

disconnected emotional exchanges, created a violent and lurid fantasy world. At one point the Whore bit 'God's wrist' resulting in an 'immense jet of blood' shooting across the stage. Despite the brevity and virtually unrealisable images of the play, the work reflected the Surrealist dream world and its obsession with memory. When Surrealism would take your hand into death, Breton had written, 'it will glove your hand, burying therein the profound M with which the word Memory begins'. It was this same M that in its distorted way characterized Roger Vitrac's *Les Mystères de l'amour* ('The Mysteries of Love'), produced by Artaud in the same year. 'There is death', Lea concluded at the end of the fifth tableau of this rhetorical work. 'Yes,' Patrick replied, 'the heart is red already as far as the end of the theatre where someone is about to die.' And Lea fired a shot into the audience, pretending to kill a spectator. A 'drame surréaliste', Vitrac's play was perfectly consistent with Surrealism's 'automatic writing' and its own brand of lucidity.

Such lucidity was to dominate the extensive writings of Breton and the numerous Surrealist writers, painters and film makers. But by 1938 when Surrealism had showed its ability to dominate political, artistic and philosophical life, the Second World War was to put a stop to further group activities and performances. As a final gesture, and before Breton would depart for the United States, the Surrealists arranged an International Exhibition of Surrealism in 1938 at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts, Paris. This grand finale of works by sixty artists from fourteen nations was presented in a series of rooms described in the catalogue as follows: 'Ceiling covered with 1200 sacks of coal, revolving doors, Mazda lamps, echoes, odours from Brazil, and the rest in keeping.' Also presented were Salvador Dali's *Raining Taxi* and *La Rue Surréaliste* and a dance by Helen Vanel entitled *The Unconsummated Act*, around a pool filled with water lilies.

Despite this exhibition and subsequent shows in London and New York, Surrealist performance itself had already marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. In Paris, from the 1890s on, Jarry's and Satie's inventions had radically altered the course of 'theatrical' developments as well as providing the breeding-ground for the New Spirit, punctuated through the years by Roussel, Apollinaire, Cocteau, the 'imported' and local Dadaists and Surrealists, to name only a few of the extraordinary figures who made Paris a thriving cultural capital for so many years. Surrealism had introduced psychological studies into art so that the vast realms of the mind literally became material for new explorations in performance. Actually Surrealist performance was to affect most strongly the world of the theatre with its concentration on language, rather than subsequent performance art. For it was to the basic tenets of Dada and Futurism – chance, simultaneity and surprise – that artists, indirectly or even directly, turned following the Second World War.

## Bauhaus

The development of performance in the twenties in Germany was due largely to the pioneering work of Oskar Schlemmer at the Bauhaus. When he wrote in 1928, 'I have now pronounced the death sentence for theatre at the Bauhaus', at a time when the Dessau City Council had issued a publicly read decree forbidding parties at the Bauhaus, 'including for good measure our next party, which would have been a lovely one', these were the ironical words of a man who had set performance work of the period on its course.

### The Stage workshop 1921–3

The Bauhaus, a teaching institution for the arts, had opened its doors in April 1919 in a very different mood. Unlike the rebellious Futurist or Dada provocations, Gropius's Romantic Bauhaus manifesto had called for the unification of all the arts in a 'cathedral of Socialism'. The cautious optimism expressed in the manifesto provided a hopeful yardstick for cultural recovery in a divided and impoverished postwar Germany.

Artists and artisans of widely varying sensibilities, such as Paul Klee, Ida Kerkovius, Johannes Itten, Gunta Stölzl, Wassily Kandinsky, Oskar Schlemmer, Lyonel Feininger, Alma Buscher, László Moholy-Nagy and their families (to name only a few), began arriving in the provincial town of Weimar, taking up residence in and around the stately Grand Ducal Fine Arts Academy, and the former homes of Goethe and Nietzsche. As tutors at the Bauhaus, these people took responsibility for the various workshops – metal, sculpture, weaving, cabinet making, wall-painting, drawing, stained glass; at the same time they formed a self-contained community within the conservative town.

A stage workshop, the first ever course on performance in an art school, had been discussed from the first months as an essential aspect of the interdisciplinary curriculum. Lothar Schreyer, the Expressionist painter and dramatist, and a member of the *Sturm* group in Berlin, arrived to supervise the early Bauhaus performance programme. A collaborative venture from the start, Schreyer and students were soon building figurines for his productions of *Kindsterben* and *Mann* (Schreyer's own works), in line with his

## Spitzzeichen

Der Spielgang enthält:

Wortreihe: Worte und Laute in Takte eingeteilt  
 Tonreihe: Rhythmus/Tonhöhe/Tonstärke in Takte eingeteilt  
 Bewegungsreihe: Bewegung der Farbformen in Takte eingeteilt  
 Takt rhythmus Vier Viertel Takt - Schwarze Zackenlinie

Gleichzeitig gespielte Takte stehen untereinander/Gleichzeitig gespielte Wortreihen sind durch senkrechte Balken zusammengefasst/Das Zeichen der Farbform bezeichnet jeden Beginn ihres Spiels/Tongebung Klangspielchen

Wort	WEINEN	Wort	Wort
Bedeutung der Zeichen			
SEHR HOCH	HOCH	MITTELSTARK	GERINGSTARK
LEISE	GANZ LEISE	MITTELLEBENIG	STARK
VOLLE PAUSE	HALBE PAUSE	HALBE PAUSE	SEHR TIEF
			STARK
			SEHR TIEF
			STARK
			SEHR TIEF
			STARK

82 Woodcut executed by Margarete Schreyer of the score for the play *Crucifixion*, printed in Hamburg in 1920

simple maxim that 'work on the stage is a work of art'. They also devised a complex scheme for their production of *Crucifixion*, executed in woodcut by Margarete Schreyer, which gave detailed directions as to the tones and accents of words, direction and emphasis of movements, and 'emotional states' that the performers would adopt.

But Schreyer's workshop introduced few innovations: essentially these early productions were an extension of Expressionist theatre of the previous five years in Munich and Berlin. They resembled religious plays where language was reduced to emotionally charged stammering, movement to pantomimic gestures and where sound, colour and light merely reinforced the melodramatic content of the work. Subsequently *feelings* became the significant form of theatrical communication, which was at odds with the Bauhaus goal of achieving a synthesis of art and technology in 'pure' forms. Indeed, the first public exhibition of the school, the Bauhaus Week of 1923, was mounted under the title 'Art and Technology - A New Unity', making Schreyer's workshop something of an anomaly within the school. During the months of preparation for the exhibition, opposition to Schreyer caused serious ideological battles and, under constant fire from students and staff alike, Schreyer's resignation was inevitable. He left the Bauhaus in the autumn of that year.

The direction of the Bauhaus Stage was immediately transferred to Oskar Schlemmer, who had been invited to the school on the basis of his reputation as a painter and sculptor as much as on that of his early dance productions in his native Stuttgart. Schlemmer took the opportunity of the Bauhaus Week to introduce his own programme with a series of performances and demonstrations. On the fourth day of the Week, 17 August 1923, members of the much altered stage workshop presented *The Figural Cabinet I*, which had been performed a year earlier at a Bauhaus party.

Schlemmer described the performance as 'half shooting gallery - half *metaphysicum abstractum*', using cabaret techniques to parody the 'faith in progress' so prevalent at the time. A medley of sense and nonsense, characterized by 'Colour, Form, Nature and Art; Man and Machine, Acoustics and Mechanics', Schlemmer attributed its 'direction' to Caligari (referring to the 1919 film *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*), America, and himself. The 'Violin Body', the 'Chequered One', the 'Elemental One', the 'Better-Class Citizen', the 'Questionable One', 'Miss Rosy Red', and the 'Turk' were represented in full, half and quarter figures. Set in motion by invisible hands, the figures 'walk, stand, float, slide, roll or rollick for a quarter of an hour'. According to Schlemmer, the production was 'Babylonian confusion, full of method, a pot-pourri for the eye, in form, style and colour'. *Figural Cabinet II* was a projected variation of the first, with metallic figures on wires dashing from background to foreground and back again.

