne sera plus cette chose fermée, enclose dans l'espace restreint du plateau, mais visera à être véritablement un acte, soumis à toutes les sollicitations et à toutes les déformations des circonstances et où le hasard retrouve ses droits."<sup>2</sup>

Necessarily, theatre based on this conception differs qualitatively from the conventional stage. The latter evolves in an atmosphere of rigidity and repetition and is based on the concept of the definitive version which exists in a stable ideal world beyond the world of contingency and chance. Artaud's theatre, on the other hand, is characterized by movement and constant change: "Une mise en scène, une pièce, seront toujours sujets à caution, à révision, de telle sorte que les spectateurs venant à plusieurs soirs d'intervalle n'aient jamais le même spectacle devant les yeux."<sup>3</sup> The logical conclusion of a play in constant metamorphosis must be a play that is not repeated, and here one returns to Dali's definition of happening and to Lebel's assessment: "Ni comique, ni tragique, ni abstrait, ni figuratif, il se réinvente à chaque occasion," and Kaprow's observation on the American form: "By composing in such a way that the unforeseen has a premium placed upon it, no Happening can be reproduced."<sup>4</sup>

A clear implication of this style of theatre is a modification of Jouvet's trinité: the author is no longer solely responsible for his work, and the work itself becomes dependent on the vagaries of the situation including

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Artaud, O.C. II, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Lebel, "Notes sur les happenings," p. 569; and Allan Kaprow, "'Happenings' in the New York Scene," Art News, vol. 60, no. 3 (May 1961), p. 60.

the actor and the spectator. Artaud describes the reformed relationship between the actor and the spectator: "Une mise en scène du Théâtre Jarry sera passionnante comme un jeu, comme une partie de cartes à laquelle tous les spectateurs participeraient."<sup>1</sup> The spectator is envisioned as taking part in the creative act that is the performance and, consequently, he sheds the status of spectator to become a participant. The barrier that exists in the theatre between actor and spectator (despite Artaud's theories published some thirty years previous) constitutes one of the major targets of the artists of happening:

Le dépassement préconisé par les auteurs de happenings n'est qu'amorcé. Déjà cependant, il met en question la peinture mais aussi les habitudes de penser qu'elle engendre, y compris la frustration du spectateur, la déformation professionnelle du regardeur.<sup>2</sup>

Label projects the habits of artistic appreciation into a critique of the social system; just as the conventional artistic relationship is one of actor and spectator, so the social system is built on an actor-spectator situation in which the majority is reduced to being mere spectators. Label feels this basic division into active and passive members of society has to be changed in order to create a more equitable social situation. The happening is instrumental in this process because it overcomes this separation in the theatrical situation and manifests the possibility of change in society at large:

L'art contemporain a longtemps tâtonné et tâtonnera encore avant de retrouver la fonction magique qui lui était jadis naturellement assignée. Qu'il renouvelle enfin ses techniques, de manière à participer effectivement à la transformation du monde.<sup>3</sup>

Artaud saw his projected theatre as a force in the process of social change that he sensed was imminent; his theatre, he claimed, would appeal to "tous ceux . . . qui sentent tout ce qu'il y a de menaçant dans l'atmosphère de ce temps, qui veulent participer aux Révolutions qui se préparent."<sup>4</sup>

The interpenetration of art and life is not a discovery of either

<sup>1</sup> Artaud, O.C., II, pp. 27-28.

<sup>2</sup> Label, Le Happening, pp. 45-46.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> Artaud, O.C., II, pp. 28-29.

Artaud or the happeners. At the level of physical action in direct reply to art, historical precedents date back at least as far as "la bataille d' Hernani"; more recently the Dadaists overtly cultivated this type of active response in their audiences. Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes reports the mechanism in connection with the Dada manifestation at the Grand Palais in February 1920: "L'essentiel était atteint. Il fallait obtenir l'hostilité."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Kurt Schwitters on a tour of Holland with Van Doesberg would continually interrupt the performance from the stalls by yapping like a demented dog until the audience protested and were on the verge of physically ejecting him: "This stratagem never failed in its purpose of arousing the public from its good-natured complacency. Everywhere the public played its unsuspecting part in the proceedings."<sup>2</sup> As distinct from these devices, both Artaud and the happeners are striving for a new modus vivendi through art: for Artaud this becomes a search for universal oneness, the marriage of the spiritual forces in nature, man, and the universe; for Lebel, it is more a release of the repressed instincts of man in order to restore him to total, integral life. Both see the prevailing Western conception of culture, civilisation, and indeed the universe as an inhibition to the realization of their different quests for unity. Consequently both attack language, logic, and single perspective as the pillars of this culture and as instruments in compartmentalizing the universe into subject and object, in effecting a fundamental differentiation in the world view. The contestation of these basic principles of Western culture can be traced back to the revolution in pictorial art produced by the Cubists.

The fundamental change that Cubism introduced into art was a new concept of space and a resultant rejection of the single perspective that had dominated graphic art since the Renaissance. In the experimental sciences, the new awareness of space was championed by Einstein's theory of relativity.

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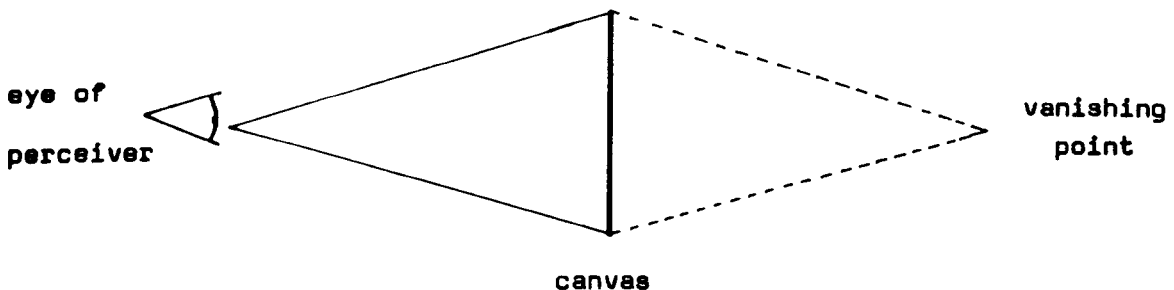
<sup>1</sup> Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Déjà jadis ou Du Mouvement Dada à l'espace abstrait (Paris: Julliard, 1958), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Richter, Dada: Art and Anti-Art (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), p. 144.

After Einstein, the Newtonian concept of space as a static entity began to lose ground in favour of the space conception of modern mechanics which states that space is relative. The parallel between the Cubists and Einstein in this respect is obvious:

It [Cubism] views objects relatively: that is, from several points of view, no one of which has exclusive authority. And in so dissecting objects it sees them simultaneously from all sides. . . . It goes around and into its objects.<sup>1</sup>

The role of the observer in this new spatial perspective is correspondingly modified. In traditional, perspective (post-Renaissance) painting every element is related to the unique point of view of the individual spectator; the canvas opens out, as it were, from the vanishing point to be met by the eye of the observer:



The observer is drawn into the perfect illusion of the painting; in fact, he effaces himself and abdicates his own reality in favour of that of the canvas. It is more a question of self-effacement before, rather than involvement in, the illusion. The Cubist painting does not have the single vanishing point of perspective; the subject is exploded over the total area of the canvas. The observer consequently never loses his own self-consciousness as he is forced to make successive changes in position in front of the canvas, either purely a matter of moving his eyes from one part of the painting to another or even a need to move physically in order to gain an alternative perspective. Thus, the observer is engaged in a more active relationship with the canvas: self-effacement becomes self-consciousness and an involvement in the painting:

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<sup>1</sup> Siegfried Giedion, Space, Time and Architecture: the Growth of a New Tradition, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954 repr. 1959), p. 432.

In particular, it has become plain that the aesthetic qualities of space are not limited to its infinity for sight, as in the gardens of Versailles. The essence of space as it is conceived today is its many-sidedness, the infinite potentiality for relations within it. . . . In order to grasp the true nature of space the observer must project himself through it.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the implied activity of the observer, movement and time are introduced into painting. For example, Marcel Duchamp's Nu descendant un escalier (1911) is an attempt to account for the movement of the figure down the staircase suggested by freezing a succession of moments in the same way as the ciné camera. In the theatre, movement also became a prime concern of innovators; Artaud's hieroglyphic figures are attributable to a fascination with movement, and the Bauhaus group experimented enthusiastically with the dynamic possibilities of the human form. Nevertheless neither Artaud nor the Bauhaus, for all their theoretical experimentation, extended the dynamic possibilities out from the stage and into the auditorium; the performance despite all its movement remained in the frame of the stage and the audience retained its privileged position, one possibly equivalent to the spectator of a pre-Cubist painting with its single perspective.

To be accurate, the Cubists themselves did not expand the theory of space outside the frame and into the spectator space until the first experiments in collage technique. Only with Picasso's Nature morte à la chaise canée (1912) and Braque's Compotier et verre (1912) did the surface of the work become important; its irregularity engaged the spectator in a spatial relationship as well as encouraging a tactile experience. Painting passed from a purely visual art form to a more widely sensual one. A further consequence of the collage technique was the introduction into art of a whole host of new materials previously excluded from the process of artistic creation. Apollinaire remarked: "On peut peindre avec ce qu'on voudra, avec des pipes, des timbres-poste, des cartes postales ou à jouer, des candélabres, des morceaux de toile cirée, des faux cols, du papier peint, des journaux."<sup>2</sup>

Allan Kaprow traces the development of happening back through

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 431-32.

<sup>2</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire, Les Peintres cubistes (Paris: Hermann, 1965), p. 67.

environment to this very technique of collage:

The pieces of paper curled up off the canvas, were removed from the surface to exist on their own, became more solid as they grew into other materials and, reaching out further into the room, finally filled it entirely. Suddenly, they were jungles, crowded streets, littered alleys, dream spaces of science fiction, rooms of madness, and junk-filled attics of the mind . . .<sup>1</sup>

In environment art, the art work encompasses the spectator and his movement through the work is another element in artistic creation. Environmental work reflects the new conception of relative space more accurately: it does away with the fixed point of observation; the observer passes through the work which is only fully realized in the multiple relationships which the observer has with it as he passes through. In this way, even the concept of the spectator/observer is transformed as he becomes an integral part of the work. The spectator's journey through the environment places the work in a state of permanent change; the notion of a fixed stable art object begins to disappear.

The juxtaposition of disparate elements in the visual arts as early as 1912 has a counterpart in the collage-performance which the Dadaists introduced at the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916. In these performances, poetry, music, song, recitations of manifestos and poèmes simultanés were intermixed. The poème simultané is in itself a collage of noise, combining the human voice with all manner of other screams and whistles:

Bells, drums, cow-bells, blows on the table or on empty boxes, all enlivened the already wild accents of the new poetic language, and excited, by purely physical means, an audience which had begun by sitting impassively behind its beer-mugs. From this state of immobility it was roused into frenzied involvement with what was going on.<sup>2</sup>

The aims of the poème simultané are explained by the author, Tristan Tzara, in the Dadaist paper called Cabaret Voltaire of 15 May 1916:

Je voulais réaliser un poème basé sur d'autres principes. Qui consistent dans la possibilité que je donne à chaque écoutant de lier les associations convenables. Il retient les éléments caractéristiques pour sa personnalité, les entremêle, les fragments, etc.<sup>3</sup>

Just as for the collage and the environment, the poème simultané presents a work which is not complete in itself but which is completed by the relationship

<sup>1</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup>Richter, Dada, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Tristan Tzara cited by Richter, Dada, p. 30.

between the work and the observer/listener. The happening involves a similar collage of activities inside the environment set; the artistic form is likewise relative in that each individual will experience these activities and the total happening in a different way as he moves around the environment. The legacy of Dada and collage is evident in the writings of the happeners; Kaprow describes the method of creation of a happening as "the collage-assemblage method of juxtaposing events,"<sup>1</sup> and Al Hansen openly acknowledges the importance of these early experiments in mixed media production:

The idea that seems to come from Futurism, Dadaism, even Surrealism, is that of the art work enclosing the observer, of art work that overlaps and interpenetrates different art forms. This focuses on the happening in the way that these performances engulf the spectator.<sup>2</sup>

Apollinaire referred to the use of everyday objects in the work of art by the Cubists. Dada expands this practice and destroys the whole concept of the art work by exhibiting the object without any transmutation into an artistic form; the ready-made serves as the antithesis of the aesthetic object. Happening takes up the everyday object once more either incorporating it into an environment for a work or, conversely, using it in its customary situation as a found environment. Taking the existing environment as the basis and inspiration of an art work is a technique of even primitive artists, the cave-dwellers in their rock etchings:

When the world was looked upon as an inseparable whole, rocks were looked upon with different eyes than ours. The animals that primeval man engraved or painted were, for him, already living in the rock. It is a fact that the natural traces of forms in the rock inspired paleolithic man to create from a fragment the so-to-speak innate form of an animal or a human figure.<sup>3</sup>

A clear example is the bison at La Mouthe (Dordogne) where the outline of the back and to some extent the head has followed the natural rock. Artaud observed a similar practice among the Tarahumara Indians of Mexico. Significant for Artaud was the organic interpenetration in this culture of art, life and religion. Primeval art shows a total lack of direction with animals

<sup>1</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup>Hansen, Primer, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Siegfried Giedion, The Eternal Present, vol. 1: The Beginning of Art (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 20-22.



drawn upside down or back to back, as well as a lack of relief implied in the dislocation and juxtaposition of flat surfaces. These characteristics point to the basic unity and wholeness that reigned in the world of primeval man. Even time was an eternal present as Siegfried Giedion's title states. The inanimate and the animate, the animate and the spiritual—all were fused into a unified whole. Ancient man was totally integrated with his environment:

Undoubtedly prehistoric art is without a frame. It has absolute freedom of direction. . . . The space conception of primeval art is perhaps the most revealing trait of the conception of oneness of the world: a world of unbroken interrelation where everything is in association, where the sacred is inseparable from the profane.<sup>1</sup>

It is to this vision of unalienated man seen in primeval art that Lebel refers when he compares happening and "l'art des sauvages et des fous."<sup>2</sup> The oneness of the artistic vision was broken by perspective as the integrated universe was ended by logic; the bison drawn using the natural protuberances of the rock was at one and the same time a real substance in a real space and an image in a total picture. Perspective destroys this duality as Kaprow explains:

When next a horizon line was drawn under a cow, the separation of image from environment occurred like a logical thunderbolt. . . . Painting had become symbol rather than power, i.e., something which stood for experience rather <sup>than</sup> acting directly upon it.<sup>3</sup>

The aim of happening is to reintegrate art into life so that direct communion of man and the environment can be re-established. This process explains the attention paid to the performance space by happeners and other avant-garde dramatic artists and the importance the space has in the creative process. Kaprow's Courtyard (New York, 1962) as well as Oldenburg's Moviehouse (Dallas, 1965) were preceded by examinations of the suggested venues to evaluate the potentialities of the space. Al Hansen expresses his thoughts: "It seems to me the happening is more successful when the performers and myself have come to terms with the environment; the time/space place, accepting the limitations of what is available and working with them."<sup>4</sup> Richard Schechner and his

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Lebel, Le Happening, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 156.

<sup>4</sup>Hansen, Primer, p. 22.

Performance Group arrive at a like conclusion concerning the role of space in creation: "Articuler un espace cela signifie: laisser un espace dire ce qu'il a à dire. C'est-à-dire regarder cet espace, l'explorer, non comme un moyen d'y faire ce qu'on voudrait y faire, mais pour y faire ce qu'il vous incite à faire."<sup>1</sup> Part of the space is the objects found in the space; the everyday object in the happening is regarded in a similar light as the total environment as Kaprow observes:

In making a Happening, it is better to approach composition without borrowed form theories, and instead to let the form emerge from what the materials can do. . . . In this way a whole body of nonintellectualized, nonculturized experience is open to the artist and he is free to use his mind anew in connecting things he did not consider before.<sup>2</sup>

The art work arises out of the space and the materials present in a manner akin to the primeval man's cave drawings.

The similarity between the primeval age and our own lies in the concept of space and the interrelation of all things in space. Primitive man's space was non-directional and everything, animate and inanimate alike, was equally infused with a soul, thus enabling a rock to become a bison. For modern man, the Renaissance idea of static space and single perspective is eclipsed by the notion of relative space and of the non-causal interrelation of the universe through the erratic flow of particles, ideas first conceptualized by the philosopher A. N. Whitehead in the 1920s. Happening can be seen as that development in theatre which corresponds to this view of the universe and so can be considered as a product of a particular intellectual climate.

The evolution in the experimental sciences and the space conception of quantum theory have not been paralleled by a corresponding modification of Western man's world view; for example, man continues to think in terms of cause and effect and subject-predicate logic. Whitehead tried to evolve a system in which the new advances of scientific knowledge could be reconciled with empirical observation of the world:

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Schechner, "Propos sur le théâtre de l'environnement," Travail théâtral, no. 9 (October-December 1972), p. 83, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 202.

The false idea which we have to get rid of is that of nature as a mere aggregate of independent entities, each capable of isolation. . . .

The explanation of nature which I urge as an alternative ideal to this accidental view of nature, is that nothing in nature could be what it is except as an ingredient in nature as it is. . . . The isolation of an entity in thought, when we think of it as a bare "it," has no counterpart in any corresponding isolation in nature. Such isolation is merely part of the procedure of intellectual knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

In place of the subject-predicate system of logic in which a causal relationship is established, Whitehead substitutes the concept of the actual entity, "drops of experience, complex and interdependent."<sup>2</sup> This concept embraces both the subject and predicate, or subject-object, and by so doing overcomes the division between them as a critic notes: "Within this small slab of space and time we find united subject and object, percipient and perceived—all opposites and irreconcilables that have been the despair of metaphysics."<sup>3</sup> The actual entity is not perceived by a privileged mind but rather prehended. Prehension, for Whitehead, is the process by which the object becomes part of the subject before it is even identified as an object: "A prehension is not so much a relation as a relating."<sup>4</sup> The philosophy Whitehead proposes is a philosophy of organism bringing him closer to certain strains of oriental thought than to traditional Western thought: "One side makes process ultimate; the other side makes fact ultimate."<sup>5</sup>

Whitehead's philosophic system could read as an apology for the happening before the fact: just as the actual entity encompasses both subject and object substituting as the basic element of the system, process, a relating between subject and object, so the happening is an art form which defines itself as a relating between the observer and itself and as a disappearing of the observer as he helps to fashion the art work. In addition, the movement

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred N. Whitehead, The Concept of Nature (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1920), p. 141; and p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred N. Whitehead, Process and Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Jordan, New Shapes of Reality (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968), p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Victor Lowe, Understanding Whitehead (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 9.

of people through and around the work implies a process of creation that is in a continual state of becoming. Kaprow affirms that it is the concept of "reality understood as constant metamorphosis" that lies at the "root of our present innovations."<sup>1</sup>

By this argument, happening results from a changing conception of the structure of the universe as envisaged in a philosophical vision. It can also be maintained that happening derives from a revolution in our modes of communication. Like Whitehead, Marshall McLuhan opposes the Western system of thought and perception based as it is on subject-predicate logic and causal associations. McLuhan argues that this system became firmly established as the result of printing and the spread of literacy after the invention of the press. The practice of sentence construction produced in Western man linear consciousness; at the same time, the practice of reading in straight horizontal lines caused a single perspective style of perception. He posits that this mode of consciousness and perception has been rendered obsolete by the advances in communication systems and the revolution effected by the advent of electronic media; the alphabet has been superseded by visual images:

Neither Hume nor Kant, . . . detected the hidden cause of our Western bias toward sequence as "logic" in the all-pervasive technology of the alphabet. Today in the electric age we feel as free to invent nonlinear logics as we do to make non-Euclidean geometries.<sup>2</sup>

In happening, as in Artaud, is demonstrated this aversion for the grammatical sentence and a predilection for visual impact.

Electronic media have demoted the word from the central position in communication, and by so doing, have brought about a correlative abandonment of the concept of a single perspective. In the modern world, man is bombarded simultaneously with information from all sides so that information is no longer compartmentalized into neat topics. The concept of space that relates to this situation is not the organized space of the single printed line but rather "acoustic space":

<sup>1</sup> Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man, 2nd ed. (New York: Signet Books, 1964 repr. 1966), p. 88.

There are no lines or directions in acoustic space, but rather a simultaneous field. It is non-Euclidean. And the newspaper in setting up a dozen book pages on one page was already a big step towards this sort of cultural simultaneity and non-lineality.<sup>1</sup>

This notion of time/space returns man to "the multidimensional space orientation of the 'primitive.'"<sup>2</sup> The Cubist artists prefigured the impact of the advancing electronic technology; as McLuhan acknowledges, they freed art from the "straitjacket"<sup>3</sup> of lineal development. The trend in visual perception in the electronic era is the "transition from lineal connections to configurations."<sup>4</sup> Here the idea of space of the primitive re-emerges as he, too, had no concept of direction but rather perceived interconnected patterns. Happening parallels this trend: it employs a total use of space, enveloping the spectator; its structure involves series of simultaneous actions that surround the spectator who is assailed by sensual stimuli from all directions; events are juxtaposed without causal links, and the composition of the events into a whole takes place in the eye of the observer as Oldenburg indicates: "It's characteristic of all my pieces to want to put the responsibility on the individual eye."<sup>5</sup>

Electronic media also alter the basic aim of communication. Previously the instrument of communication was purely a means by which a message or piece of information was transmitted from one point to another, from one individual to another. McLuhan argues that in the present situation the means of communication is the message to be communicated; in other words, the means is not neutral but informs the message. The corollary of this situation is an interest in effect rather than meaning: "Concern with effect rather than meaning is a basic change of our electric time, for effect involves the total situation, and not a single level of information movement."<sup>6</sup> In happening the

<sup>1</sup> Marshall McLuhan, Counterblast (London: Rapp & Whiting, 1969), p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, The Medium is the Massage (London: Allen Lane Penguin Press, 1967), p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> McLuhan, Understanding Media, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Oldenburg to Kostelanetz, Theatre of Mixed Means, pp. 152-53.

<sup>6</sup> McLuhan, Understanding Media, p. 39.

meaning of the work equals the effect it has on the spectator-participant.

The consequences of the rediscovery of "acoustic space" are seen by McLuhan to lead away from the compartmentalization of experience in favour of interrelation, also cited as an aim of happening by Hansen: "I think of happenings as an art of our time. In happenings I am involved with communication and education. Schooling is so old fashioned that individuals get crammed into a compartmentalized egg crate approach to life."<sup>1</sup> "Acoustic space" also makes for the involvement of the observer in the environment by the concentration of information media, just as primitive man felt involved in his universe to the point of feeling attacked on all sides. The abandonment of logic and the alphabet frees man to react once more:

Oral cultures act and react at the same time. Phonetic culture endows men with the means of repressing their feelings and emotions when engaged in action. To act without reacting, without involvement, is the peculiar advantage of Western literate man.<sup>2</sup>

In the happening the spectator becomes an active element by reacting to the stimuli, and this reaction usually takes the form of a physical action rather than a grammatical sentence.

A final point of comparison of happening and McLuhan's information theory is the overall idea of the environment. The happeners attribute a great deal of importance to the environment for the happening: Lebel calls it "l'élément essentiel du happening"; Kaprow sees the environment and happening as manifestations of a single impulse "whose principle is extension."<sup>3</sup> The choice of terminology is interesting in that McLuhan regards the electronic media as "the extensions of man," the subtitle of Understanding Media. For McLuhan, the electronic media extend the central nervous system beyond the body and into the universe, in the same way as in the previous technology the wheel extended the foot. By a parallel argument, the environment and the happening extend the repressed instincts and desires of the participant into action. In this manner, Lebel's desire to express the hidden part of man's psyche would seem to be realized. However, the environment also has a control

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<sup>1</sup>Hansen, Primer, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>McLuhan, Understanding Media, p.88.

<sup>3</sup>Lebel, Le Happening, p. 63; and Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 184.

over the theme: "Environments are not passive wrappings, but are, rather, active processes which are invisible."<sup>1</sup> The environment in happening controls the individual by conditioning him to react in a certain way; often the spectator only becomes a participant in as much as he reacts to a stimulus:

"Marc 'O d'un côté, Lebel d'un autre, bouleversent de fond en comble notre système de perception: nous ne savons plus, avec ces derniers, où donner des yeux, nous sommes sollicités, harcelés, tourmentés, comme talonnés partout, nos nerfs sont mis à rude épreuve, nos sens sont aiguillonnés sans répit, notre système perceptif habituel s'écroule."<sup>2</sup> The spectator-participant reacts only to that which is there; the possibility to pass beyond the situation is reduced. Similarly, McLuhan's extensions of man lead to "the total involvement in all-inclusive nowness."<sup>3</sup> The point to be made is that the extensions of man, electronically or environmentally, in encouraging a development of man also imply a restriction of his freedom which is intimately bound up with the ability to imagine alternatives and hence to entertain non-existent notions.

Interpreted in this manner, happening represents an art form that reflects the social theory of reification. The process by which value is converted into economic worth, reification, ultimately reduces life to exchanges of objects. As a consequence, objects become the most essential elements in life. Man is sacrificed to the production of these objects and is himself reduced to an object by the means of mass production in which he is as replaceable as any other part of the machinery. Lucien Goldmann assesses the effect of this process on the human psyche: "La conscience tend en effet à devenir un simple reflet, à perdre toute fonction active au fur et à mesure que le processus de la réification, conséquence inévitable d'une économie marchande, s'étend et pénètre de l'intérieur tous les secteurs non économiques de la pensée et de l'affectivité."<sup>4</sup> As a simple reflet, consciousness loses its ability to go beyond that which exists and to imagine that which does not.

<sup>1</sup> McLuhan and Fiore, Medium is the Massage, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Tarrab, "Le Happening," p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> McLuhan, Counterblast, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Lucien Goldmann, "La Réification," Les Temps Modernes, 14<sup>e</sup> année, nos. 156-157 (February 1959), p. 1436.

The happening in as much as it allows only immediate reaction to a stimulus can be regarded as an artistic manifestation of this reduction of man's consciousness. Nevertheless, the practitioners of happening, and especially Lebel, attack vehemently just this process of reification in contemporary society. The paradox is apparent: the theory of happening is betrayed by the practice; the effect of the means employed runs contrary to the initial purpose for their use.

Lebel's arguments against the reified society centre ~~around~~<sup>on</sup> the question of man's alienation inside a society of objects and his incapacity to act. Goldmann analyses this situation and attributes it to the prevailing economic system: "C'est ainsi que dans ce domaine fondamental de la vie humaine qu'est la vie économique, l'économie marchande masque le caractère historique et humain de la vie sociale transformant l'homme en élément passif, en spectateur d'un drame qui se renouvelle continuellement et dans lequel les seuls éléments réellement actifs sont les choses inertes."<sup>1</sup> The happening, states Lebel, "de tous les langages à notre disposition est le moins aliénant," the reason being that the traditional roles in theatre and, indeed, in society are not respected: "Il n'y a plus de sens unique comme au théâtre ou au musée, plus de fauves derrière les barreaux comme au zoo. Il faut sortir de la condition de spectateur à laquelle la culture ou la politique nous ont habitués."<sup>2</sup> The traditional situation in the theatre is described by Jouvot: "L'acteur n'animait son personnage qu'afin de permettre au public de se donner l'âme d'un voyeur."<sup>3</sup> The happening, by allowing man to have an active role, counters this enforced passivity. The spectateur is freed to re-integrate himself into the action and the environment.

The happeners will never be able to eradicate completely the difference

<sup>1</sup>Goldmann, "La Réification," p. 1447.

<sup>2</sup>Lebel, Le Happening, p. 45; and p. 77. It is interesting to observe that the modern concept of the zoo typified by the safari park involves a reversal of roles. The spectators are locked in their cars while the animals roam free and observe them.

<sup>3</sup>Jouvot, Réflexions du comédien, p. 13.



in the roles of the spectator-participant and the actor or organizer-participant. The latter will always have prior knowledge of the happening which is not available to the former which remains the case even when the details of the happening are communicated to the participants before the event. Where the happening does differ in kind from conventional theatre is in its acceptance of the unforeseen action of the spectator as part of the work. The problem that then arises is that of the nature of the environment in which the spectator finds himself and whether the ensuing identification and re-integration releases man from the reified universe of objects. The environments of happenings are composed of everyday articles and merchandise including televisions, washing-machines and other elements of the machine society. It can be argued, as does Herbert Marcuse, that this type of confrontation of man with the objects of his own environment does not lead to a revelation about the nature of that environment but rather to its confirmation; for, "the people recognize themselves in their commodities" and "the subject which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence."<sup>1</sup> Secondly, a study of the treatment of people in happening (both actor and spectator) reveals a large degree of functionalism which might act to deny human inventiveness and reduce the human being to the status of an object among objects. On both of these levels it is possible to consider happening as a product of reified society rather than its contradiction.

From this point of view, happening can be compared with the nouveau roman and especially the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet. Purely historically it is significant that Cage's early mixed media production and Robbe-Grillet's first novel, Les Gommes, are only separated by a matter of months. Jean Bloch-Michel summarizes the contents of the new novel: "Il y a d'abord les objets, ce mot étant pris dans son sens le plus large, tout étant objet pour le sujet qui parle, y compris les êtres humains, et ceux-ci au même titre que

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 9; and p. 11.

les choses."<sup>1</sup> This aspect of the form of the novel has been interpreted by Goldmann as ample proof of the process of reification and its infiltration into the mind of the creative artist: "Sur le plan littéraire, la transformation essentielle porte en tout premier lieu . . . sur l'unité structurale personnage-objets, modifiée dans le sens d'une disparition plus ou moins radicale du personnage et d'un renforcement corrélatif non moins considérable de l'autonomie des objets."<sup>2</sup> The omnipresence of the object in Robbe-Grillet parallels the position of the object in the happening and, indeed, refers back once more to our initial comparison with Cubism. For the techniques employed by Robbe-Grillet compare with the pictorial techniques of Cubist painting. For example, the use of the present indicative in the novel and the method by which the object is described from several points of view "simultaneously" is equivalent to the break-up of the object into surfaces and the resultant impression of simultaneity of Cubist painting. The novel as well as the happening abandons the notion of story line or intrigue as a principle of organization just as Cubist painting abandons perspective. The treatment of the human form shows common traits. People in Robbe-Grillet's novels are depersonalized in one of two ways: either they appear and disappear so rapidly that they are only present as an ill-defined retinal image (for example, "le gamin" in Dans le labyrinthe) or they are fixed in artificial rigidity: "Elle pivota sur ses talons, comme une marionette, puis alla rapporter la bouteille derrière le comptoir, ayant aussitôt retrouvé son allure lente et fragile de poupées articulées."<sup>3</sup> Both these methods occur in the happening: Kaprow's Spring Happening (New York, 1960) presented shadowy figures fleeting past the eye and "human" boxes moving eerily about.<sup>4</sup> Cubist painting provides parallel examples in Duchamp's Nu descendant l'escalier: 2 (1912) and the robot-like

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Bloch-Michel, Le Présent de l'indicatif, éd. revue et augmentée (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Lucien Goldmann, Pour une sociologie du roman (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 187.

<sup>3</sup>Alain Robbe-Grillet, Le Voyeur (Paris: Minuit, 1955), p. 64.

<sup>4</sup>Allan Kaprow, Spring Happening in Happenings by Kirby, pp. 92-104.

images in Léger's L'Escalier (1913). Finally there is an emphasis on the activity demanded of the individual spectator: the Cubist painting forces the spectator to refocus continually; the happening involves the spectator in movement, and stresses the uniqueness of each individual's experience; similarly Robbe-Grillet sees the new novel asking a more creative effort from the reader: "Ce qu'il [l'auteur] lui [au lecteur] demande, ce n'est plus de recevoir tout fait un monde achevé, plein, clos sur lui-même, c'est au contraire <sup>de</sup> participer à une création, d'inventer à son tour l'oeuvre—et le monde—et d'apprendre ainsi à inventer sa propre vie."<sup>1</sup>

The need to create an art form that corresponds to the post-Einstein conception of space and to the so-called post-literate perception of man in a reified society precipitated the appearance of happening. It was the action of current trends of social, political, and philosophical thought on existing artistic forms that produced the heterogeneous art form that is happening.

### (iii) The Language of Happening

The influences of these currents of thought are clearly discernable in the structure, means of expression, and composition of the happening. In contradiction to the conventional theatrical process of creation which begins with an idea expressed through words, the point of departure of the happening are the materials that present themselves to the author-artist: "Composition is understood as an operation dependent upon the materials (including people and nature) and phenomenally indistinct from them."<sup>2</sup> Such a method of creation shows an organic interrelationship of the artist and his environment in that the artist is not a manager of materials but also is managed by them to a certain extent. The position of the artist is modified; he is no longer god-like in his creation of a world. This approach is typified by Oldenburg: "As far as I'm concerned, when I decide to do something, it's like throwing a switch, and everything that happens from that moment is a contribution to

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<sup>1</sup>Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman (Paris: Minuit, 1963), p. 134.

<sup>2</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 198.

what finally takes place."<sup>1</sup>

The creative method adopted by happeners, particularly in America, derives from their formative experiments in the plastic arts in which physical materials have a suggestive and creative force. In the theatre, also, there have been experiments based on the manipulation of the bare materials of the art, namely the physical space and the actor. For example, group creation techniques often embrace the principle of direct creation on stage. Marc'O declares: "Il ne faut plus écrire des pièces sur le papier, mais créer directement sur la scène, en démystifiant tout le temps."<sup>2</sup> But this in turn only paraphrases Artaud's essay "La Mise en scène et la métaphysique," written as early as December 1931: "L'idée d'une pièce faite de la scène directement, en se heurtant aux obstacles de la réalisation et de la scène impose la découverte d'un langage actif, actif et anarchique, où les délimitations habituelles des sentiments et des mots soient abandonnées."<sup>3</sup>

The scenic approach to creation necessitates a different theatrical vocabulary. For instance, direct creation through gesture and movement entails a diminution of the importance of the word in the theatrical creation. This demotion of the word has also resulted from the debasement language suffers in society at the hands of advertisers and propagandists (and according to Lebel, the capitalist system of economics). This distrust of the word as an accurate means of communication dates back at least as far as the phonetic poems of the Dadaist Hugo Ball: "In these phonetic poems we want to abandon a language ravaged and laid barren by journalism. We must return to the deepest alchemy of the Word, and leave even that behind us, in order to keep safe for poetry its honest sanctuary."<sup>4</sup> Identical motives are instrumental in Ionesco's linguistic experimentation; the final scene in La Cantatrice chauve could

<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg to Kostelanetz, Theatre of Mixed Means, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup>Marc'O cited in "Spectacles de Paris," Le Soir (Brussels), 11 March 1964. Marc'O was the organizer of a group that created Les Idoles, described as a pièce-happening at the Bilboquet-Théâtre (Paris) in May 1966.

<sup>3</sup>Artaud, O.C. IV, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup>Hugo Ball cited by Richter, Dada, p. 42.

easily be part of a happening. Lebel himself launches an attack on the rape of language by the media: "Notre premier objectif est de transmuter en poésie les langages que la société d'exploitation a réduit au commerce et à l'absurdité."<sup>1</sup>

But, in addition to reinvesting language with meaning, Lebel and the happeners are concerned with the primary aim of creating a theatrical language not based on the word. Happening, thus, continues Artaud's experimentation with the theatrical vocabulary which was based on the premise that theatre has little to do with "le dialogue—chose écrite et parlée," but creates its own language:

Je dis que la scène est un lieu physique et concret qui demande qu'on le remplisse, et qu'on lui fasse parler son langage concret.

Je dis que ce langage concret, destiné aux sens et indépendant de la parole, doit satisfaire d'abord les sens.<sup>2</sup>

The words that do remain are not linked in a logical grammatical way but are used in a spatial form. Language becomes a physical action: "Mais je vois en outre le diapason des voix, et le degré des intonations constituant eux aussi des sortes d'étages, et, en tout cas un élément concret ayant la même importance que le décor ou que le diapason lumineux."<sup>3</sup> In performance, this theory becomes a question of breaking up the word into syllables and giving them a rhythmic value rather than a significant one:

La tempête fait rage de plus en plus et, mêlée au vent et partant de tous les coins de la scène, on entend la voix des assassins prononçant le nom de Cenci.

D'un trait: Cenci,

sur deux temps: Cen—ci,

comme le battant d'une pendule: Cenci—Cenci—Cenci—Cenci.

Par moments, tous les sons se nouent en un point du ciel comme des oiseaux innombrables dont le vol se rassemblerait, puis il se répand et s'espace.<sup>4</sup>

In happening the word is used but rarely in the traditional sense. It is either inaudible and reduced to whispering or just a series of shouted commands

<sup>1</sup> Lebel, Le Happening, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Artaud, O.C. IV, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Antonin Artaud, Oeuvres Complètes III (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 233.

<sup>4</sup> Artaud, O.C. IV, p. 407, n. 6.

or a random list of words and phrases. Lebel in Pour conjurer l'esprit de catastrophe screamed into the faces of the audience. Michael Kirby describes the use of words in an early happening by Red Grooms, The Burning Building (New York, 1959): "It is separated from the usual progressive associations and accumulative meaning and functions as a vocal entity in which pure sound values tend to predominate."<sup>1</sup> This description is equally apt for Artaud's linguistic experiments in "Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu" and in his "Lettres de Rodez":

ratara ratara ratara  
 atara tatara rana  
  
 otara otara katara  
 otara ratara kana <sup>2</sup>

Artaud's "langage concret" finds an exact counterpart in the theoretical writings of the happeners; Lebel describes happening as "un moyen d'expression plastique" and "poésie s'arrachant . . . de la page écrite."<sup>3</sup> The language of happening does not reduce and conceptualize "en mots ou en arguments" but rather radiates as a "langage visible immédiat": "Le langage en cours est un langage plastique, un langage de signes, dans la mesure où il s'agit de poser un certain nombre d'images. C'est un langage d'instincts, et non de réflexion."<sup>4</sup> The resonances with Artaud are clear: "Le chevauchement des images et des mouvements aboutira, par des collusions d'objets, de silences, de cris et de rythmes, à la création d'un véritable langage physique à base de signes et non plus de mots."<sup>5</sup> Language for both Artaud and the happeners is a means of expression that is non-conceptual; the language should stimulate its

<sup>1</sup>Kirby, Happenings, p. 12. The script of Red Grooms, The Burning Building is in Happenings by Kirby, pp. 121-33.

<sup>2</sup>Antonin Artaud, Œuvres Complètes XIII (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 65-104; and Antonin Artaud, Œuvres Complètes IX (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) p. 188.

<sup>3</sup>Lebel, Le Happening, p. 51; and Lebel, "Notes sur les happenings," p. 572.

<sup>4</sup>Lebel, Le Happening, p. 62; and Lebel to Gilbert Tarrab, "Un Livre-spectacle: le happening," Le Soir (Brussels), 28 July 1966.

<sup>5</sup>Artaud, O.C. IV, p. 149.

own meaning in each member of the audience. The displacement of the word as a significant element is a necessary step in creating an art work that no longer relies on the logical sequence of sentence structure but rather on simultaneous total stimulation. To use McLuhan's terms, happening deserts the phonetic means of perception which preserve the divorce between man and environment for a return to the iconic level of perception: man reaching to configurations rather than sequences and open to effects from a total environment. It is an art form based on the overall integral effect rather than the story line.

The word is superseded by phonic expressions; pure noise becomes a constituent of the environment both as a simple aural stimulus and, in certain cases, a means of provocation. Oldenburg's Autobodye (Los Angeles, 1963) demonstrated the use made of noise. The sound environment was extensive: the roaring of both motorcycle and automobile engines, the thundering of the drums on cement mixers, the deafening blasts of a siren, the cacophony of car radios being switched on and off mixed with dramatic music broadcast at maximum volume through a loudspeaker.<sup>1</sup> As provocation, noise is very evident in Kaprow's Spring Happening. The audience (which still remained very passive at this early stage) were enclosed in a long cylinder from which they could peer out to the right and left into performing areas by means of lateral slits. In this confined situation they were subjected to a large range of mechanical sounds: barrels were dropped and crashed to the ground; a power saw screamed over them; bells were rung and all manner of growling sounds were produced in a contrapuntal arrangement with softer cracking sounds. The use of these harsh sound effects verged on direct physical intimidation. At the end of the happening, a man appeared pushing a high-powered lawn-mower which he drove directly at the confined audience. Noise and physical assault were combined until at the point of impact between mower and public, the sides of the tunnel exploded releasing the audience.

Kaprow's early style depended very much on creating strong emotion in

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<sup>1</sup>Class Oldenburg, Autobodyes in Happenings by Kirby, pp. 262-88.

the audience by means of noise. In May 1961 in Michigan, he orchestrated his happening, Night, with an almost identical sound environment: wooden planks crashed down onto barrels; a whole collection of suspended ironware was dropped to the ground producing a "horrendous noise"; "a piercing siren noise" accompanied the ever present power saw; and behind this created sound track, Kaprow utilized the noises that issued constantly into the courtyard from the kitchens of the hotel.<sup>1</sup> A year later in November 1962 in Courtyard, crashing plates, metallic roars, a power saw, a fog horn, boxes crashing to the ground, transistorized music and the quieter noises of rhythmic humming and tinkling bicycle bells reappeared with the planned use of the roaring engine of a motorcycle enveloping the audience as it was driven around the courtyard.<sup>2</sup>

The motorcycle is the extension of the lawn-mower of Spring Happening, and its use is notable in many happenings. Kaprow himself planned a role for it again in September 1963 in his happening, Sea, at the Edinburgh Festival.<sup>3</sup> In Lebel's Déchirex (Paris, 1965), a motorcycle ridden by a nude girl was driven through the audience to the accompaniment of Spanish bullfight cheers: "La moto descend de la scène et fonce comme un taureau dans la foule."<sup>4</sup> A recording of cannons, machine guns and a fire engine rushing to a fire was also part of his sound environment.

A marked difference in the style of the French happening and its American counterpart can be seen in the use of the motorcycle in these examples. For Kaprow, it appears because it forms an element of the everyday scene in city streets with perhaps the implication of the dehumanizing effect of the noise and fumes it causes. With Lebel, the motorcycle assumes erotic overtones as well as suggesting a similar attack on the machine society. The parallel

<sup>1</sup> Allan Kaprow, Night in New Writers IV, pp. 83-85.

<sup>2</sup> Allan Kaprow, Courtyard in Happenings by Kirby, pp. 105-16.

<sup>3</sup> Allan Kaprow, Sea in New Writers IV, pp. 101-2.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Jacques Lebel, Déchirex in Le Happening, p. 72. The use of motorbicycles is not exclusive to modern forms of theatre. Vsevolod Meyerhold used them in his production of Marcel Martinet's Earth on its Hindlegs in which "the actors roared across the stage on motor-bikes, . . . [and] dragged on heavy cannons." See James Roose-Evans, Experimental Theatre (New York: Avon Books, 1970), p. 43.



drawn by Lebel in his description between the motorcycle and the bull underlined in performance by the shouting of olé can suggest a replacement in contemporary Western society of the direct physical challenge of the fight to the death by the dare-devil riding of a motorcycle. In a McLuhanistic interpretation, the motorcycle becomes the extension of the impulse into a mechanical form. The nude girl adds another dimension to the social commentary, namely that this instinct has a sexual origin, an implication that modern society represses this instinct and transforms it into a machine fetish. This type of interpretation is not outrageous in the context of the erotic content of Lebel's happenings, whereas it would be out of place in the work of Kaprow or Oldenburg in America.

The American happening embellishes the role of the motorcycle as symbol of social depersonalization in works such as Oldenburg's Autobody where the motorcycle became a parking lot full of black and white cars and cement mixers. Here man's identification with his means of transport is perfectly realized by the visual image of the motorcycle rider who, pushed motionless across the performance area on a trolley only comes to life when mounted on his motorcycle. Kaprow used an analogous image in Bon Marché (Paris, 1963) in which a workman rolled a huge tyre through the audience until a member of the audience took it over, at which point the workman crawled on the floor making quiet motor sounds.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the motorcycle, a frequent element is the siren. It, too, has social overtones. In some factories it is now used to signal the breaks in the working day, an aural symbol of the society conditioned by noise (an extension of Pavlov's dog experiments). Of course, this idea is not original; Beckett, to name but one recent forerunner in a more traditional form of theatre, uses the noise signal in both Acte sans parole I (1957) and Oh les beaux jours (1963):

(Sonnerie perçante. Elle ouvre les yeux aussitôt. La sonnerie s'arrête. Elle regarde devant elle. Un temps long.)  
 WINNIE: Salut, sainte lumière. (Un temps. Elle ferme les yeux.)

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<sup>1</sup>Allan Kaprow, "A Happening in Paris," in New Writers IV, pp. 92-100.

Sonnerie perçante. Elle ouvre les yeux aussitôt. La sonnerie s'arrête.)<sup>1</sup>

Another constant of the sound environment of happenings is music. Kaprow has explained his use of rock and roll music in Courtyard as part of the ritual of the work; it represented the externalization of the central girl's own internal rhythms, a symbol typical of the highly intellectualized form of the American happening.<sup>2</sup> As for Lebel, he resorted to the use of jazz on at least two occasions. In Pour conjurer l'esprit de catastrophe, the Walter Maclean Jazz Combo played throughout, "relaxing the participants into a cool lethargic activity" at the beginning, and, according to the scenario of the later version at Boulogne, at the end "very fast, swinging stimulating sounds"<sup>3</sup> precipitated the final delirium of the work. Similarly for Déchirex Lebel used a full length bande sonore which included jazz played by Eric Dolphy.

Recitation appears frequently as a device to complete the aural stimulation of the happening, its appearance being favoured more by the French than the Americans (with perhaps the possible exception of Al Hansen). It is the sole area where the word retains its true function. In Déchirex, there were two straight recitations: a Mayakovsky poem recited in the original Russian (for most of those present, this simply had phonic value) and Ferlinghetti's The Great Chinese Dragon together with an extract of a Castro speech and "une petite fille [qui] lit au micro un texte du Larousse Médical sur la puberté."<sup>4</sup> At the third Festival de la Libre Expression (Paris, 1966) a critic described the reading of "les pages les plus typiques du divin marquis."<sup>5</sup>

The affinity for recitation in French happening is less surprising in the light of the frequency of manifesto reading in the Dada activities in

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Beckett, Oh les beaux jours (Paris: Minuit, 1963), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Allan Kaprow, "A Statement," in Happenings by Kirby, pp. 49-50.

<sup>3</sup> Nimmo, "Catastrophe in Paris," p. 51; and Jean-Jacques Lebel, For Exorcising the Spirit of Catastrophe in Assemblage by Kaprow, p. 234.

<sup>4</sup> Lebel, Le Happening, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> Claude Tulié, "Happening: canular en français," Entretiens sur le théâtre, no. 18 (September-October 1966), p. 26.

Paris. For example, the "manifestation Dada" at the Grand Palais (5 February 1920) consisted of seven manifestos read by a number of readers which dwindled from ten to four Dadaists and a journalist.<sup>1</sup> Dada also preceded happening in its use of a total sound environment. At la Maison de l'Oeuvre on 27 March 1920, Tzara recited La Première Aventure céleste de M. Antipyrine: "I invented on the occasion of this performance a diabolical machine composed of a klaxon and three successive invisible echoes, for the purpose of impressing on the minds of the public certain phrases describing the aims of Dada."<sup>2</sup> Even the Dadaists were not original in this respect since the futurist Russolo had celebrated bruitismo with his noise organ in 1911. For the Dadaists, however, noise was a means to shock, and purely shock, whereas in happening, noise becomes an element of the environment of a total work and its effect is in the integrated effect of that whole environment.

Lighting techniques provide a visual counterpart to the noise element. The fact that most indoor happenings were performed in dimly lit confined spaces enlarged the role of lighting in shaping the environment. Kaprow in Spring Happening capitalized on the enclosed darkness inside the cylindrical tunnel to expose the audience to sudden flashes of light: blinking lights in the tunnel, matches which suddenly flared up before the public's eyes, strong beams pursued fleeting shapes in the performance areas. Like the noise element, this use of light disorients the public. A similar social point is also possible: the lights imply a criticism of the society of traffic signals and stop-go lights of all descriptions. The association of light and activity was more overtly underscored in Kaprow's French happening, Bon Marché. Here Kaprow used the found environment of the department store at night with actions performed in different areas. The switching on and off of lights is one act in a ritual which implies a certain automatic behaviour of the human being; it is also closely linked with the process of demonstrating merchandise in a commercial situation. Perhaps the parallel is that commercialism

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<sup>1</sup> See Michel Sanouillet, Dada à Paris (Paris: Pauvert, 1965), p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Tristan Tzara, "Memoire of Dadaism," in Axel's Castle by Edmund Wilson (New York: Charles Scribner, 1934), p. 307.

produces alienated robots: "Washing machine wrapped and unwrapped with heavy tarpaulin and rope. Crumpled paper stuffed in, pulled out. Light switched off, then on. Zombie salesman. Repeated." The simulated domestic scene was no less mechanical: "Sparkling TV set under beach umbrella, nice chick watching programme for a bit, covers it with burlap, turns on bulb overhead, sits, thinks, turns off bulb, uncovers TV again, watches. Repeated from time to time."<sup>1</sup> This last example is an obvious parody of that technique of advertising which associates elements that suggest an affluent and successful existence, the beach umbrella and the shining television set.

The television is a common element of happening no doubt because it has become a symbol of contemporary society especially in its lack of real communal activity. The German Vostell used two televisions in his Télévision Décollage (Wuppertal, 1963): a man sat in front of them and watched the lines flash across the badly tuned screens.<sup>2</sup> During the happening one set was defaced by a whipped cream pie, wrapped in barbed wire, and finally burned. In his You (New York, 1964), television sets were burned and exploded before the gaze of gas-masked viewers.<sup>3</sup> In Lebel's Pour conjurer l'esprit de catastrophe, an actor appeared with a television crammed over his head signaling erotically. The aggression and eroticism in the use of television seen here did not occur in American happening.

The association of light and machine gesture was expressed by Jim Dine in Car Crash (New York, 1960).<sup>4</sup> Dine had his participants wear lights in the manner of car head-lamps, and then chase each other around the performance area like cars on a motorway. The final tableau is reminiscent of the end of Ionesco's Les Chaises with a man trying to articulate a message but only managing to make guttural sounds. Dine's words were deformed by stammering and as he stammered the light flickered—thus, light and human

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<sup>1</sup> Kaprow, "A Happening in Paris," p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> See photograph in Hansen, Primer, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> Wolf Vostell, You in Assemblage by Kaprow, pp. 256-68.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Dine, Car Crash in Happenings by Kirby, pp. 189-99.

communication are indissolubly linked. Man only functions when stimulated by flashing lights.

Label, himself, makes scant use of lighting effects as such, but employs great amounts of colour and projections. In Pour conjurer l'esprit de catastrophe, Ferro daubed paint onto a canvas to create an action painting; in the Boulogne version, the public became involved in this painting by throwing cans of paint onto a twirling board as a machine traced a faint red line. Label also created an action painting during the same happening. The beginning of Déchirex contained vivid visual stimuli as a game of badminton was played: "On ne voit clairement que les volants, peints au fluor, qui passent en comètes fluorescentes au-dessus des têtes. Arrivent deux hommes portant casques et lunettes Courrèges également peints au fluor." The same happening made complex use of projection; it utilized a film collage involving "cinq ou six films de nature, de technique, de taille, de longueur, et de couleur différentes [qui] apparaissent simultanément." Label suggested as fitting material for this collage, a mixture of films on political issues, drugs, black African magic, and the birth process shown backwards.<sup>1</sup>

Whether by using light or cinematic techniques, the happeners try to create a situation where the visual sense is exposed to intense stimulation. Together with the noise element, lighting effects strive to awaken the body to the environment, to awaken in man the capacity to relate in a non-rational way to his surroundings and so to arrive at a greater awareness of the world around him (achieved most completely in Kaprow's later work in the open air).

This process of man's re-integration into the environment is completed by the stimulation of the tactile sense. The very conditions of performance produce an intimacy and proximity greater than in traditional theatre; certain happenings, indeed, do not go beyond this elementary stage. An example is Jim Dine's Car Crash which was performed with defined areas for actor and spectator; the audience was arranged in rows of chairs in an in-the-round fashion so that the only physical action demanded was the twisting and turning

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<sup>1</sup>Label, Le Happening, pp. 71-72.

of heads as the actors entered and made exits all around. Movement of the audience is, however, constant in the work of Oldenburg, Kaprow, and Lebel. The necessity for this movement, often ensured by provocation, is described by Oldenburg: "It's really not to hurt them but to make them feel their bodies more."<sup>1</sup> In Injun (Dallas, 1962), the spectators were moved through an itinerant happening prodded by guards and grabbed at by men deformed by net costumes.<sup>2</sup> Kaprow, in particular, has used the confined space and the resultant enforced proximity of spectator to spectator for the same effect; in Spring Happening, in Night, and in Sea, the audience were jostled by moving boxes and participants; the confines of the area were reduced by moving walls and invading trees (as in Night) or by the circling of a motorcycle (as in Sea). Nimmo describes the physical situation of the audience in Lebel's Pour conjurer l'esprit de catastrophe: "The centre of the gallery, packed to almost suffocation with a swaying sea of eager-eyed faces held a solid mass of consciously willing people, desirous of seeing everything, grimly determined not to miss a thing."<sup>3</sup> The line dividing the necessity for a bodily tactile sensation from overt physical provocation in order to produce a wild, irrational response is difficult to trace. Despite Nimmo's description, Lebel's work generally tends towards incitement to physical action.<sup>4</sup> A counter-current to the Lebel style of shock happening is represented by Liquid Theatre who describe their work as "Theatre of Touch . . . an experiment in making people feel good."<sup>5</sup>

The environment to which the spectator relates is composed of the products of society, both its creations and its waste. Kaprow expresses the necessity for the materials to be "of the most perishable kind,"<sup>6</sup> thus chicken

<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg to Kostelanetz, Theatre of Mixed Means, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup>Claes Oldenburg, Injun in Happenings by Kirby, pp. 204-19.

<sup>3</sup>Nimmo, "Catastrophe in Paris," p. 51.

<sup>4</sup>See below, pp. 270-73.

<sup>5</sup>Lance Larsen, "Liquid Theatre," The Drama Review, vol. 15, no. 3a (Summer 1971), p. 91.

<sup>6</sup>Kaprow, "'Happenings' in the New York Scene," p. 60.

wire and newspaper are to be found regularly in his work as well as foodstuffs and organic material which will necessarily decay and disappear (for example, the bread, butter and wine in Bon Marché). Lebel's environment for Pour conjurer l'esprit de catastrophe was very much in the line laid down by Kaprow: "The walls of the gallery were hung with collages made up of every conceivable thing that one could think of. . . . The artists had taken their materials from old toys, telephones, cooking utensils, and the laboratory."<sup>1</sup> Newspaper cuttings and headlines were stuck to nude bodies or to boards (as in Lebel's La Tour d'Argent, Paris, 1965)<sup>2</sup>. The use of waste products and bric-à-brac harks back to the collages of the Dadaists and Cubists in the early years of the century; Kurt Schwitters proved to be the most assiduous in this direction as Richter explains:

There was no talk of the "death of art," or "non-art," or "anti-art" with him. On the contrary, every tram-ticket, every envelope, cheese wrapper or cigar-band, together with old shoe-soles or shoe-laces, wire, feathers, dishcloths—everything that had been thrown away—all<sup>3</sup> this he loved, and restored to an honoured place by means of his art.

The very clear distinction to be drawn here between Schwitters and the neo-Dadaists, Kaprow and Lebel, is that Schwitters tried to eternalize these pieces of debris whereas Kaprow and Lebel draw on them precisely because of their ephemerality. Foodstuffs are the extreme case of perishable elements: Lebel in Déchirex called for cherries and spaghetti; at the third Festival de la Libre Expression, a happening at the Théâtre de la Chimère involved a girl who was covered with whipped cream that was licked from her body.<sup>4</sup> By focusing on ephemera the happening presents a double nature. While often described as an art form that exists as a work in progress or a work in creation, the end product of this process is not the creation of a work at all,

<sup>1</sup>Nimmo, "Catastrophe in Paris," p. 52.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Jacques Lebel, La Tour d'Argent outlined in Le Happening, pp.87-8.

<sup>3</sup>Richter, Dada, p. 138.

<sup>4</sup>Tulió, "Happening: canular en français," pp. 25-26. This association of sweetness and the young girl recalls the image of the scantily clad girl emerging from a mountainous pie, a hallmark of early films from Hollywood; happening, however, uses this formula not for enjoyment but provocation.

for, as it creates itself, the happening destroys itself.

The justification for the self-creating, self-destroying art work varies from artist to artist. Kaprow argues that change is the substance of existence (as confirmed scientifically by theories of quantum physics and relativity) and, therefore, that art work in order to have relevance must incorporate change not just conceptually but organically: "If change is to be lived and felt deeply, then the art work must be free to articulate this on levels beyond the conceptual. There is no fundamental reason why it should be a fixed, enduring object to be placed in a locked case."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the art work itself must become part of the reality of change; this is achieved by establishing a relationship between a unique set of circumstances of time, place, and people, and within this matrix, by employing materials which will necessarily undergo change (for example, foodstuffs that decay). A secondary explanation put forward by Kaprow is that society has become a throw-away culture, a tendency which will naturally be reflected in the materials of artistic creation. Both arguments follow a similar line: the art work must be relevant to the contemporary world.

Lebel's arguments on this subject derive from more ideological roots. As a basic premise of the art movement that begot happenings, Lebel stated: "L'abolition du privilège de spéculer sur une valeur commerciale arbitraire et artificielle, attribuée, on n'a jamais su pourquoi, à l'oeuvre d'art."<sup>2</sup> The commercialization of art (and particularly the theatre) was something against which Charles Dullin and his pupil Jean Vilar argued: "Le théâtre est considéré comme un produit qui ne diffère en rien juridiquement de celui de l'industriel et du commerçant."<sup>3</sup> Vilar's wish was to see the arts placed outside the necessity to be profitable by the granting of direct government subsidy (a wish that has materialized in the policy of decentralized theatres and the Maisons de la Culture). Lebel's answer to the problem is to create a work which cannot exist as an object and therefore can have no exchange value. As

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<sup>1</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>Lebel, Le Happening, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Jean Vilar, De la tradition théâtrale (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 93.



he explained to the Living Theater: "Le happening que nous avons fait ensemble en 1966 sur le pont de Cassis répondait à ce même besoin de sortir des limites contraignantes et repressives de l'industrie du spectacle."<sup>1</sup> The association of culture and commercialism recurs throughout Label's writings. In Procès du Festival d'Avignon, that festival is referred to as "le supermarché d'Avignon," "la machine culturelle," "l'industrie culturelle," "l'industrie théâtrale"; his desire is to go beyond the "interdit mercantile" and to escape "aux exigences de la rentabilité."<sup>2</sup>

It must be stated that, for Label, the decommercialization of art is only one aspect of his desire for a total decommercialization of life, realizable in his eyes only by the overthrow of the capitalist system. As soon as the art work becomes an object it is absorbed into the consumer system and assumes an exchange value. The happening combats this situation by creating a self-destroying work and also a work that demands activity from the audience. The happening, for Label, is part of a drive towards a culture of participation: "Le public n'est pas là non-plus pour être nourri comme une oie."<sup>3</sup> If the spectator were to become active the consumer situation in the theatre would be destroyed, and by extension to society at large, this would lead to a destruction of the traditional relationships that obtain in contemporary capitalist society. Label sees the happening as instrumental in this revolution aiming at "le dépassement de l'aberrante relation de sujet à objet (regardeur/regardé, exploiteur/exploité, spectateur/acteur, colonialiste/colonisé, aliéniste/aliéné, légalisme/illégalisme etc.), séparation frontalière qui a jusqu'ici dominé et conditionné l'art moderne."<sup>4</sup> Here once more is the fundamental distinction between American and French happening. In Kaprow's writings there is no extension either of the happening as an art form that

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Jacques Label, Entretiens avec le Living Théâtre (Paris: Belfond, 1969), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Jacques Label, Procès du Festival d'Avignon (Paris: Belfond, 1968), p. 10; p. 11; p. 25; p. 21; and p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Label to Jean-Pierre Nicola, "Chapiteau pour un scandale," Tréteux 67 no. 4 (August-September 1967), p. 52.

<sup>4</sup>Label, Le Happening, p. 15.

escapes the capitalist system of exchange value or of the concept of audience activity as a blow against the social structure of capitalism:

The modern artist is apolitical. . . .

The best of the vanguard artists today are famous, usually prolific, financially comfortable. Those who are not yet, can be; and those few who will not be, must agree they have rejected the opportunity out of a preference for the tradition of artistic martyrdom or out of fear of temptation.<sup>1</sup>

In the light of this discussion of art as a consumer product, it is interesting to observe the recurrence of the theme of ingestion in happenings, particularly in America, as though the happening were a microcosm of the social situation: Kaprow's Eat (New York, 1964), Whitman's Mouth (New York, 1961), and C. Schneemann's Meat Joy (New York, 1964), and also the number of instances of eating or drinking during the course of happenings.<sup>2</sup> Kaprow in particular uses the digestive process. In Bon Marché, bread and jam were distributed to the audience; the association of commercialism and digestion is more obvious here when one considers that the American slang for money is "bread" and that the happening took place in a leading department store. Another clear example is the action in Household (Cornell, 1964) where participants licked a jam-covered Volkswagen.<sup>3</sup>

A frequent event which refers to the capitalist system of exchange is that of wrapping articles up and by extension the use of cellophane. In the Shining Bed (New York, 1960), Jim Dine covered an embracing couple in cellophane with the suggestion that human relationships have become a matter of pre-packaged commodities; in Autobodys Oldenburg had certain of the automobiles wrapped in plastic and muslin; and the central element of Kaprow's Courtyard was a giant mountain structure bound in black plastic. The clearest parallel between commercialism and the imagery of happening is to be found in

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<sup>1</sup> Allan Kaprow, "Should the Artist Become a Man of the World?" Art News, vol. 63, no. 6 (October 1964), p. 35; and p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> See Michael Kirby, "Allan Kaprow's Eat," Iulane Drama Review, vol. 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965), pp. 44-49; Robert Whitman, Mouth in Happenings by Kirby, pp. 148-57; and Carolee Schneemann, Meat Joy, see the long discussion in Tarab, "Le Happening," pp. 39-52.

<sup>3</sup> Allan Kaprow, Household in Assemblage, pp. 323-37.

Kaprow's explanation of the genesis of Bon Marché: "I sensed in the ritual exchange of packages for money, and in the night-time aisles of cloth-covered merchandise and mannequins, an inevitable circularity of imagery."<sup>1</sup> During the happening a washing machine was wrapped and unwrapped, a television was covered and uncovered, and a man was packaged supermarket style in plastic.

The circularity of imagery is significant in that it is suggested by the action of objects; the packages and the money are linked with the covered dummies and produce, one implication being that emphasis on exchange value entails the reification of society. Kaprow does not express this implication being more concerned as a pure artist with patterns of imagery. However, the preponderance and importance of objects in happenings is quite striking and points to a deeper social situation being revealed in the art form. In an informative article on the psychology of the new art, A. R. Solomon claims that the happening "gave to objects, which always played an important part in these events, a new importance, with the result, actually, that objects often became members of the cast, as important as the human actors."<sup>2</sup> This claim is only in part justifiable as objects had already played important roles in the absurdist theatre. For example, in Ionesco's plays, Les Chaises and Le Nouveau Locataire, objects people the stage to the exclusion of the human actor; in the final tableau of Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser, the set is dominated by the growing corpse and the proliferating mushrooms. Tardieu, at the same time, was experimenting with objects in the theatre to the point that in his Voix sans personne no human actors appear at all, and the action is performed by pieces of furniture in a room. Solomon is correct in so far as happening generally makes far greater use of the object. In Jim Dine's The Vaudeville Show, "inanimate objects became actors,"<sup>3</sup> and in Oldenburg's Voyages I (New York, 1960), newspaper replaced, as it were, Ionesco's chairs: "Great volumes of paper suddenly arriving out of a crack in the wall and engulfing all the

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<sup>1</sup>Kaprow, "A Happening in Paris," p. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Alan R. Solomon, "Jim Dine and the Psychology of the New Art," Art International (October 1964), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>Jim Dine, "A Statement," in Happenings by Kirby, p. 186.

performers and the audience; large mounds of newspaper building up and billowing over the people and welding or wedding the audience and the performers in a sea of things or objects."<sup>1</sup> A similar situation occurred in Label's Déchirex where the action of the happening was halted by the inflation of a huge polythene tube which wound itself around the floor as Ferlinghetti recited The Great Chinese Dragon: "Le tube prend des proportions énormes et paralyse le mouvement de la salle."<sup>2</sup>

The obvious corollary to the growing importance of the object is the reduction of the human being; in theatrical terms, the object emerging as the central performer diminishes the position of the actor and spectator to that of fellow objects. For the Americans the emphasis on objectification is aesthetic, treating it as a matter of volumes in movement, rather than social symbolism. The reason for this bias is probably best explained by Oldenburg's observation: "It should have been made clear that Happenings came about when painters and sculptors crossed into theatre taking with them their way of looking and doing things."<sup>3</sup> And this is amplified: "The 'happening' is one or another method of using objects in motion, and this I take to include people, both in themselves and as agents of object motion."<sup>4</sup> Thus, the happening can be described as bio-kinetic sculpture in its use of the human body linking it in theatre history to Meyerhold's bio-mechanical experiments in Russia in the 1930s. The result of Oldenburg's approach is an apparent denial of the very humanity of the actor:

It is also a way to make objects of the players. My instructions to them have always been not to display emotion or attitudes. They behave like machines—either their bodies are inert or, when they are moving, they behave unreflectively and mechanically, repeating a simple action. It is their bodies that are used, their movements more than anything.<sup>5</sup>

Autobodys aptly exemplifies this statement. Nevertheless, Oldenburg uses the human body's expressive possibilities far more than most happeners who content

<sup>1</sup>Hansen, Primer, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup>Label, Le Happening, p. 73.

<sup>3</sup>Oldenburg cited by Ken Dewey, "X-ings," Tulane Drama Review, vol. 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965), p. 216.

<sup>4</sup>Claes Oldenburg, "A Statement," in Happenings by Kirby, p. 200.

<sup>5</sup>Oldenburg to Kostelanetz, Theatre of Mixed Means, p. 154.

themselves with its deformation. The merging of the individual form into one object among other objects is total in Snapshots from the City; Oldenburg appeared bandaged and crippled in a black and white set constructed out of newspaper and waste from the New York streets, all sprayed black and white; "When people eventually came into the Judson Gallery, they saw me on the street as an object. . . . I was literally in my construction."<sup>1</sup> The human shape is disguised by masks, netted costumes, buried by debris and hardly recognizable (Injun) or reduced to unsubstantiated fleeting forms (Spring Happening). Lebel's happenings use the transformation of the human form with a deliberately symbolic intent. The man with "an imitation TV crammed over his head" or Ferro disguised with "an enormous converted cash register, studded with ping-pong balls and dominoes with hair sprouting out all over it"<sup>2</sup>—both present visual images of the impact of commerce and technology on the human psyche. In Catastrophe, a huge marionette figure, "a large head (over nine feet high) cries poems."<sup>3</sup> Once again the happening seems to be continuing a feature of the Dadaist spectacles. Michel Sanouillet describes the performance of La Première Aventure céleste de M. Antipyrine: "Le décor même de la Première aventure céleste, composé d'objets hétéroclites, d'une roue de bicyclette empruntée à Marcel Duchamp, les costumes (les personnages étaient enfermés dans d'immenses sacs en papier de diverses couleurs et leurs noms portés sur des pancartes) inaugurait le règne de l'objet-acteur."<sup>4</sup> Ribemont-Dessaignes details his performance in his own work, La Danse frontière (Paris, 26 May 1920): "Enfoui dans un immense entonnoir de carton oscillant sur sa pointe."<sup>5</sup>

Nor does the spectator escape the process of objectification. Either he is prodded and cajoled into movement in order to fulfil the kinetic vision of the artist, or pushed and jabbed into a reaction to create a so-called free flow between the audience and the actor. The public are not treated as

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Nimmo, "Catastrophe in Paris," p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> Lebel, For Exorcising the Spirit of Catastrophe in Assemblage by Kaprow, p. 234.

<sup>4</sup> Sanouillet, Dada à Paris, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Ribemont-Dessaignes, Déjà jadis, pp. 74-75.

privileged persons but rather as a material to be used in much the same way as any other material: "I have no quarrel with it. It is part of my work, and my job is to use it well (along with objects, smells, food and dogs and cats). . . . The public's only job is to decide if it wants to be a party to my efforts."<sup>1</sup> Lebel's attitude to the public is more aggressive. Whereas in America the audience is jostled or at most showered with rice grains (as in Night) or pieces of aluminium foil (as in Sea), in France the emphasis is on direct physical attack. In the plan for Déchirex, the audience is not only encircled by the motorcycle, but the nude riding it crushes "des cerises sur le visage de tous ceux qui s'approchent d'elle"; the girl swaying on top of the stationary car sprays the crowd with spaghetti; the badminton players "se jettent dans le public en assenant des coups de raquettes," and we are told that later they "continuent de donner des coups de raquettes et de pousser les gens autour de la voiture qui est offerte au public."<sup>2</sup> This happening even includes the smashing of the car with hatchets and pick axes. The tone is far removed from the "very quiet, more contemplative situation"<sup>3</sup> that Oldenburg sees as providing the best happening.

The 1966 happening at the Théâtre de la Chimère included a Japanese who sprayed the audience with sneezing powder and a final tableau in which the audience was blindfolded and led around Paris having been told they were to visit "les lieux interdits, secrets, sensuels de Paris" only to be unmasked "dans un buffet de gare parisienne."<sup>4</sup> Ben Vautier resorted to the same type of abuse of the public in his Art total when the public were led around the street with their heads in paper bags. Ben's ingenuity in this field is demonstrated by the list of eight actions that he suggests as possible happening situations:

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<sup>1</sup>Kaprow, "A Happening in Paris," p. 98.

<sup>2</sup>Lebel, Le Happening, pp. 72-73.

<sup>3</sup>Oldenburg to Kostelanetz, Theatre of Mixed Means, p. 144.

<sup>4</sup>Tulié, "Happening: canular en français," p. 26.

- 1) Les acteurs déguisés en C.R.S. descendent au parterre et embrassent les spectateurs qu'ils font monter sur la scène.
- 2) On lâchera une caisse contenant huit rats et une autre contenant huit chats dans la salle.
- 3) Au lieu de jouer la pièce les acteurs écoutent sur scène une pièce à la radio.
- 4) Profiter du moindre bruit dans la salle pour insulter et harceler les spectateurs, pour en arriver aux mains, si possible.
- 5) Une actrice fera du strip-tease, on fera évacuer la salle par la police des mœurs.
- 6) Empêcher les mécontents de sortir s'il le faut par la force.
- 7) Mettre le feu au théâtre et brûler les spectateurs.
- 8) Annoncer un vol et fouiller systématiquement tous les spectateurs.<sup>1</sup>

The aim behind this aggression is a redefinition of the theatrical roles through the enforced emergence of the audience from its passivity. However, the scope of these actions in terms of theatrical relationships is limited; it is clear by the use of scène and salle in the descriptions that the roles still exist. All Ben is achieving is a reversal of roles (for example, the audience go onto the stage and the actors descend into the auditorium) and not their disappearance.

The preoccupation with the attempt to break the barrier that exists between actor and spectator, between the activity of the one and the passivity of the other, dates back to the experiments of the futurists in Italy before the First World War. In a manifesto for futurist theatre, Marinetti compiles a not dissimilar list of actions "to make the spectators of the pit, the boxes and the gallery take part in the action." Among his suggestions are the following:

Put strong glue on some of the stalls, so that the spectator, man or woman, remains glued down, may arouse general hilarity.

Sell the same place to ten different people; hence obstructions, arguments and altercations.

Sprinkle the stalls with powders which produce itching, sneezing, etc.<sup>2</sup>

The similarity of the actions proposed at an interval of at least some forty years is quite striking and reveals the longevity of the proposition that

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<sup>1</sup>Ben, "Théâtre = Tout," Le Théâtre dans le monde, vol. 14, no. 6 (November-December 1965), p. 573. Proposal no. 5 was effected during the Paris production of Hair when a bogus police force interrupted the performance.

<sup>2</sup>Fillippo T. Marinetti, "Futurism and the Theatre," in Total Theatre, ed. E. T. Kirby, pp. 93-94.

increased physical activity necessarily increases participation and involvement in the theatrical event. Yet several reservations limit the propositions' application; it is true only if the term participation is restricted to the very narrow sense of physical reaction to a situation or if participation can be said to take place in those circumstances when the spectator-participant is unaware of his involvement in the action.

The physical provocation in happening is rendered more aggressive by a concomitant moral violation of the audience, in short, a pervasive use of scandal. Total nudity and representations of phalli abound in the European happening, for example in Lebel's Pour conjurer l'esprit de Catastrophe: "Row upon row of black penis-shaped objects strung across the ceiling" and the walls with three spot-lit cupboards containing "plastic replicas of the womb stuck with hypodermic needles"<sup>1</sup> (the work of the Japanese sculptor Kudo) formed a part of the environment. In the later Boulogne version, Kudo's contribution was even more erotically aggressive: "Kudo as sex priest makes silent sermon with immense papier-mâché phallus, then screams in Japanese, caresses public with the phallus, goes into mystic orgasm and then collapses."<sup>2</sup> The prevalence of the simulation of the sexual act in this work adds to the outrage of the public's morals. Ferro created an action painting by sticking his brush held between his thighs into pots of paint held in an identical position by two scantily clad young girls, and then daubing a huge canvas with paint. Lebel mimed the sexual act when he appeared as the television man with small portable posters in each hand, one bearing the image of the male organ and the other the female, and these he passed across each other from hand to hand. Overt nudity was employed for an action parodying the political confrontation between Russia and America; two nude girls, one wearing a Kennedy mask, the other one of Khrushchev, were stuck with newspaper headlines and then both bathed in a bath full of imitation blood. Striptease is another sexual element

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<sup>1</sup>Nimmo, "Catastrophe in Paris," p. 51; and p. 52.

<sup>2</sup>Lebel, For Exorcising the Spirit of Catastrophe in Assemblage by Kaprow, p. 234.



in happenings; at the 1966 Festival de la Libre Expression, "un travesti vêtu en religieuse . . . se déshabille sans 'paravents' . . . s'assoit sur une chaise avec une petite lampe allumée entre les jambes."<sup>1</sup> It would appear that even sexual acts themselves are not omitted from Lebel's work; in the scenario of Déchirex one reads "deux couples 'interraciaux' s'enlacent"<sup>2</sup> and in the Boulogne version of Catastrophe it is implied that two girls embrace a third in a hammock.

Perhaps the most inflammatory example of sexual aggression in Lebel's work is to be found not in a happening as such but in his production of Picasso's Le Désir attrapé par la queue. In this play, la Tarte "s'accroupit devant le trou du souffleur et, face à la salle, pisse et chaudepisse pendant dix bonnes minutes."<sup>3</sup> The justification that Lebel offers for retaining this action (apart from Picasso's insistence that nothing should be cut) indicates the reason for the extensive use of nudity and sex in the whole of his work: "C'est notre seul moyen de déranger les rapports ordinaires, conventionnels, et pour tout dire 'morts' qu'entretient le spectateur avec le monde, c'est notre seul moyen de transgresser les interdits, afin qu'au niveau de la vie, chacun ait la force de secouer le faux personnage hérité d'une société manufacturée."<sup>4</sup> The whole problem is typically returned to the psycho-social level by Lebel; the aim is not to "faire physiquement mal aux spectateurs"<sup>5</sup> but to jolt them into a new awareness of life. In nudity Lebel sees a way to break the hold that the system has over the lives, both conscious and unconscious, of the individual and hence he proclaims: "Il faut que la nudité redevienne possible."<sup>6</sup> It is one of the methods to bring about a radical change, to overthrow "les interdits d'un ordre dépolitisant, déssexualisant,

<sup>1</sup>Tulié, "Happening: canular en français," p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Lebel, Le Happening, p. 73.

<sup>3</sup>Picasso, Le Désir attrapé par la queue, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup>Lebel to Nicola, "Chapiteau pour un scandale," p. 52.

<sup>5</sup>Lebel, Entretiens avec le Living Théâtre, p. 69.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

d'où la plus élémentaire notion de liberté est organiquement exclue."<sup>1</sup>

The role Lebel attributes to the erotic places him in a current of social thought perhaps best typified by Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse argues that "erotic . . . cognition break[s] the hold of the established, contingent reality and strive[s] for a truth incompatible with it."<sup>2</sup> The release of the erotic impulses of man would break "the repressive utilization of instinctual energy" on which the economic system of the West exists: "Freed from these constraints, man would exist without work and without order; he would fall back into nature, which would destroy culture."<sup>3</sup> This could well be an alternative light in which to interpret Lebel's comparison of happening and primeval art. Both represent the art form of a non-repressive culture.

The use of sex and nudity in art is the major distinction between American and European happenings. Al Hansen has stated: "I fail to see how a theater piece could be made better by having sex introduced."<sup>4</sup> But, sex is an essential element in Lebel's work; for example, in Catastrophe, Ferro projected slides of modern art onto the stomach of a nude, girating model. The symbolism of this act remains obscure unless interpreted in the light of Lebel's closing remarks as he goose-steps out of the gallery shouting "Heil Art! Heil Sex!": political power controls art and sex; by releasing sexual instincts from repression happening will liberate art and social man: "On ne peut transformer ni la psychologie ni les rapports sociaux sans transformer ou libérer la sexualité. On ne peut pas réaliser une révolution à un seul niveau. Sans cela on va droit à l'échec."<sup>5</sup> The use of sex highlights the difference in aim between the two schools of happening:<sup>6</sup> for the Americans the happening

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Jacques Lebel, "Une ébauche géniale du théâtre total," L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 500 (August 1972), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Marcuse, One Dimensional Man, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup>Marcuse, Eros and Civilisation, p. 175.

<sup>4</sup>Hansen, Primer, p. 87.

<sup>5</sup>Julian Beck cited by Lebel, Entretiens avec le Living Théâtre, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup>Happening is not restricted to Western Europe and North America; events have occurred in Japan and Eastern Europe. However, we are concerned with a comparison of North American and European happening in as far as it throws light on the happenings that have occurred in France.

is basically an aesthetic question, an attempt to create an art form that can relate to modern man's needs through its transitoriness, its rapidity, and its environmental involvement; for Lebel, however, the happening has the further dimension of "l'agitation sociale."<sup>1</sup> The American happening is descriptive of a situation; the French happening is a means by which to change the situation. Lebel summarizes the aims of Catastrophe: "We have striven to give our audience an idea, an attitude of dissent against commercialism of art, a conscientious use of our subconscious, and a more direct use of our consensus in sex and art."<sup>2</sup>

Jorge Lavelli arrives at similar conclusions in his experiments with the happening form: "Le but du happening est de libérer des énergies refoulées, dans un éclatement qui dénonce et viole en même temps les structures policières de la société et de sa culture."<sup>3</sup> This explains the aggressive nature of French happening that Hansen notes:

Violence seems to be more characteristic of European happenings than of happenings in America. There is something soft and poetic and perhaps even music hallish about the American happenings. The European happening has much more of a chicken wandering across the stage followed by a man quickly swinging an axe who cuts it in half, by the participants or performers having intercourse or being stripped naked.<sup>4</sup>

The Europeans are attempting to break down barriers and then push their freedom as far as possible, whereas the Americans are much more concerned with trying to create a total art work. The Europeans set out to achieve a psycho-social liberation, the Americans to solve an aesthetic problem. An illustration is Kaprow's commentary on the use of ephemeral material and city waste: it is either "a further enlargement of the domain of art's subject matter," or a re-posing of the problem (begun by Duchamp's objets trouvés) of "what may be (or become) art and what may not"; the outcome of this use of waste will be the feasibility of "a new range of forms not possible with conventional means."<sup>5</sup> All four points are argued solely from the aesthetic angle with no

<sup>1</sup>Lebel, Le Happening, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup>Lebel to Nimmo, Catastrophe in Paris, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>Nores and Godard, Lavelli, p. 149.

<sup>4</sup>Hansen, Primer, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, pp. 166-67.

mention of Lebel's arguments that the happening by its ephemerality escapes commercialism.

Kaprow, himself, is aware of the distinction between his own "rough ritual style" and Lebel's style which is "more surreal, erotic and sometimes political in overtone and intent." The point on which he allows comparison with Lebel is the need "to break down as many traditional barriers as possible—those that divide the arts, that separate these from the spectator or listener, and that prevent art and life from mixing."<sup>1</sup> Again, only aesthetic considerations predominate. Whereas for Kaprow the breaking of traditional barriers is seen as an aesthetic end in itself, for Lebel the happening represents "la pratique de la révolution psychophysique permanente."<sup>2</sup> Happening is an effort towards a redefinition of culture that will radically alter the nature of society and civilisation—a replacement of the culture based on the text, the spoken word, and the passive receiver by a culture based on the action, the performance of the act, and the active participant. Lebel's happening is what McLuhan would call a post-literate art form, one that relates to the electronic era by its emphasis on involvement in the world about oneself.

The socio-political aims of Lebel's work suggested in the social symbolism of his creations are made totally obvious in the overt political statements that they include. The initial event of Catastrophe presented the following situation: a pram draped in a tricolour was pushed in by a mother; the baby in the pram was a mask of De Gaulle. The political analogy is that France (the mother) begets De Gaulle (the child). Another actor grabbed the De Gaulle mask, the implication being that social revolution (overthrowing De Gaulle) not only necessitates the violation of society but also the violation of the family. Masks of the politicians Kennedy and Khrushchev were worn during the happening, and the final event was an improvisation dealing with the rejection of the black American Meredith's application to enter Mississippi University. Such overt references to political situations

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<sup>1</sup>Kaprow, "A Happening in Paris," pp. 98-99.

<sup>2</sup>Lebel, Entretiens avec le Living Théâtre, p. 227.

never occur in American happening.

Despite these ideological differences, the happenings of both Europe and North America attempt a redefinition of theatrical language that has implications for the positions of actor and spectator. The new language proposes an environment of noise, light, and touch that encompasses both actor and spectator. Sensual shock is coupled with erotic stimulation and moral outrage to promote a more physically active reaction from the spectator-cum-participant. Moreover, the very form of happenings precludes the easy identification of spectator and character, and demands a more committed response.

#### (iv) The Structure and Creative Process of Happening

The hypothetical description refers to the organization of happening as a "compartmental structure"; the basis of this structure is the arrangement and juxtaposition of "theatrical units that are completely self-contained and hermetic."<sup>1</sup> Michael Kirby thus implies that the relationship between these units is just temporal in that one event happens before, after, or at the same time as another, and that there is no necessary literary link between them. What is clear is that any notion of intrigue or story line has been abandoned by happening. Kaprow posits: "Happenings are events which, put simply, happen. . . . They appear to go nowhere and do not make any particular literary point."<sup>2</sup> Happenings, then, are anti-theatrical in as much as they deny that central element of the theatrical event as defined by Maurice Descotes: "La pièce de théâtre doit être avant tout cette histoire bien menée, bien racontée, apte à satisfaire la curiosité élémentaire qui est le sentiment premier de la foule rassemblée pour apprendre et attendre 'ce qui va se passer.'"<sup>3</sup> The principle of organization of happening must be looked for elsewhere. The absurdist dramatists destroyed the conventional concept of intrigue

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<sup>1</sup> Kirby, Happenings, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Kaprow, "'Happenings' in the New York Scene," p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Descotes, Le Public de théâtre, p. 348.

by a denial of action and development, but nevertheless, structure was given to the whole by thematic orchestration and the ritualistic repetition of certain phrases. Happening's structure springs from rhythm and movement and in this respect is totally non-literary:

Time or "pacing" will acquire an order that is determined more by the character of movements within environments than by a fixed concept of regular development and conclusion. There need be no rhythmic coordination between the several points of a Happening.<sup>1</sup>

This movement/rhythm concept of structure is best illustrated by reference to Kaprow's Bon Marché. An account of the action runs: on arriving at the supermarket, the first moment of the happening was the vague wanderings of the public through the darkened store where five counters were lit by bulbs; each spectator-participant was given a cloth bag to carry containing a heavy object; the sound environment was the public address system encouraging people to buy this or that product and broadcasting the time in different parts of the world. The first moment is characterized by undirected, unconcentrated movement, general sound, and a uniform lighting system. The second moment consisted of specific actions performed in specific locations; at the five lit counters, five actions were performed: a washing-machine was wrapped and unwrapped, filled with and emptied of newspaper by an expressionless salesman while a light was switched on and off; a man was pushed around in a basket, was wrapped up and led away; another ritual of wrapping and unwrapping was performed at a different counter; at the fourth counter a girl buttered bread and spread jam; and, at the fifth, a girl covered in plastic was washed down with suds by a bearded attendant. This period is marked by the definition of areas either by flashing lights (contrasting with the uniform dimness of the opening) or by specific noises like the mechanical clicking of the girl in plastic or the blasts of a police whistle and fog-horn during the wrapping of the man (as opposed to the general public address system); similarly the audience is directed towards certain points in contrast to the earlier vague meanderings. In the third moment, the audience returned to its wanderings as

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<sup>1</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 191.

they passed from counter to counter, perhaps asking the demonstrators questions. The fact that certain events were carried out randomly in the space the audience occupied distinguishes the third moment from the first. The performance areas (which were formerly the counters) and the spectator area are fused as four actions were performed: a woman dragged a cot and bedding through the aisles of the shop; a workman rolled a tyre among the spectators; photographers shot flashguns that were answered by cap pistols; and finally a mad-dog man ran through the crowd on all fours. The breaking of the barrier between separate performance and spectating areas was underlined by spectators actively entering the action either by taking over the tyre from the workman or by creating their own action; the breaking of the physical barrier led in some cases to the breaking of the psychological barrier which enforced a passive role on the spectator. The fourth moment is in radical contrast as it draws spectators, actors, and those who have created their own event, all three, together around a single spotlight, "a bright hard circle of idiotic importance."<sup>1</sup> A single spectator was declared the winner, and he was sat on a steel chair to receive his prize of money and wine. The concentration into one spot is emphasized by the demonstrators from the other counters clambering through the crowd towards the winner and the wine. In this period, the single spectator becomes the central actor, especially as the demonstrators collapse one by one among the feet of the crowd. The swing is towards a very tightly packed space with a magnification of the crowd's activity around the central point. From this frenzy the happening decelerated as the last demonstrator poured a final bottle of wine over the girl covered in plastic and dropped slowly to the floor after having asked the spectators to rip open their cloth bags. The original silence was restored and then the public address system broadcast the exact time in Paris and requested the contents of the bags (a stone) to be deposited in the pool at the foot of the plastic-covered girl before leaving the supermarket. The structure of this happening is based on a variety of rhythms obtained through movement. It is a series of groupings

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<sup>1</sup>Kaprow, "A Happening in Paris," p. 94.

and dispersings with a final moment of spatial concentration underlined by the broadcasting of the accurate time in one place, Paris (as opposed to the world capitals of the opening sequence).

