PROTO-MODERNISTIC SCENOGRAPHY:

TECHNOLOGY AND AESTHETICS

by

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Preface

The present dissertation will explore the nature of proto-modernistic scenography in relation to the scenographic forms that preceded it, i.e. illusionistic, realistic and naturalistic. It will question the alleged originality and innovative form of the first modernistic examples and it will challenge the long cherished myth of discontinuity and rupture as employed by the modernistic discourse. Instead, by examining the realised productions rather than the theoretical thinking, it will attempt to bring into prominence the continuities and common features of all those forms, to stress the presence of already known techniques and practices within the 'new'; in place of radical discontinuity and violent rupture, it will introduce the idea of subtle continuity and gradual transformation.

The main corpus of the present study will be confined to performances in the modernistic mode given during the years 1900-1914. This particular period may be termed proto-modernistic, as opposed to the High Modernism of the years after WWI. While 1900 – the beginning of the new century – is a convenient date from which to count the appearance of modernism in theatre, 1914 – the outbreak of World War I – marks the first crucial point in its course; apart from being an important date in the political calendar, the War affected the general intellectual climate, not least the theatre. During those fourteen years only a limited number of performances in the modernistic mode took place. They all mark a marginal practice, which became more and more frequent as the years passed by. Towards the end of the period the examples of what was by then called New Stagecraft multiplied and the solutions to non-realistic quests given enriched.

While concentrating on the period 1900-1914 and on its 'new' stage forms, I will also refer to earlier and later periods as well as to different stage forms whenever I find it necessary. In other words, I will frame the main body of my study with information on what went on before and what followed, in order to show how theatre modernism emerged and how it developed, how it is related to the past and how it projects into the future. However, the main focus of the present study will not be on the 'innovative' but on the 'traditional' elements of the proto-modernistic scenography, the allusions to earlier forms demonstrating the existing

continuities, the references to future developments exposing the timidity of the steps taken by the first modernist practitioners.

The same balance of tight focus and flexibility characterises the choice of countries on whose stagecraft I wish to focus. The study examines practices exercised throughout a whole range of European countries, the major sources of reference being Germany and Britain. Germany was undeniably the cultural centre in the field of stagecraft during the period in question and a model for the theatre activities in many other countries, including Britain. However, since the language of my research is English, when it comes to specific examples, the study focuses inevitably on productions mounted on English soil.

The proposed re-evaluation of the proto-modernistic scenography is only possible through the careful examination of the technical aspect of the settings along with their more usual aesthetic evaluation. In other words, a different methodological approach towards theatre scenography is needed, which will combine the analysis of its aesthetic aspects (the standard method of analysing stage sets) with the analysis of its technological aspects (of very little interest so far in academic circles). Thus, the stage setting will no longer be viewed primarily as a work of art, studied in terms of art history. On the contrary, it will be treated as an organic whole, its material dimension not being neglected.

Moreover, stage sets have to be regarded as integral parts of a theatre performance, acquiring their total significance only within the limits of it and as long as it lasts. For that reason, apart from the general discussion that focuses on the sets themselves (dealt with in the First Part), I have pursued the detailed analysis of specific performances/events. The study incorporates three case studies that constitute its Second Part: E.G. Craig's *Dido and Aeneas* (1900), Max Reinhardt's *The Miracle* (designer: Ernst Stern, 1911) and Harley Granville Barker's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (designer: Norman Wilkinson, 1914). In each case, not only the actual sets, but also the general scenographic approach, the outcome of the collaboration of director and designer, is studied. As I will attempt to show, all three productions, which have been hailed as landmarks in the history of modern British theatre, demonstrate a considerable degree of traditionalism that makes them more hybrid and less radically innovative. However,

by the end of the period of my study the number of practical solutions to the modernistic objectives significantly multiplied.

In order to facilitate the analysis of both the general aspects of proto-modernistic scenography and the specific case studies, I have adopted a standard division in three sections: Venues, Technology and Aesthetics. When referring to venues I analyse only matters of general architectural layout and in particular the stage-auditorium relationships established in each case, while all the technical details of the construction of the stage proper are discussed in the section Technology; in the same section I also examine the technical characteristics of the scenery itself (materials, construction, arrangement etc.) as well as the lighting equipment in use. The section on Aesthetics is concerned with the principles underlying the scenographic practice, as well as their visual realisation. When it comes to the case-studies, the analysis of the overall aesthetic character of each production, as well as the scenographic treatment of the visual sources of reference is added.

Finally, the dissertation incorporates a series of diverse visual material (set designs, promptbook drawings, model photographs, production photographs, architectonic plans and reconstructions, artists' renderings etc.), which do not just clarify the written text, but form an integral part of the study. In each case an effort was made to include the most important visual sources, turning the dissertation into a heavily illustrated volume.

First Part

1. Introduction

The change of intellectual climate that occurred around the turn of the twentieth century and that embraced all arts, not least the theatre, manifested itself as a destructive force. Modernism, as this movement was termed later, forcibly rejected the past, strongly objected the present; it favoured radical innovation and thorough change. The Modernistic discourse articulated itself around discontinuity and rupture.[1]

However, the close study of the earlier stages of modernistic theatre performance and scenography, i.e. the period that begins with the turn of the century and ends with the outbreak of World War I (1900-1914) reveals a different image in terms of its relation to both past and present. In the present dissertation I want to argue that the proto-modernistic performances of the period 1900-1914 and their scenography – in terms of both aesthetics and technology – maintain a considerable share of traditionalism and use techniques that are thought of as belonging to the past. It is only later that the modernistic achievements are considerably detached from their realistic premises. Instead of an account of radical ruptures, I propose an evolutionary narrative of subtle continuities.

What must become clear in the first place is that despite any assertions of the opposite, modernistic discourse and practice retains an ambiguous relationship with the past; on the one hand it claims complete freedom from past forms and on the other it returns to them. The second practise is described as atavism[2] that means rejection of the present and immediate past and return to earlier stages of theatre history in order to find models and examples on which to build the future. Even if there is no slavish imitation or thoughtless reproduction, the careful study of the past to which the modernists eagerly devoted themselves offers the service of challenging the dominant theories and practices; it proves that they are only temporary, since there has already existed a significant number of dissimilar ways of presenting things on stage.

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[1] For a brief introduction to – literary – modernism see Peter Childs, *Modernism*, London: Routledge, 2000. Christopher Innes analyses mainly the modernistic drama, but refers to the theatre as well in his "Modernism in drama" in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, Michael Levenson (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 130-156.

While there is no coherent view among the first modernists as to which periods of stage history are worth studying and which of them cannot in any way serve as a model, there is however a mutual agreement on what the characteristics of the rejected theatre forms are: they all dismiss what they consider as contaminated by the objective for realistic representation of the world.

To give only two examples of this diverse and yet similar approach to the past: Sheldon Cheney in his brief historical introduction to his very interesting account of modernistic *Stage Decoration*[3] dismisses the whole period from the introduction of perspectively painted scenery in the Renaissance until the late nineteenth century as a period of continuous culmination of realistic practices; for him the models for the modernist theatre practitioners could be found in the theatre of antiquity and the Middle Ages. On the other hand, Georg Fuchs in his *Revolution in the Theatre*[4] perceives the history of perspective scenography as fragmented, spotting differences between its various phases. Therefore, only in the last years of the nineteenth century did the theatre come close to realistic representation and hence deviated from 'true art', while the earlier baroque theatre, being grandiose and artificial, demonstrated a great degree of theatricality and hence was most suitable as a model for the future.

If 'atavism' describes best the ambiguous relation of the modernists to the past, their relation to the present is no less problematic. The very present that the modernists so forcibly rejected was much more restraining than they wished to think, it informed their practice to a much greater degree than even themselves wished to believe. This dependency on the present stage conditions and conceptions is two-fold: it refers to the material conditions of the stage which the first modernists were obliged to use and at the same time it relates to given principles that underpin the standard stage practice of the age. In other words, both modernistic practice and theory make use of the present stage conditions, which are presented as either considerably restraining or as the main source of counter-inspiration. The close study of the achievements of the first modernists shows that they react to very specific conditions and conceptions taking the

[2] The term is borrowed from the natural sciences and literally it means "resemblance to grand-parents or more remote ancestors rather than to parents; tendency to reproduce the ancestral type in animals or plants." *Oxford English Dictionary Online,* Oxford University Press, 2002.
[3] Sheldon Cheney, *Stage Decoration*, New York: John Day, 1928.

present as starting point from which they depart. To sum up: the modernist movement in its very first steps is articulated mainly as an opposition, it rejects certain established conceptions and is expressed in negations.

However, this transition from the realistic and naturalistic ideals to the modernistic ones that took place in the first years of the twentieth century was very slow and inevitably gradual. When studying the first modernistic performances and their scenography, one does not come across a set of extraordinary innovations nor does one find a coherently subversive whole. On the contrary, the majority of the productions and their sets, in particular, fuse old techniques and new ideas, traditional elements and innovative uses. There are some elements and characteristics that were more resistant to change, and therefore were incorporated in the modernistic language, only to be expelled later, when the New Stagecraft had developed further. Nevertheless, there is not a single way in which modernistic scenography departs from the realistic dominant mode. The diverse character of the modernistic movement prevents us from articulating a systematic and clear record of changes. Still, a roughly sketched evolutionary line can be established, where the theory appears to be more radical and innovative than the actual realisations. While the most radical theorists of the modern movement published their books even before the beginnings of the twentieth century (Appia[5]) or during the first decade (Craig[6]), the actual stage practice shows that the steps taken were more timid and less unexpected.[7] In other words, the application of the theories on the stages of the time was not a destructive process, but rather a gradual transformation of already existing techniques and practices.

To conclude: the scenography of the proto-modernistic theatre (in terms of both aesthetics and technology) is to a significant degree grounded in the past, even if it reaches forward. As Walter René Fuerst and Samuel Hume point out in their most valuable book *Twentieth Century Stage Decoration*, "no real break occurred, and that what we have chosen to call modern stage decoration rests inevitably on what went before."[8]

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[4] Georg Fuchs, *Revolution in the theatre: conclusions concerning the Munich Artists' Theatre*; condensed and adapted from the German by Constance Connor Kuhn, Cornell U.P.; Oxford U.P, 1959.
[5] Adolphe Appia, *La Mise en Scène du Drame Wagnerien*, Paris: Chailly, 1895 and *Die Musik und die Inscenierung*, Munich, 1899.
[6] Edward Gordon Craig, *The Art of the Theatre*, Edinburgh & London: Foulis, 1905.
[7] Cheney, *Stage Decoration*, pp. 39-40.
[8] Walter René Fuerst & Samuel J. Hume, *Twentieth Century Stage Decoration*, 1929, reprint, New York: Blom, 1969, vol 1, p. 5.

2. The New Stagecraft: origins and development

AESTHETICS

The close study of the aesthetics of the proto-modernistic scenography (1900-1914) makes apparent that no violent and definite rupture so eagerly manifested in the modernistic discourse really occurred. On the contrary, a slow and gradual transformation – ranging from beautified realism and extending to somewhat abstract forms in the years after the World War I – seems to be a more truthful narrative.

The first modernistic settings maintain aesthetic qualities that can be traced in the preceding forms that modernists claimed to have abandoned completely, as a result of their commitment to contemporary theatre practice. The first modernistic sets departed from their realistic origins following a course that cannot be regarded as drastically radical. The contemporary scholar Sheldon Cheney has articulated a very specific evolutionary process. Here is his summary of the steps taken:

> At first the picture was merely stripped of unnecessary detail. Then *suggestion* was added to *simplification*: the picture intimated more than it stated. Then *design* came in, consciously, and the wholly tasteful simple setting evolved. And as a final improvement in the picture mode, *stylization* was accomplished, austere or lavish, grotesque or reticent, historized or aesthetic."[9]

The *simplification* of the scenic image, the elimination of superfluous details, was the first step away from the detailed realistic images of the age. For Cheney, the step of *simplification* was essentially a negative one, as it just stripped a set of what it already possessed (Fig. 2.1). The next step, *suggestion*, the mere indication of place instead of its full exposition, was the first creative one. It asked for the careful selection of elements that are absolutely necessary for the image to be produced (Fig. 2.2). A further step, according to Cheney, was the employment of *design*, the use of purely visual qualities in the composition of the stage picture, i.e. line, colour, mass, light and shade (Fig. 2.3). The final step in this evolutionary course is *stylization* by which the set attains its distinct character that is in line with the spirit of the play in question (Fig. 2.4).

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[9] Cheney, *Stage Decoration*, p. 136.

The unquestionable source of inspiration for the transformation of the first modernistic settings was the new achievements and theories in the realm of visual arts, where the realistic rendering of the subject matter was gradually abandoned, giving way to a more decorative treatment of the composition. Instead of reproducing nature, modernist painters were aiming either at expressing an inner truth by distorting the features of the picture, or at unmasking the easel painting as such by the synthesis of line and colour that produced abstract forms.

In a similar way, the first modernist practitioners attempted initially to replace the imitative representation of nature with expressionistic re-creation. [10] Under the influence of painting the settings gradually discarded numerous details necessary for the creation of a life-like image and presented a more simplified image whose main quality was mood and atmosphere. With the ability to present a life-like image – particular stress was put on the virtuosity in the rendering of details – not being regarded any more as the main skill of the designer, the first modernist designers occupied themselves with combining the formal characteristics of a picture (colours, lines, light and shade) in a harmonious composition so as to promote expression.

However, theatre is different in its nature than painting, and the stage unfolds in three dimensions unlike the painting that has only two. The methods applied on the surface of a painted picture do not necessarily comply with the ones employed within the space of a theatre stage. Therefore, in the case of stage design the actual solutions to artistic problems were provided by theatre itself.

What is interesting is that this evaluation of purely visual qualities of the stage set led to the reactivation of certain structural patterns and compositional qualities of earlier specimens of perspective scenery, itself an essentially atavistic attitude. In other words, the first modernists, by defying the previous realistic dogma that dictated a complex composition and an irregular arrangement of set pieces that

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[10] "Expressionism in stage decoration and in play production means many things to many people (as doubtless does realism), due to the common confusion in art terminology", writes Cheney (*Stage Decoration,* p. 99) and goes on explaining his own view: "For me Expressionism includes all those methods that look to greater intensification of dramatic emotion, to greater theatrical expressiveness, as against those that are designed to imitate life with faithful detail, that give back an interesting representation of actuality". The general application of the term also is also noted by Kenneth MacGowan in *The Theatre of Tomorrow,* New York: Boni & Liveright, 1921, pp. 111-12, where a number of different modernistic styles in painting, such as cubism or vorticism, are grouped under the heading 'expressionism' – a use which is not valid any more.

follow the way 'nature plants', reactivated less complicated forms and even reached the elementally simple composition of an early perspective stage, i.e. they went 'back to the basics'. That happened because for the most part they erected their sets in a traditional space, the box of the Italian-type stage.

Two of the most popular patterns of early perspective scenography that reoccur in a great number of proto-modernistic sets, even if their function is redefined are symmetry, and organisation in parallel planes. Symmetry in the proto-modernistic sets, rather than a device that accentuates the illusion of depth, is a balancing device that reinforces the artificiality of the stage picture. Sometimes the right half of the stage mirrors the left one in every detail (Fig. 2.5); in settings of architectural character only the general structure is symmetrical, while minor decorative details differ (Fig. 2.6).

The second feature of early perspective settings that is reoccurring in some modernistic sets is the organisation of the stage picture in parallel planes. Rather than dividing the scenic image into several sections, one more distanced than the other so that the illusion of great depth is created, the parallel planes of a proto-modernistic set clear the stage from intermediary details and leave the stage free for the actor; the human figure moving in the front planes stands out against a neutral and unobtrusive background. Even if the traditional wings placed one behind the other are not in use anymore, sliding pillars of more solid nature have replaced them (Fig. 2.6 & Fig. 2.7).

Despite their more tasteful appearance the first specimens of modernistic sets remained very close to the standard sets of the age, in the sense that they still sought to "produce a proper environment for the action of the drama."[11] The majority of such sets served the essentially realistic function to *represent* a locale of action, to reproduce an actual space, despite the differences in the style of *representation.* In other words, as Sheldon Cheney argues in his *Stage Decoration*,

> the setting has been conceived primarily *as a picture*, despite the passing of the painter of perspective, and despite the placing of plastic objects and the use of flat walls in the picture. Always, too, the artists have been seeking reality of place, putting emphasis on the elements that indicate the locale of action. However much they simplified, made suggestive and stylized, they were working with a realistic

[11] Fuerst & Hume, *Twentieth Century Stage Decoration*, vol. 1, p. 3.

> intent. What they simplified was real rooms, gardens or forests, what they suggested was actuality, what they stylized was a succession of places outside the theatre. The painter, having learned the inadequacy of easel-painting in the theatre, was trying other means than painting – but yet he was not utilizing primarily *the theatre*.[12]

What was opposed to the *representational* function of scenery by the modernists was what Alexander Bakshy – largely informed by his knowledge of earlier types of theatre – called *presentational* function (a characteristically opposing expression). Bakshy described the difference between the two as follows

> Regarded from the point of view of the stage, performances have ranged themselves according to the manner in which the medium of the theatre, as such, was treated, assuming *presentational* character when the peculiar nature of the medium was frankly admitted, and *representational* character when the object was to conceal that nature and create an illusion of an entirely different world.[13]

It is only after WWI that this kind of scenography (equivalent to the 'abstract art') began to be practised, however marginally. Cheney groups the examples that follow the *presentational* mode in three categories. First: The 'space stage' created in a void by the mere use of light was considered essentially theatrical, as it employed only theatrical means and did not pretend to recreate natural conditions on stage (Fig. 2.8).[14] Second: The architectural stages (models for which were found in ancient Greek and Elizabethan theatre) functioned as a space of action rather than serving any kind of representation (Fig. 2.9).[15] Third: Constructivist scenography served a similar function by unmasking the material reality of the set and its surrounding space (rostrums, flights of stairs, lighting equipment, stage walls – Fig.2.10).[16]

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[12] Cheney, *Stage Decoration*, p. 70.
[13] Alexander Bakshy, *The Path of the Modern Russian Stage*, London: Cecil Palmer & Hayward, [1916], p. xviii.
[14] Cheney, *Stage Decoration*, pp. 123-130.
[15] Ibid. pp. 113-122.
[16] Ibid. pp. 131-136. A comprehensive study of the complex relationship of modernistic scenography with modern art is lacking in the bibliography. All the books that are supposed to be covering the subject deal exclusively with the work of significant painters for the stage. As a rule they are written by art historians interested in all aspects of a major artist's work (for example, Picasso and his designs for the Russian Ballet after WWI). What, however, would have been more interesting for the student of the theatre is a study which will attempt to identify the less obvious and more subtle influence of the *principles* of modern painting on scenography, which is not – and should not be regarded as – applied painting.
Two contemporary books (Sheldon Cheney, *Modern Art and the Theatre: Being Notes on Certain Approaches to a New Art of the Stage, with Special Reference to Parallel Developments in Painting, Sculpture and the Other Arts*, Scarborough-on-Hudson: The Sleepy Hollow Press, 1921 and Huntly Carter, *The New Spirit in Drama and Art*, New York: Kennerly, 1913) contribute greatly to the discussion by recording achievements in both fields and at the same time pointing towards possible future developments. According to Carter "rhythm is the connecting link between plastic forms of art and the 'scene'" (p.210), but he seems to find it only in painterly settings and not in the "least satisfactory" work of Craig. Cheney, on the other hand, tries to find which are the "expressive forms which pertain particularly and peculiarly to the theatre" (p.1) and identify the way for this art to reach

VENUES

The link between modernistic theatre practice and contemporary stage conditions is strong as far as venues are concerned. Theatre buildings, being materially solid and economically constraining, exhibited considerable resistance to the desires of modernist 'revolutionists'. It is sufficient to note that only a limited number of theatres built before the outbreak of WWI deviate from the dominant Italian-type of the end of the nineteenth century, the most famous being the ones designed by Professor Max Littmann of Germany or the venue at the Hellerau Institute, 'dictated' by Adolphe Appia for his collaborative productions with Emil Jacques-Dalcroze. Rather than belonging to a new theatre type, the theatres designed by Max Littmann manifested a modernisation of the traditional Italian type. The rectangular auditorium, arranged in a single slope, was clearly influenced by Wagner's Bayreuth; a discrete proscenium frame, combined with a built-in inner proscenium, a shallow stage (21 feet only) and little stage equipment that favoured the horizontal movement of scenery characterise the Munich Künstlertheater (the Munich Artists' Theatre,1908), that became the model for many other Art Theatres (Fig. 2.11 & Fig. 2.12).[17]

The Festival Auditorium at Hellerau (1910-12) was much more innovative. It was a simple rectangular hall where both audience and performance facilities were erected from scratch. There was no attempt to divide those two spaces. On the contrary, the aim was to unify them by omitting the standard proscenium and by illuminating the entire hall equally and brightly. It even accommodated a newly devised lighting system, placed behind the translucent walls of the hall. All standard facilities for shifting scenery were absent. The scenery as designed by Appia consisted of a combination of steps and platforms echoing the arrangement of the auditorium in a single slope (Fig. 2.13 & Fig. 2.15).[18]

In all other cases – and almost without exception in Britain – the usual modernistic practice was the partial transformation or remodelling of already existing picture-

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abstraction, already attained in the visual arts. It is only in his *Stage Decoration* that he is able to trace such examples.

[17] For a detailed account see Fuchs, *Revolution in the Theatre*, Chapter IV: Stage and Auditorium, pp. 66-101.

[18] See Richard Leacroft and Helen Leacroft, *Theatre and Playhouse; An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building form Ancient Greece to the Present Day*, London: Methuen, 1984, p. 167.

frame theatres wherein the modernistic sets were erected. The standard way to break out of the boundaries of the picture-frame was to construct a forestage, i.e. a stage that extended the over the orchestra pit and into the auditorium. By this means the function of the magic box of illusions was compromised and a certain proximity between spectator and spectacle, actor and audience was achieved. Thus the proto-modernistic practice re-activated the forestages of the earlier phases of Italian theatres.

Nevertheless, the physical reality of existing buildings proved to be considerably restrictive and in several cases the new transformed shape appears closer to earlier forms of the Italian stage than to anything else, even when the expressed intentions followed completely different models from theatre history. The most striking example is the "Shakespeare-stage", a German innovation, a variation of which was used by Harley Granville Barker for his Savoy productions in 1912-1914. Whilst in principle inspired by Shakespearean plays and the stage on which they were originally performed, in terms of actual stage space the stage devised by Barker recreated to a considerable degree the conditions of the Restoration stage, with its extended forestage and the proscenium doors placed on either side of the forestage.[19]

Even in cases when the building that underwent transformation was of a different nature to a standard picture-frame theatre, the new shape interestingly revived some of the 'unwanted' features for reasons of scenic effectiveness. For example, Reinhardt's production of *The Miracle* (1911), for which London's Olympia Exhibition Hall was converted into a gothic cathedral, made use of two stage spaces, the larger one placed in the midst of the audience and the smaller one placed behind a kind of proscenium arch, cleverly disguised as the cathedral great doors. Despite the fact that the proscenium arch was by far the most criticised structural element of the dominant theatre type of the age due to its function of separating the audience from the performance, its presence in the Reinhardt spectacle was indispensable, as the director wanted to achieve the illusionistic effect of endless sky. Not at all surprisingly, Reinhardt's *The Miracle* combined a

[19] For a detailed account of the scenography of Granville Barker's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, see chapter 5 of the present dissertation.

number of traditional and modern elements: it burst out of the limits of the proscenium arch and at the same time made use of it (Fig. 2.15).[20]

Besides those marginal attempts to redefine theatre architecture and the hybrid outcomes, the majority of modernistic performances were mounted in conventional venues; almost all the sets were realised within a picture-frame theatre and the frontal relationship of spectacle and audience was retained. The main technological transformations were the ones exercised within the limits of the picture-frame stage, concerning the machinery and the other equipment provided.

[20] For a detailed account of the scenography of Reinhardt's *The Miracle*, see chapter 4 of the present dissertation.

TECHNOLOGY

It is generally accepted that almost all the technological features of both the stage and the scenery proper that are regarded as modernistic and were amply employed in such a context were devised in the first place for realistic purposes in the late years of the nineteenth century. The theatre machinists of that age devised a series of technical means by which they were able to accommodate and shift a number of different sets used in a single performance and constructed 'plastically', i.e. in volumes. Later on most of the technical solutions were adopted by the modernist practitioners and used for their own non-realistic purposes. However, they would not easily admit such a transaction, which would challenge their claims of novelty and innovation.[21]

The rapidly developing realistic ideals and practices of the end of the nineteenth century called for a new treatment of stage sets and their material construction. The use of two-dimensional pieces of scenery (canvas flats and backcloths), painted according to the laws of perspective and arranged in parallel planes within the proscenium stage, aiming at giving the illusion of enormous depth and vast space, was no longer thought of as satisfactory. Perspective depth and *tromp l'oeil* volume had to give way to 'real' depth and volume in order to be in line with the realistic ideals of the age. Thus, painted scenery was gradually replaced by 'solidly built' sets and three-dimensional props.[22] Nevertheless, the 'solidly built' or 'plastic' sets of the realistic stages were in reality made of the same materials which the illusionistic stage had been using for a long time; they were constructed of conventional canvas flats, only treated somewhat differently. In order to represent a house, for example, the flats were joined together at various angles forming an appropriate ground plan and were painted as a unified surface just like interior walls; a number of rostrums provided different stage levels and all doors and windows were solid. In other words, the three dimensions of real life were not recreated on the two dimensions of canvas flats, but were reproduced in the arrangement of the flats and rostrums and in the actual dimensions of 'practicable' pieces of furniture, e.g. chairs, tables. The stage picture was complemented by an

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[21] Fuerst and Hume (*Twentieth Century Stage Decoration*) as late as 1929 are among those few writers on modernistic scenography that acknowledge the dependency upon earlier technical inventions but feel confident by their renewed use in modernistic context.

[22] However, the application of the new principle was more successful in sets representing urban and domestic environments than natural surroundings.

array of details (chandeliers, paintings, etc.), which were thought of as enhancing the realistic effect (Fig. 2.16).

What is more, more than one such set was needed for a single performance; each play asked for a series of different locales that were all literally reproduced on stage. Hence, complex and detailed sets followed one after the other on the realistic stage.

In order to meet the needs of such a scenic display the stage had to be equipped with quite sophisticated machinery. Since the main objective was to shift randomly arranged sets in volumes, the old method of shifting scenery was no longer adequate. As the method of replacing individual pieces of scenery by hand was very time-consuming or demanded a great number of stage-hands, the realistic stage engaged itself with the aim of discovering new ways of transposing simultaneously large sections of a set or even a whole set and replacing it by another, prepared in advance. Because of the large dimensions and considerable weight of such sets (as well as for safety reasons) the stage was no longer constructed of wood but of iron. Moreover, the hitherto employed manual power could not meet the demands any more and was soon replaced by mechanical power, i.e. electricity and hydraulics.

The part of the stage that was most reinforced for the purpose of quick scene-changing was the floor. Its articulation as well as it surrounding mechanisms (under the stage as well as in the wing space on either side of the central stage area) was considerably developed during the last years of the nineteenth century and until the First World War. The objective of the experimentation was to find practical ways of transposing the floor along with the sets placed on it. As Fuerst and Hume point out the available options were limited:

> It is impossible to imagine more than three directions in which the stage floor can move: up and down (vertical movement); from one side to the other and from front to back or vice versa (movement in the horizontal plane); and lastly, a circular movement by which the different sectors of a circle are rotated in succession past the proscenium opening. In addition there can, of course, be combinations of these movements.[23]

From the various technical solutions that the theatre technicians of the time came up with the sinking and elevator stages followed a vertical movement; the moving

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[23] Fuerst & Hume, *Twentieth Century Stage Decoration*, vol. 1, p. 89.

platforms or sliding stages moved in the horizontal plane; the revolving stage engaged itself with the circular movement.

The earliest of these solutions, the sinking stage (already installed in the Budapest Opera House in the 1870s – Fig.2.17), was still very close to the given stage floor conditions, only slightly adapted to the three-dimensionality of the sets it was carrying. The stage floor was still divided into rectangular sections running parallel to the proscenium opening (similar to the earlier entrances or bays), but the very narrow sections of the flooring (sloat cuts) through which the flats were raised and lowered had completely disappeared. The remaining wider sections acted as both bridge cuts, i.e. parts of the stage floor that were removed and withdrawn at the wings space on either side of the stage, and bridges, i.e. platforms that ascended from the cellars to stage level occupying the place of the removed bridge cuts, most usually holding a group of actors and less frequently accompanying them with pieces of scenery. The modified version of the late years of the nineteenth century united the two elements into one, which could be lifted or sunk at different heights and at an angle and even rotate according to the specific needs of the staging. The system was operated by the newly employed hydraulic power (Fig. 2.18).[24]

While the Budapest Opera House system divided the stage floor and consequently the actual set in parallel sections, the 'elevator stage' invented by the American Steele MacKaye and installed in the Madison Square Theatre in New York in 1879, treated the stage floor as a single surface and consequently the scenic space as a unit. The 'elevator stage' combined two entire sets constructed in advance that could be mounted on the two levels of this gigantic elevator-like construction and used alternatively (Fig. 2.19).

In addition, the sliding or wagon stages followed horizontal movement. They were either simple wagons mounted on wheels carrying parts of the set or huge platforms of the dimensions of the central stage that were stationed at the wing space and rolled into the acting area whenever needed. They demanded an additional space on either side of the stage proper or even a third one of the same dimensions at the back (Fig. 2.20).

The circular movement of the stage floor was served only by the revolving stage. The revolving stage, a stage equipped with a great turntable, was introduced in the Western theatre (it originated in the Japanese theatre) by Karl Lautenschlaeger for the Residenztheater in Munich in 1896. At first both its construction and its use were traditional; the revolve extended to the under stage space and even maintained the standard floor division of the illusionistic stage. On that surface a number of separate box-like sets, the one placed next to the other, were arranged. As the revolve rotated, a completely new set was presented to the audience through the proscenium opening (Fig.2.21). Soon it was further developed and used widely in the next few years, as it was indeed an ingenious way of rapidly shifting between a number of different locales.

