

PART II

THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

RELIGION AND ART: *PARSIFAL* AS PARADIGM

The Idea of Return

With *Parsifal* (1882) Wagner accomplished the return to the stage of religious cult, thereby fulfilling what Thomas Mann called “the secret longing of the theatre, its ultimate ambition”: to return to “that ritual from which it first emerged among both Christians and heathens.”¹ When Mann adds that this closeness to the sacred origins of the theatre makes *Parsifal* the most theatrical of Wagner’s works, it is clear that what is at stake is the very idea of theatre and that this is not simply a theatrical question. The secret longing of the theatre, we are to understand, expresses a secret longing of secular modernity. In 1902 the Russian poet and novelist Andrey Bely asked: “Does not the musical character of contemporary plays, their *symbolism*, indicate the tendency of drama to become mystery? It is from mystery that drama emerged. It is to mystery that drama is destined to return. Once drama approaches mystery, returns to it, it will inevitably descend from the boards of the stage and extend into life. Do we not have a sign here that life will be transformed into mystery?”² A return to the origins carries with it a promise of regeneration,

1. Thomas Mann, “Versuch über das Theater” (1907), in *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1960), 10: 23–62; see also Mann’s 1929 lecture on Freud and the idea of the “great return.”

2. Andrey Bely, *The Dramatic Symphony and the Forms of Art*, trans. Roger Keys and Angela Keys (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), 181.

whose condition is a reversal of profane perspectives. *Return* and *regeneration* together form the master trope of a romantic modernism that takes us from a countervision of theatre to a countervision of society and draws its strength from a counterphilosophy of history and time, predicated not on the idea of progress but on that of return and *re-ligio*. Gilbert Durand can thus speak in his study of the art religion of the moderns of the two founding myths of European modernism: a progressive, rationalist myth, which appeals to the “principle of hope” to mask the terrors of history; and the myth of eternal return, which affirms the permanence of the species and confirms man’s hope of renewal and regeneration. Durand looks to art as the vehicle of this hope because the work of art offers the space of an “opening” to time and destiny,³ beyond the fatal dialectic of demythologization and remythologization, repression and return of the repressed.

Wagner occupies center stage in Durand’s study of the religion of art, and *Parsifal* center stage in Durand’s reconstruction of Wagner’s quest for redemption. In Durand’s account, *Parsifal* becomes the paradigmatic work of the art religion of the moderns because it embodies the reversal of perspectives intrinsic to the idea of return. Conceived as *Bühnenweihfestspiel* (Stage Consecration Festival Play), which inaugurates and consecrates a festival theatre, *Parsifal* is tied to the idea of return, to the renewal of what Hugo von Hofmannsthal termed the ancient instinct for festival: “Of all secular institutions, the theatre is the only remaining one of any power and universal validity that links our love of festival, our joy at spectacle and laughter, to the ancient instinct of festival implanted in the human race from time immemorial.”⁴ With its roots in the sacred origins of theatre the festival play stands apart from the secular routine of the modern theatre. On the basis of this distinction Hans-Georg Gadamer distinguishes two very different types of theatre. The one type reaches from antiquity through to the baroque (Calderón); it is a communal theatre of elevated religious presence. The other type appears in the Renaissance and becomes institutionalized in the course of the eighteenth century as a permanent professional theatre, based on the separation of actors and audience.⁵ This modern form of the theatre is a pale shadow of the theatre’s former festive character. It is infected by the historicism that makes its repertoire an imaginary museum of world drama, cut off from the communal spirit that transcends each

3. Gilbert Durand, *Beaux-arts et archétypes: La religion de l'art* (Paris: PUF, 1989), 17–18. See also Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1965).

4. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “Komödie” (1922), in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4, *Prosa* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1955), 95.

5. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Festive Character of Theatre,” in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicolas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Carl Dahlhaus distinguishes between the baroque *vertical stage* of mythology (Christian or pagan), embracing heaven and hell, Olympus and the underworld, and dominated by the scenic image, and the drama of the Renaissance *horizontal stage*, based on dialogue and the realism of history as opposed to the illusionism of mythology. Carl Dahlhaus, “Richard Wagners ‘Bühnenfestspiel’: Revolutionsfest und Kunstreligion,” in *Das Fest*, ed. Walter Haug and Rainer Warning (Munich: Fink, 1989), 604–5.

of us individually and embodies the real power of theatre. Gadamer ties the authentic (aesthetically nondifferentiated) experience of art to festive fusion, that is to say, to religious experience. By separating sacred and profane spheres, the festival “raises the participants out of their everyday existence and elevates them into a kind of universal communion.”⁶ This elevation into a transformed state of being forms the goal of the festive occasion, which has its own temporality: the timeless moment of heightened presence in which past and present become one in an act of remembrance. This act of return is at the same time an act of creation: “Something drawn from within ourselves takes shape as a more profound representation of our own reality. This overwhelming truth is summoned up from hidden depths to address us.”⁷

Gadamer’s two theatrical traditions are based on the distinction between community and society (Tönnies’s *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, the source of this distinction, belongs, like *Parsifal*, to the 1880s). Gadamer does not address the question of whether the festive character of theatre can be recaptured in modernity. A positive answer, which affirms the idea of return against the modern dominance of history, would involve a reversal of Gadamer’s Hegelian perspective—but with an inescapably modern twist. Where festive theatre once tied aesthetic to religious experience, its modern counterpart must tie religious to aesthetic experience. This is precisely the answer of Wagner. With his festival drama of regeneration Wagner wants to recover and reinstate through art a *sacred* conception of time, space, and place and a *symbolic* conception of meaning against the progressive trend to demythologization in the name of history. By turning to myth against modernity he seeks to master the meaningless progression of what Walter Benjamin termed homogeneous empty time, and Durand, echoing Mircea Eliade, the terrors of history.⁸

What can the idea of return—and behind it, the myth of eternal return—offer against the irreversible power of time, compounded by the idea of progress? Two intuitions are central to the idea of return: the assertion of the priority of myth over history, and of the priority of figurative over objective meaning.⁹ As Durand puts it, the historicist construction of history is dependent on cyclic or progressive archetypes, *not* the other way round. In other words, it is not history, the modern idol, that explains myth, but myth that gives meaning to history. Once we have dethroned historicism as the unrecognized myth of history and abandoned the historical or evolutionary explanation of myth, we are ready to recognize myth’s

6. Gadamer, “Festive Character of Theatre,” 58.

7. *Ibid.*, 60.

8. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), 262; Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*.

9. See Jean-Pierre Sironneau, “Hermès ou la pensée du retour,” in *La galaxie de l’imaginaire: Dérive autour de l’oeuvre de Gilbert Durand*, ed. Michel Maffesoli (Paris: Berg International, 1980), 71–100.

meaning-creating power, that is, the universal creative power of the imagination.¹⁰ In romantic anthropology, man is the *symbolic animal*; the polysemy of the symbol underlies the continuum of religious and aesthetic experience, denied by the modern separation of art and religion.

Paul Ricoeur's "essay in interpretation" similarly seeks to reinstate man as the symbolic animal. Ricoeur derives symbolism from the creative polysemy of language: "A symbol exists... where linguistic expression lends itself by its double or multiple meanings to a work of interpretation."¹¹ This work of interpretation takes place within a hermeneutical field polarized into diametrically opposed approaches to the meaning of symbols. Ricoeur considers the oscillation between the poles of demystification and of the restoration of meaning as a characteristic expression of our modern condition, divided between the perspectives of art and science, myth and enlightenment. The one pole operates through a hermeneutics of suspicion. Its masters are Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. They seek to decipher the multiple meaning of symbols by unmasking hidden unconscious forces as the true source of meaning.¹² This exercise in suspicion refuses the *intentional structure* of the symbol in favor of a reductionism that ties explanation to *causes* (psychological, social, etc.), *genesis* (individual, historical), or *function* (affective, ideological).¹³ A *hermeneutic of recollection*, by contrast, recognizes the intentional structure of the symbol: the "something intended," which forms the implicit object of ritual, myth, belief, and calls for description, that is, for a phenomenological approach that seeks to elucidate and amplify what the symbol simultaneously reveals and conceals. Ricoeur can thus assimilate a phenomenology of the symbol to a phenomenology of religion. As against suspicion's foreclosure of meaning, recollection embraces the hermeneutic circle: "to believe is to listen to the call, but to hear we must believe in order to understand and understand in order to believe."¹⁴ But if recollection presupposes faith not suspicion, it is nevertheless a *postcritical* faith, which shares a common impulse with its opponent: both shift the origin of meaning to a center other than consciousness.¹⁵ For the one, the hermeneutic of suspicion, this center lies in unconscious forces; for the other, the hermeneutic of recollection, it is to be sought in the mythopoetic core of the imagination and its archetypes (Durand), the repository of the primordial language of man.

10. See Gilbert Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (Paris: Bordas, 1969), 450–61.

11. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay in Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970), 18.

12. *Ibid.*, 32–34.

13. *Ibid.*, 28.

14. *Ibid.*, 525.

15. *Ibid.*, 54. Precisely this common trait of the *depotentiation* of consciousness exposes both poles of the hermeneutic field to complementary dangers.

Religion and Art

For Wagner the renewal of the theatre and of society always meant a return to theatre's sacred origins. It was Wagner's firm conviction that myth gave meaning to history and that it alone provided the true subject matter of great drama.¹⁶ Wagner's turn to myth against history presupposed, however, a history of myth, which traced the loss of the creative shaping power of myth since the high point of its flowering in Athenian tragedy. This is the origin to which theatre must return if it is to become once again the collective work of art of a free community. The *Orest-eia* thus served as the dramaturgic model for *The Ring of the Nibelungs*, conceived as the artwork of the future, the child of the union of art and revolution. Like its Greek model, it was intended for a single festival performance, which would crown and consecrate the revolutionary struggles of a liberated humanity. As Wagner put it in a letter to Theodor Uhlig of 12 November 1851, "Only the revolution can bring me the artists and audience; the next revolution will bring to an end our whole theatre business." "With it [my whole work] I shall then give the people of the revolution the meaning of this revolution in its noblest sense. This public will understand me; the present cannot."¹⁷

The festival performance, as envisaged by Wagner, was to mark the point of return and regeneration. The return to the sacred origins of the theatre, to the Greek *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the Greek art religion, announced the end of the history of European decadence—artistic, religious, and political—since the downfall of Athens. Wagner's social myth of history, the myth of the loss of the regenerating powers of myth, was strikingly silent about the place of Christianity. Between Athens and the nineteenth century, Wagner registers, and Nietzsche in his wake, nothing but the rule of Socratic-Alexandrian enlightenment. *Parsifal*, and with it the essay "Religion and Art" (1880), must therefore be seen not only as a new stage in Wagner's quest to renew the theatre but as a corrective to the conception of history and myth in the *Ring* cycle, that is, a corrective to the unresolved ambiguities of the tetralogy's exploration of a mythical understanding of history and human being. I shall come back to the relation of *Parsifal* to Wagner's work as a whole later. For the moment it is sufficient to stress the reversal of perspectives, which derives the meaning of history from myth. This reversal, which aims to break the destructive power of time, necessarily involves an undoing of the *historical* distinction between the cyclic time of nature and the directed time of history.¹⁸ The assimilation of history to nature is in danger, however, of returning history to the

16. For a more detailed account of the relation between myth and history in Wagner's work, see Peter Murphy and David Roberts, *Dialectic of Romanticism: A Critique of Modernism* (London: Continuum, 2004), 50–57.

17. Quoted in Dahlhaus, "Richard Wagner's 'Bühnenfestspiel,'" 592.

18. Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, 90.

power of *fate*.¹⁹ The ring, as symbol of the cyclic conception of history, is inherently ambiguous. Wagner's revolutionary drama of emancipation from the repetitive power of fate (the curse of the ring) falls back into the clutches of Schopenhauer's dismissal of history as the return of the ever same. *Tristan and Isolde* (1857), composed under the impact of the rereading of *The World as Will and Representation* in 1854, is the most purely Schopenhauerian of Wagner's music dramas. But the same can also be said of *Parsifal* and its gospel of compassion. *Tristan* and *Parsifal* point to each other. Both works are drawn from the cycle of Arthurian romance. Wagner outlined the idea of *Parsifal* to Mathilde Wesendonck during the composition of *Tristan*. Parsifal was originally to appear at Tristan's deathbed; Amfortas in turn is a reprise of Tristan's suffering and longing for release. And yet *Parsifal* takes back *Tristan*, sets the saving power of *agape* against the fatal power of *eros*. *Tristan* and *Parsifal* define the meeting and parting of Wagner and Nietzsche: the meeting under the sign of Dionysus, that is, under the sign of the identity of history and nature; the parting under the sign of Christ, that is, under the sign of the *reconciliation* of nature and spirit. Just as *Parsifal* responds to *Tristan*, so "Religion und Kunst" (Religion and Art) must be seen as answering *The Birth of Tragedy*. Wagner's vision of revolutionary and then national birth in 1849 and 1871, underwritten by the rebirth of the Greek *Gesamtkunstwerk*, yields now to the rescue of Christianity.

In *Opera and Drama* (1851) Wagner made the artwork of the future the inheritor of the divided legacy of the Renaissance: the already completed histories of opera and drama point beyond the divorce of music and word to their reunion in the Wagnerian music drama, a reunion already prefigured in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Beethoven's last four symphonies play a structurally similar role in "Religion and Art"; what they announce, however, is no longer the reunion and mutual redemption of word and music but the redemptive reunion of religion and art through compassion. The argument derives from the underlying schema of decadence and regeneration that forms a constant in Wagner's thought. It results now, however, in a very different interpretation of European art history. Not only has the emphasis moved from the Greek *Gesamtkunstwerk* to the Christian art religion; the distinction between the sacred and the secular now becomes central. The modern, historical opposition between sacred and profane epochs, which for instance allowed Joseph d'Ortigue to write in the 1830s that "in the Catholic centuries all music is religious, even that composed on profane subjects, [and] in the centuries of skepticism, all music is profane, even that composed on sacred subjects" (see chapter 3), is subjected by Wagner to a radical revision. The application of the distinction between the sacred and the secular to the arts must be preceded by the distinction between the spirit and the letter, the essential truth of religion as

19. This is precisely the crux of Ernst Bloch's critique in *The Spirit of Utopia* of the *Ring* and his elevation of *Parsifal* to the model of the artwork to come.

opposed to its artificial, dogmatic elaboration. Here Wagner follows Franz Overbeck, who regarded church history as the secularization of Christianity's original message.²⁰ On the basis of this crucial distinction Wagner can argue in "Religion and Art" that the higher development of art was stifled by its bondage to the service of the church's dogmatic, that is, allegorical, symbolism. The term Wagner uses is "fetishism" (10: 212). But instead of seeing the Renaissance and Reformation as the necessary conditions of art's emancipation from the shackles of religion, Wagner reverses direction to argue in good Hegelian fashion that secularization initiated not the higher development but the progressive decline of the arts—with the one saving exception of music. Why this is so reveals the anti-Greek thrust of Wagner's countermanifesto to Nietzsche.

Unlike the plastic arts and poetry, which attained perfection in antiquity, music possesses an inner affinity to Christianity: "Strictly speaking, music is the only art which wholly corresponds to Christian belief" (10: 231). This correspondence stems from the fact that Western art music—as opposed to popular music—is a product of Christianity, owing nothing to antiquity. As the youngest art, music has yet to unfold its infinite potential, which is one with the higher development of art, just as this higher development is tied to the rescue of the essential truth of religion. The passage from the old art religion (which embraces both the Greek *Kunstreligion* and medieval sacred art) to the new art religion, set in train by the secularization of the arts, is entrusted to the power of music—no longer the affirmation of Schopenhauer's Will, as Nietzsche claimed, but of its *negation* (in accordance with the negation of the world as the essential truth of Christianity and Buddhism). The passage from the old to the new art religion enables Wagner both to confirm and to reverse Hegel's verdict on the fate of art in modernity. In Wagner's argument, confirmation and reversal form the two faces of the challenge of secularization facing art, understood as the necessity of passing from the allegorical representation of Christian dogma to the symbolization of the essential truths of religion. Wagner argues that the visual and the plastic arts cannot meet this challenge. Deprived of their ideal religious content, painting and sculpture decline, in thrall to objects, into the depiction of the real world. Not even the rebirth of the Greek ideal of beauty in the Renaissance could halt this decline, because it was impossible to bring back to life the Greek unity of art and religion (10: 220). The highest achievements of painting and sculpture are thus confined to allegorical representations of Christian

20. Wagner's sharp division between original Christianity and its dogmatic decline is derived from Franz Overbeck, *Die Christlichkeit der Theologie* (1873). Overbeck treats theology as the index of the critical and historical process of secularization that has destroyed religion but cannot reconstruct it. Original Christianity, Overbeck insists, is defined by its negation of the world. A "modern" Christianity is a contradiction in terms because Christianity is the form in which the ancient world has been conserved and preserved into the present. See Karl Löwith, "Overbeck's Historical Analysis of Primitive and Passing Christianity," in *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green, with preface by Hans-Georg Gadamer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 377–88.

belief such as the Annunciation, the Passion of Christ, and the Last Judgment. Even though the function of the visible image is to represent the invisible higher world, allegory indicates at the same time the limit of idealization, the limit that signaled the supplanting of Greek art by Christian religion in Hegel's philosophy of art. Wagner does not except poetry from this judgment. It is tied even more firmly to the dogmatic word and is therefore even less capable of adding anything in its own right to Christian belief. Only in conjunction with music, which translates the dogmatic word into sentiment, can Christian poetry affect the heart.

We can now return to d'Ortigue's distinction between sacred medieval music and profane modern music. Wagner argues that the secularization (*Verweltlichung*) of the church resulted in the secularization of music. He regards this process of secularization, however, as the necessary condition of the passage from the old to the new art religion. In the Christian art religion, religion gave life and meaning to the arts, defining thereby the limits to the further development of art. Music alone escaped these limits by doing what the visual and plastic arts could not do, that is, by *carrying the process of secularization to completion*. At the term of this process, music becomes the pure expression of the pure core of religion, liberated from the "allegorical decorations" and the worldly entanglements of institutionalized religion. In other words, the mutually redemptive convergence of art and religion in the new art religion can occur only *after* secularization, after the Enlightenment's dismantling of dogmatism. Andrey Bely was one of the first to grasp Wagner's paradox that the secularization of music opened a new process of spiritualization: "With the spread of Christianity the most sublime art—music—becomes completely free of poetry and acquires independence and development. At the present moment the human spirit is at a watershed. Beyond that watershed there begins an increased gravitation towards religious questions. Is not the pre-eminent growth of music up to Beethoven and the broadening of its sphere of influence from Beethoven to Wagner the arch-image of such a watershed?"²¹ Ricoeur's hermeneutic of recollection acquires as its historical precondition somewhat paradoxically and yet logically a hermeneutic of demystification. It is Wagner, not Nietzsche, who denounces the "theatrical hocus-pocus" (*Gaukelwerk*) of the Roman church as a frivolous game with the divine (10: 248) and quotes with approval Schiller's understanding of the pure form of Christianity as "the representation of beautiful morality or the humanization of the sacred, and in this sense the only aesthetic religion."²²

If we ask what Wagner means by a purified religion, the answer must take the form of negation. Wagner follows his mentor Schopenhauer in identifying the essence of religion with the Christian and Buddhist negation of the world of change and suffering (10: 212). The sublime truth of religion is revealed in Christ's

21. Bely, *Dramatic Symphony*, 167.

22. Schiller to Goethe, 17 August 1795, quoted in Wagner, "What Use Is This Knowledge? An Appendix to 'Religion and Art,'" in *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen* (Berlin: Bong, 1913), 10: 258.

complete sacrifice of the will, which makes his Passion the *redeeming act of compassion* with all living things. As we have seen, Wagner's return to the truth of Christianity signifies the displacement of the Greek *Gesamtkunstwerk* as ideal model of social and aesthetic renewal. The consequences of this displacement are spelled out in "Religion and Art": an overt critique and rejection of Nietzsche, which involves a counterconstruction to his own and Nietzsche's Greek-oriented account of degeneration and regeneration, bound up with a rethinking of the task of art.²³ Nietzsche's response to secularization had been to argue in *The Birth of Tragedy* that music possesses the power to give birth to new myths. Wagner bids farewell in "Religion and Art" to the dream of the Greek religion of beauty, which sought to master the vision of the frightful by means of beautiful form. This sublime play of the intellect could neither deny nor escape the murderous course of human history (10: 228–29). Against Nietzsche's aesthetic justification of the world as the eternal passion and redemption of the Will, Wagner sets his own dialectical version of passion and redemption: we must recognize the harsh school of punishment that the Will in its blindness has inflicted on itself—in order that it may become seeing in us and that good may come of evil. History does not teach the worship of power and conquest, preached by professors and a mindless, amateur philology. Our sympathy belongs to the defeated not to the victors. And this means that our only refuge against the enormous tragedy of existence lies with the suffering savior, the crucified redeemer, not with the beautiful illusion of the Greeks (10: 245–47).

The path to regeneration demands the renunciation of the world; that alone can cancel the inescapable law of nature, the degeneration inscribed in sinful man's will to power. The signature of man's downfall is the killing and eating of animals, its historical index the worldly decay of otherworldly religions (10: 223–24). Wagner links the desire for regeneration to the countermovement throughout history of the (unfulfilled) longing for the lost paradise, for the paradisaical state of a redeemed nature, for which Christ sacrificed his flesh and blood. "This is the sole holy office of Christian belief: in its care and exercise lies the whole teaching of the redeemer" (10: 230)—and in its recollection and reaffirmation the whole teaching of *Parsifal*, its "Good Friday magic" (*Karfreitagszauber*):

We believe ourselves already partakers of this redemption in the holy hour, when all the phenomenal forms of the world dissolve as in a prophetic dream: we are no longer disquieted by the thought and image of that yawning abyss, of the frightful monsters of the deep, all the diseased offspring of the self-lacerating Will, that the day!—and mankind's history has provided: we hear only the lament of nature, pure and longing for peace, free from fear, filled with hope, all-calming, world-redemptive. The soul

23. If "Religion and Art" is to be read as an answer to *The Birth of Tragedy*, we can equally read *Genealogy of Morals* (1887), subtitled *A Polemic*, as Nietzsche's answer to *Parsifal*. See Agnes Heller, *An Ethics of Personality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

of mankind united in lament, conscious through this lament of its high office of the redemption of fellow-suffering nature, soars free of the abyss of phenomena, and released from that frightful causal chain of birth and death, senses in itself the binding of the restless Will, delivered from itself. (10: 249)

The religion of lament defines the task of art—to transform the world tragedy of suffering into reconciliation—and the office of the artist: to assume the mantle of poetic prophet and priest. The Greek tragedians and Shakespeare were such prophets, who held the mirror up to a world of violence and horror, Cassandras who will now at last find a hearing. The message of reconciliation is entrusted to the poetic priest. It will accompany us into a reborn life and reveal the final wisdom of Goethe's *Faust*, that everything transitory is merely a simile, a symbol (10: 247–48).

But should we not add that everything transitory is not merely but *essentially* a symbol? Is this not the essence of Wagner's art religion: the transformation of the material world of suffering into the immaterial world of sound? How else could music, the "sounding soul of Christian religion," assume the inheritance of the church? Holy music has soared beyond the confining walls of the temple "to permeate and reanimate nature, to teach mankind in need of redemption a new language, in which the infinite can express itself in the most definite form" (10: 250). This combination of "divine content and pure form" makes the new language of music the symbolic language *kat' exochon*. As opposed to the word, as opposed to the allegorical signs of the other arts, music alone is able to state, "This is" (10: 222). Wagner's final consecration of music completes the reversal of his earlier positions. Beethoven remains, however, the touchstone and presiding genius of Wagner's lifelong quest for redemption. The young, revolutionary Wagner received the authorization for the music drama from the Ninth Symphony. The late, religious Wagner finds confirmation of the revelatory power of music in the contrast between the *limited words* of Schiller and the unfolding of the inexpressible in Beethoven's music (10: 250). Wagner's final wisdom is expressed in the paradox that religion can remain true to itself only by becoming art, and that art can realize its redemptive mission only by becoming the vehicle of inexpressible truth. Alfred Nowak is thus right to counter the well-known critique of *Parsifal* in Adorno's essay on Wagner, that a completely profane age would like to produce out of itself a sacral sphere, by pointing out that this is precisely the argument of "Religion and Art."²⁴

The Profoundest Symbol: The Grail

In a letter of 30 May 1859 to Mathilde Wesendonck Wagner writes of the utter delight and admiration aroused in him by Christian mythmaking, which has invented

24. Alfred Nowak, "Wagners *Parsifal* und die Idee der Kunstreligion," in *Richard Wagner. Werke und Wirkung*, ed. Carl Dahlhaus (Regensburg: Bosse, 1971), 172.

in the Grail the profoundest of all symbols to express the sensuous-spiritual core of a religion. This statement is complemented twenty years later by the credo that opens "Religion and Art": "One could say that where religion becomes artificial, art is called upon to rescue the core of religion by grasping the symbolic value of the mythological symbols that religion believes to be true, in order to reveal by means of an ideal representation the deep truth hidden in them" (10: 211). Wagner's contemporary Johann Jakob Bachofen also considered the core of religion to reside in the symbol. In his "Essay on Grave Symbolism," published in 1859, he treats symbolism as the primordial language of humanity. Symbol precedes myth and finds its exegesis and elaboration in myth and ritual.²⁵ Wagner's final reversal of the relation between music and words echoes Bachofen's assertion that the symbol plumbs the depths, whereas the word remains on the surface. As we have already indicated, Durand identifies the primordial language of man with archetypes. In his investigation into the anthropological structure of the imaginary, he proposes the outline of a general archetypology, directed to the connection between surface and depth, imaginary and rational processes. Myth is understood as the narrative exegesis of a dynamic system of archetypes and symbols, that is to say, as a rationalization through which archetypes become ideas and symbols words. As opposed to the stability of archetypes, the (verbal) symbol is characterized by ambivalence.²⁶ But like Ricoeur, Durand stresses the creative semanticism of symbols, evident in religious and artistic experience. Moreover, the symbolic function, shared by religion and art, opens onto the *space of re-presentation*.²⁷

This space of representation/re-presentation, in which the theatre returns to its sacred origins and regains its festive character, is of course a recurrent theme of the art religion of the moderns. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's distinction between "meaning culture" and "presence culture" rests on the difference between the modern culture of representation, in which *time* is of the essence, and a premodern *space* of re-presentation, which revolves around the act of making present again. Gumbrecht regards opera as the privileged site of presence in the modern theatre, because music, as opposed to words, cannot be reduced to meaning.²⁸ When Gurnemanz tells Parsifal as he leads him into the hall of the Grail castle that here time is transformed into space (Du siehst, mein Sohn, / zum Raum wird hier die Zeit), he provides, in Lévi-Strauss's words, "the most profound definition that anyone has ever offered for myth."²⁹ The transformation of time into space is underpinned by

25. Christoph Jamme, *Introduction à la philosophie du mythe* (Paris: Vrin, 1995), 97–98.

26. Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques*, 63–64.

