Modern Marionettes: The Triadic Ballet and Utopian Androgyny

by

Laura Arike

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Laura Arike

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Professor Marsha Morton, Thesis Advisor

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Dr. John Decker, Department Chair

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Introduction

The work of Bauhaus artist Oskar Schlemmer was deeply concerned with the physical and spiritual transformation of the human body through a synthesis of abstraction and figurative practice. Much of his seminal work was created during his employment at the Bauhaus from 1921 to 1929. The notable *Triadisches Ballett* (Triadic Ballet) premiered in 1922, after which Schlemmer then became head of the Bauhaus's theatre workshop in 1923. In pursuit of a "new modern being," Schlemmer united dichotomous elements: machine and nature, abstraction and figuration, spirituality and objectivity. This thesis will focus on Schlemmer's fusion of masculinity and femininity in his costumes for the Triadic Ballet and the utopian goal created by its contradictory elements. I will briefly consider the historical context of the androgyne in German philosophy and literature, initiated by German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann in the eighteenth century and reformed by the specific environment within which Schlemmer was operating. The Weimar Republic (1918-1933) encompassed an age of radical experimentation with sexuality and gender in spite of its largely conservative values. This provided an ideal platform that allowed Schlemmer to create androgynous figures that reinterpreted binaries and injected the Bauhaus with depictions of fused men and women that embraced gender and sexual fluidity. During Schlemmer's years at the Bauhaus, beginning in 1921, the development of the "New Woman" as well as the "New Man" proliferated in society as many began to critique the militaristic masculinity and domestic femininity that dominated post-war perceptions and expectations. These new representations were direct results of gendered

perceptions after World War I that generated new confrontations with modernity and gender codes.

This thesis will ultimately address the way in which Oskar Schlemmer integrated the "New Woman" and the "New Man" in his approach to the Triadic Ballet; one that was informed by a geometric and mathematical exploration of the human body and its ability to inhabit space as transformable structures. His reevaluation of human form coincided with the Bauhaus's reconsideration of societal conventions in their attempt to construct a "new structure of the future."[1] This thesis will closely examine Schlemmer's representation of androgyny within this context and its cultural implications. I will analyse the conceptualization and formal execution of the Triadic Ballet through letters and essays by Schlemmer, whose construction of a new modern being, untethered from convictions of conventional appearance, communicates one of the many utopian images of the Bauhaus.

[1] Walter Gropius, "Bauhaus Manifesto" 1919, in David Frankel, Leah Dickerman, and Barry Bergdoll, *Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009, pg. 86.

Chapter 1: History of the Androgyne in Germany

Born in 1888 in Stuttgart, Germany, Oskar Schlemmer attended the School of Applied Arts and later the Stuttgart Academy of Fine Art, with a concentration in landscape painting, between 1906 to 1910.[2] By 1912, Schlemmer was under the mentorship of abstract artist Adolf Hölzel, deviating from his training in impressionism in pursuit of a cubist practice.[3] As a result of this exposure to cubism and pictorial abstraction, Schlemmer's paintings became defined by the flattening of form—specifically, of the human figure. An early application of his growing interest in the geometric and mathematical exploration of the human body through the androgyne is revealed in paintings such as *Composition on Pink Ground* (1915), Figure 1 (a later version), and *Figural Plan K 1* (1922), Figure 2, both of which employ a distillation of human form into defined shapes of ambiguous gender. Through his careful consideration of flattened form contained by physical space in painting, he established an enduring thread in his work: the importance of motion-through-space that would later be embodied by his Triadic Ballet.[4] However, Schlemmer's work in transformable structures was predicated on his fixation with the androgyne; much of which is evident in his art prior to the Bauhaus. In September 1915, Schlemmer noted his personal inclination towards a "reconciliation of polarities,"[5] writing: "I vacillate between two styles, two worlds, two attitudes toward life. If I could succeed in analyzing them, I think I would be able to shake off all these doubts … everything should merge

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[2] "Oskar Schlemmer: MoMA." *The Museum of Modern Art*. Accessed February 20, 2020. https://www.moma.org/artists/5219.
[3] Karin von Maur, "Oskar Schlemmer." *Oxford Art Online*, 2003.
[4] Johannes Birringer, "Bauhaus, Constructivism, Performance." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art 35*, no. 2, 2013, pg. 39.
[5] Susanne Lahusen, "Oskar Schlemmer: Mechanical Ballets?" *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 4, no. 2, 1986, pg. 65.

into one great current. Mysticism, the primitive, the most recent, Greece, Gothic—all the elements must be drawn upon."[6] This statement from Schlemmer recalls Friedrich Nietzche's concept of Apollonian and Dionysian elements—a balancing of two opposites—which he acknowledges in a later diary entry in September 1922:

> The 'Triadic Ballet': dance of the trinity, changing faces of the One, Two, and Three, in form, color, and movement; it should also follow the plane geometry of the dance surface and the solid geometry of the moving bodies, producing that sense of spatial dimension which necessarily results from tracing such basic forms as the straight line, the diagonal, the circle, the ellipse, and their combinations. Thus the dance, which is Dionysian and wholly emotional in origin, becomes strict and Apollonian in its final form, a symbol of balancing the opposites.[7]

This chapter will provide a foundation for Schlemmer's investigation of the human figure and its capacity to contain these opposing elements, specifically manifested through androgynous form, an overarching ethos that would largely inform his endeavors at the Bauhaus. An analysis of primary sources, including *The Theater of the Bauhaus* by Walter Gropius (1996) and *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer* (1990), will be used to illustrate Schlemmer's motivation in creating a new modern being. This "new modern being" will be understood as Schlemmer using fundamental elements of the human body to explore mechanization, figuration, abstraction, and spirituality, the combination of which produced an ultimately androgynous figure. This section will also consider the history of the androgyne in German philosophy and literature, propagated by German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann in the eighteenth century and reformed by the specific political and social environment that Schlemmer was operating within. This discussion will additionally reference the conceptions of the body

[6] Oskar Schlemmer and Tut Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1990, pg. 30.
[7] Ibid, 128.

established by Nazarene painters in nineteenth century Germany, whose androgynous models of the human figure provided a modern alternative to associations with gender from antiquity.

Schlemmer arrived at the Weimar Bauhaus in 1921, appointed by director Walter Gropius to instruct the Wood and Stone Workshop and later the Sculpture Workshop due to his previous experience as an apprentice in both an inlay and marquetry workshop from 1905 and 1909.[8] During these years at the Bauhaus, Schlemmer was heavily involved in the production of student shows promoting puppetry and pantomime at Bauhaus festivals,[9] writing in March 1922 that: "... the door is gradually being opened to the theatre in the Bauhaus … What is left for me are the dance and the comic, which I gladly and graciously confess to be my own."[10] Schlemmer had composed the Triadic Ballet in its entirety between 1916 to 1922; its first formal production premiered in Stuttgart on September 30th, 1922, at the Theatre of the Stuttgart Landestheater. The performance, based on the principle of the trinity, featured three acts and three participants; two male, one female, comprised of twelve dances and eighteen costumes. These costumes were largely androgynous due to their disregard for "individual anatomic idiosyncrasies,"[11] which Schlemmer abandoned in pursuit of a universal presentation of the body, as seen in Figure 3. Bauhaus director Walter Gropius commented: "[the costumes are] pure creations of the imagination, symbolizing eternal types of human character and their different moods, serene, tragic, funny or serious."[12] These "eternal" types of human character differed in their aesthetic

[8] "Oskar Schlemmer: MoMA." *The Museum of Modern Art*. Accessed February 20, 2020. https://www.moma.org/artists/5219.
[9] Johannes Birringer, "Bauhaus, Constructivism, Performance." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art 35*, no. 2, 2013, pg. 41.
[10] Oskar Schlemmer and Tut Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1990, pg. 56.
[11] Michelle Ferranti, "Utopia and Its End: Karl Mannheim's "Sociology of Knowledge" and the Private Writings of Oskar Schlemmer." *Utopian Studies 15*, no. 2, 2004, pg 47.
[12] Walter Gropius, *The Theater of the Bauhaus.* London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, pg 8.

execution, but each were united by a distinct ambiguity of gender that can be traced back, in Germany, to origins in art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann's profound interest in androgyny.