The revolving stage was the kind of floor articulation devised for realistic purposes that the modernistic stage used the most. Besides its effectiveness in providing a continuous flow of action when shifting between various locales – an ability the modernistic staging still cared for, especially in the Shakespearean productions – it also offered a range of different possibilities that departed from the mere accumulation of a number of strikingly dissimilar locales that was the realistic ideal. As the work of Max Reinhardt and his main designer Ernst Stern clearly illustrated, the set mounted on a revolving stage could be articulated as a sophisticated puzzle of interior and exterior locales that intermingled (Fig. 2.22). When commenting on Reinhardt's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* J. Bab noted:

> Soon we had no longer individual pictures in the various segments of the revolving stage passing before our eyes but an entire structure, shown through the rotations of the stage from all possible angles.[25]

The reappearance of the same scenic elements seen from different angles created a sense of unity that suited most the modernistic ideal. It is not surprising that the practice of constructing a set from a limited number of pieces (e.g. columns, arches, flights of steps), which alternated places within the limits of the stage or were combined in different ways in order to create a different scene of action, was employed in a great number of later modernistic sets, even when the use of the revolve or other kind of movable floor was essentially abandoned. The

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[24] Hydraulic bridges were installed in Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1896. In 1898 electric bridges were added. See "Drury Lane, its machinery and mechanical equipment", *The Stage Yearbook*, 1910, pp. 20-23 and Leacroft & Leacroft, *Theatre and Playhouse*, p. 118.
[25] Quoted in Leacroft & Leacroft, *Theatre and Playhouse*, p. 129.

so-called 'unit-sets' were characterised by both unity and diversity, as they presented a slightly different image made of the same more or less elements (Fig. 2.23).

Not only the stage floor and its surrounding equipment were modified in order to satisfy the realistic demands of the late nineteenth century, but also the rest of the stage area was altered as well. All the traditional means of concealing the backstage area from the sight of the audience (wings for the sides, borders for the top, backcloth for the rear) were united in a single construction. The sky-dome, later called cyclorama, which evolved from the earlier panorama, expanded its dimensions towards all possible directions and developed as a shell construction occupying the whole of the rear of the stage space (Fig. 2.24). In conjunction with the system of diffused (indirect) lighting accompanying it (first presented in 1902 by Mariano Fortuny), the cyclorama proved to be the perfect means of producing on stage realistic images of sky stretching to infinity. Evenly lit, it could give a perfect impression of day-lit sky; when images of clouds were projected on its surface, it simulated a cloudy sky (Fig. 2.25 & Fig. 2.26).

The cyclorama was eagerly adopted by the first modernist directors and designers and soon became one of the most celebrated elements of the New Stagecraft. The designers and directors took advantage of its formal qualities as a unified surface (single coloured cloth, evenly lit or plunged in darkness) and they incorporated it into their design in various ways. The presence of a cyclorama helped them beautify their stage picture, as it reinforced the outlines of shapes and figures placed in front of it and gave prominence to purely aesthetic qualities of the stage picture (line, colour, proportion – Fig. 2.27). The combined use of cyclorama and revolving stage that was widely employed in the next few years encouraged the sculptural treatment of the actual sets that stood out against a unified background (Fig. 2.28). Besides representing the sky, the cyclorama was employed as a mere masking device concealing the back and top limits of the stage. In that case, more than being an unobtrusive background to the action, it stood as an explicit convention and was not to be read as part of the realistic scenic image (Fig. 2.29). Edward Gordon Craig was one of the first to use a structure similar to the cyclorama (inspired by the experiments of Professor Hubert von Herkomer) in non-realistic context. In his production of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (1900) the changing of colouring of the backcloth was not dictated by any

changes in the natural environment, but corresponded to the changes in mood and atmosphere in the course of the opera.[26]

If there is a single element of the traditional stagecraft that was eliminated in modernistic staging that is surely the footlights, a row of lights placed at the lower front edge of the stage in order to illuminate the actors moving in this area, introduced back in the late sixteenth century. However, the reasons for such a disappearance were neither very recent nor very radical. Edward Gordon Craig in his 1900 production of *Dido and Aeneas* replaced the standard footlights with lights placed on individual stands within the auditorium. Five years later in his *The Art of the Theatre* he was still polemically fighting against them.[27] However, the footlights had been criticised long before they were actually eliminated by modernist practitioners well into the twentieth century. Their abolition has been the object of constant demand since at least the 1760s-1780s, when a general discussion about lighting problems in conjunction with architecture had begun throughout Europe.[28] The standard reproach against the footlights was the unnaturalness of their light: coming from below and not from above, it destroyed the illusion of natural lighting of the romantic stage pictures. The main reason for their continuance was that the technical means available, i.e. candles and later on gas lighting, could not support a different arrangement of those pieces of the lighting equipment. It is very interesting that, by the time it became technically possible to use instead powerful electric lights hung in the dress circle, the realistic objective had already been seriously questioned. Therefore the new lighting disposition encouraged a different treatment of light and shadow. For example, the overall effect of Craig's *Dido and Aeneas* was not at all realistic; on the contrary, he took advantage of the absence of frontal lighting in order to create sharp contrasts of light and shade in line with the symbolic interpretation of the opera.

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[26] For a detailed account of the scenography of Craig's *Dido and Aeneas* see chapter 3 of the present dissertation.

[27] Edward Gordon Craig, *The Art of the Theatre*, included in his collection of essays *On the Art of the Theatre*, 1911, reprint, New York: Theatre Art Books, 1956, pp. 162-165.

[28] For example, in 1771 the Italian Giambattista Pasquali in his *Del Teatro in Venezia* argues against the footlights for reasons of verisimilitude. In 1782 the French Pierre Patte in his *Essai sur l'architecture theatrale* even proposed the footlights to "be replaced by reverbarators *in front* of the forestage, mounted on the respective tiers of boxes near the stage, or in other words for the first time front-of-house spotlights!" (See Gosta Bergman, *Lighting in the Theatre*, Almqvist & Wiksell International: Stockholm, Sweden, 1977, p.195) The issue was raised In England by George Saunders in *A Treatise on Theatres*, 1790.

It is clear that the first modernists used essentially the same material equipment as the realists preceding them. As the years passed, they developed further the machinery inherited according to their new aesthetic needs. In particular, they concentrated on specific devices that seemed more appropriate for the creation of more tasteful settings (e.g. cyclorama). Only later did they use them in a different aesthetic context and in order to achieve other than beautified realistic effects. Not being interested in reproducing faithful images of the surrounding world on stage, they created images that could be found only on a theatre stage. In this context, the available technical means were employed overtly as such.

AESTHETICS AND TECHNOLOGY

The combined analysis of aesthetics and technology of the proto-modernistic scenography that lies at the heart of the present dissertation opens up a new perspective, as quite often the level of conservatism and innovation differs between these two aspects, even within the limits of a single performance. While it is sometimes very hard to distinguish between the two, in some cases a discrepancy between the aesthetic achievement and the technology supporting it in terms of conservatism and innovation is quite apparent, thus altering our perception of the whole spectacle and its scenography.

The major example of such a reconsideration is the settings of the Russian Ballet's productions that astonished the West European theatre in the first years of the modern movement (1909-12) and were regarded as highly original and innovative; in fact, they depart only to a limited degree from the contemporary scenographic practices, as they make use of various techniques of the age. Instead of attempting to reproduce the outer world in the realistic mode, Bakst and the other Russian Ballet designers, influenced by recent developments in visual arts, opted for a decorative rendering of their subject matter. They offered a visual feast enhancing the purely visual aspects of the scenery (line and colour as expressive means). However, the perspectively painted two-dimensional pieces of scenery (wings, borders, backcloth etc.) employed by the Russian designers are the standard structural features of traditional nineteenth-century scenography, only the *style* of painting differing (Fig. 2.30).

While the technical 'conservatism' of the Russian Ballets' scenography has been noted on several occasions by both theatre practitioners of a later age and by scholars of modernistic scenography,[29] the fact that such a similar conservatism characterises the early work of Edward Gordon Craig has hardly been noticed. However surprising this may sound, the careful study of the promptbooks and notebooks of one his very first productions (Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas,* 1900) shows,

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[29] Interestingly it is only Huntly Carter in *The New Spirit in Drama and Art* who praises enthusiastically the scenography of Russian Ballet on the basis of their painterly quality. The majority of later books on the subject either dismiss them completely (Fuerst & Hume, *Twentieth Century Stage Decoration*) or accept them as one of the very first steps of modernistic scenography (Kenneth MacGowan, *The Theatre of Tomorrow*). Denis Bablet in his later study (*Esthétique Générale du Decor de Theatre de 1870 a 1914*, Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1965) gives them much credit as innovators.

as I argue in chapter 3, that it is informed by a great number of traditional stage techniques (notably Herkomer's gauze system), although he has revised their use.

Max Reinhardt's *The Miracle* (1911), which I examine in chapter 4, shows partial dependence upon traditional stage techniques in order to achieve an effect that deviates from nineteenth-century aesthetics.

Harley Granville-Barker's Shakespearean productions at the Savoy and especially *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1914), with which I deal in chapter 5, also exploit a tradition, but this time the newly developing tradition of modernism itself. It frankly draws on earlier achievements in modernistic scenographic practice; it uses a set of techniques already known but marginally employed, while the final simplicity of the scenic image is influenced by pioneers such as Craig.

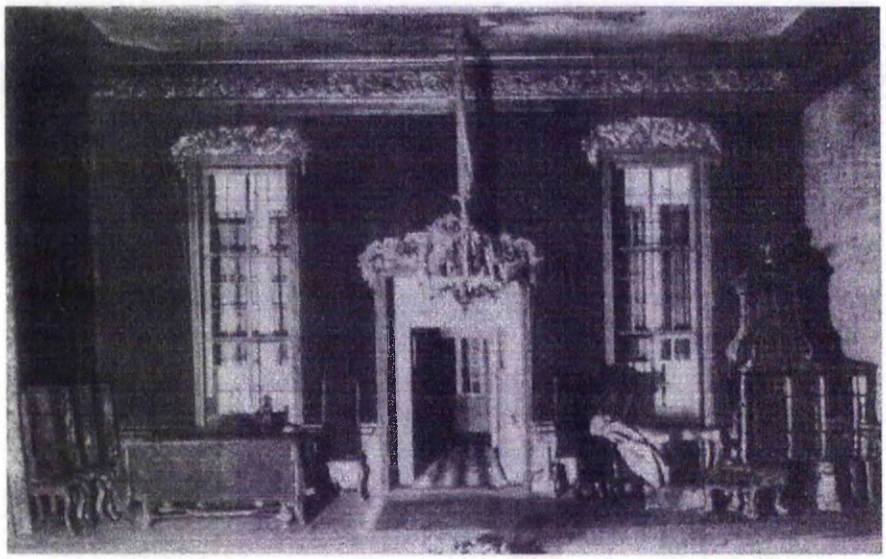

Fig. 2.1 *Die Raüber*, 1909, Deutsches Theater, Berlin, Dir: Max Reinhardt, Des: Emil Orlik. Photograph of the set.

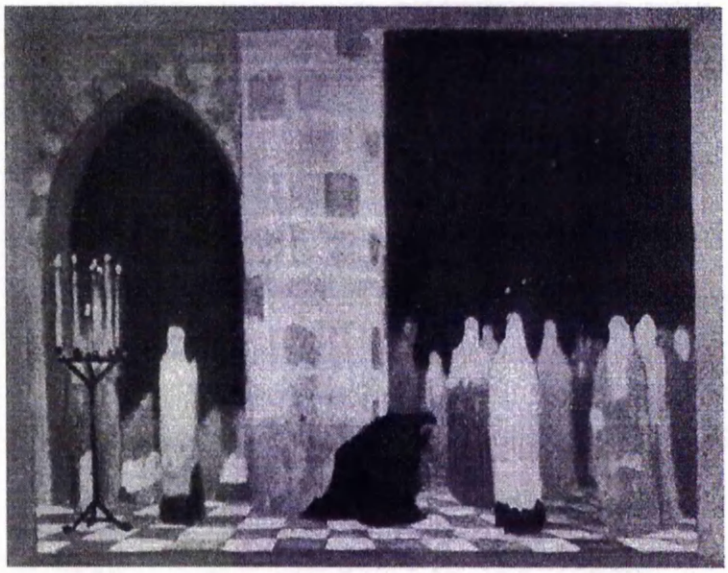

Fig. 2.2 *Faust*, 1908, Munich Künstlertheater, Dir: Georg Fuchs, Des: Fritz Erler. Design by Erler.

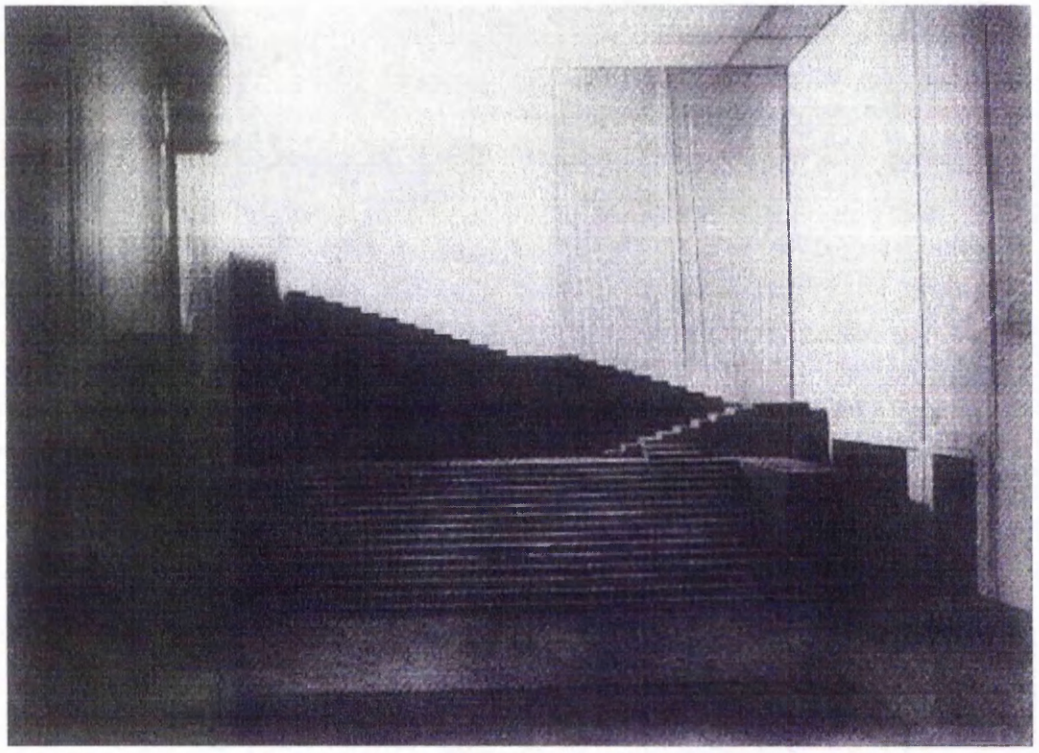

Fig. 2.3 *Orphée et Eurydice*, 1912, Festival Auditorium, Hellerau, Dir: Emil Jacques-Dalcroze, Des: Adolphe Appia. Photograph of the set.

Fig. 2.4 *Twelfth Night*, 1912, Savoy Theatre, London, Dir: H.G. Barker, Des: N. Wilkinson. Production photograph.

Fig. 2.5 *King Lear*, 1908, Deutsches Theater, Kammerspiele, Berlin, Dir: Max Reinhardt, Des: Karl Czeschka. Photograph of the set.

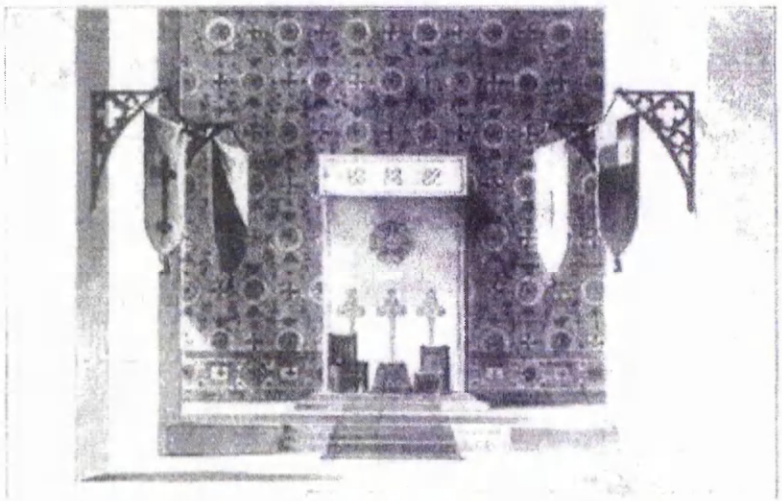

Fig. 2.6 *Hamlet*, 1907, Mannheim Court Theatre, Dir. & Des: Karl Hagemann. The Banquet Hall. Design.

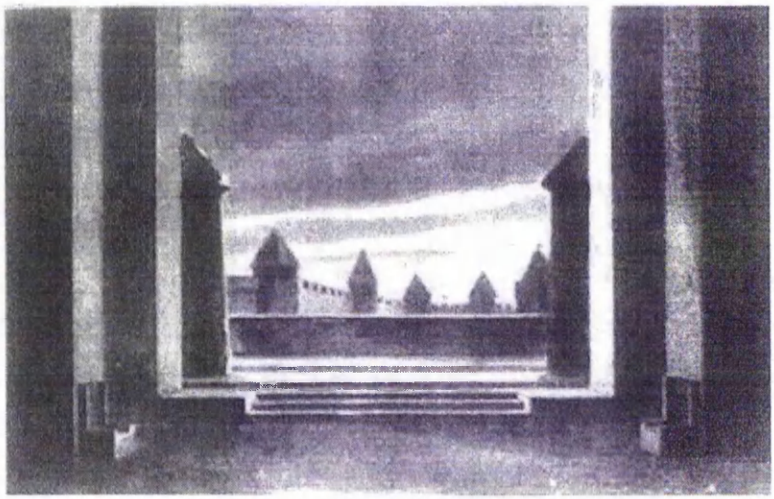

Fig. 2.7 *Hamlet*, 1907, Mannheim Court Theatre, Dir. & Des: Karl Hagemann. The Terrace. Design.

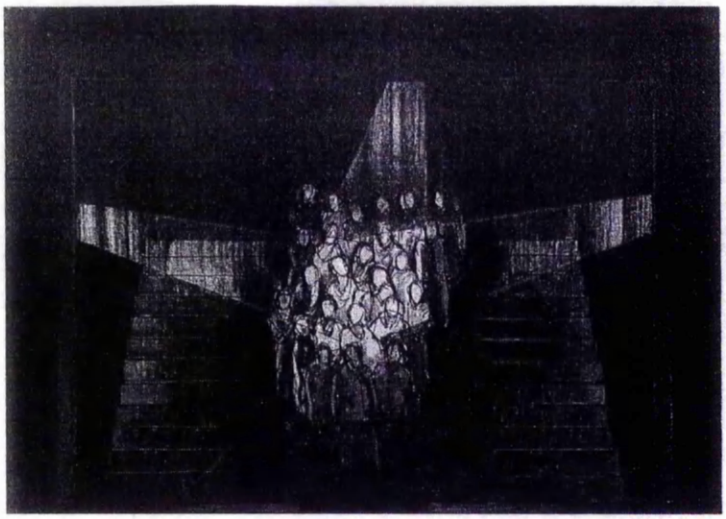

Fig. 2.8 *Masse-Mench*, 1922, Volksbühne, Berlin, Dir: Jürgen Fehling, Des: Strohbach. Drawing by Robert Edmond Jones.

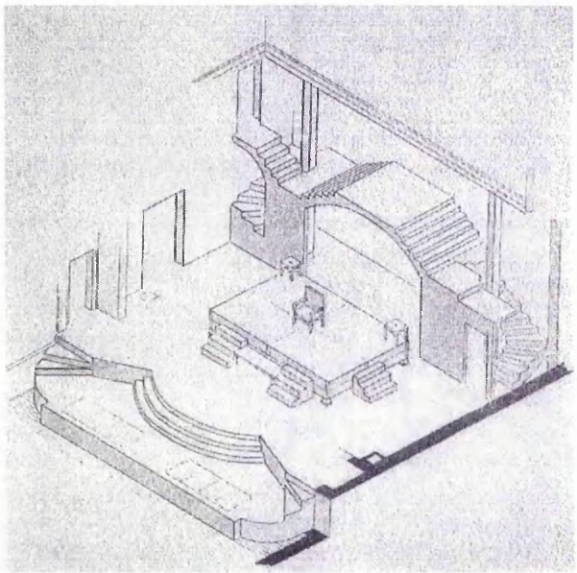

Fig.2.9 Vieux Colombier, 1919-20, Paris. The stage. Isometric drawing by Louis Jouvet.

Fig. 2.10 *Le Cocu Magnifique*, 1922, Meyerhold Theatre, Moscow, Dir: Vsevolod Meyerhold, Des: Lubov Popova. Production photograph

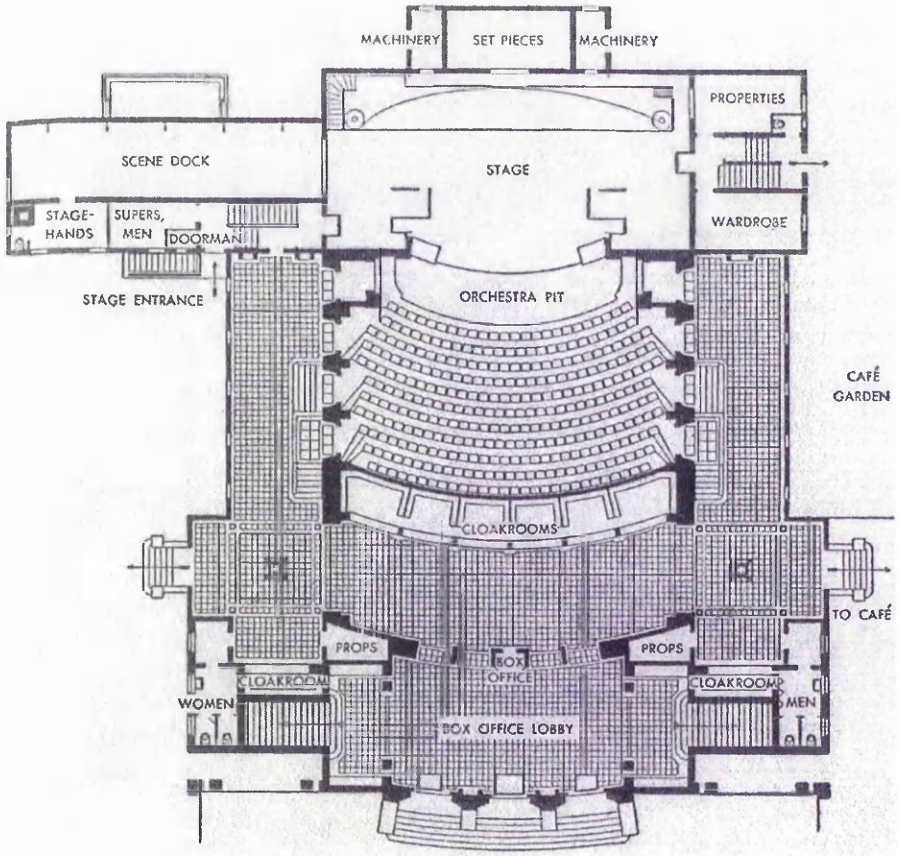

Fig. 2.11 Munich Künstlertheater, 1908, Arch: Max Littmann. Ground plan.

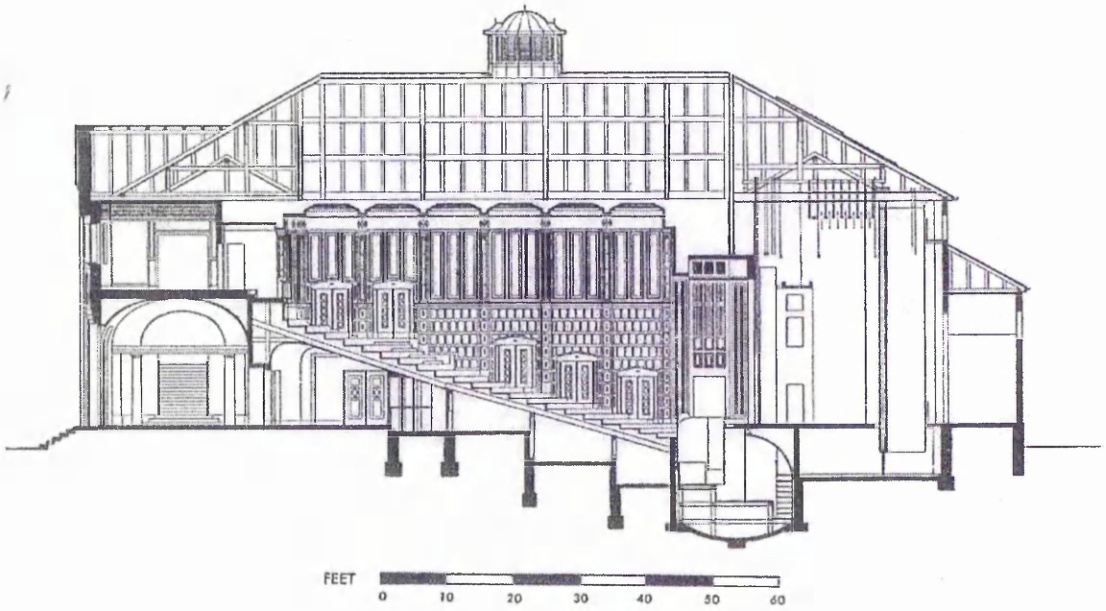

Fig. 2.12 Munich Künstlertheater, 1908, Arch: Max Littmann. Section.

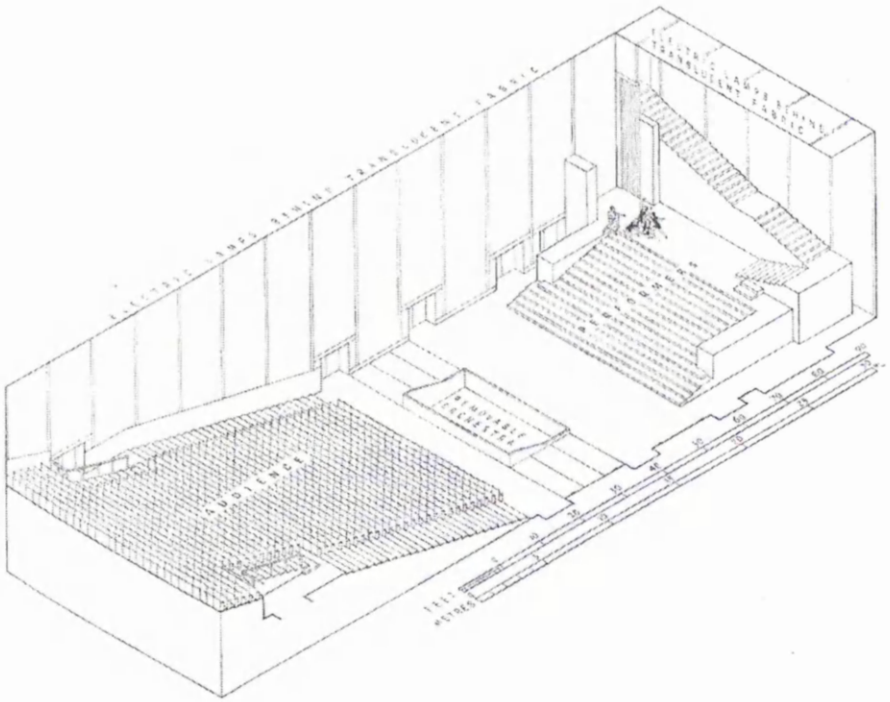

Fig. 2.13 Festival Auditorium, 1910-12, Hellerau, Arch: Heinrich Tessenow. Isometric reconstruction by Richard Leacroft.

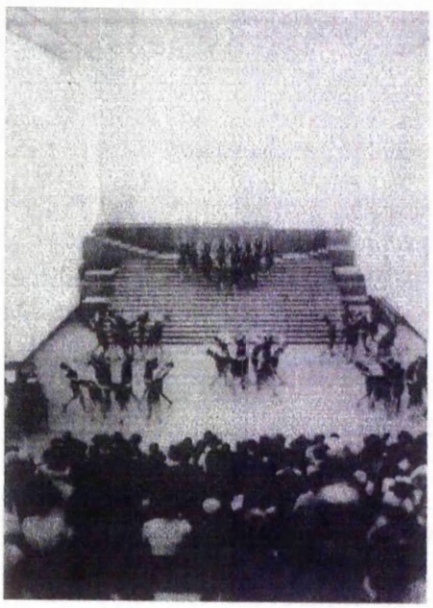

Fig. 2.14 Festival Auditorium, 1910-12, Hellerau, Arch: Heinrich Tessenow. Production photograph.

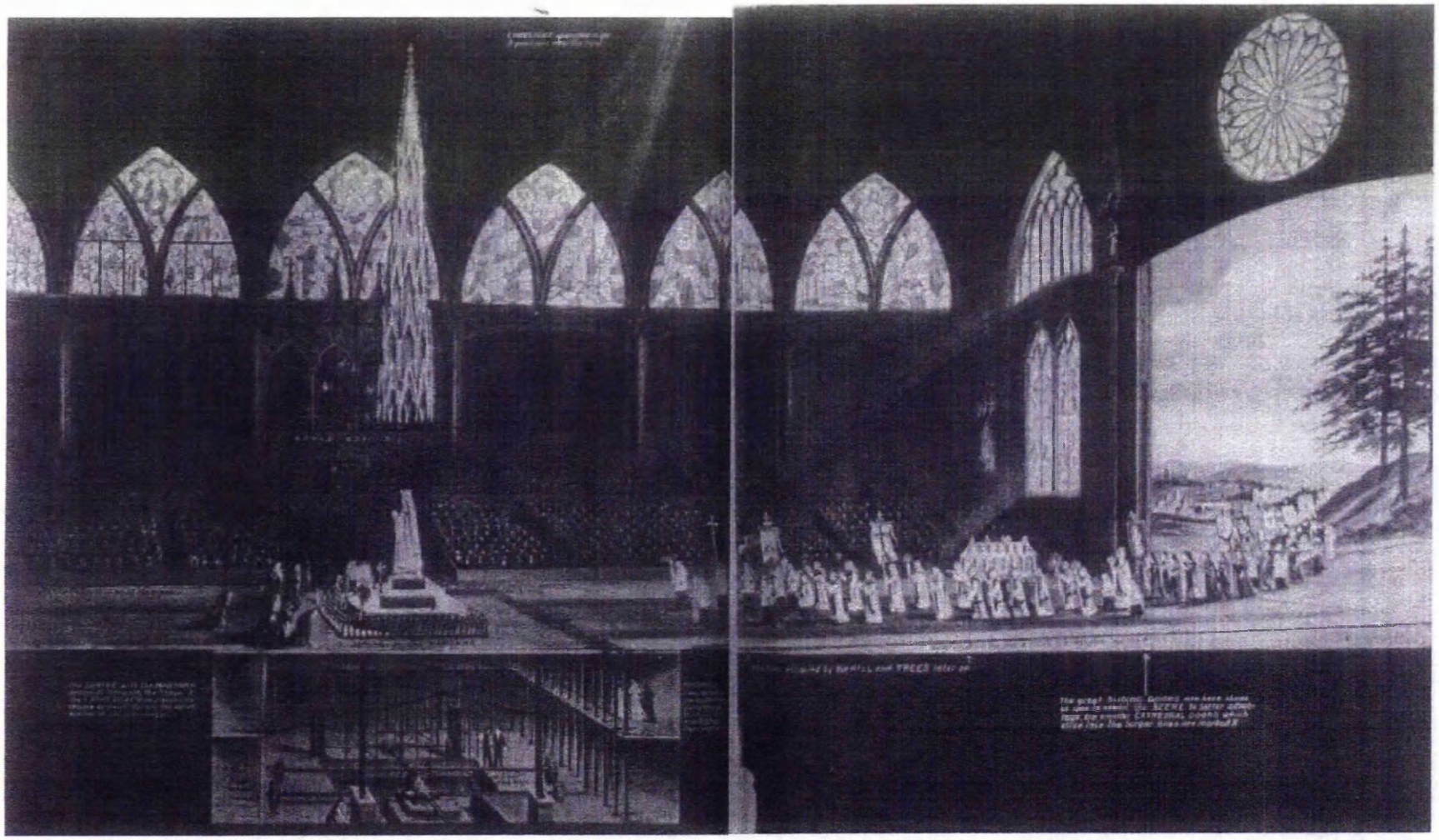

Fig. 2.15 Olympia Exhibition Hall, 1911, London, As modelled for Reinhardt's production of *The Miracle*. Arch: Hermann Dernburg, Des: Ernst Stern. Contemporary reconstruction.

