

# "Pluie d'été à Hiroshima", artists at work

by Joëlle Gayot

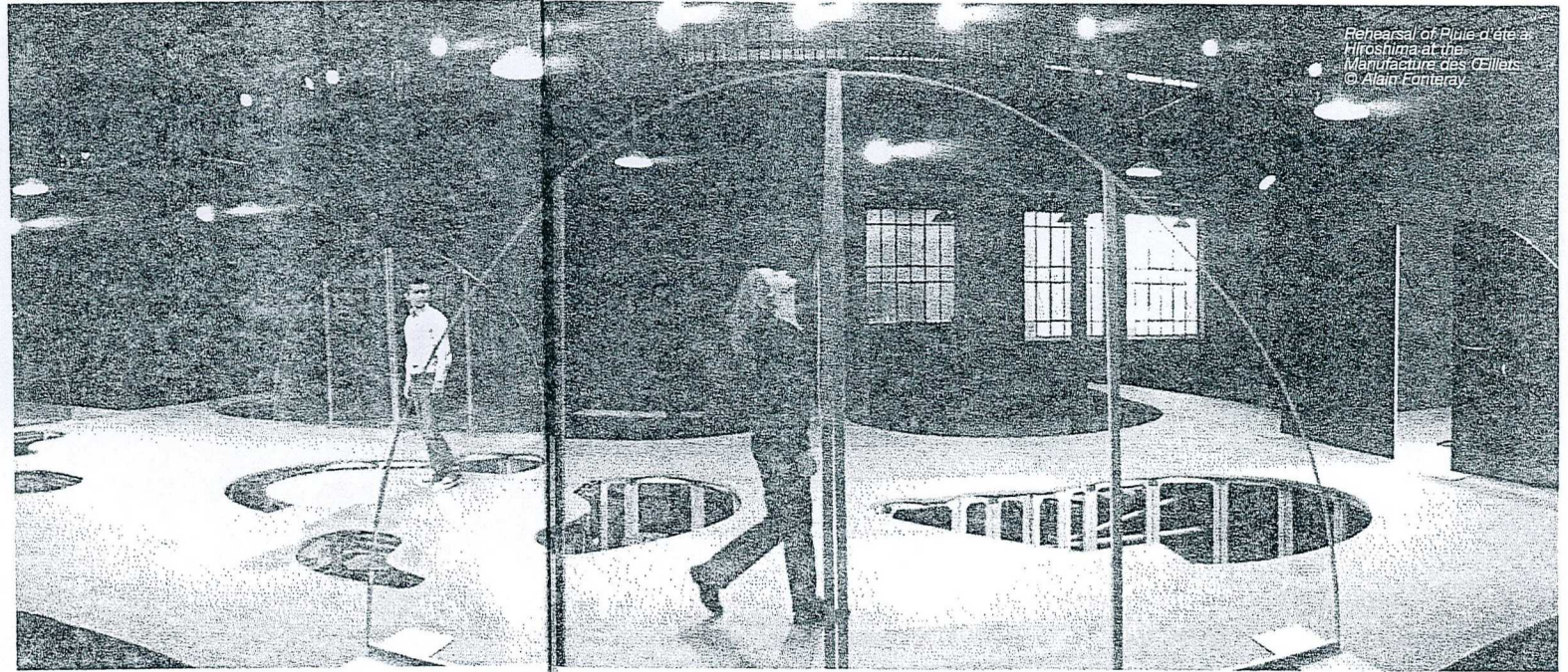
Thirteen years after the première of *La Pluie d'été* (The Summer Rain), the novel he had adapted for the stage, the director Eric Vigner returns to the writing of Marguerite Duras for a composite production entitled *Pluie d'été à Hiroshima* (Summer Rain in Hiroshima). A diptych combining *La pluie d'été* and *Hiroshima mon amour*, the script of the film made by Alain Resnais and which the writer had confided to Vigner in 1993.

The first stage version of *La Pluie d'été* still stands out in the memory even if one hasn't seen it. It is the very example of this magnificent trace which the theatre leaves behind itself. A phantom trace, shared by those who were really there and the others who saw nothing, but who, from repeated accounts, imagine that they were also witnesses to it, a little frustrated to have missed the event and obliged to wait until history decides to repeat itself. This is what happened on the occasion of a double anniversary: the tenth anniversary of Duras's death and the tenth anniversary of the inauguration of the Centre Dramatique de Bretagne in Lorient.