Winckelmann's observations were primarily concerned with a rediscovery of classical art and Greek antiquity, through which he asserted that the Greek ideal of beauty resulted from its incorporation of both "the manliness of a beautiful boy" as well as "the forms of enduring feminine youth."[13] Winckelmann famously proclaimed that "beauty is nothing other than the middle between two extremes. Just as the middle path is always the best, it is always the most beautiful. In order to find the middle, one must know the two extremes."[14] Similarly to Schlemmer's art, Winckelmann's writing encompassed a "doubling" of binaries and extremes; as Schlemmer investigated overlap between machine and nature, abstraction and figuration, spirituality and objectivity, Winckelmann did so through various oppositions such as "nature and art," "filled with majesty and armed with thunder," and "bow and arrow."[15] As will be revealed with Schlemmer's figures, Winckelmann's utopian embodiment of androgyny could not be found in nature; rather, they were beyond the natural world. Winckelmann writes, "Art went still further, and united the beauty and characteristics pecuilar to each sex in the images of hermaphrodities … artists intended to express in this entity comrpised of both sexes an image of exalted beauty, and this image was ideal. Hermaphrodites such as those produced by art have probably never been conceived in reality."[16] The remarkable success of Winckelmann's seminal

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[13] Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Sämtliche Werke,* ed. Joseph Eiselein (Donauöschingen: Verlag Deutscher Classiker, 1825-29), vol. 12: xliii, in Catriona MacLeod, *Embodying Ambiguity: Androgyny and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Keller*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998, pg. 30.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Catriona MacLeod, *Embodying Ambiguity: Androgyny and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Keller*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998, pg. 30.

work, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (The History of Ancient Art), published in Dresden in 1764, allowed his theories to proliferate across Germany and Europe.[17] Many of Winckelmann's contemporaries and later theologians echoed his sentiments regarding androgyny; in a 1798 edition of Schlegels' journal *Athenäum*, philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher described his own utopian society based on the androgyne in which "the *Schranken des Geschlects* (barriers of gender) would be overcome."[18]

The Nazarene movement, formed in 1809 by six art students in Vienna, was chiefly motivated by reinvigorating modern painting with the spirituality and purity that existed in the art of the High Renaissance in Italy and Northern Europe.[19] Their conceptions of human form were crucial to their construction of a national identity and visual language; many of their paintings championed androgynous, individualized confrontations of the body. Art historian Cordula Grewe traced this inclination toward the androgyne in her article, "The Nationalized Body: Conceptions of the Body and Nationalist Imagery in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in which she argued that the Nazarene painters sought to combat the "decadence of the 18th century" through their use of defined body contour lines and a reduction of the male model's pubescent body to a "purified ornamentalized outline."[20] Nazarenes combined their use of young male models as reference for the body with their conviction that Christianity was best expressed through detailed, emotional depictions of the face; an act of "dualism" in its simultaneous use of

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[17] Zdravko Blažeković, "Preface: Neoclassical Reverberations of Discovering Antiquity." *Music in Art 40*, no. 1-2, 2015, pg. 7.
[18] Catriona MacLeod, *Embodying Ambiguity: Androgyny and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Keller.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998, pg. 30.
[19] Françoise Forster-Hahn. *Spirit of an Age Nineteenth-Century Paintings from the Nationalgalerie, Berlin.* London: National Gallery Company, 2001, pg. 79.
[20] Cordula Grewe, "The Nationalized Body: Conceptions of the Body and Nationalist Imagery in Nineteenth-Century Germany," *Bulletin of the German Historic Institute 26*, 2000, pg. 9.

abstraction in the body and specificity in the face that is similar to the "doubling" seen in the writing of Winckelmann and earlier German theologians. Grewe continues, "Nazarene depictions of the male body contradicted both the stereotype of modern masculinity and the call for the masculine citizen-warrior as advanced by the war party in Prussia,"[21] concluding that "the Nazarene ideal of the androgynous male thus provided an alternative to the modern masculine stereotype."[22] This propensity toward the androgyne as a utopian response to the expectations of masculinity and the consequences of the Napoleonic wars were reiterated in the early twentieth century following the First World War. The devastation of the war would serve to advance the presence of fused genders in visual arts and the development of the "New Woman" and the "New Man." The continued evolution of the history of the androgyne in Germany, which began with Winckelmann and the Nazarenes, will be discussed at length in the following chapter, which examines the experimentation of sexuality and gender in the Weimar Republic and its profound influence on Oskar Schlemmer's Triadic Ballet.

[21] Ibid, 10.
[22] Ibid, 12.

Chapter 2: ‘New Woman’ and ‘New Man’ in Weimar Germany

The devastation of World War I radically altered the social and political climate in Germany and led to a reconsideration of gendered behavior that was prevalent throughout the Weimar Republic between 1918 and 1933. During the war, women assumed roles in the workforce that were left abandoned by men in combat, drastically increasing their visible space in society as they occupied other public domains outside of the factories such as restaurants, bars, and theatres—unaccompanied by men. Even as the conflict concluded, women maintained a distinct presence in the post-war scene outside of the home, producing a fragmented system of traditional femininity through their transformation of physical appearances and expectations of gender. The onset of the socially liberated woman is concretized by the “New Woman,” a young, androgynous-appearing female who inserted herself in the post-war urban workforce and social scene, thereby generating new confrontations with modernity and gender codes. The idea of the New Woman was manifested in the visual arts: images of short-haired, flat-chested women, clad in blazers and trousers while smoking cigarettes, appeared in portraiture and other figural artwork, catalyzing depictions of gender ambiguity in the Weimar Era and *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). Similarly, the notion of the “New Man” proliferated as many began to critique the militaristic masculinity that dominated perceptions and expectations of manhood after the war. The humiliation that resulted from Germany’s defeat in World War I led to a promotion of aggressive masculinity to mitigate the loss; however, the New Man diverged from the mechanized body and emotional detachment that defined soldiers. This chapter will establish various Weimar Era perspectives of gender and sexuality to further contextualize the history of

the androgyne in Germany as it specifically operates within the Bauhaus. This discussion will reveal a modern synthesis of gender that invariably affected Oskar Schlemmer's theoretical motivation and subsequent artistic production. I will additionally explore the development of typology and the classification of particular stereotypes in Weimar social sciences and visual arts to argue that Schlemmer adapted a similar approach in his typification of bodily forms for the Triadic Ballet.

