

Revising Oscar Schlemmer's Concept of Dance

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I. Introduction

To specialists, the name Schlemmer evokes immediate recognition but equally frank acknowledgment of only limited awareness of this artist's virtuosity and influence.¹⁾ Born in Stuttgart Germany, Oskar Schlemmer (1888-1943), best known as a visual artist and a teaching professional at the Bauhaus, was also an important pioneer in the field of dance.

Through his dance works, he opened up new choreographic possibilities in the early twentieth century by inventing a unique non-literal dance style and incorporating everyday-life movements into his dance vocabulary. Schlemmer's principal endeavors and contributions range from the exploration of the relationship between dancer and space and the transformation of the

1) Arnold L Lehman & Brenda Richardson, eds.(1986). *Oskar Schlemmer* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art), p. 9.

human form through masks and costumes, to elevating the use of theatrical elements in his works to a role that was equal in prominence to that of the dance itself. Although forgotten for nearly a half century after his works were condemned by the Nazi regime as Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art) and discontinued, the trail of many of his innovations and experiments are found again in the works of contemporary choreographers. In several respects, it is appropriate to attest that Schlemmer was a forgotten genius who laid a cornerstone for the American avant-garde and post-modern dance movement.²⁾

However, he remained little known in comparison to the international fame and reputation of many of his colleague from the Bauhaus era and his contemporary German choreographers. There has been intermittent research on Schlemmer but most simply described or introduced his work, or noted his name briefly while describing the general socio-cultural currents of the early twentieth century.

This study is inspired by two related areas of neglect concerning Schlemmer's choreographic career. First is an apparent lack of awareness of the extent of Schlemmer's true contributions to the dance world, second is a critical controversy surrounding both Schlemmer's dance and the interpretation of its core concept: the transformation of the human form in space, which has often been, and still is in many ways, mischaracterized as dehumanization or mechanization. Reconstructions of Schlemmer's dance during last four decades³⁾ and recent reviews of reconstruction on

2) Debra McCall(1986). *Reconstructing Schlemmer's Bauhaus Dances: A Personal Narrative*, Oskar Schlemmer, eds. Arnold L. Lehman & Brenda Richardson (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art) p.149.

3) In the late 1960s, British scholar Margarete Hasting reconstructed a portion of Schlemmer's most famous work, *The Triadic Ballet* and *Man and Mask*. The German choreographer, Gerhard Bohner, choreographed *The Triadic Ballet* based on Schlemmer's *The Triadic Ballet* in the 1970s. American Dance historian and dancer, Debra Mccall reconstructed Shclemmer's *Bauhaus Dance* in 1984. In the 1990s, attempts to reconstruct Schlemmer's dance works have continued among European choreographers and educators.

Schlemmer's dance which have been favorable suggest to examine earlier reviews of Schlemmer's dance. It is especially important to clarify Schlemmer's concept of the transformation of human form, as there has been a great deal of confusion and even misrepresentation as to what he meant and how this was revealed in his choreography. Thus this study is focused on clarifying Schlemmer's ideas and dispelling the misconceptions surrounding them by examining background of misunderstanding on Schlemmer's concept and works.

II. Negative Assessments and Past Studies on Schlemmer

Although Schlemmer started his artistic career as a painter, Schlemmer had dedicated much time to the questions of dance and devoted equal amount of effort in dance until his death. Between 1916 and 1922, he had developed The Triadic Ballet (Fig. 1), a plotless costume play in which the essential features of geometrically stylized body attire defined the dance. The range and depth of his interest in dance and theater became wider and deeper as he became the director of the Bauhaus Theater in 1923.⁴⁾ Through his theater workshop at the Bauhaus, Schlemmer created unique style of dance works called the Bauhaus Dances. His works were invited to many important venues including German Dance Congress and International Music Festivals and even won 3rd place in Modern Ballet competition in Paris in 1932.

While Schlemmer's dance works were appreciated by many of his contemporary avant-garde artistic practitioners, the critics were quite antipathetic. In 1929, for instance, the Frankfurt theater critic Bruno Reifenberg

4) Schlemmer joined the Bauhaus in 1920 as a form master. He joined he Bauhaus at the age of 32 and spent the next nine years from 1921 to 1929 as a member of the organization

condemned Schlemmer's art as meaningless experimentation, comparable to a pianist's finger exercise.⁵⁾ He also protested that Schlemmer's dances were nothing but empty formalism of a tedious display of plot-less scenes:

Who cares about a space in which cubes roll about instead of a human figure? We could try to endow the hoops, circles, and rods with the appearance of life, but we refuse to. We are fed up with having the "ABC of walking and running," explained to us when it's already clear how well we walk and run together when we know where we're going and why.⁶⁾

In 1931, Ernst Kállai denigrated Schlemmer's Raumtanz (Space Dance): "[It] is nothing but a structural arrangement of the stage...[and his dancer] might become merely a puppet completely subordinate to the mechanics of space."⁷⁾

More recently in 1966, Rudolph Arnheim pointed out the mechanical aspect of Schlemmer's The Triadic Ballet, in line with the design of Bauhaus, stating:

...Pure functionalism does not eliminate the need of stylistic choice...Nor does a reduction to simplest shape produce pure functionality. In the furniture and implement designed at the Bauhaus, we discover by now a preference for elementary geometry, not derived from function but dictated by the character of its makers and more directly expressed perhaps in Feininger's and Klee's Cubism or Schlemmer's 'Mechanical Ballet' of human robots.⁸⁾

Hermann G. Scheffauer also writes on Schlemmer's "mechanical" ballets in 1926, citing Schlemmer's essay directly. He defines these ballets, as those in which "rude conventionalized marionettes"⁹⁾ instead of men performed.