27. *Ibid.*, 457, 473.

28. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Production of Presence, Interspersed with Absence: A Modernist View on Music, Libretti, and Staging," in *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity*, ed. Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 343–55.

29. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "From Chrétien de Troyes to Richard Wagner," in *The View from Afar* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 219. The music of this transformation scene underscores the change of time into space. It does not trace a tonal movement but "progresses" through the circle of minor thirds, which suspend harmonic logic; the bell motif alternates between the first and the fifth note of the key in

the symmetrical structure of *Parsifal*, which appears most clearly in the mirroring transformation scenes in acts 1 and 3. In act 1 Parsifal's entry into the Grail castle is accompanied by the changing of the set from the left to the right, and in act 3 the changing from right to left unfolds the reversal that reenchants the world (in act 2 by contrast Klingsor's magic garden—the realm governed by desire and transience—rises from below). The elevation of space over time foregrounds space as the *a priori* and the *sensorium* of the imagination.³⁰ This imaginary space is directed according to Durand to the denial and overcoming of the deadly entropy of time. The *work* of art lies in the investment of time with our anguish and our hopes, that is, in the *mise-en-scène* of the work of transformation, which leads us (with Gurnemanz) to the other of everyday space-time: the *cairos* of meaning and the *u-topia* of myth.³¹

Durand accordingly understands *Parsifal* as the completion and crowning of Wagner's lifework in that it resolves the *ambiguities of time* in *The Ring* and *Tristan*. He identifies a threefold failure in Wagner's quest to overcome time: Wotan and the space-time of memory, the space that endures; Siegfried and the space-time of heroic adventure; Tristan and Isolde and the space-time of the endless present of love. The space of memory reveals the two faces of Saturn the father: the God, who is forced through his bondage to the law to kill his own son (Siegmond), sets in train the downfall of the gods. The second space-time is turned not toward the past but the future and the exploits of the solar hero, who forges the weapon and slays the monster only to fall victim to his own blindness. The third space-time refuses past and future for the ecstasy of the liberation from individuation in the mystic union of the love death. The return to the mother and eternal night signals, however, not the overcoming but the embrace of death. It is left to Parsifal, the healer of the sick king and antitype of Siegfried and Tristan, to traverse these space-times and to reveal within the frozen landscape of the wasteland the promise of the return of the golden age, which can reunite past, present, and future under the sign of renewal. Pierre Boulez describes *Parsifal* as a staged passion, in which the choruses in act 1 refer to the three phases of ceremonial rite—preparation, accomplishment, and thanksgiving—whose dramatic function is to frame and present in sequence Amfortas (the present), Titurel (the past), and Parsifal (the future).³² The myth of the degeneration of divine powers (*The Ring*) yields to the myth of their regeneration. The principle of corruption—the destruction of human and divine love, of the harmony of man and nature—expounded at length in *The Ring*, is reduced to its archetypal abbreviation in *Parsifal* in the form of the separation of spear and

order to reinforce the stage direction, which calls for Gurnemanz and Parsifal to stride without movement. See Dahlhaus, "Richard Wagners 'Bühnenfestspiel,'" 608.

30. Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques*, 472.

31. Durand, *Beaux-arts et archétypes*, 216–17, 234.

32. Pierre Boulez, "Approaches to *Parsifal*," in *Orientations*, trans. Martin Cooper (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), 250.

chalice.³³ Conversely, the redemptive power of loving sacrifice, which can only be hinted at in the concluding bars of *Twilight of the Gods*, is presented and celebrated in the final scene of *Parsifal*, itself the sublime symbol of art's re-generation of the deep symbolic truths of religion,³⁴ which enacts at the same time the self-revelation of the theatre.

In the unveiling of the Grail, theatre and temple, drama and religious service, fuse in the act of presentation itself. Particularly relevant here is Karl Solger's (1780–1819) understanding of the innermost meaning of music as real presence: "the presence of the divinity and the dissolving of the congregation in the same."³⁵ In James Treadwell's words, "Bayreuth exists to turn itself into a process of revelation. It is the place where the Grail can at last be seen." As the symbol of the completion of Wagner's lifework and of his mission to resacralize the theatre, the Grail is "the icon around which the Festspielhaus is built, in the same way that great cathedrals have been built to house sacred relics and assemble their devotees."³⁶ Wagner's festival theatre is thus intended to embody the homecoming of art (a theme that we shall encounter again in Bloch's philosophy of music), just as the quest for the Grail is the symbol of Parsifal's homecoming. He is introduced as the simpleton, who knows neither whence he came nor his father's name, who has sent him on his way or even his own name. The way forward is therefore the way back: homecoming as recollection, the making present of the origin, whether it be the return of the theatre to its beginnings as sacred festival or that of the lost modern subject, who becomes "knowing through compassion." The final paradox of *Parsifal*—*Erlösung dem Erlöser*, the redeemer redeemed—points back to the Gnostic "Song of the Pearl," preserved in the apocryphal *Acts of St. Thomas*. Eliade follows Hans Jonas in calling the "Song of the Pearl" the best version of the idea of the "saved savior," *salvator salvatus*.³⁷ It is the parable of the heavenly messenger, who is sent into the world to recover the pearl, forgets his mission (Parsifal's self-accusation in act 2), and is finally awakened to remembrance of his divine origin. Whether the "king's son" represents the redeemer or the individual soul remains open in Gnostic symbolism, an ambiguity that helped to ensure the ongoing life of

33. Kurt Hübner, *Die Wahrheit des Mythos* (Munich: Beck, 1985), 392.

34. A theosophical interpretation of Wagner's last work by his English translator William Ashton Ellis, a member of the Theosophical Society and editor of the Wagner journal *The Meister* (1888–95), in the journal *La société nouvelle* (1888) captures this fin-de-siècle mood of decadence and renewal. A great historical cycle has reached its culmination in materialism. Wagner heralds the dawn of a new age of spiritual wisdom. The symbolism of *Parsifal* combines in perfect union Christianity and Buddhism: Parsifal is a Buddha, Klingsor a black magician, and the Grail knights an occult confraternity. See Daniel Large and William Weber, eds., *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 268.

35. Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* (1829; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962), 342, quoted in Nowak, "Wagners *Parsifal*," 168.

36. James Treadwell, *Interpreting Wagner* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 260–61.

37. Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 381.

this parable as far as Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*.³⁸ Hence Kundry appears as redeemed and redeeming: both her reproaches and her kiss bring Parsifal to knowledge through compassion. In recognizing his guilt at forgetting his mother's suffering he can now relive the suffering, the wound of Amfortas, thereby opening the way to Kundry's redemption.

If *Parsifal* can lay claim to being the paradigmatic exemplification of the art religion of the moderns, it inevitably poses the question of the relation between art and religion and *Parsifal's* status as sacred theatre in modernity. The first question is answered by Wagner in terms of "the profoundest symbol"—that is to say, the relation between art and religion can be determined only on the level of symbols. The Grail, the hollow vessel to be filled with (projected) meaning across the centuries, is the symbol of symbols and at the same time the archetype of the religious itself.³⁹ The Grail signifies not only that art is called to become symbolic but that the highest form of art (its destination and destiny) is symbolic—that is to say, the highest form of truth, pertaining to a higher reality, belongs to art. The theatre recovers its sacred origins in the re-convergence—beyond dogmatism and the dialectic of enlightenment—of art and religion in symbolism. If the Grail is the symbol of symbols, *Parsifal* presents itself as the symbol of religious and aesthetic symbolization. This self-referential consciousness makes the work paradigm and exemplar at the same time of its ambiguous status in relation to the theatre as secular institution. The intrinsic ambiguity of this modern mystery play is evident when we ask: What does *Parsifal* (re)present? Does it (re)present the semblance (*Schein*) of redemption or the redemption of semblance—or is symbolism the "truth" of both possibilities? Wagner's answer underlines *Parsifal's* special status among his creations. On 28 September 1880 he wrote to Ludwig II that the last and holiest of his works should be spared the fate of a common opera: how can a stage action, which openly presents the most sublime of Christian mysteries, be performed in theatres like ours as part of an opera repertoire and before a public like ours? It is a festival play and must be reserved in perpetuity for performance in Bayreuth (10: 167). Fifteen years earlier Wagner had replied to Ludwig's plans for a theatre in Munich dedicated to the production and performance of his works: "Only through this theatre will the world come to understand what sacredness can be invested in a dramatic performance, presented wholly in my *way*—and then all existing theatres, even the most splendid of them, will be bound to appear ridiculous in the eyes of all sensible people."⁴⁰

Wagner's idea of a sacred theatre is predicated on the recovery of a mythical consciousness as the key to a renewal of art. Art and religion are to be understood

38. Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), 1: 320–28.

39. Durand, *Beaux-arts et archétypes*, 236, 262.

40. Richard Wagner to Ludwig II, 13 September 1865.

as the two sides of the one mythic experience of being.⁴¹ *The Ring* and *Parsifal* embody, however, two very different ideas of religious theatre. Heroic sacrifice in the name of life gives way to Christ's sacrifice in the name of the negation of life. The progression from this-worldly to otherworldly salvation leaves the idea of a festival theatre suspended between the ancients and the moderns. If Aeschylus was central to Wagner's conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and *The Ring*, Calderón's *autos sacramentales*, written for the Feast of Corpus Christi, play a comparable role for *Parsifal*. These plays, of which the most famous is Calderón's *The Great Theatre of the World*, conclude the stage action with the celebration of Mass, that is, with the mystery of the Eucharist and the display of the sacred host. Dieter Borchmeyer argues, however, that the use of the chorus in *Parsifal* realizes a fusion of Greek tragedy and Christian liturgy: "The antiphonal dirge by the two processions which make up the chorus in the final scene . . . is, emotionally, the most powerful choral scene to be found in any piece of world theatre since the time of Aeschylus."⁴² That Boulez refers to act 1 and Borchmeyer to act 3 as crucial to the genre definition of *Parsifal* is not by chance. The *dramatic* action of act 2—Parsifal's vanquishing of Klingsor and Kundry—belongs to the *time-bound* sphere of destructive desire and sits uncomfortably with the *timeless* intention of the liturgic-choral tableaux of acts 1 and 3, an incompatibility indicative of the hybrid nature of this sacred drama. Thus the flower maidens stand for the fateful (mythic) illusion of a reconciliation with nature, which makes their momentary *promesse de bonheur* the negative version of the true awakening of nature in act 3. If their music is no match for that of the male choruses, the psychological complexity of Kundry, eternal Eve and unredeemed nature, exceeds the antipsychological intention of the figures in general and the simplicity of the "pure fool" Parsifal in particular, who is awakened to compassion by Kundry's kiss.

Nevertheless, for all *Parsifal*'s emotional power, the question remains: can music rescue religion; can art religion escape the ambiguity of "regarding religion as a dramatic spectacle and making a religion of that spectacle"?⁴³ This ambiguity necessarily permeates the art religion of the moderns. By the same token it made Bayreuth the fountainhead of the idea of the festival and of theatre reform in the twentieth century.

The Theater to Come

Wagner's path from the festival of the revolution to a renewal of art religion takes us from the unique celebration of the revolution in a temporary theatre constructed

41. Petra-Hildegard Wilberg, *Richard Wagners mythische Welt: Versuche wider den Historismus* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1996), 342.

42. Dieter Borchmeyer, *Richard Wagner: Theory and Theatre*, trans. Stewart Spencer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 384.

43. Boulez, "Approaches to *Parsifal*," 248.

for the occasion, as envisaged by Wagner in 1851, to the establishment and institutionalizing of a festival theatre, a temple of art, intended as a site of pilgrimage and sacred performances. Within the context of modernism, however, more immediate affiliations are evident. A direct line leads from Bayreuth to the Third Reich, prepared by the politicization and nationalization of Wagner's religion of humanity. The Bayreuth Festival soon came to be seen as a sacred national site, Wagner's art as religion, and this religion as that of the nation: "the accomplishment of the Aryan Mystery in Bayreuth."⁴⁴ A direct line also leads from Wagner's dream of a revived religious theatre to the ferment of theatrical experimentation in the first three decades of the twentieth century, triggered in the first place by the yawning gap between Wagner's theatrical vision and its realization in Bayreuth (see chapter 7).

There is also a direct link between Bayreuth and Glastonbury, associated in the medieval romances with the origins of the Grail legend. Inspired by the example of Bayreuth, the English composer Rutland Boughton (1878–1960) established in 1914 a Festival of Music, Dance, and Mystic Drama in Glastonbury. Boughton hoped to found a colony of artists willing to support themselves through farming in order to achieve freedom from commercial contamination. Although these hopes for a self-sufficient artistic colony were not realized, the festival did gain the backing of influential figures, such as Edward Elgar, Granville Bantock, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Thomas Beecham, and George Bernard Shaw. Despite the severe checks to Boughton's plans occasioned by the Great War, the Glastonbury Festival managed to mount over three hundred performances of operas, plays, and ballets between 1914 and 1926, including eleven new British works, of which perhaps the best known was the production in 1914 of Fiona Macleod's mystical drama *The Immortal Hour* with music by Boughton.⁴⁵ In 1910, Boughton and Reginald Buckley published their manifesto for a renewal of the theatre, *The Music Drama of the Future*. Both looked to Wagner as their model. Buckley's great dream was "to make these national scriptures [the Arthurian legends] the quarry from which to hew a huge music drama on the lines of Wagner's Ring, with Merlin as Britain's Isaiah, Galahad her Parsifal, Arthur her type of manhood"; Boughton was possessed by a similar national vision: "I became aware of the truly prophetic nature of all the greatest art, and of the fact that the greatest artists acquire their superhuman power by acting as the expression of the *oversoul* of a people. Then I understood why Wagner had chosen folk subjects which had been produced by that oversoul."⁴⁶ Boughton worked on his Arthurian cycle for forty years, completing it in 1945 to

44. Udo Bernbach, "Liturgietransfer: Über einen Aspekt des Zusammenhangs von Richard Wagner und Hitler und dem Dritten Reich," in *Richard Wagner im Dritten Reich*, ed. Saul Friedländer and Jörn Rüsen (Munich: Beck, 2002), 49–50.

45. Fiona Macleod was the pseudonym of the Scottish poet William Sharp (1855–1905), active in the Celtic revival at the turn of the century.

46. Quoted in Michael Hurd, *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festival* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 40.

Buckley's libretto. A member of the Communist Party from 1926 to 1929 and from 1945 to 1956, Boughton's socialism drew its inspiration from Marx and Wagner, Tolstoy, William Morris, and Ruskin. He believed that communism was the natural inheritor and goal of Christian civilization. His Arthurian cycle ends with a vision of red stars and revolution in the East.

Boughton set out in his music dramas to correct the "magnificent mistake" of *The Ring*. He considered that Wagner's suppression of the chorus in favor of the orchestra had broken the connection with the sacred origins of the theatre, the "primitive sacred choral dance which was the original source of music-drama."⁴⁷ Against Wagner's *choral orchestra* Boughton espoused what he called the *orchestral chorus*, which alone possesses the power to fuse audience and stage action, to join them "in the feeling that the drama is their own, both individually and as a joyously united body."⁴⁸ Hence Boughton's turn to *Parsifal*, because in his last work Wagner had finally come to understand that music drama is not a drama underlined or emphasized by means of music: "It is a drama which cannot get to the hearts of the audience except in terms of music. It is the most primitive form of communal art and the most primitive form of religious worship. It is the principle of Greek tragedy in a much deeper sense than that stated by Wagner himself. It is the inevitable demand for expression of man's mystic fate." "For men make drama only of those ideas which they hold in common with groups of human beings; and, among such ideas, those which are least expressible in language—the religious ideas—are just the ones which come to perfect expression in the ritual dance and the mystery of music."⁴⁹

Boughton's vision of religious drama as a communal artwork resumes the themes of the present chapter: the idea of the return to the sacred origins of the theatre as the means to national regeneration; the distinction between two types of theatre—sacred, simple, and communal against the drama of complex individualism—based on the distinction between community and society; the hatred of capitalism and commerce together with its other, the art religion of the moderns. Its paradigm for Rutland Boughton is *Parsifal*. Wagner's festival drama sums up the musico-dramatic wisdom of the past and enunciates the principle of all great art, "that art is the great book of revelation and artists the chief, perhaps the only human, bridges across the abyss of the unknown."⁵⁰ If the ritual dance and music—"music is the most mysterious and physical movement the most convincing of the arts"—provide

47. Rutland Boughton, *Parsifal: A Study* (London: Musical Opinion, 1920), 8. The study is dedicated to George Bernard Shaw.

48. Rutland Boughton and Reginald Buckley, *The Music Drama of the Future* (London: William Reeves, 1911), 32. Boughton became the musical director of the London Labour Choral Union in the 1920s. See Duncan Hall, *A Pleasant Change from Politics: Music and the British Labour Movement* (Cheltenham: New Clarion Press, 2003).

49. Boughton, *Parsifal*, 32, 8.

50. *Ibid.*, 44.

the ancient, ever-new medium of the inexpressible, the modern artist also knows that “out of our souls the heavens and hells have sprung.”⁵¹ Art religion proclaims not the sacred contents but, in Wagner’s words, the pure form of religion as the receptacle and vehicle of our mystic sense. Boughton looked to a revival of music and dance to awaken the spiritual energies of the British and save them from extinction as a people. Regeneration and return, the ancient and the modern, belong together: “In the procession of Grail knights in the first act of *Parsifal* there is a promise of that new drama . . . which is as old as the knowledge of the gods.”⁵²

Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), poet, prophet, and theorist of Russian symbolism, was by training a classicist, whose understanding of antiquity was deeply influenced by Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*.⁵³ In his own manifesto for the total work of art, Ivanov sets out like Rutland Boughton to continue and correct the Wagnerian model of the music drama. As the title indicates, “Presentiments and Portents: The New Organic Era and the Theater of the Future” (1904),⁵⁴ Ivanov operates with the Saint-Simonian distinction between critical and organic epochs. It allows him to align himself with the nineteenth-century prophets of a coming organic art and age that will liberate us from the present age of criticism and cultural differentiation. Chief among the precursors, besides the “barbarian” Russian novelists and Ibsen,⁵⁵ are of course Wagner and Nietzsche: Wagner as the advocate of a “fusion of artistic energies in a synthetic art that would gather into its focus the nation’s entire spiritual self-determination”; Nietzsche as the voice of a new integral soul as the antithesis of the “theoretical man” of our critical era (98). For Ivanov, European Symbolism marks the point of transition between the old and the new, since it is not consumed like romanticism by helpless nostalgia for a lost golden age but draws its inspiration from the messianic vision of a future golden age, the prophetic projection of an essentially revolutionary creative energy. Ivanov can thus speak in the name of the “supraindividualists,” who are “outwardly isolated but inwardly united with the world.” In them is concentrated “the inner, necessary path of symbolism,” which is already—if only potentially—universal art, universal in that the symbol, the natural “potence and embryo of myth,” strives toward mythopoiesis: “Will they [the supraindividualists] become organs of mythopoiesis, i. e., creators

51. *Ibid.*, 45.

52. *Ibid.*, 51.

53. See Vasily Rudich, “Vyacheslav Ivanov and Classical Antiquity,” in *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic, and Philosopher*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Center for International Studies, 1986), 275–89; Heinrich Stammeler, “Vyacheslav Ivanov and Nietzsche,” in Jackson and Nelson, *Vyacheslav Ivanov*, 297–312.

54. Viacheslav Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, trans. Robert Bird, ed. Michael Wachtel (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 95–110. Parenthetical page references in the text refer to this translation.

55. Georg Lukács makes Dostoevsky the herald of a coming organic epic that points beyond the utter sinfulness of the present in his *Theory of the Novel*, written in the winter of 1914–15 in response to World War I.

and craftsmen of universal art?" If this were indeed the case, then we could expect an organic era in art, which, according to the inner logic of its development, would be expressed and concentrated in a "synthetic art of universal rite and choral drama" (99).

What is this inner logic pressing toward self-expression? Ivanov discerned a "widespread craving for another, as yet unrevealed theater" (101), by which he means the regeneration of the age through the return of the theatre to its sacred origins. Then collective ecstasy constituted the primordial religious condition, in which the group found release from death and suffering (the destructive power of time) through identification with the suffering, sacrificed god.⁵⁶ In the choral dithyramb "each participant in the liturgical circular chorus was an active molecule of the organic life of the Dionysian body" (102). The evolution of theatre from this "holy rite" into "festive drama," and from the latter to mere spectacle, and then again from the medieval mysteries to the Shakespearean drama of character, represents for Ivanov so many stages in the dissolution of the original choral—that is to say, religious—community. With the replacement of the orchestra by the proscenium the progressive separation of the community from itself is set in train. The elevated stage "to this day divides the theater into two incommensurable worlds" (114): the community, no longer conscious of itself as such, and the actors, conscious of themselves only as actors. "We have had enough role-playing: we want a rite. The spectator must merge into a choral body similar to the mystical community of ancient 'orgies' and 'mysteries'" (104).

Like Rutland Boughton, Ivanov pleads for the orchestral chorus against Wagner's choral orchestra. Although Wagner had recognized that the chorus forms the very content of the drama, it functions only as the hidden and voiceless orchestral symphony: even though the festival audiences are conceived as "molecules of the orchestra's orgiastic life," they participate in the act only latently and symbolically (106). Wagner's failure to unite music and drama follows from the contradiction of the synthetic principle involved in his denial of speech to the dramatic actor and his exclusion of the real chorus as well as the choral dance. Ivanov completes his critique of Wagner's inconsistency by appealing to Wagner's crown witness: "Just as in the Ninth Symphony, the human voice alone will utter the Word. Without the chorus there is no common rite, and the spectacle dominates." (107) Ivanov sums up his idea of the theatre to come:

We envision a double chorus: a smaller chorus, immediately connected to the action, as in the tragedies of Aeschylus, and a chorus symbolizing the entire community.... The latter chorus is therefore numerous and interferes in the action only at

56. Ivanov's essay "The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God" (1904) is examined by Fausto Malcovati, "The Myth of the Suffering God and the Birth of Greek Tragedy in Ivanov's Dramatic Theory," in Jackson and Nelson, *Vyacheslav Ivanov*, 290–96.

moments of the highest animation and full liberation of Dionysian energies; the dithyrambic chorus of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is an example of this. The first chorus naturally adds play and orchestrics to the synthetic rite; the second is limited to more important rhythms, i. e., more animated ones. It gives form to movement (processions, theories) and acts with the massive grandiosity and collective (*sobornyi*) authority of the community it represents.... The chorus can therefore serve as the receptacle for the incessant creativity of the communal orgiastic consciousness. (107–8)

We may note here the parallels to Durkheim's moments of collective or revolutionary enthusiasm in Ivanov's stress on ecstatic communal creativity as the true expression of the national will and as the key to "real political freedom" (110). Schiller and Beethoven appear in this light as the highest expression of the drama of the French Revolution,⁵⁷ just as Ivanov's dramatic theory, which inspired both Vsevolod Meyerhold and Nikolai Evreinov, was to find its realization in "the mass happenings of the revolutionary period, which even Western visitors thought were fulfilling the prophecies of Wagner and Nietzsche in bringing about a rebirth of Greek drama."⁵⁸

The heady brew of religion and revolution, Wagner and Marx, found perhaps its ultimate expression in Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy of music, *Geist der Utopie* (Spirit of Utopia), published in 1918 and republished in a revised version in 1923. Georg Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* and Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia*, both written during the dark days of the First World War, are consumed by a messianic longing for redemption, which led these brothers-in-spirit to embrace the Communist revolution. Bloch (1885–1977) conceives his utopian book as a sacred offering. May it be, he writes, "like two hands, which clasp a cup (*Schale*), and carry this attained cup to the end, filled with the drink of self-encounters and of music, as the dynamite of the world, and the tropical essences of the goal, raised high to God."⁵⁹ Bloch's simile presents *Spirit of Utopia* in the image of the Grail, more exactly, as the symbol of the *Parsifal* to come, the transcendent opera, that will complete the philosophy of Western music and thus the philosophy of history. Bloch's offering responds to Hegel's offering in *Phenomenology of Spirit*: the fruits plucked from the tree of life and offered with the smile of self-encounter, the "self-conscious eye," which is superior to all the gods of the past (see chapter 2). Hegel's spirit of *tragic* fate offers us the essence of the past, internalized in recollection (*Er-innerung*).⁶⁰ Bloch's *utopian Er-innerung*, by contrast, looks forward, carried by a memory of the future, of the home where we never were and which is yet home. Music has always

57. Of Schiller Ivanov writes: "Everywhere Schiller is in the crowd and with the crowd; everywhere he is its herald, its voice"; quoted in Jackson and Nelson, *Vyacheslav Ivanov*, 304.

58. Victor Terras, "Vyacheslav Ivanov's Esthetic Thought," in Jackson and Nelson, *Vyacheslav Ivanov*, 335.

59. Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1964), 334.

60. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1973), 415.

sought to articulate this anticipatory memory because it speaks the as-yet-unknown language of our inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*). Where Hegel's philosophy unfolds the transformation of life and reality into Spirit, in Bloch's philosophy the Spirit of Utopia longs for the living realization that will cancel the split between self and world and redeem us from Hegel's "unhappy consciousness," from the pain "that finds expression in the harsh word *that God is dead*."⁶¹

Parsifal becomes the pivot on which Bloch's philosophy of music turns, forming the bridge between the *history* of music, which culminates in Wagner's last work, and the *theory* of music, which takes the form of a speculative aesthetics. Carl Dahlhaus rightly declares Bloch's philosophy of music to be a philosophy of Wagner's music.⁶² Central to the first part, the history of music, is the critique of the *Ring* cycle; and to the second part, the theory of music, the critique of the philosophy underpinning the fatality of *The Ring*: Schopenhauer's identification of the (Kantian) thing-in-itself with the blind workings of the Will. Bloch aims to transform Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music into philosophy of history on the basis that music poses the same problems of telos as the whole symphonic process of history.⁶³ Bloch regards music as the historical index of inwardness, and as such the expression of our utopian longings. Music is therefore destined, as the last among the arts, to be the vehicle of utopian advent, the absolute revealed in music that is to find its philosophical complement in *Spirit of Utopia*. "Here is indeed a speculative aesthetics, which is creative in its own right, not just commenting but spontaneous, and only through its explanation (*Deutung*) can the truly 'absolute' music rise up, and the dreamed, the utopian growing palace of music reveal itself" (155). This absolute music will be the inheritor of *Parsifal*, just as Wagner was the inheritor of Beethoven's absolute music, born from the spirit of the symphony. From the music of the night in *Tristan* to the shimmer of the distant dawn in *Parsifal*, Wagner points the way to the "birth of redemption from the spirit of music" (111): "*Tristan* is the beginning, the celestial in *Parsifal* its conjuration (*Besprechen*)" (123). Bloch likewise seeks to perform a magic conjuration. By means of his own evocative "word-music" music is to become word, to speak the finally intelligible language of the thing-in-itself. In other "words," the history of music will find its theoretical meaning in the deduction of the total work to come, which will resume musical history, uniting Bach's medieval-spiritual, Mozart's classical-worldly, Beethoven and Wagner's modern-Luciferian counterpoint, in its great spiritual form, conceived as advent (*Ereignis*). Time will become space, as in *Parsifal*, in this music of fulfillment, to reveal beyond all theatrical semblance the world transfigured by divine grace, by a Wagnerian *Karfreitagszauber*. Then all that is inward shall be outward, and all that is outward inward. The Grail offered by Bloch thus finally

61. *Ibid.*, 414.

