Prospero learns to be merciful, Miranda to love her 'brave new world', and so on, while even the consistently funny Trinculo and Stephano, stepped up by the actors' antics to the highest level of comedy, learn to love this world's expensive but tacky consumerist goods: it is a growth of a kind, seen joyously, without the slightest trace of a sneer. Prospero washes a mud-caked Ferdinand in rites of passage for his marriage to Miranda. Caliban brings in pails of water for Miranda, who washes herself. Or else he washes her with loving care.

In a production full of discoveries that open out Shakespeare's text to a completely new interpretation, Caliban and Ariel are the most exciting of all. This is so for Caliban because he is neither a beast nor a slave, but a deeply nuanced human being. The scene in which Miranda says goodbye to the island shows a Caliban who, to all intents and purposes, has replaced the mother whom she had lost; and her wrenched cry, as she attempts to run back to him, shows only too clearly the relations of affectionate interdependence that have developed over a lifetime between them. Elsewhere, Caliban, who is played by the relatively burly Aleksandr Feklistov, dances and prances about with the lightness of a fairy. His is nothing but sheer happiness. In the uproarious scenes where Trinculo and Stephano go mad with designer clothes, sunglasses, and bank cards – a delicious discovery not only for the characters, but also for their actors – Caliban–Feklistov plays at being 'cool' in unknown territory.

Ariel, for his part, is a rather prim goody-two-shoes, who really does demonstrate his capacity for changing shapes and identities. He clones himself into four besuited beings who also appear with him at the balcony level of Ormerod's design and subsequently become musicians playing accordions and wind instruments. Most impressive of all in Ariel's transformations is how Andrey Kuzichev in the role turns him into a log that Ferdinand, in the continuous rite of passage imposed by Prospero, is obliged to lug towards an alluded to (by the action) pile of wood. Ariel, meanwhile, flits back to the point of departure, suggesting, by this, as well, that Ferdinand has to haul numerous logs for an exacting taskmaster.

Two crude scenes seriously mar this strong production. It is as if Donnellan is afraid of going with its beautiful flow and thus must ironize or send it up somehow, in a kind of self-deprecation against all that (totally tasteful, by the way) Russian exuberance. The first concerns the show trial conducted on the balcony, which resonates with a similar scene in *The Winter's Tale*, composed by Donnellan with the actors of the Maly Drama Theatre in St Petersburg in 1997. The second is the masque of Act IV, Scene i, which is a heavy-handed spoof of Soviet collective-farm harvest celebrations. Really, there is no need.

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Ian Herbert

Scenography as 'Visual Bridge' in Prague

Report on the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space, 2011.

For ten hectic days at the end of June, Prague's usual crowd of tourists, hen parties, and stag-nighters was augmented by almost as large a mob of scenographers, designers, and design students, performance artists and theatre architects, all gathered for the twelfth PQ. Its full title is now the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space, reflecting a major change in emphasis: the all-new PQ places much more importance on the way in which theatre has in recent years moved out of its conventional auditoria into found spaces, factories, galleries, and streets, where the work performed has expanded far beyond the classic text-based canon.

The change was in part dictated by the unfortunate chance which saw PQ's traditional venue, the city's art-deco Industrial Palace, suffer a catastrophic fire in 2008. It gave the organizers the opportunity to have a fundamental rethink about where PQ might go in future, a rethink which took the form of wide-ranging consultation with largely avant-garde thinkers and practitioners. So PQ 2011 has gained an Artistic Director, Sodja Lotker, who – deciding that scenography is 'a discipline existing in between the visual and the performing arts' – determined to bridge that gap.

One beneficial result is that the event has spread all over Prague. The main international competitive exhibition, in which some sixty countries showed their wares, was housed in the National Gallery, together with more than forty national student stands and a basement display of Extreme Costume. Thirty countries contributed to the Architecture section, also competitive, in the cultural centre which has been developed in the historic St Anne's Church, while all over town street theatre, installations, workshops, talks, and exhibitions kept popping up almost overnight.

The most impressive sign of the new regime was a collection of thirty large white cubes, forming a performance maze in the piazzetta of the National Theatre, where the passers-by could interact with the work of designers, choreographers, artists, musicians, and other occupants of the far frontiers of performing art. Next door, in the National Theatre studio that now houses the black-light Laterna Magika, lighting and sound designers were holding court.

