Space/Time as Historical Sign: Essay on *La Célestine*, in Memory of Antoine Vitez

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> The work of theater is not out in a meadow. Our work is our existence in eternity. We work in words and movement.
> --Antoine Vitez[1]

In a small grassy courtyard just outside the wall of the ancient Palais des Papes at Avignon on the afternoon of July 16, 1989, Antoine Vitez and several actors from the Comédie-Française, translator Florence Delay, and others were gathered for an informal public interview on Vitez's production of Fernando de Rojas' *La Célestine*,[2] which had just opened four days before as the major event of the 43rd Festival d'Avignon. Sitting beside Vitez, and now and then glancing out at the polite audience seated on folding chairs or on the grass, was the legendary Jeanne Moreau, who acted the central role of the procuress Célestine, Spain's great female picaro, variously called Mother, Old Whore, Sorceress, and Sage. In person, the star looked small and fragile, much more youthful in the daylight than on film, beautiful without makeup, in blue jeans, her white-streaked hair pulled straight back. Moreau's affection and regard for Vitez was obvious, as it was for the rest of the artists there.

Curious though they may have been, the audience asked the star no questions, but directed them toward Vitez instead, who demonstrated again the poetic intelligence, clarity of insight, humor, and openmindedness,

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which made him one of the most highly regarded--indeed loved--directors in contemporary France. Once marked as an *enfant terrible* for his leftist politics and his radical reinterpretations of classical works, Vitez was nevertheless named director of the Théâtre National de Chaillot in 1981. Since June 1988 he had been placed in an even more influential position as general administrator of the Comédie-Française and director of the Thèâtre National de l'Odéon. Vitez, like Giorgio Strehler, was an outspoken advocate of Brechtian theater from the 1950s on, absorbing its lessons but adapting them to his own artistic development in the face of new political realities. Like Brecht, Vitez was highly conscious of theater's power as signifier of historicity, that is, of its ability to concretely represent the images that a society has of its own historical existence.

Vitez's staging of *La Célestine* stands as a testimony to this power. Thus it is the subject of the present essay, which will be an analysis of the spatio-temporal dynamics of the entire theatrical event, encompassing the immediate performance/reception and the French translation of the text, and touching on the history of the work as literature and drama. The play is so rich and enigmatic in its themes, characterization, and imagery, that no analysis could pretend to grasp it all. Similarly, every production has begun by cutting the long text of the original in order to achieve a certain "coherence." These inevitable reductions have not harmed the work, and are fascinating because they reveal, especially through the producers' treatment of space and time, basic assumptions about social existence, theater, and history. The spatio-temporality of Vitez's production was especially "historical," "epic," and "social" because of the presence of Jeanne Moreau in the title role, the fact that it was a watershed work separating the middle ages from the Renaissance, shown before a twentieth-century audience in the medieval Palais des Papes at Avignon, and perhaps also because it coincided with the Bicentennial of the French Revolution.

Spatio-temporality as performance

The central question of this analysis is how space and time have been represented, and how this representation in turn relates to historicity.[3] Theater performance/reception is conceived here as a "transportation" of the reader or spectator via time and space towards meaning. This experiential event is the dynamic process of signification itself. Because the theatrical sign is always being performed, space and time are not stable elements *containing* semiosis. Space is much more than individual units like the set, the stage, or the fictional settings. Instead, spatial patterns are gradually created by repetition, displacement, condensation, or expansion of internal and external spaces. In short, space is structured by time, in a process that is the play's *spatiality*. Likewise, time is not a block divided into units such as the act, the scene, or the narrative plot line. Rather, it is a unique design of multiple repetitions,

durations, and rhythms that gradually reveals itself in concrete spatial terms. Theatrical time is thus *temporality*. At its most fundamental, theater is the interweaving of temporality and spatiality at every level of text, performance, and reception.

The broad questions of this analysis will deal with spatio-temporal relationality: How are time dimensions spatialized in the performance? How is space temporalized, i.e., delineated through time? How does the design of space and time reflect social and political structures? What is the dynamic relation between the mimetic (visible) and diegetic (invisible) space?[4] This relation is very important, and can only be manifested over time. Signification patterns are created from the moving back and forth of characters, objects, sounds, light, etc., between the real and the imaginary space and time dimensions, the visible and the invisible. It gives us the sense of a rhythmic unfolding, a force carrying the play *towards* a revelation of meaning.

To find and trace this dynamic as it unfolds, more specific questions must also be pursued: What is the pattern of the *actors' movement and placement* in relation to each other, to the objects and set, and to the audience? The French *deplacement* would be a better term, since it encompasses the actors' movement, placement, relationality, and displacement. How do the actors move in the diegetic space versus the mimetic? How do *sound, music, and lighting* denote and connote spatial and temporal dimensions? What *concrete and imaginary objects*[5] appear most frequently, and how are they used in relation to the actors' and characters' overall movement through time and space? What patterns and rhythms do the objects create as they "travel" between the visible and invisible space, and from one actor/character to another?[6] What is the *relation between the actors' and spectators' space and time?* What is the function of the *theater space as a social institution?*[7] Both the actual performance and the one imagined from the text can be taken into account. The overall spatio-temporal dynamic can be read as an integrated system of signification. It is never closed off, however, because theater codes are always bound to their historical circumstances, and therefore always changing, emerging, and vanishing. Though it may make complex and numerous connections, the sign in the theater is never free. It simply does not exist outside of history, which I will define here as a society's ongoing codification of its own existence. There is no ahistorical meaning.[8]

This theory of spatio-temporality is thus based in the semiotic, but strongly affirms the historicity of the sign. In his research on the novel, Mikhail Bakhtin works from similar assumptions, and his concept of the *chronotope* provides a useful starting point for the analysis of theatrical spatio-temporality. The chronotope is defined in *The Dialogic Imagination* as "literally 'time space' . . . the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships . . . artistically expressed in literature." Time "becomes actually visible," and space becomes "responsive to the movements of time, plot and history."[9] The spatio-temporal relationships are even more complex in theater

than in the novel. In a sense, every performance is a chronotope in itself, since it always takes a particular material form in a finite historical moment. In this case of theater texts and performances, the historicity of the spatio-temporality derives not so much from some original context, as from a whole series of productions and receptions.