5) Bruno Reifenberg(1929). The Performance of the Bauhaus Stage Dessau, *Frankfurt Zeitung* Apr No.296, 22, April.

6) Ibid.

7) Ernst Kállai(1990). Between Ritual and Cabaret, *Schriftanz: A View of German Dance in The Weimar Republic*, eds. Valerie Preston-Dunlop & Susanne Lahusen (London: Dance Books Ltd.) p. 17.

8) Rudolph Arnheim(1966), From Functionalism to Expressionism, *Towards a Psychology of Art* (Berkeley, University of California), p. 196.

9) Hermann G. Scheffauer(1926), Berlin: Newest Ballets Scorn the Merely Human Form, Bauhaus Movement in Germany Gets Exotic and Colorful Effect with Mechanical and Triadic Figures. *New York Times Magazine*, (4 July), p. 22.

Numerous literatures on dance history acknowledge the influence of German expressionist choreographers such as Rudolf von Laban, Mary Wigman and Hanya Holm in the development of American modern dance. Yet, although dance scholars have studied and further developed Laban's theory of space, Schlemmer's theory of "man in space", which defines the relationship between the dancer and space, is seldom mentioned in these accounts. In American dance scholarship, Schlemmer's choreography has been represented simply as an example of a general trend: the mechanistic representation of human form.

Lincoln Kirstein, founder of New York City Ballet and who has long been acknowledged as one of the most important influences in the development of American culture in the 20th century, also criticized The Triadic Ballet in 1970. This work's "contribution by or to dance was nugatory," wrote Kirstein, "but the work is significant as a now familiar statement of dehumanization, with bankrupt choreography replaced by costume as a décor. Dancers were pieces on a metaphysical board without personality or virtuosity."¹⁰⁾

Water Sorrel introduced Schlemmer's interest in the 'man in space' in his book Dance in Its Time, yet he also defined Schlemmer's works mechanical:

His dances were creations of his imagination, sexless figures or eternal types of human moving like mechanical puppets in a variety of moods through space. He metamorphosed the Tänzer Mensch (man as a dancer) into the mechanical human figure he called Kunstfigur. He saw with the eyes of a painter, and his dance theater was a non-dancer's attempt to eliminate all literary and emotional aspects of stage movement and to rely on plastic images within geometric patterns.¹¹⁾

10) Lincoln Kirstein(1984), *Abstract Ballet: Costume as Décor*, *Four Centuries of Ballet* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.), p. 214.

11) Walter Sorell(1981), *Dance in Its Time* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 381.

III. Recent Shifts in the Evaluation on Schlemmer

Recent critical interest in Schlemmer's works dates from the 1980's when Schlemmer's reconstructed dance works started to be introduced to the American audience.¹²⁾ Nevertheless, the responses on these works were enthusiastic. To name a few, Jack Anderson, The New York Times dance critic, saw "The Triadic Ballet" reconstruction in 1985 and called it "is considered a forerunner of today's mixed media theater."¹³⁾ Anna Kisselgoff, a former chief critic of The New York Times, wrote that "Oskar Schlemmer's idea allowed him to foresee that dance would be the performing art most open to the new in the 20th century."¹⁴⁾

Schlemmer is starting to get a fresh attention in the academic aspect as well. In Suzanne K. Walther's The Dance of Death: Kurt Jooss and the Weimar Years, which provides a deep understanding of the new dance movement in post-war Germany, she asserts the importance of Schlemmer's dance amongst his contemporaries, calling Schlemmer "an important link between avant-garde art and what later became the German modern dance."¹⁵⁾

McCall insisted on the connection between Schlemmer's experimental innovative choreographic practice and American dance works. She credits Schlemmer as an avant-garde precursor to modern, post-modern and performance. McCall extends Schlemmer's influence to such American late modern dancers as Merce Cunningham, Alwin Nikolais, Judson members, and

12) Debra McCall's reconstruction of "The Bauhaus Dances" was performed at the Kitchen in 1982. Revised reconstruction was performed at the Guggenheim in 1984. Gerhard Bohner's "The Triadic Ballet" was presented at the Joyce Theater in 1985.

13) Jack Anderson(1985), West German Dance: Faddism and Hippos, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 21, November, p.8.

14) Anna Kisselgoff(1984), The Bauhaus Works were Prophetic, *The New York Times*, 29 January p.14 (H).

15) Susanne K. Walther(1994), *The Dance of Death: Kurt Joosse and the Weimar Years*. (Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH), p. 18.

even multi-media artists Meredith Monk and Laurie Anderson.¹⁶⁾

Although it is clear the critical assessment of Schlemmer's significance is beginning to be shifted dramatically in recent years, the interpretation of his choreographic concept of man still remains controversial and many critics continue to mislabel Schlemmer's choreography as dehumanizing or mechanizing.

