

the Performance Group's creations, after which it was dissolved. He is University Professor at New York University, Tisch School of the Arts.

Schechner's theoretical and critical writings are also of profound importance in the approach he adopts as a result of his practice as director. His distinctions between drama, theatre, script and performance relate the field to that of historians, archaeologists and anthropologists, and have influenced generations of Western practitioners and thinkers. For Schechner, therefore, the drama is 'what the writer writes'; the script is the code of a particular production; the theatre is 'the specific set of gestures performed by the performer in any given performance'; the performance is the totality of the event for both performers and audience. As both director and writer Schechner is concerned to make performers and audience aware of the interlinking of all these ideas and definitions, often taking examples from non-Western cultures, and drawing on his travels in Asia and the Far East. Schechner's essay attempts a historical and philosophical definition of the notion of the avant-garde. In doing so he refers to most of the figures included in this book. It is an excellent example of both the clarity and the importance of his theoretical writing, marking him out as one of the few director-theorists whose work is constantly breaking new boundaries in the analysis of performance.

Compare this article with writings by the following authors in this reader

- Banes – a contemporary, contrasting, view of postmodernism
- Butler – a contemporary USA theorist
- Beck – an American theatre contemporary
- Brook – a European view of intercultural experiment
- Cage – who also used non-Western thought and forms
- Goldberg – an art historical view
- Hijikata – a Japanese view of the avant-garde
- LeCompte – who worked with Schechner before founding the Wooster Group
- Williams – an earlier discussion on the idea of text

Further reading

- Schechner, R. (1978) *Environmental Theatre*, New York: Hawthorn.
- Schechner, R. (1988) *Performance Theory*, London: Routledge.
- Schechner, R. (2002) *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, London: Routledge.
- Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process*, Chicago: Aldine.

Note

- 1 Then known as *The Tulane Drama Review*, later as *The Drama Review*, published from New York University, and now, usually, simply *TDR*.

Oskar Schlemmer

MAN AND ART FIGURE

THE HISTORY of the theater is the history of the transfiguration of the human form. It is the history of *man* as the actor of physical and spiritual events, ranging from naïveté to reflection, from naturalness to artifice.

The materials involved in this transfiguration are form and color, the materials of the painter and sculptor. The arena for this transfiguration is found in the con-structive fusion of *space and building*, the realm of the architect. Through the manipulation of these materials the role of the artist, the synthesizer of these elements, is determined.

One of the emblems of our time is *abstraction*. It functions, on the one hand, to disconnect components from an existing and persisting whole, either to lead them individually *ad absurdum* or to elevate them to their greatest potential. On the other hand, abstraction can result in generalization and summation, in the construction in bold outline of a new totality.

A further emblem of our time is *mechanization*, the inexorable process which now lays claim to every sphere of life and art. Everything which can be mechanized *is* mechanized. The result: our recognition of that which can *not* be mechanized.

And last, but not the least, among the emblems of our time are the new potentials of technology and invention which we can use to create altogether new hypotheses and which can thus engender, or at least give promise of, the boldest fantasies.

The theater, which should be the image of our time and perhaps the one art form most peculiarly conditioned by it, must not ignore these signs.

Stage (Bühne), taken in its general sense, is what we may call the entire realm lying between religious cult and naïve popular entertainment. Neither of these things, however, is really the same thing as stage. Stage is *representation* abstracted from the natural and directing its effect at the human being.

This confrontation of passive spectator and animate actor preconditions also the form of the stage, at its most monumental as the antique arena and at its most primitive as the scaffold in the market place. The need for concentration resulted in the peep show or 'picture frame,' today the 'universal' form of the stage. The term *theater* designates the most basic nature of the stage: make-believe, mummery, metamorphosis. Between cult and theater lies 'the stage seen as a moral institution'; between theater and popular entertainment lie variety (vaudeville) and circus: the stage as an institution for the artiste. [See diagram opposite.]

