Opera as Multimedia: The Experiments of Wassily Kandinsky, Natalia Goncharova and Kurt Schwitters, 1908-1924

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Declaration

I, Cecilia Violet Stinton, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis explores the prominent role of visual media in nineteenth and twentieth-century opera through developments in media technology and changing notions of perception. In particular, it investigates the operatic experiments of the visual avant-garde: Kandinsky's *Der gelbe Klang* (1909), the Ballets Russes' *Liturgie* (1915) and Schwitters' *Merzbühne* (1919) and *Normalbühne Merz* (1924). These works tend to be considered in relation to Richard Wagner and his *Gesamtkunstwerk*, to whom the artists themselves alluded. I seek, however, to relativise Wagner's legacy by positioning these unperformed works in an expanded field of technical and mass media, and through their recreation in performance.

Chapter 1 demonstrates how the Paris Opéra of the 1820s catered to a new kind of observer and mobilised mise-en-scène to suit novel conditions of perception and attention driven by a burgeoning mass entertainment sector. I argue that the institution prepared the ground for the artistic avant-garde who, in a competitive twentieth-century mass mediascape, released opera from a narrative-bound dramaturgy. In this vein, Kandinsky's *Der gelbe Klang* used lighting technology to stimulate in the listening observer a specifically artistic kind of experience which I situate in the discourses of Neo-Kantianism and *Einfühlung*. Chapter 2 considers the artistic and commercial pressure placed on opera by the new medium of film as exemplified by the Ballets Russes who, in their unrealised ballet-opera *Liturgie*, borrowed filmic techniques in the spirit of tribute and rivalry, or *remediation*. Chapter 3 considers the parallels between Schwitters' Merz stage works and the radical staging practices at Berlin's Kroll Opera House (1927-1931). I explore their strategy of montaging a historically consistent operatic score and libretto with a contemporary staging in the light of Ernst Bloch's theory of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (non-contemporaneity), a constellation which demonstrates the demands made of the perceptual faculties of the observer across media and institutions.

Impact Statement

This thesis addresses the role of visual media in nineteenth and twentieth-century opera. Traditionally considered a principally musical art form, opera tends to be positioned in the discipline of musicology and, as such, my contribution is an interdisciplinary one. Encompassing visual, textual and musical objects, media theory grounds my research and opens up new pathways for other scholars seeking to rigorously broaden their disciplinary purview. While I have focused on opera's early twentieth-century situation in an expanded field of technical and mass media, it is clear that the relationship between spoken-word theatre and film, as well as that of painting and photography, are equally fruitful areas of study. Indeed, the medium of painting worked through the pressures of mechanical reproduction decades before live performance reckoned with those of early sound recording and film. Thus, painting provides a model for the way traditional artistic media dealt with competition from new media. Future research might address the dynamic between live performance and more recent forms of digital media, which offer the perception-altering techniques of live streaming and virtual reality.

My research attends to a number of unrealised artistic experiments and, in doing so, attempts to redress scholarship's tendency to privilege completed works over so-called 'failures'. More readily available than sketches, proposals or plans, completed artworks dominate scholarly discourse. This thesis suggests an alternative art history in which concepts, ideas and visions carry the same weight as completed designs or productions and, in this way, highlights the scholarly potential of unfinished works, as well as the contingencies that hindered their completion.

I applied my professional skills as an operatic stage director to recreate Wassily Kandinsky's *Der gelbe Klang* (1909), the Ballets Russes' *Liturgie* (1915) and Kurt Schwitters' *Zusammenstoss* (1928) as performances. While practised in musicology, dance and theatre studies, this practical approach has fewer precedents in art history. The reasons for this are rooted in the structure of undergraduate curricula in UK universities: practical musicianship is a prerequisite skill for admission to study musicology, whereas art history sets no practical requirement and tends to be distanced from studio art. My contribution exerts pressure on the distance between theory and practice in art history and seeks to demonstrate the potential of practice-led research or, more modestly, the usefulness of the different kinds of questions raised from the point of view of practice.

Staging performances opened my research up to a range of publics. I collaborated with student and community volunteers, as well as creative professionals, to present public performances at five different venues. In June 2019, I participated in 'Between Design, Ballet and Choreography' to discuss the process of recreating *Liturgie* as part of the *Natalia Goncharova* exhibition programme at Tate Modern. A film of my production of *Der gelbe Klang* was installed at the Trapholt Museum of Modern Art, Denmark as part of their exhibition SENSE ME between September 2019 and June 2020.

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to bring the unrealised operatic experiments of the visual avant-garde into a productive constellation. Wassily Kandinsky's *Der gelbe Klang* (The Yellow Sound, 1909), Natalia Goncharova's *Liturgie* (Liturgy, 1915) and Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbühne* (Merz Stage, 1919) and *Normalbühne Merz* (Standard Merz Stage, 1924) evince a peculiar situation in which visual practitioners did not merely design for but instead actually devised their own operas. My classification of these works as opera is informed by a number of factors: first, Kandinsky and Schwitters' explicit consideration of their projects in dialogue with the composer Richard Wagner's idealised notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, of which opera was an exemplar; second, the Ballets Russes' referencing of their project as a 'ballet-opera' and their regular engagement with mainstream operatic institutions;[1] and third, the projects' consistent suggestion of sound, whether in the form of a sung musical score or other kinds of vocalised and mechanical noises, for which opera, more than ballet, offers an institutional and high-art model, the latter of which I argue was at stake for Kandinsky, Goncharova and Schwitters as they grappled with the position of art in the age of technical reproduction and mass entertainment. *Gesamtkunstwerk* was a concept articulated by Wagner in texts written between 1849 and 1857 in Zürich, most notably the essays *The Artwork of the Future* (1849) and *Opera and Drama* (1851), which were conceived during his involvement in the 1849 Dresden uprising, and reflect its socially-radical spirit. Wagner attempted to practically realise *Gesamtkunstwerk* through staging his music dramas in a purpose-built theatre, the *Festspielhaus*, which opened in Bayreuth in 1876. Though *Gesamtkunstwerk* tends to be translated as 'total work of art', which highlights the formal combination of media exemplified by theatre, Wagner set it a distinct social function, to unify

[1] I consider the ballet-opera *Liturgie* principally as an opera, since the operatic genre has traditionally absorbed ballet and dance into its apparatus, whereas the genre of ballet has very rarely included operatic singing.

a divided and fragmented society through their communal participation in the art work. Thus, as Matthew Wilson Smith has argued, the term can also be translated as a '"communal work of art," "collective work of art," "combined work of art," and "unified work of art"'.[2] Wilson Smith has noted the relationship of Wagner's theory and practice with technology and mass culture: *Gesamtkunstwerk* represented Wagner's attempt to distance audiences from the pernicious fragmentary consequences of industrial capitalism by using, paradoxically, its materials and products – theatre technology – as the means to do so. Significant, however, was Wagner's effort to mask rather than expose his use of new technologies in the *Festspielhaus*. While there are commonalities between Wagner's project and my modernist case studies – namely the questioning of art's function under the conditions of modernity, and the application of the products of modernity to address this – my aim here is not to measure Wagner's artistic ideals against those of his modernist successors. Instead, I am concerned with the particular strategies these twentieth-century visual artists envisioned to combine media, their resistance to conventional narrative and their exploration of visual abstraction, factors which firmly distinguish them from Wagner, whose designs at Bayreuth were drawn from the landscape painting tradition,[3] and whose music dramas remained tethered to narrative. To ascertain what opera – as a live art form combining many media, and as a genre, with institutional and cultural conventions – offered the protagonists of the visual avant-garde, is a principal aim of this thesis and one which demands a number of disciplinary approaches.

Combining music, text, movement, gesture, set, props, costumes and lighting, opera is a 'multimedial' phenomenon as defined by Chiel Kattenbelt, an 'occurrence where there are

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[2] Matthew Wilson Smith, 'The Total Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 8-21 (8-9).
[3] Wilson Smith, 'Total Stage: Wagner's Festspielhaus', *The Total Work of Art*, 22-47 (26).

many media in one and the same object'.[4] I take 'multimedial' to also encompass what others, including Kattenbelt, term 'intermedial', 'the co-relation of media in the sense of mutual influences between media', since a multimedial situation is the precondition of intermedial experience.[5] Put another way, the experience of opera is paradigmatically intermedial because as an object, it is multimedial. 'Intermedial' can therefore describe an instance of multimedia in which its combined components elicit a particularly powerful response in the receiving subject. The genre of opera long predates the term 'multimedia', which was invented in the twentieth century to highlight the many applications of the computer. Yet opera's institutional and generic conventions have assumed a hierarchy which privileges textual media (the musical score and libretto, or operatic script) over visual media (set and costume design, lighting, staging and choreography). This privilege has traditionally manifested itself in the order of the operatic production process which, in its initial stages, brought the composer and librettist together before a designer was consulted.[6] As such, the designer's role has traditionally responded rather than contributed to the specifications of the composer and librettist, and has at the same time been subordinated to the conditions and contingencies of the performance event. At the stage of an opera's publication, which tends to be after its performed premiere, it is the composer and librettist, and not the designer, who feature as the named authors of the opera score. Kandinsky's, Goncharova's and Schwitters' idiosyncratic attempts to combine media under the banner of opera, conversely, put visual media at the

[4] Chiel Kattenbelt, 'Intermediality in Theatre and Performance: Definitions, Perceptions and Medial Relationships', *Culture, Language and Representation*, 6 (2008), 19-29 (20).
[5] Kattenbelt, 'Intermediality in Theatre and Performance', 20-21.
[6] The relationship between opera's literary and musical texts, however, was not without its own tensions and has changed over time: the eighteenth-century situation, for example, tended towards a distinct preference for vocal display over clarity of text with the use of coloratura, the florid ornamentation of melody, which was carried over into the nineteenth century as a feature of the Italian bel canto style. The case of Mozart is indicative of this tendency. Writing to his father in 1781, he claimed: 'I should say that in an opera the poetry must be altogether the obedient daughter of the music'. Tim Carter, 'In the Operatic Workshop: The Case of Varesco's and Mozart's Idomeneo', *"Music's Obedient Daughter": The Opera Libretto from Source to Score*, ed. Sabine Lichtenstein (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014), 69-106 (69). Brill ebook. The reforms of Mozart's contemporary, Christoph Willibald Gluck, however, prioritised the intelligibility of the text through its carefully spare musical setting.

heart of operatic creation and thus radically complicated its traditional medial hierarchy. In the hands of these visual artists, opera emerged as multimedia, a constellation in which different medial inputs could be freely combined without the generic operatic convention in which music and text, and therefore narrative, structured its mise-en-scène.

The chapters of this thesis investigate the individual conditions of these operatic experiments. For now, however, it is instructive to highlight their commonalities. None of these operas reached the stage during the lifetime of their creators, something which appears to be due to their pursuit outside of an institutional context, a situation bound up with the historical contingencies of war and hyperinflation which hampered theatres' operations. The extra-institutional position of Kandinsky's and Schwitters' experiments is unremarkable, since neither artist had designed professionally for the theatre or opera. It is more striking in the case of Goncharova, since she worked in the theatrical mainstream as a designer for the Ballets Russes, and *Liturgie*, which remained untethered to any theatrical specification and which was pursued most energetically between 1914 and 1915, is therefore most convincingly a casualty of theatres going dark in the First World War. Yet an examination of these artists' archives reveals that their ambitious, unparadigmatic and non-narrative approaches to opera were both inspired by and pushed the limits of the available technology, and, as such, one can speculate that they were neither easily realisable nor commercially viable in the twentieth-century theatre. Their lack of performance does not diminish the evidence which demonstrates the seriousness and rigour with which the projects were pursued over notably extended timescales.

The value of unrealised artistic projects has been considered by Hans Ulrich Obrist. In *Unbuilt Roads*, Obrist documents the projects of over one hundred visual artists that never

came to fruition and observes that, while architectural designs are typically published as part of the competition process whether successful or not, visual artists' unrealised works are not brought to light in the same way. Obrist thematises the reasons hindering an artist from seeing a proposal through: technical, political or financial issues; rejected commissions; 'desk-drawer projects' created independently without external specifications but which the artist discards or disremembers.[7] Unrealised art works go unrecognised, so Obrist claims, because of society's pervasive predisposition towards successes over failures and, as such, 'unsuccessful' works remain obscure as a matter of course.[8] At the level of scholarly reception, art works tend to be more accessible than artistic plans or proposals and in turn are more readily critiqued by scholars. Finished art works thus constitute the main preoccupation of art history and criticism, which creates a self-perpetuating cycle of research. Yet as the artist Joel Fisher argued in 'The Success of Failure', a 1987-1988 exhibition and accompanying article which Obrist himself cites, 'the failures of big ideas are sometimes more impressive than the success of little ones'.[9] By attending to such 'failures', this thesis taps into this potentially conceptually rich, alternative art history.

The unrealised status of these case studies was a defining factor in their selection for this study. Unperformed in the lifetimes of their creators, these works exemplify the role of contingency in the production of art works, those determinants which shape, enable or impede a work's creation, despite its authors' initial plans. Moreover, with no original performances to refer to, these case studies provide fertile ground on which to engage in a speculative kind of enquiry, where the conditions under which these works were conceived can be used to

[7] Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Unbuilt Roads', *Sharp Tongues, Loose Lips, Open Eyes, Ears to the Ground* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 131-132. See also *Unbuilt Roads: 107 Unrealized Projects*, ed. Hans Ulrich Obrist, Guy Tortora (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 1997).
[8] Obrist, 'Unbuilt Roads', 132.
[9] Joel Fisher, 'The Success of Failure', *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 155-162 (161-162). Quoted in Obrist, 'Unbuilt Roads', 132.

explore the kinds of decisions their agents made as determined by these conditions. To put it another way, the unperformed-ness of these case studies demands the historian to consider the past a place of contingency, and history an imaginative practice.

One of the salient conditions under which these works were conceived was that of mass media. Whether referred to explicitly through comment, or implicitly through their silence, the agents of my case studies were forced to engage with the ramifications of new media technologies on audiences and artistic production. Kandinsky, Goncharova and Schwitters' participation in operatic multimedia coincides with their exploration of abstraction in their plastic art practice, a fact that evinces a synergy between modernist multimedia and so-called medium specificity, concepts which tend to be positioned in opposition to one another. Multimedia and visual abstraction were both means of experimenting with the creation of an aesthetic experience in subjects which I argue Kandinsky, the Ballets Russes and Schwitters associated with an active, as opposed to a passive, audience experience.

While the case studies envision varying degrees of narrative – the appearance, disappearance and reappearance of five yellow giants in Kandinsky's pastoral setting, scenes from the life of Christ in the Ballets Russes' animation of ancient icons, and Schwitters' splicing of whirring machines with human interactions from contemporary life – they all prescribe remarkably specific juxtapositions of media. Their sources call for the simultaneous presentation of certain sonic and visual effects: words and non-verbal sounds of certain timbres, pitches and volumes are matched with sets and performing bodies of certain colours and textures, which move in specific ways and are illuminated by different qualities of light. They thus evince a serious engagement with the imaginative faculties of the listening observer, and their ability to process and synthesise these narrative-defying media constellations. As theorists of

psychological response attempted to quantify the impact of lines and form on the human psyche, these practitioners similarly employed visual abstraction, but also multimedia combinations, in their search for a form of distinctly aesthetic spectatorship, separate from the everyday slew of mass media consumption, with which their art works now competed.

The historical contingency of war and hyperinflation, which caused theatres to go dark, budgets to be cut and certain materials more difficult to source, offers one explanation of why none of these case studies were realised in the lifetime of their creators. Their radical multimedia projects were certainly incompatible with the industry's sense of what was commercially viable, and the high financial stakes of opera and theatre make it, at least compared with the plastic arts, relatively risk averse, especially in times of austerity. Yet the appearance of these case studies in their makers' chronologies strongly suggests that these multimedia experiments were important imaginative exercises which developed their own thinking on the creation of aesthetic experience across their fine art practice. With neither the creative parameters of a commission nor the technical specifications of a performance venue, these practitioners were remarkably free from technical limitations and practicalities. Indeed, the longer these experiments remained conceptual, the longer they remained uncompromisingly and productively radical and, from this position, these projects are far from 'failures'.

Though they denote operatic works which give equal weight to visual media, the archives of my case studies are remarkably textual. In the case of Kandinsky, *Der gelbe Klang* was presented neither on stage, nor as set or costume designs, but rather as a libretto which described the intended visual as well as musical and sonic gestures unfolding over time in the printed medium of the *Blaue Reiter* almanac. Schwitters similarly tested his Merz stage out as

a detailed written scenario, which paid equal attention to action, colours, textures and sounds, in the gallerist Herwarth Walden's *Sturm* as well as his own *Merz* journal. Like Kandinsky, Schwitters produced little in the way of actual designs or sketches for his stage works, but a notable exception is the model he built of his *Normalbühne Merz*. Goncharova, on the other hand, produced a significant number of sketches, costume designs and a written libretto for *Liturgie*, which are dispersed in the Ekstrom Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; and the Pompidou Centre, Paris. That none of these artists re-engaged with their projects on stage during the later, more stable decades of their lives does not diminish their significance: if not only motivated by their actual realisation as performances, what lay behind their assiduous theoretical efforts to combine media? Since all three artists experimented with opera alongside work in an abstract visual idiom, then what role, if any, did opera play in this process?

To comprehend these artists' pursuits of multimedia, I used my training as an operatic stage director to reconstruct *Der gelbe Klang*, *Liturgie* and *Zusammenstoss* (Collision) as performances between 2015 and 2017.[10] Though practised in musicology, dance and theatre studies, this practical approach has fewer precedents in art history. Unlike musicology, in which practical musicianship is a prerequisite for admission and features as at least part of the undergraduate curriculum,[11] art history tends not to set practical requirements for entrance and, separated from studio art, lacks the resources to encompass a practical area. As first a musicologist by training, my decision to cross-fertilise this practical approach was intuitive, though the skills required were not necessarily all musicological ones. The process of

[10] The latter performance was an opera libretto written by Schwitters in 1927 (some years after his *Merzbühne* and *Normalbühne Merz*) which is not addressed in this study. See the appendices to this thesis for further details.
[11] Musicology's disciplinary conventions are bound up with the peculiarities of its media. Western classical notation and theory, which constitutes a significant part of academic courses, are not accessible to students and scholars without a specialist musical training. The impetus to gain such a training comes with playing a musical instrument which reveals its notational and theoretical language.

physically recreating these unperformed and in some respects incomplete stage works required skills in dramaturgy and stagecraft which I developed outside the academy. Practical research in creative disciplines has been defined by Estelle Barrett as a question: 'What knowledge can studio based enquiry reveal that may not be revealed by other modes of enquiry?'[12] Robin Nelson, meanwhile, has considered how the performing arts, with their unstable, diverse and transient object of study, exert pressure on the 'idea of fixed, measurable and recordable "knowledge"'.[13] Indeed, the performing arts have been disputed as a legitimate site of knowledge production as they straddle vocational training as well as those of conventional knowledge production.[14] Critiquing the intellectual rationale for practice as research in UK universities, Nicholas Till considers the approach merely an outcome of the strategic incorporation of drama and music conservatoires and art schools into the higher education system in the 1960s.[15]

The present study is positioned in an academic department and is principally composed of academic outputs.[16] Practice's experiential knowledge has instead figured as one tool among many and has informed and directed my historical and theoretical line of enquiry. Approaching a mixed-media archive from the point of view of practice forced me to think in an interdisciplinary way about how the libretto, design, movement and music interrelated. I considered the resources required to combine them – schedules, budgets, spaces, equipment,

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[12] Estelle Barrett, 'Foreword', *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, ed. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), n.p.
[13] Robin Nelson, 'Introduction: The What, Where, When and Why of "Practice as Research"', *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances,* ed. Robin Nelson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3-22 (4).
[14] Nelson, 'Introduction', *Practice as Research in the Arts*, ed. Nelson, 3.
[15] Nicholas Till, 'Opus versus output', *Times Higher Education*, 38 (March, 2013), 42-45 (43).
[16] As Nelson defines it, practice as research is a project in which 'a practice… is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry' and, in the specific context of a UK PhD, a practiced-based one is '50:50 – the thesis constitutes a substantial practice together with 30,000 to 40,000 words'; Nelson, 'Introduction', *Practice as Research in the Arts*, ed. Nelson, 9, 11. The present thesis thus adheres to a standard, non-practice-based format.

personnel – and, from this position, could more concretely identify the concerns of the artists involved and generated the ‘apparatus, media and agents’ framework, a theoretical model which attempts to highlight the question of contingency in large-scale art production, and which I will outline shortly. A critique often levelled at practice-based research is that its outcomes are unpredictable and subjective.[17] Such material, however, highlights the key issue of contingency: how decisions are taken, opportunities opened up or foreclosed, possibilities found or compromises made, the matters that affect a work without reflecting an author’s prior plan. Instead of searching for the artistic intentions behind these experiments, practice enabled me to examine the conditions under which they were pursued and to ascertain the kinds of decisions made as determined by these conditions. Staging these experiments ultimately pushed me to consider more seriously the question of media which figures as a key area of study. It was by making prototypes of Goncharova’s designs for *Liturgie*, informed by archival notes that the costumes should be constructed from rigid materials, and seeing dancers perform in them, that their movement stuck me as similar to the stilted moving images of early film. This, coupled with knowledge of Diaghilev’s own aversion to film, enabled me to pursue the Ballets Russes’ relationship with the new media technology as a principal line of enquiry. While this study addresses media, it also considers the question of aesthetic perception. Sitting through the performances I reconstructed gave me an untaught sense of the kinds of structures of experience pursued by these authors.

Equally significant to this thesis is a broader shift within operatic institutions over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Concomitant with these visual artists’ experiments with opera outside its institutional framework, a vigorous engagement with opera’s visual media, its mise-en-scène, staging and movement, was playing out within it. Though not yet

[17] Barrett, ‘Introduction’, *Practice as Research*, ed. Barrett, Bolt 1-13 (3).

named as such, the role of the stage director germinated in the nineteenth century and flourished as a credited author in the twentieth. Though innovations in operatic staging are principally associated with the Paris Opéra, the reasons why inventive scenic practices in Germany usurped their French counterparts, and why to this day Germany remains the centre for experimental opera staging, have not been thoroughly explored. Alongside my multimedia case studies, therefore, is the wider institutional question of the visual in opera. In both the avant-garde periphery and on the mainstream stage, opera got 'visual' in the early twentieth century. The conditions which precipitated this dual shift must therefore be considered in an expanded field that extends beyond opera studies' largely institutional history of opera.

The tendency of theatrical institutions to commission visual artists, as opposed to specialised theatre designers, has been mapped by Denise Wendel-Poray, who locates the distinctive shift in the early nineteenth century. More a richly illustrated catalogue than a scholarly study, Wendel-Poray's premise that 'the experience of designing for the stage… during the course of an artist's career, is always significant and often becomes a catalyst to stylistic change'[18] is unspecific. Nevertheless, she brings productive assertions to light: first, that the role of the artist-stage designer gained momentum in the nineteenth century (her survey begins in 1816 with the German architect-designer and optical entertainment experimenter, Karl Friedrich Schinkel) which, as we will see, was indeed a watershed moment in operatic and mass visual media; and second, the identification of opera as a particularly productive site of visual experimentation since Wendel-Poray focusses her twelve chapters exclusively on operatic designs. This observation is consistent with that of Clemens Risi, who, in his description of the twentieth-century German phenomenon of *Regieoper* or directors' opera, a topic I attend to in my third chapter, writes: 'The production of such stagings directs attention in particular

[18] Denise Wendel-Poray, *Painting the Stage: Artists as Stage Designers* (Milan: Skira, 2019), 12.

to the relationship between auditory and visual elements, and to the question of how the musical plane interacts with the scenic one'.[19] This intersection of musical and scenic planes sits at the heart of my study, which considers how and why visual artists were drawn to opera more than spoken-word theatre, with its consistent musical accompaniment and sung and therefore abstracted literary text. Though Wendel-Poray exempts visual artists' contributions to ballet on the grounds that, in including neither spoken nor sung text, the genre has looser ties to narrative, is fundamentally more abstract and 'requires a different scenic approach',[20] I demonstrate this distinction between opera and ballet to be a false one which obstructs the situation of how artists experimented across media precisely by hijacking generic boundaries. The Ballets Russes' ballet-opera *Liturgie* is testament to this.

Wider disciplinary factors account for the scholarly oversight of my case studies, which slip between the disciplines of art history, opera studies and media theory while at the same time staking a claim to them all. Though eager to insert avant-garde artists into the history of abstract painting, art history has largely resisted including their equally abstract multimedia works into the narrative of modernism. Overlooked in the context of exhibitions, catalogues and artists' monographs, the works remain unrealised or very rarely performed. When they are performed, often the performative nature of the work itself is separated in critiques of it from its medial aspects and as such, the opportunity to historically ground such multimedia works within an artist's oeuvre or artistic movement is overlooked.[21] The salient reason is the

[19] Clemens Risi, 'Opera in Performance: "Regietheater" and the Performative Turn', *The Opera Quarterly*, 35 (2019), 7-19 (8).
[20] Wendel-Poray, *Painting the Stage*, 16.
[21] An oversight of this kind can be identified in the critical documentation of the 2011 performances of *Der gelbe Klang* at Tate Modern and the University of Glamorgan, UK, in which the discussion focussed more on twenty-first century performance conditions – the limitations of a non-theatrical venue which inspired a durational approach to the work – than Kandinsky's historical conditions: 'Each picture was rehearsed in loops as separate pictures of adaptable duration where the shortest version of the cycle was governed by the physical and spatial requirements of the text, and the longest cycle was limited only by the schedule of production and the performer's endurance'. As such, the performance event added little to an understanding of the work's historical

impact of the modernist-formalist critical paradigm that prevailed from the mid-twentieth century through the work of art historians including Clement Greenberg and Alfred Barr. Reacting to the social and political force field of their time, in which powerful new media technologies commandeered visual media for commercial and political ends through mass media, their accounts of modern art privileged the medium and its specific, objective qualities as the locus of aesthetic autonomy and thus, through this dictum of purity, reasserted disciplinary boundaries. The essential characteristic of modernist painting, for example, must be the principle of flatness. This, in turn, became a powerful force in modernist discourse.[22]

In his study of art and music relationships within modernism, Simon Shaw-Miller holds Greenberg's criticism partially responsible for art history's failure to account for 'hybrid and "theatrical" manifestations of practices that operate under the "surface" of this paradigm of modernism'.[23] My multimedia case studies add to the theoretical ones of Shaw-Miller which, against the grain of medium purity, evince a modernist concern with the interrelation of media. Where Shaw-Miller probes the intellectual tenets of modernist art-music relationships, concentrating on the theoretical contributions of Greenberg, Richard Wagner and others, my operatic examples demand a different approach. Media theory, in particular, helps to situate operatic multimedia in an expanded field of technical and mass media. Developments in technology both inform the possibilities of these works' realisation, and at the same time

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situation. Geraint D'Arcy, Richard J. Hand, 'Open Your Eyes/Shut Your Eyes: Staging Kandinsky's *The Yellow Sound* at Tate Modern', *Performance Research*, 17 (2012), 56-60 (57-58).

[22] An excerpt from Greenberg's 'Modernist Painting' summarises the situation: 'The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence… Each art, it turned out, had to effect this demonstration on its own account. What had to be exhibited and made explicit was that which was unique and irreducible not only in art in general, but also in each particular art. Each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself. By doing this each art would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of this area all the more secure. It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium'. Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' (1965), *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 5-10 (5).

[23] Simon Shaw-Miller, *The Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), ix.

illustrate the technologically generated mass entertainments operating alongside them which, in a fast-moving mediascape, made new perceptual demands of observers. The question of media therefore leads to issues of perception which are also at stake for art theorists grappling with the aesthetics of multimedia installation art in the sixties. In an attempt to protect art from its dissolution into commercial entertainment, Greenberg mixed the question of what was unique to aesthetic experience with what was unique to the medium in aesthetic production. By contrast, I seek to reclaim the idea of aesthetic experience, rather than medium specificity, as a basis on which to explore visual artists' investment in multimedia.

In a 1981 essay entitled 'Intermedia', Greenberg observed the prevalence of multimedia in the context of museums and galleries and considered the particular openness of the visual art scene to 'extraneous mediums'.[24] According to Greenberg, this was due in part to the leading position of painting within modernism:

> It was painting that was first compelled in the mid-nineteenth century, to innovate and "experiment" in technical, material, utterly "formal" ways. It was painting that had earliest in the course of modernism to dig into its "mechanisms". …So it was painting that in the beginning profiled itself as the modernist, the avant-garde art par excellence. …In the latter nineteenth century painting was what startled most, and kept on startling most.[25]

Yet Greenberg does not elaborate how or why painting took on a preeminent role in generating the new – which is a question equally relevant to the visual's rise to prominence in opera production – and his reasoning for the receptiveness of visual art institutions to multimedia remains unspecific. Meanwhile, Greenberg's emphasis on visual art institutions

[24] Greenberg, 'Intermedia' (1981), *Late Writings*, ed. Robert C. Morgan (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 93-98 (94).
[25] Greenberg, 'Intermedia' *Late Writings*, ed. Morgan, 94.

overlooks the outputs of visual artists outside of museums and galleries and thus neglects their generically transgressive multimedia works. Significantly, however, issues of experience and perception – of time and attention – are raised by Greenberg as he suggests that experimental performance's manifestation in a visual art context is to do with the social conventions surrounding the space and their peculiar demands on the listening observer. Though performance art demands time and attention, as in a concert, poetry reading or a page of text, 'it's so much easier to walk out of a gallery or museum than a theatre or concert hall without seeming rude'.[26] Thus performance works were tolerated and thus emerged in visual art institutions because the observer could control their own time and attention.[27] Visual art institutions' hosting of multimedia art enabled performance to be experienced in a manner commensurate with the observer's media-saturated conditions of attention in their daily life.

Art historians such as Rosalind Krauss have attempted to stretch Greenberg's definition of medium specificity to encompass multimedia or 'art of the post-medium condition', a rubric developed against the ubiquity of multimedia installation art in the sixties.[28] Striving for a unity within diverse forms via the technological media of video, film and television, Krauss considers the Belgian poet, visual artist and filmmaker Marcel Broodthaers the progenitor of such work. As such, Krauss does not acknowledge the earlier twentieth-century multimedia moment of my case studies, an oversight shared by Juliane Rebentisch, who, in a study of the aesthetics of installation art, also considers the sixties as the decade in which 'intermediality', which she defines as the transgression of discrete areas of competence, was meaningfully pursued by visual practitioners.[29] Rebentisch justifies her choice with the authority of

[26] Greenberg, 'Intermedia' *Late Writings*, ed. Morgan, 96.
[27] Greenberg, 'Intermedia' *Late Writings*, ed. Morgan, 96.
[28] 'In the age of television, so it broadcast, we inhabit a post-medium condition'. Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 20.
[29] Juliane Rebentisch, *The Aesthetics of Installation Art*, trans. Daniel Hendrickson and Gerrit Jackson (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 84.

Theodor W. Adorno, who, in his 1967 essay 'Art and the Arts', observed the 'erosion' or 'fraying' of the frontiers of discrete art forms.[30] Unlike Greenberg, who maintained that generic boundaries could protect the category of art from its dissolution into entertainment, the erosion of artistic boundaries was for Adorno not necessarily to the detriment of art. Instead, he considered art's survival as dependent on its defiance of predetermined expectations of it. Thus, the partitioning of art into preconceived art forms was one of the entrenched precepts from which art urgently needed to liberate itself in order to remain autonomous. Adorno's position is relevant to the present study of unclassifiable multimedia art forms, which themselves frustrate generic and institutional expectations of art. Although Rebentisch's definition of installation art does account for its modernist precursors, its prehistory still privileges artists' constructions and assemblages over their stage experiments, as demonstrated by the example of Schwitters, which is symptomatic of the wider situation in which art historians are unable to put aside institutions and genres in order to embrace the idea of multimedia in full.[31]

While neither Krauss's nor Rebentisch's frameworks accommodate my modernist case studies, both point to useful theoretical points of departure. Still adhering to the medium in her subsequent *Under Blue Cup*, Krauss identifies 'knights of the medium', artists who refute the postmodern abandonment of medium specificity.[32] Their medium consciousness manifests itself as a series of rules which, related to something technical, dictate the handling of the

[30] Rebentisch, 100. T. W. Adorno, 'Art and the Arts', trans. Rodney Livingstone, *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2003), 368-387.
[31] Rebentisch's borrowed definition of the modernist precursors to installation art reads thus: 'the inclusiveness of Futurist Cubist Collage; Duchamp's readymades; Dada and the constructions of Schwitters and Baader; El Lissitzky and Constructivist approaches to space; Duchamp again and his contributions to the Surrealist exhibitions in 1938 and 1942; Fontana's 'spatialism'; assemblage; happenings; Klein and Manzoni; the Pop tableaux of Kienholz, Oldenburg, Segal and Thek; Fluxus; Minimalism; Pop Art; Arte Povera; Process Art; Conceptualism…'. Nicolas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley, and Michael Petry, *Installation Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 199), 9. Quoted in Rebentisch, 8.
[32] Krauss, *Under Blue Cup* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 18.

many media adopted.[33] More radically abandoning Krauss's adherence to Greenbergian dictum, Rebentisch argues for aesthetic autonomy's place in the structure of aesthetic experience rather than as a material support or logic:

> Art is not autonomous because it is constituted in this or that way, but because it allows for an experience distinct from the spheres of practical and theoretical reason, by virtue of the specific structure of the relation between its subject and its object.[34]

More specifically, Rebentisch describes the experience particular to installation art in terms of the active position it designates for the observer.[35] The perceptual imperatives of installation art in the sixties are shared, it seems, by those of earlier multimedia media experiments, as demonstrated by Juliet Koss in her critical genealogy of Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[36] As Koss highlights, the pursuit of active and engaged modes of spectatorship was a pressing concern across modernist media and genres. Artists responded to new media technologies with both enthusiasm and trepidation, mobilised and rejected them as they explored how aesthetic experience could be defined against that of the mundane and the everyday. Though compelling, Rebentisch's argument on the subject of installation art is weakened by a lack of specificity since she puts no art works through the mechanics of her argument. Rebentisch feels no need to incorporate images into her study since she deems them 'sterile and unsatisfactory as reproductions of installation art…Theory cannot quote illustrations like poems'.[37] This reluctance to compromise with the constraints of academic media, of text and printed images, is a further reason why my case studies, and performance more generally,

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[33] Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, 17.
[34] Rebentisch, 11. Rebentisch situates her turn towards aesthetic experience in German philosophy of the 1980s to the early 2000s by Rüdiger Bubner, Christel Fricke, Josef Früchtl, Hans Robert Jauß and Andrea Kern. Their discussions concentrate on 'what constitutes the practice of engaging aesthetic objects and, hence, the specific structure of aesthetic experience. The question of what constitutes aesthetic objects has been subordinated to that of the specific structure of our experience of them: aesthetic objects, in this view, are in general those objects that provide the occasion for a particular, specifically aesthetic experience'. Rebentisch, 9.
[35] Rebentisch, 15.
[36] Juliet Koss, *Modernism After Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
[37] Rebentisch, 17.

have been overlooked in the scholarly realm. My chapters offer an alternative approach, employing the imperfect but necessary media of academic writing and presentation, and using technical descriptions and images to bring the reader as close as possible to the works in question.

Devoted to a longstanding multimedia genre, opera studies seems a productive area in which to consider visual artists' multimedia. Yet while the field has not pursued medium specificity in the same way as art history, it has its own biases. Opera's ontological challenge as text and performance has been succinctly expressed by Carolyn Abbate: 'a performance is "the only work that counts" and paradoxically is "not a work at all"'.[38] The dilemma of what constitutes opera's object of study has been approached from a number of angles, the majority of which have marginalised its visual media. Since musical notation and theory are not accessible to scholars without a specialist musical training, opera studies is positioned within the discipline of musicology and, confusing opera's least theoretically accessible quality with its most important one, reinforces the assumption that music is its principal object of study. Meanwhile, opera studies has afforded written texts, the medium of academia, more authority over those which are not as consistently noted down, reproduced or preserved in archives, and thus design, as a traditionally ephemeral component, has been considered less worthy of analysis than libretti or musical scores. That the digital availability of operatic performance has precipitated no palpable increase in publications on the subject of staging is suggestive of opera's profile as a principally musical art form, but also points to the issue of mediation and the challenges of capturing live performance on film, which necessarily irons out its structure of perception, that is, the listening observer's freedom to look where they choose. Paradoxically, however, it is precisely this emphasis on liveness as a precondition for

[38] Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), ix.

critiquing performance that has precluded the meaningful examination of operatic staging.[39] Comprising principally non-musical archives, it is already clear why opera studies has not acknowledged the efforts of Kandinsky, Goncharova and Schwitters.

David J. Levin, Abbate and Roger Parker are among the scholars who have attempted to redress the media balance in opera studies by challenging music as the heart of inquiry. Yet it is worth noting that Abbate, Parker and Levin have privileged opera's textual media, the musical score and libretto, over its mise-en-scène. While in *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*, Abbate and Parker condemn a principally musical conception of opera as 'seeing only one of the three primary colours', their collection still only meaningfully engages with two of its medial inputs, the libretto and musical score.[40] The reasons for this omission are inscribed in the terms of their study: '"analysing opera"', according to Abbate and Parker, 'should mean not only "analysing music" but simultaneously engaging, with equal sophistication, the poetry and the drama'.[41] Carving opera into the categories 'music', 'poetry' and 'drama' exposes their textual bias: both poetry and drama point back towards the opera's literary basis, its plot and narrative as embodied through sung text. 'Drama' here assumes narrative as a structuring principle in opera, upon which music and scenery are created, a paradigm that I argue is radically challenged in the twentieth century in a situation that resembles 'postdramatic theatre', a term coined by Hans-Thies Lehmann in the context of twentieth-century spoken word theatre. The term 'drama', moreover, fails to encompass

[39] David J. Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner and Zemlinsky* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 7-8.
[40] Abbate and Roger Parker, *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 4. It is puzzling that there is little reference to and no analysis of Verdi's staging manuals, which, unlike many aspects of staging and scenography, are well preserved, readily available and include not only textual descriptions but also diagrams. Verdi's staging manuals were so central to the overall conception of his operas that disregarding them had dire consequences, as the La Scala opera house discovered in 1846 in the wake of their attempt at producing *Attila*. Verdi was so disappointed with their production, he eventually suspended their access to the producing rights of his operas. Evan Baker, *From the Score to the Stage: An Illustrated History of Continental Opera Production and Staging* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 180.
[41] Abbate and Parker, 4.

scenography – the set, costume, lighting and special effects – the visual strategies of opera which took on a pre-eminence and a gradual independence from music and drama in the nineteenth century.

Though also devoted to the study of an operatic text, this time its literary one, Levin's collection *Opera Through Other Eyes* has exposed another assumption in Abbate and Parker's call for extra musical engagement in opera: that such inquiry is only useful in as far as it can illuminate the musical stratagems at play.[42] Levin, with his stake in the operatic libretto, critiques the supposition of the text as a stable and referential medium of opera:

> the words remain implicitly homogeneous and univalent, providing a presumably stable ground upon which music is seen (or heard) to rest, from which it takes off and to which it may return. But language's referential ground is hardly so stable: if we look (or listen) a bit more closely, we can perceive the shifting, restless quality of the words, how they take off and respond not necessarily just to the music, but by, from, and to themselves… This is an important point because it complicates a traditional and tidy juxtaposition of opera's signifying systems. For words are recognised as an erratic player in the interplay of systems, we can no longer simply juxtapose music's ability to emote with language's ability to concretise and refer… Instead the split between words and music presents us with competing modes of complicated referentiality.[43]

Levin's account of operatic referentiality is complicated further by the actual intelligibility of opera's textual basis, which too often goes uncritiqued. Sidestepping theories concerning the relative importance of music and text in operatic works, Paul Robinson has outlined four

[42] Levin, 'Introduction', *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David J. Levin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 1-18 (8). Another more recent account of the literary peculiarities of opera libretti is offered in *"Music's Obedient Daughter": The Opera Libretto from Source to Score*, ed. Lichtenstein (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014). Brill ebook.
[43] Levin, 'Introduction', *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. Levin, 9-10.

operatic conventions which frustrate the understanding of words in performance: the language (often foreign); the text as sung by the powerful operatic voice; ensemble singing; and the accompaniment of a full orchestra.[44] Indeed, the technical modernisation of musical instruments increased the volume of the orchestra in the nineteenth century, which in turn exerted even more pressure on the operatic voice. Technological factors thus drove text to become even less intelligible in opera and so offered a visual avant-garde, invested in the idea of abstraction, a pre-existing situation in which narrative clarity had been sacrificed, if for the sake of technology rather than expressivity, though this hardly mattered.

Levin incorporates staging as a further mode of opera's complex referentiality in *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner and Zemlinsky*. Through case studies, Levin examines the way in which radical dramaturgical and scenic reinterpretations of canonical operas unsettle conventionalised readings of the operatic texts. Citing Lehmann's concept of postdramatic theatre, in which the staged text is 'merely a component with equal rights in a gestic, musical, visual, etc. total composition',[45] Levin presents operatic examples whose expressive modes appear at times in conflict with one another. Borrowing again from Lehmann, who in turn has borrowed from the philosopher Julia Kristeva, these stagings are 'polylogical' in that they are concerned with generating heterogeneous, as opposed to homogenised, meanings.[46] Opera's postdramatic moment, according to Levin, occurred with

[44] Operatic singing requires a certain volume, which exerts a pressure on the voice that changes its sound and distorts the words. The high frequency of the female operatic voice in particular renders the words incomprehensible due to increased overtones and a distortion of vowels. The smooth, sustained or *legato* vocal tone which enables composers to weave larger-scale phrases sacrifices articulation, that momentary interruption of sound which enables the listener to register individual words. Since vowel sounds are easier to articulate in song than consonants, certain languages are predisposed towards intelligibility, for example, Italian more than English. Ensemble singing often means to bury texts in layers of different voices singing either the same or different words, overlapping and interlocking with different rhythms and at different pitches. Paul Robinson, 'A Deconstructive Postscript: Reading Libretti and Misreading Opera', *Reading Opera*, ed. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 328-346 (329-337).
[45] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London and New York, Routeledge, 2006), 46. Quoted in Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 11.
[46] Lehmann, 32. Quoted in Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 12, 23-24.

the arrival of experimental directors from the spoken-word theatre in the 1970s and, as such, Levin addresses the work of late twentieth and early twentieth-first century directors Peter Sellars, Calixto Bieto and Hans Neuenfels.[47] Highlighting the potential of filmed performances to reinvigorate the study of mise-en-scène, Levin selects case studies based on their wide digital availability, an effective approach, but one which can neither elucidate productions created before the wide availability of technological media, nor those which were never filmed.[48] Nevertheless, Levin's approach has inspired my own: I examine the clash of media at play in my case studies through staging them, and use their filmed documentation as a means of considering how their media interrelate.

Levin's chronology is shared by another significant study of operatic staging, Susan McClary's *The Passions of Peter Sellars: Staging the Music*. McClary maps Sellars's early Mozart-Da Ponte stagings, the operas for which he collages the musical and literary texts, and his staged productions of works not originally written for the stage, such as Bach's liturgical passions. A musicologist by training, McClary pays particular attention to the way in which Sellars combines visual and musical media, with which he creates the intermedial effects of harmony and tension.[49] McClary here identifies the same media constellation in twentieth-century opera highlighted by Wendel-Poray and Risi, that is, one where a peculiar synergy occurs at the intersection of the musical and visual planes. The present study considers similar kinds of directorial and dramaturgical interventions in which practitioners questioned the alleged unity of theatrical meaning, yet my chronology is positioned in the nineteenth and

[47] Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 24.
[48] As Levin explains: 'I have been guided not only by a sense of their interpretive achievement and theoretical significance, but also by a pragmatic consideration, namely, their availability in recorded form, on video or DVD – that is, their availability for my readers to experience via the mediation of a TV or computer screen. I am willing to risk – and will seek to account for – the complications (there are some obvious losses but also some gains) occasioned by that mediation in order to focus our attention on the fact and consequences of mise-en-scène'. Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 7.
[49] Susan McClary, *The Passions of Peter Sellars: Staging the Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019).

early twentieth centuries, before the director existed as an official position in operatic institutions. Rather than considering practitioners invited to bring techniques from the spoken-word theatre, as in the case of Sellars, Bieto and Neuenfels, I consider operatic outsiders who identified opera for themselves as a productive site of experimentation.

The history of staging focussed on technology and institutions, rather than individual directors and performances, is another pertinent branch of opera studies. Significant in this literature is Evan Baker's *From the Score to the Stage: An Illustrated History of Continental Opera Production and Staging*, which proceeds on the assumption that 'an opera performed without scenery, costumes and stage action is an incomplete art form, merely music and singing'.[50] Substantiated by a vast array of archival documents and illustrations, Baker's survey considers not only technological innovations in the theatre but also the personnel – administrative, creative and technical – involved in implementing them. Similarly concerned with technologies, Gundula Kreuzer's *Curtain, Gong, Steam: Wagnerian Technologies of Nineteenth-Century Opera* is more explicitly grounded in media studies as she considers composers' specific call for certain technologies for their

> dramatic, musical, aesthetic, and cultural meanings; their material functioning and sensorial effects; their absorption (at least temporarily) into a widely shared vision of the respective operas; and the gradual transformation of all these aspects in later productions or works.[51]

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[50] Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, xvi. Another essential contribution to this subfield is *Opera on Stage*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, trans. Kate Singleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), a far-reaching study of Italian opera's visual media which gives particular weight to the first three centuries of the genre. While not focussing exclusively on opera, Christopher Baugh's *Theatre, Performance and Technology: The Development of Scenography in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) offers a transnational survey of twentieth-century technological developments as appropriated, but also rejected, in scenographic practices by designers, writers and directors.

[51] Gundula Kreuzer's *Curtain, Gong, Steam: Wagnerian Technologies of Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 3. Kreuzer's account follows that of Patrick Carnegy, whose, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) provides detailed insight into how Wagner and others actually staged his productions.

