

THE BAUHAUS THEATER - OSKAR SCHLEMMER'S *DESIGN-IN MOTION* CONCEPT¹

A B S T R A C T

Bauhaus Theater obtained its most complete form through Oskar Schlemmer's artistic, pedagogical and theoretical work. The key problem for Schlemmer was the law of motion of the human body in space. His poetic implied anti narrative and anti-mimetic theater and also the widespread use of stage figures with the vivid articulation of space as his primary intentions. The human body on stage, converted into *artificial figure*, was the universal symbol of human being defined by opposites, which exists in a geometrical given space and determine it metaphysically. Use of term 'dance' in Schlemmer's play most titles, is consistent with the conception of stage event as a stage play of artificial figure in geometrical given space. *Design-in motion* concept, which means the organization of the stage with specific mechanical-choreographic motions and working with form and color, determine the Schlemmer's stage as the *absolute visual stage*. Within the Bauhaus, Oskar Schlemmer's stage work has contributed to understanding of the theatrical event as the equally important artwork area for design of totality of space in which was established harmony between man, his life process and environment in which man exists.

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KEY WORDS

BAUHAUS THEATER
OSKAR SCHLEMMER
DESIGN IN MOTION CONCEPT
VISUAL STAGE
MECHANIC/METAPHYSIC
HUMAN BODY IN SPACE
ARTIFICIAL FIGURE
TRIADIC BALLET

With the repercussions of one of the most significant and most influential schools of architecture and visual arts, the Bauhaus was opened in 1919 in Weimar. The entire existence of this institution was marked by the influences of the rapid political and economic changes of the period between the two wars. The antagonism of the right-wing oriented politicians and intellectuals towards the ideology of the Bauhaus had an impact that the school was relocated to Dessau in 1925, and thereafter also to Berlin in 1933.² Closing of the Bauhaus in April 1933 represented one of the numerous consequences of the Nazi government decision to remove from the Third Reich area any expression of that which could be named »decadent« namely, »Bolshevik« art.

The Bauhaus emerged through integration of the Weimar School of Arts and Crafts (Grossherzogliche Kunstgewerbeschule) with the Weimar Academy of Fine Arts (Grossherzogliche Hochschule für bildende Kunst) which were closed during the World War One. The pedagogic work in the Bauhaus was profiled in compliance with implementation of the reform of the artistic education and the accentuated democracy and the entire concept was conformed to the development of the post-war modern, industrial society and the concept of creation of the utilitarian and mass accessible articles which would promote and make more qualitative the customary conditions of the life process. It concerned the concept of modernization of everyday living space in the industrialized society, through combination of different craft but also art skills in creation of the modern building as a “complete artwork integrating various arts into the oneness of a new harmony.”³

As regards the poetic orientations of the Bauhaus artists, it was common for them the acceptance of the many achievements of the historical avant-gardes which through the work of this school were introduced in the system of mass, industrial production. Through integration of the craft artistic work and the technological aspect, within the Bauhaus the *design* was developed primarily as the area of creating the articles for everyday use. The artistic work should have been conformed to the variable circumstances of the post-war life, and also to represent the integral part of the design process. The final product of the synthesis of the research of the new materials, simple forms and colors in the Bauhaus workshops comprised, particularly in the late years of the school work, designing of the prototypes of the useful articles which, later on, would be introduced into the mass industrial production. That way the development of the German industry was initiated, and, at the same time, typical modernist aspiration towards the fusion of the art and technology was demonstrated. “The Bauhaus workshops were really laboratories for working out practical new designs for present day articles and improving models for mass productions.”⁴

With the Bauhaus the paradigm of art as neutral practice of creation of fine articles intended for interest free aesthetic enjoyment experienced the radical alternation. The concepts relating to the understanding of function and status of the artwork, artistic creativity and artwork valuation were questioned. With the Bauhaus practice first the distinction between art and crafts was disrupted, which, since the enlightenment, rested on the elitist established dichotomy between ‘fine’ and ‘utilitarian’ result of the artwork, namely craft work.⁵ In that respect also the difference between ‘expression’ and ‘design’ was problematized, when the identification of creativity solely with the exceptional work of the creator genius comprised the difference between the individual and the group, negating the possibility of collective artistic work. Also, by the school work it was indicated to the existence of the dichotomy between the ‘private’ and the ‘public’ as well, which related to the isolation of the artworks in the museum spaces and private collections, and to excluding the aesthetic experience from the man’s mundane activities and sensorial experiences. For the Bauhaus ideology the mentioned ‘beaux-arts’ concepts meant the passé (outdated) heritages since they prevented the integration of the craftwork, artistic creativity and technological aspect in realization of the democratic society and creation of the architectural object being the integration of the entire elements of space in which the man exists. The promotion of the society and quality of life process should have been realized by a rational building of the visually harmonized and functional environment through integration of the crafts-art work. “The Bauhaus wants to educate architects, painters, and sculptors of all levels, according to their capabilities, to become competent craftsmen or independent creative artists and to form a working community of leading and future artists-craftsmen. These men, of kindred spirit, will know how to design buildings harmoniously in their entirety – structure, furnishing, and ornamentation.”⁶



