

PART I

THE ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE

REFOUNDING SOCIETY

Ancients and Moderns: Rousseau's Civil Religion

Rousseau stands at the beginning of what we might call the passage of modernity. In *Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique* (The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right) (1762) he constructs the imaginary history of the foundation of society through an act of association that effects “the passage from the state of nature to the civil state” (1.8). This founding act, through which the “*Republic* or *body politic*” gains its unity, common identity, life, and will, points to a second act of self-institution: the recovery of the republic, of the sovereign body politic, through the refoundation of society. Rousseau’s appeal to the eighteenth-century imagination springs from what Jean Starobinski calls this mythic figure of the rebirth and regeneration of society.¹ This second passage—the passage of modernity, from slavery to freedom, from despotism to democracy, which announces the death of the old divinity, the Christian God, and the birth of a new divinity, humanity²—draws its inspiration from the archetypal image of the republics of antiquity, Sparta and Rome.

1. Jean Starobinski, *1789: Les emblèmes de la raison* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 175–78.

2. Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), 58.

For Rousseau a Christian republic is a contradiction in terms, since the kingdom of God is not of this world. He declares: "True Christians are made to be slaves" (4.8). Rousseau condemns the Christian separation of the theological and political systems as a perpetual source of social dissension inimical to social unity; he acknowledges at the same time, however, that there can be no state without a religious basis. Rousseau therefore seeks a new unifying principle of social cohesion. The social contract must be completed by a civil religion, by a purely civil profession of faith, designed to preserve the unity of the body politic. The civil religion of the republic demands the moral adherence of each citizen just as each citizen participates in the moral universality of the General Will. Rousseau's political religion accordingly replaces impiety with antisocial behavior, to be punished by banishment, and apostasy with its civil equivalent, perjury—the repudiation of the profession of faith to which each citizen has sworn—to be punished by death (4.8). In Robespierre's republic of virtue, all opponents of the General Will are by definition guilty of atheism.

But what *form* is the civil religion to take? In its general form as the religion of man, based on natural divine right or law, it possesses neither temples nor altars nor rites. In its particular form as civil or positive divine right or law, the religion of the citizen is good in that it equates the divine cult with the state, and bad in that it encourages superstition, "drowns the true cult of the Divinity in empty ceremonial," supports tyranny, and unleashes murderous intolerance (4.8). Rousseau does not provide an answer in the *Social Contract*. We note, however, that as with the General Will the religion of man precludes representation in the double sense of political and/or theatrical representation. The religion of man consecrates the General Will as the invisible spirit, the indwelling divinity of the republic, that can never be represented but comes to *presence* (is instituted and constituted) in the general assembly of the citizens, whether in the political forum or in the public festival.

We find the same sentiments in the contrast that Rousseau draws in his *Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre* (1758) between the public spirit of the festival and the private vices indulged by idle theatrical amusements. Rousseau's ire was aroused by d'Alembert's suggestion, at the prompting of Voltaire, in his article on Geneva in the *Encyclopédie* that a dramatic theatre be established in the city republic so that "Geneva would join to the prudence of Lacedaemon the urbanity of Athens." Like Plato, Rousseau, the citizen of Geneva, refuses dramatic art a place in the republic. Not only would it ruin our "antique simplicity"; it threatens public liberty. But when Rousseau turns from his review and moral condemnation of French classical theatre to the entertainments fitting for a republic, an unacknowledged tension between two conceptions of the festival appears. In the *Letter to M. D'Alembert* and the *Social Contract* Rousseau's interest is the same: "to transform each individual who, in isolation, is a complete but solitary whole, into a part of something greater than himself, from which, in a sense, he derives his life and his being; to substitute a communal and moral existence for the purely physical and independent life with

which we are all of us endowed by nature.”³ But is this communal existence the task of the legislator or the spontaneous act of the people? The latter, declares Rousseau in the *Letter to M. D’Alembert*: the festivals of the citizen are not those that enclose a few spectators in the gloomy confines of the theatre. “No, happy peoples, these are not your festivals. It is in the open air, under the sky, that you ought to gather and give yourselves to the sweet sentiment of your happiness.” A happy people, united by bonds of joy and pleasure, will be drawn naturally to the free and generous atmosphere of festivity. Unlike the theatre, the entertainment of the people needs neither spectacle nor spectators.

But what then will be the objects of these entertainments? What will be shown in them? Nothing, if you please. With liberty, wherever abundance reigns, well-being also reigns. Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of a square; gather the people together there, and you will have a festival. Do better yet; let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves; make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united.⁴

Rousseau gives color and body to these sentiments through his description (in a footnote) of a spontaneous gathering that he had experienced as a child, set in motion by the officers and soldiers of the local regiment dancing together in the square after their exercises.

A dance of men, cheered by a long meal, would seem to present nothing very interesting to see; however, the harmony of five or six hundred men in uniform, holding one another by the hand and forming a long ribbon which wound around, serpent-like, in cadence and without confusion, with countless turns and returns, countless sorts of figured evolutions, the excellence of the tunes which animated them, the sound of the drums, the glare of the torches, a certain military pomp in the midst of pleasure, all this created a very lively sensation which could not be experienced coldly.

Soon they are joined by their women folk, wine is brought, and the dance is suspended.

There resulted from all this a general emotion that I could not describe but which, in universal gaiety, is quite naturally felt in the midst of all that is dear to us. My father, embracing me, was seized with trembling which I think I still feel and share. “Jean-Jacques,” he said to me, “love your country. Do you see all these good

3. *Social Contract*, 2.7, in *Social Contract: Essays by Locke, Hume, and Rousseau*, ed. Ernest Baker (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), 291.

4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts, Letter to M. D’Alembert on the Theatre*, ed. Allan Bloom (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1960), 125–26.

Genevans? They are all friends, they are all brothers; joy and concord reign in their midst.”⁵

These often-quoted passages breathe Rousseau’s nostalgia for the lost community of childhood: “Ah, where are the games and festivals of my youth? Where is the concord of the citizens?” There, in the suspension of social distances, in the one body of the dance, in the sense of universal gaiety, Rousseau found his dream of communal transparency, in which the abolition of the distance between desire and pleasure excluded representation. The spontaneous festival “actualizes what is perpetually denied to social man but what is intended everywhere and always in a gathering of persons: the affective community, the integration of the members who love and recognize each other, the joy felt in rediscovering a hidden common belonging.”⁶ Nevertheless, Rousseau finds it necessary to bring back the legislator to direct and supervise popular festivals precisely in relation to the young people of Geneva, for whom he proposes periodic balls, open to all the marriageable young, to be presided over by a magistrate appointed by the council. Suitably conducted, such balls would serve many useful purposes, from training the young to the enhancement of social concord. The aim of training citizens for the republic allows Rousseau to slide imperceptibly from spontaneous to regulated activities, taking the “modest festivals and games without pomp” of the Spartans as his model. In Sparta, the citizens, “constantly assembled, consecrated the whole of life to amusements which were the great business of the state and to games from which they relaxed only for war.”⁷ The rapid passage to the great business of state appears to indicate that Rousseau is scarcely conscious that his contrast between republican entertainments and those of the theatre brings into play two very different types of festival. The patriotic games and festivals of the Spartan model seem scarcely compatible with the utopian moment of community of childhood memory, where the reciprocal opening of hearts realizes a sense of presence of each to all and “a collective soul is formed amidst the raptures of joy.”⁸ Doubtless in Rousseau’s mind it is this aesthetic and ethical model of community that is intended in the public festivals that will make up the civic religion of the *Social Contract*. But where the utopian moment of community suspends and transcends the social hierarchies and distances of the social order, the public festival serves to cement and reinforce the social order. The one dispenses with representation, the other in its instrumentality restores spectacle and theatricality.

5. Ibid., 135.

6. Paul-Monique Vernes, *La ville, la fête, la démocratie: Rousseau et les illusions de la communauté* (Paris: Payot, 1978), 70, 77.

7. Ibid., 133.

8. Jean Duvignaud, “La fête civique,” in *Histoire des spectacles*, ed. Guy Dumur (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 240.

Rousseau's dream of a world without differences and divisions, of the transparent community beyond all social contradictions, defines the spontaneous popular festival as a *liminal* experience in a double sense. It creates an interregnum that suspends and transcends the social order. The interregnum belongs to times of transition and renewal: festivals that celebrate the death of the old and the birth of the new year, times of "disorder" between the old and the new king, times of the carnivalistic inversion of the social order, which recall the perennial image of a lost golden age of equality and bring back the originary space of the social to which societies can return to renew themselves. The revolutionary festivals of federation in 1790 came closest to this liminal experience of the suspension of the social-symbolic order, the consciousness of the dissolution of old social identities in the utopia of liberty, equality, and fraternity. And here too in the Revolution a gulf opened up between the festivals of 1790 and the public festivals of the Republic.

Rousseau's mythical figure in the *Social Contract* of life recovered through death, of the abolition of the past and of the recovering of the original transparency of the body politic present to itself, this dream of origin and of refoundation was played out in the French Revolution. It would reveal the double face of instituting/instituted power: the never forgotten dream of Saturn's golden age of equality, and the drama of the Revolution consuming its own children, like Saturn. To this double mythical image corresponds Michelet's distinction between the spontaneous festival of the people, charged with the religious creativity so important for Durkheim, and the Jacobin usurpation of the General Will in the festivals of the state religion. The tension between these two ideas of festival brings to the fore the contradictions of representation, in theatrical and political form. The fatal passage from the universal religion of humanity and nature, from the pure festival of freedom and the pure social bond of unity—which as such *institutes nothing*⁹—to the phantasm of the Republic *one and indivisible*, in which virtue has become one with terror, defines the crisis of refoundation. It marks the parting of the ways between the true and the false sublime of the new religion of society.

The Festivals of the French Revolution

Michelet, the great historian of the French Revolution, singles out the final chapter of the *Social Contract* on civil religion and the praise of the Jesus of the Gospels in "the Creed of a Savoyard Priest" in book 4 of *Émile* as forming together the last will and testament of the eighteenth century.¹⁰ They announced the new life, the new religion, of the French people that emerged spontaneously from the revolutionary events of 1789. In the winter of 1789, Michelet writes, France crossed the passage from one world to another, toward national unity as Frenchmen. The

9. Marc Richir, *Du sublime en politique* (Paris: Payot, 1991).

10. Jules Michelet, *Histoire de la révolution française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 383.

people, not the leaders, were the actors in this holy epoch of the nation: "No one saw this wondrous unity without thanking God. These are the sacred days of the world." Michelet is the historian of the Revolution as festival, the festival that belonged to the people not their leaders: "Profoundly human Genius! I love to follow, to observe it in its glorious festivals in which a whole people, simultaneously actor and witness, gave and received the impulse of moral enthusiasm, where every heart swelled with the greatness of France, of a fatherland, which proclaimed as its law the rights of Humanity."¹¹ In his famous preface of 1847 to his *History of the French Revolution* Michelet addresses the spirit of the Revolution, which fulfilled the legacy of the eighteenth century by abolishing the double theological and political incarnation of tyranny: "That century, that of the spirit, abolished the gods of the flesh in the state and in religion, so that there was no longer any idol, and there was no god but God."¹² But what in Michelet's eyes was this God other than the people itself, the God revealed in the sublime passage from the brotherhood of death to that of life, the God present in the spontaneous unity of the nascent nation that canceled all distinctions of class, fortune, and parties? Michelet's eloquence swells to a climax in his conjuration of the "sacred days" of the Revolution. In the festivals of federation he perceives the miracle of a new religion, the miracle of a return to nature, manifested in what we could term with Rousseau the natural divine law of sociability, the benevolence that sweeps aside all artificial barriers to fraternity. Michelet echoes Rousseau in his admiration of the festival of the people for the people: "There is in these immense assemblies, in which the people of all classes and communions form one heart, something more sacred than an altar. No special cult can lend holiness to the one holy thing: man fraternizing before God. The beauty, grandeur, eternal charm of these festivals: the symbol in them is living. The symbol of man is man."¹³

The importance of the revolutionary festivals is clear: they manifest the social bond as such, brought to consciousness by the tabula rasa of the Revolution. In returning men to a state of nature, the Revolution discovered society,¹⁴ or more exactly the sacred nature of the social bond. The revolutionary festival springs from the dream of an original equality, the return of the golden age. The people present to itself in the political forum and in the festival embodies the original instituting power of foundation and refoundation. The festival thus inaugurates a new political *space*, that of the French people, of the nation, no longer divided and separated

11. *Ibid.*, 6.

12. *Ibid.*, 3.

13. *Ibid.*, 406. Michelet's son-in-law Alfred Dumesnil developed a theory of the festival and proposed great public festivals as the expression of the new religion of the People and Nation in *La foi nouvelle cherchée par l'art* (Paris, 1850). See Paul Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes: Doctrines de l'âge romantique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), 537.

14. Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, 60. See also Inge Baxmann, *Die Feste der Französischen Revolution: Inszenierung von Gesellschaft als Natur* (Weinheim: Beltz, 1989).

by historical borders and barriers, and the new *time* of a new political era, ordered and manifested through a new calendar. The declaration of the Republic on the day of the autumn equinox “consecrated the social regeneration of the French people.”¹⁵ The most important function of the revolutionary festival lies for Mona Ozouf in the “transfer of sacrality” from the old to the new values, which could be expressed and celebrated only through the invention of a civil religion, for which of course the model was the city republics of antiquity. The spirit of the Revolution was betrayed, however, once the new religion of humanity split apart into contending sects, and fratricidal leaders usurped the place of the people. In Michelet’s judgment, the failure of the Revolution was prefigured in the passing of the moment of religious creativity in 1790, the upsurge of popular inspiration that had made of the Revolution a kind of dream. And with this moment the possibility of giving the Revolution a solid social foundation was lost.¹⁶

Jacques-Louis David emerged as the master planner of the Republic’s ceremonies.¹⁷ With the series of paintings *The Oath of the Horatii* (1785), *The Death of Socrates* (1787), and *The Lictors Bring to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons* (1789) David established himself as the preeminent painter of his generation and ensured the hegemony of neoclassicism in France from 1790 to 1815. David’s exaltation of civic virtue and heroism expressed in ideal form the morality and philosophy of the bourgeoisie. His choice of noble and sublime subjects broke with the rococo style of the court and the Christian iconography of the church, with the twin goals of regenerating painting and morally instructing society. Sponsored by Marat and Danton, David was proposed for a seat in the National Convention and elected in September 1792, later becoming secretary and then president of the Convention. He voted for the execution of the king (for which his wife divorced him), supported the Jacobins in their struggle against the Girondins, and remained a close friend and ally of Robespierre to the end. In September 1793 he was appointed a member of the Committee of General Security, which has been described as “a kind of terroristic ministry of homeland security.”¹⁸ This committee was subordinated to the Committee of Public Safety, of which David became one of the twelve, and later fourteen, members. In this capacity he signed 406 of the 4,700 decrees of the committee.¹⁹ He was also the dominant member

15. Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 160.

16. Michelet, *Histoire de la révolution française*, 410.

17. David Dowd’s 1948 study of David remains the best account of the painter’s role as propagandist and pageant master of the Revolution. D. L. Dowd, *Pageant Master of the Republic: Jacques-Louis David and the French Revolution* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1948); see also Alphonse Aulard, *Le culte de la raison* (1892; Aalen: Scientia, 1975), 308–20.

18. Colin Jones, “At the Heart of the Terror,” *New York Review of Books*, 20 December 2007, 69.

19. Warren Roberts, *Jacques-Louis David: Revolutionary Artist* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 74–75. Among the decrees signed by David was one for the arrest of Quatremère de Quincy, his traveling companion in Italy in 1779 (see chapter 2).

of the Committee for Public Instruction from October 1793. This accumulation of offices, including membership of the Commission for Monuments and its successor, the Temporary Commission of the Arts, which took control of the Royal Academies and the National Museum of the Louvre, meant that by the end of 1793 "David stood supreme and unchallenged as a kind of 'dictator of the arts.' He had suppressed the Academy [of Painting and Sculpture], captured the art commissions, organized the artistic contests, and brought the artists' societies to heel."²⁰ His varied activities as official propagandist of the Jacobin regime during the Terror covered "national fêtes, comprising public funerals of Jacobin heroes, triumphal celebrations in honor of republican achievements, and religious festivals such as the Fête of the Supreme Being; public works, involving monuments, statues and city planning; and graphic representations such as paintings, engravings, and caricatures."²¹ David was arrested and imprisoned after the fall of Robespierre, but by 1797 he had attracted the attention of Napoleon, embarking on a new career as official court painter of the emperor in 1804. Faithful to the cause of the Revolution, he went into exile to Brussels in 1815.

David's activities as propagandist of the Revolution are epitomized by his most famous painting, *Marat Assassinated*, presented to the Convention 14 November 1793. In his speech to the Convention the following day he summed up his conception of the public, moral function of art: "It is thus that the traits of heroism, of civic virtue offered to the regard of the people will electrify the soul, and will cause to germinate in it, all the passions of glory, of devotion to the welfare of the fatherland."²² His most valuable contribution to the Revolution, however, was not as painter but as pageant master, involved in the planning and staging of festivals from 1791 to 1794. It was he who established the pattern of the republican festival, contributing to the creation of the new symbols of the moral unity of the people after the break with the monarchy and the church, which had still occupied the presiding role in the 1790 Fête de la Fédération. The new type of public festival appeared with the interment of Voltaire in the Pantheon in 1791 and the "simple but sublime" (Robespierre) Festival of Liberty in 1792, with music by François-Joseph Gossec and songs by Marie-Joseph Chénier. D. L. Dowd lists the chief components of the republican festivals: the procession, with its floats, carriages, costumes, and banners, consisting of civil functionaries, the Convention, the Paris commune, sections, and popular societies, was framed by temporary monuments (triumphal arches, statues of liberty, temples, altars, pyramids, and obelisks), which provided the setting for the symbolic rites and ceremonies, such as civil oaths, official orations, solemn hymns, marches, and triumphal choruses. The Festival of Unity and Indivisibility on 10 August 1793, to celebrate the anniversary of the overthrow of

20. Dowd, *Pageant Master*, 95.

21. *Ibid.*, 97.

22. *Ibid.*, 79.

the monarchy, gives a good idea of how David deployed the participating masses in order to achieve the intended mass effects. The festival commenced at the site of the Bastille with speeches, cannon fire, and songs. The procession was led by the popular societies under the banner of the all-seeing eye of surveillance, the emblem of the Jacobin clubs, followed by members of the Convention with the ark containing the text of the new constitution, an allegory of the sovereign people, a chariot of liberty, and floats honoring the aged, the blind, foundlings, workers, and the fallen soldier. The constitution was proclaimed at the fifth station, the Altar of the Fatherland on the Champs de Mars, where the ark and the fasces of unity were deposited. The whole event, which lasted some sixteen hours, concluded with singing and dancing, banquets, and a military pantomime and attracted some 200,000 enthusiastic spectators.²³

The culminating point of David's propaganda and of Robespierre's power was the Festival of the Supreme Being on 20 Prairial, Year II (8 June 1794). How was the refoundation of society to be anchored in the hearts and minds of the people? This was the question that preoccupied Robespierre, Rousseau's most faithful disciple. Robespierre presented his decision to found a new national religion through the establishment of the cult of the Supreme Being as the logical consequence and culmination of the Jacobins' struggle against the enemies of the Republic, who by espousing atheism, materialism, and nihilism had placed reason in the hands of crime. In his speech to the National Convention of 18 Floréal, Year II (7 May 1794), "On the Relation of Religion and Morality to Republican Principles, and on National Festivals," Robespierre set out to establish Rousseau's natural divine law and to embody it in appropriate festive form. Ozouf considers the Festival of the Supreme Being the exemplary revolutionary festival. In joining with Rousseau to reject atheism and embrace deism, Robespierre expressed the intellectual consensus of the century, summed up in Kant's religion within the bounds of reason. The festival signified above all the supersession of *historical* religion by *natural* religion, that is, the replacement of the hierarchical festivals of the ancien régime by the "universal religion of nature."²⁴ In Robespierre's words, "The true priest of the Supreme Being is nature; its temple, the universe; its festivals, the joy of a great people assembled under his gaze." Even if the idea of the Supreme Being and that of the immortality of the soul are nothing but fictions, they are, Robespierre declared, humanity's most beautiful dreams.²⁵ They alone form the pure foundation of virtue and justice; they alone bar the way to chaos, emptiness, and violence. And they must be inculcated through an institution that comprises an essential part of public education: "A system of festivals... would provide both the softest bonds

23. Ibid., 110–13.

24. Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 1.

25. H. Morse Stephens, *The Principal Speeches of the Statesmen and Orators of the French Revolution, 1789–95* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 2: 401, 308.

of fraternity and the most powerful means of regeneration.”²⁶ National festivals will give expression to the very principle of the people’s moral instinct, its sublime enthusiasm. Echoing Rousseau, Robespierre hails the festival of humanity: “Man is the greatest object there is in nature, and the most magnificent of all spectacles is that of a great people assembled. One never speaks without enthusiasm of the national festivals of Greece;... One beheld a spectacle greater than the games; it was the spectators themselves, it was the people which had conquered Asia, whose republican virtues had elevated it at times above humanity.”²⁷

To prolonged applause Robespierre read out the articles of the decree establishing the new state religion, to be inaugurated and celebrated by the Festival of the Supreme Being, 20 Prairial, Year II (8 June 1794), under the direction of Jacques-Louis David. The exalted sentiments inspiring the festival found sentimental expression in David’s scenario presented to the Convention: “Dawn has scarcely announced the day when the sounds of military music echo from all sides, replacing the calm of slumber with an enchanting awakening. Beneath the benevolent star that brings life and colour to nature, friends, brothers, spouses, children, old men, and mothers embrace and hasten to decorate and celebrate the festival of the Divinity.”²⁸ The more prosaic report in the *Gazette nationale* two days later specified reveille at exactly five in the morning. At exactly eight cannon fire summoned the gathered sections to proceed to the National Gardens (the Tuileries), where Robespierre hailed the eternally happy day that the French people had consecrated to the Supreme Being: “Never has the world he created offered him a sight so worthy of his eyes.” After Robespierre’s speech the hymn of François Louis Désforgues, “Father of the Universe, supreme Intelligence,” set to music by François-Joseph Gossec, was played. With the torch handed to him by David, Robespierre set fire to the effigies of Egotism, Atheism, and Nothingness (le Néant), revealing a somewhat singed statue of Wisdom. After Robespierre’s second speech the assembled citizens proceeded to the Champs de Mars and grouped themselves around the mountain that David had constructed, on which the Convention took up position, with Robespierre occupying the summit. There followed a hymn to the Supreme Being, words by Marie-Joseph Chénier, to a great symphony of instruments and voices (200 drummers and a choir of 2,400 drawn from the forty-eight districts of Paris), and then oaths to the Republic, the singing of “The Marseillaise,” and military salutes. Conrad L. Donakowski sums up the whole complex of expectations going back to Plato that were reinforced by the festivals of the Revolution:

The continuing artistic and popular quest for theatrical happenings which combine all the arts as symbols of a reintegrated psyche and society; the belief that social

26. *Ibid.*, 411.

27. *Ibid.*, 410–11.

28. Aulard, *Le culte de la raison*, 308.

revolution will be accomplished under a radical change of artistic styles which will be more popular and therefore more democratic; the belief that somehow the new styles of song and dance are getting back to “nature”; that new model human communities must have their own style or artistic language; that public aesthetic education is necessary and desirable in a democracy; that certain past styles are models which ought to be revived; and that God and the people are one.²⁹

Revolution and Representation

Michelet's 1847 preface to his *History of the French Revolution* opens with his contemplation of the empty space bequeathed by the Revolution, its only monument the arid plain of the Champs de Mars. An appropriate beginning, for this site bears mute witness to the instituting spirit of the Revolution, the sublime enthusiasm of the people. This space is sacred: a God lives there, an omnipotent spirit, says Michelet. Its emptiness, like the “nothing” of Rousseau's popular festival, is the very symbol and cipher of the revolutionary sublime in its unrepresentability as the politics of the General Will and the religion of the Supreme Being. If for Ozouf the Festival of the Supreme Being is the exemplary festival, it is because it shares with all the revolutionary festivals the animating imaginary of a return to an original equality.³⁰ When Michelet declares that man is the true symbol of man, he means with Rousseau the image of man as total not fragmentary being, who demanded a new form of participation, that of public assembly. Thus the festival alone could guarantee the undivided expression of the people's sovereign, instituting power. What mattered to the revolutionaries was “being able to conceive of a society in which the instituted is still not too far removed from the institutor. Indeed, it was in this sense that the festival is itself, for the men of the Revolution, *their great borrowing from antiquity*, for the festival is instituting.”³¹ In opening the originary space of the social, the festival—Rousseau's theatre without representation—*opens the space of social performance, the common space of religion, politics, and theatre*, the space, that is, of representation. All the contradictions of the Revolution appear and are played out in this public space. The very attempt to deny representation entangled the Jacobins in fateful illusions, ideological and theatrical in equal measure.

