

Making the Scene

*A History of Stage Design and Technology
in Europe and the United States*

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Fig. 8.21. Production photograph showing a scene design by Alexander Golovin from the performance of *Don Juan*, directed by Meyerhold, for the Alexandinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg, 1910. Note the small cabinets on each side of the stage, which hid commentators on the action.

Picture # GIK 7149/27. © St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music.



one of Reinhardt's final productions, *Die Weg der Verheissung* (The Eternal Road) by Franz Werfel (1890–1945), a saga of the Jewish struggle to survive, staged in New York at the Manhattan Opera House in 1937. [fig 8.20] It was designed by Horner. Much of Reinhardt's time in the United States was spent in Hollywood, where he headed a school for actors and directed films. By the 1930s, he was probably the best-known director in the world, and many young designers visited his theatres, where they became acquainted with his methods and adopted aspects of those practices in their own work. He was an important influence on the development of what came to be known in the United States as the "new stagecraft."

Russian Modernism

While Reinhardt was influencing theatre practice in Central Europe in the early twentieth century, other important changes were taking place in Russia in theatres under the influence of Sergei Diaghilev (1872–1929) and Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940). Both were partially influenced by the visual art of the symbolists and other revolutionary painters. [fig 8.21]

In Russia, the antirealist impulse was at first most evident in *The World of Art*, a periodical established by Diaghilev in 1898. It

covered all the arts but eventually was most influential in music and ballet. After the 1903 retirement of Marius Petipa (1818–1910), who had dominated Russian ballet in the nineteenth century, full-length fairy-tale works, such as *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*, were largely replaced by shorter works that offered opportunities for novel choreography, set to the music of composers such as Igor Stravinsky, whose scores included complex rhythms and shifts in mood. The settings were designed by major artists of various new schools. In 1909, Diaghilev took a ballet company that emphasized these new qualities to Paris. The enthusiastic response led him to create the Ballets Russes, which toured throughout Europe to enthusiastic response for both its dancing and its visual design, especially the costumes and scenery. When the Russian Revolution erupted in 1917, the Ballet Russes stayed in France, where it was one of the most praised and influential companies in Europe. It remained a major company until Diaghilev's death in 1929.

The scenic style of the Ballets Russes did not depend on any new technical devices, for it relied primarily on painted wings and drops. Nevertheless, it departed markedly from illusionism, because line, color, and decorative motifs were considerably stylized to reflect moods and themes rather than specific periods or places. Although the designers drew on familiar forms and



decorative motifs, they created a sense of exoticism and fantasy through stylization. The influence upon European scenic art of the Ballets Russes' designers—among them Leon Bakst (1866–1924), [figs 8.22 and 8.23] Alexandre Benois (1870–1960), [figs 8.24 and 8.25] Alexander Golovin (1863–1930), Mstislav Dobujinsky (1875–1957), [fig 8.26] Natalia Gontcharova (1881–1962), [fig 8.27] and Mikhail Larionov (1881–1964) [fig 8.28]—was incalculable. After World War I, many of the Russian designers were replaced by French designers—among them Pablo Picasso, [figs 8.29 and 8.30] Henri Matisse, Georges Braque (1882–1963), Juan Gris (1887–1927), and Marie Laurencin (1883–1956)—and reflected all the major avant-garde trends in painting. The settings for ballet were probably the most influential of the time, in the way operatic designs were influential in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. The Ballet Russes' popularity did much to resurrect interest in ballet, which had grown fallow outside of Russia.

Fig. 8.22. (upper left) Leon Bakst's scene design for *Scheherazade*, Ballets Russes, Paris, 1910.

Leon Bakst (Russian, 1866–1924). Watercolor, metallic paint, and graphite on paper, 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 40 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., TL 1998.81. In the collection of the McNay Art Museum, gift of Robert L. B. Tobin. Photograph: Michael Smith.

Fig. 8.23. (upper right) Leon Bakst's scene design for *Jeux (Games)*, ca. 1914.

Leon Bakst (Russian, 1866–1924). Graphite, pastel, and charcoal on paper, mounted on canvas, 29 × 41 in., TL 1998.53. In the collection of the McNay Art Museum, gift of Robert L. B. Tobin. Photograph: Michael Smith.

Fig. 8.24. (bottom left) Alexandre Benois's scene design for "The King's Bedroom" in act III of *Le Rossignol (The Nightingale)*, Ballets Russes, 1914.

Alexandre Benois (Russian, 1870–1960). Gouache and pastel on paper, mounted on canvas; 38 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 42 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., TL 1998.111. In the collection of the McNay Art Museum, gift of Robert L. B. Tobin. © Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York / ADAGP, Paris. Photograph: Michael Smith.

Fig. 8.25. (bottom right) Alexandre Benois's scene design for act II in *Giselle*, 1910.

Alexandre Benois (Russian, 1870–1960). Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper, 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., TL 1998.103.21. In the collection of the McNay Art Museum, gift of Robert L. B. Tobin. © Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York / ADAGP, Paris. Photograph: Michael Smith.



Fig. 8.26. Mstislav Dobujinsky's scene design for *Ballet Imperiale*, 1941. Mstislav Dobujinsky (Russian, 1875–1957). Gouache on paper, 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., TL1998.145. In the collection of the McNay Art Museum, gift of Robert L. B. Tobin. Photograph: Michael Smith.



Fig. 8.27. Natalia Gontcharova's design for the decor for act I, *Le Coq d'Or*, ca. 1913. Natalia Gontcharova (Russian, 1881–1962). Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper, 12 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 16 in., TL1998.173. In the collection of the McNay Art Museum, gift of Robert L. B. Tobin. © Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York / ADAGP, Paris. Photograph: Michael Smith.

