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Adolphe Appia, Theatre Artist by Richard C. Beacham, and: *Adolphe Appia: Essays, Scenarios, and Designs* ed. by Richard C. Beacham (review)

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Dr. Raben's "strategic triad" (p. 95) works best in her chapters 4 and 5. She mentions the "menacing tone" (p. 73) of Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, but fails to note that "the other culture" (p. 92) in Pinter, though "not identified" (p. 92) is Jewishness.

The *rapprochement* between the pre-Holocaust *Water Hen* and the post-Holocaust *Endgame* is valid and deepens our perspective of both plays. A thorough reading of Daniel Gerould on Witkiewicz and Ruby Cohn on Beckett yielded fine results. However, no Beckett scholar would call Deirdre Bair's irresponsible biography "ambitious" (p. 111).

No one will say about *Major Strategies* that it is not an ambitious study. A short book, it takes a huge bite of our cultural cake. Scholars, however, pride themselves on being *gourmets* rather than *gourmands*. Yet, though often seriously misleading, this study stimulates discussion.

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RICHARD C. BEACHAM. *Adolphe Appia, Theatre Artist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987. Pp. 190, illustrated. $44.50.
RICHARD C. BEACHAM, ed. *Adolphe Appia: Essays, Scenarios, and Designs*. Trans. Walther R. Volbach. Ann Arbor, London: U.M.I. Research Press 1989. Pp. 480, illustrated. $49.95.

In 1905 the critic Georg Fuchs, who was soon to found the Munich Art Theatre, called for the radical reform of the proscenium arch stage with its perspective scenery and illusionistic productions: "Away with the footlights! Away with the wings, the backcloths, the flys, the flats, and the padded tights! Away with the peep-show stage! Away with the auditorium! This entire sham-world of paste, wire, canvas and tinsel is ripe for destruction!" At that time, in fact, Adolphe Appia, who had begun his career as a shy student of music in Switzerland, had for some twenty years been piecing together highly imaginative theories to justify such reform, and his ground-breaking book, *La Mise en scène du drame wagnérien*, had been published in 1895, to be followed in 1899 by his equally important study, *Die Musik und die Inszenierung*.

Today Appia is chiefly remembered for his innovative lighting design, but Richard Beacham is right to name him as the precursor of the symbolist stage reformers of his time in the use and development of scenic stage space and the kind of performance that went with it. Alas, he has not been recognized as such, and not until quite recently have the first two of five volumes of his essays and scenarios begun to appear in French from the Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Theaterkultur. Even less of his work has been available in English, and most of the selection of essays now published in U.M.I.'s Theatre and Dramatic Studies series have never before been translated – "a measure of his neglect," Beacham aptly suggests. This makes the collection offered here and translated by the eminent Appia scholar Walther Volbach an essential book, a bible

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indeed of stage symbolism for students of the modern theatre. With its companion study in the "Directors in Perspective" series from Cambridge, much of which is revised and reproduced for the helpful introductions to the *Essays*, and with a liberal sprinkling of well-chosen comparative designs in both books, this exciting period in western theatre history has been well served and the publication is an event in itself.

Adolphe Appia was a private person, and to his diffidence as a stutterer we may owe so much of his writing. It is certainly worth telling his rather sad story again. His study of music at Leipzig, and subsequently his study of art at Dresden, drew him inevitably to Wagner and to the composer's inspirational thinking about the possible unity of music and drama, but Appia suffered an understandable disillusion when he saw *Parsifal* at Bayreuth. There the settings were still massively pictorial and quasi-realistic, and even the careful treatment of the characters belied the consistency of thinking present in the music and the drama. His preoccupation with Wagner after his death as the abiding genius of the new theatre art led Appia to redesign the *Ring* in order to articulate his vision of a new kind of stagecraft. Wagner was to be the test of new theory, and whether it would work in practice. Unfortunately Wagner's widow Cosima was set upon preserving every detail of the Bayreuth staging, and coldly dismissed Appia's abstract designs with "All this has no meaning at all!" Thus Bayreuth continued for many years in a state of artistic stagnation and succeeded only in putting a stop to the revolution Wagner had dreamed of. When at last in 1924 Appia with his disciple Oskar Wälterlin attempted to mount the *Ring* cycle in Basel, the organized eruption of hisses and boos succeeded in making the production known, but at the same time forced the theatre to cancel the rest of the opera as planned.

