Theatrical Landscapes: Karl-Ernst Herrmann’s Scenography at the Berliner Schaubühne

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Karl-Ernst Herrmann’s theatrical and operatic scenography is inquisitive and inventive, defying easy categorization and simple labeling. The stage designs that the German scenographer created for theatre and opera exhibit not only the proliferation of diversity, but also the continuities and discontinuities in his oeuvre and scenography at large. Born in 1936, he belongs to a generation of directors and designers who revolutionized German theatre in the 1970s, forming a “theatre of new imagery.” Together with Wilfried Minks, Achim Freyer, Erich Wonder, and Axel Manthey, Herrmann shaped the visual modes of German theatre, transforming theatre architecture, scenography, and the scenic image. His famous sets for Peter Stein at the Schaubühne were particularly inventive, spectacular in scale and frequently technically complex. Nevertheless, nowadays his work is often forgotten, his contributions to theatre and scenography being overshadowed by those of Stein, with whom Herrmann has collaborated since the late 1960s.

In his designs for the Schaubühne Herrmann refined the use of pictorialism, symbolism, realism, and theatricalization, all of which he would later employ in his operatic scenography. In particular, his designs for Stein yielded the most important experiments with theatrical spaces in the German theatre, leading to what Fisher-Lichte declares as the completion of a process that began at the beginning of the twentieth century. I argue that Herrmann’s emphasis on sensual pleasure in vision (Schaulust) is the main feature of his evolving aestheticism, which later becomes the signature aspect of his scenography. Through close analysis of the trajectory of his stylistic
development in such productions like Peer Gynt, Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, Sommergäste, Shakespeare’s Memory, As You Like It, Oresteia, and Three Sisters, I aim to show how styles in contemporary scenography are recycled (starting with the realism and historicism that Herrmann championed himself).

Critical reception

Karl-Ernst Herrmann has worked as a theatre designer of sets and costumes for almost fifty years. His fame and influence among German designers can be traced back to his work with Peter Stein. In addition to Stein, Herrmann has frequently collaborated with Claus Peymann and Luc Bondy. Christopher Balme captures Herrmann’s influence:

Herrmann’s designs are characterized by innovative spatial experiments in conjunction with a keen awareness of the dramaturgical and historical requirements of the texts. Most importantly, after decades of allusive abstractionism, Herrmann reintroduced realism as well as environmental staging into German scenography.7

Balme’s account is standard, and accurate, in noting the main features of Herrmann’s style and his impact on 1970s West German scenography. However, Balme underplays the important role of allusive abstraction in his designs. American designer and scholar Richard Riddell, when assessing the three most important designers responsible for audaciously experimental mise-en-scène—Herrmann, Wilfried Minks and Achim Freyer—acknowledges Herrmann’s role in changing German scenography, by pointing to the inherent realism and referentialism of Herrmann’s early work:

Despite the physical expansiveness of his work, Herrmann’s designs appear conservative when compared to Minks’... In Herrmann's hands, the Bühnenraum became a total spatial composition, but it also regained its former function, that of placing the action and contributing to a unified production statement. The woods in As You Like It (and in Sommergäste), the plain in Peer Gynt, and the town and river in Die Wupper are, quite literally, stage settings. They are backgrounds, playing areas for the actors, making no claim to self-sufficiency.8
Riddell’s judgment echoes that of other American scholars, in particular Marvin Carlson. Carlson criticizes the use of simple iconicity, suggesting that Herrmann’s designs are of a nineteenth-century provenance and thus ultimately epigonic. Hence I want to complicate Carlson’s reading of Herrmann’s “extreme realism” onstage since his sets are not just picturesque. Instead, they resist simple interpretations although at first glance they seem merely to be illusionistically pleasing décors. German journalist and author Nora Eckert partially agrees with Riddell. Comparing Herrmann with Minks (both were Willi Schmidt’s students), she asserts that although Herrmann’s sets were not as spectacular as Minks’s, they were more intense and, as an artistic invention, more innovative. In a survey of 1980s West German scenography, Martin Graue credits Herrmann with an extensive influence on other designers as well as for the unprecedented emphasis on the visual aspects of theatre: Herrmann “creates spaces that seem familiar and utterly convincing as living spaces for their characters. His poetic realism often carries a utopian element; his use of natural materials, earth or trees, and his quotations of nature (either physically or on beautifully painted backdrops) allow associations of counter-worlds to the plays’ darker ones.” Most recently, Klaus van den Berg argues that Herrmann’s Shakespearean scenography follows Walter Benjamin’s concept of an image space that “eliminate[s] the theatre of illusion and replace[s] it with a stage that performed as a visual field in which location and image lay open similar to a display case.” Therefore, the suggestion that Herrmann’s sets are primarily backgrounds misconstrues the role of scenography at the Schaubühne, which, as its German name suggests, highlights the role of visuality in the theatre. Each evening the audience could experience the transformative aspects of scenography that used not only powerful images, but also created entire environments, profoundly restructuring spectatorial experiences.

The Schaubühne

The Berliner Schaubühne, which celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2012, became one of the most important German theatres in the post-World War II era and was arguably the greatest intellectual stage during the 1970s in West Germany. Thanks to Peter Stein’s reorganization, it even eclipsed the famous Berliner Ensemble. He turned a small, state-subsidized private theatre
into a collective, in which all members of the theatre, including technical staff, participated in decision making. Everyone would have a hand in artistic issues such as play selection, but also in addressing questions of salaries and employment. In 1970, just three years after his directorial debut, the young Stein (often then described as l’enfant terrible of German theatre) was invited to lead the Schaubühne, together with the director Claus Peymann. Stein and Peymann worked alongside the original management of the director Jürgen Schütthelm, the stage designer Klaus Weiffenbach and the dramaturg Dieter Sturm.

Stein arrived in Berlin with a group of co-workers with whom he had previously worked in Munich, Bremen and Zurich. This group, together with such actors as Bruno Ganz, Michael König, Edith Clever and Jutta Lampe, became the core of the new Schaubühne. Shortly thereafter the management was narrowed down to Stein and Sturm. Generous subsidies, unparalleled in English-speaking countries, allowed the ensemble to conduct comprehensive dramaturgical research and enjoy extensive rehearsal time, both of which were essential for realizing the theatre’s provocative and highly imaginative productions. Soon Stein came to be regarded as “Germany’s greatest living director,” an equivalent figure to Giorgio Strehler, Patrice Cheréau, Ingmar Bergman and Peter Brook in other European nations, while the Schaubühne’s productions drew lavish praise. German critic Volker Canaris’s observation was typical enough: they “have succeeded in uniting the intellectual and sensual aspects of the plays, providing the spectator not only with the enjoyment of an experience, but with food for thought… [Stein’s] productions are faultlessly, almost frighteningly perfect, each as beautiful and clever as the last. In addition they are highly successful both with audiences and critics.” This unanimous praise waned over the years as critics became increasingly disappointed with Stein’s departure from politically aware theatre and his growing conservatism.