The performance was a great success precisely because its mechanical devices and overall pictorial design reflected both the art and technology sensibilities of the Bauhaus. Schlemmer's ability to translate his painterly talents (the early plans for the figurines had already been suggested in his paintings) into innovative performances was much appreciated within a school which specifically aimed at attracting artists who would work beyond the boundaries of their own disciplines. Schlemmer's refusal to accept the limits of art categories resulted in performances which quickly became the focus of Bauhaus activities, while his position as overall director of the Bauhaus Stage became firmly established.

### Bauhaus festivities

The Bauhaus community was held together as much by its manifesto and Gropius's novel vision of a teaching school for all the arts, as by the social events they organized to make Weimar a lively cultural centre. The 'Bauhaus Festivities' soon became famous and drew party-goers from the local communities of Weimar (and later Dessau), as well as from surrounding cities such as Berlin. Parties were elaborately prepared around themes, such as 'Meta', 'The Beard, Nose and Heart Festival' or 'The White Festival' (where everyone was instructed to appear in a costume 'dotted, chequered and striped'), which more often than not were devised and coordinated by Schlemmer and his students.

These events provided the group with the opportunity to experiment with new performance ideas: for example, the *Figural Cabinet* performance was an elaboration of one such festive evening. On the other hand, *Meta*,<sup>83</sup> performed at a rented hall in Weimar in 1924, was the basis for a festive evening held at the Ilm Chalet in the summer of that year. In the staged

performance, the simple plot was 'freed from all accessories' and defined only by placards bearing directions such as 'entrance', 'intermission', 'passion', 'climax' and so on. The actors performed the designated actions around the props of a couch, stairs, ladder, door and parallel bars. For the Ilm Chalet evening, there were similar signals for action.

It was at the Ilm Chalet Gasthaus, only a bicycle ride from Weimar, that the Bauhaus band first tried out their combinations. One such evening was described by a visiting reporter from Berlin: 'What an imaginative and dainty name and what a shack that adorns itself with it', he wrote of the Ilm Chalet. But there was more 'artistic and youthful energy in this royal chamber of Victoriana' than in any stylishly decorated State Art Society Annual Dance in Berlin. The Bauhaus jazz band, playing the *Banana Shimmy* and *Java Girls*, was the best he had ever heard, and the pantomime and costumes without equal. Another famous Bauhaus dance, held in February 1929, was the Metallic Festival. As the title suggests, the entire school was decorated in metallic colour and substances, and for those who took up the invitations printed on elegant metal-coloured card, a chute awaited them at the entrance to the school. Down this miniature dipper they sped through the hallway between the two Bauhaus buildings, to be greeted in the main festive room by tinkling bells and a loud flourish played by a four-piece village band.

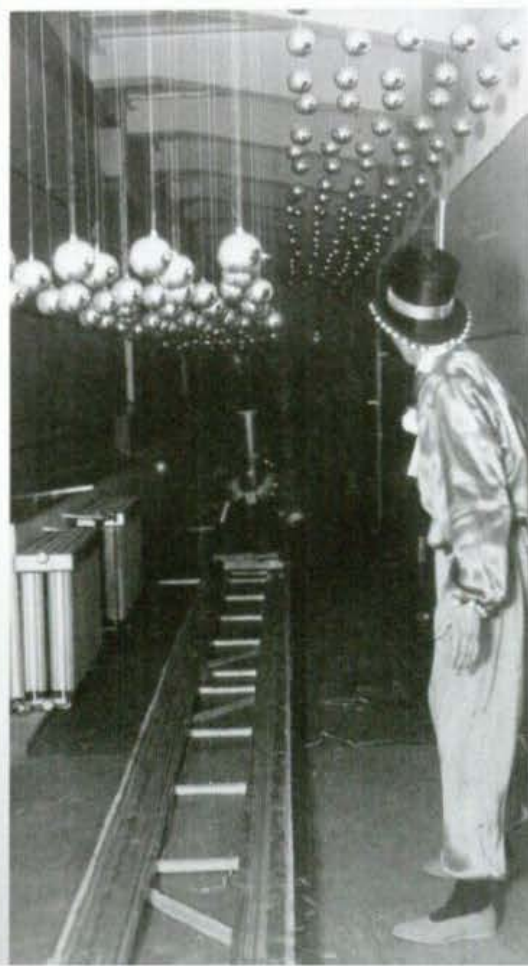
83 Oskar Schlemmer, scene from *Meta or the Pantomime of Scenes*, 1924



84 Maquettes for *The Figural Cabinet 1* executed by Carl Schlemmer, 1922-3

85 Schlemmer, *The Figural Cabinet 1* (made by Carl Schlemmer), which was performed for the first time at a Bauhaus party in 1922. It was staged again during the Bauhaus week in 1923 and during a tour of the Bauhaus Stage in 1926

86 Metallic Festival, 9 February 1929. A chute connected the wing between two Bauhaus buildings. The figure in costume prepares to take off on the chute which would bring him into the main festival rooms

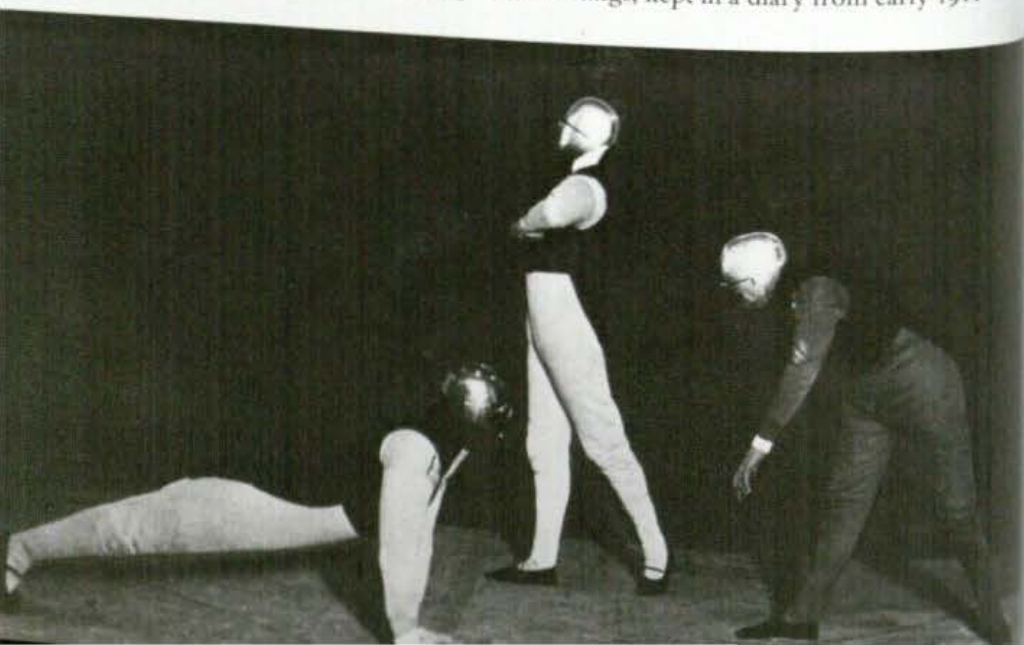


In fact it was to those earlier festivities that Schlemmer attributed the original spirit of Bauhaus performance. 'From the first day of its existence, the Bauhaus sensed the impulse for creative theatre,' he wrote, 'for from that first day the play instinct was present. It was expressed in our exuberant parties, in improvisations, and in the imaginative masks and costumes that we made.' In addition, Schlemmer pointed out that there was a distinct feeling for satire and parody. 'It was probably a legacy of the Dadaists to ridicule automatically everything that smacked of solemnity or ethical precepts.' And so, he wrote, the grotesque flourished again. 'It found its nourishment in travesty and in mocking the antiquated forms of the contemporary theatre. Though its tendency was fundamentally negative, its evident recognition of the origin, conditions, and laws of theatrical play was a positive feature.'

