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## 'I'm not at all interested in meaning'

By *editor*

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Eric Vigner is a native of Rennes in Brittany, France, where he was born and brought up in a worker's family. He did his graduation in visual arts from the University of Brittany and went on to study in Paris at the National School of Theatre Art and Techniques and at the National Drama Academy. In 1991, he founded a theatre company, Suzanne. There he gained a reputation with works like Savannah Bay. Plue D'ete, A Hiroshima, Le bête dans la jungle all by the great writer Margurite Duras with whom eric shares special bond, and other plays like Maison D'os, Espspace Go Theatre Montreal, and Antogona.etc Eric Vigner was awarded the honour of Chevalier dans l 'Ordre arts et des letters' in 1998. Currently, Eric heads the CDDB — Theatre of Lorient, National Drama Centre which is one of the 33 French national drama centers and the only one in Brittany. It aims to create, host, produce and tour with theatre. The theatre is supported by the French state, the region of Brittany, by the Morbihan Foundation and by the municipality of Lorient. Over the years, this has become one of the leading Centres in France.

Eric's concerns to create a dialogue with other theatre cultures are driven by his belief in inter-lingual theatre. He believes "that there is a common point of meeting in all languages of the world; we can hear this in fundamental sounds like a shout or scream. In this play, Bartholo has a peculiar moaning groan that is special to him and it communicates what he is feeling. We have to find a way o create a theatre language that is universally understood. I will explain by an example. Some years ago I did a play on the Brancusi versus the American administration. The Brancusi case deals with what is a work of art in the eyes of an American customs officer in the Port of New York towards the end of the 1920s. This was the question an American court had to decide in a lawsuit that was to become famous, with Brancusi filing suit against the US Customs Service. One of Brancusi's works, Oiseau (The Bird) had not been recognised as a work of art by a customs officer who levied a 40 per cent ad valorem duty on it upon entry on US territory, the rate applicable to all sorts of manufactured products, while works of art were deemed exempt from customs payment. The sculptor sued the American administration and won. So there was a big discussion on one of his sculpture The Bird in space — is it art or is it not art? Brancusi was not concerned with whether it was bird or not he wanted the audience to feel the flight. "The word 'bird' did not have the same meaning for the counsel for the defence as it had for plaintiff. For the one it meant a flying object, for the other it constituted the very essence of flight. In the Brancusi trial, the testimony of different players was couched in the same words, but that one of voice was different and so was the emotional content. The meaning as such was not enough. When testifying they testified to different things. On stage, I am not interested in meaning, not at all. What interests me is the language, the writing, as poetic material — the word per se... It is not meaning that we are concerned with: what we work with is the tone of voice, what we search for is the moment when the tone makes sense."

“When I did Moliere’s The Bourgeois Gentleman in Seoul, South Korea, I had a similar experience. I took the actor who was playing the character who is learning the alphabet and asked to shout to make any noises he wanted. You are a child. You are discovering the capacity of your lung power. You must practise your alphabets at the top of your voice. And you know that the children in both in Albania and in France laughed in the play at this point. Eric has said that he sees the Albanian people in black and white. How is it so?

“You see, for 50 years Albania was closed to the world. It only opened up for working visits recently. We saw some b/w photographs of the Albanians, mostly of the peasantry and some of prostitutes taken by a well- known photographer the Albanian Marubi. Then came the venetian blinds These were used by the women in this area. So the white screen separating the black interior from the white exterior was also perforated. Useless Precautions, the subtitle of the play, is important because whatever one attempts the result will be the same; the count will get Rosine and Figaro would have ingratiated himself to the count leaving one unhappy person Dr Bartholo the man who truly loves Rosine.

This is part of Eric Vigner’s trilogy in black and white: Barber of Seville, The Solitude of the Cotton Fields and Othello follow each other. If Barber of Seville is the comedy of jealousy, Othello is the tragedy of jealousy and The Solitude falls somewhere in between. All three are the victims of a blind spot or of a paradox. If Bartholo is the paradox of negation of the outside world, in The Solitude it is the client’s negation of desire that results in the choice of weapons and in Othello the blind spot is what drives him to kill a wife he loves deeply. From the Barber... the black hole expands in Othello, to engulf the narrative.

Arts Age Correspondent Kavita Nagpal

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