Karl-Ernst Herrmann was also among the new Schaubühne founding members and for many years he was Stein’s most frequent collaborator. They had met in Bremen in 1967 in Kurt Hübner’s theatre, where Stein had been directing his second play, Schiller’s Kabale und Liebe (Intrigue and Love, 1967). Soon after, Herrmann and Stein worked together for the first time on Brecht’s Im Dickicht der Städte (In the Jungle of Cities). This production, for which Herrmann created a simple Brechtian setting, premiered in March 1968.
in Munich and was invited to the prestigious Berliner Theatertreffen in the same year. Between 1970 and 1987 Herrmann created over thirty set designs for the Schaubühne, collaborating on half of Stein’s productions, six with Bondy, and one each with Peymann and Grüber. Interestingly, at the Schaubühne Herrmann never designed costumes, which have become a significant element of his operatic scenography. During the same period, Herrmann also worked closely with Peymann in Salzburg, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Bochum, and Vienna.

The Schaubühne’s first home (until 1980) in the theatre am Halleschen Ufer (today’s HAU 2) offered Herrmann endless possibilities to be innovative: here he could rearrange the stage and auditorium for almost every production because the former lecture hall was not a typical proscenium theatre. Moreover, the theatre was technically limited, containing a primitively equipped stage without space for a pulley system or spaces where the elements of the scenery could be rolled away. Such technical restrictions fostered creativity when it came to designing new spatial configurations between actors and audience. The Schaubühne spectators never knew where they would be seated or in what direction they would be looking. When the theatrical home base proved to be too small, the ensemble sought non-traditional spaces, and over the course of the years some productions were moved to an exhibition hall (Philips Pavilion on the Berlin Fairground: Antikenprojekt I), a film studio in Spandau (CCC Film: Shakespeare’s Memory), a sports stadium (Olympia Stadion, Winterreise), and a hotel (Esplanade: Rudi).

Like the theatre am Halleschen Ufer, the Schaubühne’s later home on Lehniner Platz, where the company moved in 1981, was also not a proscenium theatre. The structure of the former movie theatre Universum, designed by Erich Mendelsohn in the 1920s, was converted for theatrical performances. Here, as Graue describes, “a new space can be created for each production. The building’s floor consists of 76 moveable platforms that can be raised and lowered three meters, allowing almost every theatrical space imaginable. Two revolving soundproof metal curtains can transform the long empty space into three different theatres, one being the concrete apse of the building.” After renovation for Stein’s ensemble, the old cinema housed three flexible spaces and became the most technologically advanced theatre in Germany.
Fig. 1. The Schaubühne’s new home on Lehniner Platz. Erich Mendelsohn designed the former movie theatre Universum in the style of Streamline Moderne (late Art Deco) in the late 1920s. Courtesy of Schaubühne. Photographer: Gianmarco Bresadola.
Fig. 2. The large hall of the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, after extensive structural alterations for the needs of the modern theatre company. The interior space without any partitions. Courtesy of Schaubühne. Photographer: Siegfried Büker.

Peer Gynt, 1971

According to scholars Frederick J. and Lise-Lone Markers, Peer Gynt—Stein and Herrmann’s first collaborative production at the Schaubühne—was “a milestone in the history of Ibsen performance.”20 Ibsen’s work was the first of Stein’s nineteenth-century plays, initiating his interest in the bourgeois theatre. He chose to emphasize its historical origins in its subtitle “A Tale from Nineteenth Century,” but eventually deconstructed the play and shifted its meaning from a tale of personal suffering and a quest for a “true self” to a more general reflection on the corrupt and corrupting bourgeois society.21 This radically comprehensive analysis of Peer Gynt lasted approximately seven hours and was billed on two consecutive evenings. Stein divided the fifty years of Peer’s life into eight segments that were played by six different actors: such a choice reflected the theatre’s collectivism while simultaneously permitting a critique of bourgeois individualism.
Working within such conceptual parameters, Herrmann created a setting that was simultaneously modern and suggestively spectacular. More precisely, he endowed this colossal production with an architectonic set while equally maintaining an adequately poetic aesthetics that evocatively highlighted the naivety of nineteenth-century theatre. Stein wanted to have a set that mirrored the complexity of the play and preserved its fairytale elements, yet at the same time would determine the actors’ movements and action. He thus insisted on the set being finished before the actors started their rehearsals. That proved to be impossible and the unusual, technically challenging set remained under construction up until the final minutes before the premiere. Despite these technical difficulties Herrmann provided Stein with a visually astonishing arena-like landscape set that significantly contributed to the success of this production.

To create an open stage landscape Herrmann reconstructed the entire space of the Schaubühne. He turned the available theatrical space into the vast, majestic landscapes of Peer’s peregrinations that Ibsen had included to purposefully disregard contemporary staging techniques. The spectators were placed on bleachers on two levels on both sides of the eighty-two-foot oblong sculpted platform (25 m by 10 m). In this way, Herrmann presented the audience with a panoramic view reminiscent of nineteenth century viewing techniques and landscape painting. At the same time the spectators could be closer to the unfolding events on stage than in the traditional proscenium theatre. This idea of diminishing the distance was an important component of resisting passive spectatorship, stemming from Brecht’s theory and practice.

A Zeit reviewer described the set in Peer Gynt:

One looked down on a hilly panorama that, at one end of the traverse, ascended to the Nordic mountain where Solveig waited, throughout the second part, singing outside her hut (a grotesquely lovely image of the male fantasy of an unshakably faithful beloved who, should the need arise, can attest to the fact that he has not lived his life in vain – a woman to be exhibited in a glass display-case). Located at the opposite end was, in the first part the idyllic setting for the rustic wedding and, on the second evening, a splendid shining in the unreal brilliance of a theatre sun, a toy yacht sailed and then exploded. This was our grandparents’ canvas dream-world of adventures on land and sea.
brought to life. For winter-time, a white cloth covered this hilly landscape; were we in the desert, then a yellow cover lay outstretched in the glittering light of the projectors. In addition, this stage structure was continually ready with ingenious surprises. The mountain opened on the troll world, which looked like a nice old-fashioned dusty parlor. Or, at the touch of a button…a Sphinx rose up from the stage floor, leaving an indentation deep enough to house Professor Begriffenfeldt’s madhouse.25

More precisely, on the site of the original stage where the platform declined into a depression, Herrmann located Haegstad farm in the first day of the performance. Later in the second day he placed the seascape there, displaying the theatrical effects of stage machinery with its climax of the yacht sinking. On the opposite side was a big mountain, which opened to reveal the troll kingdom with a piano and an ornamented chest of drawers. In the middle of the platform was an open space on which most of the action took place. Additional visual elements including a colossal sculpted Sphinx, a mill and a tree defined the setting of the action. Herrmann altered the colors of the platform’s undulating surface depending on when or where the action was taking place: yellow as the Sahara’s sand, grey as the Norwegian mountains or white during winter. He supplemented his multifarious unit set with painted backdrops of clouded sky, which referred again to the nineteenth-century aesthetic of pictorial illusionism, as well as with additional giant scale paint drops adorning the walls around and above the audience on the raised levels.