The question as to the origin of life and the cosmos, that is, whether in the beginning there was Word, Deed, or Form – Spirit, Act, or Shape – Mind, Happening, or Manifestation – pertains also to the world of the stage, and leads us to a differentiation of:

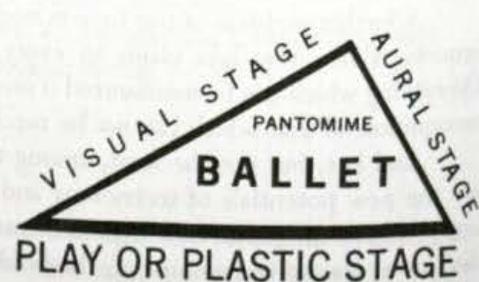
- the *oral or sound stage (Sprech-oder Tonbühne)* of a literary or musical event;
- the *play stage (Spielbühne)* of a physical-mimetic event;
- the *visual stage (Schaubühne)* of an optical event.

Each of these stage forms has its corresponding representative, thus:

- the *author* (as writer or composer) who is the creator of the word or musical sound;
- the *actor* whose body and its movements make him the player;
- the *designer* who is the builder of form and color.

Each of these stage forms can exist for itself and be complete within itself.

The combination of two or all three stage forms – with one of them always predominating – is a question of weight distribution, and is something that can be perfected with mathematical precision. The executor of this process is the universal *regisseur* or *director*. E.g.:



SCHEME FOR STAGE, CULT, AND POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT ACCORDING TO:

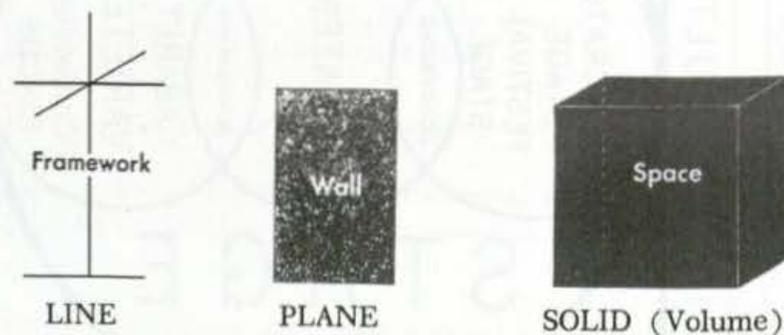
PLACE	PERSON	GENRE			SPEECH	MUSIC	DANCE
TEMPLE	PRIEST	<div style="text-align: center;"> </div>			SERMON	ORATORIO	DERVISH
ARCHITECTURAL STAGE	PROPHET				ANCIENT TRAGEDY	EARLY OPERA (e.g. Handel)	MASS GYMNASTICS
STYLIZED OR SPACE STAGE	SPEAKER				SCHILLER ("BRIDE OF MESSINA")	WAGNER	CHORIC DANCE
THEATER OF ILLUSION	ACTOR				SHAKESPEARE	MOZART	BALLET
WINGS AND BORDERS	PERFORMER (COMMEDIAN)				IMPROVISA-TION COMEDIA DELL'ARTE	OPERA BUFFA OPERETTA	MIME & MUMMERY
SIMPLEST STAGE OR APPARATUS & MACHINERY	ARTISTE				CONFERENCIER (M.C.)	MUSIC HALL SONG JAZZ BAND	CARICATURE & PARODY
PODIUM SCAFFOLD	ARTISTE				CLOWNERY	CIRCUS BAND	ACROBATICS
FAIRGROUND SIDESHOW	FOOL JESTER				DOGGEREL BALLAD	FOLK SONG	FOLK DANCE

From the standpoint of *material* the actor has the advantages of immediacy and independence. He constitutes his own material with his body, his voice, his gestures, and his movements. Today, however, the once noble type who was both the poet and the projector of his own word has become an ideal. At one time Shakespeare, who was an actor before he was a poet, filled this role – so, too, did the improvising actors of the *commedia dell' arte*. Today's actor bases his existence as player on the writer's word. Yet when the word is silent, when the body alone is articulate and its play is on exhibition – as a dancer's is – then it is free and is its own lawgiver.

The material of the author is *word or sound*.

Except for the unusual circumstance in which he is his own actor, singer, or musician, he creates the representational material for transmission and reproduction on the stage, whether it is meant for the organic human voice or for artificial, abstract instruments. The higher the state of perfection of the latter, the broader their formative potential, while the human voice is and remains a limited, if unique, phenomenon. Mechanical reproduction by means of various kinds of technological equipment is now capable of replacing the sound of the musical instrument and the human voice or of detaching it from its source, and can enlarge it beyond its dimensional and temporal limitations.

The material of the formative artist – painter, sculptor, architect – is *form and color*.



