

RESEARCH
ARTICLE**From Sachs Meiningen to Nikolai Akhlebkov: Redefining the Aesthetics of Space between the Illusion of Theatre and the Rebellion against the Italian Box Set****Hamza Djaballah**

Dr.

Department of Arts, Faculty of Arts, Languages and Arts, Djillali Liabès University – Sidi Bel Abbès

Algeria

Email: Hamzadjaballah536@gmail.com

Doi Serial<https://doi.org/10.56334/sei/8.7.57>**Keywords**

Directorial trends, illusion, rebellion, Italian box, aesthetics, theatrical space, theatrical environment.

Abstract

For most pioneers and innovators from various modern trends in theatrical directing, the theatrical space, has been regarded the most important element. This focus has led them to concentrate on updating the aesthetics of the space and working on it based on a triadic relationship system: the actor, the audience, and the space (the spatial creation with all its components). Therefore, it is important to examine the key historical milestones in the development of modern theatrical trends and to explore the experiences of significant pioneers whose work has influenced the theatrical performance. This includes those who, during their practices, updated the aesthetics of the space, as well as others who relied on new approaches in their research that redefined the performance elements, particularly the actor and the audience, and the relationship between them and how each connects to the space.

Citation

Djaballah H. (2025). From Sachs Meiningen to Nikolai Akhlebkov: Redefining the Aesthetics of Space between the Illusion of Theatre and the Rebellion against the Italian Box Set. *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 8(7), 543-552; doi:10.56334/sei/8.7.57. <https://imcra-az.org/archive/365-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-7-volvi-2025.html>

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Received: 19.08.2024

Accepted: 22.04.2025

Published: 03.06.2025 (available online)

Introduction

The art of theatre has long been regarded as an integrated network of mechanisms connected to development and renewed procedures. The postmodern era has produced creativity in writing methods and performance levels, pushing the audience to the limits of mental engagement and achieving sensory awareness. Scenography is particularly prominent in the theatre of images, representing a phenomenon that seeks the secrets of theatre production.

The theatrical space has been a crucial element for most pioneers and innovators from various modern trends in theatrical directing. This significant interest has led them to concentrate on redefining the aesthetics of the space and developing it based on a triadic relationship system: the actor, the audience, and the space. As a result, the scenography components have entered the realm of the directorial process, making an interconnection between the work of

the scenographer and the director so clear that it often becomes difficult to distinguish between their roles.

Therefore, it is essential to examine the key historical milestones in the progress of modern theatrical trends, while also touching upon the experiences of significant pioneers whose work has influenced theatrical performance. This includes those who, during their practices, redefined the aesthetics of the space, as well as others who relied on new approaches in their research that renewed the performance elements, particularly the actor and the audience, and the relationship between them and how each connects to the space.

1. The First Phase: Theatrical Illusion**1.1. George II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (1826-1914)**

From the mid-19th century until the early 20th century, the phenomenon of stardom was a common theatrical tradi-

tion at that time (prior to the era of the Meiningen Company, associated with the theatrical troupe of Duke George II of Saxe-Meiningen, which emerged in Berlin on March 1, 1874). "These stars showed little interest in the preparatory stages, which consisted of only a few hours spent getting acquainted with their entrances and exits on stage or identifying their main themes during the performance, without regard for the system or collaboration mandated by the nature of theatrical work that encompasses different elements of the arts" (Zaki, 1989, p. 30).

George II established what can be termed the new system for theatre companies (or theatrical troupe), where "... he annulled the star system, which had resulted in a massive tradition of elaborate decoration and ostentation, and emphasized single-ensemble theatre or group theatre. In his view, even minor roles became significant" (El Sharkawy, 2012, p.173). This is considered by historians and scholars of directing to be the foundation for the emergence of the first theatrical director, and they classified his theatre as "director's theatre." He outlined several principles, including those related to the company's interactions among its members, which are professional guidelines for how the troupe operates and achieves its work effectively:

- Systematic and long-term training.
- Preparation of sets that belong to the historical period of the text.
- Preparation and sewing of costumes relevant to the era.
- Accessories and how to handle them (Zaki, Op. Cit., p.37).

Before addressing the characteristics and essential features that defined George II's directorial style, it is important to take a moment to discuss this significant figure who helped establish theatrical directing as an independent art form. Herein lies the paradox: George II was neither a director nor an actor; he was "a painter whose patience in mastering the visual arts led him to venture into the theatrical work as an amateur and enthusiast. He thought about forming a theatre company with second-rate actors... Once the company began to work, the actors became attached to him, believing in his new system of theatrical work based on methods and approaches none of them had encountered before" (Ibid, p. 31).

¹ The Meiningen Company, named after the emergence of the Saxe-Meiningen troupe, which appeared on stage for the first time as a new theatrical company and created a unique event. The troupe's productions showcased a high level of professionalism at a time when critical acclaim and the audience's cheers praised the works of this young company from Meiningen, a small town located on the River Werra (Zaki, 1989).

