

香港劇場年鑑2015

舞蹈・戲曲・戲劇

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舞台設計的補白與啟示

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(一) 透明與補白

「好的設計顯而易見，偉大的設計透明不現。」(Good design is obvious. Great design is transparent.)

這是著名平面設計師祖·斯帕拉諾 (Joe Sparano) 發人深省的名句。應該看見甚麼？應該看不見甚麼？如何看？而看到的代表甚麼？看不到的又是否代表不存在？作為舞台設計師與劇場人，在創作期間，我們經常會在以上疑問之間反覆思量。當我們嘗試將劇場的視點拉闊，放在一個城市的人文與歷史舞台之上，究竟劇場與舞台美學，在這個城市之間，曾被看到甚麼？應被看到甚麼？又存在過甚麼？

作為一個國際都會，香港的生活節奏——不論工作抑或文娛活動——盡皆急速、重疊而頻繁。單看戲劇製作，香港的四十多個演出空間，一年之內可以上演超過二千五百多場演出。其數目雖然龐大，但製作多、演期短，往往有口碑之作還未形成氣候時，已經落幕。又或有潛質之作，劇評刊出之際，創作團隊早已解散，並已分別投入下一個演出項目，檢討及改善的時機欠奉，更遑論可以累積和沉澱更有深度的版本。

大概，我們日常生活的地方是一座玻璃之城，璀璨多采卻底子單薄，閃爍同時脆弱。經歷過的藝術活動不少，每每人潮過後總是留白太多，跡近透明而被遺忘。

為將香港舞台設計近四、五十年的發展史作重點式的記錄與展示，拋磚引玉，香港舞台技術及設計人員協會（下稱「HKATTS」）遂於二〇一二年底草擬計劃書，以《舞台上的平行空間》為策展意念，構思舉辦以一系列的舞台設計展覽為主，輔以專業對話、專題工作坊及展覽導賞等綜合活動，向民政事務局「藝能發展資助計劃」申請撥款。及後計劃獲得取錄，HKATTS最終於二〇一三至二〇一五年期間，籌辦了《香港舞台設計展——舞台上的平行空間》三部曲，分別於二〇一三年十二月、二〇一四年十月及二〇一五年一月在香港文化中心、銅鑼灣希慎廣場及香港藝術中心順利完成了構思中的所有活動，嘗試以微薄的力量，集結眾人的意志，開啟一頁為舞台美學補白的篇章。

而當中籌辦三個展覽的構思過程與經歷，在展覽閉幕一年多以後，是時候來做另一個策展補完計劃，記錄吉光片羽，好讓經驗累積，期望可以沉澱與發展下一幅更有層次的圖畫。



《舞台上的平行空間》第一部分（2013）
設計圖由作者提供

(二) 舞台就是幻象？

猶記得HKATTs於二〇一三年籌辦《香港舞台設計展》第一部分時，曾經以「舞台就是幻象」作為序言標題。當時為了在香港文化中心大堂，呈現一個結合平面視覺與立體空間、可堪玩味的場景以展示本地舞台發展的點滴，討論過後，我們以美國著名畫家愛德華·霍普（Edward Hopper）一九四二年的名作《夜遊者》（*Nighthawks*）作為設計意念，將其平面畫作建構成一個大約九米長四米深的三角形展覽空間「夜遊者的空間」。

構思初期，我們簡單地回顧了一些舞台設計發展史的資料，從二千四百多年前的古希臘劇場，到十四世紀文藝復興時期的透視圖及至十六至十八世紀巴洛克時期的佈景舞台，再到二十世紀具現代意義的鏡框式舞台、彼得·布祿克打破了以上模擬真實觀念的「空的空間」（*The Empty Space*）理論等……在浩瀚的學術書海之內，對從事舞台創作經年的劇場人而言，有時難免會想得太多太繁複，也難以取捨。最後，我們嘗試轉換一個角度，從經過香港文化中心的遊人的視點出發，重新引發想像。及後我們發現，作為一個「舞台設計入門」的展覽，在這個公共空間「建構幻象」，似乎較學術論文式的展示更為適合。而「營造氣氛」，也是舞台設計的重要一環。再經過一番尋索，愛德華·霍

普的《夜遊者》成為了這道給公眾進入劇場美學世界的「隨意門」。

我們在這個「夜遊者的空間」裡，展示了一些較早前錄製好的劇場前輩們——如「香港歌劇之父」盧景文教授、資深劇場技術經理李炳強先生等等——的錄像訪談，展覽牆上還裝裱了一些劇場定義與睿智短句，引發觀者的思考。同場的另一個較小的展區內，我們以地圖的形式，簡介了香港劇場的分佈與發展概略。在旁的展覽櫃，亦分別以全息投影錄像（*Hologram video*）及虛擬現實感應裝置「*Leap Motion*」等多媒體技術，動態展示香港劇場的演出資料。這一系列的展示，透過這一道名為《夜遊者》的「隨意門」，在六天展期內，帶了超過七千名「日遊者」進入這個幻象的舞台。

(三) 商場·劇場

首站完結，下一站在銅鑼灣希慎廣場的第二部分展覽籌備工作隨即進行。跟文藝氣息較濃的香港文化中心不同，在銅鑼灣這個熙來攘往的鬧市中，如何向「購物就是一切」的遊人推廣舞台設計，是一個充滿疑問的過程。

記得第一次到商場實地考察時，經初步商討得悉，希慎廣場將慷慨地給予我們分佈於五個樓層的分散式展示空間。每個展區面積雖

小，卻可同時展示給不同樓層的觀眾，讓「推廣」的目標更有效益。而經過上回的經驗，我們是次以銅鑼灣購物觀光的遊人作設計視點。首先想到的，是分散的展區難以讓觀眾順序地觀看展覽。縱使我們不以「順序」作設計策劃，亦難以引領觀眾看畢全程。由此推論，一本簡潔而資料齊全的小冊子看來是必須的。而作為一個進駐商場的文藝展覽，我們也得參考一下廣告設計的要義。包括以下這一句：

「思考多一點，設計少一點。」(Think more, design less.)