These formative means, invented by the human mind, can be called *abstract* by virtue of their artificiality and insofar as they represent an undertaking whose purpose, contrary to nature, is order. Form is manifest in extensions of height, breadth, and depth; as line, as plane, and as solid or volume. Depending on these extensions, form becomes then linear framework, wall, or space, and, as such, rigid – i.e., tangible – form.

Non-rigid, intangible form occurs as light, whose linear effect appears in the geometry of the light beam and of pyrotechnical display, and whose solid- and space-creating effect comes through illumination. To each of these manifestations of light (which in themselves are already colored – only nothingness is without color) can be added coloring (*intensifying*) color.

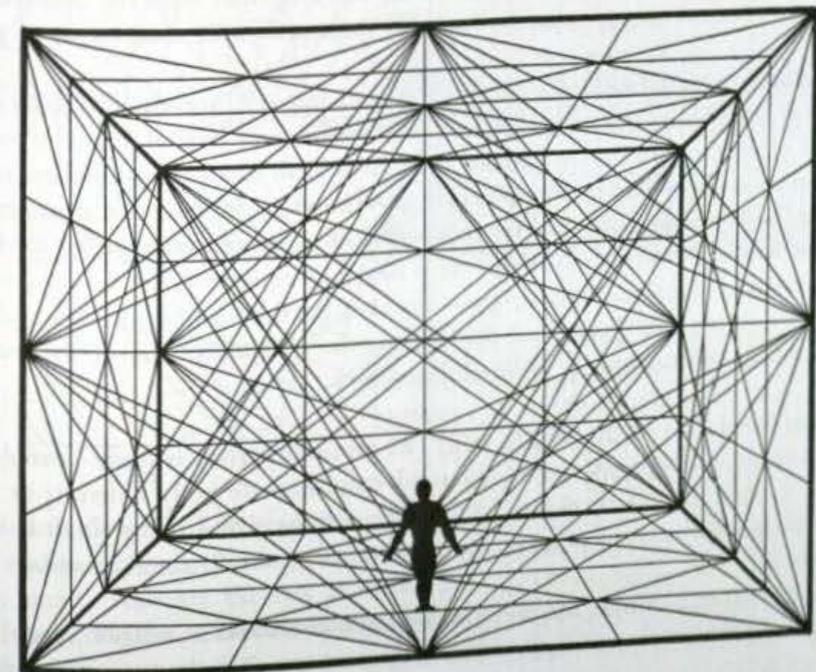
Color and form reveal their elementary values within the constructive manipulation of architectonic space. Here they constitute both object and receptacle, that which is to be filled and fulfilled by Man, the living organism.

In painting and sculpture, form and color are the means of establishing these connections with organic nature through the representation of its phenomena. Man, its chief phenomenon, is both an organism of flesh and blood and at the same time the exponent of number and 'Measure of All Things' (the Golden Section).

These arts – architecture, sculpture, painting – are fixed. They are momentary, frozen motion. Their nature is the immutability of not an accidental but a typified condition, the stability of forces in equilibrium. And thus what may appear at first as a deficiency, particularly in our age of motion, is actually their greatest merit.

The stage as the arena for successive and transient action, however, offers *form and color in motion*, in the first instance in their primary aspect as separate and individual mobile, colored or uncolored, linear, flat, or plastic forms, but furthermore as fluctuating, mobile space and as transformable architectonic structures. Such kaleidoscopic play, at once infinitely variable and strictly organized, would constitute – theoretically – the *absolute* visual stage (*Schaubühne*). Man, the animated being, would be banned from view in this mechanistic organism. He would stand as 'the perfect engineer' at the central switchboard, from where he would direct this feast for the eyes.

Yet all the while Man seeks *meaning*. Whether it is the Faustian problem whose goal is the creation of Homunculus or the anthropomorphic impulse in Man which



created his gods and idols, he is incessantly seeking his likeness, his image, or the sublime. He seeks his equal, the superman, or the figures of his fancy.

Man, the human organism, stands in the cubical, abstract space of the stage. Man and Space. Each has different laws of order. Whose shall prevail?

Either abstract space is adapted in deference to natural man and transformed back into nature or the imitation of nature. This happens in the theater of illusionistic realism.

Or natural man, in deference to abstract space, is recast to fit its mold. This happens on the abstract stage.