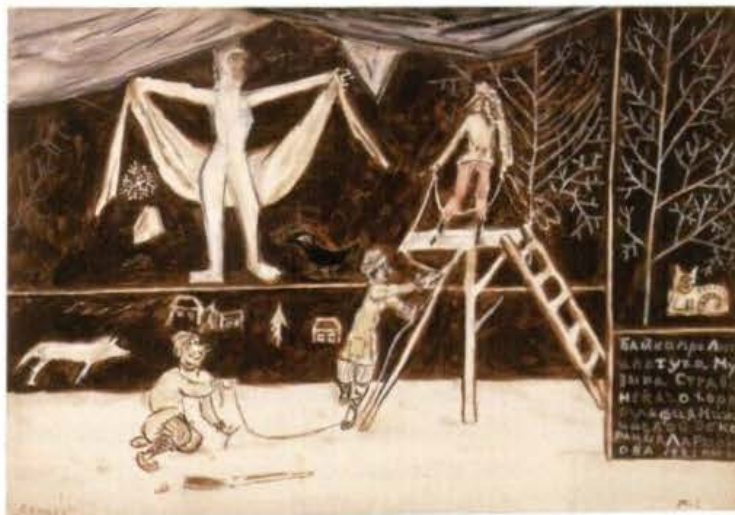


Fig. 8.28. Mikhail Larionov's scene design for *Le Renard (The Fox)*, ca. 1921. Mikhail Larionov (Russian, 1881–1964). Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper, 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., TL1998.264. In the collection of the McNay Art Museum, gift of Robert L. B. Tobin. © Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York / ADAGP, Paris. Photograph: Michael Smith.



Fig. 8.29. Pablo Picasso's scene design for *Pulcinella*, Ballets Russes, 1919–1920. Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973). Watercolor and gouache on paper, 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., TL2001.106. In the collection of the McNay Art Museum, gift of the Tobin Endowment. © Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York. Photograph: Michael Smith.



Fig. 8.30. Pablo Picasso's model for *Le Tricorne*, Ballets Russes, 1919. Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973). Watercolor and graphite on board, 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., TL2001.105. In the collection of the McNay Art Museum, gift of the Tobin Endowment. © Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York. Photograph: Michael Smith.

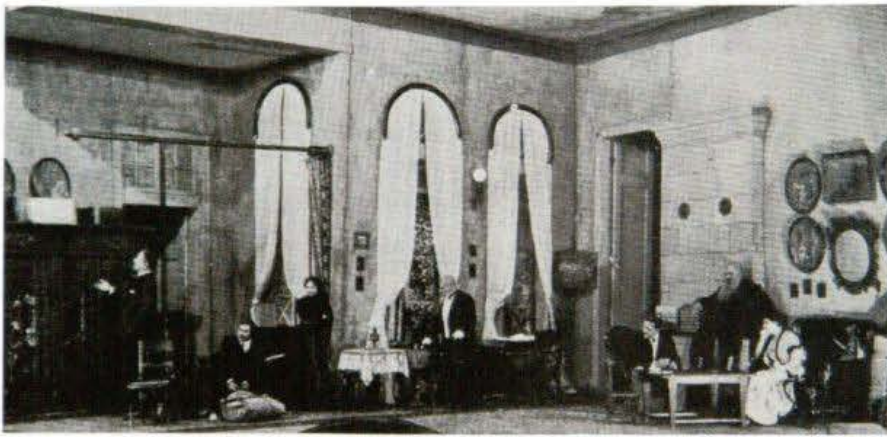


Fig. 8.31. Constantine Smoff's scene design for Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, produced by Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre.
In the collection of the Bakhrushin State Central Theatrical Museum, Moscow.

Fig. 8.32. Nicolai Sapunov's scene design for Tolstoy's *Tsar Féodor*, produced by Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre.
In the collection of the Bakhrushin State Central Theatrical Museum, Moscow.

Fig. 8.33. Nikolai Ulyanov's projected setting for *Schluck und Jau* for Meyerhold's Theatre-Studio, 1905.
In the collection of the Bakhrushin State Central Theatrical Museum, Moscow.

In the late nineteenth century, Russian interest in French symbolist drama (especially Maeterlinck's) had increased, but Constantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938), one of the leaders of the Moscow Art Theatre, could find no satisfactory means of staging symbolist plays, because his production ideas were based largely on Saxe-Meiningen's. Therefore, despite determined efforts, the Moscow Art Theatre found its productions of symbolist plays to be unsatisfactory. To solve the problem, Stanislavsky in 1905 formed the Studio and employed Meyerhold to head it. Among the designers connected with the Studio were Vasili Denisov (1862–1921), Nikolai Ulyanov (1922–1990), Nikolai Sapunov (1880–1912), and Sergei Sudeikin (1882–1946). [figs 8.31 and 8.32]

Among this group's innovations was the abandonment of scenic models, which they associated with the working methods of the naturalistic theatre. As Meyerhold put it, "Out of the dissatisfaction with models was born the technique of impressionistic plans. . . . Each artist now tried to vary this crude naturalistic job [the building of houses, gardens, and streets on the stage] by introducing refined stylized coloring and trick lighting effects [in their painting]" (Meyerhold and Brown, 42–43). A rendering of Ulyanov's setting for scene 3 of Hauptmann's *Schluck und Jau*, produced in 1905, shows a row of arbors curving around the stage space. A female figure is seated in each arbor, and all are embroidering on the same broad ribbon, all in perfect unison. [fig 8.33]

Of the Studio, one critic declared that the work of the director and designer was entirely successful but that the actors seemed unable to break away from the methods they had learned at the Moscow Art Theatre. Stanislavsky could not reconcile the traditional acting style of his company with what he saw in Meyerhold's productions. Stanislavsky at first postponed the opening of the Studio and then canceled it altogether.

Soon afterward, Meyerhold was invited to join Vera Komisarzhenskaya's company in Saint Petersburg as an actor and director. Komisarzhenskaya (1864–1910), one of the most admired actresses in Russia, wished to reform the theatre and encouraged Meyerhold to stage plays by Maeterlinck and other symbolist playwrights. Among his first productions was Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, staged in November 1906 with a setting by Sapunov that consisted of a single backdrop. The walls were light blue; the openwork screens on either side of the stage were pale gold. Each character wore a monochromatic costume designed specifically for the play. At stage left, a huge armchair covered in white fur—it had the effect of a throne—was reserved for Hedda. Elsewhere on the stage were a white sofa and a white grand piano. The stage was long and narrow, thirty-five feet wide but only twelve feet deep; it was raised higher than the usual level and seemed to hover above the audience. The goal was a cold, regal, autumnal effect. In what is usually staged as an intimate conversation between Hedda and

Lovborg, they looked straight ahead, toward the audience. Meyerhold's goal was to make the spectator seek the inner rather than the outer reality.