這是另一著名平面設計師艾琳·路佩登(Ellen Lupton)的睿智短句。若把這句作為設計這個展覽的思考原點，我則會以「欲速則不達」作呼應，意即不能一蹴而就。

為此，我們摒棄了「觀眾必須看畢全程」的觀念，在商場之內，能夠吸引觀眾駐足觀看已然難得，若可以簡潔步驟介紹舞台設計的四個界別——佈景、服裝、燈光、音響——而過後觀眾對其中之一產生興趣已經不錯。之後，我們以「不同樓層觀賞」的空間特性，想出「舞台上下，探索我們的平行空間」作為展覽主題。在首四個樓層的小型展示空間，我們設計了代表四個類別的小型工作室，分別展示設計師由構想、草圖到具體構成的過程，讓觀眾可以得到一個從劇場

觀眾席看不到的印象。在最後一個樓層、較大的展區裡，我們製作了一個多功能的展覽牆，當中包括了以一幅大型的一點透視圖作背景的拍照區、展示了劇場各式工具的「百子櫃」展覽箱、循環播放四段由本地著名劇場及樂隊組合「朱凌凌」拍攝的舞台設計介紹短片，還有配合二維條碼(QR code)展示的小型全息投影錄像裝置。

就在距離計劃中裝設展覽的日子還不到三天之際，發生了一段小插曲。我們收到商場有關方面的來電，指其中一個將會展示燈光設計工作室的樓層，由於整個區域在建築圖則內都屬於消防通道，這一層的展覽將不能取得消防處的批准。基於這個突發的事故，我們只好放棄燈光設計工作室的展區，並快速修改印刷中的小冊子。隨機應變，也是設計過程的一門功課。而塞翁失馬，亦焉知非福？希慎廣場為補償這事故造成的損失，將原定兩週的展期延長至三週，讓這個第二部曲的展覽可以接觸超過二萬四千名可能從未進入過劇場的觀眾。

(四)藝術中心的「空的空間」

經歷過兩站的《舞台上的平行空間》，來到第三部曲，挑戰不減。其實第二部曲和第三部曲的展期，只有兩個多月的間距。在籌備期間最繁忙的六個月裡，我們的策展與製作團隊，差不多每逢星期天的早上都會見面。

由構思展覽意念、宣傳、展覽與出版書籍的平面設計，到選擇展品、各項聯絡、文字校對、中英文的翻譯對照、圖則修正、物流安排、人手編配、設計細節定案、政府撥款前後的資金流動安排等等，每一項也得到各人的互相協作與適時調度才能成事。可幸的是，兩次展覽過後，團隊的默契油然而生，面對最後一部曲、最大規模的展覽，反而沒有之前的艱澀與困惑。

這裡僅節錄一段刊在HKATTS網頁上的「舞台上的平行空間：文字專欄」《第九回——一瞬即逝的時空》的描述，以概括團隊的協作情況：

「主席羅國豪的人手調配與快速應變、聯合策展人陳焯華的意念思辯、財務甘玉儀（她的工作已不止是財務了）與宣傳鄭永強的適時策劃、項目統籌劉漢華與利湛求的高超技術低調配合、總編輯周穎榆的旁徵博引，加上一眾平面與空間設計隊員日以繼夜的無間斷努力、短片創作與錄像製作小組的超額付出，還有不能盡錄的團隊成員交織成的創作過程，都沉澱成今日你所見到的一室光景。」

我們將香港藝術中心的展覽定義為一個「綜合的結集」，將藝術中心包氏畫廊的兩個偌大樓層，劃分為十個展區，主要包括：「本地舞台製作互動展示」、「故事·我的平行空間」、「香港劇場圖譜」、「舞台科藝體

驗空間」以及「布拉格四年展香港館設計預覽」等等。在這個為期十二天的展覽當中，雖然以地域所限，最終大概只能接觸到近六千名觀眾，較希慎廣場為少，但這次展覽的面向亦較之前有所不同。尤其在「舞台科藝體驗空間」展區內，我們舉辦了不同的工作坊與講座，讓參與的學生和劇場愛好者，可以有更深入的體驗。

在此特別引用展覽中取材自英國導演彼得·布祿克的著作《空的空間》而演化的序言：

「在劇場製作數量密集、演期短暫的氛圍下，我們經歷的，是一個節奏極快的『空的空間』。在恆常經歷變化已成為習慣的當下，香港獨有的『劇場行為』，是不斷高速的『經過』，而鮮有沉澱和『注視』這個『過程』。」

