



## Conversation with Alejandro Luna

*By Giorgio Ursini Ursic*

Alejandro Luna was not born in Europe; his passport states that his country of birth is Mexico. Certainly, Alejandro Luna is one of the most important stage designers in Latin America, but his work, “luminous magic”, tells us something more.

It expresses as much the deep roots in the old continent as new meanings, of a commonly shared ancient legacy of dreams reconstructed according to new laws and linked to other traditions. As travellers, letting ourselves be led, through his inventions, by his creativity that seems to have no limits when it is about light and shadow, or when it recalls spaces made from nothing (or rather, from illusions, that immense void from which the theatre is born), it reflects ourselves and something of ourselves is discovered.

In this way, following the utopia of Giorgio Strehler who, today as in the past, shepherds us onto the path of curiosity towards the prodigious meeting between men both alike and distinct, we as Christopher Columbus though with a difference: we do not merely wish to discover “the other” but to rediscover ourselves.

The artistic life of Alejandro Luna is conducted under the sign of shining creation, and to us the attempt to shed light on something that he rediscovers beyond the Atlantic.

### **Alejandro, what was your first contact with the theatre?**

I certainly wasn't the type of child that played with puppets or improvised performances from tales read. The only thing I remember is that my grandmother took me to the theatre every Saturday to see Spanish comedies by the Blanch sisters; she was a friend of Isabelita and so, at the end of the show we would stop by to see her in her dressing room. It was a family ritual. Now, it amazes me to think that they produced a different work every week. How did they ever manage that? It was only later, when I saw *Los signos del zodiaco* (The Signs of the Zodiac) by Sergio Magaña that theatre succeeded in really moving me as never before; that experience taught me that the stage intensified life. From that production on, the expectations I harboured towards the theatre changed, but those

were always expectations as a spectator, I was then far from imagining that I would spend a lifetime on the stage. It was only later, when I began University, that certain circumstances came about that pushed me towards the theatre. I went there to study Architecture but I very soon crossed the campus to Arts and Philosophy, attracted by the female students. Up till then, I had only attended classes full of guys, right from junior to high school so when I got to the School of Architecture I realised that out of a thousand students only ten were girls. I can say that I changed place so as to go looking for the other half of my species. At the Faculty, my friend Eduardo García Máynez was studying Directing in Dramatic Arts and I very soon found myself at his side both in studying and in taking part as an actor in the students' Drama Group productions. And as I was the actor who studied Architecture, and therefore knew how to draw and was familiar with materials and such, my companions always asked me to design the sets.

### **What were you like as an actor?**

The first show in which I acted and for which I produced ideas for the design was a double bill: *A Marriage Proposal* by Anton Chechov and the adaptation of a collection of tales by Avercenko. The second was *Liliom*, by Ferenc Molnár, where I played the part of Ficsur. The funny thing was that at the beginning they asked me to act on condition that I took care of the stage design and in the end they asked me to do the stage design on condition that I forgot about acting!

### **And as a stage designer?**

*A Marriage Proposal* had a very simple set, for the "La Capilla" theatre, a tiny playhouse that Salvador Novo had placed at our disposal. I have to confess that, forty years later, when I went to Siberia, I realised how much importance the dogs had in that work. By contrast, the design of *Liliom* was very ambitious and disproportionate to our abilities. I made loads of mistakes. From then on I can say that the best way to learn is to err and I would say that I learnt a great deal, almost everything, with that stage production. Amongst other things, that the shows for students, where there were only young people, it was better to choose from the expressionist repertoire. So, after that catastrophe, Eduardo and I worked on *La máquina de sumar* (The Adding Machine) by Elmer Rice and *El mono velludo* (The Hairy Ape) by O'Neill, etc., with decidedly better results.

### **Did you attend the courses in stage design at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at UNAM?**

No, I am self-taught. Even though I found the courses in Architecture and Theatre that I did between 1957 and 1961 were of great use, the most useful aspect of my training was hands-on experience. Before leaving university, they offered me a contract to take care of seasonal productions of the Student Drama Group preparatory courses. At the end of each course the group had to stage works directed by theatrical masters, actors, critics and amateurs. Various masters such as André Moreau, Héctor Azar and Eduardo García Máynez himself had the good taste to select works by Molière or by Aristophanes, adaptable to the youthful spirit of these amateur thespians. But the rest of it was atrocious, particularly the Greek tragedies. I had to prepare about twenty sets per year with the minimum economic resources. So, I had the idea of lumping together all the funds and preparing a series of modular elements, a kind of mosaic or jigsaw puzzle made up of various backdrops and platforms, adaptable for any production. By adding together just a few things it was possible to represent the particular era, to suggest the character... I worked for four or five years, at a rhythm of twenty sets per year, in all around a hundred sets. I learnt the craft. And I believe I have had a privileged education.