The ebb-and-flow style of this happening recurs in many of Kaprow's happenings (Sea and Night) and derives from a desire to construct his work on the rhythms of nature which tend to be cyclic. This pattern gives Kaprow's work a ritual style since most primitive rituals are tied to natural cycles. The analysis of Bon Marché shows that the progression of the happening is closely tied to the movements of spectators and participants and the space in which they evolve. Space-time articulation is the basic vocabulary of the happening and not the grammatical sentence with its implied causality.

Label's happenings do not use space in such a well-defined way as Kaprow's but Déchirex does follow a similar spatial development. Again, the happening is grouped about a series of moments. The opening sequence posits a traditional audience-stage relationship in that the audience was confronted with two proscenium arches; on the left, two girls were playing badminton in ultra-violet light with fluorescent equipment, and on the right, a film collage was projected. The second moment begins when the crowd reacted to Mexican bullfighting music and, simultaneously, a motorcycle and the badminton players descended into the spectating area, a dramatic breaking of the physical barrier between audience and actors. During the third moment, the single area is made even more common to both sets of people by "des actions spontanées qui ont lieu dans la salle":<sup>1</sup> a nude girl covered with spaghetti danced on top of a car; a recitation was made from the Larousse Médical; a Mayakovsky poem was read; and a speech by Castro was broadcast as well as other sound elements. The fourth moment is the herding of the crowd into a space around the car by the circling motorcycle and the flailing badminton rackets. The physical concentration of the audience is compensated for by the violent physical action of breaking up the car; at this point, the purely evasive activity of the crowd was turned into positive activity (in the context of

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<sup>1</sup>Label, Le Happening, p. 72.



the happening) as the crowd took command of the offered car and began to dismantle it. The final moment is a paralysis of the activity; as Ferlinghetti read his poem, a huge plastic tube wound its way among the spectator-participants causing a freezing of the action as it inflated. The public and the participants become a single unit experiencing a common, enforced immobility. In this second instance, the structure of the happening is again derived from the correlation between space and activity with a concluding reassembling of actors and spectators. In both Bon Marché and Déchirex, structure can be defined most accurately in terms of flow and movement through space; these elements give happening a form despite its "self-contained and hermetic" theatrical events.

As spatial articulation and movement become prime features in the organization of the work, the physical position of the spectator is integrated into the artistic conception of the happening. It has been said of Spring Happening: "The viewing situation has become an organic part of the work itself."<sup>1</sup> Space is no longer a stable, static element but rather kinetic; and so the observer and passive spectator become participants in the work by their movement in the sense that they are a constructive part of the whole.

The organic use of the physical position of the spectator has developed during a second phase of happening experimentation. In the formative years, between 1959 and 1961, a more or less traditional situation obtained in which the audience was situated in defined areas of seating, albeit in the round or inside a surrounding environment. For example, Red Grooms's The Burning Building had a delineated stage area and therefore one can assume an equally well-defined audience area; for Whitman's happenings EG and The American Moon (both New York, 1960), there appears to have been specific performance areas in the centre of the seated public.<sup>2</sup> The American Moon played with the physical position of the audience. The spectators were seated facing inwards inside six tunnels that radiated out from the centre of the room, leaving a

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<sup>1</sup> Kirby, Happenings, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Whitman, The American Moon in Happenings by Kirby, pp. 137-47.

roughly oval area where most of the action of the piece took place. The spectators could only see part of the central area and the mouth of the opposite tunnel. They were deliberately left unsure about the shape of the room until the end of the happening. As was the case with Dine's Car Crash, the division into specific areas for spectator and actor is attenuated by the action of the happening being carried on around and above the audience.

It is worthwhile noting that certain happenings are deliberate attempts to exploit the tension, the attente (as Duvignaud calls it), that is established between the actor and spectator in the traditional situation. An example is Ben's Publik (Deuxième Festival de la Libre Expression, 1965): Ben sat alone on stage looking expressionless out at the audience and doing absolutely nothing; over his head was a sign which said: "Regarder ça suffit." In the programme, Ben explains the happening:

La pièce va durer une heure.  
Aucune action préconçue n'aura lieu.  
Observez le public.  
Toutes ses réactions, même les plus infimes et imperceptibles,  
sont l'action de la pièce.<sup>1</sup>

The sign is an ironic comment on the traditional role of the spectator which the happening aims to reverse by having the spectator perform and the actor observe. Irony as a mechanism does very little to destroy the whole concept of defined roles which is the aim of Lebel's work. In this respect, Lebel's Catastrophe can be seen as a progression: "Composée surtout d'un happening et d'une exposition-environnement, cette manifestation intègre le 'public' entièrement dans son mouvement."<sup>2</sup> The development of the happening in general has been away from fixed positions and fixed roles towards fluidity of movement and interaction between spectator and actor to the point of eradicating

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<sup>1</sup> Ben, "Programme pour un happening," Le Théâtre dans le monde, vol. 14, no. 6 (November-December 1965), p. 571. For further details, see Tarrab, "Le Happening," pp. 16-17; and Lebel, Le Happening, p. 51. There is some confusion concerning the date of this work. Tarrab quotes Ben who indicates that the first performance was in Nice (1962); he also mentions a 1964 Paris performance. Lebel maintains that Publik was created at the Deuxième Festival de la Libre Expression (Paris 1965). One can only conclude that Ben repeated the happening over a period of years in different places.

<sup>2</sup> Lebel, Le Happening, p. 87.

the barrier between them.

The spatial transformations of a happening in progress are clearly impossible in the fixed arrangement of seats and stage that exists in the traditional theatre. Indeed, it is arguable that the rigidity of the physical setting reinforces the notion of immutable roles for the actor and the spectator which precludes the possibility of free interplay. Reform of theatrical architecture is a principle on which the éphémère panique is based because of Jodorowsky's objections to just this rigidity and its roles. The area that happenings define in their action has developed towards the sphere, that is, a total use of the three-dimensional environment including the space occupied by the audience.<sup>1</sup> The experimentation with theatrical space has been pursued more avidly by the Americans than Label, most of whose work has been performed in the more or less rectangular envelope of a gallery. Kaprow has personally struck out against this "limiting rectangularity of the gallery architecture."<sup>2</sup> Just as the theatre building imposes a certain physical relationship on actor and spectator, so the gallery has a limiting effect on the possibilities of creation and of art's interaction with life. Jérôme Savary's Grand Magic Circus refuses the theatre building precisely because its architecture causes a rupture between theatre and the life of the community, a rupture that they seek to repair. Kaprow argues the same case against the museum venue: "With the emergence of the picture shop and museum in the last two centuries as a direct consequence of art's separation from society, art came to mean a dream world, cut off from real life capable of only indirect reference to the existence most people knew."<sup>3</sup> The original venue of most happenings was a small room in a museum (for example, the Reuben Gallery or the Judson Gallery in New York) and it is interesting to observe that in these happenings the audience-actor relationship remained formal. This would seem to support Kaprow's argument that the physical envelope informs the nature of the

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<sup>1</sup>The work of Jacques Poliéri has also developed towards the use of spherical structures in the exploitation of the theatrical space. See below, Chapter VI, pp. 549-56.

<sup>2</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

theatrical relationships and that the creativity of the early happening was inhibited by the physical setting. This point is made in performance in Déchirex as the two proscenium arches of the beginning impose the attitude of voyeur on the spectator; when this defined physical situation is broken there is a subsequent willed alteration in the spectator's attitude to the performance.

The creation of environment inside the gallery helped to reduce the effect of the envelope but interplay was still restricted. Oldenburg's development away from the basement of the Judson Gallery is symptomatic of the spatial development of the happening as a whole. At first, he tried to bring the city into the gallery by constructing environments with the city's scrap material (Snapshots from the City). Dissatisfied he moved from the gallery to the concept of the found environment in the city itself: the swimming pool of Washes (New York, 1965)<sup>1</sup> and the parking lot of Autobodys. As he moved outside, the itinerant happening took over (Injun) and audience movement became more integral to the work. Finally he embarked upon a transcontinental trilogy of happenings: Gayety, Autobodys, and Stars (Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington, 1963). Kaprow's work has evolved in a parallel manner from the Reuben Gallery and works like Spring Happening where actor-audience delineation was rigid, to the tenement block of Courtyard or the supermarket of Bon Marché and their flow of spectator and actor, and ultimately to the open air happenings in the natural environment as in Household where "interactivity between art, the public, and nature"<sup>2</sup> is achieved with the disappearance of the spectator. Not that Kaprow has realized the ideal happening: Copeau's revolution of the actor and spectator thinking simultaneously has not been achieved, but Anouilh's dictum that the audience ought to be rehearsed has been observed.<sup>3</sup> For, in Household, Kaprow gathered together all those

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<sup>1</sup>Claes Oldenburg, Washes, Tulane Drama Review, vol. 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965), pp. 108-18.

<sup>2</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup>See Jacques Copeau cited by Pierre-Henri Simon, Théâtre et destin (Paris: Armand Colin, 1959), p. 37; and Jean Anouilh, La Grotte (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1961), p. 11.

interested in participating and all discussed the plan for the action beforehand. Alain Jouffroy in his novel, Un rêve plus long que la nuit, describes one such happening that took place at Sheepshead Bay near New York:

C'est cela le vrai, le fou théâtre, une improvisation au ralenti, sur la plage, à la tombée du jour; des hommes et des femmes que nul spectateur froid ne regarde; tous les amis participent à la fête et ne s'intéressent à rien d'autre qu'à la construction et à la destruction des tours, au jeu du vent dans les étoffes clouées sur les poteaux d'amarrage: il n'y a pas de plus beau théâtre que le moment que l'on vit.<sup>1</sup>

Here we see the happening fully integrated into the life of the subject.

Oldenburg's and Kaprow's progression out of the gallery and into the city links them with a whole branch of happening that takes the city as its basic material. Wolf Vostell has created works like Cityrama I (Cologne, 1961) which he describes as "a permanent realistic demonstration in twenty-six places in Cologne" and which involves visiting certain areas of the city and looking at bomb damage and similar sights. His Ligne petite ceinture (Paris, 1962) has for a plan the route map of a Parisian bus; the action is the following:

—————Faites attention aux circonstances  
 —————accoustiques et optiques simultanées  
 —————Bruits—Cris—Voix—————  
 —————Murs d'affiches (décollages)—————  
 —————Décombres—————Ruines etc.—————<sup>2</sup>

In America, Ken Dewey has created City Scale (1963)<sup>3</sup> which prescribes a dawn to dusk ramble and activity around New York and a similar piece called Cincinatti Journey (1965).

The use of the city in this manner suggests very strongly an extension of the Dadaist visit to Saint-Julien-des-Pauvres (Paris, April 1921) in which the Dadaists planned to take members of the public up to the church and then read at random from the Larousse encyclopaedia. Breton explained the purpose of this activity in the programme: "Il ne s'agit pas d'une manifestation anti-

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<sup>1</sup>Alain Jouffroy, Un rêve plus long que la nuit (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 186.

<sup>2</sup>Wolf Vostell, Cityrama I and Ligne petite ceinture in Assemblage by Kaprow, pp. 244-46.

<sup>3</sup>Ken Dewey, City Scale, plan in Tulane Drama Review, vol. 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965), between pp. 186 and 187.

cléricale comme on serait tenté de le croire, bien plutôt d'une nouvelle interprétation de la nature appliquée cette fois non pas à l'art mais à la vie."<sup>1</sup>

The mechanism of Dewey's City Scale is to present familiar sights in an unfamiliar way (for example, bathing a bank in blue light) which seems to echo the random reading of the Larousse in front of the familiar church.

The discussion of the use of space in happening and, indeed, of the other means employed by this art form includes many references back to the Dada movement. The superficial similarity between the two movements is remarkable and nowhere more so than in the case of the Max Ernst Exhibition held at the Au Sans Pareil Gallery in May and June 1922. Asté d'Esparbès describes it in the columns of Comoedia (7 May 1922):

Avec le mauvais goût qui les caractérise, les Dadas ont fait appel, cette fois, au ressort de l'épouvante. La scène était dans la cave et toutes les lumières éteintes à l'intérieur du magasin, il montait par une trappe des gémissements à fendre l'âme et le murmure d'une discussion dont nous n'avons pu saisir que quelques bribes. . . .

Les Dadas, sans cravates et gantés de blanc, passaient et repassaient. André Breton croquait des allumettes, Georges Ribbement [sic] -Dessaignes criait à chaque instant: "Il pleut sur un crâne." Aragon miaulait, Philippe Soupault jouait à cache-cache avec Tristan Tzara tandis que Benjamin Péret et Chachourne [sic] se serraient la main à chaque instant. Sur le seuil où se tenait un mannequin au sourire énigmatique Jacques Rigaut comptait à voix haute les automobiles et les perles des visiteuses.<sup>2</sup>

Certain elements in this example prefigure the happening experiments: the dimly lit room and lighting effects of the struck matches and the white gloves; the enforced proximity of the public and the "actors"; the noise environment composed of screams, shouts, and whisperings with no intelligible sentences pronounced; the actors used as puppets by repeating the handshake; and the automatic shouting of Ribemont-Dessaignes. There was no delineation of actor and spectator areas as events were carried out among the audience. The role of the "actor" was decidedly in the non-matrixed style of the happening by which each action is independent of all other actions and independent of any setting. Sanouillet has underlined the continuity between Dada and surrealism, and now happening, in the matter of theatrical experimentation:

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<sup>1</sup> André Breton cited by Sanouillet, Dada à Paris, p. 244.

<sup>2</sup> Asté d'Esparbès cited by Sanouillet, Dada à Paris, pp. 250-51.

ceux  
Tous qui parmi les Dadaïstes et les Surréalistes qui ont pris conscience des problèmes du théâtre (Ribemont-Dessaignes, Tzara, Vitrac, Artaud . . . ) ont posé comme condition première à la restauration de la communion théâtrale primitive un changement d'attitude de la part du public. Le spectateur passif et consentant devait céder place à un participant hostile, constamment fustigé par les provocations de l'auteur et des acteurs.<sup>1</sup>

The point of dissimilarity is the method adopted by the happeners. Dada and surrealism used shock techniques and physical confrontation with the audience; the happening aims at an end product of incorporation of and cooperation with the public. The spectator of the Dada manifestation stayed outside the "play" and was constantly thwarted and pushed into an act of rebellion against the actor; the happener tries to encourage collusion between actor and spectator, to create a situation in which actor and spectator are one.<sup>2</sup>

The basic relationships of theatre—author/actor/spectator—in which the first two agents interact in order to present a work to the third, are modified by an approach to creation which aims at the active cooperation of actor and spectator. The inclusion of the spectator in the happening as a constructive element and as a creative force, as well as the belief that it is in the eye of each individual spectator that the total art work is realized, means that the art work is a fluid, intangible entity. The first manifestations of this type of art form are the touchable sculptures of Oldenburg and the rearrangeable creations of Kaprow; these latter works immediately preceded the blossoming of the happening. In Kaprow's Words (New York, 1961),<sup>3</sup> the spectator was free to move and rearrange elements of the sculpture as he wished; the form was a newspaper kiosk which bristled with headlines and pictures all of which could be removed and replaced in a different order. The choice of the newspaper kiosk with the juxtaposition of its many stories and news items is relevant to Kaprow's demand that art should relate to the psyche

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<sup>1</sup>Sanouillet, Dada à Paris, p. 154, n. 1.

<sup>2</sup>There is a form of happening, happening auto-géré, in which this initial barrier is not present. The happening evolves from the interaction and improvisation of a number of people all of whom are participants. See Tarrab, "Le Happening," pp. 59-65.

<sup>3</sup>Allan Kaprow, Words, illustrations in Assemblage, p. 52 and p. 54.

of contemporary man; the newspaper is the symbol of the explosion of the media and the bombardment of man by many simultaneous levels of information (a case argued by McLuhan in Understanding Media). In happening, the symbol is replaced by the use of mixed media themselves. Words also prefigured happening in its use of an everyday city object as its central image. The opportunity given to the audience to effect the nature of the art work by rearranging its elements alters fundamentally the process of creation of the work; the work is no longer completed in the studio before being exhibited: "This would simply continue the compositional process into the performance process and two usually distinct phases would begin to merge as the caesura between them is pulled out."<sup>1</sup>

Not in total contrast is the conventional theatrical situation where the role of the author is restricted by a series of choices made by the director and the production team (including the actor) which may modify his original conception of the play. Similarly, as Salacrou has observed, the play is not complete until its performance in front of a public, and this situation can modify the work yet again:

Le public qui venait entendre ma pièce avait encore dans la tête tant de discours radiodiffusés, tant de dépêches de journaux, qu'à travers la grille de ses inquiétudes et de ses angoisses, toutes mes phrases devenaient allusives. Le vrai drame de ma pièce disparut dans le drame du public.<sup>2</sup>

The theatre by its very structure would appear to attract those artists interested in the principles of change and the rearrangeable. However, in the theatrical situation, the author still has a complete, fully developed idea, a pre-existing total conception of his work. Although perhaps modified, this conception is portrayed as a finished work to the public. The rehearsal in conventional theatre ensures that the work created is presented as a homogeneous whole, an object offered to the public. The process of creation is almost totally over on contact with the audience which has been excluded from that process in all but its imagined presence as the intended partner in

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<sup>1</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup>Armand Salacrou, Théâtre IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p.127.



the communicative action of art. Generally, the audience is allowed to interpret what it perceives but not to modify the nature of what it perceives. In the happening the audience is given the opportunity to compose what it experiences.

An illustration of the relative difference in responsibility and role of the conventional dramatic author and the author of happening is the nature and position of the text in the finished work. In conventional theatre, the text retains a central position and tends to be a word-perfect script. Despite the widespread belief that happenings are totally non-textual, they generally have a script or scenario. It is, however, very rarely concerned with dialogue or words, but merely lists a series of actions, perhaps with places and times as well without any expressed relation between one act and the next. Often the sequence of actions is determined by chance methods such as turning a pack of cards. Indeed, the fact that it has been possible to discuss structure implies a certain pre-existing conception of the work; Kaprow's statement referring to the most uncontrolled moment of Bon Marché, "almost lose it one night,"<sup>1</sup> does imply that a measure of control over the events is conceived by the author. However, the happenner would not interfere with the production as Oldenburg affirms: "I like to withdraw and let the thing handle itself and find its own way."<sup>2</sup> Instead of having a general idea that is then filled out and developed by the single author to become a structured script, the happening author works from the general idea (or structure) in performance. The performance itself develops the general idea, and the work as the product of the single author becomes a collective enterprise open to the vagaries of situation, weather and participants. The happening is in fact the creation of the work, or as Hansen has expressed it "a representation of the creative process in action."<sup>3</sup>

The very fact that the concept of the author is eclipsed in happening

<sup>1</sup> Kaprow, "A Happening in Paris," p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Oldenburg to Kostelanetz, Theatre of Mixed Means, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Hansen, Primer, p. 87.

production has led to Peter Brook's criticism that the resultant work is formless: "There is eventually a need for authorship to reach the ultimate compactness and focus that collective work is almost obliged to miss."<sup>1</sup> The happening is seen to become divorced from life because there is no presence behind the production: "Presque toujours il manque à ses jeux une présence, CELLE DU CREATEUR, qui donnerait au 'happening' sa réalité. Faute de quoi, celui-ci tourne toujours à la mystification."<sup>2</sup> Alfred Simon's criticism, as well as Brook's, is based on a desire for a single stable point of view, an omniscient author, as in the nineteenth-century novel—a desire that the happenings consider an anachronism in a universe based on relativity and metamorphosis. The only reality of happening is the experience of each individual present and his contribution to the work: "L'artiste ou l'écrivain est lui-même devenu une pièce de musée, anachronique et inutile, dès lors que le privilège de la transgression est exercé par tous et non par un."<sup>3</sup> Lebel's attitude towards authorship is characteristically political in overtone; for him, the events of Paris, May 1968 proved that the public had realized the aim of happening for itself, that is, a new psycho-social world view. Kaprow, on the other hand, believes that the public is still incapable of directing their own happenings, and hence still assigns a prominent position to himself in the production: "In the case of those Happenings with more detailed instructions or more expanded action, the artist must be present at every moment, directing and participating, for the tradition is too young for the complete stranger to know what to do with such plans if he got them."<sup>4</sup> In such happenings Kaprow has adopted the practice of discussing the action beforehand and so his control over events is greater than Lebel's. As early as October 1963, he briefed the crowd on "what would take place."<sup>5</sup> Kaprow's method is to

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<sup>1</sup> Brook, Empty Space, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Simon, "La Métaphore primordiale," Esprit, no. 5 (May 1965), p. 842.

<sup>3</sup> Lebel, Entretiens avec le Living Théâtre, p. 220.

<sup>4</sup> Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> Allan Kaprow, "An Artist's Story of a Happening," New York Times, 6 October 1963.

draw up guidelines along which the happening may develop: "I try to plan for different degrees of flexibility within parameters of an otherwise strictly controlled imagery."<sup>1</sup> Despite these parameters, the author's control is not total and the artist "need not be the only one responsible for a creative action."<sup>2</sup> Obvious co-creators of the happening are the physical setting and the spectator-participant. Al Hansen considers the creation of a happening in a similar light: "My approach to happenings has been to write a framework notation as a skeleton within which the performers will fill space and build a monster or creature which could then be considered the product of us all."<sup>3</sup>

If happening is non-theatrical in the modifications it brings to the creative process, it is equally non-theatrical in its choice of performers. Just as the theatrical building is considered a restraining factor on the creative process so the learned techniques of a trained actor will create a theatrical atmosphere thus impeding the breakdown of the barrier between actor and audience:

Actors are stage-trained and bring over habits from their art that are hard to shake off. . . . The best participants have been persons not normally engaged in art or performance, but who are moved to take part in an activity that is at once meaningful to them in its ideas yet natural in its methods.<sup>4</sup>

The emphasis in happening is not on learning a role or embodying an imagined character. The concept of characterization is rendered obsolete. In a tradition that includes Artaud and Genet who both attacked Western theatre for its emphasis on psychological depiction of character and the subsequent exhibitionism, the happening rejects the actor, "exhibitionniste menteur," in favour of the actor, "poète en état de transe."<sup>5</sup> For Jodorowsky and Lebel, with their preoccupation of passing beyond the conscious world, trance is the state of release of repressions, that moment when the subconscious takes full possession of the being, as opposed to the traditional concept of trance as

<sup>1</sup>Kaprow, "A Statement," in Happenings by Kirby, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup>Hansen Primer, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup>Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 197.

<sup>5</sup>Jodorowsky, "Vers l'éphémère panique," p. 85.

that moment when the god visits the celebrant. The trance of Al Hansen's happenings is different again; the actors through reflection and contemplation become so involved with the work that they are oblivious of their physical beings:

These two girls [Meredith Monk and Phoebe Neville] approach happenings so filled with danger and joie, that if not watched carefully they will easily destroy something or hurt themselves. It is not unusual in the happening world for happening performer types to be uninhibited<sup>1</sup> to the point of actually hurting themselves or someone in the audience.

In a Kaprow piece, trance is not utilized, his work being more controlled and concerned with the creation of a total effect. Trance acting is one method by which happener-performers avoid exhibitionism. The trance is the total commitment of the actor to the work; it is not the imaginary world of character but the vital world of involvement.

The incarnation of roles and characters is replaced by a performance of gestures and simple actions; in this way, the performer is not attempting to create a total illusion of reality but is presenting a lived action. By reducing the temptation of exhibitionism and inauthenticity, the simple action emphasizes the irreducible presence of the actor as a living being. The philosophic debate concerning the reality of the character and the actor is no longer valid. The actor is present in his own reality; the happening introduces him in a state of brute presence.

Discussion of the actor-object appears throughout modern dramatic theory and centres on this very problem of the conflicting realms of the living actor and the imaginary character; for example, Craig and Ionesco have argued in favour of the puppet. Their objections to the actor arose because the human being can only be artificially integrated into the theatrical illusion; his own physical reality reacts against the illusion. The puppet resolves the conflict by rejecting the living element. In Happening a reverse process has been established; by discarding characterization and reducing the actor-performer to his naked presence, illusion is destroyed in favour of reality. Happening is reality; theoretically the position of the actor in

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<sup>1</sup>Hansen, Primer, p. 76.

happening achieves the desired fusion of art and life. The actor-performer is not absorbed into a situation.

When Label produced Picasso's Le Désir attrapé par la queue, he urged his actors to be "actifs" and to improvise around the text so as not to remain "fidèles du mot à mot."<sup>1</sup> Improvisation is another method of obviating the conflict of real and imaginary. It demands that the actor divulge his own nature; it constitutes a movement through the fictitious realism of Antoine's Théâtre Libre towards what could be called ultra-realism. Theatre has often experimented with the division between the reality of the theatre and lived reality usually in an attempt to persuade the audience to accept the stage reality as lived reality, hence, the passage of actors through the audience in order to involve the audience, to make them believe in the reality of the actor-character. Happening again resolves this division by creating no rival "reality." For example, Ann Halprin's Apartment 6 (1965) presented the actors on stage with no pre-existing lines or action: "In our situation there's absolutely nothing pretended. We don't play any roles. We just are who we are. I don't know where it's going to lead to. . . . We avoid personalizing."<sup>2</sup>

The position of the actor in happening is complicated. Either his creative role is reduced to carrying out an action prescribed by the author in which his value is that of being simply a living being, or his creativity is the reason for the existence of happening as Label directs his actors: "I'm not going to tell you what you should do in this show; I know you are capable of doing it. All I ask of you is for you to conjure up the spirit of a catastrophe."<sup>3</sup> In both cases, the movement is away from psychological character development towards physical activity and consequently the substitution of lived reality for the dramatic illusion.

The spectator has become integral to the creation of the art work as has the actor. Being an art form that does not allow for duration in time

<sup>1</sup>Label to Nicola, "Chapiteau pour un scandale," p. 51.

<sup>2</sup>Ann Halprin, "Interview," Tulane Drama Review, vol. 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965), p. 166.

<sup>3</sup>Label to Nimmo, "Catastrophe in Paris," p. 49.

or place, the happening involves the spectator in an unconventional manner; Schechner expresses it: "The thing done is no longer any more important than those who do it and those who witness it."<sup>1</sup> From being the external subject to whom the art object is proffered and who has the privilege of observing a total complete work, the spectator has become an agent in the creative process. A happening in which the spectator does assume an amount of autonomy is Milan Knížák's Demonstration for All the Senses (Prague, 1964). The first of the three moments is a mise en condition (essential for the happeners to release the individual from imposed reactions learned by life in society), "a disturbance of their normal state of mind" effected by enclosing spectators in a dark room. The second constitutes the happening proper with the customary sequence of unrelated actions performed mainly by the spectator-participants. The final moment "ends in a fortnight, and is different for each participant. Everything that happens to him during this period is a second demonstration."<sup>2</sup> Here the author acts purely as a motivating agent, leaving the creative role to the spectator who chooses what constitutes the art work in the ensuing days. The distinction between the spectator and actor has been eliminated by the concept of the participant.

The destruction of the barrier between spectator and actor is central to Lebel's argument in Le Happening; he sees in the art form a means to combat the alienation of modern society. Instead of the subject/object separation, he calls for "un échange et une collaboration effective": "Puisqu'il s'agit de théâtre, je crois qu'en 1967 l'essentiel est de détruire la relation aliénée scène/salle (ou, si vous préférez, acteurs/public, sujet/objet) et de la remplacer par une relation libre, indéterminée."<sup>3</sup> The example of his work studied would seem to indicate that his success in practice in this realm is limited. Most of the activity of the audience is confined to defensive

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Schechner, "Happenings," Tulane Drama Review, vol. 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965), p. 230

<sup>2</sup>Milan Knížák, Demonstration for All the Senses in Assemblage by Kaprow, p. 305.

<sup>3</sup>Lebel, Le Happening, p. 27; and Lebel, "Parler du happening," p. 11.

evasion of assaults by the actors. At the outset of his happenings there is a division between audience and actor. Although the action is directed toward a diminution of the barrier allowing the two to intermingle and to interreact, its effect is minimal. For example, the final tableau of Déchirex finds actors and spectators immobilized while engaged in a common activity. This is interaction at a very basic level; the spectator is no longer spatially separated from the actor but his knowledge of what is expected is less than that of the actor. The concept of audience participation is ill-defined and has lost all real meaning. Ben describes the following situation as "la participation directe du public à l'action": "Benjamin Patterson bande les yeux au public qu'il amène faire un tour de 20 minutes dans la rue. Il fait vivre la pièce au public qui devient acteur à part entière."<sup>1</sup> This type of participation derives from simple physical provocation and is not at all creative; the decision to act on the part of the audience is not a free one and does not derive from any inspiration. This situation puts the spectator in a more passive position than in the conventional theatre; the participation is imposed by the author, and the spectator is just a material in his design. Label is aware of this type of shortcoming<sup>2</sup> and rather more optimistically claims: "Toute personne présente à un happening y participe. Il n'y a plus de public, d'acteurs, d'exhibitionnistes, de voyeurs, tous peuvent changer d'état à volonté. . . . Nul n'est réduit à zéro, comme au théâtre."<sup>3</sup>

Happening is an art form capable of accommodating the spontaneous action of the audience; in fact it seeks to encourage this action. Yet the difficulty remains that forcing the public to act does not ensure any meaningful creative act. Label's happenings do not appear to surmount the problem of inspiring in the audience the desire to participate in any worthwhile manner. Al Hansen concludes from his own experience of happening, both as author and participant:

<sup>1</sup>Ben, "Théâtre = Tout," p. 574.

<sup>2</sup>Label, Le Happening, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup>Label, "Notes sur les happenings," p. 569.

The relationship between the performer and the spectator in happenings is classical. . . . Rarely do these people, who are moved into taking part by the freedom that seems to be exhibited, add anything. They usually do not know how to do a little—they try to do too much and to allow them to do this is a lot like entering into a debate with a heckler at a nightclub.<sup>1</sup>

Kaprow also expresses reservations about the value of provoking the spectator into some kind of physical reaction and then claiming the result as audience participation: "To assemble people unprepared for an event and say that they are 'participating' if apples are thrown at them or they are herded about is to ask very little of the whole notion of participation."<sup>2</sup> Kaprow himself has solved this problem by starting his work from a revised standpoint. Instead of the initial situation of actor-spectator separation which is to be eradicated during the happening, Kaprow begins from a situation where all present are willing participants. His method is to assemble a group of participants before embarking on the action in order to discuss the scenario for the piece; in this way, the participants are made aware of the demands of the work so that their own actions during the execution of the work will be in tone with the total piece. The spontaneity of the participant is in no way impaired by this process but rather it is channeled in order to conform to an overall pattern.

Through its malleable structure, happening entails a redefinition of the theatrical space and of the production process of conventional theatre. Author, actor and spectator become involved more closely, both physically and creatively, in the art work with the ultimate objective of the elimination of these independent roles altogether. Even in the more moderate work of Lebel and Kaprow, the approach allows a degree of involvement in the creative process unfamiliar in conventional theatre.

#### (v) The Challenge of Happening

The happening, it has been argued, does not create an illusion. Rather the work is composed from the direct physical confrontation of the spectator-participant and the work in progress. Now, the traditional mode of

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<sup>1</sup> Hansen, Primer, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Kaprow, Assemblage, p. 196.



perception of art involves the self-effacement of the spectator; the spectator passes into the imaginary world of the art object and willingly takes this imaginary realm for reality. Gouhier describes this state of consciousness as "la perception esthétique."<sup>1</sup> In The Dehumanization of Art, Ortega y Gasset argues that this mode of perception differs from the perception of everyday reality and thus that there are two modes of consciousness: "Perception of 'lived' reality and perception of artistic forms, are essentially incompatible because they call for a different adjustment of our perceptive apparatus."<sup>2</sup> In the state of artistic perception the subject in his self-effacement loses his ability to act, as Mikel Dufrenne observes:

Cela ne signifie pas que la peinture soit de l'irréel, mais que je me suis irréalisé pour proclamer sa réalité et que j'ai pris pied dans ce nouveau monde qu'elle m'ouvre, homme nouveau moi-même. Mais il faut bien voir qu'en m'irréalisant je m'interdis toute participation active.<sup>3</sup>

Theory maintains that active participation and aesthetic contemplation are antagonistic; the reality of the art work is not the same as the reality of lived experience, for we are active in lived experience but inactive in the reality of the art work. An illustration of this statement is that, although accepting the stage action as "real," we do not jump to our feet to warn a character on stage of impending danger. In Racine et Shakespeare, Stendhal reports the case of a soldier who, at a performance of Othello, shot at the hero who was about to murder Desdemona. Stendhal explains the situation of the soldier in the following way:

L'illusion parfaite était celle du soldat en faction au théâtre de Baltimore. Il est impossible que vous ne conveniez pas que les spectateurs savent bien qu'ils sont au théâtre, et qu'ils assistent à la représentation d'un ouvrage d'art, et non pas à un fait vrai.<sup>4</sup>

The soldier-spectator had entered the illusion of the stage with the consciousness of lived reality; his action resulted from the confusion of the imaginary

<sup>1</sup>Gouhier, L'Essence du théâtre, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>José Ortega y Gasset, The Dehumanization of Art (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup>Mikel Dufrenne, Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique, vol. 1 (Paris: P.U.F., 1967), p. 94.

<sup>4</sup>Stendhal, Racine et Shakespeare (Paris: Flammarion, 1970), p. 58.

and the real. Another case is reported by Allardyce Nicoll: at a performance of Clifford Odets's Waiting for Lefty in 1935, the striking taxi drivers in the audience shouted and stamped their feet in support of the taxi drivers on stage.<sup>1</sup> In both cases, the spectators were unable to distinguish between reality and imaginary reconstruction in artistic form.

In happening, however, active participation is consciously sought; the audience are either forced or invited to respond with real acts to the real actions effected by the actors. Sartre explains the process:

Entre les spectateurs et ceux que nous appellerons non plus les acteurs mais les agents, il n'y a qu'une différence provisoire, c'est-à-dire une différence du temps. Les agents font réellement quelque chose, peu importe quoi, mais quelque chose de provoquant, qui fasse qu'un événement réel se produise n'importe quoi! <sup>2</sup>

The happening substitutes lived action for the "sorte d'abandon de conscience."<sup>3</sup> By so doing the realms of art and life merge; aesthetic perception is superseded by reaction, the traditional response to popular forms. Margaret Mead argues from a different angle that for art and reality to coincide "the whole sensuous being must be caught up in the experience."<sup>4</sup> On this account, as well, happening achieves art-life integration by its use of visual, aural, and tactile stimuli and the involvement of the being in a total environment.

For Label, the aim of happening is exactly to effect a combination of art and life: "Le happening ne se contente pas d'interpréter la vie, il participe à son déroulement dans la réalité."<sup>5</sup> By implication, this process is a destruction of art; for art to become indistinguishable from life necessitates the absorption of art into life: "Dans le happening, c'est finalement le réel qui absorbe l'imaginaire."<sup>6</sup> Whereas in the case of Stendhal's soldier the imaginary world took complete control of the man so that he lived the

<sup>1</sup>Allardyce Nicoll, The Theatre and Dramatic Theory (London: Harrap, 1962), pp. 25-26.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, Un Théâtre de situations (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 179.

<sup>3</sup>Jan Doat, Entrée du public (Paris: Flore, 1947), p. 61.

<sup>4</sup>Margaret Mead, "Art and Reality," College Art Journal, vol. 2, no. 4, pt. 1 (May 1943), p. 119.

<sup>5</sup>Label, Le Happening, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup>Sartre, Théâtre de situations, p.182.

situation as he would have lived a real one, the happening presents a situation in which the real totally controls the imaginary. For Lebel, the happening is the context in which all things become possible: "Finissons-en avec la culture mercantile, celle qui institutionnalise la répression physique et psychique, celle qui sert à remplacer la vie et empêcher d'être."<sup>1</sup>

By taking art from its realm divorced from everyday reality, does one in fact create a situation which is independent of, and hence unaffected by, the constraints that obtain in a particular society? Only in this case can happening help to overthrow society. However, through happening it is arguable that art becomes an extension of the social repressions; happening can be seen to aptly illustrate the Marcusean concept of repressive desublimation.<sup>2</sup> The role of art in the past was to portray situations to which man could aspire and hence pass from the existing world to a world of fulfilled desires. This possibility to surpass the everyday is all-important since it provides a perspective from which the everyday situation may be criticized. In short, art constitutes a facet of the ability to think negatively in the sense of being able to deny the existing situation, and to perceive an alternative. Marcuse argues that the traditional role of art has been eroded by the all-pervasiveness of the capitalist system: the heroes of the past are no longer larger than life; their outrageous and daring deeds have become attainable; the mythical realm has been desublimated into the everyday.

It would seem evident that the happening by attempting to articulate "ce qui est caché derrière le mur" and to incorporate it into everyday existence is contributing to the very process of the demystification of life. The happening atrophies life by denying its imaginary dimension. Hans Richter in a concluding comparison of Dada and the neo-Dadaist happening movement makes a telling point:

Art in this zero form has taken on a new meaning, no longer magical but socio-psychological, no longer transcendental but therapeutic. It

<sup>1</sup>Lebel, Entretiens avec le Living Théâtre, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup>Marcuse, One Dimensional Man, pp. 56-83.

confirms our existence by confronting the self with an object, and by means of this confrontation, evoking sensations of the self when it is face to face with the outside world.<sup>1</sup>

Richter's observation appears true when one considers the use of the everyday in primitive art and the happening; for the cave-dweller the manifestation of the bison's form in the rock was of transcendental magical significance, whereas the happeners' use of the everyday object from the city street remains a strictly social phenomenon. There is a parallel dissimilarity between Artaud's quest for the transcendental and Lebel's quest for social liberation. Desublimation is also apparent in the happeners' interpretation of trance: for them, trance comes to mean the release from repressions, the state when the subconscious and authentic personality take control, a purely psychological process. In primitive ritual trance is taken to be a state when the participant is possessed by transcendental forces, by the godhead.

On a performance level, the fact that happening is an art of confrontation is further evidence of desublimation, that is, the aesthetic response of traditional art has become physical reaction to a stimulus. The happening could be the theatrical counterpart of McLuhan's disc jockey:

That's Patty Baby and that's the girl with the dancing feet and that's Freddy Cannon there on the David Mickie Show in the night time ooohbah scuba-doo how are you booboo. Next we'll be Swinging on a Star and ssshhhwwoooo and sliding on a moonbeam.<sup>2</sup>

The disc jockey acts and reacts simultaneously to his own words without any reflection; there is no depth or relief to his experience as both action and reaction are kept on the same plane.

Can this simple reaction to the stimulus ever develop into a creative act on the part of the spectator-participant? In Lebel's happenings, it appears not: the audience participation of Déchirex is limited to the destruction of a car and to the evasion of blows from badminton rackets; in Catastrophe, the audience's contribution to the action is restricted to a morbid curiosity. The later developments in Kaprow's work, on the other hand, do seem to point to the possibility of creative action by the participants.

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<sup>1</sup>Richter, Dada, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup>McLuhan, Understanding Media, p. 81.

However, this is achieved only by eliminating totally the spectator and adopting the methods of group creation by the discussion of a plan of action beforehand.

The assessment of the effectiveness of happening is made impossible in the eyes of its practitioners by virtue of the premise that the happening is a lived experience and that, consequently, the only value of happening is its effect on the individual spectator-participant; in other words, all objective criteria are rendered invalid: "La seule logique du happening est celle de l'halluciné/hallucinant—ne perdons pas notre temps dehors; de l'extérieur rien ne peut être vécu, senti ni compris."<sup>1</sup> Lebel argues that the actions of the individuals present create the happening, that the process of creation is not a relationship but a relating, and that only the participant can experience and evaluate his experience for himself: "Du dehors l'essentiel est inintelligible."<sup>2</sup> The German artist Vostell submits that not even the author has the means or the authority to assess the effectiveness of his own creation: "It is not important what I, Vostell, think; what the public itself takes away, as a result of any of my images and the Happening, is important."<sup>3</sup>

The difficulty of assessment does not, however, preclude criticism of the method by which happening sets out to achieve avowed aims. Lebel has described happening as the least alienating of art forms. The effect of happening, then, should be to reintegrate man into his society and his environment, an effect Jean Duvignaud clearly thinks it has: "De même que les Africains emmenés en esclavage aux Antilles et au Brésil ont, à travers leurs danses de possession, maintenu et récupéré une partie perdue, des manifestations comme le 'happening' tentent de retrouver une participation chaleureuse que condamne la société industrielle, de reprendre possession de la substance humaine totale, de ce 'mana' sans lequel la vie n'est qu'un sommeil appliqué."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lebel, "Parler du happening," p. 11.      <sup>2</sup>Lebel, Le Happening, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup>Vostell, You in Assemblage by Kaprow, p. 257.

<sup>4</sup>Jean Duvignaud, "Le Voudou de l'âge industriel," Le Nouvel Observateur no. 74, 13 April 1966, p. 55.

The happening does indeed awaken man's sensorium, and in this way makes him aware of his physical existence in a universe which is dominated by the machine and which is introducing a life style of physical divorce from the natural environment. Nevertheless the question still remains whether the environment of which happening is making man aware is instrumental in recreating an integral existence for man. The world of the happening is the world of mixed means, machines, and objects. Man is thus confronted with an objectified world; if any reintegration takes place it is that of man into an alienated society. To overcome this paradox it is necessary to postulate that the object presented is there to be surpassed. For example, the interpretation of the role of the motorcycle in happening as a criticism of the growing dominance of the machine in contemporary society relies on an intellectual process, a rational deduction from the event. But such intellectual exercises are contrary to the methods of happening: "C'est un langage d'instincts et non de réflexion. La communication—si elle a lieu—se fait d'instinct, de nerfs à nerfs, d'ondes à ondes."<sup>1</sup> The contradictory situation is apparent: to achieve its aims happening must involve an intellectual interpretation; but happening by its methods tries to circumvent that process.

Schechner has described the happening as "a celebration of the world's complexity."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the happening's explosion of space and time and the breaking up of continuous, sustained action into parcels of unconnected events is certainly an attempt to produce an art form compatible with modern man's comprehension of the world. But by celebrating this world is man aided in his attempts to cope with it? Surely man is being integrated into the exploded world of the machine. It is symptomatic of the paradox of happening that the same author can write that the trend towards including the public in the creative process of the work of art, as well as in the work itself, constitutes an attempt "to forge unalienated communal moments from the stony reifications

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<sup>1</sup>Label to Tarab, "Un livre-spectacle: le happening,"

<sup>2</sup>Schechner, "Happenings," p. 231.

of American society."<sup>1</sup> The physical inclusion of the audience in happening when limited to reaction to physical provocation does not appear a qualitative improvement over reaction to the factory whistle.

The divorce in practice between the aims of the happeners and the effects they achieve is nowhere made more apparent than in the case of Kaprow's Courtyard. Kaprow explains at length the ritual significance of the girl clad in white, the eruption of the black mountain of boxes and the lowering of the suspended canopy;<sup>2</sup> but for the spectator the effect is lost: "A ritual! It was a composition using space, colour and movement, and the setting in which the Happening took place gave it a nightmarish, obsessive quality, although 'the meaning' of the 'action' was more or less non-existent."<sup>3</sup>

Lebel attributes to the happening a role in the reform of society. If the participational activity of the audience is limited and the ability of happening to go beyond the object and alienation is suspect, clearly the destruction of the spectator/actor barrier (if and when achieved) has not led to a concomitant destruction of the barriers of the society at large, in Lebel's eyes the master/slave, exploiter/exploited relationships. This failure may well result from factors similar to those that defeated Breton's aims for the Dadaist visit to Saint-Julien-des-Pauvres; in particular, the participants continue to view the whole affair as a Dadaist or happening prank and not as the revelatory experience intended. For Lebel, the public itself does not make the necessary transfer from the happening into life; the public does not share the conviction of the author of the continuity of art and life. A further factor could well be the very limited public to which happenings are played, not only in numbers but also in composition; generally happening has been the art form of an artistic élite, an art form for the delectation of other artists, "l'artiste consomme son propre art, loin du public et des circuits

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Schechner, "Audience Participation," The Drama Review, vol. 15, no. 3a (Summer 1971), p. 74.

<sup>2</sup>See Kaprow, "A Statement," in Happenings by Kirby, pp. 44-52.

<sup>3</sup>Richter, Dada, p. 213.

commerciaux."<sup>1</sup> The failure of the happening to be an effective force in the revolutionary struggle has apparently been admitted by Lebel himself who has abandoned all artistic activity since 1967 "pour consacrer son temps et son énergie à la transformation de la société et des rapports humains par l'action directe."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hahn, "Pop art et happenings," p. 1330.

<sup>2</sup> N.D.L., L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 500 (August 1972), p. 7, n. 1.



## CHAPTER V

### GROUP AUTHORSHIP AND COLLECTIVE CREATION

#### (i) Collective Creation and Popular Theatre

The collective approach to dramatic creation posits the responsibility of a group and not a succession of individuals for the production. It is a method of creation that seeks to obviate the hierarchical structure that presides over a conventional production. The latter is understood as a double procedure: the preparation of a play text followed by its rehearsal and performance. This primary division is further subdivided by the allotment of functions inside the theatre. Generally speaking, the theatrical venture involves two groups of people, one administrative and the other creative.<sup>1</sup> The passage of a play text from the author to the stage involves these two groups in a series of isolated choices. For example, in the case of Beckett's En attendant Godot, it is commonly known that the artist submitted his manuscript to Roger Blin whose direction he had admired in a production of Strindberg's Ghost Sonata. Blin then had to solicit the aid of a theatre director and a producer. Their considerations involved not only the artistic merit of the play, but also its potential as an economically sound production. In our example the Théâtre Babylone accepted the text. It was only at that time that the process of creation proper could begin after the independent decisions of at least four people.

Disregarding the whole gamut of functions inside the administrative branch (house-manager, box-office, publicity), the number of roles to be filled in a theatrical production remains high. The director holds auditions for a cast. This practice generally serves to bring together another group of

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<sup>1</sup> There are cases in which these two branches are combined by a central figure who at once leads a company of actors and heads the administrative staff of a theatre, for example Jean-Louis Barrault and the Compagnie Renaud-Barrault.

individuals which will evolve its own hierarchy ranging from the leading roles to the extra. Besides the actors there are the major functions of set-designer, costumier, lighting engineer, perhaps even a musical director, all of whom are surrounded by a team of individuals having an internal system of ranks and positions. The organ of the production, the stage, also has its attendant staff under the control of the stage-manager. Although the success of many productions proves that this creative method can produce a unified, homogeneous work, the very elaboration of functions and specializations causes compartmentalization. Each individual is assigned a specific task to perform. Many of those so involved in the work have very little influence on the development of the production. Responsibility for its success or failure is not with them but artistically with the director, or economically with the theatre director. This process of creation is equatable with the assembly-line manufacture of an automobile in which many workers are employed, but few, if any, participate. The collective approach suggests itself as an alternative to this method.

The emergence of theatre collectives is comparatively recent.<sup>1</sup> A few examples exist of similar ventures before and just after the war: Harold Clurman's The Group Theatre was active in post-depression New York; Joan Littlewood in England has piloted her Theatre Workshop since 1945; and the Living Theater, perhaps the most influential theatre group to have emerged, was begun by Judith Malina and Julian Beck in 1947. In France, attempts that approximate to the collective method were made at least as early as Jacques Copeau's retreat to Burgundy in the early 1920s. If his company, Les Copiaux, still resorted to rehearsing pre-existing texts (as in the 1928 production of Corneille's L'illusion comique), their method of concentrating on the creativity of the actor and the incorporation of improvisation into the creative technique was very much the same as that proposed by present-day collectives. As early as October 1932 Antonin Artaud outlined a method of creation that has obvious relevance to the contemporary theatre: "Nous ne jouerons pas de pièce

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<sup>1</sup>It must be understood that the present study does not intend to give an exhaustive list of possible originators of the collective method. Hence no particular mention will be made of the organization of theatrical companies at the time of Molière nor the dramatic practice of the commedia dell'arte.

écrite, mais autour de thèmes, de faits ou d'oeuvres connus, nous tenterons des essais de mise en scène directe."<sup>1</sup> Although Artaud is not eliminating the possibility of using pre-existing texts altogether, he is advocating a reworking of these texts through the creativity of the actor on stage. Rather than an attack on the institution of the text, it is perhaps an invective against that approach to directing by which all the stage movements, gestures, and voices are established before the first rehearsal.

However, it is very striking that despite such precedents the phenomenon of the collective approach has experienced a concentrated resurgence since 1960. From twenty-eight English-speaking groups listed by Theodore Shank, all but three came into being after 1960.<sup>2</sup> One of the three exceptions is the San Francisco Mime Troupe which was started in 1959 but reformed as a collective only in 1970. In France, the focal date in the emergence of this phenomenon is as late as 1968. Apart from the ephemeral street theatre ventures (such as Action Culturelle de l'Epée de Bois)<sup>3</sup> which blossomed during the political troubles, there are groups such as the Théâtre du Chêne Noir which parallel the experience of the San Francisco Mime Troupe.<sup>4</sup> Having been formed for play readings at the 1966 Avignon Festival, they have adopted collective methods of creation only since 1968. Another company from the provinces, Théâtre de l'Acte from Toulouse, was founded in the wake of 1968 by a dozen or so young people living in a commune. Indeed, it was in that same year that Le Grand Magic Circus emerged while the Théâtre du Soleil's first post-1968 production, Les Clowns, saw the total abandonment of a pre-existing play text in favour of the development of a work based entirely on the creativity of the actors.

The trend towards an alternative approach to dramatic creation since

<sup>1</sup> Artaud, D.C. IV, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Shank, "Theatre Collectives," in Contemporary Dramatists, ed. James Vinson (London: St. James Press, 1973), pp. 909-13.

<sup>3</sup> Action Culturelle de l'Epée de Bois, "Three Street Plays," The Drama Review, vol. 13, no. 4 (Summer 1969), pp. 119-22.

<sup>4</sup> Gérard Gelas, Le Théâtre du Chêne Noir (Paris: Stock, 1972).

1960 can be identified in the positions assumed by certain playwrights towards new productions. The example of Arrabal's play Bella ciao comes immediately to mind as does Armand Gatti's experiment in collective authorship, Les 13 Soleils de la rue Saint-Blaise. Clearly neither Arrabal nor Gatti have become members of a theatre group but in order to become the recorder of the anxieties of a particular circle, a step has been taken away from the conventional procedure of the solitary playwright creating from his own individual imagination.

In the light of this evidence it seems valid to draw a parallel between the emergence of theatre collectives and social events and situations. Shank proposes with some conviction that the collective method reflects "the need, whether conscious or subconscious, for wholeness in contrast with the psychic fragmentation of the individual in the established technocratic society."<sup>1</sup> In this view the accepted belief of the society is that human needs are best satisfied through increased specialization. Shank's argument is that theatrical organization is a microcosm of society as a whole, and so the competition and compartmentalization of the technological society are to be found in the conventional production system, two examples being the practice of auditions (the competition for parts, the selling of a skill) and the specialization demanded by a theatrical creation. By extension the theatre collective becomes the dramatic embodiment of the counter culture.<sup>2</sup> A similar interpretation can be advanced in the case of France: the theatre collective could appear as an artistic counterpart to the movement for worker participation much discussed and proposed during May 1968. A rallying concept for those who opposed the status quo, it came to represent the right of each individual to take an active part in the constitution of the state, in the organization of his work. Marc'O, himself active in fringe theatrical activities, had anticipated this movement and its impact on the theatrical structure: "Cette exigence nouvelle d'un théâtre de participation institue le groupe comme responsable de la

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<sup>1</sup>Shank, "Theatre Collectives," p. 903.

<sup>2</sup>See Theodore Roszak, The Making of the Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969).

représentation devant le public."<sup>1</sup> If the happening, especially in France, was the manifestation of an anarchist attitude towards the technological society, the collective is the constructive result of that revolt in its formulation of an alternative approach to society.<sup>2</sup> It is noticeable that in their works and manifestos the groups consistently mention a need to develop social commitment. The search to define one's position in socio-political terms appears throughout avant-garde theatre. Both Arrabal and Gatti abandoned the expression of a vague philosophy of alienation characteristic of the immediate post-war period and moved in the direction of social and political commitment. Arrabal's Et Ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs and Gatti's Chant public devant deux chaises électriques are cases in point. Indeed, the leaders of the state-subsidized theatres and Maisons de la Culture declared in May 1968:

Tout effort d'ordre culturel ne pourra plus que nous apparaître vain aussi longtemps qu'il ne se proposera pas expressément d'être une entreprise de politisation: c'est-à-dire d'inventer sans relâche, à l'intention de ce "non-public," des occasions de se politiser, de se choisir librement, par-delà le sentiment d'impuissance et d'absurdité que ne cesse de susciter en lui un système social où les hommes ne sont, pratiquement jamais en mesure d'inventer ensemble leur propre humanité.<sup>3</sup>

Although the collective approach as a whole can be seen to derive from a particular socio-political situation that does not mean that all the groups have identical interests and aims. There are those whose work concentrates mainly on theatrical experimentation and the research for a renewed dramatic language (Open Theater, Performance Group, Group N), those who use the theatrical form to promote particular political ends (Agitprop Theatre, People Show, Red Ladder Theatre), or those who represent the problems of a single group of people in society (El Teatro Campesino, New Feminist Theatre).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Marc'O, "La Création collective," La Nef, 24<sup>e</sup> année, no. 29 (January-March 1967), p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>It is interesting to note that Jean-Jacques Lebel abandoned the happening during the troubles of May 1968 and formed a loose theatre collective that undertook street theatre.

<sup>3</sup>"La Déclaration de Villeurbanne," in Le Théâtre hors les murs by Philippe Madral (Paris: Seuil, 1969), pp. 246-47.

<sup>4</sup>Details of these groups can be found in: Jonathan Hammond, "A Potted History of the Fringe," Theatre Quarterly, vol. 3, no. 12 (October-December

Nevertheless it is possible to discern certain common aspects concerning organization and method of creation among these groups.

Central to their existence is the opposition to the hierarchical structure of the conventional theatre in favour of fluid cooperation. The emphasis is away from the individual and towards the group. For instance, the author in a conventional situation is the most important figure as the provider of the basic material. This exalted position is symbolized by the prominence of his name in advertisements. In group theatre, the author (if indeed a single author emerges) becomes a member of the company and his function is harnessed to the work of the actors: "Au niveau de la représentation, il partagera réellement les responsabilités avec les autres participants, mais son effet créatif portera bien moins sur le texte lui-même que sur la structure de composition du texte."<sup>1</sup> In those productions where a text of a non-cooperating author is used, the group feels free to adapt, cut, or expand the text according to their own improvisations on a theme. Such was the case for Autopsie de Macbeth performed by Group N (Paris, February 1970). The text consisted of about fifty phrases or short speeches from Shakespeare rearranged, restructured and repeated as many as ten times in a variety of languages. Similarly, Orbe-Recherche Théâtrale used a collage of quotations from Michaux's work in their production Khôma (Paris, February 1974). In some cases the author will be one of the group and will compose a text from his own direct experience of the improvisations; for example, Numa Sodoul who wrote the middle section of Orbe's Oratorio concentrationnaire (Paris, February 1970). The author in all cases is subordinate to the actor.

Without the central authority of the author most groups have recognized the necessity for an outside observer to criticize and help improve the actors' work. This is the function of the director in the theatre collective.

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1973), pp. 37-46; Theodore Shank, "The Theatre of the Cultural Revolution," Yale French Studies, no. 46 (1971), pp. 167-85; and Theodore Shank, "Collective Creation," The Drama Review, vol. 16, no. 2 (June 1972), pp. 3-31. Other information is the result of personal observation and interviews.

<sup>1</sup> Marc'O, "Création collective," p. 79.

The director is no longer the artistic dictator who receives the credit for a successful production (as in the formula Peter Brook's production of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream), but rather "quelqu'un qui stimule, observe et coordonne."<sup>1</sup>

It is the actor who assumes the major creative role. If the actor is central to the specificity of all theatre, it is inside the collective approach that he is given responsibility commensurate with his importance. Nor is the actor to be viewed as engaged in the isolated search for a character proposed by Stanislavsky, but rather as a member of a creative team. The creation of a work begins with the actor's own creativity: "La 'mise en scène' ne peut préexister à l'invention de l'acteur lui-même. C'est l'acteur qui propose." In this process of creation the actor does not incarnate roles or create characters but rather reveals himself to the audience: "L'acteur n'est jamais que lui-même," declares the Théâtre de l'Acte. In this way the actor escapes from "des servitudes psychologiques et du carcan scénique du théâtre traditionnel."<sup>2</sup> A member of Orbe described the physical and psychological commitment demanded by a performance of Oratorio concentrationnaire as equivalent to running ten thousand metres at the speed one would run one hundred metres.<sup>3</sup> It was thus consistent that the group should avoid traditional make-up and use instead walnut stain that took days to wear off. In many of these groups the actor is seen as an officiant who sacrifices himself to the audience during a complex ritual of communication.<sup>4</sup> Even in the less ritualistic groups the actor retains his position as the incipient creative force.

If the author is replaced by the actor, the text is replaced by the actors' improvisations on a theme. It is the original improvisations that will be worked and reworked in order to constitute both the form and the content of

<sup>1</sup>Théâtre de l'Acte, Duplicated typescript distributed at a performance of Maman, L'Atelier de Recherche et Création (Clichy), 21 January 1973, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 3; p. 6; and p. 1. <sup>3</sup>Shank, "Cultural Revolution," p. 179.

<sup>4</sup>This style of theatrical performance has been made famous in recent years by the Pole Grotowski and his Theatre Laboratory. See Jerzy Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre (London: Methuen, 1968).

the performance. Performances themselves are not generally improvised (that is the quality peculiar to happening), but rather improvisation is the technique by which a work is created. Since theme, form, and content of a piece originate and evolve inside the group, the collective method avoids the primary division of the writing of the text followed by rehearsal. The group becomes totally responsible for the production. Each member helps to develop all aspects of the work so that specialization is kept to a minimum.

The dramatic language of the alternative theatre reveals an antagonism to contemporary conventional theatre. In fact, the French groups either consciously or unconsciously owe much to Antonin Artaud's theoretical writings concerned with the creation of "une poésie dans l'espace."<sup>1</sup> The Théâtre de l'Acte are representative of the groups that are re-introducing his theories into the collective method: "Or, c'est bien de danser qu'il s'agit, c'est-à-dire de retrouver l'usage d'un corps libre, de ce corps asservi par des siècles d'une culture chrétienne, de renouer avec l'image du désir, avec l'espace, avec l'autre, c'est-à-dire faire exactement l'inverse de ce que nous ordonne la suite des actes quotidiens en société."<sup>2</sup> In performance, the "sens physique"<sup>3</sup> that the group gives to its language became stifled grunts, groans, wailings, and screams in Maman. These were amplified and made more physical by the multiple-stage set of Costas (Paris, February 1973) which allowed the encircled audience to be assailed from all sides by deafening noises and mad rushes. The director of Group N, Emilio Galli, explained the value of this type of vocabulary: "The distortion of phonetics and gestures provides a new language of signs, of graphics, and of music very much richer than traditional theatre language."<sup>4</sup> Thus, Group N's Autopsie de Macbeth employed a vast range of non-verbal sounds: breathing, gurgling, choking, blowing, and clicking. The same sounds were used, but more loudly, in the Théâtre du Chêne Noir's production Sarcophage (Avignon, November 1969) which also provided a strong visual

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<sup>1</sup>Artaud, O.C. IV, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>Théâtre de l'Acte, Maman typescript, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Emilio Galli cited by Shank, "Cultural Revolution," p. 172.



stimulus in its use of rolls of green and red paper and flashing bulbs. In all these productions there is a conscious movement away from literary language towards spatial semaphore. The type of performance that results is a combination of vigorous physical activity accompanied by assorted noises which acts directly, physically, on the spectator. Admittedly, this type of performance marks the extreme of theatrical experimentation, but the same distrust of the word is illustrated, albeit more mildly, by the highly visual productions of Le Grand Magic Circus or by the articulation of space in the Théâtre du Soleil's 1789. Both these companies, without going to the extremes of Artaud, have elaborated a language which draws on song, mime, clowning, and music, far beyond the simple word.

The venues in which these groups perform vary from the street (Bread and Puppet Theatre) to the factory or union hall (Agitprop Theatre) to any suitable location provided that it is not a theatre building. The theatre building proper is undesirable because of its association with a conventional cultural activity; its structure generally imposes customary roles on those inside. A hierarchy is suggested by the seating arrangements (a compartmentalized structure of stalls, circles, and galleries), and the mere existence of rows of rigid seats causes a division between actor and spectator implying active and passive roles respectively.<sup>1</sup> Therefore Orbe's Oratorio concentrationnaire was performed in a bare room, the audience standing close to the actors. The effect of physical suffering and torture was enhanced by the intimacy of the theatrical situation. Similarly, the Théâtre de l'Acte have consciously tried to vary the spectator-actor relationship for each of their creations: L'Odyssée (created in 1970) with its seven mansions involved the audience in physical movement thus underlining the itinerant theme; Cestas created the chaos of contemporary life through its simultaneous use of multiple stages. Place and spectator are integrated into the production. The

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<sup>1</sup> Dissatisfaction with the structure of theatrical buildings has been common throughout the century: Gropius, Meyerhold, Appia, and Reinhardt all disregarded conventional structures at the same period as Artaud was proposing his open plan theatre. See Artaud, O.C. IV, pp. 114-15.

theatrical venue becomes more than just an ornamental framework for a cultural pastime.<sup>1</sup>

For these groups the whole nature of theatre is more than pure entertainment, more than a pleasure-giving commodity to be exchanged for the price of a ticket. It constitutes a means by which to improve the quality of life of the community at large. However, stating this conviction, not to proceed to an examination of the composition of the theatrical audience is naive. For, to effect any social change requires that the production should reach a broad social spectrum. It is clear that many groups become so involved in their own experimentation that they are oblivious of society at large. In such cases the audience attracted will remain primarily middle class and liberal since it is they alone who can afford to support such eclectic art. The problem that has to be faced by the groups is that of creating a popular audience, that is, an audience that includes a percentage of the urban proletariat or the rural peasantry.

This same problem has received increasing attention throughout this century as the state in France has become more actively involved in cultural affairs and as theatre expenditure has entered the national budget. For the state, the problem is posed in a different fashion; if the theatre is to be subsidized by the taxes of the whole community then theatre has a duty to serve all sections of that community and not just the wealthy, privileged minority that constitutes the conventional theatrical audience. The state began to promote the concept of a Théâtre National Populaire in 1920 when the Chambre des Députés voted 110,000 francs for the establishment of a national theatre at the Palais de Trocadero.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The search for alternative locations away from the conventional theatre places the contemporary groups in a tradition of twentieth-century theatre innovators: Antoine had created his Théâtre Libre in 1887 outside the fashionable theatrical circuit; Copeau's Vieux Colombier was founded in 1913 on the bank of the Seine opposite to that of the established theatres; Vilar in 1947 took the theatre right away from Paris to the Palais des Papes at Avignon.

<sup>2</sup>The idea of a national theatre had been suggested by Chénier as early as 1789 and echoed by Michelet in the 1850s. Early attempts to found a popular theatre were made by Rolland, Gémier and Bernheim with his "Trente ans de théâtre." See Romain Rolland, Le Théâtre du peuple (Paris: Hachette, 1913), pp. 67-107.

However, in 1945 France, theatrically speaking, was still a divided nation: on the one hand there was the capital (in effect a rectangle bordered by Place de la République, Place de l'Etoile, Montmartre and the Quartier Latin) which supported fifty-two theatres or one theatre for every ninety thousand inhabitants; on the other hand the provinces could only muster fifty-one theatres or one theatre for every 713,000 inhabitants. Furthermore these provincial theatres did not organize any regular activities. Being without permanent acting troupes of their own they could only welcome touring companies from the capital such as those of Baret and Karsenty. By spring 1970 the availability of grants and subsidies from the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles and from local authorities had helped to create and maintain nine Centres Dramatiques Nationaux and eight Troupes Permanentes de Décentralisation in the provinces as well as the Parisian Théâtre National Populaire, the Théâtre de l'Est Parisien, and the Tréteaux de France. In addition, there are twenty-five planned Maisons de la Culture which aim to provide facilities not only for theatre but for many other activities as well.<sup>1</sup> It is undeniable that great efforts have been made by these centres to find a wider theatre-going audience, to reach a public that would not normally experience theatre, and to create works that are directly relevant to a local population. For example, Roger Planchon's second production as the head of the Théâtre de la Cité (now T.N.P. Villeurbanne) was Dumas's Les Trois Mousquetaires (May 1958), chosen because it was the second most frequently mentioned work in a questionnaire distributed among the local people. Indeed, Jean Vilar at the T.N.P. attempted to solve the problem of attracting a popular audience from a very practical viewpoint: he toured the suburbs; he kept prices as low as possible, encouraging the less well off to attend by special reduced tickets for groups, associations, unions and workers' committees; all supplementary charges (cloakroom, usherettes' tips) were discontinued. Moreover he arranged that the finishing time should always be early enough so that workers could return home after the performance

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<sup>1</sup>France, Embassy Press and Information Dept., "Dramatic Art in the French Provinces," A/77/12/70. Also see André de Baecque, Les Maisons de la Culture, 2nd ed. (Paris: Seghers, 1967).

and still be fully prepared for the next working day. The subsequent earlier starting time was made more practical by the possibility of obtaining reasonably priced food at the theatre. Similarly the early arrival was greeted with welcoming music which reduced the formality of the gathering in the foyer.

However, if one can take the results of Vilar's time at the T.N.P. and perhaps the efforts of the T.E.P. as representative of the effect of these official ventures, figures reveal that their success was limited. Of 3,382 performances by the T.N.P., only 151 took place in the Parisian suburbs and only four hundred in the provinces. Well over half of the total were acted at the Palais de Chaillot which is situated in a very fashionable and expensive district of Paris far beyond the everyday experience of the working man.<sup>1</sup> Far from travelling it would appear that Vilar's company was resident inside the metropolis, 2,254 performances inside Paris out of 3,382 total. Even at the T.N.P., the theatre remained a cultural activity enjoyed by a small minority of the community.

The social composition of that minority as revealed by figures at the T.E.P. would suggest that the effort to attract a broader based audience has been far from successful. For example, a survey conducted by the Communist Party in March 1967 revealed that 43.4% of the population of the area surrounding the T.E.P. in the 20th arrondissement could be classified as workers,<sup>2</sup> whereas this same category represented only 11% of the total public that visited the T.E.P. in the 1966-67 season. The 1968-69 season's figures would suggest that there had been a marginal increase up to 13%.<sup>3</sup> The constant element in both sets of figures was the student percentage of 30-35%. The audience of the T.E.P. is still far from reflecting the social structure that

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<sup>1</sup>This can hardly be attributed to Vilar since the theatre is provided by the State. It does perhaps cast some doubt on the motives of the authorities, however. For figures, see Claude Roy, Jean Vilar (Paris: Seghers, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>See Geneviève Rozenthal, Le Théâtre en France, Notes et Etudes Documentaires, nos. 3907-8 (Paris: Documentation Française, July 1972).

<sup>3</sup>Interpretation of percentages is confused by the adoption of different categories for each season.

obtains outside the theatre.<sup>1</sup>

It would appear that the state-subsidized venture into the creation of a national and popular theatre has not realized its objectives as affirmed by Jean Vilar in 1952:

Le T.N.P. est un service public. . . . Il est désormais question, et pour trois ans, d'apporter à la partie la plus vive de la société contemporaine et particulièrement aux hommes, aux femmes et aux enfants de la tâche ingrate et du labeur dur, les charmes d'un plaisir dont ils n'auraient jamais dû, depuis le temps des cathédrales et des mystères, être sevrés.

Nous allons aussi tenter de réunir, dans les travées de la communion dramatique, le petit boutiquier de Suresnes et le haut magistrat, l'ouvrier de Puteaux et l'agent de changes, le facteur des pauvres et le professeur agrégé.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, a survey conducted by the Institut Français d'Opinion Publique in 1968 concluded that there was no noticeable difference between the audience of the subsidized theatres and that of the private boulevard theatre.

According to Rozenthal's figures this would mean that only 5% of the French people go regularly to the theatre.<sup>3</sup>

Sartre predicted this situation as early as 1955 after only three years of Vilar's directorship at the T.N.P. Sartre argued that the theatre remained a bourgeois institution because the worker was still not a frequent visitor to the theatre, although occasionally attracted through his workers' organization. He did not go more often because of the bourgeois ceremony of dressing up, booking tickets for example, and because of the repertory, usually masterpieces of French culture, a culture from which the worker was excluded. Sartre felt the theatre should produce plays written for the working class, which interested the working class.<sup>4</sup> His conclusion means that the word "popular" should be reinterpreted as theatre for the lower classes.

These same reservations were taken up again and rephrased by the leaders

<sup>1</sup>For further details of the success and failure of subsidized theatres in the Parisian suburbs, see Madral, Théâtre hors les murs.

<sup>2</sup>Jean Vilar cited by Emile Copfermann, Le Théâtre Populaire. Pourquoi? (Paris: Maspéro, 1965), p. 58.

<sup>3</sup>I.F.O.P., "Le Théâtre et le public," 1968 cited by Rozenthal, Théâtre en France, p. 82; and p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, "Jean-Paul Sartre nous parle de théâtre," Théâtre populaire, no. 15 (September-October 1955), pp. 1-9.

of the state-aided theatres themselves in 1968. They emphasized the exclusion of the lower classes from the cultural activity of the nation (as indeed they were excluded from all but the manual activities in the economic structure) and hence they criticized the practice of taking the classics to the people:

Car la simple "diffusion" des oeuvres d'art, même agrémentée d'un peu d'animation, apparaissait déjà de plus en plus incapable de provoquer une rencontre effective entre ces oeuvres et d'énormes quantités d'hommes et de femmes qui s'acharnaient à survivre au sein de notre société mais qui, à bien des égards, en demeuraient exclus: contraints d'y participer à la production des biens matériels mais privés des moyens de contribuer à l'orientation même de sa démarche générale.<sup>1</sup>

They were forced to realize that despite their good intentions and honest labour their work as members of a cultural industry was regarded by the majority of the populace "comme une option faite par des privilégiés en faveur d'une culture héréditaire, particulariste, c'est-à-dire tout simplement bourgeoise."<sup>2</sup> Their conclusions echo Sartre. Theatre must abandon its traditional procedures which refer to an a priori, pre-existing content in favour of a process which, from the meeting with the public, will define a content that relates to it. In short, the yoke of the bourgeois heritage is to be thrown off: "Car il est maintenant tout à fait clair qu'aucune définition de la culture ne sera valable, n'aura de sens, qu'au prix d'apparaître utile aux intéressés eux-mêmes, c'est-à-dire dans l'exacte mesure où le 'non-public' y pourra trouver l'instrument dont il a besoin."<sup>3</sup>

It is the more surprising that the official ventures should have met with such limited results given that Romain Rolland at the turn of the century had already formulated a recipe for a national theatre. In the preface to Le Théâtre du peuple, first published in 1903, Rolland declares:

Le théâtre du peuple n'est pas un article de mode et un jeu de dilettantes. C'est l'expression impérieuse d'une société nouvelle, sa voix et sa pensée; et c'est, par la force des choses, dans les heures de crise, sa machine de guerre contre une société caduque et vieillie. Il ne faut point d'équivoque. Il ne s'agit pas d'ouvrir de nouveaux vieux . . . théâtres bourgeois qui tâchent de donner le change en se disant populaires. Il s'agit d'élever le Théâtre par et pour le Peuple. Il s'agit de fonder un art nouveau pour un monde nouveau.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Déclaration de Villeurbanne," p. 245.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>4</sup>Rolland, Théâtre du peuple, pp. xi-xii.

Thus Rolland rejects the idea of taking the masterpieces to the people. In his analysis of Bernheim's production of Andromaque at Ba-Ta-Clan in 1903 he agrees that it was enjoyed by the people but for the wrong reasons: it was admired for the melodramatic qualities of the plot rather than for its poetic inspiration.<sup>1</sup> The material that, in Rolland's view, is conducive to the creation of a popular theatre is history and, in particular, the history of the French people. This theme not only utilizes an interest common to all citizens of France, it also emphasizes their common heritage, conditions that could lead to the realization of a community of belief inside the performance between spectator and spectator, spectator and actor. This concept of the existence of a body of communal beliefs is central to Rolland's understanding of popular theatre.<sup>2</sup>

Rolland also recognizes in his essay that it is not sufficient to create a potentially popular theme, but that this theme must also be staged and developed in a popular fashion. His attack on Corneille reveals his own convictions of what makes a play popular: "Peu de personnages; peu d'événements; point de mise en scène; une action qui se traduit en paroles abstraites. . . . Rien pour la vie physique du peuple qui souffre d'être comprimée. Rien pour son imagination enfantine et avide."<sup>3</sup> Rolland takes the circus, melodrama, pantomime and burlesque show as prime examples of popular theatre in that their simplicity and directness appeal "à l'âme par les sens."<sup>4</sup> His theatre in theory is not to be dominated by the word but by physical action. The sensual element of the performance is to be enhanced by a staging that owes more to the fête populaire than to the theatre proper. Thus singing and music—"la force tyrannique des sons, qui remue les foules passives,"<sup>5</sup>—as well as great crowds of actors and spectators are central to his theatrical credo.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 142. This is the basis of the popularity of both the Greek theatre and the medieval mystery play.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 26

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>5</sup>Romain Rolland, Théâtre de la révolution: Le 14 Juillet; Danton; Les Loups (Paris: Hachette, 1909), p. 150.

Indeed, Rolland's commentary on his "Variante, pour une représentation de fête populaire avec orchestre et chœurs," written for the play Le 14 Juillet, states: "Il n'est pas nécessaire que le public saisisse tous les mots de la foule, pas plus que toutes les notes de l'orchestre et des chœurs; il faut qu'il ait seulement l'impression d'une kermesse triomphante."<sup>1</sup> This variation is the closest that Rolland comes to incorporating his theatrical observations into a creative work. However, his efforts to forge a new national identity through the medium of theatre have been recognized by revivals of his plays at times of public celebration throughout the century. For example, his Danton was staged at the Arènes de Lutèce to celebrate the liberation in March 1945.

Firmin Gémier shared Rolland's belief in the power of history as a dramatic theme and his enthusiasm for sumptuous staging.<sup>2</sup> He put these precepts into practice in some audacious productions in the first quarter of this century. An experimenter with theatrical design, Gémier suppressed the footlights at the Théâtre-Antoine<sup>3</sup> for his 1917 production of François Porché's Les Butors et la finette in which he had a funeral cortège form a procession through the audience. His approach was to involve the audience sensually in the production by surrounding it with the action; it was, thus, not uncommon to have speeches delivered from all over the auditorium or to have athletic events included in the productions.<sup>4</sup> In fact as early as 1903 he had staged a Festival Vaudois at Lausanne in front of twenty thousand spectators. The production (which treated the history of the Swiss canton) had involved two thousand performers, many of them local people, who circulated through and around the audience. As a result, the whole assembly was caught up in the action.<sup>5</sup> Gémier also recognized the importance of travel in order to reach the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> It was Gémier who directed a production of Le 14 Juillet (21 March 1902) at Théâtre Renaissance-Gémier (Paris) which gave only twenty-nine performances. See Paul Blanchart, Firmin Gémier (Paris: L'Arche, 1954), p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Copeau was to have similar alterations made to his Vieux-Colombier in 1920.

<sup>4</sup> See the description of Gémier's production of Bouhéliier's Oedipe, roi de Thèbes (17 December 1919) in Blanchart, Firmin Gémier, pp. 206-8.

<sup>5</sup> Firmin Gémier, Le Théâtre, ed. Paul Gsell (Paris: Grasset, 1925), p. 274.



majority of the nation. Consequently in 1911 he founded an ill-fated itinerant company, Le Théâtre National Ambulant. He had hoped to reanimate the traditions of "le vrai théâtre, . . . celui qui se déplace, qui va au-devant de la foule et l'appelle bruyamment au spectacle, comme faisaient naguère nos premiers baladins . . . les premiers acteurs, nos primitifs à nous!"<sup>1</sup>

The approach of both Gémier and Rolland relied not only on theme but on form. Their theme was history and their form they derived, in theory, from popular entertainments and public celebrations. Their choice of theme and form was made to attract the whole nation into the theatre; through this national theatre, the nation could be regenerated. The activities of most of the decentralized theatres imply that little note has been taken of the observations of their precursors.<sup>2</sup> Instead of trying to produce plays that draw on themes from a popular heritage expressed in a popular form, most of the centres have contented themselves with the choice of a Brecht play as he is considered the master of proletarian theatre. Very little observable attention has been given to the problem of evolving a style of theatrical production based on the techniques of popular theatre.

Both Le Grand Magic Circus and Le Théâtre du Soleil are theatre groups which seek to overcome the deficiencies of the state-aided theatres by recourse to alternative production techniques and to popular forms of entertainment. While similar in approach, the two groups differ in the conception of their functions in society: the Théâtre du Soleil believes in the educational role of theatre and consequently its work tends towards the Sartrean solution of a theatre that is written for and concerned with the problems of the oppressed; on the other hand, Le Grand Magic Circus concentrates on the creation of a fête populaire, their work being based on the simple proposition that it is human interaction that needs to be stimulated in the systemized contemporary world.

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<sup>1</sup>Gémier cited by Blanchart, Firmin Gémier, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup>Notable exceptions have been Roger Planchon's Théâtre de la Cité (now T.N.P. Villeurbanne) and Marcel Maréchal's Compagnie du Cothurne.

(ii) Towards a Popular Theatre: Le Grand Magic Circus

Le Grand Magic Circus came into existence in autumn 1968 after several years during which the basic idea had matured and developed in the mind and through the theatrical experiences of Jérôme Savary. Savary's beginnings in the theatre had a very real influence on the evolution of Le Grand Magic Circus; he was a designer with Victor Garcia and Jean-Marie Serreau as well as playing Wenceslas in Garcia's production of Jarry's Ubu Roi. However, both these experiences proved frustrating. With Garcia there was a clash of temperament and style: "Moi, j'aime les décors réalistes, comme au Châtelet, j'aime que l'église soit vraiment une église et non pas une forme symbolique. Ce qui est vraiment anti-Garcia."<sup>1</sup> With Jean-Marie Serreau again personality intervened. For Savary it was not enough to be a designer answerable to someone else's general concept of a play and its production. Even as a director one was tied to the author's text and his imagination:

En ce qui concerne le théâtre, personnellement, je ne comprends pas le plaisir que l'on peut éprouver à employer les mots des autres . . . . Dire le texte d'un autre, j'en suis incapable. Je me sens malhonnête, sacrilège. Je ne vois pas comment je pourrais monter une pièce sans trahir l'auteur.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless it was using a text that Savary and Le Grand Magic Circus (then called Le Grand Théâtre Panique) first came to public notice. The play in question was Arrabal's Le Labyrinthe performed at the Théâtre Daniel Sorano (Vincennes) in January 1967. The choice of text is characteristic: Arrabal's plays are an evocation of emotions, fantasies, and dreams in which it is vital to create a corresponding atmosphere; Arrabal is an author who gives the director a free hand to adapt and alter his text. Savary was thus able to create his own play, as it were. He introduced a great deal of music played by the actors themselves, new characters and even live animals; he invited the author and cartoonist Copi to take part in the performance, though his role was difficult to understand: " Il ne fait strictement rien pendant toute la pièce, sinon esquisser très rapidement un pas de danse, avec un petit

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<sup>1</sup>Jérôme Savary, "Une grande fête pour adultes tristes," Preuves, no. 11 (3<sup>e</sup> trim. 1972), p. 140.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

filet de sang qui lui coule de la bouche."<sup>1</sup> In particular five new characters were introduced to add to the five of the text. Savary explains their function:

Ils représentent l'humanité soumise. Ils sont muets, mais bruyants. Leurs costumes sont grotesques. Ils vont et viennent en jouant de la trompette, du tambour, de la crécelle. Ils représentent l'humanité qui n'a plus rien à dire.<sup>2</sup>

The whole performance was marked by a complete disregard for the superiority and autonomy of the text; in fact the words of the text often were drowned by the clamour of the instruments and the flushing of the toilets that formed a central part of the set design: "N'étant tenus par aucune logique dramatique, ni par aucune valeur de texte, les jeunes animateurs que cela intéresse peuvent projeter sur la pièce et sur la scène les sons, les formes ou les gestes de leur propre délire."<sup>3</sup> The onus of success or failure of the venture was placed squarely on the enthusiasm of the actors as they improvised around the text. In the manner of Ionesco, the traditional logic of the dramatic performance was replaced by "une puissante et haletante respiration dramatique."<sup>4</sup> The proliferation of the spectacle through its music and the additional characters led to a comparison with happening.<sup>5</sup>

This production received comprehensive critical coverage and toured Belgium and Germany before being invited to the Mercury Theatre in London (June 1968). The circumstances of these last performances pushed the spectacle even further away from any conventional theatrical form. Chance would have it that by 1968 the original cast had disbanded, and Savary was forced to try and persuade colleagues to come to London. On arrival he had only four actors; the rest he recruited on the spot. Rehearsal (which for the original production only lasted fifteen days) was confined to a couple of directives from Savary:

<sup>1</sup> Guy Dumur, Le Nouvel Observateur, 17 January 1967, p. 39. As well as being the author of several plays, Copi has since collaborated with Savary on Good-bye Mr. Freud (Paris, Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, November 1974).

<sup>2</sup> Savary cited by Françoise Varenne, Le Figaro, 30 December 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, Le Monde, 14 January 1967, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Sandier, Arts et Loisirs, no. 68 (18 January 1967), pp. 29-30.

<sup>5</sup> Dumur, Le Nouvel Observateur, 17 January 1967, p. 39: "Jamais, je dis bien jamais, le théâtre ne s'était donné tant de libertés, même lorsqu'il se veut 'happening.'"

"J'indique grosso modo les mouvements, les ballets, je demande aux acteurs de dire les textes qui leur plaisent."<sup>1</sup> Thus, Arrabal's play was completely replaced by a collage of unrelated texts, spoken in English and French, according to the native tongue of the actor. The babel of the original performance was amplified and the nonscripted elements became most important. Reliance on the actors' improvisations of the moment was complete: "Le Labyrinthe se transforme en show extravagant, avec pétards, fumigènes, confettis."<sup>2</sup> Two eye-witness accounts will give some idea of the nature and atmosphere of the spectacle:

The performance is improvised, as it proceeds, under the energetic direction of Jérôme Savary who conducts the proceedings sometimes from the roof, on top of a ladder, or even suspended upside down over the audience. . . . There is generated an atmosphere of extraordinary tension and excitement. . . . The audience forgets time, caught up in an atmosphere of fun and exuberance which is a mixture of fiesta, carnival, cabaret and night club, fairground, dance-hall, orgy and revivalist meeting.

Deafening irregular drumming dazes the senses, dislodging you from the security of measured time. Lights wheel and stab through the darkness shattering space's accustomed dimensions to fragmented glimpses of bodies and forces. Actors erupt from behind, around and above you, swinging out of the dark on ropes, addressing one another nonsensically in both French and English.<sup>3</sup>

This type of performance abolishes many accepted conventions in the theatre: the separation of the audience and the actor spatially by means of the distinct delineation of acting areas and sitting areas;<sup>4</sup> the weakening of the distinction between actor and spectator (still not quite as far as the happeners' single concept of participant); and the disregard for the author's text.<sup>5</sup> The logic of any development whatever is replaced by a desire to create an atmosphere of orgiastic energy, a total environment; the vicarious

<sup>1</sup> Savary, "Grande fête," p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Roose-Evans, Experimental Theatre, pp. 96-97; and Ronald Bryden, The Observer, 16 June 1968, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Ansorge, Plays and Players, vol. 15, no. 11 (August 1968), p. 47: "An anti-Arrabal piece, only loosely connected with the original printed text (or any other printed text for that matter). There was no attempt to distinguish events which occurred on stage from events which occurred in the audience."