This same disregard for 'antiquated forms' meant that the Stage workshop imposed no qualifying requirements on the students beyond their will to perform. With few exceptions, those students who joined Schlemmer's course were not professionally trained dancers. Nor for that matter was Schlemmer, but over the years, through directing and demonstrating numerous productions, he became involved in actually dancing his own work. One of the dance students, Andreas Weinger, was also leader of the famous Bauhaus jazz band.

### Schlemmer's theory of performance

Parallel to this satiric and often absurd aspect of many of the performances and festivities, Schlemmer developed a more specific theory of performance. Maintained throughout his various manifestos on the aims of the Stage workshop, as well as in his private writings, kept in a diary from early 1911



until his death, Schlemmer's theory of performance was a unique contribution to the Bauhaus. In it he obsessively analysed the problem of theory and practice that was central to such an educational programme. Schlemmer expressed this questioning in the form of the classic mythological opposition between Apollo and Dionysus: theory pertained to Apollo, the god of intellect, while practice was symbolized by the wild festivities of Dionysus.

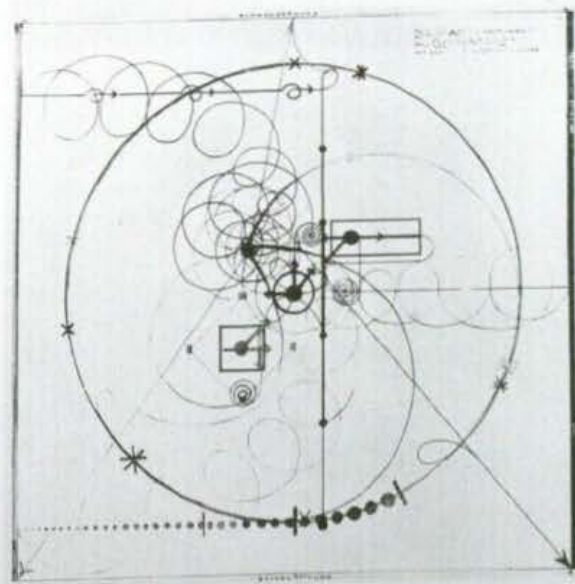
Schlemmer's own alternations between theory and practice reflected a puritan ethic. He considered painting and drawing to be the aspect of his work that was most rigorously intellectual, while the unadulterated pleasure he obtained from his experiments in theatre was, he wrote, constantly suspect for this reason. In his paintings, as in his theatrical experiments, the essential investigation was of space; the paintings delineated the two-dimensional elements of space, while theatre provided a place in which to 'experience' space.

Although beset with doubts as to the specificity of the two media, theatre and painting, Schlemmer did consider them as complementary activities: in his writings he clearly described painting as theoretical research, while performance was the 'practice' of that classical equation. 'The dance is Dionysian and wholly emotional in origin', he wrote. But this satisfied only one aspect of his temperament: 'I struggle between two souls in my breast – one painting-oriented, or rather philosophical-artistic; the other theatrical; or, to put it bluntly, an ethical soul and an aesthetic one.'

In a piece entitled *Gesture Dance* performed in 1926–7, Schlemmer devised a dance demonstration to illustrate these abstract theories. He first prepared a notation system which graphically described the linear paths of motion and the forward movements of the dancers. Following these directions, three figures, dressed in the primary colours of red, yellow and blue, executed

87 Opposite: Scene from *Gesture Dance* with Schlemmer, Siedhoff, Kaminsky

88 Schlemmer, diagram for *Gesture Dance*, 1926, with stage open at both ends. Schlemmer's complex notation system was used to plan and record the actual movements of each performance



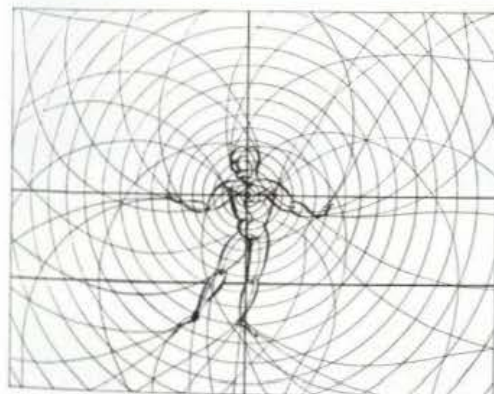
complicated 'geometric' gestures and banal 'everyday actions', such as 'pointed sneezing, broad laughing and soft listening', which were 'always a means towards isolating abstract form'. This demonstration was intentionally didactic and at the same time it revealed Schlemmer's methodical transition from one medium to another: he moved from the two-dimensional surface (notation and painting) to the plastic (reliefs and sculptures) to the animatedly plastic art of the human body.

So preparing a performance involved these various stages: words or abstract printed signs, demonstrations, and physical images in the form of paintings, which all became a means for representing layers of real space and time changes. In this way notation as well as painting involved for Schlemmer the theory of space, while performance in real space provided the 'practice' to complement that theory.

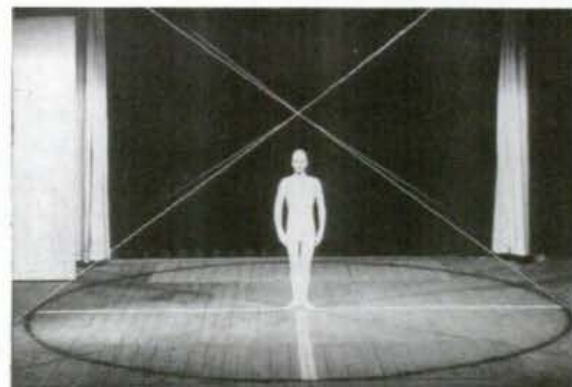
### Performance space

The opposition of visual plane and spatial depth was a complex problem that preoccupied many of those working at the Bauhaus during Schlemmer's time there. 'Space: as the unifying element in architecture' was what Schlemmer considered to be the common denominator of the mixed interests of the Bauhaus staff. What characterized the 1920s' discussion on space was the notion of *Raumempfindung* or 'felt volume', and it was to this 'sensation of space' that Schlemmer attributed the origins of each of his dance productions. He explained that 'out of the plane geometry, out of the pursuit of the straight line, the diagonal, the circle and the curve, a stereometry of space evolves, by the moving vertical line of the dancing figure'. The relationship of the 'geometry of the plane' to the 'stereometry of the space' could be *felt* if one were to imagine 'a space filled with a soft pliable substance in which the figures of the sequence of the dancer's movements were to harden as a negative form.'

In a lecture-demonstration given at the Bauhaus in 1927, Schlemmer and students illustrated these abstract theories: first the square surface of the floor was divided into bisecting axes and diagonals, completed by a circle. Then taut wires crossed the empty stage, defining the 'volume' or cubic dimension of the space. Following these guidelines, the dancers moved within the 'spatial linear web', their movement dictated by the already geometrically divided stage. Phase two added costumes emphasizing various parts of the body, leading to gestures, characterization, and abstract colour harmonies provided by the coloured attire. Thus the demonstration led the viewers through the 'mathematical dance' to the 'space dance' to the 'gesture dance', culminating in the combination of elements of variety theatre and circus suggested by the masks and props in the final sequence.