Figure 1. Hxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Comprehension that architecture, visual art, sculpture, designing of articles and spatial planning are only instrumentally detached elements of one entirety has enabled the integration of work into until then disciplinarily separated art and crafts fields. The building was understood as a unifying, harmonious synthesis of complex space in which man exists and which all types of artists and craftsmen should individually contribute to. In that way, both aesthetic and social human needs would have been met. This concept of collective work has liberated the artist from the romanticist psychology of the creator 'genius' and the artwork as an exceptional masterpiece. The common work oriented towards the unique goal was realized from the platform of modern constructivism. The overall, harmonized space of the human existence was formed by rationally built or designed house – 'bau' (building) 'haus' (house). "Artist at the Bauhaus attempted to find an objective common denominator of form – in a way to develop a science of design. Such a foundation of general, super personal formal laws provides an organic and unifying background for various talents. Expression then has reference to the same universally acknowledged basic concepts."⁷ Modernization of the human living space comprised the practical realization of the three imperatives: simple forms, efficiencies and functionalities, and in respect to the artistic expression the application of mathematical and geometric forms, prime colors and modern, durable materials.

Organic connection of the human activities, Gropius' concept of the 'total architecture' and focusing the creative activities towards the common goal of the functional design were summarized in the key problem around which all the Bauhaus courses and workshops were profiled – the problem of the *relationship between the man and his living space*. In this context the stage work was also developed within the Bauhaus. Perceiving the school work, at the beginning of the 1960s Gropius stated: "the Bauhaus embraces the whole range of visual arts: architecture, planning, sculpture, industrial design, and stage work."⁸ However, in the school manifest program of work, Gropius invited the architects, painters and sculptors to unify their goals, whereas, he did not take the theater into consideration as a relevant artistic pedagogic area.⁹ The Bauhaus Stage Workshop was established only in the summer of 1921, and already in 1922 the concentric scheme of the school program structure prepared by Paul Klee in the central circle integrated the area of the building and the theatre (Bau and Bühne).¹⁰ The Bauhaus Stage Workshop was initially run by Schreyer, who, as the member of the "Sturm" group favored the expressionistic theatre. However, since the arrival of the artists such as Oskar Schlemmer, László Moholy-Nagy and Wassily Kandinsky, the realized stage and light experiments indicated to the emphasized poetic orientation towards

abstraction and constructivism. When in October 1925 Oskar Schlemmer assumed the management of the Bauhaus Stage Workshop, the theatre became one of the central fields of school work, with regards to the potential of integrating within itself all other artistic fields. The stage space was understood as per the analogy with architectural space, and in compliance with Gropius' ideas on integrated artwork which unifies various arts into oneness of the new harmony. The theatre thus became also the thematic field of the fourth in series of fourteen Bauhaus books – the collection of books *Die Bühne im Bauhaus* published in 1925.¹¹

The profile of the Bauhaus theater was most completely built through artistic pedagogic theoretical work of Oskar Schlemmer.¹² This visual artist, choreographer and dancer, completed the studies at the Academy of Arts in Stuttgart and before his arrival in the Bauhaus he did his service in the German army for several years. Since 1921, in Weimar Bauhaus, Schlemmer first supervised the workshop for work in wood and stone, and later on, parallel with the Bauhaus Stage Workshop, he taught the course titled “Man”, which practical part comprised schematic display of the human body and drawing of the nude figure. Also significant is Schlemmer's painting opus in which, following the cubism influence, gradually more intensive interest in the problem of presenting the human figure in space as a constant of his artistic poetics was reflected.¹³ The work in the Bauhaus Stage Workshop since 1925 has proceeded in significantly improved conditions with regards to the fact that the experimental theater stage was built as an integral part of the Bauhaus Dessau building which until 1929 resulted in the program of twelve conducted Schlemmer's creations. “Gropius is building me a stage which will be a pleasure to use as I see fit, despite its small dimensions.”¹⁴ Schlemmer was content with the simple Dessau stage since the stage of not of that big dimensions could be controlled with a small number of variables This stage was frontally open and its only mechanism was a four-row system for opening of the side walls and moving of the suspended requisites. “Schlemmer rarely takes advantages of the way it opens on both sides, to the main hall and to the canteen, but consistently conducts his experiments on the front opening stage.”¹⁵ In 1927 the Bauhaus Theatre performed at the German Theater Exhibition in Magdeburg. On that occasion, the third issue of the Bauhaus magazine was devoted to the theater, and Schlemmer, as that issue editor, wrote an extensive report on the objectives and methods of the Bauhaus Theater which he presented also in the form of the lecture-demonstration before “The Circle of Friends of the Bauhaus” in 1927.¹⁶ After Hannes Meyer had assumed the management of the Bauhaus in 1928 the request for politicization of the theater achievements contents became

