

Hall just up the road—to reach across the social barriers now existing in Shaftesbury Avenue to the young people of the Cut. Nevertheless Bill Howell, the architect, has made it abundantly clear that in *his* brief there were only two things of importance—money and Dunlop.

Now one would think that some of the money from the temples would be diverted to the “missionaries” of theatre so that when the monument has been erected it could at least be bent to the artist’s will; or conversely—a much “leadered” thought—so that the artist will not build in solid concrete such quirks of his character as will last beyond his own time there.

To trust to so happy an outcome is to confuse aesthetics and ascetics. It is also to begin at the end and work back to the beginning. At the Edinburgh Festival for Dunlop’s *Comedy of Errors* the auditorium was determined by the dimensions of the tent he had pitched inside an ice rink. The stage was that space needed by the actors and the gaps they left untouched contained the audience—on condition there were 500 of them. The atmosphere was more that of a circus than of a play or perhaps was a subtle fusion of the two into something rich and strange. At any rate the critics liked it.

In view of this way of going about things, it is curious that the auditorium of the Young Vic was allowed so much architectural character—the “T”-shaped stage thrusting a long tongue into the audience—an audience of 400 sitting on rigid benches and confronting each other from side to side across a mere 27 feet or so—the emphasis of the surrounding balcony with its hard, defined pillars and abrupt gap just above the stage. This is not intimate theatre in the cosy way that one associates with that word, but something is almost bound to happen there. As Peter James, Dunlop’s assistant, explained, it is impossible for the actor not to be aware of the audience. The building thrusts him into this relationship. You can’t avoid it and you can’t avoid the reactions that come back either. They give the actor a new sense of his responsibility to his audience. Once you have a strong actor/audience

relationship the rest will follow. The relationship of both to the building is inevitable. Dunlop believes that the strong features of the auditorium are the things to which the actor relates, but for Peter James, also directing there, they are in many ways restrictive. To him this building is something to be explored and used and then cast off. He would prefer the box which can be all things to all men—the ultimate in flexibility—not too large or too finite and of infinite variety. Around this box would run a corridor permitting entrance at any level and at any point. Flexible seating units—light and easily moved around—would house the audience in a new position each night and the entire floor would consist of traps or modules so that on the instant caverns could yawn below*.

The all-over grid of the Young Vic is to Peter James too sparsely populated. Its fifty or so lanterns—though they seem adequate for all practical purposes—are merely scratching at the surface and in an ideal theatre the fields of light and sound would be the places where the money was spent. Vast sums of money exist for theatre—much of it being misused. It should be spent not just as capital but as production costs, to “push back the frontiers of experience”. In fact there is a sense that if you push back hard enough in all directions you must find something of value. And with all this he conveyed a kind of practical energy which stopped it from sounding a mere collection of high-flown phrases. The “Freehold”, he instanced, had worked marvels by concentrating on physical prowess—on making their bodies do and say what they please, but this was only one aspect of theatre. Why not, he demanded, a show without actors?

The audience that he aims to please is varied. Coaches of kids, students, people from the Cut and an estimated ten per cent of theatre fanatics mill about together. The priorities of this audience are as yet not fully known; its composition is in fact being

*We have a description of what is said to be just such a modular theatre which is now opening in California. We intend to publish this early next year as soon as we have photographs.—ED.