在這個脈絡底下，相對於首兩個部分的展覽，藝術中心的「平行空間」就是一個沉澱、昇華與傳承的「劇場行為」（an act of theatre）。

（五）P與Q

對於修讀過舞台美學的設計師而言，我們對英國的拉爾夫·高爾泰（Ralph Koltai）、美國的李名覺（Ming Cho Lee）以及捷克的約瑟夫·史博達（Josef Svoboda）比較熟悉，但對另一捷克舞臺設計師羅斯特（František Tröster）的名字則相當陌生。其實在捷克，甚至世界劇場美學史之

上，羅斯特的貢獻可謂影響深遠。

一九五九年，在巴西聖保羅舉行的藝術雙年展內，羅斯特為前捷克斯洛伐克所策劃的展區，以捷克斯洛伐克的舞台設計及劇場建築發展史為主題，大受好評，最後眾望所歸，奪得雙年展金獎而回。基於此次展覽的成功，接續三屆的雙年展，羅斯特繼續為捷克設計了同樣獲得好評的舞台展覽。這一連串的「劇場行為」，讓舞台美學得到重視，從而令捷克政府萌生了在首都布拉格主辦世界性的舞台設計展的意念。自一九六七年起，每四年舉辦一次的布拉格四年展（Prague Quadrennial，下稱「PQ」），是當今世上最受全球劇場設計界重視的展覽。而以上曾提及，較為人所熟悉的著名舞台美學家，都是因為曾在PQ參展而開始備受世界注目。反觀羅斯特在世上所留下的作品資料乏善足陳，從他為世界劇場美學的貢獻觀之，很值得後世為他補白資料。

回看我們的城市，自九十年代起，HKATTS已透過「國際舞台美術家劇場建築師暨劇場技術師組織」代表香港地區，積極參與PQ，將本地作品帶到國際舞台。一九九五年，王志強、黃錦江、陳興泰與余振球等本地舞台設計師，成為首批有記錄參與這個展覽的香港代表團隊。一九九九年，香港演藝學院帶同四個校內製作參與了PQ的「國際學生設計展」。二〇〇三年，趙瑞珍、李峰、華文偉與袁玉英四人，以「形、神、意、象」（Form, Spirit,

Meaning, Image）參與專業組別展覽。二〇〇七年，李衛民、袁玉英、徐碩朋、譚嘉儀與陳焯華，構思了一個帶點戲謔的主題「平+靚+快=正？！」（Economical+Beautiful+Fast=Sublime?!），將五個舞台作品放進一間裝置成商店的展館內，在布拉格自嘲一個購物之都的戲劇實況。

二〇一一年，由陳志權、楊福全聯合策展，以反映香港劇場兩極化的主題「質樸與浮華」（Extravagance and Minimalism）為主軸，帶同袁卓華、陳焯華、陳志權、葉卓棠與楊子欣的作品參與「國家館」（Section of Countries and Regions）的專業競賽展覽。二〇一五年，由陳焯華、徐碩朋聯合策展，陳寶愉、陳健德、楊子欣、邵偉敏及何珮珊組成的團隊，聯合設計了題為「Why theatre exists?」的香港館，以一比一等身投影錄像，播放香港舞台工作者的自身提問，引發反思，並選取了四個舞台作品的設計模型作展覽焦點，另以平板電腦互動裝置，將二十多個香港舞台作品帶到布拉格展出。

從以上的簡要回顧來看，香港的舞台設計早在二十年前開始，已漸具國際視野。值得一提的是，以上六屆的香港代表隊，皆在未能獲到香港政府——如香港藝術發展局或民政事務局——的全額資助下，以部分自費的方式，代表香港參與國際性展覽。這與其他同樣代表香港，參與四年一度的國際體壇盛事的奧運代表隊，以及兩年一度的威尼斯建築雙年展及藝

術雙年展等團隊所獲得的資助，大相逕庭。若參照鄰近地區，如台灣和南韓政府，每屆展覽皆全力資助其本土舞台設計師與劇場技術人員，連同各式贊助商，動輒過百人參與PQ的盛況，比對之下，蔚為兩極奇觀。

個人認為，發展戲劇與舞台藝術，不應只計算短期的成本效益，亦不能只看數字那一面。文化與創意，若只看產業而忽略培育，幾近患上近視，看不到遠景與未來。謹借俄羅斯超現實主義畫家馬克·夏卡爾（Marc Chagall）的一句話，作為反思：

「如果我的創作源於心靈，幾乎一切都很完美；但如果源於大腦，幾乎甚麼也成不了。」
(If I create from the heart, nearly everything works; if from the head, almost nothing.)

（六）縱向思維

若論文化創意思維，即時想到最近看到的一本書，其中的思考方式，極具啟發性。這就是美國媒體理論家和普及科學作家史蒂芬·強森（Steven Johnson）的科技史著作《我們如何走到今天？》（*How We Got to Now*），當中提到的玻璃發展史，頗令人印象深刻。

一二〇四年，當君士坦丁堡失陷之際，一群土耳其玻璃工匠為了逃避戰火，橫越地中海和亞

得里亞海，到了威尼斯繼續其玻璃工匠生涯。惟玻璃生產必須使用超高溫爐具，極易引起火災。政府遂將他們驅趕到附近的穆拉諾群島集中生產。誰不知聚在島上的工匠，或因多了交流，或因互相比拼，技術愈發進步，讓玻璃變得更透明。加上印刷術的發展，人們看書多了，便造就了眼鏡業的興起。之後，玻璃鏡片被放進望遠鏡，促進了天文學，亦挑戰了傳統宗教理念。然後，玻璃被放進顯微鏡，令醫學更昌明。同時，玻璃亦遇上了水銀，變成鏡子，人類看到了自己，自畫像成了潮流，也改寫了近代藝術史。到二十世紀中期，玻璃被拉長變成光纖，用來傳送訊息，之後的，都是我們身處的歷史了。