While Kreuzer acknowledges the technological innovations behind other operatic institutions in the nineteenth century – citing Hervé Lacombe's definition of the Paris Opéra as a 'product of technology'[52] – she justifies her focus on Wagner through his unparalleled individual control of his works' technical production, not least through the construction of a purpose-built theatre.[53] Here Kreuzer follows the lead of media theorist Friedrich Kittler, who considers the media elision of Wagner's music dramas a 'monomaniacal anticipation of the gramophone and the movies' which 'truly achieved the transition from traditional art to media technology'.[54] Kittler stresses the proto-filmic qualities of Wagner's 1876 *Festspielhaus* in Bayreuth. Indeed, in Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*, Kittler claims 'the capitalist medium recalls above all its prehistory in Wagner'.[55] Labelling film, and by extension opera, a product of capitalism, Kittler refers principally to the massiveness of opera's means, a situation which extends beyond Kreuzer's focus on technology: Wagner and others not only worked within the confines of what was technologically possible, but also what was financially realisable. The relationship between film and theatre, once film had fully emerged as a new medium, has also been identified by Kittler as a fruitful but neglected area of study, comparable to that of the competitive relationship between painting and photography.[56] This insight is consistent with Adorno's conclusion that the threat of mass media was the salient concern in the twentieth-century crisis of opera.[57] As new technologies, film in particular, emulated and enhanced sensational multimedia effects first pioneered on the nineteenth-century operatic stage, how should opera respond?

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[52] Hervé Lacombe, 'The Machine and The State', *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, 21.
[53] Kreuzer, 14.
[54] Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 23. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800 / 1900*, trans. Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 116. Quoted in Kreuzer, 14. See also Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, trans. Anthony Enns (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 44.
[55] Kittler, 'World-Breath: On Wagner's Media Technology', *Opera Through Other Eyes*, 215-235 (234).
[56] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 22.
[57] As Adorno pithily puts it his chapter 'Opera': 'The film has materially outbid the opera, while intellectually underbidding it so far that nothing from its fund could keep it competitive.' *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), 80.

Initiated by Kandinsky, Goncharova and Schwitters between 1909 and 1924, my multimedia case studies were developed once film had emerged into an urban mass mediascape. What Nicholas Vazsonyi observed in the case of Wagner in the nineteenth century – the composer's realisation that '"great art" could not speak for itself, or could no longer do so in the crowded and noisy marketplace of the emerging masses'[58] applied equally to artists in the twentieth century confronted with commercially-driven mass media and an accompanying mass audience. Thus, alongside artists' handling of new technologies within the theatre, their experience of those same technologies outside of it, in the form of mass media, equally informed their idiosyncratic approaches to combining media, and as such, I address both situations in the following chapters. The technological shifts brought on by industrialisation, which in turn precipitated a demographic move towards the cities, was also accompanied by changes in spectatorship. Koss has considered the German situation through Wagnerian and post-Wagernian attempts to combine media in the light of such evolving models of spectatorship. In a series of case studies, *Modernism After Wagner* demonstrates the way in which agents across disciplines attempted to cater to, as well as shape, the modern audience as it evolved between 1849 and 1930. Koss productively considers the early reception of film in Germany, in particular the ways in which its mass audience and peculiar structure of perception were discussed, however, her study also stretches to notions of spectatorship which emerged in aesthetic philosophy, perceptual psychology, optics, and art and architecture history. In the case of the discourse of *Einfühlung*, which articulated the idea of an active, embodied response and circulated in Munich as artists experimented with visual abstraction, this way of perceiving was drawn as a specifically artistic one, and helped artists stake out

[58] Nicholas Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1-2. Here Vazsonyi has built on the arguments of Andreas Huyssen, who has identified Wagner's situation in a 'vortex of commodification'. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986), 42.

areas of art and non-art in an increasingly image-saturated mediascape. The category of art was thus considered not in terms of medium specificity, but as a thought-like experience which revealed the mechanisms of thinking itself.

To theoretically place my multimedia case studies, I abandon modernist notions of medium specificity. Complicated and cumbersome, opera absorbs the medium into a three-part structure. Its many media are negotiated by agents within a large apparatus[59] that cannot be contained or explained by the logics of medium purity which persist in aesthetics, nor the purely technological insights advanced by media theory. This 'medium – agents – apparatus' framework diverges from both a Brechtian and a Kittlerian sense of the medium. In the case of Bertolt Brecht, whom I consider first as a media theorist, the institutional, economic, legal and technical structures – what he defines as the apparatus – are as significant in artistic production as the medium and agents.[60] Kittler, meanwhile, qualifies a medium by its ability to disrupt the irreversibility of the flow of time and therefore absorbs neither the apparatus nor its agents into the equation. Offering 'a media studies without people', Kittler does not consider human experience, audiences or reception.[61] As Kittler puts it, 'perceptible and aesthetic properties are always only dependent variables of technical feasibility'.[62] The kind of paradigm I am drawing here is instead not only a technical one, but also an interpersonal one, involving agents who also register, process and store data. While I identify the

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[59] In this respect, I follow Kreuzer, who rejects reductive accounts of opera's verbal, musical, and visual modes of meaning in favour of considering the media and agents active in creating each of these inputs. Kreuzer, 3.
[60] Roswitha Mueller has outlined Brecht's sense of the apparatus as 'a broad category to include every aspect of the means of cultural production, from the actual technological equipment to promotion agencies, as well as the class that is in possession of the means of production… Apparatus as the means of cultural production refers either to the entire cultural complex or to smaller organization units within it, for example, the theatre, the opera, radio, the press, and the film companies. Finally, it also includes the technical units, the tools of production. The confluence of economics, politics, and culture in the hands of the same group, the economically powerful class, as Brecht has pointed out, has severe consequences for culture.' Roswitha Mueller, *Bertolt Brecht and the Theory of Media* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 15-16.
[61] John Durham Peters, 'Introduction: Friedrich Kittler's Light Shows', *Optical Media*, 3-4.
[62] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 222.

interactions of the producing agents as pertinent sources, I will not consider them at the cost of the apparatus or the medium and therefore will not be framing their activity in theories of collaborative practice such as 'relational aesthetics' or 'art worlds'.[63] That said, my method seeks to avoid a Kittlerian technological determinism. Ultimately, this framework is representative of my own experiences working as an opera director both within and outside an institutional context, and which have revealed to me the extreme extent to which the medium is shaped by the contingencies of its institutions and agents.

The present study highlights the significant ruptures under the continuity of 'opera' which the notion of a single institution, and even a single genre, blinds us to. As Jonathan Crary has shown at an archaeological level – that is, operating beneath the consciousness of individual subjects – a new kind of observer was forged in the nineteenth century. A contribution of this thesis is to put an institutional and economic history on to Crary's concept in which a physically natural optics was usurped by a physiologically embodied one.[64] While previously the observer had been a mind and what they experienced took place in the world, in the nineteenth century, the observer was a body in which effects were produced within the density of the body and not from outside it. Yet as observers changed, so too did media, technology and capital in the operatic apparatus. My first chapter begins at the Paris Opéra of the 1820s where the institution catered to this new observer and mobilised mise-en-scène to suit novel conditions of perception and attention driven by a burgeoning mass entertainment sector. The institution pre-empted the artistic avant-garde who, in a competitive twentieth-century mass mediascape, released opera from a narrative-bound dramaturgy. In this vein, Kandinsky's *Der gelbe Klang* used lighting technology to stimulate in the listening observer a

[63] Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1998). Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
[64] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

specifically artistic kind of experience which I situate in the discourses of *Einfühlung* and Neo-Kantianism, the latter of which was a reaction to the positivist belief in scientific progress which compelled German intellectuals to look back to Kant. Moving from a French to a German context not only takes seriously the national shift in scenographic innovation, but also illuminates how Crary's terms map on to those of Neo-Kantianism. While the Neo-Kantians accepted the presence of the sovereign subject, and were invested in the active role of the observer as responsible for producing knowledge, Crary considers experience in a subjectless way, claiming that under the conditions of the observer in the nineteenth century, a body was inserted into an apparatus and sensations were created in that body. At stake in both positions, however, is an emphasis on the creation of experience within the observer and, as we will see, multimedia was a particularly productive situation for this process.

The second chapter considers the artistic and commercial pressure placed on opera by the new medium of film as exemplified by the Ballets Russes. The threat of film seeped into a legal zone of culture as the dancers' contracts forbade them from dancing in front of any form of mechanical reproduction. Yet their unrealised ballet-opera, *Liturgie*, demonstrates the appropriation of filmic techniques in the spirit of tribute and rivalry, or *remediation*. The final chapter examines the commonality between Schwitters' Merz stage works and the radical staging practices at Berlin's Kroll Opera House (1927-31). I explore their shared commitment to a Neo-Kantian redefinition of culture which tethered cultural experience to that of spiritual edification, a definition which was also at stake for early film critics, and which Schwitters and the Kroll embodied in a strategy of montaging a historically consistent operatic score and libretto with a contemporary staging. In the light of Ernst Bloch's theory of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (non-contemporaneity), this practice is part of a constellation which demonstrates the demands made of the perceptual faculties of the observer across media and institutions.

Chapter 1 Part I: 'Effects without causes': a new observer at the Paris Opéra

An epigraph to Walter Benjamin's 1935 essay, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' reads:

> The magic columns of these palaces,
>
> Show to enthusiasts from all parts,
>
> With the objects their porticos display,
>
> That industry is the rival of the arts.[65]

Describing the arcades of Paris, which he informs us were constructed in the decades after 1822 following a surge in the textile industry and the structural possibilities of cast iron, Benjamin offers a pithy reading of the state of culture and modernity in the nineteenth century: industry not only shared the space of culture, but in doing so it entered into a relationship of *rivalry* with it (figs. 1 and 2). Combing the nineteenth century for traces of his twentieth-century concerns, Benjamin undertook the complex task of analysing the rapidly changing relationship between art and technology. A short walk from the arcades of Benjamin's Paris, the Paris Opéra (or the Académie Royale de Musique, as it was also known) adjusted to its relocation on the rue Le Peletier, where a newly-built venue designed by François Debret opened its doors in 1821 (fig. 3). The new auditorium, known as the Salle Le Peletier, was conceived on an unprecedented scale with raked seating to improve sightlines and the new technology of gas light.[66] While Benjamin identified the arcades as the site of initial efforts in gas lighting, the Opéra was as quick to mobilise the new technology. Beyond their common use of gas light, the arcades and Opéra had other parallels. Benjamin's

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[65] The epigraph is taken from the *Nouveaux Tableaux de Paris* (Paris, 1828) and quoted in Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century' (1935), *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.

[66] Simon Williams, 'The Spectacle of the Past in Grand Opera', *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 58-75 (60).

depiction of the arcades as an 'invention of industrial luxury'[67] equally held true for the Opéra, which was required, according to its management, to be kept 'in a state of pomp and luxury becoming a national theatre'.[68] The arcades and the Opéra not only shared new technologies but, as Benjamin notes, they even became physically connected by way of a narrow wooden arcade.[69] But while Benjamin's arcades were resolutely 'temples of commodity capital',[70] the situation of the Paris Opéra was not quite so clear: though it in theory remained a purveyor of art, in practice it was embroiled in and dependant on industry and capital like never before.[71]

Opera's apparatus, media and agents have always combined art and technology to a certain extent. The case of the Paris Opéra exemplified their proximity and frustrated any neat delineation between the two. Following Benjamin's mutually illuminating coordinates, Paris in the nineteenth century, and the position from which he considered it, Germany in the early twentieth, a synergy between nineteenth-century opera production and early twentieth-century avant-garde multimedia practice emerges. More specifically, the activity of the Paris Opéra sheds light on to the peculiar and persistent engagement of avant-garde artists, some of whom

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[67] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Tiedemann, trans. Eiland and McLaughlin, 3.
[68] As evinced in the 1831 contract for the incoming director. Evan Baker, *From the Score to the Stage: An Illustrated History of Continental Opera Productions and Staging* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 123.
[69] 'The narrow streets surrounding the Opéra and the hazards to which pedestrians were exposed on emerging from this theatre, which is always besieged by carriages, gave a group of speculators in 1821 the idea of using some of the structures separating the new theatre from the boulevard. This enterprise, a source of riches for its originators, was at the same time of great benefit to the public. By way of a small, narrow covered arcade built of wood, one had, in fact, direct access, with all the security of the Opéra's vestibule, to these galleries, and from there to the boulevard.... Above the entablature of Doric pilasters dividing the shops rise two floors of apartments, and above the apartments-running the length of the galleries-reigns an enormous glass-paned roof'. J. A. Dulaure, *Histoire physique, civile et morale de Paris depuis 1821 jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1835), vol. 2, 28-29 quoted in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Tiedemann, trans. Eiland and McLaughlin, 32.
[70] Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', *The Arcades Project*, ed. Tiedemann, trans. Eiland and McLaughlin, 37.
[71] Klaus van den Berg has similarly followed Benjamin to address not operatic staging, but rather the opera house, as an instance of capitalist mass spectacle comparable with the arcades. Van den Berg considers the Paris Opéra's Palais Garnier, which was completed in 1875, as a 'paradigm of the modern exhibition site'. Klaus van den Berg, 'The Opera House as Urban Exhibition Space', *Operatic Geographies: the Place of Opera and the Opera House*, ed. Suzanne Aspden (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 213-233 (215).

were Benjamin's artistic associates, with opera. Their commonality was a shared sense of the potential of many media, including technological media, to enhance and intensify perceptual experience against changing modes of spectatorship.[72]

In his *Passagen-Werk* (Arcades Project) Benjamin excavates the archaeology of modernity from the detritus of mass culture. Though he embarked upon the project in 1927, it remained unfinished upon his death and was published posthumously. The notes he left behind offer rich insights into art, technology and structures of perception in nineteenth-century Paris, through topics concerning the visual and attention such as 'Boredom', 'Reproduction Technology, Lithography', 'Modes of Lighting' and the 'Panorama'.[73] Benjamin's description of the situation of architecture and painting under the conditions of modernity evokes a process that has come to be called *remediation*: 'Just as architecture, with the first appearance of iron construction, begins to outgrow art, so does painting, in its turn, with the first appearance of the panoramas'.[74] The question of how opera navigated the inventions and new pressures of modernity can also be understood as a process of remediation on a vast scale. Absorbing both architecture and painting as well as lighting into its apparatus and media, opera outgrew art and entered its industrial phase of production: it employed an unprecedented number of administrative, technical and artistic agents to produce a record number of performances that played to larger audiences than ever before.[75]

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[72] The nineteenth-century opera house pursued perceptual intensity almost scientifically: the latest technologies were harnessed and used via experiments of trial and error. David Trippett and Benjamin Walton illustrate this in their convincing case for the proximity of the laboratory and the stage in the nineteenth century. Their citation of the phrase 'quantifiable originality', a term used with regard to the quality of an opera by the Victorian polymath Herbert Spencer, is remarkably applicable to the approach taken by opera industry agents who also treated the opera house as a laboratory for creating new sensory experiences which would, importantly, insure a financial return. David Trippett and Benjamin Walton, *Nineteenth-Century Opera and the Scientific Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1.

[73] Frederic J. Schwartz has brought to light the investment of the critical theorists in visual experience as a means of reckoning with modernity. Frederic Schwartz, *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

[74] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 5.

[75] By 1826 the Opéra had a 72-member orchestra which had grown to 81 members by 1836. In 1829 the Opéra employed 24 safety staff compared with a mere 9 at the Théâtre-Français and 7 at the Théâtre de l'Odéon. Hervé

Quick to develop a competitive and complicit relationship with new technologies, the Paris Opéra was particularly attentive to those adopted by the popular entertainments that fuelled the public's taste for optical novelty and ultimately altered contemporary spectatorial expectations. Borrowing agents and media from these smaller entertainment venues known as the boulevard theatres, the Opéra expanded opera's already unwieldy means of production and, in doing so, created the form of industrialised culture or the culture industry that Theodor W. Adorno came to identify with the institution. As he put it in his 1955 essay 'Bürgerliche Oper' (Bourgeois Opera):

> Opera shares with film not just the suddenness of its invention but also many of its functions: among them the presentation of the body of common knowledge to the masses as well as the massiveness of the means, employed teleologically in the material of opera as in film, which lent opera – at least opera since the middle of the nineteenth century, if not earlier – a similarity to the modern culture industry.[76]

As portrait painting grappled with photography and the decorative arts with mass production, so opera negotiated mass culture through a process of remediation, at once rejecting and absorbing it.

The theatre was often the public's first experience of the new technologies of the Industrial Revolution. Those elements which contributed to Benjamin's arcades – textile dyes, iron

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Lacombe, 'The 'Machine' and The State', *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera* ed. Charlton, 19-42 (34). Ambitious stage effects at the Opéra demanded the organised input of a team of stagehands; the institution often required sixty *machinistes* and a crew of at least forty men to deliver an individual opera as a staged performance. The Salle Le Peletier's capacity varied from an audience of 1,400 to one of 1,950 through its subsequent renovations. The previous venue could only seat 1,300. Karin Pendle and Stephen Wilkins, 'Paradise Found: The Salle Le Peletier and French Grand Opera', *Opera in Context: Essays on Historical Stagings from the Late Renaissance to the Time of Puccini*, ed. Mark Radice (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1998), 171-207 (189, 175).

[76] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Bourgeois Opera', *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David J. Levin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 25-43 (31-32).

construction, hydraulic power and gas light – also precipitated a sea change in theatrical scenography, and the cosmopolitan Opéra led the way. Innovations in theatrical lighting altered the visual experience of opera, not least in enabling the set, props, costumes and performers to be properly seen. Rather than merely providing a source of illumination, light was activated as a theatrical medium which demanded a specialised agent – first the technical director and then the specialist lighting designer – to oversee its implementation. Artificial light in the form of oil, then gas and eventually electric power developed an increased autonomy as its qualities of form, colour, intensity, direction and movement were honed and mobilised as controllable features.[77] The potential of stronger and more varied lighting threw the materiality of theatrical mise-en-scène into question as it literally had to be reconsidered in a new light via the laws of reflection, refraction and absorption.

This tendency towards a more calculated handling of opera's visual media gained traction via a certain standardisation of operatic production facilitated by another of Benjamin's instruments of mass culture: 'Reproduction Technology, Lithography'. Printing offered an effective means of fixing and controlling operatic media, and thus produced an exchangeable, exportable commodity in the form of libretti, scores and staging manuals. It was from the position of standardised production, which emerged as the result of commercial speculation and which institutionalised the precise combination of the visual, musical and textual media of opera, that avant-garde practitioners were able to dismantle and reassemble operatic media in new configurations. Buried underneath the Opéra's chandeliers and *grandeur* was in fact the kernel of its antipode, an expressive multimedia form free from traditional narrative and scenic conventions. This chapter demonstrates how the multimedia experiments of the avant-

[77] Movement can be defined as any shift in the intensity, form or colour of the light source, but it can also include the actual repositioning of it with the directing of a beam from one area of the stage to another one. This latter kind of movement, however, was not commonly used until the introduction of the modern automated lighting fixture in the 1980s.

garde, and the associated forms of concept-driven *Regieoper* and post-dramatic theatre, could not have occurred *without* opera's industrial phase of production. While opera's medial reconfiguration began in Paris, the international centre of opera production in the early nineteenth century, I probe why and how the locus of innovative staging practices transferred to German-speaking lands in the early twentieth century. The variable, I suggest, is the timing of waves of industrialisation which played out later and more rapidly in Germany.

A brief institutional history of the Paris Opéra is instructive in understanding its pivotal position in the history of the form. Established in 1669 by the poet Pierre Perrin, the Théâtre de l'Opéra was the premiere purveyor of opera in France and, though part of the royal household, weathered the upheaval of the 1789 revolution.[78] While the Opéra's prosperity did suffer from a certain disdain of practices of the *ancien régime*, it was more negatively affected by a saturation of the theatrical market after the passing of a law that allowed the free creation of public theatres in 1791.[79] After assuming power in 1804, Napoleon Bonaparte responded to the dire situation of French theatrical life by bringing theatres under state control in 1807 via a licensing system which decreased the number of official Parisian theatres to eight – four *grands théâtres* and four *théâtres secondaires* – each with an allocated repertoire. Here the Opéra figured as one of the four *grands théâtres* and was given a monopoly over 'through-composed French operas', musical works in the French language without any spoken dialogue, along with ballet-pantomimes of between one and five acts. Over the course of the century Napoleon's laws relaxed, and from 1820 onwards the number of theatre licenses granted in Paris began to rise again: competition from private enterprises had returned with

[78] The following account is drawn from Alicia Levin, 'Appendix', *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830-1914*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 379-381.
[79] For an examination of how and why the royal Opéra was exempted from destruction at the hands of the revolutionaries, see Victoria Johnson, *Backstage at the Revolution: How the Royal Paris Opera Survived the End of the Old Regime* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

vengeance. Though these new theatres still had to restrict themselves to particular repertoires, their managers cannily pushed generic boundaries and encroached upon the Opéra's programme, jeopardising its exclusive rights to French opera. What is more, the boulevard theatres were able to experiment more freely with the dazzling visual effects afforded by new technologies as their smaller scale made them cheaper and less complex to coordinate. In 1827 the director of the Opéra, Émile Lubbert, responded to the new competition by pushing the matter of the visual up on the management's agenda and establishing a *comité de mise-en-scène*, a committee dedicated to the coordination and review of the different technical departments concerned with stagecraft. The group were to provide feedback on the preliminary sketches of 'decorations, costumes and machines which were to create the staging of a work' to maintain a dialogue between the fragmented departments and therefore ensure standards.[80] Therefore 1820 marked the decade that the Opéra's institutional impetus shifted towards mise-en-scène for reasons which were not so much artistic but pragmatic.

The competitive pressure exerted by the boulevard theatres on the Opéra was compounded by an increasing overlap in their desired clientele. The industrial and social shifts of the period resulted in the doubling of the Parisian population between 1800 and 1850 and expanded the Opéra's sense of its audience.[81] By the 1820s, the Opéra's state sponsors were attuned to the lucrative potential of this new, middle-class audience and warned against being a 'remote, [or] a fossilised institution alienated from modern France'.[82] The so-called 'bourgeoisification' of opera tends to be ascribed to the Paris Opéra in 1830 and the tenure of

[80] As written in a letter from Émile Lubbert to Sosthène de La Rochefoucauld on June 11th 1828: 'Ce comité était destiné à donner son « opinion sur les plans et dessins des décorations, costumes, machines auxquels donnent lieu la mise en scène d'un ouvrage »'. Nicole Wild, 'La question de la mise en scène à l'époque du grand opéra', *Le Répertoire de l'Opéra de Paris (1671–2009): Analyse et interpretation*, ed. Michel Noirayand and Solveig Serre (Paris: École des Chartes, 2010), 313-320 (313).
[81] Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, 122.
[82] Williams, 'The Spectacle of the Past', 60.

its director Louis-Désiré Véron.[83] Despite some backlash, Véron courted this new audience. As one critic decried:

> The latest blow to the Opéra was dealt by the present Director… The showplace of the aristocracy is today the rendezvous of the bourgeoisie; the boxes are still rented by people of good breeding, but the shop and the factory have already invaded the galleries and the amphitheatre.[84]

Véron's own reflections show audience expansion to have been an explicit priority:

> I said to myself 'The July Revolution is the triumph of the bourgeoisie: this victorious bourgeoisie will want to cut a dash and be entertained. The Opéra shall be its Versailles, it will flock there to take the place of the banished court and nobility'.[85]

Prioritising visual spectacle to draw an audience accustomed to the optical entertainments of the popular stage, Véron adopted other strategies to accommodate this new clientele, such as decreasing the ticket prices for the first time in three decades,[86] and delaying performance start times to account for professional working hours.[87] As spectacle came to the fore among its institutional imperatives, the Opéra pioneered changes to the operatic apparatus which are now presumed as the standard of operatic production. The coordination and synchronisation of mise-en-scène with opera's other medial components called for more advanced planning years ahead of time and lengthier, less ad hoc rehearsal schedules. The formation of the 1827 staging committee, meanwhile, foregrounded the need for an agent to pull together opera's

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[83] For a detailed account of opera audiences from Véron's tenure onwards, see Steven Huebner, 'Opera Audiences in Paris 1830-1870', *Music & Letters*, 70 (1989), 206-225.
[84] Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theatre in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 29.
[85] Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera*, 30.
[86] James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 241-242.
[87] Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera*, 33.

fragmented production model. [88] In this way, space in the operatic apparatus was created for, if not yet filled by, the stage director.

Excursus: the stage director

Before the nineteenth century, theatrical productions had nothing like the amount of rehearsal time we have become accustomed to in the twenty-first century. Michael R. Booth has observed how the situation was sustained by a system that required little rehearsal time and barely any need for a stage director, and thus precluded the existence of the role. Writing from the point of view of theatre rather than opera, Booth has identified three factors which made theatre without a stage director tenable: the persistence of the traditional style of classical acting; the actor's specialisation as a particular character type; and the repertory prior to mass urbanisation.[89] The tenets of classical acting worked as a 'long-established set of acting principles' which 'defined the expression of tragic and comic passions and served in total as a guide to every emotional situation encountered on the stage', thus rendering a stage director redundant.[90] Furthermore, a performer's specialisation in a certain character type such as a villain or joker was neither codified nor instructed but instead learnt by the actor through practice. Finally, since cities before mass urbanisation were not populous enough to generate a demand for long runs of the same production, companies operated on the basis of a changing repertory to appeal to the limited audience of the locale and programmes changed a few times each week or sometimes each night. The high turnover of productions made it unfeasible to have more than eight or nine rehearsals in a large theatre for a new play, while plays already in the repertory but not recently performed might only have received a couple

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[88] As mise-en-scène was prioritised at the Opéra, the lead-in time for a significant new production was increased to at least eighteen months in order to account for its complex coordination and a generous rehearsal schedule. Williams, 'The Spectacle of the Past', 60.

[89] Michael R. Booth, 'The Nineteenth-Century Theatre', *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Theatre*, ed. John Russell Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 329-331.

[90] Booth, 'The Nineteenth-Century Theatre', 329-330.

of rehearsals if a new performer was joining the company, or sometimes no rehearsal at all. The purpose of these rehearsals was largely to establish logistical cues, lines, positioning and were 'in no sense… "rehearsals" as we understand them' and as such, lengthier rehearsal runs were not only hard to schedule but surplus to requirements.

In the 1820s and 1830s – the period before the 'star system' in which the celebrity opera singers drained budgets, dictated and curtailed rehearsal time, limited the repertoire and homogenised production methods – the Opéra established the conditions which were to later enable *Regieoper*, an experimental approach opera production established in twentieth-century Germany which tends not to be associated with its Parisian precursor.[91] David J. Levin has observed how Weimar Berlin's Kroll Opera, and a handful of European opera houses in the 1970s, changed their apparatus to disregarded the star system in order to nurture an environment of 'dramatic and dramaturgical experimentation',[92] not unlike the Opéra of the 1820s and 30s. These institutions returned to the model where a permanently employed ensemble of singers were available to the opera house for long stretches of rehearsals and many performances, offering the required conditions for new methods of dramaturgy and staging. Resident to the institution, these agents were part of the specific character of the house and were familiar with its artistic ambitions, which Levin suggests, created a culture of cooperation crucial to the success of ambitious but onerous staging rehearsals.

The July Revolution of 1830 demanded a change in leadership and a restructuring at the Opéra. Previously a department of the royal household, the Opéra evolved into a system of franchised entrepreneurship where it became a private enterprise headed by a state-appointed

[91] For details on the increase in singers' salaries between 1831 and 1836 see Lacombe, 'The 'Machine' and The State', 30.
[92] David J. Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 24.

director who managed the company at his own risk though with scope for personal profit.[93] A new director primed for the commercial challenge was sought, and Véron, not an artist but a medical entrepreneur turned publisher, assumed the role in 1831. Apart from a small amount of government subsidy, the Opéra participated in a competitive market, and it was under these conditions that its visual media came to flourish. In contrast to the previous institutional dictum that new operatic scenarios should be based upon the pre-existing generic scenery available, Véron's contract stipulated that all operatic premieres were 'to be mounted with new sets and costume'.[94] Driven by the imperative of box office sales to underwrite large budgets, the terms of Véron's contract are intriguing as they explicitly outline a hierarchy of operatic media at an institutional level and speak volumes of the role of spectacle in public life. Véron's memoires are a testament to his commitment to the tenets of his contract: 'An opera in five acts cannot exist without a highly dramatic action, bringing into play great passions of the human heart and powerful historical interests; at the same time this dramatic action must be capable of being comprehended by the eyes, like the action of a ballet'.[95]

Leading the institution from 1831-35, Véron was quick to refurbish the theatre and update its technical equipment. Lighting appears to have been key in these improvements, and more modern Locatelli astro-lamps were fitted to offer a greater variety of lighting levels.[96] The particular effect of the Locatelli lamp was described by the French writer Antoine-Claude Pasquin Valéry in 1839 as throwing 'a brighter light upon the scenery and the decorations',

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[93] The term 'franchised entrepreneurship' is borrowed from Lacombe 'The 'Machine' and The State', 26-27. Franchised entrepreneurship remained in place for over two decades where it was led by a number of director-entrepreneurs with uneven bouts of success. Only after the poor financial management of Nestor Roqueplan, in which the Opéra got into one million francs worth of debt, did Napoleon III bring the institution back under government management. Alicia Levin**,** 'Appendix', *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer,* ed. Fauser and Everist, 383.

[94] Pendle and Wilkins, 'Paradise Found', *Opera in Context*, ed. Radice, 184.

[95] Gerhard, *The Urbanization*, 147.

[96] Victoria Huckenpahler, 'Confessions of an Opera Director: Chapters from the Mémoires of Dr. Louis Véron, Part One', *Dance Chronicle*, 7 (1984), 50-106 (54).

but leaving the audience 'in comparative darkness'.[97] Here the dimmed auditorium figured as a result of innovations in lighting technology which followed an institutional conviction that spectacle, the vivid visibility of the stage but also the new possibilities of light, could play a pivotal role in selling a performance. Indeed, Andreas Blühm and Louise Lippincott's observation that 'almost anything viewed under electric light became a desirable commodity' in the Paris of the 1880s seems just as applicable to gas light in the Paris of the 1830s.[98] Véron's decision to emphasise opera's visual media was therefore not due to any aesthetic programme but rather by a financial calculation,[99] one which pre-empted the apparatus of the film industry in the twentieth century. Gilles Deleuze's insight into film as an industrial art here stands as much for its earlier prototype: 'what defines industrial art is not mechanical reproduction but the internalised relation with money'.[100] Véron ended his tenure having turned an overall profit and was the only director of the Opéra to do so, proof of the efficacy of his new management style and the financial-visual-perceptual equation at its core.[101]

But how did this new calculation of operatic media, of vastly investing in its visual provision, emerge as a commercial strategy? Jonathan Crary has pinpointed the 1820s to 40s, which are also the significant years of the Opéra's staging reforms, as the decades in which, at an archaeological level, a new kind of observer was forged.[102] Across scientific, philosophical and aesthetic discourses, the sense of vision was conceived as physiologically embodied, that

[97] Antoine Claude Pasquin Valery, *Historical, Literary, and Artistic Travels in Italy: A Complete and Methodical Guide for Travellers and Artists*, trans. C. E. Clifton (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1839), 188.
[98] Andreas Blühm and Louise Lippincott, *Light! The Industrial Age 1750-1900 Art & Science, Technology and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 188.
[99] Véron's previous careers in business – as a medic patenting cough syrup, and as the founder of the literary publication *La Revue de Paris* in 1829 – made him a convincing candidate to lead the Opéra. Huckenpahler, 52.
[100] Gilles Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Caleta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 77.
[101] Gerhard, *The Urbanization*, 34.
[102] The following passage is drawn from two chapters by Jonathan Crary, 'Subjective Vision and the Separation of the Senses' and 'Techniques of the Observer', *Techniques of the Observer on Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 67-96 and 97-136.

is, produced in the body of the observer and not, in its essence, veridical. Until this point, vision had been considered part of a sovereign mental process, the observer was as a mind and what they experienced played out in the world. In the nineteenth century, the observer came to be considered a body in which effects were generated from the material of the body rather than from outside of it. Thus, vision was no longer a reliable indicator of the world outside. Optical inventions of the period physically manifested this new knowledge: the stereoscope, for example, exemplified the body's ability to reconcile disjointed views as a unified whole via binocular vision by fooling the eye through inserting it into a technological apparatus to produce the illusion of depth.[103] In this way, a cluttered visual field was shown to produce an intensified perceptual experience which, in the case of the stereoscope, was one of heightened three-dimensionality. The significance of the stereoscope's discovery was felt beyond the realm of scientific enquiry. Entertainment was no longer about presenting something to simply be seen, but instead was concerned with finding new ways of producing experiences in the body. Challenging the store set in classical aesthetics on coherence through proportion, harmony and symmetry, the stereoscope proved that a disordered visual field could bring about in the observer a powerful experience which ultimately opened up the possibility of disunity – as opposed to unity – as the desideratum of aesthetic achievement. As Crary has emphasised, the previous idea of a more or less instantaneous perception, which offered a faithful reflection of what was happening in the world, came to be understood as a situation in which perception unfolded over time, and showed the body to be not simply passing on information but processing and producing it. As such, another kind of optical practice emerged which mobilised the observers' embodied and time-based production of vision: the diorama. Invented by one of the Opéra's scenic designers, the diorama presented a

[103] The stereoscope operated by simultaneously displaying two images of the same object from slightly different angles, with each eye exposed to only the specific image created for it. The brain's synthesis of these two images combined and accepted them as a single view of a three-dimensional object, perceiving a depth established by the variance in the two original images.

painted image that subtly changed via coloured lighting effects over time and proposed an intensity of perception based upon a new understanding of how vision was experienced, generated in the density of the body over time. Principally scientific devices used to examine visual perception such as the kaleidoscope and stereoscope were cross-fertilised into the burgeoning entertainment sector and offered new and intense visual experiences to a mass audience. The Opéra addressed their new audience's shifting visual perception by drastically changing their own policy towards mise-en-scène.

Crary additionally highlights how this new knowledge of sensory perception also put the straightforward relationship between stimulus (cause) and sensation (effect) into question: stimulus and sensation were newly understood to be arbitrarily and unpredictably related and as such, optical experience could no longer be attached to a fixed referent. In a seminal study in physiological optics, *Handbuch der Physiologie des Menschen* (1833), Johannes Müller outlined the doctrine of specific nerve energies which proposed the human sensorium to be made up of smaller specialised systems. Müller grounded his theory in the new knowledge that nerves of the various senses were physiologically discrete, able to read one type of sensation only, and not those pertaining to other sensory organs. Radically, Müller claimed that the same cause, for example electricity, could create totally different sensations from one type of nerve to another. The application of electricity to the optic nerve generated the experience of light, to the skin the sensation of touch. On the other hand, Müller demonstrated that a number of *different* causes could produce the *same* sensation in any one sensory nerve. Thus, an ultimately arbitrary relationship between stimulus and sensation was established.[104]

Pushing Crary's theory into an institutional context and considering it in terms of media,

[104] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 88-90.

I would like to suggest this new sense of the observer as a site in which sensations could be freely created worked as a liberating force in opera, encouraging new media combinations – of music, sound, movement, lighting and scenery – which externalised and performed these arbitrary relations and their perceptual possibilities. Unexpected combinations could offer novel experiential realms which exerted pressure on, though did not yet usurp, traditional narrative-driven structures which had up until that point dictated opera's musical and visual media. As such, the Opéra's staging strategies offered a laboratory in which these arbitrary media combinations (stimuli), and their potential perceptual rewards (sensations), were worked out. In this way, the Opéra's achievements in spectacle cannot be read as merely frivolous or lazy visual glosses to the score and libretto, but are rather explorations, by trial and error in some cases, of the new possibilities of psychological reception. If the Opéra succeeded in eliciting powerful responses through its medial combinations, its financial rewards could be handsome. Though Véron's scientific and literary background might have positioned him in spaces where ideas of perceptual psychology were in circulation, I am not arguing he had any awareness of this epistemic shift in how vision was understood. Rather, Véron's tenure at the Opéra coincided with some of the far-reaching implications of this shift, not least in the form of the optical entertainments which contributed to the audience's altered mode of spectatorship and which, in turn, placed pressure on the Opéra. Put simply, the Opéra had to alter its visual media to match the experience of a new spectator, one schooled by new forms of commercial entertainment.

Nowhere is the engagement of the arbitrary relationship between stimulus and sensation more clearly played out than at the Opéra, whose spectacle for the sake of spectacle was derided by Richard Wagner. In his 1851 essay 'Opera and Drama' (*Oper und Drama*), Wagner accused the composer Giacomo Meyerbeer and the librettist Eugène Scribe of producing 'effects

without causes' (*Wirkung ohne Ursache*) and cited a moment in Act III of *Le Prophète* in which a spectacular and pioneering electrically-lit sunrise occurred as the protagonist John of Leyden decided to march against the city of Münster accompanied by a processional hymn.[105] At stake for Wagner was a logical system of meaning. To him, the lack of narrative motivation for the sunrise made the gesture implausible and therefore redundant. In spite of his criticisms, however, Wagner was highly attentive to the techniques of French grand opera.[106] Thomas S. Grey has described how, even after his admonition of *Le Prophète*, Wagner was not averse to unprompted visual display and borrowed the apocalyptic final tableau format from the grand opera tradition in his music drama *Götterdammerung*. As Grey describes, Wagner's appropriation was to achieve 'maximum "effect"' at the conclusion of his tetralogy and considered the spectacle the most appropriate means of ending the enormous cycle: 'The musical cataclysm and catharsis that accompany Brünnhilde's (and Valhalla's) immolation are a direct response to the stage spectacle prescribed in the text. The *dramatic* 'cause' of these effects is rather less obvious'.[107] The context of Crary's observer gives Wagner's phrase a new complexion: it shows that, although he could not articulate it as such, he was sensitive to what was happening in observers, and to the stresses playing out around them. Through a commercial strategy that ultimately emulated its boulevard theatre competitors, the Opéra's inclination towards the non-narrative use of visual media laid the ground for the artistic possibilities of media combinations that engaged the avant-garde in the early twentieth century, and slowly released opera from a dramaturgy that ultimately wed it to

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[105] Richard Wagner, 'Opera and Drama', *Richard Wagner's Prose Works Volume 2*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1893), 95-100.

[106] Katherine Syer causally links Wagner's burgeoning interest in writing scenarios for his music dramas with his encounter of the dramatist and opera librettist Scribe in Paris. 'From Page to Stage: Wagner as Regisseur', *Richard Wagner and His World*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Princeton: Princeton University press, 2009), 3-22 (3). For a vivid account of Wagner's formative years in Paris and his relationship with the operatic establishment in particular between 1839 and 1841, see Flora Wilson, 'Wagner Among the Boulevards: Tannhäuser in Paris', *Opera: Passion, Power and Politics*, ed. Katie Bailey (London: V&A, 2017), 168-191.

[107] Thomas S. Grey, 'Richard Wagner and the Legacy of French Grand Opera', *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. Charlton, 319-343 (339).

narrative. The independence and experimental interdependence of media already under way at the Opéra has been overshadowed by Wagner's dominance in operatic discourse in the latter half of the century. I contend that, more than Wagner, Crary's epistemic shift in vision more convincingly accounts for the medial shifts within and, significantly in the case of my multimedia case studies, outside of operatic institutions in the nineteenth century and beyond.

In taking a position of 'more is more', the Opéra's policy intimated that the optimum experience of opera was additive and varied, especially when it came to appealing to an audience attuned to the boulevard theatres with their shorter attractions of acrobatics and fireworks. Through mobilising many media, the Opéra opened up the possibility of switching frequently between different medial registers and in Crary's terms, sought to engage the specialised systems of the human sensorium, a strategy I suggest worked in tandem with an increasingly through-composed musical score. The tendency towards through-composed music in both operatic and symphonic writing in the nineteenth century overwrote the previous format of 'numbers' or movements, smaller sections neatly rounded off with gaps which, in the case of opera, were not silent but filled with applause. The 'numbers' formula offered a briefly altered mode of attention as the observer reengaged with their own presence among others during the applause, a moment of cognitive breath that the through-composed formula denied. As paradigmatic operatic writing moved towards the through-composed format exemplified by Wagner and Verdi, but also taken up by Rossini, Auber, Gounod and others, opera's non-musical media took up the task of appealing to different modes of perception at regular intervals, finding new ways to engage the subject as music filled the small breaks that had previously fulfilled this role. Hervé Lacombe has highlighted this change in opera's musical form yet does not consider the overriding question of *why* these changes were brought into effect beyond the mutual influence of different composers and

librettists: ‘As the century progressed, traditional numbers were gradually abandoned in favour of larger scenes; ultimately, composers would envisage their musical forms in terms of whole acts, than of the entire opera’.[108] It is productive to consider how this incremental lengthening in musical form – from numbers to whole scenes and eventually to acts – coincided with the piecemeal development in scenographic techniques that could puncture the music’s unending and immersive quality, whether dramatically called for or not. This handling of media was geared towards engendering an active perceptual experience in the observer that was established within the specific vortex of technological media and shifting modes of spectatorship characterised by moments of medial variety and disunity to be synthesised in the observer. Like the discourse of *Einfühlung* (empathy) – which was to gain traction towards the end of the century in Germany and which, as we shall see, had much to bear on avant-garde theory and practice in theatre – the Opéra’s operations also committed to activating the observer.

‘Modes of Lighting’

The history of theatrical lighting reveals the interdependence of systems that define operatic media more broadly or, in the specific terms of this thesis, characterise the dynamism between the operatic apparatus, media and agents. Technological advances in gas and electric lighting changed the parameters of visibility and therefore the possibilities of staging and scenography irrevocably. A brief account of the previous conditions is instructive in fathoming the

[108] Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Edward Schneider (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 120-143 (138). In ‘Space and Time: Manipulating Reality’, Lacombe offers a detailed account of musical and textual form in grand opera. Alongside Wagner’s *Der fliegende Holländer*, Lacombe cites Gounod’s *Mireille* (Act 1), *Roméo et Juliette* (Acts 1 and 2) and *Sapho* (Act 3) as exemplifying the move from shorter numbers into more through-composed structures. Lacombe also includes a fascinating discussion of the deployment of offstage music, and highlights the operatic anticipation of various cinematic techniques, such as the isolation of one part of a scene as a kind of close-up. However, Lacombe does not attribute these shifts to broader issues of media and perception, nor does he allude to Crary’s new observer.

significance of this shift. The seventeenth and eighteenth-century scheme of oil lamps and tallow candles projected a frame of illumination around the stage but left its centre – the strongest compositional position for a performer to occupy – consistently deprived of light.[109] While the positioning of top lighting could in theory prevent this central blind spot, the technology available was too feeble to carry beams from the top of the proscenium to the stage. Instead, the footlights provided the most effective source of light due to their shorter distance of travel from the stage to the performer, so staging tended to be localised to the illuminated downstage area, unrealistically compressing the playing space. Lighting from below and at a severe angle, the footlights disfigured the performer's physiognomy and amplified their gestures by the shadows they produced, while their consistency was hampered by their susceptibility to draughts and a resultant flickering.[110] As such, the theatrical lighting apparatus set confines for the physical placement of the performers.

As with the physical positioning of performers, scenery was created to compensate for the low light level emitted from oil lamps and tallow candles. Even if appropriate to the dramatic milieu, darker tones were avoided since they absorbed too much valuable light and instead lighter and brighter colours as well as reflective materials were applied to the costumes and set to improve visibility. While the sets evoked generic scenarios in order to be reused from production to production, lighting was an exhaustible resource that needed constant

[109] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, light sources of oil lamps or tallow candles would have been positioned as follows: from the sides (attached to the wings and proscenium arch); from below (placed at the footlights illuminating the performers at an extreme angle from the front) and from above (with lights positioned at the top of the proscenium arch and borders, with their beams channelled down to the stage by reflectors). Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, 90. Wolfgang Schivelbusch offers further context to the history of theatrical lighting. *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Angela Davies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 193-194.

[110] For the writer and critic E.T.A Hoffmann, the footlights' assault on naturalistic lighting was a source of irritation. Hoffmann claimed they transformed performers 'into grotesque masks', he continued: 'our groups [of actors] resemble Chinese paintings, lacking composition and perspective – all because of this preposterous lighting'. Quoted in Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, 194-195.

replenishment and was one of the greatest expenses.[111] Gradually this changed. Introduced in 1783, the Argand oil lamp provided ten times the amount of light compared with older models, succeeded in illuminating the stage at distance and provided a more even quality of light (fig. 4).[112] Decades later the situation changed again with the invention of gas lighting. Beaten by the Odéon theatre, which adopted the technology in 1821, the Opéra followed suit and installed gas lighting in 1822; it is notable that French theatres were ahead of their German counterparts when it came to gas lighting provision as only a small number of theatres, such as those in Dresden and Cologne, adopted the new technology in the 1840s.[113] Gas light offered a number of advantages from the point of view of staging and logistics, and in doing so, it altered the operatic apparatus and its required agents significantly. Gas provided not only powerful luminosity but also the flexibility to change the strength of illumination via a throttle which regulated the amount of gas travelling from the supply to the light source. These controls could be operated via the means of stops or cooks from a single location, the gas-table, from which a network of pipes travelled to the different light sources.[114] Variations in light could now be achieved more subtly and quickly, with gentle progressions that could engage both the footlights as well as lights positioned elsewhere (fig. 5). In this way, light presented a remarkably intermedial phenomenon in its particular contribution to 'mutual influences between media'.[115] Light appealed to the eye to create a static image, but could also work kinetically over time and synchronise precisely with the durational medium of music, varying its luminous intensity with musical gradations of

[111] Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, 57. Lighting was especially costly since the stage, the auditorium and its boxes were lit for the duration of the performance to allow the audience to follow the libretto and to see and be seen by those around them.

[112] The Argand lamp was technically different from previous models: its wick contained a channel through which air could feed the flame and a lamp chimney enclosed the flame and tightened above it to increase the speed of the air current. A fastening allowed the wick to be raised or dropped which increased or decreased the size of the flame. Gösta Mauritz Bergman, *Lighting in the Theatre* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977), 198-199.

