


THE TOTAL WORK OF ART

in European Modernism

David **Roberts**

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THE TOTAL WORK OF ART IN
EUROPEAN MODERNISM

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DAVID ROBERTS

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For György Markus

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PREFACE

This book forms the third part of a trilogy on European modernism that drew its original impulse from dissatisfaction with Theodor Adorno's reading of cultural modernity. The first book in the trilogy, *Art and Enlightenment: Aesthetic Theory after Adorno* (1992), set out to show that Adorno's theory of the rationalization of the arts, as demonstrated in his *Philosophy of Modern Music*, itself falls victim to the contradictions inherent in the reduction of modern culture to the single logic of enlightenment and its dialectic. The hidden romantic roots of Max Horkheimer's and Adorno's critique of enlightenment occlude in turn the antagonistic complementarity of the two imaginaries—enlightenment and romanticism—that define cultural modernism. In the second book, *Dialectic of Romanticism: A Critique of Modernism* (2004), Peter Murphy and I distance ourselves from enlightened and romantic modernisms and their rival historicisms, from the perspective of a third, classical modernism, which stresses civilizational continuities against the will to remake society in the name of the most advanced techniques or the most potent myths. The recurrent polarity of futurisms and archaisms across the whole epoch of modernism is reflected aesthetically in the idea of the avant-garde, on the one hand, and the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, on the other. The idea of the total work of art thus emerged as the focus of the present investigation, which undertakes a re-vision of modernism in the light of the counterimaginary of aesthetic totalization, as opposed to the more familiar accounts of the avant-garde in terms of aesthetic rationalization.

I would like to thank the colleagues and friends who have read and commented on parts of the manuscript. Andrew Benjamin, Marie and Leslie Bodi, Götz Grossklaus, Andrew Milner, Peter Murphy, Brian Nelson, Ken Segar, and Philip Thomson have all helped me to correct my errors, simplify my sentences, and clarify my argument. I would especially like to thank Robert Savage for reading the entire manuscript with such careful and helpful attention. My greatest thanks are due to György Markus, who has been the mentor of this project since its inception. As my sternest critic, he has constantly challenged me to rethink and reformulate my ideas. Finally, I should like to express my appreciation for the interest and support that Peter Uwe Hohendahl has brought to my work. I am delighted that both *Art and Enlightenment* and *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* have been published in series of which he is the editor.

THE TOTAL WORK OF ART IN
EUROPEAN MODERNISM

INTRODUCTION

This is the first book in English to treat the total work of art as a key concept in aesthetic modernism, and, as far as I can see, the first to attempt an overview of the theory and history of the total work in European art since the French Revolution. It is therefore both an ambitious and necessarily preliminary undertaking, in which my guiding concern has been to demonstrate the significance of the idea of the total work for modern art and politics. The term “total work of art” translates the German *Gesamtkunstwerk*, coined by Wagner in the wake of the 1848 revolutions. If the total work of art is usually understood as the intention to reunite the arts into the one integrated work, it is tied from the beginning to the desire to recover and renew the public function of art. The synthesis of the arts in the service of social and cultural regeneration was a particularly German dream, which made Wagner and Nietzsche the other center of aesthetic modernism, alongside Baudelaire and Mallarmé. A spectrum of questions is posed by the idea of the total work of art, which run counter to key assumptions of aesthetic modernism, such as the separation and autonomy of the arts. Separation foregrounds and privileges the internal logic of the individual arts and fails to recognize the countervailing quest for synthesis, especially in avant-garde theory and practice. Autonomy foregrounds the emancipation of the arts from social controls and fails to recognize the countervailing quest for a new social role for art, especially in avant-garde theory and practice. The total work, moreover, cuts across the neat equation of avant-gardism

with progress and deconstructs the familiar left-right divide between revolution and reaction, or between the modern and the antimodern. Situated at the interface between art, religion, and politics, the total work of art invites us to rethink the relationship between art and religion, and art and politics, in European modernism.

The European reception of Wagner's music dramas and ideas from the 1880s onward, led by the French symbolists, was the catalyst that drove the quest for synthesis of the arts and the utopian dreams of cultural and political regeneration. Standing at the center of what Heidegger called the long nineteenth century, Wagner united in his theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* the two main conceptions of the total work of art that emerged out of the shock of the French Revolution and the corresponding consciousness of a new historical epoch. I therefore argue for twin lineages of the total work, a French revolutionary and a German aesthetic, which interrelate across the whole epoch of European modernism, culminating in the aesthetic and political radicalism of the avant-garde movements in response to the crisis of autonomous art and the accelerating political crisis of European societies from the 1890s on. This critical period from the turn of the century to the 1930s forms the central focus of the present study. I explore these key years of the European avant-garde from two closely related perspectives: the meta-aesthetic and the meta-political. The search for a synthesis of the arts was tied to a vision of transcendence of the sphere of art in the total work of art. These projects expressed a common will to recover the lost public function of art, a will that pointed beyond the aesthetic revolutions of the avant-garde to political revolution as the promise of a complete reunion of art and life. I examine how this will to revolution played out in relation to the totalitarian movements of the interwar years, how, that is, the avant-garde's utopian dreams of the total work found perverted realization in totalitarianism's total work of art.

* * *

The collapse of the ancien régime in France demonstrated in dramatic fashion the demise of what we may call the premodern *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which had attained its last flowering in the baroque integration of the arts. Church, palace, and opera house, and the pomp and splendor of religious services, courtly festivals, opera, and ballet, made the self-representation of absolutism into a theatrical celebration of social and religious unity. The French Revolution shattered these idols: churches became temples to national heroes (the Pantheon), palaces became national museums (the Louvre); the emancipation of art from service to throne and altar was proclaimed. The political and religious caesura of the French Revolution thus posed the question of the *destination* of art. From social patronage to the market, from the organic living totality of the setting of church and palace to the decontextualized setting of the museum and the retrospective gaze of art history, the liberating kiss of the Enlightenment ratified the *cultural secularization* of art, that is to say, the dissolution of the alliance of art, throne, and altar. Set free from patronage of the

court and from the ideological control of the church and religion, the newly gained autonomy of art becomes the source of the permanent but productive crisis that drove the quest for self-transcendence. Hans Belting speaks of art's feverish self-interrogation in the space vacated by religion.¹ Politics and art in the modern sense not only presuppose the loss of religious legitimation; they both also laid claim to the inheritance of religion in their own right.

The critique of bourgeois society and its alienations led to a plethora of countervisions of social solidarity, archaizing or futuristic in inspiration, from Romantic and catholic idealizations of the Middle Ages to anarchistic or early socialist utopias, from Saint-Simon's benevolent *régime industriel* and Comte's positivism to Marx's classless society. In art we observe two main reintegrating tendencies: the *social*, the association and collaboration of artists, from the Nazarenes at the beginning of the nineteenth century through to the bohemian countercultures and the militant avant-garde movements of the early decades of the twentieth century; and the *ideological*, the search for a new social function for art. Both these tendencies found a common focus in the unifying idea of the total work of art, which runs through the whole period of modernism from the French Revolution to the Bolshevik and Fascist revolutions. The modern idea stands, however, in an inverse relation to its premodern predecessors, whose function was to express and celebrate the existing unity of society. The modern idea of the total work of art both intends a critique of existing society and anticipates a redemptive or utopian alternative.

The total work of art in modernity can thus be thought of as a ideal focus for the persistence of the sacred in relation to culture and power: "Ever since the death of God, the religion of art of the Romantics, the new priests and seers, had entrusted to the community of artists the heritage no longer assumed by the Christian church: namely the task of winning people over by rejecting the life of this world and offering in exchange an image of a better world to come, an image able to lead people toward physical and moral perfection."² In harmony with these romantic, totalizing tendencies, the total work of art articulates a critique of modern, aesthetically differentiated art. This countermovement to our customary understanding of modern art as an end in itself is crucial to an adequate understanding of the idea of the avant-garde, which received its decisive formative impulse from the Saint-Simonians when they launched in the 1820s the project of an artistic avant-garde marching in the vanguard of social change. They envisaged a "beautiful destiny" for artists, that "of exercising in society a positive power, a truly priestly function," in association with scientists and industrialists.

1. Hans Belting, *Das unsichtbare Meisterwerk: Die modernen Mythen der Kunst* (Munich: Beck, 1998), 18.

2. Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, trans. Janet Lloyd and Thomas Lloyd (Stanford, Calif.; Stanford University Press, 2004), 7.

The artwork of the future was preceded by manifestos announcing its advent, usually in the form of philosophical-historical speculations. This is the case throughout the nineteenth century, from the French revolutionary debates on the function of festivals, Schiller and Hölderlin's visions of aesthetic education, Schelling's anticipation of a synthesis of the ancients and moderns that will consummate the modern age, Mazzini's philosophy of music, Wagner's union of art and revolution in the artwork of the future, and Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* up to Mallarmé's "dreams of a poet." But it was Wagner's writings and music dramas, along with Nietzsche's passionate advocacy and subsequent apostasy, that provided the inescapable reference point for all future developments. Wagner is perhaps unique among composers in that his extramusical influence has been even greater than his musical. The Bayreuth Festival, which was inaugurated in 1876 with the first complete performance of the *Ring* tetralogy, marked the beginning of the enthusiastic cult of Wagner and Wagnerism across Europe.³ In making the idea of a synthesis of the arts in the service of social and cultural regeneration a central focus for modernist artists, Wagner sets the stage for our investigation of the theory and practice of the total work of art in the avant-garde movements in part 2, and the path to the totalitarian total work of art in Italy, Russia, and Germany in part 3.

In the decisive years of the European avant-garde, from Marinetti's 1909 futurist manifesto to the last manifesto of surrealism in 1938, we observe a far-reaching convergence between the idea of the total work and the spirit of avant-gardism. A recent comprehensive collection of avant-garde manifestos from this period identifies their common tendency as a totalizing impulse directed against all existing institutions.⁴ Let me highlight two main themes that emerge from the examination of the avant-garde from the point of view of the total work of art.

First, the dialectic of *analysis and synthesis* in avant-garde art has not received sufficient attention. The search for synthesis runs counter to the logic of differentiation and the corresponding self-reflexive explorations of the formal and technical possibilities of each of the arts, which attained a new stage of intensity with the simultaneous moves to atonality in music and to nonfiguration and abstraction in painting, immediately prior to the First World War. If this analytic line of the *absolute work* represents the historically more significant line of development, it needs to be seen nonetheless in terms of the countervailing will to the *total work*. When Wassily Kandinsky distinguishes between "two extremely powerful tendencies" in contemporary art—"a tendency towards the unification of the arts" as against "the tendency of each art to become immersed in itself"—it is in order to argue in his "Programme for the Institute of Artistic Culture," for the Moscow

3. Daniel Large and William Weber, eds., *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

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

institute of which he was briefly director in 1920, that analysis finds its justification in the service of synthesis. Oskar Schlemmer, one of the leading figures of the Bauhaus, neatly sums up the dialectic of analysis and synthesis, of absolute work and total work: “One of the emblems of our time is *abstraction*. It functions, on the one hand, to disconnect components from an existing and persisting whole, either to lead them individually *ad absurdum* or to elevate them to their highest potential. On the other hand, abstraction can result in generalization and summation, in the construction in bold outline of a new totality.” The creative search for alternatives to Wagner’s own theory and practice made the idea of the total work of art a screen on which were projected the most varied visions of aesthetic synthesis, which I attempt to map in terms of a typology of the theory and practice of the union of the arts in the theatre from fin-de-siècle symbolism through to Artaud’s theatre of cruelty in the 1930s.

The second theme of importance is the totalizing impulse of the avant-garde, based on the apparently irresistible analogy between the reintegration of the arts and the reintegration of society. This impulse appears particularly clearly in the search for an artistic mission and a social function that goes beyond the limits of autonomous art. While avant-garde programmes for cultural and political renewal are widely recognized, the religious or more generally the spiritual dimensions of avant-garde art have attracted comparatively little attention. It is not by chance that there is a strong connection between the total work of art and the question of sacred art in modernity. The idea of the total work of art highlights the ambiguous place of art between religion and politics. This applies as much to the aestheticism of the fin de siècle as to the revolt of the futurists and expressionists against their symbolist origins. Aestheticism’s religion of art, inspired by Wagner’s fusion of art and religion in *Parsifal*, found its extreme expression in Mallarmé’s and Scriabin’s projects for an ultimate theatrical Mystery capable of reuniting poet and people, composer and world. Kandinsky and his fellow artists in the Blaue Reiter affirmed “the spiritual in art.” The theatre reform movement from Alphonse Appia, Georg Fuchs, and Gordon Craig through to Artaud sought inspiration in the return to the sacred and popular origins of theatre. Hofmannsthal, Claudel, and Brecht in the 1920s reworked the religious tradition of world theatre for Catholic or Communist purposes.

Part 3 covers the same critical years of European modernism as Part 2 but with a new focus: the meta-political imaginary of the total work in relation to the totalitarian movements of the twentieth century. In part 2, Wagner provides the indispensable reference point. The French Revolution—and Nietzsche—are central to the argument of part 3. The political legacy of the Revolution, the entwined myths of revolution and nation, began to unravel in and after the 1848–49 revolutions and to separate into the two, increasingly hostile camps of socialism and nationalism, attaining their extreme expression in the rival totalitarian movements that emerged from World War I. It is therefore important to distinguish between continuities

and discontinuities in relation to the original French revolutionary paradigm. Continuity is most readily apparent in the generic and functional similarity between the French revolutionary festivals and the mass rallies and mass spectacles in the Russian, Italian, and German revolutions, predicated on their common function of mobilizing and manifesting the revolutionary dynamic of the masses. And yet, for all that the Marxist ideology of the Bolshevik Revolution and the ideology of the Fascist movements originate in the nineteenth century, it is clear that the totalitarian regimes constituted something radically new and that their total challenge to liberal society could only have come out of the total crisis of the Great War.

In terms of the radically new, my primary interest lies in the political activism of the avant-garde, which sprang from the presumed revolutionary affinity between the artistic avant-garde and the political vanguard, the source of the highly productive ferment of avant-garde experiments and expectations in the 1920s. That these expectations could embrace opposed ideological extremes appears particularly clearly in the sharply diverging paths of futurism in Italy and Russia. The Italian and Russian futurists did share, however, the same iconoclastic will to sacrifice the art of the past to the imperatives of modernization. Walter Benjamin's famous opposition of the Fascist aestheticization of politics and the Communist politicization of art recognizes but underplays their common ground: avant-garde radicalism, driven by the desire to break through the limits separating art and reality, art and social or political action. In this sense the perversion of the idea of the total work of art in totalitarianism reveals a perversion latent in the hubris of aesthetic and political modernism.

* * *

Now that I have sketched the framework of my inquiry, we can turn to the *definition* of the total work that underpins the present study. First, a couple of terminological clarifications are called for. *Modernity* stands for the complex of changes that produced a new kind of society and a new historical consciousness of a radical break with the past, symbolized by the caesura of the French Revolution. As Hans Blumenberg observes, "Modernity was the first and only age that understood itself as an epoch and, in so doing, simultaneously created other epochs."⁵ *Modernism* as ism signifies historicist interpretations of modernity as a new epoch. *Postmodernism* signifies those interpretations of modernity that question or reject the grand narratives of modernism as progress, decadence, or nihilism, and signals in this sense the end of the *epoch of modernism*, which is used here as a period concept, denoting the age of European high culture from the French Revolution to the end of the Second World War, as opposed to the more narrow periodizations of aesthetic modernism ranging between 1848 and the 1930s, as well as those that extend it into the 1960s.

5. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983), 116.

I am treating the period 1890 into the 1930s as the core period of aesthetic modernism under the creative and critical sign of the avant-garde.

My definition of the total work builds on that of Roger Fornoff in his 650-page monograph, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk* (The Longing for the Total Work of Art). Fornoff is the first to have undertaken a systematic historical and theoretical reconstruction of what he calls an aesthetic conception of modernism/modernity. It is truly a pioneering effort and establishes an indispensable reference for further investigations.⁶ Although I have a number of reservations, I shall be working with Fornoff's definition, which captures the two essential elements of Wagner's understanding of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—aesthetic and social synthesis. The total work of art is characterized for Fornoff by four basic structural components:

- i. An inter- or multimedial union of different arts in relation to a comprehensive vision of the world and society
- ii. An implicit or explicit theory of the ideal union of the arts
- iii. A closed worldview, combining a social-utopian or historical-philosophical or metaphysical-religious image of the whole with a radical critique of existing society and culture
- iv. A projection of an aesthetic-social or aesthetic-religious utopia, which looks to the power of art for its expression and as the aesthetic means to a transformation of society

However important the political, social, or religious elements, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* remains explicitly aesthetic.⁷ Fornoff's definition has, like all definitions, a double function. On the one hand, it aims to capture the defining core of the concept; on the other, as *heuristic instrument*, it is to serve as analytic probe. The core consists of the *combination* of two elements, an inter- or multimedial union of the arts together with a comprehensive vision of the world. The combination is determining: if we confine ourselves to the theory and practice of the union of the arts, the field loses

6. Roger Fornoff, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk: Studien zu einer ästhetischen Konzeption der Moderne* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2004). See my review essay: David Roberts, "The Total Work of Art," *Thesis Eleven* 83 (2005): 104–21. Two monographs have appeared since Fornoff: Anke Finger, *Das Gesamtkunstwerk der Moderne* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006); and Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Finger adds nothing of consequence to Fornoff's study; Smith does through his investigation of the connection between the total work of art and multimedia developments in mass culture before and after World War II, which I briefly examine in the conclusion. A third monograph, Marcella Lista, *L'oeuvre d'art totale à la naissance des avant-gardes (1908–1914)* (Paris: CTHS, 2006), comes closest to my intention despite its very narrow periodization of the avant-garde movements. Lista sees the idea of the total work, understood as the totalizing will to the unity of the arts as a reflection of the unity of life, as fundamental to the genesis of the avant-gardes—in particular futurism, expressionism, abstraction—in the years 1908 to 1913.

7. Fornoff, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk*, 20–21.

all contours; if we confine ourselves to worldview, the field shrinks to the standpoint of the individual artist. Worldviews, comprising a utopian, philosophical, or religious image of the whole, thus look to and presuppose the socially transformative powers of art. We can rephrase the intention of Fornoff's definition in the following way: the total work of art seeks to convey a world vision, anticipate a future utopian or redeemed state of society, and act as the medium of such a transformation. We find a comparable formulation in Marcella Lista's definition of Wagner's artwork of the future: the totalizing union of the arts, as the reflection of the deep unity of life, is directed to the goal of making aesthetic experience the yeast of a society to come.⁸ It was Wagner above all who made the idea of the synthesis of the arts in the service of social and cultural regeneration a central focus for aesthetic modernism. But if his works and his writings provide the dominant reference for subsequent developments, these appear primarily in the form of a search for alternatives to his own theory and practice. As Lista puts it, Wagner set in train a new exploration of the stage as the site of the totalization of aesthetic forms.⁹

With reference to *worldviews*: the idea of the total work is tied to philosophies of history in which the total work appears as the artwork of the future; that is to say, it must pay tribute to modern historical consciousness by projecting its utopian or redemptive vision into speculative constructions of a once and future artwork. These projections, which all imply a fundamental questioning of the modern separation of art, religion, and politics, form the defining characteristic of the *manifestos* of the total work of art from Schelling through to Ernst Bloch's romantic-revolutionary spirit of utopia or Artaud's theatre of cruelty. The importance of these aesthetic counterimaginaries is underlined by the "exceptional consensus that united all the thinkers of modernity" from Kant to Bataille on the subject of art, which made art what Jean-Joseph Goux has called the "unanimous utopia" (more exactly, the unanimous counterutopia to the scientific utopia) of the moderns.¹⁰ Such counterimaginaries or alternative modernities, whether aesthetic, political, economic, or scientific in nature, define the utopian horizon but also the dystopian limits of modernity. The complexity and pluralism of modern society both provoke and relativize all such retotalizing visions; in this sense they partake as *discourses* in the self-interrogation and debates at the heart of modernity's cultural and political identity, which it is the function of high culture to articulate. Totalitarianism's claim to a total resolution of the contradictions of modernity therefore signified the destruction of modernity's high culture, just as the totalitarian claim to total power signified the destruction of democratic politics.¹¹

8. Lista, *L'oeuvre d'art totale*, 6.

9. Ibid, 5. Lista understands the persistent tendency to the totalization of the arts as the attempt to attain through art a form of universal truth together with initiatory and revelatory experience (289).

10. Jean-Joseph Goux, "The Eclipse of Art?" *Thesis Eleven* 44 (1996): 57–58.

11. In the light of these remarks, it is necessary to highlight the contrasting role of literature, the modern art-form par excellence with its dependence on the market in place of patronage, as the bearer

In relation to Fornoff's final point, the total work as the *aesthetic means to social transformation*, two comments are called for. The idea of the total work is associated from the beginning with the dream of reviving the civil religion and the art religion of antiquity. The collective dimension of *reception* is therefore integral to the idea of the total work and appears particularly clearly in the illusory project of the collective work creating its representative audience and vice versa. The "representative" audience, beyond all social divisions, is to give back to the artwork its lost social function. This populist notion lies at the heart of the dream of a participatory theatre and politics beyond representation. It is present in the pure, unmediated unity of Rousseau's and Robespierre's virtuous people, and in the romantic-revolutionary appeals of Michelet or Wagner to the spontaneous creativity of the people, to which corresponds the genius of the artist as the medium of the people's deepest aspirations. The alliance between the people and the artist-genius (from Wagner to Mallarmé, from d'Annunzio to Mussolini and Hitler) is a recurrent feature of modernism and emblematic of what Habermas terms its "aesthetic core."¹²

My second comment is of greater import. Fornoff resists the extension of the concept of the total work, confining it to artworks, artistic projects and conceptions. By confining the total work to the aesthetic realm, Fornoff excludes the dimension of the political from his definition. This has two major consequences. Owing to his concentration on the German tradition, the French genealogy of the total work remains out of focus. We need to add to Fornoff's theatrical and the architectonic archetypes of the total work that of the *popular festival*, modeled on the civil religions of antiquity. The French preoccupation with civil religion—from Rousseau to Robespierre, from Saint-Simon and Comte to Durkheim and beyond—sprang from the fear that the loss of the socially binding power of religion in postrevolutionary society would lead to anomie, atomization, and social disintegration. Rousseau's opposition of the whole human being, incarnated in the community, to the fragmented existence of the socially alienated individual informs both the French and the German visions of a reconciliation of the individual and society.

The festival of the people adds a crucial dimension to the definition of the total work of art and thematizes the equally crucial question of participation. The

of the consciousness of the processes of individualization, temporalization, and historicization constitutive of cultural modernity. In its capacity for self-reflection, literature stands as the antithesis to the idea of the total work. Directed to the solitary reader, the novel has an individualizing function, which privileges through irony, parody, and satire meaning over presence, critical reflection over collective identification. The novel no longer claims to be a vehicle of truth in the Hegelian sense. On the contrary, it is defined by its essentially demythicizing intention, as opposed to the remythicizing interest of the romance. Much of the lack of recognition that a writer such as John Cowper Powys has encountered derives from the critical failure to distinguish between the novel and the romance in relation precisely to such works as *The Glastonbury Romance*.

12. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983), 8. See also Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. and trans. Christopher Fynsk (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

function of the total work—as theatre or festival—is predicated on the overcoming of the (modern) separation of actors and spectators, producing, in Derrida’s paradoxical formulation, a theatre without representation. Thus the goal of the total work would be the elimination of all objectifying and distancing frames and boundaries in and through the participation—in ever-widening circles of totalization—of audience, community, people, or nation, which would have to await the new media of communication in the twentieth century for a full realization. And this brings me to the second consequence of the omission of the political. The other side to French thinking on civic religion appeared in the social psychology of the urban-industrial masses advanced by Gustave Le Bon and Georges Sorel, the prelude to the potent combination of manipulation and myth in the mass politics of Mussolini and Hitler. We cannot simply treat the Fascist aestheticization of politics as a perversion of the idea of the total work of art without examining the historical-genetic affinity of the total work and the totalitarian state. As the preceding points indicate, I am arguing for an *intrinsic relationship* between the total work of art and the avant-garde, as well as an undeniable *affinity* with totalitarianism, underpinned by the links between the artistic avant-garde and the revolutionary vanguard party. The perspective opened up by the idea and practice of the total work of art offers a necessary and long overdue complement and corrective to the purely aesthetic understanding of the critical years of European modernism.

* * *

To recapitulate: the argument of the present study is structured in three parts. Part 1, “The Artwork of the Future,” traces the idea of the total work across the nineteenth century from the French Revolution through to the Wagnerism of the fin de siècle. Rousseau’s critique of representation in the theatre and in politics provides our starting point. His antitheatrical ideal of the popular festival inspired French revolutionary attempts to make such festivals central to the new civil religion of the nation (chapter 1). The Revolution triggered in turn intense discussions among German poets and thinkers on the possibilities of aesthetic politics and a new mythology for the new age (chapter 2). Both the French and the Germans looked to the public life of the polis in antiquity as models for the reintegration of art, religion, and politics: Sparta in the case of Rousseau and the French revolutionaries, Athens in the case of the Germans. The revolutionary festival and the festival drama thus figure as paradigms of the two main lines of the total work, which Wagner, enthused by the 1848–49 revolutions, sought to combine in the artwork of the future. Wagner’s inspiration for the artwork of the future and for a liberated humanity came from his vision of the Athenian polis as itself a work of art that found the supreme expression of its political-religious unity and identity in the tragic dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles. The union of art, religion, and politics in Athenian tragedy is to be recreated in music drama, just as the modern synthesis of the arts, in which the orchestra takes the place of the Greek

chorus, is intended to give life and body to the vision of social synthesis (chapter 3). In their critical responses to Wagner, Nietzsche and Mallarmé articulate the two poles of the total work, the political and the spiritual respectively. Mallarmé's grandiose idea of the Book as symbolist Mystery announces the avant-garde quest for a resacralized theatre; Nietzsche's prophecy of the coming theatrical age of the political actor and the masses foreshadows the mass politics of the twentieth century (chapter 4).

In part 2 the quest for "the spiritual in art" (Kandinsky) forms the organizing perspective of our investigation of some of the most important avant-garde projects directed to a realization of the total work of art. The analyses of individual artworks and projects are grouped around four main themes. The first concerns the total work as *symbol*. Wagner's *Parsifal*, one of the most important inspirations for the European symbolist movement, stands as the paradigm of the restoration of the symbolic function of art and of the will to the resacralization of the stage (chapter 5). The total work as *apocalypse* has as its focus the paradox of the impossible masterpiece. Mallarmé's Book and Scriabin's Mystery defy the possibility of realization. The idea of the absolute and the total work fuse here in a virtuality, which is fascinating in that the two projects present the pure limit-case for the transcendence of the boundaries of art and thus of the spiritual in art (chapter 6). The total work as *synthesis of the arts* is examined through three representative examples: Stravinsky's collaboration with the Ballets Russes; Kandinsky and Schoenberg's experiments with alternatives to the Wagnerian conception of the union of the arts in the music drama; and Bruno Taut's manifesto for the crystal cathedral as the transcendent spiritual center of the city (chapter 7). The total work as the *re-generation of sacred theatre* is examined in relation to the theory and practice of Hofmannsthal and Claudel, Brecht, and Artaud. In conclusion I sketch out a typology of the implicit or explicit theory and practice of the union of the arts in relation to the theatre, which all respond directly or indirectly to Wagner (chapter 8).

