CELEBRATING *SPECTACLE*

A CONVERSATION WITH DAVID ROCKWELL, JULIE TAYMOR, SIMON DOONAN

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DAVID ROCKWELL: . . . And yes, it's right out of *Waiting for Guffman*, the community theater. **(laughter)** And the community theater was a place where, early on, I got the sense that this was a group of people coming together to celebrate and, together, through storytelling, we were creating this magic. And I was smitten by that experience. And then, years later, right before we moved to Mexico, I had a day in New York that truly changed the way I thought about design and space and really kind of launched the way our studio's been thinking about this subject. We came into New York with four older brothers and I went to Schrafft's for lunch. It was the first New York restaurant experience. And I don't remember the way the place looked. What I remember is how it felt, I remember the relationship between the tables. I also remember that dining with my four brothers was no longer a competitive art form—who could get the last piece of steak. There was a kind of sense memory to it that was extraordinary and very communal, and from there we went to the Imperial Theater to see *Fiddler on the Roof*, which was really a seminal thing for me that I've obviously post-rationalized and thought about, as designers do. But it was thirteen hundred strangers, including me, going into this space, and, through the magic of storytelling, became a community, so there was a—for the time of the show, there was this

kind of bond and it made me fall in love with New York, it made me fall in love with theater, and it intrigued me about the idea of celebrating in a live, communal way.

We moved to Guadalajara, Mexico, which couldn't have been more different than Deal, New Jersey, other than eight thousand feet above sea level, so that you'd pass out if you ran more than a hundred yards. It was Deal turned inside out. It was *all* public realm. The house was a walled, small space the size of this stage, but it faced an avenue full of roses. It led to a marketplace that sat next to a bullring next to Mariachi Square. It was urban theater, and it was amazingly seductive. And I paid attention to the spectacles that happened in the space, but also the rituals that connected them, and the richness of the rituals. So that interest and really obsession in public space and celebration continued through architecture school, both in Syracuse and in London, and it was clear to me that the dialogue about buildings is mostly about the buildings, it certainly was in school, and I was interested in the communal experience, the community-driven experience, that forms the lives and prepares the lives that live inside of buildings. I was interested in looking at it from the inside out. And that's really been the body of my work in the city for the last twenty-two years, creating spaces that contain that experience. I overlook Union Square, which is an incredible space, and, like Bryant Park, is a different spectacle every day. Transformable, totally immersive, all different, but all sharing the notion that these are people who are seeking a live, participatory, unprogrammed, unmediated experience. And what we've found is so rich and wonderful about New York is creating places that contain that.

In thinking about the book, the research started by realizing that we wanted to reach out to people in the world who were big-picture thinkers and big-picture makers of spectacle. And if you think about New York, most of the images, sort of icons of New York, are from the air, it's a birds-eye view and it's a very neatly organized city. But as you get down to the ground, it's much messier, it's much more vital, there's much more sort of uncontrolled space, and that's how I wanted to approach the book. So I wanted to—we had twenty amazing interviews on the subject, all very diverse, there is not a bigger range than John Waters and Don Mischer, who produces the Super Bowl halftime. **(laughter)** But the subject could *contain* that diversity. We also had a great core team, Marc Hacker, Molly Heinz, Chee Perlman and an in-house editorial board allowed us to really pursue this subject with this group. When we intersected with Bruce, the breakthrough was realizing that this was a book about the fact that these were experiences you have to participate in. So we realized that the key was making this an invitation to

participate, and, in doing so, we had to develop a kind of two-dimensional language that would represent these awe-inspiring, amazing events. For the purposes of the book—and I'm sure there will be a range of definitions of what spectacle means—for the purposes of this book, we defined "spectacle" as live, participatory, man-made experiences that turbocharge reality, that create an opportunity for this awe-inspiring experience, and we really approached it as a lens, a designer's lens, up to this world to see what they felt like, what they were like, what was the common language, what was so thrilling about them and yet the sort of paradox of lasting in our memory but not lasting in real time was quite extraordinary and Bruce really allowed us to think about the language of the book.

I'm going to run through it in about two minutes, very quickly. It's organized in three main chapters. One is, what are spectacles? They're big, they're bold, and they're brief. And I'm going to talk about that. What do spectacles do? They connect us, they transform us, and they utterly immerse us. And the last chapter is an invitation to go out, called "Getting There," and it's, as you'll see, a calendar of a hundred spectacles around the world and how to get there and what to do when you're there. So it invited you in. And the book became a matrix, a weave of the primary narrative with a series of sidebars that allowed us to tackle subjects around the subject. When we were dealing with circus, we could look at the Feejee Mermaid, which is a kind of bizarre P. T. Barnum story. The abuse of spectacle. The statistics. The Holi Festival, which you see on the images around us, in India, which I'll mention briefly, but what is it that makes that compelling? So I want to start with a quick go-through of the book to give you a sense of that. I guess I'm supposed to click this.

Spectacles are big. It's an obvious point, but they're big in a way that allows us to see the world in a different way. Their very size transforms our perception of what was there before. We're looking at Kumbh Mela, which is over three thousand years old. It's a Hindu ritual, a bathing ritual. Every three years this takes place. Every twelve years, there's a Maha Kumbh Mela, which I guess is the most extraordinary-sized event. And it's so big that you could only perceive it from a satellite. There were seventy million people over the course of forty days, and, on *one* day, twenty-five million people bathed in the Ganges River at the same time. We spoke to Nick Day, who took a lot of these pictures, a really interesting filmmaker, about a documentary he made, and the reports are—and all of the reports about this—were what was surprising is how amazingly serene it was. The level of sort of temporary city that

was set up—fifty square miles of tent, twenty-five linear miles of temporary pontoon bridges—big on a scale that's hard to fathom.