For example, in a survey of dance and ballet appearing in the 1980's, Susan Au emphasized the mechanical aspects of Schlemmer's choreography. In 1988, she wrote in Ballet and Modern Dance, "Schlemmer aimed at representing universal, idealized forms in his choreography as well as his art." She noted:

The dancers in *The Triadic Ballet* emerge as depersonalized, occasionally dehumanized figures... The dancers often resemble articulated dolls or puppets, a quality heightened by the simple, often repetitive movements and lack of emotional interaction.¹⁷⁾

In 1991, Tharandt B Elisabeth referred to a part of Schlemmer's essay "Theater (Bühne)" in her dissertation stating "The idea of eliminating the human being from the stage by advancing mechanization became a primary issue in Schlemmer's theatrical creation."¹⁸⁾

Other contemporary critics tend to respond similarly. In the article, "Epilogue: Repeatability, Reconstruction, and Beyond," Mark Franko suggested in 1993 that "Schlemmer focused on the issue of autonomy, and was fascinated with the idea of the dancer and/or actor as machine, and with the automization of the body."¹⁹⁾ Furthermore, he pointed out that the

16) Debra McCall(1986), p. 149.

17) Susan Au(1988), *Ballet and Modern Dance* (New York: Thames and Hudson Ltd.), p. 115.

18) Tharandt B Elisabeth (1991), *Walter Gropius, Total Theater revisited*, (Ph. D. dissertation, South Illinois University), p. 47.

19) Mark Franko(1993), *Dance as Text: ideologies of the Baroque Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 8.

photographs and descriptions of Schlemmer's costumes suggest complete dehumanization and therefore, Schlemmer's work is thought to mechanize the human being.

Karl Toepfer devotes some coverage in *Empire of Ecstasy*, a 1997 publication, to the subject of the Bauhaus experimentation. Even though he reports that *The Triadic Ballet* was well known throughout Europe in the 1920's, Toepfer believes that Schlemmer's greatest contribution lay not in producing any particular piece but in rethinking the process by which dance does its work. Toepfer states that Schlemmer's thinking about bodily movement was neither precise nor innovative, and his work was entirely dependent on the visual context, the scenic design. He concludes, "[Schlemmer's] dance became a play of forms, an activation of space that ultimately needed no bodies, no dancers. It was the image of a machine-doll."²⁰⁾

When we compare these comments to the more recent reviews above, we can see that the critical response to Schlemmer's work has shifted. Still, the interpretation of Schlemmer's choreographic concept of man is a controversial matter. Both then and now, some critics have interpreted Schlemmer's dance as dehumanizing or mechanizing. Despite recent shifts, as these relatively recent examples illustrate, the overall critical response to Schlemmer's dance remains close to the opinions previously mentioned, those are based on seriously biased study and interpretation of his work.

IV. Background of the Misinterpretation of Schlemmer's Concept and Works

Why Schlemmer and his works have been persistently misunderstood?

20) Karl Toepfer(1977), *Empire of Ecstasy* (Berkeley: University of California Press), p.145.

First, Schlemmer has been mistakenly associated with some of his contemporaries, such as the Italian Futurists and Russian Constructivists who were intrigued by the idea of the machine representing the human being mechanically in many art forms—painting, sculpture, and film, and by the same token, interest in the machine and its impact in industrial society became a subject for dance. Many ballet pieces such as Coppelia, that features a mechanical doll coming to life, focused on the representation of the marionette or depersonalized human forms. Especially, Schlemmer’s representation of the human form has often been compared to that of one contemporary, Fernand Léger’s film Ballet Mechanical (1924), who held the utopian belief that the machine would improve human existence and that man and machine could be happily united.

But Schlemmer himself denied any similarity between his work and Léger’s, and disputed the suggestion that dehumanization or mechanization²¹⁾ was a basis for his choreography.²²⁾ The term “mechanistic” or “mechanical” also played a major role in creating the misunderstanding of Schlemmer’s work. “Mechanical dancers” was the term Schlemmer used to describe the figures of The Triadic Ballet.” In “Misunderstandings: a Reply to Kállais,” Schlemmer’s attempts to clear up Kállais’s misunderstanding of *Raumtanz*

21) The term “dehumanization” is the restriction or denial of free play to those qualities, thoughts, and activities, which are characteristically human. Today the term is widely used in connection with those mechanical, repetitive, assembly line tasks, which reduce the performers to the level of components in a machine. Alan Bullock & Stephen Trombley eds (1988)., *The Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers), p. 209.

22) Schlemmer confessed his dislike toward Léger’s style in his diary: As to Léger, and the similarity. A confession: not conscious, since my attitude toward him is more negative than otherwise. I would say it is more a question of lapidary style. I was surprised to see this cropping up in France, also. Something else, but also similar, then appeared in Italy—irrational—mysterious. Oskar Schlemmer(1972), *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*. ed. Tut Schlemmer, trans. Krishna Winston (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), p. 157.