In Russia, Italy, and Germany the avant-gardes formed the bridge between the nineteenth-century idea of the total work and the postwar revolutionary regimes and their totalitarian ideologies. In part 3, "The Sublime in Politics," I trace one of the paths to the totalitarian total work with reference to the crucial role of d'Annunzio, Marinetti, and Jünger, the disciples of Nietzsche, in the Fascist aestheticization of politics. In relation to the Communist politicization of art, the crucial question concerns the tense relations between art and revolution, avant-garde and vanguard party, whose terminus was the Stalinist state, built on the destruction of the old Bolshevik and artistic elites. The Bolshevik Revolution thus presents the *limit case* for the Saint-Simonian destination of the avant-garde. If in comparable fashion the Third Reich marked the terminus for the aestheticization of politics, the Fascist total work of art arrived at its totalitarian "realization" in a form that to my mind is only partially captured by Benjamin's concept of aestheticization. Although Odo Marquard in his typology of the total work of art derives the totalitarian total work of art from

Benjamin, defining it as the staging of the *state of emergency*,¹³ I want to argue that the aesthetic category that corresponds to the state of emergency is the *sublime*—a conception of the sublime, however, that comes from Nietzsche, not Kant. It is not only a question of the suspension and paralysis of the faculties in a state of terror; the creation of the new collective man demanded the sublime passage of death. To the last, National Socialism exalted the sacrificial death of the hero as the lifeblood of the national community. Bolshevism for its part staged in the show trials of the 1930s the liquidation of the enemies of the revolution—the sublime, purifying logic rehearsed by Bertolt Brecht in his didactic plays at the end of the 1920s. Not only is the sublime, if we follow Lyotard, the defining category of modern art; it is equally, if we follow Arendt, the defining category of totalitarianism. Arendt defined the *novum* of totalitarianism in terms of the terror that explodes “the very alternative upon which all definitions of the essence of government have been based in political philosophy, that is the alternative between lawful and lawless government, between arbitrary and legitimate power.”¹⁴ In his 1936–37 lectures on Nietzsche, “The Will to Power as Art,” Heidegger observes that the question of the sublime explodes every true aesthetics, even that of Kant, because it explodes the very subjectivity of the subject.¹⁵ As the *liminal* experience par excellence, the sublime signifies the abyssal ground of modern, secularized art and politics, which refers on the one hand to a meta-aesthetic imaginary, tied to the destination or the “end” of (aesthetically differentiated) art, and on the other to a meta-political imaginary, tied to the destination or “end” of (functionally differentiated) politics. In each case the redemptive claim to a transcendence of the defining limits and contradictions of the respective spheres was ultimately destructive in its consequences.

Nietzsche’s reversal or “taking back” of Kant’s theory of the sublime is central to the argument of part 3. Romain Rolland’s *Théâtre du peuple* and d’Annunzio’s novel *Il fuoco* represent in particularly clear fashion at the turn of the century the dual lineage of the total work of art. Both texts have in common in the context of fin-de-siècle decadence the theme of national regeneration: in the service of socialism with Rolland (1866–1944), who draws his inspiration from the French Revolution, and in the service of nationalism with d’Annunzio (1863–1938), who draws his inspiration from Wagner and Nietzsche. Each author dreams of the total work that will transcend the limits of the theatre to effect a sublime union of art and life through the mobilization of the masses (chapter 9). This is the guiding theme of the last two chapters: the path to the totalitarian total work in Russia (chapter 10) and in Germany (chapter 11).

13. Odo Marquard, “Gesamtkunstwerk und Identitätssystem,” in *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk: Europäische Utopien seit 1800*, ed. Harald Szeemann (Aarau: Sauerländer, 1983), 40–49.

14. Hannah Arendt, “Ideology and Terror: A Form of Government,” in *Totalitarianism: Part Three of the Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 159.

15. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 1, *The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 123.

PART I

THE ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE

REFOUNDING SOCIETY

Ancients and Moderns: Rousseau's Civil Religion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. *Social Contract*, 2.7, in *Social Contract: Essays by Locke, Hume, and Rousseau*, ed. Ernest Baker (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), 291.
 4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts, Letter to M. D’Alembert on the Theatre*, ed. Allan Bloom (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1960), 125–26.

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

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

5. Ibid., 135.

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

7. Ibid., 133.

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

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

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

The Festivals of the French Revolution

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

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

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

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

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

11. *Ibid.*, 6.

12. *Ibid.*, 3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

20. Dowd, *Pageant Master*, 95.

21. *Ibid.*, 97.

22. *Ibid.*, 79.

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

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

23. *Ibid.*, 110–13.

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

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

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

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

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

26. *Ibid.*, 411.

27. *Ibid.*, 410–11.

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

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

Revolution and Representation

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

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

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

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

31. *Ibid.*, 275.

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

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

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

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

34. *Ibid.*, 51.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Abyss of Political Foundation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE DESTINATION OF ART

The Secularization of Art: Quatremère de Quincy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Aesthetic Education: Schiller

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

14. Schelling speaks in 1803 of the festivals, monuments, plays, and public affairs of antiquity as the various branches of the “one general objective and living work of art.” Friedrich Schelling, *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*, lecture 14, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Abt. 1 (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856), 5: 352. See also the section “The Living Work of Art” in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). The progression from “the abstract work of art” to “the living work of art” signifies the passage from the *cult* devoted to the gods to the *festival* of the people.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

19. *Ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Aesthetic Revolution: Hölderlin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Destiny of Art: Hegel

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

37. See the section "The Place of Art in Relation to Religion and Philosophy" in the introduction to part 1 of the *Lectures on Aesthetics*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PROPHETS AND PRECURSORS: PARIS 1830–1848

Organic and Critical Epochs: Saint-Simon

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13. *Ibid.*, Session 3, 55–56.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Musical Palingenesis: Mazzini and Balzac

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

35. Belting, *Invisible Masterpiece*, 8.

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

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

The Musical City: Berlioz

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ancients and Moderns: Wagner

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

STAGING THE ABSOLUTE

Modernism or the Long Nineteenth Century

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Birth of Tragedy: Nietzsche

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, 784.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Great Work: Mallarmé

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

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

16. *Ibid.*, 66.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

32. *Ibid.*, 541.

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

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

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

34. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, 395.

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

36. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in zwei Bänden* (Munich: Hanser, 1967), 1: 225.

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

Dialectic of Enlightenment: From the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century

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

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

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

38. *Ibid.*, 2: 302.

39. *Ibid.*, 2: 300.

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

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

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

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

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

42. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, 390.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

47. *Ibid.*, 210–11.

48. *Ibid.*, 394.

49. *Ibid.*, 444, 446.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

54. *Ibid.*, 75.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

57. Burrows, *Distorting Mirrors*, 179.

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

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

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

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

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

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 *Orestia* 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 Wagners '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 Wagner's '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 theological 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 musicodramatic 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 Stammler, “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.

* * *

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 *Livre* 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

* * *

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 spirituel," 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 urdrama 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, in-existent. 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 palpating 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 Nemin 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. Nemin’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 musical* 16 (1935): 107; quoted in Shaw–Miller, “Skriabin and Obukhov,” 23.

77. Shaw–Miller, “Skriabin 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 Fornoff, *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 generis*²⁸—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 Burluk 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 Steegmuller, *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 Skryabin* (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 Scheerbarth 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 Scheerbarth'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 Francisco, *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 Hellbrunn 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”?

* * *

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 Babet 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-scène."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, *Brecht’s 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 (Claudél'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.

PART III

THE SUBLIME IN POLITICS

NATIONAL REGENERATION

The Community to Come

In chapter 1 the concept of the sublime in politics or the political sublime was introduced in relation to the founding moment of political modernity: the dissolution of institutions and the return of the social to its origins in the French Revolution. This is the abyss of political foundation, as theorized by Marc Richir: the liminal experience of the passage from the old world of absolutism to a new world, in which the utopian image of community emerged as in a dream from the anarchy of liberty, equality, and fraternity. This dream experience, this popular enthusiasm, constitutes for Richir the sublime instituting moment of the Revolution, sublime because it could not be represented and institutionalized. Despite its provenance in antiquity, the concept of the sublime is essentially a modern invention: the ongoing reevaluation of the sublime in the “double aesthetics” of the sublime and the beautiful in European art since the eighteenth century corresponds and responds to the withdrawal of the divine in modernity.¹ It indicates that the sublime has become the privileged proxy of the sacred, and that the ambiguities of the aesthetic judgment of the sublime reflect the rediscovered and henceforth constitutive ambiguity

1. For the double aesthetics of modernity, see Peter Murphy and David Roberts, *Dialectic of Romanticism: A Critique of Modernism* (London: Continuum, 2004), 27–32.

of the concept. At the same time, precisely as an *aesthetic* category, the concept of the sublime attempts to contain, distance, and master the threatening and destructive force and fascination of the unbounded. In similar fashion, the privileging of nature as the sublime object of aesthetic theory can be thought of as a displacement of violence and terror from the human to the “inhuman” natural world. This displacement points to the need to posit in addition to the aesthetic sublime the *political* sublime. In speaking of the sublime in the political, as opposed to politics, Richir can distinguish between the revolutionary moment of the return of the social to its origins and its subsequent recollection and celebration in the revolutionary festivals. The festivals thus came to be conceived as both the product and the producer of the sublime re-fusion and regeneration of the social body.² In similar fashion the festival or the festival drama as total work of art came to be conceived as the aesthetic pledge of the community to come, just as the founding revolution of modernity pointed to the revolution to come that will claim to realize—as with the Bolshevik Revolution—or undo—as with the Fascist movements—the legacy of the French Revolution.

The present chapter consists of two parts: first, two texts that appeal to the community to come, Romain Rolland’s *Théâtre du peuple* (1903) and Gabriele d’Annunzio’s novel *Il fuoco* (1900), chosen because they represent in particularly clear form at the turn of the century the two lines of the nineteenth-century inheritance, with clear links (in retrospect) to the Russian and Italian revolutions respectively. In addition, the Italian text leads into the question of the *genealogy* of the Fascist aestheticization of politics, addressed in the second part of the chapter. Both texts have in common in the context of fin-de-siècle decadence the theme of national regeneration, in the service of socialism with Rolland (1866–1944), who draws his inspiration from the French Revolution, and in the service of nationalism with d’Annunzio (1863–1938), who draws his inspiration from Wagner and Nietzsche. Each author dreams of the total work that will transcend the limits of the theatre to effect a reunion of art and life through the mobilization of the masses. Both texts thus stand in the continuity of the conjurations of the total work across the nineteenth century. Their interest for our purposes lies in their relation to the postwar totalitarian revolutions. The connection in the case of Rolland is straightforward; the reception of *Le théâtre du peuple* in Russia underlined the continuity (at least initially) between the French and the Russian revolutions (see chapter 10). The connection in the case of d’Annunzio is more substantial in that he is acknowledged as a crucial figure—together with the futurists—in the elaboration

2. Jeffrey Alexander’s definition of the symbolic action through which the community represents itself to itself as the infusing of meaning by refusing performance applies particularly well to the French Revolution’s conception of the popular festival. Alexander understands by re-fusion the temporary recovery of the ritual process, which makes social life possible by sustaining myth. “Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy,” in *Social Performance*, ed. Jeffrey Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29–90.

of a Fascist aestheticization of politics, the focus of the final chapter in this book (chapter 11).

Romain Rolland: *Le théâtre du peuple*

Romain Rolland's manifesto for a people's theatre is dedicated to Maurice Pottecher (1867–1960), who inaugurated the first People's Theatre in Bussang, Alsace, on 22 September 1892, the centenary of the proclamation of the French Republic.³ In March 1899 a group of young writers associated with *Revue d'art dramatique* announced a competition for the best project for a popular theatre with the aim of establishing a people's theatre in Paris, to be judged by a jury that included Émile Zola, Anatole France, Octave Mirbeau, Édouard Schuré, Pottecher, and Rolland. Their circular declared the project to be a matter of life and death for art and for the people. If art does not open up to the people, it is destined to disappear with the society it represents. If the people does not find the path to art, humanity will fail its destiny (211). Diagnosis and prognosis are familiar: the crisis of modern art, evident in the elitist posturing of aestheticism, underlines the need for a reunion of art and life. This is the message of Rolland's book-manifesto, which he called a war machine against an ancient decadent society and intended as the complement to his own dramas on the French Revolution, a cycle of eight plays stretching from 1900 to 1939. Introduced by a speech of Jean Jaurès, Rolland's *Danton* was performed in December 1900 in Louis Lumet's Théâtre Civique in Paris to raise money for striking workers, followed by Rolland's "action populaire," *Le quatorze juillet*, in March 1902. The aim of the plays was to revive revolutionary energies in order to complete the goals of the Revolution, interrupted in 1794, through the mobilization of the people, which is now more mature and conscious of its destiny (95). Rolland found a congenial director in Firmin Gémier, the cofounder with André Antoine of the Théâtre Libre in Paris in the 1890s: "For Gémier as for Rolland, theater was theater only to the extent that it produced collective movement, emotion, com-motion." Gémier's ambition was to break free of the constraints of the theatre stage in order to realize a true spectacle. In his book on the theatre (1925) he writes that there is "nothing more captivating in reality and in art than the spiritual communion of the crowd."⁴ Rolland constructed the last act of *Le quatorze juillet* as an epiphany of the people in which actors and audience merged in revolutionary song. The last play in the cycle, *Robespierre* (1939), ends in similar fashion with "The Internationale" rising above "The Marseillaise."

3. Romain Rolland, *Le théâtre du peuple: Essai d'esthétique d'un théâtre nouveau* (1903; Paris: Albin Michel, 1913), 88. Parenthetical page references in the text refer to this edition.

4. Frederick Brown, *Theater and Revolution: The Culture of the French Stage* (New York: Viking, 1980), 292.

Rolland's goal of creating a new art for a new world allowed no compromises in the life-and-death struggle between the past and the future. The art of the past is dying, destined for the necropolis of our historicism, the museum. Rolland scrutinizes the theatre of the past in search of resources for the new theatre. Shakespeare is too distant and too obscure for the people; French drama, with the exception of Molière, is judged and found wanting, whether it be Racine's tragedies, Hugo's romantic drama, or the Byzantine neoromanticism of contemporary drama, which panders to an idle and degenerate bourgeoisie. Rolland's yardstick is *truth* not beauty. A people can do without beauty; it cannot do without truth, the source of all greatness (33). This truth does not spare those who set out to write for the people: Tolstoy, Gorki, and Hauptmann failed because they aimed their plays at the conscience of the bourgeoisie or at a revolutionary elite of the people. This leaves Wagner sole master of the field: "The most sovereign creator in music since Beethoven was also the most sovereign creator in drama since Schiller and Goethe" (47). The model of popular theatre provided by *Die Meistersinger* cannot be followed, however, in France because the musical education of the people has hardly begun. The young Rolland, we may recall, had championed Wagner together with his fellow pupil Claudel at public concerts in Paris ten or more years earlier. If the composer is still for Rolland the greatest artist of our time (167), he nevertheless belongs to the past: "The theatre of Wagner is poisoned, despite its grandeur, by unhealthy dreams, which reflect the milieu in which it was born, the aristocracy of decadent art, which has arrived at the end of its evolution and almost of its life. What gain could the people draw from the morbid complications of this sensibility, from the metaphysics of Valhalla, from the mystical-carnal torments of the knights of the Grail?" (47).

Having surveyed the theatre of the past, Rolland has found nothing that can serve the new theatre. What he has found, however, are some kindred spirits—Rousseau, Diderot, Michelet—and some projects of the Revolution. Rousseau's advocacy of a regeneration of drama and of popular festivals gives him a double claim to be the founding father of popular theatre. Gémier also looked throughout his directing career to Rousseau and to the festivals of Revolution for his inspiration. For the 1903 centenary of the Swiss canton of Vaud's accession to the Helvetic Federation Gémier devised a grand pageant with 2,400 actors for an amphitheatre overlooking Lake Geneva, which reached its climax when the entire audience became participants in the action. In 1914 he produced an adaptation of *Oedipus Rex* in the Cirque d'Hiver in Paris. The production was to form the inaugural event in a series entitled Olympic Games, intended to honor Rousseau's expectation of the withering away of indoor theatre and his vision of citizens exercising their Spartan virtue in martial gatherings. Besides Rousseau, Rolland also draws attention to the prerevolutionary calls by Louis-Sebastian Mercier and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre for the creation of a popular theatre capable of combining the aesthetic conceptions of Shakespeare with Rousseau's moral concerns to create a national drama.

Rolland discusses at greater length the French revolutionaries from Mirabeau and Talleyrand to Saint-Just and Robespierre, who proposed and debated the question of a theatre for the people, and adds an appendix on the principal decrees of the Revolution concerning theatres and festivals. Thus the Committee of Public Safety proposed and the Convention decreed on 4 August 1793 that from 4 August to 1 September there be performed in Paris “republican tragedies such as *Brutus*, *Wilhelm Tell*, *Caius Gracchus* . . . at the expense of the Republic” (77). In November 1793 the plan was adopted to establish national theatres to complement and complete the public festivals as a national enterprise, because the social and pedagogical purpose of the theatre should not be the object of financial speculation.⁵ It was followed in 1794 by what Rolland calls “the founding charter of the theatre of the people” (78), the decision by the Committee of Public Safety to consecrate the former Théâtre-Français to “representations given by and for the people” and henceforth renamed Théâtre du Peuple.” The municipalities were summoned in turn to organize their own free civic spectacles. A People’s Theatre required, however, a repertoire. The committee therefore called on poets in May 1794 to celebrate the principal events of the Revolution and to compose republican dramas, a regenerative task to be supervised by the Committee for Public Instruction.

Decrees were not sufficient, however, to create a national theatre. Rolland ruefully concedes that there exists no French revolutionary drama to be placed alongside the paintings of David or the music of Méhul, Lesueur, Gossec, and Cherubini. In fact, the greatest poet of the Revolution had been Schiller, and its greatest composer Beethoven. Parisian audiences preferred the new entertainments of vaudeville and operetta to republican dramas, leading Rolland to conclude that in its sublime spectacle the Revolution had written its own tragedy. Nor can Rolland draw on any later continuation of the Revolution in the theatre, leaving Michelet as the sole link between the Committee of Public Safety and Rolland’s committee a hundred years later. Rolland’s own ideas about a monumental art for and by the people do not, however, go beyond such generalities as the need to depict on stage the movements of masses, the action of the people. Although Rolland excludes the Wagnerian model of music drama, he regards melodrama as the law of popular theatre, whether Greek or Elizabethan. By melodrama he understands laughter and tears, comic interludes, delight in stage spectacle, that is to say, true emotions, true realism, simple morality (134). Besides melodrama, he calls for national epics,

5. Gémier tried to combine theatre and festival in his national enterprise. He was fascinated by David’s Mountain as the centerpiece of the Festival of the Supreme Being, which he saw as the image of the people’s return to nature, to the sacred mountain on which a tree symbolized the people’s collective soul. It led him to dream of creating a popular religion based on regional festivals: “Each Festival will be tantamount to one act of an immense play that will magnify the life of the people and be enacted by the people itself in that majestic theater whose stage is the soil of France. Thus we shall establish a *culte extérieur* whose social credo requires the liturgy which is still missing from our civil religion.” Brown, *Theater and Revolution*, 295.

on the model of Shakespeare's history plays, which France lacks. While the melodrama confirms the simple morality of the triumph of the Good, the national epic will be directed to creating the new man and his truth: "May the life of all times form a whole indissolubly united, a mountain in movement, a single Being which lives in millions of breasts and climbs by a million paths to the assault of the universe, which it will one day dominate" (144).

Given the absence of any vital tradition of popular theatre, it is hardly surprising that Rolland wanted to go beyond the limits of the theatre. However uplifting, the theatre is always a compensation, a dream compared with the glorious spectacle offered by humanity's progress. "A happy and free people needs festivals more than theatres: it will always be its own most beautiful spectacle. Let us prepare festivals for the people to come." (154) To go beyond the theatre, Rolland goes back once more to Rousseau and the French Revolution, declaring that David's organization of the revolutionary festivals, including that of the Supreme Being, revealed a greater originality than the entire theatre of the eighteenth century (157). Like the young Wagner, he makes the Revolution the source of the avant-garde's dream of the redemptive sublation of art. Rolland quotes Wagner: "Art commences where life ceases. The work of art expresses our unrealized dreams. Art is the avowal of our impotence" (167). Rolland is happy to accept that this means the end of artistic theatre. Only from its ruins can popular art be reborn. At the same time he is fully aware that the invocation of "the people to come" is also an avowal of impotence: "You want an art of the people? Begin by having a people" (169).

Rolland's activist avant-gardism had somewhat cooled when he came to write a preface to the second edition of his book in 1913. He speaks of it as a historical document, reflecting the artistic ideas and hopes of a generation, the pure and holy faith of our youth in a coming resurrection. "Forgive the passionate intransigence of this book, this longing for justice which wants to make a *tabula rasa* of everything in order to reconstruct everything!" (ix). He must now admit that the art of the people cannot flourish in an old soil. But only in order to reaffirm his faith that the moment of renewal is at hand, that the people is awakening. We can hardly imagine that the pacifist Rolland sensed the approach of war, even less the Russian Revolution, only four years away. *The Theatre of the People* was translated into Russian in 1910 by Lunacharsky and reprinted in 1918 with a preface by Ivanov. Rolland's ideas also found a more fertile soil in France after the war. On the second anniversary of Armistice Day, 11 November 1920, the Théâtre National Populaire, with Gémier as director, was inaugurated with a festival in front of Les Invalides, coinciding with the translation of the body of the unknown soldier to his grave at the Arc de Triomphe. The festival involved a reenactment of the Revolution's Festival of Federation, a commemoration of World War I, and an apotheosis of labor in which trade unions pledged to work for the rebirth of France.⁶ The great period of

6. David Bradby and John McCormick, *People's Theatre* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 42.

the French National Theatre did not occur, however, until after the Second World War under the direction of Jean Vilar.

Despite the undoubted impact of Rolland's ideas, the concept of a people's theatre suffered from a fatal flaw in its attempt to revive and renew a civic religion born of the moment of revolutionary enthusiasm. The massacres of workers in 1848 and 1871 gave the lie to the revolutionary utopia of the fraternal people. Sorel's assertion of myth as the motive force of revolutionary action and of the general strike as the civic festival of the proletariat openly recognized that the working class was not the people, not the nation. The enormous crowds of French and German workers in August 1914 bore witness, however, to the triumph of the religion of nationalism over that of socialism.⁷

Gabriele d'Annunzio: *Il fuoco*

D'Annunzio's starting point is his identification with a Nietzschean politics and its challenge to socialism as the decadent offspring of Christianity. In August 1892 the Italian Workers Party, renamed the Socialist Party the following year, was founded. A month later d'Annunzio responded with an article in *Il mattino* entitled "La bestia elettiva." His target is the dogma of 1789, the belief that the sovereignty of the state belongs to the people. The plebs will always remain slaves, mute witnesses to the competitive struggle of elites, from which a more terrible tyranny will emerge to dominate the masses, the state in the guise of the provider of public happiness. And this is as it should be, for force will always be the first law of nature. A new aristocracy is being formed with a will to power beyond the good and evil of slave morality.⁸ D'Annunzio's "new aristocracy" points to a third force between socialism and the state, the masses and the elites: the poet as the aristocratic leader who liberates the plebs from the confines of mundane existence through his vision of beauty and national greatness. According to the sociologist Scipio Sighele, d'Annunzio dreamed of transforming the degenerate mob into a noble, purposeful collective.⁹ Jared Becker interprets d'Annunzio's celebrated parliamentary switch from right to left in 1900 as a grand gesture, aimed at demonstrating the goal of uniting nationalism and socialism (Maurice Barrès had coined the formula "socialist nationalism" in the 1890s), in order to harness the energies of the masses to national-imperial goals.¹⁰ Becker regards d'Annunzio as the chief orchestrator in Italy of the shift from nineteenth-century nation building toward an imaginary of radical nationalism and imperial aggrandizement, making him the embodiment around

7. Jean Duvignaud, "La fête civique," in *Histoire des spectacles*, ed. Guy Dumur (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).

8. Gabriele d'Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici* (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), 2: 89–92.

9. Jared Becker, *Nationalism and Culture: Gabriele d'Annunzio and Italy after the Risorgimento* (New York: Lang, 1994), 9–10.

10. *Ibid.*, 48–49.

1900 of the values of an emerging Fascist ideology.¹¹ It is thus only appropriate that d'Annunzio should commemorate Nietzsche's death in 1900 with the poem "Per la morte di un distruttore," in which he hails the great destroyer and master of regeneration as the new Hermes who is carrying Dionysus into the Forum and the Colosseum. With this telling formula for the aestheticization of politics, d'Annunzio pays tribute to the mythmaker, whose rapidly growing influence reinforced the intellectual revolt against liberal modernity.¹² The 1880s and 1890s were the crucial formative years of this alternative political culture and its "intellectual revolt" against the whole legacy of the Enlightenment.¹³ The revolt against liberal, bourgeois society and its materialistic and utilitarian values went hand in hand with an acute sense of cultural decadence and social disintegration, driven by the specter haunting bourgeois society: the growth of the urban, industrial masses and the rise of mass society. This was the context of the birth of Fascist ideology, which Zeev Sternhell treats as "the immediate product of a crisis that had overtaken bourgeois democracy and liberalism, and bourgeois society in all its fundamental values," adding that "the break-away was so disruptive as to take on the dimensions of a crisis in civilization itself."¹⁴ This cultural revolt against the Enlightenment and against liberalism, socialism, and mass society was very far from being a political movement. It needed the enormous shock of the Great War to transform cultural revolt into political movements.

The theme of d'Annunzio's novel *Il fuoco* (*The Flame*) (1900) is the passing of the flame from Germany to Italy, from the dying Wagner to the young d'Annunzio.¹⁵ Wagner determines the novel's Venetian setting: the narrative covers the six months from the arrival of Wagner in Venice in September 1882 until his death in February 1883, that is, the passage from autumn to spring. It enables d'Annunzio to combine the classical myth of Persephone with the Christian myth of Parsifal (the progression from the Wasteland to the "Good Friday magic" in Wagner's *Parsifal*) in the figure of the great actress, called by her lover, the poet Stelio Effrena, Perdita (based on d'Annunzio's relationship with Eleanora Duse from 1894 to 1904). Perdita is both Persephone and Kundry. She, the aging lover, belongs to the world of nature. Her rival, the spirit of beauty, a "slender, youthful virgin," is a singer, who points beyond sexuality to the Holy Grail of Stelio's dreams, the rebirth of tragedy as the aesthetic means to Italy's renaissance. The Wagnerian theme is central to d'Annunzio's self-understanding. In the novel *Trionfo della morte* (1894)

11. *Ibid.*, 207–11.

12. See David Ohana, "The 'Anti-Intellectual' Intellectuals as Political Mythmakers," in *The Intellectual Revolt against Liberal Democracy, 1870–1945*, ed. Zeev Sternhall (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1996), 87–104.

13. Sternhell, *Intellectual Revolt against Liberal Democracy*.

14. Zeev Sternhell, "Fascist Ideology," in *Fascism: A Reader's Guide*, ed. Walter Laqueur (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1979), 333.

15. Gabriele d'Annunzio, *The Flame*, trans. Susan Bassnett (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1995). Parenthetical page references in the text refer to this edition.

he had reworked *Tristan*. Now he is ready to define himself through emulation of the master, through the translation of the German project of the total work of art to the classical world of the Mediterranean. This translation involves an ambition that goes beyond the theatre to the awakening of Italy, beyond art to the greater art of politics. Behind Wagner stands Nietzsche. Part I of *The Flame*, "The Epiphany of Fire," is centered around a speech that Stelio gives in the Doge's Palace, a speech that is intended to be what it speaks of, the *moment* of the birth of tragedy, the *moment* of the birth of aesthetic politics, from the spirit of the crowd. The occasion of the speech is "a celebration fit for a Doge in the Doge's own palace" (19), an imitation Renaissance feast, at which Benedetto Marcello's long-forgotten opera *Ariadne* is to be revived. Venice, the city of decadence and death, will stage the rebirth of the Renaissance birth of opera: the aesthetics of the dusk of nations is mirrored in Venice in the last beauty of autumn and sunset, the dying that promises rebirth.

D'Annunzio presents Stelio as the Nietzschean artist destined to transform decadence into regeneration, truth into beauty, and beauty into life, that is, the artist in whom Italy's past greatness *returns*. "Raised up in the ascending spiral of words, the soul of the crowd seemed suddenly to reach an experiencing of beauty" (45), which cancels the fatal verdict of time: "In the magical truce granted by the power of poetry and dream, it seemed that the people found the indestructible signs of primitive generations within themselves, . . . and were recognizing their right to an ancient inheritance from which they had been dispossessed. . . . As one, they felt the agitation of a man about to regain a lost treasure. . . . There spread an expectation of a return that had been foretold" (59). Stelio can thus build his speech around the evocation of the god of harvest and autumn, who returns to take possession of Venice in a "supreme Festival." It is this evocation, this power of poetry and dream, which is to possess and intoxicate the audience. Stelio senses that in "the communion between his own soul and the soul of the crowd a mystery was happening, something that was almost divine. Something greater and stronger entered the feelings that he normally experienced" (43). This communion forms part of the web of sympathy that defines for d'Annunzio the gift of the poet, who senses and captures in words the magically charged correspondences between the visible world and invisible forces. The poetic power, claimed by Stelio, is described as "the constant process of genesis of a higher life-form in which all appearance was transfigured as though by the power of a magic mirror" (11). D'Annunzio identifies here with Mallarmé's orphism, claiming for himself the mythical qualities of metamorphosis, inherent in the poet's attunement to eternal nature. But where the symbolists mobilized the doctrine of correspondence against the Wagnerian union of the arts, Stelio's speech, with its references to the "musical sense of colour" or to "great symphonic canvases," places the correspondence of the arts at the service of Wagner's aesthetics, as interpreted by Nietzsche.