In *The Dialogical Imagination*, Bakhtin most often discusses the chronotope as a specific topos, one example being that of the road, important for any study of the picaro since the road allows him or her to move freely through the layers of the social hierarchy, thus exposing them to an outsider's point of view. In *Rabelais and His World*, the author broadens his scope, describing all-pervasive chronotopes by which Rabelaisian society ordered the cosmos itself.[10] Most important here is Bakhtin's view that the medieval cosmos was ordered along a vertical axis, with all values aligned accordingly, while the Renaissance cosmos changed that order, organizing everything along a horizontal axis. Bakhtin also theorized that for the medieval and Renaissance societies, the human body was a cosmic sign system; the Church aligned it with its own vertical cosmos, the head being Heaven/God/Man and the lower extremities Hell/Devil/Woman. Through blasphemy, the cosmic order is reversed. In analyzing *La Célestine*, I will start with these notions of the chronotope--or spatio-temporal dynamic--in both senses, as topos and as metaphorical system, but will develop the analysis around the preceding questions designed for theater.

Situating Vitez

> There is no contradiction between conceptualizing and performing. . . . In my work as a "director of the actors" *[directeur des acteurs]*--a term I dislike by the way--I propose the space, the time, their partners, and the text. That is already quite a lot, the basis of the *mise en scène*. But apart from that, and more interesting, is what the actors propose: their existence, their bodies, their conscious presence, their breath.
>
> --A. Vitez, Avignon 1989

Vitez would have agreed with Bakhtin's concept of the dialogical relationship between the artwork and its socio-political context. He opposed the "Stanislavskian" ideal of theater as social and psychological mimesis, and placed himself in the Brechtian tradition of self-conscious *théâtralité*.[11] Vitez, like Brecht, insisted that theater use its "artificiality" to explore the realms of the social, that it be aware of its power to represent our images of historical existence, and that it expose its own apparatus, its own production of time and space. To Brecht and Vitez, the spatio-temporal dynamic was the performance's *Grundgestus*, the expression of both the dominant *Fabel* and its "contradictions."[12] However, Vitez ventured onto ground that Brecht avoided,

namely the psyche and body of the actor.[13] In this he followed Artaud, for whom the actor was not only the nexus of material relationships, but the lightning rod, body and voice of the metaphysical. Artaud, however, shared with Brecht the view that theater was "poetry in space." For both, as for Vitez, the notion of rhythm is central, a rhythm that is visible as well as audible. Artaud wrote that, in order to make the elements of theater--language, gesture, sets--"metaphysical," we need to "consider them in relation to all the ways they can have of making contact with time and with movement."[14] In essence, Vitez, Brecht, and Artaud conceived of theater semiotically, as a language whose vocabulary and grammar are space and time: a "poetry in space" for Artaud, a pattern of "Gests" for Brecht, and the "writing of a trajectory" for Vitez.

La Célestine in historical context

> . . . and on her forehead a name was written,
> a mystery: Babylon the great,
> the mother of prostitutes and of the earth's horrors.
> --St. John of the Apocalypse, Revelation XVII: 5

> The great prostitute who rules the earth is, for St. John, the power of Rome. . . . But . . . if woman is the great city, then that great city is a woman, and I see the procuress Célestine, mistress of the human race--thanks to whom, through permanent copulation, we continue to exist--irredeemably stigmatized with the sin of lust. . . . From the city our imagination returns to the woman. I see her, a golden cup in her hand, drunk from the blood of the saints. Thus our own Célestine reigns over the derisory orgy of valets and whores . . .
> --A. Vitez[15]

Fernando de Rojas' *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* was first published anonymously in 1499, and soon was simply called *La Celestina* because of the popularity of its main character.[16] It was for this work that Rojas coined the term tragi-comedy. Many scholars also call it the first true novel, though it was written in dialogue form and consciously emulated Plautus and Terence. However, it was probably meant to be read aloud, since medieval theater practices were just coming to Spain, and little was known of Roman staging. Yet *La Celestina* is certainly theatrical in spirit; through its dialogue, sharply delineated characters, inherent physical action, and visual and aural imagery, it is able to express the major conflicts of its transitional era. As in Shakespeare, it moves freely between several locales, consists of dialogue, asides, and soliloquies, from which we get a clear picture of the faces and

dress of the characters, and even the layout of the city. Moreover, it is held together and propelled not only by overt action but by an underlying order of images, connecting the physical to the metaphysical cosmos.

In Spain as in the rest of Renaissance Europe, the values of the feudal aristocracy and the Catholic Church were being challenged by humanism, and, even more fatally, were being made irrelevant by the opportunistic code of nascent capitalism. Rojas himself, as a lawyer from a family of *conversos*, Jews converted to Christianity, was personally affected by the conflicts of his age, including a brush with the Inquisition, which had been instituted in 1478. The year 1492 alone had seen the seizure of Grenada from the Moors, the discovery of America, and the expulsion from Spain of all unconverted Jews. Possibly for fear of censorship or worse, Rojas at first did not reveal his name at all, and then disguised it in an acrostic. He also claimed that he did not write the first act, but that it was an anonymous one-act play he had found whose "wit, philosophy, and moral" compelled him "fill in the rest" in a fortnight.