(Space Dance), he states:

The greatest misunderstandings were created by the terms “mechanical” or “mechanistic”. “Mechanical dancers” was the cheap slogan used to describe the figurines of the Triadic Ballet. However “mechanical dancers” have quite a different nature from these figurines. They could once be seen in cabaret and various other parts of machinery.²³⁾

Schlemmer points out Kállais’s preconceptions, and his attachment to the prevailing notion of the theater. Further, he explains and defends his works, and rejects the “mechanization” label pasted onto him and his work. It is here that we obtain proof directly from the primary source that the identification of Schlemmer with Léger and other artists exploring the machine analogy was a mistake from the very beginning.

Politics within the Bauhaus was another key factor that bound Schlemmer with all these groups. His position as a Form Master at the Bauhaus involved him in many administrative aspects of the institution. Moreover, because Schlemmer was a talented writer, a lot of manifestos and statements of the Bauhaus came into being through his hand, which can be accounted for as the second reason that Schlemmer was mistakenly understood. It is enough to note that aside from his diary and letters, most of Schlemmer’s writings were published under the name of the Bauhaus, and they represent the ideals of the institution, not of Schlemmer.²⁴⁾ Regardless of the director or the political and artistic tendency of the school, the Bauhaus struggled for financial and political support throughout its existence. Each director had to steer the course of the Bauhaus in such a way as to acquire support from external sources and

23) Oskar Schlemmer (1990), *Misunderstandings: a Reply to Kállai*, *Schriftanz: A View of German Dance in The Weimar Republic*, Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Susanne Lahusen eds. (London: Dance Books Ltd.), 19.

24) Schlemmer fully devoted himself to Bauhaus throughout his stay until his resignation in 1929. However, Schlemmer continually articulated skepticism about the director, aim, and situation of the school through his diaries.

it was usually Schlemmer who was appointed as the writer of the new programs and statements of the reformed institution. Also as a mediator who wished to resolve the continuous polarizations among influential faculties and to establish a more united force behind the existence and success of the Bauhaus, Schlemmer often suggested the best possible way to solve a situation, regardless of his personal preference. For example, it is also a well-known fact that the famous slogan of the Bauhaus Exhibition in 1923, ‘Art and Technology: the New Unity’ was originally suggested by Schlemmer. Schlemmer wrote the manifesto for this, and he also made a major contribution to the exhibition. Elaine S. Hochman clearly defines the background to the slogan:

The issue of fine art versus industrial design became the central issue of the Bauhaus in the year of 1923. ‘Schlemmer suggested that the Bauhaus’s entire program be changed to better reflect the school’s new “level-headed and dispassionate” character. His recommendation would culminate in the resounding reformulation of the Bauhaus’s program as ‘Art and Technology: The New Unity.’²⁵⁾

Then-director Gropius’ goal of bridging the gap between artists and technology led to “Art and Technology: the New Unity” becoming the new slogan for the Bauhaus at this time. This does not necessarily mean that Schlemmer’s own thinking and work were dominated by the ‘unity of art and technology’ and it should not be overlooked that Schlemmer himself questioned the very nature of the Exhibition. Hochman’s writing again explains this situation very clearly:

However, his [Schlemmer’s] idea was not fully fit into Gropius’ plan. The artists were less than thrilled with the idea of being associated with a school whose goal was to make money. Schlemmer thought it “dreadful.” Schlemmer, who expressed the feelings of the artistic faculty, believed that

25) Elaine S. Hochman(1997). *Bauhaus: Crucible of Modernism* (New York: Fromm International), p. 138.

artists should worry about making good art, not about whether or not it would sell. He wondered why artists should try to do something that engineers did better.²⁶⁾

It is very tempting to associate Schlemmer's geometric costumes which concealed the live dancers, and thereby appeared to dominate Schlemmer's stage with the slogan, art and technology. But given an understanding of the practical and political motivations behind the slogan as well as the role in the school that made Schlemmer feel compelled to play for the good of the institution, it becomes clear that such an association is ill-conceived.

Third reason is there have been little access to his dances, and thus little opportunity for us to experience them firsthand and respond appropriately. Many artists of Schlemmer's time, especially those from the Bauhaus, took refuge in other countries after Hitler came to power and continued their work outside Germany. Schlemmer, however, remained in Germany and his choreographic activity came to a complete halt. His dances were no longer seen and were not spoken of by the general public for over thirty years afterwards. In the evaluation of an artist, it is critical to investigate how his or her theories and ideas have been realized in the person's own works. But it is quite problematic in Schlemmer's case for although his drawings and writings can easily be found, the dances have been practically lost since the Nazis categorized his works as Entartete Kunst ("Degenerate Art") in 1937. The loss of the original works has contributed to the misunderstandings surrounding Schlemmer's choreography because most research has relied on older documents describing his works—and these very documents were typically characterized by insufficient understanding of his works and concepts.