<sup>5</sup> See Harold Hobson, The Observer, 23 June 1968, p. 26; he called this "civil war."

experience of more conventional theatre is transformed into an experience of life itself. Savary found the performance a revelation which pointed the way to develop his theatrical style: "J'ai découvert là quelque chose d'important: le problème n'est pas de jouer dans un théâtre ou dans la rue, mais de porter le jeu à l'échelle d'un quartier de manière que chacun prenne le relais, transmette le flambeau."<sup>1</sup>

The key concept to evolve from the Mercury production is the experience of life itself; it is after this production that Le Grand Théâtre Panique becomes Le Grand Cirque Panique. By autumn 1968, the name is fixed as Le Grand Magic Circus. In effect, theatre has been replaced by circus, and panic by magic. Behind these changes of name runs the key concept. The evolution towards this concept began in a negative way; the early manifestos published by Savary and collectively by Le Grand Magic Circus are, for the most part, a reaction against the form of contemporary theatre.<sup>2</sup> It has drifted away from the social role of being the collective experience of a community to become the diversion of the few, an élitist entertainment divorced from the mainstream of life which has surrounded itself in self-perpetuating and self-preserving convention. This restricted circle is in itself moribund, "un émouvant musée d'une société balzacienne en voie de disparition"; life can only be brought back to it by breaking "ce joug pesant des conventions et du cloisonnement,"<sup>3</sup> and by reinstating the theatre as a central activity for the whole community. The whole structure of contemporary theatre prohibits this rediscovery of the theatre's roots in the life of the community, and thus, this structure must be avoided:

La vie, décidément, s'entend mal avec le théâtre. Il semblerait que le théâtre ne peut s'épanouir que très loin de la vie, tout au fond de ces blockhaus en béton armé, où pratiquement tout est interdit, sauf s'asseoir. Le Magic Circus n'aime décidément pas le théâtre.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Savary, "Grande fête," p. 141.

<sup>2</sup>See: Jérôme Savary, "Nos fêtes . . .," Le Théâtre, 1968, no. 1, pp. 81-86; Le Grand Magic Circus, "Manifesto," Paris-Théâtre, 21<sup>e</sup> année, nos. 260-61 (1969), pp. 30-33; and Le Grand Magic Circus, "Savary et son Magic Circus," Le Monde, 25 February 1971, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Savary, "Nos fêtes," p. 82; and p. 86.

<sup>4</sup>Grand Magic Circus, "Savary et son Magic Circus," p. 13.

First to be shunned then is the theatre building itself. It tends to be constructed away from the centre of the community, usually in impressive style, which in itself is a barrier to the lower reaches of the social scale. Seeming bastions against change, the majority of theatre buildings are rigid in their internal arrangement which does not allow for the change in the pattern of life itself. To illustrate, life today is conducted on several levels simultaneously; the development of the media makes it possible for one man in England to be watching a moon-landing while listening to a football match taking place in France. The single perspective of the scène à l'italienne cannot cope with the movement of life and its diversity.<sup>1</sup> The division into acting area and sitting area does not allow for movement and free flow during the performance; by their physical disposition in their seats, the spectators must remain passive.

While it is true that Le Grand Magic Circus performed in theatre buildings at the Mercury Theatre in London and at Le Théâtre de la Commune at Aubervilliers and Studio des Champs-Élysées in Paris, in all three cases they tried to radically adapt the internal structure of the theatre. For L'Oratorio macabre du radeau de la Méduse<sup>2</sup> a net was suspended from the front of the balcony down to the stage providing an additional performance area that increased the opportunity for movement throughout the theatre building. At the Mercury Theatre, James Roose-Evans described the explosion of the theatrical space: Savary suspended over the audience, entrances and exits made through and around the audience, the audience arranged in sections "so that the actors can move more freely among the audience."<sup>3</sup> In Les Derniers Jours de solitude de Robinson Crusoe, the action takes place on a series of different stages around, above, and among the audience. This scenic design makes the production

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<sup>1</sup>The structure of the performance area and the conditions of perception for the audience are areas of theatrical research pursued by Michel Parent and Jacques Poliéri. See below, Chapter VI.

<sup>2</sup>This group creation by Savary and some friends was improvised around the story of the Medusa and performed as part of the V<sup>e</sup> Biennale de Paris at Studio des Champs-Élysées in October 1967. See Le Théâtre, 1968, no. 1 for diagrams of the production.

<sup>3</sup>Roose-Evans, Experimental Theatre, p. 95.

ill-suited for performance inside traditional theatrical architecture. Thus, when the troupe found themselves performing in the Théâtre de la Commune, the situation prompted several remarks from Savary during the performance: "Le Grand Magic Circus peut jouer n'importe où sauf dans un théâtre"; "cette salle qui ne nous convient absolument pas."<sup>1</sup> Ideally they seek an open space where they can pitch a huge tent; then alone is the true nature of their spectacle best displayed, much more akin as it is to the boisterous bustle of the circus than to the whispered conversations of the theatre lobby. In May 1973 at Villeurbanne, Le Grand Magic Circus performed sous chapiteau on a deserted square in an area heavily populated by immigrants. Similarly the creation of De Moïse à Mao: 5.000 ans d'aventures et d'amour at Strasbourg in November 1973 took place under a circus tent before transferring to the Roundhouse in London. If space for a tent is not available, the building selected is one not designed for theatrical productions but for another community activity. For instance, at La Rochelle for the creation and only performances of Cendrillon ou la lutte des classes (April, 1973) the basketball court was chosen; obviously the basketball court is not associated with literary or cultural events, but rather with an activity important in the town's communal life, an ideal situation for the living experience of Le Grand Magic Circus:

—En opposition aux théâtres-musées, il [Le Grand Magic Circus] cherchera à éclater dans l'espace et dans la vie. . . .  
Tous les lieux sont bons s'ils sont vivants, donc s'ils ne sont pas des théâtres.<sup>2</sup>

To remain inside a theatre building is also to attract only the bourgeoisie, a small section of the whole society. This runs contrary to the tradition of theatre. The condition of early theatre was to be nomadic, to go out and confront the people and to draw the performance from this contact as is described in Scarron's Le Roman comique. Indeed, before 1625 there were no permanent theatres. Jean-Louis Barrault still sees this as the prime condition of the theatre:

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<sup>1</sup>These comments were made on 26 April 1973. The company had expected to perform in a big top erected on a nearby site.

<sup>2</sup>Grand Magic Circus, "Manifesto," p. 32.

Je crois que la condition d'un comédien est bien d'être nomade. Nous devons vivre avec notre sac sur le dos ou notre valise à la main. . . . Nous sommes en quête des hommes et il faut que nous les rencontrions, et pour les rencontrer il faut aller vers eux.<sup>1</sup>

Le Grand Magic Circus refuses to remain permanently in one place in order to avoid becoming subject to a single set of cultural references. It avoids accumulating a great deal of stage machinery which may cause eventual dependence on the mechanical and make it impossible for the company to perform elsewhere. Early in 1973, Le Grand Magic Circus visited Bourges, Suresnes, Yvernes, Strasbourg, Poitiers, Orléans, Montpellier, Nice, Grenoble, La Rochelle, Aubervilliers, Rouen and Villeurbanne:

--Le spectacle pourra avoir lieu n'importe où et n'importe quand.  
--Il ne sera tributaire ni d'une structure sociale particulière, ni d'un matériel technique donné.<sup>2</sup>

By travelling they hope to render obsolete the concept of the theatre as a bourgeois institution, to re-establish the tradition of popular theatre which appeals to all sectors of the social structure. It is interesting to note that Evert Sprinchorn's definition of the commedia dell'arte could also be aptly applied to Le Grand Magic Circus: "Entertainment for both high-brow and low-brow, comprising tried and true situations endlessly varied, always undemanding intellectually, often raunchy and vulgar, and, at its best, vigorous and spirited as only popular art can be."<sup>3</sup> It is to the commedia dell'arte that Savary turns for a precursor.

By the very nature of a travelling company, any great mechanical mise en scène is impossible; the essence is simplicity and a reliance on the jeu of the actors and their enthusiasm for the spectacle. The matériel technique of the company is very limited: "Il transporte ses quarante-cinq palmiers en carton-pâte, ses trois dunes géantes, son monstre marin, son chien

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Louis Barrault to Jacques Chancel, "Radioscopie," O.R.T.F., 28 April 1972.

<sup>2</sup>Grand Magic Circus, "Manifesto," p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>Evert Sprinchorn, Introduction to The Commedia dell'Arte by Giacomo Oreglia, trans. Lovett Edwards (London: Methuen, 1968), p. xi. Savary compared the tradition of Le Grand Magic Circus to that of the commedia in interview to Richard C. Webb, Théâtre Jean Vilar (Suresnes), 14 March 1973.



et ses poules, dans sa voiture, à côté de sa trompette et de ses pétards."<sup>1</sup>

All the ingredients of the company's performance style are there: the exotic desert, the thrill of deep-sea peril, the excitement of live animals and fire-works, as well as the pulsating rhythms of Latin American music. Nevertheless, there have been occasions when the company have been tempted by the resources of a permanent theatre. Jean-Louis Perinetti states that Savary was delighted by the possibilities offered by the workshop at the Théâtre National de Strasbourg at the time of the creation of De Moïse à Mao.<sup>2</sup> In November 1974, Le Grand Magic Circus undertook a six-month season performing Good-bye Mr. Freud. This uncharacteristic period was used by the company as a "laboratoire vivant pour le départ des futures grandes tournées."<sup>3</sup>

Refusing dependence on any social institution, even state subsidy, Le Grand Magic Circus intend to rely solely on their popularity: "Nous n'avons pas de subvention, et finalement, c'est mieux comme ça. Le jour où les gens ne viendront plus nous voir, nous arrêterons et le Magic Circus n'existera plus."<sup>4</sup> They consider that a company who relies on a subsidy is under the power of the government who keeps it alive artificially for a limited period.

The direct financial relationship with the public is characteristic of the whole of the activity of Le Grand Magic Circus; it is based on a form of amateurism, a straightforwardness, even naivety, that makes it instantly attractive. The company exists as an association of friends without signed contracts or legal obligation: "Le Grand Magic Circus c'est 20 personnes qui travaillent ensemble POUR LE PLAISIR."<sup>5</sup> A sense of enjoyment is contagious in a theatrical situation; the company's pleasure in performing together for a public immediately instigates a welcoming atmosphere, a first step in the establishment

<sup>1</sup> Grand Magic Circus, "Savary et son Magic Circus," p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Programme note, Théâtre National de Strasbourg, November 1973.

<sup>3</sup> Jérôme Savary, Album du Grand Magic Circus (Paris: Belfond, 1974), p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> Grand Magic Circus, Les Derniers Jours de solitude de Robinson Crusoe, L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 496 (1 June 1972), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Grand Magic, <sup>Circus</sup> "La Fête, c'est avant tout la liberté," Combat, 12 February 1972, p. 12.

of an amicable dialogue: "—Il refusera l'esprit corporatif qui tend à faire du théâtre une profession, quand il pense, au contraire, que le théâtre fait partie de la vie et appartient à tous."<sup>1</sup>

Professionalism is a concept alien to Savary and his company, a concept that distinguishes them from the commedia dell'arte which relied very greatly on training and technique (much the same as the circus does). Professional formation holds no sway with the Grand Magic Circus; four of the present company have attended Lecoq's mime school in Paris, a training which is suited to the athletic performances of Le Grand Magic Circus. Instead Savary encourages the natural talents and tendencies of those who join the troupe; later these talents are included in the spectacle. The case of a young American will serve to illustrate: "Il était splendide aux t<sup>u</sup>mbas. . . . Mais en gorille, il est parfait. En présentateur de Broadway, excellent. En danseuse arabe: authentique. Alors, il fait tout à la fois, comme nous tous."<sup>2</sup> Formal technique learned during an actor's formation is considered a barrier separating the actor and the audience as it involves a certain amount of non-spontaneity and unnaturalness. It prevents a direct dialogue between actor and spectator:

La technique c'est prétentieux, intimidant, ça fait fuir.

You lose your sense of dialogue with the audience when you have theatrical training. Take that scene when a naked man clammers into the audience and sits on a woman's lap. If an actor did that he wouldn't be able to do it spontaneously. He would do it theatrically.

There is nothing quite so sordid as a professional actor. As soon as one has achieved this status, one has succeeded in cutting oneself off from the outside world.<sup>3</sup>

The example of the American illustrates another aspect of Le Grand Magic Circus's divergence from conventional theatre. The actor's skill is not bent to the dictates of a pre-existent text, but rather it is the actor's

<sup>1</sup>Grand Magic Circus, "Manifesto," pp. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup>Jérôme Savary cited by Christiane Duparc, "La Culture du trombone," Le Nouvel Observateur, 1 March 1971, p. 37. See Figure 1, p. 332.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.; Jérôme Savary cited by Byron Rogers, "Chaos in 43 Scenes," Daily Telegraph Magazine, 15 December 1972, p. 12; and Jérôme Savary to Bettina Knapp, "Sounding the Drum," The Drama Review, vol. 15, no. 1 (Fall 1970) p. 94.

**Fig. 1.** Roster for Zartan, Paris, 25 February 1971. This poster includes details of the varied talents of each member of the company, for example, Rico Elfman.

# CHRONIQUES COLONIALES COLONIALES



## LE THEATRE DE LA CITE INTERNATIONALE

THEATRE DE LA CITE INTERNATIONALE  
DIR. A.L. PERINETTI  
14 BD. JOURDAN, PARIS 14. TEL. 587.67.57 - 587.67.58.

ACCUEILLE A PARTIR DU 25 FEVRIER 1971

LES 75 PALMIERS EN CARTON-PATE, LES 3 DUNES GEANTES, L'ORAGE EN PLEINE MER, SES BRUNES ARTIFICIELLES ET SON MONSTRE MARIN, LES RUINES PERDUES DANS LA JUNGLE, DU:

### GRAND MAGIC CIRCUS ET SES ANIMAUX TRISTES

DECORS DES MILLE ET UNE NUITS POUR LE PLUS BOULEVERSANT OPERA TROPICAL.  
**LES CHRONIQUES COLONIALES** OU **ZARTAN, FRERE MAL AIME DE TARZAN**

29 TABLEAUX SONT VUEUX AU RYTHME ENDIABLE, SUR LES TEMPS HEUREUX OU LES SOMMONIES ETABLIENT ENCORE LES COLONIES, LES COLONS DES COLONS ET LES SAUVAGES DES SAUVAGES. ET LES PETITS CONSOUIL EST ENCORE POSSIBLE DE PORTER LE CASQUE COLONIAL SANS TROP DE PROBLEMES.

ANTOINETTE FILLES DES ANIMES...  
SABINE MONORY DESSINATRICE DES CARACTERES...  
MICHEL LEBOIS

# DU GRAND MAGIC CIRCUS

ET SES ANIMAUX TRISTES

### LES MEMBRES DU MAGIC CIRCUS

**LOURNES GASTRO** DES OMBRES MAGIQUES

**RIGDEL FMAN** ROI DE LA TUNBA A QUIVITE LES COCHETS ET LE BR

**HYRIAN MEZIERE** TRAGEDIENNE EXOTIQUE, LA TERREUR DES VIEUX MESSIEURS, BELLE AU BOIS DORMANT D'UN SEUL Oeil

**VALERIE KLING** LE BLANTES VENT

**ET MARIE** PLUS TROU DES RILOQUES

**PATRICK CHAUVEAU** DESSINATEUR DE RENOM PAR TIGE AUX DECORS INCAR

**SAINT-CLAUDE** NE UN PALMIER VIVANT.

**FAKIR, CRACHEUR DE FEU, HOMME TORCHE, ANCIEN ELEVE DE NORMALE SUP.**

**MARIE-PAUL ANDRE** TOUT TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

**MAXIME FERRIER** JEUNE DESSINATEUR HUMORISTE IRRESISTIBLE DANS SES ROLES DE SINGE \*\*\*

**BLANCHETTE** POULE DU MAGIC CIRCUS A VUE LONGUE CARRIERE INTERNATIONALE DERRIERE ELLE

**AUGENIMA** LE MAGIC CIRCUS S'EST PRODUIT DANS LA BERGERIE EN COLENE OU L'ADRIAN CIRQUE DE FRANKS MARIN LONG METRAGE (A VA GAVIENT LONG METRAGE DE PIERRE BARADON

**MICHEL LEBOIS** AUTEUR DE MILLE PALMIERS DECORATEUR A LA VALLIERE DU CIRCUS, ACROBATE TROMPETTISTE, INOUBLIABLE DANS LA MORT DU CYGNE

**ROBINSON SAVARY** BEBE DE TROIS MOIS INCARNE ZARTAN PETIT CRITIQUE ENTHOUSIASTE DU GRAND PRIX VOICE DE VIENNET UN PEU CABOT.

**ANDREY CONSEIL** CIRCUS, INTRALEME SANS AVOIR

**JEROME SAVARY** CHEF D'ORCHESTRE TALONNE ROULEZ DE PRES. DUKE, TERCEL DE VALERIE KLING, DRESSER INCARNE LE LION ROI DES FAUVES.

**PHILIPPE CARON** UN DES PLUS FINIS D'INCARNE ZARTAN PETIT CRITIQUE ENTHOUSIASTE DU GRAND PRIX VOICE DE VIENNET UN PEU CABOT.

**AVANT SON SPECTACLE A LA CITE INTERNATIONALE, LE MAGIC CIRCUS SE PRODUIRA DANS LES RUES LES FACULTES, CHEST TONS BURTON ENFERONT LA DE MANBE AU CHOIX PARADE NUMEROS ME GLOMB PETIT BAL APRES MIEN FANTOMES DE PARIS SPECIA LISTE EN L'ITHO GRA PHIE ADONCE SE RENSEIGNER. \*\*\***

**JEAN-PAUL INOUBLIABLE** DANS LA TERRIBLE NUIT DU CAUCHEMAR.

**SYLVIE KUHN** DANSEUSE DE CLAQUETTES, TRAPEZISTE INOUBLIABLE, SE FAIT TRANSPERER AVEC LE SOUVIRE.

**DURANT LE SPECTACLE: GRAND BAL POPULAIRE VEGETES SURPRISE. TOMBOLA DOTEE DE NOMBREUX LOTS RAFFRAICHISSEMENTS PALAIS DES MERVEILLES ATTRACTIONS, JEUX, COTILLONS, ETC...**

**AVANT SON SPECTACLE A LA CITE INTERNATIONALE, LE MAGIC CIRCUS SE PRODUIRA DANS LES RUES LES FACULTES, CHEST TONS BURTON ENFERONT LA DE MANBE AU CHOIX PARADE NUMEROS ME GLOMB PETIT BAL APRES MIEN FANTOMES DE PARIS SPECIA LISTE EN L'ITHO GRA PHIE ADONCE SE RENSEIGNER. \*\*\***

**CHRONIQUES COLONIALES** EST UNE CREATION COLLECTIVE. L'ARGUMENT, LE TEXTE, LA MUSIQUE ETC... SONT DU MAGIC CIRCUS. **MICHEL LEBOIS** SUPERVISE LES DECORS ET L'ENVIRONNEMENT. **SYLVIE KUHN** MET AU POINT LES PETITS BALLETS. **FRANK RICO ELFMAN** EST DIRECTEUR DES RYTHMES. **SAINT-CLAUDE** S'occupe DES EFFETS SPECIAUX ET DE LA PYROTECHNIE. **BOB SUPERVISE** LA FABRICATION DU MA-LAIS DES MERVEILLES. **JEROME SAVARY** ORCHESTRE LE SPECTACLE. UN GRAND NOMBRE DE GENS COLLABORENT AVEC LE MAGIC CIRCUS POUR LES "CHRONIQUES COLONIALES". LA LISTE COMPLETE DE CES COLLABORATEURS ENTHOUSIASTES, DONT VOUS SEREZ PEUT ETRE, SERA PUBLIEE LE 25 FEVRIER ET SE RA L'OCCASION D'UN FASTUEUX VIN D'HONNEUR.

**FONDE EN 1968. LE GRAND MAGIC CIRCUS**

LE GRAND MAGIC CIRCUS S'EST PRODUIT A: LONDRES: THEATRE MERCURY FRANKFURT: FESTIVAL EXPERIMENTAL II BRUXELLES: THEATRE 140. AMSTERDAM: EMISSION DE TELEVISION POUR LA CHAINE SOCIALISTE GENEVE: THEATRE DE L'ATELIER TORONTO: FESTIVAL FUT. NEW YORK: THEATRE "LA MAMA" NEW YORK: THEATRE EXTENSION NEW YORK: CENTRAL PARK CITY COLLEGE, NY BOSTON: BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY PRINCETON: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY TRENTON: MERCER COLLEGE. NEW BRUNSWICK: BRECHT WEST THEATRE. EN FRANCE LE MAGIC CIRCUS S'EST PRODUIT: AU THEATRE DE PLAISANCE "GRAND MAGIC CIRCUS" 4.968 AU GYMNASSE DU CIRQUE "CRECHE VIVANTE" 4.970. AU GYMNASSE DU CIRQUE HOMMAGE AU GRAND-GUIGNOL AUX HALLES BALZARD SPECTACLE GRATUIT A LA SORTIE CONCERT JOHN YAGI SIEGE SOCIAL DU GRAND MAGIC CIRCUS: 35 RUE LAPEYRE PARIS 5 608 98 39.

initiative that creates the spectacle. It is this approach that Savary describes as the "technique of keeping the individuality of each performer."<sup>1</sup> A technique that he feels relates his troupe to the traditional circus. Just as Savary himself finds it impossible to perform someone else's text, so he finds it impossible to impose a text on an actor: "Je ne vois pas comment je pourrais imposer un texte à un comédien sans qu'il le trahisse."<sup>2</sup> There is a basic idea or theme (usually suggested by Savary) around which the actors improvise scenes, and it is from these improvisations that the spectacle is ultimately constructed.<sup>3</sup>

It is apparent that literary worth, the invention of fine speeches full of alliteration and metaphor, do not enter into the composition of the spectacle. In contrast is the conventional theatre which functions as the slave of literature, "ce royaume de raccourci et du bon mot."<sup>4</sup> Le Grand Magic Circus propose a form of theatre which is largely spectacular and visual. In order to communicate with all people, a language has to be found which all people understand. The written word has been superseded by spectacle. An advertisement for César Birotteau would have been purely a written account of the product; today all the writing would be replaced by a glamorized picture of the product. Pierre Francastel points out: "Le dessin a cessé d'être le commentaire de la parole, il est devenu par lui-même une évidence."<sup>5</sup> Following a line of argument traced by Ionesco, the company maintain that the spoken word has become "plus utilitaire," less descriptive and poetic; under the influence of advertising and political slogans, the word has become solely an aural stimulus rather than a communicator of meaning: "On n'écoute plus le

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<sup>1</sup>From the soundtrack of a film documentary entitled Once Upon a Time by Tom Busby, premiered at the 1973 Edinburgh Festival.

<sup>2</sup>Savary, "Grande fête," p. 145.

<sup>3</sup>This practice is the same as that used in traditional theatre. Léon Chancerel in Molière (Paris: Presses Littéraires de France, 1953), p. 14 describes the early farces "dont les répliques trouvées dans la chaleur du jeu ne furent fixées qu'ensuite après l'épreuve du public, et que Molière se refusa à laisser imprimer."

<sup>4</sup>Savary, "Nos fêtes," p. 85.

<sup>5</sup>Pierre Francastel, Art et technique aux XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles (Paris: Minuit, 1956), p. 242.

sens des mots mais leur consonance."<sup>1</sup> Literature, then, has little place in direct communication with all people: "After all, today's society no longer reads. The masses enjoy television, the movies, visual forms of entertainment."<sup>2</sup>

The literary text is replaced by a series of scenes, a basic plot outline in terms of action. Again like the commedia dell'arte, Le Grand Magic Circus uses a canevas as opposed to a text. The canevas provides just the skeleton of the spectacle; it is up to each performer to supplement the outline by his performance each night. In this way the spectacle is never completely fixed; it remains open to the influences of each and every situation provided by the presence of an audience. It is true that all actors, even in conventional productions, admit the influence of the audience on each performance. However, for Le Grand Magic Circus, just as for the music-hall entertainer, the performance develops around this influence with the presence of the audience as the central element: "Le 'show' n'est jamais deux fois le même. Tout dépend du lieu, du public. Le spectacle agit sur les gens, les gens agissent sur le spectacle."<sup>3</sup>

The structure of the spectacle being a series of tableaux, each tableau in turn being an entity, there is great scope for the elaboration of one tableau if the public is responding favourably to it; analogously, the possibility exists to shorten or even omit a tableau if the situation demands. Savary explains the process of performing this open-ended spectacle:

Raconter une histoire à la manière des conteurs orientaux, sans texte écrit, définitif, en s'adaptant à ceux qui sont là, en train d'écouter, de manière qu'ils puissent la transmettre en la prenant à leur charge. Nous sommes obligés alors non pas d'inventer, mais de réinventer selon

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<sup>1</sup>Savary, "Grande fête," p. 145.

<sup>2</sup>Savary to Knapp, "Sounding the Drum," p. 94.

<sup>3</sup>Duparc, "La Culture du trombone," p. 37. This again is not a new idea in itself: "Le dramaturge a un collaborateur que l'on oublie toujours, qui a peut-être autant d'importance que lui, C'EST LE PUBLIC. L'oeuvre dramatique a besoin de la scène, a besoin d'un public, non pas épars . . . mais d'un public réuni dans une salle, grange ou palais, et frémissant dans son unité de public. . . . Et c'est chaque soir que la pièce se crée." Armand Salacrou, Théâtre II (Paris: Gallimard, 1944), p. 223; and "La première réplique nous découvrant le plaisir des spectateurs est pareille aux clés des écritures secrètes: elle nous livre l'avenir de la soirée, nous permet de le lire, esquisse une physionomie du public. . . . Par ses réactions, il accuse lui-même son esprit, son humeur; il révèle à l'avance aux comédiens le ton et

les réactions immédiates. Chaque soir, nous devons faire l'effort de nous rappeler ce que nous aurons à dire, et à le retrouver non pas sur la mémoire, mais sur la logique.<sup>1</sup>

Against the rigidity of conventional theatre with its distinct elements of actor and spectator, text and performance, theatre and life, Le Grand Magic Circus advocates a more fluid form where actor and spectator together generate the performance and through that effort theatre and life are made to exist on the same level. The comparison Savary makes is between a "dead show—with live people" and a "life-show."<sup>2</sup> He develops this idea further:

Le théâtre, on s'en fout. C'est un prétexte, une excuse. On n'est pas là pour s'exprimer, montrer notre talent. L'axe principal ne va pas de nous au public mais directement du public au public. Il s'agit de vivre ensemble, un moment, une célébration, une fête collective. Casser le mur qui sépare les gens, qui les tient cloîtrés, encassés, paralysés, enfermés dans leur quant-à-soi.<sup>3</sup>

By this concept of "life-show" or la fête, the theatrical credo of Le Grand Magic Circus fuses with a social outlook. The reason that theatre should not remain an élitist entertainment, and why Le Grand Magic Circus are seeking to reform the nature of the theatre, is because of the very important social function the theatre fulfils. As Jean-Louis Barrault expresses it: "C'est que le théâtre n'est pas fait pour accentuer ce qui sépare les hommes, il est fait au contraire pour les rassembler. Il n'est pas fait pour la division, mais pour l'union. Il n'est pas fait pour entretenir les haines mais pour faciliter les échanges et les compréhensions."<sup>4</sup> Le Grand Magic Circus would agree but argue that the mass of people do not share in this communal activity. For the theatre to perform its social function effectively the whole of society must be present. All people have to be reached and attracted since the theatre is

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l'accueil de la salle." Louis Jouvet, Témoignages sur le théâtre (Paris: Flammarion, 1952), p. 115.

<sup>1</sup>Savary, "Grande fête," p. 144.

<sup>2</sup>Savary cited by Margaret Tierney, "The Life-Show of Jérôme Savary," Plays and Players, vol. 20, no. 4 (January 1973), p. 58.

<sup>3</sup>Savary cited by Duparc, "La Culture du trombone," p. 37. Jan Deat was making a similar point as early as 1947: "Il n'y a pas de nos jours en France, de public de théâtre. Seulement un certain nombre de spectateurs assistent individuellement à la représentation, tel est l'effet du divorce total entre l'art dramatique et la communauté," Entrée du public, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup>Jean-Louis Barrault, Letter to Esprit, no. 5 (May 1965), p. 852.

a last place where men can meet and exchange ideas: "Theatre is the only living, meeting experience left for human beings. The new theatre could become the new meeting hall of society."<sup>1</sup> This extreme view has to be evaluated in the light of the massive process of modernization of cities which has caused the disappearance of many of the traditional meeting places. Huge multi-storey blocks of flats instead of a street of houses, the supermarket as opposed to the neighbourhood corner store, the smart bar in the place of the lively café—all similar developments isolate modern man from his fellows. Theatre could provide the opportunity for a social gathering. Similarly bureaucracy is stifling modern man's creativity by limiting his means of self-expression. In the parks that do exist one can do very little other than walk.<sup>2</sup> La fête by its existence challenges these social inhibitions:

Les régimes en place dans notre société répriment sciemment les possibilités de jeu pour tous. Car le jeu, synonyme de liberté, est aussi synonyme de dialogue, de réunion. S'il est un cas, et nous pensons que c'est le seul où le "théâtre" pourrait devenir "révolutionnaire," c'est bien celui-ci; un théâtre donnant la possibilité aux hommes de se réunir et de jouer (s'exprimer en toute liberté).<sup>3</sup>

Theatre and life are not only brought together in the concept of living experience as discovered at the Mercury Theatre but also in the social function of la fête as a means to create opportunities for self-expression. The challenge of Le Grand Magic Circus to conventional theatre goes beyond an aesthetic revolt which simply destroys the old towards a positive reaffirmation of the traditional role of theatre.

This theory of theatre has produced six full-length spectacles together with a whole host of more minor entertainments between 1968 and 1975: Zartan ou le frère mal aimé de Tarzan, Les Derniers Jours de solitude de Robinson Crusô, Cendrillon ou la lutte des classes, De Moïse à Mao: 5.000 ans

<sup>1</sup>Savary cited by Naseem Khan, The Guardian, 30 December 1972, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>For example, Article 6 of the Parisian park regulations: "Il est interdit: 1<sup>o</sup> de former aucun groupe ou rassemblement de nature à gêner la circulation. 2<sup>o</sup> de marcher ou s'asseoir sur les bordures de gazon et sur toutes les pelouses, seules les pelouses des bois de Boulogne et de Vincennes non interdites par une clôture ou par un écriteau sont accessibles au public."

<sup>3</sup>Grand Magic Circus, "Le Public et nous," L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 496 (1 June 1972), p. 44.



d'aventures et d'amour, Good-bye Mr. Freud, and Les Grands Sentiments. The choice of subject alone immediately situates the style of the show on a plane different from the literary: three of the heroes are a part of popular culture; for De Moïse à Mao and Good-bye Mr. Freud, they come from elementary history books and horror stories.<sup>1</sup> A bond of sympathy is immediately established by these overt references to forgotten childhood. Cendrillon is the only spectacle that follows the original story very precisely, but even it is altered to include a potent social message. The moral is expressed in the sub-titles of the spectacles: "La Lutte des classes" for Cendrillon, "Les Chroniques coloniales" for Zartan, and "La Solitude" for Robinson Crusoë. There are three stages to a spectacle which can be summarized as prespectacle, spectacle, and postspectacle. For each stage, a study of the basic form, the means of communication, and the relationship with the audience will demonstrate the theoretical principles of Le Grand Magic Circus in practice.

The idea of prespectacle is becoming increasingly popular in contemporary French productions. For instance, at the Renaud-Barrault production of Claudel's Sous le vent des Iles Baléaires (situated sous chapiteau at the Gare d'Orsay), the public was met by a foyer decorated with back-cloths from past productions, masks and many of the trappings of the theatrical performance.<sup>2</sup> Arrabal describes minutely in the text of Et Ils passèrent les menottes aux fleurs the welcome to be given to the arriving spectators. Le Théâtre du Soleil use one hall at the Cartoucherie as a foyer-reception where a slide show of the 1789-1793 period and a tract on art by Karl Marx warm the audience to the spectacle. Le Grand Magic Circus itself places great importance on this part of the show. Originally a great street parade was held to advertise its arrival in a town, much in the manner of the circus and of the travelling

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<sup>1</sup>The use of a familiar story is a traditional aspect. The Greek theatre drew on common myths; even Phèdre's tragedy was known by the audience in advance. Giraudoux highlights this process by the title, Amphitryon 38.

<sup>2</sup>It is indeed significant and exemplifies the influence of the experimental theatre on the conventional that Barrault should put on a Claudel play in such surroundings using multiple stages and many new lighting techniques.

players of traditional theatre:<sup>1</sup> "A long file of players, some in rags, some in tags, one in the full-dress uniform of a master mariner of the Second Empire, came swirling with drums and cymbals through the narrow streets of an old French town."<sup>2</sup> This describes the arrival in La Rochelle of 1972. Unfortunately this practice has been discontinued; street parades are illegal without prior permission of the authorities which ruins the surprise arrival in a town. At present the street parade has been replaced by publicity and the sight of their painted van. Nonetheless the emphasis is heavily on visual advertisements rather than the more usual verbal approach of theatre publicity. The leaflets distributed are covered with pictures and sketches which capture the low-brow, almost cartoon character of the spectacle.<sup>3</sup> Although the effect of this type of poster is limited, it is characteristic of Le Grand Magic Circus's avoidance of the written word. Similarly, the change of name to Le Grand Magic Circus came about because the former Grand Panic Circus was considered "trop lié à un mouvement littéraire."<sup>4</sup> This shunning of the text and of the literary explains the name "Circus" as opposed to "Théâtre": "The world of the circus is an old forgotten one. It is quite the opposite of what we mean by theatre. That is dominated by the word; the circus is dominated by action."<sup>5</sup>

Having arrived at the place of performance the audience is exposed to another element of the elaborate mise en condition which precedes the spectacle proper. To take the performances of Zartan at Villeurbanne as an example,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The street parade was common in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century: "[Valleron] avait sans doute agi à la façon des Confrères, 'allant appeler le monde au son du tambour jusqu'au carrefour de Saint-Eustache,' ou à la façon des comédiens nomades, faisant visiter toutes les rues, comme s'il s'agissait de faire la patrouille, par un tambour et un arlequin." This is before the affiche became custom. Another interesting point is that before 1625, the poet's name was never mentioned. See Eugène Rigal, Le Théâtre français avant la période classique (Paris: Hachette, 1901), pp. 197-98.

<sup>2</sup>Rogers, "Chaos," p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>See Figure 1, p. 332 and Figure 2, p. 339.

<sup>4</sup>Grand Magic Circus, "Petite Histoire du G.M.C.," L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 496 (1 June 1972) p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>Savary cited by Rogers, "Chaos," p. 10.

<sup>6</sup>Given that there is no extant text, quotations from Zartan are from the author's notes compiled from five consecutive performances at Villeurbanne, 7-12 May 1973.

Fig. 2. Poster for De Moïse à Mao, London, 29 January 1974.

LE GRAND  
**MAGIC  
CIRCUS**

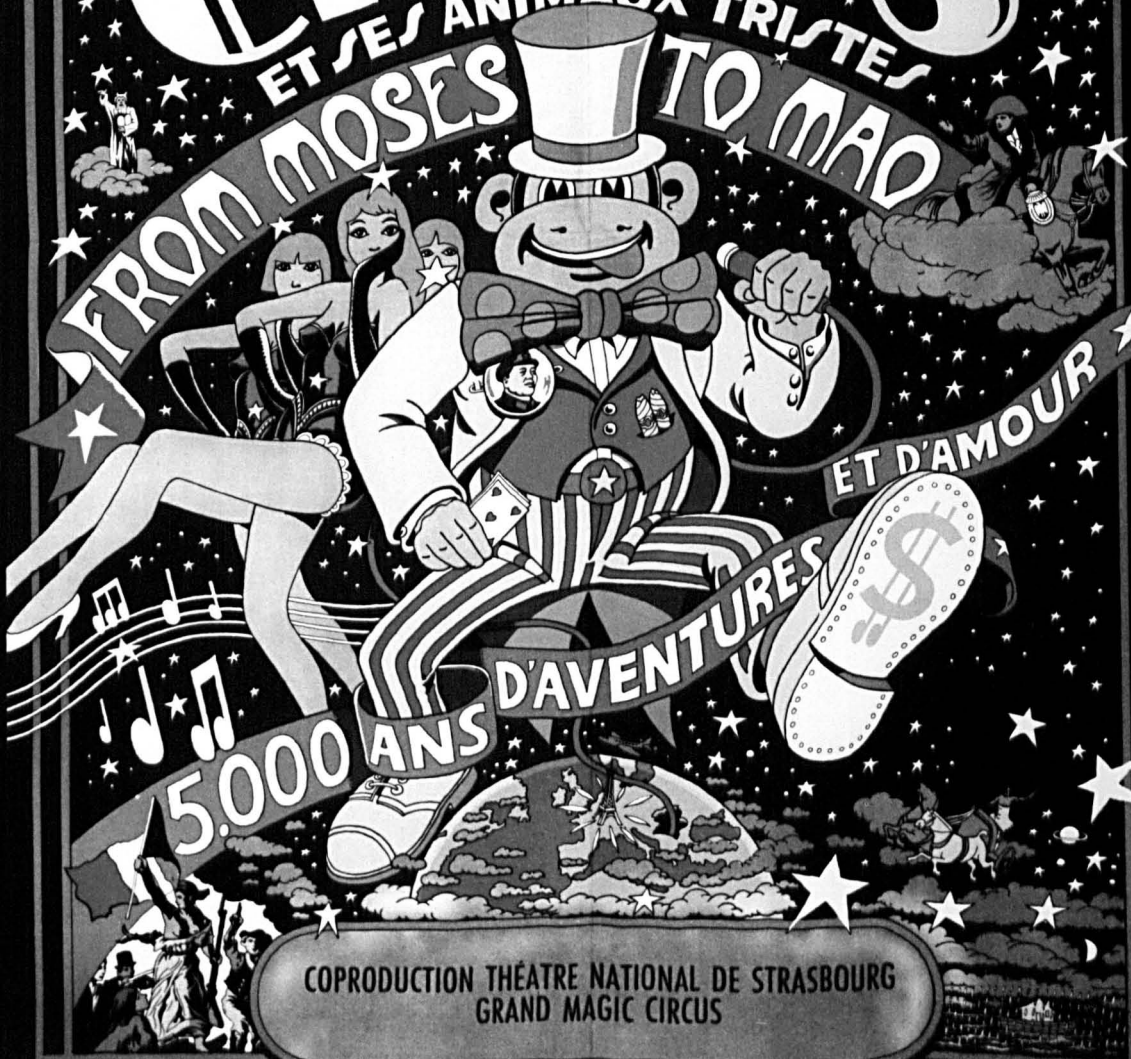
ET SES ANIMAUX TRISTES

FROM MOSES TO MAD

ET D'AMOUR

5.000 ANS  
D'AVENTURES

COPRODUCTION THÉÂTRE NATIONAL DE STRASBOURG  
GRAND MAGIC CIRCUS



the public was confronted by the huge blue tent, the orange and white banner and the fairy lights, circus music blaring out from the tent. The total atmosphere induced an excitement and a sense of gaiety.

This acclimatization process was continued and intensified on entering the theatrical space where the prespectacle began. This period usually lasts approximately thirty minutes. It follows no predetermined plan, relying solely on the spontaneous reaction of audience to actor and actor to audience. The spectator was welcomed by costumed and made-up members of the troupe and offered sangria or a sandwich, none of which of course he had to accept and there was no pressure exerted to do so. This friendly welcome is in sharp contrast to the conventional usherette who demands your attention and your tip; she is parodied by Jean-Paul Muel in the prespectacle for Robinson Crusoë: "La solide ouvreuse-homme en robe noire qui continue à entasser les nouveaux arrivants à coups de rayons de sa lampe électrique dans des interstices inexistantes" (RC:11).

From this welcome the spectator passed to the area of the performance proper which presented a dispositif scénique of multiple stages arranged in and around the fragmented seating areas. The spectator is immediately incorporated into the action of the spectacle. The passage from the outside into the performance area is studied; it influences the audience attitude towards the spectacle. The fine stairway and ornate decoration of a conventional theatre like the Opéra have a similar purpose; there it is a question of the passage from the turmoil of everyday life into a more precious realm of art. For Le Grand Magic Circus the transition is from the loneliness of modern life into a gathering of friends. Impressive architecture is replaced by an amicable handshake:

Nous aimons parler directement avec les gens. Nous leur serrons la main lorsqu'ils entrent, nous les accueillons comme des amis qui viendraient nous rejoindre pour que nous leur racontions dans de beaux décors peints en trompe l'oeil de palmiers verts et de mer bleue (déchaînée) l'histoire de Zartan.<sup>1</sup>

There is no mystification; the "grosses ficelles" of the production are

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<sup>1</sup>Savary, "Grande fête," p. 144.

openly displayed.<sup>1</sup> The subsidiary stages, although unlit, are visible with their simple painted back-cloths. The central performance area (be it the piste of Robinson Crusoe or the narrow walkway of Zartan) is illuminated. There was a constant coming and going along this runway at Villeurbanne, and it emerged that the actors were preparing their costumes and make-up for the performance. The audience, thus, has the opportunity to see the actors as people before the performance begins; as each actor finishes his make-up he re-appears on the runway and each in his own way makes approaches to the spectators. At Villeurbanne, Michel Dussarat chose a quiet, formal approach: costumed as a distinguished middle-class gentleman complete with cigar and a glass of chartreuse, he engaged members of the audience in polite conversation. On one particular occasion he courteously asked the permission of a husband before dancing a fox-trot with a highly amused lady and finally returned her to her seat with due grace and ceremony. For Robinson Crusoe at Aubervilliers, the same actor chose a more eccentric approach: his torso dressed formally in black bow tie, white shirt and black waist-coat, but wearing green and red shorts with a cloth cap on his head, he elegantly batted streamers into the audience. Celia Booth always appears as a brightly garbed clown and sets about entertaining the audience with simple acrobatics, encouraging applause from them and urging them to respond to her efforts. Maxime Ferrier usually emerges in the costume of a naval officer with heavy white make-up tinged with blue emphasizing a sullen, lean look; he passes quietly through the audience hardly speaking, distributing confetti and streamers, and encouraging the spectators to throw them about by a taciturn mimicry of the act of throwing. The prespectacle is retained for De Moïse à Mao: gay Viennese music is broadcast as Jean-Paul Muel, dressed as an elegant madam, welcomes the spectators with a kindly "Good evening"; Dussarat inscrutably dabs females with perfume and Celia Booth sprinkles glitter powder over those who desire it. At Strasbourg the prespectacle was accompanied by the elegant madam's stern treatment of a servant who

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<sup>1</sup>This idea was clear to Jean Cocteau: "La poésie de théâtre serait une grosse dentelle; une dentelle en cordages, un navire sur la mer," Théâtre I, p.5.

was dusting the spectators' seats, an altercation which terminated with the hanging of the servant just as the spectacle proper was to commence.

It is essential to underline three effects of this period of the spectacle. Firstly, the actor introduces himself to the audience as a fellow human being, not as an unapproachable god belonging to the realm of the stage. Secondly, there is the possibility for the actor to strike up a personal relationship with members of the audience, to establish a bond. Thirdly, the members of the audience are given a chance to become acquainted with each other albeit through a sense of fun. The importance of the prespectacle cannot be underestimated. It situates the spectacle on the level of human contact and establishes the mood from which the spectacle can develop. Indeed, the achievement of Le Grand Magic Circus can be attributed to the success of this period: "La grande réussite de Jérôme Savary, c'est ce conditionnement du public. Comment s'y prend-il pour transformer chaque soir six cents personnes en boy-scouts."<sup>1</sup> That the prespectacle succeeds is unquestionable. One example will suffice to illustrate the bond that is established between audience and actor. Jean-Paul Muel's parody of the conventional usherette in the prespectacle of Robinson Crusoe makes him a favourite with the audience. His reappearance later as Monsieur Duchoux or Le Père Plongeur or any of the other characters he portrays is always met with great cheers: "Arrive M. Duchoux, le planteur, en qui chacun se réjouit de reconnaître la robuste placeuse du début du spectacle" (RC:17).

The transition from prespectacle to spectacle is sudden. It is announced by the entry of Savary costumed variously in a huge green overcoat with sequined plaid lining and green bowler hat or a white suit with top hat. For Zartan the band strikes up a fast Latin American rhythm, "pour nous mettre dans l'atmosphère," and the actors suddenly return to the central runway to dance to the music. An explosion of a firework freezes them; the lights on the runway black out; the music stops. Savary begins an introductory speech of welcome which is common to the shows up until De Moïse à Mao. (In that

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<sup>1</sup>Matthieu Galey, Combat, 18 February 1972, p. 12.

spectacle, instead of composing a speech about Le Grand Magic Circus, he describes the history of the Folies de Vienne, a travelling company marooned in the middle of the Nevada desert on their way to California.) For Robinson Crusoe, the transition is marked by Savary as le bonimenteur, M. Trampolino, diving through a hoop onto the piste centrale "dans une puissante glissade qui le jette sur le public au ras de la piste de l'autre côté" (RC:11).

It is significant that the spectacle proper is begun by Savary's entrance for it is he who paces and ultimately decides the structure of the performance based on a consideration of the audience's reaction to each individual tableau. The elasticity of the performance is confirmed in Savary's admission that Robinson Crusoe has lasted between one and a half and three hours according to the mood of the audience. From the early performances of Oratorio macabre du radeau de la Méduse and Le Labyrinthe, Savary has been the central figure. Although attenuated in later productions this position has never been usurped. The form of the spectacle, a proliferation of tableaux around a central story line, makes a central commentator necessary. For example, Robinson Crusoe is summarized on a publicity tract:

Une série de somptueux tableaux dont:

- Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher
- L'assassinat de Trotsky sous les yeux épouvantés de Staline
- Le naufrage du Magic Circus dans les Caraïbes
- La tombola des sept erreurs et ses lots empoisonnés
- Le carnaval à Buckingham Palace
- Le saut de la mort du Père Paul, curé plongeur
- Le combat des sorcières de la jungle
- L'assassinat de Robinson Crusoe par le sinistre roi Fénéon, sur des textes inoubliables de Shakespeare et du Magic Circus<sup>1</sup>

This seemingly unconnected collage of tableaux is only held together by the thinnest thread, namely the introductions to the different tableaux by Savary, le bonimenteur.

Unlike the surrealists, and later the absurdists, who replaced the logic of plot and character development by symbolic association,<sup>2</sup> Le Grand

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<sup>1</sup> It is significant that the spectacle does not always include all these scenes. The length of the spectacle depends on the atmosphere of the performance on each night.

<sup>2</sup> Two instances are: "Les scènes s'emboîtent comme les mots d'un poème," Jean Cocteau, Théâtre I, p. 5; and "Une pièce de théâtre est une construction



Magic Circus base development purely on the need to vary the pace of the sketches. Sometimes the introduction is simply:

M. TRAMPOLINO: Premier tableau: l'action se situe dans un hospice de vieillards de la région parisienne. (RC:12)

Or on the arrival of a new character:

M. TRAMPOLINO: Regarde, un étranger; c'est notre dix-neuvième tableau qui arrive. (RC:23)

Similarly, in Zartan, an "agent du C.I.A." suddenly appears: "Voilà un personnage qui tombe à pic pour relancer le drame." The slender link between tableaux is unabashed: Zartan is sprinkled with such phrases as "l'arrivée inattendue," "un jour par hasard," "l'apparition d'un nouveau personnage," "l'atterrissage absolument inopiné," "l'arrivée inespérée," and "l'apparition inopinée." Robinson Crusoe contains just as many instances; the tableau "Sur l'île voisine, Banana Beach, au Tropical Bar" is quite arbitrarily introduced: "Au même instant, à trois miles de là," and terminated just as unaccountably: "Robinson Crusoe, ignorant tout de ce qui se passe sur l'île voisine fume un peu de ce bon tabac" (RC:16; and 17). De Moïse à Mao continues the line of coincidental tableaux; the action passes from a Stone Age cave to the sophistication of Chinese culture with unabashed simplicity: "At the same time thousands of miles away, another civilisation, the Chinese civilisation. Oh, what a contrast!" A new technique is introduced by breaking the action of a tableau to return to the situation of the Folies de Vienne, and then relaunching the action with an unrelated tableau. For example, from a debate on innocence one is suddenly spirited back to the Middle Ages: "Meanwhile we must work hard on our historical tableaux. And oh! What a surprise, how fortunate! Our next tableau comes from the Middle Ages."<sup>1</sup>

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constituée d'une série d'états de conscience, ou de situations, qui s'intensifient, se densifient, puis se nouent, soit pour se dénouer, soit pour finir dans un inextricable insoutenable," Eugène Ionesco, Notes et contre-notes (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), pp. 219-20.

<sup>1</sup>Quotations from De Moïse à Mao as performed at the Roundhouse (London) 15-18 February 1974. One is reminded of the annoncier in Claudel's Le Soulier de satin, Théâtre II (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 958:

"L'ANNONCIER: C'est encore moi, Mesdames et Messieurs, qui suis chargé de remplir à votre bénéfice le rôle d'éclusier et de lever les vannes de l'intéressante histoire dont vous avez entendu le commencement."

The work, subtitled Le Pire n'est pas toujours sûr (p. 566), has other

Structural coherence and logical development are secondary to speed and rhythm of action and action is unexplained. This rapidity of development leads to an explosion of time and place. Robinson Crusoe takes place in a "hospice de vieillards de la région parisienne," in the English-countryside home of the great aunts, on his desert island, on a neighbouring island, at an English port, during a battle in South America, on a ship, in the harem of a lecherous king, and at Las Vegas. Zartan's adventures are spread over three continents: the action is suddenly transferred from the Amazon jungle to Rio de Janeiro, from the ocean off Brazil to New York and Broadway, from the Ethiopian desert to Berkhamstead on Sea and Buckingham Palace. The action of De Moïse à Mao spans an equally wide area: Europe, America, and Asia. In Europe alone, the audience is whisked from Paris to London and Rome, from Greece to Switzerland, from Austerlitz to Nuremberg.

Similarly any sequential time scale is destroyed despite the fact that both Zartan and Robinson Crusoe are biographical. All the ages of Robinson Crusoe are intermingled: young Robinson playing childhood games, the adolescent Robinson leaving his aunts in search of adventure, adult Robinson leading the army, mature Robinson on his island, and old Robinson in the old people's home—all are present simultaneously:

M. TRAMPOLINO: Il [Robinson Crusoe] raconte sa vie d'aventures à une infirmière au bord de la retraite qui se tient éveillée en se pinçant le bras. Chaque fois que nous irons en arrière dans l'histoire de cet homme je me permettrai de tourner cette manivelle. Cela voudra dire Mesdames, Mesdemoiselles, Messieurs qu'il s'agit d'un flash-back. (RC:12)

However, the practice is soon forgotten being used only occasionally for comic effect, and the audience is left with a kaleidoscopic account of Robinson's life. In Zartan, the necessity to speed up the account of the hero's early life causes a telescoping of three stages of development: the young child Zartan, the boy Zartan, and the youth Zartan. This is achieved in performance by the simultaneous appearance of three actors each representing one of the

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features in common: a riotous prespectacle, the use of music, and a telescoping of time: "L'auteur s'est permis de comprimer les pays et les époques," (p. 857). Although first appearing in 1929, it was adapted for the stage by Jean-Louis Barrault only in November 1943.

stages: "Seul au monde le Grand Magic Circus est en mesure de vous présenter au même instant, sur la même scène trois générations du même personnage." The time scale becomes so involved that it crosses over itself:

M. TRAMPOLINO: Et c'est ainsi que Robinson Crusoë partit sur un beau navire pour la mer des Indes avec Rinalda Rinaldi, sa belle maîtresse. Mais je ne vais pas vous montrer ce tableau de nouveau puisque vous l'avez déjà vu il y a à peu près une heure. Alors, nous allons écouter la musique de ce tableau. (RC:35)

Just as any coherence of theatrical time (time inside the play) is denied, so historical time is dislocated by anachronism. In Robinson Crusoë there is the juxtaposition of Robinson's departure for adventure from the port which is given an eighteenth or nineteenth-century appearance by the sailors' costumes and the arrival there of the wicked Roi Fénéon who is treated in the manner of the rulers of ancient Rome. Similarly in Zartan, Spanish conquistadores break into a tableau which is apparently set in the industrial suburbs of Rio de Janeiro. In De Moïse à Mao the French Revolution is carried out by Louis XIV, Cézanne, and Jesus Christ; the Napoleonic Wars are concentrated into one tableau: the battle of Waterloo (1815), the retreat from Russia (1812), and the victory of Napoleon at Eylau (1807)—all occur concurrently. All time is somehow included in the structure of the spectacles: Robinson's life seems to span the duration from the Roman Empire to the modern day, from nineteenth-century night-club owners to the twentieth-century Père plongeur at Las Vegas, from the mutiny of nineteenth-century sailors to the assassination of Ché Guevara. This is even more true of De Moïse à Mao.

Among this patchwork of epochs, a further continuum is introduced: present time outside the theatre, "real" time for the theatre audience. Generally, references are made during the spectacle to actual events that are occurring in the neighbourhood. A simple example is the use at Villeurbanne of the front page of Le Progrès (Lyon) with a cartoon of Zartan on it at that point in the spectacle when Louise is searching for him, or a reference in the same show to the condition of the nationalized theatre (particularly relevant in Villeurbanne where Roger Planchon's T.N.P. is very successful). Two actors appear without costumes in one scene and Savary declares: "Soyez généreux,

Mesdames, Mesdemoiselles, Messieurs à nos deux camarades du théâtre subventionné lyonnais."

A final time scale is that of the time that passes during the spectacle. Already the quotation for the criss-crossing of time has included a reference to the hour between the two identical points in the story. All dialogue with the audience by the actors draws attention to the immediacy of the theatrical experience and the passing of time. All reference to the spectacle in progress emphasizes the passage of time, the chief example being M. Trampolino's soliloquy on the nature of solitude at the end of Robinson Crusoë: "La solitude, mesdames, mesdemoiselles, messieurs, tel était le thème que nous avons essayé de développer ce soir" (RC:35).

The proliferation of time and space inevitably involves the rapid introduction and disappearance of many characters which, in turn, implies the abandonment of logical character development. Only the eponymous heroes remain consistent throughout, but they are surrounded with a horde of secondary characters who appear without explanation and disappear just as unexpectedly. In Zartan, an amazing collection of characters appears: la Reine d'Angleterre, un agent de la C.I.A., a music-hall song-and-dance act, a group of Italian serenaders, a tight-rope walker, Adolph Hitler, the music critic of the New York Times—all make fleeting, undeveloped entrances. In Robinson Crusoë, the case of Maxime Nogrîpe is illustrative. He is "Français moyen, cadre supérieur chez Renault, en vacances à Banana Beach" dressed in "maillot rayé, béret, moustaches, paréa et collier de fleurs, style 'gentil membre,' l'air excédé et dédaigneux, haussant les épaules" (RC:11). He is introduced during the parade of characters and then appears just once more at the Tropical Bar on Banana Beach characteristically complaining about the weather and the cost of the holiday. This second appearance is commented on by M. Trampolino: "C'est la dernière fois que vous voyez ce personnage" (RC:21-22). He is included in the action because of his popular appeal and the humour he provides. He is a type, an exaggerated example of a kind of person that the whole audience know or with whom they can identify. He is a part of popular culture and as such

allows immediate communication between spectacle and audience. Certain other characters draw on popular culture and become types: l'Entraîneuse du bar played by Jacqueline Kaps (in Zartan there are two, the other played by Myriam Mezières), the innocent young lover played by Sylvie Kuhn, the eccentric old lady played by Celia Booth, the priest played by Jean-Paul Muel. All these types are readily recognizable and nearly always produce laughter in the audience.

In a similar way, Tarzan, Robinson Crusoe and Cinderella are products of popular myth. Every young child has been told of the exploits of these three characters. Essentially the same, De Moïse à Mao is peopled by historical figures that are known to most members of the audience. Familiarity causes an immediate bond to form between the audience and the story. It is true that Le Grand Magic Circus change the plots in order to make a particular social point, but the initial attraction is nonetheless present.

The proliferation of characters means that each actor has to perform many different roles. This practice does not allow any form of identification or involvement in the spectacle; it is impossible to believe in the reality of a character if it is obvious that the same actor has played five or six other characters. Identification would be foreign to the rapid succession of tableaux and the basically humorous effect at which Le Grand Magic Circus aims. The number of roles performed can be due simply to the needs of a particular tableau or to the learning of a new skill by an actor (hence the conjuring interlude by Jacqueline Kaps in Zartan and Cendrillon) or to some deeper significance.

The deeper significance lies in that certain actors always take a certain type of part. This method of characterization is built on the physical characteristics and on the disposition of the actor. In some respects it is the reversal of the commedia dell'arte technique where the character was stable and central, and each actor who played it added an idiosyncrasy in the process of the evolution of the stock character. In Le Grand Magic Circus, the actor's own personality is the central element; the characters portrayed bear the

stamp of this personality and, thus, these characters can be grouped together as facets of a single recognizable type. An example is the type performed by Jean-Paul Muel: in Cendrillon he played the captain of the Royal Guard and Prince Charming; in Zartan, the Cheik Sanguinaire (alias Capitaine Roger), Mr. Lee (British colonial explorer, father of Zartan), the *prêtre-ouvrier* of Rio de Janeiro's slum district, and the impresario Mayakovsky; finally, in Robinson Crusoë, he is seen as the officious usherette of the prespectacle, Roi Fénéon, the curé of the village and the curé plongeur of Las Vegas. The style of acting used in all these roles is the same: an excessive parody of the lecherous old man of farce. Because Jean-Paul Muel plays the bossy usherette and the evil Roi Fénéon, an association is set up with all the other characters he acts so that they are imbued with a certain unsavoury nature. In De Moïse à Mao, Muel continues in the same vein as Queen Victoria, Louis XIV, Victor Hugo, a lecherous medieval monk, the nagging rolling-pin-swinging wife of the caveman as well as Docteur Siegmund and the imperious madam of the prespectacle.<sup>1</sup> The overall thematic effect of this type of associative characterization is a social satire on the bulwarks of Western capitalist society: the church, the monarchy, the colonialist expansion, the army, and the capitalist system in general in the person of the impresario.

In dramatic terms the effect of the commedia dell'arte system of stock characters and of the system of stock acting by Le Grand Magic Circus is similar. The author of commedia dell'arte performances did not need to spend time introducing his characters because the audience already "knew" them through previous performances. In turn this allowed for a speed of plot development not attainable in other forms of drama. Similarly, for Le Grand Magic Circus, certain actors come to represent certain characteristics; so when a new character arrives on stage the audience are immediately aware of the relationship to have with him and, indeed, the opinion they are to form of him.

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<sup>1</sup>The women's share in this process of aleatory characterization is emphasized by Savary's addition to the text (p. 31) during a performance of Robinson Crusoë (Aubervilliers, 26 April 1973): "Nous avons très peu de jeunes filles dans le Grand Magic Circus et la même jeune fille doit incarner deux rôles complètement différents: ce n'est pas Marie, mais Olga la dompteuse."

Again this produces rapidity of development and non-literary communication of ideas about certain institutions. The characters are a mixture of traditional types (the lecherous priest is found in medieval fabliaux, the young lovers are standard in the commedia) and more modern stereotypes (Reine d'Angleterre: "My husband and I," the British colonialist, le Français moyen), but all have the advantage of familiarity and immediate recognition by the audience.

The form of the spectacle is then a loose succession of tableaux given structure by the underlying story line and theme. The very fluidity of the spectacle derives from an impression of chaos created by the abandonment of linear time, place, and character development. Because structure is only given by story line, a canevas and not a complete text, there is opportunity for the actor to improvise inside a tableau and to play on the relationship he has with the audience.

The form is based more on the principle of entertainment than of metaphysics or of logic. The free creation of characters and the collage of time and place illustrate that the emphasis is placed on action as opposed to reflection. The form is popular in the same way as the strip cartoon where action also predominates. It would be inconsistent if this popular form were accompanied by anything other than a popular theatrical language. To communicate one has to use a language intelligible to the receiver. The "language" used by Le Grand Magic Circus is popular in its avoidance of the literary and its cultivation of the spectacular and the visual drawn from a whole range of low-brow entertainments.

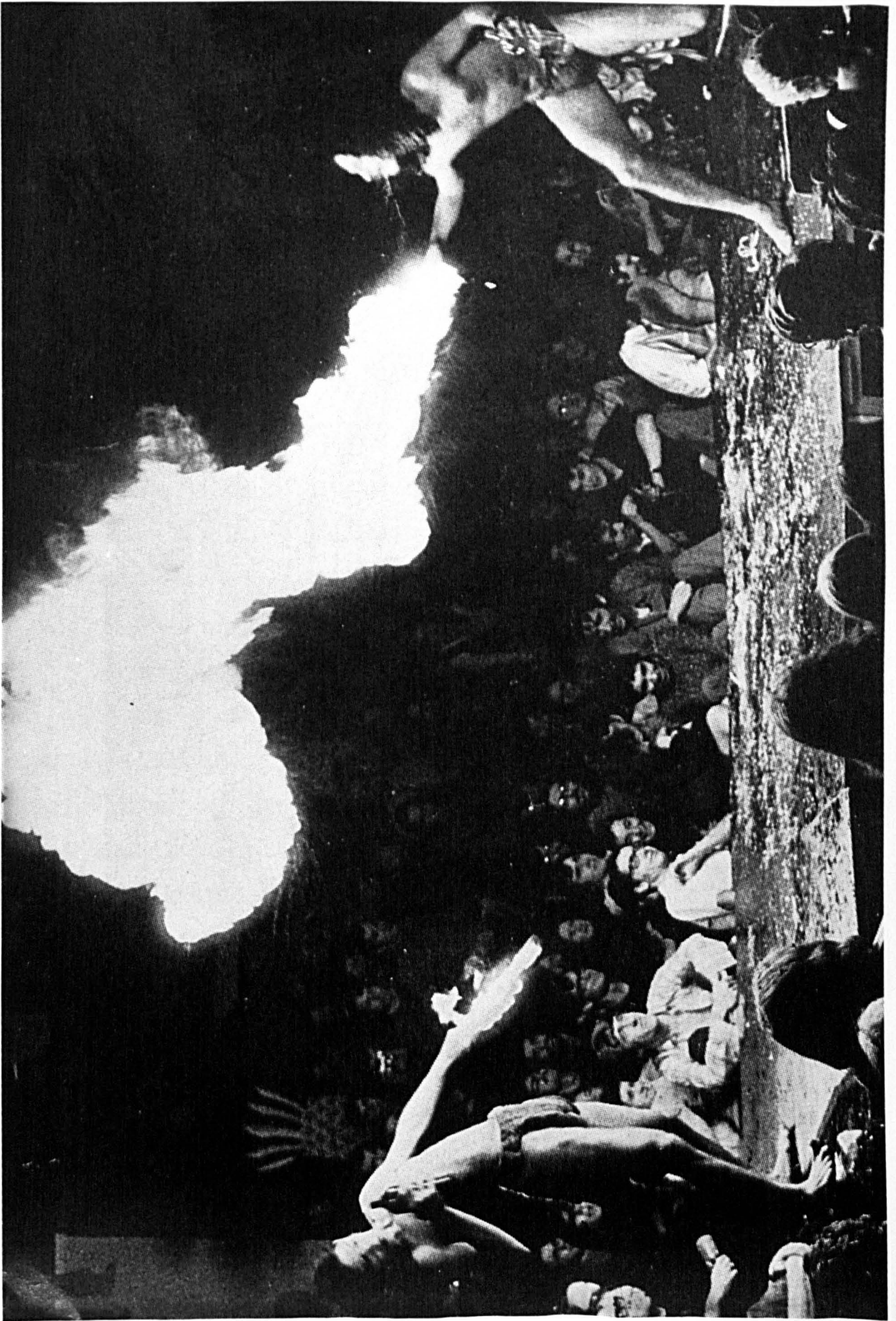
The circus not only lends its name but also provides some of the techniques employed by Savary and his company. The exaggerated make-up is reminiscent of the clown especially the sad eyes of M. Trampolino's make-up. The tall man on stilts that welcomes the audience to Robinson Crusoe, the fire-eaters, the tight-rope walkers, the live animals (chickens, turkeys, rabbits, goat and doves)—all come from the circus.<sup>1</sup> The surprise of the

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<sup>1</sup>See Figure 3, p. 351.

**Fig. 3. Fire-eating in Robinson Crusö.** The popularity of this act is reflected in the faces of the audience huddled around the central acting area.





fireworks and cabbages that explode when turning into a car (Le Grand Magic Circus version of Cinderella's pumpkin) are standard to the clown's repertoire. The carnival is the inspiration for the "dragon vert crachant du feu" which appears in Robinson Crusoë's nightmare (RC:15). The pantomime is the ancestral home of men dressed up as animals: the lion and the zebras in Robinson Crusoë; the hostile gorillas in Zartan; the horses drawing the carriage in Cendrillon; and the lion, gorilla and horse in De Moïse à Mao and Good-bye Mr. Freud. The pantomime also developed the tradition of transvestism through the character of the dame; this is exploited by Jean-Paul Muel in the prespectacles. Such traditional methods as the surprise of the sudden revelation<sup>1</sup> find their place quite naturally beside the circus, carnival and the pantomime:

(Le paysan ôte sa cape et sa fausse barbe.)

LE PAYSAN: Eh bien non, je ne suis pas un pauvre paysan. Je suis Lulu, le chef des mutins du port. (RC:24)

The plots are full of unexpected appearances by characters, for example, Robinson's discovery of his former love Rinalda Rinaldi at Roi Fénéon's orgy.

In the matter of stage business, nothing is kept from the audience. The sound effects are all produced on stage by musical instruments or the human voice (RC:12; 13; and 30); all the tricks are openly explained in diagrams in the programme (RC:13; 15; 21; and 29). The essence of these techniques is summed up by the blackboard on which old Robinson explains his escape from the sharks after the shipwreck: "Un tableau noir truqué comme en voudraient tous les élèves" (RC:14). Le Grand Magic Circus wants to appeal to the non-intellectual side of man. "Reprendre les histoires de notre enfance en sachant bien que nous ne nous adressons pas à des enfants, mais à l'enfant que tout adulte est resté," such is their goal.<sup>2</sup> What must be admitted about Le Grand Magic Circus approach to theatre is that it is blatantly anti-intellectual:

Nous voulons lui [au spectateur] faire retrouver les émerveillements, les enchantements de l'enfance. . . . Le Magic Circus n'intellectualise pas. Il aime au premier degré le cirque, les bandes dessinées, les romans photos, le music-hall, le caf' conc', les refrains populaires, la musique qui fait danser.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sudden revelations are common in Marivaux and are to be found in Ionesco's absurdist drama from Les Chaises to Macbett.

<sup>2</sup>Savary, "Grande fête," p. 144.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 143-44.

Other jeux de scène derive from more modern forms of popular entertainment: the caf' conc' represented by Frou-Frou in Robinson Crusoë and Madame Louise in Zartan, both of whom sing unsophisticated ballads; the soap opera provides the ridiculously overacted scenes of hardship in love; the comédie musicale is evoked by the people at the port; the night-club element is revealed in the strip-tease and the suggestive jokes.

The popularity and attraction of the horror film cannot be overlooked in this attempt to communicate with the masses. Le Grand Magic Circus use the vampire in both Robinson Crusoë and Cendrillon, the gore of cannibalism in the person of Friday, and the violation of innocence by sinister ogres such as the old schoolteacher and Roi Fénelon in Robinson Crusoë. These elements appeal to the "hidden caveman"<sup>1</sup> that Savary claims exists in every man.

The characteristic common to all these techniques is their blatant anti-literary nature. All of them appeal to the senses and basic instincts rather than to the intellect. Those branches of the arts which are supposed to represent the pinnacle of human achievement are included in the spectacle but only as a butt for parody: opera in the Monteverdi style is sung in a duet by Robinson and Rinaldi; Wagnerian music is played during the shipwreck scene from Zartan; modern ballet is parodied during the scene of resurrection after the battle in Robinson Crusoë; and Roi Fénelon's diabolic speech is falsely attributed to Shakespeare. The literary language is reduced to nonsense:

ROBINSON, chante: Jamais les poules ne mangent les oeufs. Les boeufs n'aiment pas le pot-au-feu. Les oies détestent la rilette. Les porcs ne mangent pas d'andouillette. (RC:16)

The rules of spoken language are ridiculed:

VIEUX ROBINSON: Il s'en suit un résultat non moins nétrange, pardon, zétrange. (RC:14)

M. TRAMPOLINO: Il prit alors, ou plutôt, il prit talors. (RC:15)

The literal interpretation of the idiomatic phrase is used (much in the manner of the early absurdist plays)<sup>2</sup> to reveal the nonsense on which language is

<sup>1</sup>Savary to Rogers, "Chaos," p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Similar playing with language is practised by Ionesco:  
"M. MARTIN: J'aime mieux pendre un oeuf que voler un boeuf," Théâtre I (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 51.

sometimes constructed:

M. TRAMPOLINO: J'en tombe debout. (Et M. Trampolino se flanque par terre, de son haut.) (RC:23)

Language is being debased by advertising; meaning is being replaced by sound association. To speak to the people one must at least take note of this change in the use of language. In Robinson Crusoe Robinson and Rinalda have the following exchange:

RINALDA, chante: On m'appelle Rinalda Rinaldi. Je suis la reine de ce port.

ROBINSON, chante: O cielo una putana.

LE PEUPLE: Ooh! (Scandalisé.)

RINALDA, chante: Une putane, non, una courtisana.

LE PEUPLE: Ah! (Soulagé.)

ROBINSON: Eh bien courtisons cette courtisane.

RINALDA, chante: Viens chez moi, je t'offre une tisane. (RC:28)<sup>1</sup>

For Le Grand Magic Circus, language is secondary to music, used not only as a diversion and entertainment but for more deep-rooted effects. For instance, certain thematic strands are underlined by musical accompaniment. In Cendrillon the appearance of the stepmother is met with a harsh discordant cacophony while Cendrillon herself is greeted with soft harmonious flute music. In Zartan the battle between Western culture and the peasant culture of South America is very effectively underscored by the opposition of the simple peasant song and the clamour of the invading culture. In Robinson Crusoe, the colonialist soldiers enter accompanied by "une musique . . . barbare" (RC:15). The music used ranges from free jazz to arias by Gabriel Fauré, Brazilian calypso rhythms, Italian serenades, British martial music, the popular song and the night-club ballad as well as rock music.

The most extensive use of music is to be found in Cendrillon which Savary himself described as a concert.<sup>2</sup> He used the music of Le Grand Magic

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<sup>1</sup> Forced rhyme in a foreign tongue is used by Molière:

"C'est pour cela que nunc convocati estis;  
Et credo quod trovabitis  
Dignam materiam medici  
In scævanti homine que voici,  
Lequel in chosis omnibus  
Dono ad interrogandum  
Et à fond examinandum  
Vostres capacitibus."

Le Malade imaginaire, Œuvres Complètes II (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 1172-73.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Even, "Jérôme Savary et les stéréotypes," Le Monde, 30 March 1973, p. 17.

Circus band, a free jazz band and L'Harmonie de Sainte-Cécile de Lagard as commentaries on the action. Dialogue was almost completely replaced by the lyrics of songs or by action performed to musical accompaniment. In this spectacle, Savary admits to leaving the realm of the theatre proper (the theatre of words): "Ce n'est pas du théâtre, mais du lyrique."<sup>1</sup>

Together with this aural stimulation there goes a direct visual stimulation. Savary has no taste for subtle symbolism; every aspect of a Grand Magic Circus production is direct, positive, and forthright. The scenery is no exception. The back-cloths of Zartan's multiple stages are bold, almost hyper-realistic representations of the mansion of Mr. Lee in its grounds, the jungle with lion and tiger, the hare~~m~~ of the Cheik Sanguinaire, and "la mer houleuse"; the palm trees are in a primitive style that immediately catches the eye. The stage properties often have a similar hyper-realistic style; the giant footprint found by Robinson and the huge vegetables grown by the civilized Friday are all grossly oversized and brightly coloured.

By drawing on the techniques of popular entertainments and by adopting an unsophisticated style, Le Grand Magic Circus try to create a lively enthusiasm during the performance. This animation is central to their shows as it is central to all forms of popular entertainment. They depend heavily on audience reaction; not just the tacit response which influences all actors, but also the boisterous clamourings of the parterre, the unsolicited comment from the back of the audience, the warnings shouted to the unsuspecting victim of some villain. Such interruptions are invited by the style of the show and are accommodated in the loose structure of the tableaux. Through both style and structure Le Grand Magic Circus attempt to encourage the audience to be active in their responses to the action.

The physical relationship with the audience further encourages a more direct rapport between actor and spectator. It also helps the spectator to strike up relationships with his neighbour which is essential for the realization of the fête collective. The dispositif scénique of all spectacles is

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<sup>1</sup>Savary cited by Louis Lanne, Sud-Ouest, 20 April 1973.

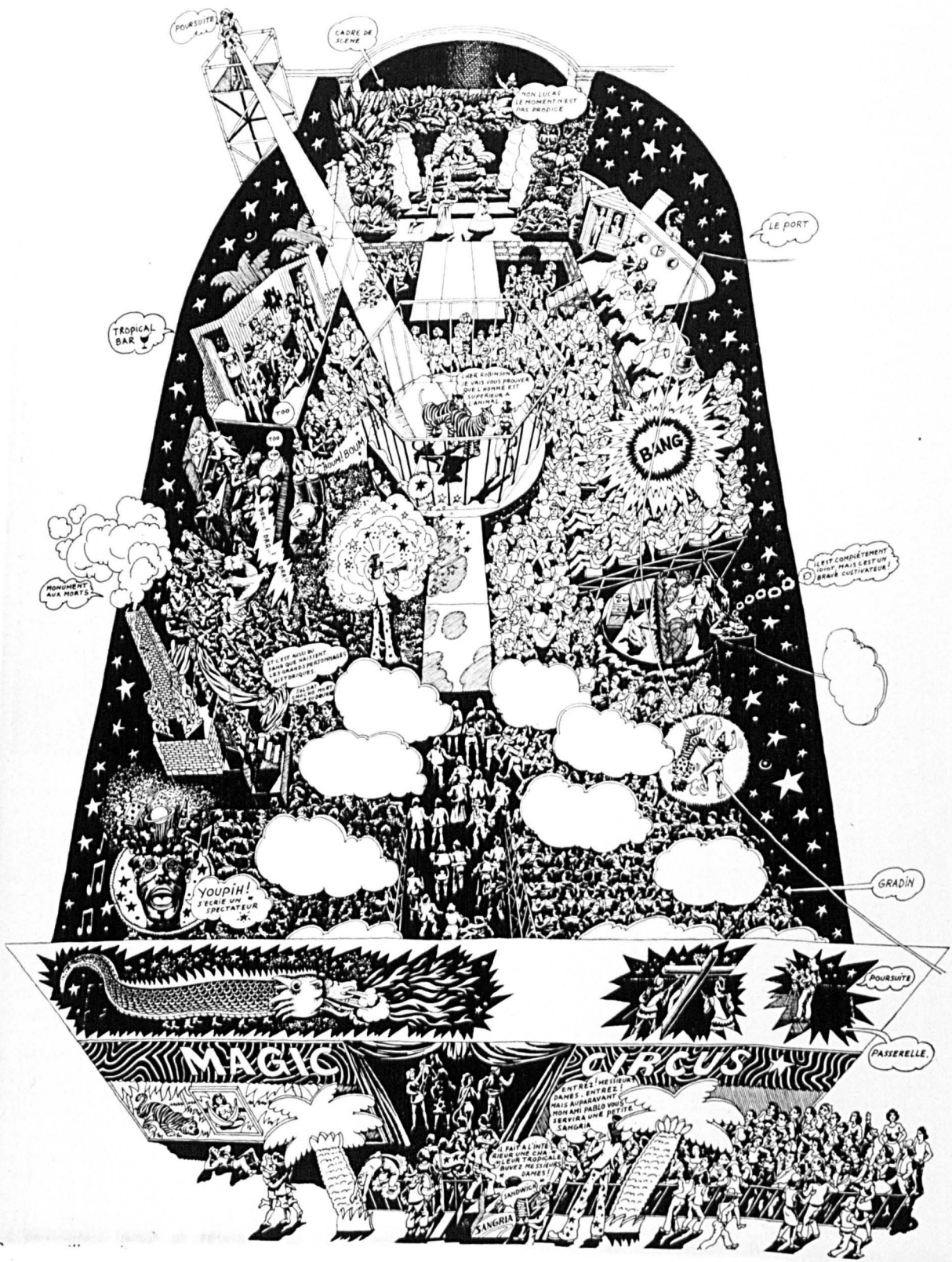
based on multiple playing areas. For Robinson Crusoe there are seven stages: the piste centrale, the Peacock Bar on Banana Beach, the Italianate stage (scene of Roi Fénéon's harem), Crusoe's island, the port, the monument for the war dead, and the balcony which serves for the cornfields, Calvary and Jeanne d'Arc's place of execution.<sup>1</sup> In Zartan there are eight stages, but Cendrillon uses only three delineated stage areas. De Moïse à Mao is more conventional in that the larger part of the action takes place on an Italianate stage connected to a large circular platform producing an area somewhat akin to a stage with a very extended apron. There are two other defined, often used, acting areas, namely a miniature scène à l'italienne high up behind the audience and a bed among the spectators. The fact that the action is spatially distributed among these stages implies a greater mobility not only of the spectacle but also of the spectator who has to make some physical movement in order to follow the action. The arrangement of the stages (Cendrillon is an exception) is a circle or oval around the edges of the audience and physically encompasses the spectators. It alters the traditional theatrical situation where there are two contiguous boxes—one being the acting area and the other, the sitting area—separated by the footlights. Here the audience are included in a single space all of which constitutes both the acting and sitting areas.

This physical inclusion of the spectator throughout the acting area is not left undeveloped and thus is not merely another gimmick nor another superficial example of the quest for audience participation which denies alteration in the roles of audience and actor. In the approach of Le Grand Magic Circus to theatre, neither the acting area nor the actor are sacrosanct elements of the drama. When unwittingly the audience spills onto one of the additional stages, (for example, Robinson's island "plus qu'à moitié conquise par des spectateurs" - RC:14), they are not hurriedly pushed aside but encouraged to play with the actors: "Je demanderai aux gens qui sont autour du port de revêtir un petit chapeau de marin" (RC:23).

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<sup>1</sup>See Figure 4, p. 357.

**Fig. 4. Diagram of dispositif scénique for Robinson Crusoë,  
designed by Michel Lebois of Le Grand Magic Circus.**



POURSUITE

CADRE DE SCENE

NON LUCAS  
LE MOMENT N'EST  
PAS PRODIGE

LE PORT

TROPICAL  
BAR

MAIS VOUS POUVEZ  
QUE L'HERNE A  
L'UNION A

BANG

MONUMENT  
AUX MORTS

EST AHAHAHAHA  
BONBARDIER  
SANS

LETT COMPLETEMENT  
D'UN  
BANK CULTIVATEUR

youpih!  
ECRIE UN  
SPECTATEUR

GRADIN

MAGIC

CIRCUS

POURSUITE

PASSERELLE

ENTREE, ENTREE  
DAMES, ENTREE  
MAIS APPARAVANT  
MON AMI PARDON  
SERVIRA UNE PETITE  
SANGRIA

SANGRIA



The arrangement of the stages denies the single stable perspective of both the Italianate stage and the theatre in the round; angles of perception are changed several times during a production demanding a re-adjustment from the audience and countering the passive acceptance of a single perspective found in most conventional theatre. Movement of the spectator, understood in the changing perspectives, involves a deeper awareness of the other individuals around him; instead of sensing their presence in the darkness while concentrating on a single focal point, the spectator actually perceives his fellows. This awareness is stimulated most in the period of mise en condition and again in those periods where there is dialogue with members of the audience, but is underscored by the very fact that at whichever acting area one looks, one's gaze has to pass through or over another sitting area; for just as the stages are distributed spatially so sitting areas are split into different sections.

Movement is not restricted to the horizontal encompassing the cordon of stages around the audience, but also operates vertically. In Zartan apes appear above the sand dunes, a shadow mime is projected on a screen above the percussion stand, actors climb ropes to the roof of the tent and scale scaffolding during the battle scene. In Robinson Crusoë the lieu scénique used for the cornfields and for Jeanne d'Arc at the stake is above the entrance to the scène à l'italienne; the "soul" of Marie la leucémique flies above the heads of the audience on a trapeze. These changes of position of the action involve an active effort on the part of the audience to follow its movement.

It is worth noting that there are three constant elements in the dispositif scénique for Zartan, Robinson Crusoë and De Moïse à Mao. Firstly, there is always one acting area which is most important and which occupies a central position in the midst of the audience. In Robinson Crusoë and De Moïse à Mao, it is the piste centrale and in Zartan, the central runway. In all three cases it is this area only that is illuminated as the public enter. Although there are no physical barriers to prevent the public walking across it, it is thus distinguishable as an acting area as opposed to a sitting area.

While implying a basic structure of performance, but not rigidly, this central area is a physical symbol of the company's approach to theatre, a structure that allows for improvisation. Secondly, there is always an additional acting area which is styled as a miniature Italianate stage with a proscenium arch. In Robinson Crusoë, the use of this area is particularly revelatory.

Positioned at the back of the piste centrale at the far end of the theatrical space, it is through this arch that the actors issue during M. Trampolino's introduction of the cast. M. Trampolino himself runs from the curtains to dive through the hoop at the very beginning of the spectacle. After the shipwreck, Robinson "swims" out from the arch towards his desert island. In De Moïse à Mao, a representation of Delacroix's La Liberté guidant le peuple is presented on the small, elevated Italianate stage. Mister Marmaduke Moïse calls on Victory to leave her golden frame and enter the action on the central stage. The Italianate stage and its division into auditorium and stage is thus symbolically broken in the course of the spectacle. Thirdly, there is always an acting area that is not apparent to the public when it enters the performance space despite all the others being fully lit, and so an element of real surprise is introduced into the performance. The audience has no sooner accustomed itself to the unusual dispositif scénique ~~than~~ <sup>than</sup> this surprise ingredient is revealed. In Robinson Crusoë, it is the area behind and above the audience used for the cornfields. In Zartan, the dunes are pulled aside to reveal the angry sea of the shipwreck tableau with its exaggerated yellows and blues and the exotic harem of the Cheik Sanguinaire complete with dancing girls and sparkling jewels. In De Moïse à Mao, the surprise is reduced to the revelation of Mao's portrait which is illuminated at the end of the show. Surprise is a mainspring of popular forms of entertainment and of childhood games; this use of the dispositif scénique is part of the same tendency towards popular theatre.

The delineation of separate spaces for audience and actor is anathema to Le Grand Magic Circus. Even those spaces that can be generally designated as sitting areas on a diagram of the dispositif scénique in practice become

involved in the action. Of course, the use of amplified sound, the scanning of lights and the audience's own activity make them an integral part of the action, but more importantly they provide points of access for actors and also undesignated acting areas. Since the principal acting area is to be found in the centre of the audience and since the wings are found in the oval space outside the audience, access generally has to be made through the audience from behind. The physical proximity of actor and spectator is, in this case, an inducement to familiarity and to the creation of a personal relationship with the actor. A particular instance from Zartan illustrates just this point: Louise, alone, is looking for Zartan; suddenly she seeks help from a man in the audience as she enters the acting area; she asks him to protect her from the strangeness of the jungle; from these remarks on the spectacle she begins a conversation with the man and his wife oblivious of the spectacle which passes on to the next tableau. Physical closeness becomes more immediate on those occasions when the actors have to clamber through to the central acting area or conversely escape from it by passing through the audience. The many examples in the productions of Zartan and Robinson Crusoë of this type of physical assault on the audience,<sup>1</sup> and the spirit of fun in which the audience accept these incursions, show to what extent the company have won the public over to the idea of fête or offer the public an opportunity to express the desire for fête.

The sitting areas are also transformed into lieux scéniques proper on occasion. The total effect of such a tableau is derived from its positioning among the audience. In Zartan, Spanish conquistadores invade during the Père-ouvrier's dramatic reconstruction of the life of the Inca chieftains (acted by Zartan and Zouzou). After a period of rioting, the soldiers line up facing the auxiliary stage but separated from it by the rows of spectators. Savary takes charge of the situation, and, as the officer, gives the order for mock adoration of the Inca chieftain. This parody produces amusement. Then comes the order: "Seis pasos por adelante." A moment of consternation is

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<sup>1</sup>The author counted 14 cases in Zartan and 15 in Robinson Crusoë.

ended by the advance of the soldiers over the audience. The whole of the audience gives way to laughter. This situation is developed by Savary ordering the soldiers to reform a line, lift their arms and repeat the show of adoration. Finally he orders another advance. This continues two or three times until the soldiers have reached the stage. The comedy of this scene is derived from the situation of the action being performed among the spectators. The response is good-humoured and a direct link is forged between actor and spectator. The use of the public area is most extensive in Cendrillon. Here the public become the Royal Ball where Cendrillon dances with the Prince. The soldiers of the Guard turn to the audience and invite them to dance. The sitting area becomes an area of action through the interaction of actor and audience.