During the interview at Avignon, Vitez reflected that the society of Rojas' century, like our own, had struggled to keep an ordered image of itself, even as its old identity was being destroyed. This was why, he explained, the play still resounds in the twentieth century. It became clear that Vitez was not attempting to reconstruct the moment of the play's birth, the transition between the medieval and the Renaissance, even though he was informed of the original context. Instead he had tried to bring that past moment into a dialectic with the present, not to blend them, but to stage a dialogue between them--and in so doing, to politicize the entire theatrical event, allowing it to be the nexus where conflictual values converge.

The most important manifestation of this "dialogical" relationship was seen in the character of Célestine, both in Rojas' text and the production. The picaro, a figure who originated in Spain, has long been a barometer of the historical imagination, and Célestine was its first appearance in female form. Rojas, in superimposing this new figure of the mendicant picaro upon the older one of the evil procuress and Great Whore of the World, was also bringing hostile ideological codes together: the Renaissance codes of humanism and capitalism were superimposed upon the old medieval code, which itself was an amalgamation of the ideologies of patriarchy, feudalism, and Catholicism. La Célestine as played by Jeanne Moreau was no less complex and contradictory as an image of the historical: she seemed to be walking, in effect, back and forth between the fifteenth and the twentieth centuries, and between the old mythic figure of Célestine and her own filmic myth.

The story

Scholars have pointed to internal evidence showing that the play's first section, which Rojas called the "first day," was indeed written by another author. As an *auto* or interlude, the argument goes, it dealt only with the seduction of the virgin youth Parmeno by the wicked Célestine. In this form, it would have been a conventional cautionary tale of the evil of women. But the play as "filled in" by Rojas spreads the blame for the tragedy (and comedy) to the men as well. Rojas' moral position is not clear, despite a preface which intones that the work was "written to attack those crazy lovers who are so conquered by their unruly appetites that they call their mistresses God, also as a warning against the wiles of procuresses and the lies of wicked servants."[17] Since the play is relatively unknown to Americans, I will provide a synopsis:

> *Day One:* Calixte, a young noble, pursues his falcon into an orchard belonging to Pleberio, a wealthy shipbuilder. There he falls in love with Mélibée, Pleberio's beautiful daughter, but she repulses him harshly, outraged at the idea of illicit love. In frenzied desire, Calixte confides in his servants, the scheming Sempronio and the virtuous Parmeno. Sempronio advises Calixte to hire Célestine to help him win Mélibée. Parmeno, recognizing Célestine as his dead mother's friend and fellow prostitute, warns Calixte, who hires her anyway, paying her one hundred gold pieces in advance. "Here," writes Rojas, "the act of the anonymous author ends."
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> *Continuation of Day One:* Célestine conjures Pluto from Hades to aid her, believing she has wound him onto her spool of thread. At Mélibée's, she pretends to be selling this thread, and obtains the girl's belt saying it is a holy relic that can cure Calixte's toothache. Calixte, rapturous over the belt, pays Célestine with a gold chain, though she had asked for a cloak. To entangle Parmeno in the plot, she has the prostitute Élicie sleep with him, inviting this couple, along with Sempronio and his mistress the prostitute Aréuse, to dinner the next day.
>
> *Day Two:* Célestine is happy to unite her "sons and daughters," but the licentious feast is interrupted by a servant who summons Célestine to Mélibée, now inflamed with desire for Calixte. Célestine arranges for the two lovers to meet at midnight, as Parmeno and Sempronio stand guard. A door separates the lovers, who agree to meet in Mélibée's garden the next night. The servants suspect that Mélibée's sudden passion is really a plot with Célestine to cheat them out of their profit. They go to Célestine's house, but she refuses to pay them so they stab her to death. Aréuse screams, watchmen arrive, and Sempronio and Parmeno jump out the

window. Half-dead from the fall, they are decapitated as murderers in the public square.

The Disastrous End: Calixte briefly grieves over his dead servants, but hastens with two replacements to meet Mélibée. The new servants hold the ladder as he climbs over the garden wall, then wait in boredom as Mélibée yields her virginity. The couple make love in the garden every night for a month, until Calixte accidentally falls off the ladder and dies. Mélibée, in despair, climbs to the highest terrace, confesses all to her father who is standing in the garden below, and jumps to her death. In a final soliloquy, the desolate Pleberio grieves for his "broken daughter."

Spatiality as performance/scenography

> That construction, is it a city, a house? I would say rather that it is a castle, a tower, maybe one of the ones built by Pleberio. An island also, posed on the stage of the theater, which one may walk around, and it is thus that Célestine walks interminably, walks, walks, as if she were wrapping up the whole construction with her thread.
>
> --A. Vitez[18]

Yannis Kokkos and Antoine Vitez had worked together for several years, arriving collaboratively at the scenographic concepts for each play, and what was called the "Vitezian" style owed much to Kokkos. Indeed, on the contemporary stage in general, the spatial design increasingly determines the *mise en scène*. Mary Angiolillo, in a revealing study of the objects used in Vitez's 1985 staging of *Ubu Roi*, points out the reasons for this development: a fundamental turn, especially since the Poor Theater, toward an "aesthetics of empty space" that eliminates anything extraneous to the production dynamics; the preoccupation of philosophers and anthropologists with questions of space; and the tendency to conceive of action as imagistic rather than narrative. "In France," writes Angiolillo, "where directors delight in deconstructing a classic and reconstructing it according to the images it provokes over the story's logic . . ., the importance of visual imagery has led to a rise in the importance of the scenographer as a kind of co-author of the . . . *mise en scène*."[19]

Indeed, being contemporary is often synonymous with being cinematographic--that is, structuring the story according to visual images. Staging *La Célestine*, however, involved more than taking a "contemporary" approach. (One of the few things that roused Vitez's anger was when he noticed an actor trying to *faire moderne*.[20]) Instead, the very notion of contemporaneity was put into a kind of *Verfremungseffekt*, because the performance space itself was, in reality, a stone courtyard dating from the fourteenth century. In this space

made up of visible layers of time surviving intact from the middle ages, the electric spotlights, loudspeakers, etc., of the performance looked as makeshift as a medieval pageant wagon must have seemed. Thus a paradoxical continuity between the past and present theater became apparent: the ephemerality of the stage as its most enduring quality.