The last reason, as Schlemmer himself did not expect to be fully appreciated in his time, sensing that his abstract style might be too avant-garde for the

26) Ibid., p. 139.

dance world of the time, he wrote in 1931:

There is no doubt that our present time is averse to experiment. Nevertheless, what second approach should not be neglected. When the impulse is strong, when it springs from inner necessity and it is not merely an extravagant passing fashion, only then is it alive and the exact time of its realization does not matter. For what else is the meaning of experiment if not the next step into the future?²⁷⁾

Careful readers would have found that there is a 35-year gap between the writing of Kállais' and Arnheims' in the series of criticisms chronologically listed above. It was only after the 1960s that renewed interest in Schlemmer's dance started to emerge, which is apparent in the reconstructions of his dances that were undertaken at that time. These reconstructions and new critical writings are evidences that his ideas have a lasting relevance.

The shift in the recent criticism of Schlemmer's work has begun to open the door to a more accurate understanding and appreciation of his concepts and innovations. Kisselgoff writes:

The props and forms manipulated there by the dancers [in *The Triadic Ballet*] were meant to suggest a new vision of the man -- not a mechanistic dehumanized figure but an abstraction of man.²⁸⁾

Jowitt supports a view of Schlemmer's work as transformative:

"Working in different decades of this century, Loïe Fuller, Oskar Schlemmer, Alwin Nikolais, Mummenchanz, and Pilobolus have all made transformation an important part of their art."²⁹⁾

27) Osakr Schlemmer(1990), p. 20.

28) Anna Kisselgoff(1982). *The Dance: 6 Works Based on Schlemmer's Art*, *The New York Times*, 1 November.

29) Deborah Jowitt(1988). *Time and the Dancing Image* (Los Angeles: University of California Press), p.342.

V. Schlemmer's Concept of Dance as Transformation of Human Form

According to his diary and many other writings, Schlemmer continuously stressed the importance of transformation. Schlemmer wrote, “The history of theater was the history of the transfiguration of human form.”³⁰⁾ This sentence is an important point of departure for his fundamental theories on dance.

Although transformation was already a popular theme among theater directors of the time, his idea of it, which focused on interaction or process, did not find a ready audience in post WWI Europe, where immediate results and solid objectives were highly valued. Everyone in Schlemmer's time cried out for a new form of art—as did Schlemmer himself. In a time of increasing dehumanization, Schlemmer who believed the new man was born through spiritual rebirth felt the need to conceive of and realize a vision of spiritual rebirth in his work. Unlike the Dadaists who called for a new human being to change society or the Bauhaus members who wanted society to change first and by changing bring a new type of human being into existence, Schlemmer's vision called for man and society to find a symbiotic, interactive rebirth. He interpreted society as an environment that surrounds man, which is metaphorically related to the theater, where the stage is considered as an environment that surrounds man as artist. As he has shown in his dances, this concept played out: when the dancer (man) moves through space, the stage space (society) changes. When the law of space affects man, man changes accordingly. This was not a dichotomy of man and space, as generally conceived as so many people of Schlemmer's time looked at the new man and new society. Instead, the intention was to depict man in space, as a unified

30) Oskar Schlemmer(1961), Man and Art Figure, *The Theater of the Bauhaus* ed. Walter Gropius, (trans. Arthur Wensinger) (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press), p. 17.

system, interacting in equilibrium.

For Schlemmer, dance was the best medium through which to unfold such a concept, since it allowed him to utilize every available element of performing art and technology towards a visual realization of it. In search of the true meaning of man, Schlemmer emphasized the importance of going back to the basics, to the stage which again, was in the same line of his search for a new symbol of the time. He wrote in his diary:

We moderns lack the great symbols and beliefs of the old masters because we live in a period of decay, shifting values and, it is to be hoped, of renewal; what else can we do but remain simple and straightforward...³¹⁾

Investigation on man continues through his entire artistic career, but the most concise and integrated concept of it is found in his teaching note for a course entitled ‘Man’,

which later became a valuable source in comprehending his vision of man.

It is essential for the “new life,” which should express itself as a modern feeling about the world and life, that man should be understood as a cosmic being. His conditions of existence, his relationship with the natural and artificial environment, his mechanism and organism, his material, spiritual being is a necessary and important subject of instruction.³²⁾

Such statements, which reveal Schlemmer’s long-held view of the human being as a cosmic being as a trinity of mind, nature and soul, seem utterly inconsistent with the notion that Schlemmer’s work would focus on dehumanization or mechanization.

While he was viewing man as cosmic being, Schlemmer defined man as Tänzer Mensch, (man as dancer). Schlemmer insisted: My themes--the human figure in space, its moving and stationary functions, sitting, lying, walking,

31) Tut Schlemmer, ed.(1972) *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*. (trans. Krishna Winston) (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), p. 272.

32) Heimo Kuchling, ed.(1971). *Oskar Schlemmer, Man: Teaching Notes from the Bauhaus*, (trans. Janet Seligman) (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press), p. 25.

standing—are as simple as they are universally valid.³³⁾ In other word, man for him is moving figure in space. Again, there is an organic association between man and his surrounding space. The space is no more than an empty void unless a human being is in there and the space starts to have its meaning only when there is an interaction with the human being in it.