George II's awareness of the dominance of the French theatrical mechanism over German stages, combined with outdated theatrical traditions and systems, served as a strong motivation for a revolution at that time. This drove him to seek a new style closer to reality. Thus, "he was the first to present a visual conception of the performance in its entirety, granting it a unity of style, characterization, and interpretation... But more importantly, he was the first to master the advantages of having a unified performance style" (Evans, 2000, p. 33).

George II's passion for painting helped him embody his approach and style, particularly regarding historical accuracy in theatrical costumes. "There was a desire to achieve the realism of historical attire for the characters, which was realized by the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen in his theatrical productions, striving to create a realistic image on stage" (Al-Ameedi, 2013, p.47). His designs were characterized by their harmony with reality. The Duke stated, "It is always beneficial for the actor to touch the furniture or elements naturally, as this will strengthen their impression of realism" (Ibid, p.48).

The Duke made sure that costumes were ready from the early days of training and rehearsals, intending to enrich the actors' imagination and assist them in performing their roles effectively and expressing the character authentically. He focused on "all elements of the theatrical performance, not on isolated components, working to unify these elements—costumes, sets, lighting, makeup, and accessories—into a cohesive artistic unit that conveys a single goal: to achieve a visual vision of the performance in its entirety, thereby creating unity of style and interpretation" (Ibid.).

The stage received significant attention from the Duke, who rejected the single-level format, seeing it as monotonous and not conducive to his vision. This led him to introduce a system of multiple levels and place great importance on the relationship between the space and the different angles of the stage, as well as the movement of the actors upon it. He rejected the idea of exploiting the center of the stage as an element of artificial focus, instead linking the dramatic event to aesthetic measures that varied in height and depth, all in order to achieve an interpretation of the emotional relationships between the characters in the theatrical performance. In this regard, Max Grube, one of the troupe's actors, described the Meiningen style by stating that "the Duke envisioned the stage as a white canvas on which to portray whatever decorations and shapes he wished. This led critics to believe that Saxe-Meiningen preferred visual images over words" (Zaki, Op. Cit., p.32).

All the innovations that the Duke reached in theatre, particularly the ensemble style he adopted in the performance and actor training, as well as the realism of sets, lighting,

and historical accuracy in costumes and accessories, had a significant impact on global theatre, especially in Europe. This paved the way for the emergence of several directors influenced by him. "This influence was seen in André Antoine, the founder of the Théâtre Libre in France. He adopted many of the troupe's strengths and innovations and applied them in his theatrical works, particularly regarding scenes of gatherings and human clusters, the precise depiction of artistic atmospheres represented in sets and costumes, and the remarkable flexibility in inventing details of the theatrical form, along with the innovations that Saxe-Meiningen excelled in" (Ibid, p.32).

All these innovations and additions brought by the Duke made him a pioneer of realism and naturalism in theatre. He established well-studied scientific foundations for each element of the theatrical performance, which included the actors' performances, historical accuracy of costumes and sets, and their accessories. He emphasized their importance in interpreting the central idea of the play, particularly the element of clothing, which significantly aids in clarifying and conveying the idea to the audience.

1.2. André Antoine

In response to Émile Zola's call that heralded the beginning of the era of naturalism through his articles and theories, André Antoine emerged, influenced by the approach of the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen but with a greater intensity in depicting reality on stage. He aimed for a closer-to-life accuracy in portraying events through distinct characters with natural features.

André Antoine (1858-1943): A French theatrical director born to poor parents in rural France, he moved to Paris at the age of 8. His parents became unable to work at an early age, and he left school to support them. He worked as a messenger boy for a stockbroker and later as a writer for a company in Paris. Subsequently, he worked in a public library, where he passionately read as many books as he could for education and knowledge. He loved theatre from an early age, connecting with amateur troupes that were prevalent in Paris at that time. Through his theatrical experiences, he became the head of the amateur troupe (Le Cercle des Gloires) in 1883, which performed in a small and modest venue on the Rue des Élysées. He reached out to young playwrights whose works were often rejected by censors and Parisian theatres. He eventually separated from the aforementioned amateur troupe with several of its members and founded the Théâtre Libre in 1887. He continued to present his theatrical works until 1896 when this theatre was eventually closed (Atiya, 2012, p.25).

Émile Zola (1840-1902): A French author, novelist, and playwright, he was a strong advocate of naturalism. He wrote several plays to be performed at the Théâtre Libre, which was founded by André Antoine, notably the play *Thérèse Raquin* and a play adapted from the story *Jacques Damour*.