### **I believe that the University finances the professional theatre. How was it in those days?**

The University Theatre was structured at various levels: at the initial level it constituted an option for the preparatory grade and for the schools and the professional faculties, an amateur theatre that sought talent and audiences; that of the students of Dramatic Art and that of the professional. I had to do them all. In effect, the University financed the professional theatre. Perhaps the only other

example is that of Chile. At the University one experimented new repertoires and new theatrical forms, new languages, that is. It was the centre of the avant-garde. At University there were the “sacred cows”, talented young directors and they welcomed painters of the New Plastic Art and actors with intellectual pretensions. In those years the theatre of Juan José Gurrola, José Luis Ibáñez, Héctor Azar and Héctor Mendoza was all the rage and they worked with painters who created sets that reflected their very personal plastic universes or the latest “ism” in trend.

### **Which other institutions helped the theatre?**

Amongst others, the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes stood out and – an unusual case in this world – the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social. These organisations took it upon themselves to aid particularly theatre that was “well done”; there were also independent producers and a respectable commercial theatre. Bellas Artes sponsored, for example, the works of Seki Sano, who was assistant to Stanislavski and Mejerchol’d and had disseminated that realism that was to develop into the style of acting in the openair, in the Spanish way; or that of Fernando Wagner, a pupil of Reinhart and master of the directors of my generation; or that again of our authors, national glories, such as Emilio Carballido and Sergio Magaña, or directors like Xavier Rojas and Rafael López Miernau, who introduced, respectively, the theatre arena and a moderately political theatre. The Seguro Social example in Mexico was a case sui generis. With the support of the President, Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964), thanks to his meeting the politician, Benito Coquet, a lover of the theatre, and thanks to the Prieto brothers, Julio, a stage designer and Alejandro, an architect, the conviction spread that, in order that social welfare be complete, this had to include the theatre. To this one owes the construction of a mighty infrastructure, over thirty theatres built in one go throughout the country, and the creation of a company that would stage with competence the works that Mexican society would have to see, a type of theatre directed rather at the middle class than at bluecollar workers.

### **What tendencies in theatrical design did you recognise at that time?**

Two tendencies: that of stage designers by profession and that of painters. Among the first, the most important and the most productive, professionals immersed in the construction of an institutional theatre and linked to commercial theatre, there were Julio Prieto, Antonio López Mancera and David Antón. The other tendency was that of painters who became involved in the theatre, without previous experience but with artistic and intellectual ambitions, free of prejudice. In the fifties and sixties, it was again artists who renewed scenery. Just to cite a few, I still remember the marvellous sets by Juan Soriano, Arnold Belkin, Manuel Felguérez, Lilia Carrillo, Leonora Carrington, Vlady, Roger von Gunten, Kasuya Sakai, Vicente Rojo, José Luis Cuevas... The majority of these plastic artists created various stage sets then returned to paint in their workshops and studios. Apart from the fact that these activities require a full-time commitment, the monitoring of the work and the individual decision were not compatible with working as a team, with theatre as a group effort.

### **Which did you prefer?**

I was interested in everything, I didn’t find myself in either of these tendencies. I admired the fresh, bold sceneries by the painters but for me this was a wholly unusual approach; I am not a painter, I had never painted nor considered ever doing so. I saw all the sets by Julio Prieto in the theatres of the Seguro Social, while Toño López Mancera, my master at the Faculty, taught us as part of the course the grammatical structure of the language of stage design and invited us to see the stage and lighting designs of the productions at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. However, due to my training as an architect, the use of traditional techniques created conflict for me. At school they trained me according to the canons of rational and functional architecture, an honest architecture, where it was sinful to simulate a material or falsify perspective or make improper use of ornamentation. In fact, the term “scenography” was used in the negative sense, it was synonymous with perversity. Perhaps there was in effect something that stopped me from siding fully in favour with the tendencies

dominant in stage design in that period, maybe the fact that stage design was not my principal interest, it was merely my passport into the theatre. I loved everything about the theatre: the architecture, the dramaturgy, the direction, the production, the rehearsals. I particularly enjoyed watching the actors make their characters come to life, the teamwork. Right from the start, I worked together with Eduardo. Together we chose the works, we discussed the parts and planned the direction, the stage design and the lighting. I always attended the rehearsals, taking care to modify the design according to the stimuli and the results gained through the process of staging a production. Following the death of Eduardo, I began to work in the same way with the Polish director, Ludwig Margules and we have continued in this way for over twenty years.

