

making for an atmosphere which was very different from the decorum of Reinhardt's theatre.

Piscator was different in other ways; Miss Redlich remembers. Where, as a director, Reinhardt used to whisper, Piscator would shout, and shout long and loud to get what he wanted.

Whatever one may think of the left wing political theatre to which Piscator devoted his life, he will surely be remembered by anyone concerned with theatre history for his electrifyingly original productions in Weimar Berlin which somehow represent so much of that period's theatrical achievement, with their combination of theatrical talent and extraordinary technical imagination. Revolves, cycloramas, back and front projection, scaffold sets, treadmills and moving belts,

Piscator made brilliant and ample use of theatrical hardware on a scale hitherto unprecedented, creating a theatre which was the meeting place of traditional acting and the new technologies of the twenties. It was indeed frequently a case of "Technik Technik über alles"; the sets for his play *Rasputin* were based on a huge rotating hemisphere which weighed all of five tons and which was enormously expensive to set up and strike. Moreover the actors frequently felt dominated by the hardware - the treadmills were noisy enough to drown all but the clearest and loudest of speeches while it often proved difficult to put in a really moving performance whilst being whisked across the stage on a moving band.

Mr Willett has given us a detailed and accurate reconstruction of the eight pro-

ductions that may be said to have made Piscator's reputation. This is the most important section of his meticulous biography. The biographical section is less interesting, since as with so many books about Weimar culture it tends to lapse into the mere naming of names which are frequently none too familiar to the general reader. Although Mr Willett has struggled valiantly to avoid that pitfall there is a little too much of that kind of thing going on.

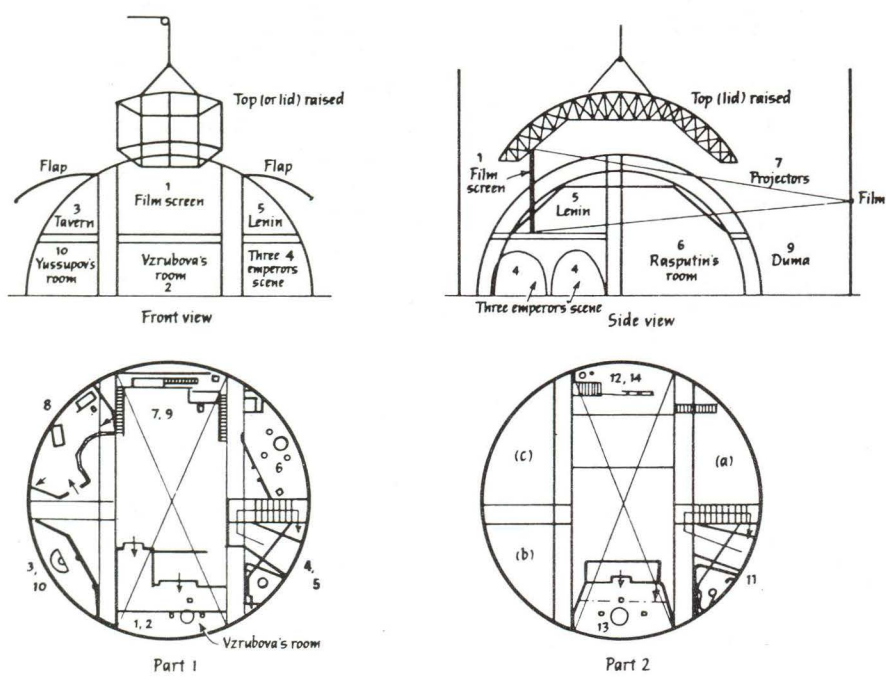
After Piscator left Weimar Germany, and not a moment too soon, incidentally, his star faded fast. He made farcical attempts to work in the Soviet Union, putting on productions for the descendants of 18th century German colonists in the so called Volga German Republic. Shortly to be deported by Stalin, causing instant loss of potential audience, their dialect had the disadvantage of being incomprehensible to native Germans. After cooling his heels for a while in France, Piscator went to the United States where under the auspices of that marvellous institution The New School he founded the Dramatic Workshop. Mr Willett is at pains not to exaggerate his achievement in this sphere but the fact remains that names such as Marlon Brando, Rod Steiger, Walter Matthau, Tony Curtis, Tennessee Williams remain associated with his enterprise.

He returned to Germany in 1951 and, fascinatingly, found a country in which no one wanted to know - there was no place for a political theatre which might remind Germany of her immediate past. It is a strange fact that for some fifteen years after the war there were no politics or ideas in Germany, it was a country in which nothing happened - except for the steady process of economic miracle making. Piscator and other returning artists such as George Grosz were all too aware of what Piscator called a lack of conscience, while Grosz wished to present his fellow countrymen with wreaths made of barbed wire - such were his dying words. It was this atrophy of conscience and consciousness, incidentally, which is responsible for much of the provocative terrorism to be found in Germany today. However it must be said that by the late 1950's Germany was beginning to come to terms with its past, through writers such as Hochhuth. This gave a new impetus to Piscator's conception of political theatre, which was now "primarily focussed on its immediate past". By 1966 the year of his unexpected death Piscator was once more working, and working well in a kind of political theatre which undertook the painful business of raising the consciousness of a W. German theatre-going public which was reluctantly beginning to renew its acquaintance with recent history.

Mr Willett has written a work both scholarly and readable. He does not indulge in blind adulation of his subject as producer, director or ideologue. His study is balanced, sensible and highly informative; recommended to anybody interested in modern German theatre or indeed the history of the twentieth century stage.

°Alex de Jonge is the author of a recent study of the period *The Weimar Chronicle*, Paddington Press £6.55.

Rasputin, THEATER AM NOLLENDORFPLATZ, 1927



30. Diagrammatic sections and plans to show use of the hemispherical stage.

Scenes and direction of stage rotation. 1. Lower part closed; film projected on screen suspended from removable top. 2. Vzrubova's room - then rotates anti-clockwise. 3. Tavern (upper level) - then clockwise. 4. The three emperors (lower level, with two small flaps opened). 5. Lenin (upper level) - then clockwise. 6. Rasputin's room - then clockwise. 7. Projections on closed upper part - then clockwise. 8. The Tsar's HQ - then rotates clockwise while the flaps of 8 are closed, and back anti-clockwise allowing projections to be thrown on the closed surface. 9. The Duma - then clockwise with more projections on the closed surface. 10. Yussupov's room (lower level). During the interval which follows, numbers 2, 4 and 9 are struck, and 13, 11 and 12 set up in their places, the rest of the hemisphere being closed to form projection surfaces. The second part, then, begins with the stage rotating to bring on the first scene: 11. The Villa Rode - then clockwise as text is projected on closed surface (a). 12. The Yussupov palace - then clockwise, through 180°. 13. The Tsarina's room (lower level, with film projected on suspended screen above). 12 meanwhile is struck and 14 set in its place. Anti-clockwise rotation as film and text are projected on surfaces (b) and (c). 14. The Smolny Institute, with film and projections above.