Antoine emphasized "the importance of dialogue in delivery rather than rhetoric, as the characters are real people living in real places and do not notice the audience's presence. He insisted that his actors forget that there is an audience watching them" (Atiya, 2012, p.27). In doing so, he established new principles that rejected the shortcomings of acting in the French theatre at that time. Among these shortcomings was the idea of the star actor, whose goal was to attract the audience's attention and influence them. This star actor often relied on lengthy dialogues, neglecting his fellow actors and directing all his words to the audience, disregarding the events of the play and the necessary harmony and coordination among performers based on precise and studied movements that align with the nature of the theatrical action. This is because "... the essence of Antoine's method is for the actor to live his role, not just deliver his lines. Movement is the most powerful means of expression for the actor, and therefore he must realize that his entire physicality is part of the character he portrays, and that his hands, feet, and back can be more expressive than any verbal noise" (El Sharkawy, Op. Cit., p.177).

These new visions in acting, emphasizing teamwork during theatrical performances and rejecting the idea of the star actor, followed in the footsteps of his predecessor, George II. Antoine aimed to present the suffering of humanity to the audience in his plays, revealing the concepts of exploitation and alienation by relying on his naturalistic approach. He sought to convey these ideas as parts of a small life on stage. This carried within it a complete and definitive rejection of the control of the aristocracy and nobles over governance and power, heralding the establishment of new social values that grant individuals the freedom to control their lives and shape their social reality within this existence.

What Antoine presented through his designs and work on stage sets was a confirmation of his naturalistic philosophy, which posits that humans are the makers of their own destinies. The purpose of the stage sets was to depict life on stage and encourage the audience to believe in what was presented and see them within it. To achieve this, he designed a stage in the shape of a room, with a wall facing the audience that was transparent, which he called the "fourth wall." This innovation meant that raising the curtain no longer signified the true beginning of the theatrical events, but rather allowed the audience to witness actions that were already taking place before the curtain was lifted (Atiya, 2012, p.29).

André Antoine followed in the footsteps of the Duke, believing that "stage sets can significantly contribute to establishing the 'psychological atmosphere,' and that theatrical embellishments can also enhance the performance". Through his new practices, Antoine discovered that the art

of acting was no longer limited to delivery and gestures alone; there were other elements, such as stillness and movement in all their dimensions, that began to take their place on stage as essential components of the craft of naturalistic acting (Zaki, Op. Cit., p.39-40).

Antoine insisted on producing at the highest levels, paying attention to every detail. He did not stop at creating internal atmospheres on stage; he deliberately directed light sources such as the sun, moon, and lamps, ensuring their clarity. He opposed the use of low lighting because its direction contradicted reality. He also sought to achieve external atmospheres by using sounds as effects to represent animals like birds, crickets, and frogs. He employed real props and appropriate lighting to depict night and day (Atiya, Op. Cit, p.30).

1.3. Constantin Stanislavski

"Create your own method" is a famous quote by Stanislavski, who is considered one of the most prominent pioneers who influenced theatre worldwide. His works and experiences are important material studied in all theatrical institutes and academies in various countries. Notably, his books *My Life in Art* and *An Actor Prepares* are the essence of his life's experience, which he established through what is known as "the system" and its importance in training the actor both physically and psychologically.

Stanislavski was influenced by the methods of his predecessor, George II, and worked on establishing his own approach to dealing with the text and the actor. This eventually became a foundational method in theatre based on two essential pillars: the theatrical text, which carries a social message or function, and the actor, who is responsible for conveying this message or function to the audience. Stanislavski focused his directorial efforts and interests on the text and its service, believing that the primary task of the director is to convey the idea and objective of the play to the audience. He maintained that the actions of the characters created by the playwright should appear justified, logical, cohesive, and acceptable, as they are in real life, and that the purpose and content of the text should be clear to the audience. From here, he demonstrated his

loyalty to the playwright's ideas (Atiya, Op. Cit, p.31), considering the director to be the leader, the mind of the team, and its discerning eye. Therefore, it was essential for him to understand the text thoroughly and grasp all the lines of the play's events, enabling him to assist his actors in performing their roles and discovering the truths of the characters they portray in response to the spirit of the text, the type of play, and the theatrical school and movement to which it belongs. All of this aimed to achieve enjoyment and pleasure for the viewer and create a sense of illusion through spontaneity and genuine emotions in acting.

As he once mentioned to one of his actor friends, "Always keep nature in your sights. Try to get under the skin of the role you are performing to express it. Study the social framework of the character and don't forget to examine their past life. This way, you will study all layers of society" (Evans, Op. Cit., p. 27).

Stanislavski emphasized the importance of actors arriving on time before the performance, advising them to come hours early so they could prepare themselves internally and perform their roles with sincerity. By sincerity, he meant "the authenticity of the actor's feelings and sensations, and the truth of the internal creative impulse striving to express himself" (Bentley, 1986, p. 221). This is what Stanislavski refers to as "psychological tactics," which involves internal work on oneself and the development of the actor's internal tactics. This is defined by a set of specific "mechanisms and exercises such as imagination, creative illusion, physical and mental relaxation, emotional memory—even magical memory—given circumstances, emotional and physical connection between actors, and a sense of internal truth," among others (Ghaleb, 2017).