The use of the audience area as an element in the action culminates in the inclusion of the audience itself in the dramatic action. These tableaux will be referred to as scenes of total environment and they fall into two categories: firstly, those scenes in which the audience remains more or less passive but is subjected to violent, sensual experiences; secondly, those scenes in which sensual stimulation is coupled to an active role in creating the atmosphere of the scene. Characteristic of the first category are the nightmare and shipwreck episodes which are constants of the troupe's productions. In Zartan, the nightmare is Mr. Lee's; he is dreaming of the imminent birth of his child and he sees him snatched from his wife's belly by an ogre. The portrayal of the nightmare is a struggle which ends with the ogre slitting open the wife's dress front and pulling out a chicken in a mass of fluttering. The horror of the scene is communicated by the amplification of strident music all around the tent, by jungle noises produced by actors encircling the audience in the oval wings, and by the scanning of audience and central runway with red light. The horror is conveyed by direct action on the senses rather than by the sight of Mr. Lee's writhing body as he agonizes in his sleep. The nightmare and shipwreck in Robinson Crusoe are expressed by similar techniques of sensual attack.

Of the second category, the best examples are found in Cendrillon and

Zartan. In Cendrillon, this technique is used to illustrate the phrase, "Quelle agitation dans la maison!"<sup>1</sup> during the enactment of the two ugly sisters' preparations for the Royal Ball. The form of this spectacle is such that the cast, for the most part, remain on the orchestra platform. However, for this tableau, the sisters and the stepmother come down to small platforms situated in the middle of the audience. Their descent is accompanied by a cacophonous mixture of sounds produced by the modern jazz quartet and the rapid panning and looping of a ghoulish green light from two spotlights. To these stimuli are added perfume, sprays, canisters of talcum powder and handfuls of straw which are sprinkled, shaken, emptied and thrown by the rest of the cast as it invades the audience area. This type of action invites reciprocal gestures by members of the audience producing an atmosphere of unseemly, garish chaos which corresponds to the hideous attempts made by the sisters to bedeck themselves suitably for the ball. A second example is the battle scene in Zartan. The battle is between Western industrialized culture and the quiet peasant culture of South America. The unsightliness, the mindlessness and the hysteria of war are expressed in vivid sensual terms. The action is conceived as a battle of sounds: harsh shouting and random hootings, bangings, and clashing represent Western culture; a sweet, simple solo by a peasant girl represents the oppressed culture. The Western culture is symbolized by the actors each shouting a quotation from the arts: spread out among the audience, filling the whole theatrical area with sound, Jean-Paul Muel recites a Shakespearean Brutus-style oration; Jacqueline Kaps sings an aria; Savary urges the audience to add their own favourite quotations:

Voilà le moment pour ceux d'entre vous qui avez rêvé de dire un jour un petit texte en public, de réciter un poème devant 950 spectateurs. Le moment est arrivé pour réaliser ce rêve. Parce que Zartan qui se débat dans le jungle sauvage, ne lutte pas pour lui-même, mais il défend la culture occidentale, et il n'y a personne ici ce soir quelles que soient sa race ou sa conviction politique qui ne soit pas fortement empreint de la culture occidentale. . . . Zartan se débat pour vous aussi, aidez-lui, récitez pour qu'il ne soit pas seul à lutter dans le jungle impénétrable.

The audience are encouraged to become part of the force of Western culture.

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<sup>1</sup>This does not appear in the child's picture book used as a text and serves as an example of the liberties the troupe take with texts in general.

This babel is amplified by the explosion of fireworks to represent guns. The atmosphere is made heavy with smoke from coloured flares. The shouting audience is panned by red spotlights. It is this chaos that is juxtaposed contrapuntally with the single voice of the peasant song.

These scenes are closest to the happening-styled performances of Le Labyrinthe in their totally unscripted nature and in their concentration on the evocation of a total environment. However, they do not present themselves to a completely unprepared audience. All the other practices earlier help create the atmosphere in which such scenes can take place effectively. The attempt at total environment is also anticipated by those parts of the spectacle where Savary addresses himself directly to the public: the introduction of the troupe, the long soliloquy on the nature of solitude in Robinson Crusoë, and the lotteries that are held during both Robinson and Zartan: "Voilà le moment pour vous de participer à notre grand concours aux lots; vous avez l'occasion de gagner de quoi faire la fête en rentrant chez vous. Tout le jeu consiste à identifier cette nouvelle danseuse exotique."

These techniques make the audience ready for the final stage of the show, the postspectacle. It is this part of the performance when Le Grand Magic Circus rediscover the contact they evolve with the children during their afternoons of play. Savary has described the evening performances as "moins optimistes. Nous distrayons le public en provoquant sa prise de conscience plus que nous ne le faisons effectivement jouer."<sup>1</sup> The postspectacle is when the audience does begin to "play." Its mechanics are easy to explain: the percussionists strike up a rapid Brazilian rhythm as the final parade of actors is making its exit; the actors begin to dance to the music inviting the audience to join in. The result is a party that continues as long as strength lasts, audience and actors mingling. In La Rochelle after the Cendrillon performances, the band moved out into the street. After a Roundhouse performance, the cast gradually withdrew leaving the audience to make their own music.

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<sup>1</sup>Grand Magic Circus, "Le Public et nous," p. 44.

The whole performance appears to be directed at the generation during the postspectacle of an atmosphere which will encourage creative impulses in the public. These impulses are interpreted by Le Grand Magic Circus as the willingness to express oneself in dance or music. To this end, the emphasis is placed on the relationship between the actor and the spectator; the other elements of the dispositif scénique and the form of the spectacle are used to foster this relationship: "La barrière n'est pas toujours, comme on le croit, dans le texte, ni même dans l'architecture mais dans la relation humaine."<sup>1</sup> It is only through the establishment of a central affinity that any valid form of participation can take place. One critic has a simple definition of this rapport between actor and spectator: "The Magic Circus doesn't hector, bully, or impose its will: it waits for you to make the first move, and doesn't ignore you when you do."<sup>2</sup> Onto this relationship there have to be grafted the multiple associations of the spectators one with another and with the actors. Without these prerequisites one must agree with M. Trampolino: "Vous savez très bien que la participation est un leurre. (Rires.) C'est un problème purement esthétique" (RC:24). All real participation is dependent on the desire of all parties involved to make the experience effective; otherwise the audience becomes mere objects pushed and assaulted by the actors. Le Grand Magic Circus have that desire and have also found it in their audiences:

Partout où nous allons, nous sentons chez les spectateurs le besoin de faire quelque chose ensemble, quelque chose avec nous. La vraie participation, ce n'est pas la création collective bidon, c'est vibrer ensemble, rire ensemble; ce sont mille têtes qui réagissent ensemble.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to realize the progress made in this respect from the early panic productions of Le Labyrinthe and Oratorio macabre where the audience is immediately confronted by violent sensual attack. Through the process of the tripartite spectacle, the audience is cajoled into a frame of mind: what could have been called anti-theatre because of its overt antagonism

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<sup>1</sup>Savary to Webb, Interview, Théâtre Jean Vilar (Suresnes), 14 March 1973.

<sup>2</sup>Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 5 January 1973, pp. 28-29.

<sup>3</sup>Savary cited by Even, "Les Stéréotypes," p. 17.

of the audience has developed an attentive attitude to its spectators. A precise example from the mise en condition stage of the spectacles will illustrate this transformation. For Le Labyrinthe in Paris, the mise en condition consisted of "trois feuillets de papier pelure chiffonnés dans une boîte d'allumettes"<sup>1</sup> which was the programme. For Oratorio macabre: "Les spectateurs étaient invités, à l'entrée, à tatouer eux-mêmes le dos de l'un ou l'autre des acteurs."<sup>2</sup> These two cases are surely aimed at scandalizing the bourgeois theatre-going public. The present attitude is to encourage all spectators (which includes the bourgeoisie) to communicate with each other.

If successful, the result of the harmonious relationship between spectator and actor is a situation where neither actor nor spectator have a role to play: "Qu'il n'y ait plus de spectateurs passifs, sans que personne ne devienne acteur."<sup>3</sup> At La Rochelle, the creation of Cendrillon was a new departure in the pursuit of this ideal. The fundamental innovation was to use the local populace (about one hundred of them) in the production of a concert-spectacle based on the Cinderella story. The period of preparation was limited to three afternoon ateliers théâtraux in which the hundred local people were split into groups under the direction of an actor. Each group worked on a section of the spectacle. The role of the members of Le Grand Magic Circus was to coordinate, "lier l'action."<sup>4</sup> The performances given had many rough edges but the anti-professional approach of the troupe was vindicated. The public as spectators could obviously take the lead from the public as actors and together create a living experience. An answer to the query "Comment concevoir qu'un individu qui paye puisse jouer innocemment avec celui qui est payé?"<sup>5</sup> was outlined through the use of the inhabitants of the

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<sup>1</sup>Claude Baignarès, Le Figaro, 14 January 1967. By the time of the London performance, the programme had been altered to a sheet two feet long bearing "no legend save the word PANIQUE, placed inconspicuously in minute capitals in the top left-hand corner," Hilary Spurling, The Spectator, 14 June 1968, p. 826.

<sup>2</sup>Jacques Joubert, Le Figaro littéraire, 9 October 1967.

<sup>3</sup>Savary cited by Even, "Les Stéréotypes," p. 17. <sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Grand Magic Circus, "Le Public et nous," p. 44.



town in the spectacle. Hence, the members of the audience were able to react naturally towards these members of the cast from the outset.

The success of *Le Grand Magic Circus* lies in establishing communication on a simple level that is directed at the senses rather than the intellect: "Sans chercher à le faire 'participer' vraiment, . . . il [*Le Grand Magic Circus*] l'enveloppe (par le jeu au milieu du public, le contact charnel, le regard, la musique et le rythme) et l'entraîne doucement, presque malgré lui, vers un état de création collective."<sup>1</sup> This approach to theatre differs decidedly from the conventional as Colette Godard implies: "La seule et unique condition était de laisser au vestiaire, toute référence théâtrale."<sup>2</sup> Most people who attend must do so for "un courant mystérieux s'enroule autour des interprètes et des spectateurs."<sup>3</sup> Many critics trace the appeal of *Le Grand Magic Circus* to the "désinvolture," the "je-m'en-fichisme" of their spectacles, "théâtre de dérision pure."<sup>4</sup> A basic problem arising from a premise of entertainment and sensual communication is whether the spectacle will have any lasting positive effect on the public. After all, Savary has referred to the prise de conscience by the public, and a prise de conscience is dependent on some kind of identification with a character or an underlying theme. In Robinson Crusoë, the theme of solitude is indeed there; in Zartan, the evil of colonialism is expressed; and in Cendrillon, the plight of the exploited revealed. But all these themes are swamped in the light-hearted approach. In Robinson Crusoë, the deeper significance of the spectacle, the encroachment on the human liberty to express oneself by the spectre of mass industrialization and urban redevelopment, is so subtly expressed as to be completely overlooked. At Aubervilliers, Savary added a new commentary to draw attention to this subtle point: "Il faut la voir au moins trois fois pour la

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<sup>1</sup>Jérôme Savary, "Robinson: la solitude," L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 496 (1 June 1972), p. 7

<sup>2</sup>Colette Godard, Le Monde, 3 March 1971, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>P. Mazars, Le Figaro, 17 November 1971.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.; Y. Navarre, Pariscopes, 1 March 1972; Guy Dumur, Le Nouvel Observateur, 8 March 1971, p. 55; and Pierre Marcabru, France-Soir, 19 Feb. 1972.

comprendre."<sup>1</sup> The scene is a visual image: a monument for the war dead rotates, the face with the commemorative plaque is replaced by a representation of a factory chimney belching smoke. The fruits of the horrors of war are the horrors of a society that is poisoning itself and stifling mankind. Characteristically, this theme is expressed in visual terms.

The question of validity after the performance re-introduces the concept of the "life-show." Instead of themes and ideas being carried out of the theatre in conceptual terms in the minds of the spectators, the aim is that the desire for self-expression (which is synonymous with freedom for Le Grand Magic Circus) will be present in the audience as sensual impulses and that these impulses will be transformed into positive action. After the postspectacle, at the end of certain performances of Robinson Crusoë, Savary urged the audience: "Retournez chez vous et allez faire votre cirque vous-mêmes."<sup>2</sup> Leaflets for the children's entertainments in the afternoons carry the heading: "Pour que les enfants apprennent à faire le cirque eux-mêmes." The company are convinced that their theatre can have an application and an effectiveness beyond the place of performance and that it can change the lot of the ordinary man. The symbol of this belief is "notre camion, vous le connaissez, vous l'avez vu stationné au-dehors, à côté du théâtre. . . . Ce qui montre que quelquefois le théâtre a un prolongement dans la rue."<sup>3</sup>

By turning the spectacle into a living experience, Le Grand Magic Circus hope to obliterate the divorce that exists between life and art, the divorce which allows the event in the theatre to be considered as unreal and having no bearing on life. M. Trampolino illustrates this aspect of theatre when he tells the sad story of the white rabbit:

M. TRAMPOLINO: Vous me croyez, bien sûr. . . . Eh bien vous avez tort. Je l'ai acheté la semaine dernière à la Samaritaine. . . . Et vous viendrez nous dire que le théâtre c'est la vie! . . . Mais si le

<sup>1</sup>This was added to the text (pp. 28-29) on 28 April 1973.

<sup>2</sup>This occurred at the Roundhouse and at Aubervilliers, although not in the printed text of the Cité Universitaire production.

<sup>3</sup>Savary during an Aubervilliers performance of Robinson Crusoë, 27 April 1973.

théâtre c'était la vie vous seriez tous en train de lui courir derrière. (RC:35; and 37)

The constant commentaries of Savary and the open display of the "grosses ficelles" of the production are designed to destroy any form of dramatic illusion and to keep the audience aware of the spectacle in creation, the immediacy of the experience.

It is true that by this insistence on the here and now of the performance and the social situation of the audience, ~~that~~ this type of production denies the religious (in spiritual terms) sense of the theatre in order to concentrate on a more literal level of religious experience, a being together. In this respect it cannot be popular in the same way as Greek theatre and the medieval mystery-plays were; it cannot present a re-affirmation of a body of common beliefs. But popular it remains in the manner of the commedia dell'arte, as an entertainment.

Rediscovery of the roots of the theatre is what Savary claims. In the process, Le Grand Magic Circus deny the attributes of conventional theatre: the text has been displaced as the point of departure and central element by a canevas; the theatre building has been transformed into a mobile unit; the actor has been demystified; plot and character construction have been replaced by proliferation. Savary has doubted the appellation theatre as far as it concerns his spectacles:

Et qu'on nous laisse, nous, donner nos fêtes comme nous l'entendons, où nous l'entendons, sans chercher à leur donner un nom. Il sera bien temps de savoir, un jour, si c'est ou non, du théâtre et ce qu'est au juste le théâtre.<sup>1</sup>

Yet it is theatre: the central element is the actor on whom the effectiveness of the spectacle solely depends. If one posits that the specificity of the theatre is the experience of the immediate physical presence of an actor and a spectator, then Le Grand Magic Circus not only respects this principle, but builds its performances squarely on it.

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<sup>1</sup>Savary, "Nos fêtes," p. 86.

(iii) A Collective Approach to Historical Theatre: Le Théâtre du Soleil

The history of Le Théâtre du Soleil is really the history of Ariane Mnouchkine, the director and main inspiration of the group. Her first organized theatrical experiences were had under the auspices of L'Association Théâtrale des Etudiants de France when she designed the costumes for a 1959 student production of L'orca's Noces de Sang. By March 1960 she had become a leading figure in the Association since it was she who succeeded in attracting Jean-Paul Sartre to the Sorbonne to deliver a lecture entitled "Théâtre épique et théâtre dramatique."<sup>1</sup> In the theatre the following year Mnouchkine led a cast of young student actors in a production of Henri Bauchau's Gengis Khan which was performed three times at the Arènes de Lutèce. It is really from this production that an embryonic form of Le Théâtre du Soleil dates; for, of the nine students that took part, all nine were still together at the time of the performances of Le Songe d'une nuit d'été early in 1968 at the Cirque de Montmartre. Indeed, it would appear that all but one, Jean-Pierre Tailhade, collaborated on the group's most famous productions, 1789 and 1793, between 1970 and 1972. The survival of this nucleus of actors is the more surprising in that Le Théâtre du Soleil did not spring directly from the Gengis Khan production. For example, Mnouchkine herself spent three years travelling the world, working on films in Italy as well as studying the oriental theatre in the Far East. During the same period she also took part in student productions at Oxford University (and was even assistant stage-manager of the student theatre).<sup>2</sup> It was only in May 1964, after an earlier abortive attempt to form a travelling company on the lines of Copeau's Les Copiaux, that Le Théâtre du Soleil was established.

The name the company adopted has been explained by Mnouchkine and Jean-Claude Penchenat (probably the ~~most~~ central figure in the company next

<sup>1</sup> Sartre, Un théâtre de situations, pp. 104-51.

<sup>2</sup> For details of Mnouchkine's biography, see: Michèle Manceaux, "La Militante du théâtre," Le Nouvel Observateur, no. 320 (28 December 1970), p. 35; and Claude Morand, "Pour Ariane à 28 ans, une place au Soleil," Arts-Loisirs, no. 82 (19 April 1967), p. 31.

to Mnouchkine herself), as a reaction to the depersonalized, abbreviated titles such as T.N.P., T.O.P., and T.E.P. that have been adopted by some of the government-subsidized theatres. Their aversion for these formula-style names can be interpreted as a protest against the dull uniformity that the production system of capitalism imposes on the servants of that system. This interpretation seems valid in the light of the political direction of the company, and of the recurrent theme in its work of man's instinctual power over and above his social position.

The name itself derives from the film directors, Max Ophuls, George Cukor, and Jean Renoir whom Mnouchkine classifies as "les cinéastes de la lumière."<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to see a close thematic or stylistic parallel between their work and that of Le Théâtre du Soleil: Max Ophuls specialized in women in love set against luxurious surroundings; George Cukor is probably best known for his film My Fair Lady which appeared in 1964 at the time of the formation of the company; Jean Renoir in La Règle du jeu or La Grande Illusion showed a related interest in formality and external forms and a predilection for the stylized mannerisms of the French eighteenth-century comedy of Beaumarchais and Marivaux. Unlike the other two, however, Renoir's work does treat a certain social problem, that of the stranger or outsider and how he wishes to belong to a milieu which is not his as, for example, in his version of Gorki's Les Bas Fonds. This theme can be seen in a modified form in the social preoccupations of Le Théâtre du Soleil and in their desire to bring the masses, or the non-public, into the theatre and into an advantageous position in society. All three directors have in common, nevertheless, a clarity and precision in their imagery and, perhaps after all, it was this aspect of their work that prompted Mnouchkine and Penchenat to celebrate them in the name of their own theatrical company.

The formation of the company led to a full-scale production of Gorki's Les Petits Bourgeois (Paris, Théâtre Mouffetard, November 1964). Between 1964

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<sup>1</sup>Ariane Mnouchkine and Jean-Claude Penchenat, "L'Aventure du Théâtre du Soleil," Preuves, no. 7 (3<sup>e</sup> trim. 1971), p. 119.

and 1975, the company have produced seven full-length spectacles: Gautier's Le Capitaine Fracasse, Wesker's La Cuisine, Shakespeare's Le Songe d'une nuit d'été; and their own creations, Les Clowns, 1789: La Révolution doit s'arrêter à la perfection du bonheur, 1793: La Cité révolutionnaire est de ce monde, and L'Age d'or.<sup>1</sup> In forming their company, the participants wished to go beyond a purely theatrical troupe—that is, one that contents itself with the simple performance of dramatic works—and realize a collective for which each member felt responsible and to which he could make a creative contribution. The common denominator on which this collective was based was the desire to perform theatrical pieces. In the programme notes to Le Capitaine Fracasse, the genesis of the company is described:

Dix comédiens et techniciens de formations diverses découvrent en travaillant ensemble que pour eux faire du théâtre est synonyme d'oeuvre collective et de passion commune et qu'une seule solution est envisageable: fonder une compagnie. C'est ce qui est fait en le nom de "Théâtre du Soleil."<sup>2</sup>

The point of departure of Le Théâtre du Soleil is based on equality, harmony, and unity. For example, the star system is no longer observed; the whole company is listed in alphabetical order or in order of entry on stage without the usual specialist headings which, in advertisements, follow the formula: The X theatre presents Y, a play by Z, directed by A and starring B and C. The usual advertisement in the case of Le Théâtre du Soleil simply reads: "1789, un spectacle du Théâtre du Soleil." (A similar convention is also used by the Comédie Française; the actors are listed in alphabetical order obviating any hierarchy.) They have striven to avoid the formal split of administrators and performing actors. All have a responsibility in every aspect of the group's activity and a total involvement in the life of the group. Perhaps the most striking instance of this commitment was the monu-

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<sup>1</sup> Le Capitaine Fracasse, Paris, Théâtre Récamier, January 1966; La Cuisine, Paris, Cirque de Montmartre, April 1967; Le Songe d'une nuit d'été, Paris, Cirque de Montmartre, February 1968; Les Clowns, Aubervilliers, Théâtre de la Commune, April 1969; 1789, Milan, Palais des Sports, November 1970; 1793, Vincennes, La Cartoucherie, December 1970; 1793, Vincennes, La Cartoucherie, May 1972; and L'Age d'or, Vincennes, La Cartoucherie, March 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Paris, Théâtre Récamier, 22 January 1966.

mental labour of preparing the disused arms factory, ~~La~~ Cartoucherie, at Vincennes for the performances of 1789. In the period September to December 1970, the company rendered the huge shell of the building comfortable and warm enough for a Parisian audience in mid-winter. Each member of the group had to perform all manner of tasks in order to ensure the successful outcome of the production and to prolong the activity of the company. It is the qualities demanded by team-work that are paramount to the group and it is these and not purely acting ability that are examined when a prospective recruit makes his first approaches to the company: "La communauté est grande ouverte. Si quelqu'un vient se présenter, je lui demande d'être là le lendemain vers sept heures, pour décharger les décors ou quelque chose de ce genre. Très vite, on voit ceux qui se découragent."<sup>1</sup>

Although the principles of the company demand a shared responsibility and an equality in the distribution of duties, they do not preclude the specialization of certain individuals to resolve particular technical problems, nor do they restrict the creativity of the individual within the framework posited by the group. The company is aware of the distinction to be made between egalitarianism and total conformity:

Nous sommes égaux mais pas similaires. Il ne faut pas être démagogique et penser que bientôt les comédiens feront les décors et les éclairages. Ce n'est pas vrai. Il y a des moments où les comédiens et les techniciens ont été entièrement rassemblés, lorsque nous avons aménagé la Cartoucherie, mais en période de création d'un spectacle, lorsqu'on répète de 8 à 10 heures par jour, le partage des tâches est nécessaire.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently one of the company, Guy-Claude François, began as early as March 1971 to study and acquire the technical and electrical expertise that would later be essential to achieve the daylight and sun effects required for the staging of 1793. Following his lead four other members concentrated on this side of the production.<sup>3</sup>

In effect a working community has been established. This does not

<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine to Manceaux, "Militante," p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>Mnouchkine cited by Françoise Kourilsky, "L'Entreprise Théâtre du Soleil," Travail théâtral, no. 8 (July-September 1972), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Théâtre du Soleil, 1793: La Cité révolutionnaire est de ce monde, Paris: Stock, 1972), p. 160.

mean, however, that Le Théâtre du Soleil are the French equivalent to the American Living Theater. The latter existed as an anarchist commune, which was to be an embryonic form of the post-revolutionary alternative society.<sup>1</sup> Le Théâtre du Soleil has chosen to work inside the existing social structure and to use its theatrical expertise with the aim of reforming society. Their examination of the problems of social living begins with their own group situation. The group deems it necessary to scrutinize their own internal organization and to evaluate its possible applications for society at large as they develop their theatrical experiments. Their work poses not only technical problems, but also stimulates reflection on the structure and nature of the group, the micro-society:

Au cours de l'élaboration de 1793 des questions fondamentales ont été posées sur le problème de l'appartenance au groupe, sur la raison de cette appartenance. On peut de moins en moins être là comme un acteur en représentation, et ne pas s'engager à la fois dans le sens du spectacle et dans le sens de la participation au groupe.<sup>2</sup>

Inside their own company, the actors try to resolve problems such as that of eradicating the spectre of repressive authority which threatens the structure of society: "Le plus dur dans une communauté, c'est de supprimer l'autorité. Nous avons progressé. Le succès ou l'échec de la troupe est devenu le succès ou l'échec de chacun."<sup>3</sup>

The structure and composition of the collective do not remain stable and immutable. The constant self-examination and mutual questioning render it ever-changing. This state is desired by the members of the group because, like the members of Le Grand Magic Circus, they are very aware of the danger of becoming institutionalized. In the eyes of Le Théâtre du Soleil this is interpreted as becoming a theatre that is divorced from the social needs of the people, for any stable structure is incompatible with the flow of events. This threat was made clear to them at the time of the attempted overthrow of the Gaullist government in May 1968; the revolt could be attributed, in part, to

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<sup>1</sup> See Pierre Biner, Le Living Théâtre, 2nd ed. (Lausanne: La Cité, 1969) and Lebel, Entretiens avec le Living Théâtre.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Claude Penchenat cited by Kourilsky, "Entreprise," p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Mnouchkine to Manceaux, "Militante," p. 35.



the breakdown of communication between the institutions of the state and the people: "Nous avons pu délimiter les dangers de l'institutionnalisation, nous nous sommes rendus compte que nous devons être toujours disponibles, prêts à changer de structures face aux événements."<sup>1</sup> An example of the company's willingness to involve itself in the problems of the oppressed outside the theatre was its collaboration with the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons on a brief, documentary play, La Justice telle qu'on la rend.<sup>2</sup> This short dramatic piece deals with the apparent victimization of six prisoners after a revolt of the inmates of the Prison Charles III; it reproduces the scene of the audience correctionnelle, basing the dialogue on the court transcripts and on direct observation for the physical portrayal of the leading figures. In the disturbances of May 1968, the company performed La Cuisine for the workers in strike-bound factories.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in 1973 the actors became the organizers, coordinators, and leaders of an anti-censorship demonstration through the streets of Paris protesting against the policies of the Ministre des Affaires Culturelles, Maurice Druon.<sup>4</sup>

The legal standing of the company as a workers' cooperative resulted in the same egalitarian principles being applied to the material position of each member within the group. Between January 1969 and July 1975, salaries rose by annual increments from 1000 francs a month to 1750 francs a month. However, the precarious financial position of the company meant that in the summer of 1974, all members of the company agreed to draw no salary in order to pool their resources for the creation of L'Age d'or. The company in fact had only been in a position to pay salaries to all its forty-five members after the success of 1789. Indeed, in 1964 there had been no full-time members for the creation of Les Petits Bourgeois, and only after the successful production

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<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 121.

<sup>2</sup>Théâtre du Soleil, La Justice telle qu'on la rend, Esprit, October 1972, pp. 524-55.

<sup>3</sup>Sylvain Zegel, Les Idées de mai (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 230.

<sup>4</sup>The demonstration took place 13 May 1973. Political and artistic reactions to the minister's speech are reported in Le Monde, 5, 11, 15, 20, 23 and 25 May 1973.

of La Cuisine in 1967 could it afford six salaries.<sup>1</sup>

The result in performance of this egalitarian system of organization is that the spectator is struck by the enthusiasm of each actor at the same time as the cohesion of the group. Françoise Kourilsky's assessment of the success of the company's production of La Cuisine aptly translates this impression: "La réussite ici est celle d'un ensemble formé par des méthodes de travail collectif, et non celle d'individus occasionnellement réunis. La moindre intonation sonne juste, le moindre geste est 'vrai.'"<sup>2</sup> Jean-Jacques Olivier echoes Mnouchkine's own words describing Le Théâtre du Soleil's production technique when he stated that the company represents "un changement total de mentalité."<sup>3</sup>

Although praised by certain critics for its unconventional, if not revolutionary, approach to theatrical organization, the company itself believes that it is this aspect, and neither the form nor content of its spectacles, that caused its strained relationship with the central government; for its organization and structure reveal an alternative method to the exploited/exploiter, slave/master relationships that obtain in the present capitalist system: "La façon dont la troupe fonctionne, dont elle produit ses spectacles, ce simple fait que nous ne nous emboîtons pas dans un cadre pré-existant, cela les désarçonne, les inquiète."<sup>4</sup>

The Théâtre du Soleil was granted its first state subsidy in 1971 by the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles. In that year it received a total of 300,000 francs. In the same year the smallest decentralized company, Le Théâtre des Pays de la Loire, was accorded 400,000 francs and the Théâtre

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<sup>1</sup>For details see: Emile Copfermann, "Où est la différence?" Travail théâtral, no. 2 (January-March 1971), p. 14; Kourilsky, "Entreprise," pp. 19-20; and Jean-Jacques Olivier, "Si vous n'allez pas à la Cartoucherie de Vincennes," Le Figaro, 28 April 1973, p. 19. A communiqué from the company confusing the issue announces "un salaire égal de 1500 francs." See Louis Dandrel, "La Pauvreté subventionnée du Théâtre du Soleil," Le Monde, 3 April 1973, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Françoise Kourilsky, Le Nouvel Observateur, 19 April 1967, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Olivier, "Si vous n'allez pas," p. 19.

<sup>4</sup>Mnouchkine to Emile Copfermann, "Entretien avec Ariane Mnouchkine," Travail théâtral, no. 2 (January-March 1971), p. 9.

National de Strasbourg received a staggering 3,300,000 francs. In the years 1971-1975, the company's grant increased gradually from 300,000 to 1,000,000 francs. These amounts are not over-generous if one considers the success of its productions: in 1967 the production of La Cuisine won the Prix des Associations des Spectateurs; even before opening at Vincennes, 1789 had played to 20,000 spectators at the Palais des Sports in Milan; since then, 1789 has attracted some 250,000 people and 1793 some 90,000 out into the Bois de Vincennes. The popularity of the company can be assessed by the fact that some five thousand people bought tickets in advance, often at five or ten times the face value, to finance the production L'Age d'or. At a press conference in April 1973, Mnouchkine pointed out that each Cartoucherie spectator was subsidized to the value of 1.70 francs whereas each spectator at the Maison de la Culture at Grenoble represented 3.75 francs of national subsidy. She argued that it was not that her company should receive more at the expense of other companies but that the allotment of subsidies should be more equal and that the proportion of the national budget assigned to cultural affairs should be increased to accommodate this redistribution.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that a company which opposes the government of the day should receive financial support however meagre from the central authority may appear paradoxical. Indeed, M. Druon's statements on accepting the office of Ministre des Affaires Culturelles made it the more surprising that the Théâtre du Soleil received a grant for 1974.<sup>2</sup> Probably more surprising still is that this same company should choose to be financially dependent on the government at all. The Théâtre du Soleil is aware of the tenuous situation in which it finds itself, but affirms that it does not in any way compromise its principles because of the subsidy it receives: "Nous savons que nous participons à un système contre lequel nous luttons. L'essentiel est de connaître précisément notre marge de liberté, de la maintenir, de la développer autant que possible."<sup>3</sup> It is adamant that the money is accepted to aid the creation of spectacles

<sup>1</sup> See Dandrel, "Pauvreté," p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> See Le Monde, 4 May 1973.

<sup>3</sup> Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 127.

that have been conceived solely in the light of what the company wants to communicate to the public, and that this process is in no way modified in order to court the favour of the ministry. The company retains its independence and freedom inside its place of work.

This place of work is the Cartoucherie at Vincennes which was rented to them in the first instance on a lease of three years commencing September 1970. Before acquiring this centre for its activities, the company existed in a piecemeal fashion, either touring the suburbs of Paris or having infrequent and short runs at conventional theatres such as Théâtre Récamier or Théâtre Mouffetard. A first taste of stable working conditions was had at the Théâtre de la Commune (Aubervilliers) thanks to Gabriel Garran who co-produced Les Clowns, performed in April 1969. Despite these experiences inside the traditional theatrical framework, this type of theatre was not what the company were seeking. The alternative organizational structure of the company demanded an alternative instrument for its productions: "Nous ne pouvons nous installer dans un théâtre. . . . Ils [les hommes du théâtre] ont accepté d'être prisonniers de leur lieu. . . . Moi je ne l'accepte pas."<sup>1</sup> This statement was made by Mnouchkine when the company had just secured the Cartoucherie, but it reflects the deep-rooted aversion for the structured architecture of the theatre. In its formative years the company had planned "une salle protéiforme et malléable, dans un bâtiment en dur au coeur de la ville."<sup>2</sup> In April 1969, after the success of Les Clowns, the company entered into preliminary negotiations concerning the leasing of one of the vacated warehouses of the disused market, Les Halles; this venue would have offered a large empty space within which the company would have been free to create their own lieu théâtral. The desire to construct their own venue and to escape from a fixed structure underlay the company's search for ideal performance conditions.

Obviously a company has to perform where it can, but on those occasions

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<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine to Copfermann, "Entretien," p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Ariane Mnouchkine, "Le Théâtre du Soleil," L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui no. 152 (October–November 1970), p. 43.

when it had a choice, the Théâtre du Soleil opted for non-theatrical venues. For instance, for the productions Le Songe d'une nuit d'été and La Cuisine, the company leased the Cirque de Montmartre. This building was associated more with forms of popular entertainment like the circus than with the conventional ritual of Parisian theatre going. Structurally it presented a circular arena in which the audience dominated a central area, a far cry from the tiered structure of the conventional theatre building. Nevertheless, the company still found it an impossible method of existence. The procedure of having to lease a theatre was a crippling financial burden; despite very successful seasons with both productions the company found itself in grave economic difficulties. The financial structure of the theatrical industry was, and remains, a barrier to the activities of new young companies despite government aid.

An alternative to bankruptcy was to design a travelling production. As early as 1964, the company had taken Les Petits Bourgeois on a twenty-five performance tour of the Parisian suburbs after its run at Théâtre Mouffetard. For a year between November 1964 and November 1965, Le Théâtre du Soleil played at Ivry, Pantin, Noisy-le-sec, Courbevoie, Vincennes, Levallois-Perret, Bourges, and in 1967 they revived the production at Sartrouville. The attraction of an itinerant theatre was not purely economic. It was a method by which the company could discover a public outside the fashionable areas of the capital. This principle, inspired by Vilar, was central to activity by the company before 1971:

Réclamer pour le théâtre un lieu non prévu à cet usage, c'est bouleverser le tracé convenu de la ville, c'est aussi ne pas entrer dans un cadre précis, d'où méfiance. Cette réflexion . . . nous conduit à sortir du théâtre comme institution architecturale, pour aller au plus près d'un public virtuel, qui subit des contraintes socio-culturelles considérables.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently the production of Les Clowns, although created inside the Théâtre de la Commune, was organized around a structure that was independent of the architectural envelope of the theatre, namely a baraque foraine. In this way the production was able to travel to the 1969 Festival d'Avignon and also tour

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

the surrounding working-class districts to entertain the non-theatre-going public.

After such a period of nomadic and uncertain activity, the offer of the Cartoucherie at a rent of 500 francs monthly was some comfort; but, the company were very aware of the dangers of settling in one location: "Nous ne voulons pas tomber dans la production, régulière et normalisée, qui dévaloriserait notre travail."<sup>1</sup> The Cartoucherie challenged the company's principles of seeking out the non-public and of fighting against alienating institutionalization. It represents a partial betrayal of these principles; for the contention had always been that the theatre building should be avoided in favour of public places because they alone retain the vestiges of "une activité sociale intense" and the possibility of "transformer la collectivité en communauté" which the company feels is the function of the theatre in contemporary society especially as "les lieux d'échange et de rencontre tendent à se raréfier."<sup>2</sup> Clearly the deserted army installation in a remote area of the Bois de Vincennes does not satisfy this need. However, it must be added in the company's defense that the alternative was dissolution. Furthermore, inside the Cartoucherie, the company strove to create a theatrical space that did away with a rigid internal design and that encouraged a communal theatre by avoiding the segregation of the audience into socio-financial groupings. The company democratize the theatrical performance by having one-price tickets, by denying any real privileged position in spectacles that revolve around the audience, and by extending a free bus service from the nearest Métro station to the place of performance. They try and make it possible for mothers to attend by offering a child-minding service for weekend performances.

The preoccupation with architectural considerations has been paralleled by an examination of the traditional production process in the theatre particularly in its effect on the composition of the theatrical audience. For example, it found that the use of written texts of established playwrights

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<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine to Copfermann, "Entretien," p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Mnouchkine, "Théâtre du Soleil," p. 43.

(Gorki, Shakespeare, Wesker, and even Brecht whose Baal they abandoned in rehearsal) did not correspond to the desire to remain close to the preoccupations of the society at large and particularly of the working classes. At the time of the creation of 1789 this realization became concrete: "Nous savions que nous devions aller plus loin, c'est-à-dire ne plus monter pour l'instant de pièce écrite. . . . Mais nous exprimer collectivement en tant que groupe dialoguant avec le public par la médiation du théâtre de la manière la plus directe, la plus étroite."<sup>1</sup>

In its fear of institutionalization, its aversion for the theatrical building, and its abandonment of the written text, the company attempt to realize a new form of theatre, to attract a new audience while remaining associated to the mainstream of theatrical activity through their dependence on the government. This position is close to those forward looking companies in the decentralized system such as Planchon's Théâtre National Populaire at Villeurbanne.

Jérôme Savary and Le Grand Magic Circus have resolved the question of attracting a new audience by travel, by visiting as many local communities as possible. For Mnouchkine such activity is a "nomadisme comme fin en soi"<sup>2</sup> which fails to produce the desired results. Her ideal would be to give a performance in a town followed by the cultivation of interest in the surrounding area and finally to create a cultural activity in the town using the local people. This type of programme could well have resulted from the company's experience while rehearsing Les Clowns in Salines de Chaux d'Arc-et-Senans during the summer of 1968. Here the local populace became so interested in the company's work that it asked the company to perform for them. The resulting improvisations on the theme of the clown marked the first steps in the creation of the spectacle proper.

There is an obvious compromise implied in the choice of this manner of activity. To be able to spend time creating the basis for local cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> Mnouchkine, "Théâtre du Soleil," p. 43.

activity, one must reduce the number of venues visited and, consequently, the size of the new audience. There has been vacillation in the ideas of Le Théâtre du Soleil between nomadism and intensive activity in a single area. In the 1967 programme notes for La Cuisine, the company formulated a plan of future development: "La Compagnie va désormais concentrer ses efforts dans une localité où elle pourra créer ses spectacles, en recevoir d'autres, encourager les initiatives locales, notamment la construction d'un théâtre correspondant réellement aux besoins scéniques actuelles, susciter enfin dans la ville choisie un réel besoin de théâtre."<sup>1</sup> This idea was re-affirmed by Jean-Pierre Tailhade at the time when it appeared that the company would be able to lease Pavillon 11 of Les Halles from the Ville de Paris: "Nous pourrions animer des quartiers de Paris, aller à la rencontre d'un nouveau public dont les besoins sont évidents, et essayer d'atteindre, comme nous le faisons actuellement, les jeunes travailleurs et les lycéens, qui constitueront la majorité de ce que l'on appelle maintenant le non-public."<sup>2</sup>

However, now the company is resident at Vincennes publicized activity is limited to a programme of informing and encouraging the public, especially that section of it reached through the comités d'entreprise and the hostels for young workers. It holds séances d'animation, in the manner of Vilar at the T.N.P., and public debates which serve to introduce the spectacle to a public who would otherwise only learn of it through word of mouth and press coverage, both of which are unreliable. The following table of statistics describes the composition of one audience attracted to the Cartoucherie during May 1972. Further statistics compiled for the period 12-30 May 1972 reflect that while university students and lycéens form a large part of the audience, there is still a considerable interest shown by the comités d'entreprise.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 385 (August 1967), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Pierre Tailhade cited by Lucien Attoun, Les Nouvelles littéraires 17 Paril 1969, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Figures and table from Renée Saurel, Les Temps Modernes, 28<sup>e</sup> année, nos. 312-13 (July-August 1972), p. 323.



	<u>Places</u>
Comité d'Entreprise de l'O.R.T.F.	70
Comité d'Entreprise Aérospatiale de Suresnes	17
Comité d'Entreprise Honeywell Bull	53
Comité d'Entreprise Crédit Lyonnais	29
Lycée de Meaux	80
Université de Californie	17
Ecole Normale d'Orléans	60
Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture de Bièvres	60
ALPHA (FNAC)	46
Art et Vie	15
COPAR	42
	<hr/>
Total de réservations	489
Individuels	311
	<hr/>
TOTAL	800

These figures, however encouraging, suggest that the majority of spectators are young and belong to the university student or lycéen categories which does not appear to constitute a breakthrough in the search for a new public.<sup>1</sup> Possible reasons for this apparent failure are manifold. The difficulty of access of the Cartoucherie, even with its free bus service, means that to arrive on time for a 20:30 hours start, the would-be spectator from a working-class district of Paris would have to count on at least one hour's travelling time. This time has clearly to be added on again at the end of the performance for the return journey which would mean that this spectator would not reach home until midnight, hardly an hour conducive to encourage a worker who has to rise early in the morning. Another important factor is the cost; although selling tickets of uniform price, the Théâtre du Soleil "demanded" 15 francs in 1973 which put it beyond the means of many of the working class. A final observation concerns 1789 in particular which was a three-hour spectacle for the duration of which most of the spectators stood.

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<sup>1</sup>This opinion has been confirmed by the author's personal observations during 1973 and 1974.

Although this arrangement was important for the conception of the spectacle, it failed to appreciate the problem of fatigue. During his time at the T.N.P., Vilar had been faced with the same problems and had tried to solve particular ones, for example, by beginning the performance early in the evening and providing reasonably priced food. The Théâtre du Soleil do not seem to have developed or resolved these same problems, nor do they seem to have taken notice of several surveys that have treated the problem of why theatre audiences are smaller. These have shown that the time factor, difficulty of access, and cost are the three most common reasons given for disaffection with the theatre.<sup>1</sup>

The obvious concern with the composition of its audiences that prompted the statistical research in May 1972 derives from the company's desire to help change the quality of life for the majority. In fact, it is aware that to be in any way effective in a socio-political situation, the company must attract those members of society to whom it wishes to communicate, in this case the working class. Mnouchkine has not hidden her social aims: "J'ai besoin de changer le monde . . . même si cette ambition paraît prétentieuse," and the company have declared: "Nous luttons contre la société capitaliste."<sup>2</sup> Theatre is the instrument through which this struggle is carried on, and as a consequence, the company's theatrical activity has all the fervour and emotion engendered by the desire for social change. Theatre has become the means of realization of one's ideals and even of self-fulfillment and has ceased to be a cultural adornment or a personal hobby: "Au début, j'ai fait du théâtre pour mon plaisir. Puis le plaisir est devenu une passion, puis un sacerdoce."<sup>3</sup>

This committed viewpoint leads the company into a paradox; to a certain extent, its ideals of social reform that existed in a virtual form as desires have been transferred into an imagined realm, that of the theatre. This paradox of social revolution and artistic expression caused Jean-Jacques

<sup>1</sup> See René Kaes, "Publics et participation ouvrière," Esprit, no. 5 (May 1965), pp. 900-16; and Rozenthal, Le Théâtre en France.

<sup>2</sup> Ariane Mnouchkine, "Une prise de conscience," Le Théâtre, 1968, no. 1, p. 119; and Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> Mnouchkine cited by Michèle Motte, L'Express, 19 February 1968, p. 58.

Label to abandon art. On the other hand, Le Théâtre du Soleil commit their social ideals to their art while acknowledging that the theatre itself cannot bring about the social revolution: "Je ne crois pas que le théâtre puisse changer le monde mais ce n'est pas une raison pour condamner le théâtre."<sup>1</sup>

The company show an understanding of the process by which their political aims are made unreal by the audience:

Pendant le spectacle, le public, s'identifiant au peuple, manifeste son adhésion à nos idées. Cependant, hors du lieu théâtral, il redevient lui-même et, pas plus que nous d'ailleurs, ne cherche immédiatement à regagner sa révolution perdue. Il est malheureusement impossible de contrôler l'impact d'un spectacle. . . . Devons-nous nous politiser davantage? Ou nous restreindre aux limites du temps et du lieu théâtraux? Nous politiser davantage équivaldrait à en sortir.<sup>2</sup>

The paradoxical situation caused by the incompatibility of effective political action and artistic form is resolved by a clear-sighted appraisal of the function of theatre: "Le théâtre n'est un moteur que pour ceux qui en font. Le public, au mieux, y trouve des forces."<sup>3</sup> Theatre can only be effective in the role of positing and suggesting new possibilities which may not have occurred to the spectator. All that can be achieved is a new understanding on the part of the spectator after he has experienced a situation in the theatrical space. The overall justification for its continued activity is that through theatre, the company can best articulate its political ideals despite the necessary compromises to be made when it chooses an artistic means of expression and a genre that is irremediably bound to economic considerations: "Notre problème actuel est de savoir comment poursuivre notre action, jusqu'à quel point nous pouvons continuer à participer au système d'exploitation d'un spectacle, inévitable à l'intérieur d'une société capitaliste, sans nous laisser aller à la facilité du succès."<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, a change in the social structure that is destined not to terminate in the rise of another élitist regime and in the consequent lack of

<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine to Manceaux, "Militante," p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 126.

<sup>3</sup>Mnouchkine, "Prise," p. 123

<sup>4</sup>Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 126.

amelioration of the common lot must originate in the lower classes and remain in their control. This is exactly the dynamic of the French Revolution as portrayed by Le Théâtre du Soleil's 1789. Since the Théâtre du Soleil choose to militate in the theatrical space for just such a change, it is essential that they should attract a lower class audience. Thus, the company have to confront the problem of popular theatre which has faced the directors of the decentralized theatre groups whose raison d'être is precisely to involve the people in the culture of France. The problem is squarely posed by Mnouchkine:

Ce public, appelons-le public populaire, n'existe d'ailleurs pas actuellement. Il représente un but à atteindre. Il représente une masse de gens, depuis des siècles dépossédés du théâtre. . . . Le problème n'est pas de former ses goûts, mais de le faire exister, de le faire venir au théâtre, sans démagogie.<sup>1</sup>

The Théâtre du Soleil's approach to popular theatre can be seen against the back-cloth of the post-1968 reappraisal of theatre. Arguing more gravely it maintains that the nature of the capitalist system of production has put the theatre out of the sphere of the working-class man. The mentality of performing a task for payment and of profit-making has so ingrained itself in the servants of the system that any activity that is not rentable is valued as worthless. Thus, the word "culture" is meaningless for the working man or at best considered to refer to a realm which is outside his own experience: "En France, en tout cas, le mot 'culture' signifie culture bourgeoise; le théâtre populaire s'adresse à ceux qui ne la possèdent pas."<sup>2</sup> In these circumstances Mnouchkine comes to a conclusion that is close to the Déclaration de Villeurbanne: theatre must provide plays and a form of culture "qui concerne le peuple, où il se retrouve, où il est informé."<sup>3</sup> This is also the standpoint of both Sartre and Brecht.<sup>4</sup> At the same time as political commitment to the people, however, one must not forget the important factor of enjoyment. Mnouchkine

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<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine, "Prise," p. 121; and p. 123.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>3</sup>Mnouchkine to Manceaux, "Militante," p. 35.

<sup>4</sup>See Bertolt Brecht, Brecht on Theatre: the Development of an Aesthetic, ed. trans. John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1964), p. 108: "Popular means intelligible to the broad masses, taking over their own forms of expression and enriching them/adopting and consolidating their standpoint."

again: "Sur le plan du répertoire je ne crois pas plus au théâtre didactique politique, qu'au théâtre hermétique. . . . Le plaisir est essentiel."<sup>1</sup>

While the ethos stands firm, the theatrical method and style of Le Théâtre du Soleil are in a state of constant evolution as it attempts to further its dramatic ideal. In the pre-1968 period two methods of production were used: there was the more traditional approach involving a pre-existing stage script and rehearsals of that script, for example, Les Petits Bourgeois, La Cuisine and Le Songe d'une nuit d'été; also, a first attempt at a collective creation, Le Capitaine Fracasse was made in which the company itself worked on and adapted a pre-existing non-dramatic text in order to produce an authentic dramatic work. It is interesting to note the coincidence that Marcel Maréchal also chose Gautier's story in a production whose method was to break new ground for his own company, Compagnie du Cothurne, namely the use of a writer to create a play text for a particular company of actors, in short, a system of close collaboration between an author and an acting company.<sup>2</sup>

In both approaches common features are to be found despite the contention of the company that each production represents a new departure. Primarily there is the constant, intricate, planned preparation of a production over a period of months: the retreat to the Ardèche in the summer of 1964 to prepare Les Petits Bourgeois; the rehearsals on Le Songe which began in September 1967 for the first performance in February 1968; the genesis of Les Clowns over an equally long period in 1969; more recently, the half-year of evolution before the first performances of 1793; and the year and a half of preparation for L'Age d'or. Mnouchkine admits: "Les habitudes du Théâtre-Français, trois semaines ou un mois de répétition, cela me semble effrayant. Pour qu'une oeuvre trouve son rythme, son éclairage, il faut du temps, de la patience, que le travail collabore avec la durée."<sup>3</sup> Although spending an equally exhaustive period in rehearsal, the company have evolved in the matter

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<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine, "Prise," p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>Serge Ganzl, Fracasse (Paris: Stock, 1972).

<sup>3</sup>Mnouchkine to Claude Roy, "Shakespeare chez les lions," Le Nouvel Observateur, no. 173 (6 March 1968), p. 44.

of how this time is used. To illustrate, in the early play productions research and work were concentrated almost totally on the text itself: the characterization of Les Petits Bourgeois or the theme of man's instinctual power and how to express it in Le Songe. However, in the later productions, primary research has taken the form of self-instruction on the period and events to be treated in the creation.

A second feature common to the pre-1968 productions is the unconventional treatment of the theatrical space and more especially the scenic area. It could well be that Mnouchkine was influenced in this respect by her experience of the oriental forms of drama, especially kabuki, during her travels prior to the formation of the company. Claude Roy mentions that it was kabuki in particular that she studied in the East.<sup>1</sup> This in fact would be consistent with her own theatrical convictions, for kabuki is the traditional popular form of theatre of Japan. The arrangement of the theatrical space in kabuki presents a narrow stage running the full width of the audience and two continuations of the stage that run the full length of the auditorium and along which characters pass at different moments in the performance.<sup>2</sup> In Le Théâtre du Soleil's production of Les Clowns a not dissimilar scenic situation is described. At the Théâtre de la Commune the company were working in a theatre in which the width of the stage was commensurate with that of the auditorium, and an aisle passed down each side wall. In addition, the company constructed "un long praticable dans la salle."<sup>3</sup> The method of access to the stage or main acting area followed a pattern: characters would enter by the swing-doors at the back of the auditorium and at the end of each of the aisles; they would make their way down the aisles to the stage, but would then find themselves unable to climb up onto the stage; at which point they would have recourse to the gangway built out into the audience. The similarities with

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> See Masakatsu Gunji, Kabuki, trans. John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1969), p. 45; and pp. 151-55.

<sup>3</sup> Mnouchkine cited by Attoun, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 17 April 1969, p. 13.

kabuki can be seen as the movement through the audience and the projections of the stage provided for this effect (in this case the two aisles can be considered projections of the scenic space).

Even if this parallelism were unconscious, the desire to change the perspective of the traditional theatrical situation is clear. In reality, the movement and scenic design for La Cuisine was suggested to Mnouchkine by the proportions of the Cirque de Montmartre: "Dès le départ, je me suis persuadée que le public devait dominer la scène."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the action of the play was exposed to the full view of the audience which was confronted with a proliferation of activities: "Il y a presque constamment trente personnes sur la scène et trois ou quatre actions simultanées."<sup>2</sup> In the same building the following year, the company produced yet another surprising set and scenic arrangement for Le Songe: "Un lieu scénique extraordinaire" is how Renée Saurel described it and continued:

Le public n'étant admis que sur l'hémicycle, l'autre moitié a été recouverte de peaux de chèvres, qui nous renvoient, somptueusement, à notre animalité. Épaisses, voluptueuses, mêlant les blancs aux roux et au noir, elles tapissent également la piste centrale. Au fond, une sorte de cyclorama blond à lamelles mobiles, sur lequel la lumière lunaire jouera. . . . Sur ce plan incliné, tapissé de fourrure, sur la piste du bas, les acteurs, . . . se battent, s'étreignent, et tombent foudroyés par le plaisir.<sup>3</sup>

These unconventional sets are not gratuitous experiments, the product of contemporary antagonism against the Italianate stage. Each set evolves organically from the overall conception of the play which is not limited by any pre-existing architectural structure nor technical equipment. J.-P. Bégot reports that during the rehearsals and creation of Les Clowns at Aubervilliers, the technical director of the Théâtre de la Commune was struck by the company's freedom and independence of the resources of lighting and staging at their disposal (and it must be remembered that this production was the first for

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<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine to Paul-Louis Mignon, "Ariane Mnouchkine," L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, nos. 526-27 (1-15 October 1973), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Jean Dutourd, France-Soir, 9 April 1967.

<sup>3</sup>Renée Saurel, Les Temps Modernes, 23<sup>e</sup> année, no. 262 (March 1968), pp. 1701-2. It is interesting that this arrangement is close to Gémier's organization of the Cirque d'Hiver for Bouhelier's Oedipe, roi de Thèbes (1919).

which they had the full use of an established theatre): "Chose rare, la technique ici ne détermine pas le spectacle mais s'y soumet."<sup>1</sup>

Each new venture prompts a rethinking of their work to date and an effort towards new forms. In the matter of stage design, each production has its own scenic form which will disappear with the rest of the production, leaving the necessity to create new designs for each production. Guy-Claude François reflects this attitude: "Nous pensons plutôt que chaque spectacle impose une forme de scénographie différente."<sup>2</sup> This continual research and reconstruction is never arbitrary; the stage design sought is always that which best suits the argument underlying the development of the work and that which is instrumental to its expression. After the production of 1789, Emile Copfermann was able to write of "la concordance du cadre de la représentation et la représentation."<sup>3</sup>

The desire to progress and not repeat its work is central to the activity of Le Théâtre du Soleil as a whole. Mnouchkine declared in 1968 that "je veux aller plus loin à chaque spectacle."<sup>4</sup> This spirit is most strikingly reflected in the attitude towards the position of the actor in the troupe. The choice of Les Petits Bourgeois in 1964 was unadventurous but the play offered inexperienced actors the opportunity to practice their acting styles since the characterization was straightforward verging on types. The technique was improvisational but on the lines of Stanislavsky's method. According to this approach, the actor immerses himself in the play and his character; a total identification between actor and role is sought: "The very best that can happen is to have the actor completely carried away by the play. Then regardless of his own will he lives the part, not noticing how he feels, not thinking about what he does, and it all moves of its own accord, subcon-

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<sup>1</sup>J.-P. Bégot, "Recherches sur une création collective au Théâtre du Soleil: Les Clowns," (Maîtrise, Institut des Etudes Théâtrales, Paris III, Censier, 1969-70), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Guy-Claude François, "A chaque spectacle sa scénographie," Travail théâtral, no. 2 (January-March 1971), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Emile Copfermann, Les Lettres françaises, 23 December 1970, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>Mnouchkine, "Prise," p. 125.



sciously and intuitively."<sup>1</sup>

Mnouchkine and Penchenat qualified this method as the "recherche des motivations subjectives."<sup>2</sup> This research was continued for La Cuisine. For example, included in the preparation for the play were visits to the kitchen of a large hotel and observation of waiters in action as well as classes given by a kitchen waiter on how to walk with, and carry, a tray among other serving skills; such attention to detail reveals a concern to produce accurate movements in the play as well as convincing portrayals of waiters. At the same time a group approach to production was developed; the emphasis was changing from the individual actor's attempt to create an identity for his character to the group's ability to present a total reality of the kitchen of the play, that is, not just the naturalistic gesture, but an understanding of the desires and motivation of the individuals in their social context. In the first weeks of rehearsal of the play (Mnouchkine had secured the rights of performance as early as June 1966), all the actors played all the parts as a prerequisite to attaining a homogeneous style for the production,<sup>3</sup> and as a means to obviate the rivalry and subsequent disunity encouraged by the concept of a lead actor. Greater freedom for creativity had been given to the actor the previous year; in the production Le Capitaine Fracasse, after Philippe Léotard and Ariane Mnouchkine adapted Gautier, this adaptation was reworked by the actors before a final rewriting.<sup>4</sup>

The movement towards increased collectivization in production and more reliance on the company's and the actor's own creativity is typified by the fact that the incidental music for the production of Le Songe was composed by Jacques Lasry on the snatches of tunes the actors themselves hummed or whistled during rehearsals. The result, according to Matthieu Galey, was very effective in the context of the whole production as it suggested "tout le murmure, les

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<sup>1</sup>Constantin Stanislavsky, An Actor Prepares (London: Bles, 1936), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 120.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 120-21.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

frissons, les soupirs d'une forêt enchantée, habitée par des rêves troublés."<sup>1</sup>  
 In addition, the company did not rely on Eluard's existing translation and adaptation of Shakespeare but preferred Léotard's new version.

The company's own reaction to Le Capitaine Fracasse was disappointment; the result was "en deçà de notre ambition."<sup>2</sup> However, through these procedures the company prepared itself for a major step, the production of Les Clowns. The company abandoned any type of pre-text, even a motivating idea: "Au départ des Clowns, il n'existait rien; rien en effet, sinon la créativité des comédiens."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the actor became the initial creator replacing the author (La Cuisine) and even the adaptor (Le Capitaine Fracasse). This transfer of responsibility to the performing artist provoked a modification in creative technique. If in the conventional situation, the author primarily represents the verbal expression of theme, it is obviously content or thematic structure that is the basis of the production. If, however, it is the actor that is given the task of creating the initial articulation of a production, the emphasis will be transferred onto the form the expression should assume: "Les acteurs sont laissés pour la première fois en face de la liberté la plus totale. Aucun thème n'est imposé. La préoccupation fondamentale est la recherche d'une forme, la plus élémentaire, la plus directe possible."<sup>4</sup>

The actor was left to his own resources. The company did not study circus clowns nor did they invite clowns to give classes on their art, rather each actor was forced to resort to his own personal memories and create the stylized gestures and individual voice on that basis. Max Douchin, one of the actors, described this process to Lucien Attoun: "La difficulté, en vérité, c'est précisément de trouver 'son' clown. Tout notre travail est parti de là."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthieu Galey, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 29 February 1968, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> Mnouchkine to Copfermann, "Entretien," p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Théâtre du Soleil, 1789: La Révolution doit s'arrêter à la perfection du bonheur (Paris: Stock, 1971), p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> Max Douchin cited by Attoun, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 17 April 1969, p. 13.

This technique derives from Stanislavsky in that it relies heavily on the personal research and mental concentration of the individual actor and culminates in the creation of a personal clown. On the other hand, this creation is fully conscious and has nothing of the intuitive coincidence of character and actor as described by Stanislavsky. Indeed, the concept of "'son' clown" presupposes an independent entity that is only described by the actor's craft and not revitalized through the actor's incarnation of it. This process implies a certain critical distance on the part of the actor towards his clown, as does the fact that the actor is not building on a reality but on a remembered reality which will necessarily be moderated by the critical faculties. In effect, the clown that the audience observes is the actor's reflections on the state of "the clown." This reflective technique of building characters is important in the creation of the later historical plays and their argumentation.

From the individual quest for a clown, the production was moulded together collectively under the direction of Mnouchkine: "Ensuite, la création s'est développée collectivement, soumise au dialogue des comédiens et du metteur en scène devenu pour eux un regard, le regard de celui qui, témoin de ce que chacun apporte dans l'improvisation, l'aide à définir l'espace et le temps les plus justes pour mettre en valeur sa création."<sup>1</sup> It is at this stage that certain restrictions were put on the free creativity of the actor, restrictions often of a practical nature since the improvisations ran to about six hours in length and necessarily had to be reduced to compose a normal length production. This abbreviation did also present certain problems in the area of the group's attempt to reduce authoritarianism; it is natural that an actor who had worked for several months on an improvisation should be reluctant to have it cut or even omitted altogether from the production. Such shortcomings are why Mnouchkine and Penchenat have reservations about the success of Les Clowns as a collective creation; rather they describe it as "un collage d'expressions individuelles" or as "la quintessence de la création individuelle

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<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine to Mignon, "Ariane Mnouchkine," p. 18.

de chacun."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Les Clowns was significant in that it provided the company with the experience of a production developed from their own creativity and of the collective method which was to come to maturity in 1789 and 1793.

As the company evolved their creative method and laid more emphasis on the actor as the basic material to the gradual exclusion of the play text, there was a concomitant development of its dramatic language. Originally, it retained the conventional fidelity to the printed word (Les Petits Bourgeois). By 1967 and the rehearsals for La Cuisine, Mnouchkine had attended Lecoq's theatrical school to learn the principles of corporal movement and expression together with "le placement de la voix, le chant, l'acrobatie, l'improvisation."<sup>2</sup> This fact reflects an effort to create a dramatic language that is not solely based on the pre-existing text. Indeed, despite using Wesker's play, the aspect most remarked upon by the critics concerning the production of La Cuisine was the movement, "ce grouillement symphonique de gestes" as Gilles Sandier expressed it.<sup>3</sup> In retrospect, Matthieu Galey corroborated this impression and continued interestingly: "On se rappelle davantage le mouvement et le bruit, le décor et les gestes, le rythme aussi, plutôt que la pièce elle-même, prétexte à cet extraordinaire exercice de virtuosité."<sup>4</sup>

The use of dance and corporal expression was at the heart of the company's version of Shakespeare's Le Songe d'une nuit d'été in 1968. In this production some of the leading roles were taken by dancers rather than actors. For instance, Ursula Kubler played Titania while Germinal Casado took the part of Oberon. The programme notes to the production explain the reason for this approach: "Pour rendre le monde du réalisme fantastique qui est celui du Songe, il a fallu, en effet associer étroitement les techniques de jeu de l'acteur à la musique et à la danse."<sup>5</sup> In his review, Sandier again emphasized

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<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 123; and Mnouchkine to Copfermann, "Entretien," p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Mignon, "Ariane Mnouchkine," p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Gilles Sandier, Arts et Loisirs, no. 82 (19 April 1967), p. 32.

<sup>4</sup>Matthieu Galey, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 8 May 1969, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>Paris, Cirque de Montmartre, 15 February 1968.

the use made of a strongly physical dramatic language: "Ce spectacle gymnique, érotique, acrobatique."<sup>1</sup> Les Clowns constituted a decidedly important production in the evolution of a new dramatic language. The group abandoned the printed text completely. Indeed, during the rehearsals even recourse to the spoken word was regarded as a sign that the improvisations were breaking down or losing their clarity of expression. J.-P. Bégot has recorded certain of Mnouchkine's remarks as she presided over the early efforts of the actors: "Est-ce que vous vous rendez compte que c'est à partir du moment où ça commence à ne plus aller que vous avez recours aux mots?"<sup>2</sup> The production was to be based not on a logical structure and grammatical sentences but on rhythm. The rejection of the conventional play text went against the conviction of the primacy and necessity of a pre-existing script which still prevailed in 1969 among certain critics. For example, Jean Dutourd attributed the failure of the production to please him to its tendency to repeat itself, to a misconception that the company had of the theatrical genre: "C'est que, sans auteur, le théâtre n'existe pas."<sup>3</sup>

The portrayal of a situation through physical means rather than through verbal description is more relevant to the thematic evolution of the company. In La Cuisine, the psychology of individual characters was subordinated to a recreation of a total social situation, the relationship of man and society. This was communicated in the rushing activity of the kitchen. The production did not aim at flat psychological realism but attempted to account for the reactions of the group to the situation of the kitchen. The trend away from psychology (a characteristic the company share with Artaud and Genet) was continued in the method of approach to Les Clowns. Claude Merlin described the process of character building to Attoun in these words: "L'important, pour trouver 'son' clown, c'est d'élaguer toute action

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<sup>1</sup>Gilles Sandier, Théâtre et combat: Regards sur le théâtre actuel (Paris: Stock, 1970), p. 227.

<sup>2</sup>Bégot, "Les Clowns," p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>Jean Dutourd, France-Soir, 27 April 1969.

psychologique."<sup>1</sup> This attitude anticipates the development of the company's approach to historical productions and characterization which is exemplified in 1793.

The style of the company's productions has been distinguished by an avoidance of realism which is seen as a limiting mode of expression. The depth of the company's opposition to realism is reflected in the anecdote told by Mnouchkine herself: on reading the reviews after the opening of La Cuisine, she was upset to the point of physical sickness because many critics had seen it as a purely realistic production.<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lemarchand typifies this interpretation; the performance suggested to him "le plus extrême souci de réalisme."<sup>3</sup> Fortunately not all reviewers agreed with him as the observations on the movement of the production have revealed. Perhaps the best understanding of the company's aim is shown by Emile Copfermann's review: "Ariane Mnouchkine évite le naturalisme--le jeu demeure stylisé: la pièce ne tombe pas dans le symbolisme--elle aurait pu: la cuisine représente le monde, la pièce est une méditation sur la société."<sup>4</sup>

The production of Le Songe d'une nuit d'été was to illustrate "la force vivante et révolutionnaire"<sup>5</sup> of the desire in men's hearts. This approach is in flat contradiction to the style adopted for the play traditionally, that is, a realistic interpretation that surrounded Bottom and his troupe of workers with clumsy pranks and light-hearted humour. For Mnouchkine, Bottom became the incarnation of the force of love, synonymous with the god Eros. She described the theme of the play unequivocally to Claude Roy: "Ni une féerie, ni une farce, mais la grande nuit de l'inconscient, avec ses terreurs et ses interdits, sa cruauté et son innocence."<sup>6</sup> Renée Saurel was

<sup>1</sup>Claude Merlin cited by Attoun, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 17 April 1969, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Mnouchkine, "Prise," p. 124.

<sup>3</sup>Jacques Lemarchand, Le Figaro littéraire, 15 April 1967.

<sup>4</sup>Emile Copfermann, Les Lettres françaises, 15 April 1967, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>Paris, Cirque de Montmartre, 15 February 1968.

<sup>6</sup>Mnouchkine to Roy, "Shakespeare," p. 44.

sensitive to this interpretation in her review describing the production as "un flot qui emporte les barrières, les tabous, les barrages de la morale, . . . et met à nu les fantasmes, les désirs refoulés, les envies de meurtre."<sup>1</sup>

If Les Clowns began as an exercise in the traditional techniques of the clown, it soon became a means to "aborder des problèmes fondamentaux."<sup>2</sup> In none of their productions are the company content with the observation of detail for its own sake, but rather use a sense of precision and accuracy to go beyond, "dépasser le réalisme."<sup>3</sup> It could be either Lecoq's teaching or Mnouchkine's observation of the kabuki theatre that lies at the root of the "forme claire, directe, lumineuse"<sup>4</sup> which typifies the company's work. Although less stylized than the Japanese popular theatre with its traditional mie and ma,<sup>5</sup> the company employ economy of gesture and disciplined acting in a rigidly organized structure.

Clarity of expression aids the company to effect the communication with a wider public that it views as fundamental to its existence. Lucien Attoun, in an account of all the company's work, distinguishes a central preoccupation that gives them an overall unity: "Le souci du Théâtre du Soleil [est] de tenter une rencontre immédiate et permanente, donc en profondeur, avec les spectateurs d'aujourd'hui, en faisant confronter la réalité sociale et politique d'une condition humaine inadmissible au plaisir de la fête théâtrale nécessaire, non pas comme dérivatif mais comme dépassement."<sup>6</sup> Its style reflects an attempt to reveal the aspirations of man and their incompatibility with certain social situations. In La Cuisine there is direct

<sup>1</sup> Saurel, Les Temps modernes, 23<sup>e</sup> année, no. 262 (March 1968), p. 1703.

<sup>2</sup> Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> Mnouchkine to Copfermann, "Entretien," p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> See Gunji, Kabuki, p. 16; and p. 17: "Mie, one of the exaggeratedly theatrical poses that are used to mark moments of emotional climax. . . . Ma—the slight dramatic pause left between a particular moment in the narrative as expressed in the music or dialogue, and the bodily movements and facial expressions that correspond to that movement in the acting."

<sup>6</sup> Lucien Attoun, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 31 December 1970, p. 13.

confrontation of man and his situation; in Le Songe is expressed the human power and energy that could be released if man had the opportunity to do so. As Mnouchkine has observed: "Ouvrir les portes de l'inconscient, c'est aussi changer quelque chose au monde."<sup>1</sup> To this end, the company do not use the techniques of the happening nor the Living Theater which attempt to spread the freedom and anarchy of the subconscious during the performance usually by some kind of physical confrontation with the audience. On the contrary, Le Théâtre du Soleil seeks an emotional as well as intellectual appreciation of the theatrical situation on the part of the spectators: "Cette conception me coupe d'une grande partie de la dramaturgie contemporaine: je n'adhère pas à sa forme agressive. . . . Je pense que les spectateurs répondent à l'agression directe en la refusant, en retrouvant leur fauteuil."<sup>2</sup> A precise example is the company's attitude towards the nudity of Puck in Le Songe. It would have been entirely consistent with their view of the play to have Puck appear naked and, in fact, rehearsals were begun in that manner. However, the company as a whole could not readily accept the situation. Since this was the case, the audience, it was argued, would not be able to appreciate the reasons behind his nakedness either but would rather see it as "une exhibition osée."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, anarchy is rejected alongside of realism. The public must be presented with a performance that is clear and understandable and with which it can readily identify, a reason why the company has resorted to popular themes for its collective creations. In Le Capitaine Fracasse, it was a question of communicating "à travers un roman populaire";<sup>4</sup> Les Clowns drew on the tradition of the circus; whereas 1789 and 1793 had the common heritage of a national history on which to build. Inside these productions a popular dramatic language was beginning to evolve.

History became the basis for the attempts made since September 1970 to provide a production which would concern and relate directly to a popular audience: "Ce que nous tentons et qui est encore à l'état embryonnaire,

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<sup>1</sup> Mnouchkine, "Prise," p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> Mnouchkine to Mignon, "Ariane Mnouchkine," p. 17.



balbutiant, c'est de trouver quelque chose de commun à partir duquel s'établit un rapport avec le public."<sup>1</sup> Of all periods, the French Revolution appeared the most conducive, partly because the Revolution is central in the experience of every Frenchman and, perhaps, partly because the genesis of the production dates back to a period when modern France had just experienced another traumatic upheaval and near revolution. Mnouchkine claimed that "nous voulions que le contenu soit commun aux spectateurs et aux acteurs."<sup>2</sup> The resonances between the historical subject and more recent events, although not strictly conscious, are neither totally unconscious. Parallels were discernible between the position of the Députés de l'Assemblée Nationale in 1789 and that of the trade unions in the struggles of 1968; the order of marital law is perhaps more readily seen as a clear reference to the loi anticasseuse of the 1968 authorities. The company do not deny the possibility of such echoes, and no doubt would see in them a sign that it has succeeded in stimulating the critical faculties of at least some of its audience. Yet its explanation is less literal: "Il se trouve que, comme tout le monde, nous avons vécu mai 1968 et que, comme beaucoup, nous avons analysé cette période."<sup>3</sup> These instances are evidence of the shared past, and equally shared present, common to both the actor and spectator.

The choice of history and the choice of the French Revolution in particular in the context of a regeneration of the theatre in terms of its social function was also made by Romain Rolland. He examined the history and position of the French theatre as well as the possible utilization of theatre as a popular means of mass education. In a 1901 preface to the play Le 14 Juillet, Rolland already attributed just such a function to his play: "Ressusciter les forces de la Révolution, ranimer les puissances d'action, rallumer l'héroïsme et la foi de la nation aux flammes de l'épopée républicaine, afin que l'oeuvre interrompue en 1794 soit reprise et achevée par un

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<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine to Copfermann, "Entretien," p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Mnouchkine to Mignon, "Ariane Mnouchkine," p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 124.

peuple plus mûr et plus conscient de ses destinées: tel est notre idéal."<sup>1</sup>

When produced by Gémier, this play only lasted twenty-nine performances. While it is not possible now to account for that failure, a present day reading reveals that Rolland tried to write an accurate historical reconstruction of the tumultuous events of that day. This included crowding a mass of the common people bearing pikes and muskets onto the narrow stage to cheer and support the speeches of Robespierre, Desmoulins and Marat who tended to hold centre stage. Rolland tried to capture the climax of the storming of the Bastille in the following way:

LE PEUPLE, éclatant de joie et d'orgueil, agitant des rameaux verts, paré de cocardes vertes, de rubans verts, de feuilles vertes: Libre! Le ciel est libre!  
(Le soleil couchant pénètre par l'ouverture du pont-levis et baigne de ses rayons pourpres la cour de la Bastille, et la foule avec les rameaux.)<sup>2</sup>

The enthusiasm of the crowd seems totally artificial; the effect of the scene is probably due more to a visual and contemplative image than any revolutionary fervour generated in the audience. However, it is clear that Rolland used this scene, and moreover the whole play, as an example to be followed; hence, we read two pages later, this harangue by Desmoulins to the public at the theatre:

DESMOULINS, au public: Et maintenant, à vous! Achevez notre ouvrage!  
 La Bastille est à bas: il reste d'autres Bastilles. A l'assaut!  
 A l'assaut des mensonges! A l'assaut de la nuit! L'Esprit vaincra  
 la Force! Le passé est brisé!<sup>3</sup>

Here, Rolland is trying to force the analogy between the historical situation of the play and the social situation of his contemporaries. The method adopted is clumsy. This type of speech had not been anticipated and is totally out of character with a play that has remained behind a proscenium arch.

It could well be that consciousness of the limited resources of the theatre impelled Rolland to write in such a manner, since in the text he included an alternative ending in the event of "une représentation de fête

<sup>1</sup>Rolland, Théâtre de la Révolution, p. 3. The fact that the political ends of Rolland differ from those of Le Théâtre du Soleil is irrelevant to our argument concerning the use of the theatre as enlightenment.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

populaire avec orchestre et chœurs" which provides for a descent into the audience by the actors: "L'objet de ce tableau est de réaliser l'union du public et de l'oeuvre, de jeter un pont entre la salle et la scène, de faire d'une action dramatique réellement une action. Le drame s'adresse soudain directement au peuple."<sup>1</sup> Again, Rolland has misunderstood the mechanism of the audience's relationship to a dramatic work. Rolland is attempting to use a historical situation to produce a prise de conscience in the present. To be effective the public must allow itself to become involved in the action while retaining its critical faculties towards the historical situation. By the descent of the actors into the audience, either the actors would cease to be historical characters for the audience or the audience would be swept into the imaginary realm of the dramatic action and lose its contact with the present and, hence, its critical distance towards the subject of the play. In either case, Rolland has not achieved his aim.

Rolland's attempt at writing a popular drama on a historical subject does, however, highlight the difficulties of creating a historical play that is at once written from the point of view of the people and that avoids pure reconstruction for its own sake. Historical plays usually avoid such problems because they do not deal with history but rather with characters in history. One method is to build a plot around a central, leading figure, for example, Anouilh's Pauvre Bitos; in this case, the Revolution is enacted from the point of view of the impact of events on Robespierre. Another treatment employed is to recount the impact of historical events on a single family unit as in Sartre's Les Séquestrés d'Altona; here again the main interest of the play resides in the psychology of the characters and the production runs the risk of becoming too didactic. The Théâtre du Soleil have striven to provide an alternative method and one that deals primarily with the structure of a historical situation seen from the point of view, not of the individual, but of a whole class. It has taken up the question, posed by Rolland, of treating a mass drama but has avoided the images d'Épinal effect of the latter. The

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

problem of achieving a popular view of history together with an impact on the contemporary spectator is solved by avoiding a stereotyped image of the people (a mass of undistinguishable faces that collectively constitute a single amorphous character, the People) and by creating a theatrical situation in which the theatre public are at once integrated into and distanced from the performance. There is no lasting identification with the historical situation which would lead to oblivion of the present but rather a flow between the two poles of participation and critical distanciation.<sup>1</sup> By avoiding the character approach to historical drama, the company are able to make history the central concern of the play and not simply a decorative back-cloth or a catalyst for dramatic action.

The technique that is common to both 1789 and 1793 and which allows detailed treatment of history without psychology or simple reconstruction is based on a reflected view of history. In other words, the events of the Revolution are not presented as the company's interpretation of those events, but rather its interpretation of how another set of people regarded those events, in short, a second-hand view of history. In 1789, the primary viewpoint is that of the eighteenth-century street entertainers, the bateleurs. In this instance, history was already theatrical before the company itself reworked the material. In 1793, the events are enacted as they would have been experienced by the working people of Paris in the sections of the sans-culotterie. In both cases, the primary view of history is popular (that is, concerned with the people) as opposed to the histories of the Revolution with splendid colour plates of the heroes, Robespierre or Desmoulins, and a flashing account of the major events. Clearly, this device avoids the necessity for great crowd scenes in the manner of Rolland since the actual events do not take place in the theatrical space but are made known through reports or staged re-enactments. For instance, the taking of the Bastille in 1789 is simulated by simultaneous verbal battle descriptions. Just as events are not

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<sup>1</sup>Distanciation is usually used in connection with Bertolt Brecht as an English alternative for the VEffekt. The meaning attributed to it here is that of maintaining a critical attitude towards the events of the performance with a view to reflecting on their significance in the present.

reconstructed nor need there be realistic portrayals of the leading figures of the Revolution; they are presented as they would have appeared to the people's imagination.

The preparation needed in order to have this awareness of the period and to be able to recreate a version of history that is consistent with that of the people of 1789-1793 was exhaustive. It was not enough merely to don the costumes of the time. The actors had to make themselves familiar with the detail as well as the broad line of developments during the Revolution in order to present accurate observations on the events and informed judgements on their evolution. It was therefore necessary for the actors to address themselves to the problem of the interpretation of historical facts. For 1789 the company attended lectures which discussed current historical theories of the Revolution; the actors set themselves courses of private reading, had films screened at the Cinémathèque, and spent some weeks learning revolutionary songs.<sup>1</sup> Preparations for 1793 sent them once more into the archives of the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Musée d'Histoire du Costume, and to lectures and group readings of the various accounts of the Revolution particularly those of Mathiez, Soboul, Michelet, Jaurès and Guérin.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it was only after this vast documentation had been amassed and discussed in detail by the group that work on the theatrical production began. This procedure ensures that the whole company collectively agrees on a particular historical interpretation of the events which will be organically and necessarily integrated into the form of the production.

As far as the rehearsals themselves were concerned the company extended the technique of Les Clowns. Instead of the individual actor in isolation creating "his" clown, the primary element was a group of actors improvising around a situation. At the end of a day's work, the different groups assembled to discuss the problems and progress they had found and made. In this way the

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<sup>1</sup> François, "A chaque spectacle sa scénographie," p. 21. Indeed as early as 1967 the company underwent a course of lectures which were held for two hours each day before the evening performances of La Cuisine.

<sup>2</sup> Renée Saurel, Les Temps modernes, 28<sup>e</sup> année, nos. 312-13 (July-August 1972), pp. 313-14.

individual creativity was more immediately integrated into the collective structure of the company; the situation of having to reject certain perfected individual contributions (as in the case of Les Clowns) is avoided:

A partir des cinq tréteaux, cinq groupes d'improvisation ont travaillé sur les mêmes thèmes, chacun selon une technique différente. Le choix des scènes, leur mise en forme définitive résultent d'une critique quotidienne. C'est pourquoi 1789 est réellement une création collective.<sup>1</sup>

There is no form imposed from the outset that limits the possibilities for the production. Improvisations<sup>2</sup> are worked and reworked, curtailed and lengthened; certain extracts are done and then replaced in the production at a different point. The form and style of the productions are distilled from the imagination, creativity, and knowledge of the actors.<sup>3</sup> During this process the structure of the whole is strengthened. Certain improvisations cause the modelling of other parts of the production: "Entre temps ont été trouvées des improvisations très fortes comme celle de la Nuit du Quatre Août! celles concernant la prise de la Bastille paraissent à tous devoir être remises en question."<sup>4</sup>

Despite the similarities between 1789 and 1793, the two productions differ markedly in tone; that difference derives from the two dissimilar agents chosen to express the popular view of history. The bateleurs of 1789 necessarily imply a riotous, jovial and raucous account of the events. The emphasis on public celebration and popular rejoicing provokes a moving view of history; the rapid sequence of events which swept the people along without leaving them the time to reflect on the changes that were being made. It is at this level that the company's interpretation of history is incorporated into the production; they see in the Revolution a popular victory (hence the rejoicing) but also the controlling of the people by the bourgeoisie. The same event is regarded as cause for celebration and cause for reflection, and

<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 125.

<sup>2</sup>Improvisations in the collective situation refer to the creations of the actors in rehearsals that are not dependent on a pre-text at the outset.

<sup>3</sup>See "Un exemple du travail: la prise de la Bastille," in 1789 by Théâtre du Soleil, pp. 87-93; and "Un exemple de travail: la pétition de Mauconseil et la prise des Tuileries, le 10 août 1792," in 1793, pp. 139-55.

<sup>4</sup>Théâtre du Soleil, 1789, p. 88.

consequently the construction of the production is twofold. Under the surface frivolity and exuberance lies the seriousness of the manoeuvrings of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie who, at the same time as encouraging the people to revolt, contain the resultant revolution. This dialectic is reflected in the spectacle's structure; the successive victories of the people are followed by its defeats and containment. For example, the joy of the people on learning of the cahiers de doléances is cut short by a scene in which the illiterate state of the peasantry is shown to illustrate the impossibility of complaining in writing. Similarly the fête foraine that follows the taking of the Bastille is terminated by Lafayette, the one-time hero of the people, ordering the fair to end with the chilling words: "LA REVOLUTION EST FINIE!" (1789:53).

On the other hand, 1793 presents a form that derives from the use of the sectionnaire as mediator between events and their representation. Thus, the framework of theatricality provided by the bateleurs is replaced by the details of the daily life of a group of men and women. How the great events of 1793 and how the great public figures affected them communicates the popular view of history. Restricted to the experience of a group of city dwellers, this view will not share the panoramic quality of 1789 nor its colour or movement. Rather, the style adopted is stationary lending itself to the study of a single place of social interaction amid the tumult of events of 1793. This method is clearly very close to the history-of-the-family approach. The company were very aware of the dangers of falling into psychological portrayal and only belatedly realized the necessary connection of their method with the study of the historical situation: "On a vu que les rapports entre les sectionnaires déterminent leurs actes, et donc l'histoire. A partir de ce moment, tout devenait simple."<sup>1</sup> Confirmed in its resolve, the company steadily evolved away from the emphasis on public enthusiasm of 1789 towards a more sombre, more aware examination of history: "1789 . . . n'était pratiquement jamais au niveau du quotidien. . . . Alors que dans 1793, on voit tout le temps

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<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine cited by Colette Godard, "Le Théâtre du Soleil au travail: 1793, un 'collectif artisanal,'" Le Monde, 4 May 1972, p. 19.

les gens se battre pour le pain."<sup>1</sup>

The views of history that are represented in the two productions differ widely not only in the technique of presentation but also in the attention to detail and facts. The history in 1789 is that of popular mythology; the events enacted or referred to represent the Revolution or at least are synonymous with the Revolution in the minds of the French people. In such a context dates are unnecessary; the significance of the events exists without date in the minds of the public. Not a single date is mentioned during the performance of 1789; all events are referred to by name, for example, the "Convocation des Etats Généraux," "Le Lit de justice." 1793 is not concerned with the realm of the popular imagination as much as that of the living conditions of the people. The passage of time becomes important in that each day brings new hardships. Consequently dates proliferate: there are the vague "l'hiver 1793" or the precise "21 juillet 1792," "le 31 juillet 1792," "le 10 août" and so on until "le 5 septembre 1793" and le 9 septembre 1793." Similarly in 1789, taxes are named such as "le champart," "la gabelle," and "la taille" to give texture to a generalized picture of the suffering of the peasantry at the hands of the lords, whereas in 1793 we are presented with a much more exact description of the conditions of the urban worker. Bread is twice referred to as costing eight sous a pound and soap is mentioned as costing as much as ten sous; both commodities are used as the basis of scenes between the working-class women and the small shopkeeper (1793:22; 90-91). In the same manner other details of the economic life of the working man are referred to especially the diminishing value of the assignat and the non-payment of the solde to the wives of men who had gone to the front. In like manner, the proliferation of historical events alluded to or recounted in 1789 is reduced to just three in 1793: the storming of the Tuileries on 10 August 1792, the military victory at Valmy on 20 August 1792, and the fall of the Girondin government in May-June 1793.

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<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine to Françoise Kourilsky, "De 1783 à 1793: Entretien avec Ariane Mnouchkine," Travail théâtral, no. 8 (July-September 1972), p. 24.