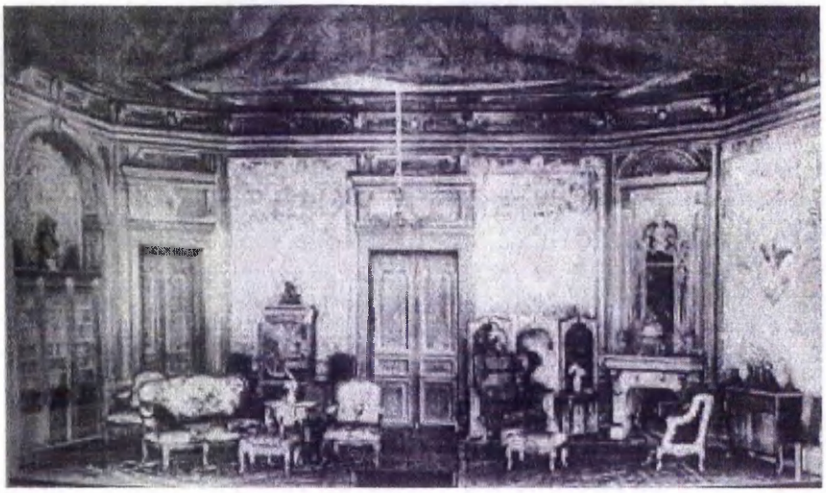

Fig. 2.16 *Le Dédale*, 1904, Comédie-Française, Paris, Des: Devred. Photograph of the set.

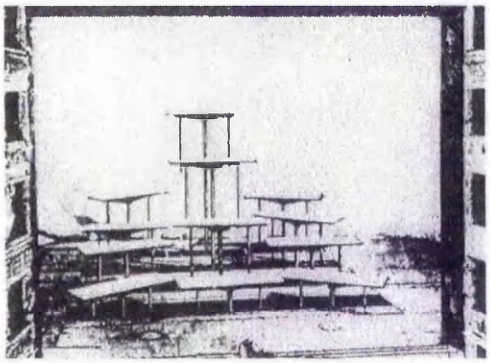

Fig. 2.17 Budapest Opera House, 1875-84. Sinking stage. Publicity photograph.

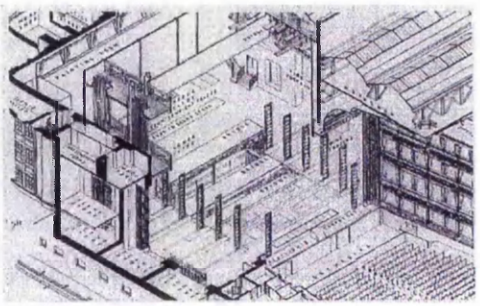

Fig. 2.18 Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, 1901, London, Arch: E.O. Sachs. The stage. Isometric reconstruction by Richard Leacroft.

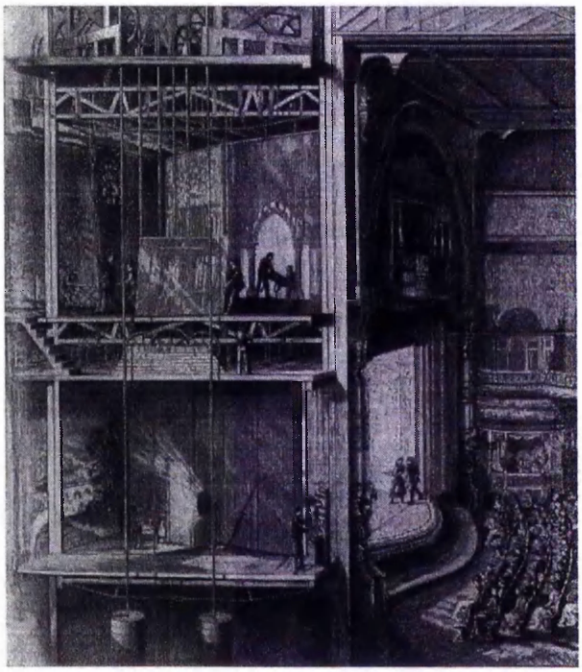

Fig. 2.19 Madison Square Theater, 1879, New York. Elevator stage. Inventor: Steele MacKaye. Magazine illustration.

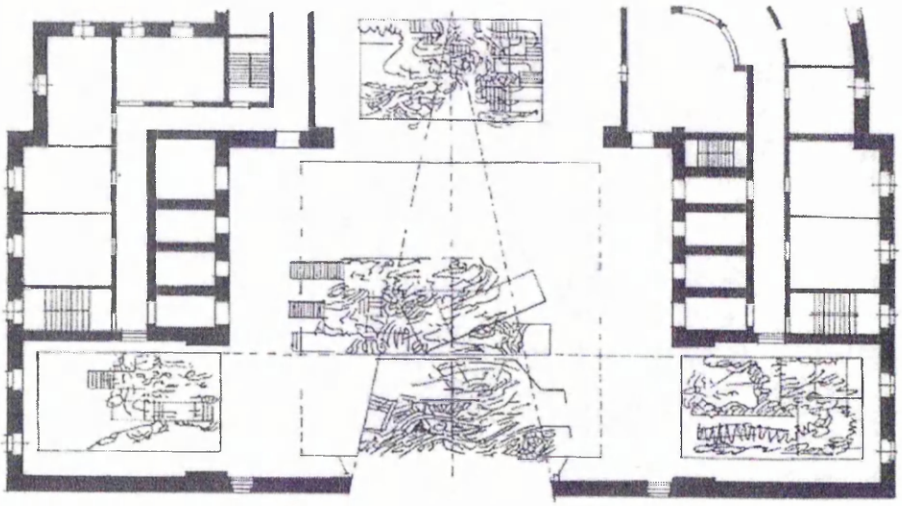

Fig. 2.20 Berlin Court Theatre. 'Reform Stage' [sliding stage]. Inventor: Herr Brandt.

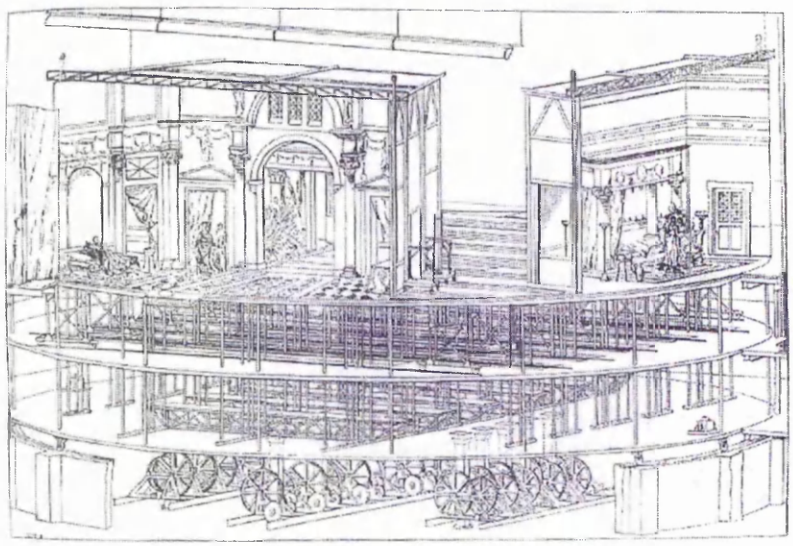

Fig. 2.21 Munich Court Opera House. Project for a revolving stage. Inventor: Karl Lautenschlaeger.

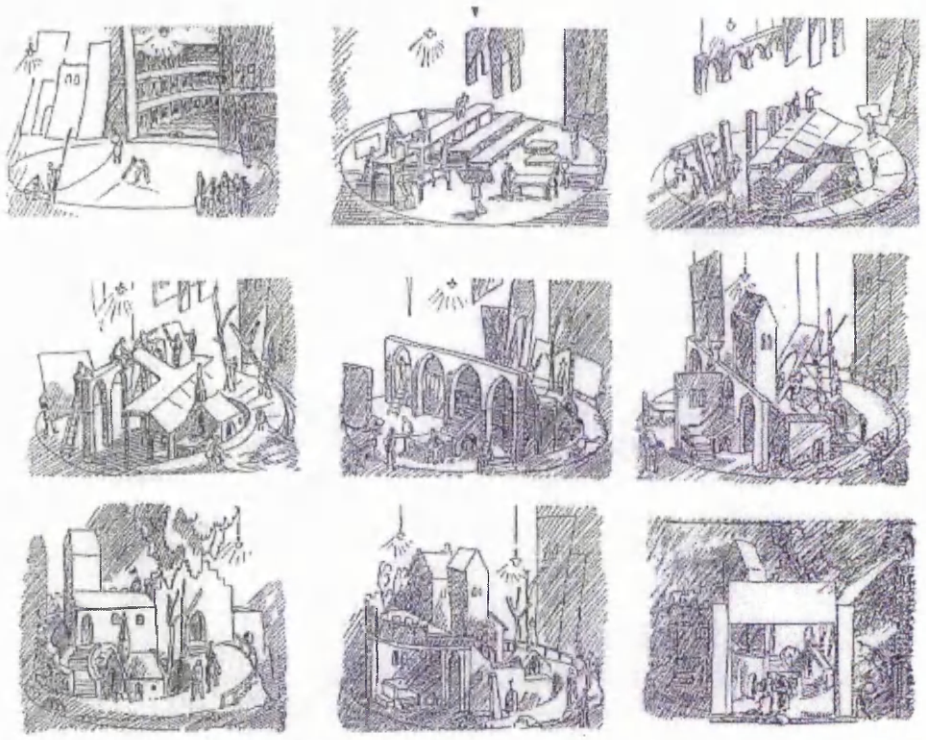

Fig. 2.22 Series of sketches depicting the construction of a revolving stage setting by Ernst Stern.

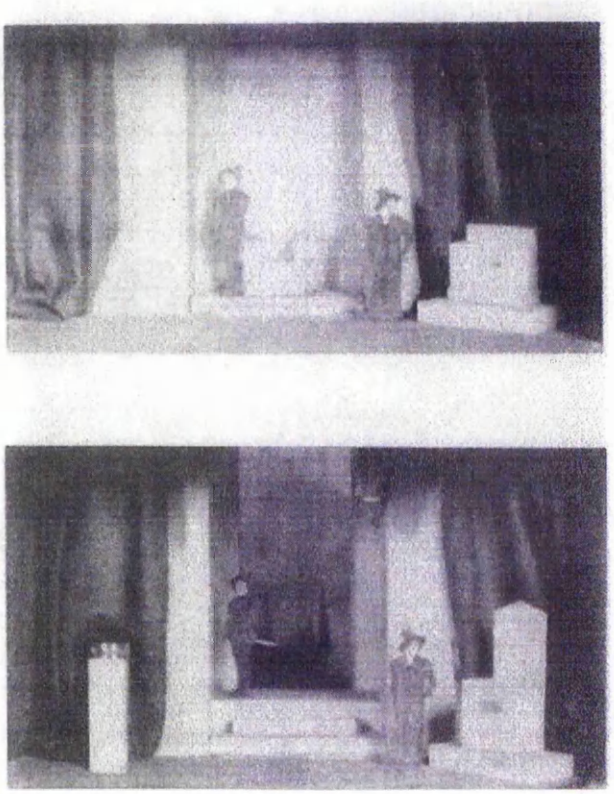

Fig. 2.23 Unit set. Des: Samuel Hume. Photographs from models for a student production of an Elizabethan tragedy in Harvard University.

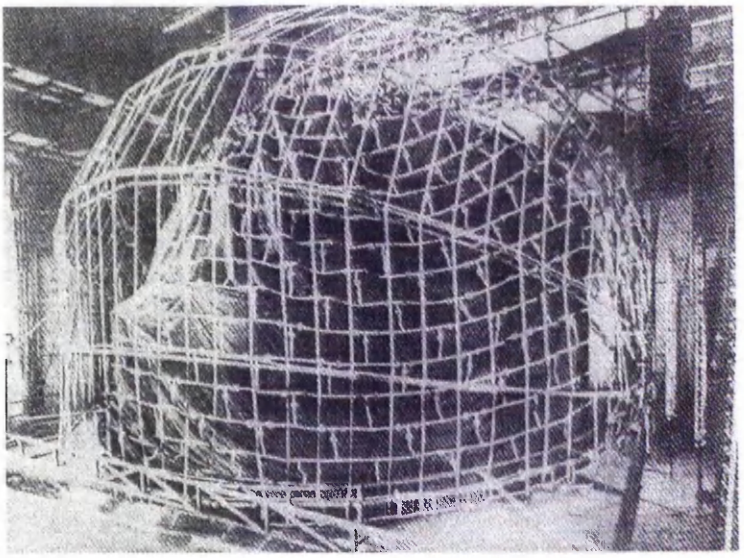

Fig. 2.24 Fortuny lighting system, 1902. The firmament. Photograph.

Fig. 2.25 *Lohengrin*. A traditional outdoors setting (with wings and borders) and one of the New Stagecraft (with cyclorama). Designs.

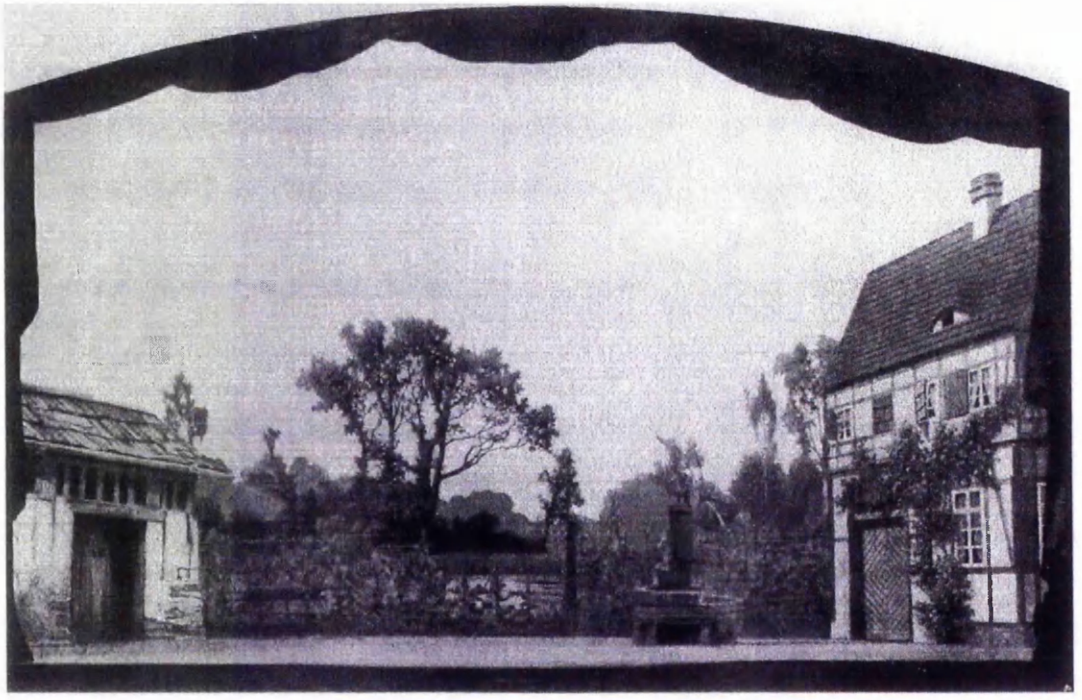

Fig. 2.26 The use of the Fortuny firmament in a set. Photograph.

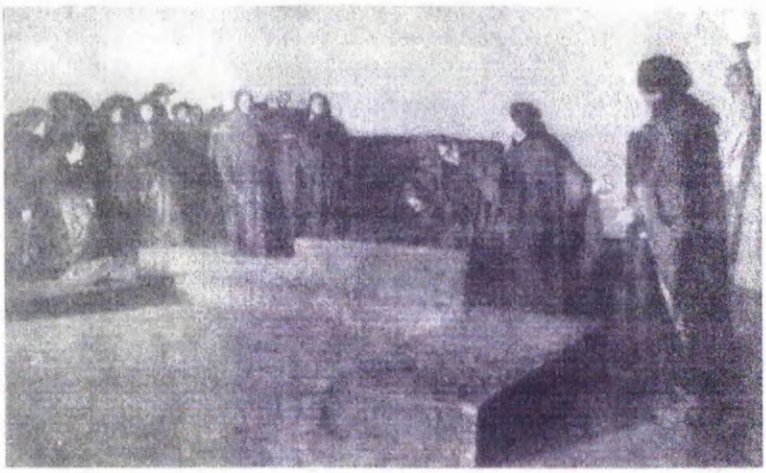

Fig. 2.27 *Hamlet*, 1909, Deutsches Theater, Berlin, Dir: Max Reinhardt, Des: Fritz Erler. Cyclorama used as a background. Production photograph

Fig. 2.28 F*aust*, 1927, New York, Des: Jo Meilziner. Model of a project.

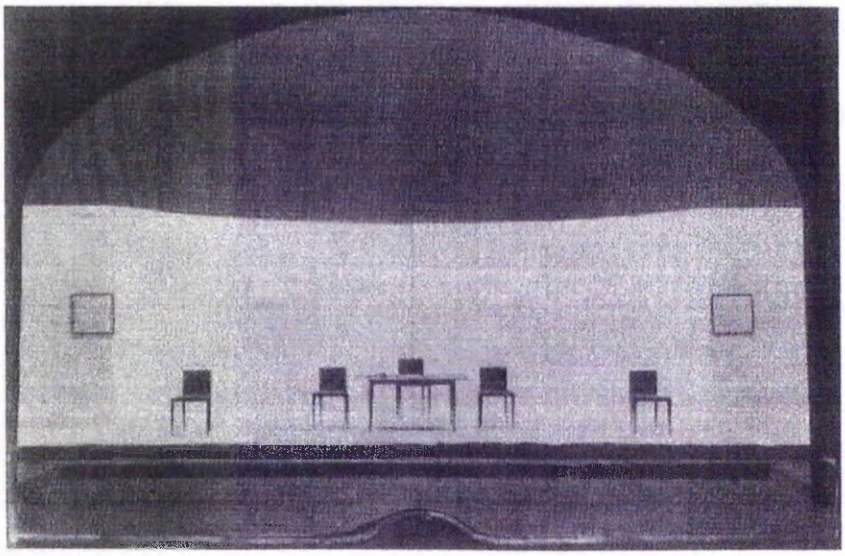

Fig. 2.29 *Marquis von Keith*, 1921, Staatstheater, Berlin, Des: Emil Pirchan. Photograph of the set.

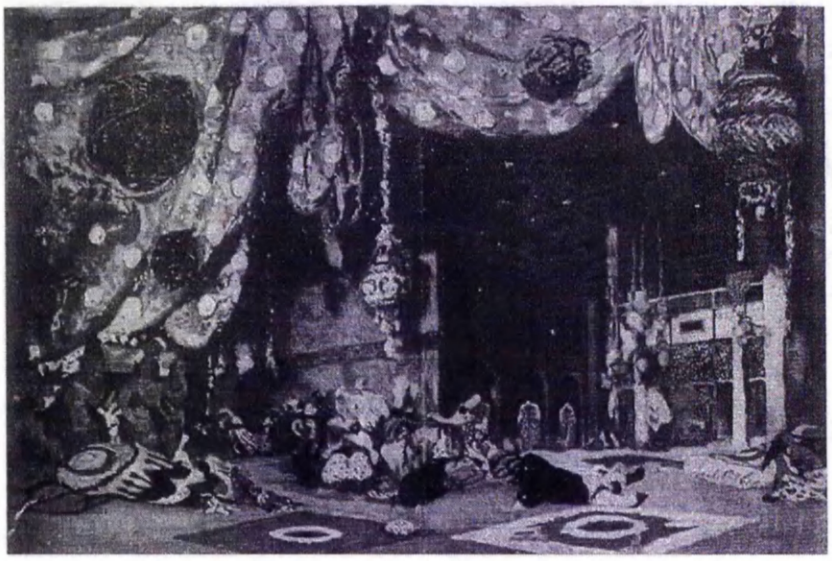

Fig. 2.30 *Sheherazade*, 1911, Russian Ballet, Covent Garden, London, Des: Leon Bakst. Design by Bakst.

Second Part

3. Craig's *Dido and Aeneas* (1900)

On May 17, 1900 in the Hampstead Conservatoire near London the première of a performance was given, which most theatre scholars of today regard as "a milestone in the history of the modern Theatre."[30] It was Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, the first production of the newly formed Purcell Operatic Society (POS). While the company was an amateur one, the stage director (his responsibilities including the visual aspect of the spectacle) was fated to become one of the key figures in New Movement in theatre. Edward Gordon Craig, being raised in the illusionistic theatre of the nineteenth century, was taking a crucial step forward towards new directions that would flourish all the way through the twentieth century, without neglecting his past.

THE SPECTACLE

Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* holds an emblematic position in the history of English music. First performed in 1689 or 1690 in Chelsea in a private performance it is considered the first English opera. Despite this fact, the score and the libretto were not published until 1889,[31] while the opera was only revived in 1895 in the Lyceum by the students of the Royal College of Music.

The major virtue of this masterpiece is the dramatic quality of the music. Action and music harmonise in an admirable whole that lasts hardly an hour. The story follows the lines of Virgil's *Aeneid*, though somewhat simplified. The programme of the POS production summarises the plot as follows:

> The Morning breaks. Dido, Queen of Carthage, filled with a Presentiment that her love for Aeneas will end in Disaster, refuses to be comforted by her Handmaidens. Aeneas enters, and his Words revive her. They leave for 'the Hills and the Vales... to the musical Groves and the cool shady Fountains', accompanied by their Train. Meantime the Sorceress and her sisters plot the Destruction of these Lovers. They sing – Harm's our delight
> And Mischief our skill',
> And it is agreed to send a Messenger in the shape of a God to summon Aeneas away. This has the desired effect; the Witches exult, and Dido is left alone to mourn her loss. Her heart breaks, and she dies singing a most glorious song.[32]

[30] Edward Craig, "Gordon Craig and Hubert von Herkomer", *Theatre Research*, vol. 10, no 1 (1969), p. 7.
[31] *The Works of Henry Purcell*, vol. III, *Dido and Aeneas,* William H. Cummings (ed.), London: Novello, Ewer and Co, 1889. This is the very edition Craig used.
[32] Quoted in Denis Bablet, *Edward Gordon Craig*, trans. Daphne Woodward, London: Heinemann, 1966, pp. 39-40.

What is apparent from that brief outline and most important for this study is the fact that *Dido and Aeneas* does not ask for an elaborate stage or complex machinery. In fact, it was written for and performed by an amateur school company in a non purpose-built theatre. The material conditions of the mounting were very close to these of the POS production.

The quite detailed and insightful description of Craig's next year's revival of *Dido and Aeneas* by Haldane Macfall presents a similarly simple and evocative approach:

> In the opening scene, when the love-sick Dido, weighed down by the premonition that evil will come of her love for Aeneas, refusing to be comforted by her maidens, seats herself on the scarlet cushions of her throne, a broad green belt of ivyclad wall flanking the throne to right and left, the note of doom is struck. Her figure at once gives the dignity of her despair, where she reclines miserably at the foot of the great lilac heavens, bowing her head to her destiny – and the sense of doom seems to grow vast as the heavens at the foot of which she bows is queenly shame.
>
> That was a splendidly composed scene in which, amidst the mysteries of the night, against a background of moonlight, the Sorceress stands high above her sea devils, who crawl about her feet, and flout and rise and fall, like clouts of raggy seaweed that flap against the rocks at the incoming of the treacherous tide, as she evilly plots the destruction of the lovers, and plans to send a messenger in the guise of a god to summon Aeneas away. It was in this scene that Gordon Craig's fine artistic feeling for black and white did him yeoman service. The dim figures, seen in half-light, compelled the imagination.
>
> The scene in which, against a background of the color of the smoke, the maidens of the court are caught in a thunder-shower, and group into the twos and threes under the upheld shields of the young warriors, was worthy to be recorded in canvas. The decorative effect, the largeness of it, the swift-telling pantomime of it, the black-and-white, all displayed that broad, masterly treatment that we associate with the great masters in paint.
>
> It is in the final scene that the noblest triumph is achieved. Attended by her kneeling maidens, the woe-begone figure of Dido, wrapped in her black robes, reclines amidst the sombre black cushions of her throne. The disconsolate woman tells with rare dignity at the base of the great lilac background that springs in one vast broad expanse straight upwards to the heavens, large and majestic as the heavens themselves. The footlights being absent, and the illumination coming from above, there was flung down upon Dido's face a gentle light, which made tragic darks hover below the finely wrought and massive brows, casting mysterious gloom about the eye-pits, and holding the lower part of the features in shadow that swept into the blackness of her robes, as she uttered the exquisite death-song. The dignity and beauty of this scene, the gracefully poised figure in the midst of the sternly tragic picture, and ultimately the majesty of the dead queen as she lay, fallen back, with upturned face towards the vast sweep of the heavens, made one of the noblest death-scenes the stage has yielded.[33]

[33] Haldane Macfall, "Some thoughts on the art of Gordon Craig, with particular reference to stage craft", *The International Studio*, v. XXIII, 1901, pp. 246-257.

VENUES

The performance of *Dido and Aeneas* took place in two different venues in consecutive years. In 1900 POS performed at the Hampstead Conservatoire and for the revival next year they rented the Coronet Theatre, Notting Hill.[34]

The initial venue, Hampstead Conservatoire, was not constructed for theatrical purpose; in fact, it was a concert hall. Nevertheless, it incorporated essential basic structures, i.e. a space from where to see and a space where to be seen, which made it suitable for performance. However, both the stage and the auditorium of this concert hall were of rather unusual structure when compared to the theatre buildings of the age.

On the one hand, the main feature of the auditorium of this concert hall was the raked seating in a single slope and the absence of boxes and balconies of the traditional Italian type theatres. This unified arrangement, reminiscent of Wagner's Bayreuth, had a great advantage in the sense that there was no real difference in the overall picture each spectator received. The major difference lay in the shape of the perceived picture. As Craig' s son Edward noted

> Those at the back of the hall would get a remarkably oblong picture, whilst those in the front would get almost square picture because they would see a greater proportion of the sky.[35]

Nevertheless, there were no such optical distortions as one gets while seated in the gallery, when much of the stage height and depth is lost sight of.

On the other hand, the dimensions and the shape of the actual stage were not ideal.[36]

> We inquired if the stage at the Conservatoire was a good one. Mr. Craig pointed to an extremely wide platform, on which the chorus was standing, the depth of which

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[34] The Coronet Theatre, Noting Hill opened in November 28, 1898 and had a capacity of 1,143 spectators. Its stage was 65' wide by 40' deep. See, Diana Howard, *London Theatres and Music Halls, 1850-1950*, London: The Library Association, 1970, p. 53. Its architect W.G.R. Sprague designed a series of other "small and elegant West End theatres". Victor Glasstone, *Victorian and Edwardian theatres: an architectural and social survey*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1975, p. 104.

[35] Edward Craig, *Gordon Craig; the story of his life*, New York: Knopf, 1968, p.120.

[36] Craig himself notes down some of the dimensions of Hampstead Conservatoire:
floor to ceiling 40ft
to cornice 30
to bottom of window 18ft
[he adds a sketch depicting the stage with only two platforms (there must have been four or five) rising above floor level; some measurements are written down: total width 44ft, height of the 1st platform 3 ½ ft, depth 10+4 ½= 14 ½ ft, width of the 2nd platform 40 ft, height 1 ft, depth 4 ½ ft]
(Ms B2 *Dido and Aeneas* notebook, p.32 verso)

> was very far from being in proportion to its width, and which was arranged, moreover, in tiers.[37]

Those tiers, which were initially constructed in order to facilitate a possible orchestra arrangement, were permanent features of the stage. Moreover, the stage itself did not offer any of the standard theatre equipment of the big theatres of the day; neither could it be converted in order to acquire most of them. For example, there was no adequate space under the stage floor to accommodate all the relevant machinery.

What is more, stage and auditorium were contained in a single hall, with no architectural feature in between to separate them.[38] In other words, the traditional proscenium arch, which set the boundaries between two distinct spaces, was missing. Craig readily remedied such an absence; he had a temporary proscenium arch erected, which he complemented with a curtain.[39] Yet, he avoided elaborate or lavish structures, as the renaissance and baroque frontispieces had been. In this particular case the material was plain grey canvas.

By employing this crucial feature of illusionistic staging Craig turned the unconventional space he had at his disposal into a fairly conventional one. He restored a certain visual relationship between the spectator and the spectacle, the two of them being at a distance to each other.[40] The spectator's sight was orientated into the stage proper, into the place of illusion. In this enclosed space any unwanted optical interference was expelled and the world of imagination could flourish.

At the same time as he added a proscenium arch and curtains, he desired, quite paradoxically, a certain fusion of stage and auditorium, spectacle and spectators.

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[37] "The Purcell Operatic Society", *The Musical Courier*, 18 May 1900.

[38] The original arrangement of the Hampstead Conservatoire is strongly reminiscent of the Festival Auditorium at Hellerau, designed on the suggestions of Appia in 1910-12. It is very interesting to note how this kind of open stage, which Craig dismissed in 1900, was chosen as an ideal form only ten years later.