Stanislavski's method, which he called psychological realism, along with his approach to acting, liberated actors in their performances from the exaggerations perpetuated by Romanticism at the time. This was reflected in the repetitive classical acting traditions that had become entrenched among most practitioners of acting during that period. This liberation stemmed from presenting a depiction of life through illusion, in which the audience sees its own reality. "With this new approach, he encouraged his actors to behave naturally on stage instead of adhering to the inherited stereotypical behaviors in action, movement, and gestures...etc"(Zaki, Op. Cit., p.43).

He also emphasized through his directorial teachings the importance and respect for the actor, considering them the core and the first seed of the theatrical work. Therefore, it was essential to monitor and assist them in their development and growth". Thus, the actor was, for him, the master of the theatre, working to immerse himself in it and

¹ **Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938):** The Russian actor, director, and educator, whose real name was Alekseyev, became famous by the name Stanislavski, derived from his grandmother's French surname, Farley Stanislavski. His love and passion for theatre from a young age led him to create a puppet theatre in his home. Born and died in Moscow, he developed an important theory in the art of acting, through which he invented new methods and techniques that help actors perform in a realistic and truthful manner. His work continues to serve as a fundamental basis for acting schools around the world today. (See Abdel Wahab, 2007).

through it, as they are the instrument of expression through which the audience is addressed"(Atiya, Op. Cit, p.31-32).

Despite his initial authoritarianism and dictatorship in his artistic beginnings, when he viewed the actor merely as a representation of his imagination—turning actors into puppets in the hands of his creativity, dancing according to his vision of them—he later rejected this working style. He began to search for the "truth" in the artistic life rather than in ordinary life. One of the reasons for this rejection was his extensive study of the methods of famous actors who preceded him and whom he admired, foremost among them being Tommaso Salvini[†] (Ibid).

Stanislavski dedicated his artistic practice and method of actor preparation, discussing them in many of his books: *My Life in Art*, *Building a Character*, *An Actor Prepares*, *The Art of Theatre*, and *Preparing the Theatrical Role*, among others. This method is based on two essential pillars:

First: What we previously discussed regarding the actor's internal and external work concerning themselves.

Second: The actor's external and internal work concerning the role.

From the perspective of external engagement, the actor should focus on the character's appearance, researching and contemplating its form and details, including clothing, makeup, and accessories. This involves the actor exploring the text's drama for specific traits in the character, which may include particular speech patterns or physical characteristics, such as stuttering, stammering, or other bodily flaws like a hunch or limp (Ghaleb, Op Cit, p.30).

As for the internal work on the role, it is related to understanding the text and the specificity of its writing, as well as knowing its author, their environment, time, and place, since it will in the end be presented to the audience. This culture and knowledge that the actor must possess are considered fundamental to Stanislavski's method for achieving illusion and naturalness in the performance, through the actors' sensory and emotional awareness.

Therefore, the actor must search for social or historical connections in their era that relate the theatrical role to their reality. This is achieved through the actor's awareness of their cultural moment in society and by studying the content of the theatrical text to understand its discourse,

meaning, and the character's mental, emotional, social, and physical structures, as well as their functional role in the text's drama (Ibid).

Based on the aforementioned, we can deduce that the method presented by Stanislavski, or the approach he adopted in preparing the actor, consists of numerous discoveries arising from his long artistic journey filled with achievements. Although, as mentioned earlier, he was strict and rigid in his directorial style, imposing his vision on the actors without giving them space for freedom in thinking and analysis, he later completely transformed this approach by making the actor's imagination and creativity fundamental aspects of building the theatrical performance. What Ben Yahya noted is that "the book *An Actor Prepares* is not just for the actor; it is a system of laws that explains and clarifies the structural world of the entire performance discourse, from writing to directing to acting, along with other techniques that complement the theatrical presentation as a whole. This is what I discovered through my practical and theoretical experience..." (Azzaoui, 2014, p. 99).

Stanislavski dealt with theatrical design in the same way he approached directing actors, relying on nature to create the space and depict the setting in a photographic manner, reflecting reality. He imposed this perspective on the set designers he worked with, requiring them to embody the theatrical scenes in accordance with what the playwright specified in the text. An incident between him and Gordon Craig illustrates this, as narrated by Zaki: "Stanislavski corresponded with Edward Gordon Craig, the British designer and director, asking him to participate in the production of *Hamlet* at the Art Theatre in Moscow. However, after Craig had made significant progress in preparing and organizing the production, Stanislavski found that the performance was heading in a direction contrary to his ideas and beliefs about theatre. He had become accustomed to the design and direction serving the vital element in the theatrical process, which is the actor" (Zaki, Op. Cit., p.36).