In all aspects of the production—set, staging, lighting, and sound—the distinction between the two different approaches to the history of the Revolution is constantly reflected. The collective method of creation in which all elements of a production are developed simultaneously and with a uniform, guiding interpretation of history, ensures this extent of homogeneity. Thus, the company can state quite unequivocally that "1789 était un spectacle de source médiévale, et que nous voulions tel, parce qu'il parle de la fin du Moyen-Age, 1793 devrait être un spectacle contemporain, parce qu'il parle vraiment des débuts de notre société."<sup>1</sup>

The style of 1789 suggests an itinerant structure for the production as a whole. Just as a medieval production would involve movement from one mansion to another in the description of the life of an individual in terms of a journey, so Le Théâtre du Soleil use a multiple-stage technique to account for the passage in time of the events of the Revolution. It must be understood that the comparison with the medieval theatre is superficial since the many stages of 1789 do not each have a solitary significance as do the mansions of heaven and hell, for example, of the mystery. Rather it is the action that takes place on them that endows them with meaning. Given the itinerant structure, the scenographer then has to account for the thematic approach of the company to its subject. He has to create a structure which will accommodate both the manifestations of public rejoicing which should include the audience and the moments of necessary critical distance to evaluate the role of the bourgeoisie. This double nature for the production suggested itself to the company as early as 29 July 1970 in an improvisation on the Bastille theme (which, in fact, was ultimately never used): "C'est la coexistence, à l'intérieur d'une même improvisation, de deux modes de représentation différents, (le rire de foire du premier de Launay et l'encerclement plus réaliste du second) qui retient l'intérêt."<sup>2</sup> In his attempts to represent this situation in the scenography, Guy-Claude François came across the analogy with the

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<sup>1</sup>Théâtre du Soleil, 1793, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup>Théâtre du Soleil, 1789, p. 87.

basketball court. He explains: "Le basket-ball est un sport qui demande à être vu de suffisamment près, parce que l'action individuelle des joueurs est intéressante à suivre mais il a besoin aussi d'un certain recul pour que le spectateur voie la stratégie du jeu."<sup>1</sup> This example provided him with certain proportions which also answered the company's need for a transportable production that could play in almost any town. The initial conception supplied the basic structure of the five stages linked by walkways which approximately describe a rectangle of the same measurements as a basketball court.

The early idea of the stages forming an enclosure was abandoned so access to the central area became possible. Outside this rectangle there would be tiers of seats for spectators. The opening up of the central area meant that there existed two groups of spectators, those inside and those outside the rectangle. This arrangement was felt to be in complete harmony with the direction of the rest of the production as it progressed towards a théâtre de foire form: "Nous retrouvions dans les rapports gradins-aire centrale-tréteaux une certaine équivalence avec les rapports du théâtre de foire sur les places des villes à marché: ainsi à Cambrai, les bateleurs s'installaient sur la place du marché pour jouer devant le menu peuple tandis que des fenêtres des maisons bourgeoises une autre vision était possible."<sup>2</sup>

The two areas for the spectators reflect the dialectic of the historical representation. The central area provides conditions of perception which lend themselves to a participatory activity on the part of the audience, a constant movement from stage to stage to follow the action, a mutual jostling--crowd conditions that are more suited to the transmission of an atmosphere or a mood rather than the understanding of a reasoned argument. The gradins provide another perspective; the spectators are outside the action and not liable to be caught up in the enthusiasm of the fête foraine, but are more liable to follow the overall movement of the production and appreciate its twofold structure. To this extent, one can state that the unconventional nature of the

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<sup>1</sup> François, "A chaque spectacle sa scénographie," p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Théâtre du Soleil, 1789, p. 94. See Figure 5, p. 408.

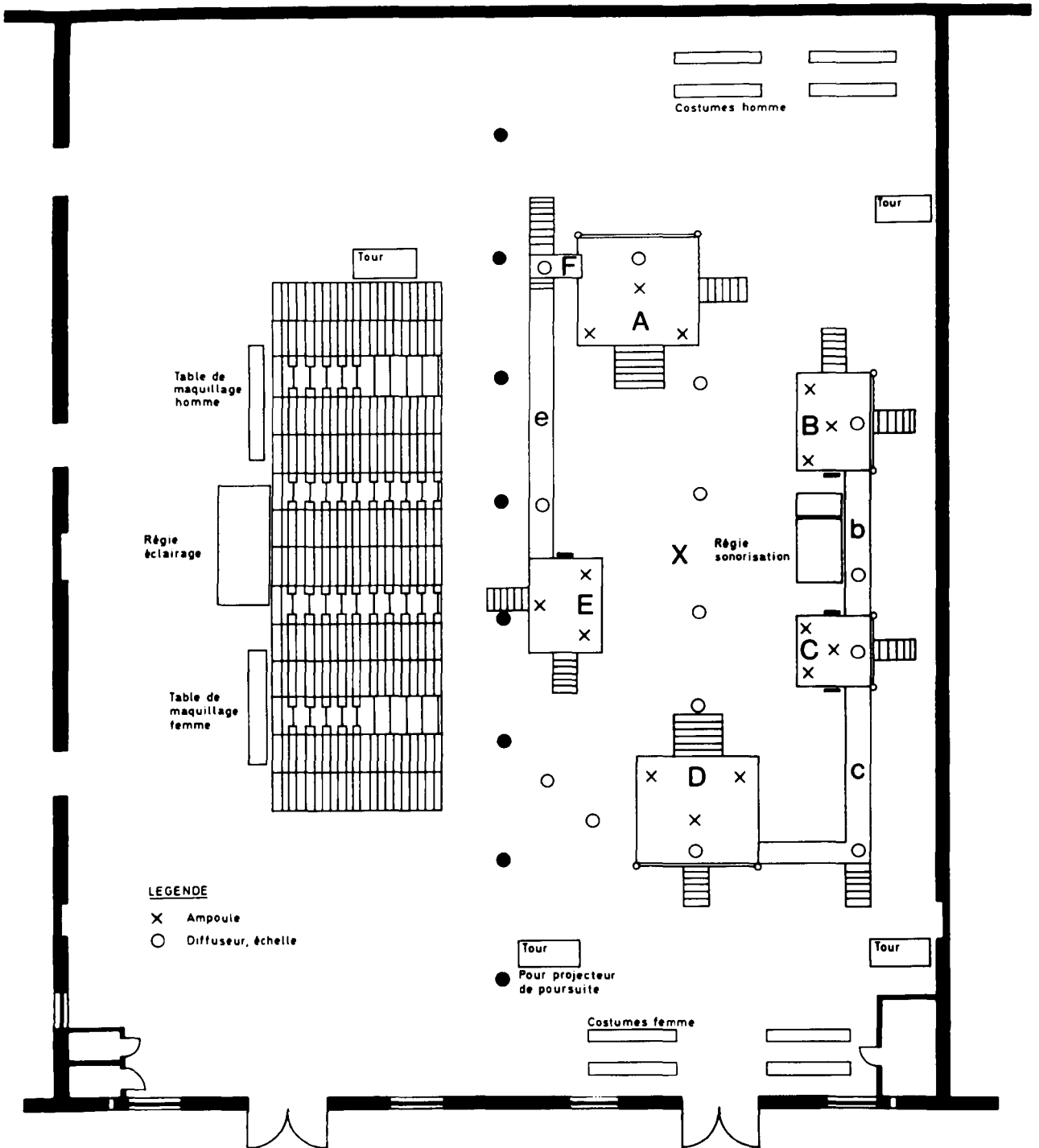


Fig. 5. Dispositif scénique de 1789

scenic structure is not used as a means of surprising the audience (indeed, an opening sequence depicting the flight to Varennes was introduced in order to reveal the full extent of the dispositif scénique to the audience from the outset) nor due to the designer's self-indulgence in theatrical ingenuity; it is instrumental in the development of the thematic content of the production.

The company uses the stage areas in five different ways, either in combination or singly. Most often the single stage depicts a single situation; this is close to the traditional relationship between audience and stage except that the spectators are grouped, standing, in front of a platform that begins at about the level of their eyes. However, this usage can be employed for a succession of scenes and it results in a cumulative effect. For instance, the opening sequence of scenes that depicts the realities of peasant life in 1788 involves the use of stages B, E, B. The subject-matter of these portrayals concerns the oppression of the farming peasantry by the taxes claimed by Church and Lord, the indigence of the non-landed peasantry, especially after the failure of the wheat crop in 1788, and the abuse of the peasantry by the landed gentry; by using successive stages the impression given to the audience in the parterre is that of nationwide suffering of the people underlined by the fact that both the land and the sea-coast are mentioned in the dialogues. This impression is reinforced by the geometry of the staging; since the positions of stages B and E are symmetrical, the audience's necessity to turn about on itself suggests an enclosed echoing misery from which there is no escape.

A combination of stages may be acted on in a single tableau. Just such a case is the scene, "La Trahison du Roi." It occurs after a succession of single-stage tableaux that poke fun at the King and treat in a light-hearted way the impossibility of the people communicating their grievances in the cahiers de doléances due to their illiteracy. The scene in question deals with the malevolent influence of Cagliostro, exerted over the King through Marie-Antoinette and her companions. The frenetic, diabolic atmosphere which surrounded the magician is translated in scenic terms by the use of strong drum

beats (an echo of voodoo ritual) and demonic cavortings along the stages and walkways on the far side of the structure from the stands (B-b-C-c-D).

More strikingly, the tour of the city by the stockbroker de Breuil in order to rally support for Necker and opposition to the King takes in not only all the stages and walkways, but commences in the parterre itself. The stockbroker begins by introducing himself to the people of the parterre and then passes from stage to stage recruiting a banker (B), two shopkeepers (C), and a retired military officer who, for a price, teaches them how to fire a rifle (D). After their instruction the group complete the circuit of the stage area "au son du tambour et sur un rythme de marche militaire" (E-A) (1789:46). This circular tour is obviously very effective theatrically but more than that, the movement around the arena communicates the time lapse between the dismissal of Necker (11 July 1789) and the storming of the Bastille (14 July 1789), the result of organization of public feeling. Furthermore, while reflecting accurately the detail of events of these three days,<sup>1</sup> the staging of the tableau reveals the political interpretation underlying the company's production. The bourgeois de Breuil (and he is very pedantic in emphasizing the significance of the "de" in his name - 1789:41) begins in the parterre with the people. His tour, however, soon takes him up onto the tréteaux where he meets other members of the shop-owning class. He completes the circuit on the level of the tréteaux (associated with the bourgeoisie). When the movement of the people begins in the parterre which leads to the taking of the Bastille we find all the bourgeois on stage A, above and apart from the people. The end of the circuit is the following stage image:

LE BANQUIER: J'ai dit "lâchez le peuple," je n'ai pas dit "armez le peuple" . . .

(Les autres personnages se concertent longuement puis peu à peu, de plus en plus fort, ils crient "lâchez le peuple" en braquant leurs fusils vers le public, puis se sauvent.) (1789:46)

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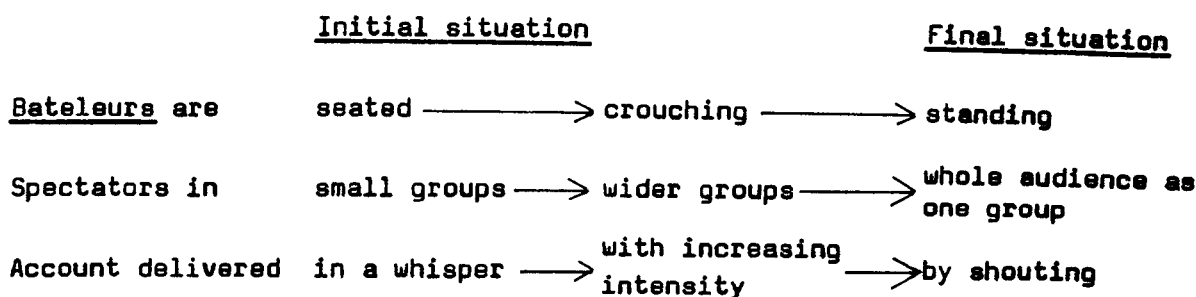
<sup>1</sup>See Albert Mathiez, The French Revolution trans. Catherine Phillipe (London: Williams & Norgate, 1927), pp. 46-47: "A meeting of stock-brokers at once took place, which decided to close the Bourse as a protest against the dismissal of Necker. Money was distributed to win over the soldiers. Bankers like Etienne Delessert, PrévotEAU, Coindre, and Boscary enlisted with their staffs in the bourgeois guard which was being formed."

The bourgeoisie mouth the revolutionary shout of the people, but are frankly opposed to them. The dynamics of de Breuil's passage around the performance area illustrate the historical point that the bourgeoisie availed themselves of the situation of popular unrest to further their own ends, but, once these ends were achieved, the people and the bourgeoisie became opponents.

The third way in which the scenic structure of multiple stages is put to use is in creating simultaneous effects. The first instance of this technique comes at the end of the initial sequence of peasant misery and before the appearance of the King. The echoing effect created by the alternating action on stages B and E is amplified by a climactic use of four stage areas, A, B, C and E (1789:16). On each area a husband comforts his wife bearing her baby in her arms. The detail of each couple and stage is the same (dull browns and whites, dim lighting) and all use exactly the same words; however, the delivery of the sentences is slightly staggered on all four stages so that a subtle echoing effect is orchestrated. This vocal décalage draws the spectator's attention from one stage to another where he is, nevertheless, confronted with the exact same scene of misery. By the end, the scene has assumed a hallucinatory quality producing a haunting image of hardship. It is the King's finery that breaks the enchantment and brings welcome relief. However, a few straggling phrases from the husbands undercut the fine phrases of the King. They leave a question mark over the sincerity of the monarch which is to be exposed <sup>as false</sup> in the ensuing scenes.

The same technique can be used for totally dissimilar ends. If the scene described above created disunity in the audience by its simultaneous soliciting of the spectator in all directions, a later similar scene creates increasing unity in the audience. The storming of the Bastille is re-enacted not on the level of the action itself but rather on that of the recitation of eye-witness reports (1789:47). The scene begins by bateleurs (spread out over all the tréteaux and among the public both in the central area and in the stands) attracting small groups of spectators around them as they each commence their account. Although the precise words used may differ, each bateleur is

aware of the progress of the report of the others so that the account proceeds at the same pace in the different areas of the theatrical space. The following diagram illustrates the technique in action:



The final situation presents a unified whole because each group of spectators is then aware of the shouted accounts of the other bateleurs; each bateleur can see the others as they stand. The movement towards increased unification and intensity is underscored by drumming which begins as "un battement régulier et croissant de tymbales" and at the moment of climax: "Le roulement de tymbales s'intensifie puis éclate" (1789:47). The climax is reached with a sudden flooding of the whole theatrical space in yellow light and the impetuous arrival of a messenger:

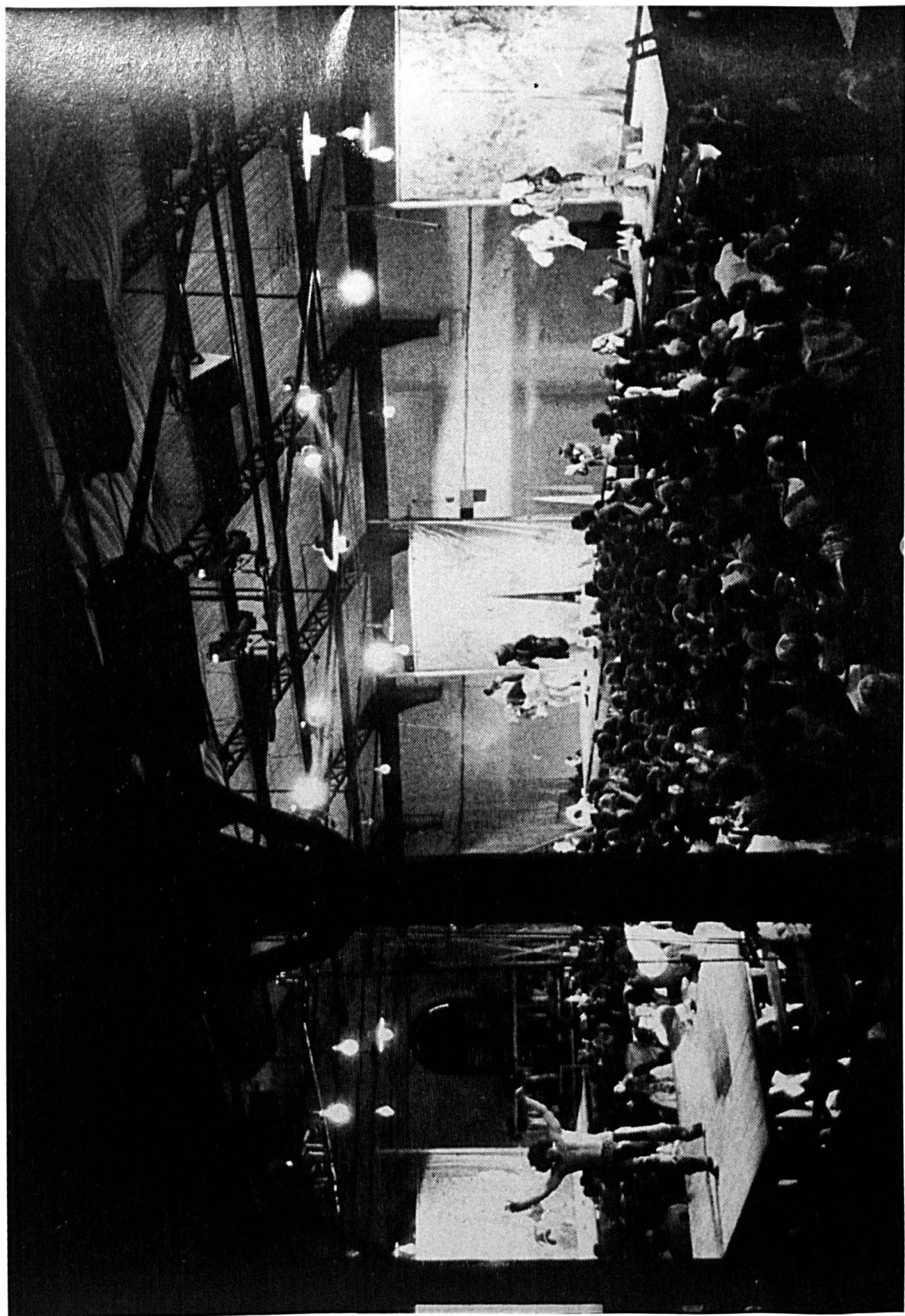
L'HOMME: Citoyens! Le Roi a renvoyé les vingt mille hommes et rappelé Necker! Le Roi viendra demain à Paris pour recevoir la cocarde, dès demain sera entreprise la démolition de la Bastille, et nous danserons sur ses ruines. LE PEUPLE EST VAINQUEUR. (1789:48)

The movement of the scene and the unbridled enthusiasm that it creates among the audience is a substitute for the physical action of the storming of the Bastille. The company do not fall into the trap of creating this peak of enthusiasm and excitement which is theatrical, and therefore not authentic, and then try to transform it into an assault. Rather, the whole action remains on the theatrical level by the eruption of the fête foraine; it is during this physical activity that the public can work off the high spirits of the Bastille accounts by throwing bean bags or shouting and cheering at a mock wrestling match.<sup>1</sup> The specific effect of this tableau is the creation of an atmosphere of public celebration; the means by which this is achieved were

<sup>1</sup>See Figure 6, p. 413.

**Fig. 6. La Fête foraine in 1789.**





proved true in the first improvisations: "Ce qui est beau, c'est que peu à peu, imperceptiblement, le ton a monté, on sentait l'émeute; de plus, le théâtre de foire est un théâtre de tradition orale, on retrouve là sa spécificité."<sup>1</sup>

Certain tableaux use the stages in a way which does not coincide with any of the three situations that have been described, but rather employ a mixture of them. An example in which the dramatic action is developed on two stages simultaneously, but not with a view to audience involvement, is the scene of the symbolic re-enactment of the Revolution that comes at the end of the production. The action is performed on stage A for an audience of garishly clad bourgeois crowded onto stage D. The events enacted summarize the moments of the Revolution: the People (in the form of a single actor) egged on by the Bourgeoisie are extricated from a great basket; they kill the Nobility and the Clergy and are then led back tamely into the basket. The cries of laughter and derision that come from the audience of bourgeois on stage D are stifled as the lid of the basket is raised and the People begin to rise again, but the Bourgeoisie with a cry of "A moi, la garde nationale" defeats them (1789:76). The theatrical situation of the play-within-a-play belies once more the overall theme of the production. The bourgeois on D completely overlook the people in the parterre in order to watch "le spectacle de leur propre révolution" (1789:74). As the enactment describes, the People were used by the Bourgeoisie and then discarded. Indeed, the situation depicted on stage A rebounds back into the "reality" of 1789 when the cry of the Bourgeoisie is met on D by the proclamation of martial law; this, in turn, is followed by a procession of the bourgeois behind the upheld black flag of ordre from D through the parterre to exit by the opening between B and A. The association of the public in the parterre and the mob of 1789 is confirmed by the bourgeois uttering the insult "canaille" to the audience, a common form of abuse during the Revolution.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Théâtre du Soleil, 1789, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Soboul, The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution: 1793-4 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), p. 24.

It is interesting to note that there is a certain consistency in the use of particular stage areas throughout the production. For example, stage D becomes associated with the confirmation of royal powers or the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie to the detriment of the people. In the last scene described, it supported the victorious bourgeois, but at the beginning of the spectacle the King appeared there in all his glory.

A final scenic area is the parterre. This area is strictly associated with the people; it is employed as an acting area when a popular victory is portrayed. In the opening minutes that present the flight of the King and Queen from Paris and their subsequent arrest at Varennes, they are led through the audience in the parterre by a handful of jubilant workers. The victory of the Bastille is likewise celebrated in the parterre as well as on the stages, and Le Chapelier reads the Bill of Human Rights to the people from the floor of the central area (1789:59). We find that the champion of the people, Marat, who appears often in the second half of the production, virtually never climbs up onto the stages; either he is "sorti de la foule" or he "s'adresse au public" from the floor (1789:70; and 73). In fact, the parterre is differentiated from the stages by the sound systems employed in these two areas. Marat, for example, usually speaks through a hand-held microphone, the reproduction of which is coarse and distorted, whereas the stages are served by very sensitive, fixed microphones suspended from above which give out clear, pure sounds.

The parterre only becomes an important acting area in the second half of the production and, significantly, only after de Breuil's tour. In fact, de Breuil is the first character (apart from the opening Varennes sequence) to position himself in the parterre. His appearance follows an incitement to action from the stages directed at the audience: "Ils n'attendent qu'un ordre, qu'un seul pour raser Paris! Etes-vous donc bien lâches! Qu'attendez-vous pour vous révolter? Les laisserez-vous faire?" (1789:40). Similar pleas from the stages by peasants during the opening sequence produced no response at all, yet this time action is forthcoming and from a bourgeois. The implication is

clear: the revolt of the people became effective when the bourgeois associated himself with it, but at the same time the people ceded their control over their own revolt. It is equally noteworthy that the final use of the parterre as an acting area is the exit parade of the bourgeois after the play-within-a-play. Despite their victories, the people have relinquished control over their own area of influence.

In this analysis of the use of the scenic structure, emphasis has been placed on how the scenography of a particular tableau underscores its thematic content. A final example will illustrate this. In the scene depicting the parliamentary debate on the Bill of Human Rights (26 August 1789) the dialogue is comprised totally of exact quotation from the historical debate; simultaneous use is made of many stages. The députés enter, as did the bateleurs for the Bastille scene, from among the people: "Entrée des députés dans la foule des spectateurs; au fur et à mesure de leurs interventions, ils montent sur les marches des escaliers qui mènent aux tréteaux ou sur les tréteaux mêmes" (1789: 60). Significantly, they are all talking among themselves and not to the people. The gradual rising from the floor represents in scenic terms their gradual divorce from the realities of the people who had forced the debate, just as from the central argument of the rights of the individual, they diversify into "délire métaphysique," "des subtilités métaphysiques" (1789:63). Furthermore, as each député climbs up onto a different stage or walkway, the spatial unity in which they entered is exploded over the whole scenic space. After the debate they all agree on a declaration of rights that totally contradicts that which they met to discuss. As though to emphasize the complete separation between the parliament and the people "à l'issue du débat parlementaire, les députés-bateleurs se séparent en se congratulant les uns les autres dans la plus parfaite et souriante solidarité" (1789:64). The movement in space coincides with the movement of the events of history interpreted by the company.

Such varied use of the theatrical space is matched by diversity in the relationships between actor and spectator. It has already been implied

that the public in the central area is associated with the Paris mob of 1789, but this perspective is only one of three. Inside the dual audience structure (the separation into central and external spectating areas) the relationship between the spectator of the parterre and the actor is developed and modified at different moments during the performance.

The first relationship could be described as that of a spectator in 1972 attending a performance set in 1789, that is to say, the relationship between the present-day and the historical fact. This relationship obtains in the scenes that are introduced by a conteur. For example, the opening tirade:

Il était une fois, dans un pays que vous avez  
oublié,  
un roi malade et accablé de peines.  
Regardez-le! . . . (1789:7)

This approach is the most common early in the spectacle; it is used to portray the peasant misery in "Marie la misérable," the abuse of the pregnant woman by her lord, and the suffering of the baby of the poor couple, as well as the spirit of joy fostered by the King's summoning of the Etats Généraux (1789:10-18). In such scenes the spectator is a detached outside observer as is shown by the fact that the appeals to the audience by characters in distress produce no response and are in fact curtailed by a change in action.

The spectator is admitted into the performance to a certain degree in the second type of relationship, namely spectators in 1789 present at sketches performed by bateleurs. Again, the manner of the relationship is illustrated by the introduction to the scene to be played. In this case, the conteur is abandoned in favour of the bateleur himself:

A ce moment-là, Louis entra dans une colère épouvantable et c'est cette colère que nous allons vous jouer, mesdames et messieurs, dans la célèbre séance du "lit de justice" . . . qui opposa d'une part, Louis, ce dernier rejeton de la dynastie maudite des Capets et, d'autre part, ce lion superbe, ce Démosthène du dix-huitième siècle, j'ai nommé le comte de Mirabeau. (1789:30)

The style of introduction is that of the fairground, and the popular rhetoric is used to whip up support for the contestants rather in the manner of the present day boxing match. At the end of the introduction the public and the

bateleur are included in a single time sequence; the Bateleur-Mirabeau is urged to answer why he sat on the benches for the Third Estate in the Assembly in the following words: "Et pourquoi Monsieur de Mirabeau, dites-le-nous!" (1789:30). This approach is most often used in situations where events are to be portrayed according to the popular imagination rather than historical fact. An almost identical speech of introduction is employed by the Bateleur-Magicien for the scene in which the malefic power of Cagliostro over the court is to be enacted:

Tout aurait pu s'arrêter là, mais la fausse bonté du roi cache une affreuse trahison. Son entourage veille. Aussi, nous allons vous jouer dans le mode barbaresque "le roi aux deux visages." Les trois créatures qui piaffent devant moi sont trois comédiennes dont je tairrai le nom, voulant leur éviter, après ce que vous allez voir, les foudres mortelles de la colère royale. (1789:36)

The sequence of tenses of this passage draws the bateleur, his public and the scene to be depicted into a single time, and that not far removed from 1789. The first tense suggests a critical distance or at least a temporal distance from the event which preceded it; but by the second half of the opening sentence we are thrown back into the immediacy of an imagined present. The banter of the bateleur is an attempt to involve the audience closely in what is to happen and to try to create the illusion of its reality by intimating that the King himself might take steps against the actresses if their names were revealed. However, the prevailing tone is that of the popular theatre; the public would not consider that they were present at the real event. In short, what is invoked is the traditional suspension of disbelief.

In these first two styles of relationship, an overtly theatrical relationship is maintained. This is emphasized by the mere fact that the introductions are often accompanied by some manner of costuming. For example, the opening conteur takes part in the scene which he has been describing, and "[il] coiffe un bonnet à oreilles d'âne" (1789:8). The bateleurs who are to represent Mirabeau, Dreux-Brézé and Louis XVI make up on stage during the preliminary speeches (1789:30). Finally, the Bateleur-Magicien abandons his role of barker in favour of that of Cagliostro: "Je vais maintenant devant vous me transformer en fauve, en un personnage auquel vous n'oserez croire,

en un mage terrible: Cagliostro!" (1789:36).

There remains the relationship in which actors and audience become identified as a single entity, the Paris mob. This fusion dominates the central part of the production and significantly coincides with the moments of great popular victories. The transformation from the bateleur-spectator relationship to the actor-spectator identification is made through an initial introductory speech. The Bateleur-Magicien tears off his wig and costume emphatically underlining the end of the theatrical representation and harangues the audience: "Si vous le voulez bien, nous allons laisser là l'imaginaire et revenir à notre réalité!" (1789:40). He is stating the precedence of 1789 reality over the imaginary realm of the theatrical representation. He proceeds to give an accurate account of the position of the foreign troops with which Louis has surrounded Paris. This speech is entirely conducted in the present tense which distinguishes it from those of the conteurs and the bateleurs. It builds in passion and intensity as the speaker identifies himself with his public: "Là, là, encore là! ils bloquent toutes nos réserves de blé, détournent tous nos convois! A Versailles, ils tiennent nos députés entre leurs griffes" (1789:40). The speech is concluded with the impassioned plea for action which is followed by the emergence of the stockbroker de Breuil from among the audience. His address is obviously spoken not to a 1972 theatre public but to a 1789 Paris crowd (1789:41). It is part of the thematic structure of the production that de Breuil should abandon the parterre and the public-Paris mob, but the identification of theatre public and 1789 workers remains nonetheless implicit.

The period for which this identification is maintained coincides exactly with a passage in the performance when actions and events flow from one to another without any break or introduction. From de Breuil's recruiting tour, we are swept into the recounting of the 14 July and then into the celebrations of la fête foraine. These are the moments of popular self-expression and the Théâtre du Soleil uses the audience to express public celebration. In the fête foraine the parterre participates symbolically in the taking of the Bastille. It must be understood that the identification of

public and Paris mob is kept at the level of theatrical effectiveness; that is, the identification is not used to bring the 1789 revolution up to date and hence effect some immediate effective political action in the present, but rather to take the 1972 audience into the past.

The identification of public and Paris mob only operates in those situations at which the mob of 1789 may have been present; therefore, it remains intact as Lafayette orders the dispersal of the crowd and as Marat emerges as champion of the people, but as soon as the action of the production spreads to the effect of the 14 July on the countryside, on the policies of the nobles and the events of the Grande Peur, the conteur is re-introduced.

It is therefore consistent that the last type of spectator-actor relationship should obtain on the occasion of the "deuxième grande victoire du peuple," namely the enforced return of the royal couple to Paris from Versailles on 5 October 1789 (1789:67). The theatrical action that covers this sequence of events is begun without any introduction; a woman just simply emerges from the crowd in the parterre and commences a verbal attack on the profiteering by the monopolists, the plot of the nobles to starve the people, and the other injustices that the people have to suffer. From this tempestuous start, action swiftly follows action: a group of women rush through the parterre and return bearing the fifteen-foot effigies of Louis and Marie-Antoinette; faced with this victory, the authorities appear on stage D and grimly decree martial law; they descend and pass through the crowd pushing back the victorious women and stifling the public rejoicing; even Marat who stands up to them with a passionate speech on behalf of the people is slowly swept back. For the remainder of the production the identification of the audience with the Paris mob is maintained as the Troisième Député ("Et le dix-neuvième siècle, . . . il est là aux portes!" - 1789:72), Marat and Barnave successively address the audience-public. However, as the audience-public, they take no further part in the events depicted, for after 5 October it is the bourgeoisie that is in control. The final exit of the bourgeois with their despising oaths to the parterre as the Paris mob underscores the



continuing identification.

The production offers not only a varied use of space but also involves the audience in a variety of relationships with the action. The interplay of spatial setting and the audience's theatrical situation is structured in order to communicate the theme of the play. The coexistence of the participational and the critical attitudes that is suggested in the configuration of the set is echoed by the different levels of rapport that are struck during the performance. By balancing the association of the theatre audience and the Paris crowd with the historical description of conteur-introduced tableaux, the company has succeeded in moulding into one production both participation and distanciation. The merit of this achievement lies in the fact that the spectator moves from one relationship to another easily and smoothly. Finding oneself in the position of the Paris mob and being treated like them (for example, the "canaille" at the end or the "dégagez" that cuts short the celebrations after 14 July) makes an assessment and critical reaction all the more deeply felt.

The opening scenes of peasant suffering are particularly revealing in an examination of audience responses to the production. The caricatures of the nobility (as a goose), the clergy (as a crow), and the ailing King who are exploiting the people (as an ass) passes from highly amusing to highly nauseating as the scene accelerates. The audience is left in an uncertain position wanting to recoil from the scene into which it has been drawn. Applause and bowing from the actors serve as an escape valve and dispel this uneasiness. The following tableau of "Marie, la misérable" presents a straightforward situation of human suffering, but the audience has no time to form a lasting judgement as the action moves quickly on. Human suffering is next treated in a more poetic manner through a crude personification of the tax, "la gabelle," ending with an appeal to the audience. But again no time is left for evaluation as "le conteur continue" (1789:13). The fourth scene involves the violation of the rights of a pregnant woman by a bombastic seigneur; after being played in a highly dramatic way, the feeling of outrage engendered is

stifled once more by bowing. In all four of the situations the spectator looks on as an outside observer and his involvement in the action is denied because his sense of moral outrage is always prevented from developing. In the following tableau that uses simultaneous contrapuntal techniques to express the hardship of a young married couple and their baby, the spectator is involved in the action, is inserted into the centre of the action which he has only observed from outside up ~~until~~<sup>to</sup> that point. The scene is not halted by the intervention of the conteur, but by the ascension of the elegantly clothed King surrounded by well-fed, pretty peasant girls and accompanied by brilliant light and grandiose music. The spectator by having first observed and then participated in (on a theatrical level of involvement) the hardship of the peasants is led to a greater feeling of disgust at the injustices of the society by the appearance of the King. This contrast of feeling is underscored by following the King's installation on stage D with all its pomp, ceremony and sycophantic smiles with the singing of a patriotic peasant song by a young, jovial peasant girl at the opposite end (stage A). The artificiality of the King is contrasted to the natural freshness of the peasant girl; the classical music booming out from hidden amplifiers is replaced by the melody of a single flute played by a peasant accompanist. This passage of the spectator through different attitudes towards the representation is symptomatic of his oscillation throughout the production, from participation to critical appreciation and back.

Since the spectator is absorbed into the theatrical reality only part of the time, he is not oblivious of his position as a contemporary individual regarding a historical subject nor of the critical sense that this temporal distancing makes available to him. Indeed, the coexistence of 1789 and 1972 in the production is demonstrated by the use of the microphone by Marat; the way he moves with it recalls the ballad singer of contemporary night-clubs.

Given the diversity of techniques in the performance, it is very surprising that most of the critical evaluations of the production emphasized the identification of the public with the Paris mob as being the central element.

However, to dwell on the fête théâtrale alone is to misunderstand the movement and structure of the production.<sup>1</sup> True, this association of the spectators to the action of the spectacle allows the company to avoid the inconsistency of Rolland's play in which the audience, which had been the passive spectators of a historical reconstruction, are suddenly turned on and asked to respond actively to the performance. But where the Théâtre du Soleil show themselves superior to Rolland is in their understanding of the theatrical experience. They accept that theatre cannot make revolution or change society itself, and so in their production the call for action that is made by the Bateleur-Magicien is answered in theatrical terms by the recitations of the capture of the Bastille and the fun of the fair. Nevertheless, certain shortcomings are apparent in the practice of the production 1789, for is it not a somewhat false assumption that the theatre going public of 1972 can be fairly identified with the Paris mob? The former is mainly middle class and it was not that class which accounted for the majority of the people in the streets during the Revolution. A second point to be made is that the spectators in the parterre, although incorporated into the revolutionary crowd with the actors, are always on a different level of comprehension of what is actually happening to that of the actors. Hence, in the scene of the return of the royal couple to Paris, the actors hurriedly clear the space for the passage of the huge effigies by keeping the spectators well away.

If 1789 is characterized by movement, variety, colour and theatricality, 1793 presents a totally different view of the world in its more static, sombre and serious composition. 1793 concerns itself with a historical reality. This is illustrated by the fact that practically all scenes of 1793 are introduced by the conteur technique. The experience of this technique in 1789 shows that such scenes do not attempt to include the audience in the performance, but are rather employed to provoke contemplation about the historical situation. Throughout the performance it is made clear that the aim of 1793 is to induce this mental activity on the part of the audience.

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<sup>1</sup>Claude Olivier, Les Lettres françaises, 20 January 1971, p. 16.

The scenic structure of 1789 suggests the théâtre de foire; it includes recognizably theatrical acting areas and is used in an overtly theatrical manner with back-cloths and curtains. The theatrical space for 1793 offers no such theatrical allusions. Furthermore, on first entering the main performance area, there are no clearly defined areas for spectators and actors. The whole theatrical area is built out of wood, a replica of the church halls which were the meeting-places for the sectionnaires.<sup>1</sup> Indeed in contrast to the set for 1789 which is only given meaning by the action portrayed on it, the set for 1793 is a defined, historical venue. The three isolated table-stages which form the main centres of the action do not allow the flow and smooth transitional movement that the 1789 set affords. Each scene is clearly demarcated by the noisy transfer of the actors from one table to another. This has important implications for the temporal conception of 1793; because each action is isolated, one is conscious of the passage from one event to the next and, by extension, the time lapse between events.

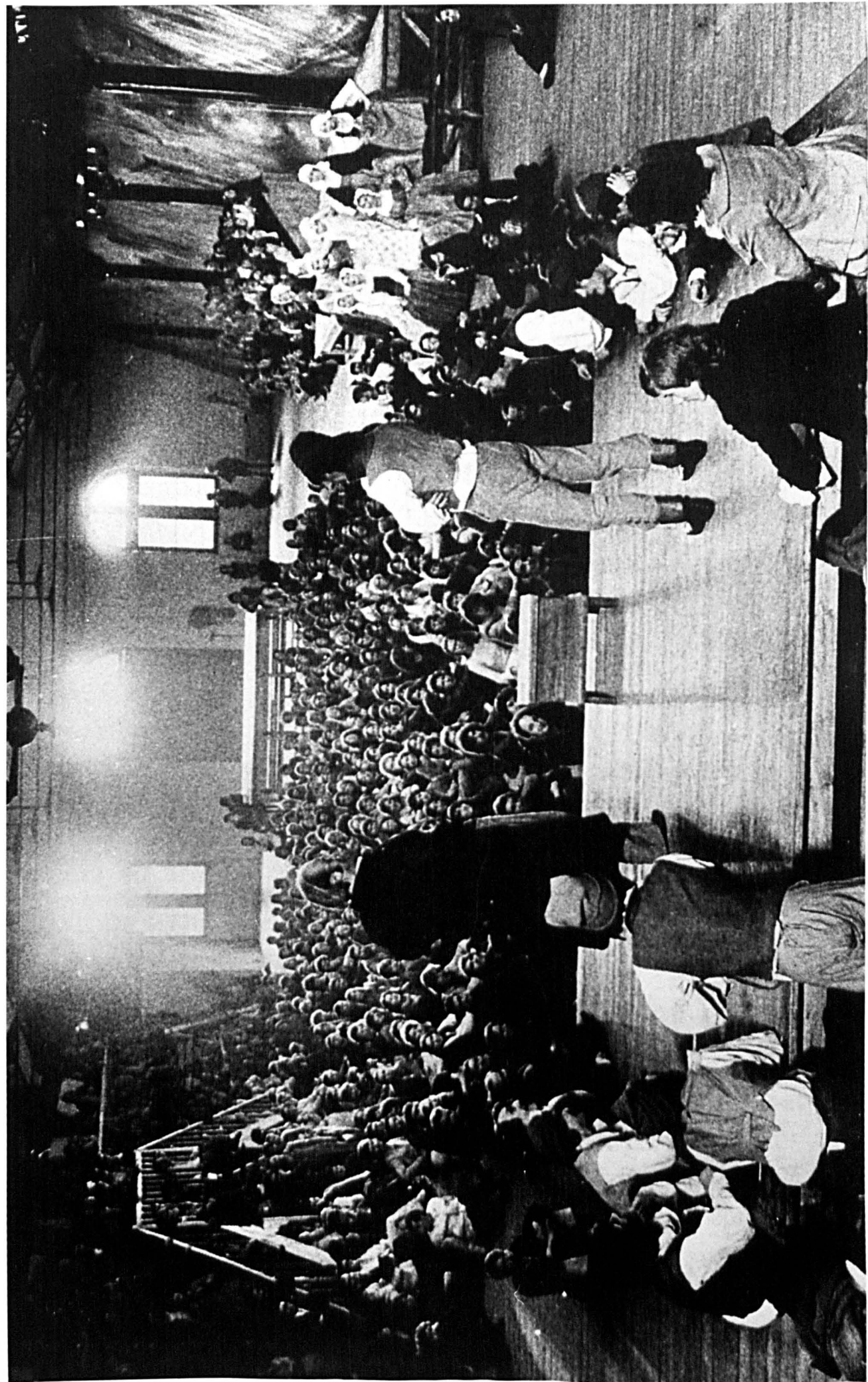
The lighting techniques of the later production fulfil the same function of insisting on the passing of time. Instead of the theatrical spotlights and stage lighting of 1789, here the lighting sources are either external to the theatrical space or in the form of naturalistic lamps suspended over each table-stage. The lighting effects are total, that is, the audience and the actors are in the same light just as they are included in the same defined place, la section. The external sources produce a synthesized daylight that shines through the glass roof of the Cartoucherie and the windows at either end. This daylight follows its natural course; during the opening sequence it diminishes and as it does so the lamps over the tables are illuminated.

Lighting also plays an important role in the evocation of a concrete reality which is the aim of the production. For example, the scene, "Le Lavoir en été," is accompanied by golden light streaming in through the windows, whereas the parallel scene, "Le Lavoir en hiver," is illuminated by a steely, grey light. Similarly, the resounding classical music of 1789—Handel, Bach

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<sup>1</sup>See Figure 7, p. 425.

**Fig. 7. Le Procès de l'accapareur from 1793.**



Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler—has no place in 1793 with its simple popular songs accompanied by drum and flute. At no time is the section drowned in sounds that are transmitted from sources outside itself. The theme of the production concentrates on the economic and political situation of the people in 1793; simplicity is what characterizes the techniques employed: "Au départ, la salle devait être entièrement utilisée, mais le spectacle évoluant vers une concentration du jeu des comédiens dans un lieu plus fermé, il nous a paru utile de n'habiter qu'une seule nef de la Cartoucherie, pour la section."<sup>1</sup>

In the matter of characterization as much as in any other aspect of production, the difference in style of 1789 and 1793 is made abundantly clear. In the former, the actors play many different parts and, furthermore, the same role is interpreted by many different actors: for example, Gérard Hardy appears as Louis XVI, a banker, a colonial noble in Santo Domingo, a member of the Comédie Française, a parliamentary secretary, and one of the triumphant bourgeois; but Louis XVI is also performed by Serge Coursan, Louis Samier, Marc Godard, and Georges Bonnaud as well as by two different-sized puppets. The continuity of the production in this respect is not to be found in any essential detail of characterization, but rather in costuming:

A chaque changement de situation, ils [les personnages] sont interprétés par un comédien différent signalé par un détail significatif de costume: les nobles portent des fraises et des chapeaux de mousquetaires, les paysans se réfèrent à Le Nain ou à Watteau selon le climat à créer. Le comédien ne donne jamais à voir Louis XVI ou Necker, par exemple, mais leur image signifiante.<sup>2</sup>

Characterization through external detail alone precludes the traditional identification either of character with his role or of spectator with actor-character. 1789 plays on the possibility of multiple and complex relationships between spectator and actor that freedom from this convention brings about.

1793 is not suited to this diffuse approach to characterization. The emphasis is on the evocation of a concrete reality and not of a reality created in the popular imagination. From emblematic costuming, the means of continuity

<sup>1</sup> Théâtre du Soleil, 1793, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> Mnouchkine and Penchenat, "Aventure," p. 124.

was turned to "la recherche et l'approche de personnages charnels."<sup>1</sup> This direction was taken up in rehearsals as early as December 1971 and by January the following year it was clear that the characters must be placed in a defined and specific milieu for the effect to be realized. From that point onwards rehearsals tended towards the creation of stable characters and a concentration on a single setting, that is, la section.<sup>2</sup>

The creation of these characters was a complex process involving the actor's own experience, personal research and observation as well as the necessity for historical accuracy. To a certain extent, 1793 proved to be the continuation of Les Clowns in this respect, where 1789 had been its continuation in the matter of the style of performance. For instance, the actors were left the freedom by Mnouchkine to form their own sectionnaire, just as in Les Clowns each actor built his own identity as a clown. Philippe Caubère became Néné d'Allauch in the production through a common Marseille heritage; Geneviève Rey, on the other hand, chose the role of a servant, Angèle Lafargue, because she considered it close to her bourgeois upbringing.<sup>3</sup> Penchenat explains the necessity of the process that encouraged the actors to resort to their personal experience and family heritage:

Oui, nous préférons tous parler de quelque chose que nous connaissions. . . . Il fallait chercher les racines qui restent en nous, parce qu'on est complètement désincarné maintenant dans une ville. Et pour parler de ces gens du peuple 1792-3, de leur chaleur, de leur force, on avait besoin de retrouver des racines.<sup>4</sup>

Once these roots had been found and the embryonic sectionnaire had been given an occupation or trade, once more the company employed direct observation. Just as for La Cuisine the actors had visited kitchens to study waiters in action, so for 1793 the actors sought a tradesman with whom to spend a day. René Patrignani, hence, visited a blacksmith; Nicole Félix, a repassouse; Roland Amstutz, a carpenter. This was not to produce an

<sup>1</sup> Théâtre du Soleil, 1793, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 148-49.

<sup>3</sup> See Françoise Kourilsky, "Entretien avec les comédiens," Travail théâtral, no. 8 (July-September 1972), p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Penchenat to Kourilsky, "Entretiens avec les comédiens," p. 35.



accurate replica of a blacksmith or carpenter, but to be able to inform the character with those gestures which reveal the social position of the trade chosen. The aim was not to recreate that particular tradesman observed but to express his social reality. In more ideological terms, "le personnage charnel doit être saisi d'un point de vue historique et social."<sup>1</sup> The creativity and observation of the actor had to be channeled through his awareness and comprehension of the historical events of 1793; as Philippe Caubère states: "Tout ce qu'on voit apparaître des personnages dans le spectacle a, en fait, une signification historique et politique."<sup>2</sup>

Evidence of the company's historical awareness is to be found in the inspiration for certain of the characters. It is a fact that none of the well-known figures of the Revolution appear directly in the performance; however, certain of these figures are at the base of characters that do appear. Gérard Hardy who plays Charles-Henri Le Breton admits his debt to Varlet. The latter shares with his theatrical counterpart a position in the postal service. Varlet was a member of the Section des Droits de l'Homme so it is natural to find him in the company's section. However, Varlet was in no way a member of the working class having enjoyed an inheritance from his mother; this economic position is reflected in the performance by his elegant and well-groomed clothes that distinguish him from the more shabbily dressed butcher, joiner and blacksmith. Finally, Varlet's extrovert and vitriolic character have made their mark in Le Breton's willingness to perform in front of his fellow sectionnaires, either as the victor of Valmy or the monopolist grocer of the rue Saint-Blaise (1793:58; and 118-20). As a political enragé Varlet was an extremist in his socialist views. A disciple of Rousseau, he was a firm believer in the power and sovereignty of the people and attacked their exploitation by merchants and politicians alike.<sup>3</sup> Le Breton is the

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Mounier, "Rôles et personnages," Travail théâtral, no. 8 (July-September 1972), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Philippe Caubère to Kourileky, "Entretien avec les comédiens," p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> See R. B. Rose, The Enragés: Socialists of the French Revolution? (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1965).

representative of this political faction inside the section created by the Théâtre du Soleil. It is he who reports the petition taken before the Convention Nationale by Jacques Roux, the more famous enragé (1793:84-86). This petition, in the words of the historian Soboul, reflected the movement towards "popular egalitarianism";<sup>1</sup> therefore, it is no surprise to find Le Breton championing the cause of equality of the people and their right to exercise direct power:

Un peuple représenté n'est pas libre. La volonté ne se représente pas. (1793:124)

Eh bien moi, je vous adjure de vous mettre à la place de la représentation nationale, que les députés descendent de leurs gradins, ils appartiennent au peuple. (1793:126)

Characteristically, it is Le Breton who assumes the role of inquisitor in the trial of the monopolist that the sectionnaires enact for their own amusement, and who, in a moment of unbridled idealism, proclaims "la réunion immédiate de la lune à la terre!" (1793: 67-70; and 76).

Further proof of the company's ability to build historical fact and detail into a theatrical performance without the simple transposition that ends in reconstruction, is revealed in the character Germain Fabre, the engraver. Georges Bonnaud constructed this theatrical creation on a certain Lange, a municipal officer in Lyons who in the summer of 1792 declared in a pamphlet that all foodstuffs should be nationalized and that prices should be fixed according to the resources of the consumers and not the claims of the landowners.<sup>2</sup> Germain Fabre is, from the outset, a firm believer in public opinion and later develops into a follower of the "philosophes", supporting a philosophy of "le bonheur commun" in order to improve the quality of life by such measures as free housing of equal standard for all.<sup>3</sup> Similar parallels exist between Franck Poumeyreau's Baptiste Dumont and Robespierre and Philippe Caubère's Néné d'Allauch and a fédéré marseillais called Romme.

<sup>1</sup>Soboul, Parisian Sans-Culottes, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>See Mathiez, French Revolution, p. 207.

<sup>3</sup>See Théâtre du Soleil, 1793, p. 19; p. 73; p. 115; pp. 75-76; and p. 111.

The names for these characters were selected to sound authentic. Not all merely sound authentic, one in particular is actually that of a tradesman who became a commissaire révolutionnaire of the Section Mont-Blanc. It is in keeping with the perspective of the production that the authentic name should not be that of a leading figure; it is also probable that the character only shares a name and a profession with his historical predecessor. What is known of this Antoine Maréchal is that during the public celebrations in honour of Marat, he proclaimed an attack on the rich who identified themselves with the cause of the people in the sections.<sup>1</sup> Roland Amstutz's version of Maréchal, the menuisier, remains a more conservative figure by his championing of the shopkeeper and the right to own property. In an imaginary constitution that carries his name, he puts forward three articles: equality of opportunity for children, the right of inheritance and the right to possess property (1793:71; and 75). The apparent contradiction of these articles is representative of the sans-culottes' inability to deal with political theory; many of the demands articulated in the period were the result of specific situations and were not argued from a consistent social viewpoint. The demand for the right to own property, in fact, is the one demand that reflects the social ideal of the sans-culotterie:

CITOYEN MENUISIER: Article deux: chaque citoyen doit avoir sa petite propriété, un artisan son atelier, un commerçant sa boutique, un paysan son champ, une propriété modeste mais suffisante pour chaque famille. Il faut que chacun soit libre et indépendant, qu'il se suffise à lui-même! (1793:71; and 73)

This speech is a theatrical restatement of a declaration by the Section des Sans-Culottes on 2 September 1793 in which it was laid down that nobody should own more than one shop or workshop in order that inequality of wealth might be gradually eroded.<sup>2</sup>

By this process of integrating the political problems of the period into the construction of a character, the company avoids plain historical

<sup>1</sup> See Soboul, Parisian Sans-Culottes, p. 83: "We have rich people in this Section, citizens under suspicion. We shall arrest them and, if necessary, force them to pay 100,000 écus as a revolutionary tax."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

reconstruction and, indeed, psychological portrayal. No persons such as Charles Le Breton or even Antoine Maréchal actually existed; these characters may be built on historical figures, but they reflect the wider political situation of the time. Nor are characters the subjective creations of the actors since they are tempered by the observance of historical and social reality. Penchenat explains: "Nous pouvions amener tout ce que nous avons envie d'amener dans la construction de notre personnage, mais pas gratuitement. Le personnage . . . doit refléter toute une catégorie de personnages, les enragés, les babouvistes, les robespierristes."<sup>1</sup>

Part of that reality was the evolution of political ideas caused by the turn of events. To reflect this situation the company realized that the characters must develop throughout the performance.<sup>2</sup> An example is Penchenat's own creation, the scribe and clerk of court, Honoré Ferron. As an ex-representative of the civil authorities and royal power (1793:65-66), Ferron is at the outset an observer of due form and honest practice:

CITOYEN GREFFIER: Citoyens, tout ce que nous disons là doit être consigné dans une pétition en bonne et due forme, signée de nous tous, que nous irons présenter à l'Assemblée, avec l'assentiment des quarante-sept autres sections! (1793:19)

The rejection of the constitution by the Assembly is theatrically enacted by a sectionnaire throwing a ball of paper into Ferron's face. In this action we have fused a representation of historical reality and the personal interaction of the sectionnaires that leads to the development of each character and his political ideas. Ferron's adherence to the traditional means of reform is symbolically ended when he plays a Girondin député (the elected representative of the people) in a light-hearted farce in the section and is beheaded. From hesitant compliance to the will of the majority, Ferron passes to authoritative action in urging the section to draw up a constitution, in calling for unity among the sectionnaires, and in leading the civic banquet on which the performance ends (1793:71; 94; and 114). Politically, his ideas advance from opposition to the constitution to a demand for the nationalization

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<sup>1</sup> Penchenat to Kourilsky, "Entretien avec les comédiens," p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

of land and the declaration of an idealistic universal republic (1793:19; and 75):

CITOYEN GREFFIER: Il faut que la Constitution soit universelle, qu'elle s'applique à tous les hommes de la terre et qu'elle régisse une république universelle où le mot de guerre serait à jamais rayé du vocabulaire. Et dans cette république universelle il n'y aurait pas de disputes puisqu'il n'y a pas de points de communication entre la terre et les planètes. (1793:76)

By the end of the performance he has become a follower of Babeuf in his support of the sovereignty of the people and the responsibility of the députés to the people (1793:121-22). Indeed, from a man who has interceded on behalf of unity in an argument between Le Breton (representing the enragé faction) and Baptiste Dumont (the follower of Robespierre), he becomes the leader of the debate that finally sees Dumont defeated in favour of the more militant approach of the enragés (1793:126). The structure of the performance is dramatically based on the relative positions of certain sectionnaires within the group; for example, Le Breton and Dumont are opponents, the latter enjoying support in the first half of the performance, the former in the second half; the evolution of Ferron is the back-cloth against which this confrontation of roles is played out. Thematically, the structure derives from the movement of history, the emergence of the enragés as a result of the worsening conditions of life.

As a group, the sectionnaires are a combination of the small shop owner (Joseph Dupril, marchand de vin), the craftsman (Adrien Réveillard, forgeron), the office employe (Charles-Henri Le Breton, commis des postes), the soldier (Jean Choux, militaire) as well as the serving class (Louise Cassius de Linval, journalière) represented in the main by women. The majority are drawn from the shopkeepers or tradesman; this explains the defence of the small property owner against the socialist proposals of Félicien Parent, who as a commis boucher, has no property to defend:

FELICIEN PARENT: . . . l'arrière-boutique, elle est pleine, alors, on rentre dedans . . . (remous dans la section)

CITOYEN MARCHAND DE VIN: Tu crois que je vais te laisser piller ma boutique de vin, moi?

CITOYEN MENUISIER: On va pas commencer à piller les honnêtes commerçants, ça se retournerait contre nous! (1793:26)

The social composition of the section reflects the distinct absence of the male working classes, the urban proletariat or the unskilled industrial labourer. Baptiste Dumont points out this fact to the sectionnaires: "La grande société populaire, c'est le peuple français, et puis, le peuple existe-t-il chaque jour dans les sections? (réactions violentes)" (1793:125). It was a fact that the sans-culottes movement was fashioned by the craftsmen and shop-owners and not by any truly working-class representation.<sup>1</sup> The make-up of the section reveals that sans-culotterie was less a movement than "a coalition of socially heterogeneous elements";<sup>2</sup> for example, the middle-class liberals, Dumont and Le Breton, are found among the craftsmen and tradesmen of the section. It was never a unified political force but was constantly "undermined by internal contradictions."<sup>3</sup> The washerwoman meets the butcher inside the section but this does not alter their commercial relationship outside the meeting hall. It is this paradox that Louise articulates:

LOUISE: Moi, c'est l'égoïsme, l'indifférence qui règnent parmi les gens comme nous, c'est ça qui divise les sans-culottes! Tiens, tu vas chez le boucher, tu es pauvre, alors tu as droit aux os et aux bas morceaux, tandis qu'aux riches, il leur réserve les morceaux les plus délicats, et plutôt que de mettre à un prix abordable les bons morceaux pour les sans-culottes, il préfère les laisser pourrir et les jeter! (1793:106)

The differences between the sectionnaires are to some extent reflected in the costuming: for example, Ferron wears white gaiters, silk choker and a broad-brimmed hat which contrasts with the uniform of the sans-culottes movement, the bonnet rouge, the short waistcoat (la carmagnole), and long trousers. It is interesting to note that as he advances in his political development towards babouvisme, Ferron's costume is altered accordingly (mainly by the abandonment of the hat). Similarly the journalist, Baptiste Dumont, stands out from the section by his middle-class attire: white socks, highly polished shoes with gold buckles, silk waistcoat and white choker. Throughout the performance, there is no noticeable change in his appearance, and so it is consistent that he should remain outside the group at the end of the

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<sup>1</sup>Soboul, Parisian Sans-Culottes, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

production (1793:126). Indeed, it is in keeping with a character based on Robespierre to refuse to wear the sans-culottes uniform, for on 19 March 1792 Robespierre himself had opposed a motion in the Convention that demanded all députés wear the bonnet rouge. This attention to the detail of costume is significant in the light of Soboul's remark: "The sans-culottes readily judged a person's character from his appearance."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the moment of Dumont's fall from popularity in the section is marked by a reference to his physical appearance as Néné d'Allauch spits out: "Il est beau comme un roi!" (1793:126).

The events and relationships in the section are, therefore, reflections of the historical and political situation, but at the same time this situation is the product of everyday events, such as those enacted by the sectionnaires. This dialectic is represented in the section by the division into a male and female group. The men are the embodiment of the social ideals and aspirations of the time, whereas the women incarnate the suffering and problems of everyday life. It is they who twice enact the scene outside a bakery to illustrate to the men the hardships in the city; it is equally through them that the economic details of urban life are expressed. The interaction between the everyday and the shaping of political initiatives in the historical context is portrayed dramatically by the position of the women inside the section.

In the opening situation, the women are ready for action as Citoyenne Angèle shouts across to the wrangling men: "Tu crois qu'on ne va pas marcher, citoyen, moi, je peux te dire qu'on est tous prêts, et nous, les femmes, on a de bonnes raisons pour ça" (1793:20). The inaction of the men would appear to be due to their own ignorance of the political issues and to their opposition to female involvement as is proved by the "brouhaha désapprobateur" that greets Néné d'Allauch's suggestion that women should vote in the election of commissars (1793:26). The scenes at the communal wash-house, in summer and winter, serve to complete their identities as individuals and also to demonstrate their political self-education through their daily experience. For example, it is Rose-Marie who points out the shortcomings in Marat's argument

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

for making the deliberations of the Convention public by building benches for four thousand spectators:

ROSE-MARIE: Quatre mille! Il y pense pas, Marat! Tous les hommes sont au front! Dix-huit mille en trois semaines qui sont partis, avec mon homme! Alors, comment on va les remplir les tribunes! Avec les riches! (1793:51)

Through their reactions to events, the divorce between the people and their elected representatives is made apparent, a divorce that lies at the root of the rise of the enragés. Thus, it is the women who begin the response to Baptiste Dumont's opposition to Jacques Roux's petition:

ANGELE: Tu ne sais pas ce que tu dis, citoyen, tu ne connais pas la misère du peuple. (1793:87)

Consequently it is they who polarize the opinion of the men and force Dumont to compromise. The increasing power of the female faction (by implication, the faction of political action through economic necessity) is demonstrated scenically at the end of this scene: "Elles sont rejointes par les hommes de la section qui avaient approuvé, dans la scène précédente, la pétition de Jacques Roux" (1793:91). Through their action, the women have become sufficiently politically aware that their next appearance is marked by their own demands and articles for a petition (1793:104-12). The final tableau presents the women standing up with the men to cite articles from the Constitution on the occasion of the general uprising of 23 August 1793 (1793:115-16). From non-voting, additional members to the section, the women have risen to become important and equal in the political activity of the section. The occasion of their political maturity is significantly also that of the defeat of Baptiste Dumont and his legal constitutional approach at the hands of the revolutionary element represented by Le Breton and Renoir. The growing prominence accorded to the women illustrates the fact that "economic fluctuations provided the rhythm of the revolutionary movement" and, more precisely, that the problem of hunger and paying for food was "the essential feature of popular movements during the Revolution."<sup>1</sup>

It is these fluctuations that are of importance in the production.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 54; and p. 42.



The movement of history and its effects on the people are what interest the company. Although interpreted through the sectionnaires presented before us, it is the people's indomitable spirit to triumph over the events and to strive towards a revolutionary society that the company gives as an example and not the individual's psychology in the moment of stress: "Si elle [une scène] n'apporte qu'une connaissance élargie du personnage, elle est finalement inutile et peut rarement rester, parce qu'en la surchargeant artificiellement on la détruit."<sup>1</sup> The final scene is one of the triumph of the people. Historical events after 1793 destroy their achievements as the final roll-call illustrates, but the repression of later years cannot eradicate the existence of "la cité révolutionnaire" nor deny that it is "de ce monde," the aphorism which is the apt sub-title to the production. Through their characterization the company illustrate Soboul's assessment of the sans-culotte movement as representing "the glimmerings of a new moral code."<sup>2</sup>

As far as the actor's attitude towards his role is concerned, the company's customary avoidance of identification recurs once more. Penchenat affirms that "il n'y a aucune identification entre nous et notre personnage," and Philippe Caubère explains that it would be impossible for the actor not to treat the character "avec distance" because the aim and direction of the production are never out of sight.<sup>3</sup>

This distance between the actor and his role is expressed in performance by the introductory formula through which an actor-conteur identifies himself as a certain sectionnaire. The most straightforward of these introductions follows this pattern:

UN CONTEUR: Le 31 juillet 1792, les assemblées du quartiers furent envahies par les citoyens de toutes origines. Je jouerai le boulanger Renoir . . . qui était, ce jour-là, président. (Jouant le citoyen boulanger)  
CITOYEN BOULANGER: D'abord, . . . (1793:17)

In this example the transition is underscored by the splitting of the speech

<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine cited by Godard, "Collectif artisanal," p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Soboul, Parisian Sans-Culottes, p. 247.

<sup>3</sup>Penchenat and Caubère to Kourilsky, "Entretien avec les comédiens," p. 37; and p. 38.

and the direct naming of the sectionnaire to be played. More often the transition is not so well defined but is nevertheless obvious:

UNE CONTEUSE: Alors, les hommes sont partis et dans Paris, les femmes sont restées et Rose-Marie Quentin, tous les jours, même le dimanche, elle va au lavoir. (Elle joue Rose-Marie.)  
 ANGELE: Bonjour, Rose-Marie! (1793:48)

The characters Adrien Réveillard, Néné d'Allauch, Agricol Chapette, and Honoré Ferron all conduct similar speeches of introduction. Not only does this technique preclude identification with the character either by the actor or indeed by the audience, it also keeps the historical situation constantly in focus.

Although each actor defines a single sectionnaire and develops a single character, there are occasions in which the sectionnaire assumes another role. This situation is reminiscent of the actor-bateleur-historical figure arrangement of 1789. However, there is a qualitative difference between the analogous situations in the two productions, a difference that again has its roots in a divergence of overall perspective. A case in point is that of Honoré Ferron's mimicry of the writing of official history in the scene, "Le Récit du fédéré." The scene is constructed around two simultaneous speeches; the one related by Agricol Chapette deals with the actual events of his journey to Paris, and the other by Ferron represents what the historians have made of the harsh facts. The accounts are timed so that as the end approaches the pace is increased, the parody more exaggerated and the official account more preposterous. However, at the end the scene is applauded by the other sectionnaires from another table-stage. It becomes apparent that the scene was played as an amusement for them as much as for the audience. Agricol Chapette and Honoré Ferron light-heartedly return their companions' applause with gracious theatrical bows. The other instances of the sectionnaire as an actor are all characterized by the conscious parody of the part by the sectionnaire. For example, Charles-Henri Le Breton introduces the farce about the monopolist grocer:

CITOYEN LE BRETON: Citoyens, nous allons vous jouer une petite saynète, sur le maximum! . . . Ça s'appellera: l'épicier accapareur ou la tasse du maximum! (Les trois coups sont frappés par le citoyen)

greffier et durant toute la scène, les sectionnaires se comporteront comme un véritable public de quignol.) (1793:120)

Similarly, Honoré Ferron incarnates a people's representative in a manner meant as a joke for the delight of the section; the stage direction emphasizes the distance: "Il joue au député girondin" (1793:70).

Any situation that refers to events outside the meeting-hall is either directly reported to the sectionnaires by one of their number (Le Breton reads Jacques Roux's petition) or is enacted in a scene for the purpose of informing the other sectionnaires. Overtly theatrical moments like the victorious return from Valmy are met with overtly theatrical responses from the other sectionnaires, such as loud applause and cheering. Even more solemn scenes such as "Le Lavoire en été" are kept on the level of enactment by their staging. In the scene in question, the women are all seated around the table-stage and enter from that position to make their speeches (1793:48). The essential distinction between 1789 and 1793 that underlies this technique is expressed by the company: "Dans 1793, ce seront, non plus les acteurs du Théâtre du Soleil qui jouent le rôle de bateleurs qui racontent la Révolution, mais les acteurs qui joueront le rôle de sectionnaires, de sans-culottes qui se racontent la Révolution."<sup>1</sup> The crucial word is the reflexive pronoun "se." The theatricality of the situation remains inside the events as they are related to each other by the sectionnaires. They are not told to the theatre audience. The spectators are not asked to suspend their disbelief and identity with any of the situations enacted, but rather to remain a twentieth-century collection of people in the face of the information presented to them. Whereas 1789 attempts to involve the audience in order to express its political opinion, 1793 simply states the company's understanding of a historical situation. 1789 is a theatre of participation; 1793 is a theatre of information. The ever present actor, either seated at the table-stage or beside it, constantly comes between the audience and the enacted event.

1789 presents a whole range of different acting styles and theatrical

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<sup>1</sup>Théâtre du Soleil, 1793, pp. 137-38.

devices. There are scenes derived from the medieval bestiary (the ailing King), from the allegory or the parable ("Marie la misérable"), from a naive symbolism ("la gabelle") as well as historical tableau ("Le Seigneur à Saint-Domingue"), statement of historical fact (the accounts of the storming of the Bastille) and the unadorned reading of historical documents ("Le Débat parlementaire"). The means used to express these variations of tone, similarly, range from almost straight acting through puppetry to parody and clowning. This is the debt owed to popular forms of entertainment. Many of the same techniques and procedures are to be found in the later production but their use is tempered by the fact that they are employed for the mutual entertainment of the sectionnaires. Whereas each of the techniques enumerated shares an almost equal importance in 1789, all are used in 1793 as moments grafted onto the main development of the production which is expressed in the form of the récit.

In 1793, there are fewer instances of direct quotation from historical documents (five in 1793 as opposed to eight in 1789), and two of these instances involve a quotation from Marat's paper L'Ami du peuple and the reading of Jacques Roux's petition (1793:50-52; and 84-94). There is but a single quotation from a major revolutionary figure, Robespierre, and this is reported by Dumont (1793:29-31). The other two citations are from the Pétition de Mauconseil and the revolutionary constitution (1793:22-24; and 115-16). The implication is that these are the only words which filtered through to the level of the people.

The other historical technique that continues from 1789 is the use of the conteur who describes historical situations and events. In 1793 not only does he introduce the scenes, but he is seen to conclude certain specific scenes. He appears in this role at the end of the scenes dealing with the popular victories, namely "Le 10 août," "La Chute de la Gironde," and "Le 5 septembre 1793" (1793:38; 97; and 129). He gives the results of the action described or enacted in cold facts and figures which serves to restore non-theatrical tone and to curtail any rising emotion in the audience.

The récit proper can only be said to occur once in 1789, and this in order to describe the storming of the Bastille. In 1793 there are at least four full-length accounts of events: Louise's account of the revolution in Santo Domingo, Baptiste Dumont's account of the workings of the Convention, the multiple account of the storming of the Tuileries, and the appeal to action by the boulangier (1793:53-55; 94-96; 33-38; and 128-29).

The pattern of the battle récits in the two productions reveals the different perspective. Although treating a similar subject and indeed a popular victory, the effect of each récit is dissimilar, reflecting the divergence in production. The Bastille scene is constructed to lead to mounting enthusiasm and the outbreak of public rejoicing. To this end, it is recounted directly to the audience and encourages them to take an active part in the fête foraine that follows. In 1793 the récit is built on four different moments and not a single flowing wave of enthusiasm. The first moment represents the emotional meaning of the event for the sans-culottes. It consists of a double action that builds from the individual to the collective level, firstly through a shooting lesson and then through an enacted account by the boulangier of the imminent uprising. Both elements are characterized by ritualistic repetition of phrases and gestures ("Il tombe, puis se relève," Mais on ne mourra pas" - 1793:36) as well as being given rhythm by quickening drum beats. Both pass from a solitary figure on stage to a group who gradually join him from the benches around the table-stage. The high emotional pitch thus elicited is broken by the men all suddenly returning to their seats. Simultaneously a second moment begins with the historical account of the events as they were experienced first by the amorphous group ("Ils sont arrivés" - 1793:36), then an unnamed individual ("On en a vu un" - 1793:36), and then an identified member of the section ("Et Néné d'Allauch, c'est là qu'il est arrivé, avec la deuxième vague. [Jouant le personnage.]" - 1793:37). This account is, in its turn, kept at the theatrical level by the mime that accompanies it: "A peine ils étaient sous les fenêtres, qu'une décharge a éclaté de tous les côtés. Couchez-vous. (Quelques sectionnaires se couchent

sur la table.)" (1793:37). Néné's own individual account with its succession of simple statements rapidly builds up the tension again, but the emotion is once more curtailed, this time by an interruption from Ferron complaining at Néné's brutality: "Non, c'est faux, ce jour-là le peuple de Paris a été grand, et les femmes aristocrates, il les a épargnées" (1793:37). Néné argues with Ferron briefly and in so doing the past and the present (for the sectionnaires) are fused: "Parce que, regarde, rien que pour notre quartier! (Il désigne les corps étendus sur la table.)" (1793:38). This altercation illustrates that it is not the mythology of the event, but its fact that is described; the interest does not lie in the proportions the event assumes in the popular imagination but rather its proportions in history. The final moment continues the statement of historical fact and its association with the sectionnaires present. Le Breton reads out the facts of the deaths and the political repercussions while there is a contrapuntal roll-call of the names on the discs attached to the bodies. Here is expressed the fusion of the everyday reality and the historical process in a highly effective dramatic scene.

The overall structure of this récit contrasts sharply with the Bastille scene of 1789. It actively dissuades emotionalism after having evoked the emotion; the account returns to the facts when it threatens to become glamorized by exaggeration or enthusiasm. The movement of the récit is held in check by historical detail; the final word is not with the rejoicing of the people but with the statement of fact. The spectator never becomes directly engaged in the event since the sectionnaires themselves are the real audience.

If the difference in the position of the audience is only indirectly expressed in the storming of the Tuileries, it is totally evident in the scenes of public rejoicing, "Les Courtilles" after Valmy and the "Banquet civique" at the end of the performance. The rejoicing is only for the sectionnaires as they pass between the table-stages dancing and singing; the theatre audience is an uninvolved outside observer of the events. Instead of building scenes that use the spectator and that rely on the position of the spectator for their effect (as is the case in 1789), the company has resorted

to the use of the récit, embellished and developed by a choral technique whereby the account is carried forward through the interventions and the interjections of the sectionnaires. For instance, in the description of the storming of the Tuileries the account passes from Adrien Réveillard to Basile Renoir to Néné d'Allauch and finally to Charles-Henri Le Breton. This scene is the articulation of the group just as the whole production is the account of the events by the section. In this procedure, there is no place for the spectator.

The spectator's non-intervention in the production of 1793 is paralleled by his physical position in relation to the performance. If 1789 involves movement and a standing mobile public, then 1793 with its more static style implies the sedentary public that positions itself in various parts of the section. Whether seated on the wooden floor, on the two side stands or on the galleries, there is no differentiation of the public; all remain inactive and contemplative.<sup>1</sup> They are accepted as part of the section just as the whole area represents a section, but no other attention is paid to them. No attempt is made to involve them in the action through any of the techniques of 1789 such as simultaneous staging. There is some cross talk between adjacent table-stages, but this forms part of the choral technique of scene building. The central space which is equatable with the parterre is not used as an acting area except on two occasions. The first is the triumphant return from Valmy; a small band followed by Le Breton and Choux pulling a diminutive toy cannon passes around and through the seated public to reach the central table-stage. There is no effort made to convey the victorious enthusiasm to the theatre public whose quiet consternation contrasts sharply with the rapturous applause and shouting of the other sectionnaires. In the light of this non-participation, Ferron's speech delivered from the floor calling for unity appears a rather artificial attempt to effect a manner of public involvement in the debate of the sectionnaires (1793:94). It seems somewhat inconsistent to make such an attempt in a production whose orientation has been away from

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<sup>1</sup>See Figure 7, p. 425.

participatory technique and towards critical examination.

Given the divorce between the productions in the matter of style of performance, is there continuity between the two stages of the Revolution as Le Théâtre du Soleil depicts them? The problem of continuity is resolved in part by the modified sharing of certain techniques but principally by a scene of introduction to 1793 which extends 1789 while at the same time leading into 1793. In fact, 1793 takes place in two contiguous halls.<sup>1</sup> Passing from the foyer, the spectators enter a first hall in which a long platform is erected. This platform, although larger, is reminiscent of the tréteaux of 1789; it stands about head high and is lit by spotlights and a very bright row of foot-lights. The space is filled by thunderous classical music (Berlioz) as a bateleur with a microphone introduces the leading figures of national and international politics of the years 1789-1793. The characters wear the heavy exaggerated make-up of the 1789 aristocracy and are costumed in the shabby finery of the bateleurs. Against the neutral, dull back-cloth, the historical figures "jouent grossièrement les scènes" in the manner of the notables in the opening scenes of 1789 who are described as "deux ogres" (1793:6; and 1789:10). At the end of this over-acted sequence in which the people are constantly frustrated by those in power, the meneur dramatically proclaims:

LE MENEUR: Mesdames et messieurs, nous venons de vous jouer la lutte des puissants contre le peuple, maintenant, nous allons vous montrer comment le peuple s'est organisé dans sa lutte contre les puissants. (Tandis que les comédiens se dépouillent de leurs costumes de parade, de la main il désigne le rideau de fond qui s'ouvre sur la troisième nef, celle des sectionnaires.) (1793:13)

The urging of the audience to advance into the second hall is in the style of the fairground barker, but it is the last time that this <sup>s</sup> style will be adopted. The movement of the public symbolizes passing beyond the colour plates of the official histories of the period into the everyday reality of the time. With this penetration through the superficial, the theatricality, make-up, and parody of the bateleur is exchanged for the direct plain statement of the sectionnaire.

Whether using theatricality or the récit, the effort of the company

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<sup>1</sup>See Figure 8, p. 444.



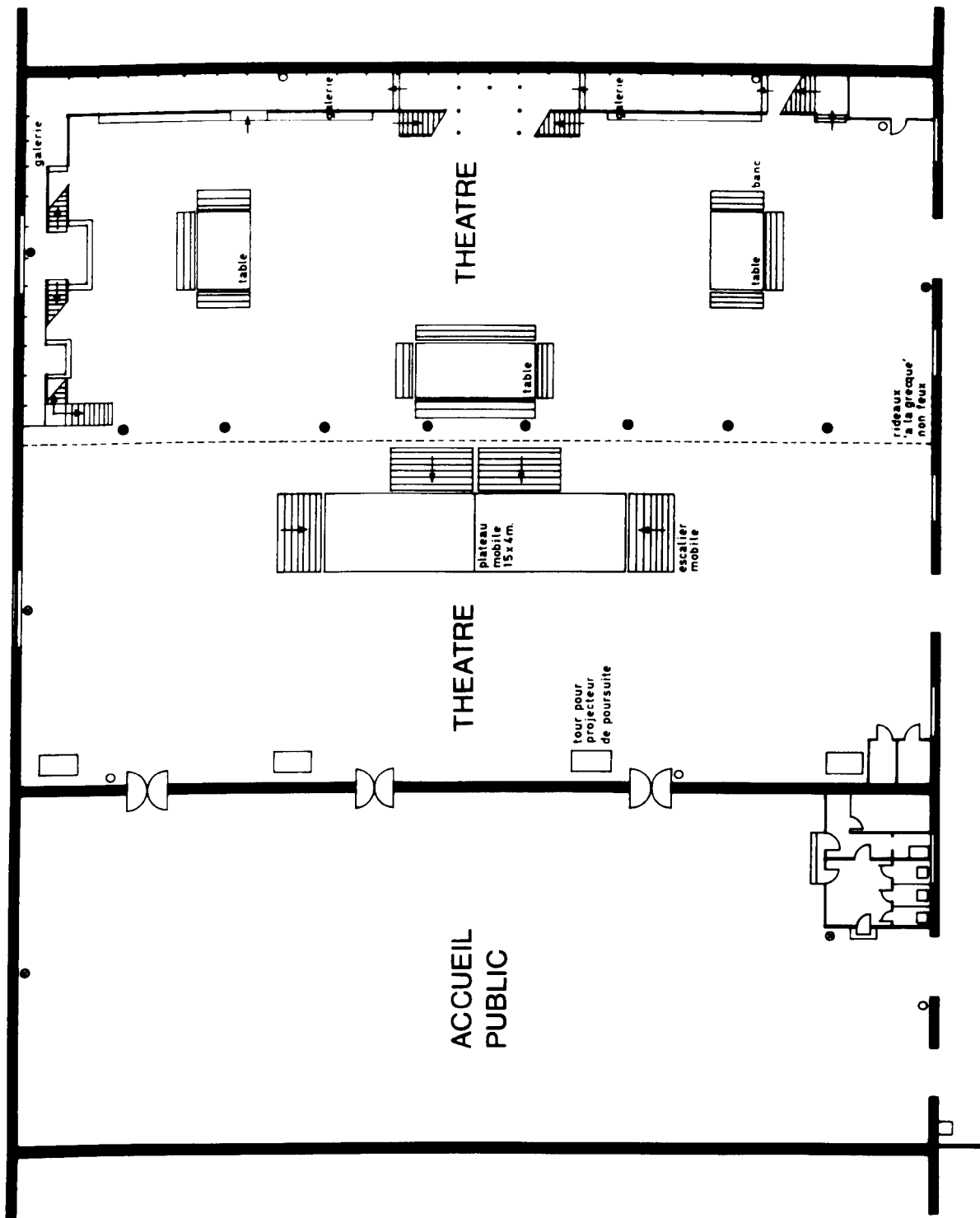


Fig. 8.

is towards an accuracy and clarity of expression and away from realism.

These same two principles that governed the earlier productions remain firmly at the base of 1789 and 1793. The evolution of the Bastille scene in 1789 was particularly arduous, but the only improvisations that held the attention of the company were those with "une précision un peu notoriale et une absence totale de lyrisme."<sup>1</sup> The final form of separate accounts of the events of 14 July, each building to a crescendo is not simply an ingenious theatrical device; it clearly expresses the import of that moment in the history of the Revolution: "La lisibilité est respectée: on sent la colère du peuple."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in the notes on the rehearsals of 1793, the preoccupation with clarity and the necessity to communicate easily with the audience recurs. The early improvisations were heavily marked by the actors' experiences of 1789, but the direction of the new production was soon established: "L'objectif se clarifie, . . . ces personnages, par une conviction et une volonté désespérée de convaincre, doivent s'efforcer de rendre claire la complexité de l'histoire."<sup>3</sup> In 1789, the complexity of history is elucidated by the very arrangement and use of the scenic space; in 1793, it is expressed through a small group of characters interacting and living the events as they happened. If a single statement could summarize the activity of the company, it would be Mnouchkine's reminder to the actors during rehearsals for 1789: "Il faut faire attention aux fioritures, aux anecdotes. On oublie le ton du spectacle, on fuit l'essentiel."<sup>4</sup> The essential of an event can be captured without realism; both the excitement of the fall of the Bastille and the reality of the storming of the Tuileries are expressed through a substitution of a récit for an event. In this practice, the company are not breaking new ground, but returning to the practices of the classical theatre both in Greece and in France. The company's feeling for its art is deep enough to allow the realization that to try and recreate reality in a theatrical situation (in the way Rolland did) can only lead to an awkward artificiality.

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<sup>1</sup> Théâtre du Soleil, 1789, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Théâtre du Soleil, 1793, p. 141.

<sup>4</sup> Théâtre du Soleil, 1789, pp.89-90.

The development from 1789 to 1793 illustrates the company's understanding of popular theatre. It is interesting to note that many critics proclaimed the first production a masterpiece of popular theatre because of the use it makes of puppetry, clowning, and the techniques of le théâtre de foire remembering above all the fête foraine that follows the storming of the Bastille. For example, here is Matthieu Galey's appreciation:

On retrouve donc ici toute une tradition. . . . Ce sont les faits, les scènes qui parlent d'eux-mêmes, flashes rapides à la manière des bandes dessinées, qui ne sont rien d'autre, après tout, que le bon vieil art populaire des fabliaux ou des complaintes, adapté aux mythes modernes du superman, de la science-fiction ou de l'érotisme.<sup>1</sup>

Claude Olivier spoke of the "tout l'arsenal abondamment colorié et chansonné que chacun de nous traîne au fond de sa mémoire."<sup>2</sup> However, the true popularity of the production was due not merely to the techniques adapted from traditional entertainments but also to the choice of a subject-matter relevant for a present-day audience. 1793 proves that the company believes that "popularity" lies as much in the pursuit of a suitable subject-matter as in the adaptation of performance techniques.

1789 and 1793 constitute two different approaches to popular, historical theatre created through the development of a collective method of creation. The style of performance is necessarily linked to the method of production. The usual criticism of such productions is that they lack the cohesion and direction of those productions which have a single figure, the director, at their head. Indeed, the company has not been unaffected by the danger of wasting its energy through diversification; during the early rehearsals of 1793 in May 1971, before any strict ideas about the production had been formed, ideas and plans multiplied: "On lançait des idées, on les refusait. Rien ne se construisait. On s'est bientôt aperçu que c'était impossible de travailler ainsi, qu'il fallait que quelqu'un cristallise un peu."<sup>3</sup> Although Ariane Mnouchkine has assumed this role in the company, her approach has been not to

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<sup>1</sup> Matthieu Galey, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 7 January 1971, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Olivier, Les Lettres françaises, 20 January 1971, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Gérard Hardy cited by Françoise Kourilsky, "Les Actions hors théâtre," Travail théâtral, no. 8 (July-September 1972), p. 48.

impose anything on the actors but to act only as a judge of their improvisations. in the light of the direction of the production. At the time of the performances of Le Songe d'une nuit d'été, Mnouchkine described her role as "un miroir parfait"<sup>1</sup> for the actors, implying that the actor is the prime mover since without a subject the mirror has nothing to reflect. As the company has developed a unified group identity, so the role of the director has evolved away from the authoritarian distributor of parts (as was the case for Les Petits Bourgeois) to the arbitrator of Les Clowns who "n'impose rien, il absorbe, assimile, avale les centaines d'improvisations que les comédiens présentent au premier spectateur qu'il est devenu."<sup>2</sup> The director as arbitrator was a negative function consisting of cutting out those improvisations and scenes that deviated from the central theme.<sup>3</sup> The historical productions brought a change; the director's role became more creative, an aid to the actor:

Il s'agissait moins, désormais, d'imposer que de sentir et de pressentir. Il fallait être le spectateur attentif et inconditionnel, . . . il fallait aussi assurer la fidélité à la lecture politique des événements, . . . articuler les improvisations les unes aux autres, et enfin aider à s'accomplir tout ce qui n'était parfois qu'ébauché dans les recherches des comédiens.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the metteur en scène emerges as an integrated member of the group who works within the framework of group discussion and group decision making.

