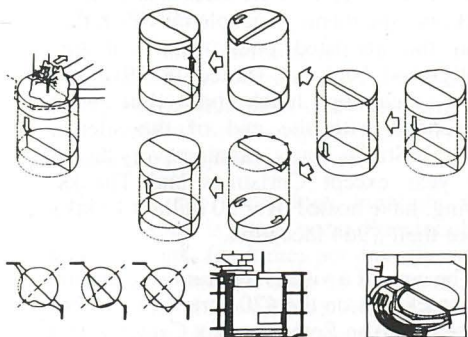
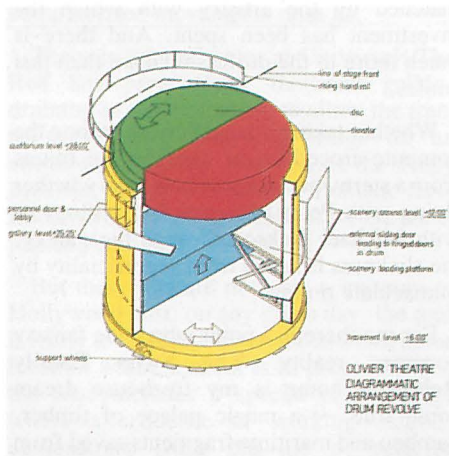


were considering seemed to pose extra problems. On any thrust stage, the floor itself is a major part of the visual environment. A rectangular lift, even in a revolving stage, presented limitations. Only the rectangular elevator that would fit within the circumference would be capable of change. What of the surrounding area?

Finally, late one night in a cafe in Vienna, the "Theta" drum (as Dick and I began to call it) was drawn on a napkin. A drum containing two SEMI-CIRCULAR elevators. Each elevator would stretch to the edge of the thrust and thus allow the removal downward of the whole acting area. On top of the rotating drum was to be a semi-circular disk, capable of being located over either elevator, but capable of independent rotation. Plentiful traps in both elevators and the disk which could be rotated to achieve trapping at any point or at any angle.

So the drum was conceived. It provided:

1. A freight elevator from the scene shops (the Olivier Theatre is on the third floor of the building)
2. A revolving stage.
3. Traps and levels that can be set at any angle to the centre line, quickly, in repertoire.



Drum Revolve control panel.

4. The whole thrust stage might be lowered to the orchestra stalls level or below, thus effectively removing the thrust and allowing its replacement with one of another shape or configuration.
5. The freedom to shape the stage floor in plan and section both above and below normal stage level, yet capable of being changed easily in repertoire.
6. A scene changing device. Half the stage (any half, front or back, at any angle) might be lowered to the basement and replaced by another half in the same, or any other position, or at any other angle. Combined with the separately rotating disk (that of course may also carry scenery – which may be tracked off to a rear stage) considerable variety might be achieved.
7. The capability of rotating and vertical movement, in silence, at any speed, under computer control (also capable of integration with the flying system) presented opportunities for dynamic stage movement that might be liberating for the director.

Ironically, when Peter Hall, on his appointment as Director, came to our office and was shown a model of the drum to be, it was this last feature that most excited him.

But **WHEN** was the drum to be? The period of the National's completion was a nightmare. Of course construction of all the advanced stage equipment went to the tender and the lowest bids (of course) were accepted. The main construction of the building was endlessly delayed and finally in crisis the company moved into the building with almost nothing finished – indeed in the stage areas some things were hardly started. Lighting and sound were just completed to allow the curtain to rise in 1976. The difficult parts, including the computer controlled flying and the drum revolve continued to be worked on by the contractors after the actors had left the stage every night, for months that stretched into years. Only by 1981 was the power flying operational (it has been working successfully ever since). The Drum was commissioned in 1978. Over the years it has been

the backstage workhorse that it was intended to be, lifting freight from workshops to stage, or performing occasional duty as a conventional revolve.

Now at last, that brilliant designer, Bill Dudley has seized the opportunity, and used the drum to its full extent.

For years, the drum has been an invention about which I've been very unsure. I've known that physically the machine worked, but was it right, did it contribute anything to the theatre? Would one as a consultant ever again recommend such a piece of complex equipment? Until "The Shaugraun" my growing doubts would have led me to say no. Since those days of the 1960's my interests have moved away from stage devices and toward exploring how best to design auditorium spaces to increase the intensity of audiences' involvement. Now having seen "The Shaugraun" work, I am less sure. Maybe it wasn't such a bad idea after all!

Guthrie's contribution to theatre was a great one. His rediscovery of the thrust led the way to most modern open stages. Stages that 'contain' the actors within the audiences' embrace. (Hindsight has made one wonder whether he was mistaken to adopt the single level auditorium inspired by the Greeks; perhaps he should have stayed nearer home with the multilevel, more intimate Elizabethan model). But scenic spectacle? All the Guthrie thrust stage theatres have fought against the limitations of insufficient backstage. But there is little sign that the public tire of spectacle. "Cats" and "Phantom" alone indicate the public's love of the visual. Is that relevant to "art" theatre?

The success of "The Shaugraun" is due to the impact of a wonderful play brilliantly performed by actors, who are vibrantly alive and within the same room. Within the very 'grasp' of an excited lively audience. That actors and audience are also contained within a whole world of illusion, within a complete "scenic environment" which complements and supports the drama, enfolding the theatre within the magic of its world, seems potent indeed.