In staging Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen* (The Awakening of Spring) in 1907, Meyerhold placed the scenic elements needed for all eighteen scenes onstage and then, through lighting, isolated each area as needed. Although this may seem commonplace today, it was innovative at the time and was made possible by developments in lighting technology, especially dimmers. In *Balaganchik* (The Fairground Booth) by Alexander Blok (1880–1921), staged first in 1906 and repeated several times in later years, Meyerhold and Sapunov experimented with the artificiality of the stage. [fig 8.34] They made everything visible to the audience—even the fairground booth was flown in with the audience watching. Meyerhold also used commedia dell'arte characters to emphasize the artificiality of the stage, a favorite goal throughout the remainder of his career.

Because Meyerhold used Komisarzhenskaya's theatre as a laboratory for his own ideas rather than seeking to promote his employer's talents as one of the most admired actresses of the day, it is not surprising that they parted ways in 1908. It was surprising, especially to his critics, that he was almost immediately employed as a stage director at the Imperial Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg. As part of his contract, he agreed not to do at the Imperial Theatre the kinds of experiments for which he was so well known. Rather, his assignments were restricted to traditional operas and plays, and he established his own private studio in which to carry out his experiments with new scenic practices. At the Imperial Theatre, Meyerhold worked most often with Golovin, who had been one of Diaghilev's principal designers, staging productions of works by Molière, Wagner, Modest Petrovich Musorgsky (1839–1881), and others (see figure 8.21). After 1914, he experimented with staging in his own studio, where he assumed the identity Dr. Dappertutto; in that guise, he worked on innovations that he would put to fuller use following the Revolution of 1917. He read widely and borrowed ideas from the theatres of Japan, China, Spain, Italy, England, and France. He was familiar with the writings of Appia, Craig, Fuchs, Jacques Rouché (1862–1957), and other theorists of the period. Undoubtedly, Meyerhold was the most dedicated and persistent of the Russian experimentalists in the years between 1900 and 1917. After the Revolution, he would expand his experiments in mainstream theatre and would become a major influence internationally.

Another important figure in the Russian theatre after 1910 was Fyodor Fyodorovich Komisarzhensky (1882–1954), the brother of Vera Komisarzhenskaya. He disapproved of Meyerhold's work and developed a style that was the most eclectic in Russia, foreshadowing what later in the twentieth century came to be called postmodernism. Unlike Reinhardt, who chose a period or style

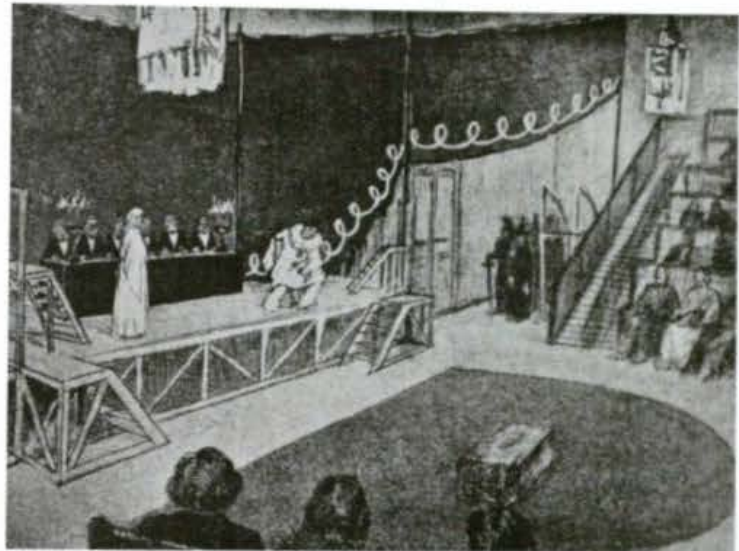


Fig. 8.34. Nicolai Sapunov's design for *Balaganchik* (Fairground Booth) for Meyerhold, 1914.

In the collection of the Bakhrushin State Central Theatrical Museum, Moscow.

for each of his productions and made everything conform to it, Komisarzhensky believed that each character and action has its own qualities for which the director must find some meaningful visual metaphor that will set up the right associations for contemporary audiences. Thus, his productions combined elements from many periods and styles, all artfully blended. Komisarzhensky fled Russia in 1919 and subsequently worked in France, England, and the United States. His work is seen to best advantage in the productions he staged in England in the 1920s and 1930s.

Expressionism

The first quarter of the twentieth century is noted for its numerous artistic movements—expressionism, futurism, Dadaism, surrealism, and numerous others—each of which had strong advocates and distinctive artistic tenets. It is difficult to say when expressionism first appeared, but the term came into use slowly and often met objections. It was never a unified movement, but subjectivity and emotionalism were hallmarks of the variations. Some historians argue that Wassily Kandinsky and Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980) were the first important expressionist artists. Kandinsky wrote *Der Gelbe Klang* (The Yellow Sound) in 1909, one of the first abstract dramas and light-and-sound events, using symbolic sets, moving colored lights, dancers, and music that expressed his faith in the ultimate triumph of spirit over materialism. There is little dialogue in *The Yellow Sound*, and most effects are achieved through the manipulation of light and sound. [fig 8.35]

Kandinsky's dramas embody the modernist characteristics of discontinuity, illogicality, obscurity, and disparateness. Kokoschka wrote the plays *Sphinx und Strohmännchen* (Sphinx and Strawman) and