62. Carl Dahlhaus, *Klassische und romantische Musikästhetik* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1988), 484.

63. Bloch, *Geist der Utopie*, 167. Parenthetical page references in the text refer to this edition.

corresponds to the chalice that Hegel offers at the end of the *Phenomenology*: the chalice of recollection with its foaming elixir of spiritual infinity. In place of Hegel's finally comprehended identity of self and substance, philosophical word and world, Bloch imagines the magic word, the finally comprehended language of music, that will redeem all creatures by naming them and in which our name will summon the messiah. At the magic word "time stands still in the inner space of absolute revelation, presence" (344).⁶⁴

64. The historical caesuras of 1917 and 1933 have cut us off irredeemably from the apocalyptic longings of European modernism. But this also means that we cannot regard the totalitarian movements, which seemed to close the gap between the art religion of the bourgeois/antibourgeois avant-gardes and the political longings of the masses, as external to the paradigm of the total work.

THE SYMBOLIST MYSTERY

Homage to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*

Wagner's *Parsifal* may be thought of as both an end and a beginning. As the completion of Wagner's programme of recovering and renewing the tradition of religious theatre, it was meant to signify the last stage of overcoming opera. As the paradigmatic example of a new cultic theatre, of art religion in the full sense of the term, it provided a model for the avant-garde search for a synthesis of the arts. How this played out in the theatre, from the Ballets Russes to Brecht and Artaud, will be the subject of the following chapters. In the present chapter I am interested in the reception of the *idea* of the total work of art in European symbolism, as it is reflected, on the one hand, in the tributes in the media of sculpture, painting, and literature to the leading role of music among the arts; and on the other, in Mallarmé's and in Scriabin's ambition to surpass Wagner by creating the absolute and ultimate work. These diverse refractions of the Wagnerian paradigm (the symbolists, particularly in France and Russia, were the artists most strongly influenced by Wagner and Wagnerism) found a common focus in the esoteric doctrine of correspondences, which Baudelaire had transformed into a general theory of the arts and poetry.¹

1. See in addition to the famous sonnet, "Correspondances," Baudelaire's "Richard Wagner and Tannhäuser in Paris" (see chapter 4).

Correspondences between the senses—primarily sight and sound but also involving taste (Proust!) and smell—not only made synaesthesia a key to the synthesis of the arts from Baudelaire to Scriabin but suggested a reciprocal correspondence between the arts: if one sense can take the place of another, then one art can substitute for another.² It allowed Mallarmé and Proust to affirm letters against music. But in defending literature they both followed the path of abstraction and dematerialization in their quest for the absolute work. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental distinction between the Great Work as envisaged by Proust and by Mallarmé. *À la recherche du temps perdu* achieves completion and self-redemptive knowledge, whereas Mallarmé's Book can only gesture toward the unrealizable idea of the total work of art. It is thus an appropriate complement and antithesis to Scriabin's Dionysian version of dematerialization in his *Mysterium*, which was to bring about the ecstatic realization—through return to the godhead—of the universal correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm.³ It is an inescapable and necessary irony that the idea of the total work of art should find its absolute impossibility objectified in two works, or rather two grandiose conceptions, for which there exist only preliminary sketches. We are fortunate, however, in having for Scriabin the contemporary testament of his brother-in-law, Boris de Schloezer. For Mallarmé we possess some two hundred sheets of notes, which survived the destruction of material pertaining to the Book and were first edited and published by Jacques Schérer in 1957. Here too we are fortunate in having in addition to Schérer's elucidations Eric Benoit's systematic reconstruction of Mallarmé's intentions.

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In 1902 the Viennese Secession held its most successful exhibition under the title "Homage to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*." The centerpiece of the exhibition was Max Klinger's statue of Beethoven, seated like a Greek god upon a throne. Composed of contrasting precious materials, it was meant to recall Phidias at the same time as it celebrated the modern cult of the divine artist. The reliefs on Beethoven's throne pay tribute to the two sources of Western civilization—Greek and Judeo-Christian. On the one side Adam and Eve, and on the other the family of Tantalus, symbolize human suffering. At the back the combined images of the birth of Venus and the crucifixion of Christ present the two gospels of redemption in the name of beauty and life and of renunciation and sacrifice respectively.⁴ In Klinger's allegory of (Greek-Christian) art religion, Beethoven is treated as Zeus and Messiah.

2. Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theatre: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 99–102.

3. Louis Marvick, "Two Versions of the Symbolist Apocalypse: Mallarmé's *Libre* and Scriabin's *Mysterium*," *Criticism* 28 (1986): 287–306.

4. Marian Bisanz-Prakken, "Der Beethoven-Fries von Gustav Klimt in der XIV. Ausstellung der Wiener Secession (1902)," in *Traum und Wirklichkeit Wien, 1870–1930* (Vienna: Museen der Stadt Wien, 1985), 529. The Viennese Secession had earlier exhibited Klinger's large painting *Christ in Olympus*.

Klinger not only attempts to give plastic form to the German art religion of the nineteenth century; he tries to reconcile the inextricable fusion and con-fusion of the pagan cult of beauty with a Christian longing for redemption. Thus—to digress for a moment—Mahler's Third Symphony (1895–96) moves from a Nietzschean sense of oneness with the World Will and Dionysian nature in its massive first movement, in which the composer thought of himself as “an instrument on which the universe plays,” to an Apollonian dream vision in the following movements, which trace the ascent of the spirit from nature to animals to man, the angels, and finally divine love. “In the fifth movement, the repentant soul pleads with Christ for mercy and receives the angelic assurance that the joys of heaven will be bestowed. As the motto of the final movement indicates, the suffering son of God now appeals to his father for the salvation of all creatures.” The motto “Father, look upon my wounds! / Let no creature be lost!” clearly evokes the Good Friday music of *Parsifal*. The last movement opens with a quotation from the adagio of Beethoven's last string quartet (op. 135) and concludes with a quotation from *Parsifal*.⁵

Klinger's statue therefore formed the appropriate focus of an exhibition that took as its model “the highest and the best” that mankind has created: temple art through the ages. The Viennese avant-garde's nostalgia for past ages of organic culture, in which all the arts found their meaning and purpose in the service of the temple, found direct expression in the exhibition. Under the artistic direction of Josef Hoffmann the exhibition was to form a harmonious whole through the mural and plastic decoration of the walls. The central hall was reserved for Klinger's Beethoven, which was visible from the two other exhibition rooms on either side of the hall. The visitor entered the exhibition through the left side room, which gave a view onto the statue. The three sides of this side room facing the visitor were covered on their upper half by Gustav Klimt's Beethoven frieze.

The exhibition was thus conceived as a temple space, a plastic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which expressed a collective artistic will to a unified style (the international art nouveau movement of the fin de siècle) and to a unification of the arts—but without a unifying cult. Carl Schorske speaks of the Secession's search for a surrogate religion that would offer a refuge from modern life, and calls the exhibition an exercise in collective narcissism, in which artists (Secession) celebrate an artist (Klinger) celebrating an artist-hero (Beethoven).⁶ Perhaps this was not true of the opening ceremony, when the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was performed in an arrangement for wind instruments by Gustav Mahler. What remained after the performance, however, was Klimt's allegorical depiction of Wagner's interpretation of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, just as this frieze, restored to its original

5. See William J. McGrath's analysis of Mahler's Third Symphony in his *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), 120–62.

6. Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1981), 254.

setting after an absence of eighty years and the intervening destruction and reconstruction of the Secession building, built by the Jugendstil architect Joseph Olbrich in 1898, remains the sole witness to the exhibition and its enormous success with the Viennese public.

Like the reliefs on Beethoven's throne, Klimt's mural is a tripartite composition, which works with the contrast between light and darkness. The two long sides of the mural are separated by the dark, narrow facing wall, which depicts the hostile powers that stand between mankind's yearning for happiness (on the left hand) and its fulfillment in and through art (on the right hand). Klimt's explication in the exhibition catalogue of his thirty-four-meter-long fresco follows Wagner's 1846 interpretation of Beethoven's setting of Schiller's "Ode to Joy." The figures on the left wall represent the longing for happiness, the sufferings of weak humanity, and their pleas to the outer (the knight in golden armor) and inner forces (compassion and ambition) needed to fight for happiness. The hostile powers are represented by the monstrous giant Typhon, whose wings cover the whole central wall, flanked by his three daughters, the Gorgons (Sickness, Madness, Death), to his left and three female figures (Voluptuousness, Debauchery, Wantonness) to his right. "The longings and aspirations of humanity pass above them." On the right wall, these longings are soothed and satisfied by Poetry. Between Poetry and the Ideal Kingdom, which completes the mural, the opening in the wall reveals the presiding genius of Beethoven, whose music carries the words of Poetry across the gulf separating the real world of longing from the ideal world of art, where "True Happiness, Pure Bliss, and Absolute Love" dwell. The last scene of the mural illustrates through a heavenly choir of angels and two lovers embracing Schiller's "Freude schöner Götterfunke. Dieser Kuß der ganzen Welt" (Joy beautiful divine spark. This kiss for the whole world).

The 1902 exhibition is regarded as the high point of the heroic years of the Secession from 1897 to 1905, brought to an end by the departure of Klimt and associated artists. There was another, now forgotten Secession dedicated to the religion of art: the "Salons de la Rose-Croix," held from 1892 to 1896 in Paris. The aim of these annual exhibitions was to "ruin realism, reform Latin taste and create a school of idealist art."⁷ The nature of this idealist art is made clear by the rules governing exhibition: history painting, patriotic or military subjects, scenes from contemporary life, portraits, still life, picturesque Orientalism, seascapes and landscapes (except for those in the style of Poussin), were excluded, along with female painters. To be promoted were the Catholic ideal, Catholic dogmas, and mysticism, legend, myth, allegory, dream, Oriental theogonies other than Chinese, allegorical murals, and sublime nudes.⁸ The founder and *spiritus rector* of the whole enterprise, Joséphin

7. Deak, "The Occult Interpretation of Richard Wagner," in *Symbolist Theatre*, 122.

8. *Ibid.*, 117–22.

Péladan (1859–1918), particularly admired the paintings of Gustave Moreau and the murals of Puvis de Chavannes.

The impetus to create the order of the Rose-Croix came from Péladan's visit to Bayreuth in 1888. There the three performances of *Parsifal* he attended made him a Wagnerian disciple, called to become the regenerator of French culture. The opening of the first salon on 10 March 1892 was celebrated by a solemn Mass of the Holy Ghost in Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, followed by the performance of the Prelude, the Last Supper of the Grail, the Good Friday music, and the Finale of *Parsifal* "by the superhuman Wagner."⁹ Péladan conceived the members of his order as knights of the Holy Grail, dedicated to the destruction of sexual love, to be replaced by aesthetic rites. It is not surprising that his mystical society has been characterized as the dramatization of the idea of a secret, occult brotherhood, a "fictional and original creation" that laid claim to a "fictional religiosity" within the context of art.¹⁰ The salons were not confined to the exhibition of paintings;¹¹ there were also concerts of music (Palestrina, Wagner, César Franck, and Beethoven during the first salon) and theatrical performances, in particular Péladan's own plays (*Le fils des étoiles* with music by Satie during the first salon).

Péladan intended his plays as a theatre of initiation, in line with his derivation of the origins of theatre from the mystery religions of antiquity.¹² He followed here the ideas of Édouard Schuré's *Les grands initiés: Esquisse de l'histoire secrète des religions* (1889). Schuré's book, which reached its hundredth edition in 1927, is a plea for a renewal of religion through a return to its ancient esoteric core. Like the occultists and theosophists of the time, Schuré distinguished between the public, institutional, and dogmatic face of religions and the essential unity of their esoteric doctrines, which teach the inner path of initiation into the secret of human divinity. Schuré regarded the symbolist movement, imbued with a longing for the higher invisible world without being able to believe, as typifying the contemporary situation of art.¹³ If this makes Péladan a representative of the symbolist avant-garde no less than Mallarmé or Maeterlinck, as Frantisek Deak argues,¹⁴ we have Péladan's own contrary evaluation of the contemporary situation of the artist in his *Origine et esthétique de la tragédie* (1905): "In formative times, he [the artist] plays the role of the avant-garde; in the period of decadence he reaches back to recapture the

9. Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France: Joséphin Péladan and the Salons of the Rose-Croix* (New York: Garland, 1976), 211–16.

10. *Ibid.*, 122, 130.

11. See Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France*, for reproductions of a representative selection of paintings from each salon. Emile Bernard, Jan Torop, Ferdinand Knopff, Felix Vallotton, Jean Delville and Ferdinand Hodler featured among the exhibitors at the 1892 salon.

12. See Joséphin Péladan, "La religion et le théâtre," *La revue bleu* (6 February 1904); and Péladan, *Origine et esthétique de la tragédie* (Paris: Sansot, 1905).

13. See Françoise Grauby, *Le création mythique à l'époque du symbolisme* (Paris: Nizet, 1994), 49–50.

14. Deak, *Symbolist Theatre*, 131–32.

thread of tradition.”¹⁵ Moreover, Péladan’s most sustained literary endeavor lay not in the theatre but in the twenty novels of his “epic of the people” (*éthopée*), *La décadence latine*. The final volume, *La vertu suprême* (1900), responds to an early novel of the cycle, *La vice suprême* (1884), with its lurid portrayal of the femme fatale. The crowning moment of the final novel directly echoes Wagner’s *Parsifal*. The hero undertakes a pilgrimage to the abbey of Montségur, modeled on Wagner’s Monsalvat. The abbey is dedicated to the Rosicrucians and their esoteric teachings. The altar is surrounded by a decor evoking a pantheon of religions; the organ plays music from *Parsifal*. The hero, Mérodack, has come to take a vow of chastity, the supreme virtue. His companions refuse, however, to join him, and Montségur crumbles. The Grail castle collapses back into the “twilight of the gods.”¹⁶

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Let us suppose Proust writes in “The Death of Cathedrals,” which appeared in *Le Figaro* in August 1904, that Catholicism died centuries ago and that the tradition of its religious services perished with it, leaving as mute witnesses the cathedrals. Let us further suppose that experts have succeeded in reconstructing the ceremonies once celebrated in the cathedrals and that they have been reenacted in the same way that Greek tragedies are performed in the Roman theatre in Orange. Would not the French government hasten to subsidize the resurrection of these religious ceremonies with far greater cause than it currently subsidizes the theatre in Orange or the Paris Opera? For are not the cathedrals the greatest and most original expression of French genius, the most perfect masterpieces of the Gothic? Caravans of snobs will make an annual pilgrimage to Amiens or Chartres or Bourges to participate in these magnificent reenactments, to “savor the work of art in the very setting that had been constructed for it,” and to experience the emotions that they had previously sought in Orange or Bayreuth. And yet, as we know, the soul of the past cannot be brought back to life, despite the best efforts of actors and singers. The pilgrims will lament the lost glory of the past, when priest and people shared the same faith as the sculptors and painters. “Alas, however, these things are as distant from us as the pious enthusiasm of the Greek people at their theatre performances.”¹⁷

Proust can now remind his readers that these religious rites have been preserved unchanged since the days when the cathedrals were built: not actors but ministers of the cult officiate, “not through aesthetic interest but through faith and thus the more aesthetically.” And further, the French cathedrals continue to live their integral life in harmony with the purpose for which they were constructed: to be the theatre of the mysterious drama of the sacrifice of the Mass. Evoking this mysterious drama through a detailed description of the symbolism of the Easter Saturday

15. Péladan, *Origine et esthétique de la tragédie*, 48.

16. Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (London: Collins, 1960), 360.

17. Marcel Proust, “La mort des cathédrales,” in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: NRF, 1936), 10: 167.

services, Proust concludes with his homage to the total work of art: "Never has a comparable spectacle, this gigantic mirror of knowledge, of the soul and of history, been offered to the gaze and intellect of man." It is the "artistic realization, the most complete there has ever been, since all the arts collaborated in it, of the greatest dream that mankind has ever attained."¹⁸

We might term this essay prophetic, since it anticipates Proust's own artistic dream to construct his magnum opus like a church or cathedral.¹⁹ What he says of the medieval cathedral applies to his own work: "One may dream in many ways, and the dwelling is large enough for all of us to find a place." And of the beauty of the Catholic ceremonies, which surpasses anything that any artist has ever conceived, he observes that Wagner alone came close by imitating it in *Parsifal*.²⁰ The *Parsifal* reference gains its full prophetic significance from Proust's original intention to have the Good Friday music as the background accompaniment to his narrator's reflections on time lost and time recovered in the library of the Guermantes's town house. Marcel's quest for lost time is his quest for the Grail; like Parsifal he must not succumb to the temptations of the flower maidens (*Les jeunes filles en fleurs*) if he is to enter the Grail castle and attain redemption. Enlightenment comes to him at the reception at the Guermantes's. Confronted by the ravages of (war) time, which reveal the decadence—individual and social—of a superannuated aristocracy (comparable to the decadence of the knights of the Grail), Marcel discovers/recovers his vocation as a writer who will conquer the destructive power of time by transmuting life—his personal life, that of his society and of the age—into art. Proust wrote this moment of mystic illumination at the end of the novel immediately following the writing of the opening episode of the involuntary memory triggered by the taste of the madeleine. Just as beginning and end form a circle, so the completion of Marcel's quest announces the genesis of the novel to come, which we have already read: two refractions, theoretical and narrative, of the architecture of time recovered. Such an architecture can only reveal itself in retrospect. Proust is expressing his own joy when his narrator refers to the intoxication Balzac and Wagner must have felt when, looking back, they realized that they had composed the *Human Comedy* and the *Ring* cycle.²¹

Looking back, we can see how Proust charts the path to his narrator's self-authorization through Marcel's creative appropriation of music.²² The pivotal scene is the performance of Vinteuil's septet, which seems to Marcel like a message from an unknown country—in Schopenhauer's words, "a paradise quite familiar and

18. Ibid., 174, 176.

19. Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 3: 1032–33.

20. Proust, "La mort des cathédrales," 176, 166.

21. Proust, *À la recherche*, 3: 261–63.

22. See Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Proust musicien* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1984).

yet eternally remote.”²³ The septet’s revelation of an unknown type of joy assures Marcel that there exists something other than the nothingness of the pleasures of this world, that is to say, something beyond the world of space, time, and causality, something beyond the destructive power of time. The imaginary musical works in *À la recherche du temps perdu*—Vinteuil’s violin sonata (modeled on that of César Franck) and his septet—thus figure as the ideal redemptive work of art, which symbolizes the higher truth, the absolute, toward which the narrator and the novel strive. Proust is replaying in fictional form Mallarmé’s 1894 Oxford lecture, “Music and Letters”: the challenge, underscored by Schopenhauer’s philosophy and Wagner’s music dramas, that music poses to literature, is taken up by Proust when he makes music the muse of Marcel’s quest for the Grail.

Can literature be both the music of time and the key to time, which opens the way to true reality? Proust finds this key in the experience of involuntary memory. Like music, it is the source of an unknown joy, of a message from a lost paradise; like the Wagnerian leitmotif or César Franck’s cyclic method of composition, it joins past and present and affirms the possibility of return, of original repetition. It is precisely this paradoxical structure that transcends the (irreversible) difference between past and present. Neither the present, as the realm of sensations that excludes the imagination, nor the past, as the realm of imagination separated from the immediacy of sensation, can give us access to these experiences; the unique quality of involuntary memory lies in the paradoxical simultaneity of absence and immediacy, imagination and sensation, such that it conveys an impression that is real without being actual, and ideal without being abstract.²⁴ This mystic coincidence of opposites contains the essence of Marcel’s redemptive illumination. From it flow the paradoxes of being and time in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Through the involuntary return of the past, Marcel grasps that he not only lives in time but that time lives within him, awaiting resurrection. They are the same but also qualitatively different times. The one is destructive, devouring time; the other is the saving experience of the pure form of time—time out of time. Behind the momentary fusion of past and present lies the essential correspondence between time and eternity. In turn this structure of involuntary memory defines the task of literature: to give a lasting life to departed life. If literature cannot cancel the difference between past and present, it can bring us to comprehend the paradox of memory. For Proust it signified the awakening of the true self from its fear of death and imprisonment in time, that is to say, the transmutation of the *time* of life into the *space* of literature. This redemption of the visible world into the invisible world of meaning fulfills what Mallarmé understands as the orphic explication of the earth.

23. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, trans. E. F. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 264 (chap. 52).

24. Proust, *À la recherche*, 3: 872–73.

Confronted by the Wagnerian total work of art, Proust shared Baudelaire's and Mallarmé's obsession with an art unifying all the arts.²⁵ And like them he embraces the doctrine of correspondences. A sound, a smell, a taste, is sufficient to trigger the "miracle of an analogy," integral to the structure of involuntary memory. Indeed, we could say that this momentary coincidence of the transitory and the eternal exemplifies Goethe's "All that is transient is a simile." Moreover, the idea of reciprocal analogy suggests a reciprocity between the arts, which allows one art, literature, to lay claim to the title of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Georges Piroué speaks of Proust's "internalized opera," which accomplishes what Mallarmé proposed as the goal of the union of poetry and theatre.²⁶

The Ultimate Fiction: Mallarmé's Book

However much it draws on ancient wisdom and Christian and non-Christian liturgical traditions, the symbolist mystery is a specifically modern mystery. The ultimate work, as conceived by Mallarmé or Scriabin, responds to the knowledge of the death of God. Absolute literature lives from the end of the old art religion. It raises the claim to fulfill the task of great art: to make manifest "what beings as a whole are" (Heidegger), the claim to be, in other words, the religion of the death of God, the art religion of modernity. It is precisely this claim that compelled Mallarmé, after two decades of poetic silence, to define and justify his own poetic project—in the closest temporal and intellectual proximity to and distance from Nietzsche—through a profound meditation on Wagner's music drama and on the essence of the theatre (this most ambiguous face of the nineteenth century). Mallarmé's closeness to Nietzsche is evident. Both proclaim the eternal justification of the world as aesthetic phenomenon. This is the logic of Mallarmé's famous observation that everything in the world exists in order to end in a book²⁷—or rather, in the Book, conceived as the Bible of the religion to come. Mallarmé's distance is evident in his critical reserve toward Wagner, which enables him to avoid the extremes of Nietzsche's position; he recognizes the greatness of Wagner and bows before the mystery of music while yet asserting the greater mystery of letters. He was not interested in a con-fusion of words and music ("Allier, non confondre"), even though he accepted the intimate affinity of music and poetry, the aural arts of time. Music has a double meaning for Mallarmé: it means the art of sounds; second, as he explained in a letter to Edmund Gosse, it is used in the Greek sense to signify the rhythm between relationships, the proportions and ratios informing the abstract

25. See Georges Piroué, *Proust et la musique du devenir* (Paris: Denoel, 1960), 114–15.

26. *Ibid.*, 119, 273.

27. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Le Livre, instrument spiritual," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 378.

architecture of the world.²⁸ As such, music is a metaphysical rival of poetry, even though we can speak of a division of labor here between the public and the private, the outer and inner faces of the Mystery. Mallarmé makes the distinction in his customary sibylline manner in “Music and Letters,” his 1894 Oxford lecture:

I posit...that Music and Letters are the alternative face extended here toward the obscure; sparkling there, with certitude, of a phenomenon, the sole, I would call the Idea.

The one of the modes inclines to the other and, disappearing there, reemerges with borrowings: twice there is accomplished, oscillating, a complete genre. Theatrically for the crowd that listens unconsciously to its greatness: or, the individual asks for lucidity, of the explanatory and familiar book.²⁹

Mallarmé’s staging of the Absolute takes the opposite path to Nietzsche’s theory of tragedy, which reconstructs the path from the unrepresentable Will (music) to its redemption in the visibility of the stage action. On a second level, a deeper affinity is apparent, in that both operate with a tension and oscillation between the visible and the invisible, as we can see in Nietzsche’s attempt in “Richard Wagner in Bayreuth” to capture the very formula of Wagner’s music drama:

In Wagner everything in the world wants to deepen and internalize itself into the audible and seek its lost soul; in Wagner everything audible in the world likewise also wants to rise up to the light as visual apparition, wants as it were to gain corporeality. His art always leads him along the double path, out of the world as audible play (*Hörspiel*) into an enigmatically related world as visual play (*Schauspiel*) and vice versa; he is continually compelled—and the observer with him—to translate the visible movement back into soul and primordial life and then again to see the most hidden weaving of the inner world as apparition and to clothe it with an apparent body (*Schein-Leib*).³⁰

Wagner, however, was dissatisfied by the naturalism of the contemporary theatre and entertained the idea of an invisible drama as the logical counterpart to the invisible orchestra. Mallarmé shared this dissatisfaction. The mystery of music pointed beyond itself and beyond Wagner to the other face of the Idea concealed/revealed in the mystery of the word. Mallarmé envisaged his *opus metaphysicum* as a staging of the Absolute through the union of the visible and the invisible, Theater and Book, united and mutually sublated in the *presentation* of the invisible ur-drama of Man (god, hero, type). The act or rite of presentation was to combine the

28. Suzanne Bernard, *Mallarmé et la musique* (Paris: Nizet, 1959), 35.

29. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, 649.

30. Nietzsche, *Werke in zwei Bänden* (Munich: Hanser, 1967), 1: 199.

two faces of the Idea, turned toward the crowd and the individual respectively. It had as its prototype the office of the Mass. Instead of the Greek tradition of mimesis, Mallarmé turned to the Catholic tradition of mystery. Against the German identification with ancient Greece, the French man of letters looks to the Christian legacy of medieval Europe as the source of the modern world.³¹ Thus when Mallarmé proposed the renewal of the dying Christian mystery through art—"Let us penetrate into the church, with art"³²—he was in fact following Wagner's reworking of the Christian mystery in *Parsifal*. In three short prose pieces, united under the title *Offices* (1892–95), Mallarmé articulates the same doctrine of the renewal and redemption of religion through art that Wagner had expounded in "Religion and Art" (see chapter 5).

The Catholic Mass provided Mallarmé with the model of presentation for the transposition of things into the sphere of meaning—the ancient, ever-new task of poetry. The transposition of the world into the Book, conceived as a work of negative creation, refuses Wagner's transformation of the world into Theatre. The Book to come signifies in this sense the antitype of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This appears very clearly in Mallarmé's and Wagner's respective theories of the arts. Wagner, we recall, derives the music drama from the three human arts of dance, music, and poetry. They accomplish the transposition into the living presence of performance. With Mallarmé, by contrast, the transposition accomplished by dance, music, and poetry consists of dematerialization,³³ abstraction, and generalization, understood as the purification of the world from the contingencies of matter, that is, from chance. Against Wagner's conception of the total work of art as "living represented religion," Mallarmé can offer no more than an ideal representation, to be accomplished through the reading of the Book. Through this operation, in which the actor is replaced by the poet-operator of the séances, the Absolute objectifies itself and becomes conscious of its self-division (as self and other). Consisting of four parts and two halves, the Book can be read forward and backward to converge in a unity that forms a fifth part, the quintessence of the whole.³⁴ The Book as totality is thus realized through this progressive, redemptive consciousness of self-identity.³⁵ Reading is conceived as the act, operation, rite, which interiorizes the theatre and reveals the equivalence between the structure of the theatre and the structure of the spirit:³⁶ the division between stage and audience corresponds to the division between conscious and unconscious spirit, the poet-operator and the crowd. The operation of reading thus demonstrates the mirror relation of reception. In

31. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, 392.