Semicircular bleachers were set up at one end of the Cour d'Honneur, and a wide stage of rough-textured wooden planks six feet off the ground was laid across the opposite side. The high gray stone walls of the square courtyard opened out onto a sky that changed from deep blue to black during the nearly five-hour-long production. The walls' sheer surface was broken by a few dark openings from which spotlights threw long beams down to the stage below. In the center of the stage floor rose a large unit also constructed of wood, its five flights of stairs all facing different directions. Breaking the steep climb were platforms, walls, and doors. As the lighting changed, this structure variously recalled a city, castle, tenement, tower, or abstract sculpture, an interior or exterior. Sometimes light filtered from the inside between the cracks in the wood, emanating warmth and life from the interior. At the apex of the structure, rising behind its narrow, topmost platform, was a large, painted wooden sculpture that at first appeared to represent Heaven, with trumpeting angels standing on a cloud. But as the light changed and the minutes passed, one noticed that this "Heaven" also formed the head of a horned bull, with half-closed, furious eyes looking downwards. Spread out on the stage floor nearest the audience was a deformed double of this head, a Hellmouth with its horns erect and its face turned to the sky. Now and then it glowed red, emitting smoke and a hollow roaring sound.

The scenography made no attempt to "cover" the enormous Cour d'Honneur, but created a transitory space that belonged to neither stage nor spectators. Light beams often played back and forth illuminating the courtyard walls, persistently returning us to the here and now, the stark weight of time that had accumulated in that space, and the tiny lives of spectacle and spectators alike. The strength of the scenography lay in its versatility: it represented the concrete locales of the city, but was also a visual metaphor of the medieval cosmos, with Heaven above and the Hellmouth below, an image also of the Great Theater of the World. The stairway unit was both a stable object and a means of lancing the action, a *machine à jouer*, and an abstract surface upon which the hypercode of theology could be inscribed. It could not be closed off, nor reduced to a specific locale. But however metaphorical and abstract it became, it never lost its materiality: it remained a human construction, a wooden theater erected for a festival, in absurd and touching defiance of the ancient stone.

Mimetic space

The construction described above was used to refer to the many different locales in Rojas' play, without any moveable pieces save one tall ladder, used by Calixte to climb to Mélibée and again as a bier to carry his body away. The largest number of scenes were set on the street as the characters, especially Célestine, moved from one house to another. The other settings included Mélibée's orchard, courtyard, bedroom, and garden; Calixte's house; Célestine's house; a church; a prostitute's bedroom; and the high terrace of Mélibée's house. The physical detail in these locales was sketched in by the stairs, doors, platforms, and walls. However, the settings became recognizable not so much through physical features as through the actors' *deplacement*. Over the course of the play these spaces also resolved themselves into a hierarchical design, inscribed in the spectators' imagination, an alignment along the vertically oriented image of the theological cosmos, as it was seen by Bakhtin.

Diegetic space

Several other locales were referential but not mimetic; they retained their realistic status, but were understood to be somewhere offstage: the road, the marketplace, the harbor, and the cities of Zamorra, Rome, Troy, and Grenada. Heaven and Hell (merged with Hades in the play) were constantly present but unseen spaces for the characters, except for Célestine, for whom Hell was so real that she threatened to "go down there" and denounce Pluto as a fraud. At one point she even "rode" between the horns of the Hellmouth during a reverie on sexual pleasure. Heaven and Hell made up the two extremes of the vertical design; counting these two spaces, the levels added up to the mystical number of seven. As in the medieval theater, Heaven and Hell were seen at all times by the audience. For the characters, however, these spaces were more real, and occupied all time dimensions. Other dimensions of diegetic space were created by the sounds: the roaring breath from the Hellmouth announced itself from time to time, women's high voices representing angels, or a single soprano voice singing in wordless passion. Another sound that lent its own, more unsettling cosmic dimension was what the French call the Mistral, the strong wind that sweeps down from the north through the long valley of the Saône and Rhône and blows constantly over Avignon. It rose to eerie shrieks, fell to a sign, whistled all over the courtyard, moaned, and whispered. Its voice was the palpable tracing of distance through time. It was also a physical force with which the actors had to contend. The Mistral slowed the rhythm of their speech and movement, whisked their words away at times, and blew their clothing and hair into fantastic, ever-changing patterns.

Spatio-temporality/vertical and horizontal

> [In] the medieval . . . cosmos, . . . all degrees of value correspond strictly to the position in space, from the lowest to the highest. The higher the element on the cosmic scale (the nearer to the [quintessential matter]) the more nearly perfect was this element's quality. . . .
>
> The Renaissance destroyed this hierarchical picture of the world; its elements were transferred to one single plane, and the higher and lower stratum became relative. The accent was placed on "forward" and "backward." . . . This cosmos was no longer moving from the bottom to the top but along the horizontal line of time, from the past to the future.
>
> --M. Bakhtin[21]

The various mimetic and diegetic spaces described above were ordered not only through the plot but in a graduated hierarchy. The main spatial orientation of the performance was vertical, with almost all of the action confined to the steps, where the characters could only descend or ascend. The changing locales of the play also aligned themselves along this vertical axis, acquiring meanings according to the theological and social value system. This hierarchy, and the *deplacement* of the actors in relation to it, was a spatio-temporal concretization of what Vitez considered the great metaphysical and visual theme of the play: the fall. And yet, the steps that Vitez and Kokkos finally chose were not strictly vertical, but broke the monolithic line with horizontal platforms, windows, etc., and by facing the stairs themselves in five different directions:

> While the reading of the play is horizontal, there are a great number of falls and climbs in the text. Therefore we have the steps. The metaphysical dimension of the play is the fall. The fall is the great visual theme. The walls of the Cour d'Honneur are also part of the vertical dimension, and we have to play in proportion, against the enormous size of this courtyard. My first idea was a single, immense staircase, much higher, frontal to the spectators.
>
> --A. Vitez, Avignon 1989

We will note from Vitez's statements and from this analysis, that it is impossible to separate space from time: every space, whether diegetic or mimetic, either directly denotes or connotes a temporal dimension. And when we come to the theme of the fall, we must speak of movement, which is already more than a relation between space and time; rather it is a relation marked by change. There are concrete, metaphorical, and metaphysical climbs and falls in both play and performance. All five main characters literally and

figuratively rise to a high point, then fall to their deaths: the highest point in the mimetic topography is Mélibée's terrace, from which she leaps near the end of the play. In the diegetic space, it is the imagined Heaven of the medieval cosmos--but in the mimetic space of the performance, the wooden "Heaven" was dwarfed by the high walls of the Cour d'Honneur, the Mistral and the night sky.

*Displacement of the actor/*Gestus

> To put one's steps in the steps of the other. Form, that is not necessarily immobility; form (in Greek they say schema), the trace of the steps, is in fact the form of movement. Electra placing her feet in the footprints of Orestes and walking, opening her legs as he did, becomes Orestes himself.
>
> --A. Vitez[22]

> If we want to talk of the unconscious, we could say that Chekhov's plays . . . permit the staging of trajectories of the unconscious--topographical trajectories of the unconscious on the stage, on the naked space of the theater, or in the space of the bourgeois salons of Chekhov.
>
> --A. Vitez[23]

The abstract patterns of an actor's body moving in time and space in a certain manner converge into what Vitez termed the "trajectory" of the character, a "writing" of the actor's psyche and body in relation to the total pattern of the actors' trajectories, all of which forms an overarching spatio-temporality that is the *mise en scène*. If Antoine Vitez did not like to think of his work as "directing the actors," it was because this suggested that he had a preconception which the actors had to follow. Nothing could be farther from the truth, at least since the 1980s. Instead, he was, as he explained, a "reader of the others," a reader and writer whose materials were time, space, actors, and texts. In *La Célestine*, actors trained under him were recognizable to theatergoers for their "Vitezian" style: physical energy, spontaneity, and willingness to be inelegant.

The entire dynamic can be seen as a rise and fall, and this pattern is repeated on the level of the human body. There are ribald references in the text to the rising of the male member, the "riding" of the sex act, etc., and Calixte's climb to Mélibée and subsequent fall is the spatio-temporal "trajectory" of that movement. Calixte's sexual attraction to Mélibée is blasphemous because he "calls her God" and refers to her in terms of religious ecstacy. This is played out in a spatio-temporal pattern when he literally ascend upwards to his lover, first slowly and with great toil as he climbs all the stairs just to speak to her through a door, then later much more

quickly with the handy ladder for the actual coitus. He is blasphemous because he is reversing the Church's cosmic values by putting woman and his lower-body appetites on the higher plane. In fact the first time we see him, as he tries to seduce Mélibée in the orchard, he spreads his arms and legs out and lies over the stairs upside down so that she can see what a beautiful body he has: a body in reverse position from the Passion of Christ. When they finally make love, it is on the highest platform, another "conversion" of the Church's value system--indeed, Rojas' most frequent euphemism for sex is "conversation." Mélibée's trajectory is also the rise and fall, and Vitez says of her, tellingly, "Mélibée's head is always inclined, a little, like a leaning tower; this woman/tower falls from the tower. Her body is inclined because it is being hit with the arrows of words."[24] This is the *Gestus* of her character and the play, a spatio-temporal dynamic that includes her body, the scenic space, and a projection/projectile into time.

Célestine herself is the one who sets up all these "conversations," or reversals of values, by living from the appetites of the lower sphere. She has had plenty of rising and falling herself "riding along that road," as she says, and always running up and down the hierarchical cosmos, from Heaven to Hell and back. When she falls, she brings all the rest down after her, and she goes down fighting, even while being murdered by the thirty stab wounds of her "children," Parmeno and Sempronio. This fall was foreshadowed by her faithful prostitute companion Aléuse, who warned that she would fall and die on the street if she kept walking around the city at night.

Conversations/language, objects, repetitions

> Sempronio dies, Sosie . . . substitutes for him, and Tristan comes in place of Parmeno. This reproduction of servants could be infinite, but in repeating itself the figure is altered; these second ones are comic. Ancient resource of the theater.
>
> --A. Vitez[25]

There are also distinct social spaces set up by the "conversation" between the master and servant classes. We know that a good deal of the humor in Roman comedy was created by the slaves speaking so that their masters either did not hear or heard wrongly. In *La Célestine* the servants and whores constantly "mumble" in the presence of their superiors, never telling them their real opinions, which, however, the audience hears. When told to repeat themselves, they literally translate their speech into the master discourse--using some of the same words, but giving only what they calculate will be accepted. The asides thus become a counter-discourse.

Rojas also extends physical blindness and deafness to a metaphor for all the characters' inability to stay away from the unsafe territory of physical love. They are, in other words, unable to see the ground they are walking on, unable

to see where love is leading, to see how high they are, or to hear the warnings of their impending fall, spoken by other characters and, in the production, roared out from the Hellmouth. Frightening at first, the repetition of this roar brought laughter.