Herrmann maintained the illusion of grandeur in his set and emphasized the crucial importance of landscape, with its height and depth symbolism, in Ibsen’s play. In his book on theatrical space, Freddie Rokem pointed out that the oppositions between the valley and the mountains that are so central to Peer Gynt, turn later into the moral struggle between societal responsibilities and individual freedom. Ibsen’s open landscapes represent only “a false freedom,” becoming “a sign of anarchy.”26 Rokem’s analysis concurs with how Herrmann conceived his set since the spatial signifiers of verticality and horizontality are crucial for the play and this production’s particular topography. Nonetheless, in her analysis of Stein’s Peer Gynt as an example of epic theatre, Sarah Bryant-Bertail argues that the open and wide set, with its expanded horizontal axis evoking an open picture book, ultimately devalued the play’s verticality and
thus its symbolism of Christian hierarchy as well as animalistic sexuality. While persuasive, Bryant-Bertail overlooks that Herrmann incessantly produced and emphasized the vertical axis in his set through the backdrops with landscapes hanging on the walls above the audience that were never mentioned in any reviews and critical analyses.

The set as landscape also had significant performative implications. It liberated Stein from the theatrical convention of the picture-frame stage, giving him an opportunity to stage the scenes simultaneously, which has been one of his directorial signatures. Frederick and Lise-Lone Markers emphasize that the platform in *Peer Gynt* was “reminiscent of the popular medieval tradition of a polyscenic stage of juxtaposed localities.” As in medieval stagings, the set’s sheer size allowed effortless juxtaposition of geographically distant localities like Norwegian mountains and the African Sahara, thus rendering Solveig’s faithful waiting in front of her hut while Peer traveled all over the world even more painfully futile.

Herrmann’s theatrical landscape not only provided actors with the extra space to travel great distances, run, jump, climb and tumble, but also offered the audience sensual pleasure in viewing this colorful pageant. The stage effects in theatrical illusion only enhanced its *Schaulust*, the sensual pleasure in vision. Such pageantry worked to foreground Stein’s contestation of the myth of bourgeois individualism, which required the audience to maintain critical distance. Fischer-Lichte summarizes the tension between the *Schaulust* and the intellectual: “The bourgeois myth of the individual and the cult of the great personality were deconstructed by presenting a nineteenth-century spectacle. Here, the question of individual identity was denounced as a bourgeois construction.” By embedding this “nineteenth-century spectacle” in modern spatial solutions that refreshed the rapport between actors and spectators, Herrmann engendered active and critical reception of Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*.

**Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, 1972**

How the audience viewed the play became Herrmann’s central creative question, determining the spatial configuration for every production at the Schaubühne. In Stein and Herrmann’s next collaboration, which was another nineteenth century play, Kleist’s *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* (1972), the audience’s gaze was established via a traditional frontal presentation. This was
crucial for Stein’s reinterpretation of Kleist’s play with its final tableau of the Prince’s effigy (a lifelike but lifeless hero) being carried away by the soldiers while the real somnambulist Prince strives to reconnect with the non-dream reality. The play, billed as Kleist’s Traum vom Prinzen von Homburg (Kleist’s Dream of the Prince from Homburg), was hailed by German critics as the most significant theatrical event of the 1972/73 season and became yet another landmark production. As with Peer Gynt, Prinz Friedrich von Homburg’s theatrical interpretation and visualization proved to be indispensable in the re-evaluation of Kleist’s play after World War II.30

In this production, Herrmann consciously returned to the frontal presentation of the proscenium theatre.31 As in Peer Gynt, his design was embedded in Stein’s concept for the production, which framed the play “as a construct of Kleist’s imagination.”32 To render the space as a dreamscape, Herrmann decorated the walls of the stage and auditorium with black velvet drapes and covered the slightly raked floor with intense blue felt, its lapis lazuli hue resembling International Klein Blue. The black velvet functioned as a visual equivalent of Kleist’s nocturnal stage direction for the first scene (“It is night.”) and funereal mood in the church scene, while the unusual color of the floor gave the production an almost surreal quality. In addition, the combination of padded space—both fabrics have sound absorbing qualities—with diffused lights allowed the actors to appear and disappear noiselessly or to fade into the background. “For the battle and execution scenes the drapes at the rear were raised to height of some two meters, revealing a back-drop with pale blue sky and low hills stretching into the distance,” that Patterson interpreted as “a broad, brightly lit horizon, a Utopia beyond the dark world of the Elector’s palace.”33
More graphic than painterly, this backdrop with russet shade molds was inspired by Caspar David Friedrich’s painting “Der Mönch am Meer” (The Monk by the Sea), a work which Kleist admired, remarking about the single figure of a Capuchin monk, “…the single spark of life in the vast realms of death, the lonely center of a lonely circle.” The austerity of Friedrich’s painting demanded emotional immersion and contemplative perception. It highlighted the conflict between the spiritual and material, the final effect of which was “a sense of empty space, loneliness, and the loss of the self.” For Stein, Friedrich’s landscape denoted Homburg’s state of mind. This incorporation of art history into the production expanded the play’s intertextuality. Herrmann’s aesthetic landscape added meditative transcendence and timelessness to the play, which Stein sought.
Similar to *Peer Gynt*, Herrmann’s alteration of both spaces in *Prinz von Homburg*—the stage and the auditorium—had significant implications for the viewing of the play. His decision to use the black velvet created greater intimacy and united the whole space into a single domain shared by actors and the audience, indicating the spectators as elements of the dreamscape. Critics and scholars have emphasized the visual pleasure of the production. For William C. Reeve, Herrmann’s “décor for the Schaubühne suggested the intimacy of a peep-show” and its appeal was based predominately on the visual appeal of the production, “offering a feast for the eyes.” 37 *Homburg*’s aestheticism was based on a rather simple combination: a juxtaposition of black and deep bright blue—ultramarine hue—with brown accents of a rusty color for soil from the grave dug for Homburg in the middle of the stage floor (center left), and of a Romantic landscape in the back. Reeve once again emphasizes the purely aesthetic aspect of the Schaubühne productions that some critics and scholars like him find objectionable. Reeve himself voices a deeply entrenched prejudice towards the visual aspects of the theatre. Nonetheless, Herrmann’s set with its aesthetically inverted color scheme gave the production a suggestive ambience, tension and serenity. As in *Peer Gynt*, Stein used Herrmann’s aesthetic set to present the scenes simultaneously, thus relativizing the play’s reality by calling its events into question through optical or temporal distortion.