more expressed, which, besides financial crisis, was the crucial reason for Schlemmer to leave the Bauhaus in 1929.¹⁷ At the Academy of Art and Applied Arts in Breslau Schlemmer aspired to continue the work started at the Bauhaus Theater, however, opening of the theater studio in this school was not approved by the competent authorities. This made the artist to fully focus on painting and create several significant painting in which he focused on that which he termed “‘grand figural style’, a classical, monumental approach to the human form that he had been developing throughout the 1920s.”¹⁸ Schlemmer was also one of the first artists who experienced the censorship of the Nazi politics when his murals for the Weimar Bauhaus were painted over at the end of 1930. “When the Nazi campaign against him, largely on the grounds of his involvement with the Bauhaus, was in full force, he protested vociferously, and not without genuine feeling, that he was in no way connected with the Bolshevism of the Dessau Bauhaus.”¹⁹ Following Schlemmer’s departure from the Bauhaus, the activities connected with the Stage Workshop in this institution were carried out discontinuously, although certain students aspired to continue the work of the Bauhaus stage by establishing the Young stage at the Bauhaus.²⁰

As the central problem of his artistic theoretical work, Schlemmer pointed out the laws of motion of the human body in space. His poetic comprised the anti-narrative and anti-mimetic, extensive use of plasticity of the stage figures with live articulation and demonstration of space as primary intention. Intensive space control meant the display of the “the elementary fact of its space”.²¹ For this artist the theater represented and exceptional *visual spatial event*, in which he researched the problems of human body motion in space, but also the then topical question of the relationship between the man and the machine. “If the aims of the Bauhaus are also the aims of our stage, it is natural that the following elements should be of first and foremost importance to us: SPACE as a part of the larger total complex, building (*Bau*). (...) An aspect of space is FORM, comprising both surface (that is, two-dimensional) form and plastic (three-dimensional) form. Aspects of form are COLOR and LIGHT, to which we attach a new importance. We are primarily visually oriented beings and can therefore take pleasure in the purely optical; we can manipulate forms and discover mysterious and surprising effects in mechanical motion from concealed sources; we can convert and transfigure space through form, color, and light.”²²

Schlemmer’s approach to stage fully fitted into the Bauhaus basic concept. For him performing represented the matter of *architecture in motion*, where the human bodies – by dressing in costumes were transformed into *artificial*

figures – and the stage object created the variable forms in constant motion. “These arts – architecture, sculpture, painting – are fixed. They are momentary, frozen motion. (...) The stage is 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 structure. Such kaleidoscopic play, at once infinitely variable and strictly organized, would constitute – theoretically – the *absolute* visual stage (*Schaubühne*).”²³

When speaking about poetic elements of his visual stage, Schlemmer refers to the history of theater, where he singles out three types of stage: oral or sound stage which implies some literary or music performance; play stage at which some physical-mimetic event is presented and visual stage at which certain optical event takes place. Schlemmer points out to that the third stage type is dealt with only by the *designer*, as the “builder of form and color,”²⁴ whereby form and color are the aspects which all *formative artists* – *painter, sculptor and architect* work with.²⁵ Indeed, Schlemmer put on equal level the components of work of the designers, painters, sculptors and architects, however, he pointed out to a rather important distinction, the distinction between the work within these fields and the work on stage. Unlike the formative arts, on stage it is the *form and color in motion, or, design in motion* that are in action. “For the stage is after all architectonic: it is ordered and planned, and it provides a setting for form and color in their liveliest and most versatile form.”²⁶ The *design in motion* concept, organization of the stage space by specific mechanical-choreographical and spatial designs and the work with color and form have exactly defined Schlemmer’s stage as the absolute visual stage. “As Schlemmer explained, using a quote from Delacroix it was to be a ‘feast for the eyes’.”²⁷

However, the absolute visual stage for Schlemmer represented the space determined by mathematical relations, but the void one, having in view that this artist, emphasized the man as the most important theater element, namely the stage as universal representation of *man’s existence in space*. In the essay “Man and Art Figure”, Schlemmer concisely presented his critical and practical vision of the theater with man in its focal place. “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 constructive fusion of *space and building*, the realm of the architect. Through the manipulation of these materials the role of the artist, the synthesis of these elements, is determined.”²⁸

From this point of view, Schlemmer analyzed the manners in which in the traditional, mimetic theater, the human figure had exclusively representational function, whereas the painters and sculptor, through focusing on form and color still expressed certain potential to treat the human figure as an abstract element. Actually, Schlemmer pointed to the dualistic aspect which determined each human individual – the physical and psychological components, rational and emotional aspect, mechanical and organic. Schlemmer continuously indicated to these dichotomies in his articles, believing that stage space and the man in it provide the possibility that the essences of the human *existence are symbolically* presented. In his stage realizations, Schlemmer, thus, gave prominence to the dualistic aspects of man singling out geometrical stage/space determinations in which human subjectivity existed and which, at the same time ensued from the dichotomy of the man himself, his physical proportionality, namely, mathematical relations. “Man is an organism of flesh and blood as well as a mechanism of dimensions and proportion. Man is a creature of emotion and reason and many more dichotomies. He carries these within himself and is much better able to reconcile himself continuously to the fact of this duality within himself, than in abstract structures of art outside himself...”²⁹ Schlemmer believed that the human organism stands in the abstract space of the stage and that each of these two elements has its own laws. “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.”³⁰