Contemplating the empty space of the Revolution, Michelet did not share these illusions. He admits no continuity between the holy days of the Revolution, the new religion born of the spirit of universal fraternity, and the artificial religion of Robespierre's republic of virtue. The human and generous epoch of the Revolution belonged to the people, whereas the epoch of violence issued from the actions of an

29. Conrad L. Donakowski, *A Muse for the Masses: Ritual and Music in the Age of Democratic Revolution, 1770–1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 75.

30. Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 114–18.

31. *Ibid.*, 275.

infinitely small number of leaders. The people's liberation from the old, theological-political "fraternity of death," accomplished by the "wondrous unity" of the nation, ended in the Terror's absolute alternative: "fraternity or death."³² For Michelet the Festival of the Supreme Being cannot be exemplary, and yet it expresses the ultimate logic of Rousseau's dream of transparency and totality, just as the civic religion of the *Social Contract* with its absolute sanction of the death penalty comes perilously close to the Jacobins' coupling of virtue and terror, fraternity or death. Charles Taylor approaches the question of the two types of festival through the lens of Victor Turner's distinction between structure and antistructure. He argues that the French Revolution embodied the paradigmatic paradox of revolution as "the anti-structure to end all anti-structure."³³ The traditional function of antistructure in the ritual process is the suspension, *not* the destruction, of the social code. Destruction sprang from the conviction that society needed to be completely reconstructed. "The epoch of the French Revolution is perhaps the moment in which at one and the same time anti-structure goes into eclipse, and the project of applying a code without moral boundaries is seriously contemplated. This emerges most clearly in the attempts... to design festivals which would express and entrench the new society."³⁴ The revolutionary festival in its dual form as antistructure and as structure embodied the two very different senses of equality entwined in Rousseau's writings on the festival: on the one hand, the utopian idea of community—the strange *vita nuova* that made the Revolution a sort of dream (Michelet); on the other, the state religion of the *Social Contract*. The one could indeed demonstrate its antistructural, antitheatrical transparency in the communal impulse that cancels the distinction between actors and spectators. The revolutionary system of festivals could not demonstrate, however, its sublime premise and purpose: "Robespierre tried to impose a cult devoid of all sensible representations, a religion worthy of its sublime project, but in that regard, the Festival of the Supreme Being was a spectacular failure. The theatrical nature of the procession staged by David, of the symbolic scenery built on the Champs de Mars, and even the sacrifice of idols burned publicly at the onset of the ceremony, all framed a stage where Robespierre became an unwilling actor and for some a high priest."³⁵

If I am insisting on these contradictions of representation that haunt the public space of performance ever since the French Revolution, it is because the idea and the practice of the total work of art will be driven by the same sublime imperative of transcendence as the Jacobin festivals and will confront the same dilemmas. In searching for transcendence, the revolutionary festivals were forced to reproduce

32. Michelet, *Histoire de la révolution française*, 4–7.

33. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 53.

34. *Ibid.*, 51.

35. Marie Helene Huet, *Mourning Glory: The Will of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 56.

the two inescapable dilemmas of representation. The one is political and can be phrased in the following fashion: do the people make the festival or does the festival make the people? The instrumental answer is given by Ozouf: "The festival was an indispensable complement to the legislative system, for although the legislator makes the laws for the people, the festivals make people for the laws."³⁶ The second is theatrical: how can the public festival escape spectacle if it is already itself a spectacle? In each case we observe an appeal to the sublime in order to transcend these contradictions. But does the sublimity attributed to the Revolution lie in the mind of the beholder, as Kant argued, or does it lie, on the contrary, in the feelings of the actors and participants in the world-historical events that made the Revolution its own sublime spectacle, as the revolutionaries thought? Although Kant speaks of the "participation" (*Teilnehmung*) that the French Revolution arouses in the observer, even at the cost of danger—a participation close in fact to the *enthusiasm* inspiring the revolutionaries to fervor and greatness of soul—he holds fast to the distinction between the spectators and the actors in this play (*Spiel*) in terms of the distinction between the *respublica noumenon* and the *respublica phaenomenon*. Since the ideal republic is greater than any realization, the spectacle of the downfall of old states and the emergence of others "as if from the bowels of the earth" cannot be the source of the sublime. Only the *idea* of the republic, namely that those who are subject to the law are themselves its legislators, can be sublime, because it grounds all forms of the state; only the ideal participation of the observer can be sublime, because it testifies to the moral character of humanity, that is, to a capacity of human being to unite nature and freedom. The "representation" (*Darstellung*) of the idea in an empirical example, as with the French Revolution, necessarily falls short, may in fact even fail, because its realization can be accomplished only through conflict and war. Kant's strict separation of spectators and actors protects the free community to come, which arouses our enthusiasm here and now, from inevitable compromise and betrayal.³⁷

For the Kantian observer the Revolution was itself a play, a representation, played out before the people, the nation, humanity. "No other historical period... has exalted to the same degree the idea of an exemplary politics, an educational spectacle for all mankind."³⁸ Politics became theatre at the same time as the actors were anxiously striving to preserve the sublimity of the Revolution from theatrical contamination. If the success of the Festival of Unity and Indivisibility was such that dramatic representations of its ceremonies played in Parisian theatres for months, this was not to be the case with the Festival of the Supreme Being. The Commission for Public Instruction rejected as impiety a proposal to reenact this

36. Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 9.

37. Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, part 2, secs. 6–8.

38. Jean Duvignaud, *Sociologie du théâtre: Essai sur les ombres collectives* (Paris: PUF, 1965), 389.

religious festival in the theatre. The God of nature must not be confused with the God created by the fantasy of poets and painters, priests or tyrants.

What stage with its cardboard rocks and trees, its sky in rags and tatters, can rival the magnificence of 20 Prairial or erase its image? The drums, the music, the roaring bronze, the cries of joy rising to heaven... the humid veils, these clouds blown around above our heads, and parted by playful winds to let the rays of the sun shine through, as if they had meant it to be witness to the most beautiful moments of the festival; finally the victory hymn, the union of the people and its representatives, all with their arms raised toward the sky, swearing under the sun the virtues and the republic.³⁹

The commission repeated Rousseau when it declared that the spectacle of the united people under the open sky—"there was the Eternal, nature in all its magnificence"—defied representation: "To place this sublime spectacle on stage is to parody it." The Committee of Public Safety joined the commission in condemning the proposed substitution of lifeless images for the unity manifested in national festivals, and decreed the banning of such representations.

As this decree indicates, this sublime religious spectacle was meant to transcend the lifeless images of the theatre, but precisely as total work of art. The description of the revolutionary festival, given by Marie-Joseph Chénier, poet, dramatist, and leading collaborator of David, in a speech to the National Convention 15 Brumaire, Year II (5 November 1793), provides, we might say, the founding definition of the total work:

Liberty will be the soul of our public festivals; they exist only for it and through it. Architecture raising its temple, painting and sculpture retracing as they wish its image, eloquence celebrating its heroes, poetry singing its praises, music conquering all hearts for it through proud and touching harmonies, dance lending gaiety to its triumphs, hymns, ceremonies, emblems, varied according to the different festivals, but always animated by its genius, young and old bowed before its statue, all the arts magnified and sanctified by it, uniting in order to make it cherished: these are the materials available to the legislators when they are called upon to organize *festivals of the people*; these are the elements on which the National Convention must impress movement and life.⁴⁰

Chénier's definition, enthused by liberty and forged in the fire of the Revolution, brings all the elements of our discussion together: the civil religion of a free people to be celebrated through the combined contribution of the arts. Animated and

39. Huet, *Mourning Glory*, 38–39; Aulard, *Le culte de la raison*, 327–29.

40. Romain Rolland, *Le théâtre du peuple: Essai d'esthétique d'un théâtre nouveau* (1903; Paris: Albin Michel, 1913), 173.

sanctified by their public function, the arts' united powers of expression appear as both product and producer of communal unity and identity, and as such the visible medium and manifestation of the (invisible) spirit of the assembled people. It is important to stress the reciprocity at work here: if the arts are magnified and sanctified by the civil religion (indeed only this higher purpose can effect a synthesis of the arts), it is equally the case that the civil religion needs the arts. Thus, despite Rousseau's original distinction, the festival partakes of "theatre," just as theatre repeatedly strives to partake of the festival by escaping from the confines of representation that separate action and spectators.

The festival therefore appears as simultaneously the *soul* and the *supplement* of the revolutionary spirit. As the aesthetic pledge of totality, the festival makes the Republic manifest to the people and the people to itself. As total work of art, the festival functions as the supplement of presence (the people present to itself under the open sky) in the double sense elucidated by Derrida. The supplement enriches nature, that which is sufficient in itself, through the addition of art, *techné*, image, representation, but it also functions as substitute by taking the place of that which is absent, not sufficient in itself. Thus we can say that just as Rousseau's idea of nature is invented at the moment of the "sentimental" consciousness of its disappearance, so the idea of the festival is revived at the moment of the collapse of the ancien régime. In inheriting and displacing absolutism's will to representation, the revolutionary festival inherits all the ambiguities of aesthetic illusion. If we take the festival's two essential but contradictory features—presence against representation, the collaborative union of the arts—it is clear that these two, "real presence" and aesthetic illusion, exclude and include each other in equal measure. Exclusion is written into Rousseau's utopian conception of the communal festival, inclusion into Chénier's "festivals for the people" with their fusion of liberty and the arts. This intended fusion exemplifies in a particularly acute, namely "absolute," fashion a recurrent impulse in European art since the French Revolution and romanticism that is directed to a fusion of art and life. We could call this impulse the bad conscience of modern art—it has generated a stream of manifestos and programmes proclaiming the sublation of art in terms of a critique of aesthetic illusion. This critique and its goal—the reunion of art and life—is of necessity ambiguous and totally ambiguous insofar as it is inspired by a totalizing impulse. Odo Marquard underlines this ambiguity when he defines the constitutive impulse of the total work of art as the abolition of the boundary between art and reality that manifests itself as a *potentiation of illusion*.⁴¹ In other words, the total work of art cannot escape the Derridean logic of the supplement: the aesthetic illusion, which is both more and less than presence, concentrates in itself the chain of supplements

41. Odo Marquard, "Gesamtkunstwerk und Identitätssystem: Überlegungen im Anschluß an Hegels Schellingkritik," in *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk: Europäische Utopien seit 1800*, ed. Harald Szeemann (Aarau: Sauerländer, 1983), 40–49.

(civil religion, pedagogic festivals, aesthetic education, mythology of reason, etc.) that responds to the dialectic of secularization unleashed by the Revolution.

The Abyss of Political Foundation

If the belief in the sublime effect of festivals could serve to dispel the dilemmas of representation, it was because the sublime spectacle of the assembled people transcended the distinction between actors and spectators. This presence of the people to itself, this manifestation of the divinity of the Revolution, belongs, however, to the liminal moment of rupture, the interregnum between the old and the new symbolic orders, described by Michelet as the crossing of the abyss from local to national identities. He compares this rite of passage to a dream, in which the dissolution of the old order uncovered the social bond, the social as such that found expression in the festivals of federation. Ozouf describes the subject of her book as the meeting of this dream, this liminal experience of original equality, with the Revolution.⁴² On the other side of this encounter lies the Jacobin republic of virtue and the indivisible people, modeled on Rousseau's General Will and sharing Rousseau's deep attachment to Sparta. The revolutionaries' identification with the heroic virtues of the ancient republics (so well illustrated in David's neoclassical paintings), above all the identification of the Jacobin leaders with Sparta and Rome, imbued the idea of revolution with the fateful illusions of regeneration through a return to the ancients, as Benjamin Constant with his contrast between ancient and modern conceptions of freedom would later charge. This identification elevated "the public virtue which brought about so many marvels in Greece and Rome" (Robespierre) to the presiding spirit of revolutionary government. Sparta was the lens through which Robespierre and Saint-Just "saw their own society as transparent, ideally united, a society whose very essence repelled conflict between different classes, interests and parties, conflict that was the sole preserve of traitors and rascals, whom it was perfectly legitimate to eliminate."⁴³ The amazing vitality of Sparta as a political ideal, so attractive to the utopian imagination in antiquity and since the Renaissance, was due above all to Plutarch. Lycurgus figured as the supreme example of the legislator, who had established the communal and military organization of Spartan life, based on an egalitarian division of land, the refusal of industry and commerce, and a morality of obedience and courage. The rule of law, the primacy of the group, and the power of the state to form and educate its subjects, this—and not Athenian democracy—furnished the imaginary of the republic that remained dominant up to the end of the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ The conviction that

42. Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 8.

43. Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Politics Ancient and Modern* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 153–54.

44. Elizabeth Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

the Athenian and Florentine essays in democracy had failed ensured the primacy of egalitarianism in utopian thought and in the French Revolution. Pierre Vidal-Naquet sums up the consequence of this fateful illusion: "The Sparta of Robespierre embodied at once a rejection of history and a desperate rejection of politics."⁴⁵ We may indeed call this rejection of history and politics sublime; it was, however, the sublime of negation, a *creatio ex nihilo*, that led with inexorable logic to the Terror's "frenzy of destruction" (Hegel).

In his study of the sublime in politics, Marc Richir interprets the French Revolution through the eyes of Michelet and his contemporary, the historian and liberal politician Edgar Quinet.⁴⁶ Richir's starting point is Michelet's and Quinet's reading of the Revolution as a religious event, the birth of a new religion in response to the collapse of the despotic machinery of the absolute state. For Richir the collapse of the classical theology of politics signifies the advent of the sublime in politics, by which he means the abyss of political foundation: the sublime encounter with and traversal of death (the death of the old symbolic order, the death of old identities), from which the people emerges and with the people the modern question of democracy. Richir works with the contemporary conception of the sublime provided by Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1791). Kant interprets the encounter with and traversal of (the fear of) death as the rite of passage through which the subject discovers a higher form of self-preservation, the idea of humanity in himself. This discovery of the moral self beyond the fear of death is the moment of the sublime, which is equally the moment—for Michelet and Richir—of the discovery of the social bond and of the birth of the new religion of humanity, liberated from the yoke of despotism. But, as Kant argued and the Revolution demonstrated, the sublime religion of man is always under the threat of the return of the repressed, the return of despotism and its logic of the debt (the original debt of death). Kant underlines the religious significance of the sublime by distinguishing between religion and superstition, the latter characterized not by reverence for the deity but by fear and anxiety with regard to the overpowering god, to whose terrifying will humans must submit.⁴⁷

Richir defines the sublime in politics as the utopian moment of the Revolution, in which the dissolution of all existing social institutions reveals, in the anarchy of liberty, equality, and fraternity, the image of the sublime community as the symbolic horizon of humanity (79–80). Richir's sublime in politics denotes this abyss of

45. Vidal-Naquet, *Politics Ancient and Modern*, 153–54.

46. Richir distinguishes *le politique* of his title (the political) from *la politique* (politics). "The political sublime" might be a better translation, but I prefer to keep to Richir's title by speaking of "the sublime in politics." Parenthetical page references in the text refer to Richir, *Du sublime en politique*.

47. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, par. 28. Kleist's novella, *The Earthquake in Chile*, a commentary on the Lisbon earthquake, the Enlightenment, and the recent events of the French Revolution, is a powerful illustration of the abyss of political foundation and its dialectic. See David Roberts, "Kleist's Kritik der Urteilskraft: Zum Erhabenen in *Das Erdbeben in Chili*," in *Kleist und die Aufklärung*, ed. Tim Mehigan (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2000), 46–57.

foundation, from which the new gods of political modernity—humanity, nation, the people—surged forth, and with them the dialectic of the desacralization and resacralization of politics. “The sacralization of the nation, spread throughout Europe by the French Revolution, put the relationships between politics and religion in a new light; it made politics religious and gave an educational role to the state.”⁴⁸ But, as Richir argues, this sublime passage from death to new life can only be a *liminal* experience, that of the return of the social to its origins, in which the community appears to itself in a kind of dream outside the space and time of history (470). It is the moment of society’s search for *self-incarnation* from below, which attained its fullest expression, as Michelet saw, in the festivals of federation and was betrayed in the Jacobins’ attempt to *incorporate* society from above (Richir, 468). The failure to grasp that the sublime community, Kant’s *respublica noumenon*, is unrepresentable underlay the Jacobins’ illusion that there could be an *unmediated* institution of society. The very attempt to symbolize the unrepresentable idea of the republic in a Festival of the Supreme Being highlights what Richir calls the “transcendental illusion” of the Revolution. The Jacobins’ short circuit of state and society by means of a “sublime” politics was the vain attempt to occupy the vacant space left by the demise of the Christian God. Hegel spells out the consequences of the Jacobins’ usurpation of the General Will: “Before the universal can perform a deed it must concentrate itself into the One of individuality and put at the head an individual self-consciousness; for the universal is only an actual will in a self, which is One.”⁴⁹ All other individuals are thereby excluded from the entirety of the deed, negated in the pure generality and abstraction of the General Will. Therefore the only deed of which general freedom is capable is *death*: “the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage” (Hegel, 360). Pure negation thereby attains its most sublime (*erhabenste*) and ultimate form: to see its pure reality disappear immediately and turn to empty nothingness (mocking the effigy of Nothingness burned in the Festival of the Supreme Being). The Terror is this frenzy, this fury of destruction. As Hegel puts it, the vacuous *Être suprême* is nothing but the exhalation of a stale gas hovering over the corpse of independent being (358).

Edmund Burke, the father of the modern theory of the sublime, declared the ruling principle of the sublime to be terror. We must recognize, with Hegel, in addition to Richir’s Kantian theory of “the sublime in politics,” the sublime politics of the republic of virtue and terror. On the one side, with Michelet and Richir, we

48. Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 9. This totalizing vision of the identity of the political and the religious, of God and the people (Mazzini), has been an ever-renewed response to the question that Chateaubriand posed at the end of his *Essai sur les révolutions*, published in 1797 in London: “What is the religion that will replace Christianity?”

49. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Absolute Freedom and Terror,” in *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 355–63. Parenthetical page references in the text refer to this edition.

have the Revolution as itself the creation of a new religion that, in opening modernity's symbolic horizon of freedom and democracy, institutes nothing (Richir, 124). On the other side we have the attempt to institute a political religion of the state, the model for the "totalitarian democracies" of the twentieth century. Both forms of the political sublime are manifested in festivals; where the essence of Rousseau's and Michelet's festival lies in the spontaneity of communal feeling, the festivals of the Revolution served purposes of mass mobilization and propaganda and thus embraced the theatricality they were designed to transcend. The General Will manifests itself, however, not only in the festival as total work of art but also, as Hegel demonstrates, in its "most sublime and ultimate form" as Terror. We have here *two completely opposed conceptions of the sublime*: if both involve the transcendence of the empirical self and therefore can lay claim to the sublime enthusiasm of the people, sublimity for Kant lies in the consciousness of moral *individuation* beyond the terror of annihilation, while for Hegel the sublimity of "absolute freedom and terror" lies in its absolute *negation* of all real individuals. As we shall see in part 3, the countertheory to Kant's sublime, Nietzsche's theory of Dionysian de-individuation, is crucial to the interpretation of the totalitarian total work of art.

THE DESTINATION OF ART

The Secularization of Art: Quatremère de Quincy

The birth of the total work of art from the spirit of revolution cannot be separated from the fundamental break in the function, purpose, and meaning of art brought to consciousness by the French Revolution. The will to create a new civil religion that directly challenged the hegemony of the Catholic Church found practical and symbolic expression in the expropriation and secularization of church property. The remodeling of Sainte-Geneviève in Paris into the Pantheon of the heroes of the Revolution went together with confiscation and collection of church treasures destined to form the core of the national patrimony. Jean Starobinski speaks of the Pantheon and the Museum as two characteristic institutions of the Revolution that shared a common intention: to combine historical knowledge with the exaltation of great men.¹ The transformation of church into national pantheon and of royal palace into public museum (the Louvre was opened as a museum on 10 August 1793

1. Jean Starobinski, *1789: Les emblèmes de la raison* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 198. Friedrich Schinkel's Altes Museum, Berlin, constructed in the 1820s, had this double function of the historical and the exemplary. The central dome, modeled after the Roman Pantheon, displays Greek statues. The surrounding galleries were arranged according to art-historical principles. See Beat Wyss, *Hegel's Art History and the Critique of Modernity*, trans. Caroline Dobson-Saltzwedel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

on the anniversary of the fall of the monarchy) announced the “cultural secularization of history.”² This cultural secularization aimed on the one hand to make the art treasures of the past available to the public, as in the case of the Louvre, and on the other to endow the republic with a national heritage, as in the case of Alexandre Lenoir’s Musée des Monuments Français. The museum was thus fashioned by the new historicist sense of history, which would make it in the spirit of Hegel the repository of humanity’s history, and in the spirit of cultural nationalism the vessel of a people’s innate genius.

The fundamental break in the understanding of the function of art, symbolized and institutionalized in the museum, elicited a number of responses that are relevant to the idea and to the history of the total work of art. We can follow Quatremère de Quincy in naming the crucial issues raised by the emergence of the national museum as the *displacement* and the *destination* of art. These issues and their consequences for art are reflected at the end of Goethe’s introduction to the first issue of his art journal, *Propyläen*. There he speaks of Italy as a great body of art (*Kunstkörper*), which at the very moment of writing (1798) is being dismembered, and of the new body of art that is in the process of being assembled in Paris. Douglas Crimp comments:

With art history, the art entity that Goethe called Italy is forever lost.... Art as we think about it *only came into being* in the nineteenth century, with *the birth of the museum and the discipline of art history*.... For us, then, art’s natural end is in the museum, or, at the very least, in the imaginary museum, that idealist space that is art with a capital A. The idea of art as autonomous, as separate from everything else, as destined to take its place in art history, is a development of modernism.³

Appealing to the cosmopolitan spirit that is nowhere more at home than in the arts and sciences, Goethe asks what can be done to create from the dispersed artistic treasures of Europe an ideal body of art that can perhaps compensate for present losses.

Quatremère’s *Letters to General Miranda* concerning the displacement of art monuments from Italy breathe this cosmopolitan spirit.⁴ Written in 1796 when he was in hiding under proscription by the Directoire, Quatremère’s letters were provoked by Bonaparte’s victories in Italy, which threatened the despoiling of Rome. Quatremère speaks like Goethe in the name of the republic of arts and letters, which belongs to Europe as a whole and not to individual nations and whose capital is

2. Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 10.

3. Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 98.

4. Quatremère de Quincy, *Lettres au Général Miranda sur le préjudice qu’occasionnent aux arts et à la science le déplacement des monuments de l’art de l’Italie*, in *Considérations morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l’art* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

Rome. A new sack of Rome would be a calamity for the cause of civilization, since Rome is to us what Greece was to Rome. As city, as place, as body of art, Rome represents an irreplaceable totality that constitutes in all its parts a universal museum, whose integrity must be protected from dismemberment. This living unity of past and present in Rome signifies the continuity of culture from the ancients to the moderns, borne out by the ongoing archaeological recovery of antiquity, inspired and guided by papal policy.⁵ For Quatremère this ongoing archaeological recovery of antiquity amounts to a true resurrection, as opposed to the deadly discontinuity signaled by the rise of the museum, in which the amassing of objects serves only to display the vanity of science, because only the preservation of continuity with the past offers the possibility of creating the new: "I do not believe I am deceiving myself in predicting that of all the causes of the revolution or regeneration of the arts, the most powerful and the most capable of producing an entirely new order of effects is this general resurrection of this nation (*peuple*) of statues, of this ancient world whose population increases daily."⁶

Quatremère is arguing from a conception of history that refuses the break with the continuity of civilization inherent in the new spirit of historicism. Although he played a significant cultural role in the Revolution—he was entrusted with the transformation of Sainte-Geneviève into the Pantheon, and along with David and others he acted as a director of the festivals of the Revolution—his understanding of "revolution or regeneration" in the field of art refuses the revolutionary rupture epitomized by and embodied in the Louvre. In a speech on the occasion of the festival of Thermidor, Year VI (27 July 1798), the minister of the interior and director of the Louvre, François de Neufchâteau, celebrated the plundering of the papal collection as an act of liberation, which had emancipated art from its alienation in the service of religion and the despotic state. Neufchâteau welcomed the return to the people of the artworks seized from French churches and palaces and from Italian and papal collections: "Today, these masterpieces are here for you to admire, steeped in the morality of a free nation."⁷ Through this passage from enslavement to freedom, these masterpieces have become art for a free nation, because they were always free in themselves. Redeemed from servitude, they can now be seen for

5. The origins of the museum go back to Pope Sixtus IV's restoration to the people of Rome of ancient statues in 1471, exhibited on the Capitoline Hill.

6. Quatremère, *Considérations morales*, 200. Hans-Georg Gadamer underscores the genetic bond between aestheticism and historicism when he writes that aesthetically cultured consciousness "does not see itself as this kind of integration of the ages; the simultaneity peculiar to it is based on the consciousness of historical relativity of taste." Aesthetic consciousness creates its own special sites for simultaneity, such as the "universal library," the museum, the theatre, and the concert hall. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1989), 87.