看似無關，但這種宏觀的縱向思維，讓我們看到，發展藝術、文化、科技與經濟，不能畫地為牢，為思想設限。歷史告訴我們，這些看似各從其類的範疇之間，既互相連繫、環環相扣，亦是多維推動，不應以單一角度，計算短期果效。

（七）演藝森林

如果「文化沙漠」是舊日香港的寫照，現時每年製作二千多場舞台演出的香港，已變成一個「演藝森林」，一個在森林定律下虛火旺盛的劇場演藝森林。



《舞台上的平行空間》第三部分（2015）
照片由作者提供

前文提及在二〇〇七年的PQ，我們將舞台設計置於「商店之內」，用意是展現香港這種「藝術商品化」的劇場現象。自二〇〇一年四月一日香港三大藝團被公司化開始，旗艦藝團正式面向市場，與本地為數不少的演出團體共同面向未及寬廣的觀眾群，「藝術創作中的商業元素」變得愈發重要。觀乎這十多年來的劇場生態發展，從香港整體製作數量和場次的增多，可見觀眾數目正在上升。演出琳瑯滿目，但劇場製作背後的配套，並未跟隨製作數量而提升。

這裡僅以個人經歷作參照。二〇〇〇年，正在演藝學院修讀畢業班的我，剛巧遇到時任特首董建華訪問學院，當時校方選了毛俊輝老師導演的《血婚》選段作示範演出，並安排我帶同舞台設計模型向特首解說。董先生聽過簡介後，問了一條問題：「你認為香港劇場發展有甚麼不足的地方？」我想了一下，回答說：「香港劇場其中一項最欠缺的是儲存空間，如果每個演出完成後可以容易找到儲存舞台佈景的地方，便不致浪費，重演也會更容易……」董先生回答說：「放心！我們正在籌備西九龍文娛藝術區計劃，到時問題就可以解決！」

十六年後的今日，西九文化區還在起步階段，興建中的第一個劇院——戲曲中心，估計明年開幕。至於董先生認為西九可以解決的佈景儲存問題，初步查證，並不在西九計劃之中。

另一個較近例子，二〇一五年一月下旬，著名舞蹈家梅卓燕以香港藝術發展局委員之身分，到藝術中心參觀第三部曲的《舞台上的平行空間》，她對記錄了大約一千個舞台作品的「本地舞台製作互動展示」展區以及當中的平板電腦程式感到興趣，建議應予以保留。在告之我們並沒有亦難以籌劃保存展覽裝置的方案後，她願意嘗試提供協助。惜在一星期的努力過後，她無奈回覆未能為這部分的展品找到容身之所。在此感謝梅女士的努力，亦可見在本地保育藝術之難度。

日本殿堂級舞台美術家妹尾河童的著作《窺看舞台》記述了一個日本傳統劇場——建於一八一六年，座落長野縣的「禰津・西宮歌舞伎舞台」——的保育情況：

「……這麼珍貴的舞台，聽說四年前差點遭到拆除的命運。那時候幸好有人提出建議：『為兒童建造遊樂園，雖然說立意不錯，但是將鄉土歷史建築留存給後代，也是很重要的一件大事。』贊同此議的人因而聚集起來，才有『保存會』的產生……」

反觀香港，建於一九二五年的經典劇場建築利舞臺，逃不了被拆卸重建成商場的命運。上述日本人對於劇場歷史如此重視的故事，相信難以在香港上演。

香港的劇場生態，除了造成對作品的保育困難外，對各項創作及專業技術人員的在職保障、職能規範、技術操作守則等也尚有頗大改善空間。

(八) 森林玻璃屋

當今的世界劇場，普遍公認德國的發展至臻完善——獨特性、實驗性、新文本、多元性以至舞台技術管理的細緻精準、舞台機關的繁複等等皆獨步全球。二〇一五年，在得到「7A班戲劇組」的部分資助下，劇團一行四人前往觀摩柏林戲劇節，在親身體驗下，亦驚訝於德國劇場技術人員對舞台裝卸的機動與準確性。為何德國的劇場發展可以如此完備？

原來德國的國營劇場，七成的收入來自國家補助，而劇場的創作與製作人員，職能分工精細，工會制度完善，工時、責任明確，各項基本權利亦得到充分保障。可見要發展創意，完善的「幕後配套」不可或缺。

同年，著名德國新文本劇作家李希特（Falk Richter）來訪港澳，有幸參與一個由他主持的工作坊。在工作坊的討論環節當中，他表示，在德國政府的觀念上，劇場藝術等同醫療和教育，是每一個公民應該享有的福利。反觀香港，我們的政府則愈來愈傾向將醫療和教育視作「商品」，並正逐步將之「商品化」。德國的經驗與成果，值得有關部門反思。

個人相信，應該在「演藝森林」之中，建造一座玻璃溫室，讓具啟發性而未及大眾接受的「未來商業元素」培育與成長，為森林提供具前瞻性的方向，這樣的社會才算健全而具生命力。

(九) 城市之鏡

劇場是社會的一面鏡子，一個地方如果重視戲劇與劇場，也就是重視一個地方的未來。劇場以真實的時空娛樂群眾，感動眾人，也不時令人反思與前瞻，是提升人文素養的重要一環。世界知名美籍華裔舞台設計師李名覺說：「劇場是社會的一層內涵，像教育一樣。」如果劇場能夠普及群眾，這個地方便有希望。