D'Annunzio can bring the two rival doctrines together because he maps the correspondences between inner and outer worlds onto the Nietzschean structure

of Dionysian depth and Apollonian appearance. What the orchestra represents for Wagner, the crowd represents for d'Annunzio: from the reciprocity between the soul of the poet and the soul of the crowd a mystery is born, the advent of the god, who floats as a "living image over the crowd that nourished it with dreams" (64), like the great painting by Veronese of the apotheosis of Venice above their heads. The passage of the god is evoked in leitmotivic images of fire and water that marry Nietzsche's aesthetic to Baudelaire's famous sonnet on correspondences:

The water seemed to be made of starry matter, of some unknown changeable nature in which was reflected the myriad images of an indefinable liquid world. It was trembling ceaselessly, and so wave after wave of stupendously simple destructions and creations swept across it, drawing in their wake a harmony that was forever renewed. Between these two marvels rose the multi-faceted, many-souled stories [of Venice] like a forest and like a people, a silent vast mass from which the genius of Art extracted the hidden concepts of Nature. (44)

The transmutation of word into dream image parallels that of music into the stage action. Within the narrative fiction Stelio's speech seeks to rival the act of creation that gave birth to Greek tragedy, to appropriate in other words Nietzsche's *double aesthetic* of the sublime and the beautiful, symbolized by the return of Dionysus, born of the crowd's "experiencing of beauty": "And so he came. He came seated on a cloud like a chariot. . . . He turned his youthful face towards the city with its aura of unspeakable, inhuman fascination, an inexplicable cruel bestiality which contrasted with the profoundly knowing glances that flew from his somber eyes" (44). The "young, longed-for god" is beautiful and bestial, the "savage god" who will shatter the self-possession of the writer Gustav Aschenbach and lure him with a seductive vision of beauty to his death in Venice. Thomas Mann's novella (1912) must be read as a reply to *The Flame*, but it was neither the first nor the last of Mann's warnings about the dangers of d'Annunzio's aestheticism.¹⁶

Stelio's own defining experience of the savage god is triggered by a discussion about the Theatre of Apollo, which is being built on the Janiculum in Rome as the Italian Bayreuth. Overwhelmed by a "vortex of feelings that stirred within him in a kind of blind fury," Stelio feels all the components of his inner life dissolving and yet at the same time increasing in a succession of terrifying sounds and images: "It was as though the blasts were bringing him alternately the screaming from some massacre and a distant apotheosis" (96). The Nietzschean superman experiences in suitably grandiose fashion the call to create the Italian total work of art that will

16. For an overview of Thomas Mann's critique of aesthetic politics in relation to his brother Heinrich and to d'Annunzio, see Renate Werner, "Cultur der Oberfläche: Anmerkungen zur Rezeption der Artisten-Metaphorik im frühen Werk Heinrich und Thomas Manns," in *Fin de Siècle: Zur Literatur und Kunst der Jahrhundertwende*, ed. Roger Bauer (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977), 609–42.

be a “monumental revelation of the ideal towards which the genius of our own race is being led,” a work that will soar above the symphonic music of Beethoven and Wagner as “the lone, dominating voice that...spoke for the multitude” (97). The poet not only speaks for the multitude; he is drawn to the great work by the “obscure desire of human multitudes.” Like the actress Perdita, who both possesses and is possessed by the intoxicated crowd, the “fascinated monster,” Stelio is both mastered by and master of the divine energies his words arouse. The transition from art to action, the birth of a Nietzschean aesthetic politics from the spirit of the crowd, is spelled out in the following passage:

In the communication that had taken place between his soul and that of the crowd, something mysterious, almost holy, had happened. Something greater and stronger had been added to the feelings that he had about his habitual self. An unknown power had seemed to converge in him, destroying the boundaries of his individual personality and giving his lone voice the quality of a chorus. There really was beauty in the masses, and only a poet or a hero could draw out flashes of it. When that beauty was revealed by a sudden clamour in a theatre or a public place or in a trench, then a torrent of joy would swell the heart of the man who had known how to provoke it with his poetry, or his speech or by brandishing his sword. So the words of a poet communicating with a crowd of people could be as powerful an action as a hero’s deeds. (99)¹⁷

Theatre, public place, battlefield: the artist as dramatic poet, as political leader, as war hero. D’Annunzio will play all these roles in both histrionic and deadly serious fashion, for the coming of the longed-for intoxication of war changed everything. The mobilization of the masses through war and through the theatre of politics carried d’Annunzio and the Italian avant-garde beyond their dreams of the cultural regeneration of the nation to the new mass politics of the twentieth century.

It is nevertheless clear that all the ingredients of mass politics were present in the decades before 1914. In “The Third Life of Italy,” written for the *North American Review* and published in 1900, d’Annunzio asks rhetorically: “Where is the leader that we could follow, capable of reconciling grand acts with grand conceptions,” the leader who “knows or divines the latent forces in the hereditary substance of the nation,” the leader capable of shaking and arousing to their very depths the dormant forces of regeneration?¹⁸ To the reflections on the crowd by Mallarmé, Durkheim, Le Bon, and Sorel (chapter 4) we can add the elitist

17. We find similar sentiments in Trotsky’s comments on the relation between the orator and the crowd: “No speaker, no matter how exhausted, could resist the electric tension of that impassioned human throng... which had become merged into a single whole.” “On such occasions, I felt as if I were listening to the speaker from the outside.” Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 295–96.

18. D’Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici*, 2: 543–53.

theories of the crowd in Italy in the writings of Gaetano Mosca and Sighele.¹⁹ D'Annunzio takes up Mallarmé's characterization of the crowd as the "chimaera" and his vision of the aesthetic politics to come, the "future spectacle" of the patriotic cult, which the currently existing state and the modern city cannot deliver. D'Annunzio answers Mallarmé's challenge with the Nietzschean conception of the artist and of art as the will to power. Stelio's boundless ambition, his aspiration to the privileges of aristocracy, his "insatiable need for domination, glory and pleasure" combine to drive him toward the dream of a "greater, more majestic form of art" and toward the crowds as his "chosen prey" (26). The total work will rise from the ruins of Italy's past greatness to show the way to the building of a Third Rome. The poet's task is to liberate the crowd from the fetters and boredom of prosaic life through the revelation of beauty: "This was the mysterious will that could possess a poet in the very act of replying to the multiform soul that questioned him about the value of life and longed to raise itself just once towards the eternal ideal" (47). Stelio's audience in the Doge's Palace is, however, only the bourgeois proxy for the "real crowd" outside, "the great unanimous crowd" that is the object of his new sublime feelings—"filling the starry night with a cry that intoxicated like blood or wine." "His thoughts did not only go out towards that crowd, but towards an infinite number of crowds" (47), in which the artist can simultaneously submerge and inflate his personality in Dionysian intoxication. Stelio's speech exemplifies, at the same time as it reflects on, the psychology of the crowd: "The great animal life-form, blind to all thought, lay before the man who alone and at that moment was to think on its behalf. It stayed motionless, compelling as an enigmatic idol, protected by its own silence . . . , and it waited for the first sound of the masterful word" (37).

The novel ends with the funeral cortege of Wagner. The pallbearers are Stelio and his disciples; two workmen, "shaped in the mould of the ancient Roman race," lay on the coffin a bundle of laurels cut on the Janiculum. While the Bavarian hillside toward which the mortal remains of Wagner are journeying still slumbers in the frost, "in the light of Rome their noble trunks were already sprouting new buds to the murmur of hidden springs" (309). More prophetic, however, is the final Venetian spectacle of sunset over the "gigantic acropolis" of the Dolomites, "steeped in glorious blood": "The whole estuary was mantled in a dark warlike magnificence as though dozens of banners were flying over it. The silence was waiting as though for the blare of imperial trumpets" (301). The aesthetics of the dusk of nations announces the dawn.

19. Scipio Sighele, *La folla delinquente* (1891); Gaetano Mosca, *Teorica dei governi* (1884) and *Elemente di scienza politica* (1896). See Becker, *Nationalism and Culture*, 9–10, for Sighele's discussions with d'Annunzio on the latter's plans around 1900 to write a series of dramas under the general title *La tragedia della folla*.

The Nietzschean Sublime

With its radical opposition of myth to enlightenment, aesthetics to ethics, tragic culture to Alexandrian decadence, *The Birth of Tragedy* was a seminal text of the new aesthetic politics, which placed the total work of art at the center of its counter-vision of modernity. Nietzsche draws both on the older European tradition, which comprehended politics as the stamping of form on formless, recalcitrant matter, as well as on the modern transformation of the aesthetic relation between chaos and form into the metaphor of creation. Now it is no longer a question of *imitation*,²⁰ but of birth (and rebirth)—the birth that is simultaneously an act of nature and of the highest consciousness, the fusion of darkness and light realized in the creative tension of the artwork. In this sense, Nietzsche resumes and deepens the aesthetic dimension of European modernism as it unfolds in response to the “death of God.” As the divine withdraws, aesthetics comes with the romantics to take its place, but at the price of a constitutive ambiguity. The theory of beauty must now recognize, indeed subordinate itself to, its other, the sublime, for which Nietzsche’s term is “the Dionysian.”

Nietzsche’s derivation of Greek tragedy from the perpetual strife and periodic reconciliation of the beautiful and the sublime, Apollonian dream and Dionysian intoxication, the plastic arts and music, gives a new, highly significant twist to the *double aesthetic* of modernity. Not only does *The Birth of Tragedy* challenge Hegel’s relegation of the possibility of great art to the past: it rewrites Edmund Burke’s empirical and reverses Kant’s transcendental analysis of the sublime. In the founding text of the modern theory of the sublime, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), Burke stresses the psychological kinship of the beautiful and the sublime as the expression of two kinds of immediate, irresistible passion, the one governed by pleasure, the other by pain and danger. Burke locates the source of the sublime in *terror*, the strongest emotion that we are capable of feeling. At a certain distance, however, danger or pain can also be cause of delight. It is this mixture of pain and pleasure, sympathy and immunity, in relation to the spectacle of suffering and calamity that explains the sublime effects of tragedy. This pleasure is inextricably mixed with pain, for the pleasure we feel at the spectacle of suffering can scarcely be separated from our fears. Burke accordingly derives the sublime from the passion of self-preservation, and beauty from sexual attraction, while acknowledging the ambiguity of our pleasure in tragedy. The effects of tragedy do not essentially differ for Burke, or for Nietzsche, from our pleasure at the spectacle of real suffering and calamity. Indeed for Nietzsche, tragedy is to be privileged only in that it holds up a mirror to the universal spectacle

20. On the modern conception of politics as typology, imitation, and fiction, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. and trans. Christopher Fynsk (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

of Dionysian destruction and creation. For Kant, however, Burke's derivation of aesthetic judgment from the passions represents only a first step, since his empirical psychology lacks the determining dimension of moral feelings and the associated ideas of reason. Aesthetic judgment, Kant argues, needs to be understood as an interplay between imagination and reason, the sensible and the supersensible. The sense of the beautiful arises from the harmony between the imagination and the understanding, the sense of the sublime from the disharmony between imagination and reason. Thus, in opposition to Burke's empiricism, Kant grounds aesthetic judgment in the subject, not the object. While aesthetic judgment of the sublime presupposes for both theorists the safe distance of the observer, Kant has a "quite different kind of self-preservation" in mind from that of Burke. The attraction of frightful spectacles lies in the opportunity that it affords us to discover and affirm our moral capacity to resist the omnipotence of nature (*Critique of Judgment*, par. 28).

Nietzsche's theory of the sublime breaks with both Burke and Kant in three crucial, interrelated aspects. First, the beautiful and the sublime are not simply opposed; in the highest form of art—tragedy—their essential complementarity is revealed. Second, Nietzsche undertakes a fundamental reevaluation of the beautiful and the sublime: self-preservation, whether conceived as natural passion or moral feeling, becomes now a property of the beautiful world of forms and is objectified in the principle of individuation. Third, the mixture of pain and pleasure that we feel in relation to the sublime is explained by Nietzsche in terms of *our fundamental ambivalence toward self-preservation*. On the one hand, we are seized by horror at the shattering of all forms and limits; on the other, we are possessed by ecstatic joy, which rises from "the innermost depths of human being, indeed of nature," at the breaking of the *principium individuationis*. This third aspect is the most important, since it attacks the very basis on which the theory of the sublime is constructed: the aesthetic judgment of the observer and the corresponding calibration of the unequal relation between subject and object. The sublime now signifies the surrender of the subject in Dionysian intoxication to the overwhelming Other, the return of culture to nature. Hence Nietzsche's distinction between spectator and participant: as spectator we perceive nature as the phenomenal world, that is, as aesthetic *phenomenon*; as participant we become one with nature as *noumenon*, the abyssal ground of the world. In Greek tragedy and Wagner's music dramas the duality of the world as phenomenon and noumenon, representation and unrepresentable Will, is mediated to us as spectators/participants through the interplay of Apollonian beauty and Dionysian sublime.

Nietzsche's theory of the sublime, with its location of the sublime neither in the subject nor in the object but in collective experience, leads us to the threshold of politics and back to our starting point in the French Revolution. The French Revolution posed in acute form the question of the sublime in politics. Does the sublimity attributed to the Revolution lie in the mind of the beholder, as Kant maintained,

or does it lie, on the contrary, in the feelings of the actors and participants in the world-historical events that made the Revolution its own sublime spectacle, as Rolland suggests? Rolland echoes Rousseau and Robespierre when he declares that a happy and free people will always be its own most beautiful spectacle. In turn the Revolution as its own sublime and beautiful spectacle *fuses* the roles of spectator and participant.

Although Kant speaks of the “participation” (*Teilnehmung*) that the French Revolution arouses in the observer, even at the cost of danger—a participation close in fact to the *enthusiasm* inspiring the revolutionaries to fervor and greatness of soul—he holds fast to the distinction between the spectators and the actors in this play (*Spiel*) in terms of the distinction between the *respublica noumenon* and the *respublica phaenomenon*. Since the ideal republic is greater than any realization, the spectacle of the downfall of old states and the emergence of others “as if from the bowels of the earth” cannot be the source of the sublime. Only the *idea* of the republic, namely that those who are subject to the law are themselves its legislators, can be sublime, because it grounds all forms of the state; only the ideal participation of the observer can be sublime, because it testifies to the moral character of humanity, that is, to a capacity of human nature to unite nature and freedom. The “representation” (*Darstellung*) of the idea in an empirical example, as with the French Revolution, necessarily falls short, may in fact even fail, because its realization can only be accomplished through conflict and war. Kant’s strict separation of spectators and actors protects the free community to come, which arouses our enthusiasm here and now, from inevitable compromise and betrayal. The ideal republic thus stands as the utopian antithesis to the logic of despotism, whose conclusion is war and the mass slaughter of the despot’s subjects.²¹ From Rousseau’s to Rolland’s “sentimental” dream of the popular festival, epitomized by the festivals of federation, from the German vision of the beautiful Greek polis to Wagner’s political-aesthetic utopia in the image of Athens, the community to come forms the animating idea of the total work. The continuity of this beautiful dream of community rests on the sublime idea of the transcendence of empirical individuality as the path to recovery of our true communal being. How does this change with Nietzsche?

By raising the Revolution to a “Platonic ideal” Kant protects its sublime unrepresentability from the fundamental ambiguity of the judgment of the sublime, however mitigated it might be by the safety of the observer—an ambiguity that relates not just to the overwhelming power of nature but to power as such and its sacrality, whether divine omnipotence or human despotism. Hence the Janus face of the French Revolution: the golden age of Saturn ends with Saturn devouring

21. Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, pt. 2, secs. 6–8. Kant’s sublime distinction between the republic as *noumenon* and *phenomenon* returns in Claude Lefort’s distinction between democracy and monarchies or totalitarian regimes. In democracy the place of power cannot be occupied; it can only be “represented.”

his children. Richir argues that the two faces of the French Revolution—society's search for self-incarnation from below and the reincorporation of society from above—present the most complete and the most problematic figuration of the abyss of political foundation. He calls the illusion that there can be an unmediated institution of society the transcendental illusion of modern politics that led to the Terror in the French Revolution and to the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century.²² Nietzsche's counterconception of the sublime comes from his enthusiastic identification with the merging of spectator and participant in the one sublime experience of ecstasy and terror. Nietzsche's *mise-en-abyme* of modernity replaces the *utopian* meta-political horizon of freedom with the *mythical* meta-aesthetic horizon of nature, thereby spelling out the consequences that he draws from the "death of God": the subjection of the subject and history to nature. To Kant's moral individuation of the observer who discovers the idea of a higher humanity within himself beyond the self of self-preservation, Nietzsche opposes Dionysian de-individuation in all its abyssal ambiguity. On the one hand, he waxes lyrical in the evocation at the beginning of *The Birth of Tragedy* of the immersion in a mystical feeling of unity that cancels the boundaries separating man from man and man from nature:

Singing and dancing the individual expresses himself as member of a higher communion: he has forgotten how to walk and talk and is ready to take flight. His gestures bespeak enchantment. Now that animals speak and the earth flows with milk and honey, he gives voice to the supernatural: he feels himself a god, he now floats as entranced and elevated as the gods he sees in his dreams. He is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: the artistic force of all nature reveals itself in the convulsions (*Schaudern*) of intoxication for the highest delight of the Primal Unity. The noblest clay, the most precious marble, man, is hewed and shaped and to the chisel blows of the Dionysian world-artist sounds the call of the Eleusian Mysteries: "You prostrate yourselves, millions? Do you sense the Creator, world?"²³

Noumenal nature is personified as the Dionysian demiurge, in whose hands we are transformed into the raw material of his world-art. But on the other hand, what is this "sentimental" vision (in the Schillerian sense) of re-enchanted nature other than the beautiful mask of the sublime annihilation that "redeems" individuation by making us one with the eternal life of nature beneath all phenomena?

If we are to speak of the sublime in politics, as I think we must, we must also insist on the irreducible ambiguity of sublime judgment, which bears witness to the irreducible ambiguity of a power exceeding all human measure, hence sacred. Durkheim addresses the "ambiguity of the notion of sacredness" in the last chapter of *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, where he distinguishes between

22. Marc Richir, *Du sublime en politique* (Paris: Payot, 1991), 468.

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

beneficent religious forces, which guard and maintain the physical and moral order, and “evil or impure powers, productive of disorders, causes of death and sickness, instigators of sacrilege,” inspiring fear and horror. For all that these forces repel each other, they nevertheless share a close kinship, which makes them capable of passing from the one form to the other: “The pure is made of the impure, and reciprocally. It is in the possibility of these transmutations that the ambiguity of the sacred consists.”²⁴ This ambiguity is tied to the sublime experience of the transcendence of the boundaries of the self that releases collective forces “of such an intensity that they cannot be satisfied except by violent and unrestrained actions, actions of superhuman or bloody barbarism. This is what explains...many of the scenes, either sublime or savage, of the French Revolution.”²⁵ The implications of the ambiguity of the sacred were developed by Durkheim’s disciples after the First World War, culminating in the short-lived Collège de Sociologie in the late 1930s. The founders of the college sought to recenter the social in the “general economy” of the transgressive sublime in response to the rise of Fascist movements across Europe, with their total challenge to a “pure” Enlightenment conception of politics, based on progressive and rationalist thinking.²⁶ In *Les jeux et les hommes*, Roger Caillois, one of the founders of the Collège de Sociologie, offers an interesting anthropological-civilizational perspective on Nietzsche’s Apollonian/Dionysian pairing, which corresponds to two of his four fundamental categories of play, those highlighted in the subtitle of his study, *Le masque et le vertige*. Caillois contrasts primitive societies and their fascination with the mask and possession to modern, ordered societies, which cultivate games of competition and chance: “Simulation and vertigo, or if you prefer pantomime and ecstasy, assure the intensity and consequently the coherence of collective life.”²⁷ Ancient Greece stands between the two types of society, the paradigm case of the transition from barbarism to civilization, where the (Apollonian) love of order, harmony, and measure stand out against the (Dionysian) background of magic confraternities of dancers and blacksmiths and disorderly swarms of terrifying masks. Vertigo and simulation embody this transition because they combine opposed attitudes to consciousness. For Caillois it is a dangerous combination because the two attitudes are mutually reinforcing, intensifying the sense of being possessed and dominated by strange forces, and thereby opening the door to collective outbursts of passion, comparable to a total metamorphosis of the conditions of life. The experience of metamorphosis is “so powerful, so irremediable that it belongs naturally to the sphere of the sacred

24. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976), 409–11.

25. *Ibid.*, 211.

26. Alexander Riley, “Renegade Durkheimianism and the Transgressive Left Sacred,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim*, ed. Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 274–301.

27. Roger Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 170.

and perhaps provides one of the principal springs of the terrifying and fascinating mixture which defines it.”²⁸ The Dionysian thus always threatens the return of the repressed. Caillois’s example is the orchestrated vertigo of the Nazi Party rallies, directed by the charismatic leader.

Only in retrospect can we measure the gulf that separates our two texts, written at the turn of the century. Rolland looks back to Rousseau and the French Revolution and forward to the world community to come. D’Annunzio looks back to Nietzsche as the prophet of an aesthetic politics to come, of a total work of art of quite another nature, implicit in the eternal justification of the world as aesthetic phenomenon, explicit in the metaphor of the Dionysian demiurge that became reality in the “world artists” of the twentieth century, waiting to shape the masses to their total will to power. And it was from the Great War and its blind machinery of death that the regenerated “nation” emerged, not as the community of peace but as the community of death, to find its re-presentation in the spectacle of the militarized masses. In declaring that we can never understand music and tragedy in terms of beauty, Nietzsche prepared the way for the Fascist sublime: the birth of tragedy from the spirit of German music was written against the background of the birth of the German nation from the “terrors and sublimities” of the Franco-Prussian War, to which Nietzsche alludes in his dedication of *The Birth of Tragedy* to Richard Wagner, dated the end of the year 1871.

28. *Ibid.*, 153.

ART AND REVOLUTION: THE SOVIET UNION

The Birth of the New Man

Alexander Blok responded to the Bolshevik Revolution by delivering his own version of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* in a lecture in Petrograd in April 1919, entitled "The Decline of Humanism." His musical theory of history recalls Saint-Simon's alternation of organic and critical epochs but is much closer in mood to the basic topos of cultural pessimism, the decline of culture into civilization, elaborated in Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1919): "Every movement has its birth in the spirit of music, through which it acts, but after a lapse of time it degenerates and begins to lose the musical, the primal element out of which it was born, and, as a result, perishes. It ceases to be culture and becomes civilization." The spirit of music does not disappear, however; it returns to its guardian, the people or the barbaric masses, waiting to be resuscitated by "those synthesized, revolutionary exertions, by those musical and will-stressed floods and forces to which Wagner, in particular, had given expression." The Russian music and poetry of the fin de siècle, inspired by Wagner, was the harbinger of a new cultural movement and the overture to the present epoch. The elemental voice of the barbaric masses mingled with that of the great artists of the nineteenth century and swelled "until with irresistible force it broke through, intoxicated and saturated with the spirit of music," sweeping away the "truth, goodness and beauty" of the world of civilization and humanism.

Apollonian beauty and order are overwhelmed by the Dionysian sublime: “Man’s entire being is in revolt; he has risen from a century-long stupor of civilization. Spirit, soul and body have been caught up in the storm and, in the turmoil of the spiritual, political and social revolution . . . there takes place a transformation—the birth of the new man.” Blok’s new man is no longer the ethical, political, or humanist personality of civilization but “in the words of Wagner, the creative being, the artistic person, who alone will be capable of living life in the epoch of storms and whirlwinds.”¹ The Artistic Superman is alone capable of embracing and mastering Dionysian chaos. Looking back in *My Life*, Trotsky equated in similar fashion the revolution with the creative union of intellectuals and the masses: “The unconscious rises from its deep well and bends the conscious mind to its will, merging it with itself in some greater synthesis” of instinct and theory.² And with the raising of instinct to consciousness, man will create the Superman, a “higher social-biological being.” Such was Trotsky’s utopian conclusion to *Literature and Revolution*, published in 1924.

The birth of the new man, hailed by Blok, born in 1881, and by Trotsky, born in 1879, testifies to the enormous influence of Wagner and Nietzsche on Russian intellectuals since the turn of the century. The reception of Nietzsche reinforced the longings for a total transformation of society; Nietzsche’s message was powerful: “Art can create a new consciousness, a new human being, a new culture, and a new world.” In *New Myth, New World*, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal sets out to demonstrate the power of what she calls the Nietzschean agenda in Russia from symbolism to Stalinism: “Nietzsche’s influence operated below the surface of events, accelerating the repudiation of established authorities and values, nourishing a panoply of utopian doctrines, reinforcing the Promethean aspects of Marxism, and contributing (along with other factors) to an eschatological mood and a free-floating radicalism that worked to the Bolsheviks’ advantage in 1917.”³ The Nietzschean agenda was inspired mainly by *The Birth of Tragedy*, with its central tenet that “art and myth could be used to mobilize the masses or to construct a new culture, a goal of almost all of Nietzsche’s Russian admirers.” The “new myth,” carried by the union of word, music, and myth and expressed in a “new art form,” the total work, anticipated the new man in his duality as member of the Dionysian collective or as the self-overcoming superman. In turn, the new man pointed beyond culture to a “new morality” in the service of myth, and finally to the greatest task of all, a “new politics,” the “great politics” of planetary rule, that demanded in Nietzsche’s words, the breeding of a new master race of “philosophical men of power and artist-tyrants,”

1. Alexander Blok, “The Decline of Humanism,” in *Art in Theory*, ed. Charles Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 260–62.

2. Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 334–35, quoted in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalin* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 47.

3. Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World*, 2–3.

who will “work as artists upon ‘man’ himself.”⁴ In his 1917 pamphlet, *Revolution and Culture*, Andrey Bely declared that the true revolutionaries were neither Marx nor Engels but Wagner, Rudolf Steiner, and Nietzsche. The 1917 revolution, however, was in no sense a revolution in Wagner’s or Nietzsche’s image, even if this current in Russian thinking carried through to the 1920s.

The longing for a total transformation of society among the Russian radical intelligentsia sprang not least from its unhappy consciousness, torn between a love of the people and the knowledge of its own isolation. Blok called it a “terrible divide” in 1909: separated from the 150 million, a few hundred thousand are agitated by a “frantic ferment” in an “unceasing succession of movements, moods and fighting banners.”⁵ This divide condemns the intellectual to trace a vicious circle, driven to despair and suicide by the “demands of individualism, demonism, aesthetics.” Lacking some higher principle, the intelligentsia is being taken over by the “will to death.” The people, however, is awakening: its “silence is being replaced by a distant and growing rumble.” It is understandable that Blok greeted the revolution as a Dionysian breakthrough, the destruction of a decadent culture by a new, invigorating barbarism. Addressing the old, dying Europe, Blok speaks in his poem “Scythians” of the redemptive love “that burns and, burning, lies in ashes.” However, after “Scythians” and “The Twelve” Blok retreated into silence, disillusioned by the course of the revolution. In “The People and the Intelligentsia” he had already asked himself whether in rushing toward the people we are not rushing to our certain death. Trotsky regarded Blok’s silence after 1918 as the logical consequence of his character: “The hectic and pathetic break with the whole past was a fatal overexertion for the poet.”⁶

Trotsky attributed the terrible divide between the intelligentsia and the people to the “Europeanization” of Russia since the eighteenth century, which had produced superstructural changes—the development of the technology of the state and the new stratum of intellectuals—without corresponding social changes. If “Europeanization” was the inevitable consequence of the “fateful curse” of Russia’s history: underdevelopment, economic and cultural poverty, then the “usurped messianism” of the intellectuals was the “ideological mirroring” of this backwardness, in which the absence of European preconditions (towns and guilds) for capitalist development meant the weakness of a bourgeois-democratic tradition. Hence the hubris, the boundless subjective radicalism and abstract fanaticism of the intelligentsia, which repeatedly sought to take the place of the missing liberal bourgeoisie. Trotsky

4. Ibid., 5–14. For the Nietzsche quotation, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1968), 504.

5. Alexander Blok, “The People and the Intelligentsia,” in *Utopias: Russian Modernist Texts, 1905–1940*, ed. Catriona Kelly (London: Penguin, 1999), 244–49.