The relationship of the director to the actor is such that as the function of the former changes so does the role of the latter. The production of Les Clowns saw the major modification to this relationship. Mnouchkine explains:

Au fond, je suis libérée d'une grande responsabilité, ou plutôt nous sommes plusieurs à la partager. Ce sont plutôt les comédiens qui, ayant tout d'un coup une plus grande responsabilité, sont pris d'angoisse: celle de devoir créer seul, sans guide.<sup>5</sup>

In the alternative method of creation, the author is superseded by a collaboration of the group of actors and the director. The actor is, therefore, the creative force. Rather than just having a role to learn and then to

<sup>1</sup>Mnouchkine to Roy, "Shakespeare," p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Théâtre du Soleil, 1789, p. 84.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid.      <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>5</sup>Mnouchkine cited by Attoun, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 17 April 1969, p. 13.

play according to the pacing and overall timing of the piece which is laid down by the director, the actor of Le Théâtre du Soleil is instrumental in the creation of the entire production from text to performance. Louis Samier, as a new arrival to the company, felt this difference very deeply when interviewed by Emile Copfermann in October 1970: "Ici on demande à un comédien d'être créateur dans le spectacle." Through the freedom given to the actor to create in a wider field, the company becomes a team of co-workers that cooperate. In the same interview, several members of the company emphasize that this collective approach to the total production is what differentiates Le Théâtre du Soleil from the normal situation in a theatre. Guy-Claude François explains: "La différence s'exprime en ceci qu'il n'existe pas vraiment chez nous de spécialisation." Gérard Hardy describes how the actors helped out in the making of the costumes and the building of the scenic structure: "Le travail est fait totalement en commun." The effect of this type of collaboration transforms the company into a means by which the individual expresses himself totally in his work inside a group framework. Françoise Descotils defines the company not in terms of its organization but as "la façon de vivre d'un groupe en accord avec ce qu'il accomplit."<sup>1</sup> In this way the company sees itself as escaping from the alienation of the modern world. Each member's contribution is equally valuable; no hierarchies are established and no talents bought and sold. Guy-Claude François states:

La différence qu'il y a entre tel théâtre et nous, c'est que dans l'un il y a une notion de consommation qui suppose au départ une connaissance, un certificat et tu vends en quelque sorte ta connaissance. Nous, ça n'est pas pareil, une évolution se fait ensemble et bon, elle se fait dans une direction. Ailleurs, tu es obligé de produire. Ici, tu as l'impression d'acquérir quelque chose.<sup>2</sup>

As far as the spectator is concerned, the attitude of the company is ambivalent. Clearly it hopes to attract a wide audience. The overt preoccupation with the spectator's political education is demonstrated in the nef d'accueil at Vincennes where a slide show of illustrations of the revolutionary

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Samier, Guy-Claude François, Gérard Hardy and Françoise Descotils to Copfermann, "Où est la différence?" p. 13, p. 14, p. 14, and p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>François, "A chaque spectacle sa scénographie," pp. 27-28.

period is projected along with a display of photographs on the problems facing the third world and a quotation from Lenin on the necessity for man to dream.<sup>1</sup> That the actors do not hide away but mingle with the audience as they prepare reveals that they believe in the equality of the spectator and do not hold the romantic view that the actor is a sensitive creator, superior to his fellow beings, an attitude that is continued by the cult of the star performer. Despite this liberal tendency outside the performance, the company do not believe, however, in the right of the spectator to play an active or creative role in the production. Ariane Mnouchkine declares: "Sans partager ses idées, je pense néanmoins comme Grotowski, que le public ne doit pas modifier le spectacle."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising to see the company using the spectator in 1789 to create the effects of public festivity, but then demanding that he should revert to the more traditional attitudes of a theatre audience. Similarly, in 1793, the audience are invited to the scene of the people's opposition to the powerful nobles but are not asked to take part in that opposition. Just as Grotowski staged a production of Faust in which the audience were seated at banquet tables on which the action took place but did not feed the audience, so Le Théâtre du Soleil invite the public to a spectacle in which they cannot participate.

#### (iv) Conclusion

The Théâtre du Soleil and Le Grand Magic Circus, major representatives of the collective approach to theatrical production, share an evolution away from production based on the rehearsal of a text that has been created prior to any influence on their part towards production understood as the creation inside the group of a spectacle that remains totally within their control. The Théâtre du Soleil had used Gorki's, Wesker's and Shakespeare's texts before the burden of creation was assumed by the company alone; similarly, they had adapted Gautier's Le Capitaine Fracasse. In the case of Le Grand Magic Circus, Arrabal's Le Labyrinthe was superseded<sup>5</sup> by the creations developed from existing

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<sup>1</sup>Théâtre du Soleil, 1793, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup>Mnouchkine to Copfermann, "Entretien," p. 11.

popular stories, Robinson and Cendrillon, which in turn led to the development of a historical spectacle, De Moïse à Mao, entirely conceived by the troupe. As a consequence the role of the author has tended to disappear from both the companies with a subsequent growth in the autonomy and importance of the actor.

As the company or troupe assumes a greater control over and responsibility for the production, so the actor's functions are not limited to acting but imply a broader involvement in the creation. The actors of Le Grand Magic Circus became musicians for Cendrillon as well as being responsible for their own costuming and properties. Maxime Ferrier who had acted many parts in Robinson Crusoë became the stage-manager for De Moïse à Mao; this job had been assumed by Patricio Quirino-Suffern for the performances of Zartan and Robinson Crusoë at Villeurbanne despite the fact that he had parts in both productions as well as acting an ugly sister in Cendrillon. The same avoidance of specialization is noticeable in Le Théâtre du Soleil's productions in which each member is expected to build the set, prepare the place of performance, and manufacture costumes. In both companies, this will and ability to work in a team effort is sought in any new recruit. Even in the advertisements, the company remains a group and not a collection of individuals.

The internal reforms of the companies find expression in the choice of venues in which to perform. Both Jérôme Savary and Ariane Mnouchkine have expressed opposition not only to established theatre buildings, but also to their conventional internal structure. These directors put forward almost identical cases in support of their objections: namely, theatre buildings are situated, for the most part, in the areas of towns that, at the time of construction, were associated with the middle classes and so these buildings are indissociably tied to the moribund ceremony of that class; secondly, the rigidity of the interior separation into stage and auditorium, and further, into rows of stalls and circles imposes a formality and reserve on the relationships between all those inside the theatre building.

The dramatic language that each company has developed draws very much on the physical, aural, and visual leading to a limitation of the autonomy of

the word. Music of all descriptions, from classical to popular, punctuates the performances of both companies. The colour and spectacle of Delacroix's canvases are not lost in Le Grand Magic Circus' parodies of that artist's historical paintings; similarly in 1789, the Théâtre du Soleil borrow both the gay frivolity of Fragonard and the sombre gravity of David. If colour is used by the one in a gratuitous, stimulating way, it is carefully managed by the other. This contrast in styles is more evident in the handling of the physical environment of the performance. While both companies employ multiple-stage techniques, the Théâtre du Soleil use the movement around and through the audience that results to underline the thematic content of the production, whereas for Le Grand Magic Circus, multiple staging simply offers the possibility of a profusion of action at a hectic pace designed to excite the spectator in the manner of the thrills of the fair.

Both companies embody alternative theatre by their basic antagonism towards the prevailing social order and their desire to improve the living conditions of the majority. The Théâtre du Soleil support of the revolutionary struggle of 1968 and of the inmates of the Prison Charles III is more overtly political than Le Grand Magic Circus charity performance at Suresnes (the proceeds of which were to go towards rebuilding a Vietnamese village) or its anti-war sketch for Les Citoyens du Monde in Paris, but the ideological allegiance of both companies is made clear by their activities.

Despite these general similarities, the two groups are decidedly dissimilar in the detail of their work. The Théâtre du Soleil organized itself in accordance with its political ideals. Egalitarianism was the motivation for declaring itself a workers' cooperative with fixed contracts of equal value. In practice this has led to a working community that is concerned with its role in society as well as its own composition, a concern that encourages a continuing self-examination and the articulation of a group point of view. Although striving to avoid institutionalization, the company's structured approach to relations is very formal in comparison with the free-wheeling band of friends that constitutes Le Grand Magic Circus. Having no legal contracts,



the troupe's aim is to enjoy itself and promote joy in the community; each member is free to leave the troupe when he pleases.

The actor in Le Théâtre du Soleil would appear to have, or at least develop, a strong sense of vocation. Commitment to the company and commitment to its social ideals instills a desire to perfect his own expertise and mastery of his art. For example, the company have twice undertaken retreats into the provinces to study acting techniques and to improve their histrionic skills. Technique, for Savary and his troupe, is to be shunned at all costs; the professionalism of the actor forms barriers between actor and spectator which prevent a natural reaction to the theatrical situation. Perhaps the only training pursued by a member of Le Grand Magic Circus is that required to learn to play a musical instrument or to perform a trick or a stunt. In the production, these dissimilar conceptions of the actor's position cause a divergence of approach: whereas Mnouchkine's company believes in detailed preparation and exhaustive rehearsals to create a tightly knit, homogeneous work, a Grand Magic Circus spectacle is chaotic, formed by the anarchic imagination of the company unrestrained by a lengthy period of preparation. For example, 1789 or 1793 develop in strict accordance with historical events, each scene revealing a meticulous attention to detail; De Moïse à Mao, on the other hand, treats history with a liberal disregard<sup>by</sup> including many anachronistic twists in plot.

Even in their attitude towards improvisation the two companies differ. 1789 or 1793 are not improvised in the sense that each performance presents a totally new work. In fact, improvisation is used as a technique by which the company evolve the structure of the production. A stable and largely unvarying text, performed intact every night, is the result of the original improvising. Neither are the spectacles that Le Grand Magic Circus perform totally unscripted. Obviously certain coups de théâtre and stage business are carefully worked out to ensure rapid movement. However, their spectacles are improvised in the sense that the commedia dell'arte improvised; against a canevas of prescribed stage movements the actors are left free to create the dialogue and to develop

a scene. Both in the early Italian theatre and Le Grand Magic Circus, this improvisation depends, for the most part, on the response of each spectator.

These variations in the method of creation and in the actor's role are aptly reflected by the contrasting reaction with which the companies have been met. Critical consensus characterizes the productions by the Théâtre du Soleil with "une précision, . . . une discrétion, . . . un sens de la finition particulière";<sup>1</sup> it is the opposite notion of "la désinvolture" that is often used to resume a Grand Magic Circus spectacle.

Underneath these stylistic contrasts, there is a differing conception of the role, function, and purpose of theatre. For Mnouchkine, theatre has the definite function of means for social change. It performs this function through its ability to enlighten those who attend a performance. In this way theatre is educative. Implicit in this process is a division into teacher and taught, the transfer of information from those who "know" to those who are "ignorant." On the other hand, theatre for Savary is a communal activity to be enjoyed by all, equally, both actor and spectator. Ideally, no distinction should be made between actor and spectator in that both are involved in the creation of la fête populaire. For Le Grand Magic Circus, la fête becomes an end in itself and not the vehicle for the communication of some form of socio-political message. For its effect the spectacle does not hinge on a reflective process as does, for example, 1789.

Since la fête involves the notion of numbers of people and reflection that of training people, it is not surprising that Le Grand Magic Circus continues to travel extensively in order to take its work to as many places as possible nor that the Théâtre du Soleil focuses on stability and the involvement of an area in their work. The latter is committed to the promotion of a popular theatre, popular being interpreted as concerned with, and performed for, the working class. Although sharing a vaguely left-wing attitude, Le Grand Magic Circus is primarily interested in creating a popular spectacle that appeals to all members of the community. The continuing,

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<sup>1</sup>Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, Le Monde, 10 April 1967.

unqualified use of popular forms of entertainment in spectacles by Le Grand Magic Circus contrasts with the decline of such practices by the Théâtre du Soleil between 1789 and 1793, whose ideological content remains undiminished and equally geared for the proletariat.

The division of teacher-taught in theatrical terms keeps the spectator in a situation of relative passivity. The Théâtre du Soleil restricts creativity in the production to the team of actors, a restriction consistent with its view of the vocation of the actor and the company. Thus, rather than extending the possibility for creative acts to the spectator, the company simply solicits the agreement of the audience. In fact, the situation that obtains during the performance is that of a consumer society: a few manufacture a product for the many to enjoy. In his book on popular theatre, Emile Copfermann argues that the characteristic of traditional popular culture was that the many created for the many.<sup>1</sup> For instance, the staging of a mystery involved a high percentage of the community. However, modern forms of popular culture have been permeated by the ethos of the production line, perpetuated by those such as the Théâtre du Soleil. Pursuing this line of argument, it follows that Le Grand Magic Circus is attempting to rediscover a traditional popular form because it actively encourages the spectator not only to participate in the spectacle, but also to begin his own form of Le Grand Magic Circus. Inspired by Gémier, Le Grand Magic Circus endeavoured to involve the community of La Rochelle in the production of Cendrillon. Their goal is to create a situation described by Copfermann: "Le seul moyen de rompre radicalement l'alternative des rapports producteurs-consommateurs de l'art est de former des producteurs qui soient en même temps des consommateurs de l'art."<sup>2</sup>

It is curious to note the correlation between this argument from a socio-economic viewpoint and Copeau's observation that the relationships inside a theatrical performance will only be radically altered when spectator and actor utter the same words at the same time with the same feeling.<sup>3</sup> Apparently

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<sup>1</sup>Copfermann, Théâtre populaire, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>3</sup>Copeau cited by P.-H. Simon, Théâtre et destin, p. 37.

the Théâtre du Soleil has organized itself into a company that avoids the system of production of conventional theatre but that stops short of extending their alternative method into the performance area. Only in a Grand Magic Circus invitation to the spectator to involve himself in the performance does the collective approach to creation present itself as a true alternative in all spheres of theatre.

## CHAPTER VI

### EXPERIMENTS IN THEATRICAL FORM AND DESIGN

The approach of the theatre groups represents theatre adapting itself to, or indeed pioneering radical systems of production and communication that are evolving in society at large. Another branch of theatrical research concerns itself particularly with the relationship between theatrical language and the technology of society. In practice, it experiments with the conditions of communication and perception of the theatrical performance. The activity in this field may be stimulated by a particular view of human personality and freedom which demands a re-examination of theatrical forms, or by an interest in the nature of dramatic language. Whatever the interest of an individual artist, the whole area of research is marked by the technological advances of the post-war period and, in particular, by the advent of the "electronic era."<sup>1</sup>

As McLuhan argues, man's perception of the world is fashioned and modified by the means of communication and the range of informational processes to which he is subject and by which he is surrounded. In contemporary society he finds himself at the centre of complex webs of data which he is called upon to assimilate simultaneously. The implications for dramatic form are summarized by John Cage: "We live in, and are more and more aware of living in, the space around us. . . . More pertinent to our daily experience is a theatre in which we ourselves are in the round."<sup>2</sup>

The response to the challenge of the electronic era can take the form either of celebrations of electronic technology in complicated kinetic spectacles or of performances that observe the changed situation of man in order to bring him to some awareness and understanding of it. In their different ways

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of the impact of electronic technology on modern society, see McLuhan, Understanding Media.

<sup>2</sup>Cage to Kirby and Schechner, "An Interview with John Cage," p. 52.

the experimenters are striving to describe a theatrical form relevant to the climate of the modern world; as such, they constitute another approach to the quest for a popular theatrical form.

(i) Armand Gatti: An Exploded Theatre at the Service of the People

Armand Gatti's conception of his art places him in the mainstream of cultural re-appraisal that is symbolized by the Déclaration de Villeurbanne (1968). There it is argued that a new culture should be created, a culture resulting from the collaboration of artist and the non-public. In other words, culture should be so formed as to include even those who are excluded from full participation in the consumer society. The new culture will be characterized by its dynamism and by its constant evolution and metamorphoses. Such convictions lead to a disregard of the works of the past as they are necessarily considered irrelevant to the conditions that prevail in contemporary society. Culture is a movement towards the future and not a withdrawal into the past. Gatti explains the relationship of the masterpiece to its society:

Les chefs-d'oeuvres renvoient à une forme de vie donnée, dans un contexte donné qui les alimentait, en était l'explication formelle et la nécessité. Par rapport à ce contexte, ce que l'on veut bien appeler un "chef-d'oeuvre" s'inscrivait comme un élément de rupture, la création d'une nouvelle dimension, d'un nouvel oxygène à apporter à l'homme. A partir de la disparition du contexte, du monde quotidien dans lequel elle plongeait ses racines, l'oeuvre perd tout son sens vital. Elle surnage à travers le temps à titre de "référence." La nouvelle combustion qu'elle allumait est refroidie. Elle n'est plus en état d'insurrection. Elle entre dans le conformisme, elle devient à son tour, cette culture dont on se gargarise, une force qui opprime.<sup>1</sup>

Gatti's words restate the case argued by Artaud in his essay, "En finir avec les chefs-d'oeuvre," for the regeneration of a culture that would unify life, artistic creation and religious belief as it did for primitive Indian tribes. Furthermore, appreciation of the works of art from the past represents for Artaud, "un des aspects du conformisme bourgeois."<sup>2</sup> Both Artaud and Gatti share the idea of a culture that is active, creative, and developed by the community at large, rather than one which is simply appreciated by a

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti to Jean-Louis Pays, "Entretien sur l'art actuel," Les Lettres françaises, 19 August 1965.

<sup>2</sup>Artaud, O.C. IV, p. 91.

privileged minority. Culture should be the reflection of each individual's creativity in society: "Chaque homme doit être en mesure de construire sa propre culture, de la construire en tant qu'auteur, en tant qu'acteur, de la construire également, en tant que spectateur."<sup>1</sup> Thus, Gatti opposes a culture that fixes itself in words and deeds which consequently anchor it in the past. His is a culture that evolves and develops, throwing off one form for another. Joaquin attacks Soledad in La Passion du général Franco for precisely that reason:

JOAQUIN: Par la force des choses, vous deviendrez une espèce de religion [ou promesse de religion]. Vous serez une direction, au lieu de vous trouver à l'intersection d'une pluralité de sens en marche.<sup>2</sup>

In order to avoid the danger of becoming fixed and producing a "reference" culture (in the same sense as a reference book), it is necessary to create an art that is not easily assimilated but rather one that opposes accepted beliefs and constantly challenges the spectator to redefine his position in the society and the world. Shock and surprise to overthrow prevailing tastes and customs have been used by the Dadaists and surrealists whose aims consisted of bringing about a radical confrontation with the accepted modes of perception. Gatti attempts to create such a revolution while remaining at a level of popular entertainment through an art that is deeply rooted in contemporary life. The Dadaists and surrealists through their scandalous behaviour and works became divorced from the mass of the population, although ideally they had wanted to return the arts to the people. Gatti has striven to avoid this pitfall at all costs: "La première idée de la pièce, [V comme Vietnam] c'est le choc provoqué par un événement. Pour essayer de traduire cet événement, la chose indispensable c'est le vécu, qui permet de parler d'un événement autrement que par références."<sup>3</sup>

A culture that depends on reference enslaves, serving only as a

<sup>1</sup> Armand Gatti, "Notes au spectateur idéal," Les Lettres françaises, 15 June 1967, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Armand Gatti, La Passion du général Franco (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p.30.

<sup>3</sup> Armand Gatti, "Théâtre d'aujourd'hui," O.R.T.F., 16 June 1967 cited by Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, p. 128.

translation of the past. By being enclosed, it cannot project into the future. Roles are imposed on the individual; the status quo is preserved. For Gatti, the idea of a regenerative culture is paralleled by the idea of liberation from the restraints of the past: "Tout ce que je demande c'est d'arriver à un art de libération."<sup>1</sup> Gatti's freedom is both socio-political and psychological. All his plays reveal a strong anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist element that is augmented by an overt championing of the victims of the system. For example, the names used in V comme Vietnam for the workers at the Pentagon are altered versions of pseudonyms that were actually used in the Pentagon: thus, Krulak who was called the Beast of the Pentagon becomes Général Bulldog; Sharp becomes Amiral Pointu; Johnson who was proud of having a father who fought at the Alamo appears as Mégasheriff; the technocrat McNamara as Quadrature; and Cardinal Spellman as La Congrégation. Gatti has made caricatures of the historical figures from America whereas the Vietnamese retain real names (such as Nguyen Hun Tang), thus implying that the Americans are the impersonal ogres and the oppressed Vietnamese are the human victims. On the psychological level, Gatti defines his concept of freedom as "le dialogue de l'homme avec ses possibles. . . . La prise de conscience de son potentiel, de sa force."<sup>2</sup> Liberation involves man in a debate with his virtual selves; by being conscious of the fact that he could be something other than he is, man escapes from the roles that are imposed upon him by the social system. The theatre is unique among art forms in presenting the spectator with an opportunity to confront himself and to confront his other possibilities:

Le théâtre dans la mesure où il est la multiplication des autres par nous et de nous par les autres, doit faire partie de l'existence. C'est une prise de conscience libératrice et militante pour tout ce qui concerne les problèmes de l'homme que nous voudrions du théâtre et du cinéma.<sup>3</sup>

Theatre becomes a means of enlightenment not only by the revelation of

<sup>1</sup>Gatti to Claude Fléouter, "Le Théâtre doit libérer l'homme," Témoignage chrétien, 14 May 1964.

<sup>2</sup>Armand Gatti, "Défense et apprentissage de la liberté," Grenier de Toulouse, no. 1 (October 1964), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Gatti to Pays, "Art actuel."



social and political injustices but also through its essence of offering man a complex of alternative roles. The resultant liberation, however, can only be individual. Gatti's theatre is not aimed at creating a community in the audience or between the stage and the auditorium. For him, theatre can only become "une fête pour tous"<sup>1</sup> after all repression and exploitation have ceased. Before that revolution the theatre's duty is to make each individual aware, to stimulate a personal response from each member of the audience:

Je suis pour un théâtre qui divise et non pas pour un théâtre qui unifie, dans lequel tout le monde se retrouve; un théâtre qui divise le plus profondément possible. Il faut que le théâtre permette aux classes les plus déshéritées de prendre conscience de leurs forces et, en même temps, de se compter.<sup>2</sup>

For Gatti there is an indissoluble bond between theatre as a means of socio-political agitation and history. He considers it necessary that theatre should treat a historical subject.<sup>3</sup> Gatti faced the same problem in this field as did Le Théâtre du Soleil; the traditional view of history and the historical play did not conform to his own view of history which had to find its own means of expression. As Leang-lo informs Li Tche-liou in Un homme seul:

LEANG-LO: L'histoire [malheurs aux vaincus!] est faite de l'opinion majoritaire d'un certain nombre de personnes qui ont touché de près ou de loin à un événement. Après quoi l'opinion . . . est filtrée par les interprétations. Ce qu'il en reste, c'est l'histoire. [Sauf accident elle n'a jamais rien eu à voir avec ce qui se passe dans la réalité.]<sup>4</sup>

Traditional history is a distillation of facts mingled with opinions that deny the multi-faceted nature of reality. History is generally treated through the leading figures of a particular period or simply the major events. In either case history is defined by immutable dates that do not take into account the different perspectives that are relevant to any single event. For Gatti, the single-character, historical play reflects this view of history. Un homme seul illustrates one way in which Gatti avoids a single perspective

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti to J. Autruisseau, "Le Crapaud-buffle d'Armand Gatti," Les Lettres françaises, 15 October 1959, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Gatti, "Spectateur idéal," p. 22.

<sup>3</sup>See Armand Gatti and Maurice Sarrazin, "Un théâtre," Grenier de Toulouse, no. 1 (October 1964), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>Armand Gatti, Un homme seul (Paris: Seuil, 1969), p. 19.

on the events. The play treats the reflections of a revolutionary on his activities before an imaginary tribunal; the different points of view are shown because the identity of the revolutionary is never stable:

PAI TCHOUN-SHI: Li Tche-liou était un nom générique dont les brigands coiffaient chacun de leurs méfaits pour créer une légende dans l'esprit [je ne crois pas exagéré de dire "borné"] des paysans.  
(HoS:14)

Li Tche-liou was based on the historical character, Wei Pa-tchoun, but the attraction of this character for Gatti derived from the fact that he represented many different aspects of the Chinese Revolution for different sections of the population. The play, then, exploded the central character in order to deal with the complex reality of a situation, in this case the Chinese Revolution. As a result, Gatti's drama is equally intricate in development and structure. A charge often levelled against Gatti is that his work is incomprehensible or too obtuse to be followed. His answer to such criticism is that he is attempting to create a historical reality:

Ce n'est pas par goût. J'y suis forcé dans la mesure où je renonce à un théâtre psychologique pour un théâtre où le héros porte l'événement. Mais l'événement est porté par un seul personnage. En fait, quand l'événement est porté par un seul personnage, c'est encore du théâtre psychologique. Mais avec l'événement dispersé sur des dizaines, des centaines de personnages on rejoint le théâtre sociologique.<sup>1</sup>

A play built around a single central character has the added inconvenience that the dominance of the character obscures the vicissitudes of the situation in which he finds himself, and hinders the appreciation of events:

Dans une entreprise un ouvrier m'a dit: "Ce que vous nous présentez ce n'est pas une vision individuelle, c'est une vision de masse." Il avait tout à fait raison. Ils ont une vision qui n'est plus du tout celle du théâtre. Hamlet est loin. Quand ils voient Hamlet, le personnage forme écran, le prince du Danemark. Et ils ne voient pas du tout ce qui se passe au niveau du comportement et qui les intéresse.<sup>2</sup>

The traditional play technique brings one or several characters into focus during a single period of time, an approach described by Gatti as a

<sup>1</sup>Gatti to Jean-Jacques Lerrant, "Armand Gatti, metteur en scène: découvrir d'abord un rythme," Bref, no. 91 (December 1965), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Gatti to Emile Copfermann, "Interview avec Armand Gatti," Cité-Panorama (Lyon) no. 8 (February-April 1966), p. 15.

"linear play."<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, his effort is towards a form that does not restrict man to a single perspective but rather one that deals with many people in many places at many times. Indeed, Gatti's idea of freedom implies the multiplication of man's possibilities and so it is not surprising to find him rejecting a form that limits itself to a few characters.

Similarly, Gatti refutes the concept of historical reconstruction in which set, costuming, and dialogue are a replica of a situation in the past. His antipathy to this conventional approach is that it isolates the event in the past and does not allow for continuation into the present and future: "La reconstitution figeait l'histoire et la privait de son vécu, de son vivant, c'est-à-dire de sa réalité et de sa signification."<sup>2</sup> In a programme note to Chant public devant deux chaises électriques, Gatti states that his intention is not to recreate history but to live it.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the temporal hiatus between spectator and action implied by a historical reconstruction is obviated by making the historical event contemporary. In Chant public, Gatti creates the complex reality of the Sacco and Vanzetti affair not by reconstructing the events themselves, but by presenting the reactions to them of five theatrical "audiences" (actors acting spectators on stage). Each "spectator's" reaction brings the affair into the present: "Chaque personnage en fonction de sa classe, de son contexte, de son quotidien s'identifie au personnage réel du drame et le revit à nouveau."<sup>4</sup>

Essential to Gatti's purpose is the suggestion in the play of the movement of history into the present and the future. In the theatrical situation, the present (and the future) are interpreted as the play going beyond the performance and projecting itself into the lives of the audience: "Je répugne toujours à substituer une réalité théâtrale décalquée à une réalité historique. Pour que je puisse jouer sur une réalité totale, il faut que mon

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti to Bettina Knapp, "Armand Gatti: A Theatre of Action," Kentucky Romance Quarterly, vol. 14, no. 4 (1967), p. 414.

<sup>2</sup>Gatti to Pays, "Art actuel."

<sup>3</sup>Palais de Chaillot, T.N.P., 17 January 1966.

<sup>4</sup>Gatti to Pays, "Art actuel."

point de départ soit pris dans l'actualité et les problèmes de l'homme d'aujourd'hui."<sup>1</sup> The present day is often reflected in the sets; they are invariably inspired by contemporary events and revised as circumstances change. This revision is very noticeable in the evolution of the staging of Chroniques d'une planète provisoire: in the first production at Toulouse in October 1963 the actions of the astronauts were observed directly by the audience; for the 1967 revival Gatti introduced an immense television screen that formed the frame of the stage. His aim was not to create an illusion of reality since the frame was disproportionate to the size of the actors, but rather to reflect the evolution of the spectator society and the vast television coverage of the American space flights. In La Vie imaginaire de l'éboueur Auguste G. the band that played at the marathon de danse was changed from the Garde-Mobile to the C.R.S., as Gatti explains: "Tout en signifiant la même chose [il] la situait davantage dans l'actualité."<sup>2</sup> In Chant public, there are two noteworthy examples. The second American theatre of the original printed text (1964) was in New Orleans, but by 1966 the venue had been changed to a meeting-hall at 203rd Street, Watts, an area of Los Angeles that had suffered violent race riots that same year. Similarly, the prison mentioned in 1966 is no longer Alcatraz but Lewisburg since Martin Sobell (one of those convicted with Julius and Ethel Rosenberg) had just been transferred there.

While these minor alterations serve to keep the play relevant to the present day situation, Gatti is not a slavish follower of historical detail. In Un homme seul, the Battle of Seven Days and Nights and the Long March are made to appear contemporaneous whereas, in fact, the battle preceded the march. This telescoping of time heightens dramatic effect at the expense of historical accuracy.

The relationship of historical fact and daily experience to the dramatic work is complex. Accuracy of detail is vital; Gatti believes without it, the impact and power of the play are lost on the spectator who will

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti to F. Gendron, "Entretien avec Armand Gatti," Les Lettres françaises, 2 October 1963.

<sup>2</sup>Armand Gatti, Théâtre [III] (Paris: Seuil, 1962), p. 15.

consider the events on stage as fictitious.<sup>1</sup> In Gatti's view of theatre as enlightenment, the spectator must be faced with a situation that forces him to reconsider his own position and not just with a naturalistic mirror image of an observable, existing situation. Richard Coe, in an analysis of La Deuxième Existence du camp de Tatenberg, astutely unravels the significance of the events of the scene, "Ballade des processions parallèles."<sup>2</sup> On the surface this scene appears to be a neo-surrealistic composition: Reuter, the fire-eater, exhales not fire but a lobster, flowers, confetti and a pair of old shoes; a second procession is made up of a prelate carrying a prehistoric thigh bone, an orchestra of victims that produces not a single sound, a team of footballers, and the emperors and empresses of Vienna transformed into the vowels, A., E., I., O., and U. The logic of these kaleidoscopic figures is shown by Coe to be "based on the plain reality of fact, only lightly glossed over with fantasy," a statement he proves "with the aid of a good guidebook and a map of Vienna."<sup>3</sup> Coe's argument is an attempt to show the impact of the absurdist dramatists, Beckett and Ionesco, on Gatti's dramatic technique. He concludes that Gatti is absurdist in technique but not in metaphysics. Gatti, himself, underlines this point to Gérard Gozlan and Jean-Louis Pays:

Le théâtre de l'absurde . . . est un théâtre d'aujourd'hui et, à ce titre indiscutablement intéressant. C'est même, je crois, une exploration très poussée vers certains problèmes de certains hommes. Mais la démarche que nous faisons est diamétralement opposée. Le théâtre de l'absurde se situe sur le plan de l'absence de l'homme sur la terre, tandis que dans le théâtre que nous essayons de faire, c'est plutôt la présence de l'homme dans la création et comment cet homme devient à son tour créateur, forgeant lui-même son destin, sa propre face d'homme.<sup>4</sup>

The parameters of Coe's argument are too narrow to allow an examination of the root causes of the strong tie between fact and fantasy in Gatti's work. For Gatti, the imaginary is part of the total reality of life and part of the individual's own reality. The imaginary is not just a dramatic technique;

<sup>1</sup>Gatti to Knapp, "Theatre of Action," p. 416.

<sup>2</sup>Richard N. Coe, "Armand Gatti's Carnival of Compassion: La Deuxième Existence du camp de Tatenberg," Yale French Studies, no. 46 (1971), pp. 71-74.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 71; and pp. 71-72.

<sup>4</sup>Gatti cited by Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, pp. 152-53.

together with fact it formulates the truth of a situation: "L'imaginaire fait partie de la réalité de chaque homme. Il fait part de son quotidien au même titre, sinon plus, que les objets qu'il touche, et les gens qu'il côtoie."<sup>1</sup> While the historical fact and the routine detail are essential, the imaginary is just as necessary as it is the fomenting ground in which man's possibilities are germinated. The imaginary reveals the alternatives to the existing situation or, rather, the synthesis of apparently heterogeneous details. Thus, Abel Antokokoletz explains the strange events of the parade to his fellows in Tatenberg: "Avec les Viennois tout est possible."<sup>2</sup> Thus, Vienna is simultaneously all those startling apparitions; not just the capital of Austria or a geographical location, it is a nexus of perspectives. Coe relates Gatti's treatment of Vienna to that of Musil in The Man Without Qualities through the similarity of Gatti's word parallèles and Musil's concept of parallel action. However, the intended meanings behind these two terms are different. For Musil, parallelism is synonymous with an escapism or "self-deludings"<sup>3</sup> whereas for Gatti the parallel situations are used as a means to enlightenment: "L'actualité a son sens et sa signification en tant que telle. Mais pour tirer un enseignement, il faut mille actualités qui se juxtaposent les unes aux autres."<sup>4</sup>

The concept of parallels recurs throughout Gatti's dramatic work. The whole structure of Auguste G. is based on the simultaneous juxtaposition and combination of five different characters called Auguste G., representing the same man at five different stages in his life: 9, 21, 30, 46 years old and an imagined Auguste G. in retirement. In 1964, Gatti tried to define his concept of parallels by coining the word selmaire, to be interpreted as "une création parallèle à une réalité donnée,"<sup>5</sup> that is, the prolongation of an event or

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti cited by Jean-Jacques Lerrant, "Le Théâtre d'Armand Gatti: c'est l'espace des 'possibles,'" Bref, no. 89 (October 1965), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Armand Gatti, Le Deuxième Existence du camp de Tatenberg in Théâtre [III], p. 293.

<sup>3</sup>Coe, "Carnival of Compassion," p. 73.

<sup>4</sup>Gatti to Pays, "Art actuel."

<sup>5</sup>Armand Gatti, Chant public devant deux chaises électriques (Paris: Seuil, 1964), p. 15.

situation in the mind of each individual. The term is frequently used in Chant public in much the same way as the word "scene" or "tableaux" would be used in a traditional play script. It emphasizes that Gatti's plays are not linearly sequential but rather exist as a matrix of points of view and reactions put together in the manner of a film, with movement playing an important, combining role.

The Vienna sequence in Tatenberg is parallel not only because it presents various possible views of Vienna in a single sequence, but also because it reveals a telescoping of time, the simultaneous expression of different epochs: the bone carried by the prelate alludes to a legend concerning the ruins of the Great Cathedral of Vienna dating from 1285; the vowel initials are a direct borrowing from the motto of the Russian emperors suggesting 1918; the Viennese football stadium is close to the Prater, which was the destination of the procession, a reference that is still valid today. In this manner, both historical and contemporary Vienna exist side by side in the scene. Characteristically, at this period of Gatti's writing (pre-1963), time is depicted as a fusion of past and present without reference to the future. In his first play performed, Le Crapaud-buffle, the dictator Don Tiburcio declares: "Le passé nous a rejoint. Considérez que le temps est maintenant un autre trajet pour nous tous."<sup>1</sup> For Le Poisson noir, Gatti anticipated the use of large screens behind the characters so that their words and the results of these words could be comprehended simultaneously. However, the screens had the disadvantage of suggesting that the situation had been completely resolved in the past; consequently, when the play was performed the screens were suppressed and the temporal dimensions of the play expanded.<sup>2</sup>

During the period of creation of Auguste G. in 1962 and following his first experience of directing in cooperation with Maurice Sarrazin at Toulouse,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Armand Gatti, Le Crapaud-buffle (Paris: L'Arche, 1959), p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Armand Gatti, Le Poisson noir, Théâtre [I] (Paris: Seuil, 1958); Performed 29 October 1964 (Grenier de Toulouse) with the author as metteur en scène.

<sup>3</sup> They collaborated on Chroniques d'une planète provisoire, Toulouse, Théâtre du Capitole, 2 October 1963.

Gatti began to elucidate ideas more clearly. He arrived at a definition of time as he understood it: "J'essaie de faire un théâtre qui ne tient plus compte du temps-durée mais du temps-possibilité."<sup>1</sup> What Gatti is rejecting is the concept of time as a passage, that is, a flow from the present into the past. This would prohibit the possibility of parallel sequences. Gatti's conception of reality requires a concept of time that allows the imaginative creations of the individual:

Nous voyons que les possibles représentent des formes de temporalités divergentes, ayant pris corps dans la durée ou non. En elles, l'homme à la fois simple et multiple se trouve confronté avec la multiplication des autres créant de nouvelles formes d'identité. Nous sommes entrés dans le temps psychologique pour le déborder et pousser jusqu'au temps des vies parallèles que nous vivons à tous les échelons de la création, mais dont nous n'avons encore qu'une conscience très réduite.<sup>2</sup>

Gatti describes the theme of Auguste G. as "la superposition des différentes temporalités d'un même personnage, toutes évoluant dans un sens propre à l'intérieur d'un même cadre."<sup>3</sup> In Auguste G., Gatti's fascination with time is rendered more complex by the inclusion of an element of the future in the character of Auguste G. in retirement, the projected desires and needs of the Auguste G. dying at 46 years of age. The preoccupation with time was reflected in the use of five giant photographic portraits of the five ages of Auguste G. which formed a kind of withdrawn frame for the performance in Jacques Rosner's set.

A definition of the concept of temporalité must take into consideration Sartre's discussion in L'Être et le néant. In his view, time is neither a collection of elements nor an infinite series of moments in the present, some of which have not yet been and others of which have already passed, but rather past, present, and future should be viewed as structures of a synthesis. Sartre consequently rejects the temporal concepts of both Descartes and Bergson since both considered time as a flow and hence the past as finished, having no existence in the present: "Le passé n'est pas rien, il n'est pas non plus le

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti to Fléouter, "Libérer l'homme."

<sup>2</sup>Gatti to Lerrant, "Espace des 'possibles,'" p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Gatti to Pays, "Art actuel."



présent, mais il appartient à sa source même comme lié à un certain présent et à un certain futur."<sup>1</sup> Gatti's time shows a certain similarity of structure: "Le présent était fait de l'expérience passée et le futur imaginé en fonction d'expérience passée et du présent."<sup>2</sup>

Gatti proposes "temps-possibilité" because "temps-durée" is a prison which does not allow for the development of the individual's possibilities; it enslaves him, enforcing a routine. The burden of "temps-durée" is the imposition of a consciousness of limitation. Activity is channelled into a fixed pattern: "Nous naissons avec des dizaines de "possibles" en nous qui peu à peu, par la force des habitudes de pensée et d'action que cette société capitaliste nous impose, s'étiolent comme les feuilles d'un arbre pris par le gel."<sup>3</sup> If this limiting way of life does not sufficiently atrophy man and his possibilities, then man will willingly amputate his own potential. Sadness for Gatti is the sight of an individual who settles down to observe a strict routine; this person is denying his own humanity which, for Gatti, lies in the pursuit of one's potentialities. On one level, his theatre is an attempt to make man realize his full potential, to evoke in man active responses so that he may pursue his own destiny;<sup>4</sup> it is a heartfelt cry against this ravaging of man by "temps-durée", a process described by Don Tiburcio in Gatti's first play:

DON TIBURCIO: A six mois un enfant participe à des dizaines, à des centaines d'existences simultanées. A dix ans, il n'en a plus que deux ou trois. Encore n'en joint-il qu'en cachette pour se donner un peu d'espace. A quinze ans, c'est le parfait imbécile. Il n'est plus qu'un, c'est-à-dire seul. Cette solitude l'épouvante, aussi va-t-il s'enterrer à vingt ans dans un rôle, une fonction. Il n'est plus rien.  
(CB:64-65)

It is against this type of chronological description of a man that Ma Young-su protests: "La naissance et la mort d'un homme n'ont rien à voir avec les dates

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, L'Être et le néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique (Paris: Gallimard, 1943 repr. 1955), p. 150; and pp. 153-54.

<sup>2</sup>Gatti to Pays, "Art actuel."

<sup>3</sup>Armand Gatti, "Un théâtre pour la cité," La Nef, 24<sup>e</sup> année, no. 29 (January-March 1967), p. 72.

<sup>4</sup>Armand Gatti, "Démons et merveilles," O.R.T.F., 29 May 1965 cited by Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, p. 100.

consignées sur lui dans les minutes d'un état civil" (HoS:25). By the simultaneous exposition of a man's past, present, and future, the spectator sees Auguste G. as more than the roadsweeper or a cipher in the police files; rather he appears as a human being who has the will to go beyond his role in society and yet is ultimately defeated by the truncheon of the police.

The parallel existences of a man are integral to that man as a whole. Gatti does not consider the individual in terms of a stable, personal identity. For him, the individual is a composite forged from situations and from contact with other men: "Notre devoir d'homme est d'être un homme non pas in abstracto mais un homme parmi les hommes. . . . Un homme et une femme en soi ça n'existe pas. Nous n'existons que par rapport aux autres."<sup>1</sup> In Auguste G., the forty-six-year-old version of the hero reflects on his relationship with his wife and with his earlier sweethearts:

AUGUSTE G. 46 ANS: Un couple, au fond, est une caserne--c'est inimaginable, le nombre de gens qui s'y installent, y vivent pendant un an ou un jour, disparaissent, sont remplacés par d'autres,--sans compter ceux qui y font carrière.<sup>2</sup>

This position is scenically translated in Un homme seul at a point when Li Tche-liou and his wife, Li Yi-hua, are trying to rediscover the attraction and feeling of their first love. As they approach each other to embrace all the characters of the imaginary court crowd onto the stage. At first they orchestrate the lovers' embrace with half-memories, details of everyday life, but gradually they physically encroach upon the entwined couple to the point of sitting on them. The couple is formed by the convergence of all these other characters and details.

Gatti's views on personality were forged by his prison camp experiences in which men lived a common existence; each individual was part of a community: "Chacun portait en lui une espèce de pensée collective, une façon de voir le monde qui n'est pas le fait d'un seul individu mais d'un nombre très grand d'individus."<sup>3</sup> This collective experience marks Gatti's early plays very

<sup>1</sup>Gatti to Pays, "Art actuel."

<sup>2</sup>Armand Gatti, La Vie imaginaire de l'éboueur Auguste G. in Théâtre [II], p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Gatti, "Démones et merveilles," cited by Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, p. 26.

heavily: L'Enfant-rat, La Deuxième Existence du camp de Tatenberg, and Chroniques d'une planète provisoire--all revolve around a central image of the prisoner-of-war camp. In his preface to L'Enfant-rat, Gatti's explanation of the use of numbers for characterization in the play underlines the concept of identity that permeates his dramatic works. The identity of a character varies according to the point of view from which he is studied; therefore, a character can have multiple identities. Rather than giving a single name to a multiple identity, a number is attributed to it since a number best represents the abstract nature of personality:

Le but de cette tentative théâtrale est de montrer que derrière le chiffre, il y a un homme, que cet homme porte dans ses paroles, ses silences et ses actes des dizaines d'autres hommes (morts ou vivants) et que de surcroît gravitent autour de lui, comme des satellites, les versions contradictoires que donnent de son personnage, ceux qui l'entourent, le connaissent ou l'ont connu.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to this interrelation, the exiles in the salt mines share a common experience, symbolized in the four characters HUIT (ex-gardiennne de camp), NEUF (ex-kapo de la mine), DIX (ex-gardien de camp), and ONZE (ex-commandant de camp). The exiles cannot throw off the experience of the camp and so these four characters are still present in their everyday lives. The play is structured around évangiles which are "une interprétation du monde qui l'entoure, donnée par l'un des personnages. Celui-ci devient en quelque sorte le personnage-soleil. Tant que dire son évangile tout se plie à son système, à sa vision des choses--même les autres personnages, lesquels se modèlent sur la façon dont il les éclaire ou se souvient d'eux."<sup>2</sup> The évangile is the forerunner of the selmaire of Chant public.

Gatti's world view is a complex juxtaposition of past, present and future in which personality as well as time is considered to be in a constant

<sup>1</sup> Armand Gatti, Théâtre [II] (Paris: Seuil, 1960), pp. 9-10. Adélaïde in the play reaffirms this idea:

"A peine entré dans le box, tu n'es plus toi. Moi aussi--je n'étais plus moi. [Chacun avait son Adélaïde, le président, le procureur, l'avocat, les journalistes, le public. Ils se la lançaient à la figure à tour de bras.] Dix, vingt Adélaïdes, qui s'empoignaient à chaque audience. Et lorsque j'y ajoutais la mienne les autres se retournaient toutes contre moi!" Armand Gatti, L'Enfant-rat in Théâtre [II], p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Gatti, Théâtre [II], p. 10.

state of metamorphosis; new forms do not eradicate previous states but rather join the old in a simultaneous, multi-dimensional action. However, a Gatti play is still created in the conventional two-process manner with written text pre-existing performance. Gatti, himself, views these periods as distinct processes: "Quand j'écris je ne tiens aucun compte de la mise en scène. Je subordonne tout à la logique des personnages et des situations."<sup>1</sup> The literary text that is produced is a work in its own right but only becomes theatre at the moment of performance: "Tout commence à la mise en scène. . . . C'est elle qui crée le phénomène du langage. L'auteur apporte la matière brute. Ce par quoi cette matière existe, c'est la mise en scène."<sup>2</sup> The process of rehearsal and performance gives the work a new life, not in the sense of resuscitation but rather of rebirth. The work on stage is not the same as that of the author's studio. Gatti was very surprised by this phenomenon, "ce travail de ré-  
imagination,"<sup>3</sup> when Vilar created Le Crapaud-buffle; he stated that his text was hardly recognizable in its new form. The strength of this impression led him to claim that "le texte-chef-d'oeuvre, ça n'existe pas."<sup>4</sup>

The transformation of a Gatti play from literary text to performed work is clearly seen in the case of Chant public. The play was in a formative state as early as April 1962 when Mireille Boris announced that Gatti was writing a play called Chant nuptial d'une horloge treating the Sacco and Vanzetti affair.<sup>5</sup> The play Chant public was completed in a period of fifteen days once the planning had been done. But in January 1964, Gatti admitted that the experience of working on Chroniques with Sarrazin had shown him that the written version of Chant public was not suitable in its initial form for stage production.<sup>6</sup> It was necessary for him to cut and prune the text. The version published at the time of the 1966 T.N.P. production of the play shows the

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti to Lerrant, "Metteur en scène," p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Gatti cited by Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, p. 222.

<sup>3</sup>Gatti to Autruisseau, "Crapaud-buffle," p. 9. <sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Mireille Boris, L'Humanité, 16 April 1962.

<sup>6</sup>Gatti to Mireille Boris, [Entretien], L'Humanité, 4 January 1964.

extent of the adaptation. Generally speaking, the stage version reveals a more tightly knit structure. To take but two examples, in the 1964 version the first sequence, "Clefs de portées sous forme de spectateurs," includes four short passages issuing from the Lyons theatre; in the 1966 text, three of these brief passages are fused into a single longer sequence.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the second sequence, "Bande sonore pour un générique," is transformed from a multitude of short flashes of historical detail from all corners of the stage into a more coherent, discursive introduction of the historical setting comprising a flow of longer speeches from each theatre (CP64:37-41; CP66:21-28). This type of structural alteration occurs throughout the 1966 version and demonstrates that Gatti was adapting a personal reflection on the affair into a communicable play. The profusion of details is grouped more coherently in the second version and, if not deemed essential, pieces are omitted. For instance, Eugene Debs, another victim of injustice, is mentioned in the 1964 version, but is not cited in the stage text (CP64:130).

The long period of genesis implied in the creation of Chant public is apparently a constant aspect of Gatti's creative process. It is not possible to outline Gatti's method of writing, as he himself admits to being an erratic writer.<sup>2</sup> Gatti's mind and mental activity are such that a single subject over a period of time will suggest itself to him from a variety of angles. Un homme seul derives from his experiences as a reporter in Kouangsi; during his work the name Wei Pa-tchoun kept recurring and the facets of the character of this guerrilla leader appeared to multiply as each new piece of information was reported: "Partout où j'allais, j'interrogeais les gens sur Wei Pa-tchoun. J'ai eu des versions innombrables et la pièce n'est pas autre chose que la confrontation de ces différentes versions."<sup>3</sup> Thus, Li Tche-liou is studied in the play from different perspectives simultaneously, a composite psychological

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti, Chant public (1964), pp. 25-26; pp. 27-28; pp. 31-32; and pp. 34-35; and Armand Gatti, Chant public devant deux chaises électriques (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 19-21.

<sup>2</sup>Gatti to Knapp, "Theatre of Action," p. 409.

<sup>3</sup>Gatti to Pays, "Art actuel."

picture that does not try to harmonize the different aspects of his identity, but rather states them as being Li Tche-liou's reality. Focal or linear psychology has been replaced by an exploded psychology.

His Rosa collective was created by an analogous process.<sup>1</sup> Although the sources of his material were not other people's reports but his own knowledge of the life and work of Rosa Luxembourg, Gatti was nevertheless in the situation of having various views of the revolutionary figure: "En huit ans j'avais imaginé plusieurs pièces sur Rosa, mais c'est alors que l'idée m'est venue de les faire coexister à l'intérieur de la même pièce, les confronter."<sup>2</sup> The work, imagined for so long, suddenly coalesces around a single idea. A similar revelatory experience led to the inspired period of composition of Chant public. His knowledge of the Sacco and Vanzetti affair had been intimate for a long period. Only the specific situation of the Cuban missile confrontation suggested the form for the play:

Ce fut le déclic. Dans mes souvenirs, Sacco et Vanzetti répétèrent au moins cinq phrases analogues. Aussitôt ces blancs et ces nuits de la Havane défilant sous la pluie avec leurs imperméables, leurs sacs, leurs couvertures, et quelquefois leurs parapluies inscrivèrent pour moi, leur marche, entre les couloirs de Sing-Sing et ceux de Charleston. Ils étaient tous à leur façon des Rosenbergs, des Saccos et des Vanzettis. Leurs ennemis étaient les mêmes et pour les mêmes raisons. . . . La plupart ne savaient rien de Sacco et Vanzetti mais ils avaient rejoint leur histoire, chacun à sa façon, chacun à sa dimension, chacun avec son éducation, chacun avec sa pigmentation de peau.<sup>3</sup>

Gatti states that the first process, writing, is undertaken independently of the idea of performance; composition develops according to its own internal logic of characterization and situation. However, this logic is not one of moulding into rectilinear coherence, but one of complex confrontation. The method of elaborating the characters of his plays encourages this complexity and also avoids the single, central hero bias of much of historical drama. He identifies with each character in turn in order to understand his feelings and reactions. The resultant play becomes very dense with a host of equally well

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<sup>1</sup> Armand Gatti, Rosa collective (Paris: Seuil, 1973).

<sup>2</sup> Gatti to Denis Bablet, "Entretien avec Armand Gatti," Travail théâtral no. 3 (April to June 1971), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Gatti, Chant public (1964), p. 13.

developed characters, all of whom present a particular point of view on the central theme: "Une fois qu'il y a autant de pièces que de personnages, je fais une sorte de mixage: beaucoup de choses disparaissent, mais je trouve le fil conducteur. C'est ainsi que cette espèce de vision kaléidoscopique forme un tout."<sup>1</sup> Observing such a method, it would be impossible for Gatti to produce a conventional play with its linear development of character and situation.

Although the written text is constructed by Gatti alone, it does not remain fixed and immutable. The authoritative author figure is not an image that Gatti pursues: "Je ne crois pas à la toute puissance de l'auteur, ce monsieur qui fait des pièces de théâtre, mais à un travail d'équipe. C'est de la communion dans l'oeuvre que peut naître la communion souhaitée du public avec cette oeuvre."<sup>2</sup> In fact after Hubert Monloup's work on Tatenberg at Lyone in 1962, Gatti tended to work exclusively with that designer. They joined with Jean-Marie Lancelot and H. Châtelain, and the four became a creative team that lasted until Gatti grew disenchanted by the theatrical industry in 1968. He left the team in order to discover a more active form by which to communicate his social and political ideals. The team, while it lasted, was a filter through which the written <sup>text</sup> passed; play scripts were adapted and modified as a result of contact with other experiences.

Especially after Chant public, which itself had been exposed to a public reading at Théâtre de la Commune at Aubervilliers in February 1964,<sup>3</sup> Gatti adopted the practice of extensive play readings and open discussions which served as an additional agency for modification and adaptation. For example, the banned La Passion du général Franco<sup>4</sup> was recited before proletarian and peasant audiences no less than fifteen times in France and

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti, "Théâtre d'aujourd'hui," cited by Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup>Gatti, "Théâtre pour la cité," p. 72.

<sup>3</sup>Advertisements appeared in Combat, 22 February 1964 and L'Humanité, 20 February 1964.

<sup>4</sup>For details of the ban see Dorothy Knowles, "To be banned or not to be banned," Drama, no. 93 (Summer 1969), pp. 53-58.

abroad. The audiences were invited to criticize and suggest more accurate details as a result of which the play was remoulded.<sup>1</sup> This practice underscores Gatti's conviction that a play should have a firm basis in reality. In addition it represents a formative stage in the development of an artistic ethos in which the author acts as servant to the community. It is in this sense that Maurice Sarrazin, Gatti's collaborator in Toulouse, can observe: "C'est un théâtre qui bouge . . . ; l'auteur n'hésite pas à modifier, il considère le théâtre comme une matière vivante au lieu d'être celui qui, ex cathedra, pond, signe et n'y touche plus."<sup>2</sup>

During the creation of a play, Gatti is liable to reconstruct a role in order that it should better suit the actor. Thus, the live experience of the performance is felt to be more important than the words on the page:

J'ai un homme, j'ai un rôle. Je cherche dans cet homme qui est en face de moi tout ce qui peut recevoir l'esprit du rôle, quitte à modifier celui-ci en conséquence. Au lieu de partir du personnage à créer, je pars de l'homme qui va l'endosser. . . . Mes idées préconçues s'abolissent devant l'homme.<sup>3</sup>

The manner in which Gatti the director deals with the actors allows dimensions that lay beyond the text to emerge. This is clearly consistent with the idea of theatre being a medium through which man's possibilities can be exploited. In interview with Bettina Knapp, he described the way he helped to construct the role of the Rabbi in Chroniques: at the outset, the actor was asked to speak his lines not as a rabbi but as an opera singer; when this had been achieved, the actor had to change and play the part in the manner of a German worker; such variations were pursued up until a few days before the first performance when Gatti asked the actor to consider himself as a rabbi.<sup>4</sup> This procedure avoids the creation of a caricature in favour of a richly complex character. The numerous possibilities facing the actor in his building of the

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti, "Théâtre d'aujourd'hui," cited by Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup>Maurice Sarrazin, "Théâtre d'aujourd'hui," cited by Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, p. 135

<sup>3</sup>Gatti to Lerrant, "Metteur en scène," p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>Knapp, "Theatre of Action," p. 417.



role tended to add new dimensions to the part of the Rabbi who subsequently became a multi-faceted creation—in Gatti's terms, a more human character.

The play text which is developed by the author is modifiable by the production team, the future spectator, and the actor. These opportunities for adaptation are a logical outcome of the view that Gatti holds of the text; not a word perfect piece of literature, it is but a basis from which to work in rehearsal: "Que je proclame . . . que chaque sujet possède une théâtralité qui lui est propre, que c'est la recherche des structures exprimant cette théâtralité qui forme une pièce."<sup>1</sup>

The spectator's contribution to the creative process has passed through various stages of evolution in Gatti's theatre. His fundamental convictions are that theatre should be a means of enlightenment for the oppressed classes and a product of the creativity of the community as a whole. This concept of popular theatre is a radical approach to the determination of the social role of theatre. The official policy towards a national popular theatre basically relies on the simple premise that a wider segment of society should be provided with theatre but not that this increased audience should take any active part in dramatic creation. Gatti contrasts the official approach which he describes as "une conquête du public par le théâtre" with an approach that he favours which would constitute "une conquête du théâtre par le public."<sup>2</sup> The participation that he envisages is a creative effort by the populace and not the self-indulgence of physical participation of the kind solicited by happening:

Cette participation physique c'est un genre de vidange; on tire la chaîne, on vide, et ça y est. . . . On sent mieux après. Je ne crois pas que cela aille beaucoup plus loin. On exclut la réflexion, alors ce qui compte ce sont les problèmes que l'on pose et que l'on ne résoudra sans doute pas le soir même, mais un jour plus tard, au contact avec la réalité. Cette attitude-là me paraît beaucoup plus valable. D'après mon expérience, c'est seulement de cette manière que le théâtre peut avoir une influence réelle.<sup>3</sup>

To match this theoretical position, Gatti works to develop the means by which the community can find self-expression in the theatre. Before 1968, Gatti produced two plays commissioned by organizations; a third resulted from

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti, *Théâtre* [III] p. 8.      <sup>2</sup>Gatti and Sarrazin, "Un théâtre," p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Gatti to Bablet, "Entretien," p. 10.

a community theatre workshop convened by the Théâtre de l'Est Parisien. Both commissioned works sprang from Gatti's relationship with the Grenier de Toulouse. V comme Vietnam answered a request from the Collectif Intersyndical Universitaire d'Action pour la Paix au Vietnam; played instead of the announced programme, it represented a departure for the subsidized theatre and its relationship with current affairs; the theatre was involved with current, political issues. More interesting for our purpose is La Passion du général Franco, created in reply to a group of emigrant Spanish workers who wished to express their solidarity with the striking Asturian miners and who wanted to draw attention to Franco's military regime. For this play, Gatti interviewed many exiled Spaniards in order to appreciate the condition of being a foreigner in a strange land.

The most advanced example of this type of author-public collaboration is Les 13 Soleils de la rue Saint-Blaise. The play was created from five recorded conversations chaired by Emile Copfermann between Gatti and the inhabitants of the 20<sup>e</sup> arrondissement in Paris. The discussion centred on the question: "Quels sont les problèmes actuels qui selon vous devraient être représentés sur scène?" The subject-matter of the play derived from the preoccupations of those participating with the quality of life especially in the light of plans for urban redevelopment. The administration of the T.E.P. and, no doubt, Gatti and Copfermann saw the venture as a new departure for the theatre:

L'expérience consistait à inverser les rôles habituels, à mettre les spectateurs en situation d'auteurs, et l'auteur et le metteur en scène en situation de spectateurs. Différents points de vue se sont affrontés. Des répliques mêmes, échangées par nos adhérents, est née la pièce. Les spectateurs-auteurs sont devenus "les treize soleils de la rue Saint-Blaise."<sup>1</sup>

According to the T.E.P.'s director, Guy Rétoré, the importance of the experiment for Gatti was that it marked "un pas sur le chemin qui conduira un jour chaque homme à être créateur."<sup>2</sup> This underlying aim unites Gatti with

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<sup>1</sup> Armand Gatti, Les 13 Soleils de la rue Saint-Blaise (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Guy Rétoré cited by Philippe Madral, L'Humanité, 13 March 1968.

the Villeurbanne declaration and the efforts of the theatre collectives—all represent the artistic manifestation of the socio-political trend that leads away from the spectator society towards a participatory community.<sup>1</sup> The experiment, however, was perhaps not as revolutionary in its final form as it was in intention. Gatti himself admits that the words of the inhabitants were full of human interest but devoid of much dramatic potential; his role as author is to "'transcender' le débat et lui donner vie théâtrale."<sup>2</sup> The work is obviously more Gatti's than the citizens' in its expression, being written in a rich, evocative vocabulary with an exuberance of imagery. For Matthieu Galey, this was so obviously the case that he referred to the whole undertaking as the "participation illusoire des spectateurs."<sup>3</sup>

After 1968, Gatti greatly reduced the creation of full scale productions that demand complex staging, a skilled production team, great expense, and the use of an established theatre. Only in 1968 did Gatti realize the paradox inherent in his situation: although a playwright who supports a radical change in society and an overthrow of the capitalist system of exploitation, he is not only dependent on the industry of theatrical production but "exhibits" his work in a situation from which those to whom he appeals are excluded. Gatti explains the untenable position of the revolutionary playwright to Denis Bablet:

*Rosa est en train d'être montée à Kassel. Elle ne peut pas toucher les gens à qui je voudrais m'adresser parce qu'ils n'appartiennent tout simplement pas à ceux qui pourront la voir. Elle devient un objet culturel, avec elle j'occupe une position privilégiée par rapport aux travailleurs. Quoique je fasse, je suis du côté des privilèges. Je suis le bouffon du système.<sup>4</sup>*

In 1968 he saw a possible resolution of the paradox in the creation of mini-pièces. These works are designed to be easily transportable through their simplicity of setting; they demand very little preparation and last

<sup>1</sup>For an analysis of the spectator society, see Guy Debord, La Société du spectacle, (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967).

<sup>2</sup>Gatti cited by Françoise Varenne, Le Figaro, 15 March 1968.

<sup>3</sup>Matthieu Galey, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 28 March 1968.

<sup>4</sup>Gatti to Bablet, "Entretien," p. 19.

approximately one and a half hours. The collection, Petit Manuel de guérilla urbaine,<sup>1</sup> is the closest that Gatti has come to agit-prop or street theatre. The mini-plays also constitute a further evolution towards Gatti's ideal of the society of creators. For the actors and directors of any of the works, Gatti has but one word: "Aucune pièce n'était donnée comme une réalité définitive: 'Vous avez une pièce. C'est une base à partir de laquelle vous devez inventez. Alors ne tenez pas compte de l'auteur, inventez!'"<sup>2</sup>

In the sketch, Machine excavatrice pour entrer dans le plan de défrichage de la colonne d'invasion Che Guevara, the spectators are also solicited to take an active part. Gatti's plot is basically a simple structure: a Cuban must go to fight a guerrilla war but he cannot tell his French lover; she does all she can to find him but fails. However, the actions and reactions of the characters in this situation are dependent on the will of the audience; there is a whole series of alternative actions from which the audience can choose: "Il y a toute une série de cas prévus et selon les avis du public les personnages font telle ou telle chose. Une dizaine de pièces possibles coexistent et le public qui choisit ne voit jamais la même pièce."<sup>3</sup>

The mini-pièces involve a measure of collective composition by demanding that the outlines laid down by the author be adapted or expanded by the actors and audience at the moment of creation. To this extent, the playlets constitute another stage in Gatti's search for an alternative dramatic language and creative process that would break "le cercle étroit où sont enfermés les rapports de consommation spectacle-spectateur."<sup>4</sup> To this end Gatti experimented between 1972 and 1974 with a more ambitious type of collective creation involving his students from the Institut des Arts de Diffusion at Louvain and the inhabitants of the Brabant Wallon. The premise

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<sup>1</sup>The plays are unpublished in French but details are given in Gatti aujourd'hui by Gozlan and Pays, pp. 252-54.

<sup>2</sup>Gatti to Bablet, "Entretien," p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>Details and quotations are taken from documents distributed by Gatti at a series of discussions entitled "Rencontres avec Armand Gatti: la recherche d'un langage," held at the Salle des Fêtes de la Mairie, Paris 17<sup>e</sup>, 15-17 June 1973.

of the experiment was expressed as: "Créer face à l'événement et non plus en fonction de principes." Thus, the intention was for the students to work with the villagers and to develop their views and experiences and desires into an action. The complex reality of the villagers formed the basis of the spectacle. An extension of the procedure used for 13 Soleils, the approach, however, left the people free to rehearse and create their own scenes and sketches all of which were to be used. For Gatti and his students, the technique obviated the alienating aspects of conventional theatrical production and experience:

Le spectacle constitue purement et simplement une forme de colonisation perpétrée sur l'individu par l'imposition d'un savoir et d'une culture étrangers à son monde, son univers et son vécu. A la notion de spectateur, issue de cette idée de spectacle, nous avons voulu substituer celle de créateur.

By May 1973, eight months of work had produced open-air and street theatre, ten plays, two musical comedies and forty-five songs. However, the major development had been the creation of pièces-trajet based on four characters from the villages: a housewife, a peasant, a worker, and a building contractor. Each play was a collage of perspectives of the central character who possessed five realities: 1) the character as he lives and acts in everyday life; 2) the character as he sees himself; 3) the character as he is seen and described by the production team; 4) the character as envisaged by each actor with his different nationality and social class; and 5) the character as represented by a huge puppet fashioned from the waste products of the consumer society. In 1974 these complex realities were fused into a whole and augmented by the scenes and sketches of the Brabant people to produce a spectacle entitled L'Arche d'Adelin. It tells the story of a Brabant peasant, Adelin, who is fleeing to <sup>the</sup> Dordogne to escape the ills of modern industrial society. The work was performed simultaneously on mobile stages mounted on 150 vehicles which travelled twenty-five kilometers during the twenty-eight-hour show.

Both in its elaborated construction and itinerant performance, Adelin is an intricate example of exploded theatre.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the creative

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti's contribution to the 1974 Festival d'Avignon, La Tribu de Carcane en guerre contre quoi? exploits similar techniques on a smaller scale.

process which encouraged the inhabitants to develop their own scenes reflects Gatti's desire to awaken man to his possibilities. Indeed, for Gatti and his students, the success of the experiment was that it provoked three thousand people to venture into areas of creativity and self-awareness that did not form part of their daily experience, that these people came to realize that they could create alternative experiences themselves, and that consequently they had glimpsed the possibility of acting on the world rather than passively suffering it.

Throughout Gatti's work an apparent development progresses towards the effacement of the dramatist before the increasing power of his public or the actors who are becoming co-creators. Never, however, is the organizing and transforming consciousness of the artist completely superseded. The process of creation which led to Chat sauvage is representative.<sup>1</sup> Discussions were organized by the acting company, Group V, around a scenario entitled Interdit aux plus de trente ans. In this scenario, Don Quixote confronts Gilles Tantin, a martyr of the events of 1968; during their dialogue the two characters try to create a common basis for mutual understanding. The discussions with the public altered this angle considerably; the central element became a debate on how one could join the cause for which Tantin died: "C'était une démarche très nouvelle: j'avais d'abord écrit la pièce comme je la voyais, elle fut ensuite soumise à des publics et je l'ai ré-écrite en fonction de ses publics."<sup>2</sup> In the resultant play, Chat sauvage, the character of Don Quixote has been written out altogether. It is significant that Don Quixote was the code name under which Gatti operated in the Resistance and with which he associated very closely. Thus, symbolically, Gatti was prepared to eliminate himself from the play: "J'ai exécuté mon brave Don Quichotte, c'est-à-dire moi-même, j'ai été fusillé dès le début de la pièce."<sup>3</sup> The author becomes the anonymous amanuensis to the public-creator.

As extreme as they apparently are, Gatti's experiments with the

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished. Details in Gatti aujourd'hui by Gozlan and Pays, p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> Gatti to Bablet, "Entretien," p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

audience's responsibility towards the performance are not totally isolated efforts. Michel Butor in collaboration with the Belgian composer, Henri Pousseur, began to write an opera, Votre Faust: fantaisie variable, genre opéra, as early as June 1961.<sup>1</sup> As the title suggests the work allows for various versions inside a single structure. The variations are due to the opportunities offered to the audience to affect the course of the action during the performance. There are four points at which the audience are able to exercise their authority over the work they are viewing. After an initial invariable sequence the audience is given the straight choice by the Directeur de Théâtre of voting either that the young composer Henri should go to the fair with Maggy or that Maggy should disappear to be replaced by another companion:

LE DIRECTEUR: La cantatrice et son ami Richard vont passer parmi vous pendant l'entracte; l'un vous proposera des boules noires qui voudront dire: "avec une autre," l'autre des boules blanches: "avec Maggy." Vous les déposerez, selon votre choix, dans les troncs, . . . Ensuite, nous passerons le pour et le contre. (VF:85)

This democratic principle does not apply at the second moment of choice which occurs before the result of the ballot. On this occasion the Directeur twice descends into the audience and leads a spectator (first a male, then a female)

<sup>1</sup>The text of Votre Faust has been subject to a lot of confusing speculation. A version containing two alternative endings was published in serial form in La Nouvelle Revue française as follows (quotations are from this text):

No. 109	January 1962	pp. 65-86
No. 110	February 1962	pp. 261-89
No. 111	March 1962	pp. 461-82
No. 112	April 1962	pp. 641-57

An alternative version for the second part, "La Banlieue de l'aube à l'aurore," was included in a special number on Butor of the Belgian review VII, no. 10 (1962). Other fragments appeared in Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, no. 41 (December 1963), pp. 203-15. Leon S. Roudiez in his Michel Butor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 44 claims that a complete text was to appear in book form in 1965, but nothing has emerged. A full text has appeared in Cahiers du Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes, no. 62 (1968).

Similar confusion surrounds the dates of performance: Roudiez claims that the opera was to be performed in Venice in autumn 1965 prior to a Parisian production by Jean-Louis Barrault (p. 43). Réal Ouellet, Les Critiques de notre temps et le nouveau roman (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1972), p. 128 claims that there was a performance in Brussels in 1967; this is confirmed in a note by Jacques Longchamp in Le Monde, 14 December 1966, p. 14; however, no trace of this performance could be found. Jacques Dubois and Jean-Marie Piemme announced the creation of the work in 1968 in Milan in the introduction to Henri Pousseur's article, "La Foire de Votre Faust," Marche Romane, vol 20, no. 3 (1970), p. 21. What is certain is that there was a concert performance of Pousseur's score at the Biennale de Bruxelles in December 1966 (reviewed by Longchamp) and a creation of the full work at the Piccola Scala (Milan) in January 1969.

onto the stage:

LE DIRECTEUR: Monsieur, vous avez la possibilité d'intervenir pour une première fois. Voulez-vous que nous jouions la suite de cette scène, ou préférez-vous que nous revenions en arrière, et que nous la remplacions par une autre où Henri sera dans sa chambre? (VF:266)

It is the minority point of view that governs the audience's third decision, for just a simple cry of "no" from any member of the audience is sufficient to stop the scene and to cause another to be commenced (VF:275-76). This choice is not without its limiting conditions; the Directeur explains that after a certain sound signal no alteration is possible, and that only one interruption is allowed between one signal and the next. The democratic process is reinstated for the final method by which the audience articulates its preferences:

LE DIRECTEUR: Mais le cri de l'un d'entre vous ne suffira plus. Il faudra que la salle entière fasse rage pour réussir à tordre ce destin si fermement orienté maintenant. Lorsque vous ferez un vacarme tel, criant, chantant si vous voulez, hurlant, applaudissant, que l'on ne pourra plus entendre la voix des acteurs, alors la scène en cours s'arrêtera. (VF:461)

The construction of a work that allows this manner of alternation is necessarily extremely complex. Henri Pousseur, himself, in describing the fair scene in the second part of the performance is forced to resort to algebraic notation to refer to the different possibilities for plot development.<sup>1</sup> Butor and Pousseur admit that there are twenty-five possible versions.<sup>2</sup> The endings of the two versions printed in La Nouvelle Revue française represent the two extremes open to Henri: either the defiant rebuttal by which he breaks his contract with the Mephistophelean director to aspire to a certain independence; or the harrowing acquiescence to the director's demands (VF:655; and 482). Between these two solutions lay another three possibilities of various gradations of salvation and damnation.<sup>3</sup> The variability that is built into the structure of the work means that it is unlikely that two audiences would in fact see the same version of Votre Faust on successive nights.

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<sup>1</sup> Pousseur, "Foire," pp. 21-27.

<sup>2</sup> Butor and Pousseur, Votre Faust, Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, no. 41 (December 1963), p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> Pousseur, "Foire," pp. 32-33.



A similar experiment was produced by the collaboration of the spatio-dynamic sculptor Nikolas Schöffer, the serialist composer Pierre Henry, and the modern dance company of Alwin Nikolais at the Hamburg Opera in February 1973. The title of the work, Kyldex-1, translates the priorities of the artists: Ky(bernetic or cybernetic) L(umino) D(ynamic) Ex(periment). The audience were supplied with five signals: a red circle, a green triangle, a white square, a blue diamond and a yellow triangle which signified stop, faster, explain, slower, and repeat respectively. At the end of each sequence the Director of the Opera, Rolf Liebermann, consulted the audience who replied with their signs. The wishes of the majority were respected.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the obvious parallels to be drawn between this type of experimentation and the surrealist fascination with aleatory techniques, both Kyldex-1 and Votre Faust play on the convention of the intrinsic collaboration between the author and his public, traditionally called the suspension of disbelief. There is an attempt to democratize this relationship by breaking the tyranny of the author and to return an element of freedom to the spectator.

Butor, in particular, is concerned with the veracity of the reality which he as author presents. All created work will necessarily present a fake reality because it is the result of a narrow choice by an individual. To approximate more closely to the true nature of experience, the work must express a multi-dimensional reality: "Le seul moyen de dire la vérité, d'aller à la recherche de la vérité, c'est de confronter inlassablement, méthodiquement, ce que nous racontons d'habitude avec ce que nous voyons, entendons, avec les informations que nous recevons, c'est donc de 'travailler' sur le récit."<sup>2</sup> Thus, inside a single work there exists a whole gamut of perspectives. In this Butor's work resembles Gatti's; both present multiple points of view on a subject inside a play expressed by a technique of confrontation between those differing views. It is noteworthy that both authors are fascinated by the idea of trajets or journeys through a work. Butor's radiophonic text, Réseau

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<sup>1</sup>For details of this performance, see Jacques Lonchamp, Le Monde, 15 February 1973, p. 27; and Martine Cadieu, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 19 February 1973, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Michel Butor, Répertoire II (Paris: Minuit, 1964), p. 89.

aérien, is constructed around conversations of passengers on as many as ten aeroplanes simultaneously flying all over the globe.<sup>1</sup> The result is a kind of patchwork of overlapping, intersecting dialogues that treat the common preoccupations of the travellers. Similarly, Gatti's La Passion du général Franco confronts four different journeys made by Spanish émigrés in order to examine the problems and human suffering involved in emigration. Both works require not an analytical understanding of sequential events, but rather a synthetic grasping of a complex reality.<sup>2</sup>

Butor's work is not offered to the public as an invitation into an imaginary space; it demands that the reader, listener, or spectator should be consciously active in the creation of the work. The reader has to break with the traditional procedure that offers him an easy story line in order to cope with the possibilities contained in a single work, or for that matter, in a single page: "La narration n'est plus une ligne, mais une surface dans laquelle nous isolons un certain nombre de lignes, de points, ou de groupements remarquables."<sup>3</sup> Thus, a text like Mobile should be read "en étoile,"<sup>4</sup> that is to say the reader should follow the lines and points out from the centre of the page. Equally, variations of type-face allow the reader to follow different routes through the study. The situation is reproduced in 6.810.000 litres d'eau par seconde which, by virtue of being a stereophonic work, offers various possibilities to the listener:

L'auditeur en réglant la balance de son appareil, peut aussi privilégier plus ou moins tel ou tel côté. . . . On a donc une double variabilité: à l'émission, l'exécutant aura choisi l'une des dix voies; à la réception, l'auditeur pourra changer de la place à l'intérieur de l'architecture transmise.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Michel Butor, Réseau aérien (Paris: Gallimard, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Although such a comparison is valid, it must be understood that while Gatti is more concerned with the socio-political aspects of his work, Butor is more interested in the aesthetic problem of expressing reality.

<sup>3</sup> Butor, Répertoire II, p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> Butor cited by Jean Roudaut, Michel Butor, ou Le livre futur: proposition (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Butor, 6.810.000 litres d'eau par seconde (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp. 20-21.

The choices made by the audience in Votre Faust are examples of the same kind of freedom and responsibility, although by the very nature of the dramatic performance individual choice is tempered by the collective will. In that same work, the limitations set on the freedom of choice by the Directeur carry a hint of coercion, as does his implication that he has some accomplices seated in the audience (VF:276; and 461).

The performance of a variable text poses problems for the actor. To change parts randomly presents no real difficulty for a musician or a chorister since the genre pre-supposes no identification between the musician-chorister and his part. In the case of the actor, however, this ability to exchange characters or portrayals successfully is questionable. In Votre Faust, the character of Henri is subjected to this treatment because of the possible changes of direction willed by the audience. The reviews of the performance indicate that this difficulty was not solved by the production. Jacques Lonchamp admitted that after the first unchangeable sequence, he found himself "dans l'aléa et la confusion"; Maurice Fleuret condemned the venture with "un intellectualisme irrespirable," implying that variation can only exist as an idea and not in practice.<sup>1</sup>

In principle, Votre Faust embodies an attempt by Butor and Pousseur to circumvent the hierarchy of creator over spectator that obtains in the conventional artistic situation: "Une espèce de balancement continuuel du rapport de maître à esclave."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Butor does not abdicate any of the author's authority in practice. In a discussion of the theories of multiple focus and character in the novel, Butor concludes: "L'écrivain doit alors contrôler l'oeuvre dans toutes ses différentes versions, les assumer comme le sculpteur responsable de tous les angles sous lesquels on pourra photographier sa statue, et du mouvement qui lie toutes ces vues."<sup>3</sup> Consequently, in the

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<sup>1</sup>Jacques Lonchamp, Le Monde, 22 January 1969; and Maurice Fleuret, Le Nouvel Observateur, 27 January 1969, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Butor and Pousseur, Votre Faust, Cahiers du Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes, no. 62 (1968), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Butor, Répertoire II, pp. 98-99.

structure of Votre Faust the spectator becomes "un élément aléatoire considérable et très difficile à contrôler."<sup>1</sup> The audience is held in check; the author retains his mastery of the work. The possibility for creative action by the spectator was never really there; he is allowed only to choose between various alternatives supplied by the author. Without channelling the spectator into a single perspective, this process does keep him within the design of the author: "Votre Faust est un solide à l'intérieur duquel on peut faire des coupes. Le public ne voit pas seulement une version; il voit en perspective la façon dont d'autres versions sont possibles."<sup>2</sup> Even this measure of freedom Butor believes can have an instructive and liberating effect on the spectator-reader. The reader is given the responsibility for the progress of the action inside the microcosm of the work; through this experience, it is possible that he teaches himself about the exercise and practice of freedom. This new found self-knowledge is of importance in his daily conduct and self-realization.<sup>3</sup>

In the text of Chant public Gatti had anticipated this possible development of the concept of audience responsibility. In the simulated theatrical situation, Bonnetade halts the action to consult the "audience":

BONNETADE: Stop! excusez ce court arrêt. Nous allons vous demander comment, à partir de là, chacun de vous voit la suite de la pièce. Vous monsieur? Non? Alors, vous monsieur? (CP66:30)

Through this device, Gatti breaks up the linear development of the direct enactment of the scenes concerning the Sacco-Vanzetti affair in order to introduce a complex of reactions to a single event. This invitation does not instance any real variation in the play's performance for the simultaneous responses to a "performance" treating the case of the anarchists by five different "audiences" in "theatres" around the globe form the basis and structure of the play.

Thus, with the profusion of geographic locations goes an explosion of perspective. Time and development are present only in an indirect way in that

<sup>1</sup>Butor and Pousseur, Votre Faust, Cahiers du Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes, no. 62 (1968), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Butor, Répertoire II, p. 99.

the supposed performance does pursue the events surrounding the case of the anarchists. What the audience in the theatre witness, though, is the realm of the parallel actions or selmaires of the different supposed spectators and these are deliberately non-chronological. Each member of each "audience" reacts according to his own socio-political context: Little Ned as a black in Los Angeles sees the case as an example of prejudice against ethnic minorities (CP66:148-49); in Boston, Farley and Anne regard it as an example of injustices perpetrated against undefended people, in particular Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, whereas their fellow Bostonians Eva, Boyd, Grant and Katz treat the whole matter as a social outing (CP66:18; and 70); in the Turin theatre, Cervi and Letizia draw analogies between their own emotional situation and the traumas that must have been suffered by Sacco and his wife; Venturelli, the anarchist, and Coleone, the unionist, cannot avoid placing the Sacco and Vanzetti affair in the context of the workers' world-wide struggle against the oppressors (CP66:42; 71; and 111-12); in Hamburg, Kassel regards the victims as the two cashiers that were supposedly shot by the anarchists; Erhman-Klose, as a professor of law, is interested in the legal conduct of the case, as is the lawyer Muller whose client Vorortzug, however, identifies with the third man convicted, Madeiros, through the situation of his son (CP64:35; CP66:14; 47-48; and 11). As a result of this proliferation of the points of view the action of the play, although centred on one affair which can be precisely dated 1920-1927, ranges from the 1886 hanging of the five Chicago workers to the Rosenberg affair of 1953; even more expansively the historical figure Judge Thayer compares it with the battle of Gettysburg, and Mann renders the play contemporary with the reference to the Watts race riots in Los Angeles (CP66:75; 27; and 39). Indeed to speak in terms of past and future in a chronological fashion does not heed Gatti's conception of time nor the basis of the play.

VENTURELLI: Vous connaissez l'affaire des pendus de Chicago? Celle qui a donné naissance à la fête du Premier Mai? . . . Même si des gens comme vous font semblant d'ignorer à qui elle est due, avons-nous un seul jour (dans notre manière de vivre ou de penser) cessé de témoigner pour ou contre les anarchistes de Chicago, et les idées pour lesquelles ils ont été pendus? (CP66:17-18)

To try and express in a text and on stage such a geographically and

temporally complex situation poses many technical problems. In the texts, Gatti uses a system of hyphens and brackets to indicate different movements in time:

Plus précisément, un tiret marque une rupture de pensée, un changement de vitesse vers l'extériorisation; une parenthèse marque un changement de vitesse vers l'intériorisation. C'est en quelque sorte une écriture à trois tons où les différentes hauteurs ne sont pas données une fois pour toutes mais s'établissent continuellement les unes par rapport aux autres.<sup>1</sup>

Gatti's problem is greater than that of Diderot who proposed a scenic design that would allow various sets to coexist on the same stage: "Différents endroits distribués de manière que le spectateur vit toute l'action."<sup>2</sup> He, however, only envisaged sets that would naturally coexist, for example, the public square with the different façades, each providing a defined area.

The performance of plays developed according to a concept of "temps-possibilité" is seen by Gatti to necessitate a parallel development of an "espace-possibilité," that is to say a space that is constantly modifiable in order to provide all possible spaces.<sup>3</sup> This variability is vital to free theatrical expression since "avant tout une pièce est déterminée par l'espace qu'on lui attribue et dans lequel les personnages se meuvent."<sup>4</sup> This dramatic experimentation with space obviously brings Gatti into conflict with the existing theatrical buildings and scenic structures which are based on a stable single perspective that limits man's potential. These limitations contradict the very nature of Gatti's philosophy of freedom to develop: "Que je vocifère . . . que toute la sénilité du théâtre vient de la scène unique et de son impossibilité à respirer dans un monde qui vit sur plusieurs dimensions et dans plusieurs âges à la fois."<sup>5</sup> Gatti's fascination with space even extends

<sup>1</sup>Gatti, Théâtre [III], pp. 10-11.    <sup>2</sup>Diderot, O.C. VII, pp. 115-16.

<sup>3</sup>Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, p. 177.

<sup>4</sup>Gatti, Théâtre [III], p. 8. Gatti contemplated and designed just such a spatial conception in an essay entitled "Pour un théâtre spatial" which by 1959 had reached the proportions of three hundred pages, but which was abandoned and lost. See Armand Gatti, "Le Théâtre c'est la fête des hommes," Bref, no. 29 (October 1959), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>Gatti, Théâtre [III], p. 9.

to a desire to explode the human form:

Je voudrais en arriver à l'éclatement de l'espace. Je voudrais même faire éclater le corps humain, prendre dans le pinceau d'un projecteur l'oeil de l'un, la bouche de l'autre, recomposer, à travers dix personnages, un être unique, éclaté.<sup>1</sup>

In effect this would lead to a scenic experiment not dissimilar to Tzara's Le Coeur à gaz which called for actors (fellow surrealists) to act parts of the body.

Gatti's plays have escaped the confines of the conventional theatrical structures on at least two occasions, but ironically in both instances it was not Gatti himself who had charge of the productions. In February 1967, Jean Hurstel recreated Tatenberg at the Théâtre Universitaire de Strasbourg. The studio theatre was arranged in an elevated scenic structure that provided several acting areas distributed throughout the theatre and joined by a series of gangways that criss-crossed and surrounded the audience. The spectators took their places in the empty spaces between. Gatti, himself, was pleased with the interpretation:

Tatenberg était monté par Hurstel dans un espace scénique où le public se trouvait inclus. Tous les rapports, tous les plans d'écriture se constituaient naturellement (et Hurstel n'employait en tout et pour tout que trois projecteurs). Ma pièce était restituée à ses possibilités.<sup>2</sup>

In March 1968 Hurstel also produced La Cigogne on a similar scenic instrument. The stage directions for this play call for the provision of "quatre faces (Nord, Sud, Est, Ouest) et sur chacune d'elles des panneaux qui coulissent comme dans les maisons japonaises."<sup>3</sup> Such indications are characteristic of Gatti's later works. At least two of the plays that comprise Petit Manuel de quérilla urbaine demand similar settings: Les Hauts Plateaux has three stages arranged at the cardinal points North, East, and West, the spectators taking up positions on the south side but inside the three stages; Machine excavatrice calls for four spaces, one at each of the points of the compass,

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti cited by Alain Schifres, "Armand Gatti," Réalités, no. 242 (March 1966), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>Armand Gatti, "Entretien avec Sud," June 1967 cited by Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, p. 226.

<sup>3</sup>Armand Gatti, La Cigogne (Paris: Seuil, 1971), p. 8.

and in the centre a bare patch from which Marianne addresses the audience which is seated in the remaining area between the stages. Only with his experiments in Belgium did Gatti escape the dilemma of being a "prisonnier des salles existantes"; generally he had to suffer the "espèce de viol" that comes of trying to adapt his theatre to the proportions of the Italianate stage.<sup>1</sup>

Although the later plays have more details of intricate stage designs, all Gatti's plays imply a dispositif éclaté. The opening tableau of Le Crapaud-buffle suggests a distinct spatial separation: at the back of the stage to the right and to the left of a coat of arms stand Huacarimac and Don Tiburcio; centre stage, "la partie vivante de la scène," is occupied by Doña Concha and a group of wailing widows around a child's bed (CB:7); further forward still on the apron passes a monk with his crucifix followed by a guard pushing a bound and gagged man in a wheelchair--backwards. The depth of the stage, and hence its proportions, are emphasized by a lot of stage business being concentrated there. For example, slides are projected onto "une immense affiche murale qui couvre tout le fond de la scène" (CB:16). Later in the play, the same spatial separation of the opening scene is evoked: "Les invités se mettent l'un après l'autre face au public, au fond de la salle. Par devant, une table (ou un simulacre de table) est installée" (CB:38). Another scene is presented with the stage divided into two cubes by illuminating one half with bright lights and keeping the other in darkness; this division is stressed by positioning Huacarimac "à la ligne de partage" (CB:51).