徐頌朋

香港舞台設計師及美術指導。過去十多年，曾為百多個戲劇、舞蹈、歌劇及音樂劇等製作擔任舞台設計，亦曾編寫及導演劇場實驗製作。徐氏作品分別於一九九九年及二〇〇七年獲選代表香港參與捷克布拉格舞台設計四年展。曾任職電影美術指導及香港演藝學院客席講師。現為展覽設計、舞台佈景及服裝設計師，香港知專設計學院講師及香港舞台技術及設計人員協會會長。

Filling in the Blanks, Inspiring Stage Design

Allan Tsui

I. Filling in the blanks

“Good design is obvious. Great design is transparent.”

This thought provoking quote is from the famous graphic designer Joe Sparano. What should we be seeing? What should we not be seeing? How should we see? And what does the seen object represent? Is that which is not seen non-existent? As stage designers and theatre workers, we frequently reflect on such questions during the process of creation. If we attempt to look beyond the theatre, to the city's cultural and historical stage, what is seen of the aesthetics of theatre and stage design in this city? What should be seen? And what has existed in the past?

As an international city, the pace of Hong Kong life, both in work and play, is hectic, overlapping, and pulsating. In theatre alone, there can be more than 2,500 performances across 40 odd venues per year. Despite the impressive numbers, the short runs of many productions result in a situation where productions are frequently over before word of mouth can create momentum. And in the case of works with potential, by the time the critics have done their work, the creative team has already disbanded, separately headed towards the

next project. There is no time for reflection and improvement, let alone for gestating and producing a version with more depth.

Perhaps we lead our daily lives in a glass city, dazzling, colourful but with insubstantial foundations; shiny but fragile. In my extensive experience of cultural activities, all too often, after the crowds depart, there are too many blanks left behind, the traces nearly transparent and then forgotten.

In order to have a record of and to exhibit the highlights of the last 40, 50 years in Hong Kong stage design history, the Hong Kong Association of Theatre Technicians and Scenographers (HKATTS) decided to start the ball rolling, even if only with a rough-cut version. To this end the association drafted a plan in late 2012 for a series of stage design exhibitions around the curatorial concept of the “parallel space on stage”, to be supplemented by professional dialogues, workshops, exhibition guides, and other integrated activities, after which an application was made to the Home Affairs Bureau's Arts Capacity Development Funding Scheme for funding. The application was approved. Between 2013 and 2015, the association organised the three-part *Hong Kong Theatre Design Exhibition – Parallel Space*, which took place in December 2013, October 2014 and



Hong Kong Theatre Design Exhibition – Parallel Space Part I (2013)
Illustration: Allan Tsui

January 2015 in the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Hysan Place in Causeway Bay, and the Hong Kong Arts Centre respectively. We successfully realised our plans for all the activities, trying with our limited resources to focus the will of the masses, thereby opening up a new chapter for filling in the blanks in stage aesthetics.

More than a year has passed since the planning and execution of the three exhibitions. It is time to come up with a curatorial plan that would complete the process, to commemorate the precious fragments, in the hope that our cumulative experience would precipitate the development of a more nuanced and complex picture.

2. The theatre as illusion?

When HKATTS was preparing for the first part of the *Hong Kong Theatre Design Exhibition* in 2013, we used “Theatre is illusion” as the epigraph. At the time, in order to come up with a set design that could incorporate both the graphic plane and three dimensional space, as well as playfully display fragments of local theatre design history, we took the famous American artist Edward Hopper’s 1924 masterpiece *Nighthawks* as our design blueprint, and turned his two dimensional painting into

an approximately 9 m long 4 m deep triangular exhibition space.

In the early days of planning, we briefly reviewed the history of stage design, from the ancient Greek theatre of 2,400 years ago to the Renaissance perspective scenery of the 14th century, the Baroque stage sets of the 16th-18th centuries, to the modern proscenium stage and Peter Brook’s smashing of naturalistic simulation with his “Empty Space” theory etc... This vast sea of scholarship proved an embarrassment of riches. To theatre people immersed in set design for years, this led to too many and complex thoughts, and it became difficult to see the wood for the trees. In the end, we tried changing our point of view to that of the people passing through the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, and conceived the project anew. Later, we found that as an “introduction to stage design”, “building an illusion” in a public space seemed more suitable than an academic exhibition. Moreover, “creating atmosphere” is also an important part of stage design. After more searching, Edward Hopper’s *Nighthawks* became the “anywhere door” to the world of theatre aesthetics.

In this “Nighthawks space”, we showcased earlier video recordings of interviews with theatre veterans

such as the “Father of Opera” Professor Lo King-man, and seasoned stage manager Peter Li, etc. We mounted theatrical definitions and aphorisms on the walls, prompting reflection by the viewers. In a smaller exhibition area within the same venue, we displayed the locations and development of Hong Kong theatres in map form. In the exhibition booth, information pertaining to Hong Kong theatrical productions was displayed dynamically through the use of multimedia technologies such as holographic projection video and virtual reality sensor device “Leap Motion”. This series of exhibitions did not fall short of our expectations: over the six days of this exhibition, more than 7,000 “day sojourners” entered this stage of illusion through the “anywhere door” called the *Nighthawks*.