[113] Bergman, 257.

[114] Bergman, 261.

[115] Kattenbelt, 'Intermediality in Theatre and Performance', 20-21.

volume and pitch. Gas light was better equipped than any other scenic technique to emulate the rapid visual sequences that also characterised the spectatorship of mass entertainments across Paris. More efficient than flying in new pieces of scenery or dropping the house curtain for a full scene change, gas light required far fewer technical agents to alter a production's milieu. As such, the flow of the performance and therefore the audience's attention were uninterrupted. After the adoption of stronger and more controllable gas light, the Opéra no longer suffered an unlit patch at centre stage and the whole space could now be occupied by performers and scenery, freeing up space for stage movement too. Indeed, the diagrams in the staging manuals from the late 1820s onwards make use of the whole footprint of the stage, as one can see, for example, in the distribution of performers in Act III Scene 2 of the Opéra's 1828 *La Muette de Portici* (fig. 6). This was something the prolific dramatist and proto-stage director Guilbert de Pixérécourt also prioritised on the boulevard stage in his melodramas.

Significant for mapping the genesis of the stage director, Gösta Bergman has identified a correlation between the introduction of gas light and the institution of the *régisseur* who, though more a stage manager than auteur, was nonetheless a prototype for the directorial role. According to Bergman, the *régisseur en chef* first appeared as a joint collaborator with the author (or in the case of the Opéra, the librettist and composer) in Paris in the late 1820s, as illumination expanded the playing space from the downstage to the centre and upstage area.[116] This example reveals the fundamental role of technological media in shaping opera, and, as we shall see, media technology continued to mould not only the operatic apparatus, but also its agents, into the twentieth century. Could the shift from *régisseur* to stage director as author, which I locate in twentieth-century Germany, be media determined too? Bergman's analysis of the adoption of electric light across European theatres tentatively suggests this:

[116] Bergman, 262.

Munich’s Residenztheater and the Austrian theatre of Brünn were among the first to go electric in 1882, some years before the Paris Opéra, which did not install electric lighting on stage until 1886. By the 1890s, Germany was the international leader in lighting technology, and its quickly-developed apparatuses provided the significant means for notable staging reformers including Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Craig, Max Reinhard and Georg Fuchs to innovate the stage.

While the adoption of more powerful and controllable illumination released the performers from their restricted positioning, it also changed operatic décor. The convention of illusionistic set painting had represented lighting effects through paint to compensate for the absence of actual light; however, this technique could not endure into the age of Argand and gas light. As the writer and dramatist Jean-Baptiste Pujoulx observed: ‘If the scene painter has painted shadows and half-shadows on the sets and the person setting up the Argand lamps in the wings does not match them exactly, then the lighting man’s system clashes with the set painter’s’.[117] In a moment of friction between the new industrial and the old artistic media, lighting applied pressure to painting’s tradition role. While accounts tend to emphasise the introduction of electric lighting in the 1880s as the catalyst for the staging reforms of the early twentieth century, it is productive to consider how these changes were already effected by Argand and gas lighting in the nineteenth century alongside the new spectatorial experiences which they both responded to and engendered.

After its move to the Salle Le Peletier, the Opéra reopened in 1822 with a gas lighting system, some years before the method became standard in theatres in 1833.[118] To celebrate the Opéra’s new theatrical conditions, Nicolas Isouard’s aptly-titled opera *Aladin, ou la lampe*

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[117] Schivelbusch, 202-203.
[118] Pendle and Wilkins, ‘Paradise Found’, 182.

merveilleuse (Aladdin, or The Magic Lamp) was chosen to christen the Salle Le Peletier's stage and was designed by two of the institution's most experienced agents, Pierre-Luc-Charles Cicéri and Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre. Principally remembered as the inventor of the daguerreotype, Daguerre in fact cut his professional teeth as a scene painter at the Opéra.[119] It was in this uncompromising space of art and technology that Daguerre initially experimented with the medium of light which he later refined in his diorama theatre and pioneering photographic invention. Quick to observe the interdependence of scenic design and light, Daguerre embraced the extension of the designer's role into the area of lighting technology:

> the decoration begins in the workshop and ends in the theater with light. In the theater, the light is artificial; it does not start from a single focus, it is produced by luminous bodies the number, placement and intensity of which the artist must determine... Leaving the lighting plot to the machinist means sacrificing decoration.[120]

In Daguerre's terms, the art of theatre necessarily swallowed up technology. The theatrical designer, therefore, must be both artist and technician.

Excursus: experimentation and the apparatus

Daguerre chose not to stay at the Opéra after returning to stage Aladin. *Instead, he left to open his own diorama theatre later that year. The diorama produced already in the age of gaslight something that Edward Gordon Craig would enthusiastically discuss in the age of*

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[119] In 1803 Daguerre was apprenticed to Ignacio Degotti, the chief painter at the Opéra. By 1815 Daguerre combined his role at the Opéra with work for other venues, including the boulevard theatres. Despite having left the Opéra to focus on more lucrative work at the Ambigu-Comique theatre, the opportunity to pursue *Aladin* with his former colleague, Cicéri, along with the Opéra's new lighting provision and decent salary, was an offer he could not refuse. Stephen Pinson, *Speculating Daguerre: Art and Enterprise in the Work of L. J. M. Daguerre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 14-18.

[120] 'la décoration se commence dans l'atelier et s'achève sur le théâtre par la lumière. Au théâtre, la lumière est factice; elle ne part pas d'un foyer unique, elle est produite par des corps lumineux dont l'artiste doit déterminer le nombre, le placement et l'intensité [...]. Livrer au machiniste la disposition de l'éclairage, c'est sacrifier la decoration'. Adolphe Lacan, *Traité de la Législation et de la Jurisprudence des Théâtres, Volume II* (Paris: Durand, 1853), 156-159. Quoted in Wild, 'La question de la mise en scène à l'époque du grand opéra', 316.

electricity: a theatre without actors. While scholarly accounts tend to ascribe the spectacles d'optique *of the panoramas and dioramas with the more adventurous lighting effects at the Opéra, the actual chronology of Daguerre's encounter with gas light – first at the Opéra before the establishment of his diorama theatre – points to a messier, more reciprocal kind of influence. Stephen Pinson puts the sacrifice of drama to spectacle at Daguerre's diorama theatre down to his wish to mitigate administrative or political problems; Daguerre's colleagues at the Ambigu-Comique theatre had indeed come unstuck with the censors.*[121] *However, I suggest that Daguerre's discarding of conventional drama and text was more purposeful than merely dodging censorship. Instead, there was a medial rationale: the diorama enabled Daguerre to explore more fully the potentialities of painting and light, that latter of which was to be instrumental in his early photographic technique. Released from the shackles of logical, narrative-driven causes and effects, Daguerre was free to experiment with those visual combinations which were not grounded in any sense of referential logic but could still potentially generate intense experiences which, in the situation of the diorama theatre and unlike those of painting, photography or the ambulatory panorama, were necessarily encountered over time. The diorama imposed time on the observer and in turn, catered to their not instantaneous but rather durational production of vision.*

The diorama theatre consisted of a dimmed room in which a centrally-seated audience viewed large paintings, of buildings or epic landscapes, at a distance through a frontal opening. Between the opening and the painting was a tunnel of opaque screens which focussed the spectator's gaze. The painting was a transparent and double-sided canvas that offered two slightly varied scenes, one scene when lit from behind and another when lit directly. The light sources were generated by two windows: a tall one behind the canvas and a skylight above

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[121] Pinson, *Speculating Daguerre*, 40.

the front of the canvas. Coloured fabric blinds and filters operated by pulleys could be manipulated between the light sources and the painting to change the intensity and hue of its light. This dioramic effect injected a temporality into the experience which could convey a change in the time of day or season; it could be elaborated by the addition of transparencies with figures to further animate the scene. As the exhibition booklet advised, the drama of light demanded a particular kind of attention: 'The changes being naturally slow and gradual… [they] must be carefully fixed by the spectator, or the effects will be lost'.[122] *After ten to fifteen minutes, the observers would feel the picture move past them when, in actual fact, the turntable auditorium with them inside it rotated to reveal the next image.*[123] *Thus the diorama embedded the observer into its mechanised apparatus and moved them as if they themselves were part of the machine.*[124] *While music occasionally featured, the diorama's popularity was principally bound up with its spectacular quality.*[125] *Daguerre's choice not to deal with text and music in the dioramic apparatus was less to do with censorship, as Pinson suggests, than with isolating light and painting from musical and textual media to ascertain their potential effects. Despite the state-of-the-art gas technology first available at the Opéra, Daguerre's experience had taught him that the contingencies of working on such a large scale – with so many agents across different media – would prove unsatisfactory: his capacity to test the impact of specific lighting effects in the observer would be frustrated by budgets not stretching to enough technical time or stage hands to realise his desired effects. As Philip James de Loutherbourg, the creator of the Eidophusikon, had discovered before him, so Daguerre came to conclude that medial experimentation and an unwieldy apparatus did not*

[122] Ralph Hyde, *Panoramania!: the Art and Entertainment of the "All-Embracing" View* (London: Trefoil & Barbican Art Gallery, 1988), 112.
[123] Bergman, 232.
[124] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 112-113.
[125] Hyde, *Panoramania!*, 33.

mix.[126] *This consideration is similarly pertinent to the twentieth-century situation in which multimedia experiments initiated by visual artists took place outside of mainstream institutional frameworks and, in some cases, remained unrealised. The diorama's darkened auditorium and sense of distance between observer and illuminated image is both pre-Wagnerian and proto-cinematic. The manipulation of the observer's perceptive state to one of fixed attention was in 1822 added to the arsenal of multimedia's spectatorial combinations that played out both in the boulevard theatres and at the Opéra. The diorama made a case for equivalent moments in an operatic media situation, for example, where knocking out the musical and or textual components could recapture attention and engage the observer in powerful ways.*

Though it was staged five years prior to the Opéra's institutionalised scenic reforms, *Aladin* marks a turning point in the visual's commanding presence in the operatic production and reception. The scenic inventory from the 1831 revival of *Aladin* reveals not only a spectacular variety of scenic design – six different sets were presented over the course of its five acts – but also its capitulation to the demands of gaslight. A description of the striking Act IV *boudoir* scene (fig. 7) is suggestive of the production as a whole:

> The set represents a room [called a boudoir in the inventory] whose walls were made of crystal and precious stones. The Act begins in half-light and becomes even darker until 'the magic lamp lights up, and fills the room with a lively and brilliant light which reflects the image of Almasie and Aladin in all the mirrors on the walls'. At Timorkan's entrance, the lamp is extinguished and the room 'disappears suddenly in clouds which cover all parts of the stage'.[127]

[126] Philip James de Loutherbourg was similarly compelled to leave the Drury Lane Theatre in London in order to pursue his medial experiments with a mechanical theatre called the Eidophusikon.
[127] Barry V. Daniels, 'Cicéri and Daguerre: Set Designers for the Paris Opéra, 1820-1822', *Theatre Survey,* 22 (1981), 69-90 (80).

The act's dramatic and scenic elements were principally vehicles to showcase gas light and its novel ability to be dimmed and brightened across different sources. The use of a box set, a design in which three walls enclose the space under the proscenium arch and leave the fourth wall opening out on to the audience, heightened the impact of gas illumination by offering it surfaces at closer range to bounce off and was likely the first of its kind at the Opéra. The incorporation of lustrous surfaces, of mirrors and crystals, intensified gas light's luminosity by catching it and reflecting it, even when the lighting level was low on stage. *Aladin*'s production schedule demonstrates the pressure that the new lighting provision exerted on the paradigmatic operatic apparatus. Though scenic work started in 1820, the premiere was pushed back until 1822 as more time was needed to fit the gas lights and to ready the costumes and scenery. Meanwhile the expense of the scenery, which came in at an extortionate 129,430 francs and which had not been anticipated by the Opéra, forced the institution to subsequently restructure its scenic atelier to economise its operations.[128]

Aladin's reception, meanwhile, was indicative of the more general position that Opéra reviews would come to take. Across the board, critics paid considerably more attention to its striking scenic gestures than to its score, libretto or even performers. The *Miroir des Spectacles* devoted the lion's share of its account to the lighting, staging and dance, only to mention the musical contributions in its final sentences.[129] The *Drapeau Blanc* meanwhile described *Aladin* as an 'opéra-féerie', an explicit fusion of the artistic opera with the 'fairy play' popular entertainment genre. In its review, *Aladin* is measured against, and emerges as mostly commensurate with, the new conditions of perception and attention that demanded

[128] Daniels, 'Cicéri and Daguerre', 85 and 75-77.
[129] *Le Miroir des spectacles, des lettres, des moeurs et des arts*, 17 February 1822, 2. Daniels references this source but this observation is my own one based on the original.

visual variety above all. As the *Drapeau Blanc* continued:

> the five most beautiful parts of the performance are those that Mr. Cicéri composed. These are five magnificent decorations, which one can only reproach in their multiplicity of columns; which harms the variety that otherwise pleases the eyes so much.[130]

The same repetition in décor was also at issue for the *Miroir des Spectacles*: 'three palaces appear one after the other, their architectural orders differ, but, in the end, they are still palaces'.[131] The *Quotidienne*, however, construed *Aladin* in terms of the kaleidoscope, a principally scientific instrument which became an optical entertainment craze in the 1820s. Such was its popularity and commonality with contemporary conditions of perception that its name entered the French vocabulary to describe a quickly changing sequence of perceptions and sensations.[132] The *Quotidienne* described *Aladin* thus: 'The theatre is a veritable kaleidoscope which constantly changes form and colour, and if it were possible for the reputation of Cicéri and Daguerre to grow, it would, as of today, be complete'.[133] Significantly, both the kaleidoscope and *Aladin* relied upon the manipulation of light along with coloured glass to achieve their visual effects: science, technological media and modes of spectatorship worked in concert with one another.

Aladin prepared the ground for the productions that came to characterise the Opéra. That lighting cues made their way into the textual staging manuals of the 1830s confirms the central role of the medium in the operatic apparatus. The 1835 production of *La Juive* by Fromental Halévy and Eugène Scribe exemplified this practice. Variations in the footlights

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[130] *Le Drapeau Blanc*, 8 February 1822, 2. Daniels references the *Le Drapeau Blanc* edition of 7 February 1822, but does not include the present one from 8 February 1822. As such, this observation and translation is my own.
[131] *Le Miroir des spectacles, des lettres, des moeurs et des arts*, 11 February 1822, 2. Quoted in Daniels, 84.
[132] A new journal was also founded in 1818 under the name *Kaléidoscope*. Gerhard, *The Urbanization*, 14-15.
[133] *Quotidienne*, 8 February 1822. Quoted in Daniels, 82.

were notated to accentuate moments of drama: Eléazar's request for candles to be put out is followed by the emphatic instruction 'nuit à la rampe' that calls for the footlights to immediately darken; meanwhile, the moment Léopold identifies his wife Eudoxie is heightened by 'jour à la rampe' with an abrupt raising of the lights.[134] That Halévy responds to these cues musically, extinguishing the orchestra some bars after the candles and footlights, and adding a tense trembling crescendo to Léopold's moment of recognition, points to the fact that the lighting plan was factored in to the production while the score was still being written, long before technical rehearsals in the theatre began.

While the musical reception of *La Juive* was lukewarm, its overall reception evinces a kind of spectatorship in which an opera's success no longer rested on its musical qualities alone: spectacle was enough to secure a triumph. Despite Vincenzo Bellini's derision of Halévy's score, *La Juive* remained in the repertoire as the press concentrated on its spectacular use of gas lighting and panoramic scenography: a score with weaknesses no longer mattered when the scenography could compensate. In this way, opera's visual media garnered increasing autonomy; however, this was not uniformly celebrated. As Hector Berlioz quipped: 'Despite the efforts that were made to prevent the audience from hearing the score… now and then one caught snatches of the composer's inspiration'.[135] This situation initially played out in 1822 in the reception of *Aladin* in which, as we have seen, spectacle dominated the reviews and gave little space to the drama and musical score and therefore omitted their weaknesses. The music critic François Castil-Blaze added a further nuance to the medial recipe for *Aladin*'s success: 'This play, constructed on the old model, awkward to score – excessively boring (although the

[134] I here follow an observation of Pendle and Wilkins but consult the primary source. *La Juive*, H. Robert Cohen, *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premieres* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1991), 142-143. Pendle and Wilkins, 197.

[135] Hector Berlioz, *Le Rénovateur/Courrier de l'Europe*, 1 March 1835. Quoted in Gerhard, *The Urbanization*, 156.

subject was well-chosen); this drama, which even a more distinguished score could not sustain, obtained a brilliant success'.[136] While the play was boring, its *subject* was well-chosen. Castil-Blaze here separates 'the play' (writing, dialogue and script) from 'its subject' (its thematic substance), a theme which would recur in theories of early filmmaking. *Aladin* remained in the repertoire throughout the 1820s.

'Boredom', 'Panorama': opera, entertainment and remediation

Following the relaxation of Napoleon Bonaparte's licensing laws, boulevard theatres were an increasing source of competition for the Opéra around 1820. These were small establishments lining the boulevard du Temple, which had long been a site of popular entertainment – magic shows, cafés, live music, clowns, marionettes, acrobats and animals –in short, a permanent fairground (fig. 8).[137] Positioned in close proximity to one of the city's most peopled districts, the boulevard's carnivalesque character was popular with residents and filled their leisure hours.[138] Gradually, these venues started to market themselves as theatres, with their genre-bending and spectacular repertoires of vaudevilles, *féeries* (fairy plays), pantomimes and *mélodrames* (melodramas).[139] Napoleon's original laws of 1807 were intended to protect the four major state-controlled theatres, of which the Opéra was one, by allowing only four boulevard theatres to present strictly limited repertoires: the Gaîté and Ambigu-Comique theatres could only present melodramas, the Vaudeville theatre only vaudeville entertainments, and the Variétés theatre only satirical parodies with acrobats and

[136] Castil-Blaze, *Theatres Lyriques de Paris: L'Academie Imperiale de Musique*, II (Paris, 1855), 173. Quoted Daniels, 77.
[137] My account draws upon Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe, *Boulevard Comedy Theatre in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2001); John McCormick, *Popular Theatres of Nineteenth Century France* (London: Routledge, 1993); and Marvin Carlson, 'The Golden Age of the Boulevard', *Popular Theatre: A Sourcebook*, ed. Joel Schechter (London: Routledge, 2002), 22-31.
[138] McCormick, *Popular Theatres of Nineteenth Century France*, 15.
[139] Meyer-Dinkgräfe, *Boulevard Comedy Theatre in Germany*, 7.

buffoonery.[140] Despite state intervention, the encroachment of these private enterprises on the Opéra's audience became more pronounced.

An excerpt from the 1830 edition of *Galignani's New Guide of Paris* offers a vivid sense of the sensations on offer on the boulevard du Temple:

> The common people prefer the boulevard du Temple, where puppet shows, pantomimes, rope-dancing, mountebanks etc., are always ready to amuse them. On Sunday evenings, this spot resembles a fair. All the diversified amusements that can be devised assail the senses – musicians, flower-girls, and tumblers, alternately succeed each other, and appear grateful for the few sous bestowed upon their indefatigable and sometimes wonderful exertions to amuse. The scenes of nearly all northern boulevards are not less amusing in the evening. They are well lighted, and the thousands of persons going to or from theatres, coming from dinners, or lounging about for diversion, keep up the bustle and animation till all-subduing sleep bids the busy world retire.[141]

Galignani's guide leads the visitor to spectacles constructed around the city's signatures of modernity: inventive lighting and ingenious mechanisms. The shadow-puppet show Ombres Chinoises de Séraphin 'will not produce regret at having engaged a visitor's idle hour' while the Spectacle Mécanique du Petit Lazari promises puppets which are transformed 'by means of mechanism'. Despite the overwhelming choice of the Néorama, Géorama, Cosmorama and Panorama Nautique, the Diorama theatre, so Galignani assures his visitor, is 'one of the prettiest exhibitions in Paris'.[142] The popularity of the grilled boxes, which were introduced

[140] Carlson, 'The Golden Age of the Boulevard', 24.
[141] John Anthony Galignani and William Galignani, *Galignani's New Guide of Paris*, 17th edn (Paris: A. and W. Galignani, 1830), 583. The brothers John Anthony Galignani and William Galignani were publishers and bookshop owners in Paris.
[142] Galignani and Galignani, 561-563.

into the Variétés theatre for those who preferred not to be seen, points to a migration of clientele from the grand state-run institutions to the self-supporting theatres.[143]

For the sake of survival, the Opéra had no choice but to respond and in doing so, demonstrated an additional nuance to its multimedia 'apparatus - media - agents' paradigm. In this competitive climate, the Opéra not only negotiated the competing and interdependent forces internal to it – its own budgets, programming, and personnel – but confronted those external to it. As such, an additional definition is instructive, not simply opera as multimedia but also opera as that which remediates.[144] In ascribing this label, I mean to emphasise the susceptibility of opera to competing forms of multimedia, especially to those which generate a response of rivalry or of tribute. The threat posed by the boulevard theatres provoked a process of remediation which the Opéra turned to its advantage. Rivalry, as it turned out, was not all bad. Given the proto-Hollywood massiveness of its means and high financial stakes, the Opéra approached the mounting of new productions as a series of calculations; after all, the decision to explore new techniques and invest in new technologies came at a price and with risks. Would their efforts be positively received? Would the production attract a healthy audience? Cautious to experiment on their grand scale, the Opéra looked to the boulevard theatres for inspiration and mimicked and magnified their most dazzling and well-received *coups de théâtre*. The process of remediation played out in a number of ways but most

[143] Carlson, 'The Golden Age of the Boulevard', 24.
[144] I have borrowed the concept of remediation from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's definition of the medium as 'that which remediates' which accounts for the changing relationship that one medium has with another: 'A medium is that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real. A medium in our culture never operates in isolation, because it must enter into relationships of respect and rivalry with other media'. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT, 2000), 98. The term 'remediation' is close to that of 'transmediality' as defined by Kattenbelt: 'The concept of transmediality is mainly used in art and communication theoretical discourses for referring to the change (transposition, translation etc) from one medium to another. This transfer may apply to the content (to what is represented, the story) or to the form (in formalistic terms we might say to the principles of construction, stylistic procedures and aesthetic conventions)'. Kattenbelt, 'Intermediality in Theatre and Performance', 23.

significantly, it forced the Opéra, which had traditionally privileged text and music, to pay careful attention to its visual media.[145]

Insights into the programmes of one of the Opéra's rivals, the Cirque Olimpique, hammer home the reality of its competition. Having sidestepped Napoleonic legislation and closure by claiming status as a circus as opposed to a theatre,[146] the Cirque Olimpique by the 1830s accommodated 1,800 spectators, matching the Salle Peletier's capacity of between 1,450 and 1,900.[147] The institution presented enormous pageants and staged historic events with hundreds of performers, tens of horses and a considerable team of designers and technicians.[148] Reviews of its 1835 four-act *féerie*, *Zazezizozu*, which featured magic carpets and fantastical kingdoms in keeping with the genre, celebrated the performance's visual novelty, popularity and profitability. The exaggerated pear shape of the character Grosbec (fig. 9) anticipates the sculptural and architectonic costume designs of the early twentieth-century avant-garde. The *Revue de Paris* highlighted the sheer glut of new productions on offer and the 'jealousy' between small and large venues:

> While the Bouffes and l'Opéra sound their fanfares, the small theatres, jealous of their larger neighbours, make sparks fly. What a profusion of masterpieces, good God! *Zazezizozu, un Mariage anglais, les Tribulations de la parternité, le Coup de canne*,

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[145] Pendle has investigated the relationship between the Parisian boulevard theatres and the Opéra and, while she does not use the term 'remediation' as such, she shows it to be the dynamic at work. Pendle, 'The Boulevard Theatres and Continuity in French Opera of the 19th Century', *Music in Paris in the Eighteenth Thirties* ed. Peter Bloom (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1987), 509-535.
[146] Carlson, 'The Golden Age of the Boulevard', ed. Schechter, 26. Carlson's chapter, as well as that of Pendle, alerted me to the Cirque Olimpique and stimulated further primary research in contemporary journals.
[147] Galignani and Galignani, 59. Pendle and Wilkins, 175.
[148] Carlson, 'The Golden Age of the Boulevard', ed. Schechter, 30. Galignani describes the Cirque thus: 'A circus or sandy area, in which the equestrian exercises take place, and which serves to augment the pomp of military spectacles, by receiving the troops that cannot be drawn up on the stage, occupies that part of the house which in other theatres forms the pit. The curtain represents crimson velvet, fringed with gold; the scenery is excellent and the lustre [auditorium chandelier] has 120 burners. The saloon is decorated with a superb looking-glass, four elegant candelabra, and a bust of Charles X. The feats of horsemanship performed here are unrivalled, and Franconi's stud is celebrated throughout Europe. The stranger should certainly not quit the French capital without spending an evening at the Cirque-Olimpique, which is uniformly well attended'. Galignani and Galignani, 559.

etc., etc.! In truth, the critic needs serious horsepower to follow these rapidly rising stars…[149]

The *L'Indépendant* emphasised the achievement of the Cirque in finding visual novelty in a saturated market.[150] Meanwhile, the production's effect on the viewer's mode of attention was also deemed noteworthy: '…the spectacles as new as they are varied, follow one another with a speed that gives curiosity not a moment to breathe'.[151] And while *Le Monde dramatique* remarked upon the production's great success with a full house every night,[152] *L'Indépendant* cut straight to the economics of it all: 'We can be sure that it will have a good number of performances as profitable as they are brilliant'.[153]

A similarly rapid sequence of stage pictures was prodigiously pursued in the Cirque's *Les Pilules du Diable* (The Devil's Pills), a *féerie* in three acts and twenty tableaux premiered in 1839 (fig. 10). The production's libretto called for a cast of twenty-one named characters as well as a Chorus and no less than twenty scene changes.[154] In the first act alone the mise-en-scène transformed from an apothecary's shop to a public square, a country road, a witch's den, a return to the square at night and a fantastical garden. The descriptions include a particular innovation in stagecraft that the Opéra would come to adopt, the use of *practicables* or three-dimensional props. The fifth tableau specifies a well, an obelisk, a house with a practical window and a stone bench, while the sixth tableau requires a practical throne. In a subsequent act, *Les Pilules* presents the 'first train on a Parisian stage, which not only rolled onto the stage but exploded'.[155] That same icon of modernity was later to feature in *L'Arrivée*

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[149] *Revue de Paris, Volume 24* (Paris, 1835), 121. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
[150] *L'Indépendant,* 10 December 1835, 3.
[151] *L'Indépendant*, 10 December 1835, 3.
[152] *Le Monde dramatique, Volume II* (Paris, 1835), 48.
[153] *L'Indépendant*, 10 December 1835, 3.
[154] The production's libretto was reproduced in the theatrical anthology *Magasin Theatral.* Anicet Bourgeois, 'Les Pilules du diable, féerie en 3 actes et 20 tableaux', *Magasin Théatral* (Paris: Marchant, 1839).
[155] As the fourth tableau of Act 2 states: 'Le theatre représente le point de depart du chemin de fer; au fond, un grand mer'. *Magasin Théatral*, 12. Carlson, 'The Golden Age of the Boulevard', 30.

d'un train en gare de La Ciotat (1896) one of the Lumière brothers' first films. The structure of the libretto is conceived visually as scenes are organised by *tableaux* or pictures. Each *tableau* begins 'Le théâtre représente' (the theatre represents): it is the mise-en-scène that is doing the performing.

The competitive atmosphere of the Parisian theatre scene did not prevent agents from moving between institutions and in this way, taking technical expertise and ideas with them. Two notable practitioners associated with the Opéra, the designer Daguerre and the librettist Scribe, enjoyed extremely successful careers in the boulevard theatres. Scribe had worked as a playwright in the same milieu and genre as the prolific Pixérécourt, who was champion of the melodrama, a popular theatrical genre in which good and evil were embodied by a cast of stock characters who tussled over a series of improbable events. As was customary on the boulevards, Pixérécourt's melodramas emphasised spectacular staging over sophisticated narrative: his productions included at least one mimed musical sequence and were lauded for their novel positioning of performers in space and their sense of ensemble.[156] Consistent with his declaration 'I write for those who are unable to read', Pixérécourt worked as both writer and director on his productions and took personal responsibility for the technical effects and sets.[157] Though the Opéra clearly aspired to weaving spectacle just as thoroughly into its own productions, the vast scale of the institution and number of agents required made such a degree of involvement from any individual an impossibility. What was more possible, however, was to get a writer well-versed in the technique of writing for the boulevard stage to transfer the technique to the opera libretto. After the formation of the staging committee in 1827, Scribe's visually-conceived, *tableau*-centred method of devising a dramatic text made him an intuitive choice for the Opéra's 1828 season.

[156] Pendle, 'The Boulevard Theatres', *Music in Paris*, 514, 518.
[157] Pendle, 'The Boulevard Theatres', *Music in Paris*, 516.

Remediation: *La Muette de Portici* (1828)

La Muette de Portici (The Mute Girl of Portici) was a collaboration between the composer Daniel Auber, librettists Scribe and Germain Delavigne, the Opéra's chief designer Cicéri and the régisseur Jacques Solomé, and was one which heralded a prosperous new phase at the Opéra. While Pendle has written at length on its boulevard borrowings, which I in turn borrow from her, Jane Fulcher has focused on the politics of its staging, as well as its move towards an aesthetic of realism. Gerhard has similarly concentrated on the historical detail of *La Muette*'s designs, which he concludes were a means of assuaging the audiences' incipient uncertainly about the authenticity of outside appearances. In a milieu where garments were no longer stable markers of class, Gerhard considers *La Muette*'s degree of historical and geographical accuracy to have been a means of placating its audience. Sarah Hibberd, meanwhile, contends that it was neither *La Muette*'s political nor its historical content, but rather its mute heroine that excited the crowds at its premiere. In a similar vein, Mary Ann Smart has analysed the production and reception of *La Muette'*s mobilisation of muteness concentrating particularly on the idea of a mute character. Detailed as these studies are, however, none of them address *La Muette*'s rapid switch between medial modes from the point of view of spectatorship, nor deploy the concept of Crary's new observer. Here, along with an attempt to connect *Le Muette*'s medial interventions with early twentieth century ones, marks my contribution.[158]

The production, which was the first produced under the aegis of the new *comité de mise-en-*

[158] See Jane Fulcher, *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge: University 1987), 11-46; Sarah Hibberd, 'La Muette and her context', *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. Charlton, 149-167; Mary Ann Smart, *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 32-68; Gerhard, *The Urbanization*, 149-150.

scène and for which one of the first staging manuals was created,[159] liberally borrowed from the boulevards: its incorporation of a mute protagonist and the spectacular eruption of a volcano were already established tropes in boulevard productions of the preceding decade.[160] Confident of the success of volcanic spectacle, Cicéri undertook careful research, consulting with a colleague in Milan, Alessandro Sanquirico, and invested in superior machinery that would outdo those of the boulevards (fig. 11).[161] Carefully positioned oil and gas lamps provided flaming lava while their projection on to revolving cylinders added their flowing sense of motion. Technical crew stationed behind and above the proscenium arch and in the fly tower, the space above the stage, threw papier-mâché rocks to conjure a deluge of volcanic debris.[162] An accomplished *coup de théâtre*, the extreme spectacle of the exploding volcano was to reappear in Solomé's 1832 production of Halévy's opera-ballet *La tentation* and persisted as a popular trope across media into the twentieth century, appearing in Itala Film's 1914 blockbuster *Cabiria* among other early silent films.

[159] Jacques Solomé was responsible for the staging in consultation with Scribe as well as for producing the staging manual for its subsequent revival. Solomé worked at the Opéra between 1827 and 1831.
[160] A production named *La Muette de la forêt* had been presented at the Gaîté theatre only a month before the opera's premiere. Pendle, 'The Boulevard Theatres', *Music in Paris*, 512. For the use of volcanic explosions on the boulevards see Pendle and Wilkins, 182. In 1827 alone, smoking volcanoes were depicted both at Daguerre's Diorama Theatre and in Pixérécourt's melodrama *La tête de mort; ou, Les ruines de Pompeïa* in Pendle, 'The Boulevard Theatres', *Music in Paris*, 516.
[161] Pendle, 'The Boulevard Theatres', *Music in Paris*, 518. Solomé's staging instructions for this scene read as follows: '[Fenella] in despair [after Masaniello's death], passes between the now united Alphonse and Elvire, and rapidly climbs the stairway at the rear [of the stage]. Arriving at the top, she hurls herself into the lava [flow]. Hanging over the scene, a cloud drop disappears and reveals a furious Vesuvius that throws up a whirlwind of fire and smoke; the lava comes down towards the bottom of the steps. It must be reckoned for the music for the chorus to begin as Fenella jumps into the lava. After the final chorus, everyone is shaken by the greatest fright. A man arrives at the top of the steps; from the top of the terrace comes the sound of a detonation and engulfs him and three children, two held by his hands, and one on his back. The people view this tableau of horror, and form the following groups. The people fill the entire stage; mothers carry their children; the men support their wives; some fall to the ground, others support themselves on the colonnades. Those who come by the terrace expire on the steps; lastly, [all portray] great terror in [their] movements. Alphonse at the centre of the scene; Elvire, her head hidden in his bosom; the pages and ladies gather into different groups. The underground noises continue; the roll of drums, thunderclaps, shaking, rumblings, everything is happening all at once. Just before the curtain is lowered, many rocks of all sizes – as if from the crater – fall from the flies from Vesuvius up to the steps'. Jacques Solomé, *Indications générales et observations pour la mise-en-scène de 'La Muette de Portici'* (Paris: Duverger, n.d), 47. Quoted in Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, 142-143.
[162] Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, 143-144.

However, the Opéra's remediation of melodrama in *La Muette* worked at a much more profound level, beyond the replica of the genre's signature visual gestures. Instead, remediation operated most powerfully at the level of the operatic production process. Considered to render perception more intense, varied visual spectacle and medial contrasts were imperatives for the Opéra and touched not only the designer and librettist, but also the composer. *La Muette* remarkably applied pantomime sequences not only to large crowd scenes but to the key dramatic interactions of its principal characters and called for a dancer-actor in the role of Fenella, opera's first mute protagonist (fig. 12). This decision pushed the Opéra towards a new sense of the economy of its media and the relationship of this economy to its audience. *La Muette* set in motion a gradual shift from centuries of operatic production that had privileged text and music to one that inclined towards the visual and most crucially, considered the *tableau* as a structuring principle. The pendulum-move away from text and towards spectacle was here set in motion: the dramaturgy of *La Muette* no longer merely added mise-en-scène to the performance but instead *relied* on the visual to convey crucial parts of the narrative.

A brief example demonstrates this point. The Act 1 Scene IV encounter between the singing character of Elvire and the mute Fenella involves the former singing her questions while the latter gesticulates replies accompanied by the orchestra. What is notable here is the efficiency with which an event that occurred in the past, and which the audience is not privy to, is condensed. In two minutes, Fenella communicates her previous seduction, abandonment, subsequent imprisonment, escape and need for Elvire's protection. The stage directions for Fenella's mime vividly convey past events in a manner that informs the audience with lucidity and speed, supplying the information required to follow the unfolding drama. An excerpt

of the exchange from the libretto is instructive:

> FENELLA: (She enters with terror; sees the princess and runs to her knees)
>
> ELVIRE: What do you want? Speak.
>
> FENELLA: (She signals to the princess that she cannot speak… and, with pleading gestures, she beseeches Elvire to protect her from Selva)
>
> ELVIRE: (raising her) I can defend you. When my happiness is so great, how could I refuse someone so unhappy my support? (to Selva) Who is this unfortunate woman?
>
> SELVA: The daughter of a fisherman. She has been imprisoned for a month on the viceroy's order. But this morning, defying a harsh law, she broke from her shackles.
>
> ELVIRE: (to Fenella) What is your crime?
>
> FENELLA: (She replies that she is not guilty; she appeals to the sky)
>
> ELVIRE: Who disturbed your rest?
>
> FENELLA: (She signals that love took possession of her heart and caused all her troubles)
>
> ELVIRE: Alas! poor victim! I understand you: love has touched your heart. But of your ills who is the author?
>
> FENELLA: (Signs that she dismissed him; but he swore he loved her and pressed her to his heart; then showing the scarf from around her, she makes it clear that she received it from him)
>
> ELVIRE: He gave you that scarf!
>
> FENELLA: (She sighs and gestures that he did). [163]

To appreciate the novelty of this dramaturgical intervention, it is instructive to compare it with a more conventional handling of the same narrative demand, the expression of a past

[163] Eugène Scribe and Germain Delavigne, *La Muette de Portici: Opéra en Cinq Actes* (1828) (Brussels: J. P. Meline, 1831), 7-8.

event. Paradigmatic operatic approaches before and during the nineteenth century tended to use the aria, a musical and textual form that suspends action to express an emotion or reflect upon an idea, to recount episodes from the past. Melodic, highly structured and full of repetition, arias were both virtuosic showcases for the singer, as well as vehicles for adding detail and expression to the narrative. Suspending the physical action is intuitive for a moment of reflection but is also a condition of operatic singing technique since physical movement often must be reduced to a minimum in order for the performer to produce a supported vocal delivery. The aria channels the audience's focus towards the singer's vocal line and the text, and demands significantly more time to deliver than either sung or spoken dialogue or gestures to convey the same information. An alternative nineteenth century example occurs in Act 1 Scene III of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) where, in what is sometimes called Isolde's 'narrative and curse', the character Isolde - who has thus far appeared disturbed and angry trapped on a ship commanded by Tristan - describes a previous encounter with Tristan to her maid. The backstory is crucial to the music drama since it finally elucidates her unexplained fury: as she recounts, Tristan killed her previous fiancée and when she sought revenge and attempted to kill Tristan herself, their eyes locked and she found she could not go through with it. Depending on the performers and their tempi, the sung explanation lasts ten minutes and requires a certain clarity of text to be intelligible and a certain volume to project over the orchestra.[164] Under the Wagnerian conditions of a dimmed auditorium, the audience would have no immediate recourse to the printed libretto to understand what was being sung.

[164] The passage in Act 1 Scene 3 begins at Isolde's: '*Von einem Kahn, der klein und arm…'* and ends at Brangaene's interjection: *'O Süsse! Traute! Theure!*'. Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Piano and Vocal Score (1865) (New York: G. Schirmer, 1934), 31-44.

La Muette avoids the protracted sung retelling of Fenella's past events and instead employs a method that Anselm Gerhard has observed is not unlike the flashback in film.[165] The negotiation of media here presented something novel: neither the text served the music nor the music served the text, but instead music was relegated to aid the visual effect, while the text evaporated altogether. Peter Brooks has described the mute role within what he terms the 'text of muteness' thus:

> Gesture in all forms is a necessary complement and supplement to the word, tableau is a repeated device in the summary of meanings acted out, and the mute role is the virtuoso emblem of the possibilities of meaning engendered in the absence of the word. If it is relatively easy to grasp the effect created by tableau, it is much more difficult to talk about how gestuality in general, and the exclusively gestural language of the mutes in particular, creates meaning.[166]

Mute gesture for Brooks points towards multiplicities of meaning: it is an expressive technique that pushes against overdetermined combinations of media to present 'meanings which are ineffable, but nonetheless operative within the sphere of human ethical relationships'.[167] This ineffability of gesture, of opening up one of opera's signifying systems to possible interpretation, made particular demands of the observer, by prescribing a more active kind of engagement, focussing their eyes carefully on the performer in order to follow the narrative. Brooks uses the concept of *catachresis*, which he defines as the sign applied when the actual word for something does not exist, to elucidate the workings of gesture and invokes Roland Barthes' description:

> catachresis 'restores the blank of the compared [the tenor], whose existence is completely given over to the word of the comparer [the vehicle]' Yet of course it is the

[165] Gerhard, *The Urbanization*, 146.
[166] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 62.
[167] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 72.

> fullness, the pregnancy, of the blank that is significant: meaning-full though unspeakable.[168]

The 'meaning-full though unspeakable' sense of catachresis and the related form of mimed performance is certainly at stake in twentieth-century avant-garde opera and post-dramatic theatre practices which phase out dialogue, text and narrative in performance. However, the appearance of muteness in *La Muette* shows how the technique was tested in the nineteenth century, grounded in a construction of the observer whose sense of vision was newly recognised as generated in the density of the body and was, in the wake of its commercial exploitation in popular culture, a necessary element in Opera's financial success.

Significant too is the brevity with which the mimed retelling in *La Muette* takes place; the visual language of gesture proves more expedient than a verbal and musical one. What is more, the back and forth shift between medial registers, achieved through the sung dialogue of Elvire and mimed responses of Fenella, challenges the audience to cognitively switch between sight and sound themselves to follow the drama. The quick succession of these medial gear changes can be seen to operate as proto-Brechtian jolts which stimulate each of the separate nerve systems as they were newly recognised in the early nineteenth century. Rather than appealing to verbal, musical and visual sensory receptors all at once, *La Muette* shifts rapidly between them in different combinations. At each shift, either sung text or gesture is suddenly halted which itself prompts a shock of absence. In this specific case Elvire's sung text, the timbre of her piercing soprano voice and the spare orchestral accompaniment is altered with Fenella's demonstrative gestures and a more involved, fuller orchestral sound. The baton of the narrative is passed from text to gesture as the music responds to these shifts. At Fenella's mimed responses, the abrupt interruption of the singing

[168] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 72-73.

and yet the continuation of the orchestral accompaniment pulls the rug from under the audience's receptive feet and creates a sudden jab of thwarted expectation.

The mode of perception engendered by changing displays of visual media and its commercial potential was not only pursued at the boulevard theatres but also in other areas of the entertainment industry. Initially created in a scientific experiment to explore waves of light, the kaleidoscope was patented in 1817 and became a major popular curiosity in the 1820s that took hold across Europe and drew paying crowds to peep at the colourful kinetic novelty (fig. 13).[169] Comprising internal mirrors and individual fragments of coloured glass, the kaleidoscope relied on an aperture for natural light and small movements generated by the observer to create ever new patterns. Light, colour and movement, also elements which were undergoing significant innovation at the Opéra, figured as the visual qualities harnessed to generate the optical entertainment.

In a publication produced by the Scottish scientist who invented the kaleidoscope, John Brewster, it was the time-based nature of the optical instrumental that was stressed: 'It is unquestionable, that, by a skilful combination of these *passing visions*, the mind may derive *a degree of pleasure far superior* to that which arises from the immediate impression which they make upon the organ of vision'.[170] Brewster pinpointed the kaleidoscope's quality of visually unfolding over time as a means of rendering the perceptual experience more intense. Elaborating further, Brewster suggests that the addition of other media could also powerfully enhance the kaleidoscopic experience and emphasised its potential as an antidote

[169] Gerhard has noted in passing the affinity between the visual impetus of French grand opera and the structure of perception created by the kaleidoscope, however he does not analyse it in detail, nor in the context of Crary's new observer. Gerhard, *The Urbanization*, 14-15.
[170] John Brewster, *The Kaleidoscope: Its History, Theory and Construction: with Its application to the fine and useful arts* (London: John Murray, 1858), 160-161 (emphasis added).

to boredom, one of Benjamin's excavation sites of modernity in the *Passagen-Werk*:

> The combination of fine forms, and ever-varying tints, which it presents in succession to the eye, have already been found, by experience, to communicate to those who have a taste for this kind of beauty, a pleasure as intense and as permanent as that which the finest ear derives from musical sounds. An eye for admiring and appreciating the effect of fine forms, seems, indeed, to be much more general than an ear for music; *and we have heard of many cases where the tedium of severe and continued indisposition has been removed, and where many a dull and solitary hour has been rendered cheerful, by the unceasing variety of entertainment which the Kaleidoscope afforded*.[171]

Indeed, the kaleidoscope and its ability to absorb in an 'unceasing variety of entertainment' spread across Europe, and its potency was illustrated in a playful Viennese watercolour caricature of 1818, which displays the composer Franz Schubert peering through the device and therefore distracted from an impending collision with his associate Leopold Kupelwieser, who is riding an early kind of bicycle (fig. 14).[172] Significant here is Brewster's conviction that an 'eye for admiring and appreciating the effect of fine forms, seems, indeed, to be much more general than an ear for music'. Brewster's implication that optical appreciation was more universal than auditory appreciation and, as such, boredom (in a long symphonic concert or, it is tempting to wonder, an opera performance) could be suspended via the kinetic visual stimulation offered by his invention. Opting to interpolate the distinctive visual, movement-based modality of mime into an opera, the apparatus and agents behind *La Muette*, it appears, worked according to the same logic.

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[171] Brewster, *The Kaleidoscope*, 159 (emphasis added).

[172] Susanna Clark, *Analyzing Schubert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1-2.

Brewster goes on to describe how the kaleidoscope's moving sequences of coloured forms could be an appropriate accompaniment to music and thus prepares the ground for a more thorough technological synchronisation of visual effects with sound: 'These combinations of colours and forms may be adapted to a piece of music, and their succession exhibited on a screen by means of the electric, or lime-ball, or other lights to which we have already had occasion to refer'.[173] The medium of electric or lime-ball light made visible by the means of a screen, Brewster posits, is the appropriate means for combining kinetic visual media with sound, a fusion that would be taken up some decades later in the stage compositions of Wassily Kandinsky, and then at the Bauhaus in the moving colour-compositions of Kurt Schwerdtfeger, Josef Hartwig and Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, which were theorised by László Moholy-Nagy in *Painting, Photography, Film* (1925).[174] Significant too is the re-imagination of the kaleidoscope from individual to mass spectacle. The nearest multimedia experience to the time-based, coloured lighting displays Brewster imagined in the nineteenth century, however, were those early ambitious lighting attempts in the Opéra and boulevard theatres. That Brewster's multimedia vision was only thoroughly explored in twentieth century points not only to the piecemeal development and availability of technological media, but also to the slow pace of large apparatuses with many agents.