32. *Ibid.*, 395.

33. Mallarmé regards dance not in terms of the body but of abstract movement or writing, for which his term is "arabesque." See Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, 541.

34. Jacques Schérer, *Le 'Livre' de Mallarmé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), 105.

35. Eric Benoit, *Mallarmé et le mystère de 'Livre'* (Paris: Champion, 1998), 28.

36. *Ibid.*, 62.

Mallarmé's words, "The crowd, from which nothing can be hidden, since everything comes from it, will recognize itself... in the work."³⁷ Even though the crowd listens to its own unconscious mystery in music, it will never come to recognize itself in music. Only literature can bring the crowd to self-knowledge and thus to self-redemption—or rather, this will be the role of the Book, the Bible to come: "If in future a religion reemerges, it will be the amplification to a thousand joys of *the instinct for heaven in each of us*."³⁸

The universal human spirit, latent in the multiple subjectivities of the crowd, is Mallarmé's Absolute, expressed obscurely, unconsciously, by Music, elucidated by Letters. This Absolute forms the basis of Mallarmé's aesthetics: from it arises the im/possibility of the Absolute Work, of the art religion, which will inherit from Catholicism the mystery of the divinity present in the human spirit, that is to say, the mystery of mysteries, encompassing all of mankind's religious creativity in the self-consciousness of totality.³⁹ For Mallarmé the universal archetypes of the quest for meaning—the myths, symbols, and rites of religion—are resumed and objectified in the universal drama of the Mass. The Mass celebrates the very type of the hero in the Passion of Christ and the very type of transformation in the miracle of transubstantiation. Moreover, freed from the constraints of scenic representation, the Mass offers Mallarmé the sublation of the dichotomy Theatre/Book:⁴⁰ its ideal drama of the invisibly present hero enacts more purely the idea of presentation as the means to the circular identity, to the "penetration, in reciprocity," of audience and hero, the crowd and the god. Through his synthetic myth Mallarmé hopes to capture (in contrast to Wagner's reliance on Germanic myths) the irreducible structures of the human spirit, that is to say, the ideal timeless source of mankind's poetic fictions present in the anonymous creativity of the crowd.

The Hegelian drama of the Book, in which self-divided, self-alienated spirit attains self-identity, is conceived as a reciprocal process of reception and creation, that is, as a communion, which effects the passage from the individual to the universal. This passage, central to the communal fusion intended by ceremony and festival, reaffirms the original connection between poetry and the sacred and points forward to a religion to come. However, as we know, Mallarmé's art religion is most emphatically an *art* religion, which grasps and presents its truth as fiction, while

37. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, 700.

38. *Ibid.*, 654.

39. Benoit, *Mallarmé et le mystère de 'Livre'*, 101–2.

40. Paul Valéry sums up Mallarmé's thinking on the theatre when he writes to Gide on 5 December 1891: "All *drama* is impossible after the Mass.... The only appearance of Art before everyone—everyone. And the *liturgical drama* is Perfection—in the Perfection.... that a *total crowd* will give me." He anticipates Proust's judgment when he continues: "Throughout the ceremony, the beauty of the ancient words, gestures, the organ, the emotion which swells at every moment of the mystic duration, the spasm of enthusiasm, the little death which constricts the throat at the elevation, then Being. It is the extraordinary spasm of ecstasy, the masterpiece of all the arts." *Gide-Valéry, Correspondances, 1890–1942* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), 142–43.

yet asserting the reciprocity between reception and creation as proof of the Spirit. This reciprocal proof manifests the “aesthetic relation,” that is, the self-reflexivity designated by the notion of fiction, which Mallarmé declares “the very procedure of the human spirit.”⁴¹ Everything converges on the procedure of *fictioning*: the human spirit realizes itself—one is tempted to say in a progressive dialectic of enlightenment—in the sequence myth/religion, Catholic Mass, literature, the Book. Mallarmé’s Book unfolds the *modern mystery* of divine self-creation. Its “absolute” modernity lies precisely in making the human spirit the medium and source of the Absolute—a (dangerous) conundrum, inherent in the idea of the total work of art and built into the dialectic of enlightenment. Whether we take the romantic idea of a new mythology, Wagner’s idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or the revolutionary festival, they are all premised on a belief in the genius of the people and consequently characterized by the circularity of self-creation.

The conception of literature shared by the “orphyic poets” (Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Rilke) places the “aesthetic relation,” the self-fictioning spirit, at the heart of the miracle of language, which generalizes the miracle of transubstantiation through the transposition of facts into ideals,⁴² in order to effect the poetic dematerialization and spiritualization of the material world. These orphyic powers find in turn their self-reflexive presentation in the Book, which is finally nothing but a fiction suspended over the abyss. As Eric Benoit puts it, “The Book of the Whole, which will realize ‘the intimate correlation of Poetry and the Universe’ (24 September 1867), is conceived from the beginning as Book of Nothing, Book of Nothingness, Book of Fiction, revealing thereby the relation of Poetry and Non-Being.”⁴³ However, we must take this process of poetic spiritualization a stage further, bearing Maurice Blanchot’s reservations in mind.⁴⁴ Blanchot argues that the Book is not to be thought of as an unrealized project, and thereby subjected to the fatal hubris of self-creation. It is neither a tangible artifact nor a reconstructable operation; it is nothing other than the idea of the Absolute Work—that is, the conceptual identity of the absolute and the total work of art—which exemplifies its own im/possibility precisely and solely as Virtual Book. Blanchot’s “Book to come” is accordingly the presentation and *mise-en-abyme* of the oscillation of Being and Nothingness in the “real presence” of fiction. Only in this fashion, we may add, can it escape the danger of self-deification and remain the work, the religion to come after the death of God. In Mallarmé’s words, “The Book is thus like God: necessary, present, inexistent. Of God it has the attributes uncontestable, inexhaustible, inexpressible.”⁴⁵ Only in this fashion, we may add, through its refusal of closure, can it shed light on the

41. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, 851.

42. *Ibid.*, 522.

43. Benoit, *Mallarmé et le mystère de ‘Livre’*, 14.

44. Maurice Blanchot, “Le livre à venir,” in *Le livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 271–97.

45. Quoted in Marvick, “Two Versions of the Symbolist Apocalypse,” 298.

constitution of society. The Latin *factio* translates the Greek *poiesis*. As the “very procedure of the human spirit,” *factio* points to the foundation of the economy in credit and of the social bond in a transcendent/al fiction. If this means that politics lives from the sacred, it also means that politics must learn from poetics that it too is based on fiction.⁴⁶

The Last Ecstasy: Scriabin’s *Mysterium*

Both Mallarmé’s *Book* and Scriabin’s *Mysterium* lay claim to being the ultimate work of art, the ultimate expression of the romantic longing for the Absolute. Each proclaims the self-redemption of the human spirit as the mystery of mysteries, to be realized in the case of the *Book* through the intellect and in the case of the *Mysterium* through the senses. Gnosis and ecstasy thus form the polar opposites that determine their respective conceptions of the total work. Mallarmé seeks to outbid religious tradition by means of a higher-order schematization of mankind’s “self-fictionings.” This will to abstraction is reflected in the subsumption of all the arts and all genres in the *Book*. Scriabin’s conception of the human spirit is its antithesis. All of his compositions rehearse “The Poem of Ecstasy,” written in conjunction with his Fourth Symphony (1906–9) of the same title. The poem is a hymn to the eternal creative-destructive play of the divine spirit, which finds its redemption in the phenomenal world—“Divine play / In multiplicity of forms”—just as the world finds redemption in the supreme moment of blissful oneness:

I create you,
This complex unity
This feeling of bliss
Seizing you completely,
I am the instant illumining eternity
I am the affirmation.
I am Ecstasy.⁴⁷

The Nietzschean echoes are unmistakable: the exaltation of the Dionysian Will, the double play of redemption between Apollonian dream vision and Dionysian intoxication. *Prometheus: Poem of Fire*, Scriabin’s Fifth Symphony (1910) and last completed orchestral work, also refers to Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, which had on its title page an image of Prometheus Unbound. The cover design for *Prometheus*, commissioned by Scriabin from the Belgian artist and fellow theosophist Jean Delville, announces an even grander programme than Nietzsche’s vision of the

46. See Benoit, *Mallarmé et le mystère de ‘Livre’*, 135–38, 418–20.

47. Alexander Scriabin, “*Poem of Ecstasy*” and “*Prometheus: Poem of Fire*” in *Full Score* (New York: Dover, 1995), 7.

redemptive unbinding of Prometheus/Dionysus. Delville's design "shows a lyre (the world symbolized by music) rising from a lotus flower (the womb or mind of Asia). Over a Star of David, the ancient symbol of Lucifer according to Theosophy, shines the face of Prometheus. Thus the composer incorporated into his world-view all religions, including 'Sons of the Flame of Wisdom,' Theosophy's secret cult to which both Scriabin and Delville belonged."⁴⁸ *Prometheus* unfolds the birth of human consciousness from matter and its development, culminating in a delirious celebration of the myriad forms of life, whose dissonances finally resolve into harmony. The fact that *Prometheus* was performed in the presence of Lenin at a concert in the Bolshoi Theatre in October 1918 to celebrate the first anniversary of the October Revolution marks the momentary and short-lived meeting of mysticism and revolutionism.⁴⁹

Scriabin's synthesizing intention is evident in the two best-known features of *Prometheus*: its synaesthetic and harmonic experiments. The score includes a part for a color keyboard (*tastiera per luce*), whose function, according to Scriabin, was "to bathe the performance space in a vast interplay of colored lights, pervading the very air and atmosphere."⁵⁰ Although the synaesthetic effects of combining sound and color fascinated contemporaries such as Kandinsky and Schoenberg (see chapter 7), the quest for a new musical language beyond tonality led by Scriabin (1872–1915) and Schoenberg (1874–1951) in the years before the First World War was of far greater significance. Scriabin's famous "mystic chord," made up of fourths (augmented, diminished, perfect), is the source of both melody and harmony in *Prometheus*. Scriabin's attraction to the harmonic ambiguity of the tritone (augmented fourth), which divides the octave into equal halves of six semitones, shows him moving toward twelve-tone music.⁵¹ His move beyond tonality was, however, symptomatic of his mystic desire to move beyond the limits of art and of avant-gardism. The *Mysterium* signified "the insuperable barrier between all works of art and his unique artistic design."⁵² Boris de Schloezer locates the beginnings of Scriabin's grand conception in his plan for an opera, which was to conclude with the death of the hero during a great festival, which "crowns the attainment of universal unification with the production of a grandiose musical drama created by the hero."⁵³ The very plan of the opera—a grandiose musical drama within a grandiose

48. Ibid., 113 (note by Faubion Bowers). The Dover edition reproduces on its cover Delville's splendid design. See Madame Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* on Prometheus as Lucifer and fallen angel.

49. Marcella Lista, *L'oeuvre d'art totale à la naissance des avant-gardes (1908–1914)* (Paris: CTHS, 2006), 292.

50. Scriabin, "Poem of Ecstasy," 114.

51. See Robert P. Morgan, "Secret Languages: The Roots of Musical Modernism," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1984): 442–61; Richard Taruskin, "Scriabin and the Superhuman," in *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 308–59.

52. Boris de Schloezer, *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic*, trans. Nicolas Slonimsky (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 181.

53. Ibid., 171.

musical drama, a great festival within a great festival, a total work of art within a total work of art!—confronted Scriabin with the “insuperable barrier” separating representation from life. By foregrounding the frame of representation, his play-within-the-play would have amounted to the *inverse* of the total work of art beyond representation.⁵⁴

As the “Poem of Ecstasy” indicates, Scriabin identified with the living process of creation. The work of art could not be an end in itself; its function was to attain an intensified mode of existence: “Scriabin valued life above art; in art, he saw the means of enrichment, of enhancement, of subtilization of life, culminating in the acquisition of mystical power.”⁵⁵ The synthesis of the arts, for which the composer’s term was “total art,”⁵⁶ constituted an essential step toward acquisition of this power at the same time as it anticipated the return to a primal and final harmony. For all his deep appreciation of Wagner (the only composer he took seriously), Scriabin rejected Wagner’s mimetic parallelism of music and drama in favor of what he called the counterpointing of the arts, that is, an interpenetration that denied the separation of the arts in the name of an all-embracing, once-and-future “Omni-art.”⁵⁷ To that end, Scriabin wanted to return the theatre to its religious origins by abolishing the duality of actors and audience that Wagner had failed to surmount.⁵⁸ “Scriabin refused to separate art from religion; in his view religion is immanent to art, which itself becomes a religious phenomenon.”⁵⁹ It was precisely the separation of the two that had led to a fatally narrow understanding of art, and to the loss of its true meaning and significance, which Scriabin felt he was summoned to recover. This mystic destiny defined his purpose as artist. He had been called to bring the whole tradition of mystical-religious art to its climax. Exceeding his faith in the redemptive power of art, which he shared with the romantics, was his belief in the magical powers of the artist, which he shared with Novalis, whose depiction of the orphic poet in his unfinished novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* Scriabin greatly admired. Scriabin’s favorite legend was that of Orpheus: “To him it represented

54. After 1945, both Peter Weiss, *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis De Sade* (London: John Calder, 1964), and Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *The Visit*, trans. Patrick Bowles (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), employ this framing technique in their critiques of the idea of redemptive theatre.

55. Schloezer, *Scriabin*, 99.

56. *Ibid.*, 169.

57. *Ibid.*, 84. According to Scriabin, a faint memory of Omni-art is present below the surface of the modern separated arts and underlies the symbolist doctrine of correspondences. Simon Shaw-Miller, “Scriabin and Obukhov: *Mysterium* and *La livre de la vie*; The Concept of Artistic Synthesis,” *Consciousness, Literature, and the Arts, Archive* 1.3 (December 2000): 9, <http://blackboard.lincoln.ac.uk>.

58. Scriabin: “The true eradication of the stage can be accomplished in the Mystery”; quoted in Shaw-Miller, “Scriabin and Obukhov,” 7.

59. Schloezer, *Scriabin*, 233.

the vestigial remembrance of a historic man who once wielded great power, the true nature and significance of which has been lost.”⁶⁰

In the hermetic tradition, Orpheus was one of the line of teachers and transmitters of the wisdom of the ancients. This ancient wisdom, as presented by Madame Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), read by Scriabin in 1906, provides the key to the *Mysterium*. According to Schloezer, Scriabin likened Madame Blavatsky’s synthesis of Indian and pre-Christian esoteric speculations on man and the universe to the grandeur of Wagner’s music dramas.⁶¹ Bearing the theosophical interpretation of *Parsifal* in mind (on which, see chapter 5), Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine* and Wagner’s sacred festival drama may be considered the spiritual parents of the *Mysterium*. It needs to be added, however, that Scriabin aimed to transcend his models by realizing the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* in (pre- and posthistoric) Omni-art and by transforming theosophy’s secret teachings into the ecstatic moment of apocalyptic revelation. The basic idea of the *Mysterium*—“the union of humanity with divinity and the return of the world to oneness”⁶²—anticipates the far-distant conclusion to Madame Blavatsky’s account of Cosmogogenesis (volume 1) and Anthropogenesis (volume 2), which situates us as the fifth of the seven races of man in the seven rounds of life and evolution. Two further cycles (Manvantara) are needed to complete the evolution of the universe to perfect enlightenment: “The Cycles of Matter will be succeeded by Cycles of Spirituality and a fully developed mind.”⁶³

The prospect of an endlessly distant liberation from the phenomenal world of space and time was unacceptable to Scriabin. “He harboured apocalyptic expectations of a new earth, a new heaven, awaiting the palpitating fulfillment of the promise of that angel who vowed to the ‘eternally living’ that ‘time will cease to be.’”⁶⁴ What Madame Blavatsky attributed to two further cycles of evolution, Scriabin entrusted to the boundless “cosmic creative force, in which he was immersed and with which he merged.” This ecstasy of spirit, which enabled him to pass beyond the illusion of space and time to behold “the cosmos directly, in its perennial motion, its dance,”⁶⁵ drove his conviction that the end of the universe and the

60. Ibid., 234. Schloezer quotes Leonid Sabaneiev’s report of Scriabin’s understanding of the orphic power of art as the exercise of a magical power over the human mind “by means of a mysterious, incantatory, rhythmic force.” “Once we accept the principle of effective action on the psychic plane, each performance of a work of art becomes an act of *magic, a sacrament*. Both the creator of a work of art and its performer become *magicians*, or votaries, who stir psychological storms and cast spells upon the souls of men.” The goal of such theurgic art is catharsis and ecstasy. Schloezer, *Scriabin*, 237.

61. Schloezer, *Scriabin*, 68.

62. Ibid., 67.

63. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888; reprint, Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company, 1974), 2: 446.

64. Schloezer, *Scriabin*, 96. See Blavatsky, “When Time Be no Longer,” in *Secret Doctrine*, 2: 565.

65. Schloezer, *Scriabin*, 127, 129.

transfiguration of humanity were near and that he was the chosen instrument of this imminent consummation of all things. In his notebooks he writes:

But there is a higher synthesis [than of man and society] that is of divine nature, and which at the supreme moment of existence is bound to engulf the entire universe and impart to it a harmonious flowering, that is, ecstasy, returning it to the primordial state of repose that is nonbeing. Such a synthesis can be consummated only by human consciousness, elevated to a superior consciousness of the world, freeing the spirit from the claims of the past and carrying all living souls away in its divine creative flight. This will be the last ecstasy, but it is already close at hand.⁶⁶

How Scriabin envisaged the performance of *Mysterium* is largely a matter of conjecture. It is doubtful that he had anything more than a general conception. We do know that the intended site of this last ecstasy was to be in India. English theosophical admirers bought land for this purpose in Darjeeling in 1914. For the theosophists not only was India the font of ancient wisdom, but nothing less than the backdrop of the Himalayas could suffice for the ultimate multimedia spectacle. Scriabin's notebooks include a sketch of the temple he planned to construct in the shape of a hemisphere, which would appear as a sphere through its reflection in water. Twelve stars crown the cupola of the temple world, which is entered through twelve doors. The twelve external pillars supporting the temple may well symbolize the twelve color chords of *Prometheus*. The temple would have room for two thousand participants grouped in circles around the Artist-Messiah.⁶⁷ "The *Mysterium* was to be inaugurated with a carillon of bells descending from the clouds; dirigibles would be used to circumvent the law of gravity."⁶⁸ The ritual was to end on the seventh day with an orgiastic dance, a sacramental act of cosmic eros. Referring to his Seventh Piano Sonata, Scriabin speaks of it approaching the final dance of *Mysterium* before the instant of *dematerialization*.⁶⁹ "Art has performed its mission; the creation of beauty is accomplished, the world is impregnated with the image of the Deity. The Seventh Day is ended; the *Mysterium* has brought mankind, and the whole universe with it, to the threshold of death.... A blessed immersion into God takes place, a fusion with God, now resurrected and lovingly receiving his sons unto himself."⁷⁰ Scriabin seems to have imagined the entire population of the world participating, and the earth itself as the temple.

Confronted by this cosmic task, it is hardly surprising that Scriabin blinked and retreated to working on a prelude to apocalypse, an *Acte préalable* (Preliminary

66. Quoted in Schloezer, *Scriabin*, 120.

67. *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk: Europäische Utopien seit 1800*, ed. Harald Szeeman (Aarau: Sauerländer, 1983), 283.

68. Marvick, "Two Versions of the Symbolist Apocalypse," 294.

69. Andreas Pütz, *Von Wagner zu Scriabin* (Kassel: Bosse, 1995), 150.

70. Quoted in Schloezer, *Scriabin*, 270.

Act), which was to precede the final act and serve as a purification rite, involving the physical, moral, aesthetic, religious, and philosophical preparation of the participants. As opposed to the *Mysterium*, the *Preliminary Act* remained within the boundaries of art, even though designed solely for adepts and not for an audience. It remained on the level of representation, comparable in this sense to the Mass as a repeatable rite. Scriabin worked on the *Act* in 1914, completing the text by autumn, together with musical material that he did not have time to turn into an orchestral score before his death from blood poisoning in April 1915.⁷¹ "Scriabin intended to restore in this work the unity of all the arts... sound, light, words and physical movements were to form a close-knit contrapuntal fabric."⁷² But beyond the unity of the arts, beyond representation, there beckoned the instant of dematerialization, the instant when time will cease to be. In 1906, Scriabin wrote: "A moment of ecstasy will cease to be a moment in time, for it will compress time into itself." Schloezer comments that the goal of the *Mysterium* was to experience "death in time and space."⁷³ Where Scriabin speaks of dematerialization, Mallarmé speaks of the abolition of the phenomenal world. Each takes the symbolists' occult quest for essence, for the absolute, to its mystical conclusion: Nothing, *nirvana*—in Mallarmé's words, "le Néant, auquel je suis arrivé sans connaître le Bouddhisme."⁷⁴

The composer Nicolai Obukhov (1892–1954), a follower of Scriabin, took up the challenge of the total work of art. Escaping from the Bolshevik Revolution, he settled in Paris in 1929. His life's work was devoted to *The Book of Life*, consisting of eight hundred pages of short score, a libretto in Russian in seven chapters, divided into fourteen sections. Like Scriabin, he believed there was a higher reality that art could reach. The spiritual power of music could only be realized through the "absolute harmony" offered by the twelve-tone method of composition. Obukhov invented new instruments to supplement the orchestra, such as the Ether, which either functioned as a kind of wind machine or operated to produce sounds both below and above the human hearing range, and the Croix Sonore, constructed in the 1930s, which was similar to the Theremin or the Ondes Martinot. The Croix Sonore works as a symbol of balance, just as the orchestra is governed by its relation to the four elements: air (woodwind and brass), earth (percussion), fire (strings), and water (keyboards). The work is called a "sacred action," directed to the idea of *transformation*, for which music is the bridge to the transubstantiation of matter into divine spirit, comparable to the act of transubstantiation in the Mass.⁷⁵ An ideal

71. The Russian composer Alexander Nemtin devoted many years to creating from the fifty-three pages of sketches a tripartite work lasting three hours with massive orchestral and choral parts, solo piano, organ, and light keyboard. Nemtin's reconstruction is available in a recording by Vladimir Ashkenazy and the Deutsche Symphonie-Orchester Berlin: Scriabin, *Preparation for the Final Mystery*, Decca 466329–2.

72. Schloezer, *Scriabin*, 333.

73. *Ibid.*, 231, 219.

74. Marvick, "Two Versions of the Symbolist Apocalypse," 293.

75. Shaw-Miller, "Scriabin and Obukhov," 122–23.

performance would involve the arrangement of the participants in spirals within a stage setting. “The ‘terrestrial’ orchestra will be coiled up around the scene. A dome will contain the ‘celestial’ orchestra. Lighting changes will intervene in the ‘Sacred Action,’ a synthesis of cult and orgy (the latter meant symbolically). Such is the ritual where science and religion are married.”⁷⁶ Theosophists were attracted by Obukhov’s intentions and arranged for a partial performance at a theosophical venue in 1926, which was complemented by the public performance of the symphonic poem *Préface de la livre de vie* on 3 June 1926 at the Paris Opera, conducted by Sergei Koussevitzky. Neither this performance nor a later performance from *The Book of Life* in 1934 succeeded in persuading the audience. Despite their evident failure to realize their mystic visions, Simon Shaw–Miller is nevertheless right to insist that Scriabin and Obukhov, or Mallarmé and Proust, reveal against the conventional interpretations of the modernist movement “a synthetic impulse at the heart of modernist culture.”⁷⁷

Gnosis and Ecstasy

Mallarmé and Scriabin: two versions of the symbolist apocalypse (Marvick), that is to say, opposed versions of *revelation* through the mystic paths of gnosis and ecstasy respectively. They display the alternative faces of the Idea, the division between Music and Letters, and in this sense the dismemberment of Orpheus. Novalis, the predecessor, points in opposite directions in relation to Mallarmé and Scriabin. For the former he points to the path of absolute literature in pursuit of an absolute poetics. Face-to-face with a mute and meaningless universe, Mallarmé ties modernism’s quest for the absolute to the “glorious lies” of mankind’s self-fictionings. Gnosis springs from the “aesthetic relation” between art and truth, which allows us to speak without reservation of Mallarmé’s *art* religion. Art, more exactly poetics, reveals the ultimate truths of religion—and politics. The price is total, however: the will to totality retreats—as it progresses on the path to self-enlightenment—into the virtuality of Blanchot’s “Book to come.” Construed in this fashion, Novalis stands at the beginning of Calasso’s heroic age of modernism, which attains its self-sacrificial truth in Mallarmé’s *via negativa*.

A completely different picture emerges if we take Scriabin as our reference point. Novalis now appears as a last avatar of Orpheus, the legendary personification of the ancient ideal of art and its miraculous theurgic powers, capable of transforming and transfiguring life. Scriabin’s Novalis indicates the true path to the future: it lies in undoing the dismemberment of Orpheus, undoing, that is, the historical consequences of the secularization and enlightenment of art,

76. M. Orban, “Nicolas Obouhow: Un musicien mystique,” *La revue musicale* 16 (1935): 107; quoted in Shaw–Miller, “Scriabin and Obukhov,” 23.

77. Shaw–Miller, “Scriabin and Obukhov.”

which have severed art's roots in religion and released the arts into lonely autonomy. If this process of secularization provides the springboard for Mallarmé's leap into the abyss, it defines at the same time for Scriabin the path of return and the sacred task of anamnesis, which found kindred spirits in German romanticism and idealism. Ivanov, who was close to Scriabin in the last two years of his life, stresses the deep affinity between Scriabin and Novalis's "magic idealism": the identification of personal consciousness with universal spirit; the harmony of nature and awakened consciousness; the fusion of the human and the divine in theurgic creativity; the reconciliation of all contraries in "synthetic memory"; collective ecstasy as the means to universal transfiguration.⁷⁸ But we could also see this affinity as determined by a comparable response to the sense of historical crisis, triggered by the French Revolution in the case of Novalis and by the 1905 uprising and the First World War in the case of Scriabin. Ivanov's essay "Scriabin's View of Art," written in 1915 to commemorate the composer's death, captures the apocalyptic expectations that suffused Russian society and consumed Scriabin. Ivanov speaks of Scriabin's appearance as heralding a turning point in the universal life of the spirit. Scriabin announces the alternative: "that there will either be no more art at all or else it will be born from the roots of being itself and give birth to being, thereby becoming the most important and real of actions; that the time of *works* of art has passed and that from now on, one can conceive only of *events* of art."⁷⁹

Is this not the logic inscribed in Mallarmé's and Scriabin's antithetical projects—the *reconnection of art and being*, the revolutionary-redemptive dream that impelled the avant-garde movements to proclaim across the decade of the First World War the apocalypse of modernism?