6. Leon Trotsky, *Literatur und Revolution* (Berlin: Gerhardt, 1968), 102. Blok and Trotsky shared a similar understanding of the radical intelligentsia as a subculture, hostile to the state and the ruling classes and in search of new values and ideals, that is, as a counterelite in waiting.

deemed himself in 1912 exempt from these illusions because the Marxist intelligentsia represented the “idea” of the proletariat. The failure of the expected proletarian revolution in the industrialized countries of Europe after 1918, however, deprived the Bolshevik Revolution in an agrarian society of its initial justification and led to the second revolution of Stalinism, the building of socialism in one country. In *The Russian Revolution*, completed in exile in 1930, Trotsky now claimed for the Bolsheviks “the privilege of historic backwardness” that compels the “adoption of whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole series of intermediate stages.”⁷ This universal law of uneven development, which combines the old with more contemporary forms, the archaic with the futuristic, was elevated into the ideology of the Great Leap Forward. This expression of the Marxist intelligentsia’s own “usurped messianism” was no less an “ideological mirroring” of historic backwardness than that of the rootless artistic intelligentsia. And did not Trotsky decree his own fate—and that of the Old Bolsheviks—when in 1912 he asserted that the possibility of a Russian future demanded the eradication of Russia’s past, in particular the eradication of its messianic intelligentsia?⁸

The tragedy of the revolution against the “peculiarities of Russian development” lay in the utopian-messianic will to the short circuit of history. In his book *On the Russian Peasantry*, a collection of articles for émigré newspapers from 1922, Maxim Gorky spoke of the “tragic nature” of a revolution among semisavage people and of the tragic nature of Bolshevism, which in *concept* signified a movement of urban and industrial culture, electrification, and organization but in *execution* proved itself to be a spontaneous peasant revolt, cruel, savage, anarchic, and destructive. Gorky’s concluded: “With others of his kind, Lenin, an amoral person who regards the sufferings of the people with aristocratic indifference, a theoretician and dreamer with no acquaintance with real life, carried out a planetary experiment, and it has failed.”⁹ The tragedy of Russian literature and art was epitomized for Nina Berberova by the funeral of Blok, which she attended, and the shooting of the Acmeist poet Nikolai Gumilev for counterrevolutionary activities, both in August 1921. These deaths signified for her the end of a historical period, the two hundred years of Russian literature, announced by the emigration of intellectuals and the beginning of the planned repressions that would destroy two generations.¹⁰ For all the forebodings of Gorky, who did not rally to the Soviet regime until the late twenties, or of Berberova, who left Russia with the poet Vladislav Khodasevich in 1922, the years of the New Economic Policy in fact provided a favorable environment for avant-garde experiments. For a decade after the Bolshevik Revolution “the radical artistic tendency . . . dominated culture in Russia to an extent unmatched anywhere

7. Trotsky, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 3.

8. Trotsky, *Literatur und Revolution*, 301.

9. Vitaly Shentalinsky, *The KGB’s Literary Archive* (London: Harvill, 1995), 237.

10. Nina Berberova, *The Italics Are Mine* (London: Vintage, 1993), 126.

else in the world. Its influence touched not only elite forms such as poetry, theatre design and easel painting, but popular or populist forms such as movies, bestselling novels and the ‘mass festivals’ held to mark the new Soviet holidays, posters and pamphlets.”¹¹

Blok and Trotsky, the artist and the revolutionary, introduce the questions that will concern us in the present chapter: Were art and revolution the two faces of the one creative-destructive force, called to form an alliance? Or would one or both avant-gardes be swept away by the revolutionary storm? The ever-tighter subordination of artists to party control by the late twenties gives us a first answer: artistic freedom could no longer be tolerated. The comparative freedom of the 1920s was due primarily to the party’s preoccupation with more pressing issues. From the first, however, the party regarded art as an instrument of agitation, instruction, and propaganda—that is, politics was conceived in a scientized and not an aesthetic mode. The consolidation of Stalin’s absolute power in the 1930s gives us a second answer: the sentence of death, inscribed in the “fateful curse” of Russia’s backwardness, would be executed by Stalin on the two intelligentsias of the Russian renaissance: the artistic avant-garde, the contemporaries of the West; and the political vanguard that leapt over the bourgeois revolution to claim leadership of the world revolution. He, and he alone, would be the artist-tyrant, the master builder of the second Russian revolution.

The fraught relationship between art and revolution will be examined in the light of three distinct attempts to realize the total work of art in the name of the revolution: the mass festivals of the revolution, which took the French revolutionary festivals as their guide; the avant-garde’s quest for a truly revolutionary culture that would transcend the limits of bourgeois art and reunite art with life; and Stalinism’s total work of art. Stalin’s total work—the show trials—represents something new: the specifically *totalitarian* total work, which literally liquidated the gap between art and life, just as conversely Soviet realism aimed to leap over the gap between reality and potentiality. The historical course of the Russian avant-garde may be measured against the total works that provide their prologue and epilogue, the futurists’ *Victory over the Sun* (1914) and Eisenstein’s *Ivan the Terrible*, commissioned by Stalin in 1941.

Festivals of the Revolution

The two main transmitters of the theory and practice of popular theatre to the Bolsheviks were Ivanov (see chapter 5) and Rolland (see chapter 9). Ivanov provided the vision of a redemptive collective theatre that would renew the tradition of popular theatre from Greek tragedy to the medieval mysteries. Inspired by Ivanov,

11. Kelly, *Utopias*, xix.

the theatre director Nikolai Evreinov set out to revive the premodern theatrical tradition through his Ancient Theatre Company in St. Petersburg between 1907 and 1912. Appropriately, he directed perhaps the best known of the revolutionary mass festivals, *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, in 1920. Anatoly Lunacharsky combined, like Ivanov, enthusiasm for the ancient theatre and for Wagner and Nietzsche, but also for the festivals of the French Revolution. He translated Rolland's *Théâtre du peuple*, published by Gorky's press in 1910; in 1904 he wrote the preface to a translation of Wagner's *Art and Revolution*, in which he identified with Wagner's belief that art and the social movement have the same goal: "the creation of a strong, beautiful man, to whom revolution shall give his strength, and art his beauty."¹² Rolland's book with a preface by Ivanov, and Wagner's manifesto with the preface by Lunacharsky, along with a translation of Julien Tiersot's *Les fêtes et les chants de la révolution française* (1903), were among the first Soviet theatre books to be reissued in 1919 by Narkompros, the People's Commission for Enlightenment, headed by Lunacharsky.

Lunacharsky (1875–1933) has been termed, with his brother-in-law Alexander Bogdanov and Maxim Gorky, a Nietzschean Marxist.¹³ Lunacharsky sought to reconcile Nietzschean individualism and Marxist collectivism, the intelligentsia and the proletariat—the theme of *Faust and the City* (written before 1914 but first published in 1918), one of his more than seventy plays. Art and religion, he believed, had a crucial role to play in the coming social revolution through the creation of an ennobling and empowering illusion. Gorky's and Lunacharsky's Marxist surrogate for religion—the worship of the immortal spirit of collective humanity—was designed to keep the revolution alive by converting the long-suffering masses into heroes willing to fight and die for socialism.¹⁴ Lunacharsky's essentially religious view of art drew him, like Ivanov and the symbolists, to the central religious function of the festival in strengthening the collective sense of community. In "Socialism and Art," his contribution to the 1908 Russian symbolist symposium, *Theatre: A Book about the New Theatre*, he presented his Wagnerian idea of a theatre-temple as an ideal means toward the spiritual emancipation of the proletariat.

As Commissar for Enlightenment, Lunacharsky incorporated the presuppositions, hopes, and expectations of the Left intelligentsia with regard to the place of art in the revolution. His Saint-Simonian vision of art and revolution marching in step is evident in his enthusiastic evocation of the total work, "which we are already approaching"—an evocation that mixes freedom and order in a rather disturbing fashion:

12. Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World*, 77.

13. A. L. Tait, "Lunacharsky: A Nietzschean Marxist?" in *Nietzsche in Russia*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 275–92.

14. Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World*, 80; R. C. Williams, "From Positivism to Collectivism: Lunacharsky and Proletarian Culture," in *Artists in Revolution: Portraits of the Russian Avant-Garde, 1905–1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

And just think what character our festive occasions will take on when, by means of General Military Instruction, we create rhythmically moving masses embracing thousands and tens of thousands of people—and not just a crowd, but a strictly regulated, collective, peaceful army sincerely possessed by one definite idea. . . . The popular holiday will adorn itself with all the arts, it will resound with music and choirs that will express the sensations and ideas of the holiday by spectacles on several stages, by songs, and by poetry readings at different points in the rejoicing crowd: it will unite everything in a common act.¹⁵

Lunacharsky's enthusiasm for the mass festival was reinforced by the dramatic spectacle *Toward the World Commune*, performed in Petrograd to celebrate the meeting of the Second Congress of the Third International in June 1920 in Moscow. One could sense, he writes, "the approach of the moment when art . . . would become the expression of national ideas and feelings—ideas and feelings that are Revolutionary and Communist."¹⁶ The festival scenario that Lunacharsky produced for the 1921 Moscow Comintern conference, to be performed in Red Square, was intended as a continuation of the 1920 festival. It traced mankind's ascent from the Stone Age to the present, starting from ancient Egypt and progressing through feudalism and capitalism to the triumph of the Third International and the construction of the city of the future.¹⁷ Although the planned festival was canceled due to the desperate economic situation, Lunacharsky continued to hope for the new total work that would celebrate the revolution. He envisaged this festival spectacle as a worker-peasant opera with orchestra, chorus, and dancers, designed for summer performances in a huge amphitheatre.¹⁸ In 1933, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Wagner's death, he described Wagner's music dramas as the highest synthesis of music and literature and lamented the failure of Soviet artists to create a major revolutionary opera. But by 1933 Lunacharsky was also forced to draw a line between the revolution and Wagner.¹⁹

The theatre section of Narkompros, the National Bureau for Mass Spectacles and Festivals, was set up in October 1919 by representatives of the Worker-Peasant and Red Army theatre. It employed leading symbolists and Wagnerites such as Ivanov, Bely, and Blok but also younger radicals who wanted a complete break

15. Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Revolution and Art," in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902–1934*, ed. and trans. John Bowlit (New York: Viking, 1976), 192. It was decreed in 1918 that all Soviet citizens were to receive military instruction.

16. Lunacharsky, "Revolution and Art," 192.

17. James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 212.

18. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, "Wagner and Wagnerian Ideas in Russia," in *(Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. D. C. Large and William Weber (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 241.

19. Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Der Weg Richard Wagners," in *Das Erbe* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1965), 45–56.

with the past, indicative of a clear generational split. “The generation of Russians that came to maturity before the Revolution of 1905 was profoundly influenced by *The Birth of Tragedy*, and it shared an enthusiasm for mass drama. The older Bolsheviks who administered Soviet culture immediately after the Revolution, such as Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875–1933), Pavel Kogan (1872–1932) and Vladimir Friche (1870–1929) saw mass drama as the summit of socialist culture.” The generation that came to maturity after 1905 became leaders of the Proletkult (e.g., Platon Kerzhentsev, 1881–1940) or of the futurists (Vladimir Mayakovsky, 1893–1930).²⁰ The first policy statement of the National Bureau for Mass Spectacles and Festivals fudged the conflict between the old populism and the new proletarianism by declaring that festivals expressed “an organic need lying deep in popular consciousness”; hence they will be “created only by the masses themselves in the process of collective creation,” which will merge ritual and drama in the celebration of national unity.²¹ The popular/proletarian tension was in fact already present in the two master manifestos of revolution in the theatre, reissued by the National Bureau, Wagner’s *Art and Revolution* and Rolland’s *Théâtre du peuple*. Of comparable influence was Platon Kerzhentsev’s *The Creative Theatre* (1918), which was reprinted five times in the 1920s; it took as its models the French revolutionary festivals and Rolland’s description of French and Swiss popular theatre. Kerzhentsev argued that the Bolshevik Revolution had created the conditions—the abolition of the boundary separating manual and intellectual labour—for a theatrical revolution, which would overcome the disastrous division between stage and audience. Kerzhentsev insisted that this cultural revolution could only be the work of the proletariat, not of some nebulous “people.” But, as Lars Kleberg points out, the only real difference between Ivanov and Kerzhentsev lay in their theoretical premises: the one postulated an abstract people, and the other an abstract proletariat, as the foundation of the theatrical revolution.²² Rosenthal calls *Creative Theatre* a proletarian version of the “Nietzsche/Wagner/Ivanov syndrome.”²³ Ivanov had influenced not only Evreinov’s Ancient Theatre but also Pavel Gaideburov’s prewar Mobile-Popular Theatre in St. Petersburg. Gaideburov held that true theatre was classless, a church through which the people would be led to a pan-national illumination of life, and life itself would become a perfect work of art. Following the revolution, Gaideburov developed a hybrid theatrical form that he termed “Masses” and taught with his actors improvisation for adult education classes as a means to

20. James von Geldern, “Nietzschean Leaders and Followers in Soviet Mass Theatre, 1917–27,” in *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 133. By 1938, Kerzhentsev had become the head of the State Committee on the Arts. In this capacity he led the campaign against Meyerhold and his theatre. This did not prevent his own purging and death in 1940.

21. Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 136–38.

22. Lars Kleberg, *Theatre as Action: Soviet Russian Avant-Garde Aesthetics* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1993), 61, 64.

23. Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World*, 121.

realizing popular creativity. The “Seven Points,” formulated by one of his pupils, Nikolai Vinogradov, provide in a nutshell a definition of the total work of art and a further illustration of the centrality of the “Nietzsche/Wagner/Ivanov syndrome” in the thinking of the Soviet revolution in the theatre: (1) The theatre is a temple; (2) universality; (3) monumentality; (4) creativity of the masses; (5) an orchestra of the arts [i.e., synthetic art]; (6) the joy of labor; (7) transfiguration of the world.²⁴

Petrograd, the theatre city, can claim the honor of staging the two most famous mass spectacles, *Toward the World Commune* on 19 June 1920 and *The Storming of the Winter Palace* on 7 November 1920, the third anniversary of the revolution.²⁵ *Toward the World Commune*, performed on Vasilevsky Island on the banks of the Neva in front of the monumental Stock Exchange, presented with four thousand actors (mainly soldiers) the prehistory of the Third International in the form of a mystery play, consisting of the following scenes or stations: The *Communist Manifesto*, the Paris Commune, and the death of the First International (act 1); the Second International betrays the workers and votes for war (act 2); world war and revolution, the victory of the Red Army, and the Russian commune; apotheosis: the Third International and the world commune (act 3). Two groups enacted the struggle between revolution and reaction: the “slaves” below at the entrance to the Stock Exchange and the “masters” above. The unarmed slaves surged up the steps of the Exchange to be met by massed ranks of soldiers. In the final confrontation a huge puppet representing Tsar Nicholas II is overcome by the arrival of Red Guards. *Son et lumière* played a key role: the ruling classes danced to Johann Strauss, the Paris Commune buried its dead to Chopin’s Funeral March, “The Internationale” was sung in the apotheosis. Fanfares, orchestra, choir, military band, sirens, and gunfire were employed separately or combined.²⁶

Toward the World Commune and *The Storming of the Winter Palace* posed enormous problems of “organizing the masses in performances of a Wagnerian dimension, total works of art embracing many arts, huge numbers of spectators and performers, and ample outdoor space.”²⁷ How the producer, Dimitri Tiomkin, and the director, Evreinev, solved the problem of coordinating the cast of six thousand can be seen in Yury Annenkov’s general plan and sketch of the stage design for *The Storming of the Winter Palace*.²⁸ Each section of the arena, comprising army and workers, fire brigade, trucks, Red platform, White platform, fireworks, and projectors, was controlled by assistant directors linked by telephone to the central

24. Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 119–22.

25. See Katerina Clark, “Petrograd: Ritual Capital of Revolutionary Russia,” in *Petersburg: Crucible of Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 122–39.

26. *Ibid.*, 185–89. Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 44–45.

27. Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 94.

28. Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre*, 69. Tiomkin started as a pupil of Scriabin and ended as a successful Hollywood composer (e.g., *High Noon*); Evreinev emigrated to Paris.

direction, located among the spectators in the center of Palace Square, that is, at the center of the action taking place around the spectators. "At the stroke of ten, Palace Square was plunged into darkness. A cannon shot shattered the silence, and an orchestra of 500... struck up Henri Litolff's *Robespierre* overture.... One hundred and fifty search lights mounted on the roofs of surrounding buildings were switched on at once, illuminating the Whites, who opened the action."²⁹ The use of lighting to switch attention from one part of the square to another solved the problem of dividing the spectacle into distinct episodes and sharp contrasts. Moreover, staging the action in situ gave the unity of time and space that concentrated the revolutionary events of 1917 into the one symbolic action, capable—like the storming of the Bastille—of dramatizing the revolutionary myth of origin.

The Storming of the Winter Palace was the high point and end point of such mass spectacles: "The mass spectacles of 1920 were dynamic, gripping, moving; through them the Bolsheviks claimed an inalienable right to direct the fate of their country and the worldwide proletariat."³⁰ The party's claim to leadership paralleled the progression from the spontaneous *jours* of the French Revolution through to the festivals of the Jacobins. The contrasting images of freedom and order, uneasily juxtaposed in Lunacharsky, reflected, on the one hand, the iconoclastic and carnivalesque outburst of popular rejoicing at the "boundless perspective of newly opened space on which to fashion a world," and on the other hand, the reassertion of order and hierarchy over the masses "in a kinesthetic exercise of revolution, a massive performance of revolutionary values and myths that were to infuse the new society-in-the-making."³¹ In Moscow, the "utopia of release and reversal which carnival plays at was overlaid by Lenin's utopia of order, historical reverence and political pedagogy."³²

Two ideas of mass drama and popular festival, with sharply opposed conceptions of the "people," are evident here. Richard Stites draws the parallel to the French Revolution and the polarity of incarnation of the people from below—his term is "transcendent social solidarity"—and incorporation from above by the party leadership. James von Geldern draws the parallel to the 1848 revolutions, where the contrasting ideas of the people as a homogeneous collective or as the struggling masses stand side by side in Wagner's *Art and Revolution* and Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*.³³ In his preface to *Art and Revolution*, Lunacharsky could still assume that Wagner and Marx belonged together. The contradiction between

29. Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 202. For a description of the staging and performance, see pp. 202–5.

30. Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 178.

31. Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 79–80, 94.

32. *Ibid.*, 92. Lenin's utopia of order drew on Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1602). Lenin's "monumental propaganda" campaign for Moscow involved pulling down tsarist statues and replacing them with monuments to revolutionary heroes and great men, May Day festivals, and decoration of public buildings for holidays.

33. Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 33.

freedom and order, spontaneity and hierarchy, surfaced in practical terms in the tension between amateur performers and professionals. It was resolved in terms of Nietzsche's duality of the Dionysian chorus and the Apollonian actor. Pavel Kogan, the first director of the National Bureau, stated in 1919: "For the festival we must attract the participation of both proletarian collectives (Red Army units, worker unions, etc.) and individual artists, poets, musicians—but only those ideologically inclined towards the workers—who can merge with them in a single creative impulse." The task of the artistic leaders of the masses will be to find appropriate forms for the proletarian content, the revolutionary passion, intoxication, and orgasm essential to mass theatrical action.³⁴ The theatre director Alexander Tairov summed up the contradiction built into the idea of the revolutionary festival (and of the total work of art): "The gist of the paradox was that revolutionary festivals could be either popular or they could be the grand artwork of the future envisioned by Wagner, but they could not be both."³⁵ Von Geldern analyzes the contradiction in terms of the distinction between drama and ritual; Lars Kleberg in terms of the confusion between drama and ritual. In a situation of revolutionary rupture and civil war the Bolsheviks could not appeal to a shared political language, that is, to an understanding of festive performance as a ritual celebration of a shared unity. They had to create a new mythology through dramatizations of the revolution.³⁶ But even though theatre emerged in Greece precisely through its separation from ritual and the ritual unity of actors and spectators, the Athenian dramatic festivals nevertheless served as the recurrent model (with medieval drama) for modern conceptions of popular theatre because they were seen as uniquely capable of speaking to society as a whole and creating ideological and moral unity. Kleberg calls this recurrent dream the *myth of the representative audience*.³⁷ Kleberg's study of the Soviet Russian avant-garde charts the disintegration across the 1920s of this myth of a total theatre and its representative audience, given new life by the revolution.

From Art to Life: The Russian Avant-Garde

Victory over the Sun, the futurist (anti)total work of art, with prologue by Velimir Khlebnikov (1885–1922), text by Alexei Kruchenykh (1886–1968), music by Mikhail Matyushin (1866–1934), and costumes and sets by Kasimir Malevich (1878–1935), was produced in the Luna Park Theatre in a suburb of St. Petersburg in December 1913. It shared the program with Mayakovsky's *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy*, in which the author played the title role. The "opera" set out to shock the audience

34. Von Geldern, "Nietzschean Leaders," 133.

35. Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 138.

36. *Ibid.*, 11.

37. Kleberg, *Theatre as Action*, 45.

and critics and their expectations by presenting the newest breakthroughs in literature, music, and the visual arts, as Matyushin explained:

In the visual arts: complete displacement of planes, displacements of visual relationship, introduction of new concepts of relief and weight, dynamics of form and colour. In music: new ideas of harmony and of melody, new pitch (quarter of a tone), simultaneous movements of four completely independent voices (Reger, Schoenberg). In the discovery of words: the breakaway from the meaning of words—the right of a word to be independent, hence, new creations of words (discovery by the genius, Khlebnikov).³⁸

The libretto mixed sense and nonsense; the music, according to one of the actors, was like a parody of Verdi; the costumes transformed the human figures into moving machines, with masks resembling gas masks; the actors, other than the singers, were amateurs.³⁹ The “plot,” set in Futureland, involved the burial of the sun, the return of the world to the dark gods of chaos and bedlam as liberation from the past and the pull of the earth’s gravity. It concluded with the arrival of the aviator, laughing and singing a nonsense song, hailed by the chorus of Strong Men. The advent of flight offered a new myth for the new century: the Promethean Assumption of Man into the heavens.⁴⁰ This was the theme of d’Annunzio’s prewar novel *Forse che si forse che non*, which appeared one year after Marinetti’s “African novel,” *Mafarka the Futurist* (1909). The two works express the new myth: the hero’s transcendence of the decadent embrace of the earth and woman’s enslaving passions is celebrated as the marriage of myth and machine, vitalism and technology. As in Marinetti’s *Mafarka*, the new man of the Russian futurists with his victory over the sun buries God and proclaims his mastery over nature. The chaos and cacophony, the gratuitous violence of the action, signaled anarchic liberation from the old world. Malevich and Matyushin summed up their intentions in a St. Petersburg newspaper: “The Futurists want to break free of this regulated world, these ties, which are conceivable in it. They want to transform the world into chaos, to smash established values into fragments and create new values out of these fragments, unexpected and unseen links.”⁴¹

38. Mikhail Matyushin, *The Day* 1–2, Moscow 1914, quoted in K. Tomashevsky, “Victory over the Sun,” *The Drama Review* 15.4 (1971): 101, introducing a translation of *Victory over the Sun* in the same issue. On the redefinition of the arts in *Victory over the Sun*, see Marcella Lista, *L’oeuvre d’art totale à la naissance des avant-gardes (1908–1914)* (Paris: CTHS, 2006), 196–238.

39. See Robert Benedetti, “Reconstructing *Victory over the Sun*,” *The Drama Review* 28.3 (1984): 17–30, for illustrations of Malevich’s original designs and the reconstructions for a performance at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1980.

40. Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 121.

41. Christine Lodder, *Constructivist Strands in Russian Art, 1914–1937* (London: Pindar Press, 2005), 41.

Victory over the Sun is known, however, not so much in its own right, that is, for its attempt to set up a new relationship between words, music, and staging, as for Malevich's contribution. Looking back, Malevich claimed that the backdrop used in act 1—a black-and-white square divided diagonally—represented the origins of suprematism. Suprematism took the futurist revolt against all previous art to its logical conclusion, the reduction of the world and its objects to nothing as the condition of creating new values *ex nihilo*. In 1915 Malevich declared: "I have transformed myself in the *zero of form* and dragged myself out of the *rubbish-filled pool of Academic art*. I have destroyed the ring of the horizon and escaped from the circle of things, from the horizon-ring which confines the artist and the forms of nature."⁴² Beyond the world of objects and of all art based on imitation lies nonobjective creation, "pure painting as such, without any attributes of real life." Leaving futurism behind him, Malevich holds fast, however, to the rhetorical excesses of the futurists, extending his verbal radicalism to political revolution after 1917, declaring that "the avant-garde of revolutionary destruction is marching over the whole wide world." Political revolution, dedicated to the destruction of the foundations of the old, leads the way, headed by Russia. And just as Russia has now become the center of political life, so a "similar centre must be formed for art and creativity." Malevich, the pure revolutionary, proclaims once more victory over the sun: "We, like a new planet on the blue dome of the sunken sun, we are the limit of an absolutely new world, and declare all things to be groundless."⁴³ Malevich's apocalyptic absolutism demonstrates the dialectic of utopia advanced by Dostoevsky in *The Possessed*: starting from the premise of unlimited freedom, we arrive at complete despotism. Thus in 1920 El Lissitzky, celebrating the destruction of individual creativity that had hitherto divided artists and nonartists, hails the revolutionary path of the creative collectivity on which Communism and suprematism march together. Communism, however, will have to give way to suprematism because the latter encompasses the "totality of life's phenomena" and offers the true model of perfection.⁴⁴ In a similar vein, Nicolai Punin could claim in 1919 the superiority of futurism over Communism: "Futurism is not only an artistic movement; it is an entire world view, which has its basis in Communism, but which in effect leaves Communism as culture behind."⁴⁵

The claims of the avant-garde to the powers of world construction (suprematism) and to the formation of the New Man (futurism) were from the first regarded with suspicion by the party, ever sensitive to any threat or challenge to its authority. These claims expressed what we might call the utopian revolutionary credo, indeed

42. K. S. Malevich, "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting," in *Essays on Art, 1915–1933*, ed. Troels Anderson (London: Rapp & Whiting, 1969), 19.

43. *Ibid.*, 63, 68, 54.

44. Lazar el Lissitzky, "Suprematism in World Construction," in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902–1934*, ed. and trans. John E. Bowlt (New York: Viking, 1976), 158.

45. Halina Stephan, "*Lef*" and the Left Front of the Arts (Munich: Sagner, 1981), 8.

the birthright, of the avant-garde—the belief that artistic and political radicalism are natural allies—going back to Saint-Simon and to the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. Although the paths of aesthetic innovation and political radicalism increasingly diverged after 1848, the Russian avant-garde was deeply affected by the events of 1905 and increasingly radicalized and politicized by the First World War and the revolutions of 1917. Moreover, the Bolshevik Revolution, which seemed to promise unlimited scope for artistic experiment, gave a fresh impetus to the “great wave of artistic innovation and revolutionary commitment that typifies Russian art from about 1905 to 1925.”⁴⁶ In short, the revolution was perceived by many artists as the longed-for *destination* of art, which would cancel the isolation and alienation of the artist by reuniting art with life. But whether it was Proletkult or futurism or constructivism, the avant-garde movements could not maintain their claims to cultural leadership for long.