*Sommergäste [Summerfolk], 1974*

As the Schaubühne’s audience went to the theatre to see a play, the visual aspects of the production became more important. Stein and Herrmann’s next visually spectacular production, for which Herrmann recreated a forest on stage with 200-birch trees, challenged the audience’s sense of the real to an even greater degree than before. The extremism of Herrmann’s approach to Maxim Gorky’s *Sommergäste [Summerfolk]*, directed by Stein in 1974, galvanized German scenography. 38 The set not only appealed to the eye of the spectator, but also to the other senses. 39

To accomplish his objective of appealing to multiple senses, Herrmann found a haunting scenic solution: a nostalgic image of nineteenth-century Russia, replete with woodland with birches, recreated onstage using realistic elements. As Herrmann explained to the ensemble during the preparation period, his idea was to
…structure the stage, so that it arises out of the groups being together, staying together, organizing things together. The idea is to construct a platform across the front of the stage, representing the terrace of the datsha [sic]. Behind this platform there would be a slope representing a meadow, so that you look out of the house into the country. The sides and rear of the stage should be cage-like, so that there is an enclosed area where people meet and from which they basically cannot escape. For the scenes in the house, the assumption is made that they are played after dark, so that with the help of lighting an interior scene can be created.40

The stage looked precisely as he described. On the front of the stage the wooden planks formed the porch of the summerhouse, while to the left were the painted white walls of the wooden dacha. The center of the stage was covered with authentic peat, soil and grass, rising slightly into a hill towards the back of the stage where the real birches were planted, encircling the stage from three sides.41 The trees were carefully selected and the soil was meticulously maintained. The presence of the authentic earth onstage significantly affected the actors’ movements. The center stage was empty: depending on the specific scene, additional props were included, such as a hammock, timber platform, samovar, piano, rugs, tables, and a great variety of chairs.

The opening scene’s evocative image encapsulated the quintessence of a decadent bourgeois Russia at the turn of the twentieth century. “There are theater images that never fade,” as a German radio presenter contended. “For many, this includes Gorky’s Sommergäste at the Berliner Schaubühne. A birch forest suffused with light and thirteen people: the ladies in white dresses, the men in white suits, strolling, absorbed in serene and lugubrious conversations.”42 This image became one of the most striking images of 1970s German theatre. Populating the stage with all of the characters of the play, who were almost always present onstage from the first to the final seventy-eighth scene, emphasized more than ever before the polyscenic character of the stage. The unilateral direction of the audience’s gaze was not Herrmann’s goal although he seated the audience frontally again. As Joseph Svoboda explained,
Polyscenic-ness does not merely mean simultaneity or the indication of several actions occurring concurrently in several distinct places. Polyscenic-ness is an expression of a free and many-sided time-space operation, in which one and the same action is observed from several optical and ideational angles which set cause and effect next to each other and take their measure. Polyscenic-ness means a visible joining and severing of these “axes,” these relationships – a breaking up of the linear continuity of a theatre action, and its transformation into separate events or moments.\(^{43}\)

Dealing with what Svoboda defined as the disintegration of linear continuity proved challenging to spectators unaccustomed to the new type of performativity, particularly because Herrmann was seducing them with his recreation of the forest on the stage.\(^ {44}\) The alluring image of a perfectly idyllic life in the country was, however, a false one. Herrmann presented an iconic image of nineteenth-century Russia as a metaphor for nostalgic bliss, which he recreated onstage meticulously with his usual attention to detail. He chose to work within the play’s original stagecraft: naturalism. But then he did not use it only as décor; he turned the landscape with birches into an ominous element, the nature that entraps the humans disconnected from it. Writing in the first comprehensive report about the Schaubühne in Theater in 1977, Jack Zipes noted that Herrmann’s set captured a balance of oppositions: ennui and action, intimacy and menace, closeness and distance:

…the decor and lighting created by Herrmann heightened and set moods of discontent and friction wavering between indulgence and activity... The mood projected by soft lights, white birches and light summer costumes suggested a calm and contentment which constantly gave way to bright lights and contrasting colors which exposed the illusion of the summer idyll as lie.\(^ {45}\)

The birch groove was more than a splendid decoration of a minutely recreated reality.\(^ {46}\) Herrmann used realistic elements to enhance the illusion of the idyllic summer day and to expose its artificiality, thus revealing the corruption of that society. Consequently, he questioned the harmony of the presented image. Herrmann used realistic elements like the birch trees that were undeniably
authentic but contained a disturbing sense of unreality within the context of the stage.\(^{47}\) The realism was so real that it destroyed the scenic illusion. Despite its self-reflective quality, Herrmann’s extreme realism has continued to puzzle critics and scholars.