The same can be said of Vitez's staging of the medieval cosmic chronotope of verticality itself. The rise and fall was very often comic--a kind of aping of the tragedy. A slow ascent and quick descent defined the rhythm of the play. The first time that the actor playing Calixte climbed the steps to reach Mélibée, it was a long and agonizing task. The second time, however, he was practical enough to bring a wooden ladder with him, and so could take a shortcut up the entire metaphysical edifice. Of course it was this same ladder that he fell from, as a kind of quick moral lesson. In production as in the text, this fall happened so quickly and so accidentally that it was not tragic. It was, as Vitez suggested, the repetition and the quicker tempo (Calixte at it again already, with two new servants to replace the dead ones), that made it comic. Nevertheless, when the servants picked this same ladder up from the stage floor and used it to carry Calixte's broken body away, we were touched: the ladder was turned horizontally, the wooden tool he used to reach his earthly love now taking him to his grave, and the actor off the stage.

The picaro

> Here all of a sudden there is a passage to extroversion. Also the physical demand is enormous because everything is centered around walking, walking in rounds between hell and heaven. It's tiring but very liberating.
>
> . . . To define a character is to kill it. We are always in movement. The creation of a character, it fluctuates, it escapes us, it is fluid. For the moment, I'm in the flux, I see nothing.
>
> --Jeanne Moreau[26]

> The Célestine. Wandering Jew. Old traveler!
>
> --A. Vitez[27]

Only Célestine seemed able to walk over the entire space. When we first saw her, she came up on one side from beneath the wooden stage, and seemed constantly to be walking back and forth over it, as she moved over the streets on her business. In abstract terms, she was the only one who could freely move along both the vertical and horizontal axis. As a picaro/procuress, she cut through and reversed the hierarchical divisions. This was true of her language as well, a mix of sacred and profane. As the great sorceress/tradeswoman, she could turn one element to another. She at first dealt by bartering, trading thread, restored maidenheads, girls' bodies, etc., in exchange for food and clothing. But later she found herself converting to gold-

-Calixte gave her a hundred gold pieces and a gold chain instead of the cloak she asked for. Thus she was at the center of the historic changeover from the feudalistic to the capitalistic economy.

Célestine was the original female picaro, but her relation to the chronotope of the road is different from that of descendants Mother Courage or Moll Flanders. Whereas they travel far out in geographical space--i.e., along the horizontal axis--Célestine keeps within the confines of the city where she was born, but travels up and down the vertical axis to its farthest extremes. She moves through every layer of that hierarchical society, from peasants, thieves, and prostitutes to monks, rich merchants, and aristocrats; she traffics in every passage of earthly life: copulation, conception, birth, and death; she knows every plant and animal in nature, every profession in the marketplace; her speech and actions move easily between sacred and profane, Christian and pagan. Her main pastime is walking on the streets of her city, but, metaphorically, she has ridden the road of risk and pleasure, on the way to death. She has connections high and low, from the monastery to Hades. With her thread she pulled Pluto up from Hades, caught young lovers into desire, showed the way for them to climb to the heights of joy, until they fell down to their death. Her very name, "the celestine," connects her to the heavenly, yet in her society she is called the lowest of the earth. Like those celestial beings, the birds and the angels, she has even had feathers, but they were poured on her as debasement and punishment, for selling prostitutes to monks. In the value system of medieval Christianity, she is the sign of ancient evil, the Whore of Babylon, the woman/city seen in the vision of St. John of the Apocalypse in Revelation, read by the medieval Church as sign incarnate of the corrupt City of Man.

Jeanne Moreau

> It's like arriving in a city by airplane, a city of straight lines like Los Angeles or Chicago. From very high the city forms a whole. And then you land, get to your place of residence, and there, you are lost. You have to refer to a map of the city, you look for landmarks. That's it, the work of rehearsal.
>
> If he [Antoine Vitez] had said . . . *King Lear* I would have said yes. Cleopatra, Mephistopheles, yes. He said *La Célestine* and I said yes.
>
> --Jeanne Moreau[28]

Whereas Célestine has traditionally been portrayed as an ugly, terrifying hag, Moreau was beautiful and alluring, despite a deliberately harsh voice and an attempt to age her with makeup, wild white hair, and a scar painted across her face. Her movements were graceful, and purposefully dancelike. More

important, a kind of double was projected over her figure by our imagination, our memory of all the women she has played in her films. Thus Moreau attained a power of seduction out of proportion to her immediate physical presence, changing the quality of Célestine's sexuality:

> That tiny, immense woman who acts with her virtuoso voice, belongs to our dreams . . . to us. Jeanne Moreau is much more than Jeanne Moreau: . . . a kind of geometric space in the instant of a sigh, the memory we have of [all her past roles]. The witness of our life and reverie.[29]

Jeanne Moreau not only changed the quality of the protagonist, but introduced other spatial and temporal dimensions into the performance. To use the terms of the journalist quoted above, she was more than an individual; she was a "geometric space," a larger-than-life film presence somehow taken inside the spectator, where, "in the instant of a sigh," she was re-lived as the body's time. Moreau was constantly moving, and of all the characters she covered by far the greatest distance. As befits the picaro, she ranged not only all over the visible playing area, but traveled under the scaffolding where the audience sat.

In analyzing the spatio-temporality of a theatrical work, we often find that there is one particular nexus through which the movements of diegetic and mimetic space/time intersect as a dynamic. In *La Célestine* this nexus was the polyvalent, moving figure of Célestine herself, always overlaid with the physical and cinematic presence of Jeanne Moreau. In the winds of the Mistral, Moreau danced her role, the role of the great *metteur en scène* of the world, her long black skirts and white hair whirling in circles, the eye of the storm, of a value system in the throes of social, economic, and moral conversion. Moreau's presence also brought onto the scene the disturbing fragility of her physical presence, marked with the cultural sign value imposed on it by the mass media. (In the production, Célestine's once-beautiful face was literally crossed by a diagonal scar that looked like a knife slash.) Moreau's body-as-sign brought the conflictual ideologies of our own era into focus. If Moreau's life is, as Vitez said, an open history of twentieth-century woman as written by the mass media, then we must also ask what was being written about her through his own production of *La Célestine*.