For Schlemmer when man, a dancer, was on stage, he or she became an artificial figure, in other words, a man transformed into another being. In Schlemmer’s view, Man must himself be transformed in order to transform his environment. To express this view on the stage he used costumes and masks, as an immediate visual indication of man transformed. In another writing he specifies the need for a costume that reflects his definition of dance:

Since the dance is a matter of the body as well as of space, and movement in space, the structural principles of these factors are decisive in the metamorphosis of the dancer through costume.³⁴⁾

In this light, the starting point for the conceptual formation of the costume was a question of where the transformation had begun. Schlemmer’s lifelong assertion was the inevitableness of man, regardless of the technological or scientific advances, and standing at the center of his quest was always man, the human figure. He stated:

I never created a ‘mechanical Ballet’, even though it might be tempting to construct mechanically controlled dancing figures and scenery. Such a relatively restricted scope of movement, however, would not justify the high cost of machinery. Even the mechanics of the puppet are relative, as the puppet is not an automaton as E.T.A Hoffman’s Olympia is, but is moved by the human hand. The puppets of the Figural Cabinet are moved and carried by masked dancers: man, therefore, always plays a part.³⁵⁾

Schlemmer pointed out: “Everything which can be mechanized is

33) Tut Schlemmer, ed.(1972), p. 361.

34) Debra McCall(1986), p.150.

35) Osakr Schlemmer(1990), p. 19.

mechanized. The result: our recognition of that which can not be mechanized.”³⁶⁾ Strangely enough, this statement has not received any attention from other researchers before. Nevertheless, it represents important evidence that Schlemmer’s focus was on the aspect of human beings, which “cannot be mechanized”—that which is most purely, essentially, human.

We have it in his own words, then, that Schlemmer’s treatment of the human being in dance was not based on any ideal of mechanization, and the movements he employed in his choreography were not derived from the machine analogy. It would be more appropriate to state that Schlemmer developed his idea of human form and movement from Heinrich von Kleist’s marionette theory. In his article “On the Marionette Theater,” Kleist proposes the marionette as a means to resolve the dichotomy of body and spirit, for with the figure of the animated puppet, mind and matter are unified.³⁷⁾ By analyzing the marionette’s movement, Kleist suggested new possibilities of movements for dancers using the center of gravity that guides them to the movement of the jointed doll. Through this ultimate grace, which is achieved by the correct use of gravity, the dancer’s body is freed from its physical limits and is hereby able to express the essence of its soul. Far from confining the human figure to a mechanism, both Kleist and Schlemmer elevated it to a spiritual level, a free body in perfect harmony with the soul.

Bearing in mind Schlemmer’s socio-cultural milieu and its preoccupation with the rebirth of the human spirit and society, it becomes possible to analyze what Schlemmer thought: that the ideal was the mutual renewal of man and society; and what Schlemmer aimed to express: that neither man nor society is meaningful and alive when they exist alone.

36) Oskar Schlemmer(1971). Man and Artfigure, *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, ed. Walter Gropius, (trans. Arthur Wensinger) (London: Eyre Methune, Ltd.), p. 17.

37) Heinrich von Kleist(1943). *Über das Marionettentheater*, (trans. Eugene Jolas) *Prtsan Review* 14, no1., pp. 67-74.

VI. Conclusion

The choreographic method Schlemmer used was different from the mainstream German Expressionist dance. As he himself knew, his true intentions were unlikely to be discerned or properly understood in a time when the need for the renewal of man and society was rising. His dances found their initial exposure in an environment divided into extremes: the machine and technology aesthetic represented by Futurism and Constructivism, the pure physical beauty sought by Körperkultur, and the denial of existence represented by Dada, to name a few. Most of the misunderstandings surrounding Schlemmer's works and philosophy can be traced to the larger context of peculiarities of his era. These unique circumstances shaped his first audiences' response and ensured that those responses were not held up to scrutiny or reevaluation by the audiences of later eras.

Schlemmer's choreographic methods remained misunderstood and unexamined until post modern dances introduced similar methods on the stage and the world began accept everyday movements, abstract forms and expression as viable, meaningful dance elements. Dance historians and critics praise American avant-garde and post-modern choreographers' experiments as innovative. Schlemmer's choreographic output should also, then, be extolled as breaking boundaries and, even further, as a precursor of the American avant-garde and post-modern. Even though surging numbers of scholars, choreographers and theater directors recognize the importance of Schlemmer's work, further attention is required if we are to place him properly in dance history.

The definition of abstract dance was created by Schlemmer himself, and the everyday life movements he employed in his dances are in fact, one of the major components of post modern dance, which became a valid genre of

dance in the late 60's, more than 30 years after Schlemmer first used them. Schlemmer's original choreographies do not exist; nevertheless, we still see the legacy of his work. At Black Mountain College, a matrix of the American avant-garde movement, Schlemmer's student, Xanty Schawinsky conducted the theater workshop based on Schlemmer's method. Some of the key figures of American modern dance such as John Cage and Merce Cunningham were among the faculty there. They could not have avoided Schlemmer's influence in such a situation.

Alwin Nikolais, although he does not admit a direct influence from Schlemmer, shows a striking similarity in his highly regarded works, in terms of the effort to define the relationship between man and space and the use of costumes. *Mummenchanz*, and *Pilobolus* have all made transformation an important theme of their art. Traces of Schlemmer's theatrical experiment on the concept of "theatrical ABC" is also to be found in Robert Wilson's theater. The popular children's theater group 'Imago' has adopted his theatrical concepts, especially Schlemmer's "Pole Dance," in their productions.