[39] Edward Craig gives a detailed account of the method used: "He consulted Mr Judson, a local builder, who knew nothing about the theatre, but after visiting the hall said he could easily build a proscenium-cum-spotting rail in one; this he proposed to do by erecting two six-foot-square towers of sturdy scaffold poles on either side of the platform, and from them, cantilevering longer scaffold poles until they met in the centre – this would form the framework of the oblong opening that Ted required; it would measure about thirty by fifteen feet. ... Slender poles were lashed across the joints in the centre, and any slackness that might of the proscenium by the wire ropes which went up through the ceiling and were secured to the main timbres of the roof. The whole structure was cross-braced with light timbres and was then covered with painted scenic canvas." (Craig, *Gordon Craig*, p.120)

[40] He had even calculated the right distance between the seats and the stage in order to achieve the desirable visual effect: "the seats must not be nearer than a certain distance" (Ms B2, p. 1).

This equally powerful unifying effect was to be achieved mainly by scenographic means:

> Curtains gauzes etc. upside of hall / joining hall and stage there by / lights in hall same as stage/ moon – sun etc. (Ms B2, p.8 verso)

However contradictory this may sound, it was supposed to be done – it seems most improbable to have been realised, since no relevant report has appeared in the Press[41] – in an attempt to re-enforce the illusion. Craig's conception of the performance was essentially an illusionistic one:

> the scenes must mix with the audience./ in act I they must be in the palace. in act 2 in the cave (Ms B2, p. 1)

The illusionistic fusion does not result from the realistic representation of nature; it is an outcome of the artistic recreation of life:

> He created an ideal country where everything was possible, even speaking in verse, or speaking in music, or the expression of the whole of life in a dance.[42]

In other words, the illusion inherent in modernistic aesthetics is of a new kind. Sheldon Cheney named it "imaginative illusion", created when the artist leaves "everything possible to the imagination... by simplification and symbolic suggestion", in contrast to the old type of "material illusion" achieved by "multiplication of naturalistic details", that leaves "nothing to the imagination of the audience."[43]

[41] In a subsequent production, Laurence Housman's *Bethlehem* (1902, Imperial Institute, London) he did employ similar devices (a coloured cloth, corresponding to elements of the actual stage picture, draped around the auditorium; a stepped platform within the auditorium leading to the stage proper) realising thus one of the first examples of modernistic environmental scenography.
[42] W. B. Yeats, "At Stratford-on-Avon", *The Speaker*, 11 May 1901.
[43] Sheldon Cheney, *The New Movement in the Theatre*, 1914, reprint, Westport (Conn.): Greenwood, 1971, pp. 127-128.

TECHNOLOGY

The numerous press reviews covering the POS *Dido and Aeneas* (most of them referring to the 1901 revival) provide a great deal of information about what actually happened behind the proscenium arch, most of the time praising the stage manager for the simplicity of his renderings and less frequently reproaching him for not using all the resources of contemporary theatre.[44] Even if they judge things differently, they all admit that there was a certain clash with the traditional staging. However, this was only partly true, since the study of Craig's notebooks shows that the technical aspect of the scenery in *Dido and Aeneas* was at the same time traditional and innovative, a combination of given solutions, revised practices and new inventions.

Scene arrangement

A coloured drawing (Fig. 3.1) as well as a ground plan sketch from Craig's notebook (Ms A 53, p. 6 verso, Fig. 3.2) give us a clear image of the very first scene of the play and in particular of its arrangement. The overall shape is oblong, as it follows the given dimensions of the Hampstead stage. A purple backcloth, suspended on an especially erected wooden frame, limits the back of this comparatively shallow stage. On either side of the stage one cannot discern the traditional wings; they have been replaced by vertically placed sidecloths. Moreover,

> From red dot to red dot stands a hedge of green. Purple flowers
> A shag trellis upholds the green. it is semitransparent

There are also two opening cuts on either side piece of the trellis as

> the chorus are behind it dressed ready for the
> witches scene.

The only

> Properties on stage. Throne. Canopy. Step. 8 cushions R & B
> 5 red side up (Ms A 53, p. 6 verso)

are carefully marked as well.

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[44] While most critics would congratulate Craig on "abolishing the terrible footlights" (R. Peggio, "The Purcell Operatic Society", Musical Standard, 30 March 1901), the *Westminster Gazette* ("Purcell at Notting Hill, 22 [wrong date] March 1901) did not approve his staging methods: "That his [Craig's] ideas on the subject are ingenious and individual may be freely conceded. That they might provide a genuine substitute for the genuine article in the case of a performance in a building unprovided with orthodox stage appliances may also be believed. But that they should be substituted without such necessity for the more ordinary garniture of the modern stage is by no means so clear."

However detailed this sketch might appear, it nevertheless lacks one element that contributed largely to the overall synthesis. In front of the backcloth, at a certain distance (six feet), a grey gauze was stretched on a frame at an angle. This rather peculiar arrangement was indeed very effective when combined with light; when the backcloth and gauze were side lit with electric light they produced the effect of limitless depth.

The major structural element was the backcloth-gauze system, but a few other pieces were added in the various scenes.

For the Witches scenes (Act I, scene II[45] + Act III, scene II) a grey backcloth was used and the stage floor was covered with a cloth of the same colour. Moreover, a cut cloth on gauze giving the impression of some wreckage was rolled down close to the proscenium (Fig.3.3 & Fig.3.4).[46]

For Act II, scene I, the Grove – Moonshine, he changed the backcloth to a painted one (Fig. 3.5),[47] while the stage was bare except for some properties the actors were carrying.[48]

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[45] Even in the 1889 standard edition of the opera there is confusion about the act-scene division concerning the first two scenes; while the text of the libretto counts only one scene in the first act (The Palace), the music score includes the witches scene (the Cave) in the first act. For the purposes of this dissertation I will adopt the second option. Moreover, I shall treat Act III as having not one but three scenes: The Ships – Departure, Under the Ground, The Palace – Death, following Craig's division.

[46] Edward Craig in his article "Gordon Craig and Hubert von Herkomer", p. 12 alters slightly his own account of the scene given in his father's biography, as he notes that: "In the foreground was an arrangement of poles suggesting broken masts." In place of the more traditional cut-cloth, he puts the more up-to-date three-dimensional pieces.

[47] It seems wrong to believe (as the majority of Craig scholars seems to do) that only the Coronet revival presented a painted backcloth in Act II, replacing the usual plain backcloth of the other scenes. As both the *Lady* articles "The second act, in particular, with a woodland backcloth rather like a conder fan, was really beautiful" [C.M., *The Lady*, 24 May 1900] and "[T]he scenery was reduced to back-cloths of the simplest kind, sometimes an intense blue sky, sometimes a woodland scene in the style of Conder" ["Musical Notes", *The Lady*, 26 January 1901] make evident, this backcloth already existed in the Hampstead première and therefore should be regarded as forming part of the original scenographic conception. Craig includes a relevant sketch in his notebook (Ms B2, p. 6 verso), where he notes the central position of the statue of Mercury and adds the phrase "statues of Pan here and there." A woodcut entitled "Dido and Aeneas: Backcloth, 1900" included in Janet Leeper's *Edward Gordon Craig; Designs for the Theatre,* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1948, pl.6 (Fig. 3.5) may almost certainly be attributed to that scene.

[48] The staging at the Coronet must have been more elaborate, as a fountain as well as birds and fauns must have been added. See the alterations page in Ms A 53, p. 2:

> alterations for stage etc.
> grey steps leading up into orchestra act I covered with green Act. I
> a new light indigo cloth for Act I see drawing
> a new yellow or pink cloth for act I scene II & act II
> the trellis & throne to join somehow. Act I
> Act II to be far more mysterious, more moonlight
> The trees to be painted thus ...wood cutting scheme

For Act III, scene I, the Ships – Departure (Fig. 3.6), all the stage platforms were filled with the chorus. At the back, against a blue sky Craig placed some ship masts rising over the quay. In front of them there were two ground rows, one depicting a wall and the second depicting the sea. Each side of the stage was limited by the trellis work that functioned like masking wings.[49]

For the last scene, The Palace – Death, only Dido's throne, filled with black cushions, was on stage, backed by an indigo sky.[50]

As this brief account makes clear, four set features appeared in every scene (although each was different in its material substance): one backcloth and in front of it the grey gauze, and two side cloths at either side. In this shell construction everything else was accommodated (the canopy, the trellis, the floor cloth, the ship masts, the ground rows). Within these boundaries, Craig performed all the changes needed.

Craig abolished the borders as well as the wings. Instead of placing strips of cloth in parallel planes behind the proscenium arch, he practised a different system to meet the masking demands. He diminished the height of the proscenium opening and at the same time he increased the height of the backcloths. Thus the spectators could see neither pieces of cloth nor backstage structures that would ruin for them the illusion of limitless space. This innovative arrangement can be

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Here & there a silver streak: painted in lustre.
A fountain. transparent. lightmoving
Birds. Fauns.
Trellis [sketch]

[49] Edward Craig's reconstruction of Act III, scene I at Hampstead (Fig.3.6) omits the traditional ground rows and thus gives a more simplified stage image. Nevertheless, the list of set pieces and properties of Ms A5, p. 9 reveals a more traditional scenographic treatment of the same scene:

Act 3. Scene 1 Same scene as Act I scene I
Without trellis or throne.
A ground row of (sea) + boat tops.
A ground row wall (see Rossetti book)
Wings to be the trellis work (Ms A5, p. 9 recto)

Could the additional elements have been included as late as 1901?

[50] Act 3. Scene 3. Same as scene I.
Without ship row.

Properties on stage. Throne

Properties off stage. Rose leaves. Erants
A tree which shakes its petals off & dies
(Ms A5, p. 11 verso)

seen as an early type of cyclorama, which became an emblematic feature of modern scenography the years that followed.

This basic structure, which surrounded the stage space and functioned as a set of masking pieces, was a combination of the simplest box-set arrangement and the cyclorama, i.e. of an outdoors and an indoors arrangement at the same time. On the one hand, by not presenting any wings but a continuous side cloth it approximated the box-set shape, where the wings have been replaced by continuous pieces of canvas running upstage-downstage with door openings on them (still, the box-set ground plan presents a trapezoid form due to perspective restrictions). On the other hand, by not employing any form of device for masking the height other than the lowered proscenium arch it showed the way to the wide spread use of cyclorama.

As Hampstead had no facilities for suspending or lowering scenery, Craig had to build his own:

> A frame was erected at the back of the "stage" behind the orchestra platforms from which could be suspended two backcloths, one painted bright ultramarine blue, the other a medium grey; there was also a small cut cloth to be suspended close to the proscenium; these were all taken up or lowered like the sails of a ship, with the aid of block and tackle. Another frame was erected just in front of the backcloths on which was stretched a grey gauze.[51]

All the scene shifting could easily be operated manually; volunteering friends could even manoeuvre the simple mechanisms. All the scene changes were taking place behind drawn curtains and in as much silence as possible (a basic illusionistic principle):

> At the end of this scene on page 23 [Act I, Scene I] on removal of the
> hedges 1 & 2 everyone behind must come
> down close to curtain at the word "Down stage"
> This will be done noislessly [sic] & in order.
> (Ms A 53, p.6 verso)

Next year the production was revived in a traditional theatre space, the Coronet Theatre, Notting Hill, well known for avant-garde productions by many Stage Societies. This venue offered all the facilities Hampstead lacked, but the production did not appear to have changed considerably due to the change of space. One can suspect that, given the equipment available, Craig would have just

[51] Craig, *Gordon Craig*, p.120.

used the existent machinery for suspending and shifting the scenery.[52] He might as well have taken advantage of that fact in order to realise more complex arrangements. He could, for example, have used three gauzes instead of one for the Witches scene, as a sketch in his notebook suggests (Ms B2, p. 6).[53]

The fact that the changes in staging of *Dido and Aeneas* due to the change of space (the one transformed, the other traditional) were minor indicates that these venues were in essence compatible. Hampstead Conservatoire was transformed into a more or less "Italian type" stage that not only possessed a proscenium arch and a curtain; it even contained the simplest mechanisms for securing and shifting scenery. At the same time, it became evident that the traditional stage of the Coronet was in a position to accommodate less spectacular, i.e. less technically demanding, pieces just as efficiently, even if that meant that more than half of its resources were not to be used. It is as if after all these years of advancing technological sophistication of the "Italian type" stage Craig, with what the reviewers saw as simplification, returned to its early days; in other words, he went "back to the basics".

Lighting

In order to illuminate his stage Craig combined two very strong and bright lights: the comparatively antiquated limelight with the latest innovation in that field,electric light. By 1900 electric lighting was in common use in all major London theatres with the exception of Irving's Lyceum, which still favoured the much softer gaslight. Craig, who had been trained there as an actor, was familiar with that system; nonetheless, he excluded from his tools the rather old-fashioned gaslight and opted for electricity.

The lighting arrangement used in Hampstead and repeated at Coronet next year was thought of as highly original. The major surprise had been the mere fact that it did not include the ever-present footlights casting light on the actors from below;

[52] This however proved to be a trouble, as in the opening night the waits were too long. An anonymous letter (by Craig himself perhaps?) referring to that matter tries to explain the situation: "Then one of the many charms of Mr. Gordon Craig's stage management was the briefness of the waits, and then he was on those occasions mainly dependent of friends for the scene-shifting, and an ordinary local carpenter for his stage arrangements. Perhaps the absence of the professional in those departments was the reason of his complete success then. I had the curiosity last night to go behind and inquire why things went so slowly, and gathered that the very simplicity of Mr. Craig's details had dumbfounded the carpenters belonging to the Coronet ("The Purcell Operatic Society", *Daily Chronicle*, 27 March 1901).

instead the actors were lit by spotlights placed in special boxes across the auditorium. Moreover

> Immediately above the soffit of the proscenium the scaffold poles were slatted over to from a platform for six lime-lights equipped to take coloured gelatines – blue, amber, and green. On either side of the stage were less powerful electric lights, with changeable gelatines.[54]

The lighting bridge he had built as a part of the proscenium arch construction was an innovation of such novelty within the boundaries of the traditional theatre that when he attempted to erect it at the Coronet next year the plan was immediately rejected. Yet, at the end he managed to have it his way.[55] In addition, in order to light the backcloth, he used special lamps placed on the floor immediately in front of it.

Thus the light was coming from four different directions; he even might have added a fifth one:

> a lime light under the stage
> to come through 6 or 10 holes in the floor. C
> & steam which ascends as cigarette smoke in steady atmosphere.
> (Ms A 53, p.22 recto)

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[53] That sketch depicts three gauzes parallel to the proscenium. All three bear rectangular cuts (most probably schematic): the ones at the rear end and front two cuts, the one in the middle one cut. The font is pierced with stars. The arrangement is traditional.

[54] Craig, *Gordon Craig*, p. 120.

Craig's own account for Act I, Scene I (see Fig.3. 2) might be slightly different, but it does not challenge the arrangements principle:

> Lights. 4 Blue & Purple from top on backcloth
> 3 ambers from top onto stage x x x
> 2 ambers from front on people only.
> (Ms A 53, p. 6 verso)

[55] In Craig's archives there is a letter from the administrator of the Coronet Theatre, Mr. Saunders, where he denies letting him built the proscenium-cum-spotting rail he first erected in Hampstead the previous year:

March 23rd 1901

> Dear Mr. Gordon Craig,
> In answer to your letter of the 22nd I have to inform you that the Country Council have refused permission to erect a bridge across the stage immediately behind the proscenium unless plans for such structure are submitted to them in the ordinary way, which would take probably a fortnight. It would be impossible to sling cradles in the way you suggest. [Note by EGC. It was done. 24 hours later] I would not accept the responsibility and I cannot let my license be imperilled by such a thing. You must remember you are asking for many things which are absolutely outside the requirements which one gives to travelling Companies and I would ask you to consider whether it is wise to insist on so many things of the sort. Surely effects can be arranged without insisting on all these matters. I should think that you could have given all the lime light you require from your flies if necessary. [Fool (my reaction at the time)]
>
> I may be present at the rehearsal to-morrow but if not Mr. Cowley will be present in my place.

Craig saw this attitude as the characteristic and destructive one of the trade. On the verso of the letter he wrote this:

> And at this time what was the age & its clever practical men doing to the Lyceum Theatre & HI work & indeed HI himself

(pasted in an unnumbered page of the Ms A 54, notebook for *The Masque of Love*)

At the Coronet he could easily have used the under stage technology in order to encircle the stage luminously.

Nonetheless, only the lighting bridge placed immediately behind the proscenium seems to have been Craig's own invention. All the other technical solutions of some originality employed in the performance of *Dido and Aeneas* were in fact first devised by someone else. This was the distinguished Victorian painter Hubert von Herkomer, who besides his painting activity was running a small private theatre in Bushey, a village outside London.[56] Craig had attended some of his unusual performances of "pictorial music-plays",[57] as well as a public lecture on "Scenic art" delivered in January 28, 1892 in Avenue Theatre.[58] In that lecture Herkomer gave a detailed account of his own practices, which were almost identical to Craig's later practices. Herkomer in his productions used no wings or borders; he had abolished the footlights, replacing them with lights from the back of the auditorium 'boxed-up' so that they were hidden from view and – last but not least – he had devised the backcloth-gauze system that gave the impression of infinity. On that gauze, however, he would not only throw light passing through colour filters, but he would also project moving clouds to simulate nature's effects.

What becomes clear from this account is that Craig did not invent anything substantial in the technical field; he did not use extraordinary machinery or unheard of materials. On the contrary, he was largely informed by what he had already witnessed.[59]

Still, even if most of Craig's technical solutions were not unprecedented novelties, one has to admit that they were not the standard ones either. Herkomer's theories and practice rather than being widely spread in the Victorian theatre were regarded as eccentricities. In fact no one of the contemporaries seems to have made the connection between the Bushey performances and the ones in Hampstead and Coronet at the time, and most probably if it was not for Craig' s

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[56] For an account of Herkomer's theatre and cinema activities see John Stokes, *Resistible Theatres*, London: Elek, 1972, pp. 69-110.

[57] Most probably he saw the performance of *The Idyl* in 1889. Young Craig – he was 17 at the time – had the opportunity to attend this private event thanks to his mother, Ellen Terry, who was invited to it.

[58] The lecture was published in *The Magazine of Art,* 1892, pp. 259-64 and pp. 316-20.

[59] The fact that he did not invent himself anything significant in the technical field is not in any way to suggest that Craig was *indeed* an impractical man, as the well-known story goes. As a matter of fact when preparing this particular production – one of his first ones – he confronted a number of difficulties and controversies of practical nature and he showed himself capable of dealing with them in one way or the other.

son Edward this rather unusual relation might have gone unacknowledged.[60] The reason for that is not some peculiar conspiracy against the real innovator Herkomer, but the rather incompatible aesthetics of the two. Whilst Herkomer both in painting and in the theatre followed realistic aesthetics, Craig not only denounced this notion but was also working against it. If there was something radically different in Craig's production, it was not the technology of it, but rather the synthesis of the parts to a new whole.

[60] Edward Craig deals with the subject of Herkomer's influence on Craig in his article "Gordon Craig and Hubert von Herkomer", pp. 7-16. In this account he focuses on the gauze system, which was the most original of all of Herkomer's innovations.

AESTHETICS

Craig's *Dido and Aeneas* was regarded as a rather strange spectacle the aesthetics of which could not be satisfactorily described by any of the terms in use. On at least two occasions attention was drawn to the unprecedented mixture of old and new:

> Last night at this theatre, the programme was indeed composed of a strange mixture of semi-modernity and semi-antiquity.[61]

and

> Mr. Gordon Craig, its stage director, ha[s] approached the opera in a curious spirit of antiquarian reverence and ultra-modern aestheticism.[62]

Nevertheless, when commenting on this unfamiliar blend of the old and new the reviewers by no means see any connection between Craig's production and the methods of meticulous archaeological reconstruction of time and space; they do not parallel his staging with the spectacular effects of pantomime and melodrama. They do not detect realism in the scenery and the stage pictures he creates; even less, do they find any affinity with Naturalism's use of authentic material and every day settings.

Even if the mode of representation was far from antiquarianism, antiquity remained the main source of visual reference, only treated in a less strict and literal manner. Instead of attempting to reproduce the exact image of mythic Carthage on stage, Craig chose to give the image of a non-specifically defined antiquity. "Place – Carthage or anywhere", he noted on his copy of the libretto (Ms B 2, p. 5) and set out to design sets and costumes of a vaguely antiquarian flavour and of no pedantic detail. The costumes, which contributed the most to that direction, were based on "the traditional conception of Greek warriors and Greek maidens, but greatly simplified"[63] (Fig. 3.7) and the great sky-cloths were appropriate, because "in Greece or Rome, in 400 B.C. or A.D. 400, space and sky were available."[64] For the reviewer of *The Hampstead Annual* some of the stage pictures "recalled some of the most delicate friezes of Pompeii."[65]
What is more, Craig even disregarded the original stage directions, since it was not the place itself but rather the atmosphere and mood it evoked that was of

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[61] "The Coronet Theatre", *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 March 1901.
[62] W.M. Barclay Squire, "Music: Purcell at Notting Hill", *Pilot*, 30 March 1901.
[63] Craig, *Gordon Craig*, p. 119.
[64] Edward Gordon Craig, *Index to the Story of my Days: Some Memoirs of Edward Gordon Craig, 1872-1907*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 229.
[65] "The Purcell Operatic Society", *The Hampstead Annual*, 1900, pp. 136-139 (here 138).

primary importance. For example, he staged the first scene in Dido's arbour instead of her palace, since the arbour offered "connotations of a lover's meeting place and cultivated garden."[66] This was to be transformed into "a dark wasteland of dashed hopes"[67] in the final death scene. Thus an "emotional progression"[68] was established.

By giving primacy to the creation of mood rather than to the depiction of place, Craig's production bore close relationship to the latest movement of Symbolism. Arthur Symons, a leading figure of the English symbolist movement, comments on the three POS productions:

> In these remarkable experiments I seem to see the suggestion of a new art of the stage, an art no longer realistic but conventional, no longer imitative but symbolical.[69]

The performance of *Dido and Aeneas* in particular not only adopts symbolist staging practices, but also is symbolic in its essence. There are striking parallels between the practice of the Symbolist theatres *par excellence*, Paul Fort's Theatre d' Art and Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l' Oeuvre,[70] with the staging of *Dido and Aeneas*. The symbolistic productions had reduced their scenic means to a minimum; they took place on an almost bare stage bathed in semi-darkness with only simple patterned or single coloured backcloths; the absence of footlights (all the illumination was coming from above) as well as the use of transparent gauzes provided a misty effect that enhanced the feeling of mystery and dematerialisation.

In *Dido and Aeneas* Craig followed such practices, but, in addition, he used certain elements of the production in a symbolic mode or he staged scenes giving them a certain symbolic quality. For example, the use of colour is in no way realistic or naturalistic; it is not representative but evocative and suggestive of moods and situations; it is meaningful in a way that affects the senses as immediately and as directly as music itself. Moreover, for example, in the final scene, a number of visual elements suggest the idea of Dido's death: the black cushions that have replaced the scarlet ones of the first scene, the roses that fall over the dead body and finally cover it entirely (the flower that "shakes its petals

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[66] Christopher Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig: A Vision of the Theatre*, Australia etc.: Harwood Academic Press, 1998, p. 41.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] "A new art of the stage", *The Monthly Review*, June 1902.
[70] For the Symbolist scenography see Bablet, *Esthétique du Décor,* pp. 148-167.

off and dies",[71] the arbour is the deathbed, the body returns to nature), the purple sky that becomes gradually black as the light fades away (life, just as the day, comes to an end).

The simplicity that characterised the scenery of *Dido and Aeneas* was not only striking by itself. It also constructed a different relationship between the actor and the surrounding space, giving the moving figure the prominent position. By rendering the single coloured backcloths the main element of his design instead of filling the stage with pieces of painted canvas, Craig created an unobtrusive background for the action and was able to minutely choreograph the movement of his chorus who stood out in the picture.

Such an effect was facilitated by the fact that he had at his disposal a rather shallow stage, the result of an accident more than conscious choice. Around the same time a number of German theatre practitioners, the most well known being Georg Fuchs, were investigating the possibility of a staging with similar characteristics and objectives. Fuchs, speaking of the "relief stage", put forward the idea that the actor, by not being surrounded by a perspectively enlarged and detailed setting but backed by a simple patterned backcloth in a physically shallow stage, is 'projected' towards the audience, standing at the centre of attention, like a figure in a bas-relief.[72]

Besides these new ideas, Craig adopted qualities from the baroque aesthetics of Purcell's age and this contributed to the mixed character of the performance. Without attempting to reproduce the stage conditions of the age in any way, he integrated certain baroque techniques in his spectacle: the sharp contrasts of light and shade;[73] the juxtaposition of the varied colour scheme (purple, green, scarlet for the first Act – black and white for the next one etc.).

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[71] Ms A5, p. 11 verso.

[72] Fuchs first wrote on the "relief-stage" in 1904 in his *Die Schaubühne der Zukunft*. The "relief stage" became an actuality when Max Littmann designed the Künstlertheater in Munich (1908); there the director and theoretician G. Fuchs and his designer F. Erler were able to put their theory into practice, as the theatre provided the right architectural features for such a scenography. After its first season Fuchs published the valuable account *Revolution in the Theatre* (1909). For a brief account of the ideas and practices around the "relief-stage" in Germany see Bablet, *Esthétique du Décor,* pp. 359-369.

[73] In that respect, the influence of Henry Irving's Lyceum was recognisable: "The witches' scene derived increased effect no doubt from the absence of light and it stimulated our recollections of the Brocken revels in *Faust* at the Lyceum" ("An evening with Purcell", *Era*, 30 March 1901). The "absence of light" was a general characteristic of Irving's staging, who is considered to be one of the innovators in the field of lighting. Craig followed Irving's example, but employed different illuminating means. The result was that the much stronger electric light (used until then in order to illuminate the stage as brightly as possible) produced much sharper contrasts. For Irving as a pioneer in stage lighting see Bergman, *Lighting in the Theatre*, pp. 301-303.

The poet W.B. Yeats, however, saw things from a completely different angle. He did not draw any parallels to any already existing aesthetics. On the contrary, he insisted upon the originality of the visual aspect of Craig's production; an originality that went beyond mere innovation. It was a change in the nature of scene painting: Craig made scene painting an art. In other words, he gave it a new dimension, that of "a new and legitimate art appealing to a taste formed by itself and copying nothing but itself". Yeats placed Craig's production at the beginning of this new art that would gradually expand and one day dominate. It is worth quoting extensively Yeats's article:

> Naturalistic scene painting is not an art, but a trade, because it is, at best, an attempt to copy the more obvious effects of nature by the methods of the ordinary landscape painter, and by his methods made coarse and summary. It is but flashy landscape painting and lowers the taste it appeals to, for the taste it appeals to has been formed by a more delicate art. Decorative scene-painting would be, on the other hand, as inseparable from the movement as from the robes of the players and from the falling of the light; and being in itself a grave and quiet thing it would mingle with the tones of the voices, and with the sentiment of the play, without overwhelming them under an alien interest. It would be a new and legitimate art appealing to a taste formed by itself and copying nothing but itself. Mr. Gordon Craig used scenery of this kind at the Purcell Society performance the other day, and despite some marring of his effects by the half-round shape of the theatre, it was the first beautiful scenery our stage has seen. He created an ideal country where everything was possible, even speaking in verse, or speaking in music, or the expression of the whole of life in a dance, and I would like to see Stratford-on-Avon decorate its Shakespeare with like scenery.[74]

The images Craig produced on the stage of Hampstead in May 1900 and in March next year were rather unusual. The few spectators that attended the first performance as well as the considerably more that were present in the next year's revival witnessed something new to the eye, which struck them with its originality and simplicity. Although it is possible for some similarities to other performances to be traced, one has to admit that the synthesis was unique; it was the work of an artist.

[74] W. B. Yeats, "At Stratford-on-Avon", *The Speaker*, 11 May 1901.

CONCLUSION

The study of Craig's mounting of *Dido and Aeneas* reveals a rather complicated treatment that combines the old and the new. The performance's hybrid character is in line with the ambiguous way Craig treated received aesthetics and technology, borrowing material from past ages in order to give flesh and blood to his original visions. Craig was standing between the two ages, the one that was coming to its end and the one that was yet to come.

Fig. 3.1 *Dido and Aeneas*, 1900, Hampstead Conservatoire, London, Dir. & Des: E.G. Craig.
Act I, Scene i, Dido's arbour. Design by Craig

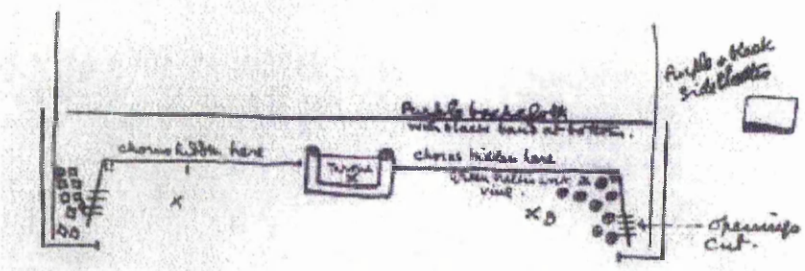

Fig. 3.2 Act I, Scene i, Dido's arbour. Ground plan.

Fig. 3.3 Act I, Scene ii, Witches' cave. Woodcut by Craig.

Fig. 3.4 Act I, Scene ii, A witch. Production photograph.

Fig. 3.5 Act II, Scene i, Grove. Woodcut of the backcloth by Craig.