Importantly, Brewster's plan for the combination of coloured light forms and music via the technology of his kaleidoscope assumed the same position as the Paris Opéra: that a

[173] Brewster, *The Kaleidoscope*, 160.
[174] Moholy-Nagy was invested in innovations in science and technology, and their potential instigation of original areas of creative practice. 'Static and Kinetic Optical Composition' contains a passage focussed on moving light displays, which he felt were a fruitful aesthetic field in their own right and, interestingly, Moholy-Nagy references the same historic attempts at reconciling colour and sound that Brewster mentions, namely light-organs and colour-pianos, such as those pioneered by Newton and Castel. László Moholy-Nagy, 'Static and Kinetic Optical Composition', *Painting, Photography, Film* (1927) trans. Janet Seligman (London: Lund Humphries, 1969), 20-22.

positive, active kind of perception could be achieved via the complementary potential of different media:

> Similar forms in different colours, and in tints of varying intensity, losing and resuming their peculiar character with different velocities, and in different times, might exhibit a *distinct relation between the optical and the acoustic phenomena simultaneously presented to the senses*. Flashes of light, coloured and colourless, and clouds of different depths of shadow, advancing into, or emerging from the centre of symmetry, or passing across the radial lines of the figure at different obliquities, *would assist in marking more emphatically the gay or the gloomy sounds with which they are accompanied*.[175]

What matters here is the simultaneous presentation of optical and acoustic sensory data determined by neither narrative nor text but instead offered up to the observer for their own active and internal synthesis. Brewster emphasises no predetermined outcome of the media combinations; he does not anticipate how optical and acoustic phenomena should relate to one another. Instead, he focuses on the experiential processing of media and the potential of their combinations more generally to elicit reactions in the observer.

‘Reproduction Technology, Lithography’

The Paris Opéra operated with high financial stakes and a clear sense of commercial purpose. Mechanical reproduction played a significant role: abandoning its previous promotional strategy of plastering playbills on the exterior auditorium walls,[176] the Opéra harnessed the press with its networks of distribution to promote its premieres via publicity campaigns which

[175] Brewster, *The Kaleidoscope*, 160-161 (emphasis added).

[176] Advertising productions had previously consisted of pasting bills on the external walls of the theatre. In the nineteenth century, this was handled by the press as publicity became a business. Lacombe, ‘The ‘Machine’ and The State’, 37.

secured record numbers of critics and increased the coverage of its operas (fig. 15).[177] Significantly, an opera's spectacle as much as its music fuelled the international appetite for its productions.[178] The coverage generated a demand for the Opéra's productions from provincial and foreign opera houses which the Opéra was more than happy to meet in its production model. Under previous conditions, a new opera performance was accompanied by a few publications insufficient for the work's full staging elsewhere: a reduced score for piano and voices and sometimes an arrangement or two of its popular arias. In the event that another opera house wished to mount the same work, an onerous process of obtaining a manually-reproduced version of the composer's autograph score and orchestral parts was required from the original commissioning opera house.[179] In response to the demand for its productions, the Opéra mass produced full scores (fig. 16) and orchestral parts along with staging manuals which enabled the transfer of these productions in all their integrity elsewhere.

While the Opéra's publicity machine was designed to create a demand for the rental or sale of its production materials to offset its large budgets, it had the secondary effect of standardising the art form. For the first time in opera, the concept of an authoritative version of the musical score was established, a practice that E.T.A Hoffmann termed *Werktreue*, or truth to the work, which gained currency through his writing in music criticism of the early nineteenth century.[180] According to Hoffmann, all forms of musical practice – criticism, analysis,

[177] Opera received more coverage than any artistic medium before it. Pages of the popular and specialised press from Paris and beyond were replete with vivid descriptions of the Opéra's productions. The German press was particularly attuned to the Parisian opera scene through the likes of Heinrich Heine and Richard Wagner who, among others, were employed as international correspondents. James A. Parakilas, 'The Operatic Canon', *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 862-878 (870).
[178] While this was in part bound up with its novel spectacular effects principally generated through improved lighting technology, the expansion of the popular press was also a contributing factor, predisposed as it was to account for opera's visual elements which were more concretely describable than its musical ones to their non-specialist readership.
[179] Parakilas, 'The Operatic Canon', 870.
[180] Beethoven's oeuvre most triumphantly represented the *werktrueue* for Hoffmann. *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings: Kreisleriana; The Poet and the Composer, Music Criticism*, ed. David Charlton, trans. Martyn Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

performance and composition – should not be led by non-musical factors (music worked to fit liturgical or ceremonial needs, for example) but instead by the logics and pressures internal to music itself.[181] As such, scores represented complete, closed urtexts impervious to editorial interference. France's legal framework compounded this situation: in 1791 it was the first country to introduce copyright law that enabled writers and composers protection and rights over their artistic content which gave the creative agent the chance to veto any changes made during subsequent performances.[182] This *werktreu* approach was completely new to the operatic apparatus and its contingencies, where edits to a score during rehearsals were often needed to fit a particular singer's preferences, the technical limitations of the theatre or the exigencies of the institution and its season. The new conditions at the Opéra required a longer-term compositional approach that avoided constant rewrites, and demanded a definitive score by the time of the premiere.[183]

Livrets de mise-en-scène

Music, however, was not the only component to be standardised and fixed. Given the adulatory commentaries of the Opéra's mises-en-scène in the press, provincial and foreign opera houses were keen to replicate the staging as well the music. Introduced in conjunction with the premieres at the Paris Opéra from 1830 onwards, *livrets de mise-en-scène* (staging manuals) are remarkable yet often unacknowledged evidence of opera's medial reconfiguration. Through their documentation and distribution of an authoritative staging, the *livrets* expanded the definition of the operatic work to its visual media and thus staging and

[181] Lydia Goehr has highlighted the broader implications of Hoffmann's definition of musical works: 'Thus, a musical work is held to be a composer's unique, objectified expression, a public and permanently existing artefact made up of musical elements (typically tones, dynamics, rhythms, harmonies, and timbres). A work is fixed with respect, at least, to the properties indicated in the score and it is repeatable in performances. Performances themselves are transitory sound events intended to present a work by complying as closely as possible with the given notational specifications'. Lydia Goher, 'Being True to the Work', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 47 (1989), 55-67 (55).
[182] Gerhard, *The Urbanization*, 39.
[183] Parakilas, 'The Operatic Canon', 871.

mise-en-scène were absorbed into the 'canonisable content' of opera.[184] The documents of the Opéra's original stagings brought Parisian productions to provincial and foreign opera houses, but also rationalised the Opéra's own production process, enabling the quick and therefore economical remounting of subsequent performances. Between 1830 and 1870 approximately 140 of these *livrets* were published by Louis Palianti, who also worked as a *régisseur* himself. As the international centre of opera production at the time, the Opéra's practice of producing *livrets* was soon adopted by other institutions and beyond France. Giuseppe Verdi's experience of the Opéra made him take a more exacting approach to the staging of his own productions, and he began producing the Italian equivalents, named *disposizioni sceniche*, after his first premiere at the Opéra, *Les vêpres siciliennes* in 1855.[185] While Wagner did not systematically produce detailed staging manuals, however he was conscious of the need to document his staging process and requested that certain agents notated the rehearsals as a *régisseur* would. Decades later, when rehearsing *The Ring* at Bayreuth in 1875, he went to great lengths to ensure the process was documented by his assistants Heinrich Porges, Richard Fricke and Julius Hey. In 1872, two years before he had even finished the score, Wagner wrote to Porges:

> I intend to invite you to follow all my rehearsals, just as you did for the 9th Symphony, in order to record and note down all my remarks, however intimate, concerning the interpretation and performance of our work, and in that way to establish a fixed tradition.[186]

The seemingly trivial parts of opera's medial package, printing and distribution, had extreme ramifications for Wagner which have not yet been articulated as such: what started as a commercial money-spinner in Paris in which new media technologies were mobilised

[184] This in turn opened up the definition of the operatic author to encompass the stage director and designers as well as the librettist and composer. Parakilas, 'The Operatic Canon', 871.
[185] Pendle and Wilkins, 206.
[186] Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 90.

to print *livrets* and accrue royalties, took on a new significance for the composer. Standardised staging was no longer a commercial imperative but an artistic one, dictated by the auteur librettist-composer-director to produce an authentic 'fixed' tradition. Nonetheless, Wagner's experiences in Paris had seeded the idea: media undeniably encouraged his situation.[187]

By 1875, the production of *livrets* had become standard practice in the theatre.[188] As stage designer Jean-Pierre Moynet remarked: 'almost every Parisian theatre régissuer publishes and makes publicly available mise-en-scène… [which] facilitate and shorten rehearsals'.[189] Since the autonomous role of the stage director had still not fully emerged, no single agent maintained absolute control over the staging process. While the composer and librettist were often present and feeding in to staging rehearsals, the rehearsals themselves tended to be led by an in-house member of the Opéra's staff. In the most prosperous period of grand opera, between 1828 and 1849, staging was seen as an intuitive extension of the designer's metier. Henri Duponchel, who had trained as a designer and went on to serve as co-director of the institution, in fact rehearsed most of the productions during this period.[190] However it was not the director but the *régisseur*, a kind of stage manager and rehearsal director, who was charged with the task of accurately noting down the *livret*.[191] Palianti's proofs, for example,

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[187] Carnegy and Syer have contributed two significant studies in English on Wagner's approach to staging, though neither highlight how these media determined Wagner's theatrical project. In a discussion of Wagner's experience of the Parisian opera scene between 1839 and 1842, Syer identifies generous resources and state of the art technology as the formative contributors to Wagner's own sense of mise-en-scène. While Syer mentions the French practice of staging manuals, she does not consider their means of production nor go as far as to frame Wagner's new attention to staging in terms of media. Syer, 'From Page to Stage: Wagner as Regisseur', *Richard Wagner and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3-26.
[188] Pendle and Wilkins, 174.
[189] Jean-Pierre Moynet, *L'Envers du theatre, machines et decorations* (Paris: Hachette, 1875), 270. Quoted in H. Robert Cohen and Marie-Odile Gigou, 'Introduction', trans. Donald Gíslason, *One Hundred Years of Operatic Staging in France*, ed. Cohen and Gigou (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986) (xxxix-lviii), xliii.
[190] Williams, 'The Spectacle of the Past', 61.
[191] Cohen and Gigou, 'Introduction', *One Hundred Years*, xlvi.

were approved by the composer and librettist before going to print; they were by all accounts reliable transcriptions of the authors' vision.[192]

The *livrets* offered intricate descriptions via text, designs and diagrams: entrances and exits of characters, spatial relationships between principals and extras, specific movements and gestures carefully corresponded to textual or musical referents – words, phrases or musical sections – in the score. Often these publications would disclose details of optimum voice types for specific roles as well as the physical construction of scenes, listing the necessary set elements, props and their positioning on stage. Meyerbeer's *Le prophète* Act IV (1849) and Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* (1859) are representative of the spatial use of text to convey the arrangement of the scenes (figs 17 and 18). Less frequently, references were made to the lighting specification, and sometimes set and costume designs were included too.[193] It is something of a paradox that the recognition of the visual in opera grew out of a largely textual practice, not least since later in the twentieth century the pre-eminence of spectacle often came at the cost of opera's literary text, as in the case of Wassily Kandinsky's *Der gelbe Klang* and the phenomenon of post-dramatic theatre more generally. The positioning of opera's visual constituent on a par with its literary and musical texts was therefore bound up with its legitimisation *as* a text.[194] However, the notation of staging manuals for operatic premieres did not persist commercially in the way that the full musical score did.

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[192] The librettist Scribe attested to Palianti's accuracy in a letter he wrote to the *régisseur*-publisher in 1849: 'I believe your work to be done with such great care and intelligence, that it makes manifestly clear the intentions of the author and may stand in his stead at rehearsals, that it should greatly help dramatic works succeed in the provinces and abroad, and that its usefulness is beyond all doubt… The proper traditions are henceforth impossible to forget and it is regrettable that such work was not done long ago.' Quoted in Cohen and Gigou, 'Introduction', *One Hundred Years*, xlv.
[193] Cohen and Gigou, 'Introduction', *One Hundred Years*, xl.
[194] Erika Fischer-Lichte has highlighted the 'antitextual' quality of the theatrical avant-garde, however she does not observe the complicity of text in this situation, nor does she consider the institutional precedents of notating the 'antitextual' gesture. 'The Avant-Garde and the Semiotics of the Antitextual Gesture', *Contours of the Theatrical Avantgarde: Performance and Textuality*, ed. and trans. James Harding (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000) 79-95 (80).

Though the scores and libretti of many famous nineteenth-century operas remained in the repertory well into the following century and beyond, their means of visual representation in the twentieth century bifurcated. On the one hand, original staging manuals were still sought to recreate nineteenth-century mises-en-scène, while on the other, institutions, stage directors and designers felt increasingly compelled to disregard the original staging instructions. This stood in stark contrast to the conductor who remained tied to the details of the *werktreue* musical score. As a small number of core eighteenth and nineteenth-century operas came to be consistently programmed in opera houses internationally into the twentieth century, their scores remained stable, but their staging, in spite of the *livrets*, did not.[195] James Parakilas has highlighted how this shift of opera houses into repertory houses has not yet been examined as an international situation, and the following is drawn from his account.[196] Based on the existing national studies, Parakilas has collated possible reasons for operatic programming's solidification in the nineteenth century: John Rosselli's study of Italy points to the establishment of a different kind of opera house: bigger, privately run and offering inexpensive opera and ballet to a broader audience. However, Rosselli does not elucidate why the same unvaried repertory of old operas would necessarily appeal more to a new, socially diverse audience than an ever-changing repertory of new ones. Matthew Ringel's investigation of the repertory of London's opera houses suggests that copyright laws incentivised the performance of older works not under copyright. However, as Parakilas suggests, the copyright argument does not stand from the Italian perspective, as publishers of new operas themselves wielded influence over operatic programming in Italy. Parakilas puts forward the role of the Paris Opéra and its publicity machine as instrumental in establishing a

[195] Parakilas defines the nineteenth-century operatic canon as encompassing 'Mozart operas from the 1780s, Rossini and Weber operas from the 1810s and 1820s, Meyerbeer and Donizetti from the 1830s, and eventually Verdi and Wagner from later decades'. Parakilas, 'The Operatic Canon', 869.
[196] Parakilas, 'The Operatic Canon', 867-868.

core international operatic repertory. I instead would like to suggest that it was not so much the Opéra's publicity machine, as the new attention this machine drew to its staging practices, that contributed to the calcification of operatic programming. The question raised by Rosselli's study, of why a standardised repertory of old operas would appeal more to a new, socially diverse audience than a varying repertory of new ones, can be explained by the nineteenth-century's construction of the observer. As we have seen, visual variation became standard in the Opéra's nineteenth-century stagings and in the mediascape more broadly. The power and inventiveness of mise-en-scène was exemplified not in its presentation of new operas, but rather by its ability to innovatively recreate the familiar. Furthermore, if we accept Brewster's hypothesis about the users of his kaleidoscope, that their 'eye for admiring and appreciating the effect of fine forms, seems, indeed, to be much more general than an ear for music', then visual novelty possessed a greater appeal to audiences than musical novelty. Put another way, the extreme visual innovation of operatic stagings *enabled* a situation in which musical repetition was promoted. Visual media in the twentieth century created the operatic repertory and its pantheon of greats. Thus standardised stagings of newly-written operas dwindled in favour of re-imaginations of historic ones.

The twentieth-century situation, where musical familiarity was sustained by visual novelty, points to the kind of pattern that for Adorno and Max Horkheimer characterises the 'culture industry', where a subject has the 'freedom to choose what is always the same'.[197] Adorno reiterates this tendency towards the musically familiar, which he associates with a passive kind of engagement, with specific reference to nineteenth-century opera: 'there is that type of operatic audience which always wants to hear the same thing and suffers the unfamiliar with

[197] Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 2010), 120-167 (167).

hostility, or, even worse, with passive disinterest'.[198] Thus the solidification of European opera programming was bound up with the audience's predilection for the aurally familiar and visually varied, which enabled the visual re-imagining of well-known operatic scores to become a widespread practice, and one suggestive of the film industry's tendency towards adaptation.

The Opéra's approach to staging in the 1820s and 30s, which privileged spectacle and its combination with the musical and textual media of opera, enabled this later nineteenth-century shift. As modes of spectatorship changed in response to new technologies and a new observer, the visual media of opera were privileged and eventually entrusted with reinvesting a familiar opera with a compelling sense of newness. By the early twentieth century, the multiplicity of staging variations for the same opera gave way in some cases to the role of staging to *critique* an operatic text through the technique of montage. The distinction between these practices is significant and can be explained thus: visual newness for the sake of variety, or to paraphrase Adorno and Horkheimer, that which is always the same and experienced passively, versus visual newness to provoke the subject's thought by rendering the latent and in Adorno's opinion, fundamental, tensions in opera. The more familiar the opera, the more powerful its deconstructive and experimental visual rendering could be. Between these different approaches to repertory and staging, the observer's attentive state was at stake. This dramaturgic trend reached its extreme in the operatic and theatrical institutions of German-speaking lands where the ground was laid for the experimental tradition of *Regieoper*, or director's opera, which can be understood as the antithesis of Adorno's proto-culture industry

[198] Adorno, 'Bourgeois Opera', 41. See also Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening', *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2001), 29-60.

sense of the Paris Opéra.[199] Indeed for Adorno, medial approaches to opera that exposed its unsettled clash of systems were not only the antithesis of the Opéra, but also of Florentine monody, Gluckian operatic reform and Wagnerian *Sprechgesang,* which he claimed all variously 'tried to get around the contradiction, or to alleviate it, and thus to promote the pure, unbroken, undialectical closure of operatic form'.[200] Adorno's analysis of the handling of media in opera gives any specific reference to visual media rather short shrift as he tends to be more invested in musical-textual relations. Significant to the present discussion, however, is that in spite of Adorno's oppositional positioning of the Opéra and more avant-garde practices of the twentieth century, a media history of the Opéra demonstrates how more experimental staging practices could not have developed *without* the Opéra.

The moment of the staging manual's obsolescence offers coordinates for this shift in the structuring of opera's visual media: the establishment of a library in 1920 to collate and conserve the *livrets* points to the wane of their production.[201] But this happened neither immediately nor uniformly. The emergence of the stage director as a credited producer with agency independent of the composer and librettist in Europe is not easy to pinpoint. In France, the professionalisation of the roles of *régissuer* and director is apparent through the *Association de la Régie théâtrale* (*Association of Theatre Directing, or l'A.R.T*) which was mooted in 1907 and established in 1911.[202] The association, however, was principally founded to preserve old nineteenth-century *livrets* rather than to promote the director's role as

[199] As Adorno described: 'If there is any meaning to opera at all… then that meaning is to be sought in contradiction itself, rather than in vainly seeking to do away with contradiction in the name of an all too seamless aesthetic unity, the kind that gloomily flourishes under the name "symbolic". Adorno, 'Bourgeois Opera', 37.
[200] Adorno, 'Bourgeois Opera', 37.
[201] Cohen and Gigou, 'Introduction', *One Hundred Years*, xlvii.
[202] The French theatre director Hubert Génin proposed the idea of forming an association for *régisseurs*, 'first of all to get to know one another better, and further, to seek out in common some mutual support, both professional and moral, which could not help but be beneficial to all branches of the theatrical profession'. Cohen and Gigou, 'Introduction', xlviii.

an author.[203] By the 1940s, however, the practice of the director as creator was widespread enough to become a divisive issue among members of *l'A.R.T*. A report from a meeting of 22 July 1941 reads thus: 'Marc Roland warns our Comrades against the appetite of certain directors who would seek to completely put the *régisseurs* out of work'.[204] Roland, who was both vice-president of *l'A.R.T* and the conservator of its library from 1940, had a vested interest in promoting the tradition encapsulated in his archive and protecting the livelihoods of his colleagues. A more affirmative indicator of the emergence of the director as author in France was the creation of a union in 1946 to protect the intellectual property of director's original mises-en-scène, this time spearheaded by *l'A.R.T*.[205] However, any linear account of the transition from the nineteenth-century director as 're-creator' to the twentieth-century director as 'creator' is reductive; instead, the two approaches uncomfortably coexisted. What is clearer, however, is that the practice of director as creator can be traced more substantially in Germany in the early twentieth century. As we have seen, the more comprehensive integration of visual media into opera in France was precipitated by waves of innovation in technological media and changing modes of spectatorship; in short, spectacle in opera was closely bound to the industrial revolution and its impacts. That Germany industrialised later and more rapidly, and maintained a system of smaller regional theatres which did not deal with the same kind of commercial competition, has much to bear on its separate twentieth-century trajectory, one which took the baton of dramaturgical innovation from France and forged the director as 'creator'. This will be explored in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

[203] A study has demonstrated that nineteenth-century *livrets* remained the sources for stagings of operas produced in France in the early twentieth century, a practice which persisted until at least the 1960s, as the account of the régisseur André Herbaux attested. Cohen and Gigou, 'Introduction', *One Hundred Years*, li-lii.
[204] 'Marc Roland met en garde nos Camarades contre l'appétit de certains metteur en scene qui chercheraient a éliminer completement les régisseurs du travail de la mise en scene'. Cohen and Gigou, 'Introduction', *One Hundred Years,* xxxi.
[205] This took place under the aegis of the director and critic Gaston Baty. L'Association de la Régie Théâtrale, *Théâtre-Histoire De L'Association de la Régie Théâtrale*
(2020). <http://www.regietheatrale.com/index/index/histoire.htm#1911> [Accessed 4 December 2021].

Excursus: twenty-first century revivals

While the commercial publication of staging manuals has not persisted into the twenty-first century, productions are still revived to meet audience demand and guarantee revenue. Despite the availability of video as a means of documenting a staging, it has neither usurped the necessity for staging rehearsals nor the use of text and notation as preparatory media. As Marie-Odile Gigou has remarked: 'video cassettes simply cannot replace the manuscript transcriptions, which are more manageable and clearly more functional on the spot'.[206] *My own experience working as an assistant director on operatic revivals, where a production from a previous season is remade with a new cast of performers, offers insight into why a video, though it might aid the director's preparation, is not transferred to the cast or rehearsal room. While performers might use audio recordings to musically prepare, they do not get sent a film in advance of staging rehearsals and, while it is expected that they arrive with music and text memorised, this is not the case for the staging. Instead, rehearsals depend on the textual media of the revival director's book – the handwritten notes from the original staging interleaved in a printed score – which are communicated by the revival director. The twenty-first century opera apparatus demonstrates what a video cannot do: stand in for agent-led, textually-dependant rehearsals which, as Gigou puts it, are more practical.*

The apparatus - media - agents conception of opera helps us to ascertain why. The range of controllable scenic elements available by the twentieth century threw the contingencies of work with performing agents into sharp relief. As Edward Gordon Craig described:

> *The actions of the actor's body, the expression of his face, the sounds of his voice, all*

[206] Gigou's observations describe the situation succinctly: 'video cassettes simply cannot replace the manuscript transcriptions, which are more manageable and clearly more functional on the spot', Gigou 'Preface', *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premieres* ed. Cohen (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1991), xii.

are at the mercy of winds, which must blow for ever around the artist, moving without unbalancing him. But with the actor, emotion possesses him; it seizes upon his limbs, moving them wither it will. He is at its beck and call… It is the same with his voice as it is with his movements. Emotion cracks the voice of the actor. It sways his voice to join in the conspiracy of his mind… Therefore the mind of the actor, we see, is less powerful than his emotion, for emotion is able to win over the mind to assist in the destruction of that which the mind would produce; and as the mind becomes the slave of the emotion it follows that accident upon accident must be continually occurring… Therefore the body of man, is by nature utterly useless as a material for an art.[207]

In response to the fragmented nineteenth-century theatrical apparatus, Craig advocated the pulling together of all theatrical media under a single agent, the director. The performers, meanwhile, remained a problem: 'Art arrives only by design. Therefore in order to make any work of art it is clear we may only work in those materials which we can calculate. Man is not one of those materials'.[208] *However, in spite of Craig's call in 1908 for the disciplined and controllable* Übermarionette *performer, a kind of automaton able to replicate the most precise instructions, opera's performing agents tend not to be mechanised and therefore the operatic apparatus is adjusted accommodate their needs.*

Performing in an auditorium and projecting unamplified over an orchestra, opera singers, like dancers and athletes, stretch their physical capabilities and have to accept the contingency of the body as their instrument. Unlike actors, opera singers devote most of their training to music and vocal technique and any acting or movement specialisation tends to be

[207] Edward Gordon Craig, 'The Actor and the Über-Marionnette' (1908), *Edward Gordon Craig: A Vision of Theatre*, ed. Christopher Innes (London: Routledge, 1998), 287-288.
[208] Craig, 'The Actor and the Über-Marionnette', 287.

supplementary. The addition of gesture and movement to their singing makes considerable mental and physical demands which need to be carefully built up in rehearsals. As such, long operatic acts are divided into scenes and scenes are broken up into smaller sections during staging sessions. After a purely musical run-through of the section to be rehearsed with the conductor and répétiteur, the rehearsal is led by the director. Dialogue is expedient for relaying staging instructions and allows a fragmented approach – of stopping, starting and repeating – as well as an opportunity for the performer to clarify any ambiguities with the director immediately. Verbal instruction accompanies the performer's multiple attempts at combining the movement, text and music: the singer might first put written notes in their score as an aid-memoire, then walk the route of their staging to absorb it into their muscle memory, then speak their sung lines while moving through their staging. Finally, they will add music, singing their lines with the pre-rehearsed movement. Using video to relay the same information would be less expedient: the performer would be limited in their ability to move through the space if trying to keep their eyes on the screen. Verbal directions, on the other hand, can be communicated to performers as they move. Structures of perception are therefore also considerations in the pedagogic rehearsal process: while the absorption of the staging through a video is a passive process, involving the physical replication of the gestures and positions seen, verbal directions force the performer to make a cognitive gear change from hearing a direction to emulating it physically themselves. Under paradigmatic operatic conditions, where works are based on a narrative with characters, rehearsals are also opportunities to feed ideas of psychological intention and characterisation to aid the performer's own embodiment of their role, something which cannot be gleaned from a video. A psychological map of how a performer could be thinking through their role is not accessible via a videoed performance. Ultimately, however, the operatic apparatus is focussed on cost: revivals are less expensive to mount than brand new productions as scenery

and costumes can be reused and the creative team receive royalties rather than a full fee. In the same vein, while rehearsals are expensive, they are more efficient than sending unrehearsed and therefore unconfident performers into technical rehearsals on stage in which many more agents are present. Any delay generated by a performer as they acclimatise to conditions on stage ultimately creates a need for more technical time which, due to the number of technicians involved, is an even more costly process.

Chapter 1 Part II: Kandinsky, *Kultur* and the total work of perception in Germany

It is impossible not to consider Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) in a study dedicated to the role of visual media and perception in nineteenth and twentieth-century opera. In his stage composition, *Der gelbe Klang*, Kandinsky envisioned a pastoral locale in which natural and supernatural events seamlessly unfold, not in dialogue or even complete sentences, but through movement, sound and colour. Light – projected onto a backcloth, solid scenery and performers' bodies – changes in colour and intensity against a soundscape of non-verbal, spoken, sung and instrumental voices, to evoke giants, flowers and birds, guiding the listening observer through an oblique journey of tension and release. While German avant-garde multimedia and French grand opera seem an unlikely pairing, it is my contention that underlying Kandinsky's kaleidoscopic stage compositions is the same premise that directed productions at the Paris Opéra: that of embodied and subjective vision. Shulamith Behr has noted the active role Kandinsky demanded of the listening observer in his stage compositions, something she situates in his reception of Wagner.[209] I seek instead to distance Kandinsky's

[209] Shulamith Behr, 'Kandinsky and Theatre: The Monumental Artwork of the Future', *Vasily Kandinsky: From Blaue Reiter to the Bauhaus, 1910-1925*, ed. Jill Lloyd (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2013), 65-84. Behr's position is representative of the *Der gelbe Klang* literature more generally. Peter Vergo and David Roberts are among the scholars who deem Wagner's theories Kandinsky's salient point of reference. Roberts considers Kandinsky's 'post-Wagnerian' attempt to combine media as a 'spiritual striving', but the process by which a synthetic artwork might bring a subject any closer to this kind of higher experiential realm at the level of perception is not explained, and issues of media are neglected. Others have taken more seriously the practicalities of *Der gelbe Klang*'s performance. Geraint D'Arcy and Richard Hand's 2011 staging presented the work as an installation in a gallery context, an approach which disregarded the historic conditions of *Der gelbe Klang*'s planned but

multimedia experiments from a Wagnerian point of reference in order to consider them in the productive new light of recent interventions in art and media history. This line of inquiry is inspired by Jonathan Crary's identification of a preponderance of German scientists and philosophers active in area of sense perception in the nineteenth century.[210] While Crary does not deal specifically with German media or art, his study is mostly situated in France, his terms are productive in a German context where questions of sensory perception were seriously pursued. Against positivism and a faith in science brought on by vigorous industrialisation, Fritz Ringer has observed a distinct cultural pessimism in the German academic sphere between 1890 and 1933. Pushing against the uncritical belief in scientific progress and the possibility of objective, scientifically-grounded experience, German intellectuals looked back to Kant.[211] Kant's affirmative sense of the subject's key role in synthesising and organising experience was pertinent to artistic investigations of sense perception, and it is notable that Neo-Kantianism set the tone and came to represent the orthodoxy for academic philosophy at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the

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thwarted production at the Munich Artists' Theatre. Closer to the approach I adopt is that of Robert Pevitts, who considers how the technical specifications of Max Littman's Munich Artists' Theatre, with its distinctive relief stage, contributed to Kandinsky's vision. Pevitts, however, does not consider theories of emotional response which, as Weiss has demonstrated, were factored into the theatre's architectural design. In this respect, my line of enquiry is closer to that of Kathleen James-Chakraborty, who takes seriously the way in which architecture and new technology contributed to experiments in perception. James-Chakraborty's emphasis on the way in which Kandinsky, but also Appia, mobilised coloured light to elicit emotional responses from a mass audience is one I elaborate, offering a detailed comparison of Kandinsky and Appia's projects to flesh out James-Chakraborty's observation. See Peter Vergo, 'Music, Kandinsky and the Idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk' *Vasily Kandinsky*, ed. Lloyd, 49-63; David Roberts 'Gesamtkunstwerk and Avant-Garde', *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2011), 147-157; Geraint D'Arcy and Richard J. Hand, 'Open Your Eyes / Shut Your Eyes: Staging Kandinsky's The Yellow Sound at Tate Modern', *Performance Research*, 7 (2012), 56-60; Robert Pevitts, 'Wassily Kandinsky's "The Yellow Sound": A Synthesis of the Arts for the Stage' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1980); Kathleen James-Chakraborty, *German Architecture for a Mass Audience* (London: Routledge, 2000), 75.

[210] Crary's litany of German thinkers engaged in issues of sense perception include Goethe, Johannes Müller, Gustav Fechner and Hermann von Helmholtz. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer on Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

[211] Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

twentieth century.[212]

Germany industrialised belatedly and more rapidly than its French or British counterparts. If industry rivalled culture in Benjamin's Paris of the nineteenth century, they were messily embroiled in twentieth-century Germany. Kathleen James-Chakraborty's study of industrialisation and modern German architecture raises similar issues to those discussed in relation to the Paris Opéra in the 1830s.[213] While industrially-produced technologies inspired artistic practice, more significant still was the arrival of a new mass audience. Indeed, the emergence of a new lower middle and working-class public was, according to James-Chakraborty, the most powerful force in German architecture between 1910 and 1940. As we have seen in the case of the Opéra, technology and techniques from the mass entertainment sector were implemented at times to meet economic imperatives. In the case of German architecture and by extension theatre design, however, James-Chakraborty traces not only a financial but also a utopian impetus behind the application of new technologies, one she expands to Appia and Kandinsky in their application of light.[214] As architects attempted to create spaces for a mass public to congregate, ideas of unity and communal experience, the like of which might recapture a pre-industrial situation that dissolved class divisions, emerged. This aim towards a unified society played out in a number of different ways, including a turn towards forms of representation capable of eliciting universal responses equally accessible to all: abstraction.

Peg Weiss has highlighted the significance of the decorative arts in Kandinsky's incipient theory and practice of abstract art in the context of Munich, the city he made his home in

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[212] Thomas Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860-1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978).
[213] James-Chakraborty, *German Architecture for a Mass Audience*, 1-9.
[214] James-Chakraborty, 73-76.

1896. Weiss demonstrates Kandinsky's borrowings from proponents of *Jugendstil*, who considered the artistic potential of modern materials as well as the metrics of psychological experience: 'The hitherto unsuspected power of line-in-itself and colour-in-itself had been revealed with special clarity as a by-product of the arts and crafts movement with its intense concern for fundamental artistic elements'.[215] Weiss demonstrates the fluid movement of theory between intellectual and artistic spheres with the example of August Endell, an architect who moved from Berlin to study at Munich University with Theodor Lipps, a philosopher investigating the psychological impact of lines and forms. Endell absorbed academic developments in the psychology of perception into his artistic theory and practice and figures for Weiss as a crucial precursor to Kandinsky's work in an abstract idiom.[216] Following Weiss, this chapter situates Kandinsky alongside theorists of psychological response and contributors to the German decorative arts. In a comparison of the theatrical activities of Munich Artists' Theatre, the Darmstadt Artists' Colony and Hellerau Garden City, Kandinsky's project is put in dialogue with those of Georg Fuchs, Adolf Hildebrand, Peter Behrens and Alexandre Salzmann, members of Munich's intellectual milieu who, with the exception of Fuchs, are only mentioned by Weiss in passing. Like Weiss and Peter Jelavich, I consider Georg Fuchs' tenure at the Munich Artists' Theatre a productive

[215] Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich: The Formative Jugendstil Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 8.

[216] Endell, for example, analysed the way in which lines – short, long, thin or thick – elicited different responses in the observer. The process of looking at a line involved, so Endell thought, a sensation akin to that of when the eye moves with an object in motion. In particular, Weiss identifies how Endell's psychological consideration of line strikingly parallels Kandinsky's psychological analysis of colour. Weiss, 34-40. A recent contributor to the history of this field of thought and experimentation in Germany is Zeynep Çelik Alexander, who has demonstrated how the idea of experiential, bodily knowledge – as opposed to that obtained through mental and intellectual processes – preoccupied thinkers from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of the Second World War. Alexander puts their key line of inquiry thus: '…can the body's physical exchanges with the world produce reliable knowledge without recourse to language, concepts, propositions, or representations?' This alternative kind of knowledge was given, according to Alexander, a 'provisional legitimacy if not complete equality' alongside more entrenched processes of knowledge and, while her study draws upon some of Crary's protagonists, Hermann von Helmholtz for example, it also extends to Endell. *Kinaesthetic Knowing: Aesthetics, Epistemology, Modern Design* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 8 and 10.

coordinate in Kandinsky's conception of multimedia.[217]

Kandinsky's stage composition, *Der gelbe Klang* (*The Yellow Sound*), was developed in Munich between 1908 and 1909 and published in *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach* (The Blue Rider Almanac) in 1912.[218] Over its fifteen pages, a one-act written scenario is structured over six scenes which are described as 'pictures'. Their settings denote generic outdoor vistas: a 'broad green hill' at the rear of the stage, 'two large red-brown rocks, one pointed, the other round' and 'a small lopsided building… At one side of the building (on the roof) a little lopsided turret with a small cracked bell. From the bell a rope'. A curtain and a backcloth provide surfaces for projections of coloured light which change over the duration of each picture. The cast list gives little detail of the historical epoch or geographic locale: 'Five Giants, Vague Creatures, Tenor (backstage), A Child, A Man, People in Flowing Robes, People in Tights, Chorus (backstage)' (fig. 19). A series of images are interspersed throughout the document, not set or costume designs by Kandinsky but instead reproductions borrowed from eclectic sources: medieval Russian and German woodcuts, a Bavarian glass painting, a Sri Lankan mask and Egyptian shadow puppets, none of which overtly correlate to Kandinsky's cast list (figs. 20, 21 and 22). While labelled a 'stage composition' by the artist

[217] While Jelavich does not consider the theories of psychological response in his account of *Der gelbe Klang*, he richly situates Kandinsky's stage work in its social and political context. Peter Jelavich, *Munich and Theatrical Modernism: Politics, Playwriting, and Performance, 1890-1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 217-235. Juliet Koss's discussion of the institution in relation to Hildebrand's theory of artistic perception also informs my own, which pushes to consider a direct synergy between Hildebrand's theories and Kandinsky's oeuvre, a connection which Koss does not tease out. Instead, Koss relates Kandinsky's painterly abstraction to his reading of Wilhelm Worringer. Koss, *Modernism After Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 93-94.

[218] The almanac was one of a few collaborative projects initiated by the Munich-based *Blaue Reiter* artistic circle formed by Wassily Kandinsky, Gabriele Münter, Franz Marc, August Macke, Alexei Jawlensky and Paul Klee. The publication included twenty contributions from the group and their associates in the form of essays, poems, quotations and images, written and edited exclusively by artists. Two group exhibitions preceded the publication in 1911 and 1912. The group advocated the expressive use of colour in painting and inclined towards an abstract style grounded in a spiritual worldview. While the editors Marc and Kandinsky planned a second almanac, their efforts were delayed by the outbreak of the First World War and, after Marc's death, Kandinsky felt unable to continue without him. Klaus Lankheit, 'A History of the Almanac', *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, 1912, ed. Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, trans. Henning Falkenstein, with Manug Terzian and Gertrude Hinderlie (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974), 11-48 (35).

himself, the work stipulates the salient features of opera and ballet but also, strikingly, those of silent film. While the musical score was produced separately, musical indications appear consistently across the scenes which call for a tenor, chorus and orchestra positioned backstage, their sound disembodied, resembling the musical conditions of early silent film screenings. Kandinsky's text is not a dialogue to be set to music, but reads instead as a collection of unusually long stage directions or a staging manual, detailing the positioning, movement and gestures of performers. Music is referenced across the scenario with notes of specific instruments which must emerge from the orchestral texture at certain moments. In the absence of any dialogue to be spoken or set to music, Kandinsky's stage composition resists any conventional structure of narrative or drama.

While Kandinsky figures as the work's writer-designer-director or, to borrow a term from film, *auteur*, the musical component was to be written by his Russian compatriot, Thomas de Hartmann, though this score was not ready by the time the *Almanac* went to print in 1912. In spite of plans initiated by Hugo Ball to stage the work at the Munich Artists' Theatre in 1914, *Der gelbe Klang* was not to reach the stage in Kandinsky's lifetime and instead was premiered in its most complete iteration at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1982 with a musical score completed from De Hartmann's sketches by Gunther Schuller.[219] De Hartmann revealed in a 1950 lecture in New York that he had also pitched *Der gelbe Klang* to the Moscow Art Theatre, however this was not successful: '…they could not understand it and did not accept it. The designs and my music – everything was lost during the Revolution'.[220] While *Der gelbe Klang* was Kandinsky's only complete published stage work,

[219] Jessica Boissel, *Wassily Kandinsky: Über Das Theater* (Köln: DuMont, 1998), 213. Hugo Ball worked as a critic-playwright at the Munich *Kammerspiele* from 1913. John Elderfield, 'Introduction' *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary by Hugo Ball*, trans. Anne Raimes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), xlvii. *Der gelbe Klang* has been mounted since the Guggenheim premiere, most notably at Tate Modern in London (2011) and in a production I staged with Spectra Ensemble at Oxford University (2015).
[220] Lankheit, 'A History', 42-43.

it was by no means his only contribution to the form. Multimedia was something of an obsession for Kandinsky in this period, and his other sketches attest: *Daphnis und Chloe* (*Daphnis and Chloe*) (1908-1909), *Stimmen* oder *Grüner Klang* (*Voice* or *Green Sound*) (1909), *Schwarz und weiß* (*Black and White*) (1909) and *Violett* (*Violet*) (1914). Conceived in a similar vein to *Der gelbe Klang*, these stage sketches use text to evoke vividly coloured scenic effects alongside indications for music and periods of silence, expressed precisely in timings of seconds. *Violett* is the most thoroughly worked of these documents and contains Kandinsky's own visual inputs, including diagrams to describe the positioning of characters and props on stage, and two colourful ink and watercolours (figs. 23, 24 and 25).[221]

Violett has a forty-strong cast list that includes 'a theatre lackey, a lady, a man and a beggar' who appear across seven tableaux interspersed with two interludes:

Picture I - a room

Picture II - a wall

Interlude

Picture III - some hills

Picture IV - a room

Interlude

Picture V - two trees

Picture VI - a street

Picture VII - a room

Apotheosis

[221] Behr's study of *Violett* pursues a different trajectory to my own one as she reads narrative into its scenic gestures. She discerns, for example, a 'parodying of social classes' with which Kandinsky intended to unmask the 'obsessive materialism of the merchant middle-classes.' 'Deciphering Wassily Kandinsky's Violet: Activist Expressionism and the Russian Slavonic Milieu', *Expressionism Reassessed*, ed. Behr, David Fanning and Douglas Jarman (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993), 174-188 (178-179).

Its *Prelude* reads thus:

> The curtain rises
>
> On a large square canvas, a large red circle. (10 seconds)
>
> In the middle of this circle, a small purple circle gets bigger.
>
> Slowly it eventually eclipses the red circle.
>
> The red circle gradually gets smaller, so that it forms a blue border.
>
> Slowly, the red shrinks. It disappears and the large circle is blue. (5 seconds)
>
> Suddenly it falls dark.[222]

An excerpt from the Picture II again shows Kandinsky's inscription of music and time into the experience which, as we have seen earlier in the chapter, was precisely what the diorama achieved:

> Pause (15-20 seconds)
>
> A dark purple light quickly crosses the scene three times.
>
> The trumpet and the drum (from behind the scene all of a sudden): Prou-ou! Boom!
>
> Pause (5 seconds)
>
> A light red light quickly crosses (a cinnabar hue), it repeats the gesture in a more prolonged way (3 seconds)
>
> The trumpet: Prou-ou-ou!
>
> Pause (5 seconds)
>
> The light becoming deep blue.[223]

The descriptions for *Violett* call for a screen-like square canvas and imply the medium of light to produce coloured shapes which mix when overlaid, however their expanding and contracting motion is more suggestive of early animation techniques. Scenic gestures in *Der gelbe Klang* demand similar kinds of effects where, what appear to be physical set elements

[222] Boissel, *Wassily Kandinsky*, 214.
[223] Boissel, *Wassily Kandinsky*, 228.

must transform: in Picture 1 for example, 'The hill at the rear grows slowly and becomes paler and paler. Finally white'.[224]

The potentialities of theatre as an artistic medium were expounded by Kandinsky in his essay *'Über Bühnenkomposition'* or 'On Stage Composition' which immediately precedes *Der gelbe Klang* in the almanac. The kind of interrelation of the arts he outlines is one where, maintaining their separate identities, 'Sound, colour, word' reach their synthesis in the receiving subject, a process which he describes as a 'vibration':

> If the method is appropriate, it causes an almost identical vibration in the soul of the audience …these vibrations in the audience's soul will also cause other strings to vibrate in turn. This is a stimulation of the audience's "fantasy", which "continues to create" the work. These strings of the soul which vibrate frequently, will also vibrate when other strings are sounded. And sometimes so intensely that they drown out the original sound. Some people are moved to tears when listening to "happy" music and vice versa. Therefore particular effects of a work are more or less coloured by their different receptions.[225]

Kandinsky here is working with the idea of producing an *effect in a subject* rather than producing a separate and autonomous *work*. This, along with his concession of the many possible responses to a multimedia experience, sounds remarkably like Brewster's nineteenth century description of what the kaleidoscope could do. As with the popular entertainments of the nineteenth century and the Opéra's re-appropriation of their techniques, Kandinsky demonstrates a similar investment in the active and productive contribution of the listening observer, and as with the neo-Kantian aesthetics of the time of, say, Adolf von Hildebrand, his concern is with the subject's ability to organise and synthesise impressions in the mind.

[224] Kandinsky, 'The Yellow Sound', *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, 207-225 (213).
[225] Kandinsky, 'On Stage Composition', *The Blue Rider Almanac*, 190-206 (191).

And as we will see, Kandinsky's theory of the theatre was rooted in German twentieth-century conditions which in some ways belatedly resembled those of nineteenth-century France.

Despite the essay's titular emphasis on the theatre, Kandinsky's principal point of reference was not a playwright but instead the composer-librettist Richard Wagner. However, criticism's tendency to position Kandinsky and his multimedia experiments in unqualified Wagnerian terms persistently fails to represent his actual outlook on the composer.[226] Kandinsky was not a straightforward disciple of Wagner but was instead rather circumspect about his efforts, especially his consistent subjugation of music to a dramatic text. Rather than allowing all discrete art forms to pursue their own separate paths, Wagner co-opted one in service of another, producing an overdetermined or external effect, as opposed to the more oblique combination which must be synthesised internally by the listening observer and which Kandinsky advocated. Kandinsky's pithy analysis merits quotation at length:

> Wagner tried to intensify the means and bring the work to a monumental height by repeating one and the same external movement in two concrete forms. His mistake was to believe that he had a universal method at his command. Actually his method is only one of a series of even more powerful possibilities of monumental art. Parallel repetition is only *one* method, and an external repetition at that. …Before Wagner movement, for example, was entirely external and superficial in opera (perhaps only decadent). It was a naïve appendage to opera: pressing the hands against the chest – love; lifting the arms – prayer; extending the arms – strong emotion, etc. Such childlike forms (which can still be seen every night) were

[226] Magdalena Dabrowski's account, for example, suggests Kandinsky's uncritical reception of Wagner which has contributed to an over-simplification of the situation. 'Kandinsky Compositions: The Music of the Spheres', *MoMA* (Spring, 1995), 10-13.