Happily Appia's work did not stop with Wagner, and his meeting with Emile Jacques-Dalcroze in 1906 encouraged his development as a designer of "rhythmic spaces" at the Hellerau Institute, where Dalcroze's "eurythmics" sparked a new direction for Appia's performance theory. The system may have begun with the musical movement of the human body, but it quickly came to have meaning for the setting, the lighting, and the costuming as well. Nothing less than theatrical space itself was to be newly perceived, and Appia advised scene designers to "design with your legs, not with your eyes." Finally, that is, the actor had been placed in his proper environment. The work with Dalcroze was marked by an outstanding production of Gluck's opera *Orfeo ed Euridice* in 1912–1913, and in his *Theatre Artist* book Beacham goes into excellent detail about this production. Yet Appia's revolutionary approach was not necessarily accepted by the public, spurring him to write more and more in explanation and justification. There lay something of a religious fervor behind the dedication of *L'Oeuvre d'art vivant* to Dalcroze in 1921: "the faithful friend to whom I owe my aesthetic homeland."

Appia's theories were advanced, not only to reform the state of the theatre and ease the dead burden of the realistic convention ("We shall no longer try to give the illusion of a forest, but the illusion of a man in the atmosphere of a forest"), but, following the ideal of Wagner's "total art-work," to co-ordinate all the multifarious arts of the theatre and bring them to a condition of harmony and unity. The error, as he saw it, lay in the audience's desire to "see" everything, missing no detail of the face, the gestures, or the

costumes, to a point where it was unable to see anything at all. But stage design and all that went with it should help the drama take place, not aim to displace it. This argument led finally to the grand idea that the staging – if not the building itself – should help the audience's awareness and perception. The sense of an audience's being at one with the performers and not just watching them is a modern (and an ancient!) view of theatre that has been pursued in our own day by directors as challenging as Richard Schechner, Joseph Chaikin, and the Becks, to name only a few of those on the North American continent. In Appia's last years, especially after the Great War with its appalling losses, his writing was increasingly taken up with the ethical and social, if not actually political, role of dramatic art as he saw it as a source of healing and renewal: the apparent distinction between the artist and his audience would dissolve when together they created their best art.

Both books reviewed here are helpful in telling and explaining this story, and are pleasing in their exhibition of many examples of Appia's designs and scenarios. Nevertheless, it remains true that he was long on theory and comparatively short on practice, and Beacham does not really address this issue. We cannot be assured that Appia's work "swept away the foundations that had supported European theatre since the Renaissance" (*Essays*, p. 3; *Theatre Artist*, p. 17), nor that before this theatrical art was in a "disastrous state" (*Essays*, p. 3). The endless ramps and steps that Appia's sketches convey to us are somewhat uncritically accepted, being presented chiefly in description and not analysis. And it can be readily seen that such abstract sets would be serviceable to only a limited range of productions and a very few genres – the *Spieltreppe* (*Jessnertreppe*) that became the vogue were a notorious invitation to histrionic mountaineering. Nevertheless, these books must join the others of importance on the story of twentieth-century theatre.

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NICK WORRALL. *Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989. Pp. 238, illustrated. $49.50.

Perhaps theatre scholars owe Mikhail Gorbachev a debt of gratitude. Thanks to the more flexible policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, fewer obstacles stand in the path of historians who wish to work in Soviet archives and, as a result, interest in Russian and Soviet theatre has revived. Recently published scholarship on Russian theatre includes Nick Worrall's *Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage*, a study of directors Alexander Tairov, Yevgeny Vakhtangov, and Nikolai Okhlopkov.

Although Worrall slips in an occasional personal anecdote, the book is primarily a descriptive study of selected productions by these three directors. It includes a very useful "Table of Historical and Theatrical Events," a general introduction, a chapter on each director, and a selected bibliography. Readers familiar with Konstantin Rudnitski's glorious *Russian and Soviet Theatre: 1905–1932* may find Worrall's treatment of