**Were you more inclined towards an architectural style of stage design?**

One is driven to split stage design into the pictorial and the architectural according to the dominating characteristics of these two disciplines, but these are divisions that disappear when one deals with the specificity of this art sui generis. In fact, in the configuration of the space certain elements converge that could be considered pictorial, sculptural or architectural. Architecture organises space in our lives while scenography, that of a production but the production is immersed in a delimited time, that which the actors and the audience share together. During this lapse of time, the space is transformed, it moves, it is active, it changes meaning. It follows that stage design, unlike architecture, is an ephemeral, kinetic art. Going beyond the time of the staging, the scenery can be viewed as painting, as architecture, as sculpture, as decoration, as an installation... but its scenic effect can only be exercised as part of a performance with actors and an audience. Scenography is therefore a collective art, and dependent. Now, I am able to articulate this thought, in the beginning, I merely intuited this. My sketches were storyboards, comic style. I understood that design for a theatre pièce was design involving a sequence of moments, a series of spaces: a movement or a sequence of movements that accompany and comprise the dramatic action, the emotive gestures of the actor-characters... Far from the kinesics created by Gordon Craig and realized by Josef Svoboda, I find that a design for the stage is a design of a movement, little matters if this is expressed through mechanical or optical movements, what is sufficient perhaps is its meaning as interpreted by the spectator. It seems to me that stage design is closer to music, to dance, to cinema, rather than the plastic arts.

**Please go into more detail on the concept of space as a key aspect of stage design.**

Perhaps my training as an architect – five years spent in the labyrinths of descriptive geometry and perspective, experimenting with the definition of various types of space – prevents me from approaching scenery design from a different angle. I believe that space is a structure that the mind activates from the sensorial stimuli that it receives. The eye detects the limits of the space, the form, the proportions, the scale, the texture, the colours, it perceives the abstract values that depend on that which is revealed by illumination – in fact, what is perceived is light, but perhaps there are also physical elements (doors, furniture, staircases). Thanks to this information, the structure of the space in the mind of the spectator is interpretive, it will depend on subjective values, on a sum of experience, perhaps even on his or her state of mind.

Designing a stage set implies an objective aimed at defining limits to a space, to a void that begins to take on a form once it has delimitations. Up to this point, we have spoken about a static space, now it needs to be given a time, the other coordinate of theatrical design. As the text gradually progresses and the actors begin to bring it to life, to dialogue with and within the space, the latter, which exists as such in the mind of the spectator, will be transformed, and will change in meaning. I believe that stage design is the design of this movement. Save rare exceptions, the public receives sensorial information that is visual and acoustic. We also know that matter is not seen until it is touched by light; we know too that light is invisible until matter reflects it onto our eye. Space is dependent on light, on its intensity, on its direction, on its temperature. However the light is, that is how the space will be. Light and space are consubstantial. These theoretical musings would perhaps

sound sterile if it were not for the practical consequences involved in the day-to-day carrying out of one's profession. On the one hand, they require that the stage designer's and the artistic director's contributions merge and combine to produce a seamless production, a joint effort that interfaces with traditional skills. On the other hand – and in my case – they require that both the stage and lighting design are created as something indissoluble.

**You stated earlier that stage design is a dependent art. On what does it depend?**

It is dependent on all the other elements that are part of the production. Stage design does not have the autonomy of painting or literature. It depends on the text, the direction, the acting, the music... Moreover, I think that stage design is not restricted to the work of the stage designer alone. If we accept that stage design is the definition of the space for a production, this definition is influenced either directly or indirectly by a number of co-designers: the architect who designed the building that houses the theatre and who defined the spaces and the rapport created between the production and its audience carries a great deal of influence; the author who intervenes with his explicit or implicit notes; the ideas of the director who defines the space in a palpable way; the choreographer who, through the movements performed by the actors and dancers, opens and closes the space; the musician who transforms it through sound... In effect, I am convinced that a certain tone or look expressed by an actress can redesign the space and the way that the spectator interprets it, which the latter, individually, constructs in his mind's eye his own scenic landscape through the stimuli received from the stage design. In this sense, the theatre, and therefore the stage design, are collective and dependent arts. This type of reflection has conditioned my work for years and perhaps they are original only in the measure in which I have integrated them into practice. I began to think in a systematic way in my work after having attended, in 1967, the Symposium held on occasion of the First Quadriennial of Prague. In a way, that exposition was the declaration of independence of Scenic Design. Prior to that, stage design was assessed according to the canons of the Artes Plásticas of the Sao Paulo Biennial. I even went so far as to think that scenic design did not exist, that only the theatre exists. Now I think that stage design is direction.