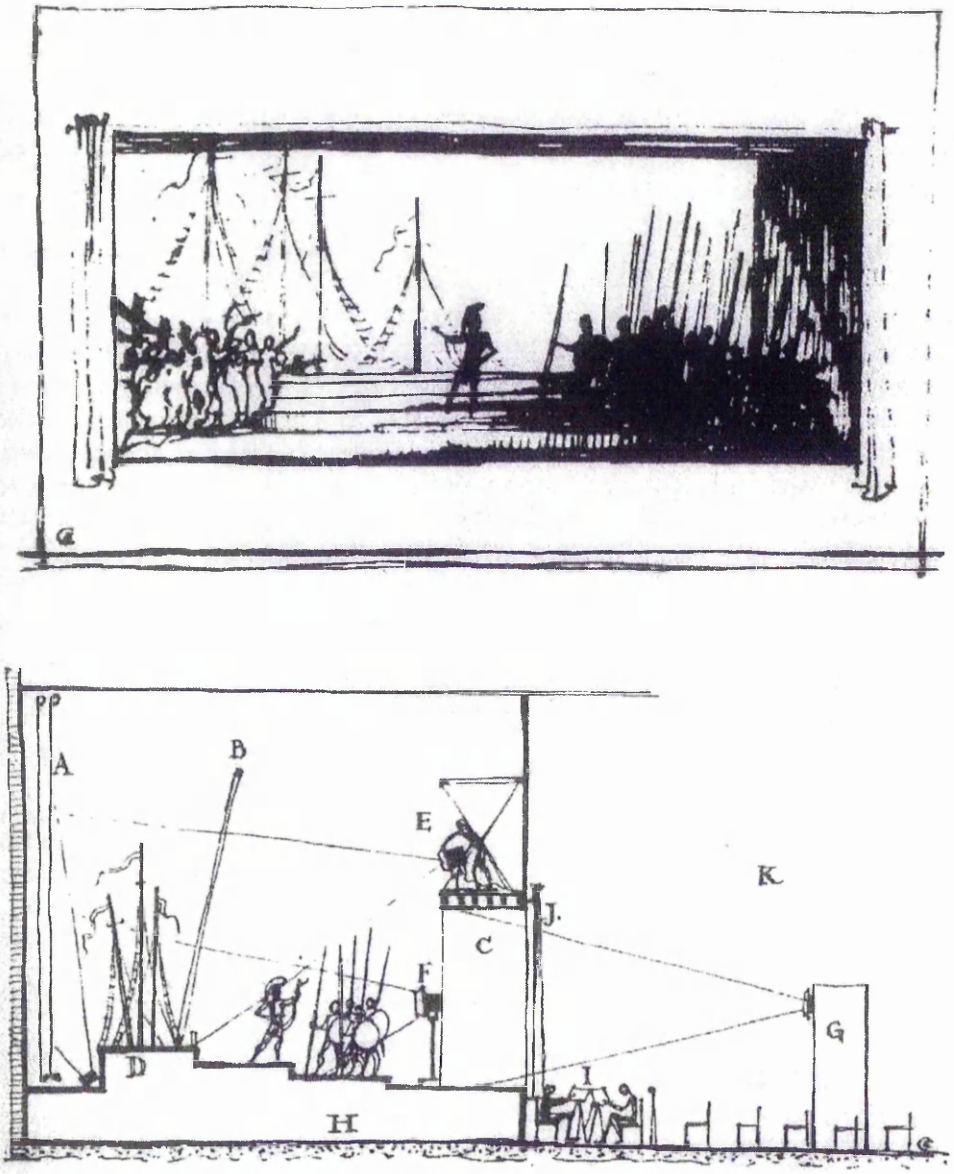

Figure 3.6 Act III, Scene i, The ships. Scenic arrangement as reconstructed by Edward Craig.
A. Two backcloths – one blue, one grey. B. Grey gauze on a stretcher. C. Temporary Proscenium-cum-spotting rail, faced with grey canvas. D. Slender scaffold poles and thin rope to suggest ship's masts. E. Battery of 5 electric lamps with coloured filters. F. Floor lamps on either side of the Proscenium. G. Auditorium lights concealed in boxes. H. Permanent platform of concert hall. I. Orchestra. J. Grey curtains. K. Auditorium.

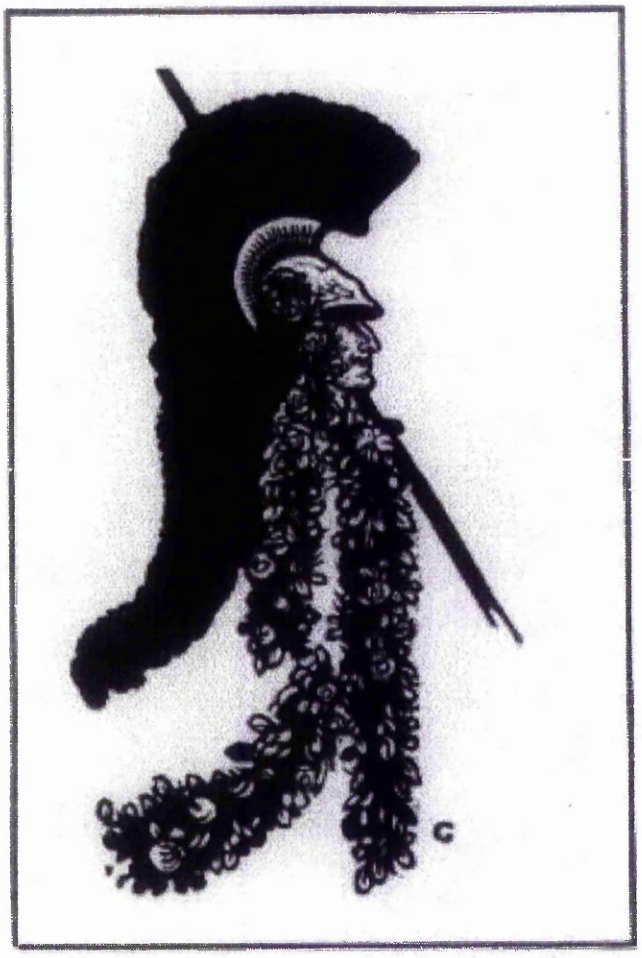

Fig. 3.7 Aeneas. Woodcut by Craig.

4. Reinhardt's *The Miracle* (1911)

When on December 23, 1911 the Olympia Exhibition Hall in London accommodated the world première of Max Reinhardt's *The Miracle*, the Austrian-born director had already been recognised as the leading figure of the New Movement in European theatre. This particular production marked the apex of his impressive international career and was hailed as a spectacle 'never seen before.' However, "Reinhardt was in many ways still fighting the battles of the nineteenth century."[75] *The Miracle*'s celebrated technical sophistication was nothing more than a further elaboration of already existing practices. What was indeed new was the director's vision for the theatre as an art offering emotional and spiritual unity between its participants.

THE SPECTACLE

The element that came first in the planning of the production in question was not, as one would expect, the play; it was the space. When the British impresario C.B. Cochran travelled to Budapest – where Reinhardt was rehearsing a production – in order to invite him to England, he had already booked the venue. Cochran was professionally involved with the Olympia, but never before had a theatre piece been produced there. With the director and the venue at hand the actual play was to be decided later – and it was *The Miracle.*

The Miracle dramatises the Flemish legend of Sister Beatrice, who left the convent succumbing to worldly temptations; for as long as the Sister wandered around the world and became acquainted with its immorality, the statue of the Madonna came to life and took her place: it was a miracle. The scenario for Reinhardt's production (devised by Dr Karl Vollmoeuller) followed the main lines of the legend but changed the ending slightly: when the Nun – the central character – returns to the cathedral, she does not meet death but lives a glorious redemption. The music was composed by Professor Engelbert Humberdinck, the composer of *Hansel and Gretel.* As for the design, Reinhardt once more collaborated with Ernst Stern, "the longest serving, most versatile and most professional of his designers".[76]

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[75] Dennis Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare; A Visual History of Twentieth-century Performance,* 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 67.

[76] Stern gives his own account of his collaboration with Reinhardt in his autobiography *My Life, My Stage,* trans. Edward Fitzgerald, London: Victor Gollancz, 1951. See also the articles by Hugh Rorrison "Max Reinhardt and Ernst Stern" in Margaret Jacobs and John Warren (ed.), *Max Reinhardt; The*

It is difficult, as it was for contemporary audience and critics, to define the genre of either the play or the production. The official programme termed it "Wordless Mystery Spectacle", alluding to the absence of spoken text, to the medieval religious subject, as well as to the spectacular character of the production – all three at once. It has also been described by the term pantomime.[77] The medieval character of the production as well as the religious sentiment Reinhardt was aiming at evoking were also indicated by the term "miracle" (as the Miracle plays of Middle Ages), or by comparison to the Oberammergau Passion Play, a still enacted medieval German spectacle dramatising the life of Christ. However, according to the contemporary writer Huntley Carter *The Miracle* "had a character of its own. It was Gothic pantomime brought up to date", in which all the modern means of expression – music, song, dance, mime, colour and line – were employed in a gothic guise.[78]

Here is the full account of the production (divided in two acts and an intermezzo) given by the designer Ernst Stern in his autobiography. Stern not only describes the action, but also gives scenographic information, both visual and technical.

> The procession winds into the enormous cathedral through the open doors. In the centre, still hidden in a sort of tabernacle, stands the wonder-working Madonna. The priests, the nuns and the people fall to their knees all around. In rows at the foot of the tabernacle are the stretchers of those who have come to seek a cure. The doors of the tabernacle open to reveal the Madonna carrying the babe in her arms and wearing a costly crown and a flowing mantle studded with jewels. All is silent, and then suddenly there is an outburst of joy. One of the lame men awaiting a cure has risen from his stretcher. Once again the Madonna has worked a miracle. A great hymn of praise and jubilation rises, accompanied by the pealing of the organ and the tolling of the bells. Everyone is singing. Gradually the cathedral empties and the sound of the singing fades away in the distance. The doors of the cathedral are still wide open. The nuns have filed out through a side entrance. One nun, however, has remained behind, and she kneels in prayer before the Madonna as though she has been left there to keep vigil.
>
> Through the open doors of the cathedral appears the figure of the fantastically-garbed street player with his pipe. His playing has drawn a band of happy children in his wake. The praying nun raises her head at the sound of the piping, and then she is irresistibly drawn to it. Lost in a dream, she dances. In the twilight the figure of a knight on horseback appears framed in the cathedral portals. Sitting motionless on his white

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Oxford Symposium, Oxford Polytechnic, 1986, pp. 55-66 and "Designing for Reinhardt; The Work of Ernst Stern", *New Theatre Quarterly* 7, 1986, pp. 217-232, the latter being an expanded and very well illustrated version of the former. The quote is from the latter, p. 217.

[77] The term does not, however, point to the very precise English genre with the same name performed around Christmas time. Therefore, when Margaret Shewring, who published an extremely useful reconstruction of the production in 1987, called *The Miracle* "the most remarkable Christmas pantomime ever presented", rather than equating the two she admitted that Reinhardt's production, by being the major theatrical event of the day, substituted for the traditional panto. See Margaret Shewring, "Reinhardt's 'Miracle' at Olympia: a Record and a Reconstruction", *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. III, No 9, February 1987, pp. 3-23. The quote is on the first page.

[78] See Huntly Carter, *The Theatre of Max Reinhardt*, 1914, reprint, New York: B. Blom, 1964, p. 224.

charger, he watches the nun, and when she sees him she returns his gaze with admiration. At that moment she is surprised by the Abbess. The doors of the cathedral are closed, the nun is rebuked for her levity and exhorted to do penance. Darkness falls and a single spotlight now illuminates the Madonna and the nun once again kneeling before her in prayer.

But again the enticing piping sounds, again the nun is caught in the conflict, and she appeals to the Madonna to help her. Struggling desperately against the pull of the life outside, she commits the sacrilege of mounting the throne of the Madonna, of plucking at her jewelled cloak. But the statue remains motionless, and in her despair the nun seizes the Babe, which disappears into nothingness at her touch. At that moment the great doors of the cathedral swing open again and the young knight rides in whilst the piping swells triumphantly. The nun throws off her grey garb, the badge of her order, and in a simple white under-robe she stands there with arms outstretched. The knight lifts her into the saddle before him and rides out into the night.

And now the miracle takes place. Slowly the statue comes to life; the jewelled mantle slips from her shoulders and she takes the crown from her head. In a long white robe she descends the steps into the nave, where she lifts the nun's robe from the stone flags and puts it on. Then she kneels before the tabernacle in the same attitude of prayer as the nun.

The Abbess enters and to her horror she discovers the disappearance of the Madonna. She calls her nuns and they flutter around searching the cathedral like a flock of frightened birds. Then the Abbess sees the kneeling figure. At first, because of the habit she thinks it is the nun, but then she discovers that it is the Madonna herself who has taken the place of the run-away. All bow down in reverence before the strange miracle.

The throne of the Madonna has disappeared. The wide-open doors of the cathedral reveal a rural landscape. The knight is lying in the grass and his lover is dancing before him. The procession of the robber baron then comes on the scene, magnificently and colourfully costumed, with crossbowmen, esquires, pages and bearers carrying the game that has been killed in the hunt. The robber baron sees the nun and is immediately enamoured of her. In the ensuing conflict the knight, her first lover, is killed and she is carried off by a new lover.

The platform now rises silently from the depths of the nave and on it there is a drunken orgy of the robber baron and his followers in which the run-away nun dances. In the middle of this scene the prince appears with his gay and splendid following. He, too, is immediately enamoured of the nun and the tragedy is repeated. The robber baron is killed and the prince carries off the nun.

The scene continues, but this time with the prince and his friends. The nun, fantastically and luxuriously garbed, dances with a supporting company of attendant women, all splendidly dressed. The prince and his feather-brained friends compel the nun to take part in a comic parody of her wedding. In the middle of it the king appears in person. In the resultant fighting both prince and king are killed.

The people are now stirred up; they regard the nun as a witch responsible for bringing so much suffering on their country. She is seized and brought before the judge – who sentences her to death. But the executioner falls victim to her charms. She is enabled to flee and falls into the hands of a band of licentious, irregular soldiery who are marauding through the countryside.

The landscape before the cathedral is covered in deep snow. A procession of the mercenaries on horse and foot, dragging their cannon, plods past. The rear is brought up by women camp-followers, and the last of them carries a baby in her arms. It is the ragged, exhausted nun. She collapses in the snow and the soldiery marches on. Then in the uncanny light of the moon and to the growing tones of the devil's piping, shrill

and mocking, a different procession passes the body of the nun: the long line of her lovers, the men who have perished of her charms.

In the cathedral the doors of the tabernacle are open and the throne of the Madonna is once again in its place, and on the throne lie the jewelled-studded cloak and the crown. The Madonna kneels before the altar in her nun's garb, picked out by a spotlight. Slowly, she rises, discards the robe and goes up the steps of the altar where she dons the crown and the blue cloak again and then becomes motionless – a statue as at the beginning. Now the doors of the cathedral slowly and silently open and through the twilight comes the nun, bowed with sorrow and repentance, and carrying the dead baby, which she lays at the foot of the Madonna. Once again a miracle takes place: the Madonna rises and takes the babe into her arms. The bells begin to toll, the nuns file in praying aloud, and the choir of angels celebrates the new miracle amidst a shower of shining roses.[79]

[79] Stern, *My Life, My stage*, pp. 93-96.

VENUE

The Olympia Exhibition Hall was not a theatre, but a construction built for the purpose of accommodating temporary exhibitions of different kinds. Moreover, it was a venue of vast dimensions.[80] The exceptional character of the venue is what appealed to Reinhardt, who had already begun experimenting with big scale productions in non-conventional venues not long before mounting his first production in England.[81]

The first thing Reinhardt and his associates (Hermann Dernburg, architect, Rudolf Dworsky, Technical Chief of the Deutsches Theater, and Ernst Stern, "art decorator") set out to do was to transform the Olympia arena into an enormous cathedral nave.[82] For that purpose they had the original iron and glass walls and roof covered with plaster ones imitating stonework. These new walls carried massive pillars, arches and niches with decorative statues, while they were pierced by huge stained-glass windows. The roof was vaulted all the way through. The image of an existing space was skilfully fabricated. Thus the rather unusual venue was turned not into a theatre but into an imaginary space, where the play's action is supposed to be taking place (Fig.4.1 & Fig. 4.2).

Reinhardt and his associates had to divide this rectangular cathedral/ hall into a space for the spectators and a space for the actors. They did not attempt in any way to reproduce the usual stage-auditorium arrangement of the picture-frame theatre, which dictates a frontal organisation of space, with the stage occupying one end and the auditorium the other, the two separated by the proscenium arch and a removable curtain. On the contrary, Reinhardt opted for a rather innovative arrangement by

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[80] Huntly Carter (*The Theatre of Max Reinhardt*, p. 420) gives the following dimensions:

Dimensions of the Great Hall	440 ft. × 250ft.
Height to crown of roof	about 100ft.
The span of the roof	170ft.
The main ribs of the roof	34ft. apart.

[81] The first such production had been *Oedipus Rex*, which premiered on September 25, 1910 in the Musikfesthalle of Munich and on November 7 of the same year was transferred to Circus Schumann in Berlin. It reached London's Covent Garden just three weeks after the premiere of *The Miracle* (January 15, 1912). The first Reinhardt production the English public witnessed was F. Freksa's *Sumurûn*, an oriental fantasy based on stories from the *Arabian Nights*. It premiered in Berlin's Kammerspiele in April 1910 and reached London's Coliseum Theatre in January 1911, where it ran successfully for six weeks. Still it was an imported production, unlike *The Miracle*.

[82] Yet Cochran claimed that the idea of transforming the Olympia into a cathedral was his and that Reinhardt followed this indication. He might have been inspired by the several exhibitions held in that venue, such as one reconstructing the city of Constantinople, its streets and its inhabitants. See Shwering, "Reinhardt's 'Miracle'", p. 4.

placing the acting space in the middle of the hall and arranging the seating around it in a horseshoe shape.[83] In other words, he encircled the stage area by rows of seats, themselves surrounded not by the real walls of the venue, but by the imaginary walls of a Gothic cathedral (Fig.4.3).

This way, a unified space, i.e. a single space that accommodates everything – actors and spectators, stage and auditorium – was created. With its concern for a unified space *The Miracle* is one of the earlier modernistic examples of what was later to be called environmental scenography.[84] It departed from the frontal staging and moved towards the environmental one, attempting to establish a new relationship between the spectator and the space, which involved not only physical transformation of the stage, but also relevant sound effects. [85]

Whether it is the stage that bursts out of the proscenium arch boundary or it is auditorium that is made into a stage, one cannot easily decide. What is sure is that this arrangement challenged the traditional visual and spatial relationships. It negated the single viewpoint that dominates the illusionistic theatre. The audience, scattered around this enormous arena, did not focus anymore in one direction, i.e. behind the proscenium arch. On the contrary, they were free to look at any possible direction. At the same time, they faced the spectacle from a great number of different viewpoints. Therefore, the mise-en-scene had to be adapted according to this new fact. On the one hand, scenery and actors were able to move more freely around the performance space, and not just in parallel planes, as had been the case until fairly recently in most productions. On the other hand, the mise-en-scène had to be very carefully calculated in order that every spectator had an equally good view of the spectacle.

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[83] A similar arrangement was devised for Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Within the enormous venues – most of them circuses – he engaged during his long tours, the main acting area was placed at the rear, in front of the gates of the Theban palace, while a much bigger circular space for the movements of the chorus was occupying the centre of the arena; platform and orchestra were connected by steps. The audience was seating around it forming a semi-circle.

[84] The term 'environmental theatre' was coined in 1968 by Richard Schechner, when he entitled his essay in the Spring edition of *The Drama Review* "6 axioms for environmental theatre". The term has been popularised since and is used to describe a wide range of performances that activate a relationship between spectator and spectacle other than frontal. The 'unified space' is only one form of environmental staging identified by Arnold Aronson in his *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography*, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981, pp. 4-5, which remains the main reference on the subject.

[85] It is interesting to compare Reinhardt's practice with Craig's aspirations for the staging of *Dido and Aeneas*, as they are expressed in his notebook. Craig also wished a certain fusion of stage and auditorium obtained by the employment of scenographic techniques, already discussed in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, hall and stage remained distinct spaces, as he never accomplished his plan.

Moreover, the practice of "extending the limits of the stage"[86] establishes a total spatial experience for the spectator who finds himself in the midst of the action. Spectators and actors become more intimate and less distinct; the real and the imaginary world overlap; life and art intersect. Later, Reinhardt articulated his concept in these words:

> Not only must we move the stage right into the auditorium, but the old tradition of separating stage and audience must be abandoned. The spectator must no longer consider himself a merely neutral onlooker, but must be an active partner in the proceedings of the stage.[87]

[86] Stern, *My Life, My Stage*, p. 90.
[87] Quoted in Hans Knudsen "Max Reinhardt in Berlin", *Theatre Research – Recherches Théâtrales*, vol. V, no 3, 1963, pp. 128-133 (here 132).

TECHNOLOGY

The technical details of the staging of *The Miracle* were a matter of continuous contemporary comment and numerous relevant illustrations appeared in the Press; understandably, since *The Miracle* demonstrated considerable technological sophistication, indispensable for a spectacle of this character and nature. Nevertheless, apart from the sheer scale of the production and the gigantic amount of its resources, almost nothing else was exceptional in the technical field. The few technological advancements that were realised in that production did not divert from the standard usage, nor did they constitute a rupture with past techniques and practices.

Scene arrangement and mechanical appliances

The space arrangement adopted for the production of *The Miracle* divided the performing space available into two smaller spaces, separated by a wall representing the outer wall of the cathedral: the central oblong one placed within the cathedral area and the outer square one, beyond its great doors (Fig. 4.4).[88] However distinct these spaces were at first sight, in fact they interacted in a complex way, as according to the scenario they had to accommodate a number of settings, one following the other.

The central performing area was occupied by the Madonna shrine for both Acts I and II. Right in the middle, a stepped pyramid shaped pedestal surrounded by a low balustrade accommodated a sort of tabernacle, under which stood hidden the statue of the Madonna. People stood all around (Fig.4.5). Just after the beginning, the

[88] The combination of two stages – a forestage in the midst of the auditorium and a fully equipped scenic stage behind it – was repeated 8 years later (1919) in the much-celebrated Grosses Schauspielhaus, designed by Hans Poelzig under the supervision of Reinhardt (Fig. 4.16). "The theatre of the five thousand", as the director called it, owes a lot to the previous experience of *The Miracle*. While remodelling Circus Renz in Berlin into celebrated Grosses Schauspielhaus, Reinhardt and Poelzig were in a way monumentalising the temporarily transformed Olympia of 1911. The new permanent building was more sophisticated, since it was not erected in order to meet the specific needs of a single performance, but had to able to meet all possible needs of a number of different productions. For example, the scenic stage possessed a revolving stage, which would have been of no use in *The Miracle*.
Most probably because of Reinhardt's attempts at Greek tragedy, it has been suggested that the major source of inspiration for the building of the Grosses Schauspielhaus had been ancient Greek theatre architecture and the performance conditions characterising the ancient Greek theatre, i.e. the fact that theatre-going was a communal event. Nevertheless, what was realised was in essence closer to the Teatro Farnese, itself a renaissance attempt to re-create ancient theatre architecture. If the centrally placed performing area of the Grosses Schauspielhaus in a way corresponded to the Greek orchestra, the space behind it was by no means equivalent to the *skene*. Rather, it resembled the magic box of illusions of the renaissance Italian theatre. In addition, the U-shaped space between the stage proper and the auditorium of the Grosses Schauspielhaus makes it particularly reminiscent of the structure of the Teatro Farnese (Fig. 4.17). For the similarities between the Grosses Schauspielhaus and the Teatro Farnese see Leacroft & Leacroft, *Theatre and Playhouse*, p. 141.

impressive statue was revealed to full sight of the audience. Figure 4.6 shows the statue first covered and then uncovered. Nevertheless, this setting did not remain unchanged during the whole performance. In fact, during the Intermezzo it was transformed into a series of different locations, namely the banquet hall, the bed chamber and the inquisition chamber. In order to realise all these diverse settings, Reinhardt and his associates chose to create another space below the floor level by excavating the ground beneath the main performing space (Fig. 4.7). In addition, they made the new floor movable by a system of cogs and wheels. Thus, quick scene changes could be obtained, as pieces of scenery and actors were raised and lowered on the movable platform. For example, for the banquet scene the platform was raised to reveal tables and benches grouped around a central table, whereupon the Nun performed her disastrous dance (Fig. 4.8 & Fig. 4.9).[89] Furthermore, for all such scenes the surrounding cathedral "disappeared" in a way, as the stained glass windows ceased to be lit.

However, this kind of understage technology was hardly new, as the first use of movable floor in sections dates back to the 1870s, when such a system was installed in the Budapest Opera House. The system had been devised to meet realistic purposes, but it was readily adopted by modern theatre practitioners, who, also using three-dimensional structures for their own purposes, were confronting more or less the same problems: presenting a variety of settings and at the same time maintaining a continuous flow of action.

Outside the cathedral gate, nature made its appearance. A low hill with a number of trees could be discerned not far from the cathedral site, as the doors opened for the crowd to enter for the initial Act. The hill and the trees – all 'plastic' – were backed by a cyclorama to simulate the sky (Fig. 4.4 & Fig. 4.10). Cecil de Banke described the cyclorama used in *The Miracle* as

> a stretched silk cyclorama upon which lights played to indicate the various times of night and day. The light, reflected back from the taut material, bathed everything in an unearthly, luminous mist.[90]

Reinhardt seems to have retained an earlier form of cyclorama, since in the last version the silk cloth was replaced by a curved surface made of plaster.

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[89] It is interesting to note that while the production photograph (Fig.4.9) shows three dimensional benches and tables, a contemporary reconstruction of the staging (Fig.4.1) suggests that different sections of the floor, raised at different heights, shaped the table surface. Was that an initial aspiration that proved very ambitious in the end?

[90] Cecil de Banke, *Hand over Hand*, London, 1957, p. 183. Quoted in Shewring, "Reinhardt's 'Miracle'", pp. 6-7.

The two spaces, however, did not remain so distinctly separate during the course of the performance. There were certain scenes during which an intersection occurred. That happened because the landscape setting was sometimes the main place of action and as such it had to be in full view of the audience. For example, the first scene of the Intermezzo, in which the Robber Baron kills the Knight and kidnaps the Nun, takes place in a forest. For such scenes to be visible by every spectator, the great western doors were opened mechanically and the three dimensional hill was wheeled inside (like a sliding stage) and occupied a more or less central position in the arena. Nevertheless, one has to consider the possibility that the cyclorama structure never crossed the border. On the contrary, it seems most probable that it remained within its initial space, i.e. behind the doors, for the illusion to be maintained. In that case the wall opening functioned like a proscenium arch. The reappearance of this very essential feature of illusionistic staging, even in a marginal position, demonstrates clearly the difficulty modernistic staging had in being liberated from all received practices. This very arch the modernists were set to abolish kept on reappearing in all sorts of productions.

Scenery proper and properties

The treatment of scenery was no less traditional, as it showed "a combination of curtains and architectural forms partly built, partly painted on canvas."[91] Most of the pieces of scenery were 'plastic', as they were to be observed from all possible angles. Moreover, their scale was considerably exaggerated in order for them to be easily discernible by each spectator seated in this vast hall.

Lighting

What rendered everything on stage visible was, of course, light. As Reinhardt was dealing with an enormous space, he was obliged to use very powerful lighting sources (limes, arcs, electric battens), which he had installed in every possible corner of the Olympia. However, the main body of lighting equipment was situated in a bridge high above the performing area. It consisted of "three lime bridges or islands of lights each containing forty searchlights or prisms. These lights were thrown down upon the scenes and players".[92] In addition to these lights, there were

[91] Theodore Komisarjevsky & Lee Simonson, *Settings and Costumes of the Modern Stage*, London & New York: The Studio, 1933, p. 18. Note that Stern, who was trained as a painter (his master was the Jugenstil painter Franz von Stuck) never renounced painted scenery, even though he used 'plastic' ones almost exclusively, since this was Reinhardt 's will (Stern, *My Life, My Stage*, pp.120-121).
[92] Carter, *The Theatre of Max Reinhardt*, p. 231.

more placed in the space between the real walls of the arena and the plaster ones of the cathedral; these threw light that seemed as if it were coming through the stained glass windows. For the cyclorama in particular it is likely that Reinhardt employed a technique of lighting developed through experimentation in the Deutsches Theater. Basil Dean argues that it "represented a new departure, for the illumination came from one central point and from a considerable distance".[93]

Thus, it was possible for the light to come from all directions. This did not mean, however, that the stage was fully illuminated all the time. On the contrary, the most common use of light involved the employment of spotlights, which picked up single figures against the gigantic background (Fig. 4.11).

Moreover, lighting was also used as a means of painting the space, replacing in a way the painted colour that is more static. Stern achieved these more flexible effects "by a system according to which rays of light are thrown upon neutral or coloured surfaces."[94]

Effects

Reinhardt exploited the full possibilities of the technology at his disposal. He even realised complicated spectacular effects, such as conflagration. Towards the end of the Banquet scene, as the Nun dances for the Robber Baron's pleasure, her dress catches fire that rapidly expands towards every possible direction. The fire effect – a typical grand effect of the illusionistic stage – is achieved by the simultaneous use of several means. The sparkling flames are simulated by stripes of yellow silk fastened on the stage floor; they float with the aid of forty-seven electric fans situated in the pit. Several arc lamps illuminate the scene. The fire effect, although realised by advanced technical means, remains one of the old sensational tricks (Fig. 4.12).

The production of *The Miracle* lent credit to Reinhardt's reputation as a stage magician and a pioneer in the use of technically sophisticated stage machinery. However, it seems more correct to say that he appropriated the infant technology of preceding years (three-dimensional plastic constructions, hydraulic and electric power for the moving of platforms) and used it for his own, non-realistic purposes.

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[93] Basil Dean, "Recollections and reflections", in *Tabs*, XX, No 3, December 1962, pp. 8-9. Quoted in Shewring, "Reinhardt's 'Miracle'", p. 6.
[94] Carter, *The theatre of Max Reinhardt*, p. 237.

AESTHETICS

If there exists a single word to describe *The Miracle*, it is undoubtedly "spectacle". Reinhardt's production is a spectacle in literal terms: it gives priority to the sight and debases the intellectual process, which is traditionally associated with the spoken text. With the combined use of song, music and dance, it appeals directly to the senses. In addition, *The Miracle* deserves the description spectacle due to the sheer scale of its production and to several elements in its staging.

A contemporary comment of a dazzled critic was:

> It is difficult to avoid superlatives in speaking of Prof. Reinhardt's production of "The Miracle", the mere bigness of it all is so impressive.[95]

Indeed, every element of the production was presented by the management and commented by the reviewers at terms of figures and scale. It was not only the venue's size, but also the number of the participants (2.000 actors and supers, 500 choir members and 200 orchestra members) as well as the impressive sums of expenditure (approximately £40,000 for eight weeks' run).[96]

The grandiose staging of the luxurious production proved to be awe-inspiring, especially in certain moments. For example, the fire effect of the Intermezzo was so life-like that it was mistaken for a real conflagration. Nevertheless, the most impressive element was undoubtedly the crowds of supers, assuming all sorts of different guises: nuns, court ladies, soldiers, knights, courtesans, pages etc. The crowds filled the vast space of the Olympia arena engaging in endless processions.

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[95] *Athenaeum*, 30 December 1911, p. 873.

[96] In detail:

Costumes	£12, 500
Scenery and properties	8,000
Movable mountain	800
Excavation for the trap	1,690
Iron frame work for cathedral doors	1,250
Electric installation apparatus	3,000
Electric wiring and fixing	1,500
Use of the organ	1,000
Artists' salaries per week, including:	
Principals	800
Chorus of 500	1,200
Minor players (1,000)	1,725
Orchestra of 200	950
Boys and girls	115
Girl dancers	175
Approximately	£40,000
(for eight weeks 'run)	

The Pall Mall Magazine, XLIX, no 225, January 1912, p. 17.