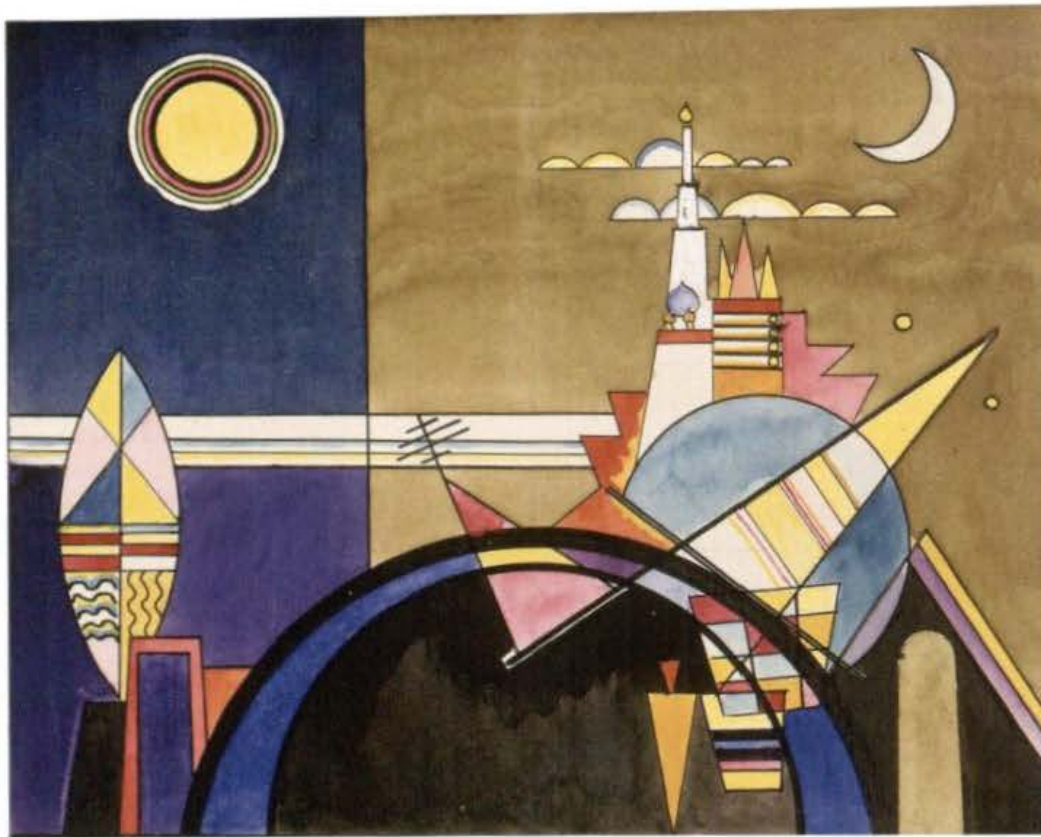


Fig. 8.35. Wassily Kandinsky's design for "The Great Gate of Kiev," Tableau XVI, for the stage setting of *Pictures of an Exhibition* by Modest Mussorsky for the Friedrich Theatre, Dessau, ca. 1928.

Watercolor, black ink, 8½ × 10¼ in., Inv. AM81-65-133. Photograph: Jean-Claude Planchet. In the collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Photograph © CNAC / MNAM / Dist. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen (*Murderer, the Hope of Women*) in 1907. *Murderer*, first performed in 1908 at the Wiener Kunstschau, was notable for its highly stylized setting and atmospheric lighting as well as its radical treatment of relations between men and women.

Although expressionism never became a strongly integrated movement, its loosely related adherents did share certain principles. They were opposed to realism and naturalism because those movements glorified science and technology, which the expressionists associated with materialism. They also disliked those movements' emphasis upon external appearance rather than the internal spirit. They were equally unhappy with symbolism because of its flight from contemporary social problems. Although they were willing to accept as valid the realists' concern for modern problems and the symbolists' antirealistic techniques, they found both movements unsatisfactory. The expressionists believed that fundamental truth is to be found within humanity—its spirit, soul, desires, and visions—and that external reality should be reshaped to make it possible for the human spirit to realize its highest aspirations. Materialism and industrialism were its major targets. Subjective vision was given priority over objective appearance. "We expressionists . . . are overcome by visions. . . . We do not reproduce but create" (Edschimid, 65). Much expressionist theatre was given over to "the regeneration of humanity" and the creation of the "new man." In 1917, Ludwig Rubiner wrote: "We want to arouse by heart-shaking assaults, terrors, threats, the

individual's awareness of his responsibility in the community! . . . We are the scum, the offal, the despised. We are the holy mob. We do not want to work because work is too slow. . . . We believe in miracles. For us, destroyer is a religious concept, inseparable for us today from creator" (Sokel, 4).

The drama written to embody this vision was usually "message centered"; the protagonist was usually sacrificed to the materialism, hypocrisy, or callousness of others. The characters were usually given generic names (Husband, Son, Mother, Soldier, Prostitute, Minister, etc.) because the playwrights were more interested in Humanity than in the Individual. Dialogue was often reduced to one- or two-word sentences (the "telegraphic style"); distortion (in varying degrees) was found in all the visual elements (scenery, lighting, and costume); walls might lean inward to suggest oppression; trees sometimes changed into skeletons; characters often moved mechanically; the color, shape, and size of objects might be markedly altered; shadows and colored light were used to establish a strong sense of mood or to isolate characters in a void. The overall impression was one of allegory clothed in nightmare or vision.

The number of expressionist playwrights prior to World War I was small, and few of their plays were produced. Not until disillusionment provoked by the war increased did the production of these plays expand, beginning in 1917, peaking in 1919, and declining until their popularity had virtually disappeared by 1924. Most of the early performances were given in the afternoon or

at private showings. The most popular of the playwrights were Fritz von Unruh (1885–1970), Georg Kaiser (1878–1945), Ernst Toller (1893–1939), and Walter Hasenclever (1890–1940), in one of whose plays, *Die Menschen* (Humanity), produced in 1918, the protagonist rises up from his grave and is handed his head in a sack. Otto Reigbert's (1890–1957) design for Hasenclever's *Der Sohn* (The Son), staged in Kiel in 1919, is indicative of the stylization and the manipulation of light and shadow. Toller's *Die Wandlung* (The Transfiguration), staged in Berlin in 1919 with settings by Robert Neppach (1890–1939), shows a battlefield scene with corpses entangled in barbed wire. [fig 8.36] Perhaps the best-known and most influential expressionist design can be seen in *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari), a 1920 film by Robert Weine (1873–1938), which had distorted scenery and stylized costumes. [fig 8.37]

Leopold Jessner (1978–1945), who was head of the Berlin Staatstheater in the 1920s, favored settings that emphasized steps (in the manner of Appia) and the manipulation of lighting, especially the use of colored light to make symbolic statements. His 1920 production of *Richard III*, with designs by Emil Pirchan (1884–1957), was performed primarily on a flight of stairs. [fig 8.38] It showed the rise in Richard's power by playing scenes ever higher on the flight of stairs, and as Richard became more powerful, the stage became increasingly red. When Richmond began to oppose Richard, the action moved downward on the stairs and the red lighting cross-faded until the end, when Richard was at ground level and the stage was bathed in white light. Thus, action was developed in Jessner's productions symbolically but without the emphasis on distortion that characterized the productions of most other expressionist directors. Jessner used steps so extensively that they (*Jessnertreppen*) came to be considered the hallmark of his staging. Expressionism declined in popularity in the late 1920s, but many of its characteristic scenic and lighting practices were absorbed into other visual modes.