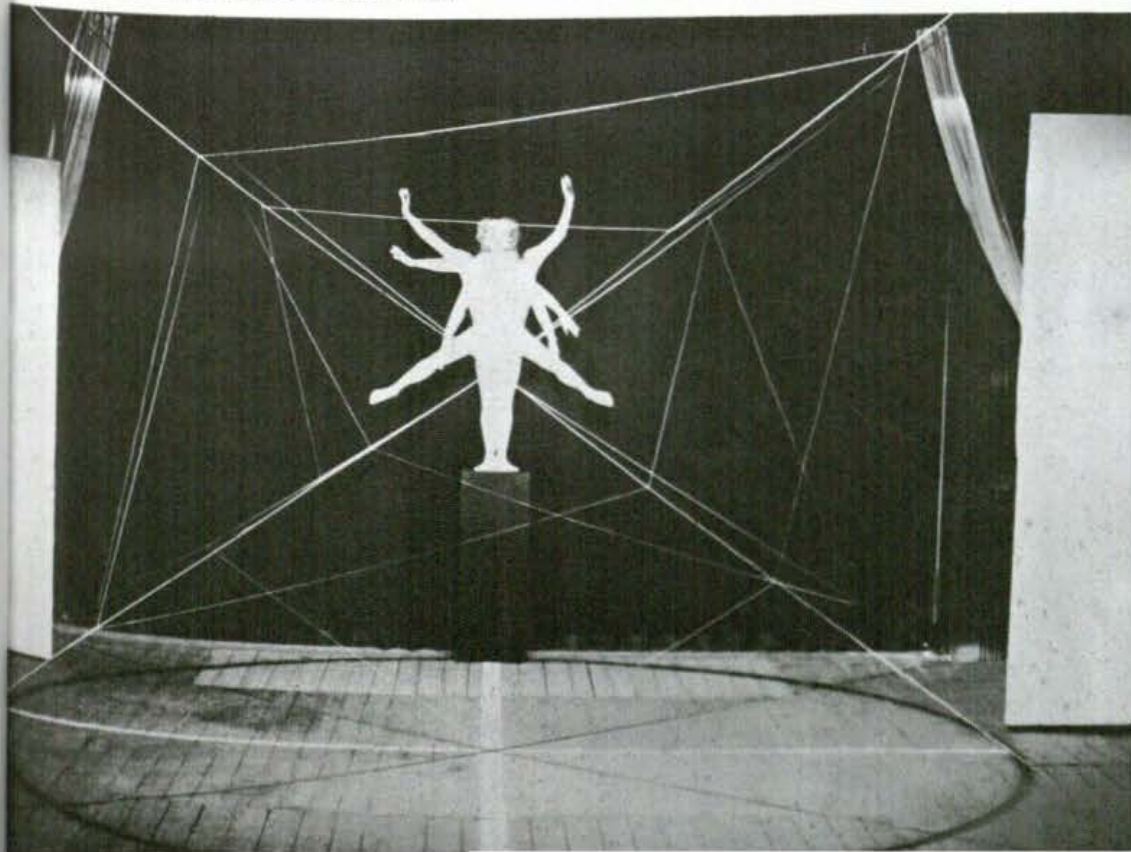


89 Schlemmer, drawing from *Mensch und Kunstfigur*, 1925



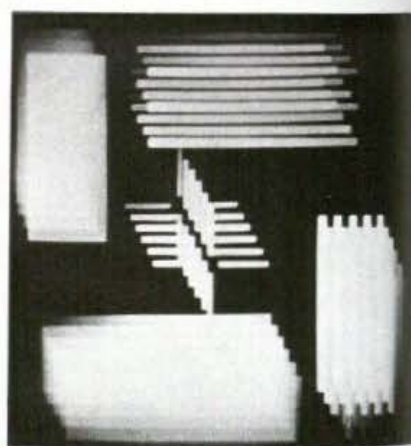
90 Schlemmer, *Figure in Space with Plane Geometry and Spatial Delineations*, performed by Werner Siedhoff

91 *Dance in Space (Delineation of Space with Figure)*, multiple exposure photograph by Lux Feininger; Bauhaus Stage demonstration, 1927





92 The projection booth for Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack's *Reflected Light Compositions*, 1922-3; Hirschfeld-Mack at the piano



93 Hirschfeld-Mack, *Cross Composition*, reflected light compositions, 1923-4

By contrast, the students Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack and Kurt Schwerdtfeger, independently of the Stage workshop, experimented with 'flattening' space in their *Reflected Light Compositions*. The 'light plays' began as an experiment for one of the Bauhaus festivities of 1922: 'Originally we had planned a quite simple shadow-show for a Lantern Festival. Accidentally, through the replacement of one of the acetylene lamps, the shadows of the paperscreen doubled themselves, and because of the many differently coloured acetylene flames, a "cold" and a "warm" shadow became visible ...'.

The next step was to multiply the sources of light, adding layers of coloured glass which were projected on the back of a transparent screen, producing kinetic, abstract designs. Sometimes the players followed intricate scores which indicated the light source and sequence of colours, rheostat settings, speed and direction of 'dissolves' and 'fade-outs'. These were 'played' on a specially constructed apparatus and accompanied by Hirschfeld-Mack's piano playing. Believing that these demonstrations would be a 'bridge of understanding for those many people who stand perplexed before abstract paintings and other new tendencies', these light projection plays were publicly shown for the first time at the Bauhaus Week in 1923, and in subsequent tours to Vienna and Berlin.

### Mechanical ballets

'Man and Machine' was as much a consideration within the Bauhaus analysis of art and technology as it has been for the Russian Constructivist or the Italian Futurist performers. Costumes of the Stage workshop were designed to metamorphose the human figure into a mechanical object. In the *Slat*

*Dance* (1927), performed by Manda von Kreibitz, the actions of lifting and bending the limbs of the body could be seen only in the movements of the long, thin slats projecting from the body of the dancer. *Glass Dance* (1929), 94 executed by Carla Grosch wearing a hooped skirt of glass rods, head covered in a glass globe and carrying glass spheres, equally restricted the dancer's movements. Costumes ranged from down-filled 'soft figures' to bodies covered in concentric hoops, and in each case the very constrictions of the elaborate attire totally transformed traditional dance movements.

In this way Schlemmer emphasized the 'object' quality of the dancers and each performance achieved his desired 'mechanical effect', not unlike that of puppets: 'Might not the dancers be real puppets, moved by strings, or better still, self-propelled by means of a precise mechanism, almost free of human intervention, at most directed by remote control?', Schlemmer noted, in one of his passionate diary entries. And it was Heinrich von Kleist's essay *Über das*

94 Schlemmer, *Glass Dance*, 1929





95 Schlemmer, scene from his pantomime *Treppenwitz*, c. 1926–7, performed by Hildebrandt, Siedhoff, Schlemmer and Weininger

*Marionettentheater* (1810), where a ballet-master walking through a park observed an afternoon puppet-show, that inspired the so-called puppet theory. Kleist had written:

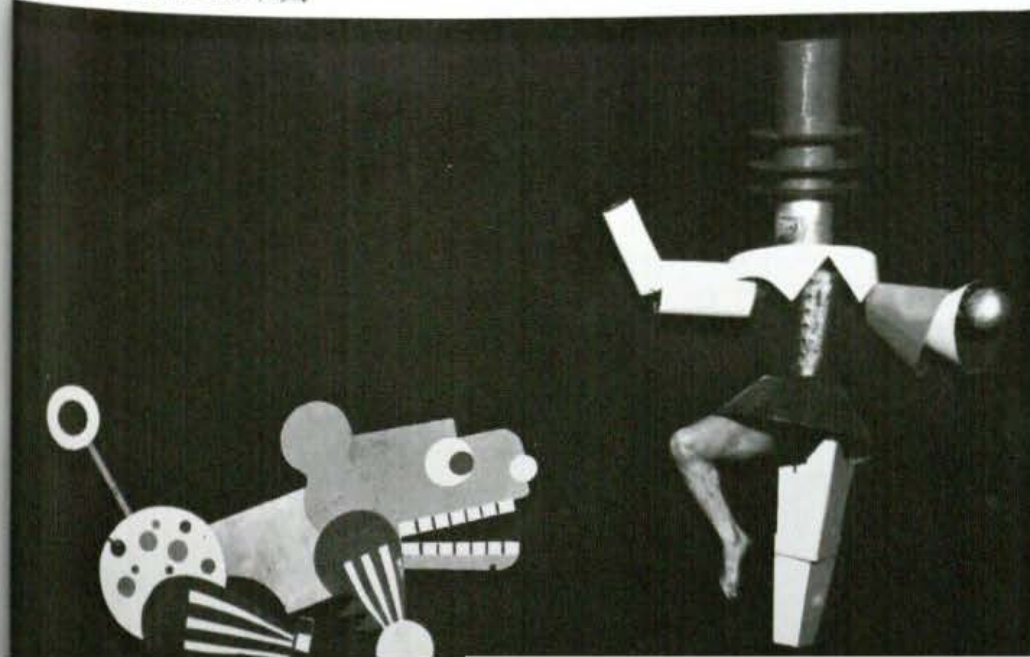
Each puppet has a focal point in movement, a centre of gravity, and when this centre is moved, the limbs follow without any additional handling. The limbs are pendula, echoing automatically the movement of the centre. Every time the centre of gravity is guided in a straight line, the limbs describe curves that complement and extend the basically simple movement.

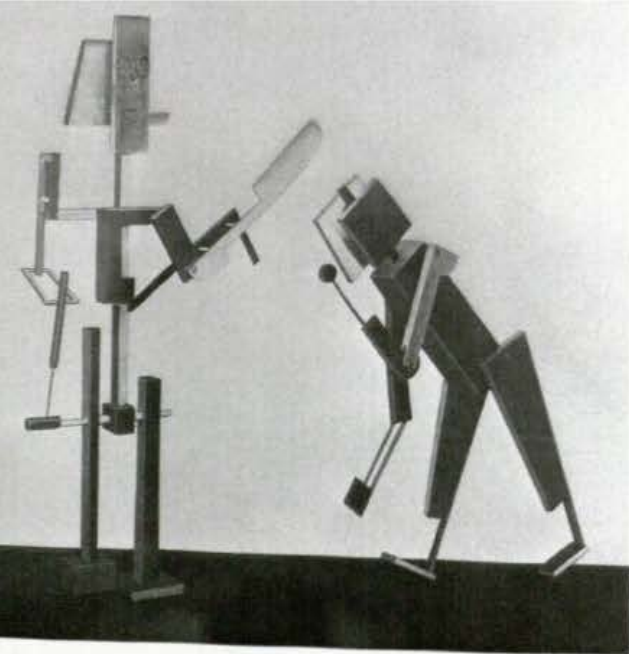
By 1923 puppets and mechanically operated figures, masks and geometrical costumes had become central features of many Bauhaus perfor-

mances. Kurt Schmidt designed a *Mechanical Ballet* in which abstract, movable figures, identified by the letters A,B,C,D,E, were carried by 'invisible' dancers, creating an illusion of dancing automatons. Equally, Schmidt's production of *Man + Machine* (1924) underlined the geometric and mechanical aspects of movement, and his *Die Abenteuer des kleinen 97* *Buckligen* ('*The Adventures of the Little Hunchback*') (1924), also based on von Kleist's ideas, led to the formation of a flexible marionette stage, under the direction of Ilse Fehling. Xanti Schawinsky added 'animal' puppets to his performance of *Circus* (1924): dressed in black leotard, Schawinsky invisibly 96 played the lion-tamer to von Fritsch's cardboard lion (with a traffic signal for the tail). Performed for the Bauhaus community and guests on the stage of a dance hall about a half-hour's walk from the institute, the work was 'essentially of a formal and pictorial concept. It was visual theatre, a realisation of painting and constructions in motion, ideas in colour, form and space and their dramatic inter-action', Schawinsky wrote.

Typically, Schlemmer's own *Treppenwitz* (1926–7) verged on the absurd. 95 A pantomime on stairs, it included such characters as the Musical Clown (Andreas Weininger). Dressed in a padded white costume with a large funnel-shaped object which totally transformed his left leg, and a violin hanging from his right leg, carrying an accordion, a paper-shaker and an umbrella with spokes only, Weininger was forced, on account of the rushed preparations for this production, to perform his own puppet-like gestures held together by safety-pins.

96 Xanti Schawinsky, scene from *Circus*, with Schawinsky as the lion-tamer and von Fritsch as the 'lion', 1924





97 Kurt Schmidt and T. Hergt (execution), 'doctor' and 'servant' figurines from the marionette play *The Adventures of the Little Hunchback*, c. 1924

Yet it was a circus artiste who was to become one of the favourites of the Bauhaus performers. Rastelli, whom Schlemmer had met in Berlin in 1924, used to perform a spectacular nine-ball juggling act which soon became a standard exercise at the Bauhaus. The students would practise the particular skills of the juggler, developing at the same time the balance and coordination that characterizes the juggling art. The usual dance-training practice of studied attitudes at the barre was replaced by the warming-up exercise of an Italian juggler.

### Painting and Performance

The relationship between painting and performance was a constant preoccupation in the development of Bauhaus performance. In his 1917 ballet *Parade*, Picasso had split the figures in half, as it were, their torsos covered in gigantic structures and their legs in trousers or traditional ballet tights and shoes. Moreover these figurines derived from Picasso's Cubist paintings. Schlemmer had found this adaptation of Picasso's own painting forms into figurines to be a vulgarization.

In an unusual production, *Chorus of Masks* (1928), he attempted a more indirect translation of painting to performance. The starting-point of this mostly improvised performance was a painting of 1923, *Tischgesellschaft*. The atmosphere of the painting was recreated in a 'light blue horizon'. 'In the darkened centre of the stage stood a long, empty table with chairs and glasses.

A large shadow, probably three times life-size, appeared on the horizon and shrank to normal human scale. A grotesque masked being entered and sat down at the table. This continued until a weird round table of twelve masked characters had assembled. Three characters descended from above, out of nowhere: an "infinitely long one", a "fantastically short one" and a "nobly dressed one". Then a gruesomely solemn drinking ceremony was celebrated. After that the drinking party came to the very front of the stage.' So Schlemmer reconstructed the atmosphere of the painting as well as its deep perspective by presenting the figures in masks, graded in size according to their position at the table, which was set at a right angle to the audience.

In a different way, Wassily Kandinsky had, in 1928, used paintings as the 'characters' of the performance itself. *Pictures at an Exhibition*, presented at the Friedrich Theater in Dessau, illustrated a 'musical poem' by Kandinsky's fellow-countryman, Modest Mussorgsky. Mussorgsky had for his part been inspired by an exhibition of naturalistic watercolours. So Kandinsky designed visual equivalents to Mussorgsky's musical phrases, with movable coloured forms and light projections. With the exception of two pictures out of sixteen, the whole setting was abstract. Kandinsky explained that only a few shapes were 'vaguely objective'. Therefore he did not proceed 'programmatically' but rather 'made use of the forms that appeared to my mind's eye while listening to the music'. The chief means, he said, were the shapes themselves, the colours of the shapes, the lighting – colour as intensified painting, and the building up of each picture, linked to the music, and 'where necessary, its dismantlement'. For instance, in the fourth picture, 'The Ancient Castle', only three long vertical strips were visible towards the back of the stage, whose black plush curtain, hung well back, created an 'immaterial' depth. These strips vanished, to be replaced by large red backdrops from the right of the stage, and a green backdrop from the left. The scene, brightly illuminated with intense colour, became increasingly dim with the *poco largamente*, falling into complete darkness with the *piano* section.