**Shakespeare’s Memory, 1976**

Before embarking on Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (1977), in which he continued using this type of extreme realism, Herrmann designed a Shakespearean extravaganza for Stein and the Schaubühne as an environmental scenography. *Shakespeare’s Memory* (1976) was an eight-hour production that lasted over two consecutive evenings in the CCC (Central Cinema Company) Film Studio in Spandau, a suburb of Berlin. This erudite variety show grew out of a project lasting several years, the likes of which the ensemble typically conducted before undertaking the staging of a play, especially concerning such a historically distant reality as the Renaissance: it was an attempt to familiarize the ensemble and audience with the microcosm of the Shakespearean universe.\(^{48}\) The texts that were eventually included encompassed a great variety of textual, visual, aural and other media, including archival and historical texts as well as fragments of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays and poems. This highly imaginative production mixed actors and spectators in a common space, allowing the audience to roam freely throughout the space(s) and watch various types of popular theatre, including pageants, acrobatics, circus, fencing, masked processions, Morris dancing, folk plays, etc. Meanwhile actors performed philosophical dialogues and treatises, speeches, lectures, and music performances in the same space. In the final section, approximately thirty fragments of monologues and dialogues from Shakespeare’s plays were performed on Shakespeare’s Island, a centrally arranged polyscenic stage.
Herrmann’s inventiveness as well as his resourcefulness in staging *Shakespeare’s Memory*, was visually and technically impressive. Overt theatricalism permeated the entire production while the vast area of the CCC
Film Studios enabled Herrmann to keep the space malleable in order to create a sense of wonder in the audience. From a technical point of view, “A gigantic, intricate wooden scaffold framed the labyrinth enclaves and mechanical partitions, allowing the actors and technicians to create, assemble and disassemble scenes quickly.” In many instances, Herrmann defined the space using light and backdrops decorated with different themes, for example, colorful landscapes in the old-English style, charts and diagrams, or simply black fabric with arch openings. Demarcating spaces with canvas walls allowed for creating flexible environments of different shapes such as rectangular or U-shape.
Fig. 5. Shakespeare's Memory (1976), dir. Peter Stein, set Karl-Ernst Herrmann, costumes Moidele Bickel, Susanne Raschig and Joachim Herzog, CCC Studio, Berlin-Spandau. Bird-eye production image showing two separate spaces: a small amphitheater (Leonardo Theatre), where an actor read Richard Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy, and a maze (Garden of Sympathies), where the spectators could explore Elizabethan “humors” by themselves. Private collection © Ruth Walz.
Perhaps the most astonishing visual element was “The Ship”: a full-scale reproduction of the partly finished rear section of an Elizabethan merchant ship with enormous planked ribs (about 15 feet high), constituting a symbol of England’s early colonialism. All these production elements aimed to conjure the essence of Shakespeare’s era, including the political, scientific and artistic developments of those times. Critics and audience alike were impressed by the display; nevertheless, many were dismayed by the definite departure from political theatre that Stein had championed early on. In his book *Shakespeare on the German Stage: The Twentieth Century*, German scholar of English literature Wilhelm Hortmann sees *Shakespeare’s Memory* as moving in the opposite direction from that which avant-garde theatre was taking: “when
others were denouncing tradition, they [the Schaubühne] try to recapture its essence.” 50 He also emphasizes that despite the lowering of the actor’s status, “Stein’s peripatetic audience in Shakespeare’s Memory came closest to the ideal of theatrical space liberated from the old constraints,” while the almost historical display of old theatrical devices and historical artifacts and tools emphasized the theatricalization of the entire show. 51
Fig. 7. *Shakespeare’s Memory*. Second evening. The Ship: a life-size reproduction of an Elizabethan trade vessel, a visual icon symbolizing England’s colonialism. The Armada table is unloaded. Private collection © Ruth Walz.
As You Like It, 1977

Shakespeare’s Memory’s ostentatious theatricalization was a prelude to the staging of an individual Shakespearean play. As You Like It, directed by Stein in 1977, was also staged in the CCC Film Studios in Spandau, since the theatre am Halleschen Ufer was deemed too small and insufficiently equipped. According to Patterson, it was “the most spectacular presentation of Shakespeare in Germany since Reinhardt and arguably the most significant Shakespeare production since Peter Brook’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream.”

Building on the previous exploration of Renaissance staging techniques as well as the spatial relationships between actor and spectator, Herrmann placed the spectators in the middle of his set, devising an environmental setting, a “total Raum” with completely different dynamics between set, actors and audience to anything he had ever created. Werner Habicht reporting for Shakespeare Quarterly on new Shakespeare plays in West Germany, described the sophistication of Herrmann’s design:

*As You Like It* began in a glaring white vestibule, where on balustrades and pedestals the court scenes were delivered in a statuesque manner. The audience, standing crammed below for the hour that was needed, was made to participate in the suffocating effect of the courtly world, which eventually culminated and released itself in the ritual violence of the wrestling match (with a well-known professional performing as Orlando’s opponent). After this a door opened, inviting the audience to share the hardships attending the nobler characters’ escape to the woods. This meant a fifteen-minute, single-file walk on a dark, narrow, thorny, and labyrinthine path obstructed with (artificial) briars and puddles, through gusts of wind and patches of blinding light, and past such surprises as a wild bear and a sleeping hermaphrodite. At last a beautiful, spacious sylvan arena revealed itself, a scene equipped with every detail of the traditional *locus amoenus* (rustling trees, stream, pond, wavy cornfield, chirping noises, singing shepherds). En route there were grandstands with seats for the audience. But there was also the unromantic poverty of peasants’ cottages, and there were little niches filled with botanical, zoological and astronomical collections. A big, partly unfolded globe near the roof of the arena suggested what the Forest of Arden was ultimately to stand for.
Herrmann could not have made the contrast between the two worlds more visually glaring. However, the visual differences were not the most...
important phenomenon although they are the most frequently discussed. The key phenomenon was the shifting configurations and rearrangement of the actor-audience relationship throughout the performance. A stilted acting style matched the formal and oppressive world of the Duke’s court, which in turn corresponded with the audience’s response towards uncomfortable viewing conditions reminiscent of the Shakespearean Globe’s groundlings.

Likewise, the unique passage of the audience through the labyrinth to the main performative space exposed them to various stimuli—visual, aural, olfactory and somatosensory—and thus emphasized the individual experience in spectatorship rather than the passive viewing of the spectacular production.
within a traditional theatre. The Forest of Arden—considered Herrmann’s most magnificent set—was presented in its paradoxical totality. Here, the surplus of details contrasted with the austerity of the court space. Herrmann seemed to follow exactly what Jan Kott suggested in his essay on Bitter Arcadia in *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* that the Forest of Arden is

The most English of all Shakespearean forests. As in Warwickshire in Stratford. There grow in the high oaks, full of logs and clearings, the streams are flowing over mossy stones, wandering among brier and thorns. The birds are singing in this forest, deer and hares are running ("poor dappled fools").
In Herrmann’s magical forest, as in Kott’s essay, everything was intensified and mixed, exact and metaphoric. The idyll of this naturalistic kingdom was just as false as in Sommergäste. Although everything seemed to point to the individual details, the total image was full of dissonance. The presence of realistic elements again astonished, since Herrmann used his
technical imagination and virtuosity to emphasize the pleasure in theatrical illusion as if perversely blurring the boundaries between illusion and reality. Although this time the spectators remained seated for the rest of the performance in horseshoe bleachers, Herrmann presented them once more with a polyscenic stage. More so than in Sommergäste, simultaneous actions forced the audience to choose its own focus while dealing with the ambiguities of the set and the play oscillating between idyll and menace, utopia and realism, totality and fragmentation.