7. For this and the following quotations from Neufchâteau's speech, see Jean-Louis Déotte, "Rome, the Archetypal Museum, and the Louvre, the Negation of Division," in *Art Museums*, ed. Susan Pearce (London: Athlone, 1995), 215–32.

what they truly are—that which persists from humanity’s history after the overthrow of kings and pontiffs. “Unsullied by impurity,” they are free to display for all “the gold of divinity” that belongs to genius. As opposed to Quatremère’s accusation of displacement as dismemberment, Neufchâteau justifies the museum as the temple of memory. By “releasing so many dead artists from the obscurity in which they languished and simultaneously crowning artists from thirty centuries,” the French nation has become the avenger of artists and the arts: “It is because of the French nation that they have today taken their rightful place in the temple of memory.”

Quatremère’s *Moral Considerations on the Destination of Works of Art*, written in 1807 but not published until 1815, denounces the museum as the negation of art’s social function and moral purpose.⁸ His rejection of modern attitudes to artworks, evident in commodification (the artwork as useful object), fashion (the artwork as useless object), and reification (the artwork as material object), clears the decks for an attack on the museum: “To remove them [artworks] without distinction from their social destination, what is this but to say that society has no need of them?” (37). Art dies once the bonds tying it to society are severed and it is deprived of public use and of public interest. This is not only the fate of the art of the past removed to the museum but the fate that necessarily awaits present and future art. The enclosure of art in the museum means that the public is no longer in a position to comprehend the original causes that alone made and make art possible. Against the “vicious circle,” which makes museums and living masterpieces mutually exclusive (36), Quatremère sets out the mutual need of art and religion: not only does art need religion as its destination; religion needs art for its beautiful illusion (55). The museum may conserve the body, but the spirit, the beliefs and the ideas that gave to artworks their being, has fled. This disinheritance enacts, on the one hand, the “de-divinization” of art (55), the desacralization to which all art is subject in the museum; on the other, it fetishizes the artwork as aesthetic object, reconstituted by the historical “spirit of criticism” that allows Venuses and Madonnas to share indifferently the same space. In other words, the virtuous circle of art and religion has now been replaced by the deadly union of art and knowledge, which had transformed the living body of art into the classification and chronology of decomposed fragments: “It is to kill art to make history of it; it is not to make history, but its epitaph” (48). Hans Sedlmayr termed this process of dismemberment of the living body of art the “death of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.”⁹ Writing from the standpoint of the lost *Gesamtkunstwerk* of tradition, it is not surprising that Sedlmayr equates the monumental architecture of the revolutionary period with eternity and death: the pantheon, the mausoleum, the museum, and the library bear witness with their

8. Parenthetical page references in the text refer to Quatremère de Quincy, *Considérations morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l’art* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

9. See the chapter “The Splitting of the Arts” in Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1955), 64–75.

pure elementary forms not only to the deadly logic of the cultural secularization of religion and art but also to the monumental geometry of the masses in the festivals of the Revolution.¹⁰

Hegel's response to the cultural secularization proclaimed by the Enlightenment and the Revolution departs from that of Quatremère. Writing at the same time (1807), both concur in regarding the museum as signifying the death of art. But what the one accuses, the other vindicates. If both agree that the beautiful religion of the Greeks, the living work of art of the polis, has been lost, there remains the question of the possibility of great art in the modern world, the question, that is, of the destination of art. It was the question that Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling jointly and separately sought to answer, a question, moreover, that was not only posed by the French Revolution but was also tied directly to the fate of the Revolution. As Hegel observed in his *Lectures on Philosophy*, only two nations participated in the French Revolution: the French in action, the Germans in thought. If we follow Starobinski this division of labor is to be read as the two paradigmatic attempts to reconcile nature and culture: through revolution in France and through the path of aesthetic education in Germany.¹¹ The present chapter traces the second path from Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education* and the philosophical fragment known as "The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism" (which has been variously attributed to Hegel, Hölderlin, or Schelling but was most likely the product of their symphilosophizing) via Hölderlin's quest to create a tragedy for the modern polis—that is, for the Swabian republic he hoped for—to Hegel's interpretation of the destiny of art in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and the *Lectures on Aesthetics* in the 1820s.

Aesthetic Education: Schiller

Robespierre's religion of universal nature underscored the contradictions of refoundation. The state religion, designed to celebrate and enshrine universal brotherhood in and through Festivals of the Supreme Being, did not survive Robespierre's fall, but it bequeathed the problem of a new religion for a new age, the civil religion that must be both the *product* and the *producer* of the people. In *Émile* Rousseau had looked to education as the means to progress. But in arguing that it is the task of education to reconstitute nature as naturally as possible, Rousseau conceded the necessity of culture supplementing nature, at the same time as he sought to draw an

10. Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte*, 21–29. A decree of the Convention of 14 August 1793 announcing an architectural competition stated that architecture should be regenerated through geometry. See Starobinski, 1789, 182.

11. Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 44–46.

absolute distinction between the pure sovereignty of the political assembly or the pure presence of the popular festival and political or theatrical representation.

Friedrich Schiller cuts through Rousseau's conundrum by insisting on the centrality of mediation against the phantasm of presence, whereby culture becomes the necessary link between nature lost and nature regained. In his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795) Schiller answers Rousseau by arguing that the original totality of human nature, destroyed by art, can be restored only by a higher art. The problem to be addressed is precisely that of the refoundation of society: How is the old society to transform itself? How is the passage from nature to freedom, from a natural polity, based on force, to an ethical polity, based on the law, possible? The Revolution's attempt to condense the work of a hundred years into the forced union of virtue and terror demonstrated that the direct path of politics cannot be the answer. Modern man and modern society are too fragmented and divided to find in themselves the necessary harmony and unity. The wounds inflicted on modern culture through the division of labor and the abstract analytic understanding mean that the organic life of the polis has been replaced by the alienated subjects of the modern state (letter 6). Hence the circle that confronts Schiller: "The state as presently constituted has caused the evil, while the state as reason conceives it, far from being able to found this better humanity would have itself to be founded on it" (letter 7). The only way that Schiller can envisage to escape this circle is to effect a "total revolution in man's whole way of feeling" (letter 27). The means to a better humanity and in turn to an ethical state must be sought in aesthetic education. (Kant had indicated the way by seeing in beauty a symbol of moral freedom.) The two sides of man—feeling and reason, matter and form—are to be reconciled in the play drive, for man is only fully human when he plays (letter 15): "There is no other way to make sensible/sensuous man rational, than first to make him aesthetic" (letter 23). Schiller can thus argue that art is our *second* creator, the necessary supplement to nature, which yet acts in the same manner as our first creator in that it gives us the means to humanity while leaving the task to our free will (letter 21).

Schiller's ideal solution to the real contradictions of the French Revolution comes, however, at a high price. The passage from nature to freedom is left suspended. Schiller's solution requires the displacement of the political problem onto a sociohistorical analysis of the negativities of modernity.¹² The displacement is in fact double: from politics to social and cultural critique, and from the latter, via the Greeks, to art as the way to the most perfect of all artworks: the construction of true political freedom (letter 2). Art points the way because it alone can steer a course between the frightful realm of physical forces and the holy realm of moral law. In freeing us from the constraints of outer and inner necessity, art opens up the realm of freedom through the free play of the imagination in aesthetic illusion

12. Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophical Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 123.

or semblance (*Schein*). However, as critics have observed, aesthetic education for the development of a political state ends in education for the aesthetic state as a harmonious enclave within the existing state. Against the enabling fiction of the social contract that is to effect the passage from nature to culture, Schiller sets the beautiful illusion of art, elevated to the necessary supplement of both nature and morality, since it serves as the sensuous pledge of the invisible ideal of moral freedom (letter 3). The political sublime calls for its beautiful complement. The theatre must take its place beside the forum and the festival. Where the French disciples of Rousseau take from antiquity the example of republican freedom, Rousseau's German disciples from Schiller to Hegel, from Hölderlin to Schelling, take the vision of beautiful harmony and the dream of the aesthetic state.¹³

The Revolution posed the question of a new civil religion to its French actors and German observers. Both shared a sense of the death of the Christian God and the conviction that Christianity cannot be the religion of a republic of free and equal citizens. For the revolutionaries, *politics* succeeds religion. It manifests and celebrates the unity of the people and of the nation in public festivals inaugurating a new era. The German observers, repulsed by the twin specters of mob anarchy and state despotism, looked to *art* to mediate between instincts and reason, and to a *new mythology* to mediate between public and private life. The highest act of reason—beauty—will act as the unifying and civilizing force that reconciles the teachings of the Enlightenment and the masses. These two faces of civil religion—the political and the aesthetic—are both modeled on antiquity. In the one case the primary reference, exemplified in the paintings of David, is to the sublime civic spirit of the Roman republic; in the other case the primary reference is to the Greek polis as a “living work of art.”¹⁴ Both French revolutionary republicanism and the German aesthetic state (Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe speaks of “national aestheticism”),¹⁵ exemplified respectively by the public festival and by the public drama, enter in equal measure into the genesis of the idea of the total work of art in that both are inspired by the revolutionary-redemptive dream of social regeneration, projected from the past into the future.

13. See Josef Chytrý, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). For the aesthetic state, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's analysis of national aestheticism in Germany in chap. 7 of *Heidegger, Art, and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*, trans. Chris Turner (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), in particular its three main components: (1) the Greek polis as model; (2) the Greek union of art and politics and religion; (3) organic politics—the state as a living totality and communal work of art.

14. Schelling speaks in 1803 of the festivals, monuments, plays, and public affairs of antiquity as the various branches of the “one general objective and living work of art.” Friedrich Schelling, *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*, lecture 14, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Abt. I (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856), 5: 352. See also the section “The Living Work of Art” in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). The progression from “the abstract work of art” to “the living work of art” signifies the passage from the *cult* devoted to the gods to the *festival* of the people.

15. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics*, chap. 7.

The German tradition of aesthetic education derives from Rousseau's diagnosis of the alienation of man in society. The restitution of true human being was conceived in analogy with the integrating and unifying powers of art, which led in turn to a political philosophy predicated on the unity and harmony of the work of art. F. R. Ankersmit has proposed a counterconception of aesthetic politics, which foregrounds the parallels between theatrical and political representation in order to insist on the centrality of the aesthetic dimension to politics. He argues that the unbridgeable aesthetic gap separating the people and the state, the represented and their representatives, is the source of both the legitimacy and the creativity of political power. If this appears close to Schiller's emphasis on the mediating space of aesthetic semblance, Ankersmit distances himself from the German tradition through his emphasis on the *brokenness* of the political domain, that is, in his terms the *aesthetic* as opposed to the *mimetic* theory of representation: "Beyond the boundaries [of representative democracy] lies the domain of mimetic representation where state and society become inseparable and where political power is inevitably illegitimate."¹⁶

Both the Jacobin mimetic and Schiller's aesthetic conception of politics rest, as we have seen, on idealized images of the ancient world. Confronted by the political failure of the French Revolution, the German thinkers transformed Rousseau's civil religion into an aesthetic religion and Rousseau's myth of the Fall into a dialectical philosophy of history, which made the unique fusion of art, religion, and politics in the Greek city-states (and a fortiori the representation of this fusion before the assembled citizens in Athenian tragedy) the model for a new religion, conceived in the light of the revolutionary dawn of a new age as the utopian completion of the Enlightenment. These utopian hopes, shared by Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling, led the young Hegel to reject (like Rousseau) Christianity and (like Schiller) the mechanical state. Hegel rejects Christianity as a private religion incapable of serving the public life of the state and of overcoming the split between the sacred and the secular. The modern mechanical state is rejected because it is devoid of the idea of freedom and hence inimical to the free and equal development of human powers. Both critiques testify to the negative historical consequences of the extinction of the political and moral autonomy of the citizen in the city republic that Hegel saw as the precondition of the spread of Christianity in the ancient world. A new religion, modeled on the ancient polis religion, points beyond Christianity and beyond the existing state. Schiller's *Aesthetic Education*, hailed by Hegel as a masterpiece in a letter to Schelling in April 1796, focused his attention on the importance of the aesthetic appeal to the imagination in Greek religion that made its mythical character superior to a historical religion such as Christianity, which

16. F. R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics: Political Philosophy beyond Fact and Value* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 18, 51. See also his less persuasive distancing of his position from that of Claude Lefort, 154–55.

was necessarily hostile, above all in its reformed Protestant form, to myth.¹⁷ All these reflections on the importance of popular religion to the aesthetic education of the people come together in the short fragment known as “The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism” (1796–97).

The fragment envisages a recasting of all metaphysics into an ethics, made up of a complete system of ideas, embracing the self, nature, the state, God, and immortality. This system of ideas is to find its unity in the idea of beauty: “I am convinced that the highest act of reason, which, in that it comprises all ideas, is an aesthetic act, and that *truth and goodness* are united like sisters *only in beauty*.”¹⁸ Only in this synthesizing aesthetic guise can the ideas of reason become a popular religion, capable of satisfying reason and the senses, that is, of combining “monotheism of reason and the heart with polytheism of the imagination and art,” and thus of educating in equal measure the philosopher and the people, the enlightened and the unenlightened. The fragment conceives this popular religion in the light of a wholly original idea: “We must have a new mythology; this mythology must, however, stand in the service of ideas, it must become a mythology of *reason*”:

Mythology must become philosophical, and the people reasonable, and philosophy must become mythological in order to make philosophy sensuous. Then external unity will reign among us. Never again the contemptuous glance, never the blind trembling of the people before its wise men and priests. Only then does *equal* development of *all* powers await us, of the individual as well as of all individuals. No power will be suppressed any longer, then general freedom and equality of spirits will reign—A higher spirit sent from heaven must establish this religion among us, it will be the last work of mankind.¹⁹

It is impossible not to see this famous programme as a commentary on the efforts of the French revolutionaries to establish a new religion. If Robespierre’s Supreme Being personified Kant’s postulates of practical reason (God, immortality, freedom), its cold allegory lacked the poetic dimensions of a new mythology of nature. This would be the mission of Hölderlin, whose tragic hero Empedokles is presented precisely as this higher spirit sent from heaven to establish the new religion of man and nature. But before we turn to Hölderlin’s fusion of poetry and philosophy, we need to consider Schelling’s conception of this fusion from the side of philosophy. Poet and philosopher concur, however, in seeing the “last work of mankind” as a total work of art.

17. H. S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development towards the Sunlight, 1770–1801* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Robert Gascoigne, *Religion, Rationality, and Community: Sacred and Secular in the Thought of Hegel and His Critics* (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1985).

18. Ernst Behler, ed., *Philosophy of German Idealism* (New York: Continuum, 1987), 161–63 (translation slightly modified).

19. *Ibid.*

In his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) and *Philosophy of Art* (1802–5) Friedrich Schelling consecrates the reunion of art and philosophy, mythology and reason. In the *System* the work of art is declared the true and eternal organon of philosophy: “Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart. The view of nature which the philosopher frames artificially, is for art the original one.”²⁰ Schelling’s metaphor of the flame recalls the beatific vision of the living radiance of divine love at the end of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*:

Substance and accidents, and their modes, became
As if together fused, all in such wise
That what I speak of is one simple flame.
Verily I think I saw with mine own eyes
The form that knits the whole world, since I taste,
In telling of it, more abounding bliss.²¹

“The form that knits the whole world” can only be realized, as *The Divine Comedy* exemplifies and Schelling recognizes, through the union of philosophy’s absolute content with the symbolism of mythology:

But now if it is art alone which can succeed in objectifying with universal validity what the philosopher is able to present in a merely subjective fashion, there is one more conclusion to be drawn. Philosophy was born and nourished by poetry in the infancy of knowledge, and with it all those sciences it has guided toward perfection; we may thus expect them, on completion, to flow back like so many individual streams into the universal ocean of poetry from which they took their source. Nor is it in general difficult to say what the medium of this return of science to poetry will be, for in mythology such a medium exists, before the occurrence of a breach seemingly beyond repair.²²

It will be the task of Schelling’s *Philosophy of Art* to deduce from the union of reason and mythology the total work of art to come. Odo Marquard is therefore correct in regarding Schelling’s identification of philosophical system and work of art as the moment of the birth of the idea of the total work of art.²³

20. Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), 231.

21. Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Laurence Binyon, canto XXXIII, lines 88–93, in *The Portable Dante* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 592.

22. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 32–33.

23. Odo Marquard, “Gesamtkunstwerk und Identitätssystem: Überlegungen im Anschluß an Hegels Schellingkritik,” in *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk: Europäische Utopien seit 1800*, ed. Harald Szeemann (Aarau: Sauerländer, 1983), 40–49.

In *Philosophy of Art* Schelling sets out to demonstrate that philosophy and art have the same content—the absolute, such that “philosophy of art is knowledge of the whole in the form or potency of art.” Since art’s knowledge of the whole expresses itself in a “polytheism of the imagination,” the necessary condition and original material of art is given by mythology: in the case of the Greeks as a mythology of nature; in the case of Christianity as a mythology of history. Schelling’s new mythology is to be a synthesis of the ancients and moderns, of nature and history, that will complete and consummate the modern age by bringing the succession of time to a conclusion in a poem of unity, the epic of a new Homer. Here the attractions of symmetry dictate that the once and future Homer epitomize the beginning and the end of history (reinforced by an etymology that reads *homeros* as meaning the “unifier”). More important for our purpose is Schelling’s comparison of ancient drama and modern opera at the end of *Philosophy of Art*:

Let me just observe that the most perfect combination of all the arts, the union of poetry and music through song, of poetry and painting through dance, and they in turn synthesized, provides the most composed theatrical phenomenon such as the ancient drama was, of which there remains for us only a caricature, the opera, which in a higher and nobler style, as regards poetry and the other competing arts, would be most likely to lead us back to the performance of the old drama with music and song.²⁴

As opposed to its operatic caricature, Schelling sees the modern world as possessing one example of the unified work of art, to be found in the *church* not the *theatre*, since the church service is the only public ceremony left to us, and the integral work of art demands a public life involving the participation of the whole people. He is therefore compelled to leave unanswered the question that he had already posed in *The System of Transcendental Idealism*: “But how a new mythology (which cannot be the invention of an individual poet but only of a new generation that represents things as if it were a single poet) can itself arise, is a problem for whose solution we must look to the future destiny of the world and the further course of history alone.”²⁵

Aesthetic Revolution: Hölderlin

Friedrich Hölderlin stands in a direct line of descent from Rousseau and Schiller. From Rousseau, the epitome of modern “sentimental” consciousness, he takes the epochal challenge of reconciling nature and culture; from Schiller, the challenge of aesthetic education. His novel in letter form, *Hyperion*, was conceived as

24. Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, ed. and trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 280.

25. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 33.

a continuation of Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education*. Hölderlin's own situation as a tutor in the Gontard family in Frankfurt and his love for Susette Gontard while writing the final version of *Hyperion* between 1796 and 1798 directly mirrored that of Rousseau's tutor in *La nouvelle Héloïse*. In Hölderlin's epistolary novel, set against the background of the Greek uprising in 1770 against Ottoman rule, the hero recounts the stages of his growth, which follows the path laid out in Rousseau's *Émile*: education, friendship, and love. Hyperion's friendship with Alabanda, the revolutionary, and his love for Diotima, his muse, exemplify the opposed paths to the healing of the split between man and nature. The failure of the Greek revolt, which degenerated into barbarous violence, is intended as a critique of French revolutionary violence and thus also of the revolutionary enthusiasm that had led Hölderlin to believe that action offered the shortest way to the realization of his dreams. Hyperion must learn to overcome not only the failure of action but also the death of Diotima before he can become the poet and teacher of his people. The path from Alabanda to Diotima, from revolution to aesthetic education, is presented as the path from Sparta to Athens. Diotima's love, inspired by the harmony of divinely beautiful nature and its divine human image in ancient Athens, reveals to him his poetic calling. In the letter on Athens at the end of part 1 Hyperion presents the art religion of the Greeks as the model for a new mythology:

The first child of divine Beauty is art. Thus it was among the Athenians. Beauty's second daughter is religion. Religion is love of Beauty. The wise man loves Beauty herself, eternal, all-embracing Beauty; the people love her children, the gods, who appear to them in multifarious forms. So it was, too, among the Athenians. And without such a love of Beauty, without such a religion, every state is a dry skeleton without life and spirit, all thought and action is a tree without a top, a column whose crown has been cut off. . . . This beauty of mind and spirit in the Athenians inevitably produced the indispensable sense of freedom.²⁶

The letter ends with a prophecy amid the ruins of Athens of a coming reunion of humanity and nature in one all-embracing divinity. But how is the poet's word to resonate among his contemporaries? The prophetic vision of a rebirth of human nature is taken back by the letter on Germany, the most unnatural of societies, at the end of part 2, which resumes Rousseau's and Schiller's critique of modern civilization. The novel ends with a total separation of poetic ideal and prosaic reality. Like Rousseau, Hyperion, the "hermit in Greece," chooses the path into solitude and communion with nature.

In Rousseau, Hölderlin saw a modern demigod, who expressed the essence of the age in a single consciousness. Hölderlin's demigods (Dionysus, Hercules, Christ)

26. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, ed. Eric L. Santner (New York: Continuum, 1990), 64, 65.

appear at *epochal turning points*, the French Revolution in the case of Rousseau and Hölderlin's other demigod, Napoleon.²⁷ Such an epochal turning point, concentrated in the moment of revolutionary change, is the theme of Hölderlin's unfinished tragedy, *Der Tod des Empedokles* (The Death of Empedocles), the plan for which he drew up in 1797 in the last phase of work on *Hyperion*. The theme is directly tied to the revolutionary hopes that were triggered by the crossing of the Rhine by the French army and the victory at Neuwied in April 1797, which mobilized German reformers and revolutionaries the length of the Rhine from Cologne to southern Germany, encouraged by the establishment of a republic in Switzerland. The Congress at Rastatt (1797–99), called to determine the territorial and political restructuring of the Holy Roman Empire, became the focus for the revolutionaries and reformers. Hölderlin was present at the Congress during November 1798. Through his friend Isaak Sinclair, who was the ambassador of Hessen-Homburg, he came into contact with the leading figures of the Württemberg reform movement. The first of the three versions of *Empedokles* seems to have been written in this period, in the months immediately following Hölderlin's departure from the Gontard household in September 1798. By June 1799 he was working on the second version and by autumn on the third version of the tragedy, accompanied by two important theoretical essays, "Der Grund zu Empedokles" (The Ground for Empedocles) and "Das untergehende Vaterland" (The Declining Fatherland, also known as *Becoming in Dissolution*), which shift attention from the dominant role of Empedocles in the first version to a greater emphasis on the historical constellation of which he is the product, a process of objectivation that reflects the disappointment of German revolutionary hopes in the course of 1799.

We are left with the unfinished tragedy, the testimony of Hölderlin's attempt to marry revolutionary change and a new mythology, for which the historical, half-legendary figure of Empedocles was well suited. He is said to have been an ardent democrat and an accomplished orator and to have refused the kingship of his city.²⁸ Hölderlin's own poetic religion is very close to Empedocles' conception of *physis* made up of the four elements—Fire, Air, Earth, and Water—which constitute the generative energies of nature and the cosmic cycle, governed by the motive forces of Love and Strife. The role of the poet as teacher, announced in *Hyperion* and projected into the figure of Empedocles, poetic thinker and political reformer, acquires its historical actuality in the context of the French Revolution and the expectation of political change in Germany. We may say that the prospect of a Swabian republic

27. See Jürgen Link, "'Trauernder Halbgott, den ich meine!'" Hölderlin and Rousseau," *Lili: Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 63 (1986): 86–114. For the historical-political background, see Pierre Bertaux, *Hölderlin und die Französische Revolution* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969).

28. G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 321.

is the condition of possibility of Hölderlin's tragedy. Just as the new mythology must create the union of philosophers and the people, so the drama of the polis needs the public space of performance, the living voice of the stage. The unfinished tragedy reflects the absent people and the isolation of the higher spirit sent from heaven to establish the new religion, and repeats the conundrum posed by Schiller: how is the solitary poet to effect the total revolution of man's whole way of feeling, which is the play's goal and presupposition? The festival drama for the Swabian republic becomes a festival play in a second sense, which is close to Marc Richir's interpretation of the utopian moment of the Revolution as a dreamlike moment outside the space and time of history.

