



Daniel Jeanneteau

Photo: Sylvain Lefevre

Théâtre de Gennevilliers

<http://www.theatre2gennevilliers.com>



## Presenter Interview プレゼンター・インタビュー

### Théâtre de Gennevilliers A bridge to Contemporary Japanese Theater

日本の現代演劇との架け橋  
ジュヌヴィリエ劇場

Daniel Jeanneteau is a leading director in the French contemporary theater scene. He is renowned for his productions combining aesthetically sophisticated stage art making creative use of scenography and lighting, and very exacting interpretations of script. Using Japanese actors, he directed three performances for the Shizuoka Performing Arts Center (SPAC): “Blasted,” “The Glass Menagerie,” and “The Blind,” and the figures of the French theater scene who already frequent Japan, he is one of the most knowledgeable about the arts scene in Japan. Since January of 2017, Jeanneteau has taken on the role of director at Théâtre de Gennevilliers as successor to Pascal Rambert, an individual with strong ties to the Komaba Agora Theater (home theater of Oriza Hirata). In this interview conducted in December of 2016 just preceding his accession to the role of director, Jeanneteau spoke about the upcoming projects of the Théâtre de Gennevilliers and relations with Japan, as he made his visit to Japan in preparation for the “Japonismes 2018” program organized by the Japan Foundation.

Interviewer: Shintaro Fujii, Waseda University

Would you please give us an overview of your background?

As I child I enjoyed reading books, and drawing. I attended the Decorative Art School of Strasbourg where I studied illustration and comics/animation, after which I re-entered the acting school of the National Theater of Strasbourg as a student of scenography. During my second year there I met Claude Regy (\*1), which became a life-changing encounter for me. I went on to do the scenography for his productions for the next 15 years, although I also did scenography for other artists during this time. After this I started to take on directing myself. My first work was Racine’s “Iphigénie,” produced by the National Theater of Strasbourg. I also directed Strindberg’s “Sonate des spectres” and Sarah Kane’s “Blasted.” In 2008, I succeeded Frédéric Fisbach as artistic director of Studio-Théâtre de Vitry. I leave that post in December of 2016 to begin directing Théâtre de Gennevilliers from January of 2017.

The Studio-Théâtre de Vitry is quite a unique theater among the French public theaters, is it not?

I agree. I think that the model it presents can be considered to be one-of-a-kind in France. It is almost hard to even call it a theater in the usual sense of the word. At Studio-Théâtre, creativity, search and experimentation come first, and staging perfor-

\*1 Claude Regy is a director still active in his 90s, known in Japan for his work with Japanese actors in a production for SPAC of Maeterlinck’s “Interior” among others.

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\*2 Theatrical workshops held regularly by director Jacques Lassalle living nearby caused this Theater to be established as a public arts facility through public funding by the city of Vitry in the 1960s. Combined with the fact that the Theater Jean Vilar also opened in Vitry in 1972, the Studio-Theater does not place its main priority on the production of performances.

\*3 Serious issues such as poverty, lack of education, unemployment, violence, the emergence of slums and racism aggregate, and impact each other creating discontent. Rioting in suburban areas throughout France was seen in 2005.

\*4 Through a serious commitment, actions have been taken to seek the democratization of the arts, while preserving the pursuit of art at its best, through coordination with such private organizations as popular education organizations.

\*5 These freelance workers in arts/entertainment industry, including performing arts, television, the film industry, etc., are entitled to receive unemployment benefits.

mances and promoting plays is not its primary objective (\*2). The nine years I spent there were very enjoyable ones for me. I welcomed many artists and companies there as residents. Among them were artists with completely different tastes and ideas from my own, but that only added to the richness of the experience.

I understand that directorships for national theaters are now limited to a maximum of 10 years.

That is true. At the same time, while Théâtre de Gennevilliers is a part of the National Drama Center (CDN, one of 39 that exist in France), the Studio-Théâtre de Vitry is not, and because of its own set of rules it would have been possible for me to stay beyond the 10 years. I felt, however, the time had come to move to a different location, as well as to pass on the directorship to someone else. Regarding this regulation limiting directorships to 10 years, I am in full support of it, because there have been instances in the past where long directorships have been harmful in the long run to theater/society.

What type of theater is Théâtre de Gennevilliers?