78. Viacheslav Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, trans. Robert Bird, ed. Michael Wachtel (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 219.

79. *Ibid.*, 228.

GESAMTKUNSTWERK AND AVANT-GARDE

The Avant-Garde: Analysis and Synthesis

Resisting translation, both *avant-garde* and *Gesamtkunstwerk* have retained their original linguistic inflexion: the one the expression of Gallic dash and daring, the other the expression of Teutonic profundities. These subliminal associations reflect two very different senses of aesthetic modernism, or rather, contribute to the valorization of a French-oriented as opposed to a German-oriented history of modern art, in which French painting rather than German music plays the leading role. This *parti pris* is so self-evident that the last crucial stage of European modernism, from the 1880s to the 1920s, is comprehended in terms of avant-gardism, that is to say, in terms of (self-evidently positive) impulses of experimentation and innovation and/or radical iconoclasm. The synthesizing, religious-redemptive, mystic or socially utopian intentions of the various movements are constantly registered and just as constantly discounted. Thus Richard Murphy, confronted by what he calls “two diametrically opposed conceptions” of the avant-garde in German expressionism—the romantic-idealist and the activist—assigns the one to the nineteenth and the other to the twentieth century.¹ Christopher Innes’s *Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant-Garde* appeared

1. Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Post-modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 35–39.

with a changed title in its second edition: *Avant-Garde Theatre, 1892–1992*. Despite his central claim that “holy theatre” constitutes a master current of our epoch, Innes is obliged to acknowledge the “incongruity” that avant-garde theatre was not “avant-garde” at all but mythic, ritualistic, and archaic, and driven by a dominant interest in the irrational and the primitive, that is to say, characterized by categories that sit uneasily with the familiar progressive connotations of avant-gardism, which not only are written into the definitions of the avant-garde but underpin the mainstream accounts of the modernism of modernism. To take a few, randomly selected definitions: *avant-garde* denotes “exploration, path-finding, innovation and invention; something new, something advanced (ahead of its time) and revolutionary”;² “a collective description of artists who adopt techniques or expressive aims radically different from those hallowed by tradition, with the implication that their work makes advances which will subsequently be widely accepted and adopted”;³ The term *avant-garde* “refers to those out front, forging a path previously unknown,” involving “genuine discoveries about the possibilities of art.”⁴ Tate Modern Online does point out that some “avant-garde movements such as Cubism for example have focused mainly on innovations of *form*, others such as Futurism, De Stijl or Surrealism have strong social programmes,” only to continue: “The notion of the avant-garde enshrines the idea that art should be judged primarily on the quality and originality of the artists’ vision and ideas.”⁵ That the notion of the avant-garde is *not* to be equated with the doctrine of aesthetic autonomy, that the avant-garde in both its iconoclastic and synthesizing poles is predominantly antagonistic to aestheticism, remains very much in the background.

Such is the power of slogans that “avant-garde” has imposed itself regardless of the programmes, social or mystic, of the various artistic movements. Publications on the avant-garde continue to proliferate, while there is still not a single book in English on the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as an integral category of aesthetic modernism—an absence that is symptomatic of the progressive reduction of the notion of the avant-garde to the dimension of artistic experiments and techniques. Is, for instance, “primitivism” really to be construed as an experimentally “progressive” exoticism, or is it, as the master current of holy theatre suggests, intended as the negation of the assumptions of progressive modernity? Referring to the “Savages” in Germany (*die Brücke, der Blaue Reiter*), Franz Marc comments: “*Mysticism* has awakened in their souls and with it the most ancient elements of art.”⁶ The first comprehensive

2. J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), s.v. “Avant-garde.”

3. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980), s.v. “Avant-garde” (Paul Griffiths).

4. Richard Kostelanetz, *Dictionary of the Avant-Gardes*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), xix.

5. See “Avant-garde,” tate.org.uk/collections/glossary (accessed 5 December 2009).

6. Franz Marc, “The ‘Savages’ of Germany,” in *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, ed. Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc; new documentary edition, ed. Klaus Lankheit (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 64.

survey of primitive art, Herbert Kuehn's *Die Kunst der Primitiven* (1923), relates contemporary abstraction to primitive abstraction and embeds the genealogy of the modern in a historical construction of the alternation of good abstraction versus bad naturalism: naturalism as the product of parasitic societies (hunters, the Athenian empire, modern capitalism), abstract or imaginative art as the product of symbiotic societies (early agriculture, sixth-century Greece, the Middle Ages). Our growing appreciation of abstract art signals the end of a long period of naturalism and the beginning of a new epoch of imaginative forms.⁷ More recently, Hal Foster has reminded us that the reinscription of modern art's multiple breaks into a line of formal innovation has characterized the Museum of Modern Art and its formalist ideology (Momism), with the result that the transgressive eruption of primitivism has been domesticated into an internal break in art history, blocking and absorbing the disruptive possibility that "art might reclaim a ritual function, that it might retain an ambivalence of the sacred object or gift and not be reduced to the equivalence of the commodity."⁸ Or is the flight into the past simply the other face of futurism, as Arnold Toynbee has argued, typical of the schism in the soul of a disintegrating society (it is worth recalling that Toynbee was the first to use the term *postmodern*)?⁹ According to Toynbee, archaism and futurism are the two mirror endeavors to escape an intolerable present by recourse to the past or future. Toynbee refers to National Socialism as Germany's attempt to save itself from irretrievable collapse by escaping into the past, and calls the ethos of futurism "essentially totalitarian."¹⁰

A first glance invites us to assimilate the synthetic tendency in the avant-garde to the archaizing, and the iconoclastic to the futurist, pole. A second glance tells us, however, that every archaism is inescapably futurist in its anticipation of the artwork to come. In other words, the poles are as much complementary as they are opposed, in that they are both impelled by a *totalizing* vision—a recent survey of avant-garde manifestos finds their common basis in a totalizing project directed against all existing institutions¹¹—and share a common enemy, aesthetically differentiated art, that is, art that has separated from life and has lost its social or spiritual function. (The political extremes of the Right and the Left likewise shared a common enemy in the liberal state and bourgeois society.) It is precisely this totalizing dimension that is occluded in the conventional definitions of the avant-garde, at the same time as critics register and retrospectively ratify the failure of the avant-garde

7. Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 30–31.

8. Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*. New York: New Press, 1999.

9. See Arnold Toynbee, "Schism in the Soul," in *A Study of History*, ed. D. C. Somervell (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 429–532; for the term *postmodern*, p. 39.

10. Toynbee, "Schism in the Soul," 507, 517.

11. Wolfgang Asholt and Walter Fähnders, eds., *Manifeste und Proklamationen der europäischen Avantgarde (1909–1938)* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995), xvi.

movements to destroy or transcend what Peter Bürger calls the bourgeois institution of art.¹² Bürger's influential theory of the avant-garde rightly foregrounds the social dimension of the "historic avant-garde" (1910–1930) but confines it to the iconoclastic wing (Dada, surrealism, constructivism; Italian futurism is excluded because of the Fascist connection) to give a *one-sided* account of avant-gardism. A more adequate account would need to recognize the complementarity of the synthetic and the iconoclastic tendencies and more generally the entwining of the idea of the avant-garde and the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* since the Saint-Simonians appropriated the military term in the 1820s. As we saw in chapter 3, the total work of art to come is tied to Saint-Simon's historical-philosophical construction of a progressive alternation of organic and critical epochs. In this construction the artistic avant-garde (like its scientific, engineering, or industrial counterparts) draws its purpose and meaning from working toward the advent of a new organic age. Gabriel-Désiré Laverdant, a leading disciple of Fourier, could thus state in 1845: "Art, the expression of society, manifests, in its highest soaring, the most advanced social tendencies: it is the forerunner and the revealer. Therefore, to know whether art worthily fulfils its proper mission as initiator, whether the artist is truly of the avant-garde, one must know where Humanity is going, what the destiny of the human race is."¹³

Although the iconoclastic tendency is also present from the first in the critique of the *secularization* of art, which made the market and commodification the enabling conditions of autonomous art, the utter rejection of modern, market-based art (e.g., Wagner's *Das Judentum in der Musik*, 1851) only revealed its full nihilistic and terroristic implications in the manifestos of Italian futurism. But again it must be stressed that the frontal attack on the institution of art is totalizing in intent, and that avant-gardism, whether archaizing or futurist, redemptive or revolutionary, denotes the terrain, the battleground, on which the art religion and the art politics of European modernism meet and interact. Insofar as this is the case, we can pose the question, is the idea of the total work of art an aspect of avant-gardism, or conversely, is the avant-garde the more salient and familiar aspect of the will to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*? Odo Marquard equates the synthetic pole of avant-gardism with the *positive* total work of art, and the iconoclastic pole with the *negative* total work of art, as the two types of the "realization" of art through the abolition of the boundary separating art and life. More important than deciding in favor of either the synthetic or the iconoclastic pole is the recognition that the avant-garde and the total work of art belong together. Without this recognition we lose the possibility of an *integral* understanding of the avant-garde's challenge, not just to

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

13. Gabriel-Désiré Laverdant, *De la mission de l'art et du rôle des artistes*, quoted in Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s.v. "Avant-garde."

fin-de-siècle aestheticism but above all to aesthetically differentiated art. This integral understanding is tied to the (impossible) dream of a reunion of art and life, in which art functions as the pledge of the coming reintegration of society. In fact, the avant-garde's totalizing visions of a countermodernity were to be "realized," that is, extinguished, in the totalitarianisms of the Left and the Right. What remains, as Hegel had already concluded, is art as nothing but art, and the avant-garde as an art-historical category, predicated on the spirit of technical experiment and innovation—in other words, the empty shell of avant-gardism, bereft of its historical-philosophical underpinnings.

In this sense, the distinctive imaginary of avant-gardism has been reinscribed, as Hal Forster observes, into a formal-progressive history. In the process a crucial distinction has been lost: the distinction between the totalizing (synthetic or iconoclastic) tendencies as opposed to the differentiating tendencies, to which corresponds Kandinsky's distinction between "two extremely powerful tendencies" that have emerged in recent times (he is writing in 1920): "a tendency towards the unification of the arts" as against the "the tendency of each art to become immersed in itself."¹⁴ Kandinsky sums up the double logic of modernism: on the one hand, the inherent tendency of each art to become "pure" art, to follow the path of purification; on the other hand, the countervailing impulse toward unification. Kandinsky did not doubt, however, that analysis found its justification in the service of synthesis. In his "Programme for the Institute of Artistic Culture" (i.e., for the Moscow Institute of which he was briefly director in 1920), Kandinsky proposed research into the basic elements of the individual arts, as well as of art in general, entailing "a theory of the individual arts," "a theory of the interrelationship of the individual arts," and "a theory of monumental art as a whole."¹⁵ In this programme Kandinsky remained true to the idea of the total work of art, which he had developed in tandem with his breakthrough to nonfigurative painting prior to 1914. His 1920 plan for "monumental art or art as a whole" envisaged "collaborative research by painters, sculptors, architects, musicians, poets, dramatists, theatre and ballet directors, circus (clowns), [and] variety (comedians)."¹⁶ Whether we take the breakthrough to *abstraction* in painting (Kandinsky, Mondrian, Malevich) or to *atonality* in music (Scriabin, Schoenberg) in the years immediately preceding World War I, in each case the formal-analytic interest is tied to an overriding synthesizing intention, itself in the service of the "spiritual in art."

The important exhibition *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Art, 1890–1985*, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1986, set out to demonstrate, in the words of its prime mover, Maurice Tuchman, that the genesis and development of abstract

14. Wassily Kandinsky, "Report to the Pan-Russian Conference 1920," in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, vol. 1, 1901–1921 (London: Faber & Faber, 1982), 473.

15. *Ibid.*, 457.

16. *Ibid.*, 463.

art were “inextricably tied” to occult and mystical belief systems. The quest for pure art as the goal of abstraction was inspired by a mystical “search for a state of oneness with ultimate reality.” This occult belief in the unity of mind and matter was reflected above all in the theory of correspondences and a fascination with synaesthesia.¹⁷ Tuchman argues that symbolism rather than cubism provided the most fertile aesthetic source for abstraction in the first two decades of the twentieth century—a genealogy, he observes, that was long ignored by the formalist-aesthetic approach to abstraction.¹⁸ Abstraction continued the symbolist dream of overcoming the material world. Mondrian marks the point of intersection between the analytic and the synthesizing tendencies, the “absolute” and the “total” work of art. In revealing through his paintings the geometrical-mathematical forms behind the material world, the abstract artist contributes to the dematerialization to be effected by industry, technology, and science. He leads the way in the task of designing an ideal society through the construction of models of the utopian total work to come as envisaged by De Stijl, which Mondrian founded together with painters, architects, designers, and a sculptor in 1917. The group aimed to liberate European culture from the “archaistic confusion” of the past in order to create an entirely new and completely harmonious civilization. De Stijl’s ambition to redesign the world according to an ideal of impersonal order and rationality combined “positive mysticism,” industrial mechanics, and utopian politics.¹⁹ This total work was to bring about the end of art, the sublation of the arts in a universal harmony—a futurism, in which utopia crystallizes into a timeless, unchanging universal order.²⁰

The practical link between Kandinsky’s two tendencies is given by the interest of artists in collaboration, evident in the proliferation of avant-gardist groupings and manifestos. Surviving members of the Blaue Reiter (Kandinsky, Klee, Feininger) found a postwar home in the Bauhaus, which Schoenberg was also meant to have joined. The avant-gardes thus functioned as the bridge between aesthetic experimentation and programmes of spiritual regeneration and/or social utopianism. The group spirit, intensified by the apocalyptic-millenarian expectations of the time, radicalized aesthetic and political tendencies in equal measure. In this enormously complex and varied field of national and international avant-gardism I want to briefly examine three leading examples of the elective affinity between

17. See Maurice Tuchman, “Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art,” in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Art, 1890–1985*, ed. M. Tuchman (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986), 17–20; V. Loers and P. Witsman, eds., *Okkultismus und Avant-Garde: Von Munch bis Mondrian* (Frankfurt: Schirn-Kunsthalle, 1995); Friedhelm Wilhelm Fischer, “Geheimlehren und moderne Kunst,” in *Fin de Siècle: Zur Literatur und Kunst der Jahrhundertwende*, ed. Roger Bauer (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977), 344–77.

18. Tuchman, “Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art,” 37. See also Robert P. Welsh, “Sacred Geometry: French Symbolism and Early Abstraction,” in Tuchman, *The Spiritual in Art*, 63–87.

19. Hilton Kramer, “Mondrian and Mysticism: ‘My long search is over,’” *The New Criterion* 14 (September 1995): 12–13, www.newcriterion.com.

20. Roger Pönhoff, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk: Studien zu einer ästhetischen Konzeption der Moderne* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2004), 252–54.

the avant-garde and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: the Ballets Russes, the Blaue Reiter, and the Bauhaus.

From Dionysus to Apollo: Stravinsky and the Ballets Russes

Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal identifies three distinct lines of reception of the idea of the (Wagnerian) total work of art in Russia from the 1890s to the Bolshevik Revolution: the aesthetic-cultural, represented by the Ballets Russes; the mystical-religious of the symbolists, notably Ivanov and Scriabin (see chapters 5 and 6); the revolutionary, led by Alexander Blok and Anatoly Lunacharsky (see chapter 10).²¹ The Ballets Russes stands out from the others because of its indifference to religious or political questions. The St. Petersburg group of artists, which had gathered around Sergei Diaghilev's journal, *The World of Art*, had one overriding aim: to contribute to the regeneration of Russian culture by creating the Russian version of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, based not on the opera but on the ballet. As Alexander Benois, one of the originators, put it, "The ballet is one of the most consistent and complete expressions of the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the idea for which our circle was ready to give its soul. It was no accident that . . . the Ballets Russes was originally conceived not by professionals of the dance, but by a circle of artists, linked together by the idea of art as an entity. Everything followed from the common desire of several painters and musicians to see the fulfillment of the theatrical dreams that haunted them."²² Herbert Read stresses Diaghilev's recognition of the productive possibilities inherent in collaboration between the arts, and his genius in bringing artists together in a common endeavor, which made the Ballets Russes between 1909 and 1929 the "visible and aggressive embodiment of the *avant-garde*."²³ The key factor here was undoubtedly the enormous success of the second season of the Ballets Russes in Paris in 1910, in particular the sumptuous Orientalism of Leon Bakst's sets for Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* and Bakst's costumes, Golovin's sets, Fokine's choreography, and Stravinsky's music for *The Firebird*.

The Russification of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which reached its scandalous climax at the premiere of *The Rite of Spring* in May 1913, preceded by *Petrushka* in 1911, was cut off by the outbreak of war. Stravinsky's *Les noces* (The Wedding), based on Russian and Ukrainian peasant wedding ceremonies and songs, was a last echo of Russian folklore. Composed in 1915, it was not performed by the Ballets Russes until 1923. In the meantime Stravinsky and Diaghilev had moved on to neoclassicism, initiated by Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* (1919), with choreography by Leonide

21. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, "Wagner and Wagnerian Ideas in Russia," in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. Daniel Large and William Weber (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 199.

22. Alexander Benois, *Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet* (London: Putnam, 1941), 370–71.

23. Herbert Read, "Stravinsky and the Muses," in *Stravinsky and the Dance* (New York: New York Public Library, 1962), 8.

Massine and sets by Picasso. Read sees close parallels between Picasso's progression from the primitivism of *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) to the *Three Musicians* (1921) and Stravinsky's progression from the primitivism of *The Rite of Spring* through to his last work for the Ballets Russes, *Apollon Musagète* (1928): in each case we observe the triumph of Apollo over Dionysus.²⁴ This triumph forms the allegorical theme of *Apollon*: "Apollo as the master of the Muses, inspiring each of them with her own art." Calliope personifies poetry and its rhythm, Polyhymnia represents mime, "Terpsichore, combining in herself both the rhythm of poetry and the eloquence of gesture, reveals dancing to the world, and thus among the Muses takes the place of honour beside the Musagetes."²⁵ *The Rite of Spring* and *Apollon* mark the two extremes of the Ballets Russes, the barbaric world of Scythian prehistory and the classical world of Greek mythology, the one the very antithesis of classical ballet, the other the beginning of Stravinsky's collaboration with Balanchine, which opened the way to the modern reappropriation of the classical language of ballet.²⁶

Stravinsky's trajectory sums up the trajectory of the Ballets Russes from the original ideal of a Russian *Gesamtkunstwerk* to the cosmopolitanism that led Diaghilev to embrace each new phase of avant-garde art. From beginning to end, however, the shared vision of ballet as the union of music, choreography, and design, which attained synthesis in the stage spectacle, was shaped by the contribution of the painters. Diaghilev rejected professional stage designers and the whole nineteenth-century idea of naturalist illusion in favor of fantasy, the creation of the stage setting as an imaginary space of enchantment. Looking back in 1930, Benois writes: "It was us, the painters (not the professionals of theatre design, but 'true' painters who made the sets out of a genuine devotion to the theatre), who helped to order the main lines of dance and the whole *mise en scène*."²⁷ The stage offered the painters a gigantic canvas, waiting to be brought to life through dance and music. In this sense, the Ballets Russes was indeed a theatre of painters. Natalie Goncharova, Michel Larionov, Giacomo Balla, Picasso, Robert and Sonia Delauney, André Derain, Matisse, Juan Gris, Georges Braque, Maurice Utrillo, Joan Miro, Max Ernst, Naum Gabo, Gorgio de Chirico, and Georges Rouault were the most famous collaborators between 1914 and 1929.

The appropriation of the stage by painters was not peculiar to the Ballets Russes. It corresponded to two basic tendencies of the avant-garde's break with scenic illusion: the de-individualization of the dramatic figure, and the elevation of the stage

24. Ibid., 10–11.

25. Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography* (New York: Norton, 1962), 134.

26. See Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky and Balanchine: A Journey of Invention* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002).

27. Quoted in Denis Bablet, *Le décor de théâtre de 1870 à 1914* (Paris: CNRS, 1989), 193. See also Igor Stravinsky, "Painters of the Russian Ballet," in *Stravinsky in Conversation with Robert Craft* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1962).

setting to a reality sui generis²⁸—or “sur-réalisme,” as the “poet among the painters,” Guillaume Apollinaire, was to call it. Apollinaire coined the term in relation to the Paris performance in May 1917 of the Ballets Russes’s *Parade*. Picasso not only put cubism on the stage for the first time in *Parade*; he took a leading role in shaping Cocteau’s scenario. The music of Satie and the choreography of Massine also played their part in creating what Apollinaire hailed as a new unity between painting, music, poetry, and dance, which gave to *Parade* the semblance of “sur-realism.” Picasso’s *Parade* is but one example of the theatre of the painters. Kandinsky’s *Der gelbe Klang* (The Yellow Sound), published in the *Blaue Reiter Almanac* (1912), the cubo-futurist opera *Victory over the Sun* (1913) with designs by Malevich, Apollinaire’s own cubist-designed burlesque *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (1917) with music by Francis Poulenc, and Oskar Schlemmer’s *Triadic Ballet* with music by Hindemith, produced for the Bauhaus theatre in 1927, shared a common interest in a post-Wagnerian and/or an anti-Wagnerian synthesis of the arts. But where Kandinsky looked to continue the symbolists’ quest for a synaesthetic synthesis through the spiritual powers of abstraction, the line from *Petrushka* and *Parade* to *Pulcinella* turned to puppets, clowns, and *commedia dell’arte*.²⁹ Meyerhold proposed in 1912 a theatre of the fairground as an alternative to Wagner’s idea of a theatre-temple. In place of the fusion of the arts, he advanced an aesthetic of discontinuity; in place of audience identification with the total work, he argued for estrangement of the audience through the introduction of the grotesque possibilities of cabaret, *commedia dell’arte*, and the arts of the circus.³⁰ Rather than the post-Wagnerian integration of the arts, favored by Kandinsky and German expressionism, the Ballets Russes and the Parisian avant-garde embraced an aesthetic of playful *estrangement*, based on popular forms of theatre and what we might call half-cubist, half-surrealist techniques of montage or collage. In the Prologue to *Les mamelles de Tirésias* the director of the troupe promises a marriage of sounds, gestures, colors, cries, music, dance, acrobatics, poetry, and painting. Cocteau’s idea for *Parade* as a series of impromptu scenes, played in front of a sideshow booth on a Parisian street as an advertisement for the show being performed inside, draws directly on the structure of puppet and puppet master, and theatre-in-the-theatre, in *Petrushka*.

The juxtaposition of the elementary forms of popular theatre within a frame of theatrical self-reflection appears most clearly in Stravinsky’s *Renard* and *L’histoire du soldat* (The Soldier’s Tale), both based on Russian folktales and written during the war in collaboration with the Swiss writer Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz. In the score of *Renard*, published in 1917, Stravinsky states that the play is to be performed

28. Marianne Kesting, “Das Theater der Maler,” in *Drama und Theater der europäischen Avantgarde*, ed. Franz Norbert Mennemeier and Erika Fischer-Lichte (Basel: Francke, 1994), 370.

29. See Glenn Watkins, “Masquerades,” in *Pyramids at the Louvre: Music, Culture, and Collage from Stravinsky to Postmodernism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 277–376.

30. Beatrice Picon-Vallin, “Meyerhold, Wagner et la synthèse des arts,” in *L’oeuvre d’art totale*, ed. Denis Bablet and Elie Konigson (Paris: CNRS, 2002), 146–47.

by clowns, dancers, or acrobats, preferably on a trestle stage with the orchestra placed behind: "If produced in a theatre, it should be played in front of the curtain. The players remain all of the time on the stage. They enter together to the accompaniment of the little introductory march, and their exeunt is managed in the same way. The roles are dumb. The singers (two tenors and two basses) are in the orchestra."³¹ Stravinsky's interest in the depersonalization of the stage action leads him to extrapolate the logic of puppet theatre to the separation of actor and singer. The vocal parts are no longer tied to stage roles; they take on a role as required, comment on the action, or are treated as instruments of the orchestra. As Roman Vlad observes, Stravinsky's techniques of estrangement completely negate Wagner's ideal: "Not only does Stravinsky show no inclination to fuse the various musical, poetic, and theatrical elements into one; he seems to be trying to keep them apart."³²

The aesthetic of estrangement did not mean that the idea of the total work of art had lost its fascination. Fresh from the scandal of *Les mamelles de Tirésias*, Apollinaire made the synthesis of the arts the focus of his programmatic lecture of November 1917, "The New Spirit and the Poets." It is not at all clear, however, what Apollinaire has in mind when he proclaims "the synthesis of the arts—music, painting, and literature" as the goal: "Let us not be surprised, therefore, that though the means at the disposal of poets are still limited, they are preparing themselves for this new art which is more vast than the art of words alone. One day they will direct an orchestra of prodigious dimensions, an orchestra that will include the whole world, its sights and sounds, human thought and language, song, dance, all the arts and all the artifices."³³ Apollinaire's "book seen and heard by the future," composed by poets with "encyclopaedic freedom," is clearly not to be confused with Mallarmé's esoteric Book or Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*—"Our young writers have cast off the obsolescent Wagnerian magic, the Germanic romanticism of the colossal," declares Apollinaire—despite his own evocations of "an orchestra of prodigious dimensions."³⁴ At the same time, it is clear that Apollinaire has not abandoned the ancient divinization of the poet in his quest for the new spirit, which will spring from the new media (cinema and phonograph) and their means of mechanical reproduction in alliance with an aesthetic of surprise.³⁵ If we catch here a glimpse of a futurist-inspired vision of the technological *Gesamtkunstwerk*, an anticipation of the global multimedia "orchestra" of today, it is only in Apollinaire's

31. Quoted in Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky*, trans. Frederick Fuller and Ann Fuller, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 58.

32. *Ibid.*, 60.

33. Guillaume Apollinaire, "The New Spirit and the Poets," quoted in Francis Steegmuller, *Apollinaire: Poet among the Painters* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1973), 279.

34. *Ibid.*, 280.

