



« Les aveugles ». Daniel Jeanneteau. 2013

Page de gauche/left: Pieter Bruegel. « La parabole des aveugles ». 1568. Huile sur bois. 86 x 154 cm. (Galleria Nazionale, Naples). Oil on wood

C.R. I don't know how you're going to manage, but first of all I couldn't keep myself from thinking that this theme was represented in a short play by Cervantes, *The Altarpiece of the Wonders*. A crook puts on for the inhabitants of a little town a show that, he says, only those free of Jewish or Arab blood will be able to see (this problem of pure blood was an obsession in seventeenth-century Spain). He announces all kinds of wonders. Everybody is standing there, wide-eyed, but when the curtain rises, there's nothing. And everyone says, "Oh shit! I've got Jewish blood! I've got Arab blood!" When the show is over, the people all clap thunderously. And that is how a con man shows the invisible. Nobody has seen anything, but everyone is persuaded that there was in fact something to see, something that they would have seen if they didn't have the bad luck to be a bit Jewish or a bit Arab. This vision of the invisible brings me to Goya and his *Caprichos*, and in particular the famous *Que viene el Coco*, in which we see children terrorized by their servant who is trying to get them into bed, threatening them that Coco will come, Coco being a kind of bogey-man, except that no one has seen him. The idea of Coco is so dreadful that no one can imagine what he is like. Goya, I think, is the first person to have represented this bogey-man. And while the little boy and the little girl are hiding against the servant, who seems to be imploring Coco on her knees, Coco is there, occupying half the image. Goya often represents two different levels at the same time, as if there was an invisible boundary between the visible and the invisible, which has become visible to those who are afraid of it. Also, Goya has wrapped his Coco in such a shroud that we can't see his face or his feet. He is a pure ghost.

D.J. He represents him without changing the absence of representation.

C.R. But this is a drawing. In the theater, how can you argue that it is possible to convey the invisible?

D.J. One of the particularities of theater is that it makes something exist on the stage during the performance, something that wasn't there before, that simply didn't exist. The being of this entity does not reside in the materiality of what figures it.

C.R. "No materiality," you say, but then what are you going to show?

D.J. In Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, Hippolyte wonders whether it is "possible to see in an image that which does not have an image." We can turn the question round and ask whether it is possible to represent in an image that which has no aspect, or on a stage, that which does not exist. What should one put on stage when staging a scene from *The Blind*? Is it enough to have twelve persons waiting and a corpse in the middle, to see people trembling with fear and miming blindness? If I had to sum up the movement of my work as a stage designer I would speak of a struggle against the image, precisely with the idea of restoring the fullness of presence as a non-visible event, to avoid having the symbol, meaning or the fiction of space dominating the action of space, the event of presence. In fact, what the director has to do is elicit visions rather than make images.

The most precise images that I recall from a show are precisely the ones that take shape within me when I am listening to a storyteller. They are images that I wouldn't have been able to produce on my own. It is as if this storyteller's power of stimulation has fertilized my hearing, and from that I have taken visions that are extremely precise, which are written within me with the weight of experience. Here we are back with Cervantes' villagers, in thrall to an invisible show, but without the simulacrum. It is in this sense that directing

and staging are an art in their own right, and not the sub-product of painting, of architecture, or even of literature. It is an art which must, it seems to me, be conceived in keeping with this economy of the imaginary, this voluntary incompleteness which invokes the intervention of the spectator as the author of part of the performance.

FROM GENTLENESS TO VIOLENCE

C.R. Do we see bodies in your production?

D.J. Of course, and even more than that. The audience and the actors will be together in the same space, with no differentiation. The Studio-Théâtre is a free, simple space. We will set out the chairs in every direction and they will accommodate the actors and spectators all mixed together. With the idea of finding something of the living expanse of the landscape, with the actual bodies of the spectators. Everything will be visible, lit, material, but the image of the show will not be treated. The voices, their organization in space, the sound apparatus, will be very precisely worked out, but there will be nothing to see. The materiality and technical nature of the apparatus will be perfectly visible, we won't hide a thing, but nevertheless everything should help produce mental images made up of sensations. At the same time as the actual rendering of the text itself.

C.R. One might imagine that after a while the spectators, because they are not really distinguished from the actors, may feel the same unease and sense of perdition.

D.J. I would like the light, which starts out strong, to get gradually dimmer, for the outlines to blur at the same time as the sounds get more faint. The idea being to accompany the public, very gently, towards an extreme violence. But without sacrificing the burlesque as it is in the Brueghel painting, at once terrible and comic. The snapshot of Brueghel's painting captures a moment that we can laugh at, even though it is one of the most tragic representations of the human condition that there is. ■

Translation, C. Penwarden

(1) Preface by Paul Gorceix in an edition of Maurice Maeterlinck's works for theater.

(2) "Something absurd (something in which, therefore, the understanding can of itself find no delight) must be present in whatever is to raise a hearty convulsive laugh. Laughter is an affect arising from a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing." Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Oxford World's Classics, 2009, p. 161.

(3) "This experience of the word we know but that we cannot attain is the experience in which the forgetting of the humanity within us aggresses [...] It is the experience where our limits and our death are confounded for the first time." Paris: P.O.L., 1993, p. 59.