The Weimar Republic's profound experimentation with gender and sexuality ultimately began with the psychological consequences of World War I that led to a divergence from conventional femininity and masculinity, encapsulated by the onset of the "New Woman" and the "New Man". The reexamination of manhood that catapulted individuals into a realm of gender ambiguity was largely a result of the mental illness and physical injuries that plagued men after the war, in addition to the grief that supplemented the monumental loss of the war itself. As author Maria Makela writes: "Difficult enough to bear when victorious, these horrible physical and psychic maladies were nearly intolerable for many German men whose gender identity was, to quote Ingrid Sharp, now 'in tatters'." Makela continues: "That German women seemed *more* rather than *less* empowered was surely a source of anxiety for many, especially perhaps because they were granted suffrage in 1918 and subsequently became actors on the political stage as well as in the workforce and on the social scene."[23] The visual representation of this female empowerment—the New Woman—is famously associated with *Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia von Harden* (1926) by Otto Dix (Figure 4), who is noted for his interrogation of human suffering at the hands of war through depictions of social injustice, class inequality, prostitution, and

[23] Maria Maleka, "New Women, New Men, New Objectivity", in *New Objectivity: Modern German Art: in the Weimar Republic 1919-1933*, edited by Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2015, pg. 54.

degenerant sexuality. In this painting, Dix confronts head-on the gender reformations occurring during the Weimar Republic: his portrait illustrates a working woman on break, framed by a cropped haircut, unapologetically smoking a cigarette through yellowed teeth, sitting clumsily as her stockings sag below her. Of the process, von Harden recalled that Dix approached her to paint the portrait and she replied: "So, you want to paint my lacklustre eyes, my ornate ears, my long nose, my thin lips; you want to paint my long hands, my short legs, my big feet—things which can only scare people off and delight no-one?" In response, Dix proclaimed: "You have brilliantly characterized yourself, and all that will lead to a portrait representative of an epoch concerned not with the outward beauty of a woman but rather with her psychological condition."[24] This portrait exemplified various facets of changing gender norms that allowed women to unabashedly consider androgyny in their daily lives through its masculinization of women's fashions and its integration of women into the workforce. By infusing these recently eroded gender codes into visual arts, Otto Dix and other New Objectivity artists not only chronicled the progression of gender and sexuality of the Weimar Era, but celebrated it, as well.[25]

This commetrative impulse of Weimar artists to document transformative physical attributes as a means to concretize constructions of gender was similarly seen in manifestations of the "New Man." German sociologist Klaus Theweleit describes the impetus behind the notion of the New Man as follows:

> The New Man is a man whose physique has been machinized [sic], his psyche eliminated —or in part displaced into his body armor, his 'predatory' suppleness. We are presented with a robot that can tell the time, find the North, stand his ground over a red-hot-machine-gun, or cut wire without a sound. In the moment of action, he is as

[24] Sergiusz Michalski, *New Objectivity: Painting, Graphic Art and Photography in Weimar Germany 1919-1933.* Köln: Taschen, 2003, pg. 56.
[25] Maria Maleka, "New Women, New Men, New Objectivity", in *New Objectivity: Modern German Art: in the Weimar Republic 1919-1933*, edited by Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2015, pg. 61.

> devoid of fear as of any other emotion. His knowledge of being able to do what he does is his only consciousness of self. This, I believe, is the ideal man of the conservative utopia: a man with machinelike periphery, whose interior has lost its meaning.[26]

Theweleit's assertion posits that the New Man evolved as a defensive response to the threats posed to traditional masculinity embodied by the apathetic and mechanical soldier. While the New Woman was championed as a liberation and emancipation from the expectations of gender, the New Man was starkly opposed to this characterization as one that was largely negative. Depictions of this state are described by art historian Änne Söll described as "part of a dystopia that isolates men, turning them into empty puppets," an alienating phenomenon succinctly captured by Figure 5, *Young Man with Yellow Gloves*, (1921), by New Objectivity painter Anton Räderscheidt. Söll continues, "The art of New Objectivity was not merely a symptom of 'crisis of masculinity' but was actively involved in the debates about gender equality, trying to tip the balance back in favor of men's sovereign status and authority."[27]

During the Weimar Republic, visual art served as an active participant in advancing the conversation surrounding gender and sexuality in Germany—one that was often interpreted in work at the Bauhaus. Art historian Elizabeth Otto spoke to the institution's cultural awareness and subsequent assessment in her essay "Designing Men: New Visions of Masculinity in Photomontages of Herbert Bayer, Marcel Breuer, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy," where she writes: "Cultural critique at the Bauhaus was not limited to issues of form and design or the unity of art and craft; this critique also explored new ways of being in this postwar world, and a key element

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[26] Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, vol. 2, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, pg. 162.
[27] Änne Söll. "Puppets, Patterns, and 'Proper Gentlemen': Men's Fashion in Anton Raderscheidt's New Objectivity Paintings", in *Fashion in European Art: Dress and Identity, Politics and the Body, 1775-1925*, edited by Justine De Young, Bloomsbury Press: London, 2017, pg. 236.

of this exploration was a reexamination of set tropes of manhood."[28] Many Bauhaus artists were immersed in radical gender and sexuality as it engaged with their own practices. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's photomontages portrayed "a troubled masculinity" through a satirization of the contradictory elements of manhood—the militarized body in opposition with the romantic artist,[29] Marianne Brandt's photomontages reinvented traditional imagery through the use of new technology and stereotypical gender roles, and T. Lux Feininger created photographs that visually imagined the future of the "female artist-engineer" through a manipulation of metallic sculptures.[30] Similar to his contemporaries, Oskar Schlemmer recognized the transformative capability produced by the dissolution of boundaries and binaries imposed by gender. In a December 29th, 1923 diary entry, Schlemmer wrote:

> Human beings and lifestyles are destroyed and new ones come in their place. Miracles occur, signs appear in the most sensitive reflector of the human spirit, art; art anticipates the events in the exterior world, and presents in perfected form much that has not yet emerged from the chaos of external reality.[31]

Schlemmer acknowledged a clear interest in the "exterior world", and sought a way to propel the reality of Weimar "chaos" forward into a realm of utopian perfection through his art. As will be discussed in the following chapter, Schlemmer assembled a series of "eternal types," as previously quoted by Walter Gropius, that would later be absorbed into his work in the Triadic Ballet. Many other Weimar Era artists resolved the chaos of the era through the construction of a "typological language," a visual index of "types" that categorized and communicated the variety

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[28] Elizabeth Otto, "Designing Men: New Visions of Masculinity in Photomontages of Herbert Bayer, Marcel Breuer, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy," in *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse, and Modernism*, eds. Jeffrey Saltetnik and Robin Schuldenfrei, London: Routledge, 2011, pg. 188.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid, 77.
[31] Oskar Schlemmer and Tut Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1990, pg. 148.

of identities emerging within the newly democratized nation. New Objectivity artists embracing representational portraits were echoing the prevalent typecasting activities occurring throughout 1920s Germany, which included the publication of behavioral guides known as *Verhaltenslehre*. These were classification schemes that documented physical attributes as well as sexual behaviors[32] in an attempt to, as historian Lynne Frame describes, "give contours to a society in disarray" by offering "a new structural security in the destabilized social landscape."[33] Of the aforementioned *Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia von Harden* in relation to typology, art historian Maria Maleka writes in her essay "'A Clear and Simple Style': Tradition and Typology in New Objectivity":

> [Harden] was also a widely recognizable type in the Weimar era, specifically, the so-called 'Garçonne,' a woman whose masculine attire and short haircut challenged existing notions of sexual difference … Dix's image turns her into a frightening symbol of the 'third sex' evoked by Venzmer [German biologist] and other conservative typologists.

While Maleka here recognizes the potentially socially regressive nature of New Objectivity in its disarming portrayal of political and social taxonomies, I will argue in the next chapter that Schlemmer utilized a similar typological method through his typification of bodily forms in order to liberate his Triadic Ballet costumes from any explicit reference to reality. His "types," which were achieved through four basic methods of abstraction, circumvented this potentially negative association with a "third sex" in a projection of androgny meant to be utopian.