More familiar to all of us in New York is the Macy's Day Parade, and the reason I wanted to include this is the bigness of the Macy's Day Parade, in some ways, as my six-year-old pointed out to me, transforms the way the buildings look. I mean, the balloons are so giant, these mammoth balloons seem to shrink the city, and for a moment, they create this very magical connection.

In addition to being big, spectacles are bold, exuberant, brash, accessible, generous, and as Simon talks about in his interview, fills this need, this human need for a kind of an exuberant self-expression. Every two years in Brussels they create the Flower Carpet. And it started in the Seventies, so it's a relatively new ritual. A million begonias set up in four days and the extraordinary pattern and color of these flowers sits in direct contrast to the kind of sobriety of the square and creates a new meaning for that place.

Spectacles are brief. For those who are designers, that is the most humbling aspect of spectacles. Because, truly, as designers, we're looking for, in general, permanence, we're looking for structures that last. And what I think is so amazing about fireworks is they disappear as they're being made. They literally are a kind of magic in the sky, and they also point out one of the factors about many of these experiences, and that is that they get their power from being right on the edge of out of control. There is a thrill in being on that *edge,* and fireworks are essentially controlled warfare, the sound, the smell. We spoke to the Gruccis about fireworks, and I was amazed at the sophistication in the technology, but the essential event has stayed the same.

Spectacles connect us. Anyone here familiar with Burning Man? Has anyone been to Burning Man? **(laughter)** Well, Burning Man, for those who don't know it, it takes place in the middle of the desert. For the week that it's up, it's the second-largest city in Nevada. And the structure of it, this circle, as Larry Harvey describes, who was the founder, and Kevin Kelly talks about it in really eloquent detail, the actual structure was formed unconsciously. That ring was formed so that people had equidistance around the main event. You connect because it's pedestrian and it's bicycles, so you can't go in your air-conditioned bubble to another air-conditioned bubble. You're forced and invited to participate and come

in contact. Everyone is an artist, everyone there participates, there are no viewers, there are no passive viewers, and the motto is it rests lightly on the earth, and towards that end, everything you bring in you take out, and when it's gone, nothing is left.

Spectacles transform. We spoke at length to an amazing artist named Peter Minshall, who is probably the greatest artist working in this form, he works out of Trinidad. And he describes Carnival in Trinidad as transforming not just the people who participate, and again, closer to home there's the Halloween Parade, which I've been to as a viewer and been to as a participant, and once you're in mask and in costume, you have a very different view of the experience as a participant. In Carnival, the people who operate and control and perform the masque, as it's called, are also the ones who make it, and they make it two or three months before, so the village or the town is transformed two or three months before by the *making* of the experience, it's transformed *during* the experience, and of course there's an aftereffect, a kind of magic that continues. So they transform on a personal level and they transform on a spatial level.

And the last characteristic we looked at is, spectacles immerse. They create a definitive, momentary break from our—whatever it is we're in—our daily life. Sight, sound, smell, surround us, and as an example of that, this is the Holi Festival in India, which is also a Hindu festival around spring, and both Carnival and this are in some ways about rejuvenation in spring, and the entire world around this experience is colored. Dried plants, dried powders are used to color the ground, the people, animals. It is a totally immersive experience.

We end the book with "Getting There." Anyone here go to the original Woodstock? Was it the same people who went to Burning Man? **(laughter)**

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My dad went.

DAVID ROCKWELL: Thanks, for that. **(laughter)** So, "Getting There" is a chapter that has a calendar of a hundred spectacles, and then an in-depth look at forty as an invitation to participate. I want to just end by showing a short, two-minute film in a second that we put together as a way to suggest what it's like to be there. But in hearing what John had to say about the screen, I have to admit I still have my

BlackBerry in my pocket. I don't know who I think I'm going to get a message from up here, or why it's so urgent, but I'm as technology-addicted as anyone, and I think the virtual connection that we have in the world has allowed us to shrink the world. It's been amazingly powerful at connecting to things around the world we never knew about, we're more mediated than we've ever been, and, I think, paradoxically, it's useful to acknowledge and look at the power of *live* experience, unplanned, and the need to create spaces that contain it, that don't put everything into neat, controlled boxes. So let's take a look at the movie.

(music)

(applause)

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Congratulations. Thank you very much. That was really terrific. To remind everyone—Simon Doonan, Julie Taymor, and David Rockwell. Would you go to Burning Man?

DAVID ROCKWELL: I would.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: You would.

DAVID ROCKWELL: And I probably will. But what I'm now—

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: It's not like the "wouldn't take the shoe off" thing because you had to go onstage. Okay, great. Good. You are one of us. Join us, brother, join us, yes. **(laughter)**

DAVID ROCKWELL: We're planning to go to Burning Man. I mean, my personal travel schedule in relation to the book has gotten much more extensive. I have a four-year-old and a six-year-old, so we're looking at kind of easing in. I want to—I'm definitely going to go to Carnival through Peter Minshall's eyes, and you know, the Burning Man issue we talk a little bit about, challenges our sense of comfort and our sense of participation, so yes, I will go.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Do you have a *hunger* for this kind of event being more accessible in *this* culture, or do you see it happening—I mean, certainly there are plenty of American events—the Macy's parade you referred to, but there's certainly nothing on the scale of twenty-five million people next to one river.