The manipulation of the supers was one element of the staging very much admired by contemporary reviewers. Some of them even suggested that the carefully orchestrated masses of extras were the real protagonists of the show (Fig. 4.13).[97]

The spectacular nature of the production is strongly reminiscent of the theatre of the previous age, which Reinhardt was supposed to be fighting. The term 'spectacular' has rightfully been attributed to the entire Victorian theatre; to the theatre of Charles Kean and Herbert Beerbohm-Tree; to pantomime and melodrama, as well as to the 'archeologically exact' and 'historically accurate' Shakespearean revivals. However, this strictly realistic rendering of the imaginary world of the play that aimed at educating the spectators was contrary to the intentions of both Reinhardt and Stern. On the contrary, they treated their visual sources – the Gothic art and architecture "of the fifteenth century, the so-called flamboyant period"[98] – in a stylised way that corresponded to the overall atmosphere of the production. Stern's designs for both set and costumes were "fantastic", suggesting a nightmare quality, especially in the Intermezzo scenes.

> Improbable and fantastically involved arabesques curled into flowers, leaves and fruit which, on closer examination, proved to be grotesquely distorted masques. And the costumes were as fantastic as the architecture, like something out of a feverish dream. ... The fashion was devilish, grotesque and mocking, recklessly extravagant and exaggerated (Fig. 4.14 & Fig. 4.15).[99]

The carefully designed distortion of the already existing (the world of Old Masters served as a valuable guide) is probably the first step that modernist designers took while attempting to liberate themselves from the restraints of realistic reconstruction so favoured in the nineteenth century. However, Reinhardt's "stylised realism", [100] that set the standards in pre-war modernistic theatre, seemed to be a rather timid step. [101]

The Middle Ages not only offered decorative possibilities; the period also provided the most suitable environment to generate and enhance the emotional response

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[97] "Of the principles there is little need to say, because it is the masses that tell" (*The Times*, 25 December 1911). "Naturally enough the arresting scenes are those in which the stage is filled; the others, which though necessary to the plot, do not employ massed effects and introduce only a few characters, seem to be tame and to drag by comparison" (*Illustrated London News,* 30 December 1911, p. 1106).

[98] Stern, *My Life, My Stage*, p. 92.

[99] Ibid.

[100] See the chapter "Reinhardt and Stylized Realism" in Fuerst & Hume, *Twentieth Century Stage Decoration*, vol. 1, pp. 16-22.

[101] Stern himself never pretended to be a revolutionary. Writing about his first scenographic venture in his autobiography (*My Life, My Stage*, p. 7), he notes: "I can hardly claim that I was a conscious pioneer in the movement for the visual reform of the stage. In fact, I was a complete tyro; I didn't even know that such a movement existed. But at least I had instinctively avoided the usual thoughtless jumble of colours."

Reinhardt was aiming for. He wanted to raise the religious fervour of each member of the audience; to turn them into a congregation, just as he had turned the original venue into a cathedral. In other words, instead of the passivity attributed to the spectator of the traditional picture-frame theatre, Reinhardt's audience, largely helped by the spatial arrangement and the type of spectacle, was supposed to be sharing a communal, quasi-religious feeling inspired by the direct appeal to the senses. Later he clarified his source of inspiration:

> The Catholic Church which aims at the highest, the most spiritual, the most supernatural, does so by means which appeal directly to the senses ... The church, the Catholic church, is the very cradle of the modern theatre.[102]

This intention, and not the material construction of the setting, is what makes *The Miracle* essentially different from nineteenth-century spectacular shows. Reinhardt was not alone in this quest of spiritual unity between actors and audience; in fact, this was a major aspect of modernist theatre theory. One has to bear in mind Adoplhe Appia and the notion of the "cathédrale de l' avenir" which he expressed towards the end of his life, when calling for a "living work of art", where there is no separation between spectators and actors; they – we – are all *living* artists.

[102] Max Reinhardt, "On the living theatre" in Oliver Martin Sayler, *Max Reinhardt and his Theatre,* 1924, reprint, New York: B. Blom, 1968, p. 66.

CONCLUSION

In an age of great controversy in the theatre, when aesthetic innovation ran parallel to extensive technical experimentation, Max Reinhardt was considered as the leading figure of both. At a time when modernist theatre practitioners were heading towards the simplification of the stage they inherited and of the images they created, Reinhardt continued to occupy himself with machinery and effects of realistic origins. *The Miracle* marks an apex of such a venture. Even if at the time the purely technical features of the production attracted greater attention, its real significance consisted in its objective to unite spiritually as well as emotionally spectators and spectacle. Several scenographic elements contributed greatly to this end, especially the innovative arrangement of space.

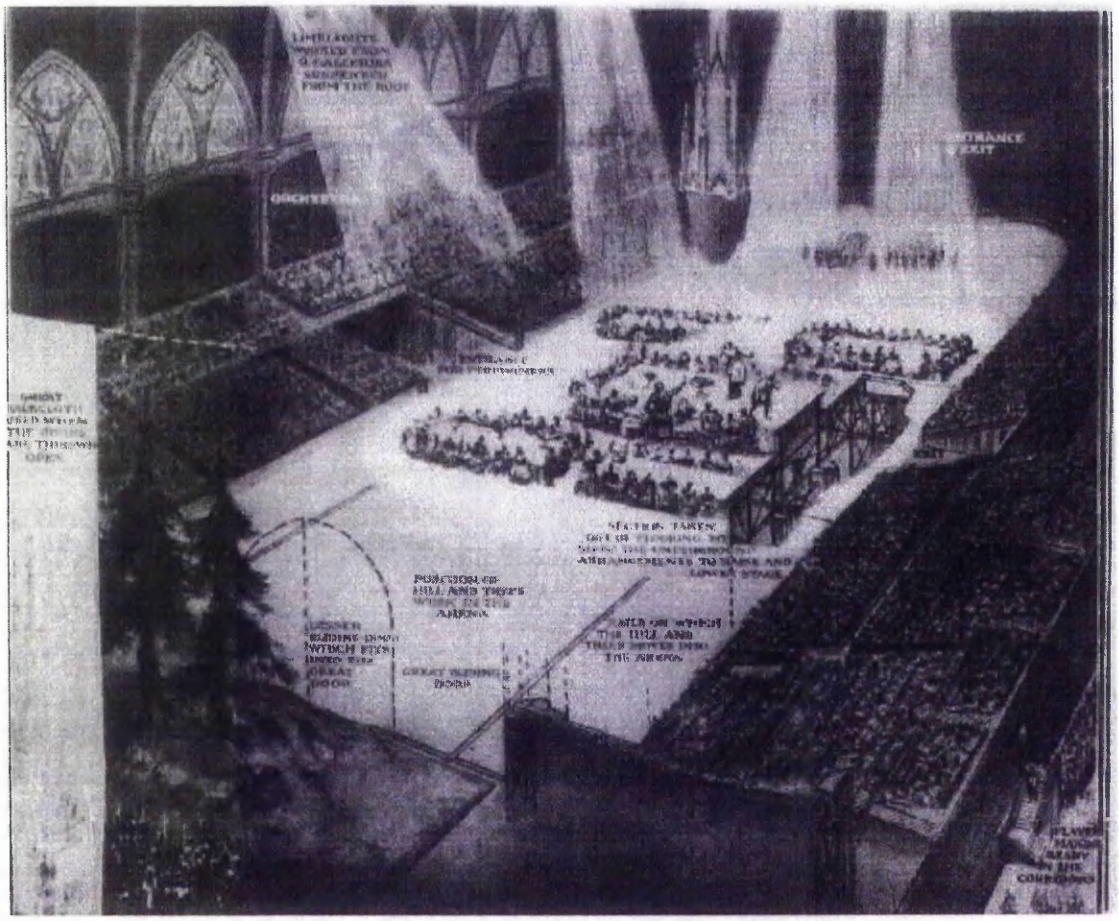

Fig. 4.1 *The Miracle*, 1911, Olympia Exhibition Hall, London, Dir: Max Reinhardt, Des: E. Stern. Contemporary reconstruction of the staging by J. Duncan.

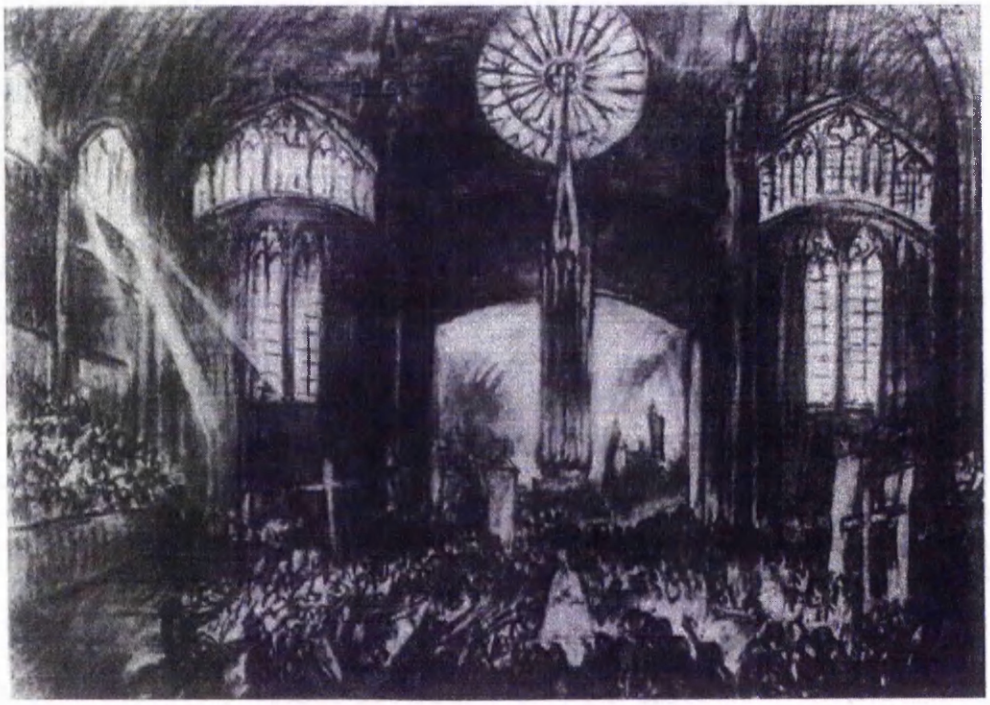

Fig. 4.2 General view. Sketch by Ernst Stern.

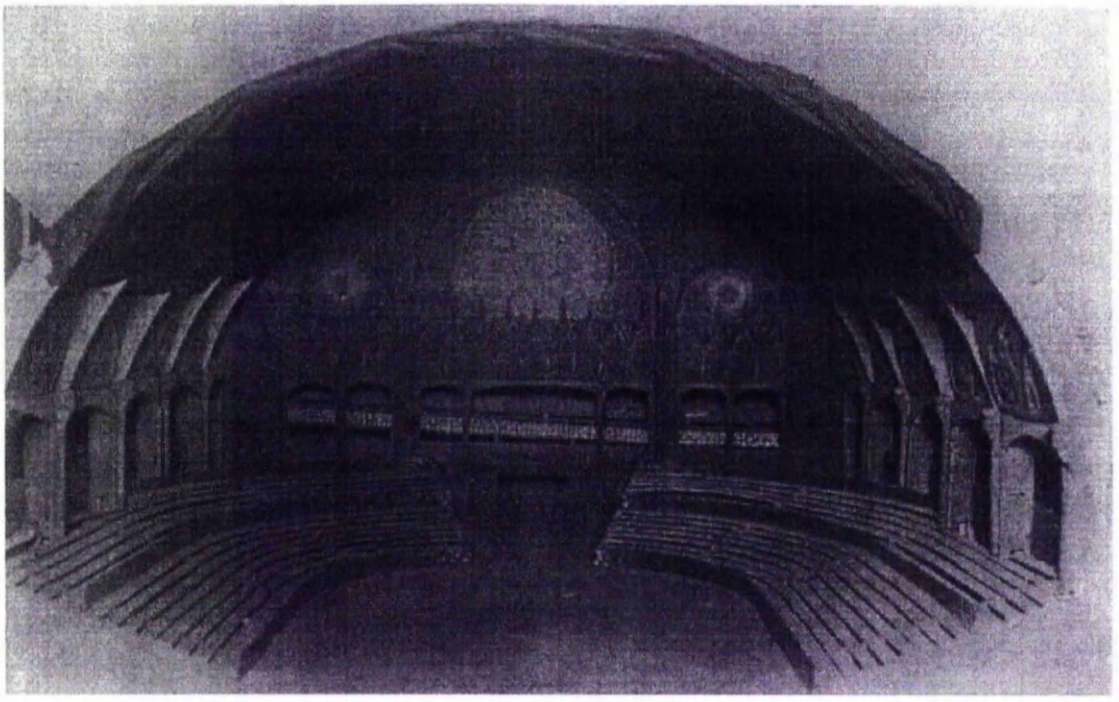

Fig. 4.3 Plastic model.

Fig. 4.4 Act I. Ground plan.

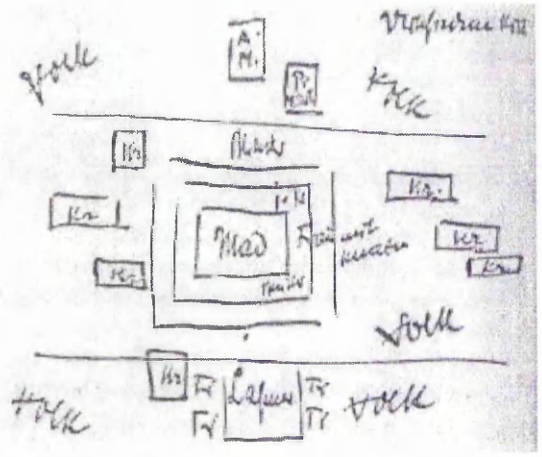

Fig. 4.5 Act I, The shrine of the Madonna. Ground plan.

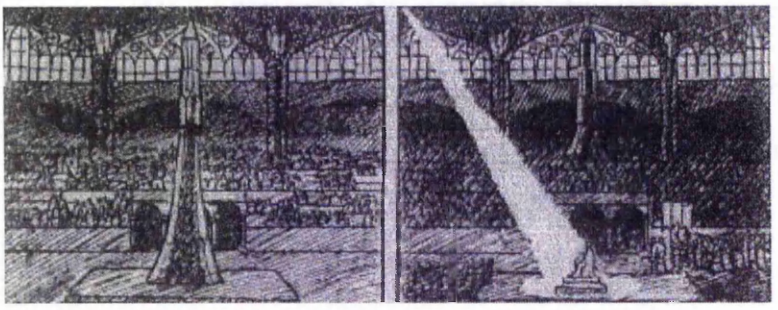

Fig. 4.6. Act I, The shrine of the Madonna. Sketch by Stern.

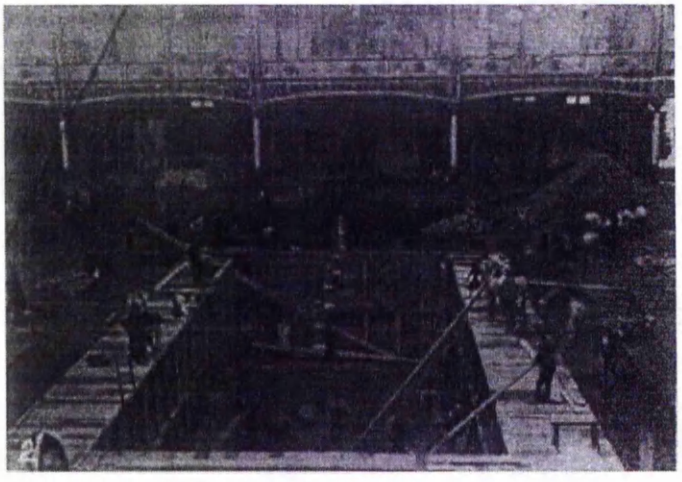

Fig. 4.7 The excavation of the great trap. Photograph.

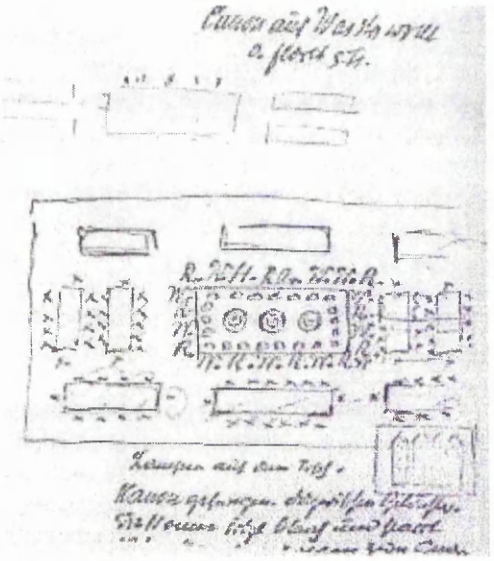

Fig. 4.8 Intermezzo, Robert Baron's banquet. Ground plan.

Fig. 4.9 Intermezzo, Robert Baron's banquet. Production photograph.

Fig. 4.10 The hill. Production photograph.

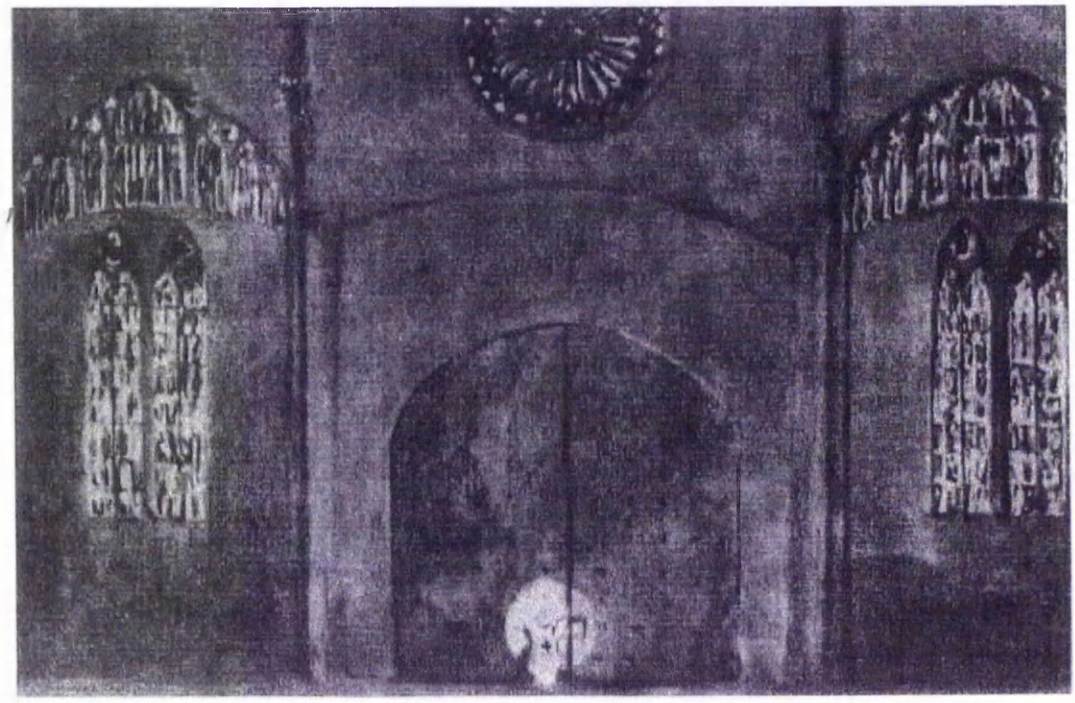

Fig. 4.11 Act I, The Nun against the cathedral doors. Drawing by Stern.

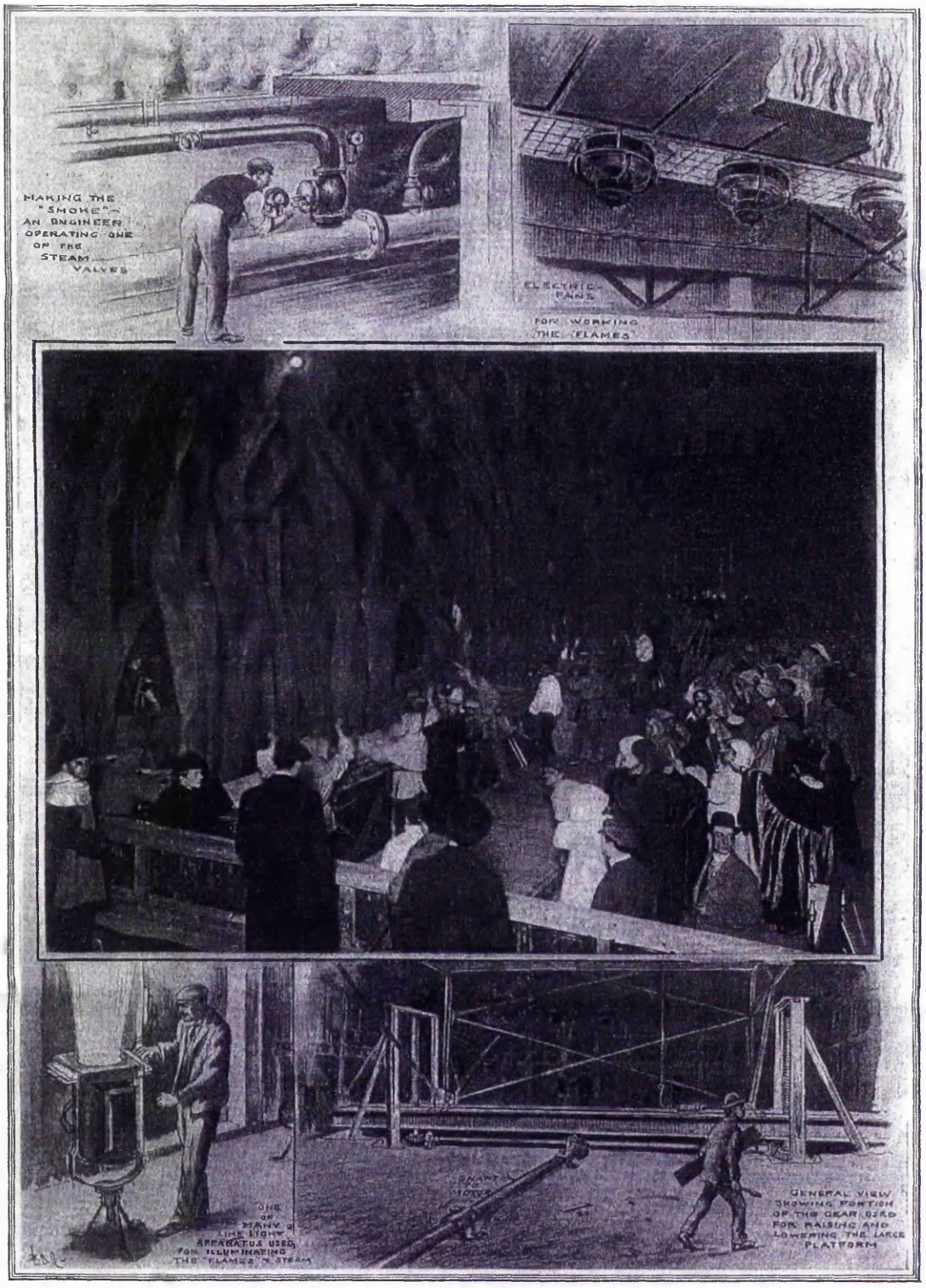

Fig. 4.12 Fire effect. Photographs and sketches.

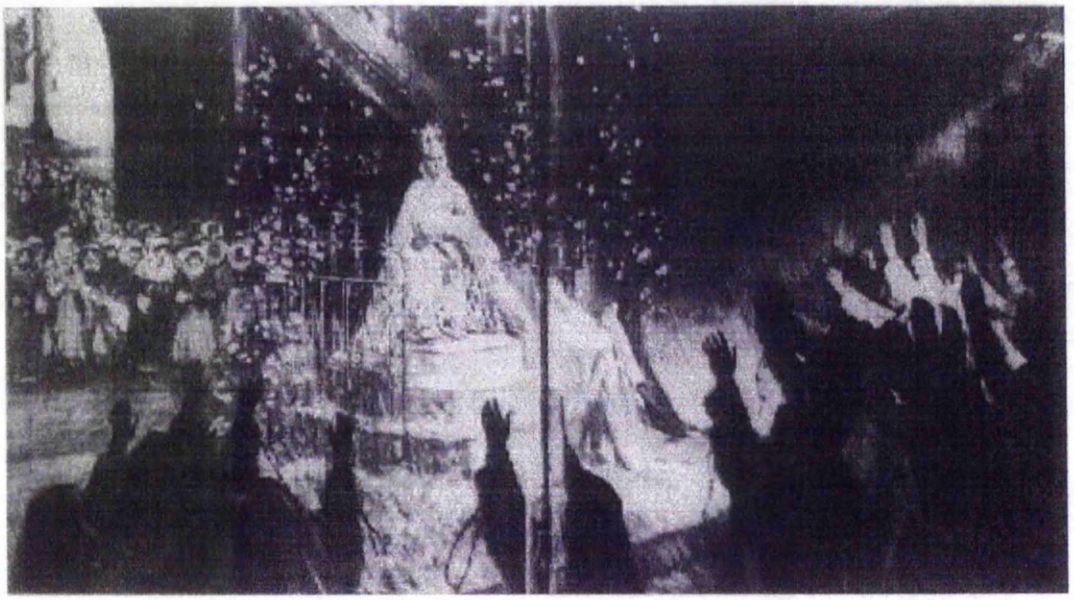

Fig. 4.13 Act II, Artist's impression. Drawing by Cyrus Caneo.

Fig. 4.14 Intermezzo. Production photograph.

Fig. 4.15 Max Pallenberg as the Spielmann. Photograph.

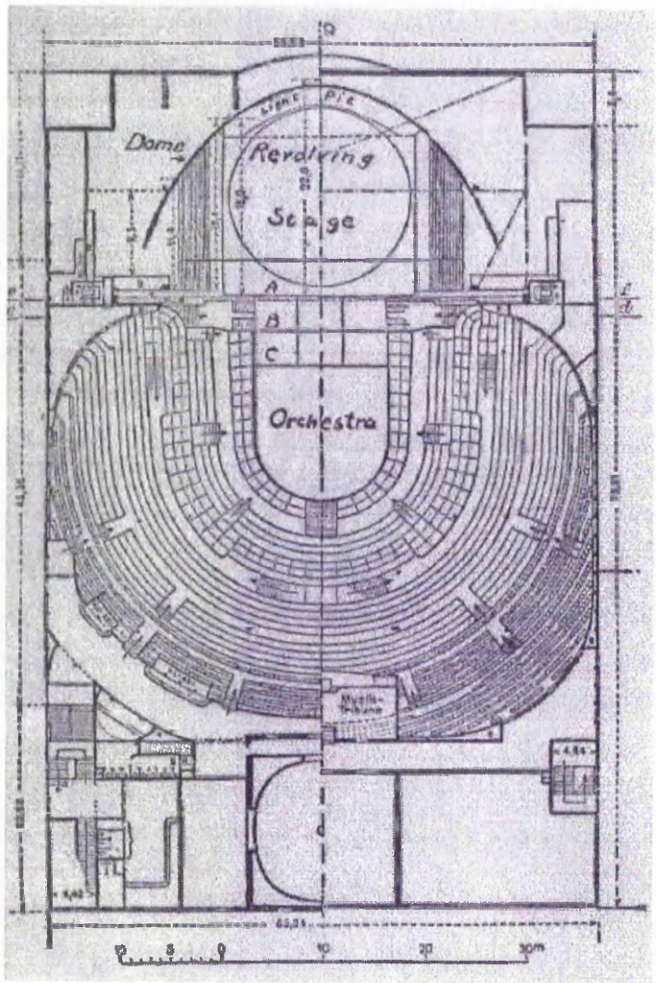

Fig 4.16 Grosses Schauspielhaus, 1919, Berlin. Arch: Hans Poelzig. Ground Plan.

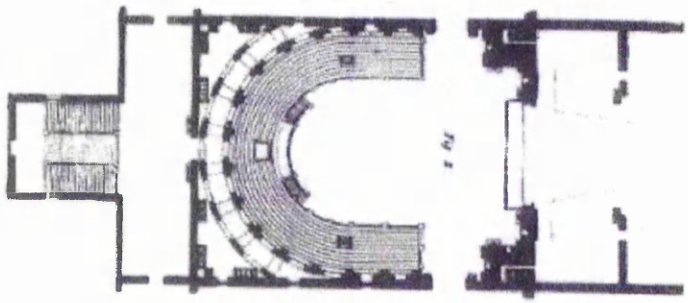

Fig.4.17 Teatro Farnese, 1618-20, Parma. Arch: G.B. Aleotti. Ground plan.

Fig. 5.1 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1914, Savoy Theatre, London, Dir: H.G. Barker, Des: N. Wilkinson. Part I, scene i, The Court. Production photograph.

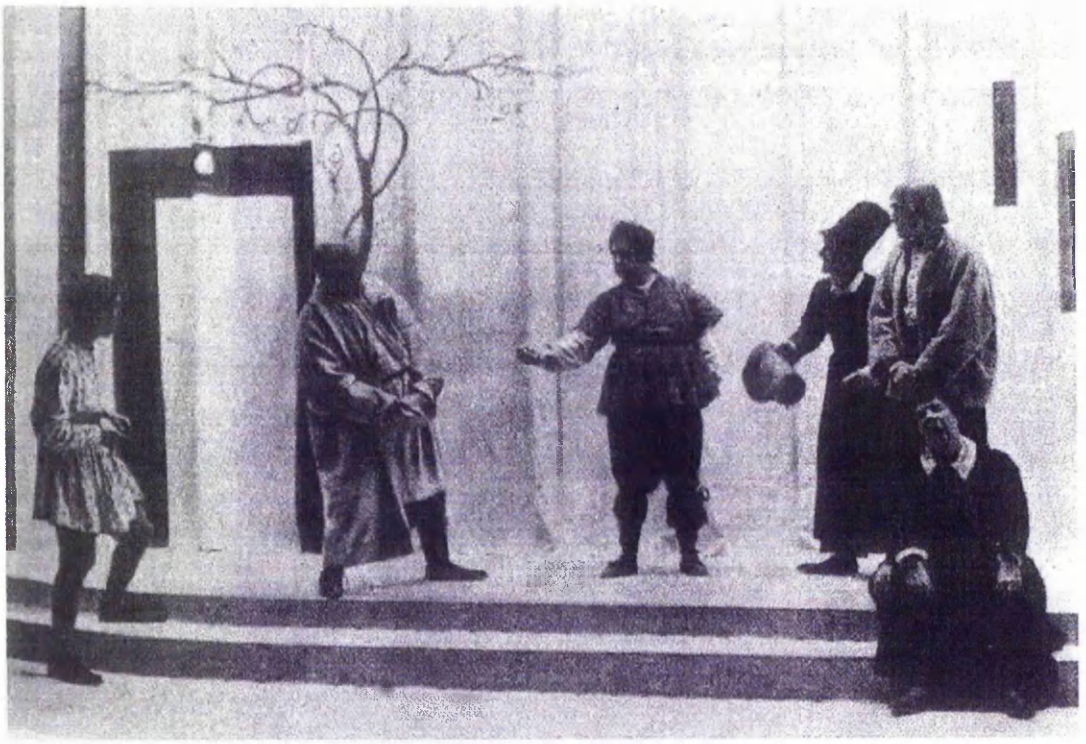

Fig. 5.2 Part I, scene ii, Quince's house. Production photograph.