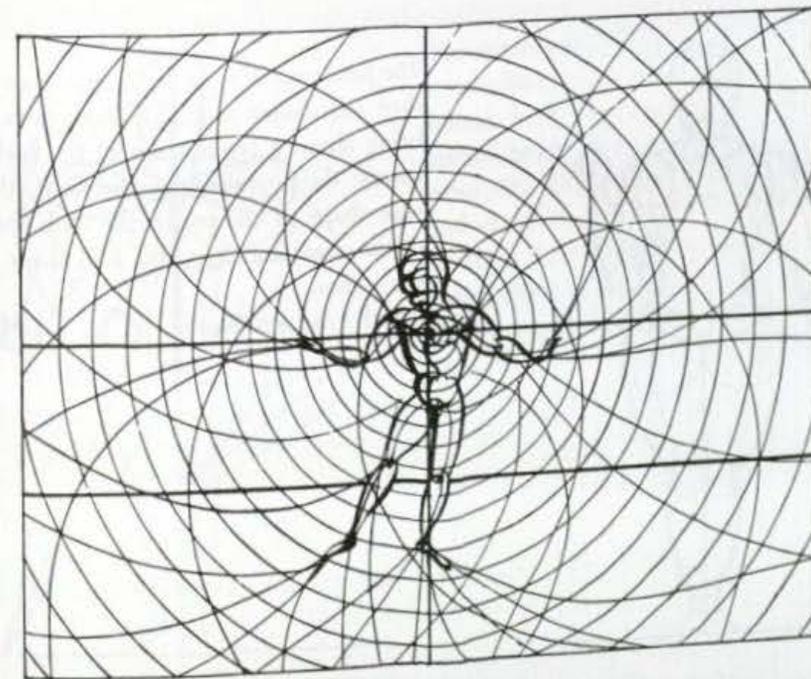
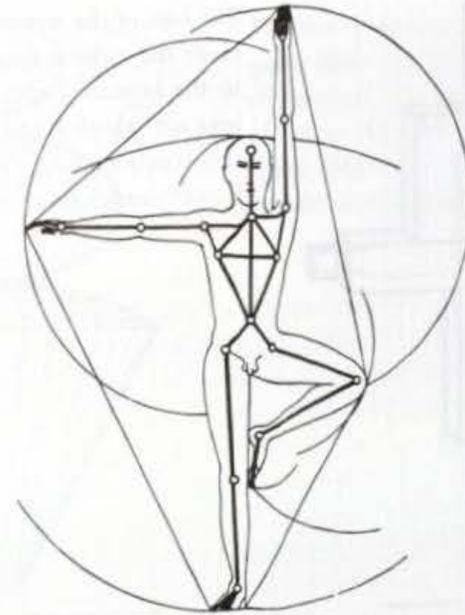
The laws of cubical space are the invisible linear network of planimetric and stereometric relationships. (See above sketch.) This mathematic corresponds to the inherent mathematic of the human body and creates its balance by means of movements, which by their very nature are determined *mechanically and rationally*. It is the geometry of calisthenics, eurhythmics, and gymnastics. These involve the *physical attributes* (together with facial stereotypy) which find expression in acrobatic precision and in the mass calisthenics of the stadium, although there is no conscious awareness of spatial relationships here. (See sketch, p. 365, top.)

The laws of organic man, on the other hand, reside in the invisible functions of his inner self: heartbeat, circulation, respiration, the activities of the brain and nervous system. If these are to be the determining factors, then their center is the human being, whose movements and emanations create an imaginary space. (See sketch, p. 365, bottom.) Cubical-abstract space is then only the horizontal and vertical framework for this flow. These movements are *determined organically and emotionally*. They constitute the *psychical impulses* (together with the mimetics of the face), which find expression in the great actor and in the mass scenes of great tragedy.