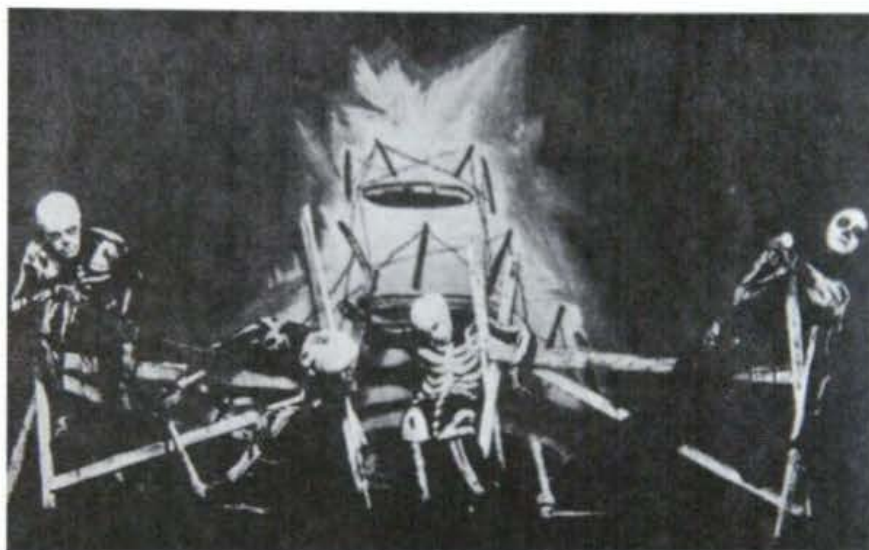


Fig. 8.36. Robert Neppach's scene design for Toller's *Die Wandlung* (The Transfiguration), 1919.

Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

Fig. 8.37. Production photograph showing Robert Wiene's scene design for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1920.

In the collection of the Deutsche Kinemathek Museum für Film und Fernsehen.

Fig. 8.38. Robert Edmund Jones's sketch of Emil Pirchan's design for *Richard III*, for a Leopold Jessner production, Berlin Staatstheater, 1920.

Robert Edmund Jones (American, 1887–1954). *Continental Stagecraft*, ca. 1922. Gouache and ink on paper, 8 1/4 × 11 1/2 in., TL1999.113.2. In the collection of the McNay Art Museum, gift of Robert L. B. Tobin. Photograph: Michael Smith.



Fig. 8.39. Umberto Boccioni's caricature, *A Futurist Soirée*, of the "Futurist Evening" at the Theatre Politeama Garibaldi, Tevisio, June 2, 1911. Left to right: Boccioni, Pratella, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Carra, and Russolo. Image ID# 1046797. Location of original drawing unknown. Courtesy of Yale University Library/Filippo Tommaso Marinetti Papers, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.



Fig. 8.40. Giacomo Balla's scene design for *Fuochi d'artificio* (Fireworks) by Stravinsky, Rome, 1915.

In the collection of the Museo Teatrale all Scala, Milan, Italy. © Artists Rights Society (ARS) NY/SIAE, Rome. Photograph © Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Futurism

Another important movement—futurism—developed more or less simultaneously with expressionism. It got its first impetus from the Italian writer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) in a manifesto published in 1909. Like the expressionists, the futurists rejected the past and wished to transform society. But they took a path diametrically opposed to the expressionists. The futurists deplored veneration of the past, perhaps partly because Italy was industrially backward, but perhaps more because Italy seemed to be valued primarily for its artistic past. Therefore, rather than denouncing machines and industrialization, the futurists glorified the energy and speed of the machine age and called for the destruction (no doubt with tongue in cheek) of all museums and libraries. They championed the racing car as representative of the beauty of the future. From 1910 onward, futurists gave *serate* (performances), some of which were so militant that they turned into riots. [fig 8.39] The futurists set out to create new art forms appropriate to the machine age. They created picture poems, kinetic sculpture, and collage; they entered such ready-mades as wine racks and urinals in art exhibitions. In music they developed the idea of *bruitisme*, or “noise music,” out of the sounds of cooking utensils, typewriters, alarm clocks, and other sounds of the modern city. Luigi Russolo (1885–1947) invented the *intonarumori*, or “noise organ,” with which the futurists gave concerts. Beginning in 1911, they published a series of manifestos championing change. In 1913, *The Variety Theatre* proclaimed that music halls, nightclubs, and circuses were superior to traditional theatre as models for drama, and championed variety's disparate attractions, interaction of performers and spectators, and mingling of elements from several media as models (*Appollonio*, 130). In 1915 and 1916, the futurists published seventy-six *sintesi* (short plays), which were performed in several Italian cities. Most of them were only a few lines long; some had no spoken dialogue. Besides their extreme brevity, they were characterized by discontinuity, abstraction, and simultaneity. The place of the action was usually the stage, time was indefinite or telescoped, nonverbal sound and symbolic lighting were common, and several media were intermingled. In most instances, clear story, logical progression, and psychological characterization were minimized or ignored.

Most of the futurists' major design work was for ballet. Representative examples include the settings by Giacomo Balla (1871–1958) for the Ballets Russes' *Feu d'Artifice* (Fireworks), [fig 8.40] staged in Rome in 1917, and the settings by Naum Gabo (1890–1977) and Antoine Pevsner (1886–1962) for the Ballets Russes' *La Chatte* (The Cat), performed in Paris in 1927. [fig 8.41] Fortunato Depero (1892–1960) was especially interested in kinetic sculpture, which carried over into theatrical designs that underwent transformations during performances. A good example of his stage