Figure 2-3. Hxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

For Schlemmer's understanding of man it is indicative the structure of the course taught by him during 1927 and 1928. The course titled "Man", aimed at providing an overall view of man and his abilities and synthesized three approaches – formal, biological and philosophical one. The structure of this course reflected Schlemmer's standpoint that man should be understood as a *cosmic being*. "Man should be understood as a *cosmic being*. His conditions of existence, his relationships with the natural and artificial environment, his mechanism and organism, his material, spiritual and intellectual image; in short, man as a bodily and spiritual being is necessary and important subject of instruction."³¹ Natural scientific approach exactly ensued from the presumption that man was a cosmic being, an integral part of the nature, but, above all, a biologically determined being. The areas from biology that were considered by Schlemmer comprised the concept of world ether,³² then, by studying cell, embryology, ontogenesis of organs, detailed study of the human anatomy (system of bones, muscles, ligaments, veins, nerves, with a particular emphasis on the organs of sight and hearing), study of the chemical component of the human body and the problems resulting from upright posture of man.³³ Through philosophical approach Schlemmer presented man as a thinking but also emotional being who perceives the world through variable concepts and ideas. The formal part, dedicated to drawing of human figure first included the study of the proportions of the static body and then led also to consideration of the body in motion. "The part dealing with figural rendering, mainly one of drawing, deals with schemata and systems of lines, planes and body sculpture; the standard measures, the theory of proportions, Dürer's measurements, and the golden section. From these develop the laws of movement, the mechanics and kinetics of the body within itself as well as in space, in the natural as well as in the cultural sphere... The paths of movement, the choreography of every day, form a transition to the conscious, shaped movement in gymnastics and the dance, and further to the art form of the stage."³⁴ Such, synthesizing, biological approach, resulted in that Schlemmer's numerous schematic representations-drawings of the man had an effect as specific *biograms* of the existence and motion of the human body in space.

Schlemmer believed that the limited space of the theater stage was determined by the linear network of planimetric and stereometric links, whereby that stage geometry was inherent to the mathematical aspect of the human body. However, besides being determined by physical proportions, man is at the same time a complex organic being who exists through functions of its inner world – the rhythm of the heart function, circulation, breathing, activities of brain, nervous

system and emotionality. Such human being is the center of each space and participates in creation of any imaginary space. Geometrically abstract space, therefore, is only horizontally vertical frame of organically and emotionally determined motion of the human body in space. The motion of the human body creates physical impulses of each space, and that way animates it and revives it. In that case, the stage is understood as a limited space of planimetric and stereometric relations by means of which it is possible, visually and symbolically, in a universal way to present this reciprocal relationship between the human body and space.

Actually, Schlemmer has built his poetic designs from specifically based stage theory, in which he synthesized rational, *scientific view with metaphysical conception* of man. Rational, scientific view emphasizes the problem of man's existence in space which Schlemmer presented through geometric mathematical relations. "Point and purpose of science: to assemble and classify what can be known: in contrast to speculative philosophy and in complete contrast to religion and art, which invent. (...) Aim of science: mathematical formula of the mechanical events of the world."³⁵ Man as an artificial figure, in Schlemmer's theater moved in geometrically determined space, in which precise, almost mechanical movements could be made. In that sense, Schlemmer through mathematical schemes of mechanical motion of man in space designed the representation of man as artistic figure on stage. Metaphysical concept of man's existence in space is based on the presumption that man's proportional-emotional *body in motion* destroys the scientific understanding of space as geometrically stable phenomenon. Human body in motion in the stage space actually becomes the *artistic figure*, something that creates the artificial exceptionality of that space. Each space is filled only when man is present in it, which means that man is always that which metaphysically determines the space. Rational, static geometrical relations of space are filled with 'living' form only that moment when human body is present in it and which consists also of the components beyond rational geometrical laws. "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. (...) 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)."³⁶

In his significant lecture on the theater in 1927, as a problem Schlemmer particularly emphasized the event of the existence of man in relation to space.³⁷ Figure-body on Schlemmer's stage is a *temporal gestalt* since only in the

entirety with space man transforms that space and abstract theater stage into fluid field of the force of motion. Man is perceived as a coherent form but also as the part of the wider entirety of the geometrically determined space which he animates and becomes the event through motion. The move, which results from the inside the organism of the human being could not have been represented in a rational-mathematical way. Transformation of space through body action is that on which Schlemmer insisted when in the texts “Man and Art Figure” and “Mathematics of the Dance” he wrote about that the body in motion introduced its own power into geometrical space and animated it. Schlemmer identified that force which was demonstrable each time when the figure moved in the controlled stage space. “Let us now observe the appearance of the human figure as an event and recognize that from the very moment at which becomes a part of the stage, it also becomes a ‘space bewitched’ creature, so to speak. Automatically and predictably, each gesture or motion is translated in meaningful terms into a unique sphere of activity.”³⁸ By the relations between the space and mechanical body motion which were represented in multitude of drawings and diagrams, Schlemmer emphasized the stage event as the gestalt of geometrically determined space and metaphysical aspect the bearer of which was the human body in motion. “Space and body mathematics, the planimetric and stereometric relationships of space together with the metaphysical inherent in the human body shall unite into a numerical, mystical synthesis... space!”³⁹ For that reason, one of the theater functions for Schlemmer was “to serve the metaphysical needs of man by constructing a world of illusion and by creating the transcendental on the basis of the rational.”⁴⁰