As Dennis Kennedy pointed out in his important book on contemporary Shakespearean productions, the scenic illusion was contained within fragments of the set and the spectator could not ignore the encompassing surroundings, which included other elements of the set that were not realistic at all, like the oversize globe from Shakespeare’s Memory. Evaluating Herrmann’s design for

*Fig 11. As You Like It. Herrmann’s reimagining of Arden’s forest. Private collection © Ruth Walz.*
As You Like It, Kennedy argued, “In Herrmann’s rendering, the artificiality of Arden lay not in a formal stylistic distancing…but rather in an agglutination of discordant elements. Arden, a beautiful falsehood, was seen as an illusory escape; ideal nature is a dream of the city-dweller, at best a temporary respite from the concerns of society left behind.”57 Taking that suggestion of escapism still further, Cynthia Marshall pointed out that this production was “the most compelling investigation of the utopian dream of escape from politics into a world of nature…push[ing] the conception of As You Like It far beyond the pastoral tradition by deconstructing the terms of nature and escape.”58 With this environmental staging in a non-theatrical space, Herrmann reached, as Iden suggested, “a limit to the expansion of theater spaces in large-scale environments.”59 Unlike Reinhardt’s naturalistic stagings that assumed the audience’s passive engagement, this production actively involved the spectators in radically changing their perspectives and their proximity to the actors and the scenery.

**Oresteia, 1980**

Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, directed by Stein in 1980, marked a departure from the aesthetics of *Schaulust* while maintaining the earlier productions’ emphasis on the active involvement of spectators in a production. After six years (since their Antiquity Project I, during which Stein presented *Exercises for Actors* and Grüber directed Euripides’ *Bacchae*) the ensemble returned to the world of classical plays. This time, however, as Fischer-Lichte emphasizes, the production was antithetical to the Schaubühne’s previous achievements, the idea of Regietheater (director’s theatre), and perhaps to the avant-garde itself. With the *Oresteia*, Stein strove to emphasize the verbal origins of the Western theatre.60 It was also the last play staged at the theatre am Halleschen Ufer in Kreuzberg and the first one presented in the newly renovated theatre am Lehniner Platz in the center of West Berlin.

For the *Oresteia*, Herrmann created another flexible design but this time set it up in starkly austere fashion, abandoning the style he used for his previous lavish sets with their plethora of realistic details. He demonstrated that he was capable of creating minimalistic settings on a large scale, the likes of which would become crucial in his later operatic scenography. The minimalist design
was embedded in the asceticism of Greek theatres. As in Greek theatres, Herrmann set apart three important segments: stage, orchestra and auditorium, but the orchestra and auditorium were not strictly separated. He added a contemporary innovation to enhance the spectators’ proximity: a wide path through the audience that allowed both the protagonists and the chorus members to enter, walk through, address and even to interact with the spectators.\textsuperscript{61} Herrmann shaped the auditorium as a semi-circle that was slightly raked with low levels of steps and covered with felt, where approximately four hundred spectators squatted for the seven and a half hour performance in a highly uncomfortable position with their backs bent and knees close to their chins. Several floating flights of stairs (with four/five metal threads) that were often blocked led to the relatively highly raised stage, like a skene in Greek theatre. During the first two parts of the trilogy, an imposing black wall closed off the rest of stage, leaving only a narrow proscenium area. Consequently, the stage that Herrmann had erected was barely used. The wall—a symbol of power—indicated the isolated palace and functioned as a visual separation between the people (the audience and chorus) and the elite. Large doors were placed in the center of the wall through which the actors entered. The door opened wide at the end of the first two parts to allow the ekkyklema to be rolled out and tipped over the stage to fully display and concretize the mutilated corpses in uncomfortable proximity. For the second part, a small door was added far stage left. Before the third part, the black wall was first sprayed white to indicate the temple of Apollo. Eventually, during the third play, the wall was completely disassembled to reveal an empty space where only a bar of justice was placed in the middle of the stage, behind which the chorus sat on chairs. Here, the spatial distancing between the actors and spectators was greatly increased.
The performance began in total darkness, conveying gloom and terror. Imperceptibly, it became lighter but the production remained semi-dark for the majority of the two first parts. Herrmann used small spotlights that the chorus adjusted during the performance. As Fischer-Lichte recalls, “The light only entered through the open doors upper left and at the both sides in front, paving lanes of light through the darkness. Sometimes the only light came from the dim glow of torches which the chorus of old men used as they shuffled through the auditorium.”

The light came through the main door to reveal the dead corpses, exposing the violence of both the patricide and matricide. In the third part, the stage was brightly lit with a wide strip of overhead lights placed directly over the stage. The segmentation of the theatre and the lighting, as Fischer-Lichte convincingly argues, indicated the separation of the aural and visual spaces, resulting in domination of the aural space of Stein’s Oresteia.
Three Sisters

Herrmann and Stein’s last important collaboration at the Schaubühne took place in 1984 when Stein directed Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*. This production became yet another visual antithesis. The reversal from the *Oresteia’s* simplicity and visual asceticism could not have been more radical. Both Stein and Herrmann tried to revive the original productions based on Stanislavsky’s notebooks and Victor Simov’s décor that eventually “had the unfortunate effect of encasing [Chekhov’s] plays in a highly detailed, representational, physical world that has imprinted itself on the theatrical consciousness,” as Aronson critically pointed out. Outdoing the Moscow Art Theatre seemed to be their aim, but it was more than an archeological
reconstruction. Laurence Senelick in his book on Chekhov’s theatre draws attention to the painterly aspect of Herrmann’s sets and his penchant for gigantism:

At first Stein’s *Three Sisters* at the Berlin Schaubühne would seem another effort to out-Moscow Moscow; but here the deployment of light and space evoked a more existential meaning. Karl-Ernst Herrmann’s scenery did call to mind a series of paintings: the first two acts took place in a spacious interior, a large, empty drawing room lit from a windowed veranda. In the first act it was flooded with light, in the second enveloped in darkness, pointing the shift from radiant hope to inspissated gloom. The third act, up under the eaves, also used a very wide, almost dioramic space, but the stage grew shallower and the ceiling lowered. The oppression of the sisters and the confinement of their lives became palpable. Finally, for the act IV exterior, Herrmann gave in to his notorious taste for gigantism: the stage opened out to its fullest depth (45 meters) and height, with more three-dimensional trees (no birches, however) and a vista that seemed to stretch to the vanishing point. All these trappings of naturalism contributed to the symbolic message… The production was not so much a prolongation of Stanislavsky as in interrogatory, stretching the naturalistic décor to its outer limits.”64
Fig. 14. Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*, dir. Peter Stein, set Karl-Ernst Herrmann, costumes Moidele Bickel, 1984. Herrmann’s set for the first two acts representing a drawing room with Jochen Tovote (Fedotik), Nikolaus Dutsch (Rode) and ensemble. Private collection © Ruth Walz.
French scholar Christine Hamon-Siréjols maintains a different opinion. In her article on contemporary revivals, she suggests that Stein and Herrmann “succeeded in outdoing its model by reason of the modern technical resources then available” and at the same time profoundly challenged naturalistic aesthetics.65 Erika Fischer-Lichte, by comparison, assigns two major roles to the set design for Three Sisters: first of all, its nineteenth-century style refers to the origin of the drama; secondly, it creates moods equivalent to the characters’ mental states. These two modes of “historicizing and aestheticizing coalesce here to conjure an image transfigured in beauty, yearningly reminding the past.”66 The production, as Fischer-Lichte suggests, invited the spectator’s identification with the foreign and historical world, eventually providing socio-psychological relief. In the context of the time when these settings were created, as well as the fact that the majority of the plays for which Herrmann designed “realistic” sets were written at the turn of the twentieth century, such designs
became a metatheatrical element of the staging. By using realistic details and creating seemingly illusionistic sets, Herrmann toyed with a multiplicity of theatrical realities. The tension in his sets between realistic details and the overall impression again created what Patterson called “powerful theatrical ambiguity,” which does not allow for an easy dismissal of his scenography as epigonic.  