**Do you think that the public is aware of this association?**

No, I don't believe so. I think that neither the public nor specialized critics are interested in penetrating these labyrinths. The public receives an audiovisual image, without knowing which tones or which movements have been proposed by the actor and which are those that have been indicated by the director; which contours are imposed by the geometry of the space or by the lighting design or generated by the interior emotions of the dancer or by the formal concerns of the choreographer. These are arguments that do not interest the public, or perhaps the public should not be interested. The public perceives them and the final result must satisfy.

**Today's theatre is mostly performed within the container whilst experimental forms reject it. What is your opinion on this?**

Theatrical architecture currently tends towards standardization and even more so towards globalization. The space conceived in the Italian manner has been newly imposed in the light of projects and constructions that have not succeeded substantially in modifying the theatre. Only when there is some local production or certain stagings from outside the small theatres are not too many, as the schemes that are not Italian adapt themselves better to that which is inaccurately called experimental theatre.

**Why do you say "inaccurately"?**

Because I believe that, if we speak about artistic experimentation, any theatre that has this ambition must run an artistic risk. Because, if we refer to a scientific experiment, a scientific method must be followed, keeping the variables under control. And also because the experimental element of a *mise-en-scène* does not depend on the arrangement of the stage in a theatre. Brecht and Bob Wilson

have renewed the scenic language without leaving the container. And in Mexico the small multi-functional spaces have served to stage memorable productions and to host the theatre of Grotowski, of Kantor, of Brook, for example. I think that architecture imposes itself when theatre becomes institutionalized. We have returned to the container after the vicissitudes of the early twentieth century, those of the period between the two wars and those of the sixties, but we have returned in a different manner.

**Just as we can speak of a national dramaturgy, do you think that one can speak of a national stage design?**

Not in the sense of the British, Polish or Czech schools. One could possibly speak of a national stage design on condition that there was a national theatre that was well defined, institutionalized, with a certain solidity and without interruptions in the programming. I am referring not only to dramaturgy but to regular seasons, repertory theatres, to public theatres with a tradition behind them... In pre-Revolution Mexico, to find a stage design with national characteristics, be it destined for the theatre, the opera or light opera, was like looking for a needle in a haystack among the hundreds of drop curtains abandoned in Spanish and Italian theatre companies. It was only after the Revolution, when our painters and intellectuals returned imbued with the European avant-garde, that an original diversification took place: the “isms” were adapted to national themes, the “zarzuela” gave way to the revue, dance poetry readings: the “Poesia en voz alta”.

After that, the revolutionary sixties were to arrive... You see, my country is a little strange, there are no repertory theatres.

Without being New York, the theatre is organised like Broadway, from season to season. One forms a group, there are rehearsals, the debut and, when the repeat performances are over, the group disbands. It seems difficult to remain a theatre group for any length of time.

There are no longterm projects and so one does not tour. The State has only sporadically attempted to form repertory theatres. We have seen various attempts on the playbill to establish a National Company but these efforts have lasted as long as a given political mandate. That said, in Mexico, as elsewhere, in the space of a year you can get to see a couple of extraordinary works, something good, but also something mediocre or bad. What is lacking in Mexico is an institutional theatre with a regular public, and this is how, in my opinion, national schools are established.

**What is it about a project that stimulates your interest?**

I shun proposals or projects that immediately must have something to say. I am driven by curiosity, to make my own discoveries during the working process, by the desire to dig deeper, to reappraise.