DAVID ROCKWELL: I think what I have a hunger for is the deep sense of ritual that that creates and I think that's an incredible example in terms of scale. And I don't think it needs to be at that scale. I thought *The Gates* in Central Park was an amazing example of something very near and dear to all of us that transformed people's experience of something they knew before. And we were working on a restaurant on the third floor of the Time Warner building looking down at it. And I knew it was coming, I'd seen drawings and had heard about it, and then when you see it from the air and when you got down into it, it was it was just magical. So whether it's big or small it's about leaving the room for that kind of self-expression.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: And it's also about just seeing—you know, whatever you think about it. I recall the media leading up to *Gates* and people, you know, the media that I was working in at the time. I mean, "Orange stuff in the Park? Why? Spend money on this? That's wacky." **(laughter)** You know, and yet when you see the impulse to do something so *out* of the rhythm, and the ordinariness, and just something on a *scale* that just says, you know, "Where does that *come* from?" It's exhilarating and it's very intuitive, even as it's unusual.

DAVID ROCKWELL: And in keeping, I think, with what was so amazing and magical about Central Park anyway. I mean, Central Park's a miracle, that it's there and allows everyone to kind of congregate. There's random paths, there's planned events. So I think in some ways it made visible the choreography that was already there.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Julie, you say that transformation is a central idea in your work. I was transformed by *Juan Darién* at the Lincoln Center Theater years ago and then I was so thrilled that you did the artwork for *Lion King*, which my little daughter Regan, you know, still talks about. And obviously, you've moved on, you did the Frida Kahlo movie. Where does this idea of transformation come from? And you have a movie that's coming out actually next summer, too, as well.

JULIE TAYMOR: Where does it come from in my work?

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: In your life?

JULIE TAYMOR: I was a traveler since I was very young. I went to Paris when I was sixteen, but perhaps most importantly, I spent four years in Indonesia, and went to India, Sri Lanka, when I was fifteen, I think, and had an introduction to this kind of spectacle that is very religiously oriented. And living in Indonesia—I went for three months and spent four years there—mostly in Indonesia and some part of the time in Japan. I was going to stay in Japan, but the theater in Japan was more like in the West by that time, which was more organized, and more associated with theatrical productions on stages, two-hour, three-hour productions.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Audience out here, stage up there.

JULIE TAYMOR: Exactly. And when I want to Java, and then subsequently to Bali, I was twenty-one years old and absolutely stunned.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: How is it different in Bali?

JULIE TAYMOR: Well, in Bali there's no word for "art." There's no separation, it's part of life.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Those poor people.

JULIE TAYMOR: Isn't that sad?

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: How sad for them, yes.

JULIE TAYMOR: So if you're a farmer, you also may be a dancer. You may be a musician and a tailor and a schoolteacher and a mask carver. And not that they haven't specialized by this time—this was a long time ago—but it was something you did as part of just being human. It was part of religion,

Hindu religion in particular, in Bali, and these performances, what we would call performances, went on all night long, they went on for nine hours, and what I learned—We know about the Suzuki method of teaching music, that the child is there very early and the father—by being there on the lap, well this is what would happen in Bali. The children would be sitting on their parent's lap, and they would be getting the movement, and the rhythm, from a very young age. They would be hanging around. They'd be moving back. There *was* no separation from the front of the stage—there was no stage—to the back of the stage.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Also within that culture there's an accessibility to the large aggregated spectacle that we don't really understand here. There's not a language for—"You know what I'm going to do tonight? I'm actually going to go to this wild, wacky thing where the entire village is getting together." In fact, you move seamlessly from what you're doing during the day to these kinds of events at night.

JULIE TAYMOR: Yes, one of the things that I remember being very, actually, *annoyed* by, was that the theater, all the talk about theater or movies was on the "Arts and Leisure" page, that we would separate the arts to our leisure activity, as opposed to saying it's the most fundamental part of our life, and that you can't just breathe without it, that it was as important as breathing and eating and drinking. And that stunned me at age twenty-one to be living in a culture where—it was absolutely fundamental. That didn't mean that you had to pay attention. That's the other thing that I loved. I loved going to an all-night Wayang Kulit, which is the shadow play, and half the time the people are eating and flirting and running around and then sometimes they would show up because—and I think these all of these spectacles have a bit of that—it's about the socializing that goes on during them.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: That was the way opera used to be.

JULIE TAYMOR: Absolutely. And Shakespeare. You'd drink, you'd eat. The other night I went to the opera, did I go to the opera? I think I was at the symphony, and I was moving my body to the music, and the woman next to me went [snaps fingers] like that. **(laughter)** I wasn't allowed because I was disturbing her presence. It just annoyed the hell out of me. I couldn't—the music made me move.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: You were in front of me. I was really pissed off. **(laughter)** It was so annoying, I was like, "Jeez, who is that woman? My God!"

JULIE TAYMOR: Or one time I remember laughing at an opera. But it is something—I think being in Indonesia at that point in my life—I'd been doing theater since I was eleven years old, I'd done it professionally, you know, I was in the Bread and Puppet Theater, and I was in those giant spectacles in Vermont in the open fields and also in the anti-Vietnam marches, being lost. I think this was when I decided I didn't like being *in* the spectacle, because you're inside these giant puppets and you can't see anything. And I prefer—I think about it. I've been to Carnival in Rio. I haven't been to Burning Man, and I have a—I think, as a creator, I have an incredible appreciation and wonder at it all, but I don't know how much I can let myself want to be *in* the mix. I am amazed—I get—I think I *was* when I was twenty-one and during that time. And now, I slightly—

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Did you take off your shoe earlier?