Stanislavski's works can be divided into two temporal phases based on his interaction with theatrical design:

- **The first phases:** Characterized by his rigidity in adhering to naturalism and his reliance on exaggeration in creating and using theatrical scenery, as well as the opulence of costumes and accessories. "He even traveled with his wife, the set designer (Simov)[‡], a tailor, and a large number of

[†] Tommaso Salvini (1829-1916): A famous Italian actor, born in Milan, known for the authenticity of his performances. He would embody his characters both physically and spiritually well before the performance began, maintaining the character until the end of the show. Stanislavski emerged from watching Salvini with impressions that later became foundational principles for the Moscow Art Theatre and Stanislavski's acting method (See Atiya, Op. Cit, p.32).

[‡] **Victor A. Simov:** One of the prominent set designers whom Stanislavski employed. He designed the sets for several plays directed by Stanislavski, including:

- *The Three Sisters* by Chekhov, 1901.

- *The Lower Depths* by Gorky, 1902.

- *The Power of Darkness* by Tolstoy, 1902.

actors to the city of Rostov-on-Don to search for the costumes and accessories needed for one of their performances. They met with (Shlyakoff), who had reconstructed the Kremlin Palace, and he welcomed them into this palace where they lived for several days. They sketched and photographed the treasures in this museum and purchased additional cloaks, coats, and shoes on their way back" (Ibid).

- **The second phase:** "Following 1906, Stanislavski adopted psychological realism in a well-studied, scientific manner. The most prominent set designer he employed during this phase was V.E. Egorov" (See Atiya, Op. Cit, p.37).

2. The Second Phase: Rebellion against the Italian Box

2.1. Max Reinhardt[†]

Max Reinhardt is deemed one of the pioneering innovators in the era of realism, which swept through theatres due to new inventions, such as the use of hydraulic motors for rising and descending platforms and the provision of additional pathways on moving stages with wings. He also invented the fixed cyclorama, which had a significant impact on theatrical presentations. The reasons for Max Reinhardt's success lie in the technical elements that enabled him to achieve a high degree of emotional impact on the audience. He employed great skill in lighting, music, and sound (Ben Brahim, 2014).

His philosophy was to free the audience from the burden of literature and language, which required significant effort to understand the theatrical work. He focused on presenting a theatre that was simple, accessible, and free from complexity. This has led one English critic to remark about Reinhardt's theatre: "If Reinhardt does not present us with

Greek drama, what does he offer?" The answer was that he presents "Reinhardtian" theatre (Ibid, 147-148), as he concentrated on classical Greek dramatic texts in his new approach to artistic direction. In his classical performances, he emphasized vibrant and varied acting as a replacement for the heavy slowness typical of classical styles, encouraging his actors to think about the demands of their roles rather than relying on conventional clichés (Zaki, Op. Cit., p.53).

The new trend of Reinhardt in directing his works and selecting these ancient texts aimed to achieve two main objectives:

- **First:** To free the audience from the traditional concepts of reception that prevailed in classical theatre, where the theatrical process was limited to one-sided communication, resembling mere indoctrination (Ben Brahim, Op. Cit, 147).

- **Second:** His reliance on epic theatre in presenting his performances, which aimed to enlighten ideas and customs through a dramatic expression approach, referred to as epic theatre. This style employed a range of techniques, the most important of which was treating events as narrative situations (Ibid).

He is distinguished by a unique style that relies on employing new methods and forms for all theatrical elements with the goal of impressing the audience. Throughout his long artistic career in theatre, both in Germany and abroad, he can be considered one of the directors who do not adhere to a single doctrine or fixed style. He believes that each play has its own unique approach to directing (Atiya, Op. Cit, 57-58).

Reinhardt adopted a script^{*} that included more detailed notes and observations than his predecessor, George II. However, we find that Reinhardt's script takes on new and developed perspectives. It records artistic significances and specifies the levels of sound, notes, and their variations and transitions for each actor in every scene. It captures the pauses that punctuate certain roles. It documents the sensory and musical meanings of each scene, clarifying the state of stage lighting, its colors, intensity, and softness. It records the transitions, encompassing all technical, movement, and acting elements from one scene to the next. It also notes sound effects, from noise to natural and unnatural sounds, including thunder, lightning, rain, and wind (Atiya, Op. Cit, p.57).

- *The Cherry Orchard* by Chekhov, 1904 (See Atiya, Op. Cit, p.32).

[†] Egorov designed several sets for director Stanislavski, including:

- *The Game of Life* by K. Hamsun, 1907.

- *The Blue Bird* by Maurice Maeterlinck, 1908 (Ibid).

^{*} **Max Reinhardt (1873-1943):** Max Reinhardt was an Austrian theatre director born in Baden, near the Austrian capital, Vienna. He began his artistic career as a stage actor in the German theatre and learned a great deal from his mentor, the German director Otto Brahm. Reinhardt served as the chief director and artistic manager of the German Theatre in Berlin and was a leading organizer and programmer in theatre by 1906. He advocated for the establishment of small theatres across Europe. Reinhardt managed and produced numerous theatre festivals in front of architectural landmarks in Salzburg, Austria, and Munich, Germany, in addition to overseeing three theatres in Germany alone. He fled to America to escape the Nazis and passed away in Hollywood in 1943 (See Atiya, Op. Cit, p.32).