Mathematical and emotional aspects of man which determine his physical being as a synthesis of dichotomy elements were represented in two manners in treating the human body as an artificial figure. Mathematical aspect of the human body was ‘fitted’ into geometrically definable stage space in such way that Schlemmer dressed the performers in the costumes of geometrical form, actually indicating to the mechanics of human body motion, namely, to the performer as a *kinetic sculpture*. Emotionally, that inner part of the human body, which could not have been represented by exact mathematical schemes and which animated the static geometrical stage space, was represented through motion of the kinetic sculpture, through conditioning of that motion by architectural stage - by the materials and objects that were on the stage - and through mask and pantomime »captured« facial expressions. Dressing in costumes in Schlemmer’s plays represented the most important stage element of transformation of the human body into artificial figure.

Sculptural costumes as the means of transformation of the traditional performer into an *artificial figure (Kunstfigur)*, as well as in the function of the key element of space dynamics construction, were fully realized in the first significant Schlemmer's play – *Triadic Ballet*. Schlemmer started working on this achievement in 1912, the opening night was held ten years later in Stuttgart and thereafter *Triadic Ballet* was presented as a central event of the grand Bauhaus exhibition in 1923. This achievement has most often been associated with Schlemmer's theater work and generally with the Bauhaus theater.⁴¹ Three basic characteristics of the *Triadic Ballet*, as stated by Schlemmer, are: “the costumes which are of a colored, three-dimensional design, the human figure which is an environment of basic mathematical shapes, and the corresponding movements of that figure in space.”⁴²

Triadic Ballet originated from the comprehension that three-dimensional space can be articulated or made visible through plastic forms. Schlemmer ‘wrapped up’ the organic body in motion in the costumes of various geometrical forms which symbolized proportionality or mathematic dimension of man, *his universality*. Human body, transformed into an artificial figure, represented the universal symbol of human being determined by dichotomy existing in geometrically rational determinable space and determining that space metaphysically.⁴³ “While his later Bauhaus dances have been called ‘gestural’ or ‘spatial’ performances (also involving a strong emphasis on light projection), the *Triadic Ballet* – in its full version comprising three acts, three performers, twelve dances and eighteen costumes, with each act displaying a different color and mood – displays a predominantly sculptural leitmotif. With exaggerated headdresses and masks, bulbous padded torsos and outfits built with wiring and concentric hoops, extended prop-like limbs and conic or spherical appendages, the *Triadic* ‘figurines’ are constructed to impede movement or shape it in very particular ways, drawing attention to the constructedness of the costumes as well as their materials.”⁴⁴

Schlemmer's first important essay on theory of stage dating from 1925., “Man and Art Figure”, published immediately before starting his work on the Dessau stage, related to the problems practically set up in the play *Triadic Ballet* and was focused on the costume as key line of the new, abstract – anti mimetic and anti-narrative stage. In this text it was emphasized that costume was liberated from its usual function of underlining certain character and used only for the purpose of articulation of the key stage events. The author wrote in it about the artificial figures moving in compliance with the geometrical lines, spiral

and squares, performing an *abstract dance* based on mathematical relations of movement. Traditional, presentational and narrative theater was reduced to the stage event as a *symbol*.

Schlemmer completely rejected the concept of mimetic theater and expression as paradigms of the highly modernist theater. He insisted on the precise adaptation of the *figure shape* to the geometrically defined space. Such figure by movement will express the inner, subjective aspects of man which is impossible to present by mathematical relations. In later achievements of the Dessau theater this artist defined the stage space by using also the various plastic forms, including decoration, certain objects in motion but also color and light. The performers had physical and visual points of orientation which enabled them to consciously and physically engage in the space mathematics. On the Dessau stage Schlemmer used also the staircases, mobile skeleton platforms and small mobile articles such as hoops, stickers, cubes, balls and sticks. These stage properties were carried by the performers and relocated in the stage space. Figures, plasticity, light and sound all made the elements of the constructed process, and thus Schlemmer was rather interested in the formal preciseness of rhythm of the sound used and percussive aspects of noise than in the work with the concept of music as the holder of ten stage action expression. He approached sound from the phenomenological point of view liberating it from its associative and semantic implications: "Our decision to approach the human word 'unliterary', in its primary state, as a happening, as if it were being heard for the first time, makes this particular field a problem and a challenge."⁴⁵ In this way, and first of all by complete rejection of the presence of the spoken work on the stage, Schlemmer translated the accent from the narrative, illusionist, mimetic or semiotic aspects of the traditional theater to the phenomenological, reality and physical experience, and with the effect of the mobile, visual geometry he indicated also to the artificial construction of the performing body.