The new religion of Hölderlin's Empedokles is that proclaimed by "The Oldest Systematic Program": "Never again . . . the blind trembling of the people before its wise men and priests. Only then does *equal* development of *all* human powers await us, of the individual as well as individuals. No power will be suppressed any longer, then general freedom and equality of spirits will reign." The ruler Kritias and the priest Hermokrates lament the subversive oratory of Empedokles that has intoxicated the people and swept away all customs and restraints of law: "Every day has become a wild celebration / One festival for all and the gods' / Modest festive days have been merged into one' (A 191–99).²⁹ Empedokles has not succeeded, however, in setting the people free. As Kritias observes, the people have now become wholly dependent on their new god and ruler. It is therefore not difficult for the high priest to reassert his hold over the easily swayed citizens and bring them to vote for Empedokles' banishment. Empedokles accepts his banishment because he is paralyzed by his own guilt. The very source of his inspired powers, his sense of oneness with nature, has become the source of his hubris. In proclaiming himself a god he has become no more than the mirror of the people's craving for a new god and ruler. Thus when the citizens, regretting their hasty decision, come to his solitary retreat on Mount Etna to offer him the crown, he is finally capable of formulating his new gospel. Refusing the crown, he offers the people in its stead his testament of death and rebirth. Dare to forget the legacy of tradition, law, and custom, the old names of the gods, and raise your newborn eyes to divine nature and recognize the beauty of your own beautiful world, in which each will be like all and a new law shall ratify the communal bond of your new life (A 1497–1530). Then the joyous union of man and the gods, man and nature, will seal the return of Saturn's golden age.

We can perhaps best understand Hölderlin's intentions in the light of this utopian vision of total harmony, anticipated in the solitary voice of the prophet (Rousseau) and the poet in search of an audience that will understand them and translate

29. The line references to the first version (A) are taken from Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 2, ed. Jochen Schmidt (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassikerverlag, 1994).

spirit into deed. Hence the signal importance of Empedokles' words to the citizens. Divinely present nature will speak for him when he is gone:

And never will she
 Abandon you if once she has approached
 For unforgettable is her moment;
 And through all times there works
 The blessed effects of her heavenly fire. (A 1597–1601)

With these words Empedokles withdraws in the name of the unforgettable moment of nature itself. The meaning of this moment in relation to the play and to the French Revolution is the subject of the two theoretical fragments. The first, "The Ground for Empedocles," traces the three stages of the reconciliation of man and nature. The initial stage of strife between the opposing forces is overcome by Empedokles but only apparently. It produces in Empedokles, as we have seen, the grandiose delusion of his own divinity, and in the people a corresponding readiness to worship him. Empedokles must transcend his own individual existence in order to achieve through sacrificial death in the fires of Mount Etna a more comprehensive reconciliation of opposites. Hölderlin's later "Remarks on Antigone" expresses this sublime structure of tragic reconciliation: "The tragic representation has as its premise... that the *infinite* enthusiasm conceives of itself *infinitely*, that is, in consciousness which cancels consciousness, separating itself in a sacred manner, and that the god is present, in the figure of death."³⁰ Empedokles' death seals the new dispensation between man and nature, projected into the vision of a once and future golden age. Shelley, who belongs with Hölderlin to the progeny of Jacobin-democratic romanticism,³¹ shares in his poem *Hellas* (1821) the dream of a "brighter Hellas" to come: "The world's great age begins anew, / the golden years return."

Another Athens shall arise,
 And to remoter time
 Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
 The splendour of its prime;
 And leave, if naught so bright may live,
 All earth can take or Heaven give.
 Saturn and Love their long repose
 Shall burst, more bright and good
 Than all who fell, than One who rose.

30. Friedrich Hölderlin, "Remarks on Antigone," in *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 113.

31. Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," *New German Critique* 32 (Spring–Summer 1984): 77–80.

At the opposite pole to Empedokles and Saturn's golden age stands Jupiter—Hölderlin's other demigod, Napoleon—the master of the world, who subdues and harnesses the extremes rather than reconciling them: "His virtue is the understanding, his goddess necessity. He is destiny itself, only with the exception that the contending forces inside him are tied to a consciousness, to a point of separation (*Scheidepunkt*) which . . . gives them direction."³²

The second and third versions of *Empedokles* rework the play in order to bring out the objective necessity of the hero's death as the condition of his new gospel attaining historical reality. Empedokles appears in the third version as the son of the "master of time," the manifestation of the spirit of historical change and renewal that returns the world to the chaos of creative origin, the moment of divinely present nature, which transforms history into nature and nature into history. Such were for Michelet the unforgettable moments of the French Revolution. Such was for Kant the French Revolution, a phenomenon in human history that "cannot be forgotten because it has uncovered a disposition and a capacity for the better in human nature." This originary, instituting moment, so central to Michelet's and Richir's interpretations of the Revolution, is the focus of the second theoretical essay, "The Declining Fatherland" or "Becoming in Dissolution." Hölderlin argues that in the moment of transition from one form of the world to another, new form the "world of worlds that always is" appears as infinite possibility between end and beginning.³³

Poised between being and nonbeing, the possible becomes real, and reality ideal. Through the dissolution of the old world the underlying inexhaustibility of relations and forces, the world of all worlds, is sensed. The consciousness of revolutionary rupture can take two forms. *Ideal dissolution* lies beyond fear, because end and beginning are certain: the dissolving world unites with the infinite feeling of present life (heavenly fire) to give birth to the new. Ideal dissolution is nevertheless tragic for Empedokles because it signifies the union of the infinite and the finite in death. Hölderlin calls its free imitation in art a "frightful yet divine dream." *Real dissolution*, by contrast, where neither end nor beginning is known, must appear as *nothing*—the nothing that Hegel was to term the "fury of disappearance" in relation to the Jacobin Terror.³⁴

32. Hölderlin, "The Ground For Empedocles," in *Essays and Letters on Theory*, 61. See also Hölderlin's ode "Natur und Kunst oder Saturn und Jupiter" (1800).

33. The parallels with Benjamin's "dialectic at a standstill" are intriguing. He speaks of the dialectical image as the pictorial image of dialectics, the law of dialectics at a standstill. "This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image is therefore a dream image." Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken, 1986), 157.

34. "In the state between being and non-being, however, the possible becomes real everywhere, and the real becomes ideal, and in the free imitation of art this is a frightful yet divine dream." Hölderlin, "Becoming in Dissolution," in *Essays and Letters on Theory*, 97. Frank Ankersmit relates sublime historical experience as the consciousness of historical change to the French Revolution and to Rousseau

In the notion of the moment of infinite possibility between being and nonbeing, Hölderlin comes close to Richir's conception of the sublime in politics, the dream-like experience of death and rebirth, in which the dissolution of all social institutions reveals in the anarchic moment of liberty, equality, and fraternity the sublime community as the symbolic horizon of humanity. It is this image of the sublime community that *Empedokles* seeks to represent. As Gérard Raulet suggests, the play attempts to stabilize the sublime in the beautiful, that is, to hold fast the moment of infinite possibility in a visionary representation of the "impossible community."³⁵ But can the sublime be mediated through the beautiful? As the three unfinished versions show, the impossible community can only be invoked, as in the critical report of Kritias or in the utopian-poetic perspective of Empedokles. The French Revolution turned to festivals as the key to recapturing and preserving the sublime instituting moment of revolutionary enthusiasm. In like manner Hölderlin ties the impossible community to the return of Saturn's golden age, to the Saturnalia as the archetypal expression of the liminal moment of an-archy between the old and the new. In the plan for the completion of the third version the play is to end with Saturn's festival and celebration of the "new world," as a choral fragment indicates.³⁶ The introduction of the chorus signals not only the sublation of the hero's tragic sacrifice in the community but also the dream of transcending the stage in the collective celebration of the new world brought to presence in the festivities. But only a Swabian republic could have given body to this dream of a festival play.

The Destiny of Art: Hegel

Between "The Oldest Systematic Program" and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel reversed his estimation of Greek religion and Christianity and placed the beautiful religion of the Greeks in the historical perspective of the progression of the absolute spirit. Beauty must yield its privilege as the highest act of reason to philosophy. Once Hegel had abandoned his hopes for a new mythology he saw his own philosophical system as the true complement and completion of the French Revolution. In recognizing that modern society in the wake of the Enlightenment and the Revolution is too complex to be conceived in the form of a living work of art, Hegel spelled out the exhaustion of the absolute purpose of art and the end of its historical function in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Art no longer embodies the highest form in which truth realizes itself. What was true for the Greeks—that art was the highest expression of the absolute—is no longer true for

and Hölderlin. Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).

35. Gérard Raulet, "La communauté impossible: Hölderlin, Kleist, Büchner et la malédiction de la politique," *Études germaniques* 45.3 (July–September 1990): 253–71.

36. See the discussion in Ernst Mögel, *Natur als Revolution: Hölderlins Empedokles-Tragödie* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994), 219–33.

us, since art's inherent limit points beyond itself to a higher form of consciousness.³⁷ This stage was reached for us in the Reformation.³⁸ Hegel accepts the iconoclasm of the Reformation without denying his nostalgia for the *art religion* of the Greeks, whose gods were created by poets and artists. Although this beautiful religion can no longer serve as model and inspiration for a mythology of reason, it remains the paradigm of the absolute purpose of art, against which modern postreligious art is to be measured and determined.

Hegel's *Aesthetics* provides the historical-philosophical ratification of the separation of art and religion in modernity, whose outcome is the emergence of aesthetic art (or rather of the arts, no longer hierarchized under the perspective of a higher social-religious purpose). Art now finds its content not in the divine but in human being. Moreover, as a consequence of the loss of the absolute purpose of art, art itself divides into its essential but now completed history and its contemporary manifestations. Art, Hegel asserts, has reached its spiritual destination in the philosophy of art, leaving contemporary art to its own human purpose. This means that the art religion of the past is now consigned to the *museum* as the beautiful appearance or semblance from which the divine spirit has fled. The museum thus signifies, as Quatremère lamented, the transformation of nonaesthetic art into aesthetic art for us. This parting of the ways between art, philosophy, and religion, and between religion and politics, in modernity exemplifies the disenchanting effects of the Enlightenment. Hegel insists, however, on the necessity of the historical process that has turned the living work of art into the museum of art history and made the museum the home of the Muses. It is the work of fate, tragic but inescapable, he writes in the *Phenomenology*:

The statues are now only stones from which the living soul has flown, just as the hymns are words from which belief has gone. The tables of the gods provide no spiritual food and drink, and in his games and festivals man no longer recovers the joyful consciousness of his unity with the divine. The works of the Muse now lack the power of the Spirit, for the Spirit has gained its certainty of itself from the crushing of gods and men. They have become what they are for us now—beautiful fruit already picked from the tree, which a friendly fate has offered us, as a girl might set the fruit before us. It cannot give us the actual life in which they existed, not the tree that bore them, not the earth and the elements which gave them their peculiar character, nor the cycle of the changing seasons that governed the process of their growth. So Fate does not restore their world to us along with the works of antique Art, it gives not the spring and summer of ethical life in which they blossomed and ripened, but only

37. See the section "The Place of Art in Relation to Religion and Philosophy" in the introduction to part I of the *Lectures on Aesthetics*.

38. The Reformation as the historical limit of Christian art: Hegel ignores the Counter-Reformation and the art of the baroque as an expression of the total work of art in the age of absolutism.

the veiled recollection of that actual world. Our active enjoyment of them is therefore not the act of divine worship through which our consciousness might come to its perfect truth and fulfilment; it is an external activity. . . . But, just as the girl who offers us the plucked fruits is more than the Nature which directly provides them . . . because she sums all this up in a higher mode, in the gleam of her self-conscious eye and in the gesture with which she offers them, so, too, the spirit of the Fate that presents us with these works of art is more than the ethical life and the actual world of their nation, for it is only the *inwardizing* in us of the Spirit which in them was still [only] *outwardly* manifested; it is the Spirit of the tragic Fate which gathers all those individual gods and attributes of the [divine] substance into one pantheon, into the Spirit that is conscious of itself as Spirit.³⁹

The museum in Hegel's perspective becomes the means to the aesthetic education of the modern individual, who needs, in order to become cultivated, to appropriate, to make his own, the cultural legacy of the past. The other, public face of this self-conscious historicism appears in the nineteenth-century cultivation of *revivalism*, no longer carried by hopes of a renaissance. Revivalism sought to breathe old life into contemporary Christian art and architecture and made stylistic eclecticism—from Gothic churches and railway stations, Renaissance town halls and hotels, to Greek parliaments and stock exchanges—the characteristic face of nineteenth-century cities. Revivalism we might say is the conservative consequence of cultural secularization. Even though this historicism, all too redolent of the museum, has now acquired as “heritage” a historical patina of its own, revivalism demonstrates a reduction of function to facade, that is, an adherence to forms from which life has departed. It was already denounced in 1834 in a rejection of modern, supposedly sacred music and architecture by the music critic Joseph d’Ortigue (whom we shall encounter in the next chapter):

Also, giving the name sacred to the music of M. Cherubini simply on the basis that it was composed on a sacred text is to carry into art a sort of ridiculous and coarse fiction: it is to fall into an empty linguistic trap of the kind that calls the Madeleine a catholic temple without thinking that it is an imitation of the Pantheon and that this monument, solely for display and for art without a religious character, could be today a profane pantheon, tomorrow a parliamentary chamber, the day after a bazaar, anything you like but a church.⁴⁰

39. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 455–56.

40. Joseph d’Ortigue, review of Cherubini’s “Credo” in *La quotidienne*, 23 March 1834, reprinted in d’Ortigue, *Écrits sur la musique, 1827–1846*, ed. Sylvia L’Ecuyer (Paris: Société Française de Musicologie, 2003), 390. The Madeleine, begun in 1764 as a neoclassical church, was reconstructed according to Napoleon’s wish that it become a Temple of Glory. After 1815 it was variously projected as an opera house, a museum, a theatre, an assembly room, and a bank before it was completed and opened as a church in 1837.

We must therefore distinguish between this kind of revivalism (for all its earnest and eloquent champions from the Nazarenes to the Pre-Raphaelites and from Pugin and Ruskin to Viollet-le Duc) and a sense of rebirth that was tied to the revolutionary-romantic idea of a refoundation and regeneration of society, espoused by Wagner and Nietzsche.

Between the museum and the avant-garde lies the development of aesthetic art as such, in which art becomes its own end. To aesthetic art corresponds the aesthetic theory of the moderns, which embraced and affirmed the progress of art—as an autonomous sphere with its own internal logic and values—and tied art in quest of its own aesthetic absolute to a progressive dynamic of self-rationalization and self-purification. In the next chapter we explore the impossible dreams of the absolute and the total work of art and examine the close connections between the theory of the avant-garde and the artwork of the future between 1830 and 1848.

PROPHETS AND PRECURSORS: PARIS 1830–1848

Organic and Critical Epochs: Saint-Simon

If we take Wagner's manifestos *Art and Revolution* and *The Artwork of the Future*, inspired by the 1848 revolutions, as summing up the will to social and aesthetic regeneration of the whole period from the French Revolution to the year of European revolutions, it is important to add that his role as revolutionary prophet was anticipated and prepared by the social doctrines of the French age of romanticism.¹ Between 1830 and 1848 writers and artists built on the victory of the romantic generation to establish themselves as a social force in their own right. We observe on the one hand the formation of a bohemian counterculture to the bourgeois *juste milieu*, and on the other hand the anointing of artists as an avant-garde of social change and spiritual renewal, launched by the Saint-Simonians. Benjamin Constant's comparison between the liberty of the ancients and the moderns seems designed to respond to Saint-Simon's philosophy of history. Constant argued that by taking the ancient polis as his sole model for the regeneration of society, Rousseau's "sublime genius, animated by the purest love of liberty," had paved the way for the tyranny of the French Revolution. To this privileging of collective authority and

1. In the following I draw on the masterly survey of Paul Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes: Doctrines de l'âge romantique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977).

power Constant opposed the modern idea of liberty, rooted in the rights of the individual and guaranteed by political liberty.² Constant's comparison brings out the split between totalizing and pluralizing conceptions that lay behind the contending interpretations of postrevolutionary society. At stake was the legacy of the Enlightenment and of the Revolution. The consolidation of bourgeois society in the wake of the July revolution had reinforced widespread perceptions of a moral vacuum left by the decay of established religion and the triumph of the commercial spirit. Was contemporary society defined by the critical spirit of analysis and justified by the ideal of liberty, or was it the case, as romantics, neo-Catholics, and scientific utopians alike maintained, that the future of society could be assured only by a shared faith that would restore social cohesion? The republican historians Michelet and Edgar Quinet regarded the Enlightenment as initiating the last religious stage of humanity's progress, in which democracy would accomplish the New Testament and realize the spirit of Christianity.³ The neo-Catholic Pierre-Simon Ballanche, by contrast, registered the imminent demise of the Enlightenment: "The critical force of the eighteenth century is reaching its end; the nineteenth century is on the point of grasping the organizing force." And yet Ballanche seems to sum up the faith of the romantic age across the spectrum of ideological positions when he wrote that mankind "is marching towards the distant horizon, unknown sanctuary of an unknown synthesis, the synthesis that will govern art, poetry, science, the law."⁴ Faith in the future, in the religion of humanity, is the self-authorizing and self-consecrating reference point of all positions. It is the common faith of the new intellectual class, the new "spiritual corporation," called to found and guide the new society. And here, as Paul Bénichou stresses, "it is not by chance that all the doctrines accord a specially high function to the Poet and Artist; they wish to add to their credit the halo of the Beautiful; Poetry and Art are the only heaven of the new world, the sole mystical crown of the spirit in the beginning century." And, Bénichou adds, all such visions of synthesis could only be conceived *aesthetically*: "Every enterprise aiming to found spiritual values appropriate to the nineteenth century arrived here, whatever different routes they took."⁵

2. "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns," in *Benjamin Constant, Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Brancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Fustel de Coulanges in the introduction to *The Ancient City* (1864) warns against the dangers of the imitation of the ancients: "Having imperfectly observed the institutions of the ancient city, men have dreamed of reviving them among us. They have deceived themselves about the liberty of the ancients, and on this very account liberty among the moderns has been put at peril. The last eighty years have clearly shown that one of the great difficulties which impede the march of modern society is the habit which it has of always keeping Greek and Roman antiquity before its eyes." Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, n.d.), 11.

3. Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes*, 474–75.

4. Quoted in Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes*, 332.

5. Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes*, 11–12, 260.

Art, science, and politics could scarcely aspire to their role as the inheritors of religion without the support of philosophies of history, themselves seeking to supersede the Christian theology of history with their own temporal dramas of salvation, whose site is history—or rather the History composed of the grand narratives of progress or return in relation to a deficient present. Saint-Simon's famous distinction between organic and critical epochs captured both the historicist consciousness of the time and the longing for a new synthesis.⁶ His philosophy of history united romantic and enlightenment, religious and scientific perspectives by combining a cyclic pattern—the alternation of organic and critical epochs—with an overall progressive telos, which gives the present its high meaning and purpose. A new organic age is being born from the final crisis of European feudalism in the French Revolution,⁷ preceded by the spread of the ideas of the Enlightenment and the triumph of Newton's mechanical theory of the universe. The new postfeudal, industrial epoch will find expression in a civil religion of love, the new Christianity, which much concerned Saint-Simon in his final years. Convinced that religion cannot disappear, that it can only transform itself, Saint-Simon looked to artists to promote the sentiments of love and sympathy that are to form the universal bond of industrial society and realize the integration of private interests into the general interest of society as a whole. Artists are thus placed by Saint-Simon at the head of an "administrative elite trinity consisting of artists, scientists and industrialists-artisans. In so doing, he gave rise to the conceptions both of an artistic avant-garde and of a social vanguard—conceptions with enormous importance for the history of art and social radicalism alike."⁸ For the Saint-Simonians, humanity is a great collective being whose organs are the arts, the sciences, and industry.⁹

In *Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles*, published in 1825 in the last year of Saint-Simon's life, there is a dialogue between an artist and a scientist postulating an organic harmony between the arts and the sciences that will give back to the arts what they now lack, the energizing inspiration of a "common drive and a general idea": "What a beautiful destiny for the arts, that of exercising in society a

6. See Georg Iggers, ed. and trans., *The Doctrine of Saint-Simon: An Exposition, First Year, 1828–29* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958); and the chapter "Epochs Organic and Critical," in Frank E. Manuel, *The New World of Henri Saint-Simon* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956).

7. Friedrich Schlegel likewise anticipates at the turn of the century a new organic age of romantic universal synthesis that will be born of the present chemical age of revolution. Fragment 426, *Athenäum* 1.2 (Leipzig: Reclam, 1984), 146.

8. Donald D. Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts: Western Europe* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 120.

9. C. Bouglé and Elie Halévy, eds., *Doctrine de Saint-Simon: Exposition Première Année 1829* (Paris: Rivière, 1924), 31. Claude Lefort stresses the contrary position of Tocqueville on society, noting that he exposes Saint-Simon's fiction of society as a collective individual—"a *grand être* that could be described, delineated, its *foundation* discerned, and its *aim* determined"—and observing further: "He shows that this fiction is inseparable from the image of omnipotent power. No matter that in the utopia this power is supposed to exist without coercion, regards itself as science, calls itself spiritual, and that it is founded on the consent of its subjects—it is still essentially despotic." Claude Lefort, "Reversibility," *Telos* 63 (Spring 1985): 114.

positive power, a true priestly function, and of marching forcefully in the van of all intellectual faculties, in the epoch of their greatest development! This is the duty of artists, this is their mission.”¹⁰ This vision of an artistic avant-garde was the work not of the master but of one of his new disciples, the writer Léon Halévy, brother of the better-known composer Fromental Halévy. This was in fact not the last essay of Saint-Simon, but the first of the Saint-Simonians.¹¹ It crystallized a whole complex of ideas concerning social actors and forces, set in train by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution:

- i. Artists form part of a wider social vanguard, through which art recovers its social function.
- ii. This social function is predicated on a new priesthood of artists and intellectuals.
- iii. The task of this new priesthood is to articulate and express holistic visions of social change, underpinned and legitimized through speculative philosophies of history. “The poet is the divine singer, placed at the head of society to serve man as interpreter, to give him laws, to reveal to him the joys of the future, to sustain and stimulate his onward march.”¹²

In Saint-Simon’s historical construction the critical epoch of transition and the “critical” role of the avant-garde belong together. The “critical” link between art and religion is spelled out in *The Doctrine of Saint-Simon*: “In organic epochs, the highest manifestation of *sentiments* carries the name of *cult* . . . ; in critical epochs it takes that of *fine arts*, an expression which contains the same idea of critique in relation to that of cult, as the term philosophy does in relation to that of religion.”¹³ In organic eras, society is unified by a single set of values, and religion constitutes the synthesis of all human activity, whereas critical ages such as the Roman Empire and Europe since the Reformation, born from the destruction of the preceding organic era, are unstable and torn by conflict. The critical relation of art to religion defines the place and function of art in modern society: its task is to overcome individualism and egoism, but to do this “the true artist needs a chorus which will repeat his songs and be receptive to his soul when it pours out.”¹⁴ Art’s intermediary spiritual authority, born of the decadence of religion, points beyond itself—art’s task is to prepare for its own sublation in a coming organic society, and the transformation of the critical doctrine of humanity’s progress into a new and final religion. No doubt the promise of a chorus, of a community and communal activity, drew artists

10. Quoted in Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts*, 122.

11. Ralph Locke, *Music, Musicians, and the Saint-Simonians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 37.

12. Iggers, *Doctrine of Saint-Simon*, Session 1, 18.

13. *Ibid.*, Session 3, 55–56.

14. *Ibid.*, Session 1, 18, 20.

and especially musicians to the Saint-Simonians' vision of a new society. Fromental Halévy, Liszt, Mendelssohn, and Berlioz were all attracted, but only one composer associated himself closely with the Ménilmontant community, Félicien David.¹⁵

There is thus from the beginning a paradox built into the very idea of the vanguard role of art, which runs through the whole period of European modernism. Whether the goal of the avant-garde is conceived as the reunion of art and religion or of art and politics or of art and life, art attains self-realization through its (self-sacrificial) transformation into faith or action. Perhaps the liberals were the only group to really recognize the right of artists to autonomy. Conversely, those who had the highest expectations of the social function of art tended to decry the cultivation of "art for art's sake" as a betrayal of art's spiritual power. The observation of the Saint-Simonian Pierre Leroux in 1831 is particularly telling: "Woe betide the artist, who, seeing his undecided age hovering between the past and the future, without destiny, tears himself apart in the same way, and finishes by having no other social religion than the cult of art, the religion of art!"¹⁶ The idea of the avant-garde thus carried with it the promise of the reintegration of art and the artist into a larger totality that was the very antithesis of the Hegelian destiny of art. But what did this synthesis of art and the religion of man and society signify? Did it mean the regeneration or the annexation of art? The artists themselves, as opposed to doctrinaires, were less attracted to collaboration. However tempting the prospect of reintegration into a greater social whole, the romantic generation evidently sensed the dangers of co-optation in the service of the religion of the future, which claimed total domination over the temporal realm. As *The Doctrine of Saint-Simon* stated, the religion of the future will be greater and more powerful than all those of the past; it will be the synthesis of all conceptions of mankind and of all modes of being: "Not only will it dominate the political order, but the political will be totally a religious institution."¹⁷ It is hardly surprising that Georg Iggers and Bénichou conclude that Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte, founder of positivism and the science of sociology, surrendered to the logic of their historical predictions and to the "totalitarian epistemology" of their respective systems, in proclaiming themselves messiahs and the true inheritors of the Enlightenment.¹⁸ The Saint-Simonians could not decide whether the vanguard artist was prophet and leader or valuable auxiliary. Comte is similarly ambivalent: the role he allots to aesthetic genius in the

15. Locke, *Music, Musicians*, chap. 6. Conrad L. Donakowski, "No Man Is an Island: The Liturgical Music of Utopian Socialism," in *A Muse for the Masses: Ritual and Music in the Age of Democratic Revolution, 1770–1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 173–87.

16. Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes*, 341.

17. See Iggers, *Doctrine of Saint-Simon*, Session 13, 203.

18. Georg Iggers, *The Cult of Authority: The Political Philosophy of the Saint-Simonians, a Chapter in the Intellectual History of Totalitarianism* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1958); Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes*, 247.

final cult of the positivist church presupposes the extirpation of poetic pride and a complete self-reformation of the artist:

Science cannot sufficiently determine the nature and the destiny of the new Supreme-Being [Comte's hypostasis of humanity] to satisfy the needs of a cult, whose object must be clearly conceived if it is to be loved without effort and served with ardor. It is the task of aesthetic genius to fill in this respect the inevitable gaps left by scientific genius.... Thus the fundamental synthesis that will inaugurate the final cult belongs more to art than to science, which can only furnish it with an indispensable basis.¹⁹

The form of "the final cult" exercised the imaginations of the scientific utopians. In his *New Christianity* (1825) Saint-Simon envisaged the combination of all the resources of the fine arts. The preacher is to arouse both fear and trembling, and hope; poets will provide poems to be recited by the congregation; musicians will reinforce the poets' words by penetrating to the depths of the soul; painters and sculptors will beautify the temple; architects will provide the ideal setting for the cult's festivals of hope and of remembrance, the latter intended to celebrate the progress of the present in relation to the past. With his emphasis on the central role of festivals, Saint-Simon's religion of industrial society can be seen as a modernizing continuation of Robespierre's civil religion. Appropriately, Rouget de Lisle, the composer of "The Marseillaise," composed the "Premier Chant des Industriels" for Saint-Simon in 1821.²⁰ In his *Letters to a Citizen of Geneva* (1802) Saint-Simon had already proposed building a temple to Newton, symbolizing the replacement of Christianity by the new religion of science, an idea clearly inspired by Étienne-Louis Boullée's plan for a cenotaph for Newton (Boullée's drawings provide a splendid example of the sublime in architecture). The germ of the idea of the avant-garde is already evident in Saint-Simon's proposal that twenty-one of the foremost scientists and artists should collaborate in the design and construction of the temple, intended to serve as a mausoleum to Newton's services to humanity and as the setting for "majestic and brilliant spectacles." Adolphe Garnier, writing in the Saint-Simonian journal *Le producteur* in 1825 and 1826, tied the renewal of the arts to a new faith and anticipated in similar fashion grandiose festivals, comparable to those of the Jewish Passover, the Olympic Games, and the Christian church, in a reconstructed society.²¹ In his brochure *Aux artistes* (1831) Émile Barrault declares, with due acknowledgment to Rousseau, that the art of the coming organic age will be the festival.²² In a bow to Plato and Rousseau, Comte banishes theatre from his ideal

19. Auguste Comte, *Discours sur l'ensemble du positivisme* (Paris, 1848), 333–34, quoted in Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes*, 315–16.

20. Locke, *Music, Musicians*, 33.

21. Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes*, 64.

22. Locke, *Music, Musicians*, 56.

state: "It is for Positivism finally to suppress the theatre, as an institution at once irrational and immoral; and it will do so by reorganizing the common education, and by founding, by sociolatriy, a system of festivals calculated to bring unprofitable satisfactions into contempt."²³

Musical Palingenesis: Mazzini and Balzac

Both Joseph d'Ortigue's "Palingénésie musicale" (1833) and Guiseppe Mazzini's "Filosofia della musica" (1836) present musical variations on Saint-Simon's alternation of critical and organic epochs and on the triadic pattern of history—paradise, paradise lost, and paradise regained—so beloved of the romantics. D'Ortigue (1802–66), a member of the neo-Catholic movement and follower of Félicité Robert de Lamennais, took the idea of palingenesis from Ballanche. A writer on music, d'Ortigue expounded the idea of an organic connection between art and the social structure. He replaced Saint-Simon's conceptual pair by the contrast between harmonic epochs of coincidence, in which the unity of the arts is attained, and epochs of separation, in which the consciousness of this unity disappears. In an age of separation like the present, d'Ortigue argues, the artist has a special role to play. The regeneration of music through the reunion of the arts will point the way to a coming restoration of belief. The situation of contemporary art and its synthesizing task is explained and justified through recourse to a triadic schema of history and its three distinct epochs:

In the first, belief dominates, considered as supreme law; in the second, dogma retreats before the shock of various social influences in revolt against it; finally, in the third, the individual, vainly seeking for common beliefs, a social bond, gathers as it were all these existing or dispersed forces in order to concentrate them in himself, and rules alone until the time when beliefs of themselves again take the place they should occupy, and return to the rank that belongs to them in the universal balance.²⁴

In terms of musical history, the first epoch (Catholicism) comprises *church music* up to Palestrina, the second epoch (Reformation) *secular opera* from Monteverdi to Rossini, and the third epoch (regeneration) announces itself in German *instrumental music* from Haydn to Beethoven. Instrumental music unites the sacred polyphony of the first epoch and the profane monody of the second in the fire of individual creation:

In the Catholic centuries, all music is religious, even that composed on profane subjects. In the centuries of skepticism, all music is profane, even that composed on sacred

23. Auguste Comte, *Système de politique positive* (Paris, 1830–42), 4: 441, quoted in Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 323.

24. Joseph d'Ortigue, "Catholicisme, réforme, régénération," quoted in Matthias Brzoska, *Die Idee des Gesamtkunstwerks in der Musik-Novellistik der Juli-Monarchie* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1985), 156.

subjects. And following this palingenetic march we observe in Germany instrumental music taking possession of dramatic music and reuniting in Beethoven these two inspirations with individual inspiration in order to form finally a great and complete system that will be the work of regeneration to come.²⁵

Six years after Beethoven's death d'Ortigue has no doubt as to the composer's significance. He declares that Beethoven unites in one person poet, historian, and prophet: the poet, who has realized artistic freedom; the historian, who has absorbed and united the religious and secular inspirations of the past; and the prophet, whose music amounts to a religious revelation. Even more, the passion of this lonely genius, who draws his spiritual profundity from the depths of his isolation, partakes of the Passion of Christ: his string quartets unfold the work of sacrifice and redemption.²⁶ Nevertheless, Beethoven is only the prophet of the regeneration to come, the total work of art that will be born from a synthesis of opera and instrumental music. The fusion of the vocal system of Rossini and of the instrumental system as developed by Beethoven will give rise to a great lyrical-dramatic system—a direct anticipation of Wagner's vision of the sublation of Rossini's "absolute melody" and of Beethoven's "absolute music" in the artwork of the future.²⁷ D'Ortigue believes, however, that it will take a century before the synthesis to come surpasses Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (Wagner's point of departure). For the present, d'Ortigue hails Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera *Robert le diable* (1831) for its marriage of German instrumental music and Italian song.²⁸

Mazzini concurs with d'Ortigue's recognition of the revolution effected by Meyerbeer's "musical drama." In a note added in 1867 to his "Filosofia della musica," published in *L'Italiano* in Paris in 1836, Mazzini confirms his earlier estimation of Meyerbeer by dubbing him "the precursor spirit to the High Priest of the music of

25. Joseph d'Ortigue, "Palingénésie musicale," *L'artiste*, 8 and 15 December 1833, quoted in Brzoska, *Die Idee des Gesamtkunstwerks*, 156. This two-part article, influenced by Pierre-Simon Ballanche's *Palingénésie sociale* (Paris, 1829), also appeared in *La France catholique*, November 1833. Unfortunately it is not reprinted in Joseph d'Ortigue, *Écrits sur la musique, 1827–1846*, ed. Sylvia L'Ecuyer (Paris: Société Française de Musicologie, 2003), which includes a survey of the life and writings of d'Ortigue, pp. 11–207.

26. The artist as messiah: this religion of art is tied to a *critical* construction of contemporary history in which the work of art acquires a prophetic quality. Cf. a century later Adorno's essay "Schönberg or Progress" (1939), in which Schönberg's musical sacrifice is compared to that of Christ: "The shocks of incomprehension, emitted by artistic technique in the age of its meaninglessness, undergo a sudden change. They illuminate the meaningless world. Modern music sacrifices itself to this effort. It has taken upon itself all the darkness and guilt of the world." Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 133.

27. See Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

28. See d'Ortigue's essay on Meyerbeer in *Revue de Paris*, 4 December 1831, reprinted in *Écrits sur la musique*, 249–58.

the future.”²⁹ That Meyerbeer has not been replaced in 1867 by Verdi or by Wagner is strange. Clearly Mazzini remains faithful to his original judgment that he and his generation are “destined only to foresee but never to contemplate the regeneration of Art and Genius” (49). For all his belief in the progress of humanity, Mazzini regards his age as an age of transition “between a synthesis consumed, and a synthesis yet to be evolved” (3).³⁰ Like Saint-Simon or d’Ortigue, he posits a necessary correlation between the arts and society. The present critical epoch is characterized above all by the lack of religious faith. Unlike the Greeks, we have no “living religion”; unlike them, we have lost the “instinct for unity, which is the secret of genius, the soul of all great things” (14). And yet the “human intellect thirsts for unity in all things” (4). Mazzini is thus impelled to look beyond romanticism, which he characterizes as essentially a “theory of transition,” to a more comprehensive vision of the once and future union of art and religion: “What! Shall an entire synthesis, a whole epoch, a Religion be sculptured in stone; shall architecture thus sum up the ruling thought of eighteen hundred centuries in a cathedral, and music be unequal to the task?”

Mazzini’s “Philosophy of Music” is directed to answering this question. However, he can only answer this question by repeating the displacement of religion by art (as with d’Ortigue) and of politics by art (as with Schiller)—that is to say, by reversing the organic bond between art and society. As Mazzini knows, the musical synthesis to come will not be the crowning expression of a new organic epoch but only its anticipation and preparation. The high priest of the music of the future will be himself a precursor, and Mazzini his prophet. Aesthetic illusion must satisfy the thirst for unity in the wilderness. Is this a utopia? Mazzini asks. No, a genius comparable to Dante will arise: “The ways of genius are hidden, like the ways of Deity, by whom it is inspired. But criticism is bound to foretell his coming” (35). Mazzini’s philosophy of music is thus very consciously the product of a critical epoch. It echoes Hegel in its assertion that the conception that formerly gave music life is exhausted, and it is a variation on Schelling in declaring music to be the organon of philosophy: “the religion of an entire world of which Poetry is only the highest philosophy” (17). Mazzini transposes Saint-Simon’s contrasting epochs into the two primary elements of history: Man and Humanity, the individual idea and the social idea, whose slowly converging strife determines the subject matter of history and defines the poles between which thought and art oscillate. The two schools of thought, founded on analysis and synthesis respectively, have consumed

29. Giuseppe Mazzini, “The Philosophy of Music,” in *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini* (London: Smith, Elder, 1891), 4: 54. Parenthetical page references in the text refer to this translation. See also Giuseppe Mazzini, *Giuseppe Mazzini’s “Philosophy of Music”* (1836), ed. Franco Sciannameo (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellon, 2004).

30. Gaetano Salvemini, *Mazzini* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), 85, characterizes the religious, political, and social theories of Mazzini as a utopian theocratic system, made up of a fusion of Dante’s *De monarchia*, Rousseau’s *Social Contract*, and the doctrine of Saint-Simon.

their energies in contestation, the one sinking of necessity into materialism, the other soaring of necessity into mysticism (20). In music these two schools find their counterparts in melody and harmony: "The first [melody] represents the individual idea; the second [harmony] the social idea; and in the perfect union of these two fundamental terms of all Music, and the consecration of this union to a sublime intent, a holy mission, lies the true secret of the art, and the conception of that *European* school of Music which—consciously or unconsciously—we all invoke" (21). The European school will unite the contribution of Italy, the home of melody, and that of Germany, the home of harmony. In the Italian school "man alone is represented; man without God." In the German school "God is there, but without man" (29). Italian music has reached its limit, its summation, exhaustion, and conclusion with Rossini. German music, by contrast, is the music of *preparation*: "It is profoundly religious, yet with a religion that has no symbol, and therefore no active faith translated into deeds, no martyrdom, no victory" (31).

In Mazzini's deduction of the art of the future, formal synthesis (the fusion of melody and harmony) is the condition of art's substantive mission, the espousal of the progressive cause of humanity, just as the marriage of the individual and the social idea is the condition of the social drama to come. Mazzini dismisses the degenerate practices of contemporary opera, which have reduced the divine art of music to a mere amusement, a compendium of cheap effects and a "thousand secondary impressions," devoid of all unity of purpose and conception. Opera is the *partial* work of art par excellence, a nameless thing of unrelated parts, which reflects the divorce of art from society and the atheism of art for art's sake. But, as we have seen from his note of 1867, Mazzini did not transcend the horizon of Meyerbeer and the 1830s. There is no recognition that his prophetic essay pointed to Wagner's own programme and practice. In his musical novella, written in Paris in 1840, *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven*, Wagner has Beethoven speak of the Ninth Symphony as a combination of symphonic music and the voice, uniting elemental feelings (the orchestra, harmony) and individual emotion in song and melody.³¹

Balzac's novella *Gambara* (1837) simultaneously espouses and reverses Mazzini's high-flown expectations. The story is Balzac's own contribution to the quarrel between the partisans of Rossini and Meyerbeer. It forms the centerpiece of the trilogy of stories devoted to art and the artist, *The Unknown Masterpiece* (1831), *Gambara*, and *Masimilla Doni*, written in conjunction with *Gambara* in 1837 but not published until 1839, brought together in the *Études philosophiques* of *La comédie humaine*. As we have seen, Rossini and Meyerbeer represent the alternatives

31. In *Opera and Drama* (1851) Wagner treats Rossini as the end of opera and announces the alliance of melody and harmony, voice and orchestra, in the music drama, the successor to and sublation of southern opera and northern drama. Particularly striking is Mazzini's anticipation of the Wagnerian leitmotif in his call for the individualization of the figures through musical themes as an essential contribution to dramatic unity.

of Italian melody and German harmony, vocal and instrumental music, sensations and ideas.³² Like Mazzini, Balzac's interest is the progress of music beyond this opposition of national schools. *Gambara*, set in Paris, embraces the cause of Meyerbeer, whereas *Massimilla Doni*, set in Venice, takes the side of Rossini. Both stories deconstruct the forced alternatives of the heated *querelle*. In the one, *Robert le diable* is praised for its happy union of harmony and melody, while in the other, Rossini's *Moïse en Égypte* is recognized as the precursor of Meyerbeer's opera. *Gambara*, "the unknown Orpheus of modern music,"³³ believes he can emulate and surpass the most advanced music of the time, only to demonstrate, like the painter Frenhofer in *The Unknown Masterpiece*, the limits of the language of music when he tries to express the ideal.

Hans Belting has taken Balzac's *Unknown Masterpiece* as the parable of modern painting's self-destructive quest "to make *art itself* visible in an authoritative and definitive epiphany."³⁴ In his arresting title *The Invisible Masterpiece* Belting captures the paradox that he sees at the heart of modern art. Modern art shared the utopian spirit of modernity and thus "always transgressed or transcended its own limits towards the idea of absolute art or of an art that was to appear at some later date."³⁵ The idea of *absolute* art was the *fata morgana* that drove artistic production and just as persistently eluded it, since it imposed on the individual artwork the impossible burden of demonstrating a conception of art with general validity. It has not been recognized, however, that *Gambara* presents in equally striking fashion the idea of the *total* work as opposed to the absolute work of art. If the one belongs in the museum, which Belting calls the space in which modern culture could reflect on itself, the space, that is, of the self-reflective *work* of art on itself, the total work belongs to the *space of performance beyond the museum*. Standing outside the confining and defining space of the museum, the total work of art represented modernism's quest for totality, the other, complementary myth of the quest to transcend the limits of art.

Balzac described the quest for the ideal in art, the governing idea of his trilogy, as the meeting of the infinitude of human passions and the infinite mystery of the world. It is a tragic encounter. The creative principle's quest for the ideal signifies

32. In his "Letters on the French Stage" in 1837 Heine joins in the debate by giving a directly political-revolutionary reading of Meyerbeer's operas. He writes that "the melodies dissolve, indeed drown in the stream of the harmonic mass, just as the particular feelings of individuals disappear in the total emotion of a whole people, and our soul throws itself willingly into these harmonic currents when it is seized by the sufferings and joys of humanity as a whole and takes a stand on the great social questions." Heinrich Heine, "Über die französische Bühne," in *Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, vol. 12/1, ed. Manfred Windfuhr (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1980), 275.

33. Honoré de Balzac, *La comédie humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 10: 515. Parenthetical volume and page references in the text refer to this edition.

34. Hans Belting, *The Invisible Masterpiece*, trans. Helen Atkins (London: Reaktion, 2001), 11; Belting discusses Balzac's tale at 121–27.

35. Belting, *Invisible Masterpiece*, 8.

the destruction of the work and the suicide of art (10: 393–94). This tragic contradiction is the key to Frenhofer's impossible dream and to Gambara's greatness and madness. Rapt in the inner world of his divine inspiration, Gambara is rebuffed and ridiculed by the world: "My music is beautiful, but when music advances from sensation to the idea, only geniuses can be the audience for they alone have the power to develop it. My misfortune comes from having heard the concerts of angels and from having believed that human beings could comprehend them" (10: 516). Balzac presents the tragic gulf between idea and realization, which dictates the grotesque juxtaposition of genius and madness in the artist and of celestial harmonies and stupefying cacophony in his music, from three angles: the theory, realization, and execution of the music of the future. Gambara is persuaded that the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, based on mathematics, will be surpassed by a higher music, based on the laws of nature. Through his dual training as a composer and instrument maker (he comes from Cremona), Gambara has learned the laws of the spiritual and the material construction of music and grasped that the combined powers of art and science destine music to become the greatest of the arts (10: 479). His operatic trilogy seeks to capture the eternal music of the universe in a correspondingly grandiose subject: the life of nations at their highest pitch. His operatic trilogy, *Mahomet*, *The Martyrs*, and *Jerusalem Delivered*, sets out to encompass—in its depiction of the struggle between the God of the Occident and the God of the Orient—the totality of emotions, human and divine, in the life of man and nations. Gambara asserts the superiority of his operas over Beethoven's symphonies because they combine all the riches of melody and harmony, that is, all the resources of the orchestra and the voice. Deprived of all access to an orchestra and opera company, Gambara is obsessed by his conviction that his science of music (Balzac's own theory, which he believed explained E. T. A. Hoffmann's theory of synaesthesia) and the adequate execution of his music demand new musical instruments. His invention and construction of the *panharmonicon*, the "bizarre instrument" with a hundred voices, designed to replace the whole orchestra, becomes the material image of his celestial music. Uniting in itself orchestral harmony and vocal melody, it becomes the medium of the composer's conception of the total work of art as universal harmony.³⁶ But when he seeks to demonstrate his "impossible music," the results are absolutely paradoxical: in a state of creative ecstasy, Gambara produces a deafening cacophony (probably a reminiscence of the deaf Beethoven at the piano), whereas in a state of higher "sobriety," induced by alcohol, he produces music worthy of angels, momentarily capable of entrancing his audience.

36. See the introduction to *Gambara* by René Guise in Balzac, *La comédie humaine*, 10: 451–52. Beethoven's *Wellington's Victory* (1813) was composed for the panharmonicon, invented by his friend Johann Nepomuk Mälzel, best known as the inventor of the metronome. Mälzel's panharmonicon was a "giant mechanical orchestral machine, run by air pressure and incorporating flutes, trumpets, drums, cymbals, triangles, strings struck by hammers [violins, cellos], and clarinets." *Mechanical Music Digest, Archives* (August 1998), www.mmdigest.com.

The Musical City: Berlioz

A narrative framework of betrayed love and revenge adds a hideous discord to the description of the harmonious city presented in "Euphonia, or the Musical Town, a Tale of the Future," first published (like *Gambara*) in the *Gazette musicale* in 1844, and later forming the twenty-fifth and concluding evening of Hector Berlioz's *Evenings in the Orchestra*. Leaving the narrative to one side for a moment, the description of the utopian city of harmony has elicited diverging responses from critics. Its enumeration of the ideal conditions for rehearsal and performance before an ideal audience is generally seen as an understandable if somewhat naive wish-list on the part of a frustrated composer and conductor. That Berlioz harbored such dreams is evident from a letter he wrote to Spontini in 1841, in which he outlined his ideas for a European musical center: "a theatre, a lyric Pantheon, exclusively devoted to the performance of monumental masterpieces." "They would be produced with the care and grandeur they deserve, and they would be listened to on the solemn festal days of art by audiences at once receptive and intelligent."³⁷ In the last chapter of his *Treatise on Orchestration*, completed in 1842, Berlioz envisages the effects made possible by a gigantic festival orchestra combined with voices. Berlioz died before the opening of Bayreuth in 1873 and could scarcely have imagined that his idea of the musical festival would spawn such a European progeny.³⁸ The irony is even greater if we consider that Euphonia is meant to embody the antithesis to the culture industry of Berlioz's time, projected five hundred years into the future, where we learn that in Italy, the home of opera, opera composers have been replaced by *operatore*, "poor devils who, for a few silver pieces, spend their days in libraries, making a compilation of the arias, duets, choruses and ensemble pieces of all the different composers and ages."³⁹ Needless to say, the opera-house managers have the last word. In such a world, Euphonia represents "only a tiny fragment of the multitude lost in the mass of the civilized nations" (235).

Can we, however, take this shining beacon of musical culture at its own estimation? Berlioz's vision of a magnificent festival of the religion of art, supported by a disciplined ensemble of performers wholly organized and dedicated to its execution, is confirmed in the discussion of Euphonia in *Evenings in the Orchestra*: "Our art, which is essentially complex, depends on numerous agents to exert its full power. To give them the unity of action which is indispensable, authority, strong and absolute authority is needed" (272). Berlioz's city of art is made in the image of

37. Letter to Gaspare Spontini, 27 August 1841, in *Correspondance générale de Berlioz* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 2: 690. Quoted in translation in Hector Berlioz, *Evenings in the Orchestra*, trans. C. R. Fortescue (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1963), 341.

38. See Jacques Barzun, "Euphonia and Bayreuth: Musical Cities," in *Berlioz and His Century* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1956), 327–35.