The original stage conception of Auguste G. manifested the ever present desire to experiment with colour and the concrete space of the stage:

L'espace de support est noir. Sur lui, en forme de triangle légèrement en pente, se superpose un espace jaune. Empiétant sur les deux se surélève, côté jardin, un espace bleu, lequel est dominé à son tour par un espace vert. Côté cour, deux autres espaces, le rouge et l'orange, lui répond asymétriquement. Ces quatre espaces latéraux sont reliés entre eux par un espace central blanc lequel, prolongé par un escalier, débouche sur l'espace jaune. (AG:17)

Shown clearly in this stage direction is Gatti's concern with movement not

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti, "Entretien avec Sud," cited by Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, p. 226; and Gatti to Claude Fléouter, "Entretien avec Armand Gatti," Le Monde, 20 January 1966.



only in the horizontal plane but also in the vertical plane. Also noticeable is an emphasis on the organic connections between the stage areas, just as Hurstel's gangways combined the elements of his exploded stage setting. When Gatti was writing Auguste G., he had had no direct experience of the theatre; his stage directions were a compromise between his spatial theatre and the requirements of the traditional stage. The complexity of such a set in practice was seen by Jacques Rosner to be an obstacle to the movement of the play. He simplified the set, reducing it to three basic areas—a hospital room, a small sloping stage-within-the-stage on the right, and a low inclined platform that ran the width of the back stage wall. The divided stages were replaced by moving panels and astute lighting techniques. The effect on one critic was all that Gatti himself could have hoped for: "A partir d'un dispositif unique et changeant, des éléments mobiles découpent, creusent, resserrent, font se dilater ou se contracter un espace scénique qui, au-delà de sa matérialité, mime la dialectique de l'Espace-Temps."<sup>1</sup> Rosner's solution to the conflict of Gatti's ideal and the existing stage was soon acknowledged by Gatti himself in his own productions. In a television interview in 1967, he described how the problem of unsuitable theatrical architecture was overcome by the use of lighting, for example, dividing the stage in two front to back or diagonally by the fading of one area and the simultaneous lighting of another.<sup>2</sup> Lighting made the single space adaptable to Gatti's theatre without, however, obtaining "de vie théâtrale sur une multiplicité d'espaces simultanés pour la simple raison que si on essayait de recréer les espaces simultanés dans un cadre à l'italienne, ils bloqueraient tout mouvement."<sup>3</sup>

While working with Sarrazin on the creation of Chroniques, Gatti began to use light as a means to ensure movement and to smooth transitional phases.

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Simon, Esprit (August 1964), p. 482.

<sup>2</sup> This could be seen in Rosner's production (performed by Théâtre de la Cité) in the scene change from the police station to the hospital. Armand Gatti, La Vie imaginaire de l'éboueur Auguste Geai, L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 272 (15 September 1962), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Gatti, "Théâtre d'aujourd'hui," cited by Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, p. 225.

For this production each scene was formed around a fixed point of light; the actors were to arrange themselves around these points and the spotlights were to find the actors and not the reverse.<sup>1</sup> Some three years later, when Gatti was directing Chant public by himself, he resorted to a similar technique:

Nous avons exclu les entrées et les sorties du théâtre conventionnel. Il n'y a pas plus d'interruption qu'il y en a dans un film entre deux plans. Quel que soit le lieu où se déroule l'action, il y a toujours sur le plateau un spectacle dans l'ombre et un spectacle dans la lumière. . . . Quand la lumière les [les acteurs] abandonne pour une autre action déjà en mouvement ils quittent le plateau en continuant leur jeu. Pour nous les lumières interviennent comme un facteur de choix, sur telle ou telle phase d'un mouvement perpétuel où les différentes temporalités s'engendrent l'une l'autre.<sup>2</sup>

Gatti's style of direction is based on movement. The desire to create speed necessitated the adaptation of certain of his directions when putting the written text onto the stage. For example, the revolving stage of Chroniques was abandoned and the moving strip in Tatenberg was also avoided. The smooth transitions that these devices were supposed to achieve in theory were effected by the simpler and more instantaneous medium of light. The transition between the bombing scene and the scene of the Promised Land in Chroniques was made possible by having certain bomb victims fall into the debris in the shadow and then rise up into the light for the following sequence.

Movement on stage played an important part in Chant public. Pierre Chaussat (Gatti's assistant) described the success of Monloup's set as "un ensemble de matières constamment en circulation qui s'engendrent, elles aussi, l'une l'autre."<sup>3</sup> With a cast of seventy and the necessity of including the different perspectives of the "spectators," the difficulties of staging that Monloup overcame were great. The dynamic of Chant public was basically an ebb and flow of characters from their respective "audiences" into a forward central area which represented an imaginary space. The thematic development of the play is underlined by this movement; from the positions of individual "spectators" at a "performance" and through their reactions, they are shown to

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<sup>1</sup> See Gatti cited by Lerrant, "Espace des 'possibles,'" p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Chaussat (~~Gatti's assistant~~) cited by Jean-Louis Pays, Les Lettres françaises, 20 January 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

have a common concern for the Sacco and Vanzetti affair, although this concern may be expressed in different ways according to each person's background. The opening sequence dealing with the assembly of each "audience" emphasized the spatial separation since each "theatre" was designated a different area on the stage; each entry was accompanied by a neon sign flashing on the back wall. The set as initially conceived would have emphasized this configuration even more since the stage was going to imitate a huge pin-ball machine and each area would have been lit from underneath.<sup>1</sup> The separation was attenuated in the second sequence when the official at each "theatre" introduced the show which the "audiences" were to witness. The passage of the microphone around the "audiences" in reply to Bonnetade's question concerning the development of the "show" anticipated the first physical breakdown of the isolated positions of each "audience" that was to occur in the first selmaire: Venturelli became "tel un Monsieur Loyal" to communicate what he thought America was like in 1920 (CP66:34); the actors from Lyons and Grant, Eva and Boyd from Boston were brought into his action; the conclusion of this sequence was the selmaire général: "Sur un signal de Venturelli toujours dans les airs qui articule l'énorme président pour lui faire battre la mesure avec le pied, Le Tin Roof Blues des Spectateurs et des Parallèles réunit toutes les salles et tous les spectateurs dans une même danse" (CP66:38).

The interpenetration and interreaction of the "spectators" was intensified throughout the play. The areas were combined through the growing identification of the "audiences" with the central but absent characters of the Sacco and Vanzetti drama: Kurlanski, Bonnetade, Little Ned, Coleone, Vastadour and Anne moved towards the figure of Vanzetti whereas Boschetto, Cervi, Venturelli, Erhman-Klose, Derlinski and Farley became involved with Sacco (CP66:67). In the second half of the production, the original spatial separation was superseded by concentration around a central area which was closely associated with the Charleston prison (CP66:79). As the stage was

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<sup>1</sup>Hubert Monloup cited by Jean-Jacques Lerrant, "Une écriture de l'espace: le décor d'Hubert Monloup au service des 'possibles' de Gatti," Bref, no. 92 (January 1966), p. 14.

given a focal point in this way so the figures of Sacco and Vanzetti and the third man accused, Madeiros, were assumed by Cervi, Vastadour, and Vorortzug. However, before the end of the performance the action was exploded again and the original spatial separation was re-established. It is significant that this return to the opening situation is begun from the break-up of a selmaire général (CP66:113). The scene of execution takes place with the stage "à nouveau salle multiple avec ses fauteuils et ses spectateurs" (CP66:118). The disunity echoes Gatti's statement that he is in favour not of a theatre of community but of a theatre that divides.

A Gatti play develops in a disjointed manner—the complexity of the characters, the multiplicity of the action, the fragmentation of time and space—but the whole is orchestrated in performance into a continuously evolving movement. The quality of the movement in fact adds to the complexity of the play. For, in the cinema, a rapid succession of images has the effect of each new image totally obliterating the preceding one; in Gatti's theatre, however, the scenes follow on from each other in a way so that perhaps both scenes are momentarily real to the spectator at the same time, one disappearing, the other appearing.

Amid these rapid transformations, there are certain elements that recur to serve as points of reference. Gatti uses colour and costume in his productions to stabilize situations. In his staging of Chant public, the set and properties of all the selmaires were the same colour as the stage; the impression was monochromatic. Thus parallel actions were consequently distinguishable from the scenes taken from the "performance" of the Sacco and Vanzetti affair at Lyons which were highly coloured. The "spectators" costumes were brightly coloured and contemporary whereas the Lyons "actors" were dressed in period costumes all of a single basic colour, red. The avant-scène was also red, a relevant fact since this area was designated an imaginary area on which certain sequences from the supposed performance were acted out. A similar use is made of colour in Auguste G. where continuity is maintained by Auguste's shock of red hair, prominent at whatever stage of his life. In both productions

of Chroniques (1963 and 1967), the stage was divided into different areas of colour to indicate the different areas of action: the camp itself was green; the ghetto, blue; Ongrille, grey; and Barbe-Roussie, red. In the unpublished Notre tranchee de chaque jour, Gatti directs: "Tous les personnages de la piece qui appartiennent au passé et qui viennent se mêler à l'action auront des costumes entièrement décolorés par opposition aux costumes normalement colorés des personnages du présent."<sup>1</sup>

The complexity of the plot of Un homme seul is similarly clarified by the use of costuming. The play is structured around the versions given by different people of the same events. Gatti explains that the character from whose point of view the events are being recounted should be dressed in a costume that contrasts violently with the indecision of the costumes of the others. The exceptions to this rule are the central characters of Li Tcheliou and Tsoun-jen who are implicated in all the versions; these two are costumed throughout in a realistic manner in the style of Tong peasants. This element of costuming helps to tie the play down to a concrete reality despite the proliferating structure. The realism of the hospital set in Auguste G. serves a similar purpose.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Gatti insists that the plays despite their rich linguistic texture and their complex structure should always be acted and designed in a realist manner: he is adamant that Les 13 Soleils should not be performed in "un décor de type symboliste."<sup>3</sup> The geometry of the stage is a further principle of organization. In Chant public, the opening sequence of the gathering of the "audiences" illustrates this point: the door in the back wall by which the "spectators" enter, the neon sign that indicates the "theatre" to which they belong, and the rows of seats towards which they are directed, all lay in a diagonal. This geometry helps the theatre audience follow the evolution of the play.

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<sup>1</sup> Armand Gatti, Notre tranchee de chaque jour, "texte ronéotypé de la Comédie de Saint-Etienne," p. 71 cited by Elizabeth Dargent, "L'Expression scénique du temps et de l'espace dans les mises en scène d'Armand Gatti" (D.E.S. mémoire, Institut des Etudes Théâtrales, Paris III, Censier, 1966-67). p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Gatti, Théâtre [III], p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Gatti, 13 Soleils, p. 13.

Nevertheless, the style of performance leads to difficulties for both actor and spectator. Not structured according to linear development, but rather according to what Gatti calls "flash time"<sup>1</sup> neither actor nor spectator has a core on which to base, for the one the performance of a character and, for the other the comprehension of the characters and situation. Rosner describes the style of acting that Auguste G. demands: "Il n'y a pas de montée dramatique, il n'y a pas de personnages qui évoluent. L'acteur doit immédiatement être en situation au maximum d'intensité sans avoir la possibilité de s'appuyer à la séquence qui précède."<sup>2</sup> Chaussat remarks that for Chant public the actor's technique has to be close to that of a film actor who does not necessarily shoot the sequences in the order that they are to be shown and hence is not in the position to rely on a developing character.<sup>3</sup> The spectator is in a position in which he does not identify with characters on stage but rather is presented with a total reality communicated in flashes.

This alternative method of dramatic writing has generally led to unfavourable reactions. The early productions of Gatti's plays were frequently met with criticism of the fragmentary structure: Jacques Bauchère called Le Crapaud-buffle, "ce fourre-tout déclamatoire, confus et vain," an opinion that Pierre Marcabru seconded: "Une jonchée d'osselets qui ne mène nulle part"; the only defence of Gatti's play came from Raymond Lavigne who supported it more because of its anti-imperialist and anti-dictatorial political content, arguing that the hostile reaction to it by the press was purely due to political motives.<sup>4</sup> However, the reception of another production dating from the early period, Le Voyage du grand'Tchou, confirms the unreadiness of the theatrical community for Gatti's style of play: Jacques Lemarchand reviewed the Marseille performance as "une sorte de fourre-tout où il a jeté, en hâte, et sans trop de réflexion, des dialogues ébauchés, de situations cocasses, des

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti to Knapp, "Theatre of Action," p. 411.

<sup>2</sup>Jacques Rosner, L'Avant-Scène: Théâtre, no. 272 (15 September 1962), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Chaussat cited by Pays, Les Lettres françaises, 20 January 1966.

<sup>4</sup>Jacques Bauchère, Réforme, 31 October 1959; Pierre Marcabru, Arts, 28 October 1959; and Raymond Lavigne, L'Humanité, 29 October 1959.

insolences momentanées."<sup>1</sup> The multi-faceted construction of Gatti's work only began to communicate itself at all successfully with Roger Planchon's 1962 production of Auguste G. Even Jean-Jacques Gautier admitted that the performance was "une expérience presque réussie"; he was not deterred by the complex staging, probably because he realized that Gatti's theatre cannot be understood on a purely rational, linear level; "cette suggestion qui remplace l'analyse" was the key to his appreciation.<sup>2</sup> The Paris revival of the same play in 1964 saw the critics becoming intrigued by Gatti's style: "Une mystérieuse alchimie" Robert Abirached called it while Jacqueline Cartier was impressed by the movement "fuyante et fascinante."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the recurring criticism that the play was too complex issued from Gilles Sandier, "cette pièce pesante et touffue," and Gilbert Guilleminault, "un prodigieux tohu-bohu."<sup>4</sup> The most hostile reaction came from Gabriel Marcel, whose attack made some fundamental points about the nature of Gatti's theatre. Marcel opposed the use of five actors for the same character in that it destroyed the concept of the central character; for him, theatre is based on this concept and to willingly flaunt it is "une hérésie." Quite accurately, Marcel realized that Gatti represents a threat to the canons of accepted theatrical practice and beyond them to society: "Ce que je trouve pour ma part le plus insupportable dans ce théâtre d'avant-garde, c'est cette sorte de volonté de destruction qui ne peut se justifier d'aucun point de vue."<sup>5</sup> The "destruction" is part of Gatti's attempt to make the spectator active, for the onus is on him to formulate his own interpretation of the play. The criticisms of Chant public in 1966 that emphasized the lack of structure such as Sandier's "polyphonie singulièrement cacophonique," Gautier's "construction abracadabrante," or the anonymous

<sup>1</sup>Jacques Lemarchand, Le Figaro littéraire, 8 December 1962, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Jacques Gautier, Le Figaro, 26 February 1962.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Abirached, Etudes, no. 321 (July-August 1964), p. 98; and Jacqueline Cartier, France-Soir, 10 May 1964.

<sup>4</sup>Gilles Sandier, Arts, 13 May 1964; and Gilbert Guilleminault, L'Aurore, 11 May 1964.

<sup>5</sup>Gabriel Marcel, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 14 May 1964.

"tohu-bohu dramatique" do not discuss the alternative response that the plays try to solicit from the audience.<sup>1</sup>

Chant public was staged with the characters deliberately talking out into the audience instead of directing their lines to each other. The practice was adopted to force the drama from the stage into the audience. Early in the performance, Coleone addresses the Turin "audience" and by implication the real theatre audience:

COLEONE: L'affaire Sacco-Vanzetti continue, en fait, en droit (et au fond de nous). Aucun de ceux qui sont présents dans cette salle du Dopolavoro turinois ne peuvent échapper à la question "Est-ce vous Nicola et Bartolomeo qui continuez à mourir? Ou bien est-ce nous qui mourrons à travers vous?" (CP66:25)

Later in the play Ehrman-Klose rephrases the question of the guilt and responsibility for the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti: "Nous sommes le lieu du crime, et à travers nous, Sacco et Vanzetti vont être une fois de plus condamnés (et exécutés)" (CP66:80).

Using direct questioning and exposure to the many dimensions of the case, Gatti is trying to break the traditional response of the audience as expressed in the 1964 version of Chant public: "Les spectateurs, comme c'est leur fonction au théâtre, participent à la mise à mort des personnages" (CP64: 162). In the written texts, Chant public ends with Laureen turning her torch light onto the seated public and Chroniques is concluded by the actors marching in line towards the front of the stage. Cervi in Chant public explains the usual theatrical situation in response to Ehrman-Klose's accusation: "Pourtant, on l'endosse cette condamnation, un habit, quitte à le rejeter lorsque (demain à l'usine) il ne paraîtra plus de mise, mais ce soir nous le portons" (CP66:80).

By creating a dramatic style that is non-scenocratic (one that does not remain centred entirely on the stage), Gatti can be seen to be following Genet's example of Les Nègres. Chant public and Les Nègres share a structure that is based on the relationship between the spectator and the play. Gatti introduces his preface to the written text of his play: "La scène et la salle.

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<sup>1</sup>Gilles Sandier, Arts et loisirs, no. 19 (2 February 1966); Jean-Jacques Gautier, Le Figaro, 28 January 1966; Le Parisien libéré, 1 Feb. 1966.



Deux espaces qui se fascinent l'un l'autre. C'est sur les éléments supposés de cette fascination que repose ce Chant public."<sup>1</sup> Unlike Genet who in his way tries to assassinate the audience through the play, Gatti is seeking to make the audience an active force. The spectator's response is included in the possibilities of the play: "Madame, votre réponse est celle du vrai spectateur, celui qui apporte son invention parallèlement à la pièce qu'il a vue, et qui finalement construit sa pièce lui-même en même temps."<sup>2</sup>

Here we find a second aspect of the spectator's contribution to the creation of the play. Gatti's observations on the oriental theatre appear to explain the role of the spectator in his own theatrical productions:

Lés tréteaux ne sont que l'indication d'un espace imaginaire illimité. L'espace, les lieux, l'endroit où se déroule une pièce, ce sont les acteurs qui le créent à chaque instant. Le jeu de mimes et de significations d'accessoires donnent à la scène une infinité d'existences différentes dans le temps et dans l'espace. De ce fait, le public devient coproducteur ou cocréateur d'un spectacle.<sup>3</sup>

In performance, this effort demanded of the audience sometimes appears to be too great. In a sample of answers to a questionnaire on Chant public conducted by Bref, the magazine of the T.N.P., difficulty in understanding and confusion were often suggested as obstacles to the complete enjoyment of the play. An example of the most violent reactions is that of a sixteen-year-old schoolboy: "Difficulté de compréhension au début de la pièce un peu trop décousue."<sup>4</sup> This would seem to imply that exploded theatre does not necessarily appeal to an audience that has lived only in the age of the electronic revolution proclaimed by McLuhan. In contradiction is Sarrazin's support of the technique:

Or, l'écriture, le morcellement du temps et de l'espace dans le théâtre de Gatti correspondent à la façon dont, moi, je perçois la vie. Je ne peux plus percevoir la vie d'une manière logique, je le déplore. J'estime donc que Gatti, en faisant éclater la perception qu'on a de la vie, a contribué à rapprocher, contrairement à ce qu'on pourrait croire, le théâtre du public.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gatti, Chant public (1964), p. 9.    <sup>2</sup>Gatti, "Spectateur idéal," p.22.

<sup>3</sup>Armand Gatti, Chine (Paris: Seuil, 1957), p. 162.

<sup>4</sup>"La Critique des spectateurs: oui à Armand Gatti," Bref, no. 93 (February 1966), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>Sarrazin, "Théâtre d'aujourd'hui," cited by Gozlan and Pays, Gatti aujourd'hui, p. 195, n. 6.

One spectator of Chant public spoke of "cette prise de conscience collective"<sup>1</sup> that the play evoked through its fragmentary structure. Similarly, the three hundred roadsweepers invited by the author to the Parisian performances of Auguste G. experienced little difficulty in understanding that play. For them, the play's exploded complex structure reflected the television news programmes which gather together pictures and reports from all over the world.<sup>2</sup> These spectators are Gatti's ideal spectators since their minds operate on a synthetic and not an analytical plane.

Ideally, this new form of dramatic language demands a new scenic concept. For Gatti, however, the need to communicate directly and immediately with his fellow man outweighs the need to wait for new scenic structures to be designed and built. In this compromise with existing theatrical architecture Gatti still hopes to induce a greater awareness of the world and its social problems through bombarding the spectator with a profusion of facts, situations, and viewpoints.

#### (ii) Michel Parent's Theatre of Simultaneity

Michel Parent is also concerned with the channels of communication of the electronic age. By experimenting with stage design, Parent hopes to lead man to use the media and not become their slave, to employ them as a means to activity and not as an excuse for passivity. The situation of the average man in contemporary society horrifies Parent, not from a class point of view like Gatti, but from the angle of his increasing inaction before the media. This average man is described as "l'homme conditionné typique"<sup>3</sup> who might be a spectator on the terraces of a football ground at Bordeaux watching one match and listening to another on a transistorized radio; he contributes to the huge cheer in Bordeaux that greets the scoring of a goal in Reims. The depressing factor for Parent is that man lives only "ponctuellement";<sup>4</sup> harassed by all the

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<sup>1</sup>"Critique des spectateurs," p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Gatti, "Défense et apprentissage de la liberté," p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Michel Parent, "Vers un nouveau théâtre," 18, no. 6 (April-June 1965), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

different informational stimuli, the individual makes no attempt to arrange them into a meaningful pattern. Parent sees his theatre as a means to make the individual aware that "au-delà de cette dissonance ponctuelle, confuse et insignifiante, la superposition de deux réalités plus étendues peut être signifiante."<sup>1</sup> A rider to the explosion of the communications industry is that to a large extent language has been corrupted and debased to serve the purpose of an increased commercialism.<sup>2</sup> These two facts taken together have conditioned man to the domiciled passivity of a consumer surrounded by electronic gadgetry that only reinforces inactivity.

From the outset, Parent's work in the theatre<sup>3</sup> has shown a tendency to develop a form of contrapuntal technique that allows the expression of two contradictory realities, and that places the spectator in a position of receiving two sets of data that have to be sorted and arranged. As early as 1954, Parent under the pseudonym Pierre-Michel Ollivier created Le Mystère du jugement. It was staged at Dijon's Hôtel-Dieu in a manner made famous by Vilar at the Palais des Papes at Avignon, inside an authentic, historical setting. Treating the trial of Joan of Arc and the part played in her fate by Nicolas Rollin, the production centred on the double nature of Rollin: on the one hand the historical figure instrumental in handing Joan over to her eventual executioners; and on the other the local figure of Rollin, the philanthropic founder of the hospital in which the play was performed. This paradox was translated scenically inside a single defined acting area by the primitive device of two opposing platforms. On one was acted Rollin's guilt and on the other, his magnanimity.

The design of Barbe-rouge, Parent's contribution to the 1960 Festival des Nuits de Bourgogne, involved a greater complexity. This play dealt with

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Parent to Jean Besse, "Festival des Nuits de Bourgogne," Les Lettres françaises, 12 June 1963.

<sup>3</sup>None of Parent's works have been published. Details of texts and performances have been amassed through study of contemporary reviews and criticisms and through correspondence with spectators of performances (namely Doctor D. Knowles and Danièle Marty.)

the relationship between Henry VIII and his six wives. Set in Dijon's La Cour de Far with elegant historical costuming, the action was not treated in a historical progression, but rather simultaneously, a technique achieved by the dramatic device of constructing the play around the visit of an old English woman to a waxworks where figures of the characters were grouped in a single study. The wax dummies had the advantage of being able to come to life in order to debate with the visitor. Thus, it was possible to produce a scene in which the King, his new fiancée, the executioner and the outgoing Anne Boleyn were all simultaneously present. Jean-Jacques Lerrant described this type of effect as "un beau parallélisme d'action."<sup>1</sup> Time and space were concentrated into a new relationship inside the dramatic structure in order to emphasize the loneliness of the King. The single perspective of the setting was disrupted by the positioning of the English visitor amid the audience. The provision of this extra focal point of attention acted as a spatial counterpart to the multilateral debate conducted on the main stage in which the central figure was first one, then another of the characters.

In these two works, not only is there an obvious attempt to produce plays with a non-linear, prismatic quality, but also a concern to have a uniformity of setting and production. Indeed, the prime quality of the annual festival was seen by one critic as the desire to insert the audience into "un complexe auditif et spatial"<sup>2</sup> that reflected accurately the intention of the author.

In addition to his practical work in the theatre, Parent has also experimented with a new form of dramatic writing in the draft of a <sup>now</sup> produced and complete play, Le Défi. Begun in 1958, this work was composed "à la façon d'une écriture musicale, c'est-à-dire selon le principe de développement simultané."<sup>3</sup> With an interest in the concordance of play and setting, the staging of such a venture would have been very interesting. However, the

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Jacques Lerrant, Le Figaro, 29 June 1960.

<sup>2</sup>F.P., Combat, 29 May 1962.

<sup>3</sup>Michel Parent, "Théâtre <sup>expérimental</sup> après le théâtre à 4 scènes, le théâtre ovale," Le Bien public (Dijon), 29 May 1964.

synthesis of simultaneous composition and an adequate scenic design was precipitated by the collaboration between Parent and the kinetic sculptor and painter, Yaacov Agam.

In April 1962, Agam designed a theatre with multiple stages in counter-point.<sup>1</sup> The design, executed by the architect Claude Parent, is for a theatre in which the stage can surround the audience on all sides. The walls of the theatre are totally adaptable in the sense that openings can be made on every side and at any height to accommodate stages of any dimensions. The transformable nature of this enveloping scenic structure means that the action of a play could be enacted simultaneously around the audience or contrapuntally on two or more stages. The seating arrangements are adapted to this type of production by providing pivoting chairs which allow the spectator to observe any of the different stages as he so desires. The stages are positioned so that visibility does not fashion the spectator's choice. In addition, for each performance a certain number of seats are to be left unoccupied in order to allow spectators to change position during the performance if they wish to follow the action of a particular stage more closely.

The variability of the scenic structure and the freedom left to the spectator to choose his position and the stages he wishes to follow implies a dynamism of performance that is inherited from the principles of kinetic art in general:

A point which in a conventional picture would be only a secondary element in a vast and organized framework of the composition, and which cannot be a center of attraction and of expression, can on the other hand become  
 (element  
 the main (theme in kinetic painting, for it is here no longer its own  
 (subject  
 materiality and its (expressive plastic (position that matter, but its  
 (pictorial plastic (situation  
 path and movement in space.<sup>2</sup>

This view of art in turn derives from a dynamic world view. Given that the natural world is always evolving and changing while still preserving an

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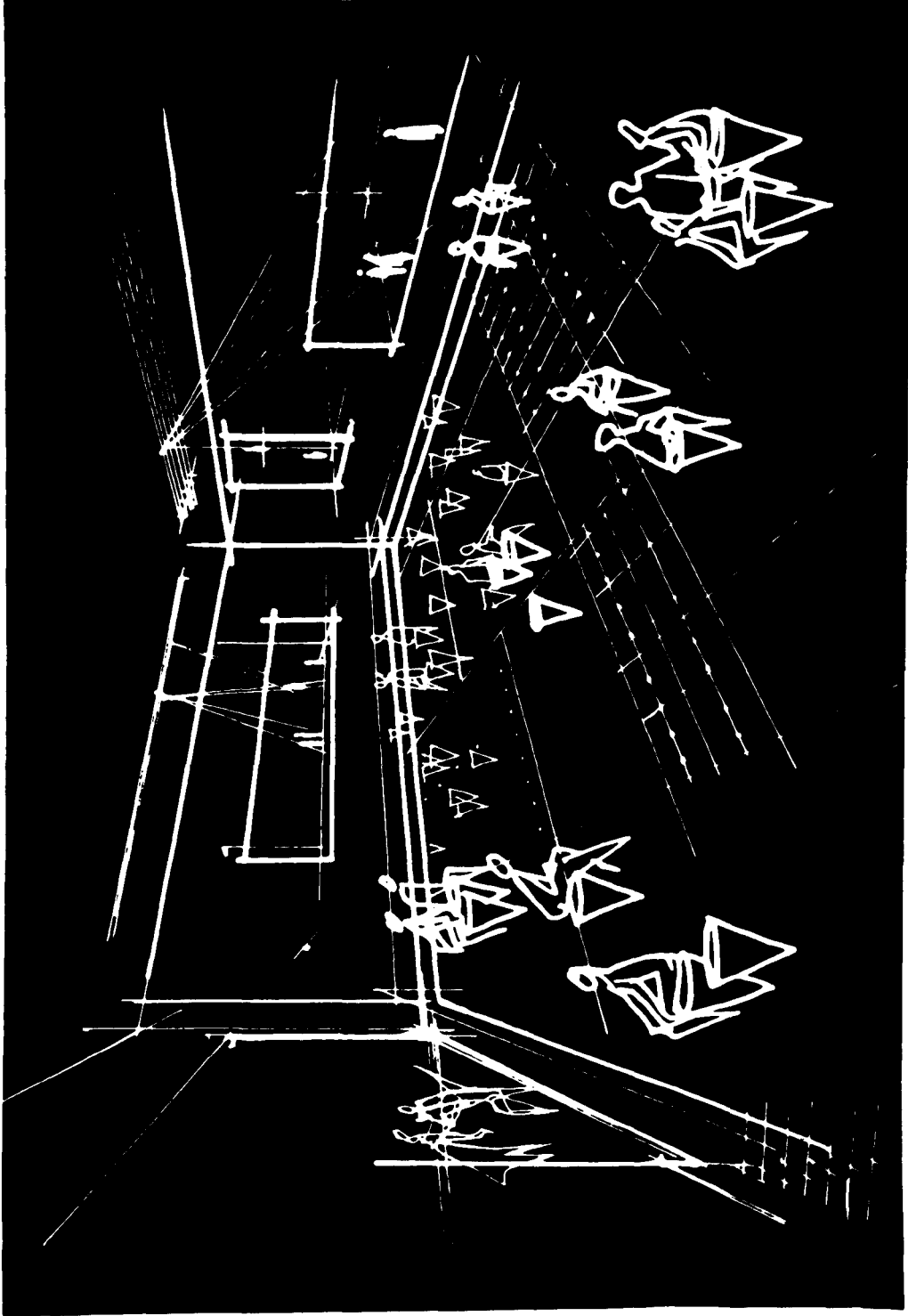
<sup>1</sup> See Figure 9, p. 505. A model of the theatre was exhibited at the exhibition *Lieu théâtral—lieu culturel* (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, September-October 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Yaacov Agam, Texts by the Artist, trans. Haakon Chevalier (Neuchâtel: du Griffon, 1962), p. 101.

The following text is extremely faint and largely illegible. It appears to be a series of paragraphs or a list of points, but the specific content cannot be discerned.

**Fig. 9. Yaacov Agam: Plan for a Theatre (with Multiple Stages (in Counterpoint**

Additional text at the bottom of the page, also very faint and illegible.



Plan for a Theater | with multiple stages | in counterpoint

overall, definite character, Agam argues that any art that tries to express this through fixed representation has only falsified it. Similarly, in the narrower context of human experience, life is not a sequence of fixed, undeviating events, but rather takes form from a conflict of several contrary inclinations which co-exist simultaneously, and which by their interaction determine our actions and moods.<sup>1</sup> Again, to express this situation in a linear fashion which either eradicates the contradictions or smoothes them into an artificial succession of isolated inclinations, prevents the faithful depiction of the human condition. Agam proposes that it is possible to account for these non-uniform stimuli in a simultaneous, but nevertheless coherent, fashion. The design of his theatre allows for just such a treatment of human conduct; the spatial theatre permits the simultaneous enactment of all the events relating to a single action.

To a certain extent, Agam can be said to be aiming at a type of realism that is relevant to an era characterized by a polyvalent, multi-dimensional consciousness. By placing the spectator in the centre of a complex of stages all emitting informational data, Agam is reproducing the position of man bombarded by the sophisticated systems of communications in the modern society. Just as Parent's football supporter is prey to various simultaneous experiences, so Agam pictures the man in the street caught up in a whole range of aural, visual and tactile experience. It is deforming this reality to translate it into the fixed, frontal situation of the conventional theatrical structure.<sup>2</sup> By embracing totally the simultaneous multiplicity of life, Agam's approach to theatrical design differs from preceding experiments. Generally, however much his predecessors reformed scenic architecture or the dramatic language, they still held to the belief that the spectator should follow everything occurring on the stage or stages. Agam's desire is for a totally new theatre: "Renouvelons le répertoire en rénovant l'écriture théâtrale: abandonnons le linéaire pour le polyphonique."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> Yaacov Agam, "Conception scénique et conception théâtrale," Entretiens sur le théâtre, November-December 1965, p. 12.



Not as presumptuous as Agam, Parent does not claim to be a revolutionary innovator. He sees both Pirandello and Brecht as possible precursors of his own work. Pirandello constructed his plays not on a single perspective but on the balancing and superimposition of hypotheses in the form of different levels of reality presented in the play. Brecht, on the other hand, although his plays tend to deal with a single action, refused the concept of identification with the characters on stage. Parent sees dramatic identification as the theatrical equivalent to the perspective of classical art in that both imply the absorption of the spectator into the art work. By keeping the spectator at a critical distance, Brecht allowed for multiple perspectives on the action. However, both dramatists were limited in that their dramatic methods led ultimately to single, relative truths: for Pirandello it was the acceptance of the absurd, and for Brecht, the acceptance of a political fact.<sup>1</sup> The spatial articulation of their plays was also restricted. In the realm of scenic architecture, Parent is cognizant of another set of forerunners: Artaud and his hangar theatre; Piscator and the experiments of the Bauhaus Group towards a Total Theatre; the Pole Cirkus, constructor of a multi-staged simultaneous theatre between the wars; and the work of Jacques Poliéri.<sup>2</sup> He considers his work surpasses the efforts of all these artists because his spectacles allow the spectator to cut and edit and ultimately create his own spectacle.

Agam's polyphony finds its counterpart in Parent's concept of contrapuntal composition. The dictionary definition of counterpoint reads: "The combination of simultaneous voice parts, each independent but all conducing to a result of uniform coherent texture." In a simultaneous production, each stage has its own action and the overall synthesis, and thus coherence, is achieved in the psyche of the individual spectator. For Parent, life is lived

<sup>1</sup>Parent, "Nouveau théâtre," p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Michel Parent, Création théâtrale et création architecturale (London: Athlone Press, 1971), p. 59, n. 1. For the experiments referred to, see: Artaud, O.C. IV, pp. 114-16; Oskar Schlemmer, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and Farkas Molnar, The Theater of the Bauhaus, ed. Walter Gropius, trans. Arthur Wensinger (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961); and Jacques Poliéri, ed., "Scénographie nouvelle," Aujourd'hui: Art et architecture, nos. 42-43 (October 1963), p. 137. A full discussion of Poliéri's work comes later in this chapter, see pp. 521-56.

in a manner similar to this musical metaphor. Man necessarily forges relationships between essentially unconnected events, objects, and people. Memory, for example, often works through the association of a piece of music with a particular person, a particular place or a particular event. The uniform texture is imposed by the consciousness that relates these disparate elements. On such grounds, Parent claims that "le contrepoint apparaît comme une cellule essentielle de la vie psychique, en tout cas comme l'une des structures de la manifestation de l'univers extérieur dans cette vie psychique."<sup>1</sup> Counterpoint is either positive or negative: the former occurs when actions are situated on two stages which by their spatial relationship allow both to be followed simultaneously; negative counterpoint takes place when the spectator, unable to follow both or all the actions, has to choose between them.<sup>2</sup>

The first production to result from the theoretical considerations of both Agam and Parent was Gilda appelle Mae West, performed in a Dijon conference hall in June 1962. The life of John Eatherly, the pilot who dropped the first atom bomb on Hiroshima, is traced through the different stages, from the moment of his receipt of the military order to bomb Japan, through his attempted suicide on returning from the mission, his subsequent involvement in an armed robbery, and his final commitment to a sanatorium.<sup>3</sup> The text of the performance was "définitivement fixé"<sup>4</sup> before being submitted to the director, Jean-Marie Serreau, and had clearly been conceived in a new form. Agam had urged a revolution of the written word because he considered the fixity implied by

<sup>1</sup>Parent, "Nouveau théâtre," p.1.      <sup>2</sup>Parent, "Théâtre expérimental."

<sup>3</sup>Parent seems to be confused about the name and status of his hero. The pilot known as the "Hiroshima pilot" was in fact a Claude Eatherly and his involvement in the bombing is in fact mythical rather than historical. For Eatherly did not in fact drop the bomb but piloted a weather plane that flew into Hiroshima a few minutes ahead of the plane carrying the bomb. Furthermore Robert J. Lifton in Death in Life (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968), p. 341 states: "His Hiroshima experience has a highly questionable causal relationship to his later mental illness." For the two sides of this case, see: Claude Eatherly and G. Anders, Burning Conscience (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1962); and William B. Huie, The Hiroshima Pilot (New York: Putnam, 1964). Parent is correct in some details, however; for example, General Tibbets was the Commander of the atomic bomb plane, the Enola Gay.

<sup>4</sup>Parent, "Théâtre expérimental."

the single orthographic structure inadequate for the expression of the thought processes which are "toujours dynamique, complexe, en va-et-vient et simultanées."<sup>1</sup> His language would be multilinear by which he meant "writing in counterpoint, with several lines superimposed, each of which would express a feeling, a sensation, a thought, and the synthesis and simultaneity of which alone would translate as completely as possible the psycho-physical state of a being at a given moment."<sup>2</sup> The script that Parent composed was written in a contrapuntal fashion. The cross-ruled paper contained words and stage directions on a grid structure. Vertically, the sheet was divided into four columns. Each column corresponded to a side of the rectangular space that Parent envisaged as his performance area. In this way, the printed page had an architectural lay-out of its own. The text reflected both the multiple and simultaneous aspects of the stage design: reading down each column successively revealed a proliferation of scenes, and reading across gave the impression of simultaneity. Indeed, this form of writing was later described by Parent as "écriture simultanée."<sup>3</sup>

Jean-Marie Serreau's set for the performance observed the spatial implications of the script. The rectangle was preferred to the square or other quadrilaterals because it contained a preferential axis, the advantage of which was that the performance could be given a rhythm by the interplay of the different axes of the scenic space. Thus, space could become an organizational principle of the production giving the whole a certain cohesion.<sup>4</sup> Around the walls, twelve different acting areas or sets were erected. All of them were simultaneously present to the audience. Apart from the cockpit of the pilot, interiors played a major role in this production: the apartments of a prostitute, Shirley, and an actress, Mircola, to which John returns for comfort and escape from his sense of guilt; the bar in which the armed robbery

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<sup>1</sup> Agam, "Conception scénique," p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Agam, Texts, p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> Parent, "Nouveau théâtre," p.9.

<sup>4</sup> The production of the play at Essen used a more square performance area which Parent found not "aussi efficace" as the Dijon rectangle. See Parent, "Théâtre expérimental."

is planned; the military headquarters where the final details of the bombing raid are worked out; a prayer stall at which John confesses to a priest; and a room in a psychiatric clinic—all these backgrounds are contrasted with the symbolic ruins of Hiroshima, each representing a stage of this man's torment.

The juxtaposition of so many different times and places could easily have led to a confusion of symbolism, but, just as Gatti used the realism of Auguste's hospital bed to anchor the play in a concrete reality, the properties of Parent's stages reflected the everyday reality of the consumer society. Refrigerators, washing machines, televisions, slot machines, and tubular steel and perspex office equipment gleamed from all the sets. The significance of this type of decor is clear, if hackneyed: the same technology that produces the labour-saving comforts of the modern urban environment also produced the horror of the atomic bomb.

The multiple sets and the simultaneous action made the conventional one-actor-for-each-part cast impossible. In fact, the character of John Eatherly was played by three different actors. Continuity and comprehension were aided by the use of colour: all three actors wore identical white shirts as part of their costumes. Mobility was lent to the performance by spotlights that switched from one stage to another underlining the parallels between one action and another. The visual impact was underscored by music and sound effects by Edgardo Canton and Jean Delanduc. The production also used the device of interweaving recorded passages of dialogue with speeches spoken from the stages to create the effect of different places and times being simultaneously present. Parent commented on this method after the production:

Des retours de situation, dans la vie de ce personnage, sont l'occasion de juxtapositions et de superpositions intégrales de scènes vécues à des moments de sa vie très éloignés. La réalité spatio-temporelle est ainsi éclatée, désarticulée et recomposée, et ce travail alchimique la rend plus significative, excite à la fois la curiosité, l'esprit critique du spectateur concerné simultanément par l'action.<sup>1</sup>

The style of Parent's theatre is consequently based not on psychology but rather on history in the same manner as Gatti's. The play does not evolve along the line of the psychological development of a central character, but

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<sup>1</sup>Parent, "Nouveau théâtre," p. 9.

through the confrontation of different moments in a single life. Each scene assumes its significance not through its causal relationship with a preceding scene but by reference to a complex of simultaneously played actions. A good illustration is the linking of three separate actions (performed at the same time) by the common line, "Oui, mon général": on his return to the United States, John is visiting Shirley, the prostitute, to seek consolation and respite from his feeling of guilt, but his account of the flight and his manner are greeted with an ironic acquiescence; another stage portrays John later in life planning the armed robbery like a military campaign with the subsequent agreement of his companions taking military form; on a third stage, we see John receiving the order to fly the bombing raid from his superior officer, General Tibbets. In this one sequence, fused by the single phrase, the effect of his one decision is shown to permeate his whole future conduct; in his personal relationships and his social behaviour, John is unable to forget the part he played in the mass murder of the people of Hiroshima. A later sequence reveals the outlaw position that he feels he occupies in society at large: simultaneously, he is depicted before a priest in confession, receiving orders in the cockpit of the plane, and before the judge presiding over the armed robbery case. Here John is at the mercy, and is a victim, of the pillars of society: Church, Military and Law.

These two sequences cohere in that they are unified by the single sentence or the theme of victimization. Not all sequences are as simultaneously presented. A slight staggering of two actions, and their presentation on non-neighbouring stages is employed to induce a critical attitude. Such is the case when Maxwell, a war colleague of John, rejoices enthusiastically on learning that he is to take part in the atomic mission. At this, on another stage, a young Japanese girl appears among the ruins of Hiroshima to try and identify a known face among the streets of photographs of those missing as a result of the raid. These two actions illustrate the double nature of the event: the heroic prowess of the military mind and the pathetic suffering of the citizen. Spatially separated, the distance between the victor and the

victim is scenically emphasized.

The two types of sequence correspond to Parent's theories of positive and negative counterpoint. For Rodo Mahert the resultant performance depended too much on technical ingenuity and was artificial. Generally, though, the critics' reaction pointed to the success of the staging: "On sort de là, troublé, abasourdi par ce miracle de 'régie,' cette virtuosité qui dérobe à la technique les moyens de la confondre, la tête bruisante, le coeur chaviré." The success of the production was attributed to the suitability of the exploded scenic structure for the depiction of John Eatherly's (and modern man's) guilt, "une mise au point minutieuse, un dynamisme sans défaillance et un esprit d'équipe absolu." The dynamism of the performance did not destroy the dramatic experience through its diversity, but rather this very diversity served to confirm it: "Des flashes multiples, des parallélismes, des contrepoints, des savants chevauchements, déclenchent en nous une émotion artistique."<sup>1</sup> Serreau was successful in combining the sensual fascination of the technical equipment (stereophonic sound, alternating spotlights) with an appreciation of the tragic situation of the central character. The human predicament remained central to the dramatic performance.

Parent's Festival continued its investigation into new theatrical forms with the 1963 production of Borchert's Devant la porte by Marcel Maréchal and his company from Lyons. Originally staged in a conventional Italianate stage, Maréchal adapted it for performance on fourteen sets arranged around the rectangle of the Palais des Congrès. He used the same swivelling chairs in order to allow the audience to follow the multiple actions. In fact, the production was in detail very similar to that for Gilda appelle Mæ West, but, significantly, critical acclaim was not ~~as~~ unanimous. A strong faction of critics clearly stated that the cohesion of staging and dramatic action was lacking,<sup>2</sup> and still others that the simultaneous staging destroyed

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<sup>1</sup>Rodo Mahert, La Tribune de Genève, 12 July 1962; Claude Sarraute, Le Monde, 4 July 1962; Gustave Joly, L'Aurore, 30 June 1962; and Jean Besse, Les Lettres françaises, 12 July 1962.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Jacques Lerrant, Le Figaro, 18 June 1963; François Cariglioli, Combat, 18 June 1963; Jacques Lemarchand, Le Figaro littéraire, 22 June 1963; and Rodo Mahert, La Tribune de Genève, 22 June 1963.

the dramatic intensity that the play had had in the earlier conventional production at Lyons.<sup>1</sup> The implication of this critical division seems to be that the new method of staging requires a new repertory, and that to adapt a play written with a conventional theatre in view to the new scenic structures will produce inconsistencies. Was this not in fact Agam's conclusion when he called for a new repertory in 1965?<sup>2</sup>

The outcome of the use of the rectangular stage is a new scenic conception that Parent calls the "théâtre oval"; he composed a production for it entitled Catharsis in 1964. Parent argues that the preferential axis of the rectangle, although giving a structural basis to the performance, also means that the audience's attention is drawn by the stages on the long sides and so an order of preference is established among the stages. The elliptical structure of the new project, on the other hand, offers "des propriétés géométriques telles que l'efficacité des scènes est plus également répartie sur les spectateurs." In effect, the design simply links the four sets of lateral stages of the rectangle by diagonal stages in each corner to produce a vaguely oval structure of eight stages. In the middle of this revised, peripheral, scenic arrangement, Parent calls for a ninth, small, central stage to be constructed. In the same way as the positioning of the English woman in the centre of the audience for Barbe-rouge, this platform leads to "une profondeur de champ nouvelle, un contrepoint général, et une intégration des spectateurs au spectacle."<sup>3</sup> The desire of the designer is no doubt to give the audience an even greater freedom of choice between the actions on the multiple stages by trying to make the power of the stimuli equal on all sides. In such a situation, the spectators' attention would not be instinctively dragged to a certain stage.<sup>4</sup>

The theme of the play performed on this structure is an investigation into the nature of the dramatic experience, especially "son rôle catalytique

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Thiblot, La Croix, 20 June 1963; and Claude Sarraute, Le Monde, 20 June 1963.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 506.

<sup>3</sup> Parent, "Théâtre expérimental."

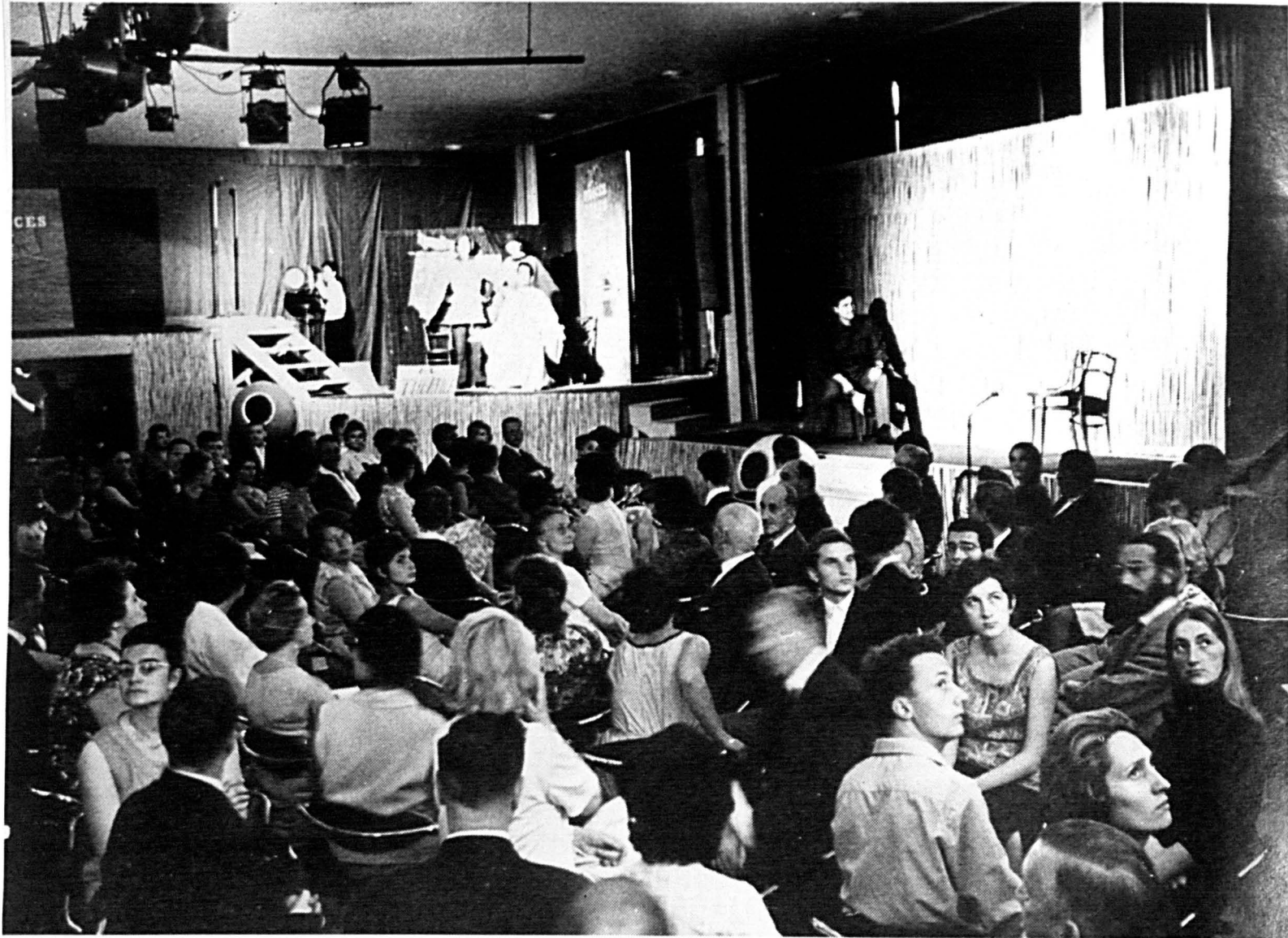
<sup>4</sup> See Figure 10, p. 514.

**Fig. 10. The Encircling Stage for Catharsis.**



Encircling Stage, at Dijon, for *Catharsis*, by Michel Parent, 1964

By courtesy of Michel Parent



obsessionnel et 'défoulant.'"<sup>1</sup> In effect, the play is a meditation on the debasement of the notions of tragedy and catharsis in modern life in the face of the reporting of events by the mass media and the scandal papers. The purgation that was central to the classical theatre as it portrayed the tragedies of antiquity has been replaced in the news media by incitement and self-indulgence. The text was constructed in a sketch-like fashion on court scenes, attacks on publicity and television, and theoretical pronouncements on the nature of catharsis. The photograph (Figure 10) clearly shows that the audience's attention was solicited from all quarters. But as the success of Gilda appelle Maë West had been dependent on clarity, the failure of Catharsis was its confusion: "Tout se brouille alors dans ses oreilles et dans son esprit. Il n'y a plus que cacophonie."<sup>2</sup>

The plot only worsened this state of affairs by remaining on the level of a theoretical dissertation. The theme of the play was introverted in the sense that it dealt with the functions of the drama; it did so on an experimental scenic design based on the theoretical premise that it offered more possibilities for the audience to exercise its freedom of choice.<sup>3</sup> Even if Gilda appelle Maë West had escaped "la tentation du formalisme,"<sup>4</sup> Catharsis was a sterile play about the theatre. A theoretical point became the centre of the action to the exclusion of human problems. The play embodied the worst in dramatic experimentation as Roger Thiblot had feared in his review of Devant la porte the previous year: "N'oublions pas, après tout, que l'émotion dramatique postule essentiellement la concentration et qu'à trop la disséminer, sous prétexte de l'approfondir, on aboutirait à un théâtre sur lequel on pourrait bâtir des copieuses dissertations esthétiques mais qui n'intéresserait, en fait, que les théoriciens."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Parent, "Nouveau théâtre," p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Roger Thiblot, La Croix, 11 July 1964.

<sup>3</sup>See Jean-Jacques Lerrant, Le Figaro, 6 July 1964; and Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, Le Monde, 7 July 1964, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>Georges Lerminier, Le Parisien libéré, 3 July 1962.

<sup>5</sup>Thiblot, La Croix, 20 June 1963.

Central to the concept of simultaneity as posited by Parent, is the freedom extended to the spectator inside the performance:

Il s'agit là, non seulement de modifier complètement les positions respectives des comédiens et spectateurs, mais de solliciter le spectateur par des appels contradictoires, de l'amener à choisir entre une infinité de spectacles possibles. En bref, de créer une liberté maximum du spectateur, de lui laisser la faculté permanente du choix.<sup>1</sup>

This seminal definition of the nature of dramatic freedom is substantially modified for successive performances. By 1964, the free choice which had been its cornerstone was no longer an absolute choice; the authoritative position of the author became clear: "Pour moi, il ne peut y avoir que choix relatif du spectateur."<sup>2</sup> The true nature of the freedom offered by Parent's productions, he finally recognized, was purely that of being able to choose between premeditated alternatives provided by the author and the production team. The spectator becomes his own editor: "C'est le spectateur lui-même qui crée son montage."<sup>3</sup>

Agam is much more precise about the innovations of his theatre: "Les spectateurs acquièrent, grâce au contrepoint, à la simultanéité et à la multiplicité des scènes, une liberté dont ils sont privés par le théâtre conventionnel. Ils choisissent leur point de vue, ils le changent à leur gré."<sup>4</sup> The basis of Agam's art is the possible transformations and permutations of forms in movement, but there is never any question as to the control of the elements:

This freedom given to the viewer raises the question as to whether  
 I am not thus relinquishing my sovereignty rights as (artist  
 (author and if the  
 (creator  
 spectator does not modify my work. I want to emphasize that the viewer  
 does not create anything. He merely modifies one of the numerous  
 (positions  
 (situations all of which I have virtually pre-included.<sup>5</sup>  
 (propositions,

Far from being dependent on a spectator's intervention, the art work is

<sup>1</sup> Parent to Jean Besse, "Entretien avec Michel Parent," Les Lettres françaises, 7 June 1962.

<sup>2</sup> Parent, "Théâtre expérimental."

<sup>3</sup> Parent, Création théâtrale, p. 60, n. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Agam, "Conception scénique," p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Agam, Texts, p. 6.

complete in itself with "its own autonomous existence, parallel to that of the viewer."<sup>1</sup>

Parent, as a man of the theatre, does not accept this premise totally; for him the dramatic work, unlike the sculpture, can only be complete by its eventual contact with the live audience. However, the idea of a definitively fixed text that not even the director should alter (this was the case for Gilda appelle Mae West) necessarily precludes the possibility for the spectator to alter the global structure of the work. The author, for Parent, is the only source for a valid renovation of the theatre and dramatic language. The director can only recreate works of the past in a contemporary form and not anything in the present.<sup>2</sup>

Simultaneity in effect only allows a vitiated form of freedom to exist in the performance, but it has, however, woven the notion of pluralism into the very fabric of the dramatic performance. Fundamental to the doctrine of the popular theatre of Rolland and Gémier was the re-creation and regeneration of a community of beliefs; this desire (which has motivated other dramatic experiments) blinded them to the realization that such a unity was impossible in an emerging, technological society. Simultaneity takes account of this situation and, indeed, exploits the differences between individual spectators by communicating a wide range of information about an event which each member of the audience synthesizes in his own way. The individual spectator becomes "un point de convergence où vient se focaliser le drame."<sup>3</sup> Parent describes this in electronic terminology calling the spectators "les capteurs des machines cybernétiques,"<sup>4</sup> processors of information fed into them. François Cariglioli aptly describes the effect of this in a complete audience: "Une salle, selon Yaacov Agam, ce sont des regards qui se croisent au lieu de converger. Ce sont des regards qui s'éparpillent. Ce sont des regards

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Parent, "Théâtre expérimental."

<sup>3</sup> Besse, Les Lettres françaises, 12 July 1962.

<sup>4</sup> Parent to Gilbert Guez, "Dijon ne redoute pas le théâtre expérimental," Paris-Théâtre, no. 209 (1964), pp. 12-13.

contradictaires. Des regards en liberté."<sup>1</sup>

The concept of a theatre in which the stage emits a single performance to a passive spectator is surpassed as each spectator searches out the actor or the action for himself. The novelty of this experience can be judged by the reaction of the actors. According to Agam, a well-known actress refused to perform when she learned that the audience did not necessarily have to look at her. Those who did agree to perform, however, considered it a new experience "parce qu'il leur a fallu se présenter, jouer comme s'ils étaient dans la vie."<sup>2</sup>

Given that Parent has managed to express the pluralism of contemporary society in his work, the basis of its exploitation in the performance has still not been examined. Is simultaneity in fact possible? It is necessary to distinguish simultaneity in the emission of stimuli from simultaneity in the perception of those same stimuli. For example, if two coloured lights are flashed at precisely the same moment, it is possible to talk of the simultaneous flash of the lights. However, a subject sitting in front of those lights might, and probably will, experience the flashes in a successive order. Paul Fraisse in his Psychologie du temps bases his case on the examination of results of perceptual experiments conducted by Piaget, Paillard, Guinzburg, Michotte and Wundt. He concludes:

Incapables d'être attentifs à deux stimulations simultanées, nous nous orientons vers l'une des deux, soit spontanément parce qu'elle nous attire, soit volontairement. Et la stimulation vers laquelle nous sommes orientés semble précéder l'autre.<sup>3</sup>

Physically different types of stimulus take longer to be transmitted to the brain and so perceptually the stimuli will appear successive. Fraisse postulates that there are only two ways in which stimuli can be experienced simultaneously. The one is by a careful adjustment of the instruments of the experiment so that the stimuli are emitted separately at a time interval that will counterbalance the difference in times of transmission to the brain.

<sup>1</sup>Cariglioli, Combat, 18 June 1963.

<sup>2</sup>Agam, "Conception scénique," p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Fraisse, Psychologie du temps (Paris: P.U.F., 1957), p. 107.

Simultaneity of emission and simultaneity of perception can only occur, though, if the stimuli themselves create "une figure ayant une unité de signification."<sup>1</sup>

The first of these methods is clearly impossible in the theatrical situation because of the many variables of distance, intensity, and movement caused by a multiple subject. (At Dijon, the audiences numbered between 180 and 250 spectators.) The second solution would only be feasible in the scenes constructed on positive counterpoint which by definition present actions that have a spatial and thematic unity. Generally speaking, the spectator is attracted by one stage rather than another, hence, the following situation of Devant la porte: "Il y a une action ou scène principale, l'autre scène ou les autres scènes concomitantes sont secondaires et ne réclament pas toute l'attention des spectateurs."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the whole notion of choice between different actions and of negative counterpoint denies the possibility of simultaneity of perception. Clearly, simultaneous theatre only means the simultaneous playing of various actions. However, even this is questionable on dramatic grounds.

During the rehearsals for Gilda appelle Mae West, Agam and the director, Jean-Marie Serreau, became involved in an argument over the possibility of performing simultaneous actions. For Agam, the necessity for the public to choose was vital; Serreau, involved less in the theory of simultaneity and more in the communicability of a dramatic performance, argued against this conception: "Je suis assez opposé à cette idée en tant que metteur en scène, parce qu'on ne peut percevoir plus de deux choses à la fois."<sup>3</sup> In the performances, it was Serreau's wishes that were observed. The only simultaneously staged play to have been generally well received and, furthermore, to have been praised so often for its staging technique was Gilda appelle Mae West. Could its success be due to Serreau's partial denial of the theory of simultaneity rather than to its exploitation?

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Thiblot, La Croix, 20 June 1963.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Marie Serreau quoted in Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal (Paris), Lieu théâtral—lieu culturel, Catalogue of the Exposition Internationale d'Architecture organized by Maison du Théâtre, 28 September—20 October, 1962.

If the principle of simultaneity is doubtful in a theatrical context because of the inevitable concentration on one stage, the question arises whether in practice the relationship between this stage and spectator remains conventional? The vital distinction lies in the fact that in the conventional situation there is no possibility to alter one's perspective. The opportunity is there for the spectator in a simultaneous staging to be more active in his appreciation of a play by choosing his own plot development.

Agam argues that the simultaneous theatre reflects the position of man in society, and is an image of the human predicament:

This new form of theatre would be closer to reality and bring man into the presence of his own tragedy, since he thus would find himself in the centre of the action, without being able to grasp it in its (totality. 1  
(truth.

Taken literally, this tends to imply that the art work would not attempt to structure this tragedy and would only provide man with a mirror image of his own chaos. Parent does not wholly accept this role for his own work. For him, the simultaneous method forces man to choose between alternatives and to order the elements of the drama:

Ce théâtre spatio-dynamique est le champ clos où les visions contradictoires du monde pourront s'affronter, et les dissonances qui paraissent sans signification en prenant une, lorsque la scène permet d'étaler le passé et le présent des événements et de les confronter.

Ce théâtre doit devenir un filtre de réflexion.<sup>2</sup>

In this, Parent is not far removed from the enlightening function that Gatti attributes to his work. On the other hand, whereas Gatti accepts the limitations of the Italianate stage but pushes them to their extremes by dynamic sets and stage movement, Parent experiments with scenic designs striving for new forms of theatre. These new forms are, however, to be based on the word. In this respect, Parent is not revolutionary; the dialogue is to remain the central element of the performance: "Les moyens de la mise en scène doivent rester importants dans le théâtre moderne, mais toujours soumis au texte et aux intentions de la pièce."<sup>3</sup>

The extent to which he experiments with the dramatic language is

<sup>1</sup>Agam, Texts, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>Parent, "Nouveau théâtre," p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Michel Parent, "A propos de Catharsis," Le Bien public (Dijon), 29 June 1964.

consequently limited. In Gilda appelle Mae West, certain sequences could be mimed on one stage while on others commentaries in words would underscore the action. This division of action and word constitutes the most audacious redefinition of scenic language that Parent attempts. Neither did he really exhaust the possibilities of his own scenic designs. Paul Morelle in an ironic review of Catharsis questioned why Parent had not tried out movement of the decor, or the public rotating in one direction while the stages moved in the other, or having the seats moving not only horizontally but vertically as well.<sup>1</sup> It was in these precise areas of redefinition of dramatic language and of mechanical stage designs that Jacques Poliéri carried out his theatrical experimentation.

### (iii) Jacques Poliéri: Theatre as Scenography

Jacques Poliéri developed his interest in the theatre at the small, rive gauche theatres that became famous after the Second World War for their productions of avant-garde writers such as Beckett, Ionesco and Adamov. Experimentation was the order of the day and nowhere was this more the case than at the Théâtre des Noctambules, then under the directorship of Jean-Marie Serreau. Poliéri in fact acted the part of Le Blessé in Serreau's creation in November 1950 of Adamov's La Grande et la Petite Manoeuvre. This production included musique concrète by Pierre Henry and an extensive sound track of voices and factory noises. The scenes were to follow each other with great rapidity, a procedure that Adamov described as "enchaînement quasi cinématographique."<sup>2</sup> Poliéri remained in the circle of the avant-garde theatres during these early years collaborating with directors such as Georges Vitaly, Robert Hossein, and Michel de Ré with whom he produced a play called Caligari in an "expressioniste-cubiste"<sup>3</sup> manner. In the 1950-1953 period, Michel de Ré was creating many of Jean Tardieu's plays and it could well have been through

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Morelle, Libération, 9 July 1964.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Adamov, Théâtre I (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 102.

<sup>3</sup>Jacques Poliéri, Scénographie-sémio-graphie (Paris: Denoël, 1971), p. 233.



this relationship that Poliéri acquainted himself with the work of the dramatist-poet.<sup>1</sup>

Poliéri's first solo production was an evening of Ionesco sketches performed at Théâtre de la Huchette in September 1953. This production appears to have passed into oblivion, but it is interesting to note with whom Poliéri was working at this period. For this spectacle, Poliéri employed the Russian line artist Annenkov as the designer. Annenkov had been designer for various famous ballet productions between the wars such as Les Comédiens jaloux (1932) and Hamlet (1934). Pierre Michaut characterizes his work as being abstract in both scenic conception and costume design.<sup>2</sup> As an artist, he embodied a combination of cubist technique with the intersection of planes characteristic of an artist like Cézanne, "an artist of sculptural, glyptic, graphic perception."<sup>3</sup> In sum, his art revealed a concern with line, rhythm, and proportion, almost architectural in its form. Ionesco's early work was similarly non-figurative in that it broke up the conventional, linear psychological development of characters by juxtaposed, non\_sensical dialogues which undermined the logic of the constructed sentence and by the revelation of the disparity between word and gesture.

All these early theatrical experiences share an aversion for the conventional and an interest in abstraction as well as the use of other art forms in the theatrical production. This artistic persuasion became evident when Poliéri approached Isidore Isou in the Boulevard Saint-Germain for a text which he could produce on stage. Isou is the founder of the lettriste movement which since 1945 has been pursuing the experiments of the Dadaists and surrealists especially in the realm of poetry which, he contends, consists simply of the sonic qualities of letters more or less arbitrarily arranged. The poems are full of onomatopoeia including intestinal rumblings, and thrive on non\_sensical interjections. The main characteristic of lettriste art is

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<sup>1</sup> Michel de Ré was responsible for the creation of seven Tardieu plays between April 1951 and November 1952 .

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Michaut, Le Ballet contemporain: 1929-1950 (Paris: Plon, 1950), pp. 24-27.

<sup>3</sup> Aleksis Rannit, "A Note on Annenkov's drawings," in People and Portraits vol. 2 by George Annenkov (New York: Inter-Language Literary Assoc. 1966) p. 10.

its disjunction of accepted forms of expression; in the theatre this leads to an exploitation of the discrepancy of word and gesture.<sup>1</sup>

The text Isou provided is entitled La Marche des jongleurs, first performed at Théâtre de Poche on 19 January 1954 with Poliéri acting one of the three parts. In effect, it is little more than a theatrical discourse on the nature of lettriste theatre. La Jeune Fille is made to utter: "Il faut dépasser le système du théâtre anecdotique et harmonique et créer le théâtre discrèpant, dans lequel les disciplines des paroles, des gestes, de la scène s'écouleront déchirées et sans amitié."<sup>2</sup> The text is a string of such declarations mixed with autobiographical details. The three actors accompany it with a whole gamut of gestures that bear no relation to what they are saying. Indeed on the printed page the divorce of word and action is represented by a two-column presentation, one devoted to the text and the other to the stage directions. The entry of the three actors sets the acrobatic tone of the piece: "Arrivée des trois personnages au pas gymnastique, à la queue leu leu. Après chaque implique dite face au public, ils font quelques pas en groupe" (MJ:101). The gestures performed involve dance, strip-tease, strangling, stabbing, jumping, crawling, climbing, and trapeze stunts. The actors also parody the history of mime with passages based on Greek, Roman, medieval and modern pantomime with extracts from commedia dell'arte techniques as well as the romantic clowning of Grimaldi and Debureau and the silent film antics of Laurel and Hardy. Gymnastic movements combine with minor muscular contractions to produce a lettriste dance described as "danse de particules pures, ciselantes, composée de fragments corporels minuscules: mouvements de doigts, d'orteils, de paupières, de lèvres etc." (MJ:189).

The basic element of Isou's theatre is not the dialogue but the

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<sup>1</sup> See: Isidore Isou, Fondements pour la transformation intégrale du théâtre, vol. 1 (Paris: Bordas, 1953); Isidore Isou, "Manifeste pour la définition et le bouleversement du théâtre," Revue théâtrale, no. 25 (1954), pp. 24-35; and Isidore Isou, "Le Théâtre neuf ou conservatoire: pour la rénovation du théâtre contemporain," Paris-Théâtre, no. 215 (1965), pp. 9-14.

<sup>2</sup> Isidore Isou, La Marche des jongleurs in Oeuvres de spectacle (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 114.

"implique": "On remplace ici des répliques, qui répliquent par des impliques qui s'impliquent en elles-mêmes et qui ne répliquent plus à personne" (MJ:108). Thus, instead of a continuous flow from speech to speech the text becomes "une assemblée infinie de moments exceptionnels, dépourvue de syncopes" (MJ:109). The "impliques" are consequently not delivered by one actor to another, but are spoken out didactically to the audience. For Isou, the theatre is not a harmonious marriage of many arts but a collection of many arts each independent and claiming its autonomy.

The text not only calls for a new relationship between the cornerstones of conventional theatre—speech and gesture—but also for the inclusion of film to contrast with the three-dimensional presence of the actors. As with the other elements the film is not used in harmony but independently as "film discrément," having no relationship with the voices of the actors (MJ:123). The interplay between film and actors is exploited as a filmed bicycle journey is continued in mime in a "fondue enchaîné avec le film" (MJ:157). Conversely the text being spoken by an actor is suddenly projected onto the screen and mimed by the man. In short, the whole venture is little more than an experiment with the elements of the theatre:

L'HOMME: Il y a autre chose dans le théâtre que le texte. Il y a les corps d'acteurs et les masses plastiques des décors qui se justifient par leur vie avant de se justifier par leurs appâts. (MJ:104)

Poliéri's involvement with the production was total, as director, actor, and creator of both film and sound effects. His belief in this form of theatre is confirmed by his determination to continue with the performance despite the disaffection of actors (who often refused to comply with the principle of le discrément) and of critics who all avoided the performances except Jean Duvignaud. His reaction was, however, a single line lambasting the whole venture.<sup>1</sup>

This production marks Poliéri's involvement in a more abstract form of theatre in which movement, gesture, and colour play an increasingly important role. This type of theatre inevitably demands experimentation in

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Duvignaud, La Nouvelle Revue française, no. 18 (1 June 1954), p. 544.

the technology needed to produce such spatio-dynamic productions. In 1955

he wrote:

Le théâtre moderne, du moins celui que j'aime, néglige de plus en plus l'anecdote prétexte; il ne conserve que sa substance, le meilleur de lui-même. Le théâtre de demain sera, je pense, un théâtre d'introspection et abstrait, utilisant et de toutes les manières les gammes du spectacle; une orchestration de sons, de lumières, de formes, de couleurs et de vie.<sup>1</sup>

His theatre is to be composed on the stage with the elements of the theatre: lighting, decor, the body of the actors. The principle of organization is to be movement, sets being replaced by dynamic structures. Thus, abstraction and purity are central to his conception: "Je rêve d'un théâtre qui, par sa forme, son esthétique, sa technique même n'exprimerait qu'une vision intérieure pure, une abstraction essentielle."<sup>2</sup> He develops this idea of theatre in a number of manifestos that take the form of "partitions techniques"<sup>3</sup> for a non-figurative style of production. These essays are written in an effusive style that rushes through disconnected words and phrases with such force that at times they have the intensity of some mystical tract.

Theatre is to become "le poème du spectacle" in an abstract sense of purity distilled from all the arts: "Ni de la danse, ni de la musique, ni de la peinture, ni de la sculpture, ni du poème, mais du spectacle pur."<sup>4</sup> The image that Poliéri employs to describe this state is that of the gem, "le théâtre cristal": "Alors enfin on peut espérer l'harmonie, le cristal véritable. Une pierre précieuse brille et nous inonde de sons, de couleurs, de formes, de poésie, des gestes, de cris purs, parfaits, abstraits."<sup>5</sup> The gem poses the quality of irreducible, brilliant presence, a flash of almost celestial radiance.

<sup>1</sup>Jacques Poliéri, "Le Théâtre kaléidoscopique," Revue théâtrale, 9<sup>e</sup> année, no. 30 (1955), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>See Poliéri, "Théâtre kaléidoscopique"; Jacques Poliéri, "Partition pour un théâtre non figuratif (et Partitions techniques I, II et III)," Revue théâtrale, 10<sup>e</sup> année, no. 32 (1956), pp. 25-30; and Jacques Poliéri, "Pour une nouvelle dimension scénique," Revue théâtrale, 10<sup>e</sup> année, no. 34 (1956), pp. 39-42. All these essays, with the exception of "Partition technique III," have been collected in Scénographie-sémiographie from which the quotations have been taken.

<sup>4</sup>Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, p. 22 and p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 24 and p. 19.

Coupled with this image, Poliéri uses mathematical and geometrical vocabulary to express the essential nature of his theatre. Just as Sartre's Roquentin is fascinated by the non-contingency of the circle in La Nausée, so Poliéri proclaims: "Cette mathématique du théâtre n'est concevable que dans l'abstraction."<sup>1</sup>

The arrangement and organization of the means of expression are to follow "une géométrie nouvelle" described "en des arabesques, des tracés nouveaux, inconnus, éblouissants"; each sequence is an independent flash of this radiance, "les instantanées scéniques,"<sup>2</sup> a rapid succession of essential moments and not the causal flow of character and plot development. This idea can be seen to have resonances with Isou's theory of "impliques." Poliéri explains: "Non pas correspondantes mais successives, les images progressent par bonds dans un discontinu sonore, plastique, lumineux, pictorial, verbal, mimique."<sup>3</sup> The fragmented structure achieves the solid purity of the crystal through the perfection of the global organization: "Un désordre synchronique—ordre parfait."<sup>4</sup> The synthesis of sound, colour, and movement comes about in the manner of the mysterious transformations by which the alchemist converted base metals into gold:

Un hurlement doux et harmonieux met en branle la machine. Il n'est que du silence. Une vibration plus forte, puis le geste est maître, le corps, le bras, le doigt. L'ongle qui scintille, déclenche le son, qui se métamorphose en couleur. Vert, rouge, noir, cercle, carré, rapide, fort, grave, clair, bleu, un voile, une feuille, une étoile. Le décor mange, englobe.<sup>5</sup>

The transformations of a force into successive physical manifestations, as though in a chain reaction, are referred to in the other "partitions techniques": "Un point bouge—s'inscrit sur la pointe du compas—de la scène—se coule sur fond sonore—prend forme humaine."<sup>6</sup> And elsewhere: "Un projecteur exprime autant qu'une tirade—un geste remplace et continue une sonorité que sépare une forme."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Poliéri, "Partition technique III," p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, p. 21.

The concept of an abstract theatre of metamorphosis is not original. Artaud described "Le Théâtre alchimique" and was fascinated by the Balinese dancers' ability to continue music into gesture.<sup>1</sup> Prior to Artaud, the qualities of movement and colour had formed the basis of research for many artists around the time of the First World War and had caused the appearance of many small artistic schools: Orphism, vorticism, suprematism, neo-plasticism. Futurism in Italy and the Bauhaus group in Germany took up the elements of these movements and applied them to the performing arts. In 1915, Enrico Prampolini described the futurist theatre: "Vibrations, luminous forms . . . will wriggle and writhe dynamically, and these veritable actor-gases of an unknown theatre will have to replace living actors."<sup>2</sup> Moholy-Nagy's spectacle, Die Mechanische Exzentrik (1913) did not banish the human actor completely but only used his plastic qualities in "a precise and fully controlled organization of form and motion, intended to be a synthesis of dynamically contrasting phenomena (space, form, motion, sound, and light)."<sup>3</sup> Oskar Schlemmer summarized the outlook of this group of experimenters towards the performing arts:

L'Art de la scène est un art spatial et le sera encore davantage à l'avenir car la scène est surtout un ensemble architecture-espace dont tous les événements sont en rapport direct avec celui-ci. La forme plane ou plastique est une division de l'espace, la couleur et la lumière sont les parties de la forme.<sup>4</sup>

Poliéri, in the course of his manifestos, continues the work of the Bauhaus integrating all the modern techniques of slide-projection, film, cyclorama, lighting, and electronic sound recording into the spectacle. The actor is referred to as a mobile and sound element capable of a wide range of movements—dance, gymnastics, mime—and of vocal utterances—words, cries, and screams.

His projects for the theatre found an outlet through the theatre of

<sup>1</sup> Artaud, D.C. IV, p. 65; and p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Enrico Prampolini, "Manifesto of futurist scenography and choreography," [1915] in Total Theatre, ed. E. T. Kirby, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, "Theater, Circus, Variety," in Theater of the Bauhaus by Schlemmer, Moholy-Nagy and Molnar, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Oskar Schlemmer, from a lecture given 16 March 1927, cited by Jacques Poliéri, ed., "Spectacles: 50 ans de recherches," Aujourd'hui: Art et architecture, 3<sup>e</sup> année, no. 17 (May 1958), p. 31.

Jean Tardieu. Poliéri considered him the only dramatist who was attempting a fundamental renovation of the dramatic language in the direction of increased dynamism and abstraction.<sup>1</sup> On no less than four occasions between 1955 and 1959, Poliéri directed plays by Tardieu. An example of Tardieu's experimentation was La Sonate et les trois messieurs which Poliéri produced for the first time in June 1955 (Paris, Théâtre de la Huchette). Poliéri terms this play revolutionary because <sup>"c'est par"</sup> "le rythme verbal et plastique (corps de l'acteur) que sont suggérées les données sonores d'une sonate de type classique."<sup>2</sup>

Tardieu's sub-title for the study, "Comment parler musique," reveals the main preoccupation of the work, to create an artificial dramatic language based entirely on rhythm. The anecdotal interest of the piece is nil; the three characters are simply referred to as A, B, and C. It is arranged in three movements, larqo, andante, and finale using the lines of the text, as in music, as themes on which to improvise. For instance, the line "une grande étendue d'eau dans le soir" is repeated four times by C in the opening movement as an unexplained theme; it is modified and redistributed in order to return at the end of the second movement in a revised choral form that resolves the tension and mystery that had built up around it:

C, même ton: N'était-ce pas . . . dans une grande étendue?  
 A: Oui, dans une grande étendue.  
 B: Une grande étendue dans le soir.  
 A: Dans le soir.  
 B: Dans le soir.

Words are used as pure sonic elements as the final crescendo of the work subsides into the fragmentation of the word "matin":

B, à C: Ma . . . ? (Un silence.)  
 C: . . . tin!  
 B, à A: Ma . . . ? (Un silence.)  
 A: . . . tin!  
 (Les trois Messieurs saluent et sortent gravement.)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Poliéri to Richard C. Webb, Interview, Centre Expérimental du Spectacle (Paris), 26 March 1973.

<sup>2</sup>Jacques Poliéri, "Notes sur le texte, le décor et le geste dans le théâtre de Jean Tardieu," Revue théâtrale, 12<sup>e</sup> année, no. 38 (1958), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Jean Tardieu, La Sonate et les trois messieurs in Théâtre I: Théâtre de chambre (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 130; and pp. 134-35.

In a preface to his Théâtre de chambre, Tardieu states that his early plan was to write a classification of the different theatrical elements in the form of short plays or studies illustrating each element. The very idea of such a theoretical undertaking indicates his leaning towards "la démarche créatrice des musiciens lorsqu'ils composent à partir d'une volonté abstraite et non d'une représentation imitative, ni d'une figuration quelconque."<sup>1</sup> Some of the titles of his plays suggest that he made a start on this plan: Monsieur Moi: dialogue avec un brillant partenaire; Ce que parler veut dire ou le patois des familles; Il y avait foule au manoir ou les monologues; Un mot pour un autre; Un geste pour un autre; Conversation-sinfonietta. Tardieu places such experiments in the tradition of abstract artists like Paul Klee and the composers Erik Satie and Anton Webern who reformed musical composition by a rejection of the chromatic scale. His theatre is non-descriptive by being enclosed upon itself. The subject of the play becomes the play itself, just as the abstract painting is its own subject.

Three of the other plays directed by Poliéri in this first production revolved on such formal elements. La Serrure presented a counterpart to Isou's La Marche des jongleurs in that the action of the play arose out of the interrelation of word and gesture which also suggested the properties and the set. The production also allowed a certain experimentation with the interrelation of light, sound, and the word, as seen in the closing sequence:

La lumière commence à diminuer progressivement et aura complètement disparu aux derniers mots du monologue, cependant que l'énorme trou de serrure sera, seul, violemment éclairé. En même temps que cet assombrissement gagne la pièce, on entend une note tenue, stridente et lancinante qui, d'abord faible, finira par devenir assourdissante, et durera encore un court moment après la chute du Client.<sup>2</sup>

The noise element was exploited in Le Guichet which listed among the characters a radio and a loudspeaker as well as the noises of a busy city, such as trains, cars, hooters, skidding and an anguished cry. Qui est là? demanded a formal pattern of gesturing based on simplicity and minutely timed execution; the

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Tardieu, Théâtre I: Théâtre de chambre, nouv. éd. (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Jean Tardieu, La Serrure in Théâtre I (1955), pp. 60-61.



mother's and son's movement of fright was stylized to such an extent that it appeared eerily unnatural: "Pendant ce temps, la Mère et le Fils détournent la tête vers la droite en cachant leur visage dans leurs mains et restent longtemps encore dans cette position."<sup>1</sup> Formality of movement was used again in the precise movements of their chairs by the gentlemen of La Sonate et les trois messieurs.

In the 1956 production of Tardieu's Une voix sans personne in the same theatre, Poliéri is to push his experimentation further. If all Tardieu's plays reduce the status of the actor to a mobile element, this play eliminates him altogether. Only a voice reciting a text is used as a counterpart to the set itself which is the central character. The action of the play is the life given to this set by the use of lighting effects. The voice itself should be as abstract as possible:

Seule une voix d'homme dira le texte du poème. Elle sera, soit transmise par haut-parleur, soit incarnée—mais non personnifiée—par un comédien, qui se tiendra à droite, . . . tournant le dos à la scène: de toute façon ce ne sera qu'une voix anonyme, parlant simplement, sans déclamation.<sup>2</sup>

This type of experiment had been tried by Edward Gordon Craig as early as 1905 when he conceived The Stairs and later Scene. Both attempted to produce dramatic effects by the interplay of set and lighting without the significant presence of living actors.<sup>3</sup>

Like Isou and Parent, Tardieu underlines the equal importance of stage action and text by dividing the printed page into columns, juxtaposing the poem and lighting effects. This practice is used by Tardieu in many of his studies for the theatre, although not for Le Temps du verbe which formed the second half of the programme in 1956. Architected by words, the plot is created by convoluted dialogues that mix past, present, and future leaving the spectator at a loss inside a Pirandellian labyrinth of reality and illusion. Whether it be the nature of lighting or vocabulary Tardieu treats "des thèmes

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Tardieu, Qui est là? in Théâtre I (1955), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Jean Tardieu, Une voix sans personne in Théâtre II: Poèmes à jouer (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 111.

<sup>3</sup>Edward Gordon Craig, Towards a New Theatre (London: Dent and Sons, 1913), pp. 41-47.

formels plutôt que des événements."<sup>1</sup>

Formalism both of text and production characterized the 1959 "Spectacle Poliéri-Tardieu" (Paris, Alliance Française). The equal status of director and author that Georges Lerminier implies underlines the importance of the technical devices that Poliéri was using to create Tardieu's plays. This same critic had objected to Poliéri's handling of the sketches of the 1955 production: "Un peu trop engagée dans le réalisme."<sup>2</sup> With his second staging of La Sonate et les trois messieurs in 1956, Poliéri moved away from realism; he abandoned the bare stage for a triple set of slide projections comprising abstract designs of lines and blinding flashes of colour (Marseille, Cité Radiieuse). The 1959 production involved even more complex staging in order to give the play increased visual dynamism. The spectacle had been filmed before the performance and was projected onto a huge panoramic screen behind the three gentlemen.<sup>3</sup> The increased spectacular appeal and, ultimately, abstraction, that this gave to the text can be assessed by Charles Dobzynski's reaction:

Peu de mouvements, les images projetées s'accordant aux gestes ou les contradisant. En fait, les phrases ne sont point ici porteuses d'images ou d'idées mais jouent le rôle d'un contrepoint sonore, ce sont des notes musicales qui résonnent et retentissent comme les bruits d'une langue quasiment inconnue.<sup>4</sup>

L'A.B.C. de notre vie shares its musical origin with La Sonate et les trois messieurs by being conceived on the lines of a concerto: "Quant à l'argument de l'oeuvre, il consiste non pas en un sujet, mais,—comme en musique—en thèmes, diversement associés, opposés ou entremêlés."<sup>5</sup> The resulting interwoven structure is based on "un plan purement formel" having no regard for dialogue nor dramatic action in any conventional sense but rather obeying "des préoccupations de rythme, d'alternance des mouvements, d'opposition des

<sup>1</sup>Tardieu cited by G.L., Le Figaro littéraire, 4 February 1956.

<sup>2</sup>Georges Lerminier, Le Parisien libéré, 9 June 1959; and 24 June 1955.

<sup>3</sup>Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, Cahier d'illustrations nos. 1 and 2.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Dobzynski, Les Lettres françaises, 11 June 1959.