In certain achievements, Schlemmer would add gloves or color stockings to the black and white costumes, which accentuated certain parts of the body opposite the costume totality however also opposite the background, stage surface or the curtains. Thereby the balance of the perfect body mathematics was altered: "Take a simple human figure in a white leotard, put it in the space. In this form he is a sort of basic figure, a blank, unwritten page. Every subsequent accessory, such as a red stocking on the left leg, a stick in the right hand, has to change the neutrality which the figure alone had. This is an imbalance, and a unilateral inflexion follows, the inner and outer state of the dancer is decisively influenced."⁴⁶

Besides forms and color the costume material also stimulated articulation of the body motion.⁴⁷ The body was in direct contact with specific materials, such as, for example, with glass in *Glastanz* or with wood in *Stäbetanz* (*Pole Dance*). In these cases, the dynamics of the body motion was liberated through material movement, or at least through sound created by that material. In that way Schlemmer problematized also the question how space and our perception of space changed depending on the nature of materials used which defined that space. A specific *design of body architecture* was in practice which comprised those same elements relevant for designing the buildings and utilitarian objects - the form, color and material.⁴⁸

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“During the last years that he was a member of the Bauhaus and its Stage Workshop, Schlemmer brought the various productions to perfection – by and large they dated from before 1928 – so they become artistically and technically exemplary performances, ready to be shown to even the most sophisticated audiences. In June 1928 the Bauhaus stage performed at the Second German Congress of the Dance in Essen. During a tour beginning in February 1929 and lasting several months, it exerted its strongest direct influence, felt by some to be a provocation. The stops on that tour were Berlin, Breslau, Frankfurt and Main, Stuttgart and Basel. In Breslau Schlemmer continued his stage work. The repertory shown on the tour was quite extensive. It consisted of short, individual pieces, being a particularly striking show of Schlemmer’s intentions: the ‘Dance in Space’, ‘Dance of Forms’, ‘Dance of Gestures’, ‘Dance of the Stage Wings’, the ‘Box Play’, the ‘Dance of Slats’, the ‘Dance of Hoops’, ‘The Wives Dance’, and the ‘Company of Masks’.”⁴⁹

The use of the term ‘dance’ in the titles of the majority of Schlemmer’s plays was in line with the conception of the theater event as stage play of the artificial figure movement in the defined space. Invisibly involved with all these laws is Man as Dancer. He obeys the laws of the body as well as the law of space; he follows his sense of himself as well as his sense of embracing space.”⁵⁰ For this artist ‘dance’ actually represented the initial point of regeneration of the modern theater. Unlike the opera and ballet, dance was not affected by tradition and dedication to words, sound and gestures. For Schlemmer, dance represented an independent stage art predestined to create something new for human senses. “Thus, the dance, according to its origin, becomes Dionysian and pure feeling, symbol for the balancing of polarities.”⁵¹ When the body is articulated in such way that its play is in the center of the happenings, as is the case in the dance, then it is free and follows only its laws.

With his viewpoint about the body which is free and follows only its inner laws of movement, Schlemmer expressed also his position towards the question of the relationship among technology, man and artistic experience, which was topical for all modernist poetics from the beginning of the twentieth century. Schlemmer's response ranged between two opposites – advocating for the metaphysics, on one side, and absolute mechanisms, on the other side. In that respect, he expressed the negative standpoint towards certain, then topical, achievements of the mechanic theater, which as a poetic determination, as believed by him, should have been prevailed over long time ago.⁵² In 1926., Schlemmer stated that the task of the artists does not go between “the shadow side and danger of the mechanical age and the bright side of exact metaphysics.”⁵³ Schlemmer was made an exclusive member of the Bauhaus exactly by his intensive interest in the human being in relation with the modern society and overall modernization of the human life.

Gropius' ‘new building’ should have united the design of the modern living space, through the work with form, color, light and materials. Schlemmer, also, worked with the same elements in his Bauhaus Stage Workshop. “It is natural that the aims of the Bauhaus – to seek the union of the artistic-ideal with the craftsman-like-practical by thoroughly investigating the creative elements, and to understand in all its ramifications the essence of *der Bau*, creative construction – have valid application to the field of the theater.”⁵⁴ It concerned the equivalent approach in interpretation of the stage space and architectural space which united the aspects of three-dimensionality of the optical effects, acoustics, as well as the “movements of mechanical and organic bodies within a limited space.”⁵⁵ The stage work of Oskar Schlemmer contributed that within the Bauhaus the theater stage was understood as equally important field of artistic work in *designing* the totality of the space entities by means of which the harmony among man, his life processes and the environment in which man exists was established.