39. Berlioz, *Evenings in the Orchestra*, 232–33. Parenthetical page references in the text refer to this work.

Sparta, not Athens. And yet all is not as it seems. The account given by the composer Shetland to his unhappy colleague Xilef (Felix reversed) of the “eminently grandiose and epic ceremony” that forms part of Euphonia’s Gluck festival needs to be read on two levels. On one level we register the tremendous effect produced by Shetland’s hymn sung by six thousand voices in the circus, “which I had accompanied only by a hundred clarinet and saxophone families, a hundred flute families, four hundred cellos, and three hundred harps” (Berlioz’s imaginary “festival orchestra” in the *Treatise on Orchestration*, made up of 467 instrumentalists, includes a mere thirty harps and thirty pianos). We follow the dramatic scene in which the statue of Gluck is crowned by the beautiful Nadira. Inspired by the occasion, her rendering of an aria from Gluck’s *Alceste* calls forth rapturous applause:

Nadira, swaying at first, drew herself up at the sound of this clamorous harmony, and raised her arms like an ancient priestess. Radiant with admiration, joy, beauty, and love, she laid the wreath on the powerful head of the Olympian Gluck. Then, inspired in my turn by this stately scene, and to allay the enthusiasm which was growing frenzied and perhaps already making me jealous, I gave the signal for the *Alceste* march. All kneeling, with Euphonian fervour, we saluted the supreme master with his religious chant. (251)

On another level, we must register in this frenzied enthusiasm a merging of art and religion, which makes the grandiose ceremony an act of communal fusion at the same time as it unfolds as a scene from grand opera. Nadira is not an ancient priestess but a “frivolous Viennese singer.” Shetland’s orchestration of tremendous effects appears not only as a self-satirical dig at Berlioz’s own cultivation of grand and sublime effects but equally as a foretaste of the megalomaniac will to power of the composer-conductor as the master of mass ceremonies.⁴⁰

Euphonia is a town of twelve thousand inhabitants in the Harz Mountains in Germany under the patronage of the German emperor. “It goes without saying that Euphonia’s form of government is military despotism. Hence the perfect order which reigns in all forms of study, and the wonderful artistic results which this has made possible” (254). The whole purpose of this “vast academy of music” lies in its solemn artistic festivals, attended annually by twenty thousand privileged visitors, selected by the minister for fine arts: “A circus, roughly similar to the circuses of ancient Greece and Rome, but built much better acoustically, is devoted to these monumental performances. It can hold an audience of twenty thousand on one side and ten thousand performers on the other.” All these performers are directed by the composer, who listens from the top of the amphitheater. “When he feels

40. See Elias Canetti on the orchestral conductor as an expression of power in *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1973), 458–60. Berlioz refers to the position of conductor of the Paris Opera orchestra as a “musical dictatorship.” Barzun, *Berlioz and His Century*, 212.

himself absolutely master of this huge, intelligent instrument,” he ascends the chief rostrum to conduct, communicating his feelings and his commands to each of the performers through an ingenious device. “They respond as swiftly as the hammers of a piano . . . and the maestro can truthfully claim to play the orchestra” (258). The *Treatise on Orchestration* ends with an evocation of the “incalculable melodic power” and unheard-of “force of penetration” waiting to be drawn forth from this “huge, intelligent instrument”:

Its repose would be as majestic as the ocean’s sleep; its agitations would be reminiscent of a tropical storm, its explosions would evoke the cries of volcanoes, it would re-create the moaning, the murmuring, the mysterious noises of virgin forests, the clamouring, the prayers, the triumphal and mourning songs of a people with an expansive soul, an ardent heart, impetuous passions; its silence would impose fear by its solemnity; and the most rebellious organizations would shudder upon seeing the roaring growth of its *crescendo*, like an immense and sublime conflagration!⁴¹

Commenting on Berlioz’s “people with an expansive soul,” Pierre Boulez observes that it calls to mind Rousseau, Robespierre, and the Champs de Mars, just as Berlioz’s imaginary orchestra reveals the underlying phantasm of the total work of art: “One is tempted to say that Berlioz’s written compositions make up only the scattered pieces of a Great Opus that escaped him—an Opus that resembles that definitive *Livre* towards which Mallarmé was working.”⁴²

Gambara’s *panharmonicon* with its hundred voices is a poor substitute for Euphonia’s assembled forces of ten thousand or even for Euphonia’s huge piano, dubbed the piano-orchestra because it can rival an orchestra of a hundred players. This piano, and a “delightful steel summer house,” constructed by the same celebrated mechanic, form the instruments of Xilef’s revenge on Nadira for her betrayal of his and Shetland’s love. As Shetland with ever-growing passion draws a tempest of sounds from the piano-orchestra to accompany at a distance the dancers led by Nadira, Xilef operates the powerful mechanism that causes the walls of the summer house to contract and crush the dancers to the “cracking noise of bones breaking and skulls bursting open” (266). This gruesome mechanical revenge, a grotesque mechanical parody of the ancient Greek legend, reduces Euphonia to silence. The parallel between the “ingenious device” that relays the conductor’s will to the performers and the “powerful mechanism” that sets the steel house in motion points to the transmission of power as the mechanism at the heart of Euphonia’s military despotism. The artwork of the future has as its condition a totally regulated society

41. Quoted in Pierre Boulez, “Berlioz and the Realm of the Imaginary,” in *Orientations*, trans. Martin Cooper (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), 217; in this essay (212–19) Boulez discusses the last chapter, “The Orchestra,” in Berlioz’s *Treatise on Orchestration*.

42. Boulez, “Berlioz and the Realm of the Imaginary,” 217.

in which the individual is subsumed in the collective. Berlioz's negative deduction of the society of the future from the festival of the future reverses the assumptions and illusions of d'Ortigue and of Mazzini, who make the artwork to come the aesthetic pledge of a future social synthesis.⁴³ The totalitarian closure of Berlioz's musical utopia is both dissolved and reinforced by the gruesome conclusion. On the one hand, it is individual passion that shatters the organized harmony of Euphonia. On the other hand, Xilef's vengeance reveals the logic of annihilation, inherent in the demand for complete power in the name of art and manifested in the will to the total work as destruction.

Berlioz also has the futuristic fusion of powerful mechanisms and utopia in his sights. Its symbol in Euphonia is the "huge organ placed on top of a tower which dominates all the buildings of the town" (256). This steam-driven organ, distinctly audible four leagues away, regulates every aspect of the daily life of the inhabitants by "telephony," that is, by the organ's "aural telegraph." If we put the steam-driven organ and the steel house together the result is a satire on the resonant architecture that fascinated the utopian imagination. One model that Euphonia mocks is the "new city" of the Saint-Simoniens.⁴⁴ At the center of this ideal city, as imagined by the religious community led by Father Enfantin at Ménilmontant outside Paris, stands the Temple-Woman (homage to the awaited female messiah). Conceived as the meeting place of heaven and earth, the universe and man, the temple provides the setting for the ultimate spectacle. The temple's organ, situated between the metal plates of the girdle, pours forth a cascade of sound from the mouth, eyes, and ears of the Temple-Woman. Precast iron construction will enable the pillars of the building to act as organ pipes, transforming the entire temple into a "roaring orchestra." The Saint-Simonian Michel Chevalier anticipates the most magnificent effects, galvanic, chemical, and mechanical, that will come from the assembly of different metals and "the action of a central fire serving the ceremonies":

A Temple of Volta, a temple built by colossal Lovers, a temple of melody and harmony, a temple whose mechanism will send forth at given moments floods of heat and light... The life of the earth manifested in its mystery by magnetism and electricity, in its splendour by the brilliance of metals and tissues, by wondrous cascades, by a splendid vegetation visible through the windows of the temple. Solar life manifested by heat and light. Human life manifested by music, by all the arts, by the profusion of paintings, of sculptures, by panoramas and dioramas which will unite in a single point all of space and all of time! What an immense communion! What a glorification of God, of his Messiah and of Humanity!⁴⁵

43. Brzoska, *Die Idee des Gesamtkunstwerks*, 190, 193.

44. Charles Duveyrier, *La ville nouvelle ou Le Paris des Saint-Simoniens* (Paris, 1832). For the following, see Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes*, 301–5.

45. Duveyrier, *La ville nouvelle*, quoted in Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes*, 302–3.

Chevalier's fantasies illustrate, in Bénichou's words, the Ménilmontant community's "dream of a theatre of communion, a spiritually and cosmically expanded version of the Public Festival."⁴⁶ Thus Émile Barrault envisages a temple, larger than the ancient circus, in which the new drama will be born, joining the past and the future through the union of all the arts. Barrault even expected the universe to collaborate through the appearance of a comet or through a display of the aurora borealis. The utopian-visionary architect Bruno Taut, who was also enthused by the prospect of cosmic effects (see chapter 7), cannot resist the idea of the resonating temple. He envisaged in 1920 such a temple as a Great Star, in which the organ pipes traverse the walls to make the whole building sound like a bell while the walls of glass glow from inside. Just as architecture dissolves into *son et lumière*, so art, itself dissolving, will permeate everything.⁴⁷

The image of the organ-temple is not confined to utopia alone. Camille Saint-Saëns was prompted to the same simile by a performance of Berlioz's *Grand messe des morts*:

His [Berlioz's] aim was to create a huge three-dimensional block of sound in which the contemplative soul might lose itself in wonder and humility, an all-consuming apocalyptic musical equivalent of the Last Judgment. It was the kind of musical experience no one had dreamed of before. Saint-Saëns seems to have grasped the nature of the acoustical idea when he said: "It seemed as if each separate slim column of each pillar in the church became an organ pipe and the whole edifice a vast organ."⁴⁸

Ancients and Moderns: Wagner

The centrality of Wagner to the history and the idea of the total work of art is twofold: his theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* forms the central directing inspiration of his music dramas;⁴⁹ his manifestos *Art and Revolution* (1849) and *The Artwork of the Future* (1849) fuse in the heat of revolutionary fervor the various anticipations since the French Revolution of the artwork to come into a powerful vision of the regeneration of man, society, and art. Beyond that, however, Wagner's aesthetic conception of politics complements Rousseau's political conception of art. Although it is clear that this complementarity reflects the historical distance that separates the *Social Contract* and *Art and Revolution* as well as the opposing Greek

46. Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes*, 304.

47. Roger Fornoff, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk; Studien zu einer ästhetischen Konzeption der Moderne* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2004), 404–8.

48. Hector Berlioz, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz*, trans. and ed. David Cairns (London: Panther, 1970), 307.

49. The term *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as opposed to what it signifies, is not prominent in Wagner's writings, for all that he coined the term. It is confined to the writings arising from the 1848–49 revolutions. For his own work Wagner used the term *Musikdrama* (music drama) and then *Bühnenfestspiel* (stage festival play).

sources of their respective utopias—Sparta for Rousseau as opposed to Athens for Wagner⁵⁰—there is nevertheless a deep structural similarity in their accounts of the foundation and the refoundation of society. To Rousseau's passage from the state of nature to the civil state, which founds society, corresponds Wagner's revolutionary passage from the existing, unnatural political state to the free association of natural universal humanity beyond the state. To Rousseau's institution of the social contract, through "the total alienation of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community" (*Social Contract* 1.6), corresponds the redemptive act of self-sacrifice through which egoistic man accedes to his communal human essence; to the one and indivisible republic corresponds the "unique, and indivisible and greatest artwork." To Rousseau's grounding of politics in the sovereignty of the people corresponds Wagner's grounding of art in the creativity of the people. These structural correspondences derive from the common figure of "total alienation," which Wagner generalizes into a comprehensive theory of redemption that springs, as in Rousseau, from a complete negation of existing society—its politics, its commerce, its social relations of oppression, its art. The whole thrust of Wagner's revolutionary radicalism lies in the rejection of political and aesthetic differentiation in the name of a once and future totality, in and through which alone true differentiation will be possible.

To understand Wagner's theory of redemption, which amounts to nothing less than the redemption of and from history, we must begin with his critical reading of the history of the West as a history of decadence. By raising fifth-century Athens to the unsurpassed model of his political-aesthetic utopia, Wagner directly challenged the modern conception of history as progress. Although, like Rousseau, Wagner distinguishes between Christ and his church—*Art and Revolution* ends with the dedication of the "altar of the future" to the twin deities of the religion of equality and beauty, Jesus and Apollo—his hostility to Christianity is such that, of Saint-Simon's progressive alternation of organic and critical epochs, he allows only the first organic epoch, that of the Greek city-states up to Socrates. The usurpation of art and religion by Greek philosophy already announces the critical moment of decline. Wagner identifies the moment of decline as the sundering of the unity of art, religion, and politics in the polis. This dismembering is inherent in the progression from the traditional temple ceremonies to the religious ceremony-become-artwork in the shape of tragedy. In going beyond the veil of religion to reveal the naked human being, art (i.e., Euripides and Aristophanes) destroyed the communal bond of religion and with it the communal artwork. Religion withdrew, abandoning political life to egoistic,

50. See R. A. Leigh, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Myth of Antiquity in the Eighteenth Century," in *Classical Influences in Western Thought, AD 1650–1870*, ed. R. Bolgar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 155–68.

absolute, singular man (3: 132–33).⁵¹ The most important source for Wagner's conception of Greek drama was Johann Gustav Droysen's translation of the plays of Aeschylus, published in 1832, and republished in 1842. "This was the version that revealed the power of the *Oresteia* to Wagner: thanks to Droysen, Wagner became the first German Hellenist to see Aeschylus' surviving trilogy as the central Greek achievement in drama."⁵² Droysen presents the Greek art religion (the drama as the sacrament in which the gods take on human form) as the antithesis of contemporary drama.⁵³

For Wagner, and for Nietzsche in turn, the eclipse of the Athenian state marked not *one* turning point in the history of the West but *the* decisive turning point. The logic of such a theory of decadence was to extend the critical epoch of "enlightenment" backward beyond the eighteenth century, beyond the Reformation and Renaissance, to embrace the two thousand years of "discontented thought" since the downfall of Athenian tragedy (3: 13). It was also to proclaim with Ludwig Feuerbach (to whom *The Artwork of the Future* is dedicated in "grateful admiration") the end of (Hegelian) philosophy, that is, philosophy's coming redemption in human emancipation, crowned by the unitary work of art. Wagner's philosophy of history operates with the familiar triadic pattern of unity, unity lost, and unity regained: the once and future unitary artwork of the polis frames the two thousand years of the enslavement of man in the political state.⁵⁴ Athens represents the unsurpassed, perhaps unsurpassable model, against which Wagner measures all of history. It is both a real historical example and an ideal image: real in that Wagner can point to the invention and institution of democratic self-determination; ideal in that Wagner can read into the beautiful synthesis of art and religion in the festival drama his own aesthetic meta-politics, which makes Athenian tragedy the higher truth of public action and the true source of communal identity:

This people streamed together from the political forum, from the law courts, from the countryside, from the ships, from the military camp, from the furthest regions, filled to thirty thousand the amphitheatre, in order to see performed the deepest of all tragedies, *Prometheus*, in order to gather themselves, to comprehend their own activities, to fuse with their being, their fellowship, their god in the most inward unity

51. All quotations from Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, ed. Wolfgang Golther (Berlin: Bong, 1913), vol. 3.

52. Michael Ewans, *Wagner and Aeschylus: The Ring and the Oresteia* (London: Faber, 1982), 27.

53. Droysen's goal in translating Aeschylus and Aristophanes was to contribute to the revival of Greek classical art by stimulating contemporary artists, and in particular by providing words for the music of his friend Felix Mendelssohn, who wrote the music for a production of *Antigone* in Berlin in 1842. A. D. Momigliano, *Studies on Modern Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 152–53.

54. The most systematic account of the political dimension of Wagner's "political-aesthetic utopia" is Udo Bernbach, *Der Wahn des Gesamtkunstwerks: Richard Wagners politische-ästhetische Utopie* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1994).

and thus to become again in the noblest and deepest tranquillity what they had been in the most restless agitation and most separate individuality only a few hours earlier. (3: 11)

Wagner makes it clear that separate social activities (politics, justice, agriculture, trade, warfare) and separate individualities find their reconciliation in the *aesthetic public sphere*. This reconciliation presupposes the essential link between a free people and a free art, whereby true art becomes the expression of the highest freedom (3: 13)—that is to say, art replaces politics as the highest activity of man. The downfall of the Athenian state thus sets in train a dual history of dissolution and disintegration: “Just as the communal spirit split into a thousand egoistic tendencies, so the great unitary artwork of tragedy dissolved into its individual constituent parts” (3: 12). This history of unity lost, constructed in the image of a free people and its free art, constitutes Wagner’s “social myth.”⁵⁵ By the same token it encloses him in the fatal circle of reciprocal causality: how can there be a free art without a free people, a free people without a free art?⁵⁶ This inescapable conundrum, intrinsic to the very idea of the artwork of the future and to Wagner’s identification of art and revolution, recurs in a variety of registers: Will the people or will the lonely artist be the creator of the redemptive-revolutionary artwork? Is the lonely artist the voice of the people, the creator or the midwife of its life-giving myth?⁵⁷ Is a free society or the subsidization of the theatre the precondition of a free art?⁵⁸ More acutely, is aesthetic illusion the means to or the substitute for the total revolution in feeling demanded by Schiller and Wagner?⁵⁹ *The Ring of the Nibelungs*, originally conceived in 1848 as the tragedy that will crown the revolution and bring to full consciousness the overthrow of the old world, ends by postponing the advent of a liberated humanity to an unknown future.

The artwork of the future thus remains true to its title. Its redemptive telos is tied to its critical function as political-aesthetic vanguard in and against a world of alienation. In this sense the artwork of the future is its own precursor in

55. See Herbert Schnädelbach, “Ring und Mythos,” in *In den Trümmern der eigenen Welt*, ed. Udo Bernbach (Berlin/Hamburg: Reimer, 1989).

56. Thus Wagner’s question: “How can man hope to become free and independent before he can exercise his noblest activity, the artistic?” (3: 33).

57. The people is the inventor of language, religion, and democracy (3: 53); “the lonely artistic spirit striving for redemption in nature cannot create the artwork of the future” (3: 61). The artist of the future will be the people (3: 169).

58. The theatre needs public subsidies in order to be able to show the transformation of the slaves of industry into beautiful, self-conscious human beings (3: 39).

59. Wagner demands for the artwork of the future complete stage illusion through the cooperation of landscape painting and all the means of optical effects through lighting (3: 153), which Alphonse Appia was the first to deliver through electric lighting. The electrical illumination of the Grail chalice at the premiere of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth in 1882 was thus a token of the new technical possibilities of stage illusion. See Matthew Wilson Smith, “Knights of the Electric Chalice,” in *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 39–46.

that it exists in the double form of theory and practice: the trilogy of the Zurich writings—*Art and Revolution*, *The Artwork of the Future*, and *Opera and Drama* (1851)—precedes, explains, and justifies the *Ring* tetralogy. Even though Wagner envisaged the reconciliation of knowledge and life in the artwork to come, his own unique combination of theory and practice indicates not only that the path to redemption must pass through critical negation but also that the idea of redemption provides the key to the whole argument of *The Artwork of the Future*. The act of redemption accomplishes the passage from egoism to communism (Feuerbach). Redemptive entry into the totality demands total sacrifice. What is sacrificed is the false individualization of self-interest, whether it be capitalist greed or art for art's sake. Modern art is thus nothing but the reflection of industrial society, the last stage of the whole epoch of absolute egoism. Here Wagner is particularly close to Marx's theory of alienation in the (unpublished) "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" of 1844, where each social sphere is conceived as a particular alienation of man's activities. Wagner asserts even more emphatically than Hegel the end of art in modernity. Having lost all connection with public life and the people, art has become the private possession and purely narcissistic practice of an artistic class in the service of the market. In *Opera and Drama*, Wagner clears the stage for the artwork of the future by reconstructing the *already completed* history of opera and drama as the divided halves of the once and future unitary artwork.

Wagner's concept of total redemption entails a cyclical philosophy of history, stretching from the downfall of the natural Greek polity to the completion of history in the communist society of the future. The analogy of politics and art means that *The Ring* presents the act of sacrificial redemption on the level of *both* content *and* form. It is precisely this double dimension that defines authentic drama as the highest form of art: the universal human art of the future will be the bearer of the universal religion of the future. As befits the religion of man, *The Ring*, inspired by Feuerbach, depicts the redemption of theology in anthropology, that is, the end of the gods in human consciousness. The dying god Wotan is complemented by the heroes, Siegfried and Brünnhilde, whose sacrificial deaths testify to the truth and necessity they embody. Wagner can thus define the tragic hero in Feuerbachian fashion as communist, that is, the individual who through his self-sacrifice merges with the collectivity out of inner, free necessity (3: 166). "The commemoration of such a death is the worthiest that men can celebrate" (3: 164).

Such a commemoration both presupposes and produces the unity and identity of a free people through its communion with itself and its god. Wagner fuses the idea of the French revolutionary festival and the German idea of tragedy in the artwork of the future,⁶⁰ which exemplifies at the same time on the level of form the redemptive return to unity, for it is only in the drama that the individual arts

60. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica ficta (Figures de Wagner)* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1991).

can unfold their highest potential. Aesthetic redemption in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is comprehended as an act of loving self-sacrifice that mirrors the truth and necessity of the tragic action. In and through this sacrificial act the arts find their freedom as *art* in the dramatic union of the three purely human art forms: dance, music, and poetry—the language of the body, the language of the heart, and the language of the spirit. Opera, by contrast, is dismissed by Wagner as nothing but the occasion for displaying the egoistic rivalry of the three sister arts (3: 119). United, however, dance, music, and poetry draw the other—plastic—arts into their redemptive orbit: “Not a single richly developed capacity of the individual arts will remain unused in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the future” (3: 156). The statue is brought to life in the dance; the colored shadows of painting, whether of the human figure or of historical scenes, will give way to the depiction of nature as the setting for the dramatic action; architecture, enriched by sculpture and painting, will attain its true destiny in building the theatre of art,⁶¹ the temple of the people without class distinctions. And perhaps the most important dimension of the Wagnerian synthesis, the introduction of the musical language of Beethoven into the drama through the orchestra: the living body of harmony, which immerses audience and dramatic action in the sea of shared feeling. This endless emotional surge finds its redemption in the poetic word, just as the poetic intention is simultaneously extinguished and realized in the living stage presentation (3: 156).

At each stage of the argument we observe the same fundamental pattern—critique, sacrifice, redemption—that defines the projected historical sequence from egoism to communism and makes Wagner the prophet of the downfall of the political state and the inheritor and liquidator of the existing arts, the creator who is called to enter into the legacy of Shakespeare and Beethoven. The two faces of redemptive sublation—inheritance and annihilation—are evident in Wagner’s treatment of absolute music and absolute literature. Beethoven, the hero of absolute music, forged the artistic key to the artwork of the future through music’s self-redemptive embrace of the poetic word in his last symphony. Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony is therefore *the* last symphony, marking the self-extinguishing limit of absolute music and its redemption into the realm of universal art, the universal drama to come (3: 96–97). Separated from the drama, the poetic word has been reduced to a mere written shadow. Literature has yet to embrace its inescapable *self-annihilation*, that is to say, its absorption into life, into the living artwork of the future (3: 116).

If we step back a moment from Wagner’s relentless deduction of the world-historical artwork to come, we can see that the threefold task of critique, sacrifice, and redemption, directed to separating the art of the future from the alienated art,

61. See Hans Sedlmayr on the theatre and the opera house as the leading task of architecture in the mid-nineteenth century. Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1955), 34–40.

the culture industry of the present, amounts to an emphatic *theory of the avant-garde*.⁶² On the one hand, Wagner endows the vanguard function of art and the artist with a revolutionary-redemptive telos. On the other hand, he already reveals what we might call the total ambivalence of this telos as it will be played out in the avant-garde movements of the first third of the twentieth century. This ambivalence is spelled out in the fate of literature: its self-annihilation is described as the redemptive absorption into life, into the living artwork of the future. The transformation of the “egoistic,” aesthetically differentiated arts can and perhaps must be construed indifferently as the redemption of art into life or of life into art. The extremes meet: the self-sacrifice of aesthetic art coincides with the dream of the total work of art. When these two inseparable aspects of the redemption of art in Wagner’s theory of the artwork of the future are separated, it necessarily entails the distinction between the absolute and the total work of art. Thus the avant-garde has come to be identified with the progressive—that is, self-destructive, self-purifying—pursuit of the absolute, flanked on the right by futurism’s and on the left by Dada and surrealism’s declaration of war on the “institution of art.”⁶³ The progressive constructions of aesthetic modernism have completely overshadowed the other, complementary quest of the avant-garde for the total work of art. Marcella Lista interprets the absolute work of art and the total work of art as two versions of the same totalizing impulse: the idea of the total work oscillated between “the utopia of a unique, absolute language, capable of containing everything, and the aspiration to a concrete synthesis of the arts, united in a monumental form.”⁶⁴

62. The analogy between art and politics also brings Wagner’s theory of the avant-garde close to the Leninist conception of the vanguard party, which raises to consciousness the revolutionary need of the proletariat, just as Wagner claims the task of the artist of the future is to raise the spontaneous, unconscious needs of the people to consciousness in the artwork of the future.

63. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

64. Marcella Lista, *L’oeuvre d’art totale à la naissance des avant-gardes (1908–1914)* (Paris: CTHS, 2006), 9.

STAGING THE ABSOLUTE

Modernism or the Long Nineteenth Century

If we define modernism (with Heidegger) as the epoch of the rule of aesthetics, the corollary of this definition is the loss of a nonaesthetic relation to art, which Heidegger understands as the inevitable consequence of the decline of great art. This decline cannot be measured aesthetically. It is not a question of the style of the work or the qualities of the artist. Artworks are great when they accomplish art's essential task: to make manifest "what beings as a whole are," by "establishing the absolute definitively as such in the realm of historical man." There is thus a direct correlation between the rise of aesthetics and the decline of great art; the greatness of the "final and greatest aesthetics in the Western tradition" (Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*) is due to its recognition of the end of great art.¹ In turn, this recognition defines the position of art in the long nineteenth century that encompasses for Heidegger the last third of the eighteenth and the first third of the twentieth centuries (1: 85).

At the center of the long nineteenth century Heidegger places Richard Wagner and the will to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Even though Wagner failed, even though his work and his influence became the very opposite of great art, Heidegger can

1. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 1: 84. Parenthetical page references in the text refer to this edition.

nevertheless conclude that “the will itself remains singular for its time. It raises Wagner—in spite of his theatricality and recklessness—above the level of other efforts focusing on art and its essential role in existence” (1: 87). “With reference to the historical position of art, the effort to produce the ‘collective artwork’ remains essential” (1: 85). It signifies that the artwork “should be a celebration of the national community. It should be *the* religion” (1: 86). This “ambiguous” evaluation of Wagner comes from Heidegger’s 1936–37 lectures entitled “Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art.” It is clearly directed against a Third Reich in Wagner’s image, a Third Reich that has failed like Wagner to achieve the great collective work of art and to satisfy an absolute need. What Heidegger objects to in Wagner’s conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is not so much the “quantitative unification” of the arts as the domination of the word by music, the domination in other words of the pure state of feeling that denies what only “great poetry and thought can create” (1: 88). Nietzsche’s struggle against Wagner’s theatricality and against the decadence of the age thus acquires in Heidegger’s eyes a signal importance for the struggle of the German people to grasp their historical determination and find their own historical essence (1: 104). And yet Heidegger’s judgment on Nietzsche is also ambiguous: “Whereas for Hegel it was art—in contrast to religion, morality, and philosophy—that fell victim to nihilism and became a thing of the past, something nonfactual, for Nietzsche art is to be pursued as the counter-movement. In spite of Nietzsche’s essential departure from Wagner, we see in this an outgrowth of the Wagnerian will to the ‘collective artwork’”(1: 90).