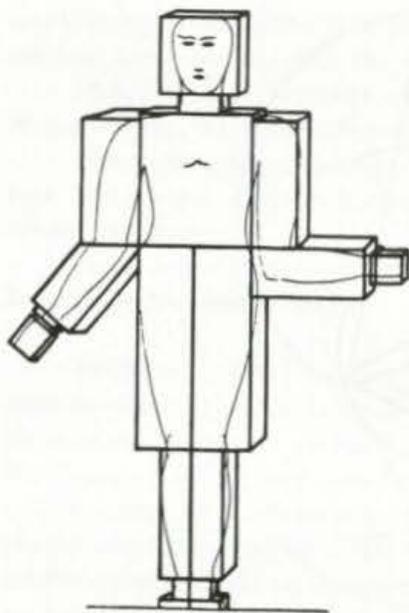
Invisibly involved with all these laws is Man as Dancer (Tänzer Mensch). He obeys the law of the body as well as the law of space; he follows his sense of himself as well as his sense of embracing space. As the one who gives birth to an almost endless range of expression, whether in free abstract movement or in symbolic pantomime, whether he is on the bare stage or in a scenic environment constructed for him, whether he speaks or sings, whether he is naked or costumed, the Tänzer Mensch is the medium of transition into the great world of the theater (das grosse theatralische Geschehen). Only one branch of this world, the metamorphosis of the human figure and its abstraction, is to be outlined here.

The transformation of the human body, its metamorphosis, is made possible by the *costume*, the disguise. Costume and mask emphasize the body's identity or they change it; they express its nature or they are purposely misleading about it; they stress its conformity to organic or mechanical laws or they invalidate this conformity.

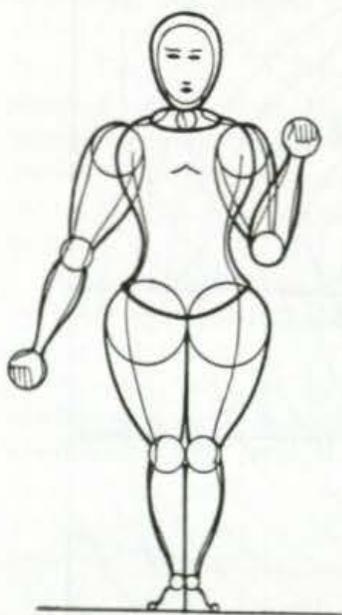
The native costume, as produced by the conventions of religion, state, and society, is different from the theatrical stage costume. Yet the two are generally



confused. Great as has been the variety of native costumes developed during the course of human history, the number of genuine stage costumes has stayed very small. They are the few standardized costumes of the *commedia dell' arte*: Harlequin, Pierrot, Columbine, etc.; and they have remained basic and authentic to this day.



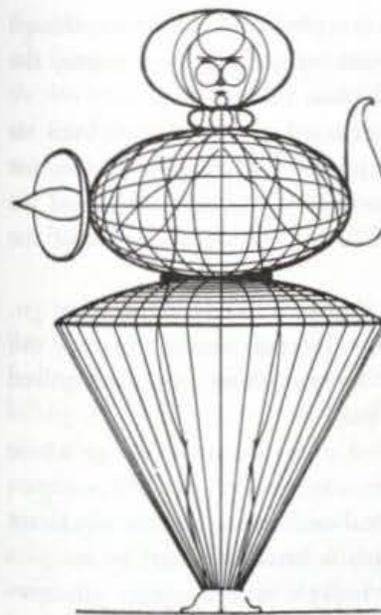
The laws of the surrounding cubical space.
Here the cubical forms are transferred to the human shape: head, torso, arms, legs are transformed into spatial-cubical constructions.
Result: *ambulant architecture.*



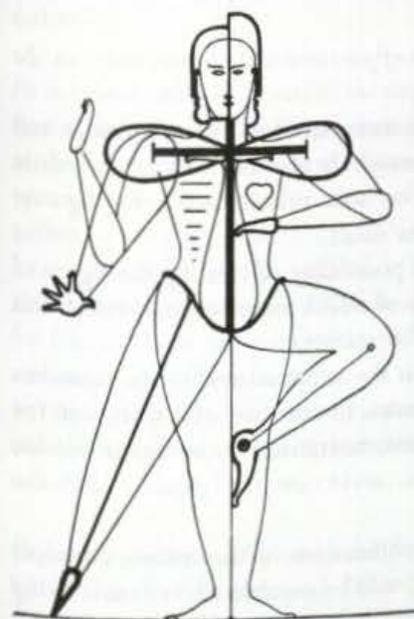
The functional laws of the human body in their relationship to space. These laws bring about a typification of the bodily forms: the egg shape of the head, the vase shape of the torso, the club shape of the arms and legs, the ball shape of the joints.
Result: *the marionette.*

The following can be considered fundamentally decisive in the transformation of the human body in terms of this stage costume (see illustrations above and opposite).