3. Shopping centre. Theatre

After the completion of part one, preparations for part two at Hysan Place, Causeway Bay, got underway immediately. Unlike the Hong Kong Cultural Centre in Tsim Sha Tsui, which has more of an artistic ambience, the challenge here was how to promote stage design to visitors to whom “shopping is everything” in the bustling downtown of Causeway Bay.

I remember my first site visit to the shopping centre, discovering in those preliminary discussions that Hysan Place had generously provisioned us with exhibition space over five floors. Although each individual exhibition area was small, we could reach potential audiences on all five levels, which made our target goal of “promotion” more effective. After our last experience, we started from the point of view of shoppers and tourists in Causeway Bay as our initial design impetus. We first thought it would be difficult to get people to watch the exhibition sequentially over scattered exhibition spaces. But even if we discarded “sequential order” in our design, it would be difficult to guide the audience through the entire exhibition. We concluded therefore that a concise and informative pamphlet was necessary. And as a cultural exhibition in a shopping centre, we inevitably turned to advertising design principles, including the following:

“Think more, design less.”

This is a quote from another well-known graphic designer Ellen Lupton. If we take this phrase as the premise for our exhibition design, we would also have to append “haste makes waste”, meaning that Rome cannot be built in a day.

Hence we abandoned the notion that “the audience must view the whole exhibition”. It was difficult enough to get people to pause and look in a shopping centre. If we further managed to concisely introduce the four aspects of stage design, namely scenery, costumes, lighting and sound, and interest the viewer in at least one — that would already be a considerable achievement. We then took the spatial characteristic of exhibiting across different storeys to come up with the theme “above the stage, below the stage, exploring our parallel space”. In the small exhibition spaces on the first four floors, each aspect of stage design was presented in four small studios, showing how designers go from a concept to a blueprint to the concrete process of realisation, thus allowing the viewer a perspective unavailable to a theatre audience in the auditorium. On the top floor, in the larger exhibition area, we created a multi-purpose exhibition wall that included a large photography area with a single-point perspective backdrop, displaying the various tools of the theatre trade in the “cabinet of curiosities”, and looping four short films introducing stage design by well-known local theatres and the band Juicyning. There was also a QR-code compatible small holographic projection video installation.

A short interlude less than three days before the planned installation of the exhibition: we received

a call from the Hysan side, saying that our plans for the lighting design studio had fallen foul of the Fire Services Department, since the proposed studio fell within the fire exit route in the building plans. Due to this emergency, we gave up the lighting studio and quickly modified the printed booklet. The ability to improvise is also an essential aspect of the design process. This proved a blessing in disguise. To compensate for our loss, Hysan Place extended the original two-week exhibition to three, which meant that more than 24,000 people who might never have stepped foot in the theatre were exposed to this second part of our exhibition.

4. The “empty space” of the Hong Kong Arts Centre

When it came to mounting the third part, the challenges had by no means diminished, despite having experienced two editions of *Parallel Space*. In fact, only two months separated the second and third parts of the exhibition. During the busiest six months of preparation, our curators and the entire production team met almost every Sunday morning. Conception, publicity, the exhibition and printed materials design, selection of exhibits, liaison, proof-reading, the comparison of Chinese and English translations, the amendment of drawings, logistics, staff assignments, design details, cash flow before and

after the allocation of government funding, etc. — each item required coordinating between team members and timely scheduling to succeed. Fortunately, after two exhibitions, the team's mutual understanding had developed to such an extent that although this final exhibition was our largest, it was also less fraught and difficult.

“Chairman Law Kwok-ho's manpower deployment and rapid response to change, co-curator Billy Chan's idea, finance officer Virginia Kam's (her duties no longer confined to finances) and publicist Danny Cheng's timely planning, project coordinators Lau Hon-wah's and Lee Cham-kau's low-key coordination of superlative skills, chief editor Winnie Chau's broad citation of scholarship, plus the unceasing efforts of graphic and interior designers, the surpassing efforts of the short film and video production teams, and the contributions, woven into the creative process, of all the other team members not listed here — all of them have created the splendours you see today in this room.”

We defined the exhibition at the Hong Kong Arts Centre as an “integrated collection”. The Pao Gallery's large split-level space in the Arts Centre was divided into ten exhibition areas. Highlights included “1,000 Productions Interactive Display”, “STORY – My Parallel Space”, “VENUE – A Map of Hong

Kong venues”, “BACKSTAGE Lab”, and “PQ2015 HK Competition”, etc. Geographical limitations meant that just under 6,000 viewers came during the 12-day exhibition, less than the numbers reached at Hysan Place. However this exhibition was targeted at a different audience. In particular, we organised various workshops and lectures in the “BACKSTAGE Lab” to offer a more in-depth experience to participating students and theatre lovers.

Here I would like to cite from Peter Brook's *Empty Space* as we modified his text for our preamble:

“In the atmosphere created by many productions and short runs, we are experiencing a very fast-paced “Empty Space”. Where the constant experience of change becomes a habit, Hong Kong's unique ‘act of theatre’ is an incessant high-speed ‘thoroughfare’ with little chance to reflect on or ‘contemplate’ this ‘process’.”

In this context, in relation to the first two parts of the exhibition, the “parallel space” of the Arts Centre was a “an act of theatre” embodying reflection, sublimation and legacy consolidation.

5. P & Q

As designers who have studied stage design, we are familiar with the British Ralph Koltai, the American

Ming Cho Lee, and the Czech Josef Svoboda. We are less familiar with another Czech stage designer František Tröster (1904-1968), although his influence is massive in the Czech republic and in the history of stage design globally.