Historicity/staging the cultural sign

Thomas Postlewait makes the point that the modern and postmodern stage, in using simultaneous setting (such as the stairway construction, with its Heaven and Hell, in *La Célestine*), is not really returning to a medieval view of cosmic oneness, but is using these practices to express a new world view:

> Medieval simultaneous setting . . . represented spatially . . . an ontological oneness of past, present, and future that united God and humanity within an ordained destiny. By contrast, . . . modern . . . simultaneity, self-consciously insistent in its multiplicity, . . . contending correspondences and incongruities . . . [is] a modern reformulation of the relations between time and space, identity and social being, history and moral order, tradition and innovation.[30]

In the early twentieth century the idea of simultaneity stirred optimism that human perception could be extended.[31] Postlewait implies that the ideology behind this appropriation was that the humane citizen should encompass multiple spaces and time dimensions so that tolerance of cultural difference could be learned. At century's end, this optimism seems to be dying, replaced by an ironic but helpless awareness that we live in a flood of visual images bought and sold on a marketplace whose space has enormously expanded through the film and even more through television.

Vitez seemed aware of the fact that it is not possible for modern audiences to "believe in" the medieval image of woman as sign of the cosmos, both earth mother and Whore of Babylon. But the point of the production--and of the written drama--may be that this image was never to be taken at face value. Rojas' work shows the mythic image of woman being converted, already in the fifteenth century, to a currency of her own body-as-object which, in Célestine's own words, could circulate in the market. Vitez may or may not have believed that the image of Jeanne Moreau as the incarnation of sensuality is likewise a reified product of the mass market. But in allowing Moreau to play her role without irony, *La Célestine* remained ambiguous. It did not take the view that all images are signs of meaningless difference/deferral. Also not quite modernist was the fact that the space and time of Célestine was more than a juxtaposition with that of Jeanne Moreau; instead there was a continuity set up between them: the world of Célestine was shown in the moment of its conversion into a contemporary world that we ourselves inhabit.

Afterward/in memory

> I had the impression that Célestine was making everything, developing and directing everything. She found something in herself that illuminated everything, that made herself and everyone else come alive. She illuminated one after the other. The characters all disappeared one after the other, and in falling, they came alive.
>
> --unidentified spectator, Avignon

For the last section of this article, I wish to return momentarily to the production of *La Célestine*. Of course this is impossible except in memory

which is, as Freud has told us, propelled by a hopeless desire to return to the scene. In the play, the last scene was already the moment of separation, the moment when the entire pattern became clear--to the spectator and to the grieving father Pleberio. After Mélibée gave her confession to her father below, and jumped from the high terrace to her death, there was a silence. Then a harsh bright light suddenly flooded the stage and the three walls of the Cour d'Honneur behind it. The spotlight was directed full into Pleberio's face, draining it of color as he stood at the edge of the stage looking out at the audience. This marked his separation from the action, and from the life he had built for his "broken daughter." The spatial separation also opened a gap between the time of the characters and the spectators' present: we suddenly remembered, with sadness, that they had been dead for centuries. The passionate bodies and lives we had followed had turned to dust long since. Now, too, the stairway which had seemed to fill a universe, looked like a child's project made of wood, a *bricolage* which could have been dismantled and carted away in thirty minutes, bleachers and all.

However, this did not happen. The actors came back to the stage again, the crowd of thousands rose to their feet in a roar, and for half an hour, at three in the morning, they applauded the work of Antoine Vitez.

> *Faire du théâtre, c'est s'enivrer de l'éphémère. S'enivrer du passage du temps. S'enivrer de la mort.*[31]
>
> --Antoine Vitez, 1930-1990

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Notes

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1. Antoine Vitez, interview at Avignon, 16 July 1989. Further quotations from this source will be indicated in the body of the article. All translations from the French sources are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

2. Fernando de Rojas' *La Célestine*, Cour d'Honneur of the Palais des Papes, 43rd Festival of Avignon, 11-22 July 1989. Translation: Florence Delay (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); director: Antoine Vitez; set and costumes: Yannis Kokkos; original music: Georges Aperghis; lighting: Patrice Trottier. Co-production of the Comédie-Française, the Théâtre National de l'Odéon, and the Opéra Municipale de Clermont-Ferrand.

3. For a discussion of theatrical spatio-temporality as it relates to historicity, see Sarah Bryant-Bertail, "A Socio-Semiotics of Theatre Performance," *New Directions in Theatre Research*, ed. Willmar Sauter (Stockholm: Nordic Theatre Studies, 1990); and "Spatio-Temporality as Theatre Performance," *Text and Presentation*, ed. Karelisa Hartigan (Lanham, MD and London: UP of America, 1990).

4. Michael Issacharoff, "Space and Reference in Drama," *Poetics Today* 2:3 (Spring 1981): 211-224. Issacharoff, borrowing the terms from Aristotle, defines the mimetic space as whatever

is seen in performance by a spectator, and the diegetic space as all that is established in the spectator/reader's imagination through verbal and non-verbal sign systems. Other useful recent English works on theater space include: *The Theatrical Space*, ed. James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987); Freddie Rokem, *Theatrical Space in Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986).