These are the possibilities of Man as Dancer, transformed through costume and moving in space. Yet there is no costume which can suspend the primary



The laws of motion of the human body in space. Here we have the various aspects of rotation, direction, and intersection of space: the spinning top, snail, spiral, disk.
Result: *a technical organism.*



The metaphysical forms of expression symbolizing various members of the human body: the star shape of the spread hand, the ∞ sign of the folded arms, the cross shape of the backbone and shoulders; the double head, multiple limbs, division and suppression of forms.
Result: *dematerialization.*

limitation of the human form: the law of gravity, to which it is subject. A step is not much longer than a yard, a leap not much higher than two. The center of gravity can be abandoned only momentarily. And only for a second can it endure in a position essentially alien to its natural one, such as a horizontal hovering or soaring.

Acrobatics make it possible to partially overcome physical limitations, though only in the realm of the organic: the contortionist with his double joints, the living geometry of the aerialist, the pyramid of human bodies.

The endeavor to free man from his physical bondage and to heighten his freedom of movement beyond his native potential resulted in substituting for the organism the mechanical human figure (*Kunstfigur*): the automaton and the marionette. E.T.A. Hoffmann extolled the first of these, Heinrich von Kleist the second.

The English stage reformer Gordon Craig demands: 'The actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure – the Übermarionette we may call him.' And the Russian Brjusov demands that we 'replace actors with mechanized dolls, into each of which a phonograph shall be built.'

Such, indeed, are two actual conclusions arrived at by the stage designer whose mind is constantly concerned with form and transformation, with figure and configuration. As far as the stage is concerned, such paradoxical exclusiveness is less significant than the enrichment of modes of expression which is brought about by it.

Possibilities are extraordinary in light of today's technological advancements: precision machinery, scientific apparatus of glass and metal, the artificial limbs developed by surgery, the fantastic costumes of the deep-sea diver and the modern soldier, and so forth. . . .

Consequently, potentialities of constructive configuration are extraordinary on the metaphysical side as well.

The artificial human figure (*Kunstfigur*) permits any kind of movement and any kind of position for as long a time as desired. It also permits – an artistic device from the periods of greatest art – a variable relative scale for figures: important ones can be large, unimportant ones small.

An equally significant aspect of this is the possibility of relating the figure of natural 'naked' Man to the abstract figure, both of which experience, through this confrontation, an intensification of their peculiar natures.

Endless perspectives are opened up: from the supernatural to the nonsensical, from the sublime to the comic. Precursors in the use of pathos, of the sublime, are the actors of ancient tragedy, monumentalized by means of masks, cothurni, and stilts. Precursors in the comic style are the gigantic and the grotesque figures of carnival and fair.

Wondrous figures of this new sort, personifications of the loftiest concepts and ideas, made of the most exquisite material, will be capable also of embodying symbolically a new faith.

Seen from this perspective, it might even be predicted that the situation will completely reverse itself: the stage designer will develop optical phenomena and will then seek out a poet who will give them their appropriate language through words and musical sounds.

And so, in accordance with idea, style, and technology, the following still await their creation (see p. 369):

the Abstract-Formal and Color
the Static, Dynamic, and Tectonic
the Mechanical, Automatic, and Electric
the Gymnastic, Acrobatic, and Equilibristic
the Comic, Grotesque, and Burlesque
the Serious, Sublime, and Monumental
the Political, Philosophical, and Metaphysical

} Theater

Utopia? It is indeed astonishing how little has been accomplished so far in this direction. This materialistic and practical age has in fact lost the genuine feeling for play and for the miraculous. Utilitarianism has gone a long way in killing it. Amazed at the flood of technological advance, we accept these wonders of utility as being already perfected art form, while actually they are only prerequisites for its creation. 'Art is without purpose' insofar as the imaginary needs of the soul can be said to be without purpose. In this time of crumbling religion, which kills the sublime, and of a decaying society, which is able to enjoy only play that is drastically erotic or artistically *outré*, all profound artistic tendencies take on the character of exclusiveness or of sectarianism.

And so there remain only three possibilities for the artist in the theater today!

He may seek realization within the confines of the given situation. This means cooperation with the stage in its present form – productions in which he places himself at the service of writers and actors in order to give to their work the appropriate optical form. It is a rare case when his intentions coincide with those of the author.