> externally connected with the libretto, which again was illustrated by the music. Wagner connected movement and musical beat directly (artistically): the movement was subordinated to the beat. This connection is still external. The inner sound of the movement plays no part. In the same artistic but still external fashion Wagner subordinated the music to the libretto, that is, to the movement in a broad sense. He represented musically, the hissing of glowing iron in water, the bearing of a hammer in the smithy, etc.[227]

Aside from Wagner's all too predictable use of parallelism, Kandinsky has a further objection: Wagner completely overlooked the values of 'colour' and 'pictorial form (decoration)'.[228]

Kandinsky's ideal stage work elicited a particular perceptual response from the listening observer, one that engaged them in a positive and active kind of way. *Der gelbe Klang* was intended to be an explicit working out of this possibility, as the essay indicates.[229] Whether *Der gelbe Klang* succeeded in the way its author hoped is hard to judge since it did not reach the stage in Kandinsky's lifetime and therefore no accounts of its performance exist. In his 1917 Dada lecture on Kandinsky, however, Hugo Ball – who was an advocate of the Russian painter whom he first met in Munich in 1912, but who was also a practical man of the theatre appears to have been satisfied with the achievements of Kandinsky's written stage compositions:

> Kandinsky has put his theory into practice – perhaps no more than schematically – in two such compositions: *Der gelbe Klang*, published in *Der Blaue Reiter*, and *Violett*

[227] Kandinsky, 'On Stage Composition', 195-196.
[228] Kandinsky, 'On Stage Composition', 197.
[229] Kandinsky finishes the essay thus: 'The reader is asked to attribute the weakness of the following little composition, *The Yellow Sound*, not to the principle of stage compositions, but to its author's account'. Kandinsky, 'The Yellow Sound', 206.

> *Vorhang* [*Violet Curtain*] (not yet published). His talent in this field is perhaps moderate, but there is no denying the genius of the conception, which, if it were eventually to be realised on the stage, would manifest a strong revolutionary force even in comparison with such lofty writers as Ibsen, Maeterlinck, and Andreev.[230]

More impressed with Kandinsky's theories that his theatrical contribution, Ball's assessment points to the fact that unlike his Russian Blue Rider associates Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov, opera-ballet for Kandinsky marked an entirely new artistic departure.[231] Ball's caution to extol Kandinsky's stage compositions was perhaps because he had yet to experience them as live theatre, though this was not for want of trying. It was Ball himself who instigated the possible mounting of Kandinsky's productions, as his diaries attest:

> When we were considering the importance and scope of our project, we could not help but choose the Künstlertheater [Munich Artists' Theatre]. In the exhibition gardens there was a theatre that seemed to be created just for our purposes. A generation of artists had once used it for experimentation, but they had aged since then. What was more obvious than to assure ourselves of the sympathy of this older generation, and to ask the administration for the use of the rooms for our modern and original purposes? We held a discussion in the theatre. Visits to Professors Habermann, Albert von Keller, Stadler, and Stuck seemed to favour the plan. An announcement signed by both generations and by many friends of the project appeared in the press. The only delay was with finances and the management of the exhibition.[232]

[230] Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary by Hugo Ball*, 1927, trans. Raimes, 234.
[231] Goncharova's initial contribution to stage design was for a version of *The Arabian Nights*, the play *Marriage of Zobeide* by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, in 1909. Katy Wan, 'Natalia Goncharova: Chronology', *Natalia Goncharova*, ed. Matthew Gale and Natalia Sidlina (London: Tate, 2019), 178-194 (181).
[232] Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, trans. Raimes, 8-9.

Ball's contention that *Der gelbe Klang* demonstrated the ideas laid out in 'On Stage Composition' is consistent with a close reading of the scenario, which avoids parallelism and sidesteps any clear sense of character or plot. In Picture 2, the movement of a fluttering flower and leaf occurs *without* musical fluttering but instead 'in utter silence', while in Picture 3, visual and sonic effects are juxtaposed as a light becomes brighter and brighter while 'lower and darker' music is sounded. The gesture concludes with the light at its most dazzling and the music and its most sombre, having descended into silence. *Der gelbe Klang*'s use of text is consistent with the flexible approach to language outlined in 'On Stage Composition': 'The word, independent or in sentences, was used to create a certain "atmosphere" that frees the soul and makes it receptive. The sound of the human voice was also used pure, i.e., without being obscured by words, or the meaning of words'.[233] The end of Picture 3 unfolds with a sudden verbal interjection that resists identifiable language: 'Long Pause. Suddenly a shrill, terrified tenor voice can be heard from behind the stage, rapidly shrieking completely unintelligible words (*a* can be heard frequently, for example, Kalasimunafakola!) Pause. It becomes dark for a moment.' At certain moments, however, parallel relations *are* pursued. In Picture 5 a blackout is coupled with silence, then, in Picture 6, the music is required to be 'as expressive as the action on the stage'. Kandinsky therefore harnessed the idea of parallelism and divergence between media to use the full range of combinations at his disposal, intensifying and subverting one gesture with another. Not only does Kandinsky commit to 'collaboration and contrast' and the 'numerous combinations between these two poles' outlined in 'On Stage Composition', but he alternates them over time with proportionately more moments of medial contrast than collaboration or parallelism. This technique creates not a drama in a conventional narrative plot-driven sense, but a more oblique and intuitive one, generated though the creation of tension and release, or as Kandinsky explains it: 'the drama

[233] Kandinsky, 'On Stage Composition', 206.

finally consists of the complex inner experiences (soul = vibrations) of the audience'.[234] The moments of release, expressed as convergence, collaboration or parallelism, are strikingly prominent since they have been hard won.

Kandinsky's application of colour in *Der gelbe Klang* is remarkably grounded in another essay of 1911, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (Concerning the Spiritual in Art), in which he articulates his theories on colour and composition with specific regard to painting. Picture 5 presents a series of gestures which enact his theories. The 'People in Coloured Tights… Their hair is the same colour as their tights. Their faces likewise. (The people are like puppets)' enter embodying different styles of movement:

> One walks fast, straight ahead; another, slowly as if with difficulty; a third now and then leaps joyously; a fourth looks around continually; a fifth advances in a solemn theatrical manner, arms crossed; a sixth walks in tiptoes, each with one palm raised, and so on.

At the same time, they are accompanied by specific orchestral sonorities: 'In the orchestra, single colours begin to speak. Corresponding to each colour sound, single figures rise from different places'.[235] These notes from Kandinsky's scenario have been transferred in Schuller's orchestration and completion of De Hartmann's score, and the indications appear beside the specific musical entries from bar 271: 'Flute (light blue), Contrabass (dark blue), Violin (orange), Bass Clarinet/Bassoon (purple), Trumpet (light red), Cello (deep red)'.[236]

The instrumental colour references provide precise musical cues for the colour performers to follow but also strikingly convey the same associations of colour and sound laid out by

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[234] Kandinsky, 'On Stage Composition', 205.
[235] Kandinsky, 'The Yellow Sound', 222-223.
[236] Wassily Kandinsky and Thomas De Hartmann, *Der Gelbe Klang*, Orchestral Score. ed. Gunther Schuller (New York: Gun MarMusic / Schirmer, 1981), 79.

Kandinsky in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*:

> In music, light blue is like a flute…a still darker (blue) a thunderous double bass… Light warm red has a certain similarity to medium yellow…In music, it is a sound of trumpets, strong, harsh and ringing… Deepened red… the sad, middle tones of a cello… Orange is like a man, convinced of his own powers. Its note is that of the angelus, or of an old violin… Violet is therefore both in the physical and the material sense a cooled red. It is consequently rather sad and ailing… In music it is an English horn, or the deep notes of woodwind instruments (e.g. a bassoon).[237]

Commenting on Kandinsky's colour theory in his 1917 lecture on the artist in Zurich, Hugo Ball elaborated:

> Do Kandinsky's paintings also have an objective psychological meaning? Hardly. His colour psychology shows only the sharpness and sensitivity with which he examines colour, it is only a venture with intent to possess the ultimate secret of that "inner necessity," it is a storming of the limits of his art, but in no way does it point to an objective interpretation of his pictures.[238]

Ball's analysis thus refutes Richard W. Sheppard's interpretation of *Der gelbe Klang* which attempts to plot a narrative from a literal reading of Kandinsky's colour theory:

> To summarise, white and blue are the colours of creative, transcendent spirituality. Yellow and red are the colours of natural vitality – unrestrained and restrained. Grey and black are the colours of spiritual emptiness. Brown and green are the colours of matter-of-fact human stability. Once Kandinsky's colour symbolism is understood in

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[237] Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M.T.H. Sadler (London: Dover Editions, 1977), 38-41.
[238] Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, trans. Raimes, 232.

> this way, *Der gelbe Klang* becomes a dramatic debate about the nature of reality and the place of man within that reality…'[239]

Rather, Ball's analysis points to the function of the associative dynamic at play in Kandinsky's multimedia work: rather than presenting an objective or scientific truth about the relationship between colour and sound, Kandinsky instead exemplified the structure of perception – active, and striving to synthesise – that he hoped to provoke in the listening observer.

Alongside Wagner's theories, Kandinsky's essays in the *Blaue Reiter* almanac are the other prevailing frame of reference for his multimedia works. Since only a few of his multimedia works were published and none of them performed in his lifetime, they are easily dismissed as imaginative exercises with little grounding in theatrical practice of the period. While there is an argument for interpreting Kandinsky's multimedia works as thought experiments that did not require a performance, a productive case can be made for their consideration within a wider discourse of German *Kultur* which was present in, but not limited to, experimental theatrical theory and practice at the time. As we will see, the consideration of Kandinsky's stage works alongside developments in experimental German theatre builds a clearer picture of the impetus behind Kandinsky's seemingly anomalous theatrical contributions. The idea of bringing about a renewed, unified German culture gained traction in avant-garde theatrical circles. With its ability to unify a mass audience, performers and many media, theatre was ideally positioned to attend to this programme of cultural regeneration. This context for Kandinsky's output is given credence by his association via Ball with the legacy of Georg Fuchs, the theatre reformer and founder of the Munich Artists' Theatre which opened in 1908. As we will see, alongside the efforts and achievements of Fuchs and others, *Der gelbe Klang*

[239] Richard W. Sheppard, 'Kandinsky's Abstract Drama Der gelbe Klang: An Interpretation', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 11 (1975), 165-176 (170).

as a thought experiment and *Der gelbe Klang* as part of the discourse of *Kultur* are by no means mutually exclusive.

The discourse of *Einfühlung*

The Munich Artists' Theatre has been investigated by Koss in a study that adopts Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* as the theoretical context for a number of subsequent modernist multimedia projects alongside changing models of modern spectatorship.[240] Through the example of the Munich Artists' Theatre and its distinctive relief stage, Koss brings one particular mode of spectatorship to the fore. *Einfühlung*, 'empathy' or more literally 'feeling in to' is identified as a multivalent theory with roots in aesthetics, optics and perceptual psychology that was in circulation in Germany at the time.[241] Defined as an 'embodied response to an image', which includes both the haptic and optic sensory modes, *Einfühlung* pointed towards a specifically artistic mode of perception which would demarcate the territories of art and non-art in an increasingly complicated urban and industrial mediascape.

It was the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand (1847-1921) and his sense of *Einfühlung*, as delineated in his single contribution to theory *The Problem of Form in Fine Arts* (1893), which inspired and justified the shallow relief stage Fuchs introduced in his new theatre. Hildebrand made a case for the perception of an art work as 'temporal, spatial and embodied' via the theoretical dichotomies of a 'distant and near view', 'seeing and scanning' and 'effective and inherent form'.[242] An ideal art work for Hildebrand combined all these pairs.

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[240] Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, 67-94.

[241] The term *Einfühlung* was first used within the discourse of visual experience by the philosopher Robert Vischer in 1873, then adopted variously by the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, psychologist Theodor Lipps and sculptor Adolf Hildebrand, while art historian Wilhelm Worringer and theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht pushed up against and reformulated its definition. For an overview of *Einfühlung* see *Einfühlung: Zu Geschichte Und Gegenwart Eines Ästhetischen Konzepts*, ed. Robin Curtis and Gertrud Koch (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2009) Brill ebook.

[242] Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, 72. See also Adolf Hildebrand, 'The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts', *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893*, ed. Robert Vischer and Harry Francis

Presenting the tension between these dichotomies, Hildebrand considered relief sculpture an exemplary art object better equipped than other visual media, painting and freestanding sculpture in particular, to powerfully stimulate the observer's visual faculties. The relief's simultaneous combination of two and three-dimensionality compelled the observer to exercise their imagination and spatial sense in order to transform it into the whole themselves, fusing a static view to take in the distant flatness, with a kinetic vision to scan the three-dimensional nearer surface. Hildebrand believed this process elicited a remarkably intense aesthetic response of both creative thought and spatial awareness. In this way, the role of the artist and that of the observer blended and artistic perception emerged as essentially active, against a less concerted and therefore more passive form of non-artistic vision. Hildebrand's neo-Kantian terms here resemble those of Crary's new observer of the nineteenth century. Though the Neo-Kantians assumed a sovereign subject, and Crary is concerned with a body rather than a subject, both positions stress the active production of experience within, rather than outside, the observer.

Georg Fuchs and the Munich Artists' Theatre

The discourse of artistic and non-artistic vision loomed large in 1908 when the Munich Artists' Theatre, designed by Max Littman under the guidance of Fuchs, was erected on the site of the *Ausstellung München*, an expansive summer exhibition of art, science and industry organised by the city to mark its 750th anniversary and to stimulate tourism.[243] Fuchs transparently borrowed the theatre's shallow stage from Hildebrand's model of sculptural relief, though its appearance was not dissimilar from the film theatres of the day (figs. 26 and

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Mallgrave, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave, Eleftherios Ikonomou and Heinrich Wölfflin (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 227-280.

[243] The following description draws upon Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, 139-184; Jelavich, *Munich and Theatrical Modernism* ,186-234; and Douglas Klahr, 'Munich as Kunststadt, 1900 – 1937: Art, Architecture, and Civic Identity', *Oxford Art Journal*, 34 (2011), 179-201.

27).[244] The theatre also appropriated Wagner's covered orchestral pit as well as its approach to sightlines which aimed to give all spectators an equal view through raked seating and an amphitheatre format. What is more, the depthless stage collapsed the distance between the performers and audience and presented a visual dissonance between its planar scene and three-dimensional performers. The failed performance of *Der gelbe Klang* and *Violett* at the Munich Artists' Theatre, which Ball informs us were thwarted by 'finances and the management of the exhibition',[245] puts the multimedia project of Fuchs and that of Kandinsky into dialogue with one another while raising speculative questions about the feasibility of their presentation via the theatre's technical means.

Koss has framed Kandinsky and his partner Gabriele Münter's painterly abstraction in terms of another voice in the discourse of *Einfühlung*, that of Wilhelm Worringer expressed in *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (or *Abstraction and Empathy*) of 1907.[246] However, through the Munich Artists' Theatre, the examples of the theorist-practitioners Hildebrand and Kandinsky

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[244] Fuchs' engagement with Hildebrand was more than a quiet appropriation of ideas, however. Wiltrud H. Steinacker has described how the two not only shared a theoretical exchange but that Fuchs actually invited Hildebrand to contribute to the theatre at a practical organisational level. Hildebrand meanwhile wrote an article for the fortnightly publication *Der Kunstwart* (*The Culture Warden*) in 1907 concerning the synergy between fine art and theatre; Hildebrand concluded that the fundamental difference between the visual art and theatre was one of spectatorship and, reflecting Fuchs' dictum, claimed that the art of theatre must leave space for the observer's imagination. W. H. Steinacker, 'Georg Fuchs and the concept of the relief stage' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 1995), 83-84.

[245] Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 9.

[246] Koss cites Münter's acknowledgement of her own borrowings from Worringer, and argues that Kandinsky's painting *Composition IV* demonstrates Worringer's sense of abstraction as it demands the viewer's energy to be deciphered as representational. Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, 93-94. Like Koss, Hilton Kramer has emphasised the energetic reception of Worringer's theories among Kandinsky's *Blaue Reiter* group. 'Introduction', Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (1908), trans. Michael Bullock (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), vii-xiv (vii). A letter from Franz Marc to Kandinsky in February 1912 attests to this: 'I am just reading Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy*, a good mind, whom we need very much. Marvellously disciplined thinking, concise and cool, extremely cool'. Lankheit, 'A History', 30. However, Magdalena Bushart has revised the persistent assumption of Worringer's publications as 'programmatic documents' of Expressionism. Relativising any causal relationship between the Expressionists and Worringer, Bushart instead positions Worringer's thought alongside that of Alois Riegl and the empathy theorist Theodor Lipps. Bushart also highlights Worringer's respect for Adolf von Hildebrand, and considers his title *Form Problems in the Gothic* a homage to Hildebrand's *The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts*. 'Changing Times, Changing Styles: Wilhelm Worringer and the Art of His Epoch', *Invisible Cathedrals: the Expressionist Art History of Wilhelm Worringer,* trans. and ed. Neil H. Donahue (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press) 69-85.

are mutually enlightening at both the level of Kandinsky's paintings as well as his theatrical works. Hildebrand used the monochromatic relief to explain an enhanced, embodied mode of perception via the tension between flatness and depth which required both a static and a moving eye; Kandinsky found in the contrasts of 'a palette laid out with colours' a psychological effect 'calling forth a vibration from the soul'.[247] Hildebrand's theory also offers a monomedial pattern for Kandinsky's multimedial one. The tensions in the dichotomies that Hildebrand found latent in the relief sculpture are comparable to those Kandinsky outlined in 'On Stage Composition' and *Der gelbe Klang,* whereby 'sound, colour and word' simultaneously follow separate, dissonant even diametrically opposed paths which also induce a powerful and active state in the listening observer. As Hildebrand's relief, so Kandinsky's multimedia mobilises different kinds of vision via scenery, lighting and performers, but also significantly, combines different kinds vision with auditory perception and therefore expands the terms of Hildebrand's discourse. *Der gelbe Klang*'s medial-perceptual situation exemplifies Crary's discussion of the nineteenth century law of specific nerve energies, where stimuli of very different kinds only achieved their effect when synthesised by the observer.[248] Kandinsky follows the logic of specific nerve energies by exploiting the arbitrariness of the kinds of stimuli in the search for a specific effect in the spectator, one that is not just the sum of the individual parts.

Fuchs' relief stage was intended to subvert Munich's predominantly naturalistic theatre scene by compressing any realistic sense of space and accentuating the performers' stylised movements against its stark, flat background.[249] An image from his production of Aristophanes' *The Birds* (1908) conveys these effects and provides some insight into Ball's

[247] As outlined in Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 23-24.
[248] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 88-90.
[249] Jelavich, 196.

possible vision for *Der gelbe Klang* (fig. 28). Fuchs' seven performers sport unwieldy costumes, padded bird suits with wings and face-covering headpieces which, despite the black and white photo, seem patterned and brightly coloured. Their tight-clad legs are the only visible part of their body and they resemble puppets. The stage is composed of a raised platform, the far side of which is taken up by a huge rock with a few smaller ones flanking it. Positioned on steps or perched on the rocks, the performers use the available levels and are spaced evenly across the width of the stage. The backdrop is totally blank. Fuchs' pared-down scene could be easily repurposed to produce Kandinsky's *Der gelbe Klang*; the latter's 'broad green hill' at the rear of the stage and 'two large red-brown rocks, one pointed, the other round', are an almost identical layout, while the costumes of 'Five Giants, Vague Creatures, People in Flowing Robes, People in Tights' require the same exaggerated three-dimensional construction of Fuchs' birds and emphasise the performers' legs, that locus of physical movement. In *Der gelbe Klang* and *Violett*, a neutral-coloured backcloth is implied as a surface upon which to project shape-shifting sequences of coloured light. Indeed, the Munich Artists' Theatre was well-equipped with electric lighting, which Fuchs applied to his non-naturalistic stage pictures to create expressive effects which he hoped could activate the audience's imaginations.[250]

Fuchs' mises-en-scène were successful in so far as they were recognised for their striking appearances. The theatre historian Mordecai Gorelik recounted that the scenery in Fuchs' 1908 presentation of Goethe's *Faust* was 'not so much scenery as a kaleidoscope made up of simple prisms'.[251] Gorelik's description of kaleidoscopic scenery summons the terms of the Opéra's nineteenth-century reception, which used the popular optical device as a referent for a quickly

[250] Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, 160.
[251] Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, 159 and 161.

changing sequence of sensations and perceptions.[252] *Faust* also incorporated mime and dance, those more ambiguous modes of representation which were mainstays of French grand opera.[253] Thus scenery and lighting transformed rapidly and movement and gesture were separated from text to offer expressive, less determinate action. The listening observer had to synthesise the elements themselves, an active process that required a heightened awareness of all media at play. Fuchs' economical sets and application of light were widely praised, though audiences were not convinced by his shallow stage. The theatre director Otto Falckenberg described the stage as the misapplication of theory to practice:

> Although we recognise the use of light as a positive result of the new theatre that will bear fruit in the future, the relief-stage has shown itself to be untenable in practice, the mistaken result of false presupposition. The display of any great mass of people demands an unrestricted freedom of movement also toward the *depth* of the stage.[254]

In spite of his theories, production photographs and reviews, the performances Fuchs actually produced pale in comparison to Kandinsky's proposed innovations. Part of Fuchs' strategy for 'retheatricalising the theatre' was to release it from its subservience to literature,[255] which was consistent in theory with Kandinsky's desire to erase the 'external action (= plot)'.[256] However, Fuchs' actual progress to this end, and certainly by Kandinsky's standards, was rather half-hearted since he was not prepared to abandon drama. Though he spurned 'all products of modern naturalist literature, the comedy of manners, bourgeois comedy, farce, conventional opera, historical drama, and so forth', Fuchs remained committed to adapting

[252] Isouard's *Aladin* of 1822, which opened the Opéra's Salle le Peletier and presented its first production in gas light, was similarly described in these terms.
[253] As we saw earlier in the chapter, mute gesture is a mode of communication especially geared towards multiplicities of meaning. Brooks, 72.
[254] Jelavich, 206.
[255] Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, 149.
[256] Kandinsky, 'On Stage Composition', 201.

classic dramatic texts, those of Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Hans Sachs, Goethe and Schiller. While Fuchs programmed these plays on purely formal grounds, for their ability to generate motion and contrast, they abandoned neither plot, dialogue nor the logical application of language as exemplified by *Der gelbe Klang*.

Fuchs was by no means the only practitioner to look to discussions of *Einfühlung* in his reform of German theatre. The efforts of his associate Peter Behrens at the Darmstadt artists' colony, and those of Adolphe Appia, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze and Heinrich Tessenow at Hellerau garden city, also powerfully engaged with its theories. These projects in Munich, Darmstadt and Hellerau, however, reposition *Einfühlung* into a broader social and economic frame of reference: the idea of a renewed German Culture. In the years preceding World War I, Germany's delayed process of industrialisation took place rapidly and comprehensively, more so than in its European counterparts. Frederic J. Schwartz has elucidated how this situation precipitated a number of theoretical positions, some of which identified culture as particularly threatened by these changes which in turn stimulated a discourse of *Kultur*.[257] Since mass production had distanced the consumer from the site of production, Culture needed to distinguish itself against this as an area of non-alienated experience. Threatened by the 'presumed loss of a common spirit, the alienation and isolation of the individual, the fragmentary character of modern life',[258] the idea of a unified culture as a means of attaining an existence free from alienation gained traction and was articulated in the tenets of the *Deutscher Werkbund*, who saw the renewal of the applied arts and architecture as a means of

[257] Frederic J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 14. Schwartz has identified German Romanticism as the pre-existing body of thought from which these thinkers drew with its advocacy of a 'unified and transcendent' kind of aesthetic creation. Schwartz, *The Werkbund*, 13-14. These ideas can also be situated more broadly into the *Lebensreform* or life-reform movements active in Germany and Switzerland from the mid-nineteenth century which similarly sought to counteract the waves of modernisation and materialism that swept the region, promoting instead a proximity to nature and spiritual life in which trends like theosophy and the garden city movement can be placed.
[258] Schwartz, *The Werkbund*, 15.

achieving this end.[259] The communities of Darmstadt and Hellerau were both closely associated with the *Werkbund*. The association's founding members in 1907 included key protagonists from Darmstadt: Joseph Maria Olbrich and Peter Behrens. Meanwhile, Hellerau, which proceeded the *Werkbund*, enlisted a number of agents who would go on to join the *Werkbund*, including Tessenow, Hermann Muthesius, Richard Riemerschmid and Bruno Paul.

Peter Behrens' *Kultursymbol*

The theatrical projects of Darmstadt and Hellerau, which both sought to place the theatre at the centre of its community as the physical and metaphorical meeting point of art and life, have much to add to Kandinsky's theoretical and theatrical context and help distinguish his specific contributions to multimedia performance.[260] Theatre was an intuitive locus in the search for a unified culture since the instance of performance, one of mass spectatorship, already laid the ground for the collapsing of the space between consumer and site of production, or audience and theatrical agents. The Darmstadt artists' colony was founded in 1899 by Ernst Ludwig, Grand Duke of Hessen, who hoped to establish an epicentre of this new German Culture that sought to unify art and life through a community of modern living.[261] Behrens was among a number of architects and artists invited to Darmstadt in 1899 who were given the initial project of designing, constructing and decorating their own houses in the Mathildenhöhe park on the outskirts of the city.[262] Darmstadt was both a community as

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[259] Schwartz puts this succinctly: 'The *Werkbund*'s attempt at the "reconquest" of cultural harmony through the spiritualisation of the commodity. For in seeking to exploit capitalism's ability to produce and distribute a certain kind of sign, the members of the *Werkbund* also brought Culture into the realm of mass consumption; they too had discovered the seemingly paradoxical fact that the search for Culture under capitalism led straight to the marketplace.' Schwartz, *The Werkbund*, 73. This paradox is equally visible in opera production under capitalism beginning in Paris in the nineteenth century.

[260] Their activities would have been known to Kandinsky, who moved to Germany from Russia in 1896 to study painting at the Munich Academy with Franz von Stuck. Hajo Düchting, *Wassily Kandinsky, 1866–1944: A Revolution in Painting* (Cologne: Taschen, 2000), 94.

[261] Stanford Anderson considers the notion of culture particular to the movements of *Secessionsstil* and *Jugendstil*: 'It was this concerted, "unseasonable" desire not just to grasp life, but through doing so to create a new *Kultur* – a totally integrated culture as one imagined it to have been exemplified in ancient Greece – that set the *Secessionsstil* and what I would term the "idealist faction" of *Jugendstil* apart from contemporary developments elsewhere.' Stanford Anderson, 'Peter Behrens's Highest Kultursymbol, The Theater' *Perspecta*, 26 (1990), 103-134 (109).

[262] Anderson, 'Peter Behrens's Highest Kultursymbol', 110.

well as an exhibition of ideal living in a situation of 'life completely formed by art'.[263] Its first exhibition in 1901 was entitled 'a "Document of German Art"' and displayed 'the unity of art and life, artist and artisan, house and décor' (fig. 29).[264] Soon after his arrival, Behrens developed his architectural and theatrical aspirations alongside Fuchs, who had been invited in his capacity as a writer in 1898 to edit *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, a new publication concerning the applied arts that was associated with the colony.[265]

In essays and a single unrealised architectural design, Behrens theorised an ideal theatrical space and scenography to unify life and art through the ceremony of theatre (fig. 30). Like Fuchs' Munich Artists' Theatre after it, Behrens' plan was characterised by an amphitheatre layout with raked rows of seats, good sightlines across the auditorium and a wide and shallow stage with backcloths provided by tapestries. A series of marble steps led from the auditorium to the forestage and thus emphasised the already close proximity between performers and audience. As he phrased it in his 1900 essay *Feste des Lebens und der Kunst: Eine Betrachtung des Theaters als höchstes Kultursymbol (*'Festivals of life and art: a consideration of the theatre as the highest cultural symbol'*)* the wide, flat stage was intended to cause a relief-like composition of performers for Behrens believed: 'The relief is the most characteristic expression of line, of line in motion, of motion which is everything in drama'.[266]

Like Fuchs, Behrens grounded his relief stage in Hildebrand's conception of the relief as an

[263] Anderson, 'Peter Behrens's Highest Kultursymbol', 115.
[264] According to Schwartz, the Darmstadt Artists' Colony marked an important point in the transition from aestheticism to the applied arts movements since the practical implementation of Gesamtkunstwerk stretched as far as architecture and the creation of everyday objects. Schwartz, *The Werkbund*, 172.
[265] Jelavich, 189.
[266] Peter Behrens, *Feste des Lebens und der Kunst: Eine Betrachtung des Theaters als höchstes Kultursymbol* (Leipzig: Diederichs, 1900), 19.

ideal art work that mobilised the optic and haptic kinds of vision that elicited *Einfühlung* in the observer.[267] Behrens rejected historical and naturalistic scenery in favour of the timeless kinds of settings adopted by Kandinsky in *Der gelbe Klang*; he also outlined a performance style that matched Kandinsky's in its expressive rather than narratively-mimetic language of movement which he described thus:

> His movements should be rhythmic, like the enunciation of his verses. His movements should themselves be a poetry of form. He will be a model of dance, of a dance that we hardly know as a fine art: as an expression of the soul through the rhythm of the limb.[268]

Appia, Dalcroze, Tessenow and Salzmann's *Orfeo*

Behrens' theatrical plan had a further resonance in another utopian settlement that also sought to bring modern living and artistic practice together through theatre; indeed, Behrens had originally been put forward to design its performance space. Hellerau garden city outside Dresden was conceived in 1906 by *Deutsche Werkstätten* furniture factory owner Karl Schmidt and Wolf Dohrn, a former student of Lipps and co-founder of the *Werkbund*, as an egalitarian community for factory workers with the goal of combining art and labour with a universal education.[269] The ethos behind Hellerau was to provide a corrective to 'arrhythmia', a phenomenon observed in 1896 by German economist Karl Bücher in his *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (*Labour and Rhythm*). Bücher maintained that ancient craftspeople enjoyed a more harmonious relationship between their songs, chants and physical movements compared to the contemporary worker, whose harmony was frustrated by the unnatural, mechanical rhythm of industrial equipment. As such, Bücher promoted the reclamation of the historic model to

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[267] Anderson, 'Peter Behrens's Highest Kultursymbol', 122.
[268] Jelavich, 190.
[269] K. J. G. Bremner, 'Total Theatre Re-Envisioned: The Means and Ends of Appia, Kandinsky and Wagner' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008), 50.

bring workers back into harmony through art and work. The founders of Hellerau were persuaded by Bücher's argument and, in 1909, requested that the music theorist, pedagogue and inventor of eurhythmics, Jacques Dalcroze, relocate his Institute for Rhythmic Education, from Geneva to their garden city with the promise of rehearsal and performance space for his practice.[270] In an attempt to combine artisanal and mass production methods at Hellerau, the relationship between rhythmic movement and work would be unified through Dalcroze's technique.

The *Festspielhaus* at Hellerau was in the end designed by Heinrich Tessenow with the consultation of the theatre theorist and designer Adolphe Appia.[271] It was completed in 1912 to present the community's productions devised at Dalcroze's school.[272] Appia and Dalcroze first met in 1906 when the former sought out the latter in Geneva to observe his pedagogical technique of eurhythmics. Dalcroze created eurhythmics as a means of teaching music with movement, having concluded that a multisensory approach to music instruction was more effective than teaching by purely auditory means (fig. 31). Appia described the genesis of Dalcroze's method in 1911 thus:

> …he asked students during the *solfeggio* [music theory] lessons to beat time, because he sensed the advantage of a movement that would somehow provide direct physical contact with the music. In the majority of them such gestures engendered a feeling of harmony and even of beauty, and did not remain merely a technical aid. As a teacher-artist, Dalcroze observed that this discipline caused his pupils' bodies to lose some of

[270] Ross Anderson, 'The Appian Way', *AA Files*, 75 (2017), 163-182 (170).
[271] Behrens had just finished his AEG Turbine Hall project in Berlin, however the condensed timeframe for the Hellerau project made Tessenow a more favourable choice. Gerald Adler, 'The German Reform Theatre: Heinrich Tessenow and Eurhythmic Performance Space at Dresden-Hellerau', *Setting the Scene: Perspectives on Twentieth-Century Theatre Architecture*, ed. Alistair Fair (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 35-59 (39). A detailed account of Tessenow's architectural designs can be found in Adler's chapter.
[272] The *Festspielhaus* building consisted of a main theatre, but also rehearsal rooms, changing facilities, and spaces for rhythmic exercises. Ross Anderson, 'The Appian Way', 170.

> their passivity, as if these were taking part in the gestures of the hands and thereby allowing the musical rhythm to permeate them.[273]

It is remarkable that Appia expressed the effects of musical movement in terms of the participant's loss of passivity which, put another way, amounted to their attainment of an active perceptual state, that condition of *Einfühlung*. This time *Einfühlung* was not provoked in the artist or audience as in Hildebrand's terms, but in the mediator between the two. Appia was quick to identify the potential of eurhythmics not only for performers but for spectators too:

> Up to now, only quiet attention has been required of the audience. To encourage this, comfortable seats have been provided in semi-darkness, to encourage a state of total passivity – evidently the proper attitude for spectators… *Eurhythmics will overturn this passivity!*[274]

As a pedagogical tool, eurhythmics could create Appia and Dalcroze's ideal audience, primed for performances through an active state of spectatorship.

A detailed explanation offered by Dalcroze in 1914 gives an impression of eurhythmics as a more fully-developed method:

> Note duration is expressed by the forward movement of the feet and the body. A quarter note, the length of an average step forward, forms the unit. Eighth notes are stepped rapidly; half the length of the quarter note, and sixteenth notes are so short that they become light running steps.[275]

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[273] Adolphe Appia, 'The Origin and Beginnings of Eurhythmics' (1911), *Adolphe Appia: Texts on Theatre*, ed. Richard C Beacham (London: Routledge, 1993), 84.
[274] Richard C. Beacham, *Adolphe Appia: Artist and Visionary of the Modern Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1994), 93.
[275] Ross Anderson, 'The Appian Way', 176.

As such, Dalcroze created a language of movement through a series of exercises using feet, but also hands and other body parts to engage the student physically in the nuances of a musical score. Here, Hildebrand's *Einfühlung* makes a striking reappearance, however not as a haptic and optical kind of vision, but a kinetic and sonic sense of audition. Dalcroze's precise combinations of music and movement find a counterpart in *Der gelbe Klang*'s similarly specific pairings of colour and sound: Dalcroze's 'sixteenth notes are so short that they become light running steps' and Kandinsky's 'light blue is like a flute'. Both pursue and invite the formation of strong and vivid associations.[276] Indeed, Kandinsky's English translator M.T.H. Sadler, also known as Michael Sadleir and met the artist in Munich before the First World War, wrote positively about Hellerau's agents and even compared Dalcroze's eurhythmics to Kandinsky's abstract paintings; from this we can deduce that the experiments at Hellerau were known to Kandinsky despite the fact he was not part of the *Werkbund* network.[277]

Dalcroze's direct connection of music to movement appealed to Appia, whose career had been preoccupied with reinvigorating the staging of Wagner's music dramas, mostly in theory but occasionally in practice.[278] Through his engagement with Wagner's oeuvre he developed an uncompromising position towards the media of opera: their organisation must be commanded by the music alone.[279] Mise-en-scène for Appia was intrinsic to the music

[276] Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 38.
[277] Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Architecture and Embodiment: The Implications of the New Sciences and Humanities for Design* (London: Routledge, 2013), 129.
[278] Through work as a volunteer under Hugh Bähr, chief electrician at the theatres in Dresden and Bayreuth in the 1880s, Appia gained a practical knowledge of theatrical lighting just as gaslight was gradually being replaced by electric light. This galvanised the young theatre theorist and designer to reimagine the mise-en-scène for Wagner's operas though these mostly existed in theory rather than practice and were presented in *Notes sur la mise en scène de l'Anneau du Nibelung* (1891) with thirty designs and later *Music and the Art of Theatre* (1899) in which the first edition included eighteen designs. Actual productions of Appia's actual mises-en-scène were realised only a few times: *Tristan und Isolde* at La Scala in Milan in 1923 and *Rheingold* in 1924 and *Walküre* in 1925 at the Basel Stadttheater. Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, 257 and 261.
[279] Appia, 'Music and the Art of the Theatre' (1899), *Adolphe Appia: Texts on Theatre*, 38.

itself and he deemed any extra-scenic descriptions redundant:

> The musical score is the sole interpreter for the director; whatever Wagner has added to it is irrelevant... his manuscript contains by definition the theatrical form, its projection in space; therefore any additional remarks on his part are superfluous, even contradictory to the aesthetic truth of an artistic work. Wagner's scenic descriptions have no organic relationship with his poetic-musical text.[280]

At stake for Appia was the process of mediation. In order for mise-en-scène to become a fully-integrated part of the music drama and to function as an expressive element, it needed to be 'derived directly from the dramatic work's original conception, and not passing again through the will of the dramatist'.[281]

Appia's scenic vision was distinctive in its economic adoption of minimalist three-dimensional set elements and expressive use of light; indeed, he deemed these media superior to scenic painting, the traditional visual medium of the stage. As we have seen, an integrated use of light and three-dimensional set elements had been pioneered some decades before Appia at the Paris Opéra, however the Opéra neither embraced such a spare aesthetic nor did away with scenic painting altogether. Behind the scenographic shifts at the Opéra and those proposed by Appia was the availability of new lighting technology: stronger, dimmable gas light in Paris of the 1820s and a whiter, brighter electric light in Germany of the 1880s and 90s.[282] As Appia wrote in 1902:

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[280] Appia, 'Theatrical Experiences and Personal Investigations' (1921), *Adolphe Appia: Essays and Scenarios and Designs* ed. Walter Volbach and Richard Beacham (London: UMI Research Press, 1989), 58-59.
[281] Appia, 'Music and the Art of the Theatre', 30.
[282] The Savoy Theatre in London was the first institution to install an electric lighting system in 1881 and was followed swiftly in 1882 by the theatre in the Austrian city of Brünn as well as the Residenztheater in Munich. The same year, Munich hosted a great electrical exhibition in which a small theatre was constructed with a total electric lighting provision of no less than 400 Edison lamps. In contrast, it was not until 1886 that electric lighting was installed on stage at the Paris Opéra. The high speed of German innovation meant that by the 1890s, Germany was the leader in lighting methods and equipment which laid the technical ground for the experiments of Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Craig and Max Reinhardt among others. Bergman, 287-288, p. 291 and 292.

> Our current stage setting is entirely the slave of painting (scenic painting), which pretends to produce for us an illusion of reality. But this illusion is itself an illusion, because the presence of the actor contradicts it. In fact, the principle of illusion produced by paintings on vertical flats, and the illusion produced but the three-dimensional and living body of the actor, are entirely contradictory. Developing the effects of these two illusions in *isolation*, as is done on our stages, cannot achieve an integrated and artistic production.[283]

In Appia's opinion, the attempt to achieve three-dimensionality via scenic painting combined with the actual three-dimensionality of the performers lacked unity. This position represents a divergence from Behrens and Fuchs who, via Hildebrand, believed that the contrasts embodied by the relief elicited an ideal unity in the observer.

Appia was determined to distance himself from an explicit, overdetermined kind of mise-en-scène but not via a juxtaposition of flat scenery and exaggeratedly three-dimensional performers. Following his conviction in the superior position of music, Appia considered the less illustrative media of light and space to be the preferable means of mise-en-scène:

> Lighting and spatial arrangement are therefore more expressive than painting, and lighting, apart from its obvious role of basic illumination, is the most expressive. This is because it is subject to few conventions, is unobtrusive, and is able therefore to communicate external life in its most expressive form.[284]

The time-based quality of music and the temporal-spatial movement of light was for Appia an optimum expressive combination: 'The length and sequence of the dramatic text on its own

[283] Appia, 'Ideas on a Reform of Our Mise en Scène' (1902), *Adolphe Appia: Texts on Theatre*, 59.
[284] Appia, 'Music and the Art of the Theatre', 33.

are not sufficient to determine how it should be staged. Music, by contrast, governs both the time duration and the continuity of the drama'.[285]

Appia's theory of staging had a broad affinity with the projects of Behrens, Fuchs and Kandinsky in so far as it rejected scenic naturalism and considered the new potentialities of electric light as central to mise-en-scène. The use of lighting as an active medium, rather than one of passive illumination in the service of the physical set, is a continuity across their projects. However, Appia's conception of an ideal combination of operatic media is remarkably at odds with that of Kandinsky: music defined the parameters of the staging whereas Kandinsky's theory and compositions called for the separate evolution of music, staging and text. Not surprisingly for a follower of Wagner, Appia had replicated a Wagnerian parallelism of mise-en-scène and music which Kandinsky had identified in 'On Stage Composition' and strove to avoid. Instead, *Der gelbe Klang* and *Violett* exemplified an alternative approach where a non-narrative scenario was conceived separately from the musical score and by a different agent. If anything, Kandinsky's model errs towards a visually-driven organisation of media more than anything else, not least because the visual scenario was conceived first.

As with scenery, Appia was also invested in the performer's embodiment of the music as opposed to producing naturalistic gestures derived from a literary text. Dalcroze's eurhythmics offered a structured gestural language with which to achieve this; the music could directly generate movement without having to mediate narrative or text:

> Just as the performer of the spoken drama has to achieve versatility required for recreating those aspects which he has learned from his experience of everyday life, so

[285] Appia, 'Music and the Art of the Theatre', 31.

> the performer of the word-tone drama has to achieve a similar versatility in order to follow the precise and direct instructions given him by the life encompassed by the score. We see now on stage music can be carried into gestures and actions of the characters.[286]

Significant here is the fact that Appia was concerned with staging existing operas written by other agents rather than creating or collaborating on a piece of new writing himself. As such, his raw material of text and music - often the music-dramas of poet-composer Wagner - had already been fused by the poet-composer who conceived of his libretti or 'poems' alongside his music composition. In short, Appia's starting point was music which already relied upon and mostly paralleled the text. If Appia's staging was to follow the music, then it remained ultimately beholden to the drama.

The achievements of Appia and Dalcroze are best measured through their much lauded but short-lived collaborations at Hellerau, which culminated in two public festivals in 1912 and 1913 before World War I suspended their collaboration.[287] Tessenow's *Festspielhaus* was completed in 1912 and encapsulated a number of significant architectural changes to theatrical space. Like Behrens' planned theatre, Tessenow's realised one sought to merge the performance and audience in a unified space by eliminating the traditional proscenium arch. Rather than replicating the amphitheatre of Behrens' unrealised Darmstadt plan, Tessenow's space was a sparer box-like design. Rejecting the vertical movement of painted scenery that was raised and lowered from a high flytower, Tessenow and Appia favoured a more horizontal approach that embraced a flattened appearance and abandoned the illusion of deeper perspectives favoured in the nineteenth century.

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[286] Appia, 'Music and the Art of the Theatre', 31-32.

[287] The following discussion is based upon Beacham, *Adolphe Appia: Artist and Visionary of the Modern Theatre*, 89-114.

Specific to the innovations at Hellerau and their critical acclaim was not only the rigour of Dalcroze's method, but also the collaboration of a specialised lighting designer, the painter and associate of Kandinsky's, Alexander von Salzmann. Salzmann took on the practical challenge of implementing Appia's theories and designed a system of diffused lighting and spotlights to give Appia the technical flexibility his vision demanded. Salzmann populated the walls and ceiling of the stage and auditorium with 7, 000 light sources which and were positioned behind diaphanous white linen primed with cedar oil, a considerable departure from the darkness of Bayreuth. Appia added a network of mobile spotlights to the ceiling of the auditorium. Here, nuanced lighting could be manipulated from a central console or 'light organ' which required only a single agent to oversee it. As Salzmann described the design: 'instead of a lighted space, we have light-producing space. Light is conveyed through the space itself, and the linking of visible light sources is done away with'. Like the covered pit at Wagner's Bayreuth, the instruments of productivity, the light sources, were hidden.

Christoph Willibald Gluck's opera *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762) was placed at the centre of the festivals of 1912 and 1913, alongside demonstrations of eurhythmics as well as exhibitions of industrial and artisanal objects fabricated at the Hellerau community. Like Fuchs and Behrens before them, Appia and Dalcroze opted for a classical drama that offered topoi and sequences already familiar to a general audience and certainly known to an operatic one.[288] In 1912 the second act of *Orfeo* was staged as part of a mixed programme of eurhythmics and then in 1913 it returned as a full-length work. Appia's advocacy of three-dimensional sets was represented in *Orfeo* by a striking series of staircases: one running from left to right across the

[288] The Orpheus myth is something of a trope in operatic compositions: Monteverdi set the tale in 1607 as did Offenbach in 1858. However, Gluck's specific opera had made an impression on later German operas which drew from its plot, a rescue in which the hero or heroine must hide or restrain their emotions, and is traceable in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, and Wagner's *Das Rheingold*.

width of the upstage space, then a central series of shallow steps leading to the downstage space (fig. 32). This integration of nondescript levels and steps rather than illusionistic scenery is not unlike the attempt of Fuchs in his production of Aristophanes' *The Birds* in 1908. Steps and platforms provided a dynamic space in which to stage expressive contrasts and varied pictures without teetering into overdetermined historical or geographical detail. Appia and Dalcroze's staging of the descent of Orpheus into the Underworld elicited a powerful response from the audience. Orpheus entered from the top of the upstage staircase, brightly illuminated by a focussed light and descended across the stage into darkness where he encountered the Furies bathed in an otherworldly blue light. Synchronised by Dalcroze to the peaks and troughs of the musical score, the Furies were positioned on Appia's various scenic levels and moved frenetically, their writhing black tight-clad limbs suggesting rather than embodying grotesque creatures (fig. 33). Tempered by Orpheus' playing, the Furies motion slowly relaxed.