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[32] Maria Makela, "'A Clear and Simple Style': Tradition and Typology in New Objectivity." Art Institute of Chicago *Museum Studies* 28, no. 1, 2002, pg. 51.
[33] Lynne Frame, "Gretchen, Girl, Gargonne? Weimar Science and Popular Culture in Search of the Ideal New Woman," in Katharina von Ankum, ed., *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, Berkeley: CA, 1997, pg. 13.

Chapter 3: Metaphysical Theatre: Oskar Schlemmer's Utopian Typology

Oskar Schlemmer believed that transformation of the human figure could be achieved by four basic methods of abstraction—a set of "types" that he used to contextualize costumed bodies in three-dimensional space – as well as further experimental efforts toward a utopian synthesis that Schlemmer called "the first step into the future."[34] The theatre served as the ideal platform for these investigations since the driving impetus of the Bauhaus to integrate art and architecture with craftsmanship and technology found immediate representation on the stage.[35] This chapter will explore Schlemmer's set of types established in his personal writings and drawings to consider how their androgynous forms promoted a Bauhaus goal of utopian regeneration through theatre's "promise of total art."[36] This chapter will additionally revisit Schlemmer's devotion to a unification of polarities—as previously examined through gender codes—and will assess this personal inclination through Schlemmer's amalgamation of new technologies in mechanization and the natural features and movements of the human body.

In his essay, "Man and Art Figure," Schlemmer divided the "transformation of the human body" into four clear, decisive parts: (1) the laws of the surrounding cubical space (Figure 6), (2) the functional laws of the human body in their relationship to space (Figure 7), (3) the laws of motion of the human body in space (Figure 8) and (4) the metaphysical forms of expression (Figure 9). Each of these figure models, realized and drawn by Schlemmer himself, contributed

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[34] Oskar Schlemmer, 'Misunderstandings', *Schrifttanz*, 4. Jahrgang, 1931 (translated by author), in Susanne Lahusen, "Oskar Schlemmer: Mechanical Ballets?" *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 4, no. 2, 1986, pg. 76.
[35] Oskar Schlemmer, "The Stage and the Bauhaus", in *Bauhaus: Art as Life*, 1926, pg. 196.
[36] Oskar Schlemmer and Tut Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1990, pg. 127.

to "the possibilities of Man as Dancer"[37] that led to a series of varied results: ambulant architecture, the marionette, a technical organism, and dematerialization, respectively.[38] Each of these typifications emphasize a geometric or metaphysical aspect of the human figure—some even combining the two—in order to illustrate the body's potential to metamorphosize with the assistance of costume and disguise.

By distilling the human body into line and shape by "extract[ing] the essentials," these four constructions acted as an equalizing force that rejected conventional conceptions of theatre. Realist and expressionist theatre, the dominant mode of stage production in the early twentieth century, relied on what choreographer and media artist Johannes Birringer describes as "physical corporeality and social/gender/racial inscriptions of the body,"[39] a convention Schlemmer reinvented through his universal conception of anatomy. Birringer continues, "Schlemmer's choreography, without denying bodily materiality, tends to neutralize it insofar as his designs were first drawn and theoretically conceived (on paper), to be applied in motion in order to explore geometric principles and what he considered the 'the laws of motion of the human body in space.'"[40] As Birringer writes, Schlemmer did not "deny bodily materiality" or seek to "dehumanize" performers through the standardization of bodies; instead, Schlemmer sought to amplify human metaphysical capabilities by balancing contradictions that embraced both nature and mechanization. In "Man and Art Figure," Schlemmer states:

> 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

[37] Ibid, 29.
[38] Oskar Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," in Oskar Schlemmer, *The Theatre of the Bauhaus,* 1921, pg. 27.
[39] Johannes Birringer. "Bauhaus, Constructivism, Performance." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 35, no. 2, 2013, pg. 44.
[40] Ibid.

> 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."[41]

In this passage, Schlemmer acknowledges dualities that bodies in theatre experience: costumes can either negate or redefine identities, remain loyal to authentic anatomical representation or distort it through illusionary methods, and be dictated exclusively by one set of codes—organic or mechanical—as opposites. Alternatively, one can choose to undermine this binary by creating a space where both intersect and inform one another—a junction where much of Schlemmer's work was built. As discussed in Chapter 1, Schlemmer was chiefly motivated by creating "a symbol of balancing the opposites";[42] an enduring thread in his work that resurfaced as he navigated an artistic realm that synthesized various aesthetic constructions into a wholly original form. While Schlemmer was familiar with Winckelmann's early inquiries into androgyny, he was also keenly aware of preliminary explorations of automatism in Germany, seen in his reference to the 1816 E.T.A Hoffmann story, "The Sandman" (*Der Sandmann*), which explores the relationship between a mad scientist, a life-like robot, Olimpia, and a disturbed young man who falls in love with her. Schlemmer additionally references Heinrich von Kleist's "On the Marionette Theatre" (*Über das Marionettentheatre*), an 1810 essay of a ballet master's observations while visiting a puppet show, ending with von Kleist's assertion that the "unreflective grace of the puppet is far greater than that of the human body."[43] Finally,

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[41] Ibid, p. 21.
[42] Oskar Schlemmer and Tut Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1990, pg. 128.
[43] Susanne Lahusen, "Oskar Schlemmer: Mechanical Ballets?" *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 4, no. 2, 1986, pg. 70.

Schlemmer quotes English modernist actor and theorist, Gordon Craig, whose theatrical conceptualization of the "Superpuppet" (*Übermarionette*) seemed to advocate for a mechanized being capable of overcoming physical restrictions inherent to human performers. Schlemmer's knowledge of preceding examples of automatism likely stems from its advantage in "permit[ting] any kind of movement and any kind of position for as long a time as desired."[44]

In practice, Schlemmer instructed his students to replicate movements of puppets in an attempt to depart from traditional dance; however, as author Susanne Lahusen writes, he "did not want to reduce the dancer to a robot," contrary to positions held by von Kleist and Craig. Lahusen continues: "What he strove for was to create new symbols to represent the technological age. Amongst these new symbols there might well be a mechanical figure, yet this figure would never replace the human dancer."[45] Just as Schlemmer fused both femininity and masculinity to produce a uniquely androgynous figure, he injected elements of newfound mechanization into the human form without letting one take precedence over the other. He thus facilitated a productive relationship that encouraged a coexistence of forms, rather than the promotion of a singular, exclusive approach. Schlemmer writes: "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."[46] Here, Schlemmer notes the importance of integrating modernity into his work, but remains faithful to his passion for the organic, human form. This desire to

[44] Oskar Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," in Oskar Schlemmer, *The Theatre of the Bauhaus,* 1921, pg. 29.
[45] Susanne Lahusen, "Oskar Schlemmer: Mechanical Ballets?" *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 4, no. 2, 1986, pg. 70.
[46] Oskar Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," in Oskar Schlemmer, *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*, 1921, pg. 17.

harmonize oppositional forces echoes the overarching ideology of the Bauhaus, which sought to do the same through a unification of craftsmanship and technology.

