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DIRECTORS IN PERSPECTIVE

General editor: Christopher Innes

Roger Blin

DIRECTORS IN PERSPECTIVE

What characterizes modern theatre above all is continual stylistic innovation, in which theory and presentation have combined to create a wealth of new forms – naturalism, expressionism, epic theatre, etc. – in a way that has made directors the leading figures rather than dramatists. To a greater extent than is perhaps generally realized, it has been directors who have provided dramatic models for playwrights, though of course there are many different variations in this relationship. In some cases a dramatist's themes challenge a director to create new performance conditions (Stanislavski and Chekhov), or a dramatist turns director to formulate an appropriate style for his work (Brecht); alternatively a director writes plays to correspond with his theory (Artaud), or creates communal scripts out of exploratory work with actors (Chaikin, Grotowski). Some directors are identified with a single theory (Craig), others gave definitive shape to a range of styles (Reinhardt); the work of some has an ideological basis (Stein), while others work more pragmatically (Bergman).

Generally speaking, those directors who have contributed to what is distinctly "modern" in today's theatre stand in much the same relationship to the dramatic texts they work with, as composers do to librettists in opera. However, since theatrical performance is the most ephemeral of the arts and the only easily reproducible element is the text, critical attention has tended to focus on the playwright. This series is designed to redress the balance by providing an overview of selected directors' stage work: those who helped to formulate modern theories of drama. Their key productions have been reconstructed from promptbooks, reviews, scene-designs, photographs, diaries, correspondence and – where these productions are contemporary – documented by first-hand description, interviews with the director, etc. Apart from its intrinsic interest, this record allows a critical perspective, testing ideas against practical problems and achievements. In each case, too, the director's work is set in context by indicating the source of his ideas and their influence, the organization of his acting company and his relationship to the theatrical or political establishment, so as to bring out wider issues: the way theatre both reflects and influences assumptions about the nature of man and his social role.

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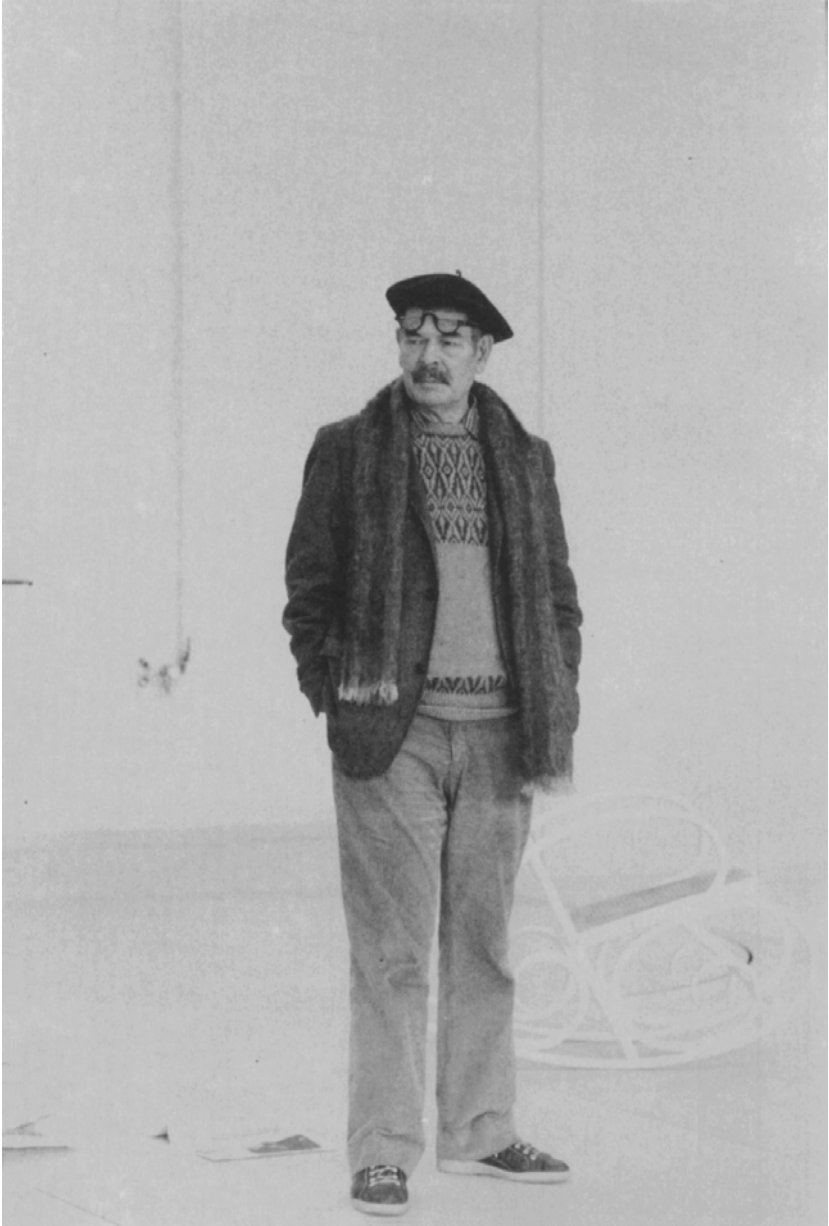
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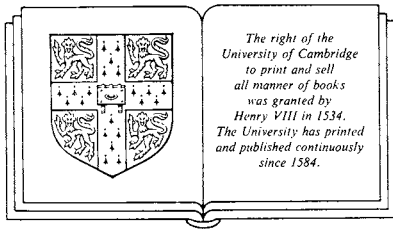
Roger Blin during rehearsals of *Triptych* by Max Frisch at the Théâtre National de l'Odéon, 1983. Ph. Yves Chériaux

Roger Blin and Twentieth-Century Playwrights

ODETTE ASLAN

Laboratoire de Recherches sur les Arts de Spectacle (CNRS)

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This book is dedicated
to Roger Blin
but also
according to his wish
to all those
who shared
with him
the joys
and pain
of that fertile period
in all the arts

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What is a director? Nothing; he shouldn't be talked about; his personality shouldn't exist; he shouldn't seek a style; he should be rigorous about rendering the thought of the author, without adding anything. For that matter, authors should direct their own works; unfortunately, most of them can't do it. In the old days the director was an actor in the company who did the blocking; there was no talk about it. I put my name as director only because I was asked to, but I don't like it. I have no theory, and I try to have no characteristic style.

Blin, interview in *Arts*, 24 February 1950

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O.A.