35. On Italian futurism, see Marcella Lista, "The Futurist Desacralization of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*," in *L'oeuvre d'art totale à la naissance des avant-gardes (1908–1914)* (Paris: CTHS, 2006), 155–94; also Giovanni Lista, *Lo spettacolo futurista* (Florence: Cantini, 1990).

new world of the poetic imagination that poets will assume the role of orchestral director as the creators, inventors, and prophets, who speak for “the greater good of the collectivity.”³⁶

The Spiritual in Art: Kandinsky and the *Blaue Reiter*

Looking back on the period of his collaboration with Kandinsky in Munich prior to World War I, Hugo Ball writes that Kandinsky, like so many of his contemporaries, was driven by the idea of a rebirth of society through the union of all artistic means.³⁷ Kandinsky’s artistic credo, *The Spiritual in Art*, and the *Blaue Reiter Almanac* (1912), coedited with Franz Marc, had just appeared. Together with Kandinsky, Ball worked on a successor volume to the *Almanac*, which was to accompany the planned reopening of the Künstlertheater in Munich (founded in 1906 by the theatre reformer Georg Fuchs) as the venue and vehicle for the expressionist total work of art, as conceived by Kandinsky and Ball.³⁸ Ball lists the proposed contributors to the volume: Kandinsky on the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the painters Marc, Kokoschka, and Klee, the choreographer Fokine, the Ukrainian composer Thomas von Hartmann, the Russian theatre director Evreinov, the architect Erich Mendelsohn, and the writer and artist Alfred Kubin.³⁹ Ball further planned, as the resident dramaturge of the Munich Kammerspiele, six programs for autumn 1914 devoted to the European avant-garde, including Claudel, Kokoschka, the artists associated with the Berlin journal *Die Aktion*, and the Italian futurists. These programs were designed as an advertisement for a future “International Society for the New Art.” The plans for the volume, for the Künstlertheater, and for the Kammerspiele were cut off by the outbreak of war. Kandinsky returned to Russia. The pacifist Ball found refuge in Zurich, where with fellow refugees from the war he opened the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 and launched Dada. The *Blaue Reiter Almanac* thus remains the most significant document of the will to the integration of the arts of the prewar avant-garde. The *Almanac* was conceived by Kandinsky as itself a “synthesized” book, which would tear down the wall between the arts.⁴⁰ The contributors included the painters Marc, Kandinsky, and August Macke, the Russian futurist David Burliuk on contemporary Russian painting, the composers Schoenberg and von Hartmann, and Leonid Sabaneiev on Scriabin.

The *Almanac* is the direct continuation of Kandinsky’s vision in *The Spiritual in Art* of the new art, embodied in “the happy dream of the theatre of the future” that

36. Quoted in Steegmüller, *Apollinaire*, 287.

37. Hugo Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit* (Zurich: Limmat Verlag, 1992), 17.

38. See Ball’s reference to his 1917 Zurich lecture on Kandinsky’s “total art” in *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, 152.

39. Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, 20.

40. Kandinsky and Marc, *Blaue Reiter Almanac*, 37.

will be one with “the creation of a new spiritual realm that is already beginning.”⁴¹ The theatre of the future is conceived as herald and token of a new organic age—this familiar vision is divided between the editors of the *Almanac*: Marc is the voice of spiritual crisis and millennial prophecy; Kandinsky sets forth his theory of the synthesis of the arts and its theatrical realization. In their joint preface to the first edition the editors proclaim: “We are standing on the threshold of one of the greatest epochs that mankind has ever experienced, the epoch of great spirituality.” In the preface to the second edition (1914) Marc affirms their rejection of the sciences and of triumphal progress. The conflict between science and religion and its consequences for art are Marc’s main concern in the essay “Two Pictures.” He laments the death of the old religion, which has led to an inescapable chasm between genuine art and the public. The loss of artistic style, the inalienable possession of earlier times, directly reflects the lost artistic instinct of the people. Marc traces the contemporary crisis to the catastrophic collapse of style in the middle of the nineteenth century. Since then serious art has been the work of individual artists (he names Cézanne, Gauguin, Picasso, Marées, Hodler, and Kandinsky): “They are characteristic, fiery signs of a new era that increase daily everywhere. This book will be their focus until dawn comes and with its natural light removes from the works the spectral appearance they now have.”⁴² Kandinsky’s “On the Question of Form” takes up Marc’s themes. Whole epochs deny the spirit at work in religion and art—“So it was during the nineteenth century and so it is for the most part today.”⁴³ Nevertheless, the creative spirit is present, hidden behind and within matter, and it is the task of material form, as the outer expression of the inner content, to serve as the temporal means to the revelation of the spirit. Kandinsky’s term for inner content is “sound” (*Klang*)—the vibration that animates matter and attunes the soul of the recipient to the spiritual cosmos. This inner content partakes of one or other of the two processes that define the modern art movement: “disintegration of the soulless, materialistic life of the nineteenth century”; “construction of the spiritual and intellectual life of the twentieth century.”⁴⁴

How “sound” provides the key to the theatre of the future is the subject of Kandinsky’s essay “On Stage Composition.” Kandinsky starts from the following premises: first, that each art has its own language (method) and is complete in itself; second, from the perspective of the final goal of knowledge, these methods are all *inwardly* identical, in that they all have as their goal spiritual action, the awakening in the soul of the audience of vibrations akin to those of the artist. The goal of the artwork is accordingly “a distinctive complex of vibrations,” and the goal of art the accumulation

41. Kandinsky, *Complete Writings on Art*, 1: 207, 219.

42. *Ibid.*, 67.

43. *Ibid.*, 147.

44. *Ibid.*, 186.

of distinctive complexes in order to refine the soul.⁴⁵ The inner identity of the arts explains—and is explicated—by synaesthesia, which means that a specific sound in one art can be strengthened by an identical sound in another art. Kandinsky takes Scriabin's combination of music and color, sound and vision, as his example. This "identity" or correspondence makes each artistic language or method the analogy of the others, since in each case the function of the material form is to reveal the spiritual: in other words, the spiritualization and synthesis of the arts proceeds through *dematerialization*, as opposed to the fatal one-dimensionality of nineteenth-century materialism and positivism. Kandinsky charges that nineteenth-century theatre substituted *external* elaboration of the parts for *inner* creation, leading to the artificial separation of drama, opera, and ballet. Drama confines itself to external life with consequent loss of the cosmic element. Opera consists of a purely external connection between music and drama, such that the music illustrates the dramatic action, or the latter serves to explain the music. In ballet, music and movement likewise constitute an external unity. And Wagner? The inescapable materialism of the age meant that Wagner's countermovement to specialization—the creation of a monumental work through organic connection of the parts—compounded the problem by raising external duplication to a universal method: "Parallel repetition is only one method, and an external repetition at that." Although the external connection of the various parts and of the two methods (drama and music) remains the form of contemporary opera, Wagner nevertheless opened the way to more powerful possibilities of monumental art.⁴⁶ What Kandinsky has in mind is the redemptive turn from the external to the internal synthesis of the arts, from the organic to the abstract *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Kandinsky's *The Yellow Sound: A Stage Composition* follows the internal approach, which brings out the inner value of each element of the composition, no longer obscured by any reference to an outer action. The elimination of plot, that is, of external unity, opens up endless possibilities of combining the elements, ranging from collaboration to contrast. Kandinsky identifies the three basic elements (external means serving inner value) that call forth the complex of inner experiences (spiritual vibrations) in the spectator: (1) musical sound and its movement; (2) physical-psychical sound and its movement, expressed through people and objects; and (3) colored tone and its movement.⁴⁷ Apart from two choral passages with a few words, Kandinsky's composition (with lost music by Thomas von Hartmann) consists of a scenario, divided into an introduction and six scenes or tableaux, describing sequences of movements by people (Giants, Indistinct Beings, a Child, a Man, People in Flowing Garb), objects (flowers, a hill), and colors. Despite

45. Ibid., 190–91. See Sixten Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: A Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting* (Abo, Finland: Abo Akademi, 1970).

46. Kandinsky, *Complete Writings on Art*, 1: 194–197.

47. Ibid., 204–5.

its generally recognized significance for the history of twentieth-century theatre, critics have been challenged to interpret *The Yellow Sound*.⁴⁸ The most recent interpreter, Roger Fornoff, argues that behind the formal-abstract play of sound, movement, and color a symbolic content awaits elucidation: Kandinsky presents the six days of creation in Genesis in the light of Rudolf Steiner's lectures on the secrets of biblical creation, given in Munich in August 1910 and published 1911. Kandinsky links the creation story to the redemptive history of man from paradise and the Fall to the crucifixion of Christ, which prefigures the advent of Joachim of Floris's third and final Kingdom of the Spirit. Fornoff suggests that Kandinsky adopts Otto Runge's color symbolism—blue for the Father, red for the Son, yellow for the Holy Spirit, thereby making *The Yellow Sound* the prophetic anticipation of what the preface to the *Almanac* calls the epoch of great spirituality.⁴⁹

There is a certain irony in the fact that Kandinsky's critique of Wagner unknowingly contains a critique of Schoenberg's own stage composition, *Die glückliche Hand* (The Fortunate/Fateful Hand (1910–13). The same spiritual striving that led Kandinsky and Schoenberg to recognize each other and brought them together found its expression not only in their parallel progression to nonfigurative painting and atonal composition but equally in their search for a synthesis of the arts that would overcome and go beyond the overwhelming influence of Wagner. Schoenberg freely admitted his early addiction to Wagner, having seen each of his operas twenty to thirty times by the age of twenty-five. Kandinsky recalled in 1913 the two events "that stamped my whole life and shook me to the depths"—the exhibition of French impressionists in Moscow and a performance of *Lohengrin*, which revealed to him that art in general was far more powerful than he had thought and that painting "could develop just such powers as music possesses."⁵⁰

Independent of Kandinsky, Schoenberg had also set out to create a stage work in which synthesis was to be achieved through the rejection of scenic illusion. On 19 August 1912 he wrote to Kandinsky: "*Der gelbe Klang* pleases me extraordinarily. It is exactly the same as what I have striven for in my *Glückliche Hand*, only you go still further than I in the renunciation of any conscious thought, any conventional plot. That is naturally a great advantage."⁵¹ Although Schoenberg had not abandoned a conventional plot—the stage action depicts the inner psychic drama of the Man, the genius who must sacrifice worldly success and erotic happiness to his lonely destiny—his aim, he said, was to *make music with the media of the stage*.⁵² Inspired by his reading of Balzac's *Seraphita*, which he described in his

48. For a review of interpretations, see Fornoff, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk*, 350–53.

49. Fornoff, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk*, 349–68.

50. Kandinsky, *Complete Writings on Art*, 1: 363–64.

51. Jelena Hahl-Koch, ed., *Arnold Schoenberg-Wassily Kandinsky: Letters, Pictures, and Documents* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 54.

52. See his lecture for the 1928 Breslau production of *Die glückliche Hand*, in Hahl-Koch, *Arnold Schoenberg-Wassily Kandinsky*, 105.

letter of 19 August 1912 as “perhaps the most glorious work in existence,” he set out to realize Balzac’s synaesthetic vision in that work: “Light gave birth to melody and melody to light; colours were both light and melody; motion was number endowed with the Word; in short, everything was at once sonorous, diaphanous, and mobile.”⁵³ Schoenberg posited a deep correspondence between the plot, the scenic action, and the music, revealed and unfolded through the color symbolism of the sets and the lighting.⁵⁴ The figures of the drama are linked to instrumental timbres, with the cello for the Man, and violin, flutes, and harps for the Woman, just as colors are tied to instruments, with yellow for the trumpet, blue for the English horn, violet for the clarinet and bassoon, and so on.⁵⁵ At the dramatic high point of the action, the inner despair of the Man is expressed through the rising storm and the crescendo of a color-and-light symphony. The stage direction states: “During this crescendo of light and storm, the MAN reacts as though both emanated from him.”⁵⁶ Schoenberg concedes that the whole scene can be interpreted realistically, but cautions that such an interpretation distorts the totality. What is decisive, he insists, is that an emotional incident of the plot is given expression by all the stage media: “It must be evident that *gestures*, *colors* and *light* are treated here similarly to the way tones are usually treated—that music is made with them; that figures and shapes, so to speak, are formed from individual light values and shades of color, which resemble the forms, figures and motives of music.”⁵⁷

Compared with Wagner’s external parallelism and Kandinsky’s internal parallelism of sound and vision, Schoenberg hesitates between the “materialism” of the nineteenth century and the “spiritualism” of the twentieth century by making the internal parallelism of the artistic means the external parallel, in Kandinsky’s terms, of a traditional plot. Kandinsky solved the problem of music theatre by sacrificing the plot; Stravinsky—just as radically—by sacrificing through his techniques of estrangement the traditional identity between sound and vision embodied in the dramatic figure. If *Petrushka* (1911) and *Pierrot lunaire* (1912) seemed to bring Stravinsky and Schoenberg together for a moment as the leaders of the musical avant-garde, *Renard* and *Die glückliche Hand* reveal the deeper divergence between Stravinsky’s *critical* and Schoenberg’s *expressive* relationship to theatrical synthesis. Stravinsky’s stage works for the Ballets Russes after *The Rite of Spring* chart his journey from Dionysian abandon to his conception of a perennial Apollonian order

53. Quoted in Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 349. See also Honoré de Balzac, *Seraphita*, trans. Carrie Bell (Cambridge: Dedalus, 1995), 151.

54. See the table comparing the color associations informing the color symbolism of Scriabin, Rudolf Steiner, Kandinsky, and Schoenberg in Andreas Pütz, *Von Wagner zu Skrjabin* (Kassel: Bosse, 1995), 144.

55. Irina Vanechkina, “Where Does the Blue Rider Gallop?” in *Schoenberg and Kandinsky: An Historic Encounter*, ed. Konrad Boehme (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997), 98.

56. Hahl-Koch, *Arnold Schoenberg-Wassily Kandinsky*, 96.

57. *Ibid.*, 106.

and measure, which is given its theoretical ratification in his *Poetics of Music* (1947). The progression from the savage emancipation of dissonance, polyharmony, and rhythmic force in *The Rite* via estrangement to the serenity of subjugated emotion in *Apollon Musagète* may be seen as so many stages of his productive critique of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁵⁸

The Crystal Cathedral: Bruno Taut and the Bauhaus

The two great recurrent symbols of the total work of art are the *theatre* and the *cathedral*: the first devoted to the arts of time—poetry, music, dance; the second to the plastic arts of space—architecture, sculpture, painting. The idea of the architectural *Gesamtkunstwerk* (as opposed to the theatrical fantasies of Ludwig II and the facades of historicism) has remained very much in the background of our investigation, although its importance cannot be denied. Its genealogy extends across the nineteenth century from Friedrich Schinkel's plans for a Prussian cathedral of freedom,⁵⁹ Gothic revivalism, the teachings of Ruskin, Morris, and Gottfried Semper, the arts and crafts movement, and art nouveau to the Bauhaus. Even though the Bauhaus never had a department of architecture, it was founded in the spirit of the architectural *Einheitswerk* and a renewed alliance between artists and artisans. Marcel Franciscono describes the Bauhaus as "the most radical and sustained effort yet made to realize the dream cherished since the industrial revolution not merely to bring visual art back into closer tie with everyday life, but to make it the very instrument of social and cultural regeneration."⁶⁰ Although theatre and cathedral represent distinct genealogies, the difference between the temporal and the plastic arts is only one of emphasis. Can we separate opera from the opera house? What would cathedrals be, asks Proust, without the religious rituals that give them meaning? And just as theatre and cathedral share a common religious-civic root, so they became the two, converging faces of avant-garde utopianism. From the side of the theatre, the theatre reformer Alphonse Appia envisaged in 1918 "the cathedral of the future, which will be the setting in a vast, open, transformable space of the most diverse manifestations of our social and artistic life."⁶¹ From the side of architecture, Walter Gropius stressed the affinities between the architectural and the theatrical *Gesamtkunstwerk*: "Just as in the work of architecture all the parts abandon their own ego for the sake

58. Schoenberg, by contrast, was driven to an irresolvable critique of art religion in *Moses and Aaron*. For an acute analysis of the conflict Schoenberg stages between words and music, truth and beauty, in his unfinished/unfinishable opera, see Theodor Adorno, "Sacred Fragment: Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*," in *Quasi una fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1993), 225–48.

59. See Fornoff, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk*, 97–157.

60. Marcel Franciscono, *Walter Gropius and the Creation of the Bauhaus in Weimar: The Ideals and Artistic Theories of Its Founding Years* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 3.

61. Adolphe Appia, "Seconde préface de l'auteur" (1918), in *La musique et la mise en scène*, ed. Edmund Stadler, *Schweizer Theater-Jahrbuch* 28–29, 1962–63 (Bern, 1963), xiii.

of a higher collective animation of the Total Work, in the same way in the theatrical work a multitude of artistic problems are concentrated, according to this specific higher law, for the sake of a new and greater unity."⁶² Appia's cathedral found its practical correlate in the Total Theatre, designed for the theatre director Erwin Piscator by Gropius in 1927, and its ideal correlate in the utopian projects, embracing buildings for the people and for religion, foreshadowed by Gropius in the 1919 manifesto of the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus was itself conceived as a multiple *Gesamtkunstwerk*: on the level of its guiding idea, the cathedral of the future; on the institutional level as a collaborative social and aesthetic synthesis; on the level of the staff and their individual projects.⁶³

The founding manifesto presents an exalted mix of utopianism and mystical medievalism, momentarily fused by the revolutionary atmosphere of the time. Gropius's vision of the cathedral of the future, which "will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity and which will one day rise toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith,"⁶⁴ was directly inspired by the utopian architecture and utopian politics of Bruno Taut, the founder in 1919 of the Arbeitsrat für Kunst in Berlin. Taut resigned, however, when the workers' soviets dissolved themselves in favor of a constituent assembly and parliamentary elections and was replaced by Gropius as chairman until the Arbeitsrat also ceased to exist in May 1921. Taut, a leading exponent of expressionist architecture, embodied the continuity of expressionist mystical utopianism across the war years. The programme of the Arbeitsrat and of the Bauhaus is prefigured in his article "A Necessity," which appeared in the leading avant-garde journal *Der Sturm* in February 1914. There Taut calls for the architectural *Gesamtkunstwerk*: "Let us build together a magnificent building! A building which will not be architecture alone, but in which everything—painting, sculpture, everything together—will create a great architecture and in which architecture will once again merge with the other arts."⁶⁵ Taut took his own message seriously, looking to contemporary painting—"the brilliant compositions of Kandinsky," the striving for unity in Marc and the cubists—and to the architectural fantasies of the writer Paul Scheerbart to free the architectural imagination. Taut's glass pavilion at the 1914 Werkbund exhibition and Gropius's "crystal symbol of a new coming faith" derive from Scheerbart's championing of glass architecture.

During the war years Taut found an outlet for his dreams of a great architecture in a series of architectural drawings, which appeared after the war. *Die Stadtkrone* (The City Crown) (1919) remains within the bounds of architectural realization;

62. Walter Gropius, *Idee und Aufbau des Staatlichen Bauhauses Weimar* (Munich: Bauhausverlag, 1923), 10.

63. See Fornoff, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk*, 446–47.

64. Walter Gropius, "Programme of the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar" (1919), in *Programmes and Manifestos on Twentieth-Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads (London, 1970), 49.

65. Quoted in Franciscano, *Walter Gropius*, 91.

Alpine Architektur (1919) and *Der Weltbaumeister* (The World Architect) (1920), as the titles indicate, discard all limits to the imagination.⁶⁶ (It is possible that Taut knew of Saint-Simon's proposal for an Alpine monument to Napoleon, involving the transformation of a Swiss mountain into a gigantic statue, with a town in the one hand and a lake in the other.)⁶⁷ *Der Weltbaumeister* takes us from the transformation of the Alps into geometrical and stereometrical forms of glass architecture to the reshaped surface of the earth, viewed from space, and finally from architecturally transformed stars, called cathedral stars, to "ornamentally blossoming" stellar systems. In this "architecture-spectacle for symphonic music," Taut proposes an abstract *Gesamtkunstwerk*, similar to Kandinsky's stage compositions, composed of color, form, sound, and movement. The universe as the theatre without limits is the setting for the growth and decay of architectonic formations, suggestive of the unfolding of the secret life of matter, animated by the World Architect, that is, the impersonal World Soul. The sequence of drawings shows a Gothic cathedral growing from below, filling the stage, opening up its marvelous interior and dissolving into abstract forms, which disperse into space. A cathedral star approaches and recedes. The earth emerges from cosmogonic chaos; plants and huts grow from it. A shining crystal building appears on a hill, revealing its glittering interior, in which everything metamorphoses into flowing colors. Stars shine through its crystal walls as the universe becomes a crystal unity, the pure Absolute. Taut's cosmic spectacle for symphonic music calls for cinematic realization. It points forward to the grandiose marriage of sound and vision in Stanley Kubrick's filmic journey in 2001 into a "theatre without limits."

To return to earth and to Taut's *The City Crown*: in the crystal cathedral as the crown of the ideal city (which returns in Philip Johnson's Crystal Cathedral in California) the archaizing and futurist poles of Taut's mysticism meet in the conviction, shared by Gropius, that great art could not arise again without a universally binding religion. *The City Crown* is imbued with the spirit of Saint-Simon's historical schema of critical and organic epochs, together with its inescapable historicist conundrum, which makes the cathedral of the future as much the producer as the product of a "new coming religion." Carried by the refusal of the *secularization* of society and its art, the rebirth of the city through the rebirth of architecture, as expounded in the essays of Taut and his architectural colleague Adolf Behne, follows the pattern set by Pugin's influential "contrasts" from the 1830s between medieval and modern architecture and art. In Taut's words, "Without religion there is no

66. For the following, see Fornoff, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk*, 387–97 (with reproductions of Taut's drawings); and Iain Boyd White, *Bruno Taut and the Architecture of Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

67. Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, div. 5, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 504.

true culture, no art.”⁶⁸ Architecture thus provides the index of the spiritual health of every society and every age, since its final goal and starting point is given by “the highest, the crystallized religious view,” which governs the life of the city.⁶⁹ As the image of the inner structure of man and his thoughts, the cities of the past formed a unity, which has been destroyed by industrialization. Religion has retreated into the private sphere; its communal power no longer informs urban planning, which has been reduced to soulless organization. The new city cannot emerge until it is once more crowned by a civic center. This is the divine task of the architect-priest. Taut’s civic center consists of four buildings in the shape of a cross—opera house, theatre, house of the people, and a smaller hall, surrounded by an aquarium, greenhouses, a museum, and a central library and reading rooms, surrounded in turn by shops, restaurants, and parks, beyond which lie the garden suburbs. The theatre and the house of the people provide the setting for communal union; the civic enthusiasm, which springs from the sublimated “primal force of assembly,” radiates outward into the life of the city and rises up to the pure architecture, the otherworldly crystal house, overlooking the city.

Opera house and crystal house, theatre and cathedral, offer on their respective—this-worldly and otherworldly—planes the same reciprocal play of light and color. This play cancels the separation of stage and auditorium (source of the reduction of the dramatic experience to a “purchased commodity”) and dissolves the limits of the theatre into vibrating light and sound. The house of the people in turn is filled with “the full harmonic sound of the human community.”⁷⁰ The crystal house above the city displays the shining, transparent, reflecting essence of glass, open to the cosmos. Sunlight bathes the interior, adorned with sculptures and paintings, “so that everything forms only a part of the great art of building.” The world of forms, released from the spell of realism, dissolves into waves, clouds, mountains: “Transfused by the light of the sun the crystal house soars like a glittering diamond over everything.”⁷¹

Taut’s glass architecture, his theatre without limits, his crystal house, all bear witness to the desire to dematerialize and spiritualize the art of building. Its converse is the process of materialization, the secularization that brings about the downfall of art (the Gnostic strain is unmistakable). Adolf Behne’s accompanying essay “Rebirth of Architecture” in *The City Crown* traces this process of materialization since the high point of the triumph of the spirit over matter in the Gothic cathedral. His essay is interesting because it brings out in the sharpest fashion what may be seen as a fundamental opposition between the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*

68. Bruno Taut, *Die Stadtkrone*, with contributions by Paul Scheerbart, Erich Baron, and Adolf Behne (Jena: Diederichs, 1919; repr., Liechtenstein: Krauss, 1977), 59.

69. *Ibid.*, 52.

70. *Ibid.*, 67.

71. *Ibid.*, 68–69.

and its antithesis, aesthetic art, contained in the very image of limit—the (picture) *frame*. In the Gothic cathedral, painting and architecture were joined in beautiful unity; the paintings, which look down from the domes and vaults, conform to the spirals, curves, and circles of cosmic creation. The descent from the transparent glowing colors of the glass windows to the altar painting marks the first step toward materialization of the spirit, toward the rationality of the horizontal and vertical lines of the frame, even though the altar frame itself is still architecture in miniature, and frame and painting still constitute a unity. The separation of painting from architecture was accomplished in the wake of the Van Eyck brothers in the fifteenth century. Only then could the modern concept of the *picture* as a painted, portable, framed panel emerge. What are the fateful consequences of this “logical progression” for modern painting?

Through separation the framed painting loses its purpose as part of a greater whole. By this, Behne understands a whole that does not comprise the sum of its parts but a total work, which draws its coherence, however many parts it has, from the “height in which everything is collected unity.”⁷² Deprived of this higher unity, painting is forced to justify itself—that is to say, it is forced to engage with the world of objects. Imitation replaces essence: “Once the colors had reality; now they signify realities.”⁷³ The frame epitomizes the replacement of the music of the spheres by earthbound geometry. Self-limitation and self-justification go together: their signature appears in the self-referential turning inward manifested by the repetition of the picture within the picture, the frame within the frame. The picture surface divides into foreground and background with the distant landscape viewed through framing arch or window (the smaller and more domestic the interior, the wider, more distant, and tempting the horizon). This separation of foreground and background is indicative of the loss of a higher unity, which produces the compensating search for the principle of *unity within* the picture, the logical conclusion of which is reached in the interiors of Vermeer. They hold fast the emptiness of an anecdotal-psychological moment, theatrically arranged for an external observer—an emptiness underscored by the painted picture in its frame on the background wall. The framed picture ends by portraying itself as an object among objects, as a piece of furniture, as a commodity. Hence the ambivalence of the process whereby the original cosmic gold ground retreats into the increasingly ornate gilded frame, last semblance of the aura of sacred painting. The “auratic” frame proclaims the sacralization of the picture as domestic object at the same time as it refers to its evident material value. Behne’s conclusion: the loss of the center leads us from the painting without frame to the frame without painting, fitting symbol of the culture of the frame, nicely captured in Georg Simmel’s “The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study” (1902). Simmel identifies the primary function of the frame as separation

72. *Ibid.*, 120.

73. *Ibid.*, 122.

from the environment, which allows the presentation of the picture as an autonomous totality in its own right and creates at the same time the distance required for aesthetic enjoyment. Behne makes it clear why Taut looked to nonfigurative painting for inspiration: the break with representation (but not the frame) signaled a first, crucial step toward the rapprochement of painting and architecture.