The performers' costumes had been a bone of contention between Dalcroze and Appia. The former had preferred Salzmann's idea of more conventional classical Greek outfits, while Appia favoured the uniform black leotards and tunics used by Dalcroze's students for public presentations. At stake was an emphasis on the pedagogical goal of the production, an overt reference to Hellerau's fusion of culture with daily life which also invited the imaginative contribution of the audience. Appia's plan in the end was implemented. The deindividuation and simplification of the performers' attire is a consistent theme in the projects of Behrens, Fuchs, Kandinsky and Appia. For Kandinsky and Behrens, however, the decision was less to do with exposing pedagogy and instead more engaged with activating the audience's inner reflections by refusing external descriptive display. Behrens, who maintained that theatre must return to its roots in dance and mime, called for the 'pure form' of the performer's

movements, which he claimed would be intensified if their costume was white or a single colour.[289] Exposing the pure form of movement was also a priority for Kandinsky, something clearly articulated in his essay 'Tanzkurven: Zu den Tänzen der Palucca' or 'Dance Curves' (1926) where he presented four abstract drawings alongside four photographs of the German dancer Gret Palucca by Charlotte Rudolph (fig. 34).[290] In the accompanying text, Kandinsky draws the viewer's attention not only to Palucca's precision but also her 'simplicity of overall form' and 'gift of large, simple form', which Kandinsky commends as a valuable quality in the work of any artist.[291] Palucca's costume is not unimportant in her achievement of large, simple form: 'the precision carries with it even the folds and corners of drapery'.[292] The contribution of costume in the exposure of basic form elucidates the specifications of *Der gelbe Klang* that include 'People in Flowing Robes' and 'People in Tights' which, like those of Appia's *Orfeo* and Fuchs' *The Birds*, either hugged or hung off the figure with a simplicity that accentuated their posture and movements. At the entrance of the 'People in Coloured Tights' in Picture 5 of *Der gelbe Klang*, Kandinsky strikingly reflects Behrens' single colour dictum: 'Their hair is the same colour as their tights. Their faces likewise. (The people are like puppets)'.[293] The 'People in Coloured Tights' enter embodying different styles of movement. As Dalcroze's eurhythmics involved a systematic association of movement and music, so Kandinsky's established one between movement and colour. In Kandinsky's case, the absence of conventional narrative and its logic was compensated by a non-narrative series of associations internal to the performance which together established its hermetic and relational world in the imagination of the active and absorbed, listening observer.

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[289] Anderson, 'Peter Behrens's Highest Kultursymbol', 123.
[290] Interestingly, Palucca was related to the legacy of Hellerau as a student of Mary Wigman who in turn was a student of Dalcroze. Palucca went on to open the Palucca School of Dance in Dresden and, among her students, was the choreographer and director, Ruth Berghaus, a key protagonist in the tradition of German *Regieoper* or director's opera.
[291] Wassily Kandinsky, 'Dance Curves' (1926), *Wassily Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 520-521.
[292] Kandinsky, 'Dance Curves', 521.
[293] Kandinsky, 'The Yellow Sound', 222.

The 1913 production of *Orfeo* pushed the instrumental use of light still further. Though there are no extant designs from the first act, written descriptions confirm a central platform bordered at the upstage by a dark blue curtain and with steps leading downstage (fig. 35). In a rare representational detail, a funeral urn was positioned on the platform to mark Eurydice's tomb. The Chorus sang from behind the curtains while the dancers were positioned as mourners at either side of the platform. The arrival of the god Amore was created though the appearance of a focussed light and a singer singing form behind the set, a disembodied technique that Kandinsky also adopted in *Der gelbe Klang* with his 'Tenor (backstage)' and 'Chorus (backstage)'. The staging of Orpheus as he took up Amore's challenge of travelling to the Underworld was also fashioned with light: Orpheus moved upstage to an opening in the curtains which emanated a vivid supernatural glow as the downstage dimmed; with arms raised, Orpheus made a distinctive silhouette against the light. Light was again highly effective in the presentation of Orpheus' act three reunion with Eurydice and was enthusiastically received by the audience. The moment of dramatic pathos was not embodied by the performers' physical gestures but was instead implied obliquely with scenic ones: at their reconciliation, brightening light reflected a rising musical intensity as the onstage spirits receded and the curtain closed. Orpheus and Eurydice were left alone in their rapture. While this kind of synchrony of light, movement and music is adopted in *Der gelbe Klang*, a combination of an intensified light with 'lower and darker' music occurs in Picture 3 while the music is required to be 'as expressive as the action on the stage' in Picture 6, the gestures for Kandinsky have an intensity that can stand apart from a narrative basis rather than standing in for it as in the case of Appia and Dalcroze.

While still ultimately beholden to narrative, Appia and Dalcroze were audacious in their treatment of *Orfeo*'s ending. Pushing against the operatic tendency to adapt texts in order to present a happy crowd-pleasing ending, which was especially criticised by Adorno who read the practice as an indication of opera's complicity in the culture industry, Dalcroze and Appia changed Gluck's ending, in which Amore restores Eurydice to life, to something more troubling. Once again, the scenic gestures did the work while the performers' movements remained neutral. In their position in front of the curtain, Orpheus stepped downstage of Eurydice and, as he turned back to her, she disappeared into the fabric of the curtain. Representing something of an anti-adaptation, Dalcroze and Appia played upon the audience's prior knowledge of the opera, only to subvert it at the last.

So what then of *Einfühlung* at Hellerau? Reports of the productions, which were attended by luminaries of the avant-garde such as Segrei Diaghilev, Vaslav Nijinsky and, in 1913, Alfred Roller, were resoundingly positive.[294] The reviews cited in Richard C. Beacham's account of the 1913 *Orfeo* reveal the effect of its idiosyncratic dramaturgy. One critic expressed their experience in terms of a total kind of perception, something which powerfully evokes *Einfühlung* as defined by Hildebrand and interpreted by Kandinsky: '…the seen and the heard became an aural and visual unity which involved one's entire perception'.[295] Another claimed the performance to have been a 'poignant and religious impression which envelopes the spectators… one can affirm that – rare thing – a drama was brought of life and not merely presented to titillate the eyes and ears of an indifferent and uncritical public'.[296] The combination of vocabulary here points to a very particular mode of spectatorship: on the

[294] Diaghilev and Nijinsky visited Hellerau in 1912 and the latter visited again to join Dalcroze's eurhythmic classes. The Ballets Russes eventually invited one of Dalcroze's pupils, Marie Rambert, to join them in Berlin to critique their activities and eventually employed her as a eurhythmics teacher and assistant in rehearsals for *The Rite of Spring*. Beacham, 'Triumph in Hellerau', 99.

[295] Beacham, *Adolphe Appia,* 102.

[296] Beacham, *Adolphe Appia*, 102.

one hand, the experience was 'enveloping' a term suggestive of immersion and often associated with a passive mode of spectatorship in the context of the reception of Wagnerian music drama; but at the same time, the writer is adamant that the performance was not providing mere entertainment to an inattentive and uncritical public. Appia and Dalcroze, like Kandinsky, had come up with a *Einfühlung*-like experience that did not seek to replicate Hildebrand's relief on a theatrical scale but instead mobilised other media, music, movement and lighting technology, to elicit a comparable artistic mode of perception.

In the context of *Einfühlung* and the discourse of German *Kultur*, Kandinsky's multimedia works emerge as neither anomalous footnotes to painterly abstraction nor failed attempts at twentieth-century *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Instead they figure as experiments which push not the idea of a total work of art but rather a total experience of perception to its limits. Though Kandinsky was not directly involved with the utopian programmes which sought to establish a unified German *Kultur*, his output nonetheless engages with the theories, media and modes of spectatorship which shaped their activities. The techniques Kandinsky shared with Fuchs, Behrens and Appia demonstrate the impact of technological media on the opening up of scenic possibilities in theatre. Electric light in particular catalysed the genesis of avant-garde multimedia, and there are yet more important Austro-German experiments beyond the scope of this chapter which attest to its importance.[297] Fuchs, Behrens, Kandinsky and Appia were all invested in the expressive value of mise-en-scène and its perceptual potential, but only Kandinsky attempted to build a perceptual experience from the ground up, at once devising

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[297] Arnold Schoenberg's 1913 'drama with music' *Die glückliche Hand* (*The Lucky Hand*) also places the medium of light at centre stage and creates a non-narrative performance with mimed sequences and remarkable coloured lighting specification. The work was premiered at the Vienna Volksoper in 1924; for details of its conception see Joseph Auner, '"Heart and Brain in Music": The Genesis of Schoenberg's Die glückliche Hand', *Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and the Transformations of Twentieth-Century Culture*, ed. Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 112-130. Schoenberg and Kandinsky shared a correspondence in which they discussed their respective multimedia experiments. *Arnold Schoenberg and Wassily Kandinsky: Letters, Pictures, and Documents*, ed. Jelena Hahl-Koch, trans. John C. Crawford (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1984).

text, music, movement and design. Unlike Fuchs, Behrens, Appia and Dalcroze, Kandinsky sought not to mine existing plays and operas which, for all their efforts to resist scenic illusion, ultimately remained tethered to narrative, set up dramatic expectations and interfered with the perceptual freedom of the listening observer.

Despite Beacham's claim that Dalcroze was inspired to stage *Orfeo* after encountering a 'dreadful' version by Fokine in Russia,[298] Appia and Dalcroze's choice of a Gluck opera was certainly not arbitrary. Gluck's operatic reforms, which emphasised textual clarity, were exemplified in *Orfeo*: convoluted plots and richly ornamented vocal writing were abandoned in favour of a simpler style that included accompanied recitative, where the singer adopts the rhythms and delivery of everyday speech, and a much less decorous vocal line. Appia and Dalcroze's anti-illusionistic scenery and movement not only rested upon a narrative, but one that was musically adapted to render its dialogue as lucidly as possible. Indeed, Gluck's operatic reforms were considered by Adorno, alongside Wagnerian *Sprechgesang*, as works which fought against opera's fundamentally contradictory and tensional nature and 'tried to get around the contradiction, or to alleviate it, and thus to promote the pure, unbroken, undialectical closure of operatic form'.[299] In their experiment, Appia and Dalcroze made a calculation regarding their audience and media: they tempered their stripped down, expressive staging with exceptional textual and narrative clarity. This formula, by Adorno's standards, was a weak one that created 'an all too seamless aesthetic unity, the kind that gloomily flourishes under the name "symbolic"'.[300]

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[298] Dalcroze described the production to Appia in a letter thus: 'Dreadful, dreadful! What settings and what atmosphere – one would think oneself in the Eighteenth Century!'. Beacham, *Adolphe Appia: Artist and Visionary,* 92.
[299] Adorno, 'Bourgeois Opera', 37.
[300] Adorno, 'Bourgeois Opera', 37.

However, the Wagnerian parallelisms of media that were latent in *Orfeo* at Hellerau, and that Kandinsky critiqued in 1912, do not appear to have precluded its powerful reception as well as its critical acclaim. The reviews did recognise the performance as a remarkably intense experience, despite the overridingly clear narrative structure of text and music. As the *Journal de Genève* testified, their staging remained a 'support for the drama':

> The setting for Orpheus at Hellerau with its classical lines and simple colours provides thereby the ideal linear support for the drama, while the simplified aesthetic format complements the body in its rhythm and movements. This architectural abstraction, this absence of all realism, produced an intimate fusion of the setting, drama, and music, which creates a unified impression of spiritual nobility.[301]

In the case of Behrens, who did eventually realise a play, *Diogenes* by Otto Erich Hartleben in 1909 at the Stadtgartenhalle in Hagen, drama was the undoing of his visual achievements. Theodor Lessing's review in *Die Schaubühne* deemed Behrens a visual practitioner who misguidedly considered staging as an end in itself; what he had achieved in his staging came at the expense of the drama.[302] In the case of Kandinsky, with no drama to be sacrificed on the altar of spectacle, such critiques could be bypassed completely. What was to become *Regieoper* or director's opera, a distinctly Austro-German approach to operatic production, was incubated in Germany in the early 1900s before the defined role of the director had been established. While Fuchs, Behrens, Appia and Dalcroze added scenographic tension and nuance to pre-existing works, they still ultimately sought canonic legitimisation and therefore remained bound to institutional, financial and audience imperatives.

[301] Beacham, *Adolphe Appia: Artist and Visionary*, 105.
[302] Stanford Anderson, 'Peter Behrens's Highest Kultursymbol', 128.

That Kandinsky did not participate in institutionalised attempts to unify life and art does not necessarily point to a lack of sympathy with their aims: *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* is nothing if not a critique of rational material values and represents another call for more intuitive spiritual ones under the conditions of an industrialised society. The mystical tone of the essay is often associated with Kandinsky's interest in theosophy, since he referenced the movement explicitly, owned books by Rudolf Steiner and Madame Blavatsky and attended Steiner's lectures in Munich in 1908.[303] The essay also borrows from *Thought-Forms* (1901), a theosophical tract by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater that was translated into German in 1908 and outlined colour associations with ideas and psychological states. The publication also included a number of images which rendered music by Mendelssohn, Gounod and Wagner visually (fig. 36). The text accompanying 'PLATE W. Music of Wagner' reveals the same conviction and detail that Kandinsky expressed in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*:

> A striking feature in this form is the radical difference between the two types of music which occur in it, one producing the angular rocky masses, and the other the rounded billowy clouds which lie between them. Other motifs are shown by the broad bands of blue and rose and green which appear at the base of the bell, and the meandering lines of white and yellow which quiver across them are probably produced by a rippling arpeggio accompaniment.[304]

The discourse of *Einfühlung* provides a context which accommodates the spiritual and scientific tensions in Kandinsky's output, at once recognising the internal, subjective and mental processes of the observer while at the same time striving to find rational ways of measuring them. *Einfühlung* was embraced by psychologists as well as art theorists in the early twentieth century and was regarded a productive line of empirical enquiry. In 1907

[303] Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, '1911-1912', *Wassily Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, 117.
[304] Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1901), 183.

Theodor Lipps called for scientific evidence to qualify the grand theoretical statements on *Einfühlung*. The psychological approach involved experiments which examined observers' experience of, for example, colours and forms and collated the results of their reactions. The outcomes demonstrated not universal aesthetic responses but rather a multiplicity of perceptual experiences between observers and confirmed the individualistic nature of spectatorship.[305] Kandinsky would later attempt this strategy at the Bauhaus, where he produced a colour questionnaire for the students, collecting their feedback on the association of colours with forms to examine the degrees of pleasure and attention they derived from various colours and their combinations.[306] In spite of the scientific facet of the discourse, *Einfühlung* and theosophy were not mutually exclusive. As Besant and Leadbeater claimed:

> It is well for us ever to bear in mind that there is a hidden side to life – that each act and word and thought has its consequences in the unseen world which is always so near to us, and that usually these unseen results are of infinitely greater importance than those which are visible to all upon the physical plane.[307]

Einfühlung as co-opted by Kandinsky and German avant-garde practitioners was nothing if not a 'thought-form', a structure of perception specific, in their case, to artistic experience.

Kandinsky's energetic engagement with stage composition is curious given his lack of impetus to realise his outputs: what might the discourse of *Einfühlung* reveal about this further contradiction in Kandinsky's oeuvre? While he referred to opera as a monumental art form, Kandinsky was not invested in building actual theatrical monuments to his stage works in the way that Behrens, Fuchs, Appia and Wagner were. Theatre for Kandinsky was not the highest *Kultursymbol* that it was for Behrens; instead, its multimedia potential was a means to

[305] Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, 77-78.
[306] Schwartz, *Blind Spots*, 266.
[307] Besant and Leadbeater, 184-185.

an end. The applicability of his treatise on painting *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* to *Der gelbe Klang* demonstrates how his theories were not specific to a medium so much as an intensity of perception. From this point of view, Kandinsky's foray into multimedia was not inconsistent with his painting but rather part of his ongoing aesthetic research into a kind of perception distinct from the experiences of modern life, and which assigned the (listening) observer an active position. If the theosophical tenets of thought-forms maintained that 'unseen results are of infinitely greater importance than those which are visible to all upon the physical plane',[308] then their logical conclusion would be precisely Kandinsky's approach, to craft a total work of perception that relied as far as possible on the imaginary capacity of his listening observer. *Der gelbe Klang*, *Violett* and the others were thus perhaps only ever intended to exist as mind-bending texts.

In his search for a spiritual kind of aesthetic experience separate from the materialism of modernity, Kandinsky was paradoxically directed back to the art form's industrial coming of age. Kandinsky's text-based stage compositions loop counterintuitively back to the Paris Opéra and its grand opera tradition. Though driven by budgetary concerns, Paris raised spectacle to the level of the music and libretto based on a new understanding of the observer and the possibilities of modern technology. Initially more engaged with the creation of new operas collaboratively devised by librettist, composer, designer and *régisseur*, this innovative phase at the Opéra was to become a victim of its own success and, in standardising and reproducing operatic texts, it established a repertory system which ultimately disincentivised new writing and laid the ground for the situation that prevailed among Kandinsky's associates, that of reinterpreting – critically or uncritically – the standard repertoire. Kandinsky's multimedia project held on to the productive achievements of the early days of

[308] Besant and Leadbeater, 184-185.

the Opéra's reforms: untethering opera from drama via visual means, opening up the perceptual possibilities of unexpected media combinations based upon knowledge of the arbitrary relation between the stimulus and sensation, and focussing on the creation of new works.

As a theatrical outsider, Kandinsky envisioned his stage compositions liberated from the kinds of institutional and technical considerations of Fuchs, Behrens, Appia and Dalcroze; his works did not operate within an institutional apparatus and had no particular venue, audience or performance date in mind. Kandinsky's German avant-garde counterparts were more deeply entrenched in their institutional training and structures and therefore more familiar with the slowness, contingency and compromise of the operatic apparatus. The comparison of Kandinsky's multimedia contributions to those of Behrens, Fuchs, Appia and Dalcroze are revealing of this: Kandinsky's vision for theatre, which remains audacious even by twenty-first century standards, was distinctive precisely because it did not emerge from within the apparatus of opera. In the twenty-first century, the potential of operatic outsiders has itself been absorbed into the operatic apparatus and has been mobilised as a commercial cause célèbre: the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma's plan for its 2020 season, for example, included a production of Puccini's *Turandot* directed by the Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei. By comparison, Kandinsky's suggestion is more ambitious still: a paradigm for the creation of new works, not those of the repertory, which recognised the visual as a possible structuring principle in multimedia. Liberated from the operatic apparatus, Kandinsky demonstrated how a visual practitioner could write an opera. As Kandinsky threw down the gauntlet in 1912, his Russian compatriot and former Blue Rider associate, Natalia Goncharova, took it up.

Chapter 2 Part I: Opera in the age of film: the Ballets Russes' *Liturgie*

As established in the previous chapter, rapid technological innovations in the theatre – steel, hydraulics and electric light – furnished the media of opera, its apparatus[309] and its agents, with tools and techniques which altered its modes of production and reception. However, opera was not only touched by inventions from within, it was also reactive to those from without. The development and proliferation of mass technological media, between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, exerted considerable pressure on traditional media and challenged their high-art status as well as their claims to modernity.[310] The question of why opera becomes emphatically visual in the early twentieth century is illuminated, therefore, by investigating its relation to the visual media technology of early silent film, the first public screening of which was given by the Lumière brothers at Paris's Grand Café in 1895.

'Complex, mercurial and energising' are the terms with which Tom Gunning describes cinema's entanglement with other media in this period[311] and live performance is no exception. The impact of early silent film upon other art forms was quickly recognised and provoked shifting positions as critics reckoned with film's rapid evolution. The French-German poet Yvan Goll likened film's pervasive qualities to that of a gas and described it as a

[309] The dramatist of theatre and film, Bertolt Brecht, used the term 'apparatus' to encompass the entire means of cultural production, from mechanical equipment to whole institutions. Roswitha Mueller, 'Learning for a new society: the Lehrstück', *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 101-117 (103).
[310] The invention of media technologies such as the phonograph and telephone occurred in such quick succession that this period is widely described as the 'Second Industrial Revolution'.
[311] Tom Gunning, 'Cinema and the New Spirit in Art within a Culture of Movement', *Picasso, Braque and Early Film in Cubism*, ed. Bernice Rose (New York: Pace Wildenstein, 2007), 17-33 (32).

technological triumph able to supersede older media. [312] Others envisaged film taking a complementary position to theatre. The German art historian Herbert Tannenbaum was convinced that cinema would regenerate the theatre in a symbiotic exchange: since theatre had failed to reach the masses anyway, the cinema could cater to this audience and leave theatre to focus on its cultural purpose.[313] This positive conceptualisation echoes a later position taken up by French film critic André Bazin on the purpose of the photographic image which he deemed liberated painting from realism and enabled it to rediscover its aesthetic independence.[314] Mechanical reproduction could thus free high-art from needing to appeal too broadly or to encompass too many modes of representation. A different take on the positive potential of opera and film is suggested by the critic 'Figaro' (A.P Hatton) who, writing in *Musical Opinion* in 1929, expressed concern over the combination of opera and film, before recognising that opera would have to appropriate filmic technologies 'in order to beat it at its own game', and reported how opera houses abroad used technology to challenge film's dominance.[315] Representing different positions, these critiques concurred on the inevitability of film's challenge to theatre, a position which precipitated even more pragmatic approaches.

The dynamic between theatre and film is identified as a scholarly lacuna by Friedrich Kittler:

> The competitive relationship between photography and painting is well known, but less is known about the relationship between film and theatre. With the exception of a single theatre historian, little light has been shed on how ballet, opera, and theatre – at least since the nineteenth century, but also in innovations like the baroque proscenium

[312] Yvan Goll, 'The Cinedram' (1920), *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907–1933* ed. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer and Michael Cowan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 52-54 (53).
[313] Herbert Tannenbaum 'Cinema and Theatre' (1912), Sabine Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907-1933* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 78-79.
[314] André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', trans. Hugh Gray, *Film Quarterly*, 13 (1960), 9.
[315] Alexandra Wilson, *Opera in the Jazz Age: Cultural Politics in 1920s Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 106.

or "picture frame" stage – evolved from elements that would later constitute cinema.[316]

This chapter addresses how live theatrical performance operated alongside film, a flourishing new form of mass entertainment, in the 1910s. Writing two decades after Kittler, my contribution adds to the literature considering opera in relation to its mass-produced counterpart.[317] Honing Kittler's observation, I suggest ballet and opera, rather than spoken-word theatre, the most productive starting point in an initial comparison with film, since they too negotiated the continuity of a musical accompaniment. The literature on the reverse line of inquiry, opera's appropriation by film, acknowledges this closeness: 'The moving picture had the same ability to paint in broad brushstrokes on a grand canvas as did opera: the essentially "semaphore" nature of operatic acting of the period adapted easily to the "pantomimic" acting required of the early film performers'.[318] Indeed, silent film was rarely silent and tended to be accompanied by music or speech, sometimes prescribed and sometimes improvised, as the technology to synchronise sound and moving image for convincing spoken dialogue had yet to be refined. Just as silent film was not silent, nor was it rendered exclusively in black and white. In fact, most films produced from the late nineteenth century to the First World War were presented with some form of colour.[319] Through techniques adopted from the earlier media of photography and the lantern slide, tinting,

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[316] Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, trans. Anthony Enns (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 22.

[317] Notable contributions are Wilson's *Opera in the Jazz Age* and Bryan Gilliam's 'Stage and Screen: Kurt Weill and Operatic Reform in the 1920s', *Music and performance during the Weimar Republic*, ed. Bryan Gilliam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1-12, which fall a decade after that of the present chapter. More proximate to this study is Marco Ladd's 'Film Music *avant la lettre?* Disentangling Film from Opera in Italy, c.1913', *The Opera Quarterly*, 34 (2018), 29-64, which traces opera in the early feature *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei*, and Jennifer Wild's *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema, 1900-1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015) which does not address opera but illuminates the situation of the visual arts vis-à-vis film in the 1910s.

[318] Paul Fryer, 'Opera', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 489. On film's parasitic dependence on opera, see Marcia J. Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) and *When Opera Meets Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Richard Fawkes, *Opera on Film* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 2000); Paul Fryer, *The Opera Singer and The Silent Film* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2005).

[319] Paolo Cherchi Usai, 'Colour', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 139.

toning, and stencilling – the latter of which was often laboriously carried out by hand on a production line – early film was injected with colour, and the assumption that it was monochromatic has hidden the continuum between the use of colour in fine art media and that of early cinema.[320] It is my contention that while maintaining its difference from the mass medium of film, experimental opera opened itself up to the processes and techniques fundamental to filmmaking: its attention to spectacle, its redefinition of aesthetic unity through montage, the autonomy of its visual, textual and musical components which were no longer assumed to be associated by analogy, a more ad hoc approach to the traditional urtext of the musical score, the dissolution of the single author and the use of time as an instrumental element of production and reception. Experimental opera and ballet became multimedia as their various medial inputs gained a new independence.

To situate this position in theory, I discard modernist notions of the medium as something with a proper area of competence.[321] Complex and unwieldy, opera swallows up the medium and instead operates in the messy tripartite structure of large apparatus, combined media and negotiating agents, which cannot be defined by the logics of medium purity which persist in aesthetics, nor the purely technological reflections advocated in media theory. This 'agents – medium – apparatus' paradigm diverges from both a Brechtian and a Kittlerian sense of the medium. In the case of Bertolt Brecht, whom I am considering principally as a media theorist, the technological, institutional, economic and legal frameworks – what he delineates as the apparatus – are as instrumental in the artistic process as the medium and its agents. Kittler, meanwhile, qualifies a medium only by its ability to disrupt the irreversibility of the flow of time and therefore does not absorb the apparatus or its agents into the equation.[322] The kind of

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[320] Usai, 'Colour', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 141, 139.
[321] In an account that connects Cubism with Dada cinema, Wild articulates a similar need to look beyond medium specificity. Wild, *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema,* 8.
[322] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 44.

paradigm I am drawing here is not only an automated and mechanical one, but also an interpersonal one, involving agents who also register, process and store data. While I identify the interactions of the producing agents as pertinent sources, I do not consider them at the cost of the apparatus or the medium and therefore do not frame their activity in theories of collaborative practice such as 'relational aesthetics' or 'art worlds'.[323] That said, my method seeks to avoid a Kittlerian technological determinism. Subject to the linearity of time, Kittler discounts human agents from his definition of media[324] and so fails to address both the producing agents and the receiving subjects, two groups of agents who will be accounted for in my approach. Ultimately, this framework is representative of my own experiences working as an opera director both within and outside an institutional context, and which have revealed to me the extreme extent to which the medium is shaped by the contingencies of it institutions and agents.

This alternative analysis of opera resembles Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's definition of the medium as 'that which remediates' which acknowledges the shifting, relational position that one medium has with another and throws the idea of medium specificity into question:

> A medium is that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real. A medium in our culture never operates in isolation, because it must enter into relationships of respect and rivalry with other media.[325]

Remediation here encompasses 'techniques, forms, and social significance' which includes the apparatus and agents I also theorise. Bolter and Grusin's definition of the medium as

[323] On 'relational aesthetics' see Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1998); on 'art worlds', Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
[324] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 44.
[325] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT, 2000), 98.

remediation has been elaborated by Andreas Huyssen. In his study of short prose pieces written for the European press, *Miniature Metropolis: Literature in an Age of Photography and Film*, Huyssen has articulated a synergy between mass media and high culture comparable to the one I am suggesting between the Ballets Russes (1909-1929) and film. In the so-called 'metropolitan miniature' Huyssen demonstrates the complex aesthetic responses to new media through the example of a group of writer-theorists.[326] Where Huyssen examines completed works, I consider an incomplete work and the process of its attempted production. Huyssen nuances Bolter and Grusin's terminology with the idea of 'remediation in reverse', where 'an older medium reasserts itself by critically working through what the new medium does and does not do'.[327] Though writing about a literary form, the terms of Huyssen's description are familiar to an art theorist: 'the metropolitan miniature… did not simply adapt itself to the new technologies and emerging mass cultural forms. It rather insisted on the *Eigensinn* (translated as obstinacy, Negt and Kluge) of literature as medium in its "differential specificity" (Sam Weber, Rosalind Krauss) in relation to photography and film'.[328] Following Huyssen, I pursue the idea that the Ballets Russes presented multimedia, opera and ballet productions with medial inputs of increased autonomy, as a means of reasserting live performance's perceived differential specificity from film.

While opera's visual turn could be described as an affirmation of Wagnerian music drama and its impulse towards a total elision of media, it must be noted that Wagner still positioned staging below text and music in his medial hierarchy. The mises-en-scène he produced in his lifetime, which were preserved after his death in 1883 at his purpose-built *Festspielhaus* in

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[326] 'rather than embracing the rejectionist version of bourgeois *Kulturkritik*, which saw film and photography endangering high culture, their approach was dialectical to the core', Andreas Huyssen, *The Miniature Metropolis* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 14.
[327] Huyssen, *The Miniature Metropolis*, 8.
[328] Huyssen, *The Miniature Metropolis*, 7.

Bayreuth, naturalistically reflected the content of the text.[329] As David Littlejohn has observed, Wagner never managed to get 'beyond his private vision of words and music united' and maintains that

> the most thoroughgoing attempt to realise a union of all the arts on the musical stage…was [in] the work of Serge Diaghilev and his Russian Ballet… At no period before or since have so many major visual artists been involved in theatrical production.[330]

The dynamic between Wagner's legacy and the Ballets Russes is far from straightforward. In 1892 the company's impresario, Sergei Diaghilev, saw seven operas in Bayreuth and – in spite of his critique of Cosima Wagner's direction and lack of cuts – remained a 'dyed-in-the-wool Wagnerian' until he conquered the Parisian art scene.[331] Later in life, Diaghilev was hesitant to admit his youthful Wagner-mania and, in the musical debates that pitted Russian and French modernism against German expressionism in 1914, he staunchly identified with the former tradition.[332] As we shall see, the Ballets Russes pursued a production model that complicated the Wagnerian one, in which the work was channelled through a single artist making decisions across most medial fronts. Kittler has noted how Wagner's *Festspielhaus*, which opened in 1876, 'truly achieved the transition from traditional art to media technology'.[333] Though the technological advances which gave rise to film also enhanced those in the theatre, Wagner's music dramas of the nineteenth century and Diaghilev's ballets and operas of the twentieth were dealing with different apparatuses, for which the latter demanded an even more fragmented mode of production. Put another way, combining media

[329] Rogelio de Egusquiza, Adolphe Appia and Mariano Fortuny were among those who felt the quality of Wagnerian staging failed to live up to his music. Their critiques precipitated a number of treatises and technical experiments as they searched for new means of rendering Wagnerian music drama on stage.
[330] David Littlejohn, *The Ultimate Art: Essays Around and About Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 265.
[331] Sjeng Scheijen, *Diaghilev: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 57-59.
[332] Scheijen, *Diaghilev: A Life*, 57.
[333] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 44.

before and after the first public screenings of film were two entirely different situations. While there can be no doubt of Wagner's seismic influence on the Russian and European avant-garde, its over-emphasis means to overlook other factors that fuelled opera's shifting medial concerns.

Despite the historic coincidence of ballet's reclamation as a modern art form and the early years of film, the Ballets Russes' engagement with the new media technology was fraught. That the Ballets Russes were not documented on film is not an accident of the archive but rather a deliberate rejection on the part of Diaghilev.[334] Through a clause in his standard dancers' contracts, Ballets Russes performers were prohibited from dancing for any person, company or association connected to the mechanical reproduction of dance (see Clause 23, fig. 37).[335] This position was not uniform among impresarios of the period; some artists' managers encouraged their performers to dabble in the new medium. In 1915, for example, the bass and former Ballets Russes artist, Feodor Chaliapin, transferred his operatic role of Tsar Ivan in Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Maid of Pskov* to a silent film version called *Ivan the Terrible*.[336]

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[334] Jane Pritchard, 'A Giant that Continues to Grow – the Impact, Influence and Legacy of the Ballets Russes', *Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes 1909-1929* ed. Jane Pritchard (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), 187-205 (202).

[335] The original French quotation read: *'Pendant cette période, l'artiste n'a pas le droit de danser pour aucune personne, société ou syndicat, s'occupant de la cinématographie ou d'autre reproduction mécanique de la danse*' and is taken from a termination of contract between Sergei Diaghilev and Denise Boyer, 7 July 1915. London, V&A Theatre and Performance Collections, THM 7/3/8/2. While Diaghilev's aversion to film was not held by other theatre impresarios of the period, his position was shared by other artistic producers. Beatriz Colomina has noted the Austrian architect Adolf Loos' antipathy towards architectural photography and its circulation in magazines, driven by his belief in the impossibility of reproducing a spatial experience via the photographic medium. 'It is my greatest pride', Loos explained, 'that the interiors which I have created are totally ineffective in photographs. I am proud of the fact that the inhabitants of my spaces do not recognise their own apartments in the photographs, just as the owner of a Monet painting would not recognise it at Kastan's. I have to forego the honour of being published in the various architectural magazines. I have been denied the satisfaction of my vanity.' Beatriz Colomina, 'Intimacy and Spectacle: The Interiors of Adolf Loos', *AA Files*, 20 (1990), 5-15 (12).

[336] Fryer, 'Opera', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 489.

Diaghilev's situation is more comparable to that of the American dancer Loïe Fuller who arrived in Paris decades before him and, after rejection from the Paris Opéra, began to perform at the Folies Bergère in 1892.[337] Fuller was best-known for her iconic serpentine dance which mobilised the proto-cinematic effect of changing coloured light projected onto her moving body which was swathed in lengths of gauzy silk.[338] Serpentine dance was an immediate success: Mallarmé described it as 'at once an artistic intoxication and an industrial achievement',[339] Toulouse-Lautrec meanwhile immortalised Fuller in a series of lithographs. Though Fuller also caught the attention of early filmmakers she, like Diaghilev, did not consent to be filmed. Earlier in 1892, Fuller had commenced a high-profile copyright injunction against Minne Renwood Bemis, an imitator of her serpentine dance. Fuller's attempt to protect her rights to the performance was unsuccessful: since serpentine dance contained no narrative, the judge ruled that it was not subject to copyright.[340] Emma Doran has identified this legal battle as the basis of Fuller's cautious response to film.[341] As Ballets Russes productions similarly entered non-narrative territory, privileging spectacle over drama, they too moved into this different legal zone of culture, forcing Diaghilev to protect his company's unique selling point.[342] While not easy to mimic in words, the visual reproductive

[337] Fuller's conquest of the Paris nightclub scene is described in Phillip Denis Cate, 'The Birth of the "Cabaret Artistique": New Technology and Modern Aesthetics', *Into the Night: Cabarets and Clubs in Modern Art*, ed. Florence Ostende with Lotte Johnson (London: Prestel with Barbican Art Gallery, 2019) 26-33 (32-33).
[338] Rhonda K. Garelick has detailed Fuller's application of technology in performance. *Electric Salome: Loïe Fuller's Performance of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton, 2007), 42. The production and reception of Fuller's serpentine dance has been explored by Ann Cooper Albright, who details the techniques Fuller used to make a distinctive imprint on the performances she failed to copyright. *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loïe Fuller* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 15-50.
[339] Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Autre étude de danse' (1893). Quoted in Lotte Johnson, 'The Chat Noir and Loïe Fuller', *Into the Night*, ed. Ostende, Johnson, 49.
[340] The specifics of this case are outlined by Heather Doughty, who also attends to copyright issues experienced by Diaghilev's choreographer Léonide Massine. Following the judicial precedent established by Fuller v. Bemis, choreography was discounted from copyright protection until the 1970s. 'The Choreographer in the Courtroom: Loïe Fuller and Leonide Massine', *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Society of Dance History Scholars* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1982), 35-39.
[341] Emma Doran, 'Figuring modern dance within fin-de-siècle visual culture and print: The case of Loïe Fuller', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 13 (2015), 21-40.
[342] My argument here borrows from Molly Nesbit who, discussing the legal situation of authorship in France, highlights how the law dictated alternative definitions of culture. 'What Was an Author?', *Yale French Studies*, 73 (1987) 229-257.

media of film and photography opened up non-narrative movement to copycat acts. In Fuller's case, a refusal to be filmed did not prevent serpentine dance from filmic treatment; the dance was preserved in early films of her many imitators such as Annabella Moore (captured by Thomas Edison in 1897) and Paola Werther (filmed by Gaumont Studios in 1900).

Fuller and Diaghilev's position in some ways reflects Peggy Phelan's ontology of performance whose specificity is its ephemerality: 'Without a copy, live performance plunges into visibility – in a maniacally charged present – and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control'.[343] In its disappearance, performance has the potential to circumvent the financial imperatives of the art market. Since Fuller and the Ballets Russes both worked within a commercial framework, their insistence on the singularity of their performances does not align with Phelan's category of authenticity, but figured instead as a means of protecting their commercial interests. Their caginess towards film and photography instead affirms Philip Auslander's notion of performance as principally created through its documentation: 'Documentation does not simply generate image/statements that describe an autonomous performance and state that it occurred: it produces an event as a performance'.[344] Wilfully sabotaging the documentation of his company for posterity, Diaghilev's discomfort at the incursion of film into live performance at the level of the contract is suggestive of a more ambiguous process: that of remediation.

Rather than attribute Diaghilev's circumspection as a straightforward suspicion of popular

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[343] Peggy Phelan, 'The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction', *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 148.
[344] Philip Auslander, 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 28 (2006), 1-10 (5).

entertainment and its modes of reproduction, I would like to suggest that his unease was more complicated and calculated. In noting Diaghilev's 'care to associate his troupe with a "high art" milieu, and to distance them from the '"popular" ballet tradition linked to music hall',[345] Lynn Garafola suggests but does not fully address the issue of opera's and ballet's high cultural status which, I contend, was not by any means secure in this period. Ann Davies has noted how as early as 1875, Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen* put opera's high art position into question with its memorable melodies, eye-catching spectacle and employment of speech rather than stylised musical recitative.[346] Similarly, Alexandra Wilson's study of British opera in the 1920s describes how it 'sat somewhere closer to the middlebrow':

> arguments that took place about opera's cultural 'impurity' were old: debates about the perceived problem of blending music with drama dated back centuries, but were still being discussed vehemently during this period. However, some arguments about opera and cultural purity that raged in the 1920s were prompted by new encounters between opera and other forms of entertainment, and the blurring of boundaries between them.[347]

Between 1875 and the 1920s then, the issue of opera's historically vexed cultural position re-reared its head. Here I would like to consider how opera's contested status might have interacted with that of film as the latter also made a concerted bid for art status in 1908, just over a decade into its existence. Film reflected the very issue of cultural legitimacy that had haunted opera from its inception, and I would like to suggest that Diaghilev quickly recognised and capitalised on this parity between the two media. Could opera follow film's example in order to reassert its high-art status? Or should opera discredit film in order to

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[345] Lynn Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', *Legacies of Twentieth-Century Dance* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 66.
[346] Ann Davies, 'Introduction', *Carmen: From Silent Film to MTV*, ed. Chris Perriam and Ann Davies (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 1-8 (2).
[347] Wilson, *Opera in the Jazz Age*, 96-97.

assert its own superiority? Might there be a situation in which both strategies were possible or even desirable? In overtly rejecting film, Diaghilev played into the latter reaction through protecting his company from any association with the mass entertainment genre. In doing so, he bought himself time to interrogate how cinema successfully navigated its popularity, new techniques and high-art status at the level of production, presentation and reception. Of Diaghilev's 'cinematic borrowings', Garafola has observed how 'in almost every instance… they had already undergone an aestheticising process that… transformed their original identity and gave them currency as high art'.[348] Buried beneath Diaghilev's *l'art pour l'art* programme, therefore, lurks a series of more nuanced medial strategies.

To illustrate this position, I focus on an example that offers insights into an opera as it reckoned with the pressures of film. *Liturgie*, an unperformed ballet-opera from 1915 based on scenes from the life of Christ, is an intriguing anomaly in the output of the Ballets Russes. As a project that failed to reach the stage, *Liturgie* resists the historiographic tendency to present Ballets Russes productions as a series of progressions which could only have occurred a certain way. Through gathering its dispersed archive and recreating it as a performance, *Liturgie* is revealed to be at odds with opera's nineteenth-century and Wagnerian paradigm of production and reception. I would like to suggest that the competitive medium of film can account in direct and indirect ways for these distinctive shifts. *Liturgie*'s attempted production occurred at a significant moment in cinema, one which has been termed as its 'theatricalisation': Jennifer Wild has identified how, during the decade between 1908 and 1918, French film companies made a case for the new media's cultural validity by framing the sources and techniques of the theatre as film's most intuitive inspiration.[349] The move precipitated a greater focus on more extended narratives as well as more theatrical modes of

[348] Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 67.
[349] Wild, *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema*, 18.

reception: 'opulent décor associated with bourgeois refinement and comfort… and a static, absorptive mode of viewing'.[350] As film moved towards the theatre, I propose that the theatre of the Ballets Russes gravitated in the opposite direction, back towards the first decade of film, the spectacular, non-narrative cinema of attractions. Wild has addressed the appeal of the cinema of attractions to the Dadaists, but its impact upon the Ballets Russes, who held on to the institutions the Dadaists rejected and occupied more of the cultural mainstream, is not elaborated.[351]

My approach in the first part of this chapter considers *Liturgie* from a contextual, archival and practical point of view. I survey the scholarship addressing film's incorporation into ballet and opera performance. While impresario Rolf de Maré's Ballets Suédois (1920-1925) is largely credited with trailblazing new media technologies in the 1920s, I identify *Liturgie*'s more covert process of filmic remediation that took place some years previously. I then set the Parisian film scene of the early 1910s as the backdrop against which the Ballets Russes' agents and audience produced and consumed live performance. Through gathering *Liturgie*'s scattered archive, my reconstruction of *Liturgie* as a performance informs my understanding of its attempted production during the summer of 1915. This practical approach taps in to the tacit knowledge and unwritten parts of the process, the information which evades the archive and emerges through operating with a creative team under comparable conditions. This experiment produced a video which is documented in the appendix to this thesis. The second part of the chapter addresses issues of reception and examines *Liturgie*'s suggestion of the Russian Orthodox tradition which conceptually and narratively underpins the work. Reading the modernist appropriation of ancient Russian culture against the grain, I describe it not in

[350] Wild, *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema*, 18.
[351] Wild refers in particular to Picasso, Apollinaire, Picabia, Duchamp, Max Jacob and Blaise Cendrars. Wild, *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema*, 140.

terms of a neo-nationalism or primitivism, but as a response to the issue of attention in modern experience, a debate provoked by technological media in cultural criticism. From this angle, the Ballets Russes have more in common with the painterly practices of El Lissitzky and the Suprematists than has been acknowledged, since they too appropriated ancient iconic modes of representation to navigate the pressures of their contemporary situation. In turning to the historic medium of icon painting for *Liturgie*, the Ballets Russes demonstrate a process of remediation alternative to Huyssen's 'remediation in reverse', in which 'an older medium reasserts itself by critically working through what the new medium does and does not do'.[352] Instead, they present a situation in which the old medium of opera looks to another old medium, that of icon painting, to respond to the pressures of the new medium of film. The circuitous route of remediation is a kind of knight's move, a side stepping of the immediate threat of a competitive new medium by turning to an even older medium at the point of its own potential obsolescence. The medium of painting encountered the pressures of printing and photography long before live performance had to respond to film. Painting was thus a store of historic reflections and precedents for responses to new media. Beyond the present study, such an approach can provide new ways of framing other instances of multimedia in the twentieth century.

The existing scholarship on ballet, opera and film tends to focus on the affirmative relationship between practitioners and the new media exemplified by the Ballets Suédois. As the first instance of projected film in a live ballet performance, their *Relâche* is credited as the significant milestone in the meeting of these media.[353] Created in 1924 by Erik Satie, Francis

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[352] Huyssen, *The Miniature Metropolis*, 8.
[353] Carole Boulbès has offered a detailed account of *Relâche* and its creation. *Relâche: Dernier Coup d'Eclat des Ballets Suédois* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2017). Nancy Van Norman Baer has considered *Relâche* in terms of the Ballets Suédois. 'The Ballets Suédois: A Synthesis of Modernist Trends in Art', *Paris Modern: The Swedish Ballet 1920-1925*, ed. Nancy Norman Van Baer, Jan Torsten Ahlstrand (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 10-37 (33).

Picabia and René Clair, *Relâche*'s incorporation of the film *Entr'acte* into its performance is regarded as the natural precursor to the Ballets Russes' foray into projections in their 1928 ballet *Ode*.[354] Indeed, Nancy Van Norman Baer maintained that the Ballets Suédois pipped the Ballets Russes to the filmic post time and time again, and labels scenes and gestures of modernity in Ballets Russes productions as bearing 'the stamp' of Rolf De Maré,[355] and describes the Ballets Russes' use of neon light and projections in *Ode* as 'indebted' to their Swedish competitors.[356] Norman Van Baer does not acknowledge that the influence between these two companies worked both ways: Jean Börlin, the principal dancer and choreographer of the Ballets Suédois, for example, was present at a London performance of *Parade* in 1919,[357] a Ballets Russes production that falls within Garafola's category of the 'filmic' and one that anticipates the Ballets Suédois's existence. Since film had been available to large publics since the early twentieth century, it seems unlikely that opera and ballet's meaningful engagement with film appeared as late as the 1920s.[358] Instead of describing *Ode* as the Ballets Russes' response to a rival upstart company, I contend that it was part of a more ambiguous and extended process of remediation which took place long before the Ballets Suédois entered the scene.