### 'Triadic Ballet'

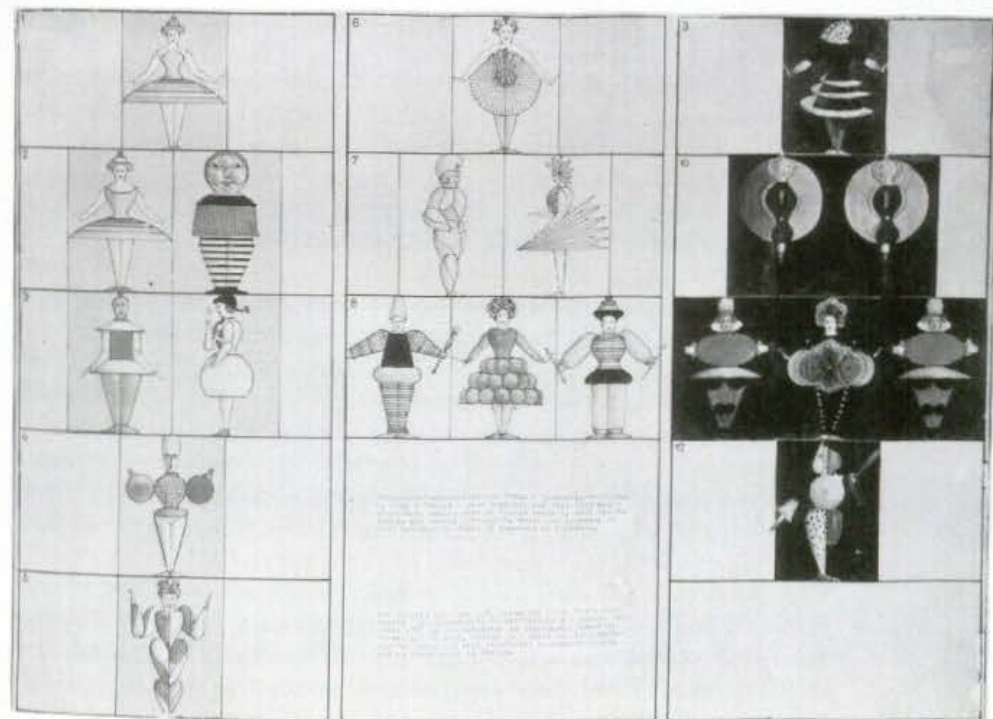
Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet* gained him an international reputation far beyond 98,99 any of his other performances. As early as 1912 he had been considering various ideas which would finally materialize in its first performance at the Stuttgart Landestheater in 1922. Performed over a ten-year period, this production contained a virtual encyclopaedia of Schlemmer's performance propositions. 'Why Triadic?', the director noted: 'Triadic – from triad (three) because of the three dancers and the three parts of the symphonic architectonic composition and the fusion of the dance, the costumes and the music.' Accompanied by a Hindemith score for player-piano, 'the mechani-





98 Schlemmer as the 'Türke' in his *Triadic Ballet*, 1922

99 Schlemmer, designs for *Triadic Ballet*, 1922 and 1926



99 cal instrument which corresponds to the stereotypical dance style', the music provided a parallel to the costumes and to the mathematical and mechanical outlines of the body. In addition, the doll-like quality of the dancers corresponded to the music-box quality of the music, thus making a 'unity of concept and style'.

Lasting several hours, the *Triadic Ballet* was a 'metaphysical review', using three dancers wearing eighteen costumes in twelve dances. The quality of the dance followed the symphonic elements of the music: for example the first section he characterized as 'scherzo' and the third 'eroica'. His interest in the 'floor geometry' determined the path of the dancers: 'for instance, a dancer moves only from downstage to the footlights along a straight line. Then the diagonal or the circle, ellipse, and so on'. The work had developed in a surprisingly pragmatic way: 'First came the costume, the figurine. Then came the search for the music which would best suit them. Music and the figurine led to the dance. This was the process.' Schlemmer noted, in addition, that dance movements should 'start with one's own life, with standing and walking, leaving leaping and dancing for much later.'

Not surprisingly, this work was the ultimate 'balance of opposites', of abstract concepts and emotional impulses. This of course fitted well into the

particular art-technology interests of the Bauhaus. Schlemmer had finally transformed the theatre workshop from its originally Expressionist bias – under Lothar Schreyer's direction – to one more in line with Bauhaus sensibilities. It had been said that students came to the Bauhaus to be 'cured of Expressionism'. Cured they may have been, only to be introduced by Schlemmer to the more philosophical notion of 'metaphysical dance' or to his love for variety theatre, Japanese theatre, Javanese puppet theatre and the various arts of circus performers. Besides eurhythmics and 'the chorus of movement developed out of them', students also analysed the eukinetics and notation systems of Rudolf von Laban in Switzerland and Laban's protégée Mary Wigman, as well as the Russian Constructivist productions (which were to be seen in Berlin, only a two-hour train ride away).

### The Bauhaus Stage

Since no actual theatre existed at the school during the Weimar period, Schlemmer and his students developed performances directly in the studios, considering each experiment a search for the 'elements of movement and space'. By 1925, when the Bauhaus moved to Dessau, where Gropius had

designed the new building complex, the theatre workshop had become important enough to warrant a specially designed theatre. Even that remained a simple elevated stage in a cubelike auditorium, constructed in such a way as to accommodate the various lighting, screens and steplike structures which Schlemmer, Kandinsky, Xanti Schawinsky, and Joost Schmidt, among others, needed to realise their work.

Despite the simple efficiency of the Dessau stage, various members of staff and students designed their own versions of the ideal stage, based on the needs of experimental performances as diverse as those presented at the Bauhaus. Walter Gropius had written that the architectonic problem of stage space had particular significance for work at the Bauhaus. 'Today's deep stage, which lets the spectator look at the other world of the stage as through a window, or which separates [itself from him] by a curtain, has almost entirely pushed aside the central arena of the past.' Gropius explained that this earlier 'arena' had formed an indivisible spatial unity with the spectators, drawing them into the action of the play. In addition he noted that the 'picture-frame' deep stage presented a two-dimensional problem, while the central arena stage presented a three-dimensional one: instead of changing the action plane, the arena stage provided an action space, in which bodies moved as sculptural forms. Gropius's Total Theatre was designed in 1926 for the director Erwin Piscator, but owing to financial difficulties was never actually built.

Joost Schmidt's Mechanical Stage of 1925 was intended for use by the Bauhaus itself. A multi-purpose structure, it extended the ideas set out by Farkas Molnár the previous year. Molnár's U-Theatre consisted of three stages, arranged one behind the other,  $12 \times 12$ ,  $6 \times 12$ , and  $12 \times 8$  metres in size. In addition, Molnár provided a fourth stage that was supposed to be hung above the centre stage. The first stage protruded into the audience so that all actions could be viewed from three sides; the second stage was designed to be variable in height, depth and sides; and the third corresponded roughly to the 'picture-frame' principle. Although distinguished for their remarkable inventiveness and flexibility, neither Schmidt's nor Molnár's design was actually executed.

Andreas Weininger's Spherical Theatre was designed to house 'mechanical plays'. The spectators, seated around the inner wall of the sphere, would, according to Weininger, find themselves in 'a new relationship to space', and in a 'new psychic, optical and acoustical relationship' with the action of the performance. Heinz Loew's Mechanical Stage, on the other hand, was designed to bring to the fore the technical apparatus which in traditional theatre 'is scrupulously hidden from audience view. Paradoxically, this often results in backstage activities becoming the more interesting aspect of theatre.' Consequently Loew proposed that the task of the future theatre would be 'to develop a technical personnel as important as the actors, one

whose job it would be to bring this apparatus into view, undisguised and as an end in itself'.

