

In this Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord we could do many things; repaint it, change it, break something, add something. This is really very interesting and creative.

One day, for a production of *Happy Days*, we moved all the seats forward and we played on the stage as it was in the 19th century. For the first time we demonstrated that the stage in that position behind the proscenium arch doesn't work. There is bad contact between the stage and audience. The way Peter Brook transformed the theatre into an Elizabethan theatre makes it a fantastic place, but it was probably a very bad venue in the past, built with a bourgeois atmosphere.

In Caracas, where we performed the play *Ubu Roi*, the owner of the space had transformed his theatre into a garage! (Just as could happen in Paris!) I kept the building as it was. I built a wall each side of the stage to create wings for the actors and to reduce the volume, and we played like that. We built seats for the audience, and the audience created their space by themselves. There was just one entrance, because to control traffic in the garage the owner had closed all the entrances except one. On the first night 500 people were outside for only 300 tickets and seats. We had to open the door to let the actors in; we said, "These are the actors!" and all the audience said, "We are also the actors!" Everybody went in and that's why there are five rows of people sitting on the floor. This reduced the space but the actors dealt with that; they just worked around and the audience took the space they needed. It was a very, very strong atmosphere. That's what theatre is; the space is in the imagination.

The exact opposite happened in New York. We had to find a theatre for the *Mahabharata*, and after a month of searching we visited an abandoned theatre almost in front of the Brooklyn Academy of Music. It had been used as a church by Mormons. We couldn't find the key of the door so we all, Peter Brook included, had to climb a ladder and go in through a window we had broken. After we had visited the Majestic Theater we had one hour to decide what to do as we had to go back to Paris. I had visited 200 spaces in Manhattan before that day, and Peter and I knew immediately that the Majestic Theater was the right one, the space we needed in New York for one year to play the *Mahabharata* and *Cherry Orchard*.



Top: the form of the Bouffes du Nord which did not work; centre: a performance in the garage in Caracas; bottom: the converted Majestic Theater in New York.

The doyen of found spaces, Jean-Guy Lecat describes his work for Peter Brook, Jason Barnes explains the difficulties and successes of using such venues abroad, and Simon Harper tells the story of film studios and bus garage used by the Almeida company.

I chose to move the floor to the new stage to the reduce the balcony for had only distant contact. We did that with an arc was, maybe, a good idea for Peter Brook, but not forever. So he built a temporary stage – which is still there after 15 years and which is now almost fixed, probably for ever.

The new organisation of the seating looks today a little bit like the Bouffes du Nord. There are six boxes on both sides; two are below the floor. We took out the front of the boxes to use the space as a possible stage set – to be used for anything, musicians – and then we painted the wall. The balcony is still there; we just made a passage, and we kept about 50% of the upper balcony.