The beginnings of the Bauhaus were tied to the short revolutionary period of postwar Germany. Neoclassicism and New Objectivity in music and painting, Schoenberg's method of composition with twelve tones, functionalism in architecture, announced the end of the high-flown hopes of the expressionist decade. "By 1921 modern architectural thinking almost everywhere was moving from an emphasis upon personal inspiration, the expression of emotion, and in Germany on utopian projects, towards geometry, "objective laws" of formal construction, and strict accommodation to utilitarian and especially industrial requirements."⁷⁴ Not only Gropius but also Behne, who had worked closely with Gropius on the Arbeitsrat für Kunst, embraced the demands of "realism." In 1920 in *Die Wiederkehr der Kunst* (The Return of Art) Behne called for a recovery of spirituality. In 1923 he joined the German Society of Friends of Russia and visited Russia in October of that year. In 1925 in *Der moderne Zweckbau* (The Modern Functional Building), which established him as an influential advocate of architectural functionalism, he praised Russia's social and architectural dynamism.⁷⁵

74. Franciscano, *Walter Gropius*, 245.

75. Christine Lodder, *Constructivist Strands in Russian Art, 1914–1937* (London: Pindar Press, 2005), 477.

THE PROMISED LAND: TOWARD A RETOTALIZED THEATRE

The Theatre Reform Movement

The sources of the theatre reform movement in the first decades of the twentieth century drew their inspiration from Wagner, in particular *Parsifal*, and from the theatre of the symbolists: "In the history of the modern theatre it is possible to trace a tradition from Wagner's concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* to the second generation symbolists (Appia, Craig, Meyerhold) and from them to the entire movement of the 'retheatricalization' of theatre, with the director as the master artist uniting the arts."¹ The symbolist theatre of shadows and halftones is perhaps best exemplified by Debussy's opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902), based on Maeterlinck's play, which also fascinated other leading composers of the time: Schoenberg, Sibelius, and Fauré. The symbolist reaction in the 1890s to naturalism was symptomatic of a wider quest that went beyond dissatisfaction with the prevailing realism of stage productions. It called into question the whole conception since the Renaissance of the theatre as a humanist-secular institution, epitomized by the theatre of illusion and perspective, in which the stage as peep show frames the action and separates actors and audience. The demand was not new, but it now

1. Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theatre: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 94.

became the decisive impulse to theatre reform and avant-garde experiments. Its corollary was the myth of the representative audience,² which could be recovered and recreated only by returning to the popular roots of the theatre. Thus Max Reinhardt's vision in 1901 of the theatre of the future: "a very large theatre for a great art of monumental effects, a festival theatre, detached from everyday life, a house of light and solemnity, in the spirit of the Greeks, not merely for the Greeks but for the great art of all epochs, in the shape of an amphitheatre, ... without the curtain, without wings, even perhaps without décor, and in the middle ... the actor, in the middle of the audience, and the audience itself, transformed into the people, drawn into, become a part of the action of the play."³ Reinhardt's aim was to recover the popular roots of the theater, the communion between actors and audience, which had formed the basis of the great theatrical ages in the past.

Popular theatre, in this original sense, mediates on the one hand between the picture frame stage and religious cult in the form of the festival or consecrated stage, and on the other hand between the picture frame stage and folk entertainment in the form of circus, *variété*, and cabaret.⁴ In both these forms, the high and the low, popular theatre may be defined by a double *de-individuating* intention: the return of the audience to communal identity, symbolized by the chorus, but equally the presentation of the actor as *persona*, whether in tragic mask or clown's costume. One path to de-individuation lay in dance. Alphonse Appia found the answer to his passionate desire for theatrical synthesis in Émile Jacques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics. Appia worked at Dalcroze's school of eurhythmics in the artists' colony at Hellerau outside Dresden for ten years. One of the most notable fruits of their collaboration was the staging of Paul Claudel's *L'annonce faite à Marie* (The Annunciation) in 1913. Appia aimed to complete Wagner's liberation of music from its "egoistic and perverse isolation" through the eurhythmic liberation of the actor's movements: drama and music were to attain a true unity through the consecration of "the divine union of music and the body." Appia believed that "the harmonious culture of the body, obeying the profound orders of music," would overcome the isolation of the spectator and transform his passivity into a sense of solidarity. He also looked to the cathedral of the future as the setting for "majestic festivals in which a whole people will participate."⁵ In prewar Munich Georg Fuchs called for a return to dance as the primary source and form of theatre. He set out to renew Germany's

2. Lars Kleberg, *Theatre as Action: Soviet Russian Avant-Garde Aesthetics* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1993), 45.

3. Max Reinhardt, *Schriften*, ed. Hugo Fetting (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1974), 67.

4. I follow here the terminology of Oskar Schlemmer's "Scheme for Stage, Cult, and Popular Entertainment," in *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*, ed. Walter Gropius (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 19.

5. Adolphe Appia, "Seconde préface de l'auteur" (1918), in *La musique et la mise en scène* (1899), ed. Edmund Stadler, *Schweizer Jahrbuch* 28/24, 1962–63 (Bern, 1963), xiii. See Mary Elizabeth Vennet-Tallon, "Alphonse Appia et l'oeuvre d'art totale," in *L'oeuvre d'art totale*, ed. Denis Bablet and Elie Konigson (Paris: CNRS, 2002), 89–109.

late medieval theatre tradition in its dual form of liturgical Christmas and Passion plays and the carnival plays of Hans Sachs, in order to escape from the primacy of the spoken word in the modern theatre. Instead of illusionistic stage depth Fuchs called for the flat relief-stage, and for the amphitheatre with its equality of seating to replace the hierarchical social space of boxes and balconies. Fuchs's goal was a cultic festival in which all social barriers would be erased in Dionysian intoxication in order to realize the true purpose of theatre, communal fusion through entry into "a higher, 'supra-real' form of consciousness."⁶ Edward Gordon Craig carried the assault on the ego-centered modern actor to the point of demanding in 1908 his replacement by the dehumanized figure of the "Übermarionette"—in Craig's eyes "the last echo of some noble and beautiful art of a past civilization," "a descendent of the stone images of the old temples."⁷ Craig's quest for theatre reform was based, like Wagner's, on a theory of the decadence of theatre since its separation from the great temple art of antiquity and of Asia. Nietzsche's Superman becomes the puppet who symbolizes the once-and-future image of man: "When he comes again and is but seen, he will be loved so well that once more it will be possible for the people to return to their ancestral joy in ceremonies. . . . Once more will Creation be celebrated."⁸ The Irish poet and playwright W. B. Yeats, whose play *The Deliverer* was produced by Craig in Dublin in 1911, echoed these sentiments when he wrote: "I have always felt that my work is not a drama but the ritual of a lost faith."⁹

It is clear that more is involved here than theatrical experiment. De-individuation is both the premise and the consequence of a rejection of modern theatre, in Brecht's terminology the Aristotelian theatre of heroic figures and empathetic audiences. The desire to transform the theatre was driven by the idea of a theatre of transformation. Its theme: judgment on the modern, autonomous subject. Stripped of his pretensions, he becomes Everyman and No One, the puppet of God or the military machine, member of the Dionysian or Communist collective. Judgment and transformation effect the passage to the New World, the promised land of a retotalized, sacred, popular theatre.

Three dramatists of the 1920s will be considered in this chapter: Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Paul Claudel, and Bertolt Brecht, together with Antonin Artaud's theatre writings and manifestos for a "theatre of cruelty." The connections between them rest on inner and outer coincidence: the Catholics Hofmannsthal and Claudel both turned to the world theatre of the Spanish baroque. Hofmannsthal

6. Peter Jalavich, *Munich and Theatrical Modernism: Politics, Playwriting, and Performance, 1890–1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 193–95.

7. Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Übermarionette," in *Total Theatre: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. T. Kirkby (New York: Dutton, 1969), 50. Against Wagner's three sister arts of music, poetry, and dance, Craig espouses the three brother arts of music, architecture, and dance—pure sound, pure form, pure movement (see Craig's essay "Geometry," *The Mask* 1.2 [1908]).

8. Craig, "Actor and the Übermarionette," 57.

9. Christopher Innes, *Avant-Garde Theatre, 1892–1992* (London: Routledge, 1993), 4.

collaborated with the director Max Reinhardt in the Salzburg Festival, and a commission from Reinhardt was the occasion of Claudel's spectacle *Christopher Columbus*, with music by Darius Milhaud. Brecht was greatly impressed by the premiere of Claudel's play at the Berlin State Opera in 1930; his own treatment of the crossing of the Atlantic, the 1929 *Lehrstück* on the aviator Lindbergh with music by Paul Hindemith, can also be read as his version of Artaud's theatre of cruelty.¹⁰ Artaud (1896–1948) and Brecht (1898–1956)—like Mallarmé and Nietzsche—were almost exact contemporaries.

World Theatre: Hofmannsthal and Claudel

The Salzburg Festival, inaugurated in 1919, was Hofmannsthal's response to the defeat and dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The heartland of Central Europe, Austria and Vienna, had suddenly been relegated to the periphery of the German "nation," divided since the Reformation between the Protestant North and the Catholic South. The festival aimed at more, however, than a continuation of the baroque legacy of the Habsburgs. Hofmannsthal intended a cultural politics, whose stake was the divided soul of Germany, a cultural politics in the spirit of the Counter-Reformation, directed against the Protestant-*bürgerlich* definition of the German nation. Hofmannsthal's Salzburg signifies in this sense the counterpart to Wagner's Bayreuth. Each festival was dedicated to the cultural-political goal of the spiritual regeneration of the German nation through art. Each, moreover, identified the split between Protestant drama and Catholic opera as the cultural symptom of the divided German soul, which Wagner's music drama and Hofmannsthal's "German national programme" were to heal.

As his own long and productive collaboration with Richard Strauss indicates, Hofmannsthal saw himself as the inheritor of a great theatrical tradition, which did not separate opera and drama.¹¹ Just as great operas—those by Gluck, Mozart, and Beethoven—are above all dramatic works, so great dramas—Goethe's *Faust*, Shakespeare's fantasy plays, Schiller's romantic dramas—presuppose music. At the center of this great tradition stand Mozart's operas and Goethe's *Faust*; they form what Hofmannsthal calls "the German national programme of 1800," which included, besides the ancients, modern—English, Spanish, and French—drama. On what grounds, however, can Hofmannsthal reclaim Goethe and Schiller and Weimar classicism from the Protestant North and the concepts of *Bildung* and *Kultur* for his programme? On what grounds can Salzburg displace Weimar and Bayreuth

10. Franz Norbert Mennemeier, "Bertolt Brechts 'Theater der Grausamkeit': Anmerkungen zum *Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis*," in *Drama und Theater der europäischen Avantgarde*, ed. Franz Norbert Mennemeier and Erika Fischer-Lichte (Tübingen: Francke, 1994), 91–102.

11. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Deutsche Festspiele zu Salzburg" (1919), in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3, *Prosa* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1952), 441–44.

as the site that truly corresponds to the nation, indeed claims to be “the heart of the heart of Europe”?¹²

Hofmannsthal’s “national” programme of 1800 looks back to a prerevolutionary Europe and to the universalism of the Catholic Church. It turns its back on the political and cultural nationalisms of the nineteenth century, which led Europe into the catastrophe of 1914 and tore the supranational Austro-Hungarian Empire apart. Just as the “people” must reconcile class divisions, so the lost tradition of popular theatre must reconcile the modern splitting of the public into the elite and the masses. Thus against Bayreuth, dedicated to one great artist,¹³ and against a Germany in the image of Weimar, Hofmannsthal sets the whole classical heritage of the nation, which extends from the Middle Ages up to Mozart and Goethe in an unbroken theatrical tradition, whose organic development is rooted in the popular culture of the South, that is, the Austrian-Bavarian lands. Hofmannsthal is at pains to underline what he calls the southern German theatrical forms present in Goethe’s world theatre: *Faust* incorporates mystery and morality play, puppet theatre and courtly opera with chorus and stage machinery. At the heart of Austria/Bavaria is Salzburg, not Vienna. The modern cosmopolitan metropolis cannot play this reintegrating national role. Salzburg thus stands for the romantic redefinition of society as community, as “aesthetic totality.”¹⁴

To create this totality through the moral and magic powers of a retotalized theatre, the collaboration of Max Reinhardt was essential. In 1917 Reinhardt submitted a memorandum to the Austrian Ministry of Culture proposing the building of a theatre in Hellbronn near Salzburg, dedicated to the original and final expression of the theatre, the festival play, as it had been realized by the Greeks and in the medieval mysteries and Passion plays of the church. Reinhardt had already achieved some of his greatest prewar successes through arena spectacles for a mass audience. Perhaps the best known was his 1911 production of the pantomime *The Miracle* by Karl Vollmüller with music by Humperdinck, performed by two thousand actors before an audience of thirty thousand at the Olympic Hall in London, transformed for the occasion into the interior of a Gothic cathedral. In the following years this production was performed in Vienna, various German cities, New York, and then at the Salzburg Festival in 1924. In 1910 Reinhardt directed *Oedipus Rex* in Hofmannsthal’s adaptation at the Circus Schumann in Berlin, and in 1911 Hofmannsthal’s version of the medieval English morality play *Everyman* at the same venue.

12. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “Die Salzburger Festspiele (1922),” in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4, *Prosa* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1955), 90–91.

13. The Salzburg Festival planners were fascinated, however, by *Parsifal* as a “stage consecration festival play,” which claimed “to merge sacred theatre (communion and Mont Salvat) and secular theatre (the performance of the Parsifal myth and Bayreuth) into a representation of a mythically determined cultural renewal.” Michael P. Steinberg, *The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival: Austria as Theatre and Ideology, 1890–1938* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 30.

14. Steinberg, *Meaning of the Salzburg Festival*, 78.

If *Oedipus* figures as a production of major importance in the history of twentieth-century theatre,¹⁵ *Everyman* failed to impress. Before a more congenial audience in Salzburg in 1920, however, staged in front of the cathedral, it made a profound impact and remained central to the festival up to 1937, forming with *Don Giovanni* and *Faust* a trinity of Catholic morality plays.

The success of *Everyman* fulfilled Hofmannsthal's idea of the festival play and confirmed the ideological goal of the Salzburg Festival: the transformation of the theatre public into the "people." As Hofmannsthal put it, the public is capricious and moody, whereas the people is old and wise and recognizes the food that it needs. To this end the modern playwright must have recourse to the great and simple dramatic forms that were truly the products of the people.¹⁶ In 1920 the difference between public and people was identified with the difference between Berlin or Vienna and Salzburg. In 1911, in relation to the Berlin production of *Everyman*, Hofmannsthal had tried to persuade himself that concealed within the metropolitan masses the people still exists, ready to respond to the revival of "this eternally great fairy tale." Built around the great opposition between the profane and the sacred, earthly life and salvation, *Everyman*, he declared, is still illuminated by a divine light.¹⁷

The audience's reception of the medieval morality play in Salzburg encouraged Hofmannsthal to rework Caldéron's most famous contribution to the genre of the *auto sacramental*, *The Great Theatre of the World*. The dramatic metaphor of the *theatrum mundi*, in which man plays the role allotted by God in the game of life, provided the perfect model for a retotalized theatre. In world theatre the stage is absorbed into the world, conceived and represented as play. The *macrocosm*, the world as play, gives meaning to the *microcosm*, the stage play. The hierarchical division of the stage into the three levels of Heaven, Earth, and Hell is crowned by the visible presence of God, who *authorizes* representation, thereby canceling the difference between actor and role, stage and audience. It was only appropriate that the *auto sacramental*, performed on the Feast of Corpus Christi, concluded with the mystery of Real Presence, the miracle of the Eucharist in the Mass. Hofmannsthal's *Salzburg Great World Theatre* sought to refunction this sacred form for contemporary purposes by expanding the role of the beggar in revolt against God's world order into an allegorical demonstration of the overcoming of the destructive forces of revolution by divine grace. Here the suggestive power of Reinhardt's staging in the University Church in Salzburg (by the baroque master Fischer von Erlach) came to the rescue of Hofmannsthal's undramatic allegory. Here too, as in *Everyman*, the figure of Death the drummer, leading the players—King, Rich Man,

15. Denis Bablet, *Esthétique générale du décor de théâtre de 1870 à 1914* (Paris: CNRS, 1975), 376.

16. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Das Spiel vor der Menge" (1911), in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3, *Prosa*, 63.

17. *Ibid.*, 64.

Beauty, Wisdom, Peasant—in a dance of death, had the desired effect on the audience. Hofmannsthal speaks of this dance of death as one of the strongest scenes of any of Reinhardt's productions, holding the audience spellbound as death fetched each figure in turn in a pantomime in which the figures followed like puppets the beat of the drum.¹⁸

The ideological programme of the Salzburg Festival found its most problematic extension in Hofmannsthal's call in a public lecture at Munich University in 1927 for a "conservative revolution." It was once again the question of the healing of the divided German soul. Now, however, Hofmannsthal seeks to harness the "Faustian," eternally restless and unsatisfied soul of Protestant "worldlessness" to his own Counter-Reformation, predicated on the "frightful experience" of the nineteenth century, which has brought us to the realization that it is impossible to live without a totality formed by faith.¹⁹ How Hofmannsthal's anti-Protestant nation is to be constructed out of Protestant spirit (*Geist*) remains a mystery. He would have been horrified, had he lived to see Hitler's "synthesis" of Catholic ritual and Protestant efficiency. Or must we conclude that Hofmannsthal's Salzburg was just as much a symptom as Wagner's Bayreuth of what the Austrian novelist Hermann Broch diagnosed as the value-vacuum of German art, whose symptomatic expression was precisely the longing for the total work of art? There is a kind of negative symmetry between Hofmannsthal's analysis of the German soul (against the countermodel of France and Austria) after the First World War and Broch's dissection of the Austrian soul (against the example of France) after the Second World War. Whereas Hofmannsthal embraces the seekers after synthesis, Broch places the *fata morgana* of synthesis at the heart of his essay "Hofmannsthal and His Age: A Study." Both writers share, however, a similarly negative interpretation of modernity as the "disintegration of values" (the title of the third, concluding part of Broch's novel *The Sleepwalkers*, 1931). For Broch the disintegration of values is the key to the "merry apocalypse" of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after 1880, which made Vienna the center of the European value-vacuum.²⁰

Broch's moral intention appears clearly at the beginning of his study, where he states that the essence of a period can usually be read from its architectonic facade. That of the second half of the nineteenth century, the period in which Hofmannsthal (1874–1929) was born, is identified as one of the most miserable, since it was the period of eclecticism, of the false baroque, the false Renaissance, the false Gothic.²¹ It was not by chance that this half century was also the period par excellence of opera house construction, with the Paris Opera (1857–74) and the Vienna Opera

18. See Hofmannsthal's description of Reinhardt's production in Cynthia Walk, *Hofmannsthal's Grosses Welttheater* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1980), 120–21.

19. Hofmannsthal, *Gesammelte Werke*, 4: 410–13.

20. Hermann Broch, "Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit: Eine Studie," in *Gesammelte Werke: Essays* (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1955), 1: 43–182 (here 83).

21. *Ibid.*, 43.

(1861–69) leading the way. If they became the representative opera houses of the period, it was because Paris and Vienna had been the two centers of absolutism in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which had made the celebration of the alliance of Catholic throne and altar the task of public representative art. But while the French Revolution had transformed Paris into a world city, Vienna remained a baroque city that clung to tradition, to become after 1848 its own museum, “symbol of the empty form, of the value-vacuum,” “a sign of decadence.”²² Behind the false facades of the museum city, Broch discerns the longing, typical of an age both historicist and decadent, for a great style, for a great art, the longing that art should become once more myth, represent once more the “totality of the universe,”²³ a longing that had made Wagner’s theatrical genius the mirror of the vacuum. The *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the product of Wagner’s “epochal instinct,” was the “total expression” of the “un-style” of the age: the self-representation of an age of irrational, mystical, and pseudo-mythical *decoration*.²⁴

And Hofmannsthal? He clung to Austria’s long theatrical tradition in the hope that the stage as the setting for a higher reality would open the way back to community for the isolated artist. His collaboration with Richard Strauss amounted to a vain, anti-Wagnerian attempt to revive the disappearing Austrian legacy through a “baroque-tinted” grand opera. Did Hofmannsthal recognize that he was assimilating himself to the vacuum in his self-delusions regarding the Salzburg Festival or in his despairing conjuration of a European “conservative revolution”?

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Seeking to commission a grandiose spectacle that could repeat the success of *The Miracle*, Reinhardt approached Claudel in 1927, who responded by writing *The Book of Christopher Columbus* in August of the same year. Claudel wanted to work with Darius Milhaud, with whom he had already collaborated in the production of his translation of the *Oresteia*, despite Reinhardt’s choice of Richard Strauss and then Manuel de Falla. Having agreed to Milhaud for a production at the Salzburg Festival in August 1928, Reinhardt then withdrew, citing financial difficulties. Milhaud nevertheless completed the music and found, on the basis of the success of his ballet, *La création du monde*, a backer in Ludwig Hörth, the director of the Berlin State Opera, where the drama with music was premiered in May 1930. From the first, Claudel envisaged a total theatre with music, chorus, dance, and film. It offered him the chance to clarify his ambivalent admiration for Wagner, documented in his dialogue “Richard Wagner: Reverie d’un poète français” (1926), and to realize his own counterconception of musical drama. The title of Claudel’s dialogue refers to Mallarmé’s own critical distancing from Wagner, but also to Claudel’s

22. *Ibid.*, 82, 79.

23. *Ibid.*, 60.

24. *Ibid.*, 73.

participation in Mallarmé's soirées and to his own initiation into the Wagnerian magic at the Concerts Lamoureux in the 1880s. Together with Romain Rolland, his fellow student at the Lycée Louis le Grand, he defended with "feet and fists the Ride of the Valkyries and the religious scene of *Parsifal*," as Rolland reports.²⁵

Between Claudel's early enthusiasm for Wagner and *Christopher Columbus* lay two crucial encounters with total theatre—the 1913 Hellerau productions of Claudel's *L'annonce faite à Marie* and Gluck's *Orpheus*, which influenced both Reinhardt and Diaghilev. Of the latter production Claudel wrote: "The performances of Gluck's *Orpheus* at Hellerau were incomparable. It is the first time since the days of the Greeks that true beauty is to be seen in the theatre."²⁶ Equally significant was the experience of Asian theatre, in particular Kabuki and No theatre, while Claudel was ambassador in Tokyo in the 1920s. The use of music in Japanese theatre clarified for him what dramatic music meant for a dramatist as opposed to a composer, not aiming like Wagner "at the realization of a sound picture but giving impulse and pace to our emotions through a medium purely rhythmical and tonal, more direct and brutal than the spoken word," as Claudel explained in a 1930 lecture entitled "Modern Drama and Music" at Yale University devoted to his play for the New World, *Christopher Columbus*.²⁷ Against Wagner, who immerses us from the outset in a narcotic, dreamlike atmosphere, Claudel says that he and Milhaud had set out to show "how the soul gradually reaches music, . . . and how all the means of sonorous expression, from discourse, dialogue and debate, sustained by simple beatings of the drum, up to an eruption of all the vocal, lyrical, orchestral riches, are gathered in a single torrent at once varied and uninterrupted."²⁸ The progress of the soul to music expresses the journey to final harmony: "In such a drama music . . . is a true actor, a collective person with diverse voices, whose voices are reunited in a harmony, the function of which is to bring together all the rest and to disengage little by little, under the inspiration of a growing enthusiasm, the elements of the final hymn."²⁹

What separated Claudel from Wagner above all—but also connected him—was his conversion to Catholicism and commitment to a renewal of Catholic drama. In Claudel's eyes Wagner signified the completion and exhaustion of the whole tradition of secular art since the Renaissance: "The supreme conflagration which consumes Valhalla is for me nothing other than the catastrophe of that imagination,

25. Odette Aslan, "Le 'Christophe Colomb' de Claudel: Du théâtre 'complète' à l'acteur 'total,'" in Bablet and Konigson, *L'oeuvre d'art totale*, 195.

26. Paul Claudel, "Le théâtre d'Hellerau," *Nouvelle revue française*, September 1913, 476; Annie Barnes, "*L'Annonce faite à Marie* at Hellerau (October 1913)," in *Claudel: A Reappraisal*, ed. Richard Griffiths (London: Rapp and Whiting, 1967), 34–47.

27. Paul Claudel, "Modern Drama and Music," in Kirkby, *Total Theatre*, 202. Claudel was the French ambassador in Washington; the lecture in English at Yale University was given in connection with the American publication of *Christopher Columbus*.

28. Claudel, "Modern Drama and Music," 206.

29. *Ibid.*, 204.

whose impotence the great man had recognized. That is why he wrote *Parsifal* after *The Ring* and called it a festival play of stage consecration"—*Parsifal* presented the programme of a new stage for a new age.³⁰ And just as Wagner found inspiration for *Parsifal* in Caldéron, so Claudel makes *The Book of Christopher Columbus* into world theatre in a double sense: the play has as its theme the unification of the world in the Catholic faith, and it takes the form of the judgment of posterity and eternity on the hero, who divides on his deathbed into the spectator and the judge of his own epic quest for the New World. As in world theatre, the action takes place in time and *sub specie aeternitatis*. The sacred and profane history of Columbus is contained in "The Book," the third testament of the unification of the earth, the gospel of Christopher Columbus, the symbolic meaning of whose name, Bearer of Christ and Ambassador of God, runs as leitmotif through the play. This Book is Claudel's homage to Mallarmé and answer to the "catastrophe" of Mallarmé's poetic quest to give meaning to the world, the catastrophe of the nineteenth century that culminated for Claudel in Wagner and Mallarmé.³¹ Claudel's Book completes the world by revealing its divine meaning, just as Columbus completed the world by revealing the unity of God's creation. Beyond that, the Book realizes Mallarmé's dream of a fusion of Book and Theatre in a performance modeled on the office of the Mass. Claudel compares *Columbus* to a Mass in which the public through the Chorus takes a continuous part. Claudel splits Mallarmé's poet-operator of the ceremonial reading of the Book into the figure of the Narrator-Explicator and the Chorus, which he distinguishes from the chorus of the ancient drama: "It is, rather, the Chorus which the Church, after the triumph of Christianity, invited to enter the sacred edifice to become an intermediary between the priest and the people, the one *officiating*, the other *official*. Between the speechless crowd and the drama developing on the stage—and if I may say so, on the altar—there was needed an officially constituted interpreter."³² As with *Parsifal*, with Gurnemanz as narrator and its Christian (and Klingsohr's pagan) chorus, the stage becomes altar, and the play an *auto sacramental*, framed by the opening procession and the final hymn. Preceded by soldiers and the standards of Aragon and Castile, the Book is carried onto the stage, followed by the Narrator and the increasingly disorderly Chorus. The Book is placed upon a lecturn and opened by the Narrator, who prays for God's guidance in presenting the Book of the life and voyages of Christopher Columbus: "For it is not he alone; all men have the calling to the Other World and to this last shore, which God's grace wishes us to attain."

30. Paul Claudel, "Le théâtre catholique (1914)," in *Positions et propositions* (Paris: Gallimard, 1928), 1: 250.

31. Paul Claudel, "Le catastrophe d'igitur (1926)," in *Oeuvres en prose*, ed. Jacques Petit and Charles Galpérine (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 508–13.