Conclusion

Herrmann’s most famous designs for the Schaubühne manifested a great variety in generating performative spaces. His sets were able to define the mood of the play even before the performance started. In his monograph on the Schaubühne, German critic Peter Iden discerns two common principles or two contrasting methods that Herrmann employed in his Schaubühne designs. The first was a concretization of the play’s reality; the second was a conceptualized counter-image in the form of an illusionary, ideal background image rendered either as a painted prospect or a “real” landscape mounted on stage. The simultaneous presence of both juxtaposing elements in effect shifted the meaning of the “reality.”

Instead of reproducing the textual stage directions, Herrmann’s theatrical scenography offered a visual interpretation of the text and provided a new understanding of theatrical space that had its own independent laws. He used a variety of means: architectural, painterly, sculptural, symbolic, realistic, or lighting, often blending them together to create a new space for a performance. He molded all theatrical spaces available to him, creating an environment that was occupied by both the actors and the spectators arranged in a constantly varying set up. The place where the audience would be seated changed from one production to the next, becoming a variable, but stimulating element for the public. Like Jerzy Gurowski, Grotowski’s designer, Herrmann created a new spatial solution for each production that affected the way the spectators viewed the play, with his innovation going further than simply creating environments encompassing spectators. His spatial designs for Stein, as Ramona Mosse asserts, “fundamentally restruct[ed] the relationship between set, action, and audience.” Notwithstanding the imperative to control the spectator’s gaze, Herrmann sought to foster an active spectator. His scenographic work always combined a creative approach to the spatiality of
 theatre with an adroit deployment of details. He eventually became notorious for his (literal) attention to detail and to the materials from which the props or design elements were made. He also creatively used older theatrical techniques, devices and aesthetics and combined them with a modern awareness of spectatorship. As we have seen, in his early theatrical designs Herrmann moved easily between conventions, between simplicity and complexity, but always with a strong emphasis on the aesthetical side of the production.

N o t e s

1 For online photos of Hermann’s scenography, see https://www.pinterest.com/lensofgender/theatrical-scenography-of-karl-ernst-herrmann.
2 Fischer-Lichte’s term corresponds directly with Marranca’s coinage of “The Theatre of Images.” Hughes goes even further and calls this trend a “tyranny of the designer equal to that of the director,” where a domineering mise-en-scène is capable of masking an uninspired director.” Erika Fischer-Lichte, Semiotik des Theaters, vol. 3 “Die Aufführung als Text” (Tübingen: Gunter Narr 1983), 187-188; David Ashley Hughes, “German Theatre in Crisis,” TDR: The Drama Review 51:4 (Winter 2007): 133-155; here 142. All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.
4 On the role of Schaulust in Stein’s œuvre see Ramona Franziska Mosse, “Between Tragedy and Utopia: Revolution and the Political Stage after 1945,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2008), 139-143.
5 In addition, he designs posters, flyers, program books and other memorabilia for the performance or even the theatre or festival. Herrmann was frequently named the Designer of the Year by Theater heute and for his contribution to the Schaubühne’s success, together with Stein received a Berlin Theatre Prize. Between 1994 and 2000, together with his wife Ursel, he taught stage design at the Münchner Akademie für Bildenden Kunst. See also http://www.goethe.de/kue/the/bbr/bbr/hl/er/index.htm. See his profile and sample photos on www.goethe.de
6 Herrmann has also collaborated with Klaus Michael Grüber, George Tabori, Christof Nel, Thomas Langhoff, and Matthias Hartmann, as well as with Dieter Giesing, Jürgen Flimm, Adolf Dresen, and Niels-Peter Rudolph. Hermann Beil stresses that Herrmann’s “collaboration with directors is not determined by ideological sectarianism but by curiosity, so he was able and capable to connect repeatedly with distinctly contrasting directorial personalities.” Hermann Beil, “Laudatio auf Karl-Ernst Herrmann: Kommen Sie rinn, da können Sie raus kieken,” April 3, 2005. http://www.hein-heckroth-ges.de/2005/#2005beil.
7 Herrmann was not the first designer to use realistic details on the German stage: this was Wilfried Minks, with whom he worked at the beginning of his career in Bremen.


13 Iden’s short section on the Schaubühne’s stage design is perhaps the most insightful reflection on the role of scenography and the most thorough assessment of Herrmann’s design although pertaining only to his work there. Peter Iden, *Die Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer 1970-1979* (München: Hanser, 1979), 61-66.


15 Patterson, xiv.


17 As Patterson describes, the stage was empty and “the action took place amid the hard functional setting of concrete and steel girders. To create different levels and to afford the possibility of simultaneous playing, wooden scaffolding was erected across the width of the stage, and the junk of the city was suggested by oil drums, crates, bottles and litter. On entering the auditorium, the audience were confronted with a film of a boxing-match projected on a screen at the front of the stage.” Patterson, 9. For photos see [http://www.gettyimages.de/detail/nachrichtenfoto/production-of-bertolt-brechts-play-in-the-jungle-of-nachrichtenfoto/542932415#production-of-bertolt-brechts-play-in-the-jungle-of-cities-by-the-picture-id542932415](http://www.gettyimages.de/detail/nachrichtenfoto/production-of-bertolt-brechts-play-in-the-jungle-of-nachrichtenfoto/542932415#production-of-bertolt-brechts-play-in-the-jungle-of-cities-by-the-picture-id542932415) and [http://www.gettyimages.de/fotos/im-dickicht-der-staedte?editorialproducts=archival&excludenudity=true&family=editorial&page=1&phrase=Im%20Dickicht%20der%20Städt%20&sort=mostpopular#license](http://www.gettyimages.de/fotos/im-dickicht-der-staedte?editorialproducts=archival&excludenudity=true&family=editorial&page=1&phrase=Im%20Dickicht%20der%20Städt%20&sort=mostpopular#license). See also [www.gettyimages.de](http://www.gettyimages.de).