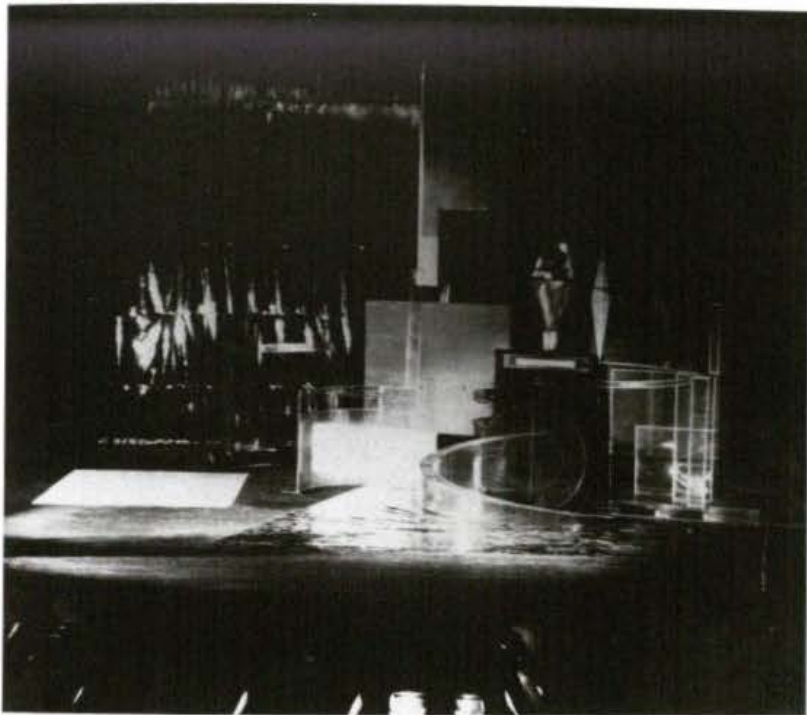


Fig. 8.41. Production photograph for the Ballets Russes' production of *La Chatte*, set design by Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, Paris, 1927.

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Fig. 8.42. Fortunato Depero's scene design for *Balli Plastici*, Teatro dei Piccoli, Rome, 1918.

© Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY/SIAE, Rome. Photograph Courtesy of Depero Archives.

design is *Balla Plastici* (Plastic Dances), at the Teatro dei Piccoli in Rome in 1918, which distorted human shape into mechanical, floral, and geometric forms. [fig 8.42]

Following World War I, Enrico Prampolini (1894–1960) was the major futurist designer. His settings and costumes can be seen in the “mechanical ballet” *Psicologia delle Macchine* (The Psychology of Machines) by Silvio Mix (1900–1927) and in *Le Marchand de Cœur* (The Merchant of Hearts) by Prampolini and Franco Casavola (1891–1955), a pantomime that intermingled human and inanimate objects, for the Théâtre de la Pantomime Futuriste in Paris in 1927. Prampolini, who designed more than one hundred productions, also wrote a number of manifestos that demanded painted scenery be replaced with “dynamic stage architecture that will move” (Kirby and Kirby, 205). [fig 8.43] He proposed that, instead of lighting the stage, the space should incorporate luminous sources “coordinated analogically with the psyche of each scenic action” (Kirby and Kirby, 205). He even stated that human actors would no longer be tolerated: “Vibrations, luminous forms (produced by electric currents and colored gases) will wriggle and writhe dynamically . . . and replace living actors. . . . The appearance of the human element on the stage shatters the mystery of the beyond that must reign in the theatre.” He called his stage “a center of spiritual attraction for the new religion of the future” (Kirby and Kirby, 206).

After 1930, interest in futurism declined. It was never a major theatrical movement, but it championed innovations that would

resurface forcefully in the 1960s: simultaneity and multiple focus, direct confrontation of audiences by performers, intermingling of actors and spectators, antiliterary and alogical biases, removal of theatre from a museum-like atmosphere, and erasing the boundaries between the arts.



Fig. 8.43. Enrico Prampolini's scene design for *I Volzani*, Teatro Argentina, Rome, 1924.

Dr. Alessandro Prampolini, Roma.

Dadaism and Surrealism

The movement known as Dada was founded in 1916 in Zurich, Switzerland, where many artists opposed to World War I had gone in an attempt to escape the war. The Cabaret Voltaire, run by Hugo Ball (1886–1927), served as its unofficial headquarters. Marcel Janco (1885–1984), a Romanian artist, was the movement's primary designer, providing settings and full-body masks. Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), who wrote seven manifestos for Dadaism between 1916 and 1920 and edited its periodical, became its best-known advocate. Other prominent members included Emmy Hennings (1885–1948), Hans Arp (1887–1966), and Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974). Dadaism was grounded in contempt for a world that had produced a global war. Its adherents sought to replace logic and reason with calculated madness, spontaneity, freedom from constraint, and all-inclusiveness. They created "antiartistic" paintings and poems, deliberately illogical works, rubbish collages, and noise music. They borrowed heavily from futurism and engaged in direct confrontations with audiences. Ball was very fond of "sound" poems, which incorporated nonverbal vocal sounds, whereas Tzara favored "chance poems," which were created by cutting sentences from newspapers, mixing them up in a hat, drawing them out at random, and declaiming them. Huelsenbeck favored African chants and dances. The first public performance at the Cabaret Voltaire, in 1917, showcased work by some of the most prominent European avant-garde artists, including Tzara, Marinetti, Kandinsky, and Kokoschka. It was not a movement that emphasized scenic design, although costumes and masks played a prominent role.

When World War I ended, the Dadaists dispersed. Some returned to Berlin, Max Ernst (1891–1976) and Hans Arp settled in Cologne, and in Hamburg, Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948) founded the movement he called "Merz." The most important Dadaist group moved to Paris, where Tzara and a group of young Frenchmen, including Louis Aragon (1897–1982), Philippe Soupault (1897–1990), and André Breton (1896–1966), sponsored a series of Dadaist "manifestations." Internal bickering led to the abandonment of Dadaism, and it was soon replaced by surrealism, a movement championed by Breton, who wrote its manifestos, which were heavily influenced by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). By the time Breton launched his surrealist movement, several proto-surrealist performances had attracted wide attention.

The label *surrealism* apparently was coined in 1917 by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), a critic who was involved in every artistic movement of the early twentieth century in France: the fauves, the cubists, the futurists, the Dadaists, and the surrealists. It was as a subtitle for his play, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias: Drame Surrealiste en Deux Actes et un Prologue* (*The Breasts of Tiresias: Surrealist Drama*



Fig. 8.44. Photograph of costumes and scenery designed by Serge Ferat for Apollinaire's *The Breasts of Tiresias*, 1917.