The Ballets Russes' particular relationship with film is not uncharted territory. Garafola offers the most recent discussion in 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes' where she highlights the proximity of the two media, but provides a rather essentialist and de-historicised notion of the

[354] 'Although Diaghilev toyed with film as a setting and mimetic device, it was his rival, Rolf de Maré who first made it part of the text of the ballet'. Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 75.
[355] Garafola, 'Rivals for the New: The Ballets Suédois and the Ballets Russes', *Paris Modern*, ed. Baer, Ahlstrand, 66-85 (74).
[356] Garafola, 'Rivals for the New', *Paris Modern*, ed. Baer, Ahlstrand, 75.
[357] Erik Näslund, 'Animating a Vision: Rolf de Maré, Jean Börlin, and the Founding of the Ballets Suédois', *Paris Modern*, ed. Baer, Ahlstrand, 38-55 (51).
[358] Richard Abel dates the emergence of moving image as a form of mass entertainment, rather than a method of selling cameras and celluloid film stock, to France between 1906 and 1907. Richard Abel, 'France – Production', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 248.

filmic in certain productions from 1916.[359] Garafola does not attend to the different stages of early film, which evolved rapidly from the late nineteenth century and whose various phases comprised radically different techniques and modes of representation. Nevertheless, an overview of previously identified 'filmic' Ballets Russes episodes helps situate *Liturgie* which, as an unrealised production, has been overlooked in this context. The coordinates on Garafola's map are France and Italy where she, Pritchard and others have traced filmic borrowings in *Parade*, *Les Femmes de Bonne Humeur* (The Good-Humoured Ladies) and *Feu d'artifice* (Fireworks) which were staged between April and May 1917, and two of which were choreographed by *Liturgie*'s Léonide Massine.[360] By this time, the Teatro Costanzi in Rome, which premiered *Les Femmes de Bonne Humeur* and *Feu d'artifice* double bill, was already screening films.[361] Garafola describes filmic cross-pollination into Ballets Russes' performances as uncomplicated tokens of modernity and credits the Italian Futurists and Jean Cocteau with turning Diaghilev's attention towards the medium.[362] In *Parade*, a collaboration between Cocteau, Satie, Picasso and Massine which premiered at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Nancy Hargrove has described the character of the Little American girl (fig. 38) as a synthesis of silent-era film starlets: 'Pearl White, whose films "The Perils of Pauline" and "The Exploits of Elaine" were very popular in France during World War I, and Mary Pickford, known as "America's Sweetheart"'.[363] Hargrove pinpoints The Little American Girl's gestures as direct borrowings from these films: 'running a race, riding a bicycle, imitating Charlie Chaplin, chasing a robber with a revolver, dancing a ragtime, taking a photo, going down on the *Titanic*, and playing in the sand, all done in a playful or impudent manner'.[364] In

[359] 'The rebirth of twentieth-century ballet coincided with the birth of film as an art form: never again would the two media be so close as during that period of genesis'. Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 67.
[360] Pritchard, 'A Giant that Continues to Grow', *Diaghilev and the Golden Age*, ed. Pritchard, 202.
[361] The Società Anonima Ambrosio's early feature *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* premiered in August 1913. Ladd, 'Film Music avant la letter?', 29.
[362] Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 66-84.
[363] Nancy D. Hargrove, 'The Great Parade: Cocteau, Picasso, Satie, Massine, Diaghilev—and T.S. Eliot', *Mosaic*, 31 (1998), 83-106 (92).
[364] Hargrove, 'The Great Parade', 92.

Hargrove's terms, the Ballets Russes' filmic borrowings are expressed as character tropes. The Léon Bakst, Massine and Vincenzo Tommasini collaboration *Les Femmes de Bonne Humeur* similarly includes a Chaplin-esque character, whose appearance as the waiter Niccolo was instantly recognizable to the audience; his 'whimsical side-way shuffle' immediately led the critic Cyril W. Beaumont to consider him a Chaplin cameo.[365]

These examples expose a simple adoption of character types, whereas the trajectory I propose is one which absorbs the formal rather than the narrative techniques of film, a few of which have been detected in *Les Femmes de Bonne Humeur*. Massine condensed Goldoni's drama into a single act by presenting it as unfolding simultaneously at either side of the stage in a choreography of accelerated gestures and fragmented, angular movements.[366] Massine's technique of velocity emulated film's technological ability to alter the frame rate of the moving image, from slow motion to the uncannily fast. The simultaneous unfolding of different parts of the narrative, on the other hand, derived from the split screen sequence, another early film technique pioneered in the film *Santa Claus* directed by George Albert Smith in 1898 but developed in the American film *Suspense*, directed by Lois Weber and Phillip Smalley in 1913 (fig. 39), and a Russian film, perhaps more familiar to Diaghilev and Massine, *The Queen of Spades*, directed by Yakov Protazanov in 1916. Kittler remarks that it is this ability to manipulate the flow of time that makes technical media *technical*, thus the performing body can never be classified as a medium.[367] Massine's filmic-choreographic intervention therefore expresses an idiosyncratic combination of technical and non-technical media. In dislocating the representational continuity of movement, the linearity of the music is put into question. Or put another way, the temporality of the musical score has been

[365] Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 73.
[366] Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 72.
[367] John Durham Peters, 'Introduction', *Optical Media*, 13.

manipulated and frustrated by the spatial and temporal commentary of the visual dance.[368] It emerges here that synchrony is no longer the desideratum of ballet. Giles Deleuze's conception of the 'time-image' as a phenomenon of modern cinema is instructive here: the time-image, which he contrasts with the 'movement-image', is characterised by the divorce of sound from image which creates a different experience of time, a Bergsonian sense of time as a qualitative rather than quantitative progression perceived by the movement from shot to shot:

> The time-image does not imply the absence of movement (even though it often includes its increased scarcity) but it implies the reversal of the subordination; it is no longer time which is subordinate to movement; it is movement which subordinates itself to time.[369]

In the time-image, Deleuze presents the viewer's engagement not as anticipating the subsequent image, but rather as focussing more intently on the image at hand.

Feu d'artifice (1917), a collaboration between the Igor Stravinsky and Giacomo Balla which premiered alongside *Les Femmes de Bonne Humeur*, is classified by Garafola as that which 'most closely approximated film'.[370] A staged musical spectacle without performers, *Feu d'artifice* (fig. 40) was described by the critic Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco thus:

> with disturbing crystalline forms, beams of coloured light, coral formations, symbols of the infinite (spirals and running light-waves), emblems of light (obelisk, pyramids, rays of sunlight and sickle-moons), aerodynamic symbols (flights of swifts and

368 Peters, 'Introduction', *Optical Media*, 12.
369 Giles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 271.
370 Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 73.

firebirds). It was all projected onto a black backdrop, illuminated from behind with red rays.[371]

Redolent of director-designer Edward Gordon Craig's notion of the *Übermarionette* or super-puppet, an imagined theatre which dispensed with the unreliable performer altogether,[372] Garafola notes how this 'chromo-kinetic experiment' paradoxically achieved the appearance of abstract cinema via the medium of theatre.[373] Comprising solid forms onto which a sense of motion was produced by the sustained play of light, *Feu d'artifice* resembles the performerless shots from Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* (1924) which credited itself as the first abstract film: its opening titles read: 'C'est le premier film sans scénario.'[374] In both cases, visual spectacle was generated not through the moving body but via the mesmerising motion of inanimate objects and the play of light on their surfaces (fig. 41).

The 1926 ballet *La Pastorale* (Pastoral) is the penultimate 'filmic' production in Garafola's survey: a section of the drama unfolds on a movie set. Garafola precedes her description of *La Pastorale* with the Ballets Suédois's 1923 *Within the Quota* which parodied Hollywood codes, thus framing Ballets Russes' efforts as derivative. Garafola's account ends with the teleological incorporation of film as 'part of the text of the ballet': the Ballets Suédois's *Relâche* (1924) included *Entr'acte*, a non-narrative filmic interlude, meanwhile Diaghilev's *Ode* (1928) incorporated Pierre Charbonnier's symbolic lighting projections – which began with the sequence of blue light, an enormous hand, a seed which grew into a series of plants

[371] Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 73.
[372] Martin Esslin, 'Modern Theatre: 1890-1920', *The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre*, ed. John Russell Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 341-379 (364).
[373] Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 73.
[374] Fernand Léger, Dudley Murphy, *Ballet Mécanique*, 1924, France, 35mm film, New York City, Museum of Modern Art, Department of Film.

and eventually a tree – and which were presented on a large white screen and intermingled with the bodies of the performers.[375]

The existing accounts of the Ballets Russes and film bring to light four assumptions I would like to challenge: firstly that the filmic is defined principally in terms of what is represented on stage rather than how a process of production is pursued; secondly that silent film has a monolithic mode of representation and was not itself quickly evolving in its early years; thirdly that Diaghilev's engagement with the filmic was either derivative, borrowed from rivals the Ballets Suédois, or rather simplistic, using film principally as a 'setting and a mimetic device';[376] and fourthly, that filmic marks on Diaghilev's ballets are only traceable from 1916 onwards. Instead, I consider the earlier appearance of film in the Ballets Russes' activity between 1914 and 1915. Through *Liturgie*, film is revealed not as an emblem of modernity but rather a medial necessity which emerged in production and evaded the control of any single agent.

Before pursuing the dynamic between the Ballets Russes and film any further, a depiction of their contemporary film culture is revealing of the new media's double-edged threat and allure. The company's activity from 1909 to 1915 overlapped with the last years of a period generally acknowledged as the era of early film which started roughly in the mid-1890s and finished around 1915.[377] My account begins at the birth of film in order to reflect upon its evolution from a spectacle-driven to a narrative-driven medium. Crucial in this chronicle are the transitional years around 1907 which resulted in the first fictional feature-length films, cinematic experiences which came closer than ever before to those of theatre. As film

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[375] Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 75-78.
[376] Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 75.
[377] Abel, 'Introduction', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, xxix.

emulated theatre in subject matter, staging, duration and as a viewing experience, I would like to explore how experimental opera looked contrarily back to film's first iteration. Beginning at this earlier historical moment allows an introduction of two prevalent genres in early film which imposed specific pressures and stimuli on opera as the century wore on: *films chantants, films d'art* and those based on Biblical themes and in particular, the life of Christ. It was with and against these genres and their changing modes of representation that the Ballets Russes' idiosyncratic failure *Liturgie* was attempted. *Liturgie*'s impulse towards a less narrative-driven and more image-led approach, with a flattened kind of staging in which sound operated as a kind of ad hoc addition, presents a peculiar combination of techniques which demand attention. Since the touring company was anchored by regular seasons in Paris, the city credited with the birth of film and a site of its rapid evolution, Parisian film culture forms my primary context, though the cosmopolitan nature of the company invites a variety of cultural and critical situations, mostly Western European, but also Russian and American.

After the Lumière brothers' legendary screening in the Salon Indien at the Grand Café in 1895, a stone's throw from the Opéra Garnier, film arrived in Paris as a by-product of selling cameras and celluloid film stock: moving images were simply a way of showcasing the apparatus and lasted just a few minutes. While the Lumière brothers were concerned with *actualités*, or footage of real events, Georges Méliès, another early pioneer, combined his background in theatre and magic to create supernatural effects with the technology to make moving images appear even more an entertaining curiosity. Gunning has described Lumière's *actualités*, Méliès' trick films and indeed most films before 1907 as the 'cinema of attractions', a mode of representation which

> directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that

> is of interest in itself… It is the direct address of the audience, in which an attraction is offered to the spectator by a cinema showman, that defines this approach to film making.[378]

By 1907 film had emerged as a mass medium, no longer a novelty of the cafés-concerts and fairgrounds. Without a specific audience of film-goers, film gradually generated enough interest not only as a tool to promote its apparatus, but as an experience.[379] Sensing the demand for film and a business opportunity, the French companies Pathé-Frères and Gaumont began to produce a vast quantity of films including fiction films; by 1906, Pathé had expanded exponentially to 1,200 employees, three studios and a 'director-unit' system that churned out a new fiction film each week.[380] Now operating at the level of industrial production, Diaghilev had no hope of keeping up with such a high turnover. As technology enabled longer running times, the representation of more extended subject matter became possible and the cinema of attractions shifted towards that of fictional narrative which precipitated 'ciné-théâtre' or 'cinema produced in the format of a legitimate theatre programme'.[381]

Film producers quickly identified opera as a comparable genre to mine. The following description relies on Paul Fryer and Laurent Mannoni's revealing chronology of opera in film: Gaumont's *photoscènes* created between 1905 and 1906 included artists from the Paris Opéra as well as music hall performers and made early if unsuccessful attempts to synchronise

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[378] Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions: Early Cinema, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (London: BFI Publishing, 1990), 56-62 (58-59).
[379] Jean-Jacques Meusy, 'France – Audiences', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 257.
[380] Abel, 'France – Production', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 248-249.
[381] Wild, *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema*, 18.

sound.[382] In a purpose-built studio and with a sophisticated kind of phonograph, the performers were instructed by a director as they lip-synced to the text of their own recordings. The moving image would be captured as a long shot, with a considerable distance between the camera and performers so as to lessen the discrepancies between the audio and visual. Fryer counts Georges Mendel as another important producer of opera on film and by 1906, his genre of *film chantants* (singing films) included scenes from *La Bohème*, *Rigoletto*, *Mignon*, *Lakmé*, *Hérodiade*, and *Guillaume Tell*.[383] What started out as a strategic pairing of media had by 1915 become a successful genre in its own right as over two hundred films drawn from opera plots were in circulation.[384] The musical treatment of these film operas was by no means consistent: alongside attempts at synchronising sound, live performances were common and excerpts from original opera scores could be taken and presented by vocalists singing behind or beside the screen. Returning to Diaghilev's circumspection regarding film: did the possibility of seeing an opera star on screen cheapen or render redundant their live iteration on the operatic stage? Was the mixing of opera singers and their lower grade, music hall counterparts in film programmes putting opera's high-art status into question? Did screenings in which the moving image of a well-known star was coupled with the live or recorded sound of different singer disturb the conception of the opera singer as an integrated voice and a physical presence? On one hand, the fluid treatment of the musical element of early film figured as a threat, but on the other, it offered a liberating creative possibility for opera, one I will return to as I consolidate *Liturgie*'s archive.

Early film's borrowing from opera was in part a way of drawing upon universally-understood,

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[382] Laurent Mannoni, 'Photoscènes', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 518.

[383] Fryer, 'Opera', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 489.

[384] Geraldine Farrar's appearance in Cecil B. DeMille's *Carmen* (1915) is one of the best-known instances of an opera singer starring in a silent film. Mary Simonson, 'Screening the Diva', *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 83-100.

simple plots and readable melodramatic acting styles, and in part a calculated move to associate the new medium with a more established one.[385] The producer Charles Pathé was the first to overtly pursue 'art' status for film: keen to capitalise on a middle-class audience, Pathé in 1908 established an offshoot company, Film d'Art, to adapt existing plays with well-known actors.[386] Drawing upon performers from the Comédie-Française, literary and operatic plots (*La Tosca* in 1909 and *La dame aux camélias* in 1912) with original music from high-art composers, Film d'Art embodied film's bid for 'art' status.[387] The company's inaugural screening included *L'Assassinat du duc de Guise* (The Assassination of the Duke of Guise) with a scenario by the dramatist Henri Lavedan and original music by the opera composer Camille Saint-Saëns.[388] The *films d'art* were plausibly more disturbing to the Ballets Russes than the derivative *films chantants*, since they used new compositions by high-art composers and in some cases new scenarios.[389] Film d'Art emulated operatic and theatrical production by enlisting writers, composers and designers to create original works, rather than borrowing from pre-existing ones. Despite or perhaps because of the establishment of an operatic repertory, a canon of operas which were guaranteed regular international performances which I have described in the previous chapter, Diaghilev was deeply invested in commissioning new productions often in shorter forms and as part of mixed programmes. Indeed, snappy new writing was one of the Ballets Russes' unique selling points and claims to modernity, and *films d'art* provided direct competition.

Up until the appearance of Film d'Art in 1908, film had not presented live performance with any pressing threat but now with longer programmes, purpose-built picture palaces and

[385] Fryer, 'Opera', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 489.
[386] Jean-Jacques Meusy, 'Film d'Art', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 237.
[387] Meusy, 'Film d'Art', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel 237.
[388] Meusy, 'Film d'Art', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel 237.
[389] Abel, 'France – Production', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 250.

theatres, in-house orchestras, literary and artistic adaptations, and deeper theatrical staging on the one hand; and the introduction of new scenario commissions, early editing techniques and on-location shooting on the other; film not only replicated and competed with opera, but it also went beyond opera's capabilities. The considerable press garnered by Film d'Art's arrival was yet another addition to the litany of threats it posed to Diaghilev's own enterprise.[390] Jean-Jacques Meusy's assessment of the impact of *films d'art* on audiences provides useful context:

> Were these efforts successful? Undoubtedly so, since the broadening of cinema audiences and their increasing loyalty can be dated to this period. Was the intelligentsia as a whole seduced by this new form of spectacle sometimes described as art? Did the well-off bourgeoisie, accustomed to prestigious theatres, regularly attend the new cinemas? Absolutely not. Despite their enhanced reputation, moving pictures remained a second-rate spectacle for many… Many among the educated classes… would acknowledge that the only moving pictures that had any worth were non-fiction: scientific films, travelogues, newsreels, etc. Only in 1917-1918 would new attitudes towards moving pictures begin to appear among the French intellectual and artistic elite.[391]

Diaghilev's pre-war productions and wartime experiments were created, consumed and judged between two important moments: at one end, the proliferation of film-going audiences, and at the other, film's general acceptance as an art form. Stuart Liebman and Richard Abel have respectively analysed writings on cinema in the general and specialised French press, Liebman from 1915 to 1919 and Abel between 1910 and 1921. While Liebman detects a basic

[390] Meusy, 'Film d'Art', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 237.
[391] Meusy, 'France – Audiences', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 257.

‘ur-theory’ of common assumptions made by commentators,[392] Abel instead insists that the period can only be characterised by a cacophony of competing opinions which eventually emerged as a ‘quasi-autonomous discourse – namely, French film theory and criticism’.[393] Despite the divergent impetuses of their arguments, Liebman and Abel concur on the most inflammatory critical debates in circulation in the period: the categorisation of cinema as an art form; the importance of a literary basis for cinema; the role of narrative in film; and the possibilities of techniques and methods particular to the camera and screen. While Liebman claims that ‘with few exceptions… there was near universal agreement about cinema’s primary role: the creation of art’;[394] Abel uses the examples of Henri Diamant-Berger, Colette, Émile Vuillermoz and Louis Dulluc, who only came around to the idea of film as an art form from around 1916.[395] However, what Liebman and Abel both ascertain is that negative responses to the question of cinema’s art status tended to come from the literary camp, who were concerned by the threat of the moving image on the written word.[396] Liebman cites Remy de Gourmont, who in 1914 lamented how the *cinématographe* cheapened existing works of literary quality:

> As far as the dramatic cinema, or, if you like, the literary cinema, is concerned, it is a complete school of bewilderment. The action that one watches takes place at such a crazy speed, this mass of barely coherent gestures represents life even less precisely than the flattest descriptions. As far as authentically valuable literary works are concerned, it is a pity to see them translated into these trembling shadows.[397]

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[392] Abel, ‘On the Threshold of French Film Theory and Criticism, 1915-1919’, *Cinema Journal*, 25 (1985), 12-33 (7).
[393] Abel, ‘On the Threshold of French Film Theory and Criticism’, 12.
[394] Stuart Liebman, ‘French film theory, 1910-1921’, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 8 (1983), 1-23 (8).
[395] Abel, ‘On the Threshold of French Film Theory and Criticism’, 16-17.
[396] ‘attacks on the cinema came principally from those – most of them were literary critics’, Abel, ‘On the Threshold of French Film Theory and Criticism, 14.
[397] Liebman, ‘French film theory, 1910-1921’, 8.

According to Abel, it was precisely this kind of elitist claim, of the written word as the foremost means of expression, which prevented most French writers from engaging with cinema until at least the mid 1920s.[398]

In contradiction to the alleged superiority of words, others were celebrating cinema for its wordless means of expression. As Dulluc proclaimed in the early twenties: 'Here is one of the most miraculous things about the fifth art, it touches the multitude without demanding the mental preparation required by books or music'.[399] The moving image was deemed film's defining element and as the American poet Vachel Lindsay claimed in 1915, 'Moving objects, not moving lips make the words of the photoplay.'[400] The conception of film as a visual rather than verbal language gained traction and film was described as a democratic visual Esperanto, one which could express itself powerfully and directly.[401] Gunning has identified a related conception of the 'gnostic (from gnosis, knowledge) mission of cinema', of film as means of revealing new, specifically visual, knowledge. [402] Gunning maintains that the gnostic potential of cinema was a force in early film long before Béla Balázs articulated the position in the 1920s, namely through the physiognomic close-up of the silent era. The recognition of film's power to communicate without text led to what Liebman describes as a considerable hostility towards 'literature' in film.[403] This anti-language stance also precipitated a critique of intertitles which were considered too recurrent and text heavy, becoming a crutch for the film. The critic Dominique Braga lamented: 'Today, there is no film of whatever value in which we do not find the use of sub-titles, explanations, written glosses of the action. This is

[398] Abel, 'On the Threshold of French Film Theory and Criticism', 15.
[399] Liebman, 'French film theory, 1910-1921', 12.
[400] Kamilla Elliot, 'Novels, films, and the word/image wars', *A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 1-22 (6).
[401] Liebman, 'French film theory, 1910-1921', 12-13.
[402] Gunning, 'In Your Face: Physiognomy, Photography, and the Gnostic Mission of Early Film', *Modernism/modernity*, 4 (1997), 1-29 (1).
[403] The critic Dominique Braga bemoaned in 1921: 'Literature is embedded in cinema like a wound. Literature is the great danger to cinema'. Quoted in Liebman, 'French film theory, 1910-1921', 14.

due to a lack of appreciation for cinema's aesthetic independence'.[404] Cinema's aesthetic independence in Braga's terms could be located in its formal properties of moving image created by light. As part of the same quest for a cinematic autonomy through specificity, Dulluc came up with the term *photogénie* which though notoriously hard to translate, Abel has construed thus:

> [*photogénie*] assumed that the 'real' was transformed by the camera/screen, which, without eliminating that 'realness', changed it into something radically new… the effect of *photogénie* was singular: to make us see ordinary things as they had never been seen before.[405]

Photogénie's essence was in the camera's capacity to capture a performer or object in an expressive way, a process achieved through experimentation with the formal possibilities of film.[406] Distinctly modernist in its terms, *photogénie* was only one of a number of positions on film.

Though not yet systematically theorised, an increased critical interest in cinema's methods and techniques helped propel it towards its recognition as an art form. As early as 1916, Vuillermoz described the techniques of juxtaposition and montage as a poet's tools.[407] The Russian film director and theorist Sergei Eisenstein was to reiterate Vuillermoz in his analogical sense of film as an image-driven language and claimed, in his 1934 'Film Language' essay, that 'montage (editing) constitutes the "language," "diction", "syntax" and

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[404] Liebman, 'French film theory, 1910-1921', 14.
[405] Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism, Volume I: 1907-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 110.
[406] Also invested in that which was uniquely cinematic, the French filmmaker Jean Epstein used the term '*photogénie*' to emphasise cinema's visual qualities. Epstein adopted the word '*cinégraphiste*', which had been prevalent in criticism in the 1910s and 1920s, to describe the role of the film director in a manner that highlighted their control over the graphic quality of the medium. 'On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*', *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations*, trans. Tom Milne, ed. Sarah Keller and Jason N. Paul (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press & Open Access Publishing, 2012), 292-296.
[407] Abel, 'On the Threshold of French Film Theory and Criticism, 26.

"speech" of film images, for it creates syntactic and discursive relationships between them, just as sequencing and spacing do between words'.[408] Liebman and Abel agree on the techniques identified by critics as specifically cinematic: 'variable speed recording, the use of filters, masks and distorting lenses, editing and the closeup'.[409] Indeed, writers had a tendency to hone in on the 'expressive, revelatory, or disruptive moments in the cinema' which stoked their reflections on non-narrative methods of structuring a film.[410]

The role of narrative, meanwhile, remained a prominent if fraught topic. Liebman describes a general position in which 'with few exceptions… contemporary writers agreed that narrative should serve as the basis for film form', though there was no consensus as to its degree of importance alongside film's other components.[411] While the script or scenario was generally regarded as a film's principal text, and the scriptwriter or scenarist its main author, Abel has identified a countercurrent in which critics credited authorial status to the director – giving the example of Dulluc in 1919 – thereby emphasising the visual and conceptual, rather than textual, contribution.[412] Here Abel locates the seed of a notion which was to come into its own in French film criticism of the 1950s through the *Cahiers du Cinéma* – that of the *auteur*.[413]

Cinema's critical reception in 1910s Paris was therefore characterised by a series of interrelated, hotly-contested and unresolved debates concerning cultural status (high/low, art/non-art), and media status (word/image). Inevitably, audiences and critics came to view live performance through the lens of the new medium. In a 1921 review, Cyril W. Beaumont described Larionov's ballet *Chout* thus: 'The best part of the production was the setting, the

[408] Elliot, 'Novels, films, and the word/image wars', ed. Stam and Raengo, 6.
[409] Liebman, 'French film theory, 1910-1921', 15. Abel, 'On the Threshold of French Film Theory', 26.
[410] Abel, 'On the Threshold of French Film Theory and Criticism', 24.
[411] Liebman, 'French film theory, 1910-1921', 17-18.
[412] Abel, 'On the Threshold of French Film Theory and Criticism', 17.
[413] Abel, 'On the Threshold of French Film Theory and Criticism', 17.

rest fell flat… I would say that the effect on the eyes was almost as irritating as those flickering streaks of coloured light so characteristic of early colour films'.[414] T.S. Eliot drew the same comparison that Beaumont observed between Diaghilev's choreographer Massine and a film actor: 'It is the rhythm… which makes Massine and Charlie Chaplin the great actors that they are".[415] While Diaghilev's audience were film viewers who fluidly compared across media, so his artistic collaborators engaged with film for work and leisure.[416] Brecht described the situation succinctly when he asserted that 'The film viewer reads stories differently. But he who writes stories is himself a film viewer'.[417] Though the legal contract prevented Ballets Russes performances and performers from reaching the screen, Diaghilev's agents were already imbued in film's mode of representation as filmgoers themselves. The contributors to *Liturgie* were no exception.

Massine acquired his first film camera in Rome in 1916 and explained in a letter to a friend: 'I take great interest in cinematography… I tried to shoot movies, but so far did not succeed'.[418] Film figured for him as a didactic tool when learning Spanish dances before creating *Le Tricorne*.[419] Goncharova, who did not emigrate to France until 1915, had been exposed to film in Russia. Yuri Tsivian has described the intermingling of film and theatre in the cabarets and miniature theatres of major Russian cities in the 1910s. In theatres, films were shown during the orchestral interludes between acts, while film venues hired performers to occupy

[414] Garafola, 'The Making of Ballet Modernism' *Dance Research Journal*, 20 (1988), 23-32 (26).
[415] Hargrove, 'The Great Parade', 94.
[416] Diaghilev's dancers Vera Karelli, Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina and Lydia Kyasht all participated in feature films in Russia, America, Germany and Britain. Pritchard, 'A Giant that Continues to Grow', *Diaghilev and The Golden Age*, ed. Pritchard, 202-204.
[417] Brecht, 'Der Dreigroschenprozess: Ein soziologisches Experiment'. Quoted in Anton Kaes, 'The Debate about Cinema: Charting a Controversy (1909-1929)', trans. David Levin, *New German Critique* (Winter, 1987), 7-33 (28).
[418] Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 73.
[419] Pritchard, 'Creating Productions', *Diaghilev and The Golden Age*, ed. Pritchard, 71-88 (82). The Ballets Suédois impresario, Rolf De Maré, provided film footage of African dances for his choreographer to use in preparation for *La Création du Monde* in 1923. Garafola, 'Rivals for the New', *Paris* Modern, ed. Baer and Ahlstrand, 73.

the gaps between reels of film.[420] These medial shifts were sometimes compressed within a single play:

> in 1911 the Petersburg Mozaika… came up with a horror play *Submarine Shipwreck*, in which a film sequence showing a submarine sinking was followed by the harrowing scene inside the boat with live actors groaning, swearing, praying.[421]

This kind of exhibition demonstrates an interchangability between the performers and projections, with each acting as the figure or ground for the other medium.[422] According to Tsivian, cinema was an 'ideal target for parody on the miniature stage' and he recounts a staging of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* at St Petersburg's The Crooked Mirror cabaret, composed as if it were a film adaptation by Boris Geyer. [423] Goncharova was active on the cabaret scene and, by the time she travelled to Paris to join the Ballets Russes in 1915, had even performed in a film, unfortunately lost, by Vladimir Kasyanov called *Drama in the Futurist Cabaret No. 13*.[424] Thus the producers of ballet and opera were also the consumers and producers of film, a situation beyond Diaghilev's control.

The new medium's situation in the 1910s can also be grounded quantitatively in statistics. The year 1914 saw a peak in establishments hosting paid film screenings, and film eclipsed the other forms of live entertainment in variety programmes.[425] By 1911, there were between 125 and 130 venues showing film programmes in Paris and by the outbreak of the First World

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[420] Yuri Tsivian, 'Russia, 1913: Cinema in the Cultural Landscape', *Silent Film*, ed. Abel (London: The Athlone Press, 1996), 194-214 (198).
[421] Tsivian, 'Russia, 1913', 198.
[422] Marshall McLuhan's sense of the terms 'figure' and 'ground' are instructive here: the figure is that which draws immediate attention while the ground adds context and is often an area of unattention; for McLuhan, the medium functions via its context or ground. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge Mss.: MIT Press, 1994) and *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews*, ed. Stephanie McLuhan and David Staines (Toronto: McClelland & Steward, 2005).
[423] Tsivian, 'Russia, 1913: Cinema in the Cultural Landscape', 197.
[424] Michael Zuch, 'Biography', *Natalia Goncharova: Between Russian Tradition and European Modernism,* ed. Beate Kemfert and Alla Chilova (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 141-143 (141).
[425] Wild, *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema*, 136.

War, this number had increased to between 171 and 186.[426] Parisian audience statistics are equally suggestive of cinema's threat to opera at the commercial level of ticket sales: in December 1914, the combined Parisian theatre and concert-going audience of 272, 080 people competed with a film-going audience of 788, 504; by July 1915, the audience of 463, 874 theatre and concert-goers was dwarfed by the 1, 223, 693 cinema spectators.[427] As the ticket prices for the Ballets Russes at the Paris Opéra between May and June 1914 attest (fig. 42), even the least expensive seat was significantly more expensive than a Parisian film programme of the same month and year (fig. 43).

The years 1913-14 also saw the first successes of early feature films, the two most notable of which were produced by Italian companies: Cines' *Quo Vadis?* (directed by Enrico Guazzoni, 1913) and Itala Films' *Cabiria* (directed by Giovanni Pastrone, 1914). *Quo Vadis?* was plot-driven and based on the life of the Emperor Nero, with a multitude of characters and punctuated by intertitles which had become standard in the industry.[428] Visually, the film was conceived on an epic scale with shots on location, five thousand supernumeraries, horses and lions, a high-quality set, keen attention to lighting, and the more theatrical 'staging in depth' (fig. 44).[429] Its camera work however was still relatively simple, having not yet achieved the level of sophistication that characterised later feature-length triumphs, and the film was made up of 'long and not always well-framed takes.'[430] At 2, 230 meters, *Quo Vadis?* ran at two hours, remarkably long for the period.[431] Released the same year as *Quo Vadis?* and historical in genre, *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompeii* (The Last Days of Pompeii) escalated the use of colour.

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[426] Meusy, *Paris-Palaces Ou Le Temps Des Cinémas 1894-1918* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1995), 276.
[427] Meusy, *Paris-Palaces*, 422.
[428] By 1912 70% of films had intertitles. Claire Dupré la Tour, 'Intertitles', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 326-328.
[429] Roberta E. Pearson, 'Historical Films', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 299.
[430] William B. Parrill, *European Silent Films on Video: A Critical Guide* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006), 327.
[431] Ivo Blom, 'Italy', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema,* ed. Abel, 338.

While the majority of features were treated by the tint of a single colour to create an overall dramatic effect (for example blue for a night-time state, green for an outdoor setting), some films had reels in which discrete elements were tinted in different colours, a process achieved through hand-cut stencils.[432] The last reel of *Gli ultimi giorni* contains such a multi-coloured scene in which the eruption of Vesuvius is rendered with red and orange flares against a blue sky.[433] *Quo Vadis?* and *Gli ultimi giorni* illustrate how early feature films mimicked and then surpassed opera's previously unique qualities. Their running times, colour, lighting and staging matched operatic modes of representation, yet with location shooting, live animals and intertitles,[434] *Quo Vadis?* presented elements opera had not achieved and, what is more, was screened in opera houses across Italy.[435] *Cabiria* superseded *Quo Vadis?* in length. There is no consensus of its number of reels or running time, but contingent on projection speed, it might have been between two and a half and three hours.[436] Part of the same historical genre, *Cabiria* depicted the Punic War between Rome and Carthage and was shot on location in Tunisia, Sicily and the Alps,[437] with scenes that included lava pouring furiously down Mount Etna (fig. 45), collapsing Roman edifices, camels and elephants. *Cabiria* was characterised by the travelling shot, an innovation in which a mobile camera slowly moved into a scene during the take, offering an impression of depth, not through its set elements, but through movement.[438]

Cabiria's production posed a further threat to opera: its big budget. The first production to cost over a million dollars, *Cabiria* heralded an era of high financial stakes with generous

[432] Liz-Anne Bawden, *The Oxford Companion to Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 148.
[433] Bawden, *The Oxford Companion to Film*, 148.
[434] Surtitles were not introduced in opera houses until the 1980s.
[435] Parrill, *European Silent Films on Video*, 327.
[436] Usai, Martin Sopocy, '"*Cabiria"*, an Incomplete Masterpiece: The Quest for the Original 1914 Version', *Film History*, 2 (1988), 155-165 (148).
[437] Georges Sadoul, *Dictionary of Films*, trans. Peter Morris (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 49.
[438] Pearson, 'Historical Films' *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 299.

budgets based on wide distribution and the possibility of large box office returns, paving the way for D.W Griffith's high-grossing feature-length films *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916). *Cabiria* demonstrated the power of mass media's financial potential as it achieved international acclaim: it was projected for six months in Paris, while its New York screenings continued for a year.[439] *Cabiria*'s lucrative potential enabled Itala Film to justify exorbitant fees to draw famous names. The company secured the input of Italy's literary luminary, Gabriele D'Annunzio, to raise the artistic profile of the film for 50, 000 gold lire.[440] Hefty budgets justified by box office potential demonstrated the lucrative possibilities of film that live performance could not compete with. Indeed, correspondence between Diaghilev and Stravinsky in the autumn of 1914 suggests financial pressures forced the latter to abandon *Liturgie*'s score. In his memoirs the composer recounted: 'I refused to do the ballet both because I disapproved of the idea of presenting the Mass as a ballet spectacle and because Diaghilev wanted me to compose it and *Les Noces* for the same price'.[441] This was a far cry from the situation of Ildebrando Pizzetti, *Cabiria*'s composer, who was offered 20,000 lire, a considerable share of the overall budget, to write music for the whole film.[442] Travelling between Paris and Italy in 1914, it seems probable that the hype surrounding *Quo Vadis?* and *Cabiria*'s release would not have been lost on Diaghilev and his collaborators.

Liturgie

As feature films gained traction and the First World War wore on, Diaghilev and his troupe pursued *Liturgie*. The collated sources suggest the following vision for the ballet-opera:

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[439] Gary Allen Smith's account suggests that *Cabiria* ran for six months in *Epic Films: Casts, Credits and Commentary on More Than 350 Historical Spectacle Movies* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009), 40. Carlo Lizzani, meanwhile, records that Cabiria ran for a whole year in *Il Cinema Italiano dalle Origini agli Anni Ottanta* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1982), 23.

[440] Sadoul, *Dictionary of Films*, trans. Morris, 49.

[441] Igor Stravinsky, Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 48.

[442] Usai, Sopocy, '"Cabiria", an Incomplete Masterpiece', 156.

against the painted backdrop of an iconostasis,[443] performers clad in rigid, icon-like costumes bring those static religious paintings to life. Their jewel-coloured geometric planes move to create familiar scenic compositions from the life of Christ in a stange and angular manner. The scenes are not consistently accompanied by music, but are variously combined with sung sacred chant, silence and the percussive sounds of the performers' feet on a resonant stage, which evokes the sounds of a liturgical ceremony within the Biblical narrative. The unstaged ballet-opera was developed by the impresario and the choreographer Léonid Massine, artist Natalia Goncharova and composer Igor Stravinsky (fig. 46), and gathered momentum in Switzerland during the summer of 1915. *Liturgie* was first brought to my attention at the Courtauld Institute in November 2014 as part of a display featuring the Moscow Jack of Diamonds group founded in 1910. Angular, flat and with byzantine-inspired gestures, the green Magus from *Liturgie* was provocative as a costume design: planes concealed the form of the human body and appeared to contain its fluid movement (fig. 47). The premise of a costume that worked against the performing body, led me to wonder whether this restrictive element might have been the reason that *Liturgie* remained unrealised. Was it an unperformable ballet?

Liturgie's unperformed status fascinated me. While impractical costume designs with potentially costly materials and inhospitable war-time conditions might explain its failure to reach the stage, *Liturgie*'s archive revealed a vigorous collaboration drawn out over a number of years. Remarkably for a performance project, the visual archive far outweighs the literary, musical and choreographic one. Goncharova contributed a vast number of designs for costumes and a backcloth between 1914 and 1916.[444] History's oversight of *Liturgie* is not

[443] An iconostasis is a wall of painted religious icons that traditionally separates the nave from the sanctuary in a church.
[444] These sources are scattered across the Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Centre Pompidou and the Archives of the Opéra, Paris, The Harvard Theatre Collection, Cambridge

only due to its lack of performance but also its image-based archive: the visual media of performance have commonly been considered purely decorative and therefore secondary. In the case of *Liturgie*, however, the visual was not an additional component but a generative one, which hints at another image-led method of making: that of early film. Kittler has thematised film's impact upon the dominance of writing as a medium: 'theatre and opera are only examples of art forms that functioned in parasitical dependence on the monopoly of writing'. [445] Kittler implies that as the play depends on the script so opera depends on the musical score. The arrival of technical media, however, 'disrupts this monopoly as such, and it therefore works on a level that is more radical than competition'.[446] Kittler's claim for film and its impact upon the written records of theatre and opera performance, working at level 'more radical than competition' bears scrutiny with *Liturgie*.

Unusually for a ballet-opera, the choreography and designs for *Liturgie* evolved long before text or music was written. In a reversal of standard practice, in which a libretto and score were produced first, dance and design led *Liturgie*'s process, while the libretto operated as a fluid and even inessential component. Without a specialist librettist in the team, the libretto appears to have been the shared responsibility of the impresario, choreographer and designer and was never decisively finalised. With its challenge to opera's traditional hierarchy of media and as an anomaly in the Ballets Russes' productions of the period, how and why did *Liturgie*'s radically reordered method of making come to be? I have conceptualised twentieth-century opera first as multimedia, a situation in which many medial components operate, and secondly as remedia, '[a medium] which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social

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and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. A number of designs from *Liturgie* remain in private collections, having been brought to light in December 2015 at Sotheby's Russian Art Sale in London, UK.
[445] I have chosen to read 'script' into Kittler's quote which contains an error: 'theatre and opera are only examples of art forms that functioned in parasitical dependence on the monopoly of writing; think about the role of role in theatre or score in opera'. Kittler, *Optical Media*, 23.
[446] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 23.

significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real'.[447] Keeping these in mind, I would now like to examine *Liturgie*'s archive in relation to the earlier genre of the Biblical passion play film.

Archive

While *Liturgie*'s archive is emphatically visual, it contains no moving image footage. Kittler maps a shift in the means of 'cultural storage' during the nineteenth century from 'the watery stuff of memory and writing' to the inscription of temporal events via the modern acoustic and optical media of the phonograph and film.[448] Film recordings are absent from the Ballets Russes' archive and, while this has been put down to the prohibitive clause in Diaghilev's contracts, it is remarkable that their rivals, the Ballets Suédois, were also undocumented by film and left a visually-weighted archive of designs, photographs and posters.[449] One of the most compelling parts of *Liturgie*'s history is the fact that significant work in design and dance took place before any music was composed. Despite its dependence on tempo and rhythm, thirty-two choreography rehearsals went ahead[450] and evidence of these is confirmed by two photos from rehearsals of the *Annunciation* (fig. 48) and the *Garden of Gethsemane* scenes,[451] and in Massine's choreographic notes. It does not seem that the music was intended to be left until last, as Diaghilev's relocation to Ouchy in Switzerland was with view to working closely with Stravinsky based nearby.[452] This ploughing on with choreography

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[447] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 98.
[448] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 13.
[449] *Derviches* was the single Ballets Suédois performance caught on film. The only other material captured was documentary footage of the company's 1922 Swedish tour. Baer, 'The Ballets Suédois', *Paris Modern*, ed. Baer, Ahlstrand, 37.
[450] Scheijen, *Diaghilev: A Life*, 310.
[451] Vicente García-Márquez, *Massine: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 54. Andrew Spira, *The Avant-Garde Icon* (London: Lund Humphries, 2008), 136. The scholar Lynn Garafola has suggested to me in person that she has access to other photographs.
[452] 'Stravinsky lived at Morges, a few kilometres from Lausanne (Ouchy) and he often came to see us. As far as I remember, he was working on 'Les Noces' and used to play fragments of it, playing and singing all the voices…When 'Liturgie' was abandoned, I began making sketches for 'Les Noces'. Natalia Goncharova, 'The Metamorphoses of the Ballet 'Les Noces', *Leonardo*, 12 (1979), 137-143 (137).

despite the lack of music reveals the contingencies of *Liturgie*'s process. Contingency comes to the fore in Brecht's accounts of writing for the screen. Describing his desultory involvement in a film adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera* in 1930, he exposed how the filmic apparatus – with its large and fragmented legal and economic components – guided the production at the cost of the author. Indeed, the Nero Film Company's premature hiring of the studio space squeezed the artistic schedule with disastrous effects.[453] Regardless of chronology's use to directors and performers for whom an intuitive order of events offers psychological and dramatic continuity, the economic implications of logistics, hiring spaces and artists' schedules means that a non-chronological order of shooting scenes is paradigmatic of film, Yet the contingencies of the filmic apparatus were seen by others as opportunities to produce brilliantly unexpected results, medial combinations which could not have been planned but needed to be tried. This positive sense of contingency is suggested in the medium-specific tenets of *photogénie* which gained traction in early film theory. Chance played no small part in Jean Epstein's description:

> We discover something in seeking something else. The important thing is to place oneself in conditions which do not exclude the unexpected, behind a wall of "célotex"; the encounter will do the rest. The *photogénie* of camera angles, of "tracking shots", of so much mechanical, vegetable, cosmic, and collective movement was not discovered by deliberate method. The cameraman of the movie newsreels indifferently collected millions of images, out of which we grew accustomed to discerning those which are exclusively cinematic.[454]

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[453] Brecht, 'IV: The Threepenny Material (1930–1932)', *Brecht On Film & Radio*, trans. and ed. Marc Silberman (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 145.

[454] Jean Epstein, 'The Cinema Continues' (1930), *French Film Theory and Criticism, Volume II: 1929-1939*, ed. Abel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 66-67.

Epstein’s emphasis on establishing an environment which does not ‘exclude the unexpected’ is evocative of Diaghilev’s Swiss studio which similarly fostered a trial and error approach to combining media.

Liturgie’s archive suggests a particular collaborative model, one of conceiving costume and choreography at roughly the same time, then adding other media contributions over a loose and fractured timeframe without the deadline of a fixed performance.[455] This concentrated period of activity – in which authors and performers occupied the same physical space while devising work – resembles the director-unit system established by the Pathé film company in 1906.[456] As Abel describes, Pathé’s system of production enabled multiple filmmakers to work regularly with a small team including performers and a cameraman to produce a series of films, typically one title each week. The Pathé studio in action depicts multiple agents working separately in shared space (fig. 49).

The simultaneous presence of the authors concerned with the concept and narrative and the performers is paradigmatic of film but unusual in theatre. Writing to Stravinsky in 1914 ‘your being at such a distance makes this all impossibly difficult’,[457] the director-unit system appears to have been a priority for Diaghilev. Indeed, Diaghilev’s collaborative model suggests that of screenwriting and editing, where the text is not fixed but can be adapted based on how it appears in the studio. Diaghilev’s agents recognised his way of working as remarkable. A crossed out note in Goncharova’s memoirs describes: ‘~~For each ballet it was Diaghilev who chose the collaborators and also the atmosphere of work. He had a great knowledge of…~~ He understood perfectly ~~in which atmosphere and~~ in which situation we

[455] Pritchard, ‘Creating Productions’, Diaghilev and the Golden Age, ed. Pritchard, 74.
[456] Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema, 1896-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 22.
[457] Stravinsky, Craft, *Memories and Commentaries*, 50.

could have the best result'.[458] This piecemeal method reflects the impulse towards the total elision of media embodied by the synchronised sound film in the 1920s. As Kittler explains: 'the individual technical elements of film – the recording device, the storage medium, the projection apparatus – were combined with one another very gradually and in stages'.[459] Or more specifically:

> Film… began at least technically as silent film, and it did not combine all three of Edison's inventions – film, light bulb, and phonograph. It is probably a historical rule of post-print media technologies that individual and isolated sensory channels must first be completely and thoroughly tested before any thought about connecting them is at all possible'.[460]

Opera emerged as multimedia when its visual media were isolated and tested out before being connected back up to the previously domineering literary and musical media. The authorial claims Kittler makes for technological media echo *Liturgie*'s situation: 'never the inventions of individual geniuses' technical media are 'a chain of assemblages that are sometimes shot down and that sometimes crystallise…'[461] Put another way, Kittler describes how 'In the age of industry… film emerged from pure teamwork'.[462] While I have discussed Kittler's aversion to humans and the untheorised nature of artistic collaboration, what matters here is his emphasis on many agents and a fractured schedule which allows medial components to be tested and combined unpredictably over time. *Liturgie*'s example demonstrates an artistic medium behaving like a technical one and blurs the boundaries traditionally used to demarcate art and technology: opera here encompasses both.

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[458] Goncharova, Memoirs. Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery, Coll. 180/32, Inv. no. 32, 2.
[459] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 153.
[460] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 163-164.
[461] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 153.
[462] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 160.