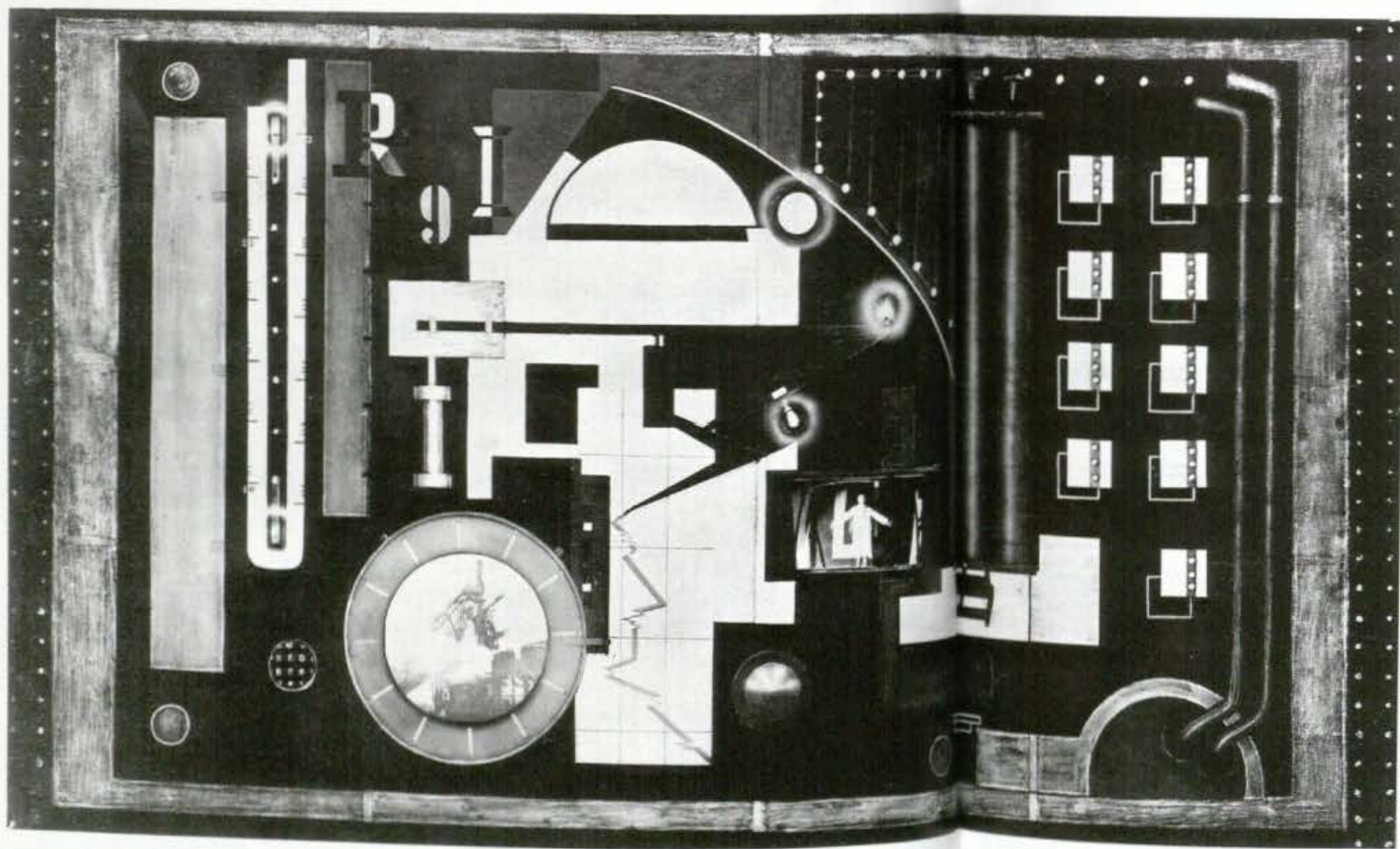
### Frederick Kiesler

Settings even attracted the attention of the police, as was the case when Frederick Kiesler presented his extraordinary backdrops for Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* at the Theater am Kurfürstendamm, Berlin, in 1922. Although never directly associated with the Bauhaus, Kiesler, with his 'space stage' and *R.U.R.* production, was assured of a considerable reputation there. Moreover, in 1924 in Vienna he had organized the first international Theatre and Music Festival, which included numerous productions and lectures by key European performers and directors, among them those of the Bauhaus.

For Čapek's play, Kiesler introduced the ultimate in 'machine age' aesthetics: the play itself proposed manufacturing human beings as the most efficient method towards a futuristic society. The inventor, his laboratory and the factory where the humans were on the production line, as well as a screening system for the factory director to admit only 'desirable visitors' into the secret organization, were all interpreted by Kiesler in a kinetic stage. 'The *R.U.R.* play was my occasion to use for the first time in a theatre a motion picture instead of a painted backdrop', Kiesler explained. For the factory director's screening device, Kiesler built a large square panel window in the middle of the stage drop, resembling an enormous television screen; this could be opened by remote control so that when he pushed a button at his desk, 'the panel opened and the audience saw two human beings reflected from a mirror arrangement backstage'. Diminished in size by the mirrors, the figures viewing the factory from the 'outside' were then given permission to enter and 'the whole thing closed from their small projected image to them walking on stage full size'.

When the director wished to demonstrate to his visitors the modernity of his robot factory, a huge diaphragm in the back of the stage would open to reveal a moving picture (projected from the back of the stage onto a circular screen). What the audience and visitors saw there was the interior of an enormous factory, workers busily in action. This illusion was particularly effective, 'since the camera was walking into the interior of the factory and the audience had the impression that the actors on the stage walked into the perspective of the moving picture too'. Another feature was a series of flashing neon lights of abstract design, which represented the laboratory of the inventor. The control chamber of the factory was an eight-foot iris from which spotlights shone into the audience.

The Berlin police were provoked into action by the back-projection equipment used at various stages throughout the play to give an idea of



100 Frederick Kiesler, setting for Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.*, Berlin, 1922. The setting comprised a mobile wall relief, 'television' panels (accomplished with mirrors) and film projection – the first time film and live performance were combined

activities beyond the main 'office' of the factory, fearing that it could easily cause a fire. So each evening, as the film began rolling, they sounded a fire alarm, much to Kiesler's amusement. After several interruptions of this kind, he capitulated to their noisy protests and built a trough of water above the canvas projection screen. Thus the film was projected onto a continuously flowing wall of water, producing a 'beautifully translucent effect'. For Kiesler, even this accidental feature contributed to the overall production: 'From the beginning to the end, the entire play was in motion and so acted by the actors. The side walls moved too. It was a theatrical concept to create tension in space.'

Meanwhile, at the Bauhaus Moholy-Nagy was prescribing a 'theatre of totality' as a 'great dynamic-rhythmic process, which can compress the greatest clashing masses or accumulations of media – as qualitative and quantitative tensions – into elemental form.' 'Nothing', he wrote in his essay *Theatre, Circus, Variety* (1924), 'stands in the way of making use of complex

APPARATUS such as film, automobile, lift, aeroplane, and other machinery, as well as optical instruments, reflecting equipment, and so on.' 'It is time to produce a kind of stage activity which will no longer permit the masses to be silent spectators which will . . . allow them to fuse with the action on the stage.' To realise such a process, he concluded, a 'thousand-eyed NEW DIRECTOR, equipped with all the modern means of understanding and communication' was needed. It was with this vision that artists at the Bauhaus involved themselves so closely with stage-space design.