^{*} The script: A written text of a play in which all the notes spoken and articulated during each rehearsal session, often reaching five to six times the length of the dramatic text itself, are recorded. However, before Max Reinhardt, these notes were limited to recording entrances and exits from the stage, along with some basic observations about stage settings and costumes (Ibid, p.57).

One of Reinhardt's most significant contributions in his approach to the text was limiting the dominance of spoken words, similar to Appia and Craig. He emphasized movement as the foundation of this direction, viewing the ideas in the text as a means to create new images and forms on stage. These creations were meant to resonate with the spirit of the age and vary according to each individual text. Reinhardt rejected the idea of the star actor and its principle of stardom. He distinguished himself through a group style that represented a single character, likening the actors to an orchestra where dialogues and lines are distributed among them to speak as one in harmony, aligning with the music used. This approach created an atmosphere of intimacy through the shared experience between actors and the audience, making it often difficult to distinguish between who is the spectator and who is the actor. Much like Craig and Appia in their treatment of actors, Reinhardt largely agreed with them. He predetermined the movements of the actors in the directing script and insisted that they follow his guidance precisely.⁵ He would go so far as to say during rehearsals, "Do everything I tell you or do everything I do" meaning there was no room for discussion (Atiya, Op. Cit, p.58).

Gulius Pop said about him: "Reinhardt was born to be an actor, and his ability as a director stems from his background as an actor who can express himself, especially in the work at hand" (Zaki, Op. Cit., p.56).

Reinhardt needed new spaces to present his grand productions. "He began his early performances in the proscenium theatre, but his subsequent works evolved beyond that structure. In 1903, he presented plays characterized by naturalism, such as *Electra*. In contrast, for other productions like *Salomé* in the same year, he employed spatial forms composed of various surfaces and levels, similar to those proposed by Adolphe Appia a decade earlier" (Rashid, 2013, p.91).

Reinhardt did not limit himself to traditional theatre; he sought new spaces that aligned with his ideas and the scale of his productions, given the large number of actors he employed. One of the most notable performances where Reinhardt moved beyond the proscenium stage was his presentation of *Oedipus Rex* in a circus in 1910, where he created a simple set representing a primitive Greek palace, along with a long rectangular space, two sets of bleachers, and semi-circular wings. The second significant production was his staging of *The Miracle*, which was primarily a gestural performance and a religious play set inside a church. He presented the play within a medieval church building (Ibid, p.92).

As previously mentioned, Reinhardt benefited from many new discoveries and innovations related to stage design, which he demonstrated clearly in his direction of Shakespeare's masterpiece *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1905. He practically applied these concepts by convincing others to use the forest as the central backdrop that domi-

nated all stages of the play, meaning that the play's vision was fundamentally based on this setting. He also employed the technique of the revolving stage⁶, making the other scenic elements mimic nature in all its aspects (Ibid).

Reinhardt's effective use of lighting, along with his significant influence from Appia and Craig's innovations in this area, allowed him to achieve a level of mastery in utilizing the mechanical discoveries that characterized the stage. This unique approach enabled Reinhardt to combine imagination, theatrical impact, and spectacle. "His declared design was to free the theatre from the shackles of literature, and his famous saying was, 'The theatre follows the theatre' not following anything else, not even the literature that had dominated it for a time" (El Sharkawy, Op. Cit., p. 189).

2.2. Vsevolod Meyerhold⁷

Meyerhold sought to explore something new in art that carried a more modern and contemporary spirit after leaving the Moscow Art Theatre, separating himself from his mentor Stanislavski. Upon meeting him again, he felt the powerful influence of the realism that Stanislavski had established. This has led him to assist his students in creating a theatre studio to implement his ideas, wherein he rejected realism as a local trend that lacked relevance and failed to attract audiences. In this context, Meyerhold stated: "The time for non-realism in theatre has come. It is essential to portray life not as it occurs in the everyday reality, but as we feel it in our dreams, visions, and moments of spiritual elevation" (Ibid, Op. Cit, p.201). He thus rejected the prevailing realistic style that relied on immersion and empathy as the method for performance. His approach became known as "conditional theatre" and the principle of "stylization" which for Meyerhold is linked to the idea of conditionality, generalization, and symbolism. Stylization of an era or phenomenon means highlighting all the expressive means and internal structures of that era or phenomenon, showcasing its distinctive internal characteristics (Al- Asadi, 2017). This principle rejected the tenets of George II's school and, consequently, the principles of the Moscow Art Theatre that followed this path. Meyerhold

⁵ Revolving stage: at the Neues Theatre in 1905. (See Zaki, Op. Cit., p.52).