JULIE TAYMOR: Oh, everything.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Oh, okay, you did, good, good, great.

JULIE TAYMOR: I fell into a volcano that was live and had to be taken out. I mean, it was a time where I didn't know if I'd ever come back to the United States.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Well, you get the people who get in the puppets and you've got the people who hang around outside the puppets. I mean, you know, it's good that there's a social differentiation. Simon, when you started doing windows at Barneys, from your background as an artist, you described that one of the things that you love the most about it is that anybody can come to see the window.

SIMON DOONAN: Can you hear me?

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Yes.

SIMON DOONAN: Well, first of all, I'm very *insulted* that you called me an "artist," I'm just horrified by that.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Saboteur?

SIMON DOONAN: Because I think, going to what you were saying, I think we tend to have a very masochistic relationship with art. You know, like, you can't move in your chair, you, you know, art is something that's dour and intimidating and obscurantist, and the whole *merging* of art with people's lives that *you* were describing, we need more of that, you know, because I think our relationship to art is very masochistic and sort of bizarre and I think it sort of needs to change. Anyway, what I do, it's not really art, it's sort of some bizarre of street theater and craft and design.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Yeah, that's *totally* unrelated.

(laughter)

SIMON DOONAN: So I'll thank you to mind your language.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: *Excuse* me. Don't call him an artist.

(laughter)

SIMON DOONAN: Yeah, well, I think there is an important distinction.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: No, I hear you.

SIMON DOONAN: I get a salary, there's a bunch of us that do it, it's sort of like, I'm happy *not* to be, because of the associations that art has in our culture where it is so sort of dour and obscurantist and noncommunicative. I mean, right now at Barneys we're working on our Andy Warhol windows, which are going to be our big holiday promotion. **(laughter)** And, you know, I *love* Warhol, because he's *incredibly* communicative and incredibly inclusive and there's a guy who understood spectacle, whereas

now I think we've moved away from that and art's become this sort of codified, dour kind of world that isn't inclusive in the way that something like Burning Man *is*. I don't think of Burning Man as a bunch of artists, I think of them as a bunch of freaks on bicycles in the nude. **(laughter)** And, you know, it's great, it's very akin to what I do. It's sort of a free thing that is more uncategorizable but probably more aligned with street theater or—

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: What's the most *surprising* thing that happened in front of one of your windows, **(laughter)** or the most interesting sort of group that aggregated there other than just tourists and people who want to come into Barneys.

SIMON DOONAN: And dogs peeing on them.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Yeah, you can skip that part, yeah.

SIMON DOONAN: Well, the best things are when things go *wrong*. You know, like we went through a period in the late Eighties of doing a lot of these celebrity caricatures. You know, you were commenting earlier on the Margaret Thatcher as the Iron Lady in the S & M outfit. During that period, we had this caricature of Bette Midler as a dancing Christmas tree clutching a menorah, **(laughter)** very inclusive, we were being *inclusive*. And Bette was in this side window, and I turned the motor on and we all went outside to watch it, and there was a big crowd gathering, and all of a sudden she started banging her head against the glass, **(laughter)** and it was so fantastic. It was just *ten* times better **(laughter)** than when she wasn't banging her head against the class. And it looked like it was going to break the window. And then at other times, I love putting food in the window—bread, rolls, because it's *cheap*, because we have very—not like you, our budgets are very small, and so we have to make things out of other things. So I'll call up Payard Bakery and say give me all your dried bread rolls, we'll make like a designer's name out of it. And then you get vermin in the window. **(laughter)** And people *love* vermin in the window, **(laughter)** they just—and you know they're going to dine out—

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Of course they do.

SIMON DOONAN: They're going to dine out on it for weeks. "Oh, I was outside Barneys, I'd just bought a Hermès handbag," Miss Fancy, and she sees a rat **(laughter)** running through Barneys' window, or a mouse. Mouse. So when things go wrong, they can really—like what you were saying, what David was saying about spectacles being on the edge, being the thing that's about to explode. So I think that's part of the thrill.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: But the surprise is great, the idea that you never know what's going to happen. The use of celebrity, by you particularly, is a way of aggregating a kind of sort of shared experience. You don't revere the celebrities, particularly, in the Iron Maiden costumes or the menorah Christmas tree kind of thing or the Tammy Faye piece that you did, that was spectacular.

SIMON DOONAN: Oh, I hate celebrities.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: But there's a sense of bringing them down

SIMON DOONAN: Deconstructing them!

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: —and also loving them at the same time.

SIMON DOONAN: Oh, absolutely.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Celebrity is a very shared experience in America.

SIMON DOONAN: It was something I entered into purely because I understood that it communicated. Because the first one we ever did was when the Reagans were leaving the White House. And we had this Mrs. Reagan with her back to the window because I couldn't get her face right and she looked terrible. So we turned her around and she was saying goodbye to the—you know, looking out wistfully at the White House, blah blah blah, holding her plane tickets. And people went *nuts*. And it was all over the papers. And I thought, "Wow! That communicates to people." So it was purely—it wasn't paying an homage absolutely, eeech, *quelle horreur*! It was more—

(laughter)

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Obviously.