NOTES

- 1 This paper was created as part of the Project "Identities of Serbian music within the world's cultural context" of the Department of Musicology of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, supported by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Serbia, under the no. 177019
- 2 "Walter Gropius, the first director of the Bauhaus school if not socialist, was at least sharing some of the aims of the left wing revolutionaries. He joined left wing association of architects, artists and intellectuals, the Arbeitstrat Fur Kunst (Working Soviet For Art), whose aim was to involve creative people directly in the forging of a new social order. He was also a member of another left-wing artist' organization in Berlin after the war, the Novembergruppe. Hannes Meyer, succeeding Gropius to work as the director of the Bauhaus school at Dessau, went further and believed in uncompromisingly left-wing political philosophy."
Jie Chang, "Reactions against Historicism of German Bauhaus and the Reaction against 'Passeism' of Italian Futurism," *Review of European Studies*. 2/1 (2010): 92.
- 3 Miško Šuvaković, "Bauhaus i teorija vizuelnog oblikovanja Paula Kleea," in *Estetika apstraktnog slikarstva* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga-Alfa, 1998), 49.
- 4 Walter Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, trans. P. Morton Shand (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1937), 37.

- 5 Walter Gropius, "Program for Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar (April 1919)," in *Bauhaus. Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago*, ed. Hans M. Wingler, trans. Wolfgang Jabs and Basil Gilbert (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press. 1978), 31. "The idea of building an alliance between the crafts, designers, and industry was hardly novel one. The possibilities of new 'Applied-arts' schools, which merged education in the arts and handicrafts, had been widely discussed in Germany in the decade before the war, and several leading reformers, including Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929), the director of Berlin's museums at The Prussian Ministry of Culture, had promoted such 'unified arts schools' as the foundation for a reformed artistic education." See Christopher Long, "Design and Re-Form. The Making of the Bauhaus," *October* (2009): 80–81. Also, the synthesis of the artistic and crafts work and the concepts on adapting the designed articles to the factory production were realized at the end of the 19th century in Great Britain, through the work of Arts and Crafts movement.
- 6 Walter Gropius, "Program for Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar (April 1919)," 32.
- 7 Eckhard Neumann ed., *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People* (New York: Reinhold, 1970), 9.
- 8 Walter Gropius, "Introduction," in *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, eds. Walter Gropius and Artur S. Wensinger, trans. Arthur S. Wensinger (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961), 7.
- 9 Cf. Walter Gropius, "Program for Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar (April 1919)," 31.
- 10 Cf. Juliet Koss, "Bauhaus Theater of Human Dolls," *The Art Bulletin* 85/4 (2003): 725.
- 11 Walter Gropius and Artur S. Wensinger, eds. *The Theater of the Bauhaus*. The book contains essays by Farkas Molnár, László Mogoly-Nagy, and Schlemmer himself, with additional images by Marcel Breuer, Kurt Schmidt, and Xanty Schawinsky. It gained an introduction by Gropius when it was published in 1961 in English translation.
- 12 Parallel with Schlemmer, specific theater designs within the Bauhaus were developed also by Walter Gropius and László Moholy-Nagy.
- 13 Among Schlemmer's most important painting achievements from the 1920s – from the period when he was intensively engaged in the work in the theater – are: *Man as Dancer* (1921), *The Laws of Cubical Space* (1923), *The Laws of Motion of the Human Body in Space* (1924), and *Figure in Space with Plane Geometry and Spatial Delineation* (1927). Cf. Susanne Lahusen, "Oskar Schlemmer Mechanical Ballets?," *Dance Research* 4/2 (1986) 65–77.
- 14 Oskar Schlemmer, "Theater (Bühne)," in *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, eds. Walter Gropius and Artur S. Wensinger, 83.
- 15 Melissa Trimmingham, "Oskar Schlemmer's Research Practice at the Dessau Bauhaus," *Theatre Research International* 2 (2004): 133.
- 16 Cf. Oskar Schlemmer, "Dessau. Autumn 1925 to Summer 1929," in *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, ed. Tut Schlemmer, trans. Krishna Winston. Evanston (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 177. It concerns the text titled "Theater (Bühne)," in *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, eds. Walter Gropius and Artur S. Wensinger, 81–104.
- 17 "There is opposition within the Bauhaus to the direction the Theater has taken. Hannes Mayer and some of the students demand that it be politicized. Since Schlemmer rejects this demand as incompatible with his views, he decides to leave the Bauhaus." Tut Schlemmer, "Dessau. Autumn 1925 to Summer 1929," in *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, ed. Tut Schlemmer, 178. Cf. John-Paul Stonard, "Oskar Schlemmer's 'Bauhausreppé', 1932: part I," *The Burlington Magazine*. 41 (2009): 456.
- 18 Cf. *Ibid.*, 460.
- 19 Cf. Hans M. Wingler, "Bauhaus Stage," in *Bauhaus. Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago*, ed. Hans M. Wingler, 520.
- 20 Oskar Schlemmer, "Theater (Bühne)," 92.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 85–88.
- 22 Oskar Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," in *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, eds. Walter Gropius and Artur S. Wensinger, 22.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 24