⁷ Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) was a Russian theatre director born in the city of Penza to a German businessman. He completed his secondary education in 1895 and enrolled in the Faculty of Law at Moscow University but later left it. He joined the Philological Institute, which was headed by Danchenko, and became a member of the Moscow Art Theatre company upon its establishment in 1898. He assisted his mentor, Stanislavski, in directing works. In 1902, he left the Art Theatre to head the New Drama Society, marking the beginning of his career as a theatre director (See Atiya, Op. Cit, p.32).

introduced new expressive means into his theatre, breaking away from the conventions of realism and naturalism. He incorporated moving mechanisms, cinema, and radio, and relied on bare configurations instead of conventional stage sets (Atiya, Op. Cit, p.63).

The conditional theatre that Meyerhold advocated for was characterized by several general features that liberated the actor from the physical constraints imposed by the set design. He moved away from the conventional stage scenery and eliminated front lighting. Additionally, he engaged the audience in the performance, allowing them to become creators who visualize and interpret the presentation themselves. This involvement made the audience a part of the creative process, establishing a connection between them and the actors by lowering the stage to the level of the audience and replacing spoken dialogue with music or sound.

Meyerhold believed that the director is primarily the organizer of the theatrical work and should equip themselves with knowledge and culture that enhance their identity as a director. This includes being well-versed in technology to benefit from it in various aspects and paying significant attention to the audience, as they are the main focus of the theatrical performance. However, Meyerhold also advocated for allowing actors the freedom to develop their roles, rejecting the idea of managing them. Instead, he emphasized guiding them and embracing their initiatives (Ibid, p.64).

Meyerhold viewed the actor a central and active element in the theatrical work, giving significant attention to them. He associated the actor with movement and addressed this through preparation and training in techniques that define their performance and allow them to execute the directorial vision. To this end, he developed a new method for training actors called "biomechanics" a concept he derived from observing actors and the fatigue they experience while performing. The fundamental challenge lies in managing this fatigue; if not addressed, it could jeopardize the future of the theatrical art (Al-Asadi, Op. Cit.,p. 70). This underscores the importance of movement as a means of expressing the actor's motivations and ideas, which the audience perceives through these movements, alongside the use of functional sets, referred to as "constructivist" design[†].

Through biomechanics, also known as kinetic mechanics or movement engineering, the actor can organize the time required to express their physical energy correctly and effectively. The organized actor becomes a synthesis of the artist and their material, forming the equation ($N = 1 + 1$), where (N) represents the actor, (1) signifies the organizer issuing the directives, and (1) refers to the actor's body executing those directives. Thus, the actor needs to train their body to respond swiftly and accurately to the commands issued by both themselves and the director (Al-Asadi, Op. Cit.,p. 70-71).

To understand biomechanics, one must refer to its origins and roots. Meyerhold based his concept of biomechanics on psychological principles, drawing on the theory of American philosopher and psychologist William James, the elder brother of writer Henry James. William James's theory posits that "knowledge is based on sensory experience"^{*}. Kamal al-Din Eid formulates an analysis of the meaning of biomechanics with the following complete phrase: "I started running and I was afraid". His analysis reveals that "I did not start running because I was afraid, but I was afraid, and then I started running". This indicates that the involuntary reflex typically precedes the feeling and is not a result of it (Eid, 2002, p.152).

Meyerhold derived the foundation of his concept of biomechanics from this formulation, as he focused on training actors in all movements—both physically and neurologically—along with their exertions, and digesting them sensorially and physically before performing. This approach contrasts with Stanislavski's method, which involves recalling these movements sensorially and physically based on the feelings of the role or character, where the responses come later rather than in advance, as Meyerhold advocates (Ibid).

Meyerhold compared the actor's body to a machine, where all parts must work together during the movement, aiming to align mechanics and its theories with acting principles. He believed that the actor's components (muscles, cartilage, nerves, and bones) should function within this system at peak capacity, maintaining a rhythmic balance among all the body elements to express meaning as directed by the brain through the nervous system. Each part has its specific role while also contributing to the overall function in relation to other parts, culminating in the final form of movement. Therefore, Meyerhold instructed his actors to completely eliminate human emotions and create a system

[†] **Biomechanics:** It is the science of body movement.

[†] **Constructivism:** It is a structural design consisting of tiers and platforms (pratikables), along with ramps, stripped down to their basic forms and cohesively arranged. This setup allows for the complete presentation of the play, with all stage scenery simplified and represented in a single view.

^{*} William James bases his theory of knowledge on sensory experience, asserting that the essence of experience is not composed of discrete elements, as is often understood in English empiricism. Instead, he views it as a continuous, flowing stream of consciousness.

based on mechanical laws, moving like a machine—such as performing a headstand—to effectively convey emotional states (Al-Asadi, Op. Cit., p. 89).