The idea of a “proletarian culture” beyond bourgeois culture had already been developed by Lunacharsky, Bogdanov, and Gorky before the revolution.⁴⁷ Social democracy, Lunacharsky wrote in 1907, is not just a political party but a great cultural movement, religious in inspiration. As we have seen, Lunacharsky envisaged a socialist civic religion in the traditional terms of festivals, public theatre, processions, and ceremonies. Bogdanov, the theoretical father of the Proletkult (the Proletarian Cultural Movement), argued that there were three paths to socialism: economic, political, and cultural. He conceived socialist culture as a higher stage in human evolution, based on the higher level of organization required by the machine mode of production. The proletarian class, the highest form of the organized human collective, would complete the historical succession of historical epochs by restoring an integral monism of spirit and matter, uniting individuality with a higher form of collectivism. Just as the original monism of religion, as the primary form of social organization, had to give way to the division of labor and the specialization of the sciences, so the sciences would now serve as the “steering and control instruments” of the revolutionary development of socialist society. The development of proletarian culture thus called for the socialization of sciences through education.⁴⁸ Bogdanov accorded art, “the highest and least understood form of organizational creativity,” an important role in organizing the human psyche and will.⁴⁹ In “The Paths of Proletarian Creation” (1920) Bogdanov refers to Proletkult’s “fundamental aspiration to conceive art as an industrial, organized process”: “Monism is expressed in his [the proletarian’s] aspiration to fuse art and

46. Williams, *Artists in Revolution*, 8.

47. See Williams, “From Positivism to Collectivism,” 23–58; on Bogdanov, see also R. C. Williams, *The Other Bolsheviks: Lenin and His Critics, 1904–1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

48. A. Bogdanov, *Die Wissenschaft und die Arbeiterklasse* (Frankfurt: makol Verlag, 1971).

49. Irina Gutkin, “The Legacy of the Symbolist Aesthetic Utopia: From Futurism to Social Realism,” in *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism*, ed. Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney Grossmann (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 172–73.

working life, to make it a weapon for the active and aesthetic transformation of his whole life."⁵⁰ Perhaps the most interesting application of Bogdanov's theories was Vsevolod Meyerhold's "biomechanical theatre" of the early 1920s, which set out to exemplify the organization of industrial labor through a Taylorist body training, designed to make the worker an extension of the machine. In order to demonstrate this organic unity of man and machine, the actors were dressed as stagehands, and the sets were constructed of mobile scaffolding.

Proletkult, which claimed over 400,000 members by 1920, also posed a challenge to the party leadership. Although it was funded by Narkompros, it remained an autonomous, nonparty organization. Supported by Lunacharsky, who saw it as a new "church militant," it was opposed by Lenin, who rejected its utopian, antielitist illusion that the revolution could dispense with bourgeois specialists. By 1920, Lenin had become extremely hostile: "Not only was the burgeoning non-Party movement permeated with Bogdanov's ideas, Lenin suspected a link between Proletkult and the 'Workers' Opposition,' a faction within the Party that demanded labor union autonomy, worker control of industry, and an end to hierarchy and privilege."⁵¹ The Central Committee of the party denounced in December 1920 Proletkult's petit bourgeois attempts to establish an institutional base separate from Soviet power. Bogdanov was forced to resign, and Proletkult was placed under the control of Narkompros, declining to insignificance in the next few years. Its main achievements lay in the field of mass education in a largely illiterate population and in the attempts to encourage and publish worker writers.

At the opposite ideological pole to Proletkult, the futurists also claimed the right of the avant-garde to define and represent revolutionary proletarian culture. Their most important organ was the journal *Art of the Commune*, edited by Osip Brik, Punin, and Mayakovsky and funded by the Division of Fine Arts in Narkompros. From the first the futurists strove to gain an artistic and administrative monopoly in the Soviet state. In similar fashion to suprematism, they proposed themselves as the true model of perfection. An anonymous contributor to the first issue of *Art of the Commune* in December 1918 argued that only the art that anticipates the future has the right to existence: "One must therefore conclude that also in art it is necessary to install a dictatorship, a dictatorship inspired by a desire to achieve the ultimate end of art according to the understanding of the new artists: this end being the victory over matter in the sense of achieving perfect mastery of it, of achieving the most perfect forms of expressing the human spirit in matter."⁵² Under pressure from Lenin, Lunacharsky was forced to issue a warning. It would be a tragedy, he wrote in the same issue of *Art of the Commune*, "if artist-innovators ultimately imagined themselves as the state school of art." He identified and condemned two

50. Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*, 181.

51. Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World*, 161.

52. Stephan, "*Lef*" and the Left Front, 8.

frightening features of this bid for power: the destructive attitude to the art and culture of the past, and the tendency to speak in the name of the cultural administration. Undaunted, Mayakovsky and Brik challenged the party on its own ground by attempting to establish their own organizational base, which grew out of poetry readings to workers and was given the title Kom-Fut (Communists-Futurists). The manifesto of Kom-Fut was published in *Art of the Commune* (January 1919). It took as its premise the Communist system's need for Communist consciousness: "Without awareness, any further development of the Communist revolution is impossible. Cultural and educational organs of the Soviet power display a complete incomprehension of the revolutionary task placed upon them." The manifesto demanded a merciless struggle against all bourgeois ideologies, the placing of cultural and educational organs under the command of the new, still developing Communist cultural ideology and the abandonment of all democratic illusions.⁵³ Kom-Fut was immediately rejected by the party, and *Art of the Commune* closed down in April 1919.

Lef, the journal of the Left Front of the Arts (1923–25), was the futurists' attempt to reinstate themselves in party favor. In the first issue of *Lef*, Sergei Tretyakov insisted on the continuity of the group's progressive credentials: "Since its infancy, Futurism has oriented itself not toward the creation of new paintings, poetry and prose, but towards the making of the new man, using art as one of the means to this creation." Tretyakov's "new man" is familiar: the "man-worker," who devotes all his disciplined energies to production for collective purposes. Informed by a modern sense of aesthetics, he finds beauty in all objects directed to the mastering of inert matter.⁵⁴ The revolutionary programme of the avant-garde is reaffirmed: agitation of the masses, militant rejection of bourgeois art, transformation of the artist into an industrial craftsman in the service of the scientific construction of life. The Left Front's new lease on life was limited, however. *Lef* was closed down in 1925.

Nevertheless, the years of the NEP (New Economic Policy) were the golden age of Soviet culture, characterized for Rosenthal by "the coexistence of functional rationality with millenarian enthusiasm as components of an overarching Prometheanism."⁵⁵ The revolutionary moment of the Russian avant-garde, distinguished by its powers of invention and experimentation, remains the most remarkable attempt to "realize" the goal of bringing "art into life until art is fully dissolved in it" (Tretyakov). The marriage of utility and creativity applied in equal measure to grand projects and designs for everyday life. Punin raised it to the formula for a new classicism. He singles out Vladimir Tatlin's "Monument to the Third International," described by its creator as an "organic synthesis of architectural, sculptural

53. *Ibid.*, 11–15.

54. *Ibid.*, 61. See also Anna Lawton, ed., *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes, 1912–1928* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 194–95, 215–16.

55. Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World*, 177.

and painterly principles,” for its solution to one of the most challenging cultural problems: “A utilitarian form appears as a purely creative form. Once again a new classicism becomes possible, not as a renaissance but as an invention. . . . Here it is. We maintain that the present project is the first revolutionary artistic work, and one which we can send to Europe.”⁵⁶ The new materials and possibilities offered by the prospective alliance of art and industry, art and technology, were the key to the broad current of constructivism in the 1920s, which Soviet industry, however, was scarcely capable of utilizing. The Working Group of Constructivists, established in Moscow in March 1921, took “Death to Art” as their motto and as their programme Alexander Rodchenko’s statement, “All new approaches to art arise from technology and engineering and move towards organization and construction.”⁵⁷ In reality, however, constructivism’s impact was greatest in theatre, photography, and film, that is to say, in fields in which the integration of art into life was directed not to the production of objects but to the production of the new Soviet man. The new creative collective thus appeared on stage, on the streets, in film, in peasant and workers’ theatre, in mass spectacles, in Meyerhold’s “biomechanical theatre,” and in Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* and *October*. The constructivists’ image of the worker as the megasubject of revolution thus anticipated the Great Leap Forward of the first Five-Year Plan in 1928.

The year 1928 marks the limit of the avant-garde. The avant-garde’s belief that the revolution represented an unparalleled convergence and cooperation between the state and art was not shared by the state. Lunacharsky did see the revolution as the great opportunity to bring artists and workers together in the building of a revolutionary culture, but he too had come to reject the Left Front by 1925, which he accused of anachronistic bourgeois attitudes. Lenin was never sympathetic to the avant-garde, rejecting as a leftist heresy the claims of Proletkult and futurism to create a proletarian culture.⁵⁸ The most sustained engagement and critique of the pre- and postrevolutionary avant-garde came from Trotsky in *Literature and Revolution*. He dismisses the Proletkult’s notion of proletarian culture out of hand. There is not and never will be a proletarian culture or art. Moreover, the demands of the present are political not cultural: the dictatorship of the proletariat is not an organization directed to the production and culture of the new society but a revolutionary regime fighting for this society. It is an abstract illusion to expect from the intellectual avant-garde the development of a proletarian culture, when their concrete cultural task here and now lies in the mediation of the most necessary elements of past and present culture to the backward masses in order to work toward

56. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory, 1900–1990* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 313. See, however, Trotsky’s sarcastic comments on Tatlin’s “Monument” in *Literature and Revolution*, 208.

57. Lodder, *Constructivist Currents in Russian Art*, 263.

58. Stephan, “Lef” and the Left Front, 53, 16–17.

the abolition of the proletariat as a class and the development of a universal, no longer class-bound culture of humanity.⁵⁹

Trotsky's treatment of futurism is equally negative, even if more nuanced. What had started as a bohemian rebellion by the half-pauperized left intelligentsia against the symbolist "world of art" was not devoid of an organic relationship to the October Revolution. Although the revolution carried the futurists with it, they became Communists without really grasping the new problems, with the result that they are artistically weakest where they strive to be most completely Communist. Hence the utopian sectarianism built into the very idea of "futurism": the avant-gardist quest to tear from the future what can only develop out of the future itself defined the abstract programme of merging art and life. Even if we recognize that the "self-sufficient nature of art" is a product of class society and privileged consumption, it simply does not make sense to demand that artists suddenly cease to paint or write or compose. Trotsky rejects this revolt of art against art and against the individuality of the artist as an outdated protest of the left intelligentsia. Only a minimal historical perspective, he reminds them, is required to understand that, given our present economic and cultural poverty, it will take generations before art can fuse with everyday life.⁶⁰ He nevertheless considers the questions raised in *Lef* concerning the connections between art, politics, technology, and economy to be extremely significant. Indeed, he translates the futurists' "music of the future" into his own utopian vision of the total work to come in the essay "The Art of the Revolution and Socialist Art." Socialist society will have its own monumental art, its own tragedies and cathedrals. The walls separating art and industry and art and nature will fall: industry will become more artistic, and nature more artificial, as the earth is reshaped according to man's taste. Saint-Simon or Bruno Taut (see chapter 8) would have approved Trotsky's prediction that when man "has learnt to move rivers and mountains and to build people's palaces on the summits of Mont Blanc or on the Atlantic seabed," he will be capable of endowing everyday life with dynamic theatricality. The human race will itself be radically reworked through artificial selection and psychological training. To crown it all, the new man and the new society will be given magnificent forms through the arts.⁶¹

Trotsky spells out the illusions of the futurists' cult of progress, their attempt to leap over the limits of reality, inspired and dazzled by what they saw as a unique historical conjunction of art and revolution. R. C. Williams underlines the price of this revolutionary hubris: "Consciously or not, the Russian avant-garde...helped prepare the way for Stalinism through their abortive great experiment. For they declared art a religion, and themselves supreme deities with total power in the artistic universe they inhabited,...God is dead, they argued, and therefore the

59. Trotsky, *Literatur und Revolution*, 158–65.

60. *Ibid.*, 111–24.

61. *Ibid.*, 202–15.

artist is free to become God. They often anticipated a leader similar to Christ or Nietzsche's artist-Superman, they fell victims to Stalin as free artists, if not as living beings."⁶² Boris Groys takes Williams's interpretation of the relation between the avant-garde and Stalin, the 1920s and the 1930s, one—provocative—step further. Not only did the avant-garde prepare the way for Stalin; Stalin “realized” the goals of the avant-garde by continuing their strategy by other means.⁶³ The Great Leap Forward of the industrial and cultural revolution, unleashed by Stalin, combined Trotsky's utopianism and the avant-garde's dream of the aesthetic-scientific reconstruction of the world. It must be stressed, however, that the avant-garde was in no sense morally complicit in Stalinism, of which they themselves were victims.

Stalin's Total Work of Art

Following the adoption of the Five-Year Plan, Stalin declared 1929 the “year of the great break,” the great leap into the future that would transform Russia from a backward to an advanced country, destined to overtake and surpass the United States. The total mobilization of the population and resources was to be effected through “centralised organisation, a command economy, a militarization of work, and a supremely authoritarian political culture.”⁶⁴ The accompanying ideological mobilization renewed the millenarian expectation of the first years of the revolution with outbursts of “militant atheism, iconoclasm, anti-intellectualism, [and] cultural nihilism.” By 1931 the excesses of the cultural revolution had to be brought under control. The campaign against revolutionary egalitarianism and the reassertion of hierarchy were crucial to the establishment of the totalitarian system of Stalinism.⁶⁵ From 1928 on, mass festivals were revived with a central emphasis on mass effects: “All festivals should be on a gigantic scale, one activist wrote, with ‘super-powerful musical instruments, super powerful cinema, super-sized sculptures and painting.’”⁶⁶ Stites compares the popular character of the early festivals with the rituals of power staged in the 1930s. The atmosphere of carnival gave way to the increasingly rigid and military orchestration of parade, decor, and spectacle.⁶⁷ It is a progression already evident in the French Revolution: the Jacobin cult of the Supreme Being became now the cult of the Supreme Leader.

62. Williams, *Artists in Revolution*, 21.

63. Boris Groys, *The Total Work of Stalinism—Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

64. Richard Stites, “Stalinism and the Restructuring of Revolutionary Utopianism,” in *The Culture of the Stalin Period*, ed. Hans Günther (London: Macmillan, 1990), 78.

65. Stites, “Stalinism and the Restructuring of Revolutionary Utopianism,” 84, 88.

66. Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World*, 274. See “The New Mass Spectacle,” devoted to the “machine or giant industrial complex” as the master metaphor for the industrialization of Soviet society in Clark, *Petersburg*, 243–50.

67. Stites, “Stalinism and the Restructuring of Revolutionary Utopianism,” 86–87.

If we think of the second—industrial and cultural and doctrinal—revolution as Stalin’s *total revolution*, involving the liquidation of the Old Bolsheviks, indeed the liquidation of the old party, his *total work of art* involved the liquidation of the artistic avant-garde, but at the same time its continuation—in Groys’s words, the birth of socialist realism from the spirit of the Russian avant-garde. As we have already seen, *Lef*’s equation of art, technology, and politics, united in a single project of social transformation, entailed the political treatment of artistic decisions, which led inevitably to a struggle for absolute leadership.⁶⁸ Groys can therefore stress the underlying identity of the artistic aims of the avant-garde and of socialist realism, the building of a new world through the coincidence of the artistic and the utilitarian in the task of socialist construction. The dictatorship of taste demanded by the futurists was now decided by the party’s prescriptions, ratified at the First Congress of the Union of Writers in August–September 1932. The resolutions ordered the dissolution of all literary and artistic factions and their incorporation into single and separate unions. Andrei Zhdanov, the supervisor of the “ideological front,” launched and defined socialist realism. “As formulated between 1932 and 1934, elaborated between 1934 and 1939, and codified after the war, the principles of Socialist Realism were the following: party-mindedness (enthusiastic support of Party doctrine); reflection (art and literature must ‘reflect’ the underlying socioeconomic circumstances); typicality of characters and situations; ‘revolutionary romanticism’; the positive hero; and narodnost (nationality or popular appeal depending on the context).”⁶⁹ Socialist realism became the method of myth creation, which glorified “the magnificent vision of a world built by the party, the total work of art, born of the will of its true creator and artist—Stalin.”⁷⁰ But this total work was nothing but a “fantasy state, wrapped in myth and embellished by the cult of a god-like leader,” in which celebration—“Life has become more joyous, Comrades”—was shadowed by terror.⁷¹ Stalinism’s grotesque fusion of utopia and dystopia reached a new height in the festivities for the twentieth anniversary of the revolution in 1937. The production of images of a happy and prosperous Soviet Union, which had already attained the stage of socialism, was seriously impeded by the arrest and murder of several of the leading organizers of the October Jubilee. Consequently, “wreckers” had to be blamed for organizational difficulties.⁷² This system-dictated Manichaeic mythology of omnipotent and omniscient leadership, beset by enemies of the people, reflected the Saturnine nature of the revolution, promising the return

68. Boris Groys, “The Birth of Socialist Realism from the Spirit of the Russian Avant-Garde,” in Günther, *Culture of the Stalin Period*, 122–48. This article summarizes Groys’s *The Total Work of Stalinism—Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*.

69. Rosenthal, *New World, New Myth*, 295.

70. Groys, *The Total Work of Stalinism*, 53.

71. Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 247.

72. Karen Petrona, *Life has become more joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 168–73.

of the golden age at the same time as it devoured its children. The “positive” and “negative” heroes of Stalinist mythology—seen by Groys as the split personification of the creative-destructive spirit of the avant-garde⁷³—belonged together, playing predestined complementary roles in the world theatre of damnation and salvation. Groys does not take the further step that his argument implies: that Stalin’s total work of art, his authentically totalitarian total work, necessarily comprised the complementarity of socialist realism and show trials.

By deliberately highlighting its theatrical and illusionary character, the term “show trial” foregrounds the trial’s generic affinity to drama and theatre, but with paradoxical intent, since the “show” concerns not appearance but reality. Rosenthal can therefore speak of a sinister form of Dionysian theatre that demanded human sacrifice: “The pre-Revolutionary ‘conditional theatre’ separated art and life. Stalin’s theatricalization of life fused the two, producing millions of real victims.”⁷⁴ It is therefore appropriate that the show trial’s immediate model was the mock trial (*agit sud*), developed and employed by the Red Army, in which enemies of the people were unmasked in a ritual that led from confession and repentance to reintegration into society. More generally, these demonstration trials exemplified Ivanov’s belief in the life-transforming powers of popular theatre. Taken over as an effective instrument of propaganda in the NEP period, mock trials were now carefully scripted and published together with instruction manuals. These scripts followed the master narrative from confession to reintegration with special attention to audience participation. The whole audience or elected representatives would be asked to judge the accused and decide punishment, prompted by actors in the audience who acted as additional witnesses or leaders of the chorus.⁷⁵ In short, the mock trial practiced and applied the utopian goals of avant-garde theatre in an effective popular form,⁷⁶ which Brecht took over, refined, and deepened in his didactic plays. In turn, Brecht anticipated the logic of the show trials when he transformed judgment into self-judgment, and the class enemy into the committed party activist in *The Measures Taken*. Not only is insight into “objective” error called for, but insight now signifies assent (*Einverständnis*), not to reintegration but to liquidation.

Lenin and Trotsky turned to the French Revolution as a model for exemplary trials with the aim of mass education. Thus the trial of Soviet revolutionaries in 1922 in Moscow was accompanied by mass demonstrations, spilling over into invasion of the courtroom and calls for death to the enemies of the people. Direct agitation was reinforced by extensive publicity through newsreel coverage (edited

73. Groys, *The Total Work of Stalinism*, 62.

74. Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World*, 249–50.

75. Julie Cassidy, *The Enemy on Trial: Early Soviet Courts on Stage and Screen* (Dekalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000), 67–68. See also Walter Benjamin’s 1927 account of Soviet pedagogical theatre in the form of “legal proceedings,” *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 1927–1934 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 40–41.

76. Cassidy, *Enemy on Trial*, 53.

by the leading experimental filmmaker, Dziga Vertov). The Shakhty trial of German and Russian engineers in 1928, the first of Stalin's show trials, represents the real turning point. It too had a large audience of 4,000 each day, amounting to some 100,000 in all. The Shakhty trial was a test run for a scenario that was still deficient. Only half of the accused confessed. Without confession, however, the show trial lacked its defining legitimation: *Einverständnis*, essential once the focus switched from external to internal enemies.⁷⁷ For Andrei Vishinsky, the master prosecutor, confession constituted the queen of evidence.⁷⁸ The mock trial dramatized scapegoating, confession, and catharsis, but—as in all morality plays—accusation was incomplete without the self-accusation (“self-criticism”) of the audience. Not only was eternal vigilance called for in a paranoid atmosphere of fear and suspicion; the “truth” of the show trials carried the message that the audience was not only the subject but also the object of judgment. Everyone was potentially, that is, objectively, an enemy of the people in a closed system that defined politics in terms of conspiracy. The show trials, concentrating on party leaders, functioned as the visible face of the Great Terror, which trapped ever-wider circles of victims in a web of extorted denunciations, the hidden dimension of the staged public confessions.

“By the 1930s, Soviet state craft had become Soviet stagecraft: those who wrote, directed and staged the script controlled the actors as well as the audience.”⁷⁹ Vyshinsky scripted the scenarios of the major trials of 1937 and 1938 under the guidance of Stalin, who “played a direct role in ordering investigations, crafting indictments, selecting the defendants, prescribing sentences,” and directing the transmission of the lessons of the show trials.⁸⁰ (It is only appropriate that a Russian theatre director—Evreinov, who had been based in Paris since the early 1920s—produced in Paris in 1938 the first dramatization of the show trials, entitled *The Steps of Nemesis*.)⁸¹ In this stagecraft the media functioned as a Greek chorus, carefully orchestrated mass meetings acted as another kind of chorus, denouncing “vermin,” “reptiles,” and “mad dogs.” The accused were ritual sacrifices in the Dionysian sense—a Soviet counterpart to the auto-da-fé of the Inquisition and the public executions of the Jacobin terror. These trials, however, could also be seen as enacting “the supreme tragedy of heroes ‘unmasked’ as traitors and receiving their just deserts.”⁸² The Bukharin trial is particularly instructive. In prison, Bukharin arrived at tragic insight into the logic of events (where else but in a letter to Stalin?): “*Great plans, great ideas and great interests outweigh everything and it would be petty to raise the question of*

77. *Ibid.*, 51.

78. Donald Rayfield, *Stalin and His Hangmen* (London: Viking, 2004), 157.

79. Cassidy, *Enemy on Trial*, 133.

80. William Chase, “Stalin the Producer,” in *Stalin: A New History*, ed. Sarah Davies and James Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 228.

81. Davies and Harris, *Stalin: A New History*, 15.

82. Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World*, 358.

my own person in the face of *universal-historical* tasks that weigh first of all on your shoulders.”⁸³ It is the sublime moment of tragic insight and assent to the “universal-historical” necessity of terror. Georg Büchner had already captured this sublime insight in Saint-Just’s speech to the National Assembly in *Danton’s Death* (1835). It was reaffirmed by Georg Lukács in his essay on Büchner’s play, written in the eye of the storm in Moscow in 1937.

Sergei Eisenstein’s film theory and the Great Terror converged when Stalin commissioned a film on Ivan the Terrible in January 1941. As with Eisenstein’s production of *Die Walküre* at the Bolshoi in 1940, the commission related to the Hitler-Stalin pact. The film was to justify the occupation of Latvia and Estonia (Ivan’s campaign against Livonia); its wider function, however, was to complete the rehabilitation of Ivan, initiated in 1934, through a glorification of his role as the defender of the Russian state against external and internal enemies. In other words, Ivan was to be presented as the precursor and prefiguration of Stalin the Terrible.⁸⁴ Here it is important to recognize in the epithet *grozny* not only the capacity to excite terror but also the greatness beyond good and evil that excites our admiration⁸⁵—in short, the ambivalence that defines our response to the sublime spectacle of world-historical figures and events.

In the 1920s, Eisenstein was drawn to cinema’s power as a mass medium. In keeping with contemporary avant-garde tendencies, his film theory focused on the means to seize and shape audience responses. In the 1930s the goal remained the same, but the focus moved from agitation to the arousing of pathos and ecstasy, his terms for the transcendence achieved by great art, the transcendence that Eisenstein saw cinema as destined to continue and renew. Instead of the revolutionary break with the past he now developed a theory of *renaissance*, which allowed him under the conditions of socialist realism to make even more ambitious claims for film. He could flesh out his 1920s argument that the avant-garde experiments in the theatre (Eisenstein had begun as a pupil of Meyerhold) pointed beyond the limits of theatre to film as a new chapter in the evolution of art by now interpreting evolution in terms of cinema’s return to learn from the great art of the past. Here his ambition was to recover what he saw as the key to transcendence, the synthesis of the arts in the form of multimedia spectacle. Eisenstein identifies three such historical attempts to achieve an organic fusion of acting, dance, music, and song: ancient Greek tragedy, Renaissance opera, and Diderot’s outline of a theory of music drama (in the third dialogue of *Les entretiens sur Le fils naturel*), each of which

83. Rayfield, *Stalin and His Hangmen*, 310. Bukharin’s insight did not prevent him from appealing to the “super-authority” of Stalin as the only power capable of saving him, accompanied by a poem to Stalin in seven cantos!

84. The parallels are unmistakable: Kurbsky as Trotsky, the *oprichniki* as the NKVD, the boyars as dangerous conspirators against the state and people, the stage-managed murder of Vladimir, the boyars’ candidate for the throne, and the assassination of Kirov.

85. Yuri Tsivian, *Ivan the Terrible* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 16.

Eisenstein ties to the ideological self-affirmation of new social classes on the way to the attainment of power. In 1937, Eisenstein avoided any reference to Wagner and the 1848 revolutions, even though Wagner's *Art and Revolution* is clearly the direct model and inspiration for Eisenstein's theory of renaissance and his argument for film as the new total work of art. Like Wagner, he attributes the disintegration of the unified arts into sharply differentiated departments to the decline of a class and the concomitant loss of an integrated worldview. However, he can claim for cinema what Wagner could only dream of for the theatre—that film not only depicted the masses but itself constituted through its reproducibility the first genuinely mass medium: “Past ages could not even dream of anything on such a scale combined with such popularity and accessibility to a mass audience. In anticipation of certain turning-points in history, men have dreamed of creating something of this nature, and at the actual moment of those turning points they sometimes partially succeeded in doing so, but they never achieved the result that will only be possible in the era of victorious socialism.”⁸⁶

History culminates in the victorious socialist revolution—and Stalin. How does this last manifesto for the total work to come—reiterated in even more extravagantly utopian form by Eisenstein in a 1947 manuscript entitled “Ever Onwards!” that was intended for the thirtieth anniversary of the October Revolution but ended as a postscript to his essays on film theory—relate to Eisenstein's masterpiece *Ivan the Terrible* (with music by Prokofiev)? It would be too simple to point to the award of the Stalin Prize for part 1 and the banning of part 2 as the “appropriate” response to the “unity of contradictions” that constituted the organizing idea of the film as regards both form and content.⁸⁷ The demands of the war precluded closer attention to part 1; after total victory, Stalin no longer needed legitimation for the Terror; on the contrary, Stalin's chief objection to part 2, expressed in a meeting with Eisenstein in February 1947, lay in the depiction of Ivan as a Hamlet figure. The indecision, guilt, and remorse of Ivan stood in the way not only of the demonstration of the reasons for Ivan's cruelty but also, above all, of the demonstration that he was not cruel enough, that he had not gone far enough in destroying the leading boyar clans.⁸⁸ Eisenstein's unfinished masterpiece was unfinishable. Beyond intervention from above, beyond Stalin's rejection of the ever more claustrophobic unfolding of the tragedy of power, the tragedy of the inhuman, superhuman Renaissance hero

86. S. M. Eisenstein, “Unity in the Image” (1937), in *Selected Works*, ed. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor (London: British Film Institute, 1991), 2: 274–78.

87. Space precludes a more detailed discussion of *Ivan the Terrible*. I can only refer here to the excellent historical and theoretical studies of Eisenstein's work and the analyses of *Ivan the Terrible* by David Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Joan Neuberger, *Ivan the Terrible* (London: Tauris, 2003); and Yuri Tsivian's study (n. 79).

88. S. M. Eisenstein, “Stalin, Molotov, and Zhdanov on *Ivan the Terrible*, Part Two,” in Eisenstein, *Selected Works*, 2: 299–304.