When invited by Gropius to join the Bauhaus in 1921 as director of the sculpture workshop, Schlemmer wrote in a diary entry:

> I noticed one thing, which became especially clear from the perspective of the Bauhaus: much of modern art nowadays tends toward practical application, toward architecture. The economic crisis may make building impossible for years to come. There are no noble tasks to which the Utopian fantasies of the moderns might be applied. The illusionary world of the theatre offers an outlet for these fantasies. We must be content with surrogates, create out of wood and cardboard what we cannot build in stone and steel.[47]

With this postulation, Schlemmer suggests that the Bauhaus could most effectively communicate its projections of utopian modernity through theatre, using the stage as a "surrogate" to visually realize the ideals of the institution without adhering to aesthetic concerns for material. Schlemmer equates a form made from "wood and cardboard" as opposed to one built in "stone and steel," reinforcing his aforementioned rejection of technology as a singular means to an end. For Schlemmer, success in the arts does not result from "practical application," whether that be manifested by the pragmatic function of architecture or through the total adaptation of mechanization. Instead, Schlemmer is persuaded by the potential of experimentation and fluidity in contributing to a utopian perfection. He writes,

> 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 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.[48]

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[47] Oskar Schlemmer and Tut Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer,* Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1990, pg. 107.
[48] Oskar Schlemmer, Moholy-Nagy László, and Walter Gropius, *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 31.

Schlemmer's criticism on the fixation of architecture and its use of technology as an agent of a misguided utopian utilitarianism continues in a later diary entry, where he notes that "a yearning for synthesis dominates today's art and calls upon architecture to unite the disparate fields of endeavor. This yearning also reaches out for the theatre, because the theatre offers the promise of total art."[49] Schlemmer's call for a "total art," which showcases his interest in Gestalt theory and *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a total work of art), prioritizes an artwork that considers the full context of an artwork as a whole, rather than individualities. Despite Schlemmer's disapproval of Bauhaus architecture as a "total art," a similar interest in totality was a fundamental ideology of the institution, articulated by Walter Gropius in the following: "The Bauhaus was inaugurated in 1919 with the specific objective of realizing a modern architectonic art, which like human nature was meant to be all-embracing in its scope. Experiment once more became the center of architecture, and that demands a broad, coordinating mind, not the narrow specialist."[50] Although Gropius gravitated toward architecture, he recognized the harmonious potential in Schlemmer's costumes, describing them as "pure creations of the imagination, symbolizing eternal types of human character and their different moods, serene, tragic, funny or serious."[51] Oskar Schlemmer's *Studies for set and costume design*, Figure 10, illustrates this multitude of human expression and the various approaches in execution Schlemmer utilized to communicate universality. The costumes range from organic with undulating curves reflecting the anatomy of

[49] Oskar Schlemmer and Tut Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer,* Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1990, pg. 127.
[50] Spiro Kostof and Dana Cuff. *The Architect: Chapters in the History of the Profession*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001, pg. 321.
[51] Walter Gropius, "Introduction," in *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*, 1921, pg. 8.

the body to a majority obfuscating the natural in pursuit of clean geometry. Idiosyncrasies of wearers are further concealed by the use of masks and headpieces in Schlemmer's designs, as seen in costumes 2, 3, and 4 on the left hand column of the study. Many of the costumes blend conventionally male and female qualities: Schlemmer fuses form-fitting, shapely designs typically associated with females with moments of masculine, mathematical rigidity. This unity is especially displayed by the rightmost figure in group 8 in the center column, whose bulbous torso and hourglass waist are coupled by rectangular, blocky legs. In this study, Schlemmer uses predominantly primary colors and shades of grey; he abstains from assigning traditionally gendered palettes such as pink for women or blue for men to the costumes, which allows the figures to exist as equal forces—composed from the same elements—enhancing their overall universality. The balance achieved by the costumes—an amalgamation of his four types outlined in "Man and Art Figure"—results in fantastical figures that advance Schlemmer's spiritual goals. Of these theatrical transformations, Schlemmer writes: "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,"[52] making evident his ultimate desire for a utopian construction of the human form.

[52] Oskar Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," in Oskar Schlemmer, The Theatre of the Bauhaus, 1921, pg. 29.

Conclusion

After leaving the Bauhaus in 1929, Schlemmer continued to construct androgynous forms in his work throughout his career, with later paintings exploring androgyny contextualized by his personal surroundings.[53] Further insight into Schlemmer's investigation of utopian androgyny can be found in his last major work, a 1932 painting entitled *Bauhaustreppe* (Bauhaus Staircase), Figure 11. Author Jonathan Jones wrote about this image: "Schlemmer's painting is more elegiac, looking back at the Bauhaus as a utopia rooted in everyday life: these are ordinary, modern young people, hair and clothes in contemporary fashions, walking purposefully, intently; they believe in what they are doing. They have the rounded, simplified, geometrical bodies that Schlemmer created in his ballets, as they ascend to the higher state of modern marionettes."[54] In its totality, *Bauhaustreppe* has been described as "an extraordinary synthesis of his work as a choreographer, easel and wall-painter and theoretician."[55] The painting has received considerable scholarship due to its exemplary integration of Schlemmer's utopian pursuits through the utilization of his distinct figural style. *Bauhaustreppe* additionally serves to commemorate daily life at the Bauhaus; a contemplative, idealized conception of the main stairway in the Dessau building and its inhabitants.[56] The figures appear with their backs to the viewer; a depersonalized approach that prevents any explicit identification, signifying their universal presence. The vertical orientation of *Bauhaustreppe* recalls writings on composition by Bauhaus colleague and

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[53] John-Paul Stonard, "Oskar Schlemmer's 'Bauhaustreppe', 1932: Part II." *The Burlington Magazine* 152, no. 1290, 2010, pg. 601.
[54] Jonathan Jones, "The Bauhaus Stairway, Oskar Schlemmer (1932)." *The Guardian.* Guardian News and Media, October 12, 2002. https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/oct/12/art.
[55] John-Paul Stonard, "Oskar Schlemmer's 'Bauhaustreppe', 1932: Part I." *The Burlington Magazine* 151, no. 1276, 2009, pg. 456.
[56] Ibid.

utopian visionary, Wassily Kandinsky. In Kandinsky's 1926 book, *Point and Line to Plane*, he analyzes the dynamics of painting that further spiritual and utopian ideals, writing that "the attainment of elementary harmony in every form of art"[57] could be achieved through "elements tending upwards … in the vertical format."[58]

The Triadic Ballet costumes by Oskar Schlemmer are the most enduring vehicle for his utopian visions of totality, as well as the most fully realized example of his interest in reconciling polarities in the visual arts.[59] The extensive history of the androgyne in Germany, advocated by Winckelmann, provided a point of departure for the evolution of the New Woman and New Man in the radically altered post-war perspective of sexuality and gender in the Weimar Republic. Oskar Schlemmer engaged with these attitudes through his work at the Bauhaus as an instructor, through which he solidified his fixation on the human form and its transformative properties with the Triadic Ballet, later translating these tenets into his triumph of painting, *Bauhaustreppe*. These "modern marionettes," repeatedly generated by Oskar Schlemmer throughout his life, inform research into a synthesis of opposites such as machine and nature, abstraction and figuration, and masculinity and femininity—conflicting dualities that continue to inform debates in the sphere of culture and visual production today.

[57] Wassily Kandinsky. *Point and Line to Plane: Contribution to the Analysis of the Pictorial Elements.* New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1947, pg. 38.
[58] Ibid, pg. 126.
[59] Susanne Lahusen, "Oskar Schlemmer: Mechanical Ballets?" *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 4, no. 2, 1986, pg. 67.