Considering that it was United States where post modern dance started and flourished, it is not difficult to imagine the surprise and enthusiasm American critics and audience would have felt when they encountered the reconstructions of Schlemmer's dances. Even Merce Cunningham, the precursor of American post modern dance, was deeply impressed when he saw Debra McCall's reconstruction of the Bauhaus Dance in 1982.³⁸⁾ Identifying the affiliation of Schlemmer's concepts with the artists of today will require another scholarly effort, one which would achieve a great

38) He was one of the original members who were at the theater workshop at the Black Mountain College, where Xanti Sawinsky, one of the students of Schlemmer, was in charge. It is unknown whether Cunningham found out the missing links between Schlemmer's works and the workshop at the Black Mountain as he saw the reconstruction, which maybe an interesting issue for further studies.

contribution to the history of American modern dance or theater.

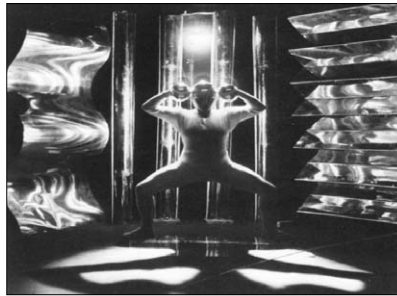
Ironically, the concerns that characterized the beginning of the twentieth century are rising again as the new millennium begins. People of today fear that the tremendous advances of technology will accelerate the isolation of human beings instead of bringing comfort and happiness. In our time the fear is fueled by the widening the gap between those who have access to this technology and those who do not, and the more severe threat to the existence of the species itself represented by environmental crises and the development of highly efficient weapons.

Artists of today are once again reexamining the meaning of human life, but now in the context of an era when “virtual reality” replaces reality. Just as Schlemmer’s contemporaries wondered whether human beings would be replaced by machines, contemporary artists are questioning, whether the presence of humans on stage still can bear any meaning. It is quite strange yet important that Schlemmer’s concept of ‘Man in Space’ has never been pointed out in the prior evaluations of him. His dances can never be correctly understood without fully understanding this concept and the artistic and historical context that gave birth to it. Placing Schlemmer in dance history by associating him with mechanistic and dehumanizing ideal is an even more serious mistake that needs to be corrected. The components of his theory, such as emphasizing the stage geometry, employing everyday movements, accentuating the relationship between the dancer and stage space, which developed to be a dance style that was free from the literal restriction can all be easily connected to the post modern dance, and his theory of ‘Man in Space’ may also be proved to be an important foundation of this new dance style that became most prominent in the United States.

At this point in time, Schlemmer’s philosophy has to suggest. Long before McLuhan had foreseen in 1965 that technology is a device used for the



<Figure 1> The Triadic Ballet” Berlin, 1926



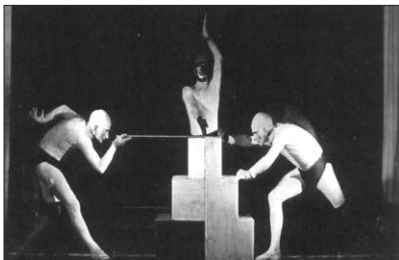
<Figure 2-1> Bauhaus Dances-Metal Dance 1926



<Figure2-2> Bauhaus Dances-Space Dance, 1926



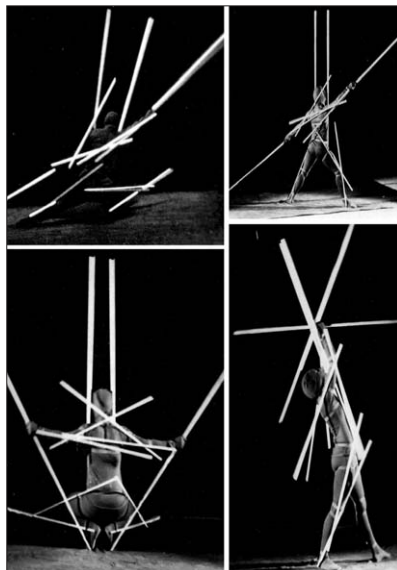
<Figure 2-3> Bauhaus Dances-Form Dance, 1927



<Figure 2-4> Bauhaus Dances-Block Play 1929



<Figure2-5> Bauhaus Dances-Flats Dance 1929



< Figure 2-6> Bauhaus Dances-Pole Dance 1928

“Extension of Man,” Schlemmer developed his own belief that technology aids to overcome the limitations of man and extends the human possibility. His ultimate notion of the transformation of the human form had a tendency to return to a Romantic view of the human being’s dignity, Humanitarianism. He said:

I believe in the necessity of (or the necessary connection with) the human figure, seen as the measure of all things, as the link, which makes understanding possible.³⁹⁾

As Schlemmer predicted 70 years ago, everything that can be mechanized may has been mechanized again in this present time. Nevertheless, Schlemmer places human beings in this situation as the one thing “which cannot be mechanized,” by elevating it to a spiritual level. Man, for Schlemmer, is a free body aided by technology, in perfect harmony with the soul, and the one at the “Control Panel”, the term, which is interestingly used also in the most modern computer operating system. In light of Schlemmer’s refusal to accept the “dehumanization” label for his dance, and in light of recent scholars’ views that his work is more rightly labeled “transformative,” it is apparent that a more thorough re-examination of Schlemmer’s own concepts and choreography is required.