As one who started my career in scenography, architecturally I find Théâtre de Gennevilliers to have one of the most interesting theater spaces of any theater in the Paris area. Its two halls include the 350-seat large hall (hall 1) and the smaller 200-seat hall 2, and the two can be used together as one large-scale hall by removing the partition between the two. There is also a rehearsal studio that can also be used for performances with an audience of about 80. And there is another that is purely a rehearsal studio.

I appreciate the fact that the Theater is located outside of Paris. It is well known that suburbs in France are faced with many problems (\*3), and I worked for a long time as an associate artist to the Théâtre Gérard Philipe located in Saint-Denis, a suburb of Paris, and in fact I still live there. In addition to Vitry, I have worked at theaters in many other municipalities on the outskirts of Paris including Nanterre, Bobigny and Montreuil. True of several other municipalities located to the north of Paris, Gennevilliers had for a long time a communist local government, under which the city has enjoyed unique legislation in the area of culture (\*4).

Can you tell us how the Theater is managed?

At Vitry there were four full-time employees including myself, but here in Gennevilliers we have 20 staff members working full-time. We have four technical staff members, which is quite few, and the other technical staff who work here are freelance—so-called *intermittents* (\*5). We have three janitorial staff members and an employee in a secretarial position. Four staff members work in public relations, and the rest are involved in production or management. It is a small staff considering the size of the theater. Our executive decisions are made by a small team including myself as director, our assistant director and a few others.

At Vitry, our public funding was about 500,000 euros, and half of the budget went to project budgets. For a small company that was a significant amount of money. At Gennevilliers, although I don't recall for certain, I believe the budget from grants is

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\*6 While Théâtre de Gennevilliers became part of the CDN in 1983, its predecessor, the Ensemble théâtral de Gennevilliers, was founded by Bernard Sobel in 1964.

\*7 Located in Bobigny, a suburb of Paris similar to Gennevilliers. Its director, Hortense Archambault, co-director of the Avignon Festival along with Vincent Baudriller until 2013, runs a very ambitious program there.

between 2 and 2.5 million euros. Because it is a larger facility, the fixed costs are also large, but I want to apply about one-third of the budget to projects.

### What sort of projects did you propose when you applied for the directorship at the Théâtre de Gennevilliers?

I believe it can be said that my proposal was basically a continuation of the work of Pascal Rambert. I believe that he did some very good work. Bernard Sobel had held the directorship of the Theater for over 40 years (\*6), and I believe that Pascal helped to modernize and globalize the theater, expanding it beyond theater to include dance, music and fine art, engaging it with the contemporary creative context. He had a renovation of the hall done that changed it into a very interesting space.

My proposals also placed emphasis on the present moment, on crossover productions and on relations with the world at large. At the heart of the projects I proposed is, of necessity creation, and on spending enough time to create each work. The theater at Nanterre Amandiers invites many pieces from other theaters and from abroad, and there is almost a kind of festival-like programming throughout the year, but here at Gennevilliers we do not place as much emphasis on presenting performances and promoting the spread of those kinds of productions.

The works that we create will obviously include my own, however I am also interested in having associate artists work with us, as well as artists brought in from outside to create, as well. In addition to bringing in Yoan Thommerel and Sonia Chiambretto as associate artists—who have done extensive work with the issue of ghettos in urban areas and mechanisms through which people are socially marginalized—I have plans to work with such artists as Lazare, a strong advocate of MC93 (\*7), as well as young directors Adrien Béal and Séverine Chavrier.

As far as working internationally, I intend for a large portion of it to be with SPAC (Shizuoka Performing Arts Center). I have been asking of Mr. Satoshi Miyagi that we take our collaboration and joint works even further. I would like for young Japanese directors to come to Théâtre de Gennevilliers to create productions.

### What kinds of specific programs do you have in mind for the local audience?

My belief is that the Theater must not be “a Parisian theater in an inconvenient place,” by which I mean that we must not rely on Paris for our audiences but must forge new relations with the citizens of Gennevilliers. CDNs located in the outskirts of large metropolitan areas are often criticized for lacking a strong presence by not being integrated into the local community, to the point that their actual usefulness has come into question. Such theaters ought not to put art on a pedestal, looming over towns and only opening their doors when performances are held. People should be allowed in not only for the shows, but to eat at the restaurant, and to use the free Wi-Fi even. I would really like to see a visit to the theater become a part of the daily life of the people of the township. Very close to the Theater, there is an establishment that supports those with psychological disorders, and they hold an entire array of cultural events. You can see there a diverse set of individuals such as you would never see at the theater. I am hoping to work together on projects with them.