Back in 1959, during the Art Biennial in São Paulo, Brazil, Tröster represented the former Czechoslovakia, taking the history of Czechoslovakian stage design and theatre architecture as his theme. This highly acclaimed exhibition lived up to expectations, and won the Biennial Gold Medal. Building on the success of the exhibition, Tröster continued to design the Czechoslovakian exhibition for the next three Biennales, which also received critical acclaim. This series of “acts of theatre”, which enabled the aesthetics of stage design to receive attention, led to the Czechoslovakian government’s idea of hosting the world stage design exhibition in the capital city of Prague. The exhibition, which has been held every four years since 1967, is the Prague Quadrennial (PQ), the world’s most important theatre design event. The great and the good, mentioned above, in the world of stage aesthetics, all launched their careers at the Prague Quadrennial where they first began to attract the attention of the world. On the other hand, Tröster’s works have fallen into obscurity. In light of his contribution to the world theatre aesthetics, it is fitting for posterity to recover his legacy.

Coming back to our city, HKATTS, which is the local representative of the International Organisation of Scenographers, Theatre Architects and Technicians (OISTAT), has been active since the 1990s in bringing local works to the international stage at PQ. In 1995, Tommy Wong, K.K. Wong, Eric Chan, Jacob Yu and other local stage designers, were the first recorded Hong Kong team to participate in the exhibition. In 1999, The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts took part in the PQ International Student Design Exhibition with four in-house productions. In 2003, Karin Chiu, Li Fung, Taurus Wah and Shybil Yuen participated in the professional exhibitions section with “Form, Spirit, Meaning, Image”. In 2007, Priman Lee, Shybil Yuen, Allan Tsui, Mandy Tam and Billy Chan conceived of a slightly tongue-in-cheek theme, “Economical + Beautiful + Fast = Sublime ?!” which presented five stage design works in an exhibition space designed to look like a shopping mall, a self-satirical dramatic act highlighting the state of theatre in a shoppers’ city.

In 2011, Ricky Chan and Frank Yeung co-curated an exhibition with the theme of “Extravagance and Minimalism”, which reflected the polarisation of the Hong Kong theatre scene. This exhibition, which featured the works of Yuen Cheuk-wa, Billy Chan, Ricky Chan, Moon Yip and Yeung Tsz-yan, was entered in the competitive professional “Section of Countries

and Regions". In 2015, co-curators Ricky Chan and Allan Tsui together with Bobo Chan, Chan Kin-tak, Yeung Tsz-yan, Siu Wai-man and Cindy Ho, jointly designed the Hong Kong Pavilion with the theme "Why Theatre Exists?" Life-sized video projections of Hong Kong backstage workers interrogating themselves promoted reflection, while four stage design models were selected to be the focus of the exhibition. Moreover, through the use of tablets, more than 20 Hong Kong stage works could also be shown in Prague.

From the brief overview above, we can see that in the past 20 years, stage design in Hong Kong has gradually gained an international perspective. It is worth noting that the Hong Kong teams at the last six Quadrennials were unable to get the full support of the Hong Kong Government — the Hong Kong Arts Development Council or the Home Affairs Bureau — and represented Hong Kong partially at their own expense. This contrasts starkly with the other teams that represent Hong Kong: the Olympic team, and the representatives at the Venice Architectural and Artistic Biennales. Benchmarking regionally, Taiwan and the South Korean governments, together with various sponsors, fully fund their local stage designers and theatre technicians, frequently sending more than a hundred people to participate in the PQ. Such a comparison affords a spectacle of diametrical opposites.

Personally, I believe that the development of theatre and stage art should not be measured in terms of short-term cost-effectiveness, nor evaluated only by the numbers. Culture and creativity, if focused only on productivity to the neglect of nurturing talent, is almost myopic, lacking a sense of far horizons or the future. To borrow a thought provoking quote from the Russian surrealist painter Marc Chagall:

"If I create from the heart, nearly everything works; if from the head, almost nothing."

6. Integrated thinking

The subject of culture and creative thinking immediately brings to mind a book I recently read, with a highly instructive philosophy. This is the book on the history of science and technology by the American media theorist and popular science writer Steven Johnson, *How We Got to Now*. His description of the history of glass is memorable.

Originally in 1204, when Constantinople fell, a group of Turkish artisans crossed the Mediterranean and the Adriatic to Venice in order to flee the war and continue their glass-making careers. However, the production of glass requires ultra-high temperature stoves — a fire hazard. Hence the government forced them to relocate to the Murano Islands, thus

concentrating glass production. Lo and behold, this concentration of artisans led, whether through more exchange or mutual competition, to rapid progress in technology, resulting in ever more transparent glass. Coinciding with the development of printing and the increase in the number of readers, this led to the rise of the optical industry. After the glass lenses were placed in telescopes, astronomy flourished but also challenged traditional religious ideas. Then glass lenses were inserted into microscopes, so that medicine flourished. At the same time, glass met mercury to become a mirror. Now that humans could see themselves, self-portraits became the trend, which changed the course of the history of art. By the middle of the 20th century, glass was stretched into fibre, used to send messages, and the rest is history.

Seemingly unrelated, this kind of big picture integrated thinking shows that for art, culture, science and technology and the economy to develop, we cannot draw lines in the sand and try to force limits on ideas. History tells us that these seemingly different categories are interlinked, interlocking and multidimensional. In other words, we must not use a single perspective to calculate short-term effectiveness.