Or he may seek realization under conditions of the greatest possible freedom. This exists for him in those areas of staging which are primarily visual display, where author and actor step back in favor of the optical or else achieve their effect only by virtue of it: ballet, pantomime, musical theater, and the like. It also exists in those areas – independent of writer and actor – of the anonymous or mechanically controlled play of forms, colors, and figures.

Or he may isolate himself altogether from the existing theater and cast his anchor far out into the sea of fantasy and distant possibilities. In this case his projects remain paper and model, materials for demonstration lectures and exhibitions of theater art. His plans founder on the impossibility of materialization. In the final analysis this is unimportant to him. His idea has been demonstrated, and its realization is a question of time, material, and technology.

This realization will come with the construction of the new theater of glass, metal, and the inventions of tomorrow.

It depends as well upon the inner transformation of the spectator – Man as alpha and omega of every artistic creation which, even in its realization, is doomed to remain Utopia so long as it does not find intellectual and spiritual receptivity and response.

■ ■ ■

Source

Schlemmer, O. (1924, 1961) 'Man and Art Figure', in W. Gropius and A. Wensinger (eds) *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan: 17–32.

Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943)

German painter, choreographer, dancer, theorist, teacher. Schlemmer trained as a painter in Stuttgart, and became increasingly interested in the other arts and attracted to dance. He described ideas for a new type of dance as early as 1912.¹ In 1920 he became Master of the Stone Masonry Workshop at the newly created Bauhaus (1919) in Weimar, under Walter Gropius. He designed productions at Stuttgart Landestheater, including Kokoschka's *Murderer, Hope of Women*. His most famous choreography, *The Triadic Ballet*, was completed and premièred in Stuttgart on 30 September 1922. He was Head of the Bauhaus Stage Workshop 1923–29 in Dessau, working with Kurt Schmidt, Xanti Schawinsky and Wassily Kandinsky. He made a number of works, *Dances for the Experimental Stage*, including *Gesture Dance* (1926) and *Stick Dance* (1927). When Meyer took over the Bauhaus (1929), Schlemmer left, rather than sacrifice his ideals. *The Triadic Ballet* was restaged for Rolf de Maré's International Choreographic Competition, Paris (1932). Schlemmer became a professor at art schools in Breslau, then in Berlin. In 1933, following the ascendancy of Nazism (and attendant disapproval of modernism), he was dismissed as 'degenerate' by the authorities. The Bauhaus was dissolved in the same year. During the Second World War he was a worker in an enamel factory, before taking his life in 1943.

The Bauhaus was perhaps the most important art school of the twentieth century, certainly one of the most influential. Its example of democratising the distinctions between artists and craftsmen, theory and practice, and between the arts is unparalleled. Significantly, it had an experimental stage workshop; dance was central to this experiment, and there was a lively interface between choreography and art.²

In this article Schlemmer describes the theoretical foundations of theatre in terms of relationships between the stage, the performer, and its visual constituents. It ranges widely and is one of the most comprehensive such statements. It was written a year after *The Triadic Ballet* and reflects this as a definitive theatre experiment of its time.

Compare this article with writings by the following authors in this reader

Anderson, Foreman and Wilson – later views of visual theatre
 Appia – a contemporary on visual theatre
 Craig – a contemporary, and to whom Schlemmer refers
 Cunningham and Cage – the Black Mountain Connection
 Kantor – a later concern with sculptural qualities of performance
 Meyerhold and Piscator – concern with staging
 Richter – a contemporary, but different, art perspective – Dada
 Wigman – contemporary, European modern dance – the individual and expression

Further reading

bitterberg, k.-g. (1968, 1975) *bauhaus*, stuttgart: institut für auslandsbeziehungen.
 Scheyer, E. (1970) 'The Shapes of Space: The Art of Mary Wigman and Oskar Schlemmer', *Dance Perspectives* 41, Spring.
 Schlemmer, O. (1969, 1971) *Man: Teaching Notes from the Bauhaus*, trans. J. Seligman, London: Lund Humphries.
 Whitford, F. (1984) *Bauhaus*, London: Thames and Hudson.

Notes

- 1 Described in his diaries but not realised until 1916. Contemporaneous with Kandinsky's similar *Der Gelbe Klang* (1912) and with the first seasons of the Ballets Russe from 1909.
- 2 This valuable connection continued at Black Mountain College, USA in the 1950s (see Cage and Cunningham) and, more informally, at Judson in the 1960s.