Arts du spectacle RES RF-50164 (1-2). Anonymous black-and-white photo. In the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

in *Two Acts and a Prologue*), completed in 1917, that the word *surrealist* was first used by an artist to describe his own work. The play purports to contain a serious message about repopulation of the postwar world. Early in the play, Thérèse, finding her life too confining, releases her breasts, which float away as balloons, and is transformed into Tirésias, leaving her husband to find the secret of creating children (sheer willpower) and to become the parent of more than forty thousand fifty children. In the prologue to the play, Apollinaire describes his ideal theatre: a circular structure with two stages, one in the middle and one surrounding the audience. He states that on these stages, as in life itself, "sounds, gestures, colors, cries, tumults, music, dancing, acrobatics, poetry, painting, choruses, actions and multiple sets" join. The sets and costumes for *The Breasts of Tiresias* were by Serge Ferat (1881–1958). [fig 8.44]

Apollinaire also used *surrealist* as a label for *Parade*, presented by the Ballets Russes in 1917 and for which he wrote the program notes. Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) provided the scenario, Erik Satie (1866–1925) the music, Picasso the settings and costumes, and Leonid Massine (1896–1979) the choreography. It was Diaghilev's first use of contemporary French painters as designers, a practice that brought new vitality to the Ballets Russes and made it as influential to stage design after the war as it had been before. [fig 8.47] *Parade* marked the theatrical debut of Cocteau, who was to be considered the major surrealist playwright (though rejected by Breton). *Parade* draws on the eighteenth-century practice of using a short skit outdoors (a *parade*) to draw spectators into the theatre. In *Parade*, there are three theatre managers outside three theatres trying to entice an audience inside. Picasso depicted the first as a cubist construction, the second as an American skyscraper, and the third as a Chinese conjurer accompanied by a horse. The crowd mistakes the "come-on" for the performance

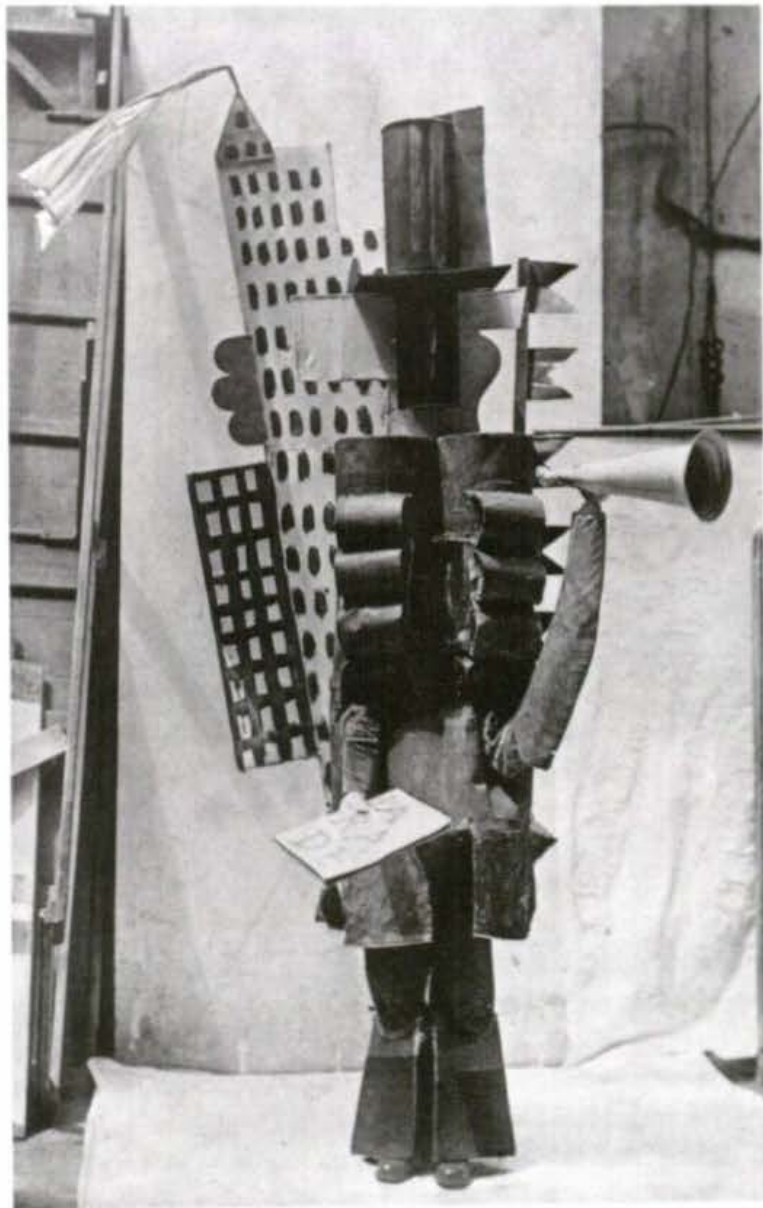


Fig. 8.45. Photograph of Statkewicz as the "American Manager" for the first performance of *Parade*, Theatre du Chatelet, designed by Pablo Picasso, May 18, 1917.

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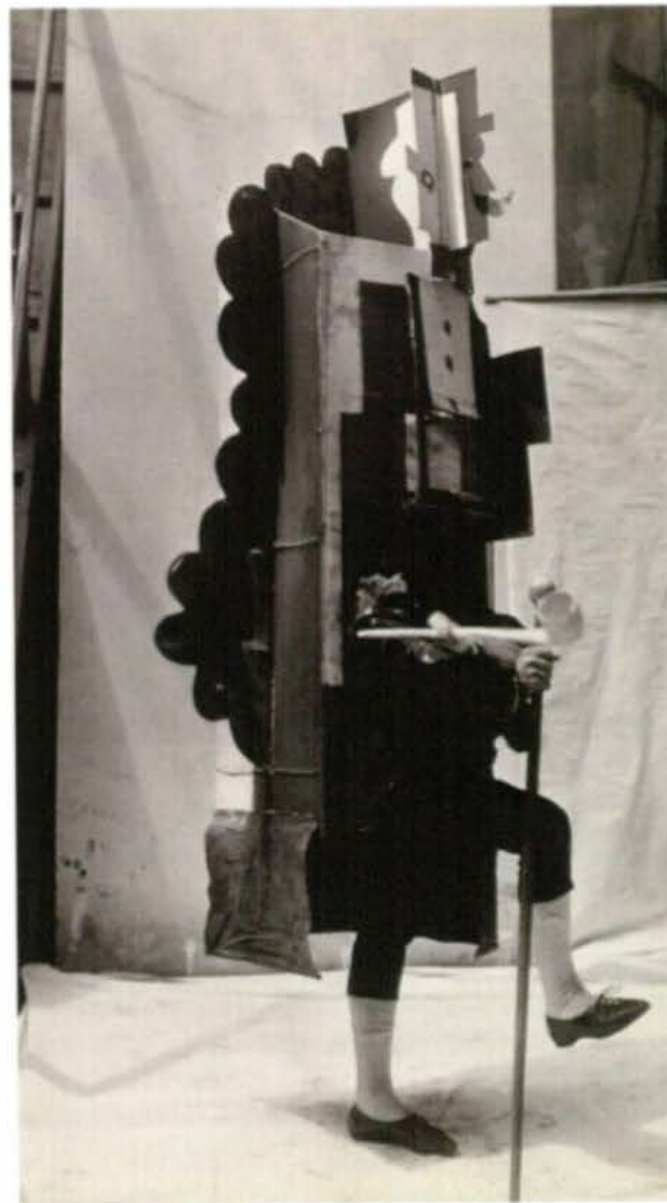