Illustrations

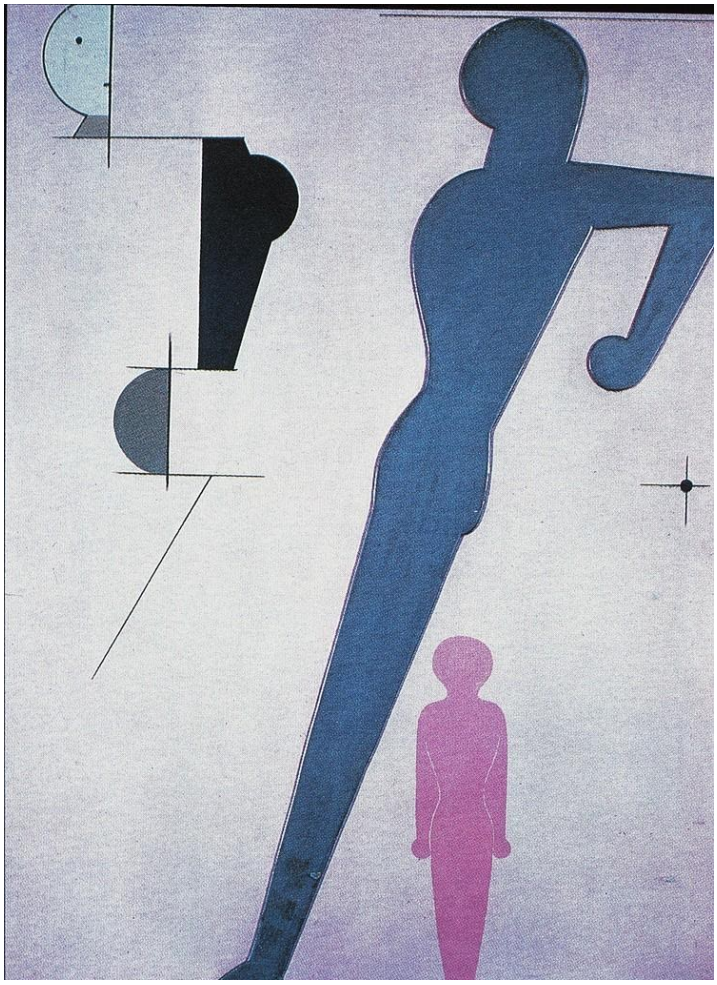

Figure 1. Oskar Schlemmer, *Composition on Pink Ground* (2nd Version), 1930, 51 1/8x38 in., University of California, San Diego.

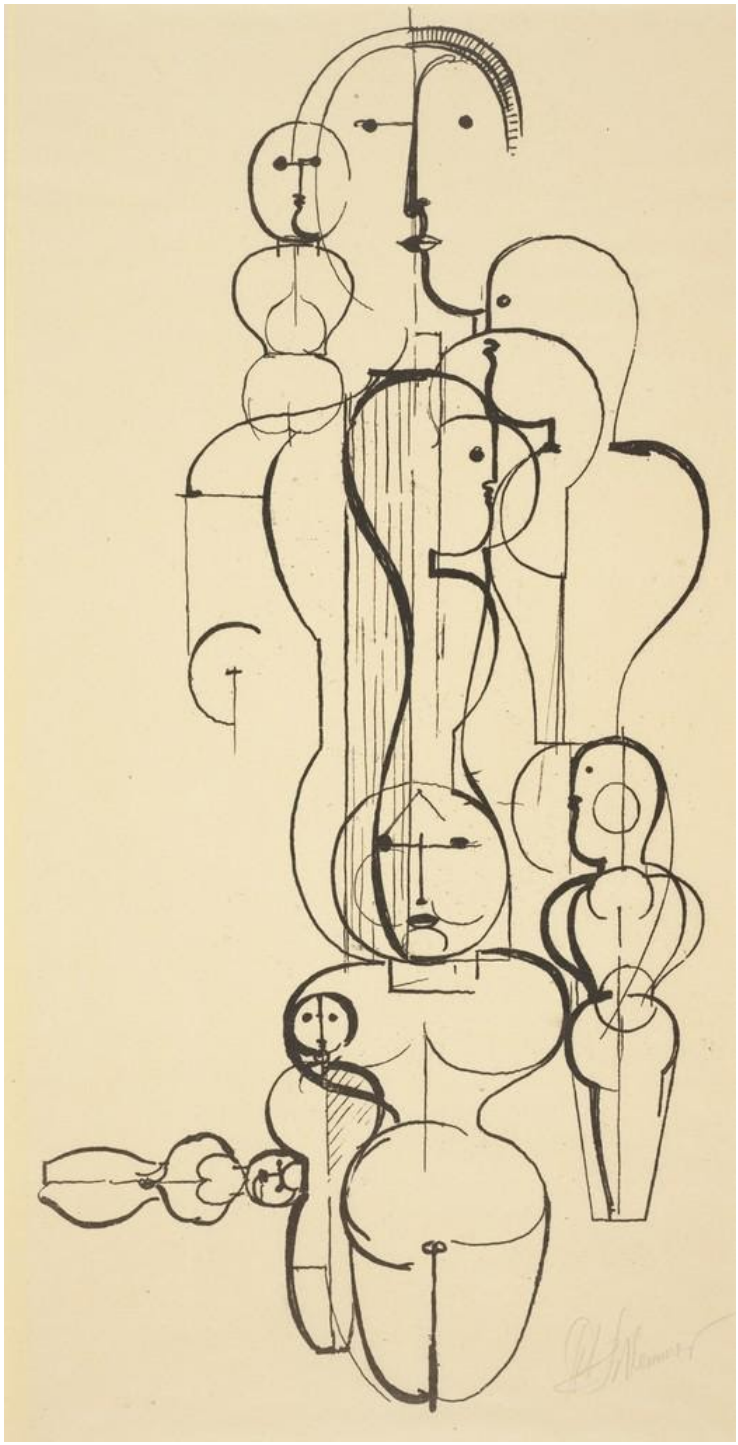

Figure 2. Oskar Schlemmer, *Figural Plan K 1* (Figurenplan K 1), 1921, 16 3/8 x 8 1/4 in., Dallas Museum of Art.

Figure 3. Oskar Schlemmer, *Triadic Ballet/Set Design*, 1922, University of California, San Diego.

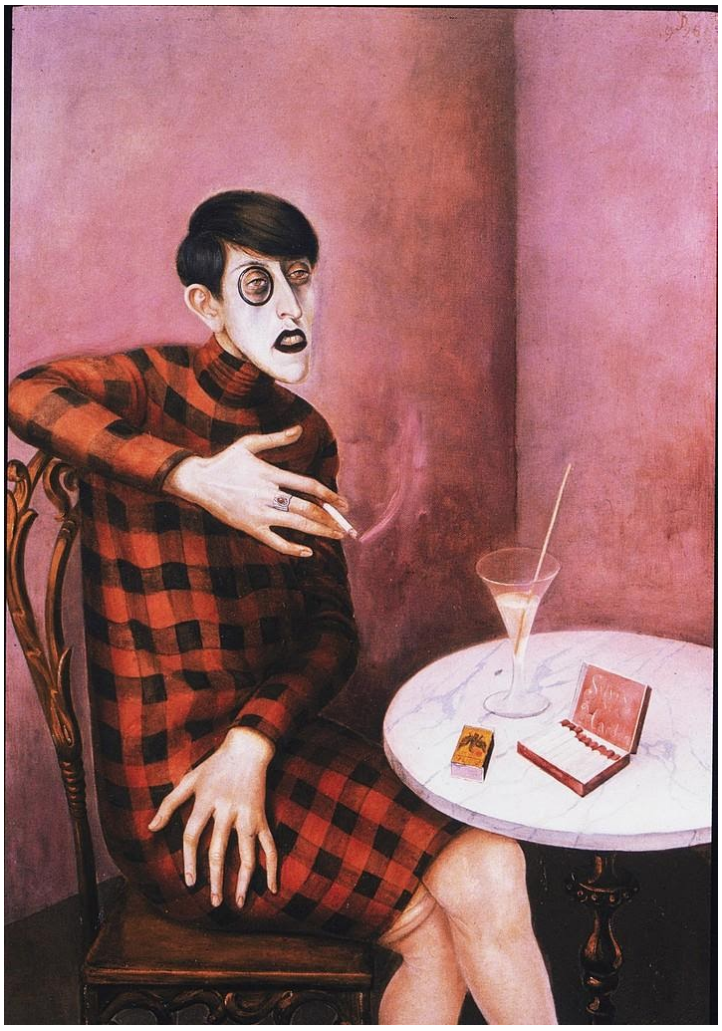

Figure 4. Otto Dix, *Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia von Harden*, 1926, oil on wood, 4′0″ x 2′ 11″, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