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The international exhibits retain their importance, even if they veer uncomfortably between installation and retrospective. Many countries, including the USA and the UK, still use PQ to show their designers' best work of the last four years, though both of these countries tried to follow a theme – Britain with references to its own successful *Transformation and Revelation* exhibition, the States with a grungy, dimly lit garage setting and some pious references to 9/11 and Katrina. Others, taking up the installation challenge, chose to showcase the work of one scenographer, or even simply to put an idea into effect that may have nothing to do with actual performance. In a welcome development, several countries made actual performance part of their exhibit.

The international jury looked both ways. The winner of the Golden Triga for best exhibit was Brazil, whose stand had a strong personality of its own as an installation but also managed to show very effectively many of the country's most interesting recent performances, including one which also took the medal for Best Production, a piece by Teatro da Vertigem staged on Sao Paulo's heavily polluted Tiete river, seen from a barge. The jury's comment that the audience was 'totally immersed' turned out, mercifully, to be a figure of speech.

Best stage design went to the two contrasting scenographers featured in the Croatian exhibit – a couple of darkened rooms showing quite lengthy videos. One, the collective Numen, had taken up the challenge of providing interchangeable settings for three shows (*Dido and Aeneas*, Camus's *The Plague*, and *Death in Venice*) playing simultaneously in contiguous spaces. Since these were being seen by three separate audiences, one wonders whether this was anything more than an act of scenographic bravado. But it convinced the jury, who gave the Croats an additional gold medal for Best Use of Theatre Technology.

The award for Best Curatorial Concept went to the Hungarian stand, another elaborate joke to follow 2007, when visitors were photographed, rubber-stamped, and led through an awesome series of checks before emerging from a non-existent exhibit. This time the stand was dedicated to a non-existent designer, whose career, as described in the very funny accompanying leaflet, ticked all the most pretentious boxes of pseudo-scenography. Visitors had to put on leaky plastic overshoes to enter and stand in a shallow pool to watch a spoof interview with 'Mihaly W. Bodza', projected on the ceiling.

Racing round over a hundred hugely varied exhibits and evaluating them was quite a feat on the part of the jury, and is one of the problems that still beset PQ. Some stands contain a great deal of work and impart a great deal of information – the expensive exhibit from cash-strapped Portugal had an explanatory book almost as large as the whole PQ catalogue. Other countries made their point more concisely, as did Cuba with just three elegant set models.

All deserved to be studied at length, but there is always the pressure to move on to the next display. In consequence, one-note stands like that of Hungary, or the gorgeous, all-white Icelandic room in which a white-clad actress could be observed contemplating suicide, are likely to have greater impact from minimal content – as witness the Georgian stand, on which Robert Sturua's house designer put up a few trees in homage to the country's greatest poet.

Everywhere, form struggles with content. Turkey had a great solution to describe a project which had been taken across Europe on a train, playing at stops along the way: they set up a whole carriage of the Orient Express, with scenes from the project playing on the 'windows'. Outside the main venues, a mass of activities included a number of established names working with students. Heiner Goebbels's group produced a series of scenes inspired by T. S. Eliot (whose *Four Quartets* produced the PQ motto – 'at the still point of the turning world'), which showed a quirky originality but collapsed artistically when the youngsters were required to act. Roma Patel's team came up with a quite stunning installation in a church crypt, evoking a Czech fairy tale with minimal resources.

Over in St Anne's Church, the architecture display induced a discipline among its exhibitors by limiting them to the space of a single table. The many ingenious responses to this challenge made great impact, with Britain showing the evolution of Tyrone Guthrie's beloved thrust stage from Edinburgh's Assembly Hall to the new Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford through a series of beautiful models set in the table's surface. France, who as a result of internal quarrels didn't have a stage design exhibit, used a table which was a fine example of metalcraft in itself to show four different approaches to found spaces. Spain set up their work-in-progress photos on a couple of postcard racks. The Mexican table, showing how some old government buildings had been reclaimed, and the Greek display of two versatile new theatres, caught the eye of the jury for a joint gold medal.

In another converted church you could follow the life and work of one single Czech designer, Milon Kalis, lovingly put together over a number of rooms, showing family photographs and letters as well as numerous costume sketches, set models and production photographs to give a complete account of a creative career tragically cut short by mental illness. It went quite against the new spirit of PQ, yet was one of the most satisfying experiences of my stay.

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