## Stretching Duras' writing

In revisiting *La Pluie d'été*, Eric Vigner is faithful to the spirit of the original but does not limit himself to the repetition of the same. This isn't a revival, it's a re-creation. He takes hold of Duras's writing, extends it and stretches it to another of its facets, the script of *Hiroshima*. The chronology of the production, moreover, attacks the periods of writing in reverse order since *Hiroshima* predates *La Pluie d'été* by more than thirty years. Furthermore, with this script, the novelist was making a first and decisive step towards dialogue-based writing. Although he reverses the order of things, Eric Vigner takes care to change nothing, or almost, in the scenography which hosts the two texts. The only variation is that carried out by vertical, luminous and transparent panels which the actors slide from one point to the other as they move about the stage.

Everything takes place on a single platform, invented by Michael Amzalag and Mathias Augustyniak, founders of the graphic creation workshop M/M and regular artistic collaborators of Vigner since 1996. They are also the ones who each season design the theatre brochure. To press close to the body of theatre, they imagined a stylised stage whose shape recalls the contours of a jigsaw. This immense platform is hemmed on the edges by alcoves which host tight groups of spectators, placed on the same level as the boards. Each audience block, from its box, has to raise its eyes to the actors who move about on this podium of tormented forms. The actors' performance space is also perforated with holes which allows them to enter and leave from underneath or to perform with their bodies half hidden.



The performance is placed in this original space which incites one to reconsider the way in which one receives a production. An audience position which is displaced plus a modified actor's posture, this overturning of old theatre traditions is sufficient in itself to change the codes of performance and to create something new. Thus, by inhabiting the space from the inside, the actors turn the stage into a matrix where the author's language is literally born. Eric Vigner therefore unfolds *Pluie d'été à Hiroshima* not on (a set), but from (its origin). He anchors speech in the ground (the under-ground) of theatre and gives birth to it from the depths of the stage. Thus, what isn't seen but exists in the entrails of this enigmatic territory very quickly takes on the value of non-

said, and almost that of a parallel fiction in its own reality in a theatre kept hidden from our gaze and which manifests itself to our awareness when the actors come back into the light des projectors.

## Actors of flesh and bone

Unwinding the threads between *La Pluie d'été* and *Hiroshima*, Vigner takes great strides through Duras's writing in the way of a geometer. He restores from the writing a strong and concrete physical sensation which breaks free agreeably from the trap of abstraction and the habitual quavering which generally accompany attempts to stage Duras's texts. Here, what one hears is the humour, the humanity, the profound sense of derision and the absurd, the goodness and the love of Duras for the characters she creates. The acuity of her gaze, her lucidity

whose driving force and dynamic are the language of Marguerite Duras.

One is surprised to hear echoes and resonances. The story of Ernesto, the child prodigy of *Pluie d'été*, who refuses to go to school because he will be taught things he doesn't know and the story of the two lovers for whom a night spent in Hiroshima brings hidden memories to the surface. On one side, a child who knows the world without having learned anything about it, on the other, in the smoking debris of Hiroshima, a woman who cannot forget what the world has taught her. Balanced between the two, the theatre reveals a hiatus, irreducible and abyssal, in which are lodged knowledge and fantasy, memory and fabrication, lies and truth. This hiatus must be approached as a imaginary world left ajar, which is fiction itself, in Marguerite Duras's version. It must be approached

and the sharpness of her ear are caught in mid-air by actors who don't simper, who don't sing, who don't seek to express the eternal and exasperating "little Durassian music" but on the contrary work with the body, the deep and strident tonalities of the voice, with laughter and the flesh. What Duras gains in density and in materiality in this full and generous performance only adds to the charm of this impalpable trembling which characterises her writing. While there is nothing in common between the two texts, nothing striking at first glance, the theatre nonetheless weaves a link from one to the other. We do not watch two productions placed beside each other in mutual indifference. On the contrary, the audience is caught up, swallowed up to be more exact, by a perpetual movement

following the path precisely traced by the theatre, in Eric Vigner's version, decidedly more an artist than ever. A theatre whose ambition and quality one can feel: the invention of a virtual, impalpable writing, written in the spectators' heads, and whose vocabulary and codes are suggested there, before our eyes, in the immediate and the concrete presence of the production. □

*Pluie d'été à Hiroshima*, after *La Pluie d'été*, by Marguerite Duras, and *Hiroshima mon Amour*, by Marguerite Duras.  
Adaptation and staging: Eric Vigner. Première in Lorient, May 2006.  
Production presented at the Avignon Festival, from 11 to 24 July 2006, Cloître des Carmes and revived at the Théâtre Nanterre Amandiers (18 Nov. to 22 Dec.)