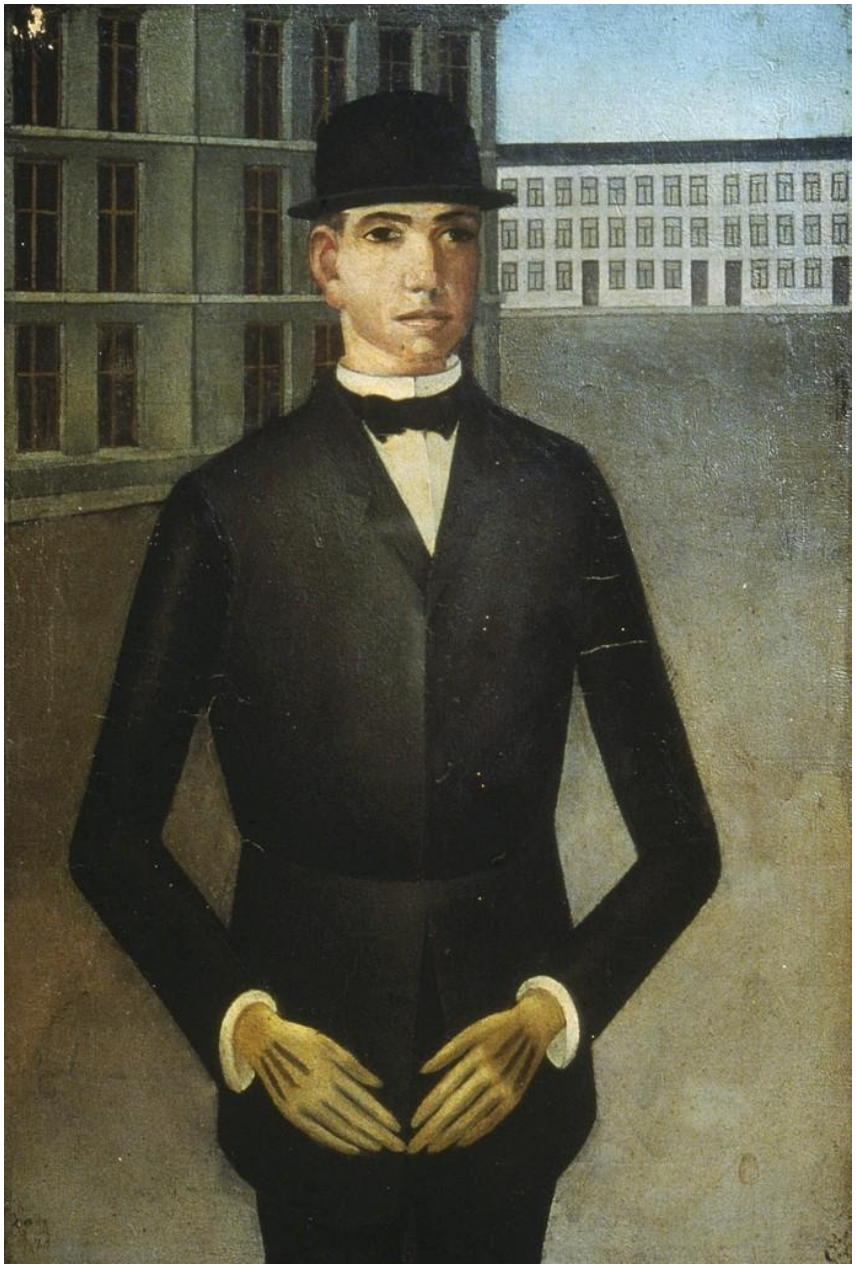

Figure 5. Anton Raderscjeidt, *Young Man with Yellow Gloves*, 1921, oil on wood, 10.6 x 7.3 in., private collection.

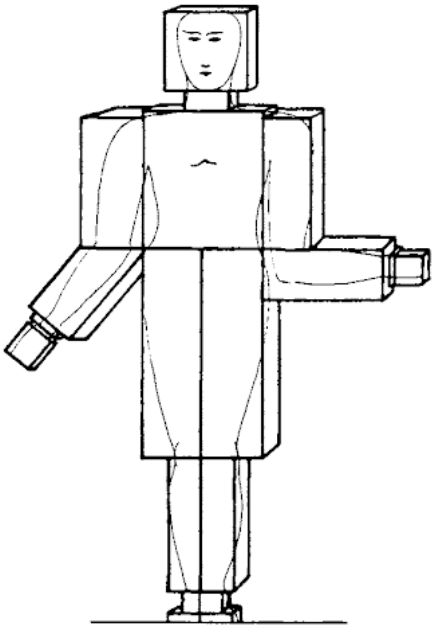

Figure 6. Oskar Schlemmer, drawing from "Man and Art Figure," 1921, *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*.

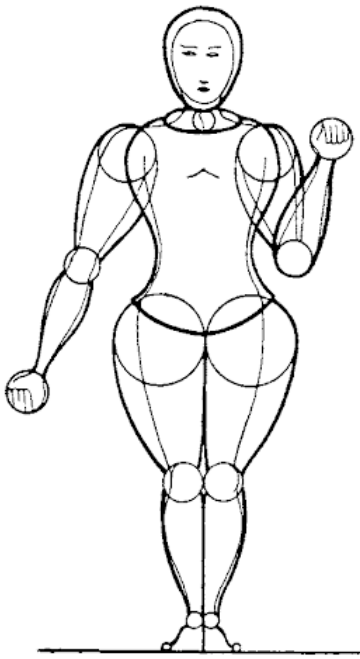

Figure 7. Oskar Schlemmer, drawing from "Man and Art Figure," 1921, *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*.

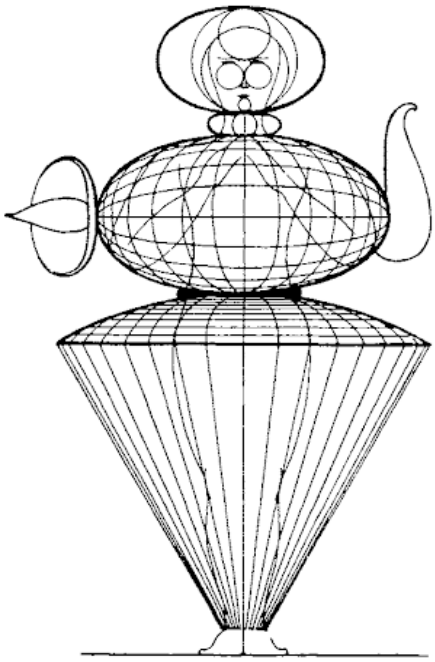

Figure 8. Oskar Schlemmer, drawing from “Man and Art Figure,” 1921, *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*.