5. See Anne Ubersfeld, *L'Objet théâtral* (Paris: C.N.D.P., 1978); *L'Espace théâtral*, with Georges Banu (Paris: C.N.D.P., 1978); and *Lire le Théâtre* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1982); Maryvonne Saison, "Les Objets dans la création théâtrale," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 79 (1974): 216-232; and Shoshana Avigal and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, "What Do Brook's Bricks Mean?" *Poetics Today* 2:3 (Spring 1981): 11-34. For a general theory of objects see Jean Baudrillard, *Le Système des objets* (Paris: Collection "Meditations": 1976); and Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Pantheon, 1971).

6. Mary Angiolillo, in *Theatrical Objects as a Sign System: An Object-Text of Jarry's* Ubu Roi *as Staged by Antoine Vitez* (unpublished dissertation, Northwestern University: 1988), provides a theoretical framework and practical semiotic analysis of the objects in an actual production. Instead of imposing a linguistic grid, she creates a concrete, cartoon vocabulary to show how each object signifies in relation to the *mise en scène*. We can read the "object-text" frame by frame, in a cinematographic manner.

7. In *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), Marvin Carlson examines the theatrical event as it has changed over time, with particular attention to the significance of theater as a social space.

8. For an analysis of theatrical spatio-temporality with emphasis on the ideological see Sarah Bryant-Bertail, "Women, Space, Ideology: *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*," *Brecht: Women and Politics*, ed. John Fuegi, John Willet, Gisela Bahr (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1985), 43-61.

Valuable discussions of space and time in relation to general theater semiotics are provided by Patrice Pavis in: "De L'Importance du rhythme dans le travail de la mise en scène," *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis* XXVI: 895 (Warsaw, 1986): 88-96; *Dictionnaire du Théâtre* (Paris: Messidor/Éditions Sociales, 1987); and *Languages of the Stage* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1981). Also see Michael Issacharoff, *Discourse as Performance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1989).

9. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics," *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 84, 85. Bakhtin writes: "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time . . . thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes . . . responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84).

10. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1968).

11. Antoine Vitez, "Quelques notes sur *la Célestine*," *La Célestine* Program, XLIII Festival d'Avignon, July 1989. Other relevant writings by Vitez include: *De Chaillot à Chaillot*, with Emile Copferman (Paris: Hachette, 1981); "À l'Intérieur du parlé, du geste, du mouvement. Entretien avec Henri Meschonnic," *Langue française* (December 1982); "Conversation avec Antoine Vitez," *L'Ane* 5 (May/June 1982).

12. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willet (London: Methuen, 1986). Also see Louis Althusser, "Piccolo Teatro: Bertolazzi and Brecht, Notes on a Materialist Theatre," *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Pantheon, 1969). Althusser reflects on how theatrical time represents ideology, social class structure, and historicity in productions of *Mother Courage* and *The Marriage of Figaro*.

13. Brecht's aversion to the psychological and aversion/attraction to the corporal are two of the major themes of recent Brechtian scholarship. See Stanton B. Garner, Jr., "Post-Brechtian Anatomies," *Theatre Journal* 42 (May 1990): 145-64; Janelle Reinelt, "Beyond Brecht: Britain's New Feminist Drama," *Theatre Journal* 38 (1986): 154-63; and Elin Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism," *The Drama Review* 32 (Spring 1988): 82-94.

14. Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Mary C. Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958) 37, 46.

15. Vitez, "Quelques notes sur *la Célestine*," Program 15.

16. Fernando de Rojas, *The Celestina*, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1955); and Fernando de Rojas, *The Celestina*, trans. Phyllis Hartnoll (Cambridge: Everyman's Library, 1959).

17. Rojas, *La Célestine*. Foreword in the French version (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

18. Vitez, "Quelques notes sur *la Célestine*," Program 16.

19. Mary Angiolillo, *Theatrical Objects as a Sign System: An Object-Text of Jarry's* Ubu Roi *as Staged by Antoine Vitez* 2-3. See note 6.

20. Aurelien Recoing, in "Antoine Vitez. Témoignages," ed. Chantal Boiron, *Théâtres-Théâtre* 13 (May 1990): 5. This is a retrospective on Vitez told through the testimony of actors with whom he worked over the past twenty years.

21. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 363-365, 402.

22. Vitez, quoted in "Antoine Vitez. Témoignages" 4.

23. Vitez, "Conversation avec Antoine Vitez," *L'Ane* 41. See note 11.

24. Vitez, "Quelques notes sur *la Célestine*," Program 16.

25. 15.

26. Jeanne Moreau, "Jeanne Moreau: 'Ma vie n'est faite que de rencontres.'" Interview with Jean-Pierre Thibaudat, Program of *La Célestine* 19.

27. Vitez, "Quelques notes sur *la Célestine*," Program 16.

28. Moreau, "Jeanne Moreau . . .," Program 19.

29. Jean-François Josselin, "Chère Jeanne . . .," *Le nouvel Observateur* (20-26 July 1989): 69. In the same issue: Guy Dumur, "Le Soulier de Satan" 68. Also see "Arts, Spectacles, Avignon 89," in *Le Monde* (6 July 1989), especially José Monleon, "*La Célestine* de Fernando de Rojas: La révolt, la plaisir et l'argent" 2-3. All collected in dossiers of articles from the French, Spanish, Belgian, Italian, German, and English press at the Bibliothèque Nationale de l'Arsenal and the Centre Georges Pompidou.

30. Thomas Postlewait, "Simultaneity in Modern Stage Design and Drama," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Fall 1988): 7.

31. See Margaret Davis, "*Modernité* and its Techniques," *Modernism: Challenges and Perspectives*, ed. M. Chefdor, R. Quinones, and A. Wachtel (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1986) 149. Quoted by Postlewait 25.

32. Vitez, "Antoine Vitez, Témoignages," *Théâtres-Théâtre* 13 (May 1990): 5. Translation: "To do theater is to inebriate oneself with the ephemeral. To inebriate oneself with the passage of time. To inebriate oneself with death."