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국문 요약

오스카 솔렘머 무용 개념의 재발견

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이 논문은 독일 스투트가르트 출신 미술가이자 바우하우스의 교수진이었으며 안무가로 활동했던 오스카 솔렘머의 작품과 그의 작품의 개념을 둘러싼 지난 80여년 간의 엇갈린 비평적 견해에서 출발했다.

솔렘머는 추상 무용이라는 용어를 창조한 장본인으로서 1920년대 이미 미국의 포스트 모던 움직임이 일어나기에 앞서 일상적 움직임을 무용에 도입하는 한편 스토리가 없는 추상적인 작품 스타일을 추구하면서 아울러 무용에 있어 가장 중요한 안무 요소인 움직임 만큼이나 공간, 음악, 조명, 의상, 소품 등 다양한 안무요소의 동일한 중요성을 중시하는 토탈 댄스 피어터를 주창하여 무용의 새로운 안무적 가능성을 개척하였다.

하지만 미술가나 교육자로서 업적을 인정받았던 것과는 달리 안무자로서 무용사에 기록된 그의 업적은 극히 제한되어 있다.

솔렘머의 작품 “삼원 발레”가 1932년 파리의 국제 무용대회에서 3등상을 수상한 것을 비롯 “삼원 발레” 및 “바우하우스 발레”가 많은 무용 및 음악 페스티벌에 초대되는 등 당시 예술가들 사이에서 각광 받던 것과는 달리 당대 비평가들은 그의 작업을 무의미한 실험 혹은 그 당시 유럽 예술계에 팽배해 있던 사회주의자나 구성주의자들의 개념과 동일시 취급하여 그의 무용 개념을 단순히 기계적 혹은 비인간적이라 분석하여 왔다. 또한 나찌가 독일 정권을 장악한 후 솔렘머의 작품을 “타락한 예술”이라 명명한 후 부터 솔렘머는 그 어떤 예술 활동도 하지 못했을 뿐 아니라 그의 작품에 대한 접근이 철저히 봉쇄되거나 많은 작품이 파손되었고 결과적으로 후대에서는 솔렘머의 작품을 제대로 접할 기회가 없어 오랜 세월 솔렘머의 작품은 그저 과거의 비평가들이 문헌에 남겨 두었던 기존의 비인간적 혹은 기계적이라는 부정적 해석의 범주에서 벗어나지 못했다. 하지만 1960년대 유럽의 안무가들이 30여년간 단절되었던 솔렘머 작품들을 재구성하여 무대에 올리면서 솔렘머 작품에 대한 관심이 증가하기 시작하였고 그의 작품 개념 또한 긍정적인 평가를 받기 시작했다. 특히 1980년대 미국 안무가 데브라 맥콜이 재구성한 바우하우스 댄스가 미국 무용계에 소개된 후에는 솔렘머의 작품이 포스트 모던 댄스 맥락하에서 역사적 가치를 인정받기 시작했으며 또한 그의 작품 속에 나타난 인간의 형태는 기계적 혹은 비인간화된 모습이기 보다는 추상화된 인간의 모습이라 평가받기 시작했다.

그러나 이러한 슐렘머 작품에 대한 재평가 역시 슐렘머가 자신의 작품 속에서 진정으로 표현하고자 했던 인간이 모든 것의 중심에 놓여있다는 인간의 중요성이나 인간과 공간의 관계 다시 말해 1차대전 이후 절망에 빠져 있던 독일의 정치적 사회적 맥락에 근거한 인간과 인간이 존재하는 사회(공간)의 유기적 관계에 대한 슐렘머의 탐구를 심도있게 다루지 못하고 있다

본 논문은 추상무용 및 포스트모던 댄스의 선구자로서의 슐렘머의 무용사적 업적에 대한 재평가의 필요성을 주장하며 그의 제반 조건으로 슐렘머의 무용작품과 글을 둘러싼 엇갈리는 비평적 논쟁 및 시대의 흐름에 따른 비평의 변화를 분석하였고 슐렘머의 작품에 대한 부정적인 평가의 근본적인 원인을 분석하여 그의 작품의 재평가의 기틀을 마련코자 하였다. 또한 슐렘머가 “공간 속의 인간”이라는 작품 개념을 통해 인간과 사회가 서로를 자극하고 좋은 방향으로 변화시킬 수 있다는 이상적 사회 형성에 대한 자신의 확고한 의지를 그의 무용 작품 속에 담고 있으며 그의 작품 개념에 대한 진정한 이해가 이루어져야만 그의 무용 개념이 무용사에 끼친 영향 및 인류에게 전달하는 진정한 메시지를 올바르게 정의할 수 있음을 강조하고 있다.

주제어: 오스카 슐렘머 (Oskar Schlemmer), 바우하우스 댄스 (Bauhaus Dances), 삼원 발레 (Triadic Ballet), 공간 속의 인간 (Man in Space), 인간 형태의 변형 (Transformations of Human Form)