(“Nietzsche *was* about Ivan,” Eisenstein noted), the very project of the total work was always—from the French to the Russian Revolution—the work to come, its anticipations postscripts to a future that never arrived. The torso of Ivan the Terrible remains as a last magnificent expression of the “Nietzsche/Wagner/Ivanov syndrome” of Russian fin-de-siècle symbolism.

THE WILL TO POWER AS ART: THE THIRD REICH

The Avant-Garde and the Breakthrough to Totality

For all that Rolland and d'Annunzio took opposite positions in relation to the French Revolution, they both claimed to speak in the name of the "people" or the "nation." Moreover, they foreshadowed the ultimate expression of the new mass politics, inaugurated by the French Revolution, in the rival revolutionary movements that emerged from the chaos and carnage of the First World War. The Bolsheviks in Russia and the Fascists in Italy both recognized the importance of mobilizing the masses through the elaboration of a civil religion. This "aesthetics of politics," pioneered in the French Revolution,¹ had a theatrical, performative character, which dramatized the myths and ideologies of political movements and regimes through mass spectacles, processions, parades, and festivals. As the most revolutionary form of nationalism, the various Fascist movements could appeal to the whole tradition of nationalizing the masses across the nineteenth century, culminating in the militarization of society in the Great War. The Fascist movements were born of war, and they mobilized for war. From first to last the Fascist aesthetics of politics was an *aesthetics of war*. War embodied the heroic, sacrificial antithesis to the decadence

1. George Mosse, "Fascism and the French Revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (1989): 5–16.

of bourgeois society and consecrated the rights of the collective over the individual. D'Annunzio and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti personify the Fascist cult of war, both in terms of its *double image* of heroic sacrifice and fascination with technology, as well as in terms of the *two types of avant-gardism* that the two writers made their own: the paramilitary vanguard of heroic sacrifice, and the avant-garde of artists as the shock troops of national regeneration and Fascist revolution.

My starting point is Georges Sorel. His *Reflections on Violence* (1908) provides not only the mobilizing myth of breakthrough, but also a sublime ethic of vanguardism congenial to the revolutionary extremes of the Left and the Right. Sorel advocated the regenerative power of heroic struggle in the service of a Nietzschean revision of Marxism, which would transform slaves into warriors. Directed to the revitalization of the class war against the reformism of the Socialist parties, his doctrine of violence found its greatest resonance on the right, to which he was in turn increasingly drawn after 1908 by his disappointments with revolutionary syndicalism. The Bolshevik seizure of power rekindled his hopes, however, of a total transformation of bourgeois society by the proletariat. In his introductory letter to *Reflections*, addressed to Daniel Halévy, Sorel explicates what we might call the Gnostic roots of his profound alienation from the contemporary world: "The pessimist regards social conditions as forming a system bound together by an iron law which cannot be evaded, so that the system is given, as it were, in one block, and cannot disappear, except in a catastrophe which involves the whole."² Sorel took as his prime exemplars of "armed pessimism" primitive Christianity and sixteenth-century Calvinism. The Calvinist's desire to establish the kingdom of God by force was driven by the mobilizing force of an absolute *will-to-deliverance*. This will-to-deliverance is one with the will to *myth*, which alone has the power to incite men "to prepare themselves for a combat which will destroy the existing state of things" (50). Unlike the theoretical constructions of *utopia*, myth cannot be refuted, since it is identical with the convictions of a group. That is, its function is to create and constitute the identity and solidarity of the group. Myth empowers by endowing its adherents with the consciousness of the creative freedom realized in action. The effectivity of myth is accordingly revealed in the *active present* of heroic action. Myth qua faith is self-validating, since heroic struggle is its own highest value. As the great epoch of Calvinist militancy demonstrated, "in the warlike excitement which accompanies this *will-to deliverance* the courageous man finds a satisfaction which is sufficient to keep up his ardour" (37).

Sorel's own will-to-deliverance, it is clear, is religious not utopian. It is deliberately antiutopian because intellectualism announces not just the decay of religion but that of society as a whole. Sorel cites Renan: "An immense moral, and *perhaps*

2. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T. E. Hulme and J. Roth, with an introduction by Edward A. Shils (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 33. Parenthetical page references in the text refer to this edition.

intellectual, degeneracy will follow the disappearance of religion from the world.” And adds that Renan dreaded the loss of the “sentiment of sublimity” (228). Measured against this yardstick, Sorel (like Nietzsche) reduces the life of society to just two possibilities—decadence or renaissance under the aegis of myth³—just as he reduces human being to the two possibilities of (bourgeois) inauthenticity or (proletarian) authenticity. The two states are incommensurable, separated by the sentiment of *sublimity*, that is to say, by the *will-to-deliverance*, which brings with it the liberating and energizing experience of *salvation*, capable of sweeping aside all the contradictions of modernity and its piecemeal reformism through the complete transformation of self and society.⁴ Sorel’s hunger for the infinite is such that he embraces “absolute revolution”: “Parties, as a rule, *define* the reforms that they wish to bring about; but the general strike has a character of *infinity*, because it puts on one side all discussions of definite reforms and confronts men with a catastrophe” (46). Sorel presents the essence of chiliastic expectation: the promise of the *breakthrough to totality*, in which the General Strike holds fast the absolute moment of pure duration that breaks the spell of profane time.⁵ “For the real Chiliast, the present becomes the breach through which what was previously inward bursts out suddenly, takes hold of the outer world and transforms it.”⁶

This longing for deliverance, this will to myth, was not confined to the “Nietzschean existential school of thinkers, cultural critics, and artists”;⁷ it found its most striking manifestation in the spontaneous enthusiasm that greeted the outbreak of war in August 1914. Robert Wohl refers to the feverish and intoxicated feeling that possessed Italian intellectuals, who saw in the war “a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to destroy the Giolittian regime, to throw off the fetters of bourgeois existence, and to open the way toward some ill-defined but radically different future.”⁸ Günter Berghaus speaks of a whole generation of young Italians who greeted the war as the culmination of their dreams: “The grandiose metaphors of *guerra come festa*, of war as a mystical, orgiastic experience of the Darwinian/Nietzschean principle of Life as Struggle, of war as a cleansing process beneficial and vital for a

3. Edward Shils, Introduction to *Reflections on Violence*, by Georges Sorel, 17.

4. “Salvation” is Sorel’s last word in *Reflections on Violence*: “It is to violence that socialism owes those high ethical values by means of which it brings *salvation* to the modern world” (249).

5. Jean Davignaud describes Sorel’s concept of the General Strike as having “the character of a festival in the course of which official time is destroyed to give way to a new time, that of the proletariat itself, which according to sociologists is a time ‘ahead of itself’, a creative time of liberty.” Jean Davignaud, “La fête civique,” in *Histoire des spectacles*, ed. Guy Dumur (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 254. The structural parallels to Benjamin’s concept of “Jetztzeit” or to the “situation” of the situationists, as well as to Carl Schmitt’s “sublime” concept of “exception” are evident: “In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition.” Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 36.

6. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 193.

7. David Ohana, “The ‘Anti-Intellectual’ Intellectuals as Political Mythmakers,” in *The Intellectual Revolt against Liberal Democracy, 1870–1945*, ed. Zeev Sternhell (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1996), 87–104.

8. Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 168.

healthy organism... finally appeared to become reality."⁹ Although the Great War inevitably disappointed the redemptive dreams it aroused, it also radicalized the inchoate longings for total revolution. Here Sorel played a crucial role as a theorist of the vanguard. His conception of a fanatical and chiliastic revolutionary sect, constituted by an elite of dedicated warriors, bound together by a sublime ethic of crisis, and called to the historic mission of restoring vitality to a dying civilization did indeed become reality in the Bolshevik vanguard party in Russia and the paramilitary *fasci* in Italy.

It has not been sufficiently remarked that *Reflections on Violence* also consists of an inquiry into the nature of the sublime, but as an ethical rather than an aesthetic category. Sorel does not follow Nietzsche's reduction of ethics to aesthetics in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nevertheless, Sorel's own version of heroic pessimism also demands the stripping away of the veils of illusion to reveal the real reality beneath appearances, which for him is the state of war as the condition of the sublime. By the state of war, Sorel means the irreversibility of catastrophe, which allows no evasions. Only from the sublime passage of death will the New Man and the New World be born. It hardly needs stating that Sorel's activism and voluntarism break with the spectator-based theory of the sublime and insist like Nietzsche on the rejuvenating energies released by the transcendence of the principle of self-preservation. Sorel's ethic of combat as transformative "inner experience" (Ernst Jünger) affirmed the ethic of war. D'Annunzio and Marinetti married this *ethic* to an *aesthetic* of war. Even though this aesthetic took very different forms for the two poets, they shared a common will to realize the revolutionary goal of translating art into political action. D'Annunzio provided Mussolini with a model of the symbols and ceremonies of the rebirth of the nation through blood and sacrifice, which d'Annunzio had elaborated in Fiume;¹⁰ Marinetti's futurists offered Mussolini the

9. Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909–1944* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1996), 82.

10. The March on Fiume on 12 September 1919, d'Annunzio's "sacred entry" into the city at the head of 2,500 soldiers and veterans, and occupation of the city for fifteen months form one of the more bizarre and remarkable episodes of the postwar period, which already indicated the Italian government's growing loss of control of the armed forces. The occupation finally collapsed in January 1921 after the Treaty of Rapallo between Italy and Yugoslavia in November 1920 recognized the demands of the Italian citizens of Fiume (representing some 58 percent of an ethnically mixed population), leading to Italian annexation in 1924. Judgments on the significance of the whole adventure vary. S. Talmon (*The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution* [London: Secker & Warburg, 1981], 499) is dismissive of d'Annunzio's "operatic dictatorship" and his motley collection of soldiers, idealists, freebooters, and bohemians: "They improvised a kind of revolutionary-collectivist utopia, inspired by the exclusive, true general will of the nation: they unfolded a new style of politics—a mixture of patriotic cult, civil religion and artistic licence." George Mosse, on the other hand, stresses the historical significance of d'Annunzio's political theatre: it announced the new political age that had reached maturity at Fiume. For the first time since the French Revolution "the aesthetics of politics had been used once again as a principal means of governance." George Mosse, "Fascism and the French Revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (1989): 15. Roger Griffin considers the "transformation of political life into a continuous display of civic liturgy," staged by d'Annunzio, as the dress-rehearsal for Mussolini and thus the first "fully fledged expression of fascism in action." Roger Griffin, "Staging the Nation's

images of heroic technological modernization. D'Annunzio and Marinetti epitomized the "double image" of Italian Fascism: the potent combination of political myth and deadly technology, fused by the conviction that all great values arise from the creative destruction of war. D'Annunzio's vanguard of paramilitaries and Marinetti's avant-garde of futurist poets, painters, and musicians formed a core component of the Fascist Party, which claimed for itself the role of vanguard and executor of the General Will of the nation.

The two vanguards, d'Annunzio's Arditi and Marinetti's futurists,¹¹ coalesced in 1919 with the launching in Milan of the *Fasci di Combattimento*. For a brief period in 1919 and 1920, d'Annunzio and Marinetti shared the leading role with Mussolini in creating the ultranationalist movement that became the prototype of the European Fascist movements. Michael Mann defines the generic features of all these movements "as the pursuit of transcendent and cleansing nation-statism through paramilitarism." Mann's definition contains four key components, three of which present an escalation or totalization of the dominant political ideology of the modern era, that of the nation-state: the *nation* conceived as the integral or organic nation of the one and indivisible people, defined against its external or internal enemies; the *state* conceived as the bearer of a moral project of national development with state power embodied in the leader and the party elite; *transcendence* conceived as the overcoming of the conflicting interests and contradictions of modern society. *Paramilitarism* provided the specifically new, Fascist component: the violent, grass-roots vehicle of integral, cleansing nationalism that enforced cultural or racial nationalism. Paramilitarism's appeal as the vanguard of the nation to both the street and the elites meant that Fascist movements were always more than a party: "Fascism was uniformed, marching, armed, dangerous, and radically destabilizing of the existing order." As was the case with their Communist rival, Fascist regimes were characterized by a dialectic between "movement" and "bureaucracy."¹² Fascism cannot be dismissed as the extreme, aberrant product of nationalism and the tensions of modernization. On the contrary, it must be recognized, Mann insists, as the major political doctrine of world-historical significance created in the first half of the twentieth century and as such lying at the heart of European modernity, precisely through its claim—like its Communist enemy and rival—to be a total solution to the ideological, political, and economic crises of Europe after the First World War. Mann does not add the necessary corollary to his claim for the world-historical significance of Fascism, that Fascism—like Communism—necessarily

Rebirth: The Politics and Aesthetics of Performance in the Context of Fascist Studies," in *Fascism and Theatre: Comparative Studies of Performance in Europe, 1925–1945*, ed. Günter Berghaus (Oxford: Berghahn, 1996), 23.

11. Pamela Ballinger, "Blutopfer und Feuertaufe: Der Kriegsritus der Arditi," in *Der Dichter als Kommandant: D'Annunzio in Fiume*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Friedrich Kittler, and Bernhard Siegert (Munich: Fink, 1996), 175–79.

12. Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–16.

failed because its totalizing ambitions were inadequate to the complexities of modernity. This does not alter the fact that its mass appeal as a movement of high ideals, with a special attraction for the young and for students, needs to be taken seriously, that is, grasped from inside.¹³

In order to grasp this mass appeal from the inside, we need to recognize that it involves two distinct but inseparable dimensions of the sublime in politics: the *sacralization* and the *staging* of power, both clearly present in Italian Fascism. The significance of Fascism's theatre of politics is not fully recognized, Emilio Gentile argues, if it is reduced to mass spectacle and mass manipulation and labeled "aestheticization of politics," without acknowledging at the same time the "consistent link between the theatricality of Fascism and its culture as a totalitarian movement and modern political religion."¹⁴ Gentile stresses the vital role of the "modernistic avant-garde intelligentsia" and of d'Annunzio in particular in the Italian search for a political religion of the nation. Thus Marinetti could claim in an interview in 1932 that he and Mussolini were the creators of a new world: "[Mussolini] is in politics exactly what I am in art. He has realized an essentially Futurist programme that calls for (*réclame*) confidence in the future of Italy, daily heroism, love of danger, violence considered as an argument."¹⁵ D'Annunzio brought the myths, rituals, and symbols born in the trenches and staged in Fiume to the construction of a national religion: "To assume its sacred nature, the Italian nation had to pass through trial by sacrifice and be sanctified with the blood of its children."¹⁶ Violence and sacrifice demonstrated not only the irresistibility of myth as an indispensable engine of political mobilization, as Le Bon, Pareto, and Sorel believed, but more generally the dialectic between the desacralization and resacralization of political power in modernity.¹⁷ As the "first European experiment since the French Revolution seeking to instrumentalize a new civic religion," Italian Fascism's affirmation of myth as the source of the meaning and purpose of collective life attributed to myth a synthesizing power that embraced artistic creation and religious and political movements.¹⁸ That is to say, the aestheticization at work in the Fascist theatre of politics owed its undeniable mass appeal to the performative reunion of art, religion, and politics that was achieved in its staging of the myth of the rebirth of the nation.¹⁹

13. *Ibid.*, 1, 3.

14. Emilio Gentile, "The Theatre of Politics in Fascist Italy," in Berghaus, *Fascism and Theatre*, 73; Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

15. Jean-Claude Marcadé, ed., *Présence de F. T. Marinetti* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1982), 374. Cf. Zeev Sternhell on futurism: "One can hardly exaggerate the significance of the avant-gardist element in the original fascism, the importance of its revolutionary aesthetic." Zeev Sternhell, Marie Sznajder, and Maria Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 28.

16. Gentile, *Sacralization of Politics*, 15.

17. *Ibid.*, 153–54.

18. *Ibid.*, 84.

19. Griffin, "Staging the Nation's Rebirth," 11–29.

The political influence of d'Annunzio and Marinetti had passed by the beginning of the twenties. Marinetti had already resigned from the Executive Committee of the Fascist Party by 1920; in 1922, d'Annunzio retreated to the monumentalization of his legend in his villa, Il Vittoriale degli Italiani, on the shore of Lake Garda, dedicated to the victories of the nation. Mussolini ensured the support of d'Annunzio through the steady flow of state funds, sponsorship, and subsidy of his collected works under the patronage of the king, by declaring Il Vittoriale a national monument in 1924 and furnishing it with the military relics of d'Annunzio's wartime exploits, the prow of the warship *Puglia*, the torpedo boat of the attack on the Austrian navy, and the plane used in the flight to Vienna.²⁰ It was only appropriate that Italian Fascism reached its inglorious end in Mussolini's puppet Republic of Salò, 1943–45, with its capital in the neighboring commune to Il Vittoriale. And Il Vittoriale itself, d'Annunzio's theatre of memory? Already in 1933, Mario Praz could describe it as a final monumental expression of the decadent movement:

It is Péladan's Montségur... translated into actuality: at the Vittoriale, also, there is a "décoration panthéonique des religions," a combined atmosphere of the shrine of Parsifal, of a princely palace, and of an aesthete's paradise, with casts of Greek statues, emblematic trappings, Franciscan symbols, objects of worship and war; a vast collection of *bric-à-brac* to which many different cultures and periods, arts, religions, and nature herself, have contributed.²¹

Even more ironic than d'Annunzio's retreat to his origins in fin-de-siècle decadence and symbolism was Marinetti's desire to monumentalize his place in Italian history. For all his undiminished military ardor, which led him to volunteer at the age of sixty for Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia and to accompany the Italian forces in Russia in the Second World War, his compromise with official fame was a pathetic spectacle. He was made a member of the Italian Academy, and in 1929 secretary of the Fascist Writers' Union. Not only did futurism gain recognition as a privileged state art (even though this meant very little in practice), but Marinetti, who had launched futurism by declaring war on the museum, ended by campaigning for state funding for a museum of futurism!

Benjamin and the Aestheticization of Politics

Benjamin seems to have been the first to have perceived and highlighted the aesthetic dimension of the Fascist cult of war, in "Theories of German Fascism," his

20. Mussolini is reported to have said of his financial support for his earlier rival for power: "When you have a rotten tooth you have two possibilities open to you: either you pull the tooth or you fill it with gold. With D'Annunzio I have chosen the latter treatment." Quoted in Fred Licht, "The Vittoriale degli Italiani," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 41.4 (December 1982): 318–24.

21. Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (London: Collins, 1960), 424.

1930 review of the volume *Krieg und Krieger* (War and Warriors), edited by Ernst Jünger (apart, that is, from Jünger himself). Benjamin derives this aesthetic dimension from the inability of capitalist societies to find constructive social uses for technology or art. The cult of art for art's sake thus stands in an essential relation to the cult of war and the unleashing of the pure destructivity of technology. Of the contributors to *War and Warriors*, he writes: "The most rabidly decadent origins of this new theory of war are emblazoned on their foreheads: it is nothing other than an uninhibited translation of the principles of *l'art pour l'art* to war itself."²² It is interesting that Carl Schmitt arrived at the same judgment in 1930 in relation to the book Jünger was then writing, *Der Arbeiter* (The Worker). Schmitt suggested to Jünger that his thinking exemplified the "system" of belief for the sake of belief, morality for the sake of morality, *l'art pour l'art*, and work for the sake of work.²³ But does Benjamin's "translation of the principle of *l'art pour l'art* to war itself" fully capture the total experience that Jünger and his comrades in arms sought on the battlefield: war as the highest revelation of being, war as the apocalypse of bourgeois civilization? What could be more decadent, Benjamin responds, than these bourgeois cravings for the downfall of the West. He quotes from *War and Warriors* a Dionysian hymn to war that surpasses human understanding: "inhuman, boundless, gigantic in its Reason, something reminiscent of a volcanic process, an elemental eruption," "a colossal wave of life directed by a painfully deep, cogently unified force" on battlefields that have already become mythic (2: 314). Out of this landscape of death is born, in the words of Jünger's brother Friedrich, "the type of soldier schooled in those hard, sober, bloody and incessant campaigns of attrition" (2: 318), who casts aside the despised "bourgeois" principle of self-preservation. This new man—the prototype of Jünger's Worker—is the war veteran, the shock trooper of Fascist total mobilization. His face bears, in Benjamin's words, the features of death, just as the "apocalyptic face of nature," at once archaic and modern, is revealed on the battlefield, as described by Jünger, where man and nature, life and death fuse in the ecstasy of combat: "That is an intoxication above all other, . . . a madness without inhibition or limits, comparable only to the forces of nature. Man is like the raging storm, the roaring sea and the crashing thunder. Then he merges into the whole, he races towards the dark gates of death like a projectile towards its target."²⁴

In 1936 Benjamin could add the second element, which was not yet apparent in 1930, to his analysis of Fascism: the combination of the decadent theory of art

22. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 1927–1934, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 314. Parenthetical volume and page references in the text refer to this edition of Benjamin's writings.

23. Ernst Jünger, *Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Briefe 1930–1983*, ed. Helmut Kiesel (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1999), 9.

24. Ernst Jünger, "Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis," in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 7 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 54.

with monumentalism. “Nothing is more instructive than this self-contradictory hybrid.”²⁵ It is as if Benjamin had already anticipated the theory of ruins developed by Albert Speer,²⁶ Hitler’s architect and director of ceremonies, or foreseen the ultimate expression of monumental decadence in the ruins of Germany’s bombed cities. Benjamin’s interest lies in fact elsewhere: in the mass character of Fascist aestheticization, not only aimed at the masses but also executed by the masses—but not of course in the interests of the masses. The monumentalizing of the masses casts a spell over spectators and actors at the same time as it paralyzes the possibility of critical thought or action. That Benjamin’s contrast between the function of Russian and German mass parades and festivals was illusory by 1936 does not affect the guiding opposition of enlightenment and propaganda, so central to his “Work of Art” essay.

In the age of the masses, Benjamin writes, the masses come face-to-face with themselves “in great ceremonial processions, great rallies, and mass sporting events, and in war, all of which are now fed into the camera.”²⁷ How the masses come face-to-face with themselves is the question: will it be through self-recognition, effected by the politicization of art, or through self-alienation, effected by the aestheticization of politics? To rephrase the question: what form must collective experience take if it is to counter the regressive, ritual spell of Fascist propaganda? In asking how art can come to the aid of political enlightenment, Benjamin is posing the question that Schiller had already famously attempted to answer 140 years earlier. Confronted by the regression of the French Revolution to the frightful kingdom of blind, destructive forces, Schiller sought to demonstrate that the problem of political practice could only be solved through the intermediate realm of art, “because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to freedom.”²⁸ Beauty for Schiller lies between Kant’s sublime of nature and the true sublime of moral autonomy, each of which exceeds the aesthetic, whose proper realm is confined to the beautiful concordance between art and nature. The double reference of representation—to both politics and art—is therefore central to a “beautiful” conception of *aesthetic politics*, which respects the aesthetic distance, the gap between the represented and representation as the condition and safeguard of the space of legitimate political power and of the political and aesthetic creativity that springs from the permanent debate on representation.²⁹ Such an aesthetic politics, espoused by Benjamin in

25. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 3: 488.

26. Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), 55. I return below to Speer’s theory of ruin-value in relation to the Pyramids.

27. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al., ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 282. Benjamin is referring here to Marinetti’s glorification of war.

28. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 9.

29. F. R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics: Political Philosophy beyond Fact and Value* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996); Marc Richir, *Du sublime en politique* (Paris: Payot, 1991).

the form of distraction as the safeguard of aesthetic distance, resists the “sublime,” totalitarian temptation—in Benjamin’s terms, the aestheticization of politics—to eliminate the gap in the name of the supposed identity of leader and people or party and proletariat. Kant’s theory of the sublime can therefore be read as political in intention, when he condemns the self-alienation that passes for religion and consists of superstitious submission to and worship of a fearful and despotic deity. In turn, Nietzsche’s theory of the sublime, which reverses Kant’s theory of the sublime, can be read as the prototype of the goal of Fascist aestheticization: the collective identification with and surrender to power in and through ecstasy and terror beyond self-preservation.

But how in practice is Benjamin’s progressive politicization of art to distinguish itself from a regressive aestheticization of politics? Both share the same origin: the First World War and the shattering of tradition, mirrored in the avant-garde’s assault on the work of art as aesthetic object. If Benjamin praises Dada’s “ruthless annihilation” of aura, he is obliged at the same time to acknowledge that Fascism has appropriated “the reactionary elements of Futurism, Expressionism, and to some extent Surrealism.”³⁰ And do not the avant-garde, film, and Fascism share the same “destructive, cathartic” interest in the liquidation of the value of tradition (3: 121)? Again, how can Benjamin appeal to the revolutionary possibilities inherent in technological reproduction, when its effects seem better suited to totalitarian purposes, based as they are on the “sense for sameness in the world” (4: 256), and the substitution of “mass existence for a unique existence” (4: 254), a substitution as applicable to its recipients as to the reproducible work of art? Benjamin must admit that the star and the dictator emerge as victors before the camera (4: 277). Nevertheless, film offers the only possibility of reaching the masses and answering the question that Benjamin had already posed to himself in a fragment associated with “The Work of Art”: how can forces, which in the political sphere lead to Fascism, have a beneficial function in the domain of art? His answer: art is the sphere in which social conflicts, even more than individual conflicts, can be resolved. He insists that the “devastating power latent in the tendencies pacified within it” does not invalidate art (3: 139). But if Benjamin is to counter Nietzsche and his disciples, d’Annunzio, Marinetti, and Jünger, it must be on their grounds—collective intoxication—and not on that of individual aesthetic judgment.

Benjamin’s starting point is therefore the matrix of the masses “from which all customary behavior towards works of art is today emerging newborn” (4: 267). The catalyst for a “different kind of participation” is the film. Technological reproduction has not only destroyed the illusion of the autonomous work of art and of the autonomous subject of reception; it has also transformed the extremely backward attitude of the masses to a painting by Picasso into a progressive response to a

30. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, 1935–1938, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al., ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 363.

Chaplin film. This new kind of participation replaces the old contemplative reception. Individual *absorption* gives way to collective *distraction*: “A person who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it. . . . By contrast, the distracted masses absorb the work into themselves” (4: 268). Benjamin presents distraction as the antithesis to tragic catharsis and as the antidote to the sublime, taking Chaplin as his model for film as the antitragic, antitotal work of art—in short, the birth of film from the matrix of the masses against the birth of tragedy from the spirit of music. Where Nietzsche dreams of a state founded on music, Benjamin dreams of the cinema as the school of the new collective subject of history, immunized à la Chaplin against the seductive power of Fascist aesthetics—the school, in which authentic, that is, collective, experience would once again become possible.³¹ The interplay of individual and collective reception and of pleasure and playful appraisal in distraction point the way to the overcoming of the splitting of authentic experience (*Erfahrung*) into debased experience (*Erlebnis*) and information (the newsreel). *Film* as medium thus plays a strategic role for Benjamin in breaking the fatal hold over the masses of the Fascist *theatre* of politics. It is not in itself, however, *politicized* art, as the other of the aestheticization of politics. That remains beyond the ambit of “The Work of Art” essay. At best, film can play an intermediary role with respect to innervation against the shocks of modern life, that is, through a subconscious habituation that helps to immunize the masses against self-alienating absorption into the spell of the Fascist collective.³²

In looking for a “different kind of participation,” Benjamin recognizes but only partially comes to grip with the challenge posed by what Frederic Spotts calls the new style of Nazi politics, which transformed *spectators* into *participants*:

What Stalin accomplished through terror, Hitler achieved through seduction. Using a new style of politics, mediated through symbols, myths, rites, spectacles and personal dramatics, he reached the masses as did no other leader of his time. Though he took away democratic government, he gave Germans what they clearly found a more meaningful sense of political participation, transforming them from spectators into participants in National Socialist theatre.³³

The locus classicus for the Nazi fusion of art and politics is Goebbels’s open letter of April 1933 to the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler: “We who are giving form to modern German politics feel ourselves artists entrusted with the lofty responsibility to form from the raw masses a full and solid image of the people.”³⁴ This image

31. Sabine Hake explores the revolutionary force of laughter in Chaplin’s films in “Chaplin Reception in Weimar Germany,” *New German Critique* 51 (1990): 87–112.

32. I owe these last points to György Markus.

33. Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (London: Hutchinson, 2002), xi–xii. Spotts’s bibliography gives an indication of the voluminous literature on the subject.

34. Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 1, 5.

of the people was to manifest itself as the national community reborn through participation in the National Socialist theatre of politics. The ability of the Nazi festivals to channel and to harness the longing for communal belonging through mystic communion with the Führer and with the *Volksgemeinschaft* lay, Jean-Paul Sironneau argues, in their appeal to the archaic instinct for domination. Outside observers, who spoke of hysteria or collective intoxication, failed to recognize the strength of the desire to escape the self in fusion with a social whole (Sironneau refers in this context to the function of Orphic and Dionysian cults).³⁵ It is not by chance that Benjamin's indictment, in the epilogue to "The Work of Art" essay, of a mankind that delights in its own destruction revolves around the key terms of "spectator" and "participant": "Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic" (4: 270).

Benjamin's paradoxical conclusion brings out into the open the ambiguity of his use of the term "aestheticization." The juxtaposition of *contemplation* and *experience* refers to two very different aesthetic pleasures in relation to the subject's own annihilation, which belong to the theory and history of the sublime. To resume: in Burke the ruling principle of the sublime is terror, the strongest emotion we can feel, defused through the pleasure afforded by the contemplation in safety of the sufferings of others in tragedy or in life. Kant transformed Burke's passion for self-preservation into a "quite different kind of self-preservation," moral not physical in nature, with a corresponding distinction between a misunderstood sublime, rooted in terror and fear, and a true sublime, arising from the conquest of terror. It is only in Nietzsche's theory of the sublime in *The Birth of Tragedy* that mankind experiences supreme aesthetic pleasure in its own annihilation, in the form of the intense terror and ecstasy experienced through the release from the principle of individuation in collective intoxication. This elimination of contemplative distance between spectator and participant makes the Nietzschean sublime into an *transaesthetic* category, for which Nietzsche's term is the Dionysian intoxication through which we experience our oneness with the ultimate ground of being, which he later identified with the Will to Power. Fascist "aestheticization" is directed to this same Dionysian possession through the annihilation of contemplative distance and the transcendence of the self-preserving individual in the community of the nation and in the mobilized, uniformed, marching masses.³⁶

35. Jean-Paul Sironneau, *Sécularisation et religions politiques* (The Hague: Mouton, 1982), 337–46.

36. For Germany, see Klaus Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation: Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971); and for Italy, Gentile, *Sacralization of Politics*. Thus if we are to speak of the Fascist aestheticization of politics, it is in terms of art's subordination and regression to ritual in the service of an ideological cult and a political religion.

Benjamin leaves us with a paradoxical formulation that needs *unfolding*. It compresses into a final paradox the whole genealogy of the Fascist aestheticization of politics that indeed has its origins in Nietzsche and fin-de-siècle decadence but ends with Hitler's seizure of power. To understand Hitler after 1933, to understand the *totalitarian* dimensions of "aestheticization," we need, on the one hand, the German counterpart to d'Annunzio and Marinetti—Jünger, aesthete, war hero, Nietzschean—and on the other, the Nazi mobilization of the masses through the medium of film. Jünger completes the Nietzsche-inspired trajectory from the overcoming of decadence in prewar France and Italy to the postwar vision of the totalitarian state as total work of art in *Der Arbeiter* (1932). Its analogue in film is the monumentalizing of the masses in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935).

The State as Work of Art: Jünger's *Der Arbeiter*

Jünger's new man is the Worker, who is capable of facing and welcoming the terrifying annihilating reality of the world as the Will to Power, revealed in the Great War.³⁷ The Worker's "heroic realism" separates him from the "bourgeois" individual who anxiously clings to life and security as his highest values. The parallel to Heidegger's distinction in *Being and Time* between authentic and inauthentic *Dasein*, the few and the many (*das Man*), is evident. In each the deciding criterion is the resolute readiness to look death in the face. The only aesthetic adequate to "heroic realism" is thus the *sublime*, the sublime that explodes, according to Heidegger, every true aesthetics, even that of Kant, because it "explodes the very subjectivity of the subject,"³⁸ pointing beyond the subject, beyond the aesthetic realm, to the beauty that is nothing but the beginning of the terrible (Rilke). The contemplation of the modern world in all its dynamism and relentless discipline, Jünger tells us in "Total Mobilization," arouses mixed feelings of pleasure and horror, as we are forced to grasp that we are inescapably caught up in this frantic process. We must submit to the total mobilization that seizes and rolls over us; it is the mysterious and compelling imperative of the age of the masses and machines. The Great War with its war economy was but the preparation for the gigantic harnessing of energies already evident in Russia and Italy, a work process dictated by the pressure of the masses. Their emergence signifies the new "democracy of death" that has canceled all distinctions between soldiers and civilians, war and peace. The wars of the Worker, rational and merciless, await us.³⁹

37. See Klaus Vondung, *Die Apokalypse in Deutschland* (Munich: dtv, 1988), 383–87.

38. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 1, *The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 123.

39. Ernst Jünger, "Die Totale Mobilmachung," sec. 3, in *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 7: 119–42. That this spectacle fills Jünger with jubilation points directly to Benjamin's epilogue to "The Work of Art."

In Jünger's apocalyptic perspective, progress with its naive cult of the machine, driven by the rival gods of socialism and nationalism, will pulverize the remnants of the old world and finally itself to reveal the identity of the "left" and the "right": "It is a grandiose and frightful spectacle, to observe the ever more similar masses caught in the nets of the World Spirit." This is the moment of destiny for Germany, the Germany that came face-to-face with itself in the war and recognized with Nietzsche that "this world is the will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!"⁴⁰ This recognition makes the Worker the deadly enemy of bourgeois *society*, because bourgeois society is the negation of the *state* as the highest means to power. In the Worker State the Work Plan takes the place of the constitution, and total mobilization of the population from cradle to grave replaces conscription. The army knows neither individuals nor the mass, dismissed by Jünger as the twin faces of the identity of democracy and anarchy. Just as the individual is replaced by the Worker as type, so are the masses by what Jünger calls the organic construction. As type the Worker appears in the dual but ultimately identical form of the master, as in the elite military orders, or the slave, as in the labor battalions. It goes without saying that labor service entails the readiness for self-sacrifice. Jünger's highest exemplar of the hero seems to be the suicide bomber, when he defines his heroic realist as the human type who is capable of blowing himself up with pleasure and affirming this act as a confirmation of order.⁴¹ This human type in Jünger's image will lead Germany's revolution against the bourgeois world, a revolution that equates order with death and destruction and in which living dangerously demands the high cruel pleasure of annihilating the abstract intellect.⁴² Jünger (writing in 1932) makes a special point of declaring "individual" artists and abstract intellectuals traitors. There will be new persecutions of the heretics, whose belief in the duality of blood and spirit, power and justice, man and nature, has fueled their secret wish ever since the world war to bring about the downfall of the "Reich" and its coming world empire (242).⁴³

In fine: Jünger regards the struggle for world power as a sublime spectacle, inhabited and transfigured by death. In Jünger's universe the fallen soldier alone lives, because he has conquered time; he belongs to eternity, whereas the bourgeois,

40. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), 550.

41. For Klaus Vondung, Jünger's Worker epitomizes the perfect synthesis of deed and sacrifice realized in self-sacrifice. Klaus Vondung, *Die Apokalypse in Deutschland*, 477 ff.

42. Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, in *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 8: 41–47. Parenthetical page references in the text refer to this edition. It is scarcely surprising that Jünger and his literary heirs have never agreed to an English translation of this text.

43. It should be added that Jünger did not hesitate after 1933 to make it clear that he wanted nothing to do with the National Socialist regime. It was clearly neither aristocratic nor ruthless enough in his eyes. At the time of writing *Der Arbeiter* he was closest to the National Bolsheviks' version of Spengler's Prussian Socialism: Socialism as the precondition for imperial tasks (*Der Arbeiter*, 254). He greatly admired Ernst Niekisch, the leading National Bolshevik, for his steadfast resistance to the Nazis.

the civilian, remains the victim consumed by time. This obsession with death and sacrifice goes to the heart of the Fascist sublime: it signifies the total rejection and negation of the values of bourgeois society in the name of the implacable absolute, born from the killing fields of the Great War—the God of Death and “nothing besides.” The invasion of bourgeois space by the “elemental powers” of war has shattered forever the illusions of peacetime and separated masters from slaves: for the one, death becomes the extreme moment of self-discovery; for the others, the mass of fearful victims, however, there awaits the “democracy of death.” This transfiguring reversal of death into the highest form of life elevates sacrifice to the supreme value of a heroic cult that acquired all the trappings of a state religion in Fascism. National Socialism drew much of its strength from its perpetuation of the infinite debt of death to the war dead, becoming in its turn the death machine that demanded ever more sacrifices to its millenarian myth of salvation and regeneration, involving a coming apocalyptic conflict as the passage to a new world. Nothing distinguishes Jünger’s apocalypse from that of the Nazis: neither the latter’s unlimited goals nor even the glaring disproportion between goals and means in the coming struggle for planetary power.

For Jünger it is useless to seek to justify the Will to Power other than as an aesthetic phenomenon. War is simply and supremely the total work, as “purposeless” as the pyramids or the cathedrals. This comparison, advanced in “Total Mobilization,” is not as arbitrary as it might seem. These three sublime manifestations of the Will to Power proclaim the conquest of *death* and *time*. Moreover, only the great politics of planetary war will make art in the grand style possible once again. Jünger expounds his vision of the total work adequate to the masters of the planet in the chapter “Art as the Shaping of the Work World” in *The Worker*. Needless to say, the age of the Worker and of planetary-imperial plans totally excludes the art and politics of bourgeois individualism, which never recognized or comprehended the arts of the state: sculpture, architecture, and drama. Jünger has nothing to say about drama, since his interest lies with the art of *space* against time, the space in which totality appears as archetypal *Gestalt*. In the new planetary space of the Worker, opened up by the downfall of the individual, *Gestalt* acts as the great creative principle, capable of grasping life in its totality and giving it *form* through a fusion of the organic and the mechanical in organic constructions. Thus the total mobilization that transforms life into energy and “grasps the earth as its elementary material” calls for *Gestaltung* in order to give form to world domination (*Herrschaft*). But just as man fuses with the machine in the organic construction, so life given form resembles death in Jünger’s utopia of extinguished individuality.

What then is Jünger’s alternative to the art of individualism, of the traitors who will never grasp the identity of art with the highest fulfillment of the life force? Instead of the absurdity of our museum culture, Jünger proposes “the great sacral landscapes devoted to the cult of the gods and the dead” (225). It is of course the dream of all “great” rulers to perpetuate themselves in “monuments immune to

the attacks of time” as similes of the eternal (232). The nearest parallel in the Third Reich were Hitler’s plans for Totenburgen, cities of the dead, intended to mark the frontiers of the new Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals, from Norway to Greece.⁴⁴ The monuments would serve as the eternal reminder of the unification of Europe under the leadership of its core people. The “future was marching with the past in the eternal present of the race, and the movement was leading toward the immobility of stone.”⁴⁵ This petrification “eternalizes,” Benjamin observes, imperial power: under the gaze of their Fascist masters “the difference between the slaves, who built the pyramids out of blocks, and the proletarian masses on the squares and parade grounds, who build blocks before the leader, is minimal” (3: 389). The petrification of life is also Jünger’s highest ideal; it corresponds to the supplanting of the individual by the typical. The individualistic world of economic competition, historical progress, and sovereign creativity comes to rest in the type as *eternal archetype*: “There is nothing more self-evident, more uniform and—from an individual standpoint—more symmetrical than grave or temple landscapes, in which simple or constant proportions, monuments, the orders of columns, ornaments and symbols are repeated in solemn monotony and surround life with definite and definitive images” (238). Such a world, as for instance the spectacle of the great pyramids at night, induces fear not admiration in the stranger. In such a world *all movement is controlled by the frightful logic of a closed, incomparable unity* (239). As Jünger puts it, the art of the empire will be the art that replicates the metallic physiognomy, the love of mathematical structures, and the lack of psychic differentiation of the Worker. We can best understand Jünger’s “organic construction” if we substitute for the uniform, solemn monotony of the rows of temple columns the serried ranks of the Worker in the rigid order of the parade ground: the type as clone of what Lewis Mumford has called the *megamachine*.

In *The City in History* (1961) Lewis Mumford speaks in passing of the inner trauma of the city, “the trauma of civilization itself, the association of mastery and slavery, of power and human sacrifice.”⁴⁶ He returned to this theme four years later in the essay “Utopia, the City, and the Machine.” There Mumford discerns at the very beginning of urban civilization “not only the archetypal form of the city as utopia but another coordinate utopian institution essential to any system of communal regimentation: the machine.”⁴⁷ The city and the machine together project the institution of kingship as “the godlike incarnation of collective power,” based on a

44. There is a direct link from the monument to commemorate Hindenburg’s victory at the battle of Tannenberg on the Eastern Front in 1914 to Hitler’s Totenburgen. Hitler visited the monument in 1933 and transformed it into Hindenburg’s mausoleum in 1934. Robert Savage has drawn my attention to the connection.

45. Eric Michaud, *Cult of Art*, 212. For the architect Wilhelm Kreis’s drawing of a Totenburg, approved by Hitler, see Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, 117.

46. Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (Harmondsworth, UK: Pelican, 1966), 376.

47. Lewis Mumford, “Utopia, the City, and the Machine,” in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (London: Souvenir Press, 1973), 3–24; the quote appears on p. 10.

coalition between military might and religious myth. The utopia of the city springs from its founding conception as a home for the gods: "To inhabit the same city as a god was to be the member of a super-community: a community in which every subject had a place . . . as part of a hierarchical structure representing the cosmos itself." The city with its monuments to sacred and secular power could not have come into being, however, without its other utopian institution, what Mumford calls the platonic model of all later machines, *the machine composed of human parts*. This machine takes two, interchangeable forms: the labor and the military machine, with the common characteristic that they enabled a concentration of energy in great assemblages of men. Organized as a "unified working whole" according to a strict division and specialization of labor under administrative supervision (the platonic model of all later bureaucracies), the labor machine made possible the execution of projects on a scale that was not surpassed until the Industrial Revolution. The most striking example remains the Great Pyramid at Giza, which already demonstrated the efficiency and perfection of the machine in the age of its invention. But if the utopian city transformed the humble human community into a gigantic collective work of art, the price, says Mumford, was "total submission to a central authority, forced labour, lifetime specialization, inflexible regimentation . . . and readiness for war." The archetypal machine thus represented an "ambivalent triumph of human design." On the one hand, it "created a visible heaven in the great city, exalting the human spirit as it had never been exalted by man's works before." On the other hand, the labor machine and the military machine nourished and sustained the imperial dreams and paranoid fantasies of rulers.⁴⁸ It is not by chance that Mumford singles out the Pyramids as the archetypal product of the machine, composed of living but rigid human parts in the service of divine kingship. Where Mumford sees the expression of a totalitarian concentration of political, economic, military, and bureaucratic power that was not to be replicated until the modern period, Jünger, as he contemplates the ruins of lost civilizations, senses in these stones symbols of the everlasting: "the deeper unity of life" beyond the distinction between masters and slaves.⁴⁹ Even more, he declares the incomprehension and objections of "individuals" to his vision of the totalitarian state utterly irrelevant. If the individual can only recognize in his exposition "the description of a situation, in which art is made by machines and in which the world appears as the setting of a new insect species," such a misunderstanding leaves him indifferent (245).

Jünger's fascination with the Pyramids found its contemporary complement in Speer's theory of ruin-value, which he developed to satisfy Hitler's desire for monuments that would speak to future generations of the greatness of the empire.

48. *Ibid.*, 17.

49. Jean-Jacques Walter also refers to the Egyptian machine in *Les machines totalitaires* (Paris: Denoel, 1982), but his main interest concerns the systematic destruction of the human person and his values in totalitarian states.

“Hitler liked to say that the purpose of his building was to transmit his time and its spirit to posterity. Ultimately, all that remained to remind men of the great epochs of history was their monumental architecture.”⁵⁰ How appropriate that Speer illustrated his theory in 1934 with a drawing of the Zeppelinfeld at Nuremberg—the setting of the party rallies—in a state of romantic decay: “its columns fallen, the walls crumbling here and there, but the outline still clearly visible.” Hitler accepted the logic of Speer’s prospective memory and gave orders that the important buildings of the Reich were to be erected in keeping with the principles of the “law of ruins.”⁵¹ We observe in Hitler and Jünger the same will to eternity in stone. Jünger’s aestheticism is directed to the totality of life as *Gestalt*. Life finds its meaning in the petrification and eternalization of great sacral landscapes, dedicated to the religion of death, the sublime landscapes that speak to Jünger of the deeper unity of life and death. It is this sublime unity of life and death that was celebrated in the great ceremonial gatherings of the National Socialist Party, which presented and enacted in the union of the Leader and the people the rebirth of the new Germany.

Hitler’s *Triumph of the Will*

If we can speak of Stalin as the invisible producer of the show trials of the 1930s, Hitler, with his architect, designer, and director Albert Speer, was the highly visible producer of the Nuremberg party rallies, devoting considerable attention to finding the definitive form for each part of the ritual. He commissioned the filming of the 1934 rally, he decided the title, and he chose Leni Riefenstahl as the director. All forms of communication and propaganda were summoned to create a *Gesamtkunstwerk*: “The Nuremberg Party rallies were the pinnacle of achievement and the most powerful examples of the political aesthetics of National Socialism and the artist-politician Adolf Hitler.”⁵² Hitler was very conscious of his double audience, the party and the people. Through the staging of the identity of the Leader and the assembled party he wanted to affirm the identity of the Leader and the nation—“One Nation, one Leader, one Reich, Germany” (camera shots 148–51).⁵³ And this was realized brilliantly by *Triumph of the Will* (1935), which received international recognition at the 1935 Venice Film Festival and at the 1937 Paris Film Festival. The film has been hailed as “the supreme realization in cinematic form of the Nazi political religion. Its artistry . . . is designed to sweep us into emphatic identification

50. Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 55.

51. *Ibid.*, 56. The ruin theory comes full circle when Jan Assmann interprets the Pyramids with reference to the circle of architects around Speer. Jan Assmann, “Stein und Zeit: Das monumentale Gedächtnis der altägyptischen Kultur,” in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, ed. J. Assmann and T. Hölscher (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), 87–114.

52. Hans-Ulrich Thamer, “The Orchestration of the National Community: The Nuremberg Party Rallies of the NSDAP,” in Berghaus, *Fascism and Theater*, 176.

53. See the complete screenplay in David Calvert Smith, *Triumph of the Will* (Richardson, Texas: Celluloid Chronicles Press, 1990).

with Hitler as a kind of human deity. The massive spectacle of regimentation, unity and loyalty powerfully conveys the message that the Nazi movement was the living symbol of the reborn German nation.⁵⁴ The power of the film derived above all from its credibility as a “true” documentary (as opposed to a restaging of events, as in Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin*)—a credibility that underwrote Goebbels’s words from the opening ceremony: “May the bright flame of enthusiasm never be extinguished. It alone gives light and warmth to the creative art of modern political propaganda.” The political aesthetics and the political religion of National Socialism are predicated on the enthusiasm that “rises from the depths of the people” (Goebbels, shot 120). *Triumph of the Will* undoubtedly succeeded in producing and conveying this collective experience of enthusiasm through the mirroring of the masses in their Leader and of the Leader in his masses, a mirroring in which the “pleasure of seeing and being seen no longer implied any externality”: “The assembled people gave birth to its now visible soul while the Führer beheld the formation, before his very eyes, of the people he had bought into the light of day in accordance with his vision.”⁵⁵ The act of creation through which the vision received its living body is thus simultaneously a *creatio ex nihilo*, in which in Hitler’s words the banner of rebirth was torn from nothingness (shot 205), and a collective (Dionysian) projection of wishes into the (Apollonian) dream vision of the savior. This reciprocity of desire and vision was raised to a higher power of projection as the audience expanded to the millions of Germans outside the ranks of the party. Hitler reminds the “Work-Soldiers” of the Reich Labor Service “that not only the hundreds of thousands at Nuremberg are looking at you, but, at this moment, that all of Germany is looking at you” (shots 161–63).

Franz Dröge and Michael Müller argue that the staging of the masses as the medium of the aestheticization of politics involves a double process of self-observation, in which the masses are overwhelmed at the same time as they overwhelm themselves in the self-experience as mass.⁵⁶ The transformation of politics into the staging of the rapturous communion of the Leader and his people—“flesh from our flesh, blood from our blood” (Hitler, shot 207)—tied the goal of transforming the individual into the “charismatic national community”⁵⁷ to the overcoming of the self in the collective experience of the mass. However, it is only in Riefenstahl’s masterful condensation of the seven days of national rebirth into two hours that this communal act of faith becomes a total work of art. Although it is

54. Robert Wistrich, quoted in the article “Triumph of the Will” in Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triumph_of_the_Will (accessed 15 April 2009).

55. Michaud, *Cult of Art*, 40.

56. Franz Dröge and Michael Müller, *Die Macht der Schönheit: Avantgarde und Faschismus* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1995), 318–24. See also the analysis of the image of the mass in relation to mass events and the mass media in Götz Großklaus, *Medienbilder: Inszenierung der Sichtbarkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004).

57. See Griffin, “Staging the Nation’s Rebirth,” 16–35, for the concept of the charismatic national community.

clear that the two dimensions of this *sublime* theater of politics, the aesthetic and the religious, can scarcely be separated—and in this sense “aestheticization” applied to Fascist politics must be regarded as a deficient concept—it will be helpful for analytic purposes to distinguish the two dimensions in relation to *Triumph of the Will*. For Hitler, the reader of Le Bon and the student of Catholic ceremony, the power of the image over the masses was all important. Riefenstahl was quick to grasp the unrivaled effectivity of film as a medium of propaganda precisely in terms of the primacy of the image, which she reinforced and magnified through the new visual possibilities offered by camera perspective. Riefenstahl’s exploitation of what Alexander Rodchenko called in 1928 the most interesting viewpoints in the modern world—the views upward from below and downward from above⁵⁸—fused the power of the image with the image of power. In the view upward from below, Hitler appears in solitary resolution against the background of the sky. The dominance of the view from above is established in the opening sequence showing Hitler’s descent through the clouds, which open onto the panorama of historic Nuremberg and the marching columns in the streets below crossed by the shadow of his plane. The vertical hierarchy of the gaze transmitted by the camera transformed the national audience into a privileged participant in the reciprocal mirroring of the Führer and the adoring masses. In canceling the difference between observers and actors, and thus the aesthetic space of semblance and play, the Nazi aestheticization of politics set out to destroy this critical, distancing function of the aesthetic and replace it with the *mobilizing power of the image*.

Triumph of the Will is thus the very antithesis of the hopes Benjamin entertained in “The Work of Art” regarding the critical, distancing effects of the camera as the instrument of the mutual penetration of art and science, capable of transforming the whole function of art: “Instead of being based on ritual, it [art] begins to be based on another practice—politics.” Not only does *Triumph of the Will* present politics as ritual; it exemplifies in disturbing fashion precisely what Benjamin claims for the camera, when he likens the cameraman to a surgeon who cuts into the patient’s body. The image produced by the cameraman “consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law,” the law of montage. Riefenstahl does indeed assemble the mass-body of the people from multiple fragments. Christian Crouse sums up the surgical technique of the film:

The camera can edit as the surgeon can cut: if its discerning eye sees only a face or a hand or a leg, then the chosen appendage is the only reality, the only representation of a human being. In film as in life, the body dismembered by art and politics is repieced onto the larger body of Nazism; bodies reconstructed give their life over to the omnipotent swastika with its four stiff legs marching in a cyclical pattern, anonymous

58. Alexander Rodchenko, “On Contemporary Photography,” in *Utopias: Russian Modernist Texts*, ed. Catriona Kelly (London: Penguin, 1999), 91.

bodies reduced to be part of an amalgamated mass, . . . agglomerated bodies used as building blocks of pyramidal empire.⁵⁹

Crouse's summary of the Nazi theatre of politics needs unpacking in order to show how the montage of the mass-body served the sacralization of power and its empire of death. We can speak of an aestheticization of the body here in the sense of the cut that decomposes and recomposes the integral image of the human being. Riefenstahl de-individualizes the participants by focusing on the part and the collective whole, the monumentalized mass. The second perspective is undoubtedly the more important, but some of her most telling shots capture the whole in the part: the SS guard outside Hitler's hotel becomes the swastika emblems on their helmets, the eagle and swastika insignia on their buckles, and the line of black jackboots (shots 29–31). The panorama of the men of the Reich Labor Service breaks down into images of shovels and boots. The lengthy sequence (shots 281–324) of the SA, the SS, and the Labor Service marching in review through the center of Nuremberg alternates between close-ups of the party leaders and long shots of the cheering crowd and the marching troops, in which the crowd metamorphoses into the raised hands of the Nazi salute and the paramilitaries into marching legs or more abstract patterns of bodies and shadows or bodies and equipment, enhanced by the black-and-white photography.

Siegfried Kracauer's 1927 reflections in *The Mass Ornament* were prompted by the coordinated movements of the Tilly Girls, a troupe of dancers who functioned as "indissoluble female units," performing intricate mathematical demonstrations. Kracauer attributes a magic force to these mass ornaments, composed of thousands of bodies, drained of life and shaped into patterns comparable to the aerial photographs of a city. They give aesthetic pleasure because they imbue material with form. As such, the ornament is an end in itself, in contrast to the "moral units" formed by soldiers.⁶⁰ When Kracauer goes on to read this—rational rather than organic—surface phenomenon as a reflection of capitalist production that destroys personality and national community, he is only superficially right. Not only did the biomechanical man of Taylorism fascinate Communists and capitalists in equal measure; the Worker as soldier constituted the "moral" unit of National Socialism, ready to sacrifice "personality" to the "national community." The driving force of the totalitarian megamachine was, as Mumford has shown, state power long before capitalism.

As befits Jünger's organic construction (neither organic nor rational), Riefenstahl's use of the camera's surgical techniques of de-individualizing and dismembering the body goes together with the animation of the inanimate, as for instance

59. Christian Crouse, "Intellectualism Cut Off at the Neck: The Body Politic-As-Aesthetic in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*," *The Film Journal* 11, www.thefilmjournal.com.

60. Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75–88.

in the shots of the standards of the SA and the SS. As the official reports of the Nuremberg rally emphasized, these standards, consecrated in the blood of the Nazi martyrs (shots 271–80), took on a life of their own, indeed a life-giving function of their own, as they circulated through the paramilitary formations.⁶¹ In similar fashion the camera's movement from Nazi symbols—predominately gigantic eagles and swastikas—to the masses and back is a recurrent structuring feature. The film begins with an image of a Nazi eagle presiding over the film title and concludes with a giant swastika covering the entire screen, which dissolves into the final sequence—with a huge, superimposed swastika—of men of the Labor Service marching into the future. This sequence captures very clearly the essence of National Socialism as a “movement”: the symbol of power fed by the lifeblood of the mobilized masses. Hitler's final words in the film, on the movement as a “living expression of our people, and therefore a symbol of eternity” (shot 357), are no contradiction: the eternity of the Thousand Year Reich was death. Not only was the Nazi movement born of the Great War; its conception of the national community was cast in the image of the front soldiers.

The contrast between movement and eternity is central to the film: the moment of the “mechanical and the lithic sublime”⁶² is that of the monumentalized mass, “controlled by the frightful logic of a closed, incomparable unity.” The spectacle of endless columns marching to the beat of military music, however imposing, finally exhausts, whereas the central scene of the commemoration of the war dead remains unforgettable. In aerial perspective, Hitler, flanked by the leaders of the SA and the SS, Lutze and Himmler, makes his way to and from the war memorial between the rigid ranks of the massed paramilitaries. The sacred space marked out by the Führer's path from the living to the dead takes us to the heart of the Nazi religion of death, which drew both its seductive power and its destructive energies from what Alexander Schuller calls the will to give back to death its anthropological primacy against secular modernity's denial of death. This sacred space thus formed the mythic center of the movement, where the celebration of the identity of the living and the dead symbolically transformed the living into an army of the dead, dedicated—like the SS—to give and to take death.⁶³ The cult of the dead hero made the hero's life a prelude to the sacrifice that imposes on the living the moral duty to give this sacrifice meaning through further sacrifice. In a leader of *Das Reich*, 27 December 1942, Goebbels prepared the Germans for the imminent fall of Stalingrad: “The army of the fallen have not laid down their arms. They are marching in the ranks of the fighting soldiers. They stand as admonition and

61. Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um den toten Helden: Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole* (Greifswald: SH-Verlag, 1996), 363–66.