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What process do candidates go through to be considered for a directorship in the CDN?

Six candidates were left after an initial screening of written applications, three males—two of them immigrants—and three women. I don't believe that at this point, I was very high on their list. It is the Ministry of Culture's stated mission to promote diversity at the managerial level as well, and thus favors women and immigrants. However, they ultimately ended up choosing an average French male (laughs). The screening of the applications is followed by an interview before a selection panel, and I think it was there that I was able to bring myself on top, by impressing upon them the pragmatic and artistic aspects of my proposals.

At the Studio-Théâtre de Vitry, I was only artistic director, but at Théâtre de Gennevilliers I will be assuming the role of director. There is a pronounced difference between the two. At Gennevilliers, I will be in charge of the theater program but also of managing the business aspects of the Theater. Unlike at Vitry, at Gennevilliers I will be able to write checks in my own name!.

What sort of people made up the selection panel?

People who fund the Theater, is perhaps the best way to understand it. They are representatives of the national government and of the municipality. Representatives of the national government come from the General Directorate of Cultural Affairs (DGCA) and Regional Cultural Affairs (DRAC), both a part of the Ministry of Culture and Communication, while the representatives from the municipality come from the city and the regional government. In my case, the panel was made up of these four members.

Please tell me about the relationship with Japan and SPAC in particular, which will be making up an important portion of the Theater's work, going forward.

Since the first time that I worked with SPAC in 2009, the closeness of our relationship has been such that I do not feel it would be possible elsewhere. I had a very fulfilling time directing "Blasted," "The Glass Menagerie" and "The Blind" with Japanese actors (I have directed all of these works with French actors as well). Once, the collaboration helped me to overcome a creative crisis that I experience as a director. It now creates a feeling like homecoming in myself each time. Although we will undoubtedly do collaborations with other countries, the "love story" with Japan is an important one to me personally.

In 2018 Japan and France will celebrate 160 years of diplomatic relations, and a large event featuring Japanese culture entitled, "Japonismes 2018" will be held. Will Théâtre de Gennevilliers be playing an important role?

Although final decisions have not yet been reached, Théâtre de Gennevilliers will most likely produce five or six works, with an emphasis on younger directors. I am impressed with the unique aesthetics and appeal of the director Kuro Tanino, and would very much like to work with him. I also think that if finances allow, works featuring both Japanese and French actors would be interesting. Such a work was done by Oriza Hirata under the directorship of Pascal at Théâtre de Gennevilliers.

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You are known as being one of the most knowledgeable people on Japan in the French theatrical scene. What were the first ties that you made with Japan?

Encounters with Japanese film—Yasujiro Ozu, Kenji Mizoguchi, Akira Kurosawa and Mikio Naruse—were a large influence on me, I feel. Today, the influences range from modern literature, manga (comics) and art to what in France is referred to collectively, and vaguely, as Zen, and I find much to be appealing in Japanese culture as a whole, including any inconsistencies that may be inherent in them. Being industrialized nations, Japan and France both enjoy a similar standard of day-to-day life. However, they can also be perceived as containing fundamental differences. And it is exactly this difference that is appealing to me. No matter how much time I spend in Japan, I never feel as if I understand it. My first stay in Japan was at the Villa Kujoyama in 1998 as a resident artist, where I stayed in Kyoto for four months. I believe this time marks my 21st or 22nd visit to Japan. I desire to stay an outsider, which is why I have decided to not study Japanese, but I consider it to be my second home.

You are fast approaching the record ex-president Chirac who visited Japan over 50 times! Your predecessor at the Studio-Théâtre de Vitry, Frédéric Fisbach, directed several performances at the Setagaya Public Theatre, and Pascal Rambert who preceded you at the National Theater of Gennevilliers also maintained very close ties to Japan through the Komaba Agora Theater. I cannot see these as coincidences. I am looking forward to your work. Thank you again for speaking with us today.