7. Performing arts forest

If “cultural desert” was an apt description of old Hong Kong, Hong Kong, which now boasts more than 2,000 performances each year, has become a “performing arts forest”, one which under the law of the forest has become a theatrical forest strong in “deficiency heat”.

As mentioned above, in the PQ of 2007, we put the stage design “in the shop”, which was intended to highlight the phenomenon of “the commercialisation of art” in Hong Kong theatre. Since 1 April 2001, the three major arts groups in Hong Kong have been corporatised, and the flagship art groups are officially market-oriented. Together with a large number of local performing groups, the flagship art groups are facing wider audiences than ever before. The commercial elements of artistic creation have become more and more important. In view of the development of the theatre ecology over the past decade or so, the number of visitors and the number of productions in Hong Kong are increasing. Despite the dazzling array of performances, the supportive infrastructure behind theatre production has not developed apace with this increase.



Hong Kong Theatre Design Exhibition – Parallel Space Part III (2015)
Photo courtesy: Allan Tsui

Here a personal anecdote may be instructive. In 2000, I was in the graduating class of The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, where then Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa visited. The school selected excerpts from *Blood Wedding* directed by Dr Fredric Mao, as a showcase, and arranged that I should talk the Chief Executive through the design with the help of a set model. After listening to the briefing, Mr Tung asked, "What do you think is lacking for the development of Hong Kong theatre?" I thought for a moment and said, "What we most lack is storage space. If we could only easily find places to store sets and props after each performance, they would not go to waste, and it would be easier to mount re-runs." Mr Tung replied, "Don't worry! We are in the process of planning the West Kowloon Cultural District project, which will take care of that problem!"

Sixteen years later, the West Kowloon Cultural District is still in its infancy. The first theatre, the Xiqu Centre, is scheduled to open next year. As for Mr Tung's view that West Kowloon can solve the problem of set storage, my initial investigations reveal that nothing exists of that nature in the West Kowloon Plan.

In a more recent example, in late January 2015, the famous dancer Mui Cheuk-yin visited the third part of the *Hong Kong Stage Design Exhibition* at the Hong

Kong Arts Centre, in her capacity as a council member of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council. She was interested in the "1,000 Productions Interactive Display" exhibit which recorded a thousand odd stage productions, as well as the apps for tablets associated with this, and recommended that this should be preserved. After telling her we did not have any such plans and would indeed find it difficult to make any plans to preserve the exhibition, she offered to try to help. Unfortunately, after a week's efforts, she was unable to find any storage space for this part of the exhibit. I would like to thank Ms Mui for her efforts. From this example you can see how hard it is to preserve art locally.

The preeminent Japanese theatre artist Saiwei Kappa, in her book *Regarding the Stage*, chronicles the conservation of the traditional Japanese theatre Nishinomiya Kabuki Stage at Nagoya Prefecture in 1816:

"... so precious a stage. Rumour has it that four years ago it was almost dismantled. Fortunately someone suggested, 'Although constructing a children's playground is not a bad idea, preserving heritage buildings for posterity is also a huge responsibility.' Those who agreed banded together, and the 'Preservation Council' was born..."

By contrast, the classic Lee Theatre, built in 1925, could not escape the fate of being demolished for a shopping mall. It is hard to imagine the story above, highlighting how Japanese cherish their theatrical history, being repeated in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong theatre ecology not only creates obstacles for preserving the legacy of productions, it also has considerable room for improvement in terms of job security, functional standards and technical codes of practice for creative and technical personnel.

8. A greenhouse in the forest

It is a truth universally acknowledged in world theatre today that Germany has developed furthest towards perfection — from its uniqueness, its experimental nature, new writing, pluralism, to the precision of stage management, the complexity of the stage machinery, etc., all of which is unparalleled in the world. In 2005, with the partial support of the Class 7A Drama Group, a party of four was sent to the Berlin Theatre Festival, where they were amazed at the flexibility and accuracy of German theatre technicians in loading and unloading the stage. Why is German theatrical development so complete?

State-run theatres in Germany receive 70% of their income from state subsidies. Theatre creatives and production teams enjoy a meticulous division of labour, a perfected trade union system, set working hours, clearly defined responsibilities, and sufficient protection for their basic rights. In other words, for creativity to flourish, “backstage infrastructure” is indispensable.

In the same year, the famous German new writing dramatist Falk Richter visited Hong Kong and Macau. I had the privilege of participating in a workshop he ran. In the workshop session, he mentioned that the German government regarded access to theatre and the arts as a civil right equivalent to medical care and education. In Hong Kong, however, our government seems increasingly inclined to regard medical care and education as “commodities” and to gradually “commercialise” them. The relevant departments should reflect on Germany’s experience and achievements.

Personally I believe we should build a greenhouse in the “theatre forest”, to nurture those embryonic and non-mainstream “future commercial elements”, thus providing a sense of vision for the forest. Only a society like this can be considered sound and vital.

9. The city's mirror

Theatre is a mirror of society. If a community cherishes drama and theatre, that community values its future. Theatre entertains in real time and space, moving audiences, sometimes even prompting reflection and insight, essential in raising the humanistic culture of a community. "The theatre is an ingredient of society, like education," says Ming Cho Lee, a world-renowned Chinese American stage designer. Where there is theatre for the masses, there is hope.

(Translated by Amy Ng)

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Allan Tsui

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