Meyerhold emphasized that a biomechanical actor must possess a talent for music, being influenced by the art of music itself. His training methods focused on how actors deliver dialogue in a melodic manner, with slow movements reminiscent of clergy and ritualistic practices. The musical rhythm holds aesthetic value within the theatrical performance. He stated, "If we remove the words from an opera and present it on stage, we essentially create a form of pantomime. In pantomime, the music dictates the pace with its varying speeds and melodies. The rhythms of movement, gestures, and group dynamics fully merge with the musical rhythm. A pantomime performance can only be considered ideal on stage when this integration is achieved (Al-Qasbi, 2010).

2.3. Nikolai Okhlobkov

Okhlobkov's view of presenting a theatrical performance was an extension of the call made by Meyerhold. His philosophy was based on the idea that the theatrical performance is a chance meeting between two close friends, a meeting that confirms their emotional unity and overall harmony. These two close friends are the actor and the director (Atiya, Op. Cit., p.72), thereby abandoning the traditional confrontation between the audience and the stage in a new formulation of the theatrical space that eliminated the dominance of the proscenium. In his attempt to balance the illusion of theater represented by Stanislavski's method and the theater as a box as seen by Meyerhold, he adopted a middle approach between these two directions, emphasizing the intimate and inherent relationship between the actors and the audience (Ibid).

This philosophy adopted by Okhlobkov in his performances, in terms of modernizing the space and frequently departing from the traditional theatrical structure, is rooted in his belief in the mission of theater and its role in uniting the people, emphasizing everything that is popular. Thus, he worked on strengthening the connection between the actors and the audience. He made the events take place in the auditorium, surrounding the audience, and at times on movable stages at the edges of the auditorium or on spatial constructions rising above the audience's heads. These were accompanied by sound effects coming from all directions, placing the audience at the heart of the action (Rashid, Op. Cit., p. 90).

In embodying this intimate and interconnected relationship between actors and the audience, which is prominent in his theatrical performances, Okhlobkov introduced a new form of spatial construction. Here, the actor moves within the audience space and interacts with them in a shared area, making the audience part of the theatrical experience.

In one performance, the audience entered the auditorium to find no seats as they were accustomed to, with the actors already moving around. They soon discovered that there was no stage; instead, one side of the wide auditorium was built to resemble a high, uneven riverbank, rising about five feet. In the center of the auditorium was a massive outcropping, and seated between these two elements was the audience. As the lights dimmed and the audience distinguished themselves among the actors, they realized they were amidst a group of partisans fighting somewhere in the Russian landscape during the Civil War (Atiya, Op. Cit., p.73). This was the foundation of Okhlobkov's new theatrical house.

Okhlobkov relied on removing barriers between the actors and the audience, positioning the audience in the midst of the action or events of the performance, which unfolded before their entry and continued until the end. Both the audience and the actors existed in complete unity, spatially and temporally. This unique space created by Okhlobkov, known as the theatrical house, was a large covered void devoid of any fixed internal architecture, except for a balcony on one side (Ibid). The stage took on different arrangements, and the audience would occupy varying positions according to the needs and requirements of each performance. Moreover, Okhlobkov borrowed some techniques from cinema, creating multiple surfaces for performance to present a montage of events. He employed cinematic editing styles, so instead of the audience following the events in chronological order, they had to track transitions from one scene to another and from one location to another (Rashid, Op. Cit., p. 90).

Conclusion

The theatrical space embodies the philosophical, aesthetic, and intellectual values in constructing the performance and assembling its elements. This is based on creating an interactive system for all components of the performance, including the audience, who play a crucial role in the process of interacting with the performance and perceiving its final image. Modernist techniques have contributed to shaping the final image of the performance, while innovative technological methods in the visual theater have expressed the overall philosophy of contemporary theater artists. This is particularly evident in postmodern theater, characterized by the dominance of performance and movement arts, including dance, ballet, circus, and vision theater. As a result, the traditional theater, with its directorial methods and established rules, faces a critical issue investigating the function of each element in the performance: the dramatist, the director, the scenographer, the choreographer, the actor, and the composer. Each of these elements must be considered in relation to the directorial vision of the theatrical work, taking into account the artistic requirements and

tools dictated by the unique characteristics and features of each component.

Thus, the current conflict between the roles of the scenographer and the director in shaping the visual aspects of the performance, due to the overlap of their visions and ideas, raises questions about the role of scenography in the theatrical design. It also prompts a deeper understanding of the close relationship between scenography and the directorial vision in defining the features of the theatrical work. This situation necessitates a serious reconsideration of the concepts of the theatrical practice, revealing the hidden struggle between the roles of the scenographer and the director. The exploration of the works of innovators and pioneers in

global experiences has led to the emergence of a new artistic approach that relies on a directorial vision, altering the features of theatrical performance compared to the classical approach to theater. The foundation of this transformation focuses on the aesthetics of theatrical space between modernization and renewal, aligning with the themes of innovative directorial processes. Thus, the study confirms the significance of the theatrical space as an active element in the design process and the formation of the theatrical image, serving as a fundamental component in its construction. This is achieved through highlighting the aesthetics of the space and working on the dynamics of the visual components of the theatrical performance.

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