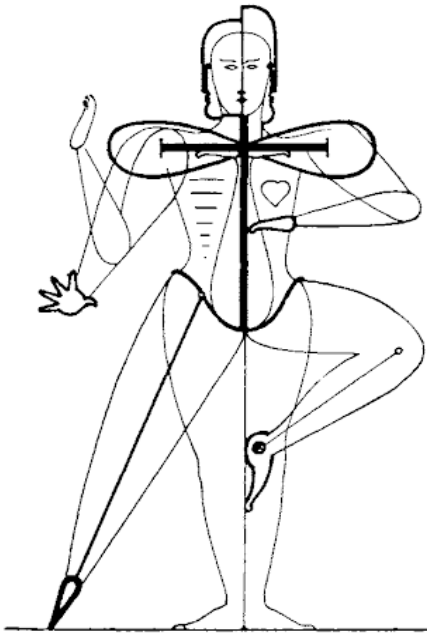

Figure 9. Oskar Schlemmer, drawing from “Man and Art Figure,” 1921, *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*.

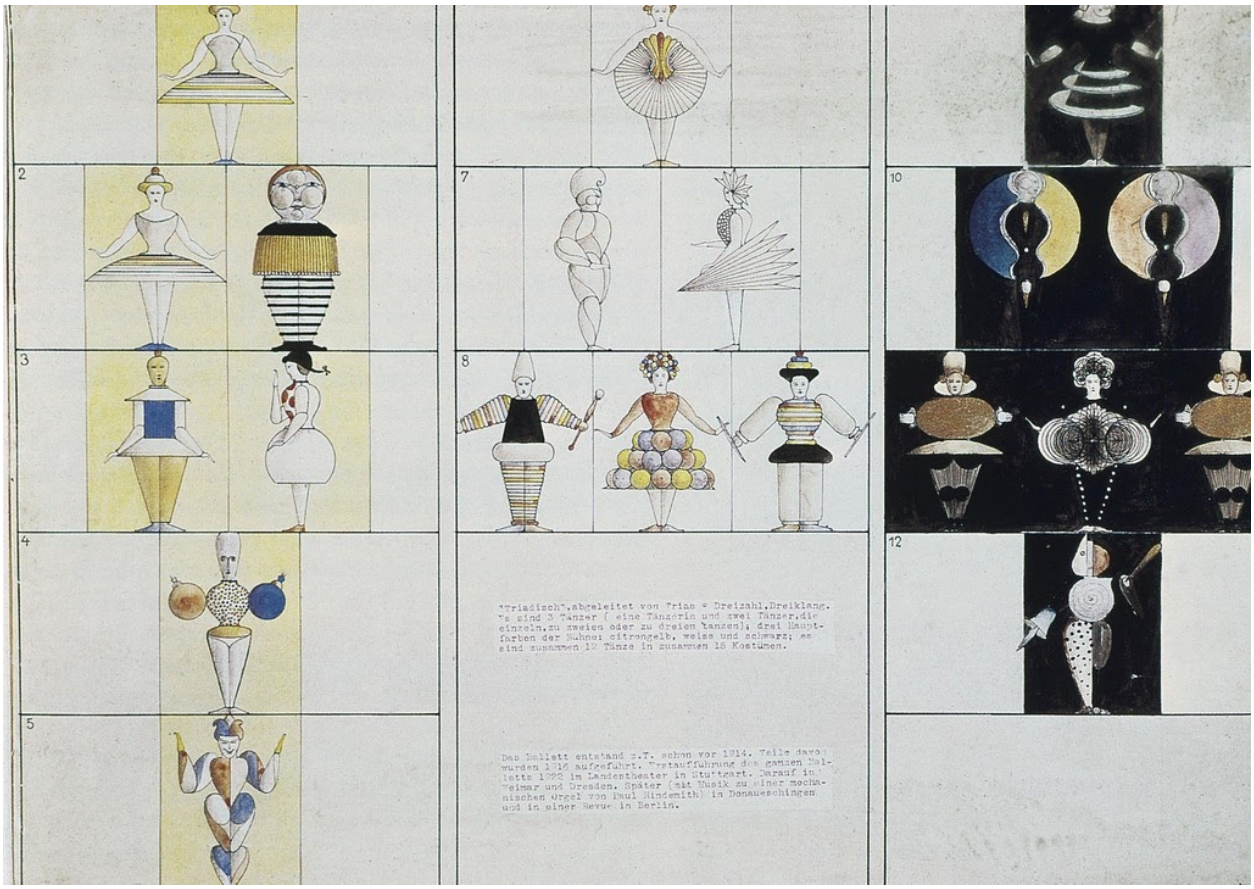

Figure 10. Oskar Schlemmer, *Triadic Ballet: studies for set and costume design*, 1922.

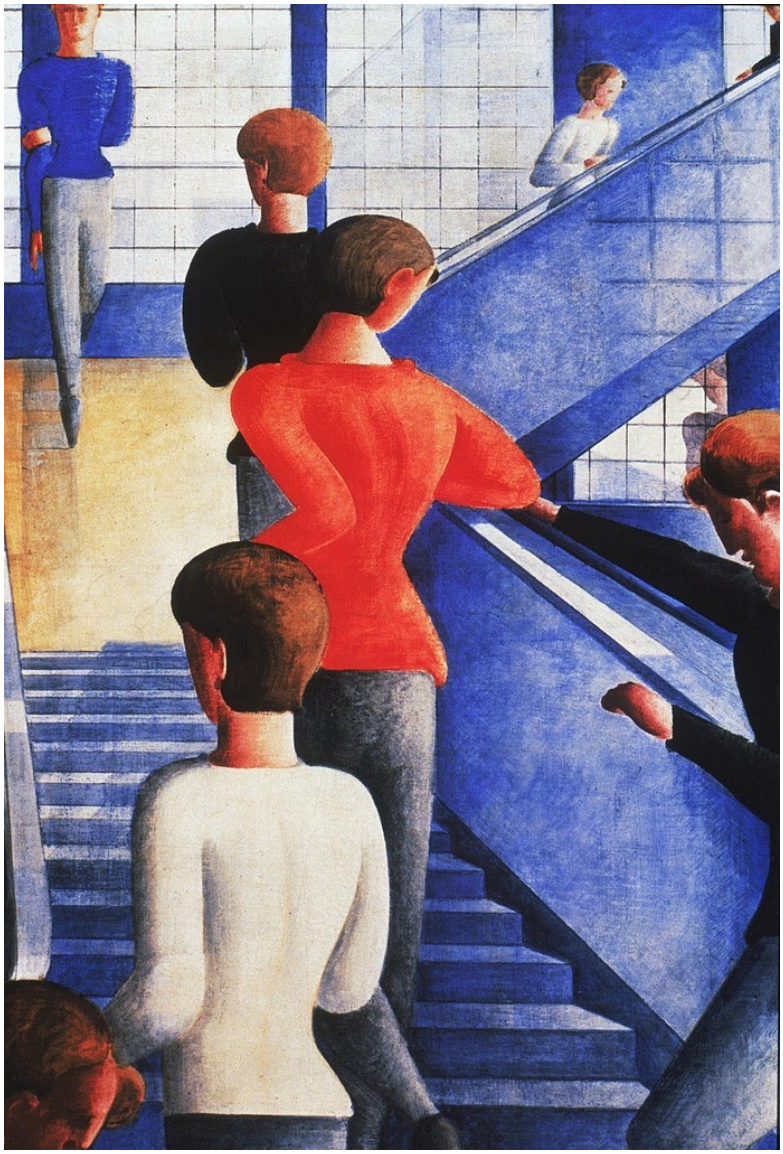

Figure 11. Oskar Schlemmer, Bauhaus Staircase (*Bauhaustreppe*), 1932, oil on canvas, 64 x 41 in., Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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