As he sees it, Heidegger’s ambiguous judgment on Wagner is tied up with the ambiguity of the long nineteenth century, revealed in the midcentury intersection of two opposed currents, that of the still-preserved tradition of the great age of the German movement after 1770, and that of the “slowly expanding wasteland” of the second half of the century, “the growing impoverishment and deterioration of existence occasioned by industry, technology, and finance” (1: 85, 88). If we step back from Heidegger’s German focus, we can observe that the 1848 revolutions and their defeat mark a new stage in the history of the total work of art that is reflected in Wagner’s own development after 1848. Wagner’s retreat from his revolutionary enthusiasm was reinforced by his reading in 1854 of Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*. Schopenhauer’s distinction between the Will and the world of phenomena, replicated in his distinction between music as the direct expression of the Will and the other arts, led Wagner, notably in his Beethoven essay of 1870, to a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between music and the word in the music drama.² The Beethoven essay stands between *Art and Revolution* (1849) and *Religion and Art* (1880): it signals the passage of redemptive power from revolution to music. The universal revolution of humanity, from which the artwork of the future was to spring, has been replaced by the redemptive power of

2. Wagner’s *Beethoven* is a key text for Ernst Bloch’s philosophy of music in *Geist der Utopie* (1918; 2nd rev. ed., 1923), written in anticipation of the “transcendent opera” to come. See chapter 5.

Beethoven's music, now declared capable of canceling the modern world of civilization.³ German music against French civilization: Wagner's 1849 vision of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as the festival drama and civil religion of a liberated humanity, the synthesis of the French Revolution and German idealism, disintegrates after 1848. It would be too simple, however, to treat 1848 as the defining watershed of the long nineteenth century. There is both continuity and discontinuity across this divide. Nationalism had already emerged as a potent mobilizing ideology in the wake of the French Revolution, just as the internationalism of its revolutionary message remains an active force up to the Bolshevik Revolution and beyond. Nevertheless, we can observe a growing tendency for the vision of political-religious redemption to split apart and divide into esoteric doctrines of aesthetic salvation and an emerging conception of mass politics. Despite this social divergence these two lines retain their link in aesthetics, the common denominator of the modernist epoch. Nietzsche's own ambivalence in relation to Wagner, which made him first Wagner's most eloquent advocate and then his unrelenting critic, is matched by that of Mallarmé. Both Mallarmé (1842–98) and Nietzsche (1844–1900) affirm the absolute need of great art at the same time as they assert the primacy of “great poetry and thought” against the seductive power of music. Both are led through their agon with Wagner and the idea of the total work of art to confront the question of *aesthetic illusion* and to ponder the staging of the absolute in the age of aesthetics that is also the age of nihilism.

The Birth of Tragedy: Nietzsche

Nietzsche's passionate advocacy of Wagner was preceded by Baudelaire's enthusiastic reception in his essay “Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris” (1861). The essay was not in fact prompted by the performance of *Tannhäuser* at the Paris Opera in 1861 but by the concerts Wagner had given in January and February 1860 in Paris. The essay elaborates Baudelaire's letter to Wagner of 17 February 1860, in which he thanked the composer for the greatest musical pleasure he had ever experienced. Although this experience was indescribable, Baudelaire ventures to translate it for Wagner: “At first it seemed to me that I knew this music... that this music was mine, and I recognized it as everyone recognizes the things they are destined to love.” What appealed to Baudelaire with such power was the music's sense of grandeur, the combination of religious ecstasy and sensual pleasure that enraptured and subjugated at the same time—the supreme paroxysm of the soul that Baudelaire tries to convey through the image of an ever more intense incandescence. The essay also undertakes a translation of the music into words by means of comparison of three descriptions of the *Lohengrin* Overture—Wagner's program notes, Liszt's commentary, and Baudelaire's own response—in order to identify

3. Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen* (Berlin: Bong, 1913), 9: 120. Wagner is writing on the eve of the Franco-Prussian war.

the common elements of these translations: spiritual and physical bliss; contemplation of something infinitely great and beautiful; luminous intensity, amounting to a sensation of space expanding to the ultimate conceivable limits. "Absolute solitude ... immensity as such." "Wagner possesses the art of translating by subtle gradations everything that is excessive, immense, ambitious in spiritual and natural man." He had been subjected to a revelation, Baudelaire declares, and craves to experience this pleasure again.⁴

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe attributes Baudelaire's total submission to Wagner to the poet's self-recognition in this music, a recognition that allows him to concede the superiority of German art and of drama as the most synthetic and perfect art, the art form par excellence through the coincidence of the arts, while yet translating Wagner back into a statement of his own poetic aesthetic.⁵ Thus in place of the *coincidence* of the arts Baudelaire advances his own doctrine of *synaesthetic correspondences*, which he first mentions in 1846 with reference to E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Kreisleriana." Baudelaire repeats here in this opposition the two complementary approaches to the idea of totality and the total work of art that come from German romanticism: synaesthesia, where the reciprocal sympathy of the arts preserves the independence of the individual arts as the path to totality, and the idea of the synthesis of the arts in the collective work of art.⁶ It would be truly surprising, he writes, "if sound could not suggest colour, if colours could not give the idea of a melody, or that sound and colour were unsuited to translate ideas, given that things have always expressed themselves by reciprocal analogy from the day that God uttered the world as a complex and indivisible totality," citing as evidence his own sonnet "Correspondances" from *Les fleurs du mal* (1861).⁷ Universal reciprocal analogy makes the artist the privileged medium who senses the correspondences between our (fallen) world and the higher world and creates an art that points beyond the visible world to our (forgotten) divine origin—a recurrent Platonic but also gnostic feature of romanticism and symbolism. In recognizing the spiritual affinity of composer and poet, Baudelaire recognizes in Wagner's music the native language of the subject prior to the Fall, the original totality that still speaks to us in correspondences. Lacoue-Labarthe cites here "L'invitation au voyage":

Tout y parlerait
À l'âme en secret
Sa douce langue natale.

Such a pre-memory transcends death and finitude with a promise of immortality.⁸

4. Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 784–85.

5. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Baudelaire *contra* Wagner," *Études françaises* 3–4 (1981): 23–52.

6. Chung-Sun Kwon, *Studie zur Idee des Gesamtkunstwerks in der Frühromantik: Zur Utopie einer Musikanschauung von Wackenroder bis Schopenhauer* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2003).

7. Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, 784.

8. Lacoue-Labarthe, "Baudelaire *contra* Wagner," 38–39.

Nietzsche recognized a kindred spirit when he discovered Wagner's letter of thanks for Baudelaire's essay in Baudelaire's posthumously published works. He copied the entire letter in his letter of 26 February 1888 to Peter Gast, adding: "If I am not mistaken, Wagner wrote a letter expressing this kind of gratitude only one other time: after receiving *The Birth of Tragedy*."

Nietzsche's defining opposition in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) between Athenian and Alexandrian culture, tragic and theoretical worldviews, rephrases Saint-Simon's opposition of organic and critical epochs. As with Wagner, Nietzsche's philosophy of history reduces Saint-Simon's cyclic-progressive conception to the stark contrast between an original moment of greatness—pre-Socratic thought and the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles—and the following two thousand years of European decadence. If Nietzsche's manifesto for the total work of art—"the birth of tragedy from the spirit of music"—revisits the theme of the artwork to come that will herald the dawn of a new organic age, it is with the certainty of its advent in the music drama of Wagner. Antiquity and modernity meet in reciprocal illumination across the two thousand years of decadence. Through Schopenhauer, Nietzsche grasps these two privileged moments of the birth of tragedy as springing from the highest creative tension between Will and Representation, the Dionysian ground of being and the Apollonian realm of beautiful semblance. Just as Greek tragedy is close to its origins in Dionysian rite, so comparably Wagner's *opus meta-physicum* recovers the tragic truth of being at the same time that it transcends it through the release from the bonds of individuation. Collective Dionysian excitement brings forth the god in the dream vision of the stage representation, which holds us fast in its spell of aesthetic illusion. This beautiful vision, however, is no more than the mask of the god, the mask that shelters us from horror. In the moment of tragic insight the veil of Maya is torn aside, and we experience the horror and the ecstasy of the shattering of the principle of individuation: the sublime moment of self-oblivion in which we become one with the god.

Nietzsche's affirmation of the eternal life of Dionysian nature, the "glowing life" uniting man and nature, is close to Hölderlin's religion of nature in *Empedokles*. Indeed, Nietzsche's enthusiastic evocation of the festival of reconciliation between nature and its estranged children echoes Empedokles' evocation of the return of the golden age and Schiller's "Ode to Joy":

Singing and dancing the individual expresses himself as member of a higher communion: he has forgotten how to walk and talk, and is about to fly dancing into the heavens. His gestures express enchantment. Just as the animals now speak, and the earth yields up milk and honey, he now gives voice to supernatural sounds: he feels like a god, he now walks about enraptured and elated as he saw the gods walk in his dreams. Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: the artistic power of the whole of nature reveals itself to the supreme gratification of the primal Oneness amidst the paroxysms of intoxication. The noblest clay, the most precious marble, man, is kneaded and hewn here, and to the chisel blows of the Dionysian world-artist

there echoes the cry of the Eleusinian mysteries: "Do you bow low, multitudes? Do you sense the Creator, world?"⁹

Like Hölderlin, Nietzsche attached the highest expectations to tragedy as the expression of the "innermost life force of a people." The dissatisfied culture of modern civilization bears witness to the loss of our mythical home. We no longer comprehend how closely art and the people, myth and custom (*Sitte*), tragedy and the state, are intertwined. The downfall of tragedy, which entailed the downfall of myth, signified the destruction of the Greek art religion by Socratic enlightenment, both cause and product of the dissolution of organic culture. This process of critical dissolution enacts the fatal logic of *secularization* (*Verweltlichung*).

Carl Dahlhaus argues that Wagner's *Beethoven* and Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* (1872) transformed Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music into a philosophy of history.¹⁰ One could equally argue that they transform Wagner's Feuerbachian religion of human divinity in *The Ring* and its revolutionary philosophy of history into a metaphysics of music. Now it is the drama of the world Will rather than the drama of Man that has become the subject of Wagner's and Nietzsche's *opus metaphysicum*. *The Ring*, conceived prior to 1848, is replaced by *Tristan and Isolde*. It is for Nietzsche the drama of the endless striving of individuated desire to find redemption in the return to the "innermost ground of the world." Nietzsche's interpretation of *Tristan and Isolde* as a reenactment of the ur-drama of the Will makes us *participants* in the world theatre. Redemption no longer lies in revolutionary action but in metaphysical insight. Nietzsche's metaphysical aesthetics (to be understood as pertaining both to sense perception and to art) has the paradoxical consequence of simultaneously depotentiating and potentiating illusion. We are called upon to see through the stage illusion into the heart of the world mystery and at the same time to affirm the eternal justification of existence and the world as aesthetic phenomenon. Aesthetic illusion thus possesses a double truth—that it is only illusion and that there is no truth outside of illusion. Nietzsche can therefore proclaim that art is greater than truth, that the Wagnerian music drama, in renewing Greek tragedy, completes the cycle of history from origin to rebirth. A tragic sense of life, worthy of the Greeks, has been recovered; it will sweep away the delusions of Socratic enlightenment. Aesthetic illusion will triumph over science, in the form of the conjoined truth of the Dionysian and the Apollonian and their double aesthetic of the sublime and the beautiful.

The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche's metaphysical manifesto of the total work of art, thus stages the absolute and grasps this staging as the second-order truth of the world illusion, which frees us from the illusions of the principle of individuation in order to open our eyes to the tragic truth of existence. The absolute in this sense is

9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 1993), 17.

10. Carl Dahlhaus, *Klassische und romantische Musikästhetik* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1988), 476.

nothing but our life illusion, whether it be religion, science, or art. The Nietzschean rebirth of tragedy thus calls for a tragic philosophy strong enough to affirm the will to illusion as the eternal justification of the world and existence, just as tragic philosophy calls for great art. Great art is defined in Nietzsche's perspective by the dual aspect of *aesthetic illusion*—if the Dionysian Will constitutes the noumenal truth of the Apollonian dream vision, the latter in turn constitutes the phenomenal redemption of the Will.

Nietzsche's reversal of the pessimism of his first master, Schopenhauer, presages the coming break with his second master, Wagner. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche presents the music drama as the musical goal of European history, which heralds cultural renewal against the decadence and nihilism of modern civilization by announcing the coming victory of myth over enlightenment. Nietzsche's diagnosis of contemporary society does not change after the break with Wagner; what changes is his evaluation of the significance of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which is now interpreted not as the overcoming but as the foremost symptom of decadence. Once again it is a question of the meaning of aesthetic illusion. Precisely because art is worth more than the truth, precisely because art is the countermovement to decadence,¹¹ cultural and political renewal demands the capacity to recognize and respond to great art and the grand style, that is to say, the strength to fight against the "genius" of the nineteenth century—epitomized in Nietzsche's eyes by Victor Hugo's and Wagner's sophisticated combination of charlatanry and virtuosity.¹² At stake is the struggle against the romantic, musical "genius" of the moderns, for like everything modern, romanticism is ambiguous:

Is music, modern music, not already decadence? ... The answer to this first-rank question of values would not remain in doubt if the proper inferences had been drawn from the fact that music achieved its greatest ripeness and fullness as romanticism—... Beethoven the first great romantic, in the sense of the French conception of romanticism, as Wagner is the last great romantic—both instinctive opponents of classical taste, of severe style—to say nothing of "grand style."¹³

Heidegger follows Nietzsche in pitting great poetry and thought against the dangerous seductions of music. Mallarmé likewise felt himself compelled to respond to the challenge of the Wagner cult that had led his closest colleagues to establish the *Revue wagnérienne* in 1885.¹⁴ That he felt the need to defend poetry

11. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), Aphorism 794 (1888).

12. *Ibid.*, Aph. 825 (1887).

13. *Ibid.*, Aph. 842 (1888).

14. See Alain Sagé, "L'oeuvre d'art totale et les symbolistes français: L'exemple de la *Revue wagnérienne* (1885–1888)," in *L'oeuvre d'art totale*, ed. Denis Bablet and Elie Konigson (Paris: CNRS, 2002), 47–58.

against music lay not simply in his recognition of the “divine” power of music. Wagner posed the question, in Heidegger’s words, of the situation of art in the nineteenth century, the Hegelian question of the possibility of great art in modernity. To defend poetry against music meant for Mallarmé no less than for Nietzsche the justification of the world and existence through art—in other words, the possibility of the poetic as opposed to the musical total work of art.

The Great Work: Mallarmé

“More and better than Nietzsche, he lived the death of God”—thus Jean-Paul Sartre’s judgment on Mallarmé, “hero, prophet, magus, and tragedian.”¹⁵ What distinguished Mallarmé from his fellow poets, “playing consciously in their work and in their life the misery of man without God,” is that he lived out the truth of this comedy, the truth of this idea of poetry.¹⁶ The price of his truth, however, was ambiguity raised to an absolute: poetry must negate itself if it is to be equal to the truth of nihilism. The project of a negative poetics (echoing Friedrich Schlegel’s programme of romantic irony), which governed his life’s work, is announced in a letter of the young Mallarmé: “Yes, *I know*, we are no more than empty forms of matter, but truly sublime for having invented God and our soul. So sublime, my friend! That I want to give myself this spectacle of matter...proclaiming before the Nothing which is the truth, these glorious lies!”¹⁷ This knowledge transforms the poet—henceforth to be understood as a “disposition of the Spiritual Universe to see itself and develop itself”¹⁸—into philosopher, the work into the *opus metaphysicum*, and poetry into the idea of absolute literature: “‘literature’ because it is knowledge that claims to be accessible only and exclusively by way of literary composition; ‘absolute’ because it is a knowledge that one assimilates in search of an absolute and that thus draws in no less than everything.”¹⁹ Whether we speak with Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy of the “literary absolute,” born of German romanticism, or with Roberto Calasso of “absolute literature,” the two delineate in Calasso’s eyes the heroic age of literary modernism that “begins in 1798 with a review, the *Athenaeum*, ...and ends in 1898 with the death of Mallarmé in Valvins.”²⁰

15. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Mallarmé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 167.

16. *Ibid.*, 66.

17. Letter to A. H. Cazalis, 28 April 1866, in Stéphane Mallarmé, *Selected Letters of Stéphane Mallarmé*, ed. Rosemary Lloyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 59–61.

18. Letter to A. H. Cazalis, 14 May 1867, in Mallarmé, *Selected Letters*, 74–76.

19. Roberto Calasso, *Literature and the Gods*, trans. Tim Parks (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 170.

20. *Ibid.*, 171. See also Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1988.

The heroic age of literary modernism begins and ends with the impossible project of the Book, conceived as a new Bible by Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis and as the true modern cult by Mallarmé. Whether we think of this project in literary terms as pointing forward to the vanishing point of the literary absolute, Maurice Blanchot's "book to come,"²¹ or in religious terms as looking back to the religions of the book, to be renewed from absolute literature, it is clear that literary modernism is born with the will to reclaim the absolute, and that the idea of absolute literature amounts to a reformulation of the old art religion. But it is also clear that the new art religion is absolutely ambiguous in nature. The will to fabricate a new mythology scarcely disguises modernism's founding myth of an absolute poetic creativity, vested in the romantic genius and grounded in the assumption of correspondence between mind and universe. Novalis's Fichtean and Mallarmé's Hegelian self-understanding of their poetic role announces a self-deification that privileges the mind as the key to the universe. The discovery of the "intimate correlation" between poetry and the universe allows Mallarmé to assert that the universe will recover in him ("in this self") its identity,²² just as Novalis can state in his unfinished/unfinishable novel of the education of the orphic poet, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, that the higher voice of the universe speaks through the poet. Although the positing of a correspondence between mind and universe, micro- and macrocosm, has multiple sources in antiquity, notably in Neoplatonism and in the hermetic writings, the idea of the absolute Book, the idea, that is, of a new religion as a product of poetic invention is distinctly modern.²³ We find Friedrich Schlegel writing to Novalis in December 1798 that he intended to found a new religion, claiming that he has history on his side: "The great *authors* of religion—Moses, Christ, Mohammed, Luther—became progressively less and less politicians and more and more teachers and writers."²⁴

Thus across the heroic age of modernism the dream of a revived art religion forms a recurrent counterpoint to Hegel's relegation of the reality and the possibility of the concept to the past. In other words, we are dealing here with a post-Enlightenment project. Along with Nietzsche, Mallarmé spells out the truth of modernism's myth of absolute creation—the God we have invented is nothing more than our fiction. Does this truth complete and crown the Enlightenment (as Robespierre and Saint-Simon and Comte or Novalis, Schlegel, Wagner, or

21. Maurice Blanchot, *Le livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959).

22. Mallarmé to Henri Cazalis, 14 May 1867; and to Villers de L'Isle-Adam, 24 September 1867; in Stéphane Mallarmé, *Correspondance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 1: 242, 259.

23. See Marianne Kesting, "Aspekte des absoluten Buches bei Novalis und Mallarmé," *Euphorion* 68 (1974): 420. See, for the theme of the "absolute book" in relation to Friedrich Schlegel and of the "empty book" in relation to Mallarmé, chaps. 17 and 19 in Hans Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981).

24. Letter to Novalis, 2 December 1798, quoted in Kesting, "Aspekte des absoluten Buches," 422.

Nietzsche could well argue), or does it confirm the dialectic of enlightenment that haunts modernism? In this altogether ambiguous constellation the modern poet feels called to create a new mythology—but in the knowledge that this creation can only be a consciously produced, second-order creation, assembled from the remains of the old mythologies. As such, it must be a mythology of mythologies, a mythology of reason in the sense that the Book will present the schema, the abstract of all sacred books, all myths, and all knowledge.²⁵ The Book is to be understood as a higher-order art religion and as a higher-order totality, through which mankind and the universe come to self-knowledge and self-identity. Novalis writes to Schlegel in November 1798: “You write about your Bible project; I too have come through the study of science and its body, the book—to the idea of the Bible, the Bible as the *ideal* of every book. The theory of the Bible, developed, will give the theory of writing and of word formation—which will give at the same time the symbolic indirect constructive method of the creative spirit.”²⁶ Mallarmé likewise conceives the Book as the demonstration and exemplification of the symbolic constructive method of the creative spirit, the ideal source that is to be abstracted from the contingencies of chance and history. That is to say, Mallarmé’s Book formalizes and absolutizes the romantic programme of poeticizing the world—hence (with Novalis) the constructive, not to say magic, power deemed to reside in the word, in word formations and combinations (reinforced by mathematical calculations); and (with Mallarmé) the symbolic power to be attributed to the printed word on the page and to the form of the Book. The Book literally realizes the magic powers of Orpheus. As the ideal of all books, the Book raises to a second order the virtue inherent in the word: its capacity to poeticize the world by its transmutation of the world into the cosmos of meaning, or more exactly, its capacity to lead the reader into the workshop of the meaning-constructing spirit. Calasso’s heroic age is defined by a Pascalian wager against a mute and meaningless universe. Novalis’s magic idealism at the beginning of the century yields to Nietzsche and Mallarmé’s open embrace of myth and fiction against cosmic nihilism but also of course against the nihilism of a decadent and materialistic modernity.

The idea of the Book belongs to the esoteric tradition since the Renaissance, embracing such distinct strands as hermeticism, alchemy, Christian Kabbalah, and Bohemian theosophy.²⁷ These strands have in common an underlying core of ancient

25. Paul Valéry explains Mallarmé’s intention as follows: “to contemplate a principle common to all possible works...to master by means of the combined analysis and construction of forms all possible relations of the universe of ideas, or that of numbers and magnitudes”; quoted in Kesting, “Aspekte des absoluten Buches,” 431.

26. Letter to Friedrich Schlegel, 7 November 1798, quoted in Kesting, “Aspekte des absoluten Buches,” 427.

27. See Antoine Faivre, “Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism,” in *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter Hanegraaff (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 109–46; see also Hanegraaff, “Romanticism and the Esoteric Connection,” in the same volume, pp. 237–68.

wisdom that constituted the tradition of *philosophia perennis* or *occulta*. The defining components of this diffuse tradition of Western esoterism are clearly integral to Mallarmé's Book (see chapter 6). The unity of mind and universe is expressed in the idea of *correspondence*, believed to exist between all parts of the universe, visible and invisible. The correspondences between the microcosm and the macrocosm enable us to read the *book of nature* and give us through this knowledge a magic power—the orphic tradition that informs Novalis's magic idealism and Mallarmé's poetic mission of *transmutation*: the great alchemical work of the purification of self and nature. Mallarmé, the poet-inventor who lays claim to the vacant place of the creator God, continues the romantic dream of challenging and displacing the natural sciences as the successor to religion. Paul Bénichou calls Mallarmé the last spiritual hero of romanticism, who carries the romantic sacralization of poetry to its limit in the idea of a Book encompassing the totality of human history.²⁸ After Victor Hugo and Baudelaire, Mallarmé represents the third and final stage of nineteenth-century romanticism.