<sup>5</sup>Jean Tardieu, L'A.B.C. de notre vie in Théâtre II, p. 9.

effets" (ABC:77; and 77-78). For the characters Monsieur Mot and Madame Parole, language is understood not as a means of significant communication but rather "des notes de musique ou des touches de couleur" (ABC:13). Tardieu uses a chorus of indistinct voices as the background music for the words of the main protagonists. That Tardieu is mainly interested in the musical quality of syllables is made clear by having a different voice utter each word of a sentence. The overall effect of the division of the sentence into its component elements is almost stereophonic as the sound source moves around the area of the stage. The interrelation of sound and the physical proportions of the stage is aptly captured by Tardieu when he observes that the ability to maintain a low indistinct murmuring and then to suddenly call out a clear word demands "une gymnastique vocale très vive" (ABC:79).<sup>1</sup>

With the stylization of the vocal part of the play goes a highly stylized fashion of movement. The Protagoniste moves across the stage either as though he is conducting "une démonstration de danse rythmique ou de gymnastique" or "comme les acteurs du théâtre chinois" (ABC:38). No more natural are the steps of Monsieur Mot and Madame Parole who at one point adopt "une gesticulation stéréotypée" (ABC:40).

The lighting effects are orchestrated in a fashion similar to the sound of the chorus. The stage is initially in darkness and remains generally very dark; against this sombre background, the characters are repeatedly highlighted by vivid spotlights. Just as the individual words are made to stand out against the monotone murmurings of the chorus, so the characters are distinguished by bright lights from the monochrome general lighting. Apart from this parallelism of light and sound, there are moments when lighting and vocal effects are coordinated:

Des effets de lumière vacillante et tournante donnent l'impression d'une sorte de vertige burlesque, pendant que de petites lumières vertes et rouges s'allument et s'éteignent et que de petites sonneries grâles et ridicules résonnent de temps en temps, selon un déclenchement saccadé, ainsi que cela se passe dans les jeux automatiques des tirs forains ou les "machines à sous" des cafés populaires. (ABC:41)

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<sup>1</sup>Poliéri, in fact, avoided this difficulty by prerecording the part of the chorus.

Voice, colour, lighting, and sound combine to express the "différents plans sonores et visuels" which constituted the meaning of the experiment (ABC:14)

Rythme à trois temps is an attempt to recreate the emotion felt by a visitor to the temple at Segesta. The action of the play is fourfold representing the temple in bright sunlight, at dusk, in starlight, and in moonlight. The front of the temple is represented by six actresses as the columns. The play progresses as the slow evolution of perspective as one travels around the temple. The actresses go through their revolutions with geometric precision as a text is read out. In effect the production gives the audience the impression of travelling while in fact remaining stationary. The experiment aims at creating a dramatic emotion with the minimal use of text and highly calculated movement. The human element is negated in favour of a language of gesture. Indeed, Tardieu recommends that the six actresses should wear half-masks because "l'expression ne doit pas être dans les jeux de physionomie mais dans les gestes—très étudiés, très calculés—et dans les paroles—très avarés, très espacées."<sup>1</sup>

Poliéri augmented the non-literary element of these plays by an elaborate system of slide projections of abstract paintings and a score by Webern. The use of the canvases of dissimilar and interlocking colours of S. Poliakoff and the swift lines on contrasting backgrounds of Hans Hartung together with the almost stained-glass effect of Vieira da Silva's juxtaposed, minute, geometrical shapes added a strongly visual dimension that Poliéri had not previously exploited. The fragmentation suggested by the painting as well as the dodecaphonic Webern score underlined the stylization of the elements of the plays and emphasized the independent nature of each of these elements—text, corporal movement, sets.

The wholesale introduction of other autonomous art works into the dramatic performance is part of Poliéri's resolution of the problem of the theatre's tardiness to develop a form comparable to the pictorial innovations of abstract art or serial composition. He proceeded with this technique in

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Tardieu, Rythme à trois temps in Théâtre II, p. 87.

a production entitled Formes sonores de la poésie (Paris, December 1959) in which the poems of Saint-John Perse and Henri Michaux were accompanied by the music of Webern, Alban Berg, and Schönberg, and later in Orchestration théâtrale (Paris, May 1960), an abstract text by Arrabal illustrated by the works of Delaunay, Klee, Malevitch, Mondrian and Calder. It is significant that the art works used are all products of "artists of movement,"<sup>1</sup> the forefathers of kinetic art. For example, Delaunay's work concerns itself with the connection between colour and movement through the interaction of large areas of juxtaposed pigments; Klee confronts surfaces of varying colour and texture, whereas Mondrian and Malevitch experiment with the dynamic possibilities of geometrical abstraction.

By bringing together different art forms into a single work, Poliéri is experimenting with a form of simultaneity. The audience becomes involved in a total spectacle in which all its senses are attracted by equally strong stimulations: the visual element of the paintings is opposed by the musical score which in turn is challenged by the kinetic properties of the stage movement. However, these tensions between the different creative manifestations exist within the single space of the Italianate stage. The obvious logical progression is to go beyond the unique space and to create a spectacle inside a more open spatial arrangement. In fact, Poliéri's investigations into the dynamism of the Italianate stage and the elements of dramatic language necessarily led him to a reappraising of that space itself. As early as 1956 in the "Partition technique III," Poliéri anticipated this necessity: "Inutile de nier plus longtemps le moule lieu théâtral craque—éclate de toutes parts—prend possession de l'espace—vire, tourne, bouge—directement scellé—cosmos scénique."<sup>2</sup> And in the contemporary "Pour une nouvelle dimension scénique," there are hints of the new direction to be taken:

Décrasser le moule— . . .  
Supprimer la rampe, la couleur

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<sup>1</sup>For a short, outlined history of kinetic art, see: Frank Popper, Naissance de l'art cinétique (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1967).

<sup>2</sup>Poliéri, "Partition technique III," p. 29.

et les cintres ne suffit pas—  
 La boîte est la même— . . .  
 Mise en scène dans l'espace.<sup>1</sup>

With the use of many forms of expression and the questioning of the structure of the performance and its area, there is a new role for the director. No longer is he just concerned with the physical representation of a dramatic text. From 1958, Poliéri underlined this change of function by adopting a new vocabulary: scénologie, scénographie, and scénographe became common terms in his writings. Scénologie concerns "tout l'appareil scénique,"<sup>2</sup> that is not only the end effect but also the means of production of the stage image; scénographie is the study of the conditions of the performance including those that appertain to the artists and those affecting the spectators: "Le concept scénographique tend à définir le phénomène physico-psychique reliant émission et réception du spectacle, le rapport géométrique, la 'distance' de la salle à la scène, puis bientôt la géométrie, la notation de cette distanciation elle-même."<sup>3</sup> The scénographe is the man who develops and examines all these relationships superceding and outgrowing the function of director. This description is more relevant to a man who declares that his aim is "un entier renouvellement de la notion d'espace spectaculaire."<sup>4</sup>

Poliéri's objections to the Italianate stage are founded in both the physical sciences and in the history of theatrical architecture itself. He argues that the proscenium stage was developed from a mathematical postulate of perspective in which "l'image est une coupe plane à travers le cône optique constitué par l'oeil du spectateur et les rayons qui le joignent à tous les points de l'espace à représenter."<sup>5</sup> This formula only holds true if one assumes a single point of perception, a field of vision of about 150°, and the restriction of the quality of vision to a single plane. These conditions do not conform to the physical attributes of the human eye. A single eye has a field of vision nearer to 200° and allows sight simultaneously to the right and the

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<sup>1</sup> Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, p. 23; p. 24; and p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 5.      <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 40.      <sup>4</sup> Poliéri, ed., "Spectacles," p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, p. 33.

left as well as a certain judgement of depth. With two eyes working in concert, the field of vision is correspondingly wider and there is not only perception of the relative positions of objects in depth but also some appreciation of the texture of surfaces. Furthermore, the human eye is mobile and can perceive space spherically. Poliéri concludes that the limitations of the conventional stage are incompatible with the range of perception of the human being.

Through the ages, different stage designs have evolved from the sense of space that prevailed in the society that constructed them. Thus, the stage of classical Greece shares a common concept of space with its art in which the lines of perspective do not all converge on a single point but rather each pair come together along a common axis. The pictorial art of the first half of the twentieth century is characterized by its extension of the visual field all over the canvas, not drawing the eye to a single vanishing-point. The theatre has not produced a design that embraces this change in perspective. It is this theatre for which Poliéri is searching, "un espace simultané, susceptible d'animation et de variabilité" in which the concept of the focal point is replaced by "une image diffractée ou enveloppante."<sup>1</sup>

The possibility of reconstruction inside the box stage is rejected; adding an extended apron or breaking the hard division formed by the arch with side-stages projecting into the audience is insufficient. All the new developments in the theatre (projections, animated images) underline the inadequacy of the conventional stage and confirm "la désintégration du point de fuite unique et fixe, et la nécessité d'établir de nouveaux rapports spectacle-spectateur."<sup>2</sup> The projects that initially appealed to Poliéri were designs on the model of the circle. Apparently, this attraction was due to a widening of his reflections on the nature of human vision. In the preface to Scénographie-sémio-graphie, he describes "la surface intérieure du champ visuel physiologique

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Poliéri, "Mise en scène et scénographie nouvelles," Le Théâtre dans le monde, vol. 15, no. 1 (1966), p. 15.

qui s'inscrit dans un conoïde est une surface concave."<sup>1</sup> The circular or annular stage reproduces this concave surface in architecture.

The idea of a spectacle surrounding the public is by no means an invention of the twentieth century. Richard Southern sketches a possible reconstruction of a medieval mystery play that used an enclosed circular space with one central and five peripheral stages.<sup>2</sup> The panorama dates from as early as 1787 and Louis Daguerre's diorama involving the use of a photographic image projected onto a 360° surface became popular from 1823 onwards. This technique has been refined to produce the common cinerama films as well as Walt Disney's circarama (1955). In the theatre, Apollinaire proposed the double circular stage in 1916 through which the audience could be at once surrounded by and surrounding the action.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, this idea was put into practice by Nikolai Okhlopkov's Moscow production of Gorki's The Mother between 1932 and 1936.<sup>4</sup>

All these precursory designs have in common the fact of a mobile performance around a stationary audience. Taking a lead from Von Laban who in 1951 had designed a theatre incorporating a circular stage with a rotating platform for the audience,<sup>5</sup> Poliéri began to plan theatres involving the principle of stage and audience movement. In 1956, at the same time as he was producing his "partitions techniques," he collaborated with the architect André Wogenscky to produce the Théâtre Sphérique. Its structure allows for a thousand strong audience to be placed on a circular rotating disc surrounded by a narrow stage that also moves, and beyond that, by a fixed stage of varying depths. The whole construction is housed in an ovoid building. The project received an alternative treatment in 1958 by Guillaume Gillet under the name

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<sup>1</sup> Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Southern, The Seven Ages of the Theatre (London: Faber, 1962), p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire, Oeuvres poétiques (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 881.

<sup>4</sup> See André Van Gysegem, Theatre in Soviet Russia (London: Faber, 1943), pp. 196-97.

<sup>5</sup> See Von Laban, "Théâtre à scène annulaire," in "Spectacles," ed. Poliéri, p. 83.



of Théâtre Mobile à Scène Annulaire. Here, the pivoting auditorium is positioned off-centre inside a single, fixed annular stage.

Poliéri's first fully realized architectural project was the Théâtre Mobile constructed for the third Festival de l'Art d'Avant-garde in Paris (1960). The architects, André Bloc and Claude Parent, combined aspects of both Wogensky's and Gillet's projects: the central pivoting disc for the spectators was decentralized, thus gaining a variable relationship with the inner rotating stage and the outer fixed but narrower stage. Both the mobile stage and the spectators' platform could move in both directions. The advantage of the off-centre setting was described by Poliéri in the catalogue to the exhibition *Lieu théâtral—lieu culturel*: "La rotation et le décentrage de la plate-forme centrale par rapport à l'ensemble de la scène annulaire donnent l'illusion du travelling: le spectateur avance, recule, pivote et participe ainsi physiquement au spectacle."<sup>1</sup>

The Théâtre Mobile was built for the spectacle Rythmes et images. For the first time, Poliéri was experimenting with other art forms inside a spectacle based on his own scenographic conceptions. The production was comprised of poetry, music, and sculpture integrated into a complex lighting system. Sculptures by Brancusi, Adam, Pevsner and Jacobsen were placed on rotating podiums which were themselves positioned on the rotating stage. With the great possibilities for movement, it was they who were "les véritables protagonistes de l'action."<sup>2</sup> The sculptures encircled the audience and were turned in accordance with the verbal, musical, and lighting plans. Poliéri described the production as "sorte de féerie verbale, musicale et plastique."<sup>3</sup> The mixture of sound, form, light, and movement was elaborated into a spectacle based on the notion of their interdependence: "La musique, les images verbales transposaient ces variations plastiques dans un espace parallèle, dont les interférences sonores et visuelles constituaient l'espace totale de l'acte

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<sup>1</sup>Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Lieu théâtral—lieu culturel, Exhibit France 10.

<sup>2</sup>Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Cahier d'illustrations no. 16.

scénique."<sup>1</sup> The extensive use he made of the sculptures is not surprising for it was the modern painters and sculptors that had been an inspiration to him in his attempts to define a modern theatre:

C'est aux peintres et sculpteurs modernes qu'il faut faire appel, si l'on veut tenter une rénovation quelconque dans l'ordre de la plantation et de l'organisation du décor. Les arts plastiques non figuratifs, en déplaçant le centre de gravité de l'image ou du volume, ont détruit la contrainte de la perspective et créé ainsi un nouvel espace.<sup>2</sup>

The most famous example of a theatre built on this principle is the smaller theatre at the Maison de la Culture at Grenoble. Designed by André Wogenscky the theatre has the same plan as Poliéri's Théâtre Sphérique. Wogenscky's justification for the mobile circular structure is indeed very close to Poliéri's argument against the Italianate stage; that is, the new shape is better suited to the range of perception of the human form.<sup>3</sup> Completed in December 1967, the first production was an adaptation by Butor of his radiophonic text 6.810.000 litres d'eau par seconde. The subject-matter is the nature of the Niagara Falls, both physical and mythical, and its significance in the American psyche as a traditional honeymoon vacation area. Formed of a complex amalgam of two descriptive passages from Chateaubriand, fragmented and juxtaposed, a factual account by the speaker, and the memories of married couples, both young and old, it is split into twelve monthly parts running from April to March thus covering the character of the Falls in all the different climatic conditions. Michael Spencer describes the text as "a multiplicity of itineraries available to producer, listener, and reader" whose global structure "produces<sup>a</sup> multidimensional impression of the site, with historical, topographical, sociological and anecdotal information and implications."<sup>4</sup> It is characteristic of Butor's work that such a system of references should come together in a single text especially in a text that deals with a

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> André Wogenscky, "La Maison de la Culture à Grenoble," Supplément, Annales de l'Institut Technique du Bâtiment et des Travaux Publics, no. 253 (January 1969), p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Spencer, "Son et Lumière at the Niagara Falls," Australian Journal of French Studies, vol. 6, no. 1 (January-April 1969), p. 104.

geographic entity. Butor does not see things in isolation but involved in a spatial matrix: "Un objet n'existe pas, pour moi, sans sa lumière, sans l'espace qui l'entoure."<sup>1</sup>

The original form of the text was conceived as a stereophonic work. Stereophony not only seems to answer the practical difficulties of expressing so much information by offering several channels of transmission, but also seems suitable for Butor's spatial imagination. The stereophonic principle can be summarized as the achievement of a three-dimensional effect of auditory perspective; this effect conveys to the listener the spatial aspects of sound. A scenic version of a text that is based on this principle would not be easily adaptable to the Italianate stage with the limitation of perspective that it imposes. The qualities of the mobile, annular stage in relation to the fixed peripheral stage and rotating decentralized audience platform offer the variations of perspective implied by the stereophonic structure. This possibility of multiple variation was what persuaded Butor to accept the challenge of producing a scenic version. He admitted that he would not have contemplated this (indeed thought it impossible) in a conventional theatrical setting.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the text is suited to the mobile theatre at Grenoble taking movement as its basis as it does. Butor was fascinated by the physical properties of the Falls which, at one and the same time, include the headlong rushing of water and the permanence of the Falls themselves. The text was constructed to capture this "sorte de monument liquide, de monument qui est perpétuel mouvement."<sup>3</sup> The theatre reproduces this dynamism inside ultimate stability by its permanent architectural construction enveloping mobile units.

The production at Grenoble by Bernard Floiriet and the Comédie des Alpes<sup>e</sup> (necessarily augmented by a whole team of technicians) employed both the fixed and the mobile circular stages. On the outer fixed stage were the

<sup>1</sup>Butor to Georges Charbonnier, Entretiens avec Michel Butor (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 139.

<sup>2</sup>"Entretien avec Michel Butor," La Maison de la Culture à Grenoble, (February 1968).

<sup>3</sup>Butor to Charbonnier, Entretiens, pp. 134-35.

different sets constructed out of shining metal, while the inner mobile stage supported a boat structure in transparent material that transported black-clad travellers back and forth. The decor was strongly visual in its contrast of shining materials, black and brightly coloured op-art costumes. The design concept of the spectacle was based on the view that the sets should no longer serve as illustration but should become an active dramatic element in their own right.<sup>1</sup> The strong visual element was accompanied by a detailed sound track that included musique concrète, dance tunes and Christmas carols, as well as the sound effects of cars, the Falls, and the tourist trade connected with them. The director, Floiriet, saw the integration of all these disciplines as the realization of a form of Total Theatre which sought "la parenté du théâtre avec la musique, la poésie, l'expression graphique."<sup>2</sup> Madeleine Chapsal, however, experienced this synthesis more as an abstract experimentation with theatrical space:

C'est une architecture où le spectateur se promène, la salle entière devient un espace de sculpture pour les réalisateurs. C'est un vide à sculpter, travail qui demande un effort inhabituel qui ressemble à celui du sculpteur et de l'architecte.<sup>3</sup>

The production at Grenoble appears to have approximated to Poliéri's own appreciation of the possibilities of the mobile theatre: "Mais le principe de la mobilité du spectateur associé à celle du spectacle implique une conception révolutionnaire, il suppose le jeu simultané et réciproque de tous les éléments qui constituent l'espace scénique: décors, son, paroles, personnages animés ou inanimés, présences."<sup>4</sup>

Poliéri was not content to stop his experimentation with this principle after Rythmes et images; therefore the first designs of the Théâtre Mobile of

<sup>1</sup>Michel Raffaeilli, "Le Décor," La Maison de la Culture à Grenoble, (February 1968).

<sup>2</sup>"Entretien avec Bernard Floiriet," La Maison de la Culture à Grenoble (February 1968).

<sup>3</sup>Madeline Chapsal, [Entretien avec Michel Butor], La Quinzaine littéraire, 1 February 1968, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Jacques Poliéri, "L'Image à 360° et l'espace scénique nouveau," in Le Lieu théâtral dans la société moderne, ed. Denis Bablet and Jean Jacquet, 3rd ed. (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1969), p. 147.

1956 are still to be found behind projects and constructions executed in 1970. The Maison de Jeunes et de la Culture, Vallée de Chevreuse (1970) was built to include an automatic, mobile auditorium with electrically operated rotating stages. To this early concept was added the possibility of adapting the theatrical space through lifts and moving sections in the auditorium. As a further alternative to the Italianate stage, the transformable theatre can be considered to satisfy the proposition that theatrical architecture should contain the dynamic qualities of human perception. In fact, the transformable theatre corresponds more logically to the constant development and evolution of the means of communication in the electronic era. In his 1967 "Notes pour un programme de recherches," Poliéri implies that architects should take note of this situation: "La variation constante des données informationnelles aboutirait ainsi à une conception mouvante, modifiable, non prédéterminée, son agencement et sa structure ne devant pas être prévus pour un laps de temps trop important."<sup>1</sup>

He himself had experimented in this form of theatre design in 1959 when, with the architect Werner Ruhnau, he submitted a project for a transformable theatre (confusingly called a Théâtre Mobile) to a design competition at Dusseldorf.<sup>2</sup> The idea posits a neutral space, the horizontal surface of which is divided into perfectly interlocking hexagonal sections. Each section can be raised or lowered independently to create all manner of relationships between acting areas and seating areas according to the requirements of a particular production. The movement of these sections is such that the spatial arrangement can be easily modified during the course of a single performance. The audience sits on pivoting seats arranged two to each section. Thus, not only can the spectator's position be altered vertically but also horizontally by the rotation of the individual seats. This last manoeuvre is executed by the spectator himself as he chooses in which direction to look, whereas the vertical movement is controlled by the director at the console.

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<sup>1</sup>Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup>Poliéri, ed., "Scénographie nouvelle," p. 184.

Poliéri had suggested that each section should itself rotate thus putting the control of all movement in the hands of the electronics technician. Ruhnau, however, rejected this possibility. The architect believed that the freedom and openness of the theatrical space with its lack of permanent structures of spatial differentiation answered the needs of the modern theatre allowing, as it did, the utilization of "la totalité de l'espace dans la multiplication des perspectives." Absolute freedom would only be achieved "par le moyen d'architectures immatérielles,"<sup>1</sup> such as the creation of an environment by jets of warm air that suggest no visible differentiation between one area and the next.

Poliéri pursued this line of development in his own way with his 1962 design Théâtre Transformable Automatique (sometimes Mobile). Displayed in the exhibition Lieu théâtral—lieu culturel, the aim of the model built by Claude Parent and André Bloc is the "utilisation totale de l'espace."<sup>2</sup> He took a step closer to immaterial architecture with the project of the Théâtre Mobile Transformable for the Salle Louis-Jouvet du Conservatoire National de l'Art Dramatique (1969). The advantage of this design over its predecessors is that not only the theatrical space, but also the technical equipment are completely movable, thus leaving very little by way of a permanent structure in the neutral space of the theatre.<sup>3</sup>

The main disadvantage for an artist working in the medium of theatrical and scenic design is that the majority of his projects and experiments have to remain as blue-prints and plans since to realize them fully would involve exorbitant financial expense. Poliéri partially circumvents this enforced practical sterility by being active on both the theoretical and practical levels of theatrical experimentation. His work on design evolved from his questioning of dramatic language, but this did not signify that he abandoned his first field completely.

Poliéri's plans for a first spectacle independent of a pre-existing

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<sup>1</sup>Werner Ruhnau, "Libération du jeu par des architectures immatérielles," in Le Lieu théâtral, eds. Bablet and Jacquot, p. 127; and p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Lieu théâtral—lieu culturel, Exhibit France 11.

<sup>3</sup>Poliéri, Scénographie—sémiographie, p. 237.

literary text were a study of the range of expression of the human body. Gamme de 7 was originally conceived for the Italianate stage in 1957 and falls into the early phase of his work. The idea is to create a "total" actor out of seven individuals. This total actor is considered to be an artist who has mastered the arts of song, mime and dance. The work is arranged around a singer on each side of whom an actor will take up position as an intermediary stage between song and mime. Then on each side of the actors will be a mime with the flanks being occupied by a dancer. The notes of the singer are metamorphosed into the gestures of the mime via the actors to end up as dance movements. The preoccupation of the spectacle is to create "une totalité rythmique du spectacle" which clearly denies all anecdotal or figurative content. As with the Tardieu productions, the "play" was considered an autonomous dramatic structure, "une composition en soi visuelle et auditive."<sup>1</sup>

This seminal concept was developed in conjunction with the design of an annular stage. On the circular stage the central element (the singer) takes up position at three places forming the points of a triangle enclosing the audience. The gamme constructs itself in the same way about these three points. Instead of seven actors in a line allowing only a single direction of development (horizontally along the line of actors), twenty-one actors are positioned on the circumference of the circle and "s'écrivent également axonométriquement, englobant de leurs réseaux l'espace du spectateur."<sup>2</sup> These networks of relationships (except for three singers who are governed by the triangle) are composed of two single lines that unite one actor, for example, with his closest and furthest partners and a double line that communicates with his two intermediary partners in the other gammes. Thus, the possibilities of interrelation between the different modes of action are greatly increased: "Une telle mise en scène est conçue à la fois par une simultanéité et un déroulement temporel et spatial. L'action a lieu en des points divers, elle est polyvisuelle."<sup>3</sup>

The Gamme de 21 has never been produced no doubt because of the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

absence of a suitable theatre. Nevertheless in October 1964, Poliéri directed a work patterned on Gamme de 7 but using fourteen actors in a constructed set at the Théâtre Gérard Philippe.<sup>1</sup> The scenic instrument consisted of a conventional Italianate stage surmounted by a platform-stage behind which hung a giant screen with two long side-stages that projected into the audience supporting two smaller raised platforms at their extremity. Thus the set surrounded the audience on three sides, a compromise <sup>with the</sup> total envelopment afforded by the circular stage. Furthermore it allowed action on three levels: stage level, platform level, and the much higher level of the platform stage above the proscenium arch.

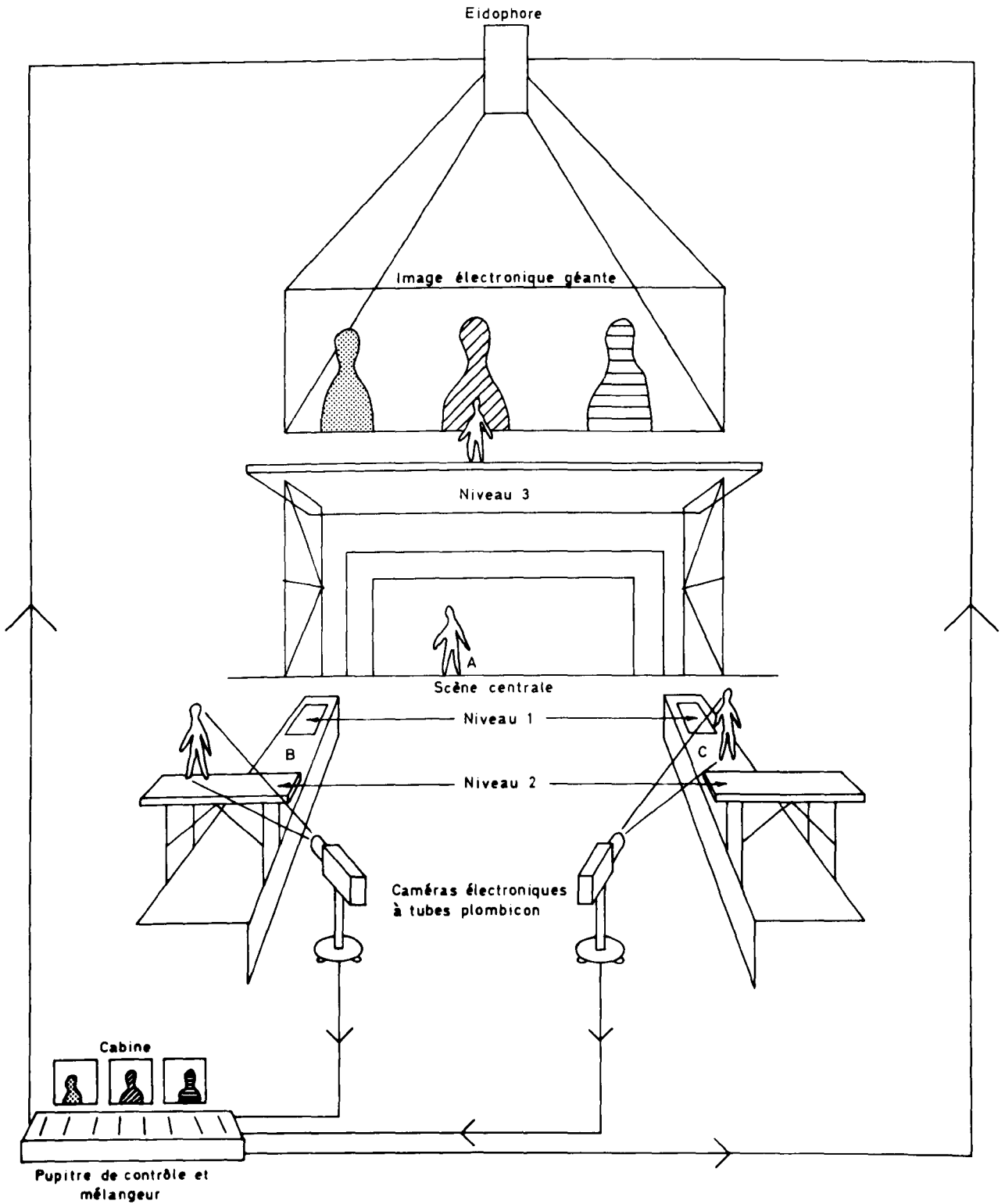
The performance was structured about three movements with the central element being the dancer and not the singer as in the projects. Each movement had its own characteristic type of gesture and was associated with a particular use of the stage areas. The first movement was enacted on the Italianate stage and was characterized by rectilinear gesture (similar to the original Gamme de 7). The action of the second movement took place on the side stages at the first level; this break-up of the single perspective was echoed in the sinuous, spiralling movements of the actors. The third movement presented the actors on all the acting areas, at all levels; the gestures became correspondingly less defined and rigid involving sudden collapses and tumblings with light, airy movements. The interrelation of gesture, stage-design, and performance was carefully monitored by Poliéri: "La structure générale de l'action organise les signes gestuels qui progressent de l'espace perspectif simple à la perspective multiple pour aboutir à l'espace tridimensionnel: sorte de conquête de l'espace."<sup>2</sup> This conquest of space was emphasized by the glass and aluminium tubing construction of the higher levels allowing the maximum field of vision for the spectators as well as suggesting actions suspended in mid-air. The harmony of set and gesture should not lead one to think that Poliéri had created a Total Theatre of harmonious synthesis of

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<sup>1</sup> See Figure 11, p. 546.

<sup>2</sup> Poliéri, Scénographie-sémio-graphie, p. 125.





## Vue perspective des scènes et de l'image électronique géante

Fig. 11. Diagram of the Set for Gamme de 7

space and movement. The musical score and lighting effects followed "des partitions parallèles indépendantes les unes des autres"<sup>1</sup> as did the images projected onto the huge screen produced by a television process which permitted increased flexibility and possible variation denied the pre-filmed action of La Sonate et les trois messieurs. In this Gamme de 7, Poliéri maintained the simultaneity of contrasting stimulations that had marked his work since La Marche des jongleurs.

The complex scenic structure used at the Théâtre Gérard Philippe evolved from earlier ventures in which Poliéri tried to break down the conventional theatrical architecture that he was forced to use. In 1959 he produced two spectacles, Texte pour des sculptures d'Arp and a scenic version of Mallarmé's Un coup de dés, that proposed a solution to his predicament not dissimilar to that adopted in 1964. Poliéri took the total stage and auditorium area of the Théâtre de l'Alliance Française and distributed his lighting equipment, and actors throughout this whole space. For Texte pour des sculptures d'Arp, he used five models of Arp sculptures as well as five live actors with a text written according to "une structure verbale parallèle à l'idée scénographique."<sup>2</sup> The action of the piece was punctuated by slides and film shots relevant to Arp's work of the period 1914-1934.

This conventional scenography also shaped the second production. Poliéri considered the exploded spatial arrangement of the set suitable to "traduire la mise en page et la typographie du poème."<sup>3</sup> The poem presents different styles of print spread irregularly over a double page with spaces and blanks that present "une vision simultanée de la Page."<sup>4</sup> For Poliéri, Mallarmé's poem is a significant innovation in modern art because of the spatial sense that it expresses. By adapting it to the stage he was attempting to create a theatrical equivalent to the artistic revolution symbolized by the poem (for much the same reason that he included kinetic paintings in his

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Cahier d'illustrations no. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Cahier d'illustrations no. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 455.

productions). Again he used many different media in this production; slide projections, film, sound effects—all were integrated into the piece. The actors took up positions in diagonal relationship to each other around the stage and auditorium (including the circle) thus producing a network of signs communicated across the space incorporating the audience, although in a simpler way than that proposed by Gamme de 21. The result of this synthesis of mixed media and scenographic innovation was "une action stéréophonique et poly-visuelle."<sup>1</sup>

Poliéri found a similar attraction in Butor's Mobile which he produced as a scenic work in 1962. By the use of an unorthodox typographical system involving four columns and three different sizes of type face, Butor hoped to capture "cet espace américain."<sup>2</sup> The work is based on a journey across America undertaken fictitiously by the juxtaposition of town names that are common to different states. Thus one travels from Clinton, Nebraska to Clinton, Iowa and to Clinton, Louisiana in a double page.<sup>3</sup> The roving, moving structure of the work is to some extent inherited from the principle of television "avec l'idée d'une image qui est formée d'un faisceau, qui balaie un écran."<sup>4</sup> The sequential structure of the conventional printed text is consequently destroyed. The work becomes impossible to read normally as the focal point chops and changes from one site to another; the reader's eyes are simultaneously attracted by the large capitals that punctuate the double page. By imposing this effort on the reader Butor hopes to make him experience the space and pace of America and its way of life.

Poliéri's scenic adaptation reproduced this experience by the use of multiple perspectives in the Théâtre Royal de Liège. Again conventional theatrical architecture was combated by the positioning of actors all round the theatre and at different levels. By the interjections of these actors

<sup>1</sup>Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, Cahier d'illustrations no. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Butor to Charbonnier, Entretiens, p. 156.

<sup>3</sup>Michel Butor, Mobile (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), pp. 100-101.

<sup>4</sup>Butor to Charbonnier, Entretiens, p. 157.

positioned around the auditorium a feeling of space was suggested. A reader was placed on the proscenium stage and moved side to side, forward and backward across it; each new position he adopted instigated a reaction from an actor positioned somewhere in the theatrical space. In this way the proportions of not only the auditorium but also the stage itself were exploited. True to Butor's own manner of composition Poliéri erected a huge screen at the back of the stage behind the reader. On this<sup>a</sup> diagram map of the United States was projected and a concentrated spotlight traced the development of the text. Similarly the verbal texture of the work was represented scenically by films of landscapes, and slides of Audubon's colour prints and clothing advertisements, all projected onto the back wall. Poliéri's interest in the experiment was the creation of "structures polyvalentes sonores et visuelles" inside a three-dimensional performance area.<sup>1</sup>

A three-dimensional space was used for his scenic version of Mallarmé's Le Livre. Poliéri was attracted by the qualities of purity, abstraction and mathematical precision that formed an important part of the poet's project. The possible arrangements of volumes, pages, lines, and words of The Book poses a mathematical problem in its own right. The unique quality of the work is that Mallarmé intended it not only to be read horizontally and vertically down the page but also in depth through the volume. This possibility was described by Poliéri as the "combinatoire tridimensionnelle."<sup>2</sup>

It was this aspect of The Book that he tried to capture in his production. The set was a modification of that used for Gamme de 7.<sup>3</sup> The scenic structure was formed by four rectangular stages that were arranged so as to leave an enclosed square space in the centre. The high level stage at one end was maintained, but the giant screen was positioned along one side. The central area was divided into four equal squares. On a diagonal, two of these squares were reserved for the audience split into two groups and facing each other. The other two squares were further divided into four smaller

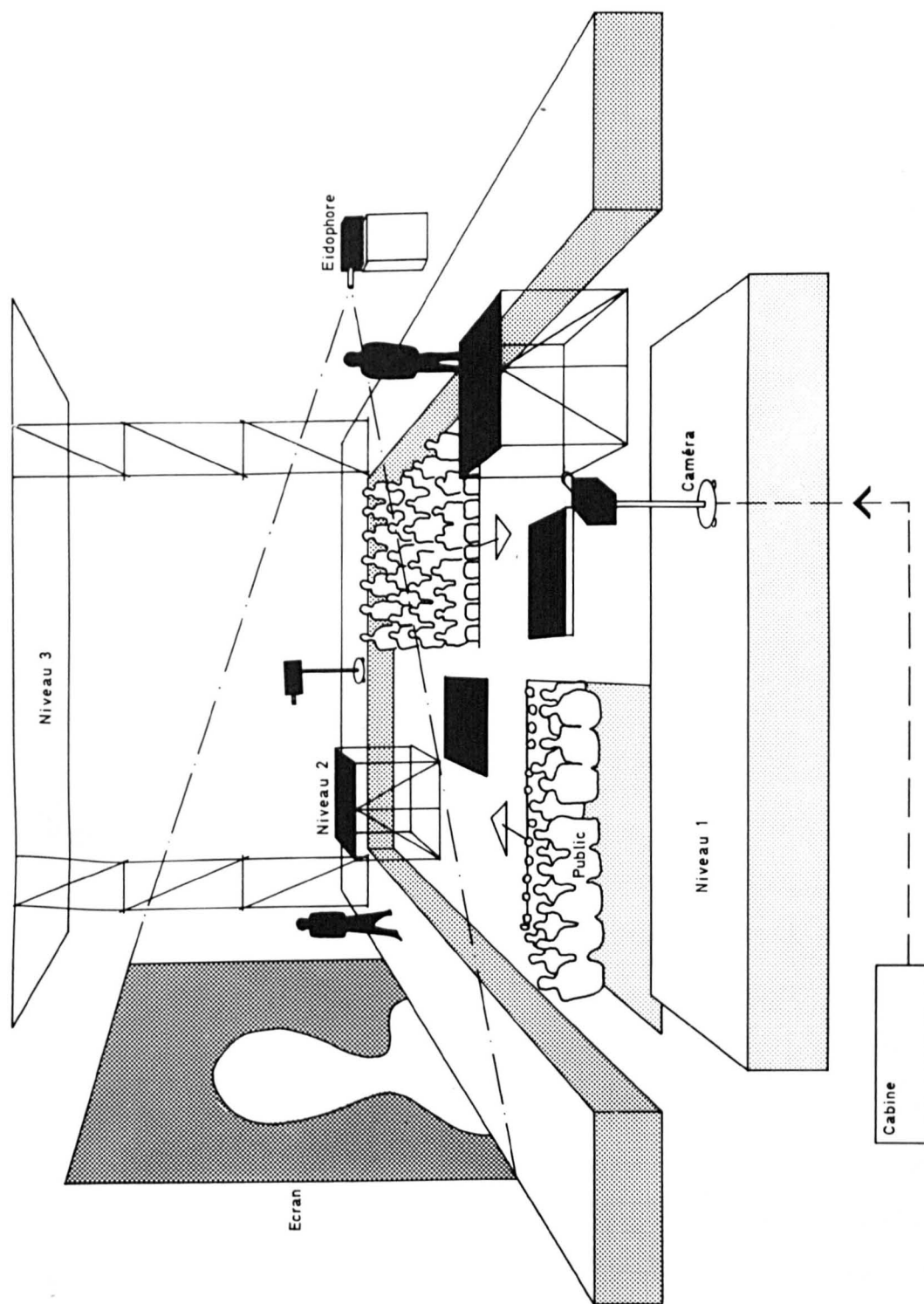
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<sup>1</sup>Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, Cahier d'illustrations no. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>3</sup>See Figure 12, p. 550.

**Fig. 12. Dispositif scénique for Le Livre de Mallarmé**



Dispositif scénique pour "le Livre de Mallarmé" (Disposition inverse du\_public)

squares. Again, on a diagonal and closest to the centre of the total area at the point of intersection of the principal diagonals, there were two acting areas at ground level. Two more areas with the same proportions but raised above the audience filled the other two smaller squares. In all, this presented ten different acting areas (including the screen) which often allowed the simultaneous presentation of several actions. The production aimed at the maximum possible fluidity through and around this complex set. The mobility and change inherent in Mallarmé's work was guaranteed by the rapid passage of the actors around the stages, the swift movement of the lights, and the counterpoint between the various scenic actions.<sup>1</sup> The complex patterns of this action could have led to a dispersal of the audience's attention, but according to one critic the experience was stunning:

Les acteurs entourent le public, entrent dans le public. Les mots se croisent au-dessus de notre tête. On parle derrière nous, devant nous, à droite, à gauche et ces diagonales verbales qui sillonnent l'espace ont des intersections palpitantes d'intensité.<sup>2</sup>

This type of staging is reminiscent of Parent allowing a measure of choice on the part of the spectator.

Poliéri pursued this idea in July 1969 with a production of Beckett's Comédie. The attraction of this piece was not in fact the text itself but the musical score by Haubenstock-Ramati that it inspired.<sup>3</sup> Poliéri called his set, "dispositif scénique multidirectionnel."<sup>4</sup> It comprised five simultaneous stages of which the most important was positioned off-centre in relation to six hexagonal podiums arranged in a fan facing the public. The stages surrounded the public on three sides. Beckett's three characters were multiplied by five and hence the spectator could follow the action on any one of the five stages. Each stage would, however, offer a different perspective to each spectator because of the different spatial relationships that existed between five stages and six angled audience areas.

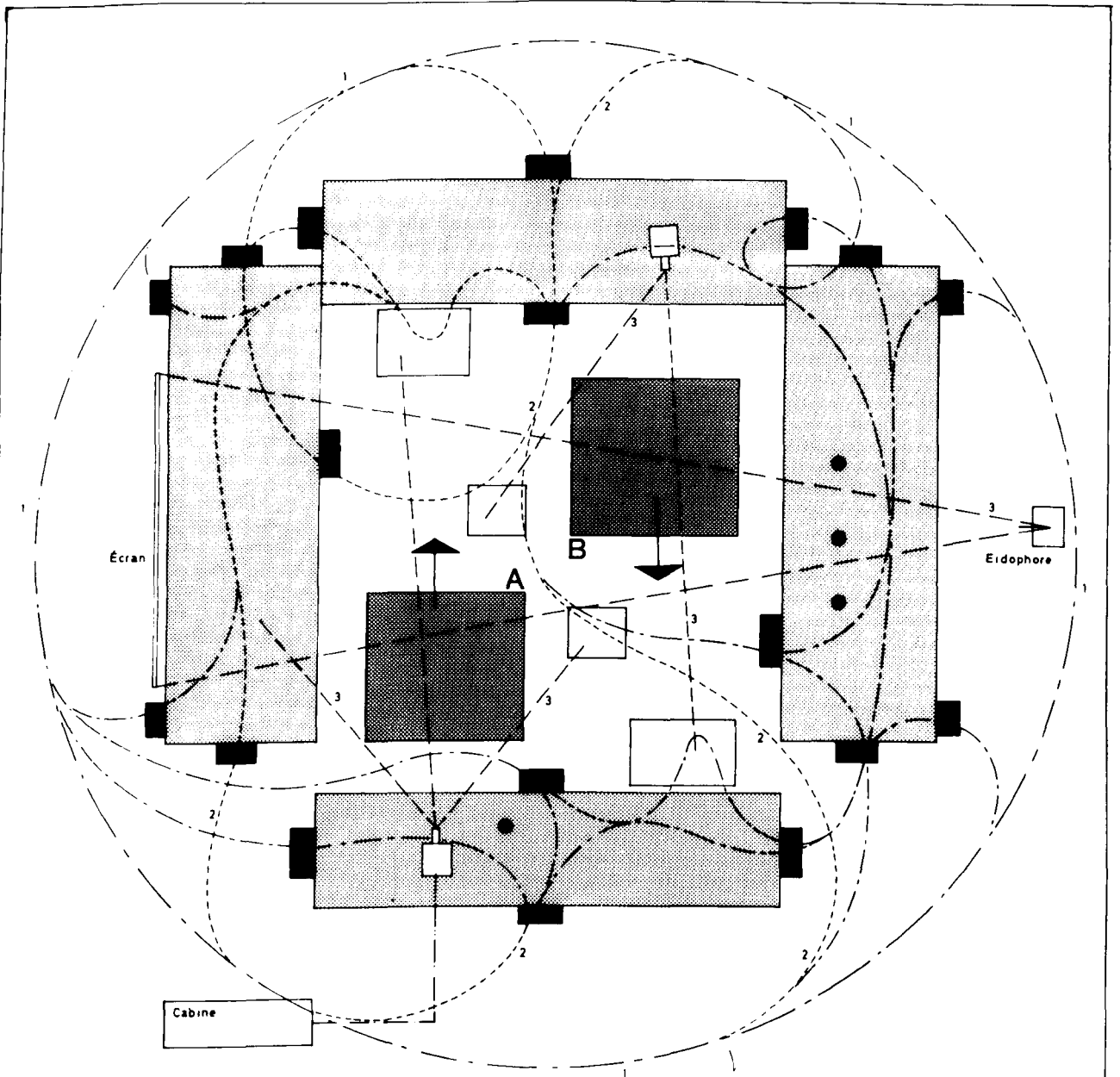
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<sup>1</sup>See diagram of actors' movements, Figure 13, p. 552.

<sup>2</sup>Catherine Valogne, Les Lettres françaises, 5 July 1967, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Poliéri to Webb, Interview, Centre Expérimental, 26 March 1973.

<sup>4</sup>Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, Cahier d'illustrations no. 13.



- 1 Acteurs circulation extérieure
- 2 Acteurs circulation intérieure
- 3 Circulation images électronique
- Points de conection de la circulation [sic]

Fig. 13.

Circulation des acteurs pour "le Livre de Mallarmé"



A third major direction that Poliéri's work has taken combines the possibility of the mobile stage and auditorium with the modifiable theatre inside a three-dimensional space. Poliéri called such projects the Théâtre du Mouvement Total. As early as 1956 his imagination had embraced this possibility:

Théâtre sans public  
 Chaque acteur est un spectacle—ou chaque toile—chaque forme,  
 chaque son—  
 Deux actions étrangères l'une à l'autre se font face—  
 Spectateur de droite, fauteuil de gauche—  
 Du fond—  
 De gauche—  
 Le haut—bas—au milieu—  
 Commencement, fin—  
 Ainsi se déroule le globe.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of using a three-dimensional space had not escaped the Bauhaus group in the 1920s; Gropius in collaboration with Piscator had designed his Total Theater (1926); Farkas Molnar's U-Theater (1924) involved vertically moving stages with drawbridges between circles and elevated acting areas; and Xanti Schawnisky's Théâtre Sphérique (1926) comprised suspended and mobile stages.<sup>2</sup> The most complete predecessor was Andreas Weininger who planned the Spherical Theatre (1924):

A sphere as architectonic structure in place of the customary theater. The spectators, on the inner wall of the sphere, find themselves in a new relationship to space. Because of their all-encompassing view, because of centripetal force, they find themselves in a new psychic, optical, acoustical relationship; they find themselves confronted with new possibilities for concentric, eccentric, multidirectional, mechanical space-stage phenomena. . . . Purpose: to educate men through the creative play of new rhythms of motion to new modes of observation; to give elementary answers to elementary necessities.<sup>3</sup>

As with the concept of the annular stage, Poliéri differs from these historical antecedents because of his dynamism. Except for parts of some of the stages,

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> See Schlemmer, Moholy-Nagy and Molnar, Theater of the Bauhaus, pp. 12-13; pp. 72-76; and Poliéri, ed. "Scénographie nouvelle," p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> Andreas Weininger in Theater of the Bauhaus by Schlemmer, Moholy-Nagy and Molnar, p. 89. Victor Garcia used a spiral structure in a recent production of Genet's Le Balcon in Brazil. The action of the play took place on platforms that moved about a well with the audience positioned at all levels around this central, modifiable space. See: Ilka M. Zanotto, "An Audience-Structure for The Balcony," The Drama Review, vol. 17, no. 2 (June 1973), pp. 58-65.

the Bauhaus group did not anticipate the movement of the acting areas and of the public to any major degree. From the outset, Poliéri had envisaged spectator movement as could only have been expected in that his Théâtre du Mouvement Total developed from the mobile designs including the rotating spectator disc. In the specifications that Poliéri submitted to the architects the whole interior wall of the sphere was to be "une scène mobile à diaphragme" and there were to be places for one thousand spectators "sur mobile rotatif."<sup>1</sup> Enzo Venturelli's initial study (1958) is a metal, spherical, inner surface that can rotate horizontally; the walls allow 20 x 10 metre segments to be opened up and horizontal surfaces to project in order to form acting areas. These elements can all be controlled mechanically and be closed off and withdrawn according to the demands of the production. The salle is thus the inner volume of the sphere separated from the mobile walls. The spectators sit on platforms attached to a central axis, some fixed and some mobile in both horizontal and vertical planes. The central axis can rotate independently of the interior wall. The use to which this structure can be put is described:

Cette salle mobile est conçue pour une mise en scène à trois dimensions. Elle utilise notamment pour les images projetées ou les films, pour les diffusions sonores, pour les acteurs et les figures qui participent avec eux à l'action, les points diagonaux du théâtre reliés entre eux par des rapports imprévus et des interactions qui créent ainsi une axonométrie scénique.<sup>2</sup>

The second study was executed by Pierre and Etienne Vago in 1962; it achieves even more mobility than Venturelli's by eliminating the central axis. Instead, it proposes that the platforms for spectators be attached to pivots that have telescopic properties so that each platform can be projected into and retracted from the spherical space. The feet of the telescopic structures are implanted in the base of the sphere on a disc that can be rotated independently of the rest of the sphere. The seats for the audience also rotate giving even greater possibilities of variation of perspective. The stages are also governed by a telescopic principle in the form of extensions from the

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<sup>1</sup>Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, pp. 69-75.

<sup>2</sup>Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Lieu théâtral—lieu culturel, Exhibit France 30.

side walls into the space already occupied by the mobile audience platforms.

The very ambitiousness of these projects and their immensely complex technology have meant that they have remained simply projects. However, Jean Lorrain reports the construction of a Théâtre Mobile at Saint-Hermain that appears to bear some relation to Poliéri's work:

Entièrement construit de tubes d'acier (2,134 au total) et de ballons de plastiques, le théâtre mobile de Patrick Antoine se présente sous l'aspect d'une sphère en aluminium doublée intérieurement d'une autre sphère en polyester translucide de 25 mètres de diamètre, autour de laquelle viennent s'ajouter quantités de bulles mobiles destinées à abuter les loges. Toutes les combinaisons seront réalisables, les corbeilles s'élèvent ou s'abaissent au gré du metteur en scène qui pourra ainsi, s'il le désire, mêler totalement les comédiens au public.<sup>1</sup>

The position of the audience outside and around the spectacle differentiates this construction, and indeed those of the Bauhaus group, from Poliéri's work which includes the audience. Poliéri's proposal for the Pavillon Océanique at the Montreal World Fair (1965) was to project films onto a hemispherical dome;<sup>2</sup> thus, the interior surface would be invested with a kind of illusory movement. The spectator could become involved with this movement by being filmed himself and then projected onto the enveloping dome. The interior space could also be given a certain dynamism, again illusory, by the play of coloured lights. More real would be the sudden transference of spectators from one area to another by the use of mechanically controlled mobile sections of the floor.

The 1970 World Fair in Osaka provided the opportunity for the Mitani group to construct a simplified version of the Théâtre du Mouvement Total (Etude no. 2). On a rotating circular platform three telescoping platforms were erected. At the beginning of the spectacle, the three audiences each faced a small screen on which a film was projected, thus constituting three independent auditoriums. As the spectacle developed, the three small screens gave way to a 360° projection using both film and slides. At this point, the platforms began to move in all three directions in accordance with the rhythm of the film. At the end of the spectacle, the vertical movements of the

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Lorrain, L'Aurore, 9 March 1972, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, pp. 47-57.

platforms were coordinated with the vertical movements of the dome itself which changed colours and moulded into the projections. Spectators and spectacle became interwoven in the same space.<sup>1</sup>

#### (iv) Conclusion

All the dramatic experiments discussed in this chapter share the common preoccupation of creating a form of theatre that is compatible with the age in which we live. The contemporary world is characterized by movement and fragmentation born of the upsurge in the electronic media. The term "news flash" is symbolic of this situation with the implied notions of a piece of information which is brought rapidly to light but which passes just as quickly. A corollary of the increased capabilities of the informational media is the communication of a sense of space as the four corners of the world are made simultaneously present, for example, in the cathode-ray tube. The experiments described deal with this environment in different ways. Gatti adopts the fragmented style of the newsreel to communicate his concern for the oppressed in society and his call to them to choose to change their exploited position. In brief, one could say that Gatti adapts a revolutionary form to a revolutionary subject. What continually frustrates him in this project is the prevailing conventions of theatrical building.

Parent evolved a new scenic architecture with the artist Agam which ideally expresses in spatial terms the position of modern man in the society of mass media. The central position of the audience in Gilda appelle Mae West articulated the ever-present impact of one decision on a man's life. The play used the complex stage arrangement in the context of a human predicament. As the human condition was abandoned by Parent for more theoretical considerations of the nature of the theatre, the instrument was exposed as being no more than an instrument.

Poliéri describes the Théâtre du Mouvement Total as the theatrical

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Cahier d'illustrations no. 17b.

design that is relevant to "l'époque de la multiplicité."<sup>1</sup> His work emerges as an extension of the experiments of the Bauhaus group who were themselves fascinated by movement and who strove to present new spatial arrangements to satisfy "the specific need of our time for a vision in motion."<sup>2</sup> Poliéri restates the same point of view thirty years later: "Les caractéristiques mêmes de notre époque sont précisément dans cette fluctuation et les notions nouvelles de mouvement, d'espace et de temps, l'essence et le matériau de la représentation future."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Bernard Floiriet is convinced that Poliéri's approach to contemporary theatre is well-founded:

Le spectateur subira sans doute, mais c'est volontaire, des effets de désorientation. Tout y concourt, d'ailleurs: l'oeuvre, la salle, la scène, ça tourne, on ne sait plus où on est. Mais au siècle de la vitesse, et de la mobilité, y-a-t-il là de quoi tellement dérouter?<sup>4</sup>

Involved in the concept of a theatre for our age is the notion of a theatre that comes to terms with the environment and proposes approaches to life for the spectator. In a sense, this could be termed a theatre of liberation. For Gatti, the case is clearly stated: his theatre is aimed at the lower reaches of the social scale in order to induce an improvement in the position of the working class inside society. Parent's theatre is less socially orientated and more concerned with man's increasing passivity in the face of the electronic media. His theatre is an attempt to awaken men and enable them to overcome this crippling power. Poliéri sees the liberation of man not in the eradication of an enemy, be it social classes or electronic gadgetry, but rather in the fusion and cooperation of man with the inevitable advance of technology:

Les choses "vont plus vite" que nous—  
de toutes façons—  
et de plus en plus—

<sup>1</sup>Jacques Poliéri, Interview on Canadian television, cited by Gilbert Tarrab, "La Nouvelle Architecture scénique: sa place dans le 'théâtre du nouveau langage,'" Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, no. 68 (December 1968), p. 102.

<sup>2</sup>Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, The New Vision (New York; W. W. Norton, 1938) cited by Kostelanetz, Theatre of Mixed Means, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>"Entretien avec Bernard Floiriet," La Maison de la Culture à Grenoble, (February 1968).

que l'on veuille ou non—  
 que nous avons quelques chances de dominer les éléments et non  
 d'être dominés par eux—<sup>1</sup>

Modern man should have "aucune peur de la technique" for, as he says in a "partition technique": "La technique est personnelle."<sup>2</sup> The social implications of his work, however, receive very little attention in his writings, and although his ultimate aim may be to harness advanced technology to the psychophysical needs of the individual, what appears to be uppermost in his mind is formal revolution in the theatre:

"Il faut que le théâtre exprime notre époque . . ." Arthur Adamov me disait ceci il y a quelques jours. . . . Mais lui, donnait à cette affirmation un sens social. Pour ma part, mes recherches concernent le plan esthétique. Il est évident que les progrès du théâtre, dans son essence, et dans sa forme doivent suivre une démarche parallèle.<sup>3</sup>

Given this particular bias, it is hardly surprising that Tardieu's work attracted him. Tardieu himself expresses a similar desire to experiment with theatrical form: "J'ai rêvé d'explorer systématiquement dans ses formes passées et dépassées comme dans ses possibilités futures, cette grande machinerie mentale et physique qu'on appelle LE THEATRE."<sup>4</sup>

The danger of such overt commitment to experimentation lies in the ease with which it degenerates into a strict adherence to the means at one's disposal and not to the end in view, into a lifeless formalism. Although Parent acknowledges Poliéri's contribution to research into the discovery of an articulation of the theatrical space that is relevant to contemporary society, he objects to the extreme use of technology in Poliéri's experiments:

Mais il semble l'attendre de mécanismes perfectionnés. S'agit-il d'une contrainte supplémentaire, et le machinisme qui envahit tout l'horizon humain va-t-il débusquer l'homme jusque dans le dernier refuge où la présence réelle continue à se manifester et à prévaloir sur tous ses succédanés.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 24; and Poliéri, "Partition technique III," p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Poliéri to Alain Schifres, "Entretien avec Jacques Poliéri," Combat, 21 January 1956.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Tardieu cited by Emilie Noulet, Jean Tardieu (Paris: Seghers, 1964), p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Parent, "Théâtre expérimental."

Gatti opposes any experimentation carried on for its own sake:

Si j'ai essayé de rompre avec une certaine forme d'écriture scénique, ce n'est certainement pas pour le simple plaisir de "faire neuf" à tout prix, comme certains de nos auteurs contemporains. . . . La technique c'est très bien, mais pour moi, il faut que cela serve toujours un CONTENU d'envergure.<sup>1</sup>

For Gatti, this means of course a socio-political stand. Even Pousseur envisages the possibility for renewed community action in his experiments in serial composition and this in the most abstract and generally considered most apolitical of art forms, music. The conception of Votre Faust is not purely experimental:

Nous croyons que cette musique contient les germes d'une nouvelle communication, que dans l'état extrêmement déchiré, dispersé, disparate de la vie artistique, de la vie musicale contemporains, reflet de la vie en général, certains faits de la musique nouvelle semblent des promesses non d'unification dans une perspective totalitaire, mais de possibilité de communication, de matière à échanges véritablement collectifs.<sup>2</sup>

The constant element of these three observations is the need or desire to go beyond the dehumanized formalism of pure experimentation.

The nature of the experiments discussed brings into focus the relationship between technology and actor. It would appear that the health and success of the dramatic venture are dependent on the technological envelope of the scenic structures being used to emphasize the human content of the play. It is significant that the reviews of Gilda appelle Mae West concentrated on the dramatic effect of the theme of John Eatherly and the Hiroshima bomb, thus implying that the performance constituted a whole, a synthesis of theme and presentation. Clearly, this was not the case for Catharsis composed according to the scenographic preoccupations of Parent; the instrument became central to the play, an exercise in technical virtuosity that denied human interaction. Indeed, despite the claims of Pousseur, the eventual performance of Votre Faust did not steer clear of the same danger; the theory of spectator responsibility and of variability of performance appeared to occupy the centre of the stage:

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<sup>1</sup> Gatti cited by Gilbert Tarrab, "Chant public devant 2 chaises électriques d'Armand Gatti," Socialisme: Revue du socialisme international et Québécois, no. 8 (1966), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Butor and Pousseur, Votre Faust, Cahiers du Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes, no. 62 (1968), p. 9.

"L'erreur était de traiter le problème abstraitement: il est bien certain que nous nous moquons de ce Faust déshumanisé, incapable d'aboutir au mythe, et qu'il nous est indifférent qu'Henri aille à la fête avec Maggy ou une autre."<sup>1</sup>  
 This interpretation is confirmed by Martine Cadieu's assessment: "Tout cela ne prend jamais racine, ni dans la sensualité ni dans la passion, et il n'y a aucun mobile humain puissant pour conduire l'action."<sup>2</sup>

The scenic version of Butor's 6.810.000 litres d'eau par seconde suffered similarly from a surfeit of electronic invention which belittled the actors on stage. This rendered impossible the contact between spectator and actor that lies at the centre of dramatic art: "Plus le spectacle est coloré, lumineux, tumultueux, plus le texte est volontairement plat, sans saveur, sans vraies possibilités pour les acteurs."<sup>3</sup> As a result, the play became a collection of aural and visual stimulations; the effect of the play was on the eardrum and the retina, a sensual experience without the organization of that experience by reflection: "Malgré les tournoisements de la salle et de la scène, malgré le très bien dispositif de Michel Raffaelli on a plus l'impression d'assister à un 'son et lumière' qu'à une pièce de théâtre."<sup>4</sup>

These two types of spectacle part company over the presence or absence of the actor. The principle of the son et lumière is to create a largely imaginary impression of an event by the play of lights and music with the recitation of a text which is often recorded and relayed over a loud-speaker system that dehumanizes even the voice of the reader. Perhaps inevitably, a text that gave "la représentation mentale" for "seule matière romanesque"<sup>5</sup> would not translate onto the three-dimensional space of the stage, especially

<sup>1</sup>Lonchamp, Le Monde, 22 January 1969.

<sup>2</sup>Martine Cadieu, Les Lettres françaises, 29 January 1969, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Kanters, L'Express, 19 February 1968, pp. 56-57.

<sup>4</sup>Colette Godard, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 22 February 1968, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup>Jean Roudaut, "Par<sup>o</sup>nthèse sur la place occupée par l'étude intitulée 6.810.000 litres d'eau par seconde parmi les autres ouvrages de Michel Butor," La Nouvelle Revue française, 14<sup>e</sup> année, no. 165 (September 1966), p. 499.



as the author considered characterization to be an architecture of words: "Un personnage de roman n'est pas un personnage en soi, ce n'est pas un personnage 'réel'; c'est un ensemble de mots, c'est une construction de mots par l'intermédiaire de laquelle nous pourrions connaître les personnages réels, c'est un mot très complexe."<sup>1</sup> The inconsistency of this view with the notion of the vital role of the presence of the actor implied by the dramatic performance is self-evident.

In Poliéri's spectacles the actor is also denied in favour of the interplay of colour and movement. Sensual titillation is the major force of his work, and this, for some critics constitutes the negation of theatre. Thus Charles Dobzynski states: "Il s'agit moins de théâtre que de fantasmagorie, de pure suggestion auditive et visuelle."<sup>2</sup> The performance of the most abstract of Tardieu's plays in 1959 was similarly received by Dominique Jamet: "Théâtre Total, nous dit-on. Mais non, théâtre adultéré, bâtard, équivoque. L'attention qu'on veut attirer sur tout, se laisse distraire par ces amuse-oreille, ces amuse-œil."<sup>3</sup> The augmentation of the text by slides, film, cinemascope, and stereophonic sound systems, it was argued, obliterated the text and obscured the actors. Ultimately, these critics were calling into question the nature of the theatrical experience; their conclusion was that theatre should offer more than the colour and fascination of a firework display.

As for the dramatic author's position in relation to this style of abstract production, it is interesting to cite the example of Arrabal. Inspired, according to Poliéri, by the essay "Le Théâtre kaléidoscopique," Arrabal wrote a scenario entitled Orchestration théâtrale which thoroughly intrigued and excited him as a project:

Il n'y avait ni personnages, ni acteurs. C'était une série de jeux entre des objets, des décors, des labyrinthes, des mobiles, des sons. Je m'étais amusé prodigeusement à l'écrire pendant tout un été. . . .  
Je voulais montrer que des "émotions" telles que l'humour,

<sup>1</sup> Butor to Charbonnier, Entretiens, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Dobzynski, Les Lettres françaises, 11 June 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Dominique Jamet, Combat, 13 June 1959.

l'impossibilité, la surprise, la confusion pouvaient naître entre des objets aussi bien qu'entre des êtres.<sup>1</sup>

This unbounded enthusiasm for the idea was, however, dashed by the performance of the work. Boredom replaced intrigue. It is revealing to quote Arrabal's reaction extensively:

Ce n'était pas la faute du metteur en scène. C'était celle de la pièce. . . Peut-être cela exigeait-il du spectateur une attention trop soutenue, une sorte d'ubiquité. Il fallait qu'aucun mouvement des objets ne vous échappe car le comique naissait de certaines répétitions.<sup>2</sup>

In the mind of the creator the absence of the actor and the complexity of the stage movement could be accepted. In performance, the lack of human interest and the superhuman effort demanded of the spectator were insurmountable problems.

The type of spectator that this form of spectacle demands is described by Poliéri at the end of "Le Théâtre kaléidoscopique":

Mais qu'il me soit encore permis d'imaginer le spectateur futur dans une cage de plexiglas avec deux abdomens et deux visages comme les personnages de toiles cubistes. Entouré de sons, de lumières, de couleurs, de formes, d'ombres, il sera perméable, et de tous ses sens, à toutes les multitudes de combinaisons, d'harmonies, de disharmonies, de rythmes, de sons, perméable à tous les points, droites, courbes, angles, lignes visuelles, auditives, statiques et dynamiques qui se dérouleront dans le magnifique et extraordinaire kaléidoscope théâtral.<sup>3</sup>

The spectator acts as an isolated instrument for receiving and recording sensory data and geometric permutations. This futuristic image of the spectator as a near-machine incarnates the ultimate conclusions of an electronic society as described by McLuhan; for, although being made aware of more stimuli and perhaps being more active in the sensory nerve-endings, man is nevertheless condemned to a solitary existence, communicating not person to person but through the depersonalizing agents of the mass media. Even Parent who opposes this type of society equates the ideal spectator of a simultaneous performance with the pick-up of a cybernetic machine, sensitive to the different signals beamed at it (or him). Gatti's plays, despite the complexity of their staging, do not demand any such reform of the human apparatus. Indeed, the actor on stage talks out to the individual in the audience. To

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<sup>1</sup> Arrabal to Schifres, Entretiens, p. 152; and p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> Poliéri, Scénographie-sémiographie, p. 18.

be sure, Gatti's spectator has to approach the performance with a synthetic rather than analytical frame of reference, but what confronts him can be assimilated.

Transforming the spectator into a machine is a denial of his humanity. The next step is to treat him as a machine or an object by moving him from place to place to enhance the effect. It is noticeable in Poliéri's work that very little time is given to the spectator as a person; the attention paid to him is very much second-hand. Poliéri is interested in the many possibilities of different angles of perception in a set or construction. This almost mathematical calculation bestows upon the spectator the benefit of multiple perspectives. It is, however, the theoretical problem that comes first. At Montreal the spectator became an unwitting element in the performance of a Total Theatre piece describing the creation; his actions were perhaps filmed and projected onto the dome, or perhaps he was played on by coloured lights, or he even could have been transported from one spot to another. In this scheme, the real spectator was the creator, the technician who made these experiments possible. The notion of participation, for Poliéri, becomes synonymous with the physical insertion of the spectator into the action; the principle of audience mobility ensures participation in his eyes. The spectator has no creative part in the spectacle, and indeed, he is no longer even Salacrou's collaborator. By comparison, the margin of freedom given to the spectator in either a Gatti creation or a Parent performance appears truly democratic. It must nevertheless be re-emphasized that Parent, Gatti, and Butor while proclaiming the freedom of the spectator or reader retain their authority as ultimate arbiters of the art work; it is they who lay down the parameters of the work inside which there is possibility for variation.

Just as the spectator's position is altered by these experiments, so too is the actor's. Once more Gatti appears the most conventional in that he bases the performance on the creativity of the actor as was seen in his treatment of the Rabbi in Chroniques. In simultaneous staging the actor loses his privileged status as he has to vie for the attention of the audience. Poliéri's

actor is an instrument on which the organizer of a spectacle plays: "Le rôle de l'interprète humain dans le spectacle pourrait être amené essentiellement à celui d'un instrument ayant la capacité d'exprimer un ensemble--varié à l'infini--de sentiments, de 'notes.'"<sup>1</sup>

The author figure still persists behind Gatti productions and to a lesser extent behind the Parent-Agam experiments. However, the new staging techniques require a new form of scenic writing. Adaptation of existing texts to multiple staging does not meet with success as was shown by Devant la porte at Dijon and an apparent unease on the part of the critics faced by Poliéri's productions of Tardieu plays, despite their experimental nature. The new repertory remains to be written; for that purpose, a valid conjecture might maintain that the concept of the single author will be replaced by that of a team of technicians. Extending the present trend, the spectator and the actor will emerge as objects, the author an amorphous technological team. The simultaneity experiments will have progressively denied the presence of the three elements of Jouvet's trinity. The essential human nature of the theatre will be negated.

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<sup>1</sup>Poliéri, ed., "Spectacles," p. 63.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A REDEFINITION

Louis Jouvet qualified the nature of the theatrical relationships as the perfect trinity of the author, actor and spectator. Throughout the thesis the balance of these three roles has been examined while the conventional understanding of the theatrical process has been overtly challenged. The redistribution of functions and the redefinition of roles necessarily alters the nature of the organization in which they operate. For Jouvet, the initial motivating force was the author and his text. In the thesis, three authors have been given detailed consideration: Genet, Arrabal, and Gatti. For all three the theatrical process is double, the preparation of a text followed by its scenic transposition which often involves textual modifications. Genet is the most conventional in his desire for his text to be respected during the staging process. Arrabal formalizes this double process by lending equal importance to both halves of the process; the preparation of the text and the production are two distinct arts. By so doing, Arrabal grants total freedom to the creator of the production, the director. Initially, Gatti also viewed theatre in this way, but experience of stage performances of his plays led him to consider the performance as the true theatrical work. The resolution of the dichotomy of text and performance comes for Gatti and Arrabal in the form of a close co-operation with a production team: Arrabal became part of a team that included Jorge Lavelli to produce Bella ciao; Gatti joined with Hubert Monloup, Jean-Marie Lancelot and H. Châtelain. Both have continued in this line: Arrabal's most recent works, Sur le fil and Jeunes Barbares d'aujourd'hui, have resulted in part from collaboration with actors; Gatti has immersed himself in group work with his students in Belgium. To a certain extent these authors have become members of a theatre collective, albeit a transitory one, for their latest productions.

The direction that the work of Gatti and Arrabal has taken raises a problem. They have both on occasion abdicated a certain autonomy in order to become a spokesman for a group. Any artist works to articulate a view that will be meaningful for his society; he usually intends to create a general, valid statement concerning the human condition. However, in the case of Arrabal and Gatti, several works produced express the views of a minority. While retaining control of the form of their work, they have allowed the group to suggest the content, and so to a certain extent, they have become propagandists, however justifiable the cause. The conventional independence of the author has been put aside. The artist and his work have <sup>a</sup>lept into the vanguard of a social debate.

Merging author and actor closes the split between text and performance. This collective approach to creation is best represented by Le Grand Magic Circus and Le Théâtre du Soleil. In both cases, there is the reconstitution of the traditional theatrical unit of the group in which all co-operate for the success of the production; one thinks, for example, of Molière's itinerant company or the troupe described by Scarron. Where the two modern acting companies differ from the author-integrated unit is in the position of the actor as the central element of the group. The actor is the creative force, and it is the actor who assumes other functions and roles to assure the production. There is here a return to a traditional form of theatrical process.

The concept of the author as sole organizer and controller of the art work is further diluted by the practice of happening. The happening is open not only to the influence of the group of participants but also to the elements, either through the perishable nature of its components or the physical environment of the piece. To a certain extent, the organizer of a happening (Kaprow in particular) views the world with a primitive vision: the physical properties of his material determine the work. As a result, the author relinquishes direct control over the development of his work.

If the happenner allows the rhythm of natural processes to shape his work, the experimenters in simultaneous techniques create their own "nature"

by regulating an artificial environment. Inside this experimental trend, there is a clear division. Gatti and Parent acknowledge the multi-dimensional space in which modern man lives and seek to encourage in man the ability to cope with the plethora of data produced by modern electronic systems. Poliéri, on the other hand, celebrates the technological advance of man in spectacles of technical wizardry that overpower the individual actor and spectator. The difference in stance of these authors corresponds to alternative views of technology. For Gatti and Parent the individual spectator and actor can affect the course of a performance through exercising his freedom of choice. For Poliéri, the author becomes a supreme architect-designer-electrician who supplies a passive audience with a controlled series of audio-visual stimulations. His style of theatre reflects the domination of the individual in society by the technocracy as described by Jacques Ellul:

Technique requires predictability and, no less, exactness of prediction. It is necessary, then, that technique prevail over the human being. For technique, this is a matter of life or death. Technique must reduce man to a technical animal, the king of the slaves of technique. Human caprice crumbles before this necessity; there can be no human autonomy in the face of technical autonomy. The individual must be fashioned by techniques . . . in order to wipe out the blots his personal determination introduces into the perfect design of the organization.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of the author in contemporary experimental theatre is open to wide interpretation. It is no longer adequately defined as a writer producing a text of dialogues to be submitted later to a production team. This type of author is represented in the thesis by Genet. Genet and Poliéri aside, there appears to be a movement away from independent composition and towards collaboration either with the natural environment or with the other participants in the theatrical process. Indeed, the role of author may even be subsumed under another of the theatrical roles as it was with Molière. As the definition of the playwright widens, so too the notion of the text expands. No longer a word perfect pre-existing script, the text can be a list of technical notes and diagrams for a technologist-author like Poliéri, the description of a simple action for the happenner, or a report of actors'

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<sup>1</sup>Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society, trans., John Wilkinson (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964), p. 138.

improvisations for the collective author.

The re-evaluation of the author leads to a re-appraisal of the position of the actor. The conventional written text requires that an actor approximates to an imaginary character. Nevertheless, even in the case of Genet and Arrabal, the actor is not supposed to settle for the easy portrayal of a character. His work is to be in the sense of un recueillement, an exercise in self-discovery and self-revelation. The actor is to become a sacrificial victim of the production and the public. This implies that the actor should not assume the character, but express his own self through it. The actor's reality becomes important. Gatti recognizes this and adapts his imaginary character to the human being in front of him. In these instances, the actor sheds the stigma of being a secondary artist. Pre-eminence is achieved in the collective creation where the actor's art becomes the central creative force. The elaboration of a spectacle derives directly from his efforts which are perhaps modelled and structured by the objective eye of a director.

If one agrees that the essence of theatre is the presence of the actor, then all these experiments respect that essence. A complication arises when considering Poliéri's spectacles and the requirements of happening. For Poliéri, the actor becomes a physical instrument on which the director can construct a kinetic spectacle; to a certain extent, the actor is no more than his verbal utterances and his movements. In happening, the concept of the actor disappears in favour of the participant; either he has to perform simple repetitive actions or he is given total freedom to create his own uninhibited actions with the aim of initiating a psychic release. The happening demands the extreme either of self-revelation or of depersonalized activity. By so doing, it is at the frontier of theatre as defined by Jean-Louis Barrault: "Tout ce qui se passe sur une scène (ou sur n'importe quelle estrade) est du spectacle. Mais tout ce qui est du spectacle n'est pas forcément du théâtre. Pour qu'il y ait théâtre, il faut que cela passe par l'homme."<sup>1</sup>

The spectator does not escape the attention of the experimental

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Louis Barrault, Comme je le pense (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 180.



dramatists. Genet turns the theatrical experience against him frustrating his desire to believe in the action. Although his experiments failed, Arrabal attempted to subject the audience to rituals of liberation. In later works, the ritual is presented to the spectator as a physical assault whose purpose is to create an atmosphere conducive to unrepressed declaration. The same technique was employed more aggressively by the happeners who ran the risk of treating the spectator as no more than an object propelled through the performance, a result that compromises the desire expressed by the happeners to produce a non-alienated art form. In his celebration of technology, Poliéri too makes the spectator an object by subjecting him to enforced movement and to a bombardment of visual signals. The spectator is understood as a receiver of these signals; the sensorium is equated with the complete human being to the exclusion of his affective and intellectual faculties. In contrast, the work of Le Grand Magic Circus and Le Théâtre du Soleil reveals that physical movement and provocation can be used to stimulate the physical, mental and affective capacity of the audience: one aim of the jostling circus techniques of Le Grand Magic Circus is to promote human contact; Le Théâtre du Soleil employ physical movement as an adjunct to the formulation and communication of the thematic content. Despite the vast scope of the experiments, it is noteworthy that a constant factor can be discerned: the physical involvement of the spectator precludes the self-effacement implied in the contemplation of the conventional art work.

In some forms of happening and in the spectacles of Le Grand Magic Circus, the spectator (or participant) is allowed to contribute to the development of the piece. His responses help to fashion the mood of the performance and often its length. This attitude to the spectator was formalized by Butor who suggests alternative outcomes for the plot of Votre Faust. A line of development is chosen by applying democratic processes such as a vote among the spectators. The aim is to respect the freedom of the spectator as a human being. It is this fundamental right that underlies Parent's experimental productions; the spectator is free to construct his own performance by

swivelling on his chair to choose between the different actions being performed simultaneously about him. Despite the freedom allowed to the spectator in these formalized experiments, his choice is limited to the alternatives presented to him by the author. However, even this restricted freedom constitutes a challenge: the art work is no longer a finished object but rather a work in progress. Process replaces product. The quality of the conventional art work is its ordering of chaos into an aesthetic whole. By applying democratic principles, this unity and perfection will not always prevail. The artistic process is attempting to accommodate the procedures of a political morality.

The interpenetration of art and politics derives from an assessment of the spectator as a social being. Indeed, the theatre is taking more and more into account the social condition and the social composition of its audience. This double-edged process motivates the whole of the national popular theatre movement in France. The experimental theatre attempts in a variety of ways to incorporate the spectator into the theatrical process. In some productions, the spectator is physically met outside the theatre. In others, the spectator assumes a creative role not just during the performance but in the initial genesis of a production. An interesting example was Gatti's collaboration with the state-supported Théâtre de l'Est Parisien to produce Les 13 Soleils de la rue Saint-Blaise which was based on interviews with the inhabitants of the 20<sup>e</sup> arrondissement. The spectator is no longer viewed as an anonymous, seated figure in the auditorium. The theatrical process is endeavouring to respect his rights as an individual and his creative powers.

The post-war period has featured a development in the function of the director. Only since the beginning of the nineteenth century has this role evolved from the organizer of the material conditions of the performance to the interpreter of a play. In recent years, the role has been accorded equal status with that of the author. The manner of the director's relationship with a living author is collaborative. Working in harness, the author and director transform the text into a performance. It is this type of relationship

that Genet enjoyed with Roger Blin and Louis Jouvet or indeed Michel Parent with Jean-Marie Serreau. For the majority of Arrabal's plays, collaboration is replaced by independence of action; the director, in theory, becomes an autonomous creative artist who produces a performance that either respects or ignores the pre-existing text. Without such a text to follow, Ariane Mnouchkine plays a role in the creation of collective spectacles that is secondary to the actors' creativity; her function is to be the critical eye that forms and structures a viable theatrical performance out of the efforts of the actors.

The roles of author, actor, spectator, and director have evolved throughout the contemporary period. It is no longer possible to characterize the activity of any one role nor to summarize effectively the relationships between them. The mutations in their nature can be seen in the wider context of the changes in role and the dissolution of conventional categories in society at large. The class system, although not abolished, is modifying its structure, and the definition of class is becoming more difficult. In industrial organizations, the hierarchy of management and workers is being challenged by the concept of industrial democracy and the demand for worker representation on management committees. Perhaps significantly, the more radical experiments with spectator involvement and collective creation in France date from the period after the troubles of May 1968 during which the idea of participation in society and its organizations was so publicly aired. Furthermore, the theatrical roles themselves are no longer isolated from society: the author, actor, spectator and director all have rights as human beings in society to be expressed and to be respected, even inside the theatre.

Equally, the performance area is being redefined by the experiments. The conventional situation provides two spaces, stage and auditorium. The separation has been underscored in this century by the darkness of the auditorium facing the brightness of the stage. Architecturally, the stage is often marked off by the proscenium arch. Genet, Arrabal, and Gatti all work within this divided space. Gatti is forced to by circumstances although he attempts to defy the confines of the single stage by complex lighting

techniques. Arrabal's early private drama was well suited for the confined space. Only as his plays include more universal problems do they demand a more complex space. With Genet, there is an acceptance of the two spaces; his drama is based on their confrontation. The rejection of the audience by the staged action polarizes their respective positions; the audience is made aware of its limited space and the actors theirs. Genet's work reveals an understanding and exploitation of the conventional theatrical space.

As the roles of performers and spectators have moved closer together, so their physical situation inside the theatre has altered. The audience finds itself in the centre of the production; exploded stage designs allow a flowing exchange between performer and spectator; the actor and spectator become spatially integrated sharing the same area. This is the case for the productions of Le Grand Magic Circus and Le Théâtre du Soleil. It is noteworthy that these companies seek non-theatrical venues for their performances. Not only do they strive to integrate the spectators into the action, they also try to make the theatrical performance a part of social intercourse. The theatrical building, they consider, is not conducive to this process as its conventions reflect a divisive outlook that alienates the majority of the population.

The happening, especially in its later forms, takes performance right away from the theatre. Its actions are situated inside natural environments. More mystical than the other experiments, the happening does not aim to integrate man and his society, but rather to put the participant and his activities within the context of natural processes.

In marked contrast, the simultaneist experiments of Poliéri and Parent exploit the situation of modern man inundated by information issuing constantly from the electronic media. Their scenic designs reflect the multi-dimensional living space of the modern world. Theirs is an attempt to produce a dramatic form relevant to the contemporary world and based on an appreciation of man's technological environment.

The trend in the design of the theatrical space appears to be away

from the simple acceptance of a divided space. The creation of a privileged space for the action or indeed for the whole production has been forsaken in pursuit of either closer physical collaboration of author, director, actors and spectators or more relevant theatrical structures.

The importance attached to space in experimental theatre affects the nature of the dramatic vocabulary. Indeed, space itself becomes part of theatrical language as movement is used to articulate points of view or even to give meaning to the dramatic experience. Happening was said by Oldenburg to have resulted from the interest shown by sculptors in theatre. As a result the experience, both visual and tactile, of physical objects as well as movement through and around them is central to happening. In this context, the word becomes a phonic element and not a means of communication of literal meaning. Much of Poliéri's work is concerned with the plastic, expressive potential of the human form and movement in space. This potential is often exploited by reference to, and comparison with, other art forms like sculpture, film, and the projected image. In both these branches of experimentation, the spectator (participant) is confronted with a whole range of means of communication. The media are as important as the message. This work can be seen as the artistic illustration of McLuhan's theories.

If this line of approach tends to lead to an abstract formalism, movement, colour, and exploded stage designs can also promote vibrant human responses and underline literal meaning. The fair setting of 1789 involves brilliant colour and excited movement which are annexed to a committed reading of history. The acrobatics, fireworks, and music of Robinson Crusoe revive the spirit of the circus and the fun of social interaction. In these cases the dramatic vocabulary is being rebuilt around the art of the traditional entertainer and not electronic inventions.

In this respect, two currents in experimental theatre are evident. The one parallels technological invention and the other looks back towards tradition. Both in their separate ways question the dominance of the written and spoken word. They seek to recast the word's position as an element among

elements and exploit the other expressive possibilities of the actor in space. Even in the work of Genet, Arrabal, and Gatti, all of whom prepare a conventional text, there is marked concern with the non-verbal elements of dramatic language. Gatti's preoccupation with movement, Arrabal's use of objects, and Genet's interest in gesture are all examples of their desire to go beyond the literary and to rehabilitate the dramatic.

In the three facets of theatre discussed, there is a discernable current of research and experimentation. In seeking to redefine the nature of theatrical relationships, theatrical space and dramatic vocabulary, the contemporary experimental theatre is reflecting social change. Creatively, physically, and linguistically, the theatre is approximating to models that pre-exist in society. Social practices are invading the world of the theatre. By encouraging this process of interrelation, the experimental theatre is questioning conventional views of the nature of theatre and art. Pierre-Henri Simon observed in 1959: "Le théâtre suppose toujours la distance: matériellement entre la scène et la salle, psychologiquement, entre le sujet et la vie."<sup>1</sup> This distance has been the subject of many of the later experiments. Physically the spectator has been placed in the centre of the performance. He has even been a partial creator of the play. The subject of the play has become the interaction of the spectator and the actor, not the spectator and the character. The lived experience has become the focal point of the performance and the distance between subject and life suppressed. As a consequence of this approach to artistic creation, the art work becomes the creative process and ceases to be an object. The spectator becomes a part of the work; his involvement in it precludes his contemplation of it. This destroys the principle of aesthetic appreciation: "La perception esthétique est à la fois contemplation et divertissement: contemplation qui libère l'esprit de l'espace vital et suspend le métier d'homme, divertissement lui offrant une délectation plutôt qu'une science."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>P.-H. Simon, Théâtre et destin, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Gouhier, Essence du théâtre, p. 26.

The viewer or spectator of an experimental theatrical production is not expected to suspend his disbelief, to forget the circumstances of his existence. He is encouraged to react as a social being, as a spectator. The dramatic experience is no longer vicarious, but becomes part of his existential experience. Yet according to conventional opinion, fusion of the two realms is impossible. The proposed ideal of an integration of art and life either makes life art or art life. The experimental theatre proposes to go beyond these categories. A redefinition of art, not its destruction, is the end in view. These experiments portend the renaissance of the traditional view of art as a functioning and integral part of the life and work of the community.

## NOTES ON THE BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Bibliography is divided into the five sections detailed below.

### I. Bibliographical Sources

Works of bibliography are arranged alphabetically by title.

### II. Primary Sources

This section contains all texts, essays, documents, and articles written by those authors selected for special study in the thesis. The arrangement of entries under each author will follow the order: complete works; collected works; individual works, documents, essays or articles; editions; and works written in collaboration.

### III. Interviews

This section is divided into nine subsections. Each subsection is dedicated to the interviews given by one of the writers discussed. Inside each subsection, entries are listed in an alphabetical sequence by name of the interviewer.

### IV. Reviews

This section has the same nine subsections as above. Each subsection is further divided into the work (1, 2, 3 and so on) and the particular production (a, b, c and so on).

### V. Other Sources

Entries are arranged alphabetically by author and then title observing the following sequence: sole author; editor; joint author; and joint editor.



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Théâtre V: Théâtre panique, L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie.

The copy of V used in the thesis is from an early printing.

It carries Théâtre IV on the title page and the essay, "Le Théâtre comme cérémonie 'panique,'" is at the back, an arrangement of the contents that differs from later printings.

Théâtre VI: Le Jardin des délices, Bestialité érotique, Une tortue nommée Dostoïevsky.

Théâtre VII: Théâtre de guérilla: L'Aurore rouge et noire, Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs.

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