In my way of working I can only work on two, or a maximum of three projects a year and in effect I can choose. There are texts that I would like to thoroughly examine scenic-wise, others on which I have already worked and to which I would like to return in order to make a comparison, as they still preserve mysteries yet to be revealed. Works that await a cast, a director, or the right balance. But it is not only the texts that attract me, I like working with friends, with young talents, and try to do new things as I like to vary in genre and in atmosphere. Perhaps by way of example I can cite a list of the most recent designs on which I have worked: Ceremonias del and the theatre were developed with decidedly nationalistic tones, that contemplated the demand of the indigenous element and of hybridization. This was the era of Mexican muralism, the “golden age” of Mexican cinema, the thirties and forties. The muralists burst onto the scene, in particular in ballet. It was also the period in which we welcomed Spanish exiles, who were to heavily influence acting styles and scenic design.

My initiation into the theatre began towards the end of the fifties, when Fernando Wagner, André Moreau and Seki Sano introduced us to another method of acting, when the Actors Studio and North American cinema began to exert influence, when theatre was performed in tiny halls and when the University hosted the emblematic seasons of the avant-garde. Those of poetry readings:

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### **In your case, if I'm not mistaken, the work on the image, on the construction of the guiding image of the production, comes first from the direction. Can you elucidate on this?**

No, it's not that. When a director offers me a project that I am not familiar with I ask him not to tell me anything, to let me read it without comment and to give me a certain amount of time before the next meeting. I do this to take precautions for the first reading, which for me is very important as it will be the only chance I have of reading the text with preconceptions. I try to read with an open mind, distancing myself from actors and scenic solutions. I read it quickly so as to get inside the work, let it penetrate me. Just as for any other human being, reading produces ideas, images and emotions. So, when I have finished reading, I make notes on what I have seen, thought and felt. I close the text and try to forget about it for a while. I think this interlude given over to an unconscious fermentation of impressions is extremely valid, as it is intuition at work. After having let this certain amount of time lapse – the longer the better – numerous analytical readings then follow, but that first reading will be unrepeatable. I then make a rapid enquiry into all that the work contains and then meet the director for the first time, during which we invariably discuss his ideas.

And I think that the director takes into consideration my ideas. At this stage there are no scenic images yet.

**Image-wise, how do things proceed after the initial reading of the text? How is an image generated? Where does it spring from?**

I begin by visualizing things when I see the actors and imagine their way of incarnating the characters. I clothe them, I put on their make-up and I arrange their hair in a provisional manner – people cleverer than I would do this in a definitive form. I try to imagine all this in what would be best to see them against: smooth or rough surfaces, empty spaces or surrounded by objects. Then I begin... naturally the director's ideas carry weight, as do the dimensions and the theatre's vanishing points, the technical problems and the balance. Many images gradually surface, some compatible with the dramaturgical point of view, others that are not appropriate. But the director needs a design project, not isolated images. I sketch out various possible solutions, sometimes developing them in parallel, but the moment arrives in which one must decide, and that's where conflict arises. It is in this phase that it helps me to refer to my notes taken after the first reading. At times the solution is at hand, at others not at all. Inevitably, one has to imagine what the director would do with these solutions, that is, I orientate myself with the sketch knowing that the director will go way beyond that which I imagine to be possible.

**You have worked on various productions of classical texts. You have also designed projects for stagings of authors such as Beckett and Pinter, authors who define the space in which the action evolves in an almost obsessive manner. What is the difference between such diverse experiences?**

I think that theatre is the art of the present, of the here and now, that the production is for today's public, even if the temporal settings remain those of always. The process of approximation interests me, through which to discover the equivalence of signs. I feel more comfortable when I am designing works of the past rather than those written by new authors. I am interested in the process of translation of the classics into our time and our space. For the production of Uncle Vanja I reproduced the arrangement and used the furniture from the main house of my family's farm, the samovar was the only Russian element. With authors who write copious indications for the stage design one can occasionally do something while keeping the style, as in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, by Tennessee Williams. I had designed this staging for a theatre-in-the-round, with a disc that took an hour to make a complete turn, thereby offering the audience a constant change in viewing angles. Faced with the meaningful images of Beckett I cannot but admire them.