- 25 Ibid., 19.
- 26 Oskar Schlemmer, "The Mathematics of the Dance (1926)," in *Bauhaus. Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago*, ed. Hans M. Wingler, 117.
- 27 Hans M. Wingler, "Stage Workshop," in *Bauhaus. Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago*, ed. Hans M. Wingler, 468.
- 28 Oskar Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," 17.
- 29 Oskar Schlemmer, "The Mathematics of the Dance (1926)," 118.
- 30 Oskar Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," 22–23.
- 31 Oskar Schlemmer, "Syllabuses – Teaching schedules," in *Oskar Schlemmer Man. Teaching notes from the Bauhaus*, ed. Heimo Kuchling, trans. Janet Seligman (London: Lund Humphries, 1971), 25.
- 32 As relevant for this concept Schlemmer quoted in his syllabus the study of Ernest Haeckel, *Natur und Mensch* (Leipzig, 1920) which, most likely, in numerous instances influenced the artist's understanding of man as a cosmic being. Cf. Oskar Schlemmer, "Bibliography to the chapter on natural science," in *Oskar Schlemmer Man. Teaching notes from the Bauhaus*, ed. Heimo Kuchling, 72.
- 33 Ibid., 71–79.
- 34 Oskar Schlemmer, "Bauhaus Journal 1928, number 2–3", cit. according to: Hans M. Wingler, "Bauhaus Stage", 523.
- 35 Oskar Schlemmer, "Third day (27/4/28). History of the origins of (1) life; (2) man," in *Oskar Schlemmer Man. Teaching notes from the Bauhaus*, ed. Heimo Kuchling, 142.
- 36 Oskar Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," 22.
- 37 Ibid., 81–101.
- 38 Ibid., 92–93.
- 39 Oskar Schlemmer, "Abstraction in Dance and Costume (1928)," in Heimo Kuchling (ed.), *Bauhaus. Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago*, ed. Heimo Kuchling, 472.
- 40 Oskar Schlemmer, "Theater (Bühne)," 81.
- 41 "In addition to the Stuttgart and Weimar productions, other took place in Dresden, Donauschingen, Berlin, Frankfurt, and Paris, some as full-length performances and others within larger revues." Juliet Koss, "Bauhaus Theater of Human Dolls," *The Art Bulletin* 85/4 (2003): 36.
- 42 Oskar Schlemmer, "The Mathematics of the Dance," in *Bauhaus. Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago*, ed. Hans M. Wingler, 119.
- 43 Symbolic character of Schlemmer's figures was pointed out also by Gropius: "His figures and forms are pure creation of imagination, symbolizing eternal types of human character and their different moods, serene or tragic, funny or serious. Possessed with the idea of finding new symbols, he considered it a 'mark of Cain in our culture that we have no symbols any longer and – worse – that we are unable to create them.' (...) he found images which expressed metaphysical ideas, e. g. the star form of the spread-out fingers of the hand, the sign of infinity (...)." Walter Gropius, "Introduction," in *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, eds. Walter Gropius and Artur S. Wensinger, 8.
- 44 Johannes Birringer, "Bauhaus, Constructivism, Performance," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 35/2 (2012): 42.
- 45 Oskar Schlemmer, "Theater (Bühne)," 91.
- 46 Oskar Schlemmer, "Neue Formen der Bühne," in *Oskar Schlemmer's Research Practice at the Dessau Bauhaus*, ed. Melissa Trimmingham, 136.
- 47 In Dessau Schlemmer realized as a series of eleven short plays titled *Stäbetanz, Metalltanz, Glastanz, Reifentanz, Kulissentanz* itd.
- 48 Schlemmer stated that three colors were used in the *Triadic Ballet* – red, blue and yellow – "later become common property at the Bauhaus through Mondrian." Oskar Schlemmer, "To Otto Meyer. September 8, 1929," in *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, ed. Tut Schlemmer, 248.
- 49 Hans M. Wingler, "Bauhaus Stage," in *Bauhaus. Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago*, ed. Hans M. Wingler, 520.
- 50 Oskar Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," 23–25.

- 51 Oskar Schlemmer, "To Hans Hildebrandt. Weimar, October 4, 1922," in *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, ed. Tut Schlemmer, 128–129.
- 52 "The Theater is staging a mini-revolution, aha, aha! The central issue: a Schlemmer theater or a Bauhaus theater! I say it is all up to them. Schmidtchen is the spokesman for mechanical theater, I for figural theater! I have declared I refuse to let myself be pinned down or be dictated to. I was doing mechanistic theater when Schmidtchen was still in swaddling clothes. Oskar Schlemmer, "Dessau, April 25, 1927," in *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, ed. Tut Schlemmer, 203.
- 53 Matthew W. Smith, "Schlemmer, Moholy-Nagy, and the Search for the Absolute Stage," *Theater* 32/3 (2002): 94.
- 54 Oskar Schlemmer, "Theater (Bühne)," 81.
- 55 Walter Gropius, "The Work of the Bauhaus Stage," in *The Bauhaus. Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago*, ed. Hans M. Wingler, 41.

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