Moreover, like Baudelaire, Mallarmé remained faithful to the founding project of romanticism—to provide modern man with a new version of the relations between the temporal and the spiritual. It is, however, a project that has become impossible and leads the poet to withdraw into the silence and solitude of a negative poetics. And yet it is precisely in this isolation that Mallarmé searches for an answer to the challenge of Wagner. Confronted by the prestige of Bayreuth, he oscillates between the rival claims of the Book and the Theatre, the Bible of esoterism and the Theatre of the people. The contradiction between a religion for the few and a religion for the people, between the sacred calling and the isolation of the poet, is built into the dream of a redemptive regeneration of art and society. It draws the poet-outsider on the one hand to the consolation of the invisible church of the elect,²⁹ on the other hand to the phantasm of the collective artwork, the communal theatre that will consecrate and celebrate the romantic trinity of God-Poet-Humanity. The Theatre and the Book as the two possibilities of the Great Work thus figure as complements and rivals in Mallarmé's thinking. But how can the Work be private and not public? The esoteric poet, withdrawn from the world, head of a self-anointed avant-garde of symbolists, cannot escape the blatant social contradiction between the dreams of an artistic elite and the crowd, between the aristocratic and the democratic principles. Hence the challenge posed by Wagner's public resonance and by the undeniable magic of music, into which Mallarmé was initiated, appropriately, on Good Friday 1885, through the Lamoureux orchestral

28. Paul Bénichou, *Selon Mallarmé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 46.

29. See, for the appeal of secret societies and secret doctrines to bohemian circles, artist colonies, and agrarian communes in Germany in the early twentieth century, Corona Hepp, *Avantgarde: Moderne Kunst, Kulturkritik und Reformbewegungen nach der Jahrhundertwende* (Munich: dtv, 1985).

concerts, which he called his Sunday religious service. Recalling this concert series, Mallarmé's young protégé, Paul Valéry, writes:

At the same time intense stimulation of interior life and communion. For a thousand beings assembled, who close their eyes for the same reasons, experience the same transport, feel themselves alone with themselves and yet identified through this intimate emotion with so many of their fellows truly become their equals (*semblables*), constitute the religious condition par excellence, the sensible unity of a living plurality. . . . This cult, this sacred function, this service, it was celebrated in my youth at the Cirque d'Été.³⁰

Valéry echoes here the sentiments of his master in "Plaisir sacré" (Sacred Pleasure), where Mallarmé declares that music announces the last and full human cult. Music satisfies the need of the multitude for the Absolute, for the Unsayable, for poetry without words. The crowd, listening "unconsciously to its own greatness," participates in the figuration of the divine, fulfilling thereby its paramount function of guarding the secret of its own collective grandeur that resides in the orchestra.³¹ The conductor accordingly *contains* what Mallarmé calls the *chimera*, that is, "the sensible unity of a living plurality," manifested in the reciprocity of music and audience, the crowd and the god.

Mallarmé's crowd is the chimera, the fabulous animal made up of various animals, which symbolizes the fusion of the many into the one. It is Hobbes's Leviathan, the still-unconscious General Will, from which all sovereignty proceeds—in the aesthetic, religious, and political spheres. Mallarmé grounds the idea of the total work of art in the self-communion of the crowd as the instituting source of the sublime unity of art, religion, and politics, waiting to be consecrated and instituted in a public cult, in the civil religion of the people. But this is precisely what the banality of modern civilization precludes. The modern city lacks the divine theatre in which the "future Spectacle" can be staged. And yet the French poet senses "the colossal approach of an Initiation."³² He even gestures in a later essay, "Solennté," in suitably fin-de-siècle style to the impending conclusion of a cycle of History, announced by the Overture to a Jubilee. If this apocalyptic moment demands the office, the ministry, of the Poet, it is because a new age demands a new art, that is, a new cult, modeled on and superseding the Mass. The solitary poet denies that he is dreaming when he anticipates like Nietzsche the return of a tragic sense of religion and death, manifested in the return of the God, the Divinity in each of us, humble foundation of the City: "'Real Presence': or that the god be there, diffuse,

30. Paul Valéry, "Au Concert Lamoureux en 1893," in *Pièces sur l'art* (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), 82, quoted in Suzanne Bernard, *Mallarmé et la musique* (Paris: Nizet, 1959), 50.

31. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, 388–90.

32. *Ibid.*, 541.

total, mimed distantly by the effaced actor, known by us, trembling in proportion to all glory, latent if undue to us in that way, that he [the actor] assumed, then renders, imbued with the authenticity of the words and the light, triumphal of Homeland, Honour, Peace.”³³ In the light of the sacrifices it demands of us on the battlefield, the state owes us such a patriotic cult and with it the apotheosis of the arts that only a capital city can provide. Throne and altar—royalty, military, aristocracy, clergy—can no longer fulfill this task.³⁴ But can the solitary poet take their place? The tragic fiction, the *opus metaphysicum*, offered by Nietzsche and Mallarmé—is this a fiction to die for? All the ironies of the dialectic of enlightenment that inaugurated the nineteenth century return at the end of the century in magnified form. The solitary poet or the solitary philosopher represents the one, conscious side of the fiction; the crowd the other, unconscious side. Is their reciprocal truth that dreamt of by the German romantics—a mythology of reason, the state as work of art? Or has this sacred truth become a fatal conflation of collective self-redemption and self-destruction? This ambiguity is left suspended with Mallarmé. The reciprocal current that will redeem artist and crowd, evidence and proof of the absolute work, remained the messianic projection of the solitary poet. Mallarmé’s theatre to come designates the empty space of advent,³⁵ the place of a collective revelation, an epiphany that will refound the city. But this empty stage for the absolute—is it not the setting for the illusory dreams of art religion and of art politics, that is to say, for the apocalypse of modernism?

If we speak of the theatre of modernism in this sense, it is because from the beginning the theatre stands under suspicion. From Rousseau and the Jacobins to Michelet, from Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling to Wagner, the theatre is accorded meaning and justified as the festival of the people, as the civic religion of the city against the reduction of art to nothing but its own private absolute. After 1848, however, with the retreat of the hopes of a revolutionary renewal of society, we observe a reversal of means and ends, adumbrated already in Wagner’s *Artwork of the Future*: the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of a liberated humanity turns into a festival theatre for a people to come,³⁶ a theatre that found its realization in the Bayreuth festival theatre for the bourgeoisie, not the people, and was subsidized appropriately enough by a dream king, entrapped in the solitary splendor of his own private theatre. Now the theatre becomes the index not only of the ambiguity of aesthetic salvation but of the age itself. Nietzsche denounces Wagner as the Cagliostro of modernity—no longer the harbinger of cultural renaissance but the primary symptom of European

33. Ibid., 394. I follow here the translation proposed by Robert Greer Cohn, *Mallarmé’s “Divagations”: A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Lang, 1990), 323.

34. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, 395.

35. Thierry Alcolombre, *Mallarmé: La poétique du théâtre et l’écriture* (Paris: Monard, 1995), 188–91.

36. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in zwei Bänden* (Munich: Hanser, 1967), I: 225.

decadence.³⁷ Nietzsche defines decadence as the antithesis of the intention of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It is characterized by the loss of a sense of the whole, consequent anarchy of the parts, and the disintegration of style. The will to style is replaced by the will to effect at any price. Wagner represents the modern artist par excellence, because he signals the emergence of the actor in music—that is, “the total transformation of art into the theatrical.”³⁸ More than that, this transformation announces the golden age of the actor, by which Nietzsche understands the age of the masses. The seductive powers of the theatre and the longing of the masses for theatrical illusion and theatrical redemption belong together. “We know the masses, we know the theatre,” says Nietzsche; they want the sublime, the profound, the overpowering.³⁹ Wagner’s success spells out the inescapable truth of cultural degeneration: wherever the masses become decisive, the actor alone can arouse great enthusiasm, the actor who is tyrant and master hypnotist. Mallarmé and Nietzsche reflect through the figure of Wagner all the ambiguity of the *empty space of advent*, opened up by the death of God.

Dialectic of Enlightenment: From the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century

With Nietzsche and Mallarmé we have reached the point at which we can take stock. Looking back, we can see them as the continuation of the two distinct, German and French, lineages of the total work of art, parallel responses to the perceived religious deficit of modern society. Looking forward, we can see that they open the way to a new, dangerously voluntaristic twist to the dialectic of enlightenment.

The first and primary lineage derives from Rousseau and the French Revolution. Its recurrent double focus is that of Rousseau’s *Social Contract*: the sovereign people and the civil religion as the public expression of the General Will. The unity of society is embodied in a religious conception of politics, just as the function of this political religion is to affirm the reformation and regeneration of society. In giving voice to the religion of Man, the civil religion amounts to a self-divinization of society. Its priests accordingly are social theorists, and its theology a *sacred sociology*,⁴⁰ a sociology of the sacred instituting power of the sovereign people, of the collective, the crowd. To speak of a sacred sociology implies, however, a recognition of its secularizing logic. It signals a contradiction in terms that is tied up with the process of enlightenment: the knowledge of the decay of the old faith and of the necessity

37. Nietzsche, “The Case of Wagner,” in *Werke in zwei Bänden*, 2: 292.

38. *Ibid.*, 2: 302.

39. *Ibid.*, 2: 300.

40. I borrow the term from the project of a sacred sociology in the name of a “full and total” society as the goal of the College of Sociology established by Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, and Michel Leiris in Paris in 1937, under the impact of events the other side of the Rhine. See Denis Hollier, ed., *The College of Sociology (1937–39)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

of a new faith involves, as we have seen, a dialectic, which drove the Jacobins, the Saint-Simonians, and Comte to decree the invention of a new public cult. In this perspective *from above*, the public festival figures as both means and end. As end, it is conceived as product of the sovereign people, the solemn manifestation of its indivisible unity; as means, it is conceived as producer of the people. This functional view of the public cult implies an instrumental view of the artist. Summoned, in Comte's words, to provide the aesthetic complement to the work of scientific genius, art is allotted the task of giving final cultic form to the reconciliation of reason and feeling, science and religion. If we turn to the perspective *from below*, as opposed to the rationalistic perspective from above, the emphasis—as with Michelet or, as we shall see, with Durkheim—on the spontaneity and creativity of the people likewise leaves little place for the artist, indeed none if we follow Rousseau. The conundrum of creativity is perfectly captured in Wagner's insistence that the creator of the artwork of the future will be, as with the Greek *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the people.

The creativity of the people figures in this emphatic but nevertheless unresolved form in the German lineage of the total work of art, conceived as the aesthetic solution to the political contradictions of the French Revolution and as the aesthetic reconciliation of reason and myth in modernity. Athens, not Rousseau's Sparta, is to be the model of a harmoniously reformed and regenerated society and key to Germany's cultural identity against French civilization. The sacred sociology of the one lineage is answered by the *national aestheticism* of the other. When Nietzsche asks whether there are people who understand Wagner's call "to ground the state on music,"⁴¹ he is articulating an understanding of politics as aesthetic foundation, as against the civil-religious understanding of politics in sacred sociology. At the same time of course Nietzsche's question points to the perennial circle of artist and people, of leader and crowd. Mallarmé's meditations on this theme "contain" the answer to this conundrum in the same way that the "conductor contains the chimaera,"⁴² just as Mallarmé's and Nietzsche's paradoxes of truth and fiction "contain" the explosive consequences of the dialectic of enlightenment waiting to be unfolded in the apocalypse of modernism.

The dialectic of the rational and the irrational, of lucidity and nihilism, is taken by Nietzsche and Mallarmé to its paradoxical conclusion. They point to the fatal knowledge that gives birth to sociology and with which the founding fathers of the discipline—Émile Durkheim, Vilfredo Pareto, and Max Weber—were forced to grapple. The emergence of the new, institutionalized sciences of sociology and of social psychology was undoubtedly related to the emergence of the new politics of mass society after 1870, which posed in more acute form the problem of social cohesion. The dialectic thus appears particularly clearly in the sociological attempts

41. Nietzsche, *Werke in zwei Bänden*, 1: 193.

42. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, 390.

to come to terms with the irrational forces of religion and the crowd as the “sacred” other and deeper “truth” of secular society. Pareto argued that society is held together only by feelings, which are not true but effective. This knowledge runs the risk, however, of destroying indispensable illusions and thus the foundation of society.⁴³ The inherent contradiction between scientific truth and social utility invites the open embrace of irrational but useful fictions. Nietzsche’s mythology of myth signifies in this sense the will to myth. Lucidity supposes and entails the double optic of disenchantment and enchantment, of negative truth and life-enhancing illusion. It is not by chance that Heidegger selects Nietzsche’s *cri de coeur* from *The Antichrist*—“Well nigh two thousand years and not a single new god!”—as the epigraph to the first volume of his 1937 Nietzsche lectures, “The Will to Power as Art.” The whole idea of a reborn art religion from the young Hegel through to the late Heidegger looked to art as the key to religious and social renewal. This, as Heidegger reminds us, defines the task and essence of great art. In “Origin of the Work of Art,” written at the same time as the Nietzsche lectures, Heidegger declares the origin of the work of art to be one with the origin of a people’s historical existence: “Poetry is founding in the triple sense of bestowing, grounding, and beginning.”⁴⁴ Tragic philosophers, however, are no more capable than scientific utopians or sociologists of creating new gods. But does sociology perhaps offer another path to origin?

It is here that Durkheim comes to meet Mallarmé. Durkheim’s lifework was directed to demonstrating that society is a *sui generis* reality irreducible to its parts. In his late work he seeks to elucidate the unconscious secret at the heart of the social: the religious creativity of the collective. Mallarmé’s chimera and Valéry’s “sensible unity of a living plurality” describe the social experience of *dedifferentiation* that involves

a transformation of consciousness, one in which the relatively distinct individual consciousness of everyday life becomes sentient with others in a common situation and in a common enterprise. . . . It is a process in which the profane becomes transformed into a sacred context (the transvaluation of mundane values)—quite the obverse of the secularization process that has preoccupied so much of the sociology of religion and its image of “modernization.”⁴⁵

The experience or better the moment of dedifferentiation, the moment of crowd formation and communal fusion, is the point at which art, religion, and politics

43. Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1970), 2: 13.

44. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), 202.

45. Edward Tiryakian, “From Durkheim to Managua: Revolutions as Religious Revivals,” in *Durkheimian Sociology: Cultural Studies*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 45.

meet and share a common ground, drawing their inspiration from the transformative power of an emergent reality that transcends profane everyday consciousness. This higher reality, the “world of sacred things” is the subject of Durkheim’s last and most important work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912). From his study of Australian totemism Durkheim arrived at the two key propositions of his sociological interpretation of religion: first, that men worship their own society without realizing it; second, that religious creation arises from the state of collective excitement in which social life attains its greatest intensity (radical individualism, i.e., the modern privatization of religion “misunderstands the fundamental conditions of the religious life”).⁴⁶ Durkheim speaks of the exceptional increase of force that seizes an assembly or a speaker addressing a crowd. Such a “general effervescence” is characteristic of “revolutionary or creative epochs”: “This is what explains the Crusades, for example, or many of the scenes, either sublime or savage, of the French Revolution.” This collective force ordinarily affects us as the “moral conscience, of which, by the way, men have never made even a slightly distinct representation except by the aid of religious symbols.”⁴⁷ Durkheim can insist that there is “something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself,” while admitting that we are living in an interregnum, in which “the old gods are growing old or already dead, and others are not yet born”: “this is what rendered vain the attempt of Comte with the old historic souvenirs artificially revived: it is life itself, and not a dead past which can produce a living cult. But this state of incertitude and confused agitation cannot last for ever. A day will come when our societies will know again those hours of creative effervescence.... As to the question of what symbols this new faith will express itself with... that is something which surpasses the human faculty of foresight.”⁴⁸

Durkheim’s dying gods and the coming gods of a new faith reflect Saint-Simon’s distinction between critical and organic epochs. Indeed we can say that this distinction underpins the whole tradition of sacred sociology since the French Revolution, just as it is integral to the distinction between the critical function and the holistic telos of avant-gardism. Durkheim remains faithful to the critical spirit of sociology; it allows him, however, to establish by means of rational inquiry that “collective consciousness is the highest form of psychic life” and that “society has a creative power which no other observable being can equal.”⁴⁹ The sacred stands for the ever-present, ever-possible regeneration of society. Like Mallarmé’s crowd, society for Durkheim contains this secret in the same way that symbols express and contain

46. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976), 425.

47. *Ibid.*, 210–11.

48. *Ibid.*, 394.

49. *Ibid.*, 444, 446.

the truths of collective faith. Mallarmé and Durkheim highlight the festive character of collective communion that makes—in Hans-Georg Gadamer's words—all cultic ceremonies, whether religious, political, or dramatic, a kind of creation.⁵⁰ At the same time we must not forget that Durkheim delegates the advent of a new faith to an unknown future. Pending a future reconciliation of the critical and the organic, the scientific and religious needs of society, Durkheim firmly defended modern postrevolutionary society, based on the individual and an "organic" social differentiation, as opposed to the "mechanical" solidarity of premodern community. The possibility of a modern sacred in individualistic society resides for Durkheim in a Kantian morality that recognizes that science and art cannot take the place of the collective power of religion.

The "secret" of the crowd found a very different reading in the theories of mass behavior and crowd psychology that proliferated in the wake of the Paris Commune and the growing sense of crisis in the Third Republic, occasioned by financial scandals, General Boulanger's demonstration of the power of a charismatic leader over a crowd, and increasing civil unrest, marked by marches, demonstrations, and strikes. Scipio Sighele's *La folla delinquente* (The Criminal Crowd) (1891), translated into French in 1892, and Gabriel Tarde's *Les lois de l'imitation* (The Laws of Imitation) (1890) translated the fears of the bourgeoisie into "scientific" psychologies of the crowd. Tarde regarded the crowd as the product of spontaneous generation, triggered by a spark of passion, which created "a single animal, a wild beast without a name, which marches to its goal with an irresistible finality."⁵¹ If we may regard Durkheim as the sociological generalization of Mallarmé's intuitions about the crowd, Gustave Le Bon's "era of the crowd" can be seen as the generalization of Nietzsche's intuitions about the age of the actor. Like Nietzsche, he sees the crowd in terms not of a creative or sublime dedifferentiation but of a destructive regression induced by hypnotic suggestion and contagion. The popularity of Le Bon's *Psychologie des foules* (1895) was doubtless due to its ability to express the cultural pessimism of the fin de siècle and crystallize the bourgeoisie's fear of the masses. The diagnosis is familiar. We are living in a critical age of transition, harbinger of the great changes that will come from "the destruction of those religious, political and social beliefs in which the elements of our civilization are rooted," compounded by the entirely new conditions of existence brought about by the scientific and industrial revolutions (e.g., the growth and urbanization of the population). Writing a century after the French Revolution Le Bon declares "the last surviving sovereign force of modern times" to be the power of crowds: "The age we are about to enter

50. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Festive Character of Theatre," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 59.

51. Susanna Burrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), 141. See also Robert Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic*. London: Sage, 1975.

will in truth be the ERA OF CROWDS.”⁵² Le Bon adds ominously that the most obvious task of the masses in history has been to destroy a worn-out civilization.

Following Tarde, Le Bon postulates the law of the mental unity of crowds—that is to say, the collective mind of the crowd constitutes a new, emergent consciousness, that of a “single being” with its own psychology. It is a consciousness governed by the unconscious, resembling the state of hypnosis. By making the irrational the key dimension of social existence and by elevating the crowd to the sole surviving sovereign force in political life, Le Bon brings the dialectic of enlightenment full circle. He argues that the destruction of religious, political, and social beliefs leaves only the silence of nature, since science cannot replace the hopes and illusions by which men live. It is no longer a question of myth serving as a necessary supplement to reason; science must recognize that the crowd is everywhere and always religious, and that this knowledge must be placed in the service of manipulating and mastering the chimera. The masses do not want the truth: “Whoever can supply them with illusions is easily their master; whoever attempts to destroy their illusions is always their victim.”⁵³ Everything therefore rests on determining the defining characteristics of the unconscious psychology of the crowd. The religion of the crowd, according to Le Bon, can be summed up under two headings: the crowd’s receptivity to the influence exercised over it by the leader, and by images. Le Bon’s most significant contribution to crowd theory was his analysis of the crowd in terms of its response to leaders. He believed that only the truly magnetic fascination exerted by a leader could tame the crowd: “The crowd demands a god before everything else.”⁵⁴ This god is supplied by the hero of the masses, who always bears the semblance of a Caesar.⁵⁵ The Caesarean leader satisfies the religious feelings of the crowd in a double fashion: on the one hand, he is the “veritable god,” the higher being who is feared and worshipped and demands blind submission to his commands; on the other hand, he incorporates the will of the crowd through his fanatical intensity and willpower, which make him capable of harnessing the crowd’s irresistible force by arousing its faith. Because the crowd can think only in images, it can be influenced only by images: “For this reason theatrical representations, in which the image is shown in its most clearly visible shape, always have an

52. Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, intro. by Robert K. Merton (New York: Vintage, 1960), 14. See, for the history of crowd theory, S. Moscovici, *The Age of the Crowd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

53. Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 110.

54. *Ibid.*, 75.

55. J. L. Talmon calls Louis Napoleon the first modern dictator: “Caesarian democracy or plebiscitarian dictatorship assumed the character of a constant search for stunts, in the form of foreign adventures, *panem et circenses* or monumental public buildings and squares.” J. L. Talmon, *Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase* (New York: Praeger, 1961), 493. See G. L. Mosse, “Mass Politics, Circuses, and Monuments,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1971, 167–82.

enormous influence on the crowd.”⁵⁶ It is hardly surprising that Mussolini stated that he no longer knew how often he had reread *The Psychology of Crowds*: “It is an excellent work to which I frequently refer.”⁵⁷

Although Freud treats Le Bon as the representative theorist of the crowd in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), he takes issue with the thesis of hypnotic suggestion, advanced by Sighele, Tarde, and Le Bon, as the key to the crowd’s unconscious identification with a leader. He replaces hypnosis with transference, that is, with the unconscious erotic bond that ties the crowd to the leader and to each other. Transference leads Freud to propose the psychology of the leader as the key to the psychology of the crowd. Drawing on the model of the primal horde and the despotic father figure, which he had developed in *Totem and Taboo* (1912), Freud argued that the leader functions as the ego ideal (i.e., super-ego) of the group but that he himself stands apart:

The members of the group were subject to ties just as we see them today, but the father of the primal horde was free. His intellectual acts were strong and independent even in isolation, and his will needed no reinforcement from others. Consistency leads us to assume that his ego had few libidinal ties; he loved no one but himself, or other people only in so far as they served his needs.... He, at the very beginning of the history of mankind, was the “superman,” whom Nietzsche only expected from the future.⁵⁸

Whether the hold of the leader was conceived as hypnotic suggestion or as unconscious transference, it is clear that Mussolini and Hitler were exactly the kind of leader that crowd theory up to Freud had been predicting since the 1890s.⁵⁹

We should note the opposed conceptions of the religious nature of the crowd in Durkheim and Le Bon. Where Durkheim foregrounds the religious creativity of the crowd without reference to a leader, Le Bon stresses the crowd’s religious receptivity and submission to a leader. Where Durkheim foregrounds the *symbolic*

56. Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 73, 118–20. It is important to recall that Le Bon is writing against the background of what Eric Hobsbawm calls the invention of tradition, dominated after 1870 by the emergence of mass politics: “After the 1870s, therefore, ... rulers and middle-class observers rediscovered the importance of ‘irrational’ elements in the maintenance of the social fabric and the social order.” Here the construction of the *nation* as an all-embracing imaginary community, transcending class, hierarchy, and regional loyalties, formed the primary symbolic focus of social cohesion. Hobsbawm stresses the *theatrical* dimension of public symbolic discourse, reflecting the democratization of politics, which found its correlate in the development of new building types for spectacle and mass ritual, such as outdoor and indoor sports stadia, exhibition buildings, etc. Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 268.

57. Burrows, *Distorting Mirrors*, 179.

58. Sigmund Freud, “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,” in *Civilization, Society, and Religion*, The Penguin Freud Library (London: Penguin, 1991), 12: 155.

59. J. S. McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob from Plato to Canetti* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 241–42.

dimension of religious representations, Le Bon stresses the power of *theatrical* illusion. Seen thus, they represent the two—positive and negative—sides of sacred sociology, which point to the coming open split between Mallarmé's esoteric quest for the symbolic Mystery and Nietzsche's anticipation of the theatrical age of the political actor and the masses—the split, that is, between the avant-garde dreams of a sacred theatre, from the French and Russian symbolists through to Claudel and Artaud, and the Fascist invocations of a new, sacred politics. The immediate inheritor of Le Bon, Nietzsche, and Pareto was Georges Sorel. His proclamation in *Reflections on Violence* (1907) of myth as the motive force of history, destined to rejuvenate decadent civilization, escapes the supposed fatality of enlightenment only to embrace the creative-destructive force of the irrational. Zeev Sternhell identifies the *mythical* conception of politics, arising from the Sorelian faith in the power of myth, as the key to the Fascist view of the world.⁶⁰ We cannot, however, simply oppose the two sides of sacred society. They also belong together. In that Durkheim resumes the whole tradition of sacred sociology, he also “contains” the dangerous consequences spelled out by Le Bon. Raymond Aron argues that Durkheim's totalizing notion of society with respect to the question of social cohesion fails to recognize the plurality of social groups and the conflict of moral ideas and leads to a devaluation of political institutions (Durkheim's definition of democracy in *Leçons de sociologie* includes “neither universal suffrage nor plurality of parties nor even parliament”): “Unless one specifies what one means by society, Durkheim's conception may, contrary to his intentions, lead or seem to lead to the pseudo-religions of our age and the adoration of a national collectivity by its own members.”⁶¹ The fin de siècle with esoteric symbolism at one pole and crowd psychology at the other sets the scene for parts 2 and 3 respectively: the avant-garde's fascination with the spiritual in art and quest for the total work, and the transformation of the total work into the totalitarian theatre of politics.

60. Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder, and Maia Asteri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 231.

61. Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, 2: 103.

