The Total Work of Art in European Modernism

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Religion and Art:
Parzifal as Paradigm

The Idea of Return

With Parzifal (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.” When Mann adds that this closeness to the sacred origins of the theatre makes Parzifal 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?” 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.”
whose condition is a reversal of profane perspectives. *Return* and *re-genera-tion* together form the master trope of a romantic modernism that takes us from a counter-viewer of theatre to a counter-view of society and draws its strength from a counter-philosophy 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 pro-gressive, 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 re-genera-tion. 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, beyond the fatal dialectic of demythologization and re-mytho-logization, repression and return of the repressed.

Wagner occupies center stage in Durand’s study of the religion of art, and *Par-sifal* center stage in Durand’s reconstruction of Wagner’s quest for redemption. In Durand’s account, *Par-sifal* 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, *Par-sifal* 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.” 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 Renais-sance and becomes institutionalized in the course of the eighteenth century as a permanent professional theatre, based on the separation of actors and audience.

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

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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.”

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

7. Ibid., 60.
meaning-creating power, that is, the universal creative power of the imagination. 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.” 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. 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). 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.” 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. 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.

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. 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 Oresteia 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.”

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. 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.
power of fate. 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

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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

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\(^{20}\) 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

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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. 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 paradisal 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

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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’ exechon*. 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.”


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
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. 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. 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.

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. 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.” The transformation of time into space is underpinned by

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27. Ibid., 457, 473.
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 (Sieg mund), 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

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chalice.\textsuperscript{33} Conversely, the redemptive power of loving sacrifice, which can only be hinted at in the concluding bars of \textit{Twilight of the Gods}, is presented and celebrated in the final scene of \textit{Parsifal}, itself the sublime symbol of art’s re-generation of the deep symbolic truths of religion,\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Parsifal}—\textit{Erlösung dem Erlöser}, the redeemer redeemed—points back to the Gnostic “Song of the Pearl,” preserved in the apocryphal \textit{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,” \textit{salvator salvatus}.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{33} Kurt Hübner, \textit{Die Wahrheit des Mythos} (Munich: Beck, 1985), 392.

\textsuperscript{34} A theosophical interpretation of Wagner’s last work by his English translator William Ashton Ellis, a member of the Theosophical Society and editor of the Wagner journal \textit{The Meister} (1888–95), in the journal \textit{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 \textit{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., \textit{Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics} (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 268.


\textsuperscript{36} James Treadwell, \textit{Interpreting Wagner} (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 260–61.

\textsuperscript{37} Mircea Eliade, \textit{A History of Religions} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 381.
this parable as far as Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival*. 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. 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.”

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

as the two sides of the one mythic experience of being.  

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.”

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”? 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

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.”

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. 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.”

Boughton worked on his Arthurian cycle for forty years, completing it in 1945 to

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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.

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.”

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.”

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.”

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 music-dramatic wisdom of the past and enunciates the principle of all great art, “that art is the great book of revelation and artists the chief, perhaps the only human, bridges across the abyss of the unknown.” If the ritual dance and music—“music is the most mysterious and physical movement the most convincing of the arts”—provide

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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." Art religion proclaims
not the sacred contents but, in Wagner’s words, the pure form of religion as the re-
ceptacle 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.”

Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), poet, prophet, and theorist of Russian symbol-
ism, was by training a classicist, whose understanding of antiquity was deeply in-
fluenced by Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy. In his own manifesto for the total work
of art, Ivanov sets out like Rutland Boughton to continue and correct the Wagne-
rian model of the music drama. As the title indicates, “Presentiments and Portents:
The New Organic Era and the Theater of the Future” (1904), 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 differen-
tiation. Chief among the precursors, besides the “barbarian” Russian novelists and
Ibsen, 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, Euro-
pean 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 sym-
bolism,” 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.
Critic, and Philosopher, ed. Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Cen-
ter 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.: North-
western 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. 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

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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 (sbornyi) 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, 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.”

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.”

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). 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.
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.*”

*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. 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. 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

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61. Ibid., 414.
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. 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.