SIMON DOONAN: It was more recognizing that this really resonated with people, but that was something that began to happen in the eighties.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: David, how is Burning Man like NASCAR? Both are profiled in the book.

DAVID ROCKWELL: Not in very many ways. **(laughter)** NASCAR is in there, I mean it is a uniquely—it's a newly minted ritual. It's uniquely American. It's *incredibly* in your face. And what's fascinating about it isn't the race, it's the whole infield culture.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Infield—the people who are inside the track.

DAVID ROCKWELL: Hot, sweaty, pick-up trucks turned into—they're like Simon's windows—pick-up trucks turned into swimming pools. I mean, there's a kind of self-expression within this confined framework. And the nail art is unbelievable. Like huge nails with decals on it.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Fingernail art.

DAVID ROCKWELL: Fingernail art. So it's much more about the kind of self-expression that happens *before* the event and after the event. The event is really not the thing, it's the kind of collision that happens before that.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: And Burning Man bans all commercialism. I mean, there's nothing allowed to be sold at Burning Man, yet if you were to *not* sell something, or buy something, at a NASCAR event you'd probably be arrested.

DAVID ROCKWELL: And I'm sure Coke is working on the Burning Man thing to figure out how to solve that.

(laughter)

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: But what is in the difference in a spectacle that is commerce-driven in some way versus a spectacle that is more spontaneous, that arises out of some cultural ritual, some religious ritual, some purely accidental kind of celebration?

DAVID ROCKWELL: Well, what intrigued me is every person interviewed treats—spectacle's like a magnifying glass up to kind of personal choice, because you're *declaring* yourself in real time to participate, so it magnifies that which people think is hideous, I mean, if the spectacle does not appeal to your aesthetics, that's a magnified thing.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Wait a minute, what do you mean?

DAVID ROCKWELL: So, when we spoke to Quincy Jones, who did a great interview in here, and we mentioned Burning Man, and he said, "Oh, my *God*, that's where they burn that thing and people run around *naked,* and it's like a horrible experience."

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Not Quincy's thing.

DAVID ROCKWELL: Not Quincy's thing. So I think the fact that it is such an explosion of energy that if it doesn't conform to your idea of right and wrong or your aesthetic inclination, that's magnified.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: So you talk about the Olympic opening ceremony—I mean it seems to me that you've got events that aggregate very specific people, you know, the Hindus in India, and then you've got NASCAR, which is a specific subculture that is probably not going to include a lot of people outside of that subculture—but then you've got the Olympic opening ceremony, which attempts to unite a global audience and, if you include the television audience, brings four *billion* people together in some way.

DAVID ROCKWELL: There's a few things that were surprising that link all the experiences and one of them was which shocked me and speaking to Don Mischer, who, all he does is larger-than-life—Super Bowl halftime—he was the one who did the convention where the balloons didn't come down. **(laughter)** It was not a happy experience.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: I'm sure he's glad you're reminding us all of that.

(laughter)

DAVID ROCKWELL: Take a bow, Don. But he talked about the Olympic ceremonies in Atlanta, which I believe is the one where Ali lit the torch, Muhammad Ali, who we also spoke to about that in the book and what he described was that when you're producing an event, what you're trying to do is to control every single facet to allow for two or three spontaneous unplanned moments, and it's that spontaneous piece, and that, in fact, in the case of Ali, no one knew that he was going to do that. So I think I think there's that uncontrollable factor that goes through. You know, NASCAR, there's the crashes, and clearly there's an element of danger in it.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: And there's the people who have been drinking for four or five days, that's a sort of a surprise, uncontrolled element.

DAVID ROCKWELL: That runs through a lot of the events.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: That runs through a lot of the events, yes. Julie, you know, in some of the events that are described in here, producers of big events say, you know, we handed flashlights out to fifty thousand people in the audience and they flashed them and wow, that was amazing, or we handed bells to people and asked them to ring at a particular time and that was the most memorable part.

JULIE TAYMOR: Shoes.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Right, the shoes thing, right. But I would think that, you know, that we have to constantly be reminded in this era of special effects and giant lighting and technology and screens and Megatrons that those simple things are really so much more powerful. Why is that?

JULIE TAYMOR: That's one of the reasons that I keep moving back and forth from cinema, film, to live theater, because there is something—if, when people say to me, in *The Lion King*, about *The Lion King*, that the first five minutes was the moving thing. It's sort of a drag first of all, because you say, "Oh, what about the other two hours and thirty-five minutes?" But you wonder because there's no *story* in the first five minutes. It's all about making a space come alive and the visceral experience of the theater, a *beautiful* theater, I might add, the original one. But the idea that people are *seeing* the magic. You know, when you say the visual effects and all, you know, I do a lot of visual effects, and not all of them cost a lot. Something like *Juan Darién* originally, maybe now a few of them are bigger-budget, but there is also the most inexpensive, as you say, it's the idea, that a little shadow puppet carved out of—not even carved, cut out of cardboard—on a stick with a light bulb moves across the space, and that the audience is aware of the strings, of what it is, and yet it's transformed—you asked about transformation—they *go* with you. They know they're in a live theater, but all of a sudden they are ready to suspend their disbelief.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: More for a puppet—more for a sock puppet—than for a human actor.

JULIE TAYMOR: Absolutely. But why people have to go to church or synagogue or a mosque is because the environment—even this room—the environment that they're in, being next to people is all part of the experience. I was thinking the other night, as the Mets were losing, I don't really like to watch baseball.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: That was last night, sweetheart. Twenty-four hours ago.