32. Claudel, "Modern Drama and Music," 207.

The Mass and Mallarmé's idea of the Book thus provide the two archetypes of the theatre that structure Claudel's renewal of world theatre. The Book allows, on the one hand, distance, commentary, and judgment on the scenes, the *tableaux vivants*; on the other, it embeds the earthly history of Columbus in the eternal perspective of God's sacred history. To the coexistence of the temporal and the eternal, the profane and the sacred, corresponds the division of the action between the stage and the proscenium. Between these two levels of the play, Columbus's life and its eternal meaning, there is a third mediating dimension, the judgment of posterity. The chorus participates in all three levels or perspectives of the world theatre. The chorus must give voice to the many roles that make music into a true actor—the inchoate and elementary obstacles that Columbus must confront and subdue, from the ground swell of the sea to the fury of the unleashed storm, from the laughter and mockery of the court and the street to the mutiny of the sailors; the responses and hymns that punctuate the reading of the Book; the call of posterity to Columbus on his deathbed to “go beyond the limit,” to cross to the other shore. The chorus thus forms, in Claudel's words, the point of intersection or reciprocity between “the speechless crowd and the drama developing on stage.” Through the collective medium of the orchestra and the chorus, music takes and lends its voice to “that audience surrounding a great man and a great event which is composed of all peoples and all generations.” “By turns murmuring applause and issuing a challenge, the public follows all the incidents of the drama—that anonymous power that we call opinion.”³³ “Every voice, every word, every act, every event calls for an echo, an answer. They bring about and diffuse a kind of collective, anonymous roaring as of a sea of generations following one another, looking on and listening.”³⁴

World theatre adopts the standpoint of eternity, the standpoint of omniscience, inherent in the passage to the New World. Going beyond the limit opens our eyes to a total world view, which is the condition of a resacralized, retotalized theatre. Retotalization calls in turn for a synthesis of the arts. Here Claudel is considerably more inventive than Hofmannsthal, who was content to rely on the power of a great and simple dramatic form, Reinhardt's directing skills, music drawn from Handel's oratorios arranged by Nilson, and the church setting. With Claudel, as we have seen, music plays a crucial role. The stage action is not only presented to the critical gaze of posterity; it also arises as a series of Apollonian dream visions from the “collective medium” of the Dionysian orchestra and chorus, “a kind of collective, anonymous roaring as of a sea.” However, the epic structure of the Book contains Greek tragedy within the higher order of Christian history: the spectacle that is generated from below is transfigured from above. In the climactic scene of part 1, the mutiny of the sailors is transformed into jubilation by the miracle of the appearance of a dove announcing land. In the climactic scene of

33. *Ibid.*, 204.

34. *Ibid.*, 207.

part 2, and of the play as a whole, Columbus, who is being transported to Spain in chains on the king's orders, faces his greatest trial. Columbus's prayers carry the ship through the first two crises of the unleashed chaos of the abyss. The third crisis, however, takes him into the eye of the storm, the deadly silence in which he must confront the accusing images of his conscience, the images of the multitudes exterminated and of the slavery that he has reestablished through his discovery of the New World. In the background the music of the chorus slowly emerges as that of *De profundis*: "From the depths I raise a cry to you, Lord..."

The most imaginative aspect of Claudel's total theatre, besides the chorus, is his use of film to transform the fixed, immobile scenery into moving images to match the changing emotions and atmosphere evoked by the music, creating what a French critic called the fourth dimension of the stage. Why not, Claudel asks, "treat the scenery like a simple frame, like a conventional foreground behind which a path is open to dreams, to memory, and to imagination?"³⁵ Thus the accusing images of Columbus's conscience appear on the screen; a montage of scenes of Asia, camels, the palace of the Great Khan, accompany Columbus's reading of Marco Polo as a child; in the same scene the faces of his mother and sister appear in close-up as Columbus is called to leave his family and follow his vocation. The action on stage can be repeated on the screen or vice versa: the dove that appears to the sailors appears first on the screen. Alternatively, dreams and imagination can look not inward but outward to the unfolding symbolic vista of the reunified world, a gigantic image of the globe circled by a dove. And it is only fitting that Claudel should employ for his play of the New World the new alliance of cinema and music—"movements, values, clusters of form and appearances continually decomposed and recomposed"—that America seemed destined to develop.³⁶

Milhaud wrote three kinds of music for the play: formal music for the ceremonial scenes, popular melodies for the historical tableaux, and radical polytonality (which he had already used in the *Oresteia*) for those moments in which the religious mission of Columbus is manifested—the dove above the ocean, the scenes with Columbus's patron Isabella, the storm at sea, and Isabella's funeral cortege. However, the very success of the Berlin production indicated to Claudel that his play had been overshadowed by the music and transformed into grand opera at the expense of the text. He was able to persuade Milhaud to write a much shorter score, for thirteen musicians, using more conventional and recognizable material (religious music, popular songs) for a production by Jean-Louis Barrault in the 1950s. The original score was to be reserved for radio and concert performances.³⁷ Claudel was not happy, however, with its concert performance as an oratorio, despite the

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 208.

37. Jacqueline de Labriolle, *Les "Christoph Colomb" de Paul Claudel* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972), 68–70.

fact that his oratorios *Joan of Arc at the Stake* and *King David*, with music by Artur Honegger, enjoyed great success and have maintained their place in the concert repertoire, unlike *The Book of Christopher Columbus*.³⁸

Brecht reportedly received a shock from the 1930 Berlin production of *Columbus*.³⁹ He was engaged at the time in developing a comparable didactic theatre with his *Lehrstücke*, addressed directly to the audience, using chorus and music, and breaking through theatrical illusion as Claudel did in *Columbus* with the exchanges between chorus and narrator as to their proper role. John Willett's call in 1960 for a proper study of the parallels between Brecht and Claudel, whom Brecht considered "an original dramatist of great stature,"⁴⁰ still remains a desideratum, and with it the scarcely explored question of Brecht and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Theatre of Cruelty: Brecht and Artaud

Brecht's didactic plays, written in the final years of the Weimar Republic, grew out of the musical reaction in the 1920s to the last wave of romantic expressionism, which climaxed before World War I in the symphonic inheritors of Wagner—Strauss, Mahler, and Schoenberg. Stravinsky was the acknowledged model in the search for new forms of musical theatre: the chamber opera *Renard* and *L'histoire du soldat* (The Soldier's Tale) (1921), with its minimalist staging and jazz influences, announced along with Diaghilev's *Parade* the revolt against the Wagnerian idea of music drama. In France, Milhaud successfully exploited the popularity of jazz in his two ballets, *Le boeuf sur le toit* (1919) with Jean Cocteau, and *La création du monde* (1923), with scenario by Blaise Cendrars and stage sets by Fernand Léger. The combination in *La création* of primitivism, an African legend of the creation and animation of the world, and Léger's mechanical art emphasized the interest in de-individuation. The masked, depersonalized dancers were integrated into a spectacle of color, light, signs, and effects designed to achieve a "formalistic synthesis of the mise-en-scene."⁴¹ In Germany *L'histoire du soldat* was performed at the Berlin State Opera in 1925 and again in 1928 together with the premiere of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* to a Latin text by Cocteau. The Donaueschingen Music Festival, founded by Paul Hindemith and others in 1921, became Stravinsky's platform in Germany. The festival moved to Baden-Baden in 1927 and changed its focus, under Hindemith's leadership, to "Gebrauchsmusik" and "Gemeinschaftsmusik"

38. Paul Valéry collaborated with Honegger on two projects, the melodramas *Amphion* (1931) and *Semiramis* (1934). "Like Claudel, Valéry was always preoccupied with the relation of words to music. These two great masters of contemporary poetry, as different as they are otherwise, always pursued the same end: to move from the spoken word to the sung word, and finally to pure music. Likewise, for both of them, the object of their search was to bring together all the possibilities of the theatre." *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, vol. 3, *Plays*, ed. Jackson Matthews (New York: Pantheon, 1960), 374.

39. Claudel, "Modern Drama and Music," 216.

40. John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, 3rd ed. (New York: New Directions, 1975), 116–17.

41. J. Garrett Glover, *The Cubist Theatre* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1983), 92–99.

(functional or applied music and amateur music-making).⁴² Functional music responded to the fascination with mechanical man, which invaded the European stage in the 1920s with Meyerhold's biomechanics, Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet* (with music by Hindemith) and Moholy-Nagy's total theatre experiments at the Bauhaus,⁴³ and George Antheil's *Ballet mécanique* for a film by Léger, as well as the "mass ornament" of popular entertainment and gymnastic displays.⁴⁴

Brecht's didactic plays had a double aim: to find new performers and audiences outside the existing commercial and subsidized theatre and to overcome the separation between stage and public by fusing performers and audience into the one learning collective. Brecht's didactic theatre needs therefore to be distinguished from the scientific intention of his epic theatre, which aimed to complete the secularization of the theatre, its separation from ritual, through a self-critique from within the institution. Epic theatre's techniques of estrangement and distanciation stand at the opposite pole to the Wagnerian synthesis of the arts. As Brecht puts it in *A Little Organon for the Theatre*, "Let us invite all the arts befitting the spectacle, not in order to undertake a Gesamtkunstwerk in which each would abandon and lose itself; on the contrary, they should advance with the art of acting the common task in their own manner, and their interaction consists in their mutual distanciation" (par. 74). The learning collective outside and beyond the theatre as institution, the goal of the didactic plays, is scarcely compatible with the enlightened audience of the epic theatre. The political enlightenment intended by the didactic plays is much closer to that of a "secular" but still ritualized version of World Theatre: its hierarchy is no longer vertical-spatial but horizontal-temporal, a retotalized theatre that takes its total ideology from Communism. Identification with the Communist Party is underpinned, however, by an even more basic will to de-individuation. At the 1929 Baden-Baden festival Brecht presented a two-part concert treatment of Lindbergh's transatlantic crossing, *Der Ozeanflug* (The Flight over the Ocean), with music by Kurt Weill, and *Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis* (The Baden-Baden Cantata of Consent), with music by Hindemith. *Der Ozeanflug* celebrates technology's conquest of the elements.⁴⁵ The central scene, entitled "Ideology," expounds the credo of a "true atheist," engaged in the liquidation of the Beyond and the expulsion of God through the destruction of misery and ignorance by workers and machines. The final chorale, which speaks in the name of the future, of the not yet attained, is repeated at the beginning of *Das Badener*

42. See Willett, *Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*, 125–30.

43. Sybil Moholy-Nagy and Laszlo L. Moholy-Nagy, *Experiments in Totality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950).

44. See Siegfried Kracauer's famous 1927 essay on the choreography of the masses in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75–88.

45. This choral play/oratorio was performed in 1929 in Berlin, directed by Otto Klemperer, and in Philadelphia in 1931, under Leopold Stokowski. It was translated into English by George Antheil, whose own opera *Transatlantic* was performed in Frankfurt in 1930.

Lehrstück. The second cantata spells out the cruel lesson that the collective must incorporate if the resistance not of nature but of society is to be overcome: the total sacrifice of the self in the cause of permanent revolution. It is precisely this restitution of meaning to existence, the struggle against injustice and exploitation, that gives meaning to the death of the individual, that is, to individual death:

THE REHEARSED CHOIR:

But you, who acquiesce in the stream of things
Do not sink back into Nothingness.
Do not dissolve yourselves like salt in water, but
Rise
Dying your death as
You labored your labor
Revolutionizing your revolution.⁴⁶

The “rehearsed choir” speaks—like Claudel’s chorus—from the other side, beyond the death of the individual that is one with the constitution of the collective. The cantata has parts for two soloists (aviators), the speaker, and the choir. The choir stands at the back on a podium, with the orchestra on the left. At the front of the stage on the left is the table at which the conductor, the speaker (Hindemith and Brecht at the premiere), and the choir leader are seated, and on the right the table at which the two soloists sit. The cantata or oratorio unfolds as a liturgical rite, drawing on the austerity of the Protestant version of World Theatre, Bach’s Passions, as opposed to the Catholic magnificence of Claudel’s theatrical spectacle. The speaker directs the ritual alternation of soloists and collective like a priest. In Hindemith’s preface to the published score, the audience is regarded as participants in the performance, called upon, like a church congregation, to join in the choral passages under the direction of the choir leader.⁴⁷ The final summons of the collective to the soloists to join the ranks of the marching workers symbolizes the function of the *Lehrstücke*—the transformation of the audience, which could only be achieved by turning away from the existing theatre in the direction of operas for schools, as in Brecht and Weill’s *Der Jasager/Der Neinsager* (The Yea Sayer and the Nay Sayer), produced at the Central Institute for Education, Berlin, in 1930, or in didactic plays for workers choirs, notably *Die Maßnahme* (The Measures Taken) in 1930, with music by Hanns Eisler.

Brecht had no time for the myth of the representative audience. If the didactic plays aimed at rehearsing the collectivizing of the individual, it was as part of the class struggle, where the part, in possession of redemptive truth, is pitted against

46. Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), 2: 610.

47. Reiner Steinweg, ed., *Brechts Modell der Lehrstücke: Zeugnisse, Diskussion, Erfahrungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976), 35–36.

society as a whole. The lesson of the struggle is total mobilization, the ultimate logic of de-individuation, of the marriage of man and machine as the Worker in war, in the factory, in the “mass ornament” of the totalitarian rally. A new theatre for the new man was Weill’s enthusiastic response to Brecht’s *Mann ist Mann* (A Man Is a Man)⁴⁸—a new theatre, assembled to accomplish the oldest sacred rite: human sacrifice, raised now to the level of acquiescence in self-sacrifice. The “démontage” in *Mann ist Mann* (1926) of the soldier Galy Gay, robbed of his identity and transformed into a fighting machine, through the pantomime of his mock execution and burial, demonstrates that “a man is a man.” It has a grotesque counterpart in the scene in *Das Badener Lehrstück* in which “Mr. Smith” is sawed into pieces. This interlude with three clowns, Brecht’s exercise in the theatre of cruelty, shocked the Baden-Baden audience and contributed to the political scandal of the performance, which led to the transfer of the festival to Berlin in the following year, but also to the refusal by the festival committee, including Hindemith, to include *Die Maßnahme* in the Berlin programme.

Die Maßnahme was the first explicitly political didactic play, which had the function, in Eisler’s words, of transforming the concert hall into a political meeting, and of realizing the revolutionary potential of “complicated polyphonic choruses, unisonic marching songs, spoken choruses, aggressive chansons and ballads.”⁴⁹ The oratorio presents a (political) party court, represented by the mass choir (four hundred singers at the Berlin premiere), which investigates the conduct of four party agitators (four actors) who have killed the fifth member of their group, whose revolutionary instincts led him to commit a series of “objective” mistakes. His liquidation in the interests of the party is ratified by his recognition of his harmful conduct. The spirit of the Stalinist show trials of the 1930s is already present in Brecht and Eisler’s rehearsal.⁵⁰ Since the trial is intended to demonstrate correct conduct, that is, the extirpation of all “objectively” harmful human feelings, such as compassion and anger, Brecht’s estrangement techniques come into their own. In his epic theatre they serve to divide the audience, whereas in the didactic play they serve to instill right conduct through the “alienation” of spontaneous, individual feeling in the name of cold, rational insight. Thus constituted and disciplined, the collective assents to the disciplinary measures taken.

* * *

Brecht and Artaud, the two most influential figures of the twentieth-century avant-garde in the theatre, are rightly regarded as antipodes. Brecht’s “rational” methods

48. Kurt Weill, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. David Drews (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 176.

49. Steinweg, *Brechts Modell der Lehrstücke*, 160.

50. This is hardly surprising since didactic play and show trial have the same model: the mock trials employed by the Red Army in the 1920s as a means of indoctrinating illiterate peasants (see chapter 11). Brecht’s informant, Tretyakov, was one of the first to disappear in Stalin’s purges.

are far removed from Artaud's "irrationality." Nevertheless, the extremes meet. In their pursuit of a retotalized theatre, rational-discursive and irrational cruelty have the same goal of *de-individuation*. What must be sacrificed in Artaud is "our petty human individuality," which cuts us off from the inhuman source of energy that alone can renew the theatre and regenerate a sick civilization. Artaud's significance lies of course not in a scarcely existing practice (his production of Shelley's *The Cenci* in the 1920s was a miserable failure) but in his writings for a theatre to come, published in 1938 under the title *Le théâtre et son double*. Driven by a radical critique and rejection of Western civilization and its arts, these essays present a familiar pattern of Nietzschean cultural critique, in which decadence and regeneration go hand in hand. Here too, in line with the culturalist understanding of culture as an expressive totality, the state of the arts—above all the theatre as the public art—serves as the index of social vitality. More is at stake, however, than a rejection of modern society. Artaud's critique of representation, contemporary with Heidegger's dissection of "the age of the world picture," concerns a civilization that has taken a fundamentally wrong turn. And just as Heidegger found comfort after the Second World War in Eastern thought, so Artaud drew inspiration from his encounter with Balinese theatre at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Paris for his quest for a ritualized theatre.

Artaud's attack on representation stands in a tradition of cultural critique going back to Rousseau. Since Nietzsche it had become a staple of the vitalist lament over the tragedy of culture (Simmel), brought about by the fatal disjunction of life and form (Lukács), words and things (Artaud), which had led to a petrification of culture and a deep sense of alienation. Artaud calls this process of petrification or formalism "idolatry,"⁵¹ the worship of forms from which all life has departed. Now the gods sleep in the museum—testimony, like the congealing of living tradition into a fixed canon of masterpieces, to the entropic "idolatry of culture," the decadence of Western art, and a final parting of ways with authentic culture. And what is decadent art? It is, of course, art that is nothing more than art, a product of modern individualism and anarchy. Even the Ballets Russes in their moment of splendor, Artaud adds, never transcended the domain of art (122): "The spiritual sickness of the West, the place par excellence where it was possible to confuse art with aestheticism, is to think that there can be painting which serves only to depict, dance which would be nothing but plastic figures, as if one had wanted to sever the forms from art, to cut their bonds with all the mystic attitudes they could take in confronting the absolute" (107).

The antithesis to the idolatrous separation of form and living force is the "theatre and its double," for all true effigies have their double (18). The theatre of representation, by contrast, is the theatre of words, of dialogue. Words belong to the

51. Antonin Artaud, *Le théâtre et son double* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 15. Parenthetical page references in the text refer to this work.

book, to literature, not to the stage, which demands a concrete, physical language, "poetry in space independent of articulated language" (60). If the disembodied word is emblematic of idolatry, Artaud is not thinking simply in terms of an opposition between abstract and concrete language. It is rather that representation has reduced the world to the visible, reducing thereby the essential word/sign—the *symbol*—to a mere shell. The theatre is robbed of its double, its shadow, when the dream image—"the hallucination which is intrinsic to all *dramatis personae*" (81)—collapses into the theatre of illusion; in Nietzschean terms, when the Apollonian dream image is no longer the projection of Dionysian forces, the product, that is, of the chorus and the community as a whole. The Western theatre of the word, which emerged in the Renaissance, marks the point at which the "supreme meaning of the theatre" started to disappear and the community to split apart into the elite and the crowd, a process completed by the early nineteenth century. If the theatre of "masterpieces" has lost contact with the crowd, it is because it has lost in its idolatry all sense of the needs of the people: "The crowd today as formerly is hungry for mystery" (118).

Mallarmé, we recall, had declared that the mystery resides in the crowd, waiting to be brought to consciousness by the word. His dematerialization of the theatre stands at the opposite pole to Artaud's refusal of the word other than in its magical and mystic function as symbol. Here too, as in the rival claims to the legacy of Orpheus by Mallarmé and Scriabin, it is a question of orphic powers. Artaud's Dionysian conception of theatre celebrates, like Scriabin, the mystery of the dismemberment of the god and the final return to unity. Artaud locates the origins of theatre in "the materialization or rather the exteriorization of a kind of essential drama of division and conflict" (76). "We must believe that the essential drama, that which was at the basis of all the Great Mysteries, espouses the second age of Creation, that of difficulty and of the Double, that of matter and the condensation of ideas" (77). The theatre and its double, the theatre of divine powers, summoned, named, and directed in "the true spectacle of life" (19), is the site of symbolic exchange between man and the gods, between visible forms and invisible forces. In origin and in essence, theatre for Artaud is a religious rite, a ceremony of conjuration that breaks language to touch life (19). Theatre's regenerative function of renewing life is presented by Artaud in terms of alchemy, the plague, and cruelty.

The metaphysical drama of division and unification is compared to the Great Work of the purification of fallen matter in order to attain the divine light of which gold is the opaque symbol. This alchemical-theatrical operation of purification culminates in an absolute purity, which Artaud compares to a single note, the audible organic manifestation of an indescribable vibration (79). Both the mysteries of Orpheus and those of Eleusis partake of this alchemical theatre, which is composed of a combination of music, colors, and forms that we can no longer imagine but can perhaps recover poetically "by extracting from the principles of all the arts their communicative and magnetic potentials by means of forms, sounds, music and

volumes, evoking in passing through all the natural similitudes of images and their likenesses...states of such sharpness and intensity, so absolutely cutting that we sense through the tremblings of the music and the form the subterranean threats of a chaos as decisive as it is dangerous" (77). The alchemical theatre of Mystery, which draws on the second age of the creation of the world and its great myths, stands in need of the images that arise from the abyss, from our metaphysical fear in face of an "inhuman reality" (74)—the images and the fear that are released by the plague, by madness, crime, drugs, war, and revolt. Only such a theatre of cruelty is capable of overcoming the split between audience and stage, by seizing the whole person, the "total man" (190), that is, by reactivating the therapeutic effects of catharsis. To effect such a regeneration the theatre must employ the totality of expressive means—"music, dance, plastic forms, pantomime, mimicry, gesture, intonation, architecture, lighting and scenery"—in order to replace the frozen forms of art with living, menacing forms, which will give the old ceremonial magic a new reality in the theatre (57–58).

A theatre in possession of magical powers cannot be a theatre of representation that repeats something preexisting. It will be *instituting* not *instituted*: a theatre of creation, origin, and foundation (again we note the parallels with Heidegger's contemporary "Origin of the Work of Art"). Through the creation of new myths, theatre is called to realize the *creative circle of catharsis, communion, and community by means of a total spectacle*. It will work through the combined effects of fear and purification—images of horror yielding to cosmic harmony, the principle of unity permeating all things, the universal vibration at the roots of all the arts, which manifests itself in analogy and correspondence. Above all, it will be a theatre of and for the masses, a theatre of the myths arising from "massed collectivities," which seeks to capture something of the poetry of festivals and crowds. It will be a theatre that speaks the language of the masses: images not words, not only because the theatrical image is more powerful than words (as Le Bon insisted) but because the theatrical image (Artaud insists) is more powerful than the thing itself. As opposed to the two-dimensional cinematic image, the theatrical image possesses the magical power of *true illusion*, which commands belief because it possesses us with all the intensity of a dream in which our rational faculties are suspended. Immersed in a universe of tortured dream visions, reminiscent of those of Hieronymus Bosch and Matthias Grünewald, the spectator becomes the subject of a collective rite of exorcism. How such a reborn "integral spectacle," which transgresses the limits of art, is to be realized—this is the focus of Artaud's manifesto "The Theatre of Cruelty," published in the *Nouvelle revue française* in October 1932.

For all its importance in the history of the theatre, Artaud's manifesto is rather disappointing when it comes to stage realization. The prescription and description of the aspects composing the total spectacle—mise-en-scène; the language of words, objects, gestures, and expressions; lighting effects; costume; use of musical instruments—are perfunctory, suggestive at most. They are best thought of as

ancillary to Artaud's rethinking of theatrical space, which sums up many of the guiding ideas of the theatre reform movement. In place of the existing division between stage and auditorium Artaud proposed a single space, such as that provided by a barn or hangar, but utilizing the architectures of certain churches and Tibetan temples. The theatrical space is to be both sacred and functional, enveloping the spectators, who are seated in the middle, which allows them to follow the surrounding action. The action develops against the backdrop of the bare, white walls from the four corners of the space, linked by galleries that allow for the horizontal and vertical movements of the actors and the action. At the very center, amid the spectators, a space serves the purpose of a periodic regrouping of the performers. The intention of this spatial organization is clear: Artaud wants to remove all barriers to direct communication with the audience through an action that envelops and "traverses" the spectator. By means of nightmarish dream visions and cathartic exorcism the dualisms of Western man are to be overcome through the reunion of body and soul in a total spectacle for the total human being. Although Artaud failed as a theatre director, his thinking about the theatre constituted the most radical attempt to break with what Derrida calls the "closure of representation,"⁵² through his refusal of the whole tradition of the stage based on the author, the voice, and the text.

Synthesis of the Arts: A Typology

In part 2 I have taken my cue from Kandinsky: his quest on the one hand for "the spiritual in art" and on the other hand the distinction he makes between the two extremely powerful tendencies in contemporary art toward analysis and synthesis respectively. As we have seen, the tendency toward unification of the arts produced a variety of theatrical experiments in response to the Wagnerian model of the total work of art. The following typology is necessarily preliminary, but it does serve to draw together the types of theatrical synthesis examined in chapters 5 through 8.

Nature I: the *organic* model, in which synthesis of the arts is achieved through the external expressive-mimetic parallelism of the arts in the theatre. The work embodies the "living represented religion" of human nature. The work as tragic music drama (Wagner).

Nature II: the *primitivist-orgiastic* model, in which the combined forces of the theatre are directed to the reunion of body and soul through the immersion of the spectator in a total spectacle. The work as ritual and magic against the spoken word, against representation (Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, Artaud's theatre of cruelty, the American Living Theatre).

52. Jacques Derrida, "Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation," in *Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 341–68.

Spirit: the *synaesthetic* model, in which aesthetic synthesis is achieved through internal correspondence (as opposed to the external expressive parallelism) of the arts. As the symbol of spirit, the work aims for abstraction and dematerialization as the means to totalization. The work as Mystery (Mallarmé, Scriabin, Kandinsky, Schoenberg).

Artifice: the *estrangement* model, which aims neither for a mimetic nor for a synaesthetic integration of the arts, but for a complex counterpoint that provokes a critical self-reflection of the theatre as representation. Comic-ironic distance is attained through recourse to popular, premodern forms of the theatre. Instead of fusion we have de-fusion (Stravinsky, Brecht's epic theatre). De-fusion, however, can also serve the purposes of re-fusion (Caudel's world theater, Brecht's didactic plays).

To these four types we may add a fifth:

Utopia: the *futurist-constructivist* model, which presents the union of art and technology, in which for instance the formal means of the theatre and the actors are transformed into functions of "production art." Alexander Bogdanov's "universal organizational science" inspired the constructivist, biomechanical theatre of Tretyakov, Meyerhold, and Eisenstein in the Soviet Union, and Moholy-Nagy's "theatre of totality" at the Bauhaus.

The emphasis on the synthesis of the arts in part 2 gives way in part 3 to an activist avant-gardism, projected into images of the total work realizing a reunion of art and life. Our fifth type, the "scientific" transcendence of the limits of art as a means to a total reconstruction of man and society (chapter 10), stands in sharp contrast to the sublime collective intoxication to be accomplished by a theatre of the people, prelude to the theatre of mass politics (chapter 9), and in even sharper contrast to the Dionysian intoxication of the battlefield embraced by d'Annunzio, Marinetti, and Jünger (chapter 11). The Italian futurist dream of a "breakthrough to totality" through the cult of the machine and of war had its fitting corollary in the will to destroy the museum. These dreams of transcending the limits of bourgeois art and the bourgeois subject are essential stages in the progression to the totalitarian work of art, which realized, through its complete fusion of art and life, the paradox inherent in Wagner's vision of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Total realization signifies self-destruction. Wagner's artistic programme of the sacrifice of the individual arts to the whole is replicated in life in the totalitarian programme of the sacrifice of the individual to the whole. Its ultimate image is the great sacral landscapes presided over by the eternity of death—Jünger's vision of the world frozen into a total work of art.