**I would now like to touch upon some essential elements of your work as a stage designer. On the one hand, the constant concern of narrating places and environments in a natural way, without ever indulging in iconography. On the other hand, the relationship between light and shadow, which in your designs always represents a basic element. Not to mention the theme of silence, the silence of spaces, naturally.**

I detest pleonasm. At times the stage design has to carry a narrative imprint, but if this results in a simple illustration of the text I avoid it. I design spaces for a future production and not for the texts. Two examples: in *Don Giovanni* most of the cast were no longer quite so young. The director and I decided to portray Don Giovanni as terminally ill, attracted by his own imminent death as an extreme act of desire. His "place" would be the "Padiglione Siviglia" of the Ospedale Spagnolo in Mexico City. In that case the stage design had to assume narrative functions in order to give new meaning to the text. By contrast, in *Idomeneo* it wasn't so important to see Crete in an eighteenth-century setting and so I could use a more abstract language focused in particular on the music. I am convinced that it is better to allow the spectator to construct places and environments rather than impose a categorical image on him. I would say that my task consists in measuring out stimuli in the normative sense, so as to trigger the spectator's creativity, something in which I hold

great faith. What I cannot allow him, however, is to second-guess what is about to take place. More than a narrative concern, it's about concentrating on making the spaces speak.

I appreciate the ambiguity when it serves to allow the spectator to make his own reading. In fact, not only ambiguity but also contradiction.

In dreams we perceive images, stimuli free of time or order and it is memory that helps us to recount a dream. I have applied a process similar to Bernhardt's *El hacedor de teatro* (The Creator of Theatre). The spectator at times saw a pinball machine, at times a butcher's refrigerator, at times wood panelling, at others, a brilliant green. Sometimes the salon scene was placed downstage, sometimes upstage. Spectators do not remember the contradictions, they choose their own stage design and the dream impression remains.

### **And, as regards the lighting?**

On light and shadow much has been written. I doubt whether anything new can be said. Light produces and transmits emotions to human

beings in a complex manner. Even though at the origins of these interrelations there has to have been natural light (that of the sun or moon)

or artificial (the usual electrical sources) and despite this we are used to that which Henry Alekan calls "our daily bath", we all expect that at the theatre, where the naturalism of cinema cannot exist, light behaves in an extraordinary manner. In fact, it could be enough to create the effect of a sunny day with a simple black backdrop on which a ray of light is silhouetted, to think, believe and even feel what the actor is experiencing when he is touched by the sun. I am fascinated by the idea that on a stage bathed in light, all it takes is for a character to come on with a torch and we all understand that night has fallen. Undoubtedly, an intense light (unidirectional), modelling, that accentuates the contrasts, will prove more "dramatic" than a soft, flat, diffuse light (multidirectional). That said, it is not necessary to follow this rule to the letter: one can attempt to set a tragedy in a mundane homogeneous light whilst relying on the acting for dramatic intensity or one can see what happens with a comedy if a light is positioned laterally, so as to cause a strong contrast. At least, this is what happens to me: it's enough to begin to believe in the goodness of that which is arbitrary to try for the exact reproduction of a twilight. I have experimented light with shadow on a set, so as to make the actors float within a white field; a diffuse light that flattened, that destroyed the third dimension, so as to see the set like a comic or like a pre-Columbian code. We certainly obtained effects but the public soon ended up with a headache. It seems, in fact, that the audience likes a non-protagonist play of lights, mixed with component elements gathered from the history of painting, from photography and from cinema. The possibilities of dialogue between light and matter are infinite, the choice of resources in function of the plastic-dramaturgical objectives and their technical realization is an exciting task. I believe that nothing better exists.

### **Your first image is illuminated?**

Any image is light, only light. Any image, whether graphic, photographic, design, or text is none other to the eye than light reflected off surfaces that filter and absorb light. Imagination is the ability to visualize this light in the absence of stimulus. We watch the actors... we could also say: we watch the light reflected by the actors. According to how the light will be, so will be the space. In visual terms the space begins to exist from the light. So, I cannot distinguish between stage designing and lighting. When I talk about stage design I am talking about light reflected off surfaces, garments, objects. Designing both comes from a single impulse. If you turn off the light there is no image.

And this something that is so obvious that we tend to forget it. We come into the world within space and surrounded by light and we live without needing to think about it but if we aspire to make space and light into a language or a fundamental part of a language then it is necessary to be conscious of it. I think that learning to illuminate implies unlearning the way in which we are used to looking and begin to see everything in terms of light, of intensity, of blending, of direction and of colour. To

always see how a face receives the light reflected from the floor, or the colour that dominates to the right if the wall is blue and to distinguish the temperature of the light sources. I like to talk on this subject with photographers because they touch light with their hands. They do this in a precise way when opening or closing the lens, when they fix more or less exposure time, when they develop the film and when they print. We all possess the ability to imagine, any text produces mental images, illuminated material, visible matter because it reflects light, and if we look carefully we can see the luminous sources, the direction of the incident ray, pick out its intensity and colour. Training can make all this become automatic.

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