Fig. 5.3 Part II, scene i, The entrance of fairies. Production photograph.

Fig. 5.4 Part II, scene ii, Titania's bower. Production photograph.

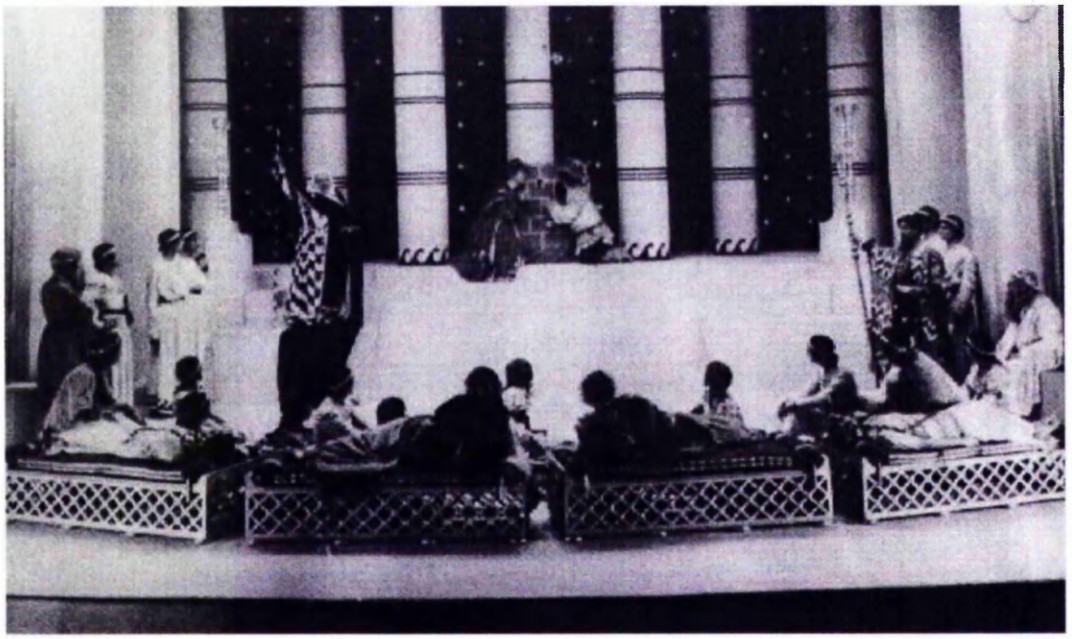

Fig. 5.5 Part III, scene ii, The performance of the mechanicals. Production photograph.

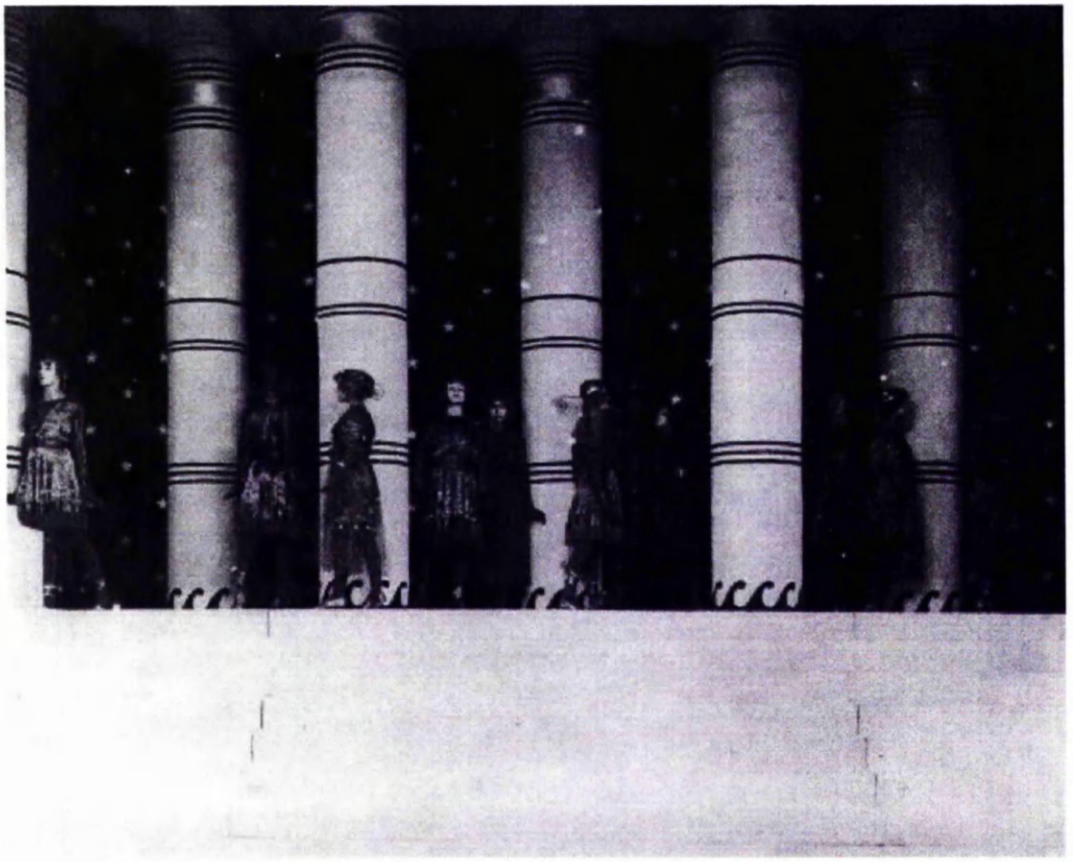

Fig. 5.6 Part III, scene ii, The final dance of the fairies. Production photograph.

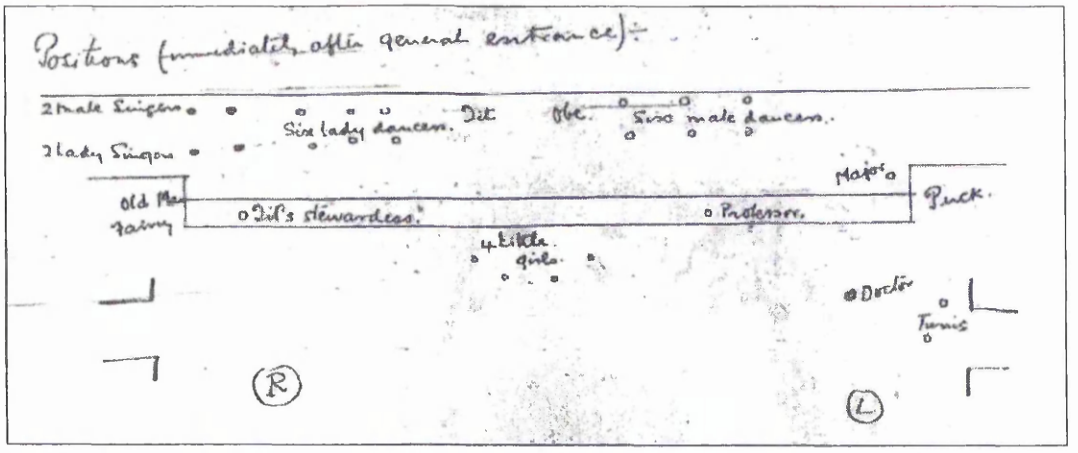

Fig. 5.7 Part II, scene i. Ground plan.

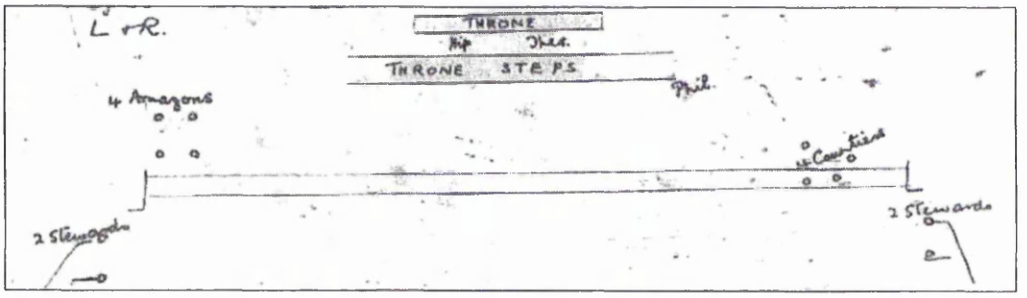

Fig. 5.8 Part I, scene i. Ground plan.

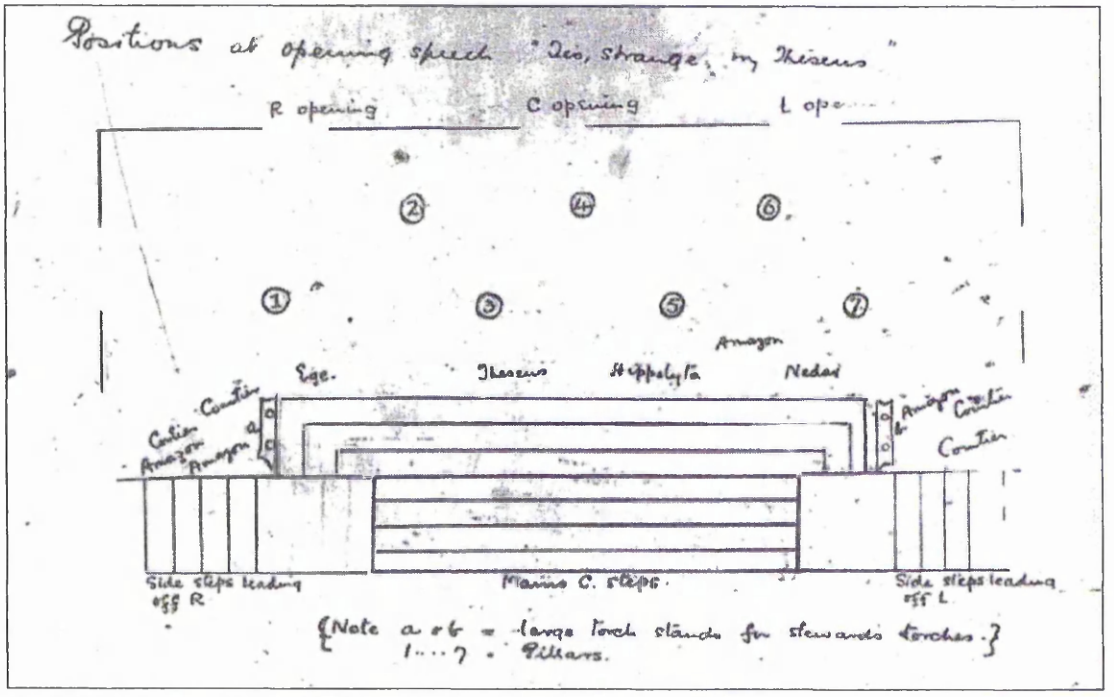

Fig. 5.9 Part III, scene ii. Ground plan.

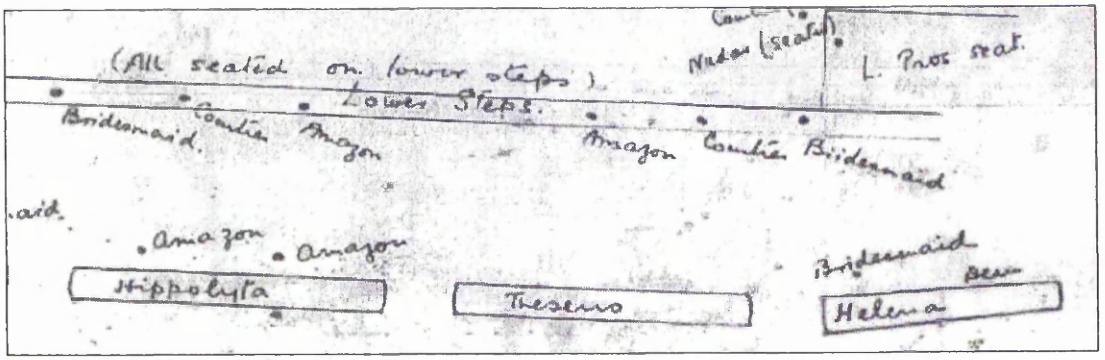

Fig. 5.10 Part III, scene ii. Ground plan.

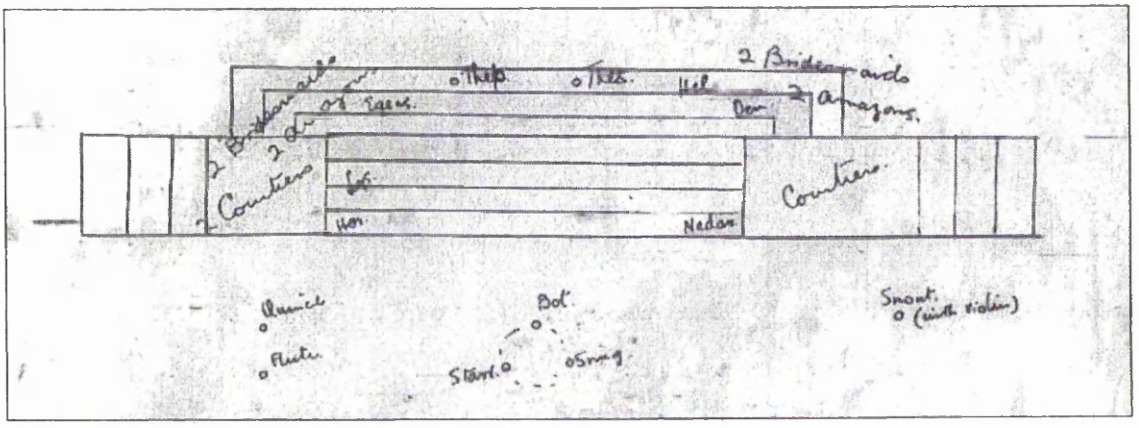

Fig. 5.11 Part III, scene ii. Ground plan.

Fig. 5.12 Titania and her train. Studio photograph.

Fig 5.13. Oberon and his train. Studio photograph.

Fig. 5.14 Puck. Studio photograph.

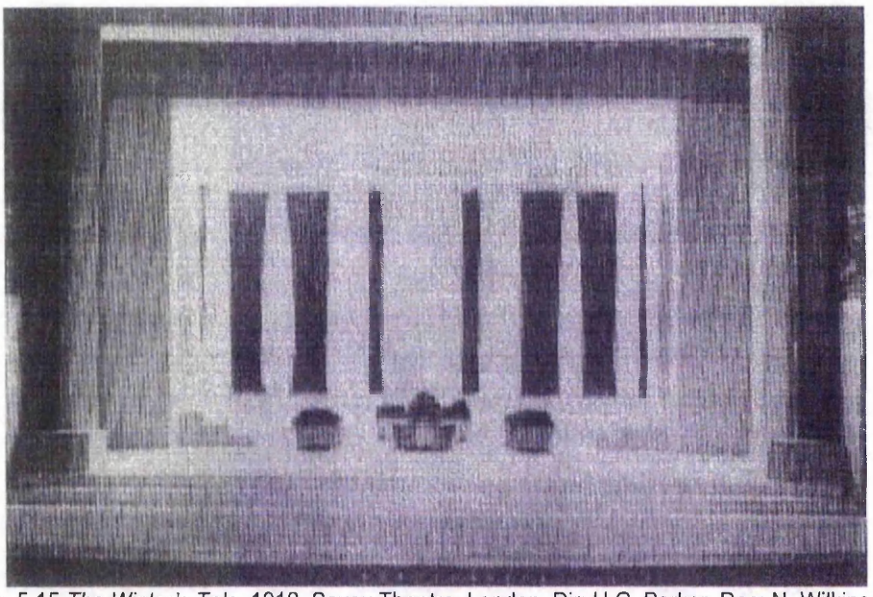

Fig. 5.15 *The Winter's Tale*, 1912, Savoy Theatre, London, Dir: H.G. Barker, Des: N. Wilkinson. Photograph of the stage arrangement.

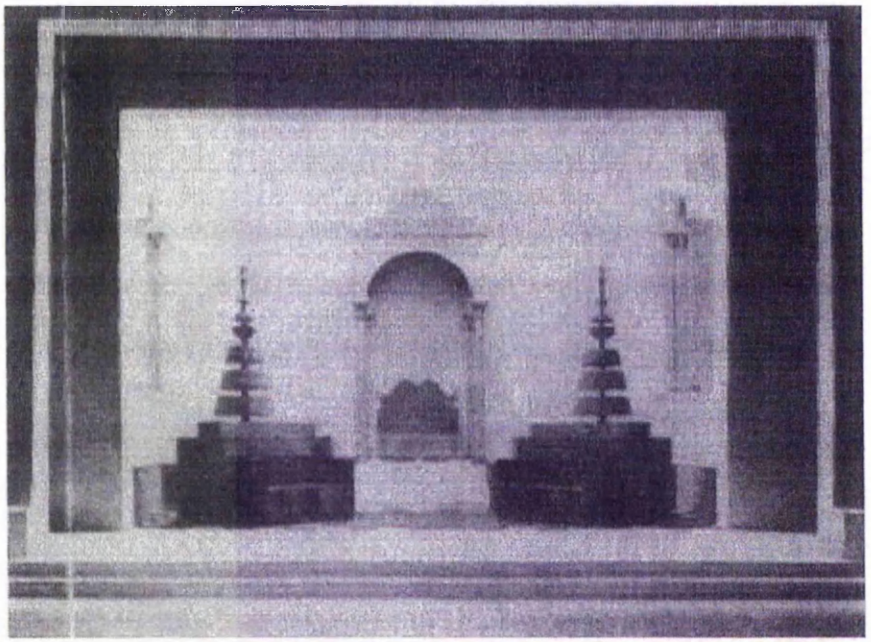

Fig. 5.16 *Twelfth Night*, 1912, Savoy Theatre, London, Dir: H.G. Barker, Des: N. Wilkinson. Photograph of the stage arrangement.

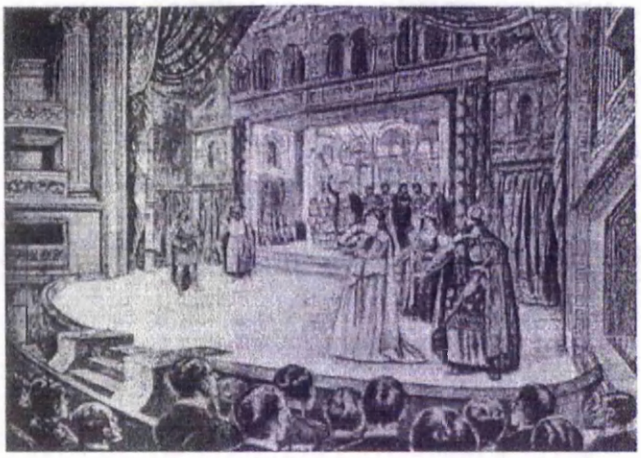

Fig. 5.17 *King Lear*, 1899, Residenztheater, Munich, "Shakespeare-Stage", Dir: Josca Savits, Des: Karl Lautenshlaeger. Artist's impression.

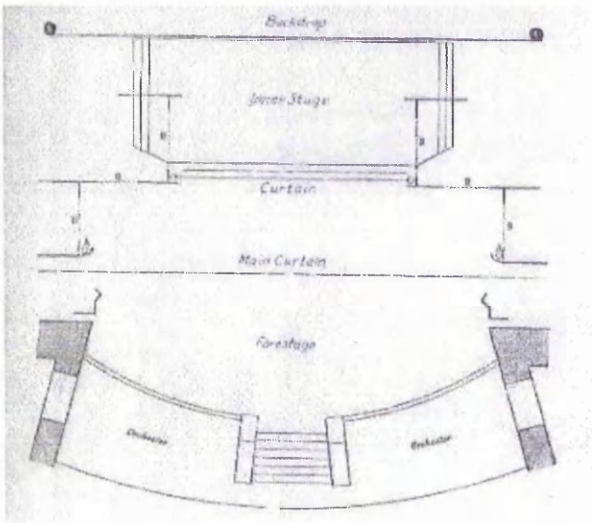

Fig. 5.18 Residenztheater, Munich, "Shakespeare-Stage", Des: Karl Lautenschlaeger. Ground plan.

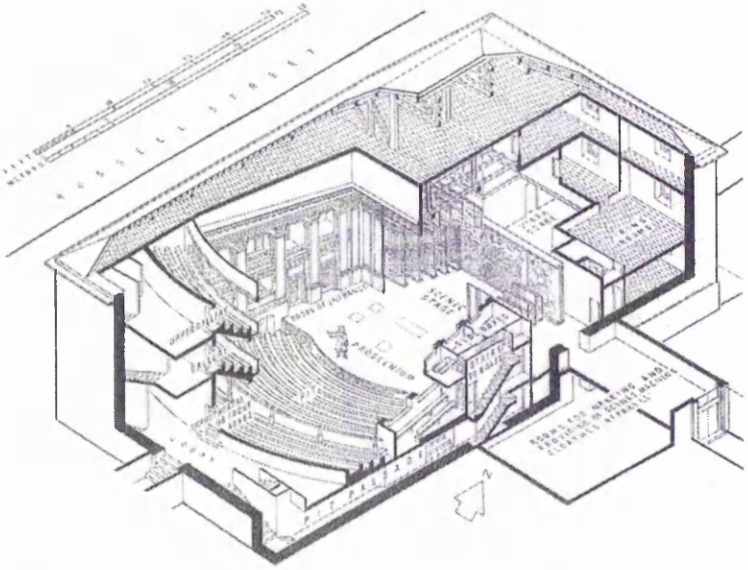

Fig. 5.19 Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, 1674, London, Arch: Sir Christopher Wren. Isometric reconstruction by Richard Leacroft.

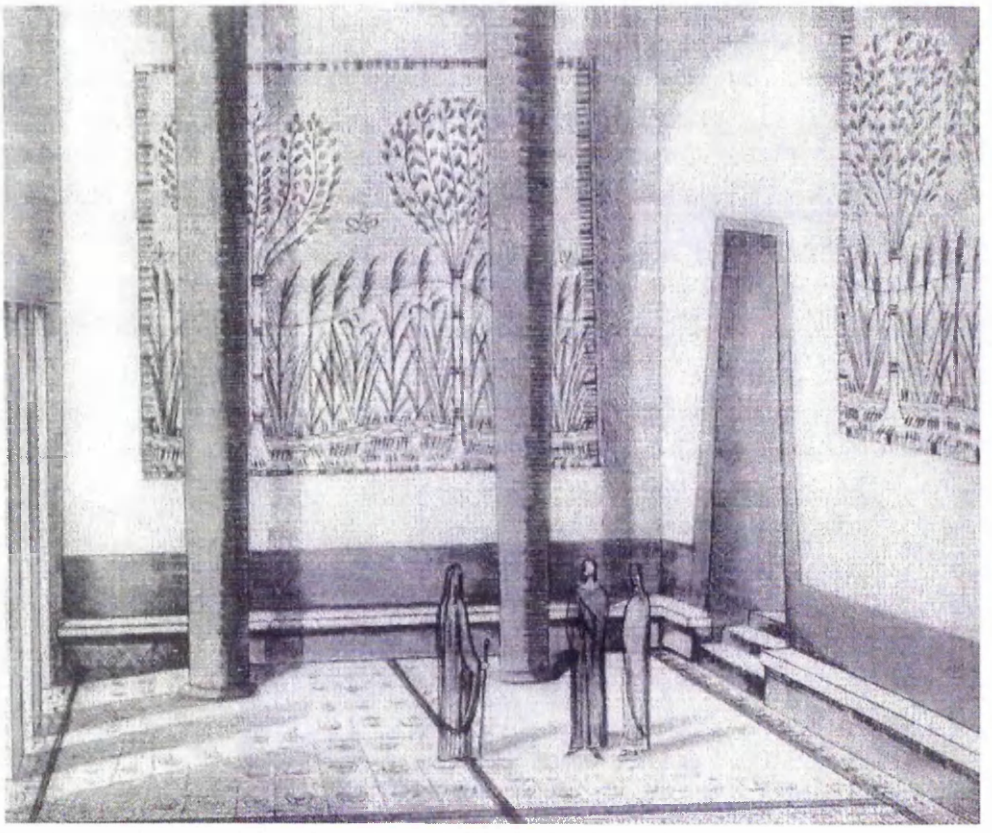

Fig. 5.20 Paul Nash, 'Theseus Palace'. Design by Nash printed as an illustration to *A Midsommer Night's Dreame*, Series: The Payers' Shakespeare, London: Ernest Benn, 1924.

5. Barker's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1914)

When Harley Granville Barker's production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* opened in February 1914 at the Savoy Theatre it had already been the most awaited production of the year. Understandably, since it was one of the first in England to apply the modernistic scenic language to Shakespearean staging, a language substantially developed on the Continent and especially in Germany. The performance followed the letter of modernism (both in technological and aesthetic aspects), and in fact confirmed the validity of such a choice. Quite unexpectedly, the visual became the dominant aspect, and what proved to be the production's major innovation (the audacious visual interpretation of the imaginary world of this very popular play) is exactly what linked it the most with the past.

THE SPECTACLE

In 1914 Harley Granville Barker already had a significant theatre career as actor, playwright and director of modern plays within the repertory system. Yet it is his work on Shakespeare that contributed to his lasting reputation. Before mounting *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he had already directed two of Shakespeare's plays, *The Winter's Tale* and *Twelfth Night*, both in 1912. All three productions were controversial, as they followed the principles and practice of New Stagecraft, challenging the standard nineteenth century spectacular staging. Karen Greif summarised his achievements as follows: "Turning away from the Victorian tradition of lavish spectacle and severely edited acting versions, Barker set a new standard of simplicity and speed, with respect for the integrity of the text and for the Elizabethan methods of stagecraft underlying Shakespeare's techniques of dramatic construction."[103]

What was considered to be Barker's major innovation was that he was the first to present a virtually unabridged version of the text,[104] which he did not rearrange in

[103] Karen Greif, " 'If This Were Play'd upon a Stage': Harley Granville Barker's Shakespeare Productions at the Savoy Theatre, 1912-1914", *Harvard Library Bulletin*, vol. 20, no 2, April 1980, pp. 117-145 (here 117).

[104] The edition he used was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Series: Favourite Classics: The Plays of Shakespeare, With an introduction of George Brandes and a Plate representing Mrs Beerbohm-Tree as 'Titania' and Miss Julia Nielson as 'Oberon', London: William Heinemann, 1912. (The Introduction is missing from the promptcopy). Later in 1914 the same publisher was to print *An Acting edition* of the same play with Harley Granville Barker's *Preface* to it.

order to fit any stage demands.[105] The quick scene changes as well as the swift delivery of speech allowed the play to last only 3 hours and 10 minutes with only two very short intervals. The intervals were not dictated by any scenic necessity but by dramatic needs. Barker disregarded the editorial division of the play in five Acts, since, he argued, it was not decided by the playwright himself, and followed a tripartite division of his own choice that divided the play in thematic parts.[106] Hence, the First Part deals with the mortals, the Second one with the fairy world, while the Third returns to the world of men after their supernatural experience.

The First Part consists of two short scenes (scenes i and ii of Act I of the standard division). As the play opened "Theseus met his court ... in an austere and symmetrical tableau in front of a grey-white curtain laced with frail green-and-gold grapevine patterns... Theseus sat with Hippolyta on a severe black throne-bench on a dais, famed by staff-bearing Amazons"[107] (Fig. 5.1).

At the end of this scene the curtain rose to disclose a new one, this time of "salmon pink silk, with steel blue masses" standing for "the roofs of the city",[108] as seen through Quince's window. The dark coloured outlines of doors and windows and a conventionally sketched tree completed the picture, which looked like a puzzle to *The Sketch* cartoonist.[109] The mechanicals had their first meeting as an amateur theatre company on a fully lit stage (Fig. 5.2).

At this point there was a five-minute interval and then the Second Part began. The action was transferred to the Wood near Athens. Two settings succeeded one another in four scenes. In the first scene the King and the Queen of the fairy

[105] What mattered most for the nineteenth-century actor-managers was not Shakespeare's text but the opportunities it provided for a great number of stage pictures to be realised. Exploiting the sophisticated machinery at their disposal, they created as many realistic and spectacular pictures as possible, at the expense of the play's original structure and pace. In order for the pictorial ideal to be fulfilled lengthy passages describing images and narrated action were omitted and replaced by the image or the action itself, while, when the original scene arrangement made the changes of three-dimensional scenery difficult and time-consuming an appropriate rearrangement was adopted. Despite of what the modernistic theatre practitioners considered an inexcusable distortion of the poet's text, the great actor-managers of the period believed that they were offering services to Shakespeare by mounting his plays with the aid of the most sophisticated stage technology of their own age. They went so far as to suggest that he would gladly have used the same means himself if only he had them at his disposal. Confident in their evolutionary view of history – therefore of theatre – and firm supporters of scientific progress – therefore of advanced stage technology – they never questioned their methods.

[106] All the details regarding this division are drawn from the promptbook of the performance.

[107] Gary Jay Williams, *Our Moonlight Revels: 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' in the Theatre*, Des Moines, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1997, p. 147.

[108] G.C.D. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, London, 1921, p. 468.

[109] *Sketch*, 18 February 1914, p. 201.

kingdom and their trains met in front of a symbolically painted backcloth in blue and green depicting a forest in a starry night. (Act II, Scene i of the standard division - Fig. 5.3).

The next forest scene (Act II, scene ii and Act III, scene i of the standard division) took place in 'Titania's bower', which consisted of "very tall, draped curtains for a background of greens, blues, violets and purples, changing much in tone according to the lights played upon them."[110] The curtains provided numerous openings through which the Fairies entered and exited. The floor was covered with "a very rough green velvety material, swelling to a hillock in the centre, on which are white spots indicating flowers."[111] "A giant wreath of flowers from which depends a light gauze canopy in which fire-flies and glowing worms flicker"[112] was suspended over the low mound (Fig. 5.4).

The next two scenes (the first one corresponding to Act III, scene ii until line 396 & the second one corresponding to Act III, scene ii from line 397 + Act IV, scene i of the standard division), which re-used the same settings as the previous ones, accommodated the action of the rest of the enchanted night until the arrival of the hunting party.