JULIE TAYMOR: Look, I know. Yes. Part of our household is very, very upset. Me, too. But, I don't like to watch baseball on TV. But I *love* to go to the baseball game. So what's the difference? Everybody knows. It's not just the hot dogs, but—that has a lot to do with it—but it is being in the space, in the crowd. Our biggest spectacles that are constantly happening are our sports—are our boxing,

our football, our baseball, our hockey. And why do people not get content with just watching them on the two-dimensional screen? Because they like that experience, and the experience of danger, and that you don't know what's going to happen, circus is the same. Live theater has that, the lights might—oh, I had this whole thing with *Grendel* you might have read about, and this wall, and "uh-oh, maybe it's going to break." There's something so exciting about that, that moment of it not being canned and perfect.

DAVID ROCKWELL: Well, tt's a call to be in the moment,

JULIE TAYMOR: Yes, absolutely.

DAVID ROCKWELL: There's no other moment you can be in, because that moment's not going to repeat.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Right, well, it's the "Bette Midler whacking her head against the window" moment. I mean, we can coin that right now, I think. You know, talking about the suspension of disbelief, and I think there is something going on in America particularly, and in Western culture, where I think the screen's dominance, people are reacting to it, people are trying to climb outside of the screen. Museum attendance is through the roof, partly because it's such an experiential kind of an event. People can go and there's lots happening and you can take your friends. But, nevertheless, politicians, and particularly twentieth-century politicians, have used spectacle and aggregations of crowds for very *frightening* ends and I wonder if it worries you to be in a giant crowd of people chanting about their favorite shoe. You know, who knows what they'll be doing tomorrow? Simon?

(laughter)

SIMON DOONAN: Absolutely. I haven't been to any of those sort of Albert Speer–type rallies. **(laughter)** I don't know what kind of life you think I'm leading. Was that what you meant?

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: I think a lot of people in America look at giant crowds of people chanting and, you know, think of government control, think of, you know, Stalinism, think of Nazism, think of

hypernationalism, think of phenomena that are spectacle, that are powerful, that are memorable, that satisfy all of these criteria but yet have very, very dangerous sort of implications.

SIMON DOONAN: Yeah. Well, I think those sort of totalitarian displays that you're talking about, they're—in a funny kind of way, they're the opposite of living in New York because living in New York is just big old mayhem twenty-four hours a day. I mean, I took the subway ride here, and it's just a completely unchoreographed spectacle, it's like the antifascist kind of spectacle, so that's why it's so odd to think of being in some like demented North Korean parade **(laughter)** in a funny outfit, though it could be kind of chic.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Or the Mall of America.

SIMON DOONAN: No, America doesn't really have stuff like that, I don't think, because it's not that kind of culture. America is—well, a few years ago, I went down to the Bahamas, and there's this resort there called the Ocean Club and it's very chichi and it's designed by Christian Liaigre, and it's very Zen and minimal and blah blah blah and then you walk down the beach, you think, "Well, this is nice, but it's a bit sort of tight-assed," **(laughter)** might be the right word. And then you walk down the beach and there's Atlantis, and you know, there are people on Jet Skis, with their children's faces tattooed on their back, **(laughter)** and they're riding along and they're having fun, and there are shark tanks, and people flying through tubes, and you think, "Great, I'm back in America, I'm not in some terrible withholding"—because *style* can be very antithetical to enjoying a spectacle. In order to enjoy a spectacle, you have to surrender all that bullshit and surrender to it. And I think what you were saying about—what were you saying about Quincy Jones's aesthetics. And I don't know, he needs to like leave his aesthetics at home and—

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: He needs to get out more.

SIMON DOONAN: Yes.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Possibly. Why, David, does Vegas make it into the book? One of the people that you interview about Las Vegas, that lives in Las Vegas, describes *America* as being fundamentally

ugly from coast to coast and that Vegas from his perspective—hasn't been to Yosemite, I guess—and *Vegas* from his perspective is a place that is committed to an idea of beauty that he really responds to.

(laughter)

DAVID ROCKWELL: That's an art critic named Dave Hickey who has made his living out of that point of view, eccentric though it might be. Vegas is in there—it's the closest thing to architecture that's in the book—and it's in there because, you know, to sort of tie into what Simon was saying about Atlantis. Vegas, first of all, the skyline is constantly changing. It's not about a permanent skyline. The population is largely tourist, it's really an ephemeral experience that never intended to be a pedestrian experience. These were air-conditioned bubbles and what people found was the most interesting thing was going, sort of moving around. It became this bizarre pedestrian experience.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Well, bizarre is not even the word. I was at a Steve Wynn hotel, I think it was the Bellagio, I think—and they have this—maybe it's another one, you get them all mixed up—but there's like this Venice canal inside, right, and there's a restaurant there, and the restaurant has an *inside*, and then there's an *outside* by the canal, and there's this, like, painted sky and I was trying to get a seat there, I was at a conference for something or other, and literally there was this heated argument going on, about this one couple who insisted on having a table *outside*. **(laughter)** Not *in*side, *out*side. And the waiters were—I mean talk about suspension of disbelief. You know, "I want *outside*. I don't want to be inside! I want outside!" And they were identical! **(laughter)** And why does that work?