18 Moidele Bickel, Susanne Raschig and Joachim Herzog were mainly responsible for costumes during the 1970s, while in the 1980s it was many others who joined the theatre.

19 Graue, 95.


21 Originally Peymann was supposed to direct it but feeling the company’s frostiness towards his artistic choices and work style he left the Schaubühne.
22 See Patterson, 88-89.
23 For online photos see
(a) http://www.zvab.com/servlet/BookDetailsPL?bi=15444178737&searchurl=kn%3Dibsen%2Bpeter%26brynt%26hind%3Don%26sortby%3D20%261%26pid=1;
(b) http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/peer-gynt-von-henrik-ibsenwerner-rehm-als-peer-nr-7-und-news-photo/545722183?
24 On Stein and Brecht see Mosse, Patterson, and Sarah Bryant-Bertail, Space and Time in Epic Theater: The Brechtian Legacy (Rochester: Camden House, 2000).
26 Rokem also mentions another way of interpreting landscapes in Peer Gynt as the “vast landscapes, which have to be understood as metaphorical explorations of the vast inner landscapes of the mind.” Freddie Rokem, Theatrical Space in Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg: Public Forms of Privacy, Theater and Dramatic Studies (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), 14, 49.
27 Bryant-Bertail, 133-135.
31 For online photos see
33 Patterson, 92.
For Michael Raab, Herrmann’s rendition of Friedrich’s landscape was enhancing the period feel. It seems that Raab has never seen Friedrich’s painting and the production photos or the video recording of Homburg. The “period feel” of this production only concerned the costumes that Moidele Bickel designed. Michael Raab, “Directors and actors in modern and contemporary German theatre, 1945-2006,” *A History of German Theatre*, eds. Simon Williams and Maik Hamburger, 332-359 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); here 344.


The play was billed as *Sommergäste nach Gorki* ("Summerfolk after Gorky") since the textual changes that Stein with his dramaturgs Botho Strauss and Ellen Hammer implemented to clear up the ambiguities in Gorky’s play and to achieve a greater coherence were too extensive. They cut down Gorky’s four acts to 78 scenes, often changing their sequence and adding their own. They also limited the characters; instead of 26, only 16 remained. Instead of an open-ended play, Stein brought out in the play a clearly defined political message.


Patterson, 112.

The trees were originally to be used for a film that Stein wanted to make with his ensemble.


Peter Lackner, writing on Stein’s early productions, suggests a deliberate function of Herrmann’s set that became the most memorable part of that production: “The acting, not in itself declamatory, drew the audience’s attention into the proscenium-framed but very realistic stage picture. Simultaneous scenes in various parts of the setting forced the audience members to direct their attention selectively or appreciate the meaning of the general composition. A deliberate breaking down of conventional stage pacing forced the audience to study details of the natural scene.” Peter Lackner, “Stein’s Path to Shakespeare,” *TDR: The Drama Review*, vol. 21, no. 2, Theatricalism Issue (June 1977): 79-102; here 94.

Zipes, 31-32.


Stein and Herrmann started quoting from reality much earlier. For example, in *Peer Gynt* they used taxidermy animals: a real horse and a real pig were also stuffed animals. See debate on realism/reality in Patterson, 74-75.

Stein directed that evening of mainly acting assignments. Earlier, in a similar vein, before presenting *The Bacchae* directed by Klaus Michael Grüber, the actors staged *Antikeprojekt I* (*Antiquity Project I*), paving their way to the Greek play.

Zipes, 36.
51 Ibid, 283.
52 Patterson, 134.
54 Werner Habicht, “Shakespeare in West Germany,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 296-299; here 298-299. For a more detailed description of the production see Patterson, 134-149.
56 Dasgupta and Marranca stated that if the scenes in the forest were aesthetically pleasing, the audience could view them only in a dim light and from a great distance, often greater than in a proscenium theatre. They claim, Stein “was never really able to radicalize the relationship between performance space and audience space.” Gautam Dasgupta and Bonnie Marranca, “Berlin Theatertrreffen 1978,” *Performing Arts Journal*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Winter 1979): 108-116; here 113.
59 Iden, 66.
61 Agamemnon arrived through the audience in a railroad cart, instead of a chariot, which the chorus laid the tracks for and pushed along. In the middle of the orchestra was a large table for the chorus and later Agamemnon’s grave was placed there, while Electra and Orestes met in the middle of the audience. After the trial, Orestes left the stage through the auditorium, shaking hands with the spectators as if thanking them for the support and the acquittal.
63 In his essay on Chekhov’s scenography, Aronson points a more general trend of the late 1980s and 1990s that marks “a return to romanticism – albeit tempered by the ironic eye of contemporary designers.” It seems that irony was not as transparent in Herrmann-Stein productions. Arnold Aronson, “The Scenography of Chekhov,” *Aronson, Looking into the Abyss. Essays on Scenography*, 117-131 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); here 118, 130.
64 For detailed descriptions of both sets see Laurence Senelick, *The Chekhov Theatre: A Century of the Plays in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 259-261, 342-343. *Three Sisters* divided the spectators: some among the scholarly audience considered it commercialized and uncritical, while popular audiences loved it. The reception of *The Cherry Orchard* was even more mixed. According to Carlson, because of its beauty the critics placed it
among Stein’s best works, while some suggested it was anti-Chekhovian in its attention to details. Carlson, *Theatre Is More Beautiful*, 17-19.


67 Patterson, 100.


69 A particularly interesting development in Herrmann’s career was the exhibition “Inszenierte Räume” in Hamburg in 1979, where together with the Austrian designer Eric Wonder, he created spaces “for the spectators to walk through and experience, rooms in which the visitor to the exhibition became the actor.” Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre*, 92.

70 Mosse, 143.

71 An interesting description of Herrmann comes courtesy of Beil, who states that “[Herrmann] always remains true to the artistic standards and accuracy in even the smallest details. He is intolerant, even angry towards sloppiness, artistic indifference, lack of imagination out of laziness, which certainly is also a form of stupidity.” Also Nicholas John asserts “…Herrmann established an aesthetic of design dependent on the highest quality of craftsmanship allied to a brilliant theatrical imagination. The refinement of his designs, with attention to exquisite detail and genuine period materials, combined to make the stage itself a work of art, a precious machine in which the artists could express themselves with the maximum truth.” Beil, ibid. Nicholas John, “The late 20th century,” Manfred Boetzkes, et al., “Stage design,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 513-515.

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