Fig. 8.46. Photograph of Leo Woizikowsky as the "French Manager" for the first performance of *Parade*, Theatre du Chatelet, designed by Pablo Picasso, May 18, 1917.

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Fig. 8.47. Pablo Picasso's model for the set design of the ballet *Parade*, 1917 (destroyed).

Musée Picasso, Paris APPH4822. © Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photograph © Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.



Fig. 8.48. Irene Lagut's scene design for Jean Cocteau's *Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* (The Wedding on the Eiffel Tower). Ballet Suedois, Paris, 1921.

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itself and never goes inside. [figs 8.45 and 8.46] It was a collage of circus and music hall acts rather than traditional ballet. Satie's score included such futurist instrumentation as typewriters, sirens, airplane propellers, and telegraph tickers. Many historians have credited this production for setting the tone for postwar experimentation in France.

Cocteau's *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* (The Weddings on the Eiffel Tower) was presented in 1921 by the Ballets Suedois, which, under the direction of Rolf de Maré (1888–1964) between 1920 and 1925, was a focus for experimentation in Paris. [fig 8.48] The setting was a painted backdrop showing a stylized bird's-eye view of Paris as seen through the girders of the Eiffel Tower. The setting was by Irene Lagut (1893–1994) and the costumes by Jean Hugo (1894–1984). Two actors dressed as phonographs recited the story from the sides of the stage. The characters (an ostrich, a lion, a hunter, a bathing beauty, and a wedding party) entered the stage through the bellows of a giant camera when the shutter was clicked.

In 1924, Maré presented another ballet of historical significance, *Relâche* (No Performance), with music by Satie and scenario and designs by Francis Picabia (1879–1953). [fig 8.49] The scenery was composed of a backdrop covered entirely with round metal disks that reflected bright light into the eyes of the spectators. The dancers were dressed in white long johns and top hats, and two nude dancers posed as Cranach's painting of Adam and Eve. The intermission was devoted to showing a film—*Entr'acte*



Fig. 8.49. Francis Picabia's scene design for *Relâche*, Ballet Suedois, 1924.

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by René Clair (1898–1981)—the first live performance to incorporate cinema.

By 1924, when surrealism was launched as a conscious movement, many productions labeled surrealist (and sometimes futurist or Dadaist) had already had a considerable impact on Parisian audiences. Breton made the unconscious mind the unifying source: "There exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease being perceived as contradictions" (123). "The spirit is marvelously prompt to seize the faintest rapport that exists between two objects selected by chance" (Bradbury and McFarlane, 303). Breton had little interest in theatre—in fact, Antonin Artaud (1896–1948), one of the major figures in twentieth-century theatre, was expelled by Breton from the surrealist movement in 1927 because of his work in theatre—and the movement was always best known for painting and visual arts. The most prominent surrealist painter who designed for the theatre was Salvador Dalí (1904–1989). Among his scenic designs are Shakespeare's *As You Like It* at the Teatro Eliseo in Rome in 1948, *Don Juan Tenorio* by José Zorrilla y Moral (1817–1893) at the Teatro Nacional Maria Guerrero in Madrid in 1950, and *Salome* by Richard Strauss (1864–1949), at Covent Garden in 1949. [fig 8.51]

Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978) also used surrealism prominently in his designs for *Le Bal* by Vittorio Rieti (1898–1994) for the Ballets Russes in 1929, as did Alberto Savinio (1891–1952) with



Fig. 8.50. Production photograph of Pablo Picasso's design for *Oedipus Rex* for the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, 1947.

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Oedipus Rex by Stravinsky at La Scala in 1948. But surrealist designs were always looked upon as something of a gimmick and were seldom seen after 1950. [fig 8.50]

Artaud

Artaud, on the other hand, was scarcely noted in the 1920s and 1930s but was destined to become one of the greatest influences on avant-garde stage design after World War II. Artaud considered the most important human concerns to be those buried in the subterranean parts of the mind, declaring that "the theatre has been created to drain abscesses collectively" (31). He did not believe that the goal he sought could be achieved through traditional theatrical means, because the audience had developed devices to render them powerless. He sought an extramoral identification that would take hold of spectators physically, kinesthetically: "It goes to the extremity of instinct and forces the actor to plunge right to the roots of his being so that he leaves the stage exhausted . . . [an experience] which acts as well upon the spectator and should not allow him to leave the theatre intact, but exhausted, involved, perhaps transformed" (Sellin, 129). To implement these effects, Artaud advocated the replacement of the traditional theatre building with remodeled barns, factories, or airplane hangars. He wished to locate acting areas in corners, on overhead catwalks, along the



Fig. 8.51. Salvador Dalí's scene design for *Don Juan Tenorio* at the Teatro Nacional Maria Guerrero, Madrid, 1950.

Courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ÖNB) Picture Archive, Vienna, 151.041-B. © Salvador Dalí, Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

walls—all surrounding the spectators. "There will not be any set," he wrote. "This function will be sufficiently undertaken by hieroglyphic characters, ritual costumes, manikins ten feet high . . . musical instruments tall as men, objects of unknown shape and purpose" (97–98). Artaud wanted to assault the audience and purge it morally and spiritually. Scene design in the traditional sense did not exist for him. Artaud achieved little recognition during his own lifetime, but as the avant-garde theatre developed after World War II, his work became a major influence on acting and design.

By the late 1920s, modernist design was common, though it was used most often in ballet. Audiences apparently had become accustomed to design that departed markedly from realism, but in the commercial theatres, realism—simplified from the detailed realism of the late nineteenth century—was still dominant.