After a fifteen-minute interval the Third Part began. The scene opened once more in Quince's house. As soon as Bottom arrived from the forest, they all set out for the palace (Act IV, scene ii of the standard division).

Theseus' palace, which accommodated the final scene of the performance (Act V, Scene i of the standard division) was "a place of massive white columns with black decorations and a background of star-spangled black, yielding to glimpses of reddish-purple."[113] "Hereon is played by Bottom and his fellow wights the tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe: 'very tragical mirth'. Theseus, his Amazon bride and the courtiers come down the stage, filling the apron, some reclining on couches, some lying on the floor, and all taking an open – if not cynical – interest in the play"[114] (Fig.5.5). Just after the Bergomask and the general

[110] *Westminster Gazette*. Quoted in M. St Claire Byrne, "Fifty Years of Shakesperian production: 1898-1948", *Shakespeare Survey*, 2, 1949, pp. 1-20 (here 8).
[111] Ibid.
[112] *Evening News*. Quoted in Byrne, "Fifty Years", p. 8.
[113] *Daily Telegraph*, 7 February 1914, p.12.
[114] *Sunday Times*, 8 February 1914, p. 6.

exit of the mortals "the golden fairies play hide-and-seek round the columns of Theseus' palace. Gradually their numbers dwindle. At last only one, a girl, is left – the last patch of gold to fade from the sight, and to leave on the mind to the strange, new impression of the play as golden"[115] (Fig.5.6).

[115] *Times*, 7 February 1914, p.8.

VENUE

When Harley Granville Barker and his designer Norman Wilkinson set out to produce a series of Shakespeare plays,[116] they thought it essential to revise the physical reality of the stage at their disposal, namely the Savoy Theatre.[117] The practice of transforming the standard features of traditional theatre buildings was a common practice among the modernist theatre practitioners. In this particular case the choices were guided by the special nature of the play to be produced.

Believing that the usual structure of the picture-frame theatre was not suitable for a repertory of plays written for a completely different stage (the Elizabethan stage was an architectural stage, i.e. a structure of permanent features not accommodating any scenery proper, that thrusts into the spectators' area) and not wanting to 'amputate' Shakespeare's plays in order for them to fit within such limits, Barker and Wilkinson looked for a different kind of stage. Nevertheless, they did not seek to return to the original stage conditions, as William Poel did;[118] on the contrary, remaining faithful to their modernistic concerns, they aimed at creating a new type of stage that would serve the plays and their original structure, informed by their knowledge of the past.

The solution they come up with for all three of their Shakespearean performances was to produce three acting areas, which ran parallel to each other and were connected by broad steps. A false proscenium of neutral appearance was erected at a distance behind the permanent one dividing the stage proper in half. Thus two

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[116] Norman Wilkinson collaborated with Granville Barker in both *The Winter's Tale* (set) and *Twelfth Night* (set and costumes). As the *Stage* noted "these two are twins in the work and triumph" (12 February 1914, p.8).

[117] The Savoy Theatre (arch: C.J. Phipps) opened in October 10, 1881 with the production of Gilbert and Sullivan's opera *Patience*. It was the first theatre ever to be fully illuminated by electricity. It had a capacity of c. 1,300 spectators and its stage was 60' wide by 52' deep. Its manager at the time, Richard D'Oyly Carte, built in 1889-91 the most technically sophisticated playhouse of the late Victorian era, the Royal English Opera House. See Howard, *London Theatres*, pp. 214-15 and Glasstone, *Victorian and Edwardian Theatres*, p. 70.

[118] William Poel, the scholar and amateur theatre practitioner, was the first who called for a different stage treatment of Shakespeare plays. Informed by his scholarly research on the actual conditions in which the plays were first performed, he advocated a thorough reconstruction of the Elizabethan stage. He pursued his goal by directing amateur performances with the Elizabethan Stage Society, given inside partly transformed venues. However advanced this idea seemed compared to the standard practice of the age, nevertheless it shared an aspect of antiquarianism, since Poel's 'Elizabethan Stage' was perceived by Victorian audiences as an image of the past, minutely reconstructed (see Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare*, p. 40). Barker was familiar with Poel's staging (he played the lead in the Elizabethan Stage Society's production of *Richard II* in 1899), but he never favoured the pedantic archaeological view of his master: "we shall not save ourselves by being Elizabethan", he stated (Letter to *Play Pictorial*, November 1912, reproduced in Eric Salmon (ed.) *Granville Barker and his Correspondents: A Selection of Letters,* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986, p. 530). However, participation in this alternative experience helped him realise the

separate spaces were produced: a narrow space at the rear corresponding to the Elizabethan "inner stage" that accommodated all the three dimensional sets used, and a wider middle stage in between the two prosceniums, where the main action was taking place. Two steps lower, extending beyond the proscenium arch and over the orchestra pit and the first row of stalls lay the lower curved stage (12 feet deep at the centre), which corresponded to the Elizabethan "apron stage" and permitted a similar proximity of spectators and performers. Entrances were provided by several openings both in front and behind the standard proscenium frame. A set of doors that led to the acting area was visible on each side of the lower stage. Thus, a number of distinct spaces was created that could be used in various combinations and which were able to meet the Shakespearean demands for a variety of locales.[119]

The overall idea of devising a stage especially for Shakespearean productions as well as its actual realisation were hardly new. In fact, a similar set of questions and objectives had already been posed by German theatre practitioners from the mid-nineteenth century.[120] The best known experiment bears the name "Shakespeare-Bühne" ("Shakespeare-Stage"), and was conceived for the Residenztheater in Munich by the Intendant Freiher von Prefall, the director Josca Savits and the head of the technical department Karl Lautenschlaeger (Fig. 5.17. & Fig. 5.18). "Shakespeare-Stage" was also divided in three parts; there is the extended proscenium, the central stage as well as the "inner stage". Instead of a false proscenium of neutral nature, the German team erected a proscenium of certain thickness painted in *trompe l'oeil* representing the wall of a palace, and accompanied it with elaborate curtains; this could be used in either outdoors or indoors scenes. The major difference, however, between "Shakespeare-Stage" and the Barker-Wilkinson stage lies in the function of the "inner stage". Rather than accommodating practicable scenery, the earlier version's "inner stage", seen through the central opening of the palace wall, was dedicated to the production of illusionistic scenic images (for example landscapes) through traditional means (painted flats and occasionally three dimensional pieces).

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possibility of a Shakespearean staging other than pictorialism.

[119] Unfortunately I have not been able to locate any relevant picture. The closest I could get were two photographs of Barker's previous Shakespearean stagings, where the remodeling of the Savoy stage is partially discernible (the proscenium doors are not depicted – Fig. 5.15 & Fig. 5.16).

[120] For a brief account of the German experiments on the staging of Shakespeare's plays, see Bablet, *Esthétique du Décor*, pp. 344-348.

Despite all Elizabethan pretences, I would argue that both the "Shakespeare-Stage" and its modernised version devised by Barker and Wilkinson are closer to the Restoration stage than to anything else. The extended forestage was the standard acting space of the early English version of the Italian type theatres, before the actors retreated behind the proscenium arch that became literally a picture-frame towards the end of the nineteenth century. Access to the forestage was provided through proscenium doors (sometimes more than one set of such doors were placed on either side of the forestage), while the actors never stepped in the scenery space behind the proscenium arch due to perspective restrictions (Fig. 5.19). The German experiment approximates the earlier model by ostracising the perspective scenery far upstage, i.e. in the "inner stage", and keeping the middle and forestages exclusively for the actors. The Barker-Wilkinson stage restores the proscenium entrances, without preventing the actors occupying the whole stage depth.[121]

The similarities of both German and English versions of "Shakespeare-Stage" with the Restoration stage does not come as a surprise, since all three were in essence variations of the Italian-type theatre. The Restoration stage was the English variant of its early phases, while both attempts in redefining the architectural surroundings of Shakespearean staging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were manifested as the remodelling of the picture-frame theatre, its latest phase.

[121] Much later, in an unfinished and presumably never sent letter to Lord Esher, Barker, when discussing the National Theatre project, made the connection between the Elizabethan stage and the Restoration one: "an Elizabethan stage (convertible to a 'Restoration') with no money spent on decorations", (21 July 1945, reproduced in Salmon, *Correspondents*, p. 526). Such a conversion was possible, since they shared not only similar scenic qualities (no decoration), but also similar physical characteristics.

TECHNOLOGY

A Midsummer Night's Dream at the Savoy demonstrated a successful application of the New Stagecraft. Having abandoned the sophisticated but cumbersome machinery dominating the theatre for so long, Barker and Wilkinson searched for a simple and effective tool that would serve their purposes (presenting a virtually uncut text and maintaining the fluidity of action despite the frequent scene changes). Almost every element they employed had already been used in modernistic experiments and was to become a standard feature of the modernistic vocabulary.

Scene arrangement

The arrangement devised by Barker and Wilkinson for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* stood in between a purely architectural stage (a fixed and immutable skeleton constituting the stage itself) and a permanent setting (which mitigated the monotony potentially inherent in such an structure by adding changeable elements).[122]

The permanent elements of this simple shell erected at the Savoy (three levels for action adjoined by broad steps, a forestage, a middle stage and an inner stage; two proscenium arches, one permanent, the opening of which was diminished by the a rectangular mount placed immediately behind it, and one temporary inner proscenium echoing the shape of the added mount; proscenium seats embracing the permanent proscenium arch) were not to be read as part of the actual set. All added surfaces were of light grey colour that rendered them unobtrusively neutral and at the same time unified them.

The changeable elements were of two categories: curtains and three-dimensional constructions. The curtains were employed in the majority of scenes (Part I, i & ii; Part II, i, ii, iii, iv; Part III, i). All locations but one were backed by those silk curtains dyed in rich colours and hung in large folds. For both Quince's house (Fig. 5.1) and the first (Fig. 5.7) and third forest scenes no other element was added. For the first court scene the addition of a low throne and some 'throne steps' seemed necessary (Fig. 5.1 & Fig. 5.8). Elementary suspension facilities were used for the manipulation of these cloths, which were hung the one behind the other in different planes, providing thus varying stage depths, in most cases within the

[122] For definitions see Fuerst & Hume, *Twentieth Century Stage Decoration*, vol. 1, pp. 36-49.

limits of the middle stage.[123]

The set for Titania's bower was more complicated, since it combined the curtained background with three-dimensional elements, and moreover it occupied the "inner stage". A low grassy mound was placed upstage, complemented by a giant wreath 'floating' above; the two were connected by a canopy, which encased Titania when asleep. Only the floor of the "inner stage" was covered by a thick carpet representing grass, while the rest of the visible stage floor kept its standard greyish colour. Behind the rear end of the mound several pieces of conventionally painted backcloths representing trees hung in various planes so that a semicircular backing was formed. Through the openings a violet blue cloth could be seen limiting the stage. As the actors were entering the stage through the numerous openings, the curtained forest was animated (Fig. 5.4).

The only exclusively three-dimensional setting of the performance was Theseus's palace. It was "treated in a real manner – real, that is, in that everything was solid, of those dimensions – tangible, not a flat piece of canvas painted to look like what it was not."[124] A combination of steps led up to a platform, which accommodated seven columns supporting some sort of ceiling. A pair of side steps provided exits to the left and right, while more openings were placed at the rear of the platform, through which a star-spangled cloth could be discerned (Fig. 5.9).

This particular arrangement proved to be very flexible, as it accommodated a series of different actions without any scene change. The upper platform and the steps leading to it provided an excellent space for the performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe", the steps serving as acting area, the columns serving both as background to the action and as backstage space. All the on-stage spectators were turning their backs upon the audience, a novel arrangement for the time. The couples reclined on low couches placed along the apron, while the rest of the courtiers were scattered across the lower steps and the proscenium seats (Fig. 5.5 & Fig. 5.10). When the Bergomask was performed, the onstage audience moved upstairs, from where they could view the dance of the mechanicals taking place

[123] It is important to note that the apron stage was never separated from the stage immediately behind it by such a curtain. It seems that Barker wanted to fully exploit the possibilities for movement offered by two levels for action and greater stage depth.
[124] Comment of Norman Wilkinson on the scenery of *Twelfth Night* in Arthur Scott Craven's article "Modern Scenic Art" in *The Stage Yearbook*, 1914, pp.17-26 (here 20).

downstage (Fig. 5.11). In other words, the palace setting served as both stage and auditorium, without possessing any of the easily recognisable features of either.[125]

Generally speaking, the arrangement allowed for a variety of locales to be produced without slowing down the pace of action. The scene changes were indeed swift. The curtains could be raised and lowered rapidly, while the more complicated sets occupying the full depth of the stage were prepared in advance and revealed when appropriate (the 'mound' must have been in place from the start, replaced by the 'palace' during the fifteen-minute second interval). Moreover, the scene changes were taking place in full sight of the audience. As the curtains rose and fell the one after the other, the overtly theatrical character of the performance was stated.

The curtains, being easily manipulated and open to diverse treatment (already used by E.G. Craig in his early productions, as well as by Reinhardt in specific Shakespearean productions),[126] became a popular feature of later modernistic stages. Similarly, the organisation of the stage in levels and the use of stepped platforms (already found in the designs of Appia) were to be put to general use in the next few years, constituting an important feature of the New Stagecraft.

Lighting

Barker's stage was very well lit; it almost excluded darkness. The footlights were removed for good and the powerful 'torpedo' lamps placed at the dress circle bathed the stage in frontal white light. The rest of the lighting equipment (a combination of electric and arc lamps: battens, lengths, bunches, flame arcs)[127] were throwing their light upon surfaces that refracted and diffused it (shiny silk curtains, pale grey floor and false proscenium surfaces) and moreover did not cast any shadows (curtained backgrounds), enhancing thus the luminous effect. At a

[125] The *Morning Post* found this setting "by far the best yet devised for the transaction of all the business in hand" (7 February 1914, p. 9).

[126] More precisely, such curtains were used in *The Winter' s Tale* (design by Emil Orlick, 1905) and in *King Lear* (design by Carl Czeschka, 1908). Fuerst & Hume (*Twentieth Century Stage Decoration*, vol. 2) reproduce one photograph from each set: *Winter' s Tale* pl. 14 and *Lear* pl. 18.

[127] The Account book gives a detailed list:

electrical effects used in "A Midsummer Night's Dream"
4 focus arc lamps and resistances
9 "torpedo" funnel lights
6 hanging bunch lights
flame arc lamps & iron barrel
small lights in bower
1 "Cocoa tin" bunch light
(p. 19 verso)

time when the contrast of light and shade was amply used for dramatic purposes, Barker's choice may seem conservative, reminiscent, on the one hand, of the illusionistic stages where no real shadow was cast so that the painted ones would not be rivalled and, on the other, of the extremely brightly lit spectacular stages of the electricity age where the more light the better the effect. Barker supported his choice by claiming to be reconstructing the daylight of the original performance in Globe Theatre, only by mechanical means. Rather than favouring Poel-type archaisms, Barker was in search for an alternative to the standard lighting scheme of the *Dream*, which almost without exception plunged the stage into semi-darkness and mist.[128] With a general light throughout each scene (only the enchanted forest was somewhat darker than the rest of the scenes, but not to the usual extent) and no special lighting effects (the glowing worms inside Titania's giant wreath being the only exception), Barker challenged the 'conventional magic' of Victorian productions of the play and added to the feeling of 'seeing with new eyes'.

The simplified scenic means Barker employed in the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were in accordance with New Stagecraft, which was trying to free itself from the excessive elaboration of the realistic stages. Later Barker called for a further degree of technical simplification, anticipating the setting designed by Sally Jacobs for Peter Brook's famous production of the *Dream* with the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1970: "These modern theatres with their electric lights, switchboards and revolving stages are well enough but what is really needed is a great white box."[129]

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[128] The most famous enchanted forest of the pictorial mode was presented by the actor-manager Samuel Phelps and designer Frederic Fenton at Sadler's Wells Theatre in 1853. There the misty atmospheric effect was produced as the forest setting was seen through a green gauze.
[129] Karl Schmidt, "How Barker Puts Plays On", *Harper's Weekly* 55, 30 January 1915, p. 115.

AESTHETICS

Both the expressed intentions of Barker and his production team regarding Shakespearean staging in general[130] and the way they were applied while staging *The Winter's Tale* and *Twelfth Night* at the Savoy in 1912 prepared the public to witness a production of the *Dream* of completely different aesthetics from the dominant pictorial mode. Yet the astonishment did not fail to come. The images on the Savoy stage – especially, if not exclusively, the fairies – were so unexpected that they could not go unnoticed. Thus the scenography of the production took over every other aspect[131] and became as obtrusive as the scenography of performances it was supposed to be subverting. As Desmond MacCarthy noted in his review,

> the majority of the audience thought as much about scenery at the Savoy Theatre as ever did at Her Majesty's. It was a different kind of scenery, but just as distracting.[132]

Unquestionably, the eye was grasped. Only the reasons for such a reaction were different this time. Audiences were startled because they were witnessing something non-familiar and not because they were beholding a very pleasing version of the well known, exceedingly glamorous or extremely realistic. Unlike the real rabbits jumping around the stage covered with a grass plat of Tree's production that were remarkable because they were the apex of realistic rendering,[133] Barker's fairies were notable because they were utterly novel. For the first time in the stage history of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the fairies originated in the Far East.[134] Contemporary reviewers thought that they resembled Cambodian idols or that they were "ormolu fairies, looking as though they had been detached from some fantastic, bristling old clock."[135] These orientalised fairies were all golden, from head to toe; even their faces glittered (Fig. 5.12 & Fig. 5.13).

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[130] Letter to *The Daily Mail*, 26 September 1912, p. 4 (reproduced in Salmon, *Correspondents*, pp. 527-29) on occasion of the mounting of *The Winter's Tale*.

[131] Even the fact that Shakespeare's text was restored in its entirety was overshadowed by the powerful images. "It is still the picture, not the play, that is the thing", notes emphatically *The Stage* (12 February 1914, p.8).

[132] Desmond McCarthy, "A Midsummer Night's Dream", *New Statesman 2*, 21 February 1914, p. 630.

[133] Herbert Beerbohm-Tree's revival was presented in Her/His Majesty's Theatre in 1910-1911.

[134] A Far Eastern setting was used in the semi-operatic version of the play entitled *The Fairy Queen* with music by Purcell (1692). However, the spectacular Chinese garden, which followed the fifth Act had not taken the place of the Athenian enchanted forest. Rather it was a kind of Edenic paradise for the lovers after the order had been restored, and carried specific connotations for contemporary audiences. In any case, the association of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Far East was never repeated since, and therefore remained foreign to early twentieth-century audiences. For *The Fairy Queen* see Williams, *Our Moonlight Revels*, pp. 39-60.

It did not come as a surprise that the eyes accustomed to little girls dressed in tutus[136] considered Barker's version as calculated eccentricity and bizarrerie. "Mr. Granville Barker's fairies at the Savoy look neither pretty nor poetical; they seem the invention of calculated eccentricity and of the resolve to do something new at all costs" noted the *Illustrated London News.*[137] The *Daily Telegraph* thought that "sometimes it seemed as if Mr. Granville Barker and Mr. Norman Wilkinson, who designed all the decoration, had chosen to be queer and discordant for the fun of it",[138] while the *Standard* detected "an outburst of pure vanity of ideas for a sheer display of theatrical originality."[139]

Although Barker attempted to justify his choice of orientalising the fairies by attributing it to Shakespeare himself (they "come from the farthest steppe of India, says Shakespeare" [140]), it seems probable that his main impetus was to differentiate his production from the ones given in the traditional mode. He programmatically rejected the Victorian interpretation of the fairies as airy winged creatures and the alternative he came up with was their orientalisation. It seems that he was indeed aware of the risk involved in his choice, as he expressed the wish "people weren't so easily startled"[141] in his Preface first printed about two weeks before the first night.

However, the fact that it was only the fairies that were attacked in such a way, while the rest of the scenography was more or less accepted, even by reviewers who disliked the fairies, reaffirms what Barker already knew, the they "are the producer's test."[142] The whole imaginary world of the play (with the possible exception of the mechanicals) was reinterpreted without receiving similar reactions. For example, the source of visual reference for the Athenian surroundings and the dresses of its inhabitants was not the glorious fifth-century Athens,[143] but mainly the recently discovered mural decorations of the Minoan

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[135] *New Statesman,* 21 February 1914, p. 630. .
[136] It was Madame Vestris's sensational production (Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, 1840) that initiated the use of *corps-de-ballet* fairies with long tutus and tiny wings, which became a standard feature of future revivals.
[137] *Illustrated London News,* 14 February 1914, p. 248.
[138] *Daily Telegraph,* 7 February 1914, p.12.
[139] *Standard,* 7 February 1914, p. 4.
[140] *Saturday Review*, 24 January 1914, p. 107.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Charles Kean (Princess's Theatre, 1856) set the standard for such a choice. Even if an earlier age would be more in line with the presence of Duke Theseus, it was classical Athens that offered magnificent possibilities for display. Kean defended his choice of age by printing extensive programme notes.

palace in Crete (Arthur Evans' excavations of Knossos had started in 1900 and were still in course at the time of the performance).[144] One is tempted to suggest that those were more successful (more beautiful and in line with the spirit of the play) and therefore less obtrusive applications, but it is also possible that they did not matter so much as the real protagonists of the performance, the fairies.

What however deserves special notice is the diversity of the sources themselves. Within a single performance the world of Greece, English countryside and Indian deities come together in an astonishing blend. The only one to avoid orientalisation was Puck, as he came from " English folklore",[145] again a novel interpretation. With his scarlet costume and shock hair, he resembled Shockheaded Peter more than anything else (Fig. 5.14). His English character brings him close to the mechanicals, whose dance "never came out of Bergamo, but is right Warwickshire."[146] Yet, they presented their play in front of courtiers dressed in Minoan or Byzantine dresses. Even if one can reasonably support that this eclectic blend has its origins in the play itself (Shakespeare after all never cared for matters of historical accuracy), it nevertheless threatened the fragile unity of the visual aspect of the performance.[147]

What offered the sought after unity was the common non-realistic (contemporary reviewers called it 'post-impressionist'[148]) treatment of all selected visual sources, justified once again by the non-realistic quality of Shakespeare's play.[149] Instead of the traditional realistic representation, suggestion and stylisation dominated; picturesque details were abolished and clarity of line and harmony of colour took over. The composition of the stage pictures was well calculated, achieving balance between unobtrusive backgrounds and colourful figures. When commenting on the

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[144] This choice was followed by Paul Nash when illustrating the play for the 'Players' Shakespeare' (London: Ernest Benn, 1924, with preface by Harley Granville Barker). Theseus palace, with its round columns and mural paintings reproduces Minoan art and architecture (Fig. 5.20).

[145] *Saturday Review*, 24 January 1914, p. 107.

[146] *Times*, 7 February 1914, p. 8.

[147] A similar disjunction of the different elements of the production (scenography, music, stage direction) is remarked by John Palmer who believes that "the production as a whole [was] more like a battlefield than a collaboration" (*Saturday Review*, 14 February 1914, p. 202).

[148] The fact that a newly coined term of the visual art vocabulary is used to describe a theatre performance demonstrates the close link between theatre and painting, with painting being on the lead of experimentation. Although the term itself was – and still is – very imprecise, it nevertheless states a certain opposition to the minute rendering of nature and its effects, as achieved by the Impressionist painters. In the context of the theatre it denotes attack on traditional methods. The description "Post-Impressionist Shakespeare" was first attributed to Barker's production of *The Winter's Tale* in 1912 (*Times*, 23 September 1912). The reviewer was inspired by the 1910 exhibition held in the Grafton Galleries titled "Manet and the Post-Impressionists", where the term was first used. For Post-Impressionism see Alan Bowness' brief introduction to *Post-Impressionism: Cross-currents in European Painting,* London, Royal Academy of Arts: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1979, pp. 9-12.

[149] See Lawrence Housman's text in the performance brochure held in the Theatre Museum.

decorative quality of both sets and costumes the reviewers found parallels to the few well-known scenographies in the modernistic mode. Rather than detecting direct influence, they were recognising the existence of a common scenic language. For example, Reinhardt' s *Sumurûn* and especially the Russian Ballet, both rich in colour of oriental character, were often mentioned. The major inspiration however had been the work of E.G. Craig, "an excellent man to steal from."[150] Barker did not fail to acknowledge publicly Craig's influence on him:

> His own production twelve years ago of Mr. Laurence Housman's 'Bethlehem' destroyed for me once and for all any illusion I may have had as to the necessity of surrounding every performance of a play with the stuffy, fussy, thick-bedaubed canvas which we are accustomed to call stage scenery, while he opened my eyes to the possibilities of real beauty and dignity in stage decoration.[151]

The fact that the visual treatment was generally well received, even praised,[152] demonstrates the considerable expansion of modernistic principles.

However, one cannot make a clear-cut distinction between choice and treatment of visual sources. One has to bear in mind that the choices of visual references made instead of the traditional ones were related to specific visual qualities of the age. For example, Minoan Crete, as seen through the lens of the Art Nouveau movement of the beginning of the century, offered magnificent decorative possibilities. What is more important is that the re-interpretation of the imaginary world of the play could not come but as a result of the quest for new forms in stage decoration around the beginning of the century. In other words, it is only because one sets out to challenge the traditional conventions of staging that one is able to redefine the visual world of the play.[153]

The redefinition proved to be considerably unsettling. With all the standard criteria regarding the judgement of a scenic image cancelled, there was only one way to respond to the presented image: to try to find new standards by which to assess it;

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[150] Letter to the *Daily Mail*, reproduced in Salmon, *Correspondents,* pp. 527-29.

[151] Ibid. Not only the general simplicity but also specific solutions are reminiscent of Craig's designs. For example, the composition of the setting for Titania's bower with the round mound and the 'floating' giant wreath is similar to Craig's version of Act II of Ibsen's *The Vikings* (Imperial Theatre, 1903): the circular shape of the banquet table is repeated in the overhanging gigantic candelabrum.

[152] Palmer, who disliked the production as a whole, speaks in favour of the scenographic rendering: "I am quite content with Mr. Wilkinson. I like geometry and audacious colour. I like simple and entirely conventional pretences, as for example that a symmetrical green cone, flanked with hanging curtains of green and purple is a forest, and a bank where the wild thyme blows" (*Saturday Review*, 14 February 1914, p. 202).

[153] This is exactly what links Barker's production with Brook's later one. It is only natural that the visual aspect of those two productions (very often subject to comparison) had nothing in common.

to think.[154] This response, which is essentially an intellectual one, was far from the passive absorption the public was accustomed to; this is what makes *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Savoy a memorable performance.

[154] "There are two things at least that can be said of Mr. Granville Barker's Shakespearean productions. One is that he always gives beholders thereof furiously to think – if only to try to think what the devil he would be at!" noted the *Referee* (8 February 1914, p. 30), while the *World* congratulated Barker "on having produced a version of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* which has set many people thinking" (10 February 1914, p. 218).
The attack the established scenic conventions in order to get an intellectual response to the presented play and not an emotional one is to be found later in Brecht's theory and practice. For the Brechtian scenography see Christopher Baugh "Brecht and stage design: the *Bühnenbildner* and the *Bühnenbauer*" in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, Peter Thomson and Gledyr Sacks (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 235-253.

CONCLUSION

Harley Granville Barker's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* systematically attacked the standard illusionistic staging of his times, attempting to replace it with a new one informed by the modernistic principles. Although he claimed to have placed at the centre of his experiment the dramatic text, it seems that the aspect that attracted most the viewers' attention was not Shakespeare's poetry, but Barker's and Wilkinson's visual rendering of the poet's world. As Kennedy concludes "the fact that scenography was the acknowledged framework for Barker's radical Shakespeare is a powerful reminder that for the audience the visual is not only an essential element of performance, it is often the primary one."[155]

[155] Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare*, p. 79.

6. Conclusion

When examining the practice of proto-modernistic scenography for the purposes of the present dissertation, instead of stressing the differences with both the present and the past, I carefully looked for similarities and sought for continuing characteristics and reoccurring patterns. This way I tried to show the gradual transformation of scenography in the first years of the century which contradicts the established narrative of radical ruptures and unexpected innovations. The aim was to offer a fair impression of those first attempts, where old features and new elements blend, not always in a balanced – certainly in an exiting – whole.

What the first modernists were trying to subvert had still a strong grip on the theatre. The material conditions of their work in particular could not possibly change overnight. The available theatre buildings obstinately insisted on their Italian character. The first transformed stage pictures, as a rule, were nothing more than beautified versions of the already known realistic mode.

In this "age of rediscovery"[155] the inspiration for the 'new' was to come from old forms previously practiced throughout theatre history. Almost all earlier theatrical periods had something to offer in this atavistic retreat to the past. In the three case-studies of the present dissertation alone one can trace an array of characteristics of past theatre forms, ranging from the ritual character of ancient Greek theatre and the community spirit of the Middle Ages, to the elemental simplicity of the first perspective scenery and the magnificent artificiality of the Baroque stage, and again to the architectonic unfussiness of the Elizabethan stage and the actor-favouring stage of the Restoration.

All those influences were appropriately incorporated into the frame of modernism and helped the first modernist theatre practitioners reconsider some very important matters. The spatial as well as the spiritual relationship between spectator and spectacle, actor and audience were of the first to be redefined. As regards scenery proper, both the choice of visual sources of reference and their treatment were revised. The form and structure of the stage picture, both in terms of aesthetic composition and material construction, were re-examined.

[155] Carter, *New Spirit*, p. 5.

The modernistic experimentation was two-fold: it embraced both aesthetic conceptions and technical resources. Indeed, the transformation of the two followed a parallel course; aesthetics and technology were so closely bound that one can hardly distinguish between them (as I attempted to do for purposes of clarity). Fuerst and Hume articulate this close relationship in the best way:

> During the first phase of the history of the modern theatre it might be said that there existed an inter-dependence between artistic and technical progress in the theatre. If modern conceptions of the mise en scène have necessitated certain technical means, it is equally true that it has only been possible to realize certain artistic conceptions, because this or that technical innovation had been introduced into the stage organization. During all this period we note a reciprocity between artistic and technical progress. Certain inventions, as for example, the concrete and plaster cyclorama and sky dome, represent artistic progress in themselves.[156]

At first the majority of the steps taken were more or less timid; the transformation was only partial. It is only in the course of time and after a corpus of productions in the new mode that the general rules of modernistic language were articulated. By using this vocabulary the modernist theatre practitioners of the last years of the second decade of the twentieth century and of the years that followed were able to continue the course of development along the lines drawn earlier. The modernistic scenography after WWI demonstrated a more radically anti-realistic character, by unmasking the artificially of the medium and using its resources openly as such, i.e. as means to produce an image made of materials provided by the theatre itself.

[156] Fuerst & Hume, *Twentieth Century Stage Decoration*, vol. 1, p. 87.

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