SIMON DOONAN: I was just there, and I said to the concierge, "Oh, where's the Grand Canal?" because I'd heard about that, and I wanted to see all that inside/outside thing and he said, "It's on the second floor." **(laughter)** How fabulous.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: It's a viaduct, I guess. That's called plumbing! That's not a canal. **(laughter)** You know, Steve Wynn in the interview in this book describes as his metaphor, his sort of template for Las Vegas, as New York City. Do you buy that?

DAVID ROCKWELL: Well, Steve is fabulous—

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: I don't have any problem with Steve.

DAVID ROCKWELL: And is a terrific, amazing salesman. I think more interestingly he describes Vegas as having no context. And that for—no context. I mean it is this almost single-purpose place built in the middle of the desert without context and therefore there's permission. But I actually think the reality of Vegas is sort of flat-footed compared to the fantasy of it, in that once you build a building in the shape of a pyramid, you're sort of stuck with that pyramid, and I think what Steve was talking about was changing the relationship of theater, that the performance was the hotel looking at the city—the audience was the hotel looking at the performance of the city. I think it was a stretch. I don't think it's anything *like* New York, and I think that's a good thing.

(laughter)

SIMON DOONAN: I think the misery of Vegas—I think Vegas is a miserable place—**(laughter)** and I think the misery of it comes from the fact that with any spectacle, there's a really sad aspect to every spectacle, because it ends and then you're out at the bus stop in the rain going home, right? **(laughter)** So in England they have this expression, "After the Lord Mayor's show comes the shit cart," and it's a little bit vulgar, but it does make a very good point, that every spectacle ends, so there's an intrinsic sadness in every spectacle, so in Vegas, you have that magnified, and you're living with that a hundred times over everywhere you go. So there's that sadness, of like that, "It's not real, it's going to end." It's multiplied a billion times, I think that's why people have mood swings when we're there, they're there.

(laughter)

JULIE TAYMOR: I think all spectacles in some ways can be seen as the same. The Festival of Holi for I don't know how long it lasts, but it's topsy-turvy for a limited amount of time. You're a poor worker and all of a sudden you're able to throw all this paint on your bath, you're able to become a woman if you're a man—it takes the banal everyday life and gives you a moment of respite. I think that's what religion is supposed to do. I think that's why it's so powerful, because you go into a church for a moment and you're singing with everybody else and you feel *transported*. So whether we like Vegas or

not it doesn't really matter—I think the thing about Vegas that, what we're talking about in the architecture, is that it's so controlled and so fabricated the only danger is losing your money on gambling, and that's what makes Vegas stay Vegas. If it was simply a *park* of that *structure*, I don't think it would work. I think what's there is the danger—maybe the promise—of sexuality or sensuality and the fact that people are gambling and from the outside, and it obviously *is* very sad, but on the other hand, it draws people. So, and back again, it's not something that you—

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Trying to figure out how to separate out the gambling in Vegas is, you know—

DAVID ROCKWELL: But the fact is in Vegas that the percentage of income spent on gambling is radically different than it used to be. It used to be 80 or 90 percent, it's now 30 percent or something.

JULIE TAYMOR: It's the entertainment.

DAVID ROCKWELL: And we were on this project for MGM where they said they wanted to create a citylike experience. So there were a bunch of us who said, "Why don't we create the world's greatest park?" I mean, you know, Vegas needs a public place, and so the client thought about it, and he said, "Well, that's good, but you've got to add the retail in somehow." **(laughter)** I mean, not crazy—

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: But that's what frustrates me about Vegas, in the sense that I mean, if you look at the experiences in this book, and think about art going way back in history. I mean, in a sense, all the art forms were originally detached from this idea of object and commerce. I mean, literature was an oral tradition, it was something that arose out of a *gathering*. Theater was *always* a gathering. Cinema is basically a proto-theatrical experience, and music was *always* gathering, was *always* live performance. The idea, in the age of recorded music, that the music is an object, is fundamentally at odds with all of human history in some way and it seems that this return to spectacle is a kind of a realignment back to the way things sort of more naturally and intuitively are.

DAVID ROCKWELL: If you think about churches, they're a building form that in some way was formed around a ritual and a procession, so it kind of embraced a set of rituals. And for me, going back

to the things that were experienced in the book make me really rethink—you know, the thing that Vegas is missing are many of the qualities that these experiences have that deal with ephemeral. We went to the Brussels Flower Carpet and I have a little film if you want to see it.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Yeah, I want to see that in a second.

DAVID ROCKWELL: And it was just *extraordinary* how much impact that carpet of flowers had in transforming a space. And there is not—at the moment—that happening in Vegas, but—

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: But it's very different from Vegas in some of the events that you describe in here. And this sadness that *you* describe, Simon, I think perhaps it relates to the idea that, in a market-driven context where commerce is driving the event, there is this sense of, "Next year we have to outdo what we did last year. We have to have more, you know, dancing girls." Or, "Okay, we did the pyramid, but we have to do the pyramid and we have to get a hooker or something." **(laughter)** You know, I mean, I don't know what it is but there's a sense that you have to outdo, whereas the Hindu experiences that you talk about, the Balinese experience that you just talked about, and the Brussels flower thing, which I want to see in a second here. You can go back to it again and again, and there's not the need to have next year be *better* than last year.

DAVID ROCKWELL: You can say the same thing about museums, too. Attendance is up, and museums are a much bigger deal in terms of these major icons, but the content, you know, the content that draws them, the buildings in some ways dwarf the content, thinking about the kind of—you think about Vegas, the buildings dwarf *any* human-driven experience, and that's an interesting thing to look at, is can you create the environment around the experience?