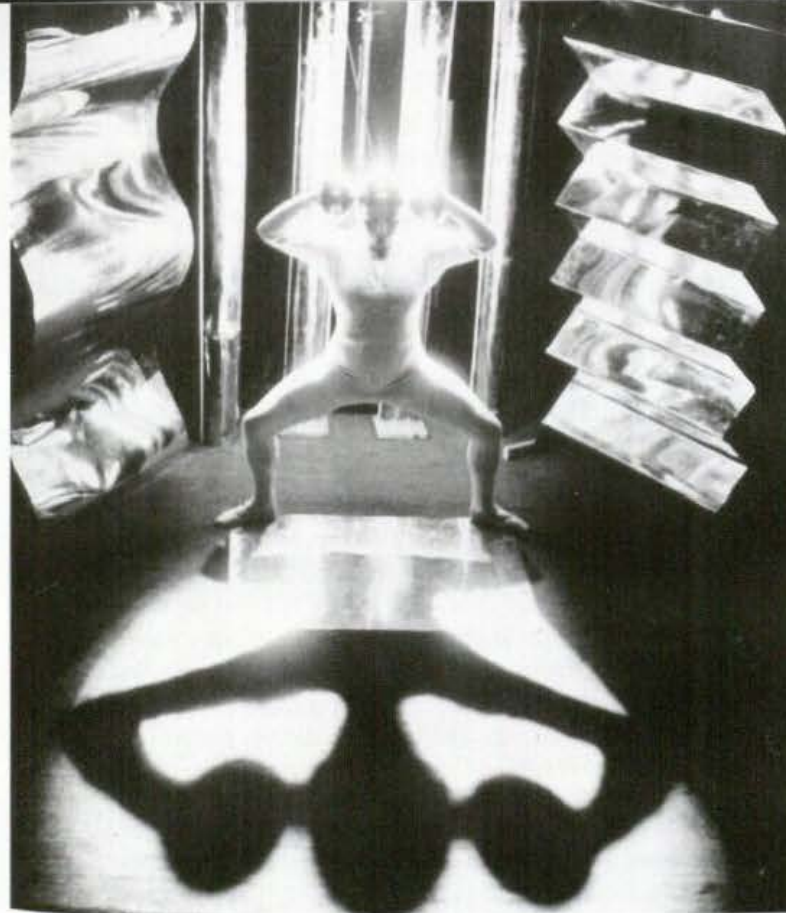
#### **Bauhaus touring company**

During the Dessau years, from 1926 onwards, Bauhaus performance gained an international reputation. This was made possible because Gropius strongly supported the Bauhaus theatre, and the students were enthusiastic participants. So much importance and encouragement were given the theatre

experiment that Schlemmer announced in his lecture demonstration of 1927: 'the point of our endeavour: to become a travelling company of actors which will perform its works wherever there is a desire to see them'. By then such a desire was widespread, and Schlemmer and company toured numerous European cities, among them Berlin, Breslau, Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Basle. The repertoire, essentially a summary of three years of Bauhaus performance, included *Dance in Space*, *Slat Dance*, *Dance of Forms*, *Metal Dance*, *Gesture Dance*, *Dance of Hoops* and *Chorus of Masks*, to name only a few.

102 *Metal Dance* was reported in the *Basler National Zeitung*, on 30 April 1929: 'The curtain rises. Black backdrop and black stage floor. Deep down stage, a cave lights up, not much larger than a door. The cave is made of highly reflecting corrugated tin plate set on edge. A female figure steps out from inside. She is wearing white tights. Head and hands are enclosed by shiny, silvery spheres. Metallically crisp, smooth and shining music sets the figure to performing crisp movements . . . the whole thing is very brief, fading away like an apparition.'

*Dance in Space* opened with a bare stage, whose black floor was outlined with a large white square. Circles and diagonals filled the square. A dancer in yellow tights and metal globular mask tripped across the stage, hopping along the white lines. A second masked figure in red tights covered the same geometrical shapes, but with large strides. Finally a third figure in blue tights calmly walked through the stage space, ignoring the one-way directions of the diagram on the floor. Essentially it represented three typical human gaits, and in Schlemmer's habitual multiples of three, it showed three characteristics of colour and their representation in form: 'yellow – pointed hopping; red – full paces; blue – calm strides'.



102 Schlemmer, *Metal Dance*, 1929

The eighth dance in this retrospective of Bauhaus performance was a *Game with Building Blocks*. On stage was a wall of building blocks, from 101 behind which three figures crawled. Piece by piece they dismantled the wall, carrying each block to another area of the stage. Throwing each block towards the next person with the rhythm that bricklayers throw bricks in chain formation, they finally built a central tower, around which a dance took place.

The *Dance of the Stage Wings* consisted of a number of partitions placed one behind the other. Hands, heads, feet, bodies and words appeared in short broken rhythm in the spaces between the partitions – 'dismembered, crazy, meaningless, foolish, banal and mysterious', the same Swiss journalist noted. 'It was extremely silly and extremely frightening', but above all, for the reporter, the work revealed the 'entire meaning and the entire stupidity of the phenomenon "stage wings"'. While acknowledging the intended absurdity



of many of the brief sequences, the journalist summed up his enthusiastic appraisal: 'People who are trying to discover "something" behind all this – will not find anything, because there is nothing to discover *behind* this. Everything is there, right in what one perceives! There are no feelings which are "expressed", rather, feelings are evoked. . . . The whole thing is a "game". It is a freed and freeing "game". . . . Pure absolute form. Just as the music is . . .'

Such favourable responses led the company to Paris to present the *Triadic Ballet* at the International Dance Congress in 1932. But it was also their last performance. The disintegration of the Bauhaus following Gropius's nine-year tenure there; the demands of a very different director, Hannes Meyer, who was against the 'formal and personal' aspects of Schlemmer's dance work; the censorship imposed by the new Prussian government: all made Schlemmer's dream a short-lived one.

The Dessau Bauhaus was finally closed down in 1932. Its then director, Mies van der Rohe, attempted to run the school as a private institution in a disused telephone factory in Berlin. But by then, the Bauhaus stage had firmly established its significance in the history of performance. Performance had been a means for extending the Bauhaus principle of a 'total art work', resulting in carefully choreographed and designed productions. It had directly translated aesthetic and artistic preoccupations into live art and 'real space'. Although often playful and satirical, it was never intentionally provocative or overtly political as the Futurists, Dadaists or Surrealists had been. Nevertheless, like them, the Bauhaus reinforced the importance of performance as a medium in its own right and with the approach of the Second World War there was a marked decrease in performance activities, not only in Germany but also in many other European centres.

103 Members of the Stage workshop dressed in masks and costumes on the roof of the Dessau Studio, c. 1926



## Living Art c. 1933 to the 1970s

Performance in the United States began to emerge in the late thirties with the arrival of European war exiles in New York. By 1945 it had become an activity in its own right, recognised as such by artists and going beyond the provocations of earlier performances.

### Black Mountain College, North Carolina

In the autumn of 1933, twenty-two students and nine faculty members moved into a huge white-columned building complex overlooking the town of Black Mountain, three miles away, and its surrounding valley and mountains. This small community soon attracted artists, writers, playwrights, dancers and musicians to its rural southern outpost, despite minimal funds and the makeshift programme which the director, John Rice, had managed to draw up.

Looking for an artist who would create a focal point for the diverse curriculum, Rice invited Josef and Anni Albers to join the community school. Albers, who had taught at the Bauhaus prior to its closure by the Nazis, quickly provided just that necessary combination of discipline and inventiveness that had characterized his years at the Bauhaus: 'art is concerned with the HOW and not the WHAT; not with literal content, but with the performance of the factual content. The performance – how it is done – that is the content of art', he explained to the students in a lecture.

Despite the lack of explicit manifesto or public declaration of its ends, the small community slowly acquired a reputation as an interdisciplinary educational hide-out. Days and nights spent in the same company would easily turn into brief improvised performances, considered more as entertainment. But in 1936, Albers invited his former Bauhaus colleague Xanti Schawinsky to help expand the art faculty. Given the freedom to devise his own programme, Schawinsky soon outlined his 'stage studies' programme, largely an extension of earlier Bauhaus experiments. 'This course is not intended as a training for any particular branch of the contemporary theatre', Schawinsky explained. Rather it would be a general study of fundamental phenomena: 'space, form, colour, light, sound, movement, music, time, etc.'