62. Iain Boyd White, “National Socialism and Modernism,” in *Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators, 1930–1945*, ed. Dawn Ades (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 262.

63. Alexander Schuller, “Mythos Mord: Über den Totalitarismus,” *Merkur* 593 (1998): 661–72.

national conscience over the whole nation and make their demand audible in their eternal silence, which cannot be overheard.”⁶⁴ But the cult of heroic death also demanded the numberless, ever-growing invisible body of victims, sacrificed to the cult of death that elevated murder to a mythical act and mass murder to the programme of totalitarianism.

64. Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um den toten Helden*, 530.

CONCLUSION

In his memorable parable of the downfall of art since the spiritual synthesis of the Gothic cathedral, Adolf Behne captures the sense of loss that haunts modern art (see chapter 7). He charts the spirit's descent from collective creation to the individual artwork as a progressive materialization that finally imprisons art in the picture frame, apt symbol of the framing of art as aesthetic object and valuable commodity. The frame, with its separating and isolating function, appears as the antithesis of the lost unity of the arts—the recurrent reminder that the commercialization of production and the privatization of reception have alienated art from its true purpose and end. Modern art is art with a bad conscience, haunted by the dream of self-redemption projected into the artwork of the future. In this sense we can speak of the idea of the total work of art as both specter and founding myth of aesthetic modernism, the redemptive dream of the avant-gardes that brought the totalizing aesthetic and political revolutions of the first third of the twentieth century into the closest proximity.

The *Götterdämmerung* of the Third Reich thus marked in suitably apocalyptic fashion the end of the totalizing tendencies of the whole epoch projected into the idea of the total work of art. What came to an end was not the total work of art as such, as a permanent possibility of modern art, but the total work of art of European modernism, that is, an emphatically historicist conception of the total work, tied to the question of the destination of history and of art. Looking back over the

150 years from the French Revolution to the German revolution, certain fundamental features of the total work stand out:

- i. The total work as the product of the historical caesura of the French Revolution and as the response to the secularization of religion, and to politics, in the modern period
- ii. The total work as organon of philosophies of history
- iii. The total work as the performative re-fusion of art, religion, and politics
- iv. The total work as the bearer of holistic, redemptive-revolutionary visions of modernity
- v. The translation of the idea of the total work from the Old to the New World after the Second World War as signifying a rebirth of the total work under the new conditions of mass culture

Let me elucidate briefly each of these features.

First, politics and art in the modern sense not only presuppose the loss of religious legitimation, reinforced by the overthrow of the *ancien régime* in the French Revolution; they both lay claim to the inheritance of religion in their own right. If the importance of this profound transformation of society is not in doubt, the meaning of *secularization* remains contested. All interpretations, however, have one thing in common: secularization is grasped as a historical phenomenon whose meaning can be determined only in relation to a philosophy of history. Secularization signifies the process within which man is henceforth comprehended as historical, and humanity moves to center stage as the subject of the historical drama of emancipation. The deeply contested self-understandings of modernity all derive directly or indirectly from this historicizing of history, which makes history into its own explanatory principle. Europe since the Enlightenment is thus the first wholly historical and self-historicizing society, which turned to philosophy of history in order to give meaning to historical existence. Who will deny, asks J. L. Talmon, that “all modern ideologies—all of which incidentally emerged in the age of Romanticism—are in essence visions of history.”¹

Hegel spells out, as we have seen (in chapter 2), the meaning of secularization for modern art. In his account the historical-logical progression from Greek classical art and the romantic art of Christian Europe to its philosophical comprehension has brought the essential history of art to an end. Severed from its union with religion, modern art reaches its terminus in and as *art history*, because art in Hegel's eyes is now a thing of the past. It continues to exist as nothing but art, that is to say, as the product of the cultural process of secularization within which art is now comprehended as history. It is thus the antithesis of the art religion (*Kunstreligion*) of the Greeks, which signified that art itself is *the* religion. As opposed to the *art religion* of the Greeks and the *religious art* of the Middle Ages (art in the service of the higher, invisible truths of revealed religion), modern art for Hegel precludes

1. J. L. Talmon, *Romanticism and Revolt: Europe, 1815–1848* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967), 163.

any essential or necessary relation between art and religion. It signals in this respect a fundamental break with the past: modern, autonomous art no longer possesses or needs a legitimizing social function. But that also means that aesthetic modernism can only be fully comprehended in terms of its founding paradox, summed up in Hegel's declaration that the essential history of art has come to an end. Secularization spells out the *constitutive truth* of modern art: it is now profane art, its place is outside the temple (*pro-fanum*). But this truth is equally the *constitutive untruth* of modern art: it is now the art that is nothing but art and therefore, Hegel says, incapable of retaining our highest interest.

The attempts to escape this essential contradiction, this founding paradox, of modern art gave rise to the recurrent dreams of the transcendence of an art that had become sovereign but that (like the vacant place of sovereignty in modern politics) cannot make its own essence visible. Thus just as the *visible* masterpieces of the past, embodying the timeless classical idea of beauty, pointed to the absolute work, the *invisible* masterpiece (Belting) to come, so the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of antiquity or of the Middle Ages, embodying the unity of society, religion, and art, pointed to the total work to come. It is precisely this utopian—redemptive and revolutionary—projection that made the artwork of the future, in its twin guises as absolute and total work of art, the telos of the avant-gardes and the vanishing point of modernism.

Second, in his account of the genesis of the idea of the total work of art Odo Marquard identifies three historical preconditions (but not the most important—the French Revolution—because the genesis he has in mind derives from aesthetics and philosophy): (a) the migration of the concept of good works from the sphere of reformed religion to find a new home in the sphere of art in the second half of the eighteenth century; good works become artworks, entrusted now with the task of human self-redemption; (b) the emergence of a new philosophical concept of totality to take the place of God and his creation; (c) the fusion of the first and second preconditions such that the philosophical system becomes artwork; and the artwork, system. This fusion was accomplished by German idealism, namely by Schelling with his declaration that *art is the only true organon of philosophy* (see chapter 2). The idea of the total work of art thus begins with the “most aesthetic” system of German idealism, Schelling's (short-lived) identity system, aesthetic because Schelling recognized that absolute, intellectual intuition is only possible in the work of art.

Marquard brackets what Hans Blumenberg in *Work on Myth* has called the fundamental myth of German idealism: the replacement of the perfect knowledge residing in God by the historical process through which knowledge becomes absolute by way of the detour through time. “This is why the fundamental myth of Idealism includes a philosophy of history” in the form of “the representation of autogenesis, of the subject's self-production.”² To Marquard's deduction of the total

2. Hans Blumenberg, *Arbeit am Mythos* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), 112–14.

work of art we can add with Blumenberg its complement in philosophy of history. Where Schelling defines the *work of art* in relation to his identity system as the only true organon of *philosophy*, we can now define the *total work of art* in relation to *the self-production of the subject* as the only true organon of *philosophy of history*. It is important to stress that we are talking here of *romantic* philosophies of history, predicated on a sense of epochal crisis and expectations of redemptive renewal and regeneration, summed up in Saint-Simon's opposition of critical and organic epochs, as opposed to philosophies of history from the Enlightenment through to Kant and Hegel, predicated on the idea of progress. From Schelling and the German romantics on, the artwork of the future is tied to romantic metanarratives of crisis and regeneration, underpinned by the apparently irresistible analogy between aesthetic synthesis and social integration, such that art is elevated to the pledge and justification of philosophy of history.

The nexus between the idea of the total work and romantic visions of history appears most clearly in the *manifestos* that announce the artwork of the future across the nineteenth century. Implicit or explicit in all these conjurations of the total work to come is the projection of the total work as the "last and greatest deed of mankind" (to borrow the striking formulation of the oldest programme of German idealism), which will bring the modern world of alienation to an end and effect the consummation of history through the synthesis of the ancients and the moderns. Hölderlin evokes the return of the golden age as the oldest and final myth; Saint-Simon and Compté deduce the necessity of a new religion; Mazzini prophesies the reunion of art and religion in a coming organic age; Wagner anticipates the end of the political state and the revolutionary liberation of humanity to be consecrated by a performance of *The Ring*; Nietzsche dreams of the rebirth of antiquity and a state founded on music; Mallarmé of a final cult in which the universe and humanity come to self-knowledge. These historical-philosophical dreams of the self-production and the self-redemption of the subject reveal the fundamental myth of German idealism to be that of European modernism, which reached its ultimate self-negating and self-destructive expression in Jünger's figure of the Worker. We can indeed speak here with Marquard of fantastic creators and of the aesthetic image of creation as central to European modernism. Nevertheless, it is not solely art as compensation for a deficient reality that explains the power of modernism's aesthetic utopias. As the image of the whole, as the promise of totality, the total work of art served as a bearer since the French Revolution of the longing for community.

Third, if the invention of the *museum* announced the transformation of the art of the past into *art history*, whose retrospective gaze reduced all past works of art into "art" in the modern sense, that is, into objects of aesthetic contemplation, divorced from their social and religious context, the *avant-garde*, by contrast, was drawn to the idea of art not as work but as *performance*, whose horizon is the ever-renewable present of collective participation. Museum and theatre thus entail different, even

opposed conceptions of modern art and of the history of modernism; they entail, moreover, different hermeneutics, as we can see from Hans-Georg Gadamer's critique of modern aesthetic art and consciousness. Gadamer derives his critique from Hegel's concept of the Greek art religion, in which "art exists not as art but as religion, as the presence of the divine, its own highest possibility." This insight allows Gadamer to distinguish modern, aesthetically differentiated art from the aesthetic nondifferentiation of premodern art in order to recover the "real experience of art—which does not experience art as art." He argues that even though Hegel's art religion is a thing of the past, the experience of art that it embodies is not past, since the experience of the *presence* of the divine transcends history. Although his distinction between aesthetically differentiated and nondifferentiated art concedes the secularization of art, secularization must nevertheless call itself into question, since a "work of art always has something sacred about it."³ For Gadamer, art is still religion (but not *the* religion), because it shares with religion the same truth of *parousia*, revealed in *play*. Play is Gadamer's key concept for reconstructing "the real experience of art." It incorporates the *mode of being common to artistic performance and religious rite*. In play we encounter the divine in a life-changing experience of a reality that transcends actors and audience and signifies the passage into a new world, distinct from the profane everyday world and its temporality. "My thesis, then," Gadamer explains, "is that the being of art cannot be defined as an object of aesthetic consciousness because, on the contrary, the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself. It is part of the *event of being that occurs in presentation*, and belongs essentially to play as play."⁴ Gadamer's three anthropological bases of the experience of art—*play*, *symbol*, and *festival*—present the three faces of return, of making present again.⁵ If all works of art impose their own temporality on us, as Gadamer claims, it is because they still participate (however distantly) in the heightened collective experience of the time of the festival. And this means that art as play still carries the trace of this unifying experience of communal presence and fusion, for which the paradigm is the festival's suspension of social divisions. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht can therefore distinguish between a (modern) *meaning culture* and a (premodern) *presence culture*, where performance signifies representation, the renewed presence of that which had been temporarily absent.⁶ Play, symbol, and festival are thus central to the *social and symbolic function of art*: the representation of the community to itself in a symbolic action that infuses meaning by

3. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1989), 573, 180.

4. *Ibid.*, 116.

5. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Festive Character of Theater," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 12–49.

6. 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.

re-fusing performance, to quote Jeffrey Alexander's apt formulation.⁷ By re-fusion, Alexander understands the temporary recovery of the ritual process, which merges text, context, and actor in a social action or performance. It is re-fusion alone that can sustain myth; without it social life would be impossible. Such a hermeneutics of participation (Gadamer) or presence (Gumbrecht) or performance (Alexander) stands as the antithesis of the hermeneutics of high culture, which revolves around the concept of the artwork as objectivation.

The hermeneutic triangle (author-work-recipient) of high culture presupposes not only the autonomous subject but also the public sphere.⁸ The production and reception of works of high culture depend on a common space of debate and discussion, which depends in turn on media of reproduction. This common space of *society* is fundamentally other than the common space of *community*. Charles Taylor's distinction between the *topical* space of community and the *metatopical* space of society is relevant here.⁹ Although the distinction between the two spaces can only emerge in modernity, this does not preclude their coexistence in modern society. It would seem self-evident that the arts of presence (opera, drama, dance) live from the topical space of community. Not for Gadamer, however. Modern aesthetic consciousness has its own special sites for simultaneity: "the 'universal library' in the sphere of literature, the museum, the theater, the concert hall, etc.,"¹⁰ sites that enshrine the artwork's *loss of its world and its place in it*. The apparently topical space of modern theatre is for Gadamer the worldless space of production/reproduction in sites of simultaneity that fail to achieve the contemporaneity of the true common space, constituted by the "real experience of art." The idea of the total work is thus tied to the topical space of community—or rather, the consciousness of its loss in modernity. This is why modern theatre is haunted by the desire to break out of the objectifying *frame* of art, which separates stage and audience, in a perpetual quest for the lost common space of collective participation. It is a phantasm that haunts modern politics no less than modern art. And that is why the "real experience of art" demands the circle of catharsis and communion: the mode of being common to artistic performance and religious rite but also political assembly. The hermeneutic, or better, the antihermeneutic, of the total work is that of *communion* as opposed to *communication*.

Fourth, the total work of art as the projection of the idea of community bears witness to the totalizing conceptions of democracy that emerged in the French Revolution, as opposed to the pluralist versions of democracy that emerged in the

7. Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy," in *Social Performance*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29–90.

8. György Markus, "The Paradoxical Unity of Culture: The Arts and the Sciences," *Thesis Eleven* 75 (November 2003): 7–24.

9. Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 113.

10. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 86.

wake of the English and American revolutions. The radical revolutionary imaginary that originated in France looked to revolutionary activity as the key to overcoming the tensions and contradictions of modernity and was readily associated with “the quest for total renovation, for the total destruction of the old and the constitution of a new order, of the total transformation of man and society.”¹¹ This revolutionary-redemptive longing is evident in what Gadamer calls in relation to the “real experience of art” the life-changing experience of the divine as the passage to a new world. The three types proposed by Marquard in his typology of the total work all spring from this longing for a breakthrough to totality.

Marquard’s *first type* is derived from Wagner. His analysis, based on quotations from Wagner’s writings, exemplifies our argument. Through the reunion of the individual arts in the “great universal artwork of the future” the “egoist will become communist, the individual the whole, the human being God, the arts art.” The total work will be the “new religion,” the “religion of the future.” The theatrical alliance of art and religion advanced by Wagner thus stands as the *anticipatory presentation and aesthetic experience of the self-production of the subject*, of the historical process by which man becomes God. In this sense Marquard’s first type is always the artwork of the future and the religion of the future. Wagner’s revision of his revolutionary hopes for the artwork of the future in his late, paradoxical but profound, historical theory of the relationship between art and religion *after* secularization provides the starting point for a number of exemplary analyses in part 2: Scriabin’s dream of the ultimate artwork as the fusion of humanity and the divine that will bring time to an end; Kandinsky’s expectation of a new organic age that will realize “the spiritual in art”; Taut’s archaic-futurist dream of the cathedral once more crowning the ideal city; Claudel’s drama of man’s calling to unify God’s creation; Brecht’s world theatre of the self-sacrifice of the individual in order to realize the Communist goal of history; Artaud’s return to the sacred origins of theatre as the condition of the integral renewal of man and culture.

If we can speak—in relation to Kandinsky and Artaud’s theory of art or the world theatre of Claudel and Brecht—of the total work of art as a model of knowledge, Marquard’s *second type*—the total anti-work of art, directed to the destruction of the arts and the overcoming of the separation of art and reality—presents the total work as a model of action.¹² This second type captures the radically new element that belonged to the revolutionary years of the avant-garde (futurism, Dada, surrealism), inspired by the apocalyptic longing for a breakthrough to totality. Thus Rolland and d’Annunzio were driven by the desire to transform theatre

11. S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Great Revolutions and the Civilizations of Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 145.

12. Marcella Lista, *L’oeuvre d’art totale à la naissance des avant-gardes (1908–1914)* (Paris: CTHS, 2006), 6.

into life. D'Annunzio, Marinetti, and Jünger greeted the First World War as the entry into authentic being (part 3).

Marquard's *third type*—the staging of the state of emergency—is that of the absolutized revolutionary situation, in which the breakthrough to totality is staged as the creation of the New Man and the New Society. The festivals of the French Revolution, in particular the Festival of the Supreme Being, are the prototype of the projection of the People-as-One and of Power-as-One. The revolutionary *tabula rasa*, the empty space of power (Lefort), served as the stage for the presentation of the self-creation of society. The two totalitarian expressions of the state of emergency analyzed in part 3 are Hitler's creation of the New Germany as a triumph of the will and Stalin's staging of permanent revolution as the purging of the body politic.

The fatal affinity with totalitarian politics has cut the knot between the total work of art and philosophy of history. The total work of European modernism is now history. It can only be presented as a historical exhibit, a citation of the ghosts of the past. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's film of Wagner's *Parsifal* (1982), one hundred years after its premiere in Bayreuth, undertakes this work of historicization. History invades the hermetic space of the "consecrated stage": the whole German romantic tradition up to the Third Reich is now reduced to the detritus of historicism's curio shop, just as the film's own "holy relics," which pass in the solemn Grail procession before Parsifal, are assembled from the theatre props of the original Bayreuth production. And the consecrated stage itself has become literally the death mask of Wagner. There remains, says Syberberg, "utopia as the society of the dead, liberation at the end of myth as recollection, myth as memory."¹³ In this utopia, *Parsifal* enters into its afterlife as its own *revenant*. With Syberberg the birth of tragedy from the spirit of music mutates into the birth of the *Trauerspiel* from the spirit of film.

Syberberg calls his act of mourning liberating. It liberates the idea of the redemptive work from the self-deceiving mirage of philosophical-historical realization. It represents in this sense the end of myth through which *Parsifal* returns to its spiritual home in the imaginary theatre of Wagner's inner world. This "journey inward again, the world after its downfall," is to be understood as returning the romantic dream of the great collective work after the German catastrophe to its utopian homelessness. At the same time the journey inward is the romantic operation par excellence, conceived by Syberberg, however, not as the romanticization of the world, as with Novalis, but rather, as with Friedrich Schlegel, as the self-critical reflection of the work in a "constant alternation of self-creation and self-destruction" (*Athenäum*, frag. 51). Syberberg's critical reflection is faithful to Schlegel's definition of the idea as "a concept completed through irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute

13. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, *Parsifal: Ein Filmessay* (Munich: Heyne, 1982), 13.

antitheses" (*Athenäum*, frag. 121). Wagner plus Brecht is Syberberg's formula for his filmic method, which combines the greatest possible distance and artificiality with the simultaneous consciousness of our location in Wagner's imaginary theatre.

Syberberg understands his postmodern *Trauerspiel* of disenchantment and re-enchantment, located both within and outside the paradigm of the redemptive artwork, as the rescue not only of Wagner's *Parsifal* but of the whole tradition of the total work of art from its false, indeed fatal, entanglement in history. He poses once more the question of redemption, but now as the "redemption of an *old dream* in the creation of an *artificial counter-world to our reality*."¹⁴ He poses once more the question of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* embracing all the genres and all the arts, but now by means of filmic transformation into a theatre of the imagination, "inventions for the inner eye." Above all, Syberberg intends his rescuing critique as the rescue of film from Hollywood, the culture industry and consumer society. And so the Grail is offered once again in Syberberg's *Parsifal*, and once more it evokes Hegel's challenge of recollection: the liberating knowledge that comes at the end—as the work of mourning.

Fifth, like Hollywood, Marquard's *fourth type* of the total work is both internal and external to the modernist epoch. It is internal in that its defining feature—the capitalist production and justification of the world as aesthetic phenomenon—emerged in the course of the nineteenth century. Benjamin's Arcades Project maps the capitalist enchantment of the world from shop windows, and department stores to world exhibitions, from fashion and photography to advertisements. It is external in that it has no ambitions to a redemptive worldview. This absence of a totalizing metanarrative distinguishes the postmodern version from its predecessors. The ubiquitous commodification and aestheticization of the lifeworld, built into capitalism's own postindustrial Arcades project—the transformation of material into symbolic production, or its simulation, if we follow Baudrillard—reveal a pluralizing rather than a totalizing alliance between capitalism and desire. The transition from the modernist to the postmodernist *Gesamtkunstwerk* means that we must speak of a change in kind, comparable to the distinction that Guy Debord draws between the *concentrated* and the *diffuse* spectacle. The modernist total work aimed in general at forms of social-symbolic performance that led to fusion between actors and audience in the name of collective values. It is precisely this defining element that disappears in the capitalist type, leaving in its place an ever more elaborate multimedia technology directed to the potentiation of illusion. Although the contemporary proliferation of art festivals could be thought of as a vindication of Bayreuth, the contemporary art festival not only domesticates the original festival idea but has become in the realm of the performing arts the equivalent of Malraux's imaginary museum. In fact, we can speak of a festivalization of the theatre

14. Ibid.

and the museum, consecrated to the mutually rewarding union of a secular religion of art and the culture industry. The line that connects Bayreuth to contemporary festival culture signifies a *de-fusion* of the original ideas of a regeneration of society through a regeneration of art and culture.

The two main forms of the total work of art—the theatrical and the architectonic—are radically refashioned in the New World. Hollywood continues the Wagnerian project, recycling myths and epic adventures, spiced with the indispensable special effects, at the same time as it replaces the Wagnerian music drama with the musical—faithful at least to the fact that popular theatre has always had its basis in song and dance, has always been multimedial in nature. The postmodern museum as the cathedral of culture is the most obvious successor to the architectonic model. The transformation of old and new city centers into tourist precincts signals in turn a musealization of the city, with Las Vegas as the flamboyant cross-over between the European city-museum and the theme parks pioneered by the Disney corporation. The continuity with the nineteenth century's historicist copies of architectural originals is evident in the migration of the art religion, the myths and historicist decor of the long nineteenth century into the postmodern "society of the spectacle." Benjamin's arcades have mutated into the total environments provided by shopping and entertainment centers, blurring the boundaries between art and life, illusion and reality. Marketing logic and customer appeal converge in the indifferenciation of authenticity and simulation. If capitalism has taken to heart the axiom that in the age of the mass media every business is show business, politics and religion are not far behind. It is clear that we are dealing here as much with discontinuities as continuities.

We can think of this interplay between continuity and discontinuity in terms of *disappearance*. By *disappearance* I understand the negative of sublation, that is, the process through which modernism and its socioaesthetic categories (artist, work, creativity, the avant-garde, the bohème) disappear in their original adversarial incarnation to reappear in a new generalized and affirmative form. Thus the antagonism of capitalism and culture, art and technology, disappears in the new "creative economy," just as the antagonism of bourgeois society and bohemian subculture disappears in the creative economy's new cultural class.¹⁵ Artistic inspiration and the unique artwork turn into the collaborative project and collective creation, the avant-garde into institutionalized innovation. The aesthetic sphere dissolves into the aestheticization of the creative economy and everyday life: a reflection of the conjoined working of democracy and capitalism, which ratified the *secularization* of modern art and culture, emanating from the United States and spreading to Europe in the wake of the youth culture and student protests of the 1960s.

15. See Daniel Bell's analysis of contemporary cultural developments in his 1996 epilogue to *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

We can trace this process of dis/appearance in the radical transformations of the total work of art after 1945 in the United States. This is of course not to deny the continuities, evident in the illuminating parallels Matthew Smith draws between Disneyland and Bayreuth, Warhol's Factory and the Bauhaus, the digital unification of the arts and the Wagnerian artwork of the future.¹⁶ These continuities highlight at the same time the fundamental sea change evident in the translation of the idea of the total work of art from the Old to the New World. If, in Smith's words, the opening of Disneyland in July 1955 marked "the rebirth of the total work of art in the wake of its catastrophic realization in the Third Reich," it was a rebirth that exchanged the monumental German sublime for the "monumental American ridiculous" (115). Even though Disney understood his "Total World" as part of a grand project of reharmonizing humanity and nature, it was tied from the beginning to commercial goals and represented "the most decisive entrance of the total work of art into mass commodity culture" (116). Andy Warhol eschewed Disneyland's "architecture of reassurance" in his staging of the dis/appearance of the cultural contradictions of capitalism into a total celebration of consumer culture. What Smith calls the "Total Vacuum" of Warhol's project signaled the terminus of the utopian impetus of the European avant-garde. "Purged of the political and ideological idea that artistic intervention in the sphere of production and consumption would enable collective social progress," Warhol's Factory led the way in demonstrating that "the cognitive and perceptual devices of modernity would have to be deployed simply for the development of a new commodity aesthetic."¹⁷ And so in the Factory art becomes the object of mass production, designed, in Warhol's words, to get more art to more people: "Art should be for everybody." Not only are the distinctions between art and nonart, high culture and mass culture, canceled, but the total critique and the total affirmation of the marriage of art and commerce become indistinguishable in what Warhol sardonically termed the Business Art Business. But, as Benjamin Buchloh reminds us, Warhol the entrepreneur is also the consumer, the "all-round reduced personality," who is invited to identify with his image as erased subject in Warhol's serial productions.¹⁸ And when we turn to Smith's third avatar of the total work of art, the virtual reality of cyberspace with its promise of "Total Immersion," the audience of the digital artwork is but a parody of the intentions of the Wagnerian collective artwork. The computer-generated, multimedia space of immersive, simulacral experience, directed to the projection of a techno-utopian vision of mastery, addresses "radically localized, dispersed, and fluid subjects" that are about "as far from a revolutionary proletariat as they are

16. Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Parenthetical page references in the text refer to this work.

17. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art, 1956–1966," in *Andy Warhol*, ed. Annette Michelson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 5.

18. *Ibid.*, 36.

from Wagner's conception of a *Volk*" (168). Smith argues that cyberspace can offer no more than an ironic realization of the total work. The ultimate unification of the arts made possible by digitalization operates in a landscape without essential content, just as in comparable fashion the communal nature of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* appears only as a "universality without totality," which dissolves the old dream of the representative audience into the decentered and unpredictable growth of users/consumers (169).

The American developments charted by Smith reflect Jacques Attali's contrast between the representative and the repetitive stages of music.¹⁹ *Representative* music belongs to the bourgeoisie and functions as the image of social harmony and the medium of the emancipation of the artist; *repetitive*, that is, recorded, music belongs to the market and its capitalist producers and functions as a medium of commercial exchange. With the rise of the repetitive music of mass culture the representative dimensions of the total work of art lose their purchase. This does not mean, however, that the idea of the total work of art has exhausted its potential. As Smith shows, new serial forms—from the theme park to video games—have emerged from the encounter with mass culture, while mega-events such as Woodstock or the ceremonies of the Olympic Games still live from the spirit of the festival. At the same time there have also been challenging European and North American revisions of the representative *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which range from the retrospective to the futuristic.²⁰ Nevertheless, the hold that the artwork of the future (and the idea of art) exercised over artists and thinkers must be seen as unique to the bourgeois era. Not only did this longing for the total work of art traverse the whole era from its revolutionary beginnings to the antibourgeois revolutions of the twentieth century; the conception of art inherent in the idea of the total work challenged all the received assumptions of modernism.

19. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

20. The *retrospectives* include Thomas Mann's judgment on the idea of the total work of art in *Doctor Faustus* (1949), Syberberg's postmortems in *Parsifal* and *Hitler: Ein Film aus Deutschland* (1977), and Peter Weiss's anarchic demolition of the dreams of revolutionary liberation in his play *Marat/Sade*, best known from the film version of Peter Brook's Royal Shakespeare Company production (1967); the *futuristic* include Kubrick's science-fiction masterpiece *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), the collaboration between the composer Philip Glass and the director Robert Wilson in their epoch-making production of the opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), and the syncretic mythologies and cosmologies of Murray Shafer's twelve-part music-theatre cycle *Patria* (1966–) and Karlheinz Stockhausen's seven-part opera cycle *Licht* (1978–2003). Thus the epilogue to the *Patria* cycle recalls Scriabin's *Mysterium* with its elimination of the distinction between audience and performers: the participants/initiators spend eight days in the forest engaged in rituals. For Kubrick, Glass and Wilson, Schafer and Stockhausen, a first point of reference is given by the Wikipedia entries with bibliographies and discographies; see also www.patria.org and www.stockhausen.org.

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