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: The best spectacles, the most powerful spectacles, it seem to me, create both a sense of newness and nostalgia at the same time, that you're both going forward and going *back* when you experience the event, and I think a lot of the more anxiety-producing experiences in our culture don't have that, and a lot of these wonderful—I mean, Burning Man, for instance, has created a kind of Hindu—you know, people who go back, people who go once and *hate* it, that's one thing, but the people who go back again and again aren't trying to *outdo* the last time they were there. They don't

want a bigger burning man or more naked people to walk by. I mean, they aren't really looking for that experience.

JULIE TAYMOR: I think the other thing that we—often, let's say, critics are going to a theater piece, and they'll say in a derogatory way that it's "spectacle." And it's used as a word as something that's empty, that it means it has no content—it's purely packaging or something. We don't, we're not Hindus, so we're just looking in awe at these pictures. But it really isn't about that. I think that for the outsider, maybe, but for the insider—it's very hard to talk about spirituality. Because you either get it or you don't, it's either part—and I'm not talking about organized religion, I'm talking about what *that* experience is, and some spectacles are sheerly there as that moment, but what happens to the people is that they get a *rise* out of being *in* it, and whatever that may be, whether it's feeling that you're connected with your religion, your god, or whatever, it's that transformation of the human experience. That is it and that is what we call spirituality. It's a word that is—it's a hard word like "ritual" and "art." I want to say that I feel so sad every time I'm ever, when I do these movies, or this and that, and they say it's "art," it's like a scarlet letter. You know, big A, Art, it's exactly what you said, which means in some ways it's supposed to be—

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: There are no artists on this stage.

JULIE TAYMOR: I'm very proud to be an artist, I hope.

DAVID ROCKWELL: Just not a big A.

JULIE TAYMOR: It's a little "a". But I think that it's very sad that we do feel that there is this disconnect. We look at these pictures and we go, "It's so *beautiful*." What is it about that—that not only is it this experience, but there's an aesthetic beauty to it, and I have felt, though I really love the wonderful things about technology—that we have, when we say this, "America has become ugly," well, there's so many beautiful parts of America, but what has happened where we've lost our sense of aesthetic appreciation, in a way?

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Just being *drawn* to beauty in this wonderful, whimsical kind of way. Simon, I'm interested, what's the biggest event you've ever attended?

SIMON DOONAN: Well, we had our own Woodstock in England. It was called the Isle of Wight Pop Festival, and Jimi Hendrix played, and Sly and the Family Stone, I went to that, because I'm very old. **(laughter)** That was pretty big. That's not very interesting, is it? Hearing about my tawdry—

(laughter)

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Oh, tell me more.

SIMON DOONAN: Oh, and they had, but the interesting part was watching all these people contend with latrines. **(laughter)** You know, nobody talks about that at pop festivals. That was the real spectacle.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Actually, there's a lot of discussion, there's a *lot* of discussion of latrine organization in this book. Let's look at the Belgian—

DAVID ROCKWELL: Can I just kind of one thing that you said, because you and I got in this discussion, and when you think about windows, or—the notion of story, and a lot of these events are back story. If you go to a celebration, you're bringing in your belief and the reason you're going there, so, in some ways, these are the kind of you know apex of a whole back story and a history whether that story's explicit or not.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Let's see the movie of the Belgian carpet and I think you get a sense in the motion here of just how the space is transformed. Could you roll that film?

(music)

(applause)

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: That was great. That was the Belgian national anthem there, I think? Not quite. So the last part of your book, before we go, I want to remind people it's an invitation to experience festivals and spectacles of one kind or another. How many people do you think will take you up on that offer, and what is it you want to experience based on writing this book? And I'll just go down the line here.

DAVID ROCKWELL: There's a whole list. Probably the first thing I'm going to do is—just because of the process of dealing with Peter Minshall, I just want to go and see that, experience that next year. But there's ten or fifteen things. The Blue Angels seems like an *amazing* event. And then there's things that I want to go back to. I love sports, so I'm hoping to go to the Super Bowl this year if I can get away.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Julie?

JULIE TAYMOR: Where I want to go?

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: What spectacle is coming up in your life that you can talk about?

JULIE TAYMOR: I don't know, actually. You know, I've been to Carnival three times in Brazil. I want to go to India, I've been when I was younger, but I really want to go back to India. I think it's probably—it's not—I have a project, but also just to travel there and experience that. Besides that, I have to read his book again, the end of it, and pick a spectacle to go to.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: Simon.

SIMON DOONAN: I want to see Julie Taymor with that little cut-out puppet and the light bulb **(laughter)** because that's my idea of a spectacle, but. It's the opposite of Vegas. Oh, God.

JOHN HOCKENBERRY: The opposite of Vegas, right. Well, Simon Doonan and Julie Taymor and David Rockwell, thank you very much. And thanks to Paul Holdengräber, our master of ceremonies.

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: We invite you all to stay for the reception, mingle with these wonderful people. I think tonight is an omen to the notion of spectacle. You have come out here to be together. In some way what Bruno Bettelheim once said about television, he said that, “Television captures the imagination but doesn’t free it.” We need to be together, we need to touch each other. As I often say, you can’t tickle yourself—you need other people. **(laughter)** Try to tickle yourself. Now, tickle yourself, try. You can’t. You need other people. So, stay around, mingle with these people. David Rockwell will also sign his book. Please stay and come back soon. Bye-bye.

(applause)