Music

Music and text are conspicuous omissions in *Liturgie*'s archive. It is hard to emphasise the extent to which rehearsing without the temporal continuity of a musical score or libretto is exceptional in opera practice even in the present day. Under paradigmatic conditions one would simply not attempt to enter into a rehearsal period without a score. As a ballet-opera, the score and libretto would traditionally be combined into a single document, presenting the singers' text underneath its musical notation. Stravinsky was commissioned by Diaghilev as follows: 'The music should be a series of a cappella sacred choruses, inspired perhaps, by Gregorian chant'.[463] *Liturgie*'s lack of music appears to have been largely due to the reluctance of the composer,[464] even though Stravinsky joined Diaghilev's team at least once during the summer of 1915 (he appears in a photo seated opposite Goncharova with a dog, fig. 46). It seems Stravinsky was struggling to produce *Les Noces* to schedule. Writing to Stravinsky in November 1914, Diaghilev signs off 'Well, and you, which tableau of Noces have you reached? Write, Dog. Yours, Seriosha'.[465] Goncharova's memoirs allude to Stravinsky's presence and also suggest his preoccupation with *Les Noces*.[466] Her remark 'Diaghilev did not like me to do anything other than 'Liturgie' for which he had brought me here'[467] indicates Diaghilev's possible comparable frustration with Stravinsky who continued to prioritise *Les Noces* over *Liturgie*. In spite of this, Diaghilev improvised other plans, including old liturgical music from Kiev, and the idea of silence with all but the percussive rhythm of the dancers' feet.[468]

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[463] Stravinsky, Craft, *Memories and Commentaries*, 50.
[464] Stravinsky appears to have been reluctant to see the project through for reasons of religious principle as well as due to an issue with the fee. Stravinsky, Craft, *Memories and Commentaries*, 48.
[465] Stravinsky, Craft, *Memories and Commentaries*, 48.
[466] 'Quand presque dans un an nous le revien a Lausanne Ouchy ou Diaghilew nous fit venire moi et Larionov pour d'autres ballets –Stravinsky apartait a Diaghilew des fragments musique de "Les Noces" je crois nouvellement ecrits qu'il chantait et jouait lui meme au pianos.' Goncharova, Memoirs. Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery, Coll. 180/30, Inv. no. 30, 2.
[467] Goncharova, Memoirs. Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery, Coll. 180/30, Inv. no. 30, 2.
[468] Spira, *The Avant-Garde Icon*, 133.

The flexibility of *Liturgie*'s score and the fact the project was pursued despite Stravinsky's abstinence, indicates a new non-operatic kind of thinking. Abel and Rick Altman describe early cinema's sound in equally ad hoc terms: 'Whether instrumental, vocal, or mechanical, sound ranged from the improvised to the pre-planned—as in scripts, scores, and cue sheets. And the practice of combining sounds with images differed widely depending on the exhibition venue'.[469] That *Liturgie*'s possible musical iterations lay not in the hands of the composer but in those of the impresario-producer reflects the treatment of music in early film screenings, where the exhibitor rather than composer controlled the final musical outcome: if the venue's music director was not keen on the score sent with the film, or thought it was beyond his orchestral forces, he would substitute something he deemed more appropriate, and cinema programmes attest to this as a frequent occurrence.[470] Integrated into early film's systems of distribution and exhibition, but subordinated to the moving image and its structure, the musical score had been taken out of the composer's hands. Had this filmic approach been pushed to its furthest conclusion for *Liturgie*, three musical versions of the ballet-opera might have coexisted: that of Stravinsky, the liturgical version and the silent one accompanied by the dancers' rhythmic feet. Massine recorded the latter manifestation in letters and notebooks from his rehearsals: 'I work on a huge ballet, it seems to me I had written to you already but in few words. The movements will be without music… Music choruses begin only when the curtain comes down and end when the curtain is again risen. It is difficult to say how this came about, one thing followed the other…'.[471] Massine suggests no rigorous method but rather happenstance, the trial and error approach that Epstein locates in *photogénie*, where a large volume of footage is gathered and whittled down to a few photogenic moments.

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[469] Abel and Rick Altman, 'Introduction', *The Sounds of Early Cinema,* ed. Abel and Rick Altman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), xiii.
[470] Norman King, 'The Sound of Silents', *Silent Film*, ed. Abel, 31.
[471] Garcia-Marquez, *Massine: A Biography*, 54.

Massine's account of unaccompanied choreography alternated with the sound of a chorus emerging from behind the curtain points to the separation of sensory experiences, which frustrates a subject's perception of the flow of time as the linking of different media serve as co-referents to measure time. This technique returns us to opera's behaviour as a technological medium with its ability to manipulate the flow of time.[472]

This dissociation of sound and movement was pursued further in the following decade and became a trope in Dadaist performance. In the Ballets Russes' 1917 *Parade* – choreographed by Massine – the character of the Manager dances without musical accompaniment. In Massine's 1924 collaboration *Mercure*, which involved largely the same creative team as *Parade* including Satie and Picasso, but was produced by the Soirées de Paris, the dancer Edith de Bonsdorff only moved when the music had ceased: 'when Satie's sentimental tunes start, she smokes and looks at the décor'.[473] Indeed, Satie's instruction for Massine to first create the choreography in order that he could devise music drawn from the dancers' movement, maps out the same mode of production adopted by the Ballets Russes in 1915.

Text

While the situation of *Liturgie*'s music appears equivocal or deliberately open ended, that of the text is even less clear. The lack of finalised libretto or scenario for *Liturgie* is due in part to the absence of a designated librettist. Diaghilev tended to appoint a specialist librettist as part of his production teams: 'As well as the advisory committee, there would be a librettist who wrote or adapted the narrative, recommending the number of scenes, the characters and the action, keeping it simple enough for an audience to follow'.[474] However, the lack of

[472] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 44.
[473] Boulbès, *Relâche*, 215.
[474] Pritchard, 'Creating Productions, *Diaghilev and the Golden Age*, ed. Pritchard, 74.

librettist did not necessarily preclude the creation of a libretto. Offering an alternative account of the Ballets Russes' process, the Russian writer Valerian Svetlov described how

> Composers, painters, ballet master, authors and those interested in the arts come together and plan the work to be done. Each makes his suggestions, which are accepted or rejected by a general consensus or opinion, and thus in the end it is difficult to say which individual was responsible for the libretto, and what was due to the common effort. The real author was, of course, he who proposed the idea, but the amendments, the working-out, the details, made it the work of all. So too with the music, the dancers; all is the result of this collective effort… Thus, both artistic unity of design and execution are achieved.[475]

While this collaborative format was pursued for *Liturgie*, it does not appear to have produced a consensus in the form of a single text.

Liturgie's text appears to have existed in many scattered iterations. Goncharova's partner Mikhail Larionov and the writer Valentin Parnac describe it thus: 'Goncharova's *Liturgie* is a church mass representing seven moments from the life of Jesus Christ'.[476] Diaghilev's correspondence with Stravinsky,[477] as well as the scholar Mary Chamot, corroborate this description, specifying a short structure and diminutive scale with a 'small group of dancers'.[478] However, parts of the dispersed archive suggest otherwise. According to Evgenia Iluchina, 'the libretto was rewritten numerous times. In the end Goncharova wrote it herself in

[475] Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 156.
[476] Valentin Parnac and Mikhail Larionov, *Gontcharova-Larionow: l'art décoratif théâtral moderne* (Paris: la Cible, 1919), 12.
[477] 'I will not go into the details of the action here but suffice to say it is a sacred spectacle, an ecstatic Mass, in six or seven short scenes. The period is roughly Byzantine…The music is a series of a cappella choruses, purely religious, perhaps inspired by Gregorian chant'. Goncharova quoted in Evgenia Iluchina, 'Natalia Goncharova – Between Theatre and Painting', *Natalia Goncharova*, ed. Kemfert and Chilova (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 41-59 (42).
[478] Mary Chamot, *Gontcharova: Stage Designs and Paintings* (London: Oresko Books, 1979), 16.

order to at least be able to stipulate the number of scenes'.[479] Through examining this source in the Tretyakov archives, it is clear that Goncharova's vision for *Liturgie* was much more expansive than that of Diaghilev or Massine. The character list alone suggests as many as fifty-two performers on stage at any one time and instead of six or seven scenes, Goncharova lays down the grand operatic scale of a prologue and two acts.[480] This divergence in the collaborative vision of the project again echoes Brecht's reflections on turning *The Threepenny Opera* into a film: 'at no time…did those involved share a common notion of the subject matter, the purpose of the film, the audience, the apparatus, etc.'.[481] In Brecht's case, the production process was so complex it was impossible for all collaborators to have a sense of the whole; the work resembled a mechanism in which many parts worked separately. Unity of artistic intention cannot be assumed in *Liturgie* since it was not conceived under the paradigmatic conditions of artistic production: from the outset there appear to have been differing senses of what the work should be. The lack of a universally-acknowledged libretto for *Liturgie* is nevertheless striking, particularly when the role of the composer – the agent who might otherwise coalesce textual fragments with a musical setting – is missing. Citing the recollections of the choreographer Bronislava Nijinska, Garafola observes how Diaghilev 'had little sympathy for ballets "without libretti". He found abstraction "foreign," and even in works such as *La Chatte* (1926) or *Ode* (1928) that made use of abstract elements, he insisted upon a libretto detailing the mimetic action'.[482] A clear departure from Diaghilev's usual method of making, the question remains: why was text neglected in the making of *Liturgie*?

[479] Iluchina, 'Natalia Goncharova – Between Theatre', *Natalia Goncharova*, ed. Kemfert and Chilova, 42.
[480] Iluchina, *Theatre in the works of M. Larionov, N. Goncharova, Paris Heritage in the Tretyakov Gallery* (Moscow: Tretyakov Gallery, 1999). Russian source translated by Anita Frison (Padua University, 2017).
[481] Brecht, 'IV: The Threepenny Material (1930–1932)', *Brecht On Film & Radio*, trans. and ed. Silberman, 172.
[482] Garafola, 'Dance, Film and the Ballets Russes', 73.

Let us recall the fierce film debates in 1910s France in which text and narrative figured as bones of contention. Across the critical spectrum, cinema was at once derided for its appropriation of literary subjects and celebrated for its potency as a wordless means of expression. By the years of *Liturgie*'s attempted production, the majority of films had intertitles.[483] Increasingly taking the form of dialogue rather than descriptive texts, intertitles were sometimes even inserted into the moving image itself, appearing simultaneously with the image action, rather than preceding it on a separate intertitle screen.[484] Intertitles were not embraced across the board, however, and received criticism on three main counts: their summary of the drama deflated any sense of suspense, their visual presence broke the illusion of reality on screen, and they appeared either too often or with too much text.[485] The backlash against intertitles played into an oppositional artistic trend epitomised by German critic Kurt Pinthus, who published what is regarded as the first serious piece of German film criticism in his article 'Quo vadis – Kino?.[486] In 1913, Pinthus compiled an anthology of new film scenarios produced by a group of young avant-garde writers. *Das Kinobuch* was 'a testament to the cinematic – as opposed to theatrical – potential of the medium'.[487] Pinthus posited an incompatibility between cinema and the written word, with moving image 'one need not learn how to read or speak in order to see',[488] and he argued for cinema's particular experience of 'direct vision' (*unmittelbare Anschauung*).[489] Though Pinthus acknowledged that theatre could also generate this experience, the live art form was restricted by its adherence to text and he thus urged audiences to be careful to separate theatre and cinema.[490] Described by

[483] Dupré la Tour, 'Intertitles', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 328.
[484] Dupré la Tour, 'Intertitles', 328.
[485] Dupré la Tour, 'Intertitles', 328.
[486] Scott Curtis, 'Pinthus, Kurt', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 521.
[487] Curtis, 'Pinthus, Kurt', 521-522.
[488] Luca Zenobi, 'Quo vadis – Kino?" Kurt Pinthus and the Theoretical Debate on the Birth of Cinema in Germany', *Imaginary Films in Literature*, ed. Stefano Ercolino, Massimo Fusillo, Mirko Linom and Luca Zenobi (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 113-139 (119).
[489] Zenobi, 'Quo vadis – Kino?"', *Imaginary Films*, ed. Ercolino, Fusillo, Linom and Zenobi, 119.
[490] Zenobi, 'Quo vadis – Kino?"', *Imaginary Films*, ed. Ercolino, Fusillo, Linom and Zenobi, 119.

Kittler as the 'l'art pour l'art of silent film', Pinthus's anthology called for plots which were 'intelligible based on image sequences alone without any intertitles or film explainers'.[491] The pushback against text in film, which asserted film as image-led, recurred later in the decade under a different guise, when French critics began crediting the director rather than screenwriter with authorial status, privileging visual over textual contributions.[492]

Drawing upon critiques of the feature film, its intertitles and the related quest for a pure cinema based on 'direct vision' – the latter of which was in its embryonic form in the 1910s – I would like to speculate that *Liturgie*'s text did not fall through the cracks of the archive but was simply not a priority. Rejecting the feature film's narrative impetus, theatrical values and dialogic intertitles, *Liturgie* emerges as the Ballets Russes' remediation of film through its relegation of text and handling of narrative, a process that adopts at once the 'l'art pour l'art of silent film' advocated by Pinthus and others, and film's earlier iteration of the 1900s, the cinema of attractions. Kittler observes how this 'l'art pour l'art of silent film' was not a profitable venture.[493] It seems Diaghilev mitigated the financial risk of such an approach by creating *Liturgie* outside the market place, without appearing to officially contract his team or commit to a performance venue.

Narrative

If we consider *Liturgie*'s textual archive not as incomplete, but rather instrumentally fluid and unstandardised in sympathy with countercurrents in film aesthetics, then what of its narrative? Diaghilev's use of the liturgy as a structure for his experiment was not an arbitrary choice but

[491] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 190.
[492] Abel, 'On the Threshold of French Film Theory and Criticism', 17. Since the role of the stage director was not formalised until the early twentieth century, there is a persuasive case to be made for the stage director as emerging from the same pressures as the film auteur-director.
[493] Kittler, *Optical Media*, 190.

instead one motivated by the formal possibilities that familiar narratives had opened up for film. *Liturgie*'s seven scenes from the life of Christ find a counterpart in the passion play films which had established themselves as a significant early cinema genre.[494] While Gaumont produced two such films in 1899 and 1906, Pathé produced a total of four, in 1900, 1902-1903, 1907, and 1913.[495] Pathé's 1907 offering was an early blockbuster and was likely viewed multiple times by more people in Europe and North America than any other film of the era.[496] *La Vie et la Passion de Notre Seigneur Jésus Christ* was therefore one of the most common filmic experiences of the time and it is likely that the genre was known to Diaghilev's agents and audience. As Roberta E. Pearson has remarked, films with Biblical topoi had particular advantages:

> They conformed perfectly to the cinema of attractions which depended for its appeal upon spectacle and narrative familiarity, that is, upon combining visually pleasing shots with well-known stories rather than constructing "new" narratives and spatio/temporal continuity. No stories were more familiar to the majority of Europeans and Americans than those of the Bible.[497]

Situated by Gunning in the late nineteenth century until about 1903 or 1904, the cinema of attractions was characterised by its direct address to the spectator through visual and technological spectacle as opposed to narrative.[498] It is remarkable that the Ballets Russes were not approaching *Liturgie* in the early 1900s, the cinema of attractions' heyday, but in 1914-15, when its mode of representation was being obscured by the narrative feature film, in

[494] Stephen Bottomore lists productions by Kirchner (1897); Lumière (1898); Gaumont (1899) in 'Religious Filmmaking', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Abel, 549.
[495] Pearson, 'Biblical films', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, 69.
[496] Pearson, 'Biblical films', 69. Bottomore credits *The Photo-Drama of Creation* (1914) as the apex of early religious filmmaking, as it was produced at huge expense with some synchronised sound, a duration of eight hours and was given at least 20, 000 screenings in America and the USA. 'Religious Filmmaking', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, 550.
[497] Pearson, 'Biblical Films', 70.
[498] Gunning, 'An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator', *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 114-133 (121-123).

which spectacle was tempered by dialogic intertitles and eventually synchronised sound.

Though intertitles were widespread by 1910, films were still screened without titles, and the separate and optional purchase of intertitles meant that exhibitors on a low budget or with international audiences could present films more flexibly.[499] Biblical stories already familiar to audiences were particularly effective in the absence of intertitles.[500] Yet the use of familiar narrative in the service of the visual became something of a trend in avant-garde ballet in the 1920s. Massine encountered an approach similar to *Liturgie*'s again with Picasso and Satie for *Mercure*, in which 'Plastic Poses in Three Tableaux' based on the exploits of the mythical god Mercury were performed at the Théâtre de la Cigale in 1924.[501] Satie described the use of mythological narrative in terms which echo film criticism of the previous decade: it offered a universal alphabet, simple and ancient in order to avoid any recourse to 'literature'.[502] Let us recall the critical position of film as a visual Esperanto, the contribution of Dulluc who affirmed film's language as a visual one, and that of Braga, who lamented film's reliance on intertitles. Satie expatiated in an interview:

> *These are the adventures of Mercury (kidnapping of Proserpina; bath of Graces, Cerberus, etc.) according to the adventures of mythology. Though there is a theme, this ballet has no plot; it is purely decorative and you can guess the wonderful contribution of Picasso which I have tried to translate musically. I wanted my music to become one body so that it could speak with the actions of the people who are moving within this simple problem. These poses are exactly the same as those you can see at the fair; the show is similar to the music hall, quite simply, without stylisation and, in*

[499] Dupré la Tour, 'Intertitles', 326-327.
[500] Dupré la Tour, 'Intertitles', 327.
[501] Boulbès, *Relâche*, 185.
[502] 'en précisant que la mythologie était un alphabet universel, simple et ancient, qui ne nécessitait pas le recours à la "littérature"'. Erik Satie, *Correspondance presque complète*, ed. Ornella Volta (Paris: Fayard/IMEC, 2000), 591-592. Quoted in Boulbès, *Relâche*, 185.

no way, has anything to do with art. I will always come back to the subtitle of "Plastic poses" which I find magnificent...[503]

In this fascinating insight, Satie mentions a process for *Mercure* in 1924 remarkably close to that of *Liturgie* in 1915: the production has a subject but no plot, the adventures of Mercury are episodic, and the order of medial inputs placed design and choreography ahead of music. *Mercure* diverges from *Liturgie* however in a couple of significant ways: Satie describes his compositional role as one of *translating* Picasso's designs musically, a combination constructed upon the submission of one medium to another. This is an inversion of Diaghilev's process which cannot be characterised by medial translation but instead by more autonomous media combination which invites moments of dissonance and discord. Like the Ballets Suédois's *Relâche* collaborators (of which Satie was one), *Mercure*'s producers associated the production with popular styles from the music hall and took pains to distance it from 'les choses de l'art', aligning their work with a more Dadaist kind of anti-art strategy. Though Diaghilev's *Parade* of 1917 provided the first creative encounter between *Mercure*'s team to create a '*Ballet réaliste*', *Liturgie* shares neither *Parade* nor *Mercure*'s popular qualities.

Mercure and *Liturgie* share the use of a common narrative to enable experimental formal techniques, a strategy pioneered by the early passion play film. Through his discovery of a particular film print in MoMA, Gunning deduces a practice peculiar to the passion play genre, in which the film exhibitor takes a more audacious approach to the cutting and collaging of shots due to the audience's guaranteed knowledge of the narrative episodes.[504] Gunning

[503] Pierre de Massot, '25 minutes avec Erik Satie', *Paris-Journal*, 30 May 1924, 2. Quoted in Boulbès, *Relâche*, 215.

[504] Gunning, 'Passion Play as Palimpsest: The Nature of the Text in the History of Early Cinema', *An Invention of the Devil?: Religion and Early Cinema*, ed. Roland Cosandey, André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1992), 102-111 (106).

points at a trend Abel has also acknowledged, that the film is never a finished product but rather something that can be made up by the film exhibitor to work with their programmes.[505] Locating a forgotten or repressed part of film history, Gunning's object of study reveals the exhibitor – rather than writer, director or production company – to be a kind of auteur.[506] This film practice sets a pattern for Diaghilev's process, which employs a flexible narrative and has the effect of throwing the authorship out to his agents, creatives and performers alike, to change the order of medial inputs with a similar, collage-like effect. As Gunning puts it: 'the passion offered an ideal subject for an exhibitor's creative contribution'.[507] Bringing new attention to the film exhibitor in creating the 'coherence and effect' of a film screening,[508] Gunning outlines the techniques at their disposal: the extra filmic techniques of music or an oral explanation, those which altered the actual presentation of the moving image, the choice of programme (with either thematic similarity or jarring diversity), special effects of projection (playing with the speed of the moving image or running it backwards), and then the cut and paste ordering of the shots.[509]

Drawing upon Gérard Genette's description of all literary texts as intertextual palimpsests,[510] reused pieces of writing material that bear clear traces of the previous texts, Gunning depicts passion play films as palimpsests par excellence: adapting the Gospels, interpolating particular stagings and liturgical conventions, and referencing previous films within the genre. Indeed, Pathé's various passion play releases each followed the structures laid out by previous versions.[511] At the centre of Gunning's study is a passion play film print which is missing a

[505] Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town*, 166.
[506] Gunning, 'Passion Play as Palimpsest', 106.
[507] Gunning, 'Passion Play as Palimpsest', 106.
[508] Gunning, 'Passion Play as Palimpsest', 105.
[509] Gunning, 'Passion Play as Palimpsest', 105.
[510] Gunning, 'Passion Play as Palimpsest', 103.
[511] Gunning invokes the palimpsest via Gerard Genette's reflections on the intertextual nature of literary texts: 'every text can be viewed as a palimpsest; a text written in reflection to a previous one'. Gunning, 'Passion Play as Palimpsest', 102.

number of episodes, 'a Frankenstein monster, a new creation cobbled together from at least three different film versions of the Passion Play'.[512] Its crucifixion sequence, for example, combines three consecutive shots from the different films.[513] In this 'Frankenstein monster', Gunning identified two strong but almost paradoxical currents: the film at once contained the 'radical discontinuities' of moving between shots from different productions with different performers and designs, but at the same time provided a 'basic continuity' through their traditionally established 'narrative events and iconographies', which enabled the drama to be followed without inordinate difficulty, in whatever formal guise it took on.[514] This method articulates the Ballets Russes' project, where they dabbled in experimental techniques as far as possible without alienating their more conventional mainstream audience; a model they found in early film: 'it appears as both a radical work of montage/collage and a work whose very existence and comprehensibility relies on strong ties to tradition. Balancing these contradictory energies, the film seems to me an emblem of the nature of early cinema'.[515]

It is unlikely Diaghilev encountered Gunning's 'Frankenstein monster' (which, in any case, was likely to have been cut and pasted by an exhibitor in the USA).[516] What I am instead highlighting through the film's existence is a culture and practice surrounding passion play films which had currency in the period, one which fostered the technique of collage. In the cases of Gunning's print and Diaghiev's *Liturgie*, the elliptical narrative demonstrates 'aesthetic display rather than coherent self-sufficient storytelling. The goal… to illustrate and recall a well-known story rather than create a self-contained diegesis with narrative flow'.[517]

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[512] Gunning, Passion Play as Palimpsest, 102.
[513] Gunning, Passion Play as Palimpsest. 103.
[514] Gunning, Passion Play as Palimpsest, 103-104.
[515] Gunning, 'Passion Play as Palimpsest', 106.
[516] Gunning, 'Passion Play as Palimpsest', 105.
[517] Gunning, 'Passion Play as Palimpsest', 107.

Choreography

Liturgie's familiar narrative avoided the pressing need for a single text but its choreographic element did rely on written notation. Though new media technology was available, only a few of *Liturgie*'s rehearsals were photographed and Massine relied on the old media storage of a notebook to record his choreography. Massine's notebooks are a remarkable intermedial source combining textual descriptions, rhythmic notation and sketches which suggest the close proximity in which dance and design were conceived. Though a small amount of musical notation is written out, it is not drafted on manuscript paper in the way a composer would present it, and the notes are unpitched and denote only rhythm (fig. 50). These notes possibly pertain to the previously mentioned 'dance in silence' version to be performed to the percussive rhythm of the dancers' feet.[518] Massine's written descriptions of *Batterie* also evoke the rhythmic value of the dancers' steps: in classical ballet *Batterie* or *Battement* describes movements where the legs and feet beat together rapidly, often during a jump. Massine uses similar terminology to describe an 'Adagio' section, replete with *développés*, *jetés* and *arabesques* (fig. 51).[519] In one of few rehearsal photos, Massine is pictured playing the Angel Gabriel with the dancer Lydia Sokolova in the role of the Virgin Mary (fig. 48). As Sokolova testified, 'all the dancers, whether soloists or not, were to count silently to co-ordinated rhythms'.[520] A drawing in Goncharova's hand, of what seems to be a saint, appears with the flat, angular style of her more complete designs (fig. 52). Subsequent sketches seem more instructive to the choreography, and include pairs of feet in different formations and a series of angular arm positions (fig. 53).[521]

[518] Spira, *The Avant-Garde Icon*, 133.
[519] Léonid Massine, Notation for *Liturgie*, Choreographic notebooks, 1915. Cambridge, Mss., Harvard University Houghton Library, MS Thr 506
[520] Spira, 136
[521] Massine, Notation for *Liturgie*, Choreographic notebooks, 1915. MS Thr 506

The process of creating choreography for *Liturgie* is recorded by Goncharova and reveals another agent whose inputs might otherwise have escaped the archive, those of her partner the painter Mikhail Larinov (standing behind the seated Stravinsky in the group photo, fig. 46). Goncharova's detailed description deserves to be given at length:

> Each morning Massine and Larionov rehearsed and worked at the choreography for "Liturgie". When the work for Liturgie was interrupted for various reasons, with two acts already completely made, Larionov and Massine began to work on "Soleil de Minuit", a ballet for the music of Rimsky-Korsakov… For the work and choreography for this ballet the same system was adopted as for "Liturgie". That is to say: Larionov and Massine prepared in the evenings at the villa where Diaghilev would join them the next day. Then the next day Larionov, Diaghilev and I would assist the rehearsal that Massine took with the artists. Diaghilev asked Larionov to watch the rehearsal closely, but not to make remarks to Massine in front of the artists so as not to offend the young prestige of Massine. For the same reason on the posters for "Soleil de Minuit", Larionov's name was placed only as the author of the set and costume and not as choreographer with Massine, and as librettist, and author of set and design. [522]

Here Goncharova gives the example of a painter working as a choreographer, evidence of the loose authorial positions taken as part of this experiment.

[522] 'Tous les jours Massine et Larionov répétaient et Laroinov et Massine travaillent à la chorégraphie de "Lithurgie". Quand le travail pour "Lithurgie" futs interrompu pour divers raisons, après deux actes déjà entièrement fuit, Larionov et Massine commencèrent a travailler a "Soleil de Minuit", ballet sur la musique de Rimsky-Korsakow (fragment de "Snegourotedka" la nuit de bouffons) Ballet pour lequel Larionov inventa le nom Sole de Minuit et fit les esquisses pour les décors et costumes. Pour le travail a la chorégraphie de ce ballet fut adopte le même système que pour le travail a "Lithurgie". C'est a dire: Larionov et Miassine préparaient le soir à la villa qu'accompait Diaghilew a Ouchy la répétition du lendemain – Puis le lendemain Larionov, Diaghilew et moi assistions a la répétition que Miassine faisait avec les artistes. Diaghilev avait demandé Larionov de bien regarder la repetition, mais de ne pas faire de remarque a Miassine devant les artistes pour ne pas porter atteinte au jeune prestige de Miassine. Pour le même raison sur les affiches de Soleil de minuit le nom de Larionov fut mis seulement comme le nom de l'auteur des décors et costume e ne fut pas sur l'affiche comme chorégraphe avec Massine, et comme librettiste, et auteur des décor et costume.' Goncharova, Memoirs. Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery, Coll. 180/30, Inv. no. 30, 2-3.

Despite the store of data in Massine's notebook, the quality of his intended movement is not easy to imagine and was perhaps only communicated through a verbal or physical explanation which evades the archive. Biographic and critical accounts of his choreographic style are consistent with Goncharova's designs and indicate an angular and static quality. Diaghilev and Massine's biographers both give earlier contexts for this quality of movement: in the summer and autumn of 1914, months before the collaborative summer in Switzerland, Diaghilev travelled through Italy to educate his young protégé on the compositions of early Italian paintings.[523] Diaghilev made this didactic process a physical and improvisational one, and asked Massine to practice replicating poses from the paintings they had seen.[524] The critic Valerian Svetlov wrote in 1929: 'All that is plastic, graceful, free from angularity is excluded… The times of 'the choreographic tenor' M. Fokine, in the smart phrase of Massine, are gone forever. All the movements of the dancers are short, angular, mechanical'.[525] Photographs from the previously discussed ballet *Mercure*, for which Massine created choreography and performed the title role in 1924, point to a similar language of static, held poses (the ballet was subtitled 'Plastic Poses in Three Tableaux') and stylised hand gestures with fingers held closely together. The photo of Massine as Mercury (another archetypal messenger figure) resembles that of him as Gabriel in *Liturgie* (compare fig. 48 with fig. 54). Both roles appear to have played upon creating static, slowly alternating poses, drawn from the simplified style of classical and early religious images. There is still much to be determined of *Liturgie*'s exact choreography, however Massine's choreographic plans can be illuminated further via an examination of Goncharova's designs.

[523] Scheijen, *Diaghilev: A Life*, 204.
[524] Garcia-Marquez, *Massine: A Biography*, 46.
[525] Valerian Svetlov, 'The Diaghileff Ballet in Paris', *Dancing Times* (December 1929) in Garafola, 'The Making of Ballet Modernism', 27.

Design

Goncharova's fluid approach to media is evident from both the materiality and display history of *Liturgie*'s visual archive (fig. 55). The designs, depicting Biblical characters, consist of pencil and crayon drawings, watercolours and what is described as watercolour with collage and tinsel. [526] Despite their original purpose for the theatre, Goncharova often showed the designs at exhibitions and reproduced sixteen of them as an album of pochoir prints in 1915.[527] Like Stravinsky's approach to his compositions for stage – which he often produced as orchestral suites as well as staged works – both economic viability and a certain maintaining of traditional, media-driven genres seem to underpin Goncharova's contribution. In fact, each medial component seems to have had enough autonomy from the thematic basis of the stage work that it could be convincingly presented in insolation from the whole.[528]

Goncharova's designs break with the visual language of the Ballets Russes up until that point. A far cry from the sensuous figures of Bakst, or her own folkloric designs for *Le Coq d'Or* (1914), Goncharova's *Liturgie* characters are excessively flat, angular and embody the static quality of Russian icon paintings. That the one extant set design is a colourful backcloth of an Orthodox iconostasis simply adds to the iconic thematic of *Liturgie*'s representation which is thrown into sharp relief by a comparison of actual icons beside Goncharova's designs. Considering Goncharova's Saint Matthew costume design (fig. 56) alongside two icons by the celebrated icon painter Andrei Rublev, Saint John the Baptist (early 1500s) (fig. 57) and Saint Paul (1410s) (fig. 58) shows Goncharova to be highly attuned to the iconic idiom.

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[526] Chamot, *Gontcharova: Stage Designs*, 66.

[527] Iluchina, 'Natalia Goncharova – Between Theatre', 48. See Natalia Goncharova, *Sixteen Pochoirs from Liturgie*, 1915 <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/fr/recherche?terms=gontcharova%20liturgie≥ [accessed 3 December 2021].

[528] 'For Stravinsky it was also a foregone conclusion that his music should be so far detached from the underlying action that it could be performed as an orchestral suite'. Ulrich Weisstein, 'Cocteau, Stravinsky, Brecht, and the Birth of Epic Opera', *Modern Drama*, 5 (1962), 149.

Goncharova’s Saint Matthew is depicted wearing a garment with the same sharp, flat folds of Rublev’s saints’ drapes, using simple straight lines, dark with white highlights, to create a sense of the voluminous fabric. Goncharova’s palette references Rublev’s luminous colours: Saint Matthew’s colour scheme adopts the delicate grey of Rublev’s Saint Paul and the deep, jewelled green of Saint John the Baptist. These colours are characterised by pure chromatic planes which are toned up with white, or muted with black, but unmixed with other colours. All the saints’ gestures are frozen, not pre-empting the moment of movement but instead remain static, having arrived in position with fingers stuck close together to simplify their hands. In the case of Saint Matthew and Saint Paul, their expressions are those of still contemplation. Working in ballet-opera, an art form largely expressed through movement, what made stasis a compelling strategy for the Ballets Russes?

The intended materiality and mechanism of the designs as physical costumes helps elucidate this question. Explained in the 1919 publication *Gontcharova-Larionow: l’art décoratif théâtral modern*, the costumes were to be ‘made of a hard material: leather, wood, metal. Some parts of the body (legs, arms) are so linked by the costume that they can only make one kind of movement that regulates the dance’.[529] Goncharova’s costumes were less garments and more restrictive structures crafted to elicit specific movements from the dancers’ bodies. This indicates a departure from the organic movements and mimed storytelling of classical ballet, and the expressive Ballets Russes productions of the early twentieth century, in favour of stylised movement abstracted from everyday representation. When recreated for Spectra

[529] Sculpture and the body add further layers of media to *Liturgie*. The French reads: ‘fait d’une matière dure: cuir, bois, métal. Quelques parties de corps (jambs, bras) sont à tel point liées par le costume qu’elles ne peuvent faire qu’un seul genre de mouvements qui sent à régler la danse. Par exemple: le bras droit et la jambe gauche s’immobilisent dans une attitude expressive tandis que l’autre jambe acquirèrent du movement au compte des autres. Les figures portent des masques. La barbe et les cheveux sont en papier mâché. L’expression, ne change pas. Le movement et les poses sont fixés. Le plancheur, vide comme un tambour, fait entendre le rhythme des pas et remplace la musique absent’. Parnac, Larionov, *Gontcharova-Larionow: l'art décoratif théâtral moderne*, 12.

Ensemble's 2016 staging, the costumes were extremely unwieldy and concealed rather than displayed the dancers' moving bodies. Goncharova's pochoir prints for St. Luke, St. Andrew and St. John (figs. 59, 60 and 61) illustrate large geometric shapes which, when rendered with ridged materials, were both cumbersome and heavy for the dancers to perform in. While such designs might be considered expressive references rather than patterns from which to literally craft constructions, Diaghilev's practice of measuring completed costumes against the original designs suggests otherwise.[530]

The preeminence of costume was a strategy the Ballets Suédois adopted in the 1920s: in *L'Homme et son désir* and *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, which premiered in 1921 (fig. 62), all medial elements, even movement, were dictated by design.[531] A collaboration between Paul Claudel, Darius Milhaud and Audrey Parr conceived in 1917, *L'Homme et son désir* challenges even *Liturgie* in its excessively unwieldy elements: 'Cut-out geometric shapes… decorated three tiers and the stage, along which the dancers moved, some carrying disks or wearing circular headpieces that integrated them with the geometric décor'.[532] In *La Création du Monde* (1923), the assimilation of design and dancer created the impression of a 'danced assemblage' as performers were totally masked by two-dimensional structures.[533] As the artist Fernand Léger remarked, in *La Création du Monde*, 'human material… had the same spectacle value as the object and the décor'.[534] By 1923, the Ballets Suédois's choreography was no more than an accessory to mise-en-scéne.[535] The physicality of *Liturgie*'s costumes manifest a certain interplay between the figure and ground, a frustration of what should be the receiving subject's point of focus.

[530] Pritchard, 'Creating Productions', 82.
[531] Baer, 'The Ballets Suédois', 17.
[532] Baer, 'The Ballets Suédois', 20.
[533] Baer, 'The Ballets Suédois', 27-28.
[534] Garafola, 'Rivals for the New', 73.
[535] Garafola, 'Rivals for the New', 74.

Liturgie's tendency towards stillness and poses held over time is shared by the Ballets Suédois's *El Greco* (1920) where 'static poses and brilliantly positioned torso and legs displayed the choreographer's own extraordinary sense of line'[536] and *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, where costumes did not permit the free movement of the dancers.[537] As Garafola attests in the case of *Liturgie*: 'rather than link a chain of connected movements in these works it bespoke an isolated picture, a static two-dimensional image'.[538] This description of alternating stills summons Eadweard Muybridge's early moving image experiments in the nineteenth century, which reveal its composition as a series of static frames per second. The heaviness of Goncharova's costumes would no doubt have decelerated the motion of the performers, a slowness which responds to the camera's ability to represent speeds absent in everyday life and beyond human vision, redolent of Gunning's sense of the new visual knowledge available through early film and articulated in the criticism of Béla Balázs, Walter Benjamin and others.

Chapter 2 Part II: The icon: a Russian reflection on media

This chapter has yet to address *Liturgie*'s specifically Russian thematic which John E. Bowlt has described as 'the most spectacular exploration of Orthodoxy by an avant-garde artist'.[539] Since the representation of religious figures had been banned in Russian theatres and cinemas, *Liturgie*'s secular staging of a religious rite was potentially sacrilegious.[540] If merely intended as an organising structure on which to hang their experiment, the company could have drawn upon familiar secular sources, as they did for *Le Coq d'Or*. But following *Le Sacre du*

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[536] Baer, 'The Ballets Suédois', 14.
[537] Baer, 'The Ballets Suédois', 23.
[538] Garafola,'The Making of Ballet Modernism', 26.
[539] John E. Bowlt, 'Orthodoxy and the Avant-Garde: Sacred Images in the Work of Goncharova, Malevich, and Their Contemporaries', *Christianity and the Arts in Russia*, ed. William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 145-150 (148).
[540] Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception*, trans. Alan Badger, ed. Richard Taylor (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 126.

primtemps in 1913, and with its potentially irreverent content, was *Liturgie* intended to be a *succès de scandale*? Though Stravinsky expressed discomfort at presenting the liturgy as theatre, religious themes were not a novelty for Goncharova who had already had a few altercations with the authorities due to her paintings' religious content.[541] Goncharova does not appear to have been wilfully antagonising the Church: she identified as a believer working with a knowledge and appreciation of Russian orthodox traditions.[542] Goncharova's complicity in staging the orthodox rite should not be read as an incendiary gesture; there is no evidence to suggest that *Liturgie* was created for the sake of a press-worthy premiere, not least because it was pursued without confirmed performance dates at a theatre. The question therefore becomes, what did the Russian orthodox tradition have to offer the Ballets Russes?

Liturgie's archive demonstrates a production process which resisted and borrowed from the medium of film. I would now like to consider the peculiar thematic of the Orthodox rite as a further remediation of technological media, specifically through the distinctive mode of spectatorship engendered by the Russian icon tradition. Rather than reading meaning into *Liturgie* via Orthodox theology, I present the Orthodox tradition as a pre-existing store of reflections on media, one raided by the Ballets Russes as they reinvented experimental opera against filmic media and in the wake of critiques levelled at Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Subject to the same pressures of modernity, the icon tradition exemplified the position of live performance which was itself threatened by mechanical reproduction. Indeed, the age-old painting tradition was summoned by other members of the Russian avant-garde, above all in

[541] Goncharova's one-woman show at the Society of Free Aesthetics in Moscow in 1910 provoked an accusation of iconoclasm from the Holy Synod, who claimed that Goncharova's iconic paintings overstepped 'the boundary of decency'; her series *The Evangelists* was removed from the 1912 avant-garde Donkey's Tail exhibition by the authorities, who deemed its religious content to be incompatible with the exhibition's provocative title. Bowlt, 'Stage Design and the Ballets Russes', *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, 5 (1987), 28-45 (147).
[542] 'Others argue – and argue with me – that I have no right to paint icons. I believe in the lord firmly enough. Who knows who believes and how?' Bowlt, *Amazons of the Avant-garde: Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, Varvara Stepanova and Nadezhda Udaltsova* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2000), 309-310. Spira, *The Avant-Garde Icon*, 139.

the medium of painting, as a means of resisting the cognitive effects of mechanical reproduction.[543]

The icon was one of a number of ancient traditions reclaimed in the early twentieth century as antidotes to the impoverishment of experience. In his 1936 essay on the Russian Greek Orthodox writer Nikolai Leskov, Walter Benjamin invoked another tradition: that of storytelling. The demise in the art of storytelling was, according to Benjamin, a symptom of the degradation of experience under the conditions of modernity. Pitted against the printing technology which gave rise to the novel and the newspaper and information they circulated, the oral tradition of storytelling contained a deep wisdom that stood the test of time: 'the intelligence that came from afar – whether spatial from foreign countries or the temporal kind of tradition – possessed an authority that gave it validity, even when it was not subject to verification' while information, on the other hand, claimed 'prompt verifiability' and recounted events already overdetermined with explanation.[544] The storyteller, meanwhile, delivered narrative events without explanation and forced the listener to construe the sequence for themselves.[545] Thus the story afforded a richness that information could not match, that of the listener's reflective understanding, to which Benjamin ascribed the term *Erfahrung*: 'the profound kind of experience… in which we are transformed by what we encounter'.[546] The optimum situation in which to access this depth of experience, Benjamin tells us, is in a state of extreme mental relaxation, that of boredom, a mental condition no longer accommodated in modern life which promotes overstimulation. From a position of boredom, the listener is more

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[543] Spira's *The Avant-Garde Icon* offers a comprehensive account of the avant-garde's adoption of the Russian painting tradition.
[544] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', trans. Harry Zohn, *Chicago Review*, 16 (1963), 80-101 (85).
[545] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', 89.
[546] Richard White, 'Walter Benjamin: "The Storyteller" and the Possibility of Wisdom' *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 51 (2017), 1-14 (10).

able to access *Erfahrung* and to remember the story to recount to someone else, thus sustaining the tradition.[547]

Like the liturgy, storytelling for Benjamin entailed 'the collective depth of cultural life—or tradition—as opposed to the individual's own personal experience'.[548] Authentic storytelling was defined by an ambiguous open-endedness and lengthy, undetermined amounts of time, qualities impossible to attain in the age of information but protected within the realm of religious worship. The issue of a deeper kind of reflective experience afforded to the subject was also at stake for Adorno in his later critique of film:

> The sound film, far surpassing the theatre of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to respond within the structure of the film, yet deviate from its precise detail without losing the thread of the story... The stunting of the mass-media consumer's powers of imagination and spontaneity does not have to be traced back to any psychological mechanisms; he must ascribe the loss of those attributes to the objective nature of the products themselves... They are so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed to apprehend them at all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts. Even though the effort required for his response is semi-automatic, no scope is left for the imagination.[549]

Adorno's temporal prescription of sustained thought and its alternative label, contemplation, will reappear in my examination of iconic and operatic modes of reception vis-à-vis film. Like information for Benjamin, facts for Adorno discouraged the mental contribution of the subject and generated only a 'semi-automatic' level of engagement. The collective and oral

[547] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', 91.
[548] White, 'Walter Benjamin: "The Storyteller"', 3.
[549] Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 2010), 126-127.

tradition of storytelling has clear parallels with the liturgy, which had suffered the decline in religion bound up with scientific progress, industrialisation and its accompanying positivism. Benjamin's lament of storytelling's decline against the newspaper and novel parallel Adorno's anxieties surrounding commercial film. A concern with the nature of experience is palpable in *Liturgie*. Carrying the authority of an age-old tradition, the icon inspired and justified the Ballets Russes' conception of a deeper, slower aesthetic experience.

Fostering a perceptual mode distinct from that of film, the icon at the same time offered an alternative precedent for film's image-centred approach. Against iconoclasm's insistence on the word, the icon's Byzantine origins were rooted in the triumph of the image. The icon emblematised the power of the visual in relation to other perceptual experiences which echoed 1910s discussions of film. The iconic elevation of the visual supported the Ballets Russes' commitment to spectacle in opera, while providing a different model to early film's positioning of image over text and sound. Amid early twentieth-century discussions concerning attention, distraction and perception under the conditions of modernity, the Ballets Russes exploited an iconic mode of perception, a cognition surpassing that of the everyday, both contemplative *and* active, to engage their audiences differently from film and thus stake out opera's separateness from the mass medium. In a knight's move, Diaghilev found in the icon solutions to his anxieties towards new media. The Orthodox tradition, moreover, served as a rebuttal to the historic and yet persistent critiques of hybrid art forms such as opera. Deeming composite genres impure and ethically tenuous these critiques, which continued into the 1920s, qualified opera as underserving of acknowledgment as autonomous, high art, worthy of meaningful attention.[550] It is credible that in addition to his sensitivity towards film, Diaghilev was equally attuned to opera's embattled critical position via the likes of Viennese

[550] Wilson, *Opera in the Jazz Age*, 99-100.

music critic Eduard Hanslick, one of Wagner's principal antagonists who decried opera as an art form that destroyed and nullified its different medial components.[551] The Orthodox liturgy, on the other hand, represented an alternative situation in which the combination of media was a legitimate, spiritually and aesthetically effective practice: the low lighting level, smell of incense, incantation of the liturgy and ritualised movement through space were in this situation, mutually inclusive.

In a 1922 essay 'The Church Ritual as a Synthesis of the Arts', the liturgy's aesthetic synthesis was considered by the Russian Orthodox priest, art historian and polymath Pavel Florensky, who posited that liturgical art forms were falsified when taken separately.[552] Concerned with an aesthetic rather than cognitive totality, Florensky's thought broke from conceptions of medium specificity which had prevailed in art criticism since Lessing. The Russian icon became for Florensky an exemplar of this alternative view which rejected the dictum of visual art as essentially spatial, and music as fundamentally temporal: the icon's qualities were visual and temporal. Guided by the icon, Florensky and the Ballets Russes pursued a model which did not engage with discourses concerning the discrete competencies of media, but instead positively sought the aesthetic and cognitive potential of their combination through the synthesis or the 'assimilation', as Benjamin calls it in 'The Storyteller', of the listening observer.

The rediscovery of ancient icons in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century inspired a number of artists.[553] Existing explanations of the avant-garde's engagement with icons run

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[551] Hanslick's 1854 invective against Wagner laid the foundations for musical formalism and formal analysis. *The Beautiful in Music*, trans. Gustav Cohen (London: Novello, 1957), 58-63.
[552] Pavel Florensky, 'The Church Ritual as a Synthesis of the Arts', *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*, trans. Wendy Salmond, ed. Nicoletta Misler (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 101-111 (109).
[553] As Viktor Lazarev has observed, until the end of the nineteenth century, only icons of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were readily available. *The Russian Icon: From its Origins to the Sixteenth Century*, trans.

along largely nationalist, primitivist and formalist lines.[554] The icon's nationalist appropriation tends to be located in the Slavophile movement of the nineteenth century, in which artists turned their backs on the European influences which had permeated art institutions since Peter the Great.[555] Here the icon offered young avant-garde painters a legacy on which to build a distinctly Russian response to the so-called primitivism of Picasso, Henri Matisse and Paul Gauguin.[556] In other accounts, it was not the Russianness but the formal qualities of icons, newly regarded as aesthetic rather than only religious artefacts,[557] which opened up new possibilities in contemporary painting. While the 1913 Moscow exhibition of Old Russian Art was a pivotal turn towards this outlook,[558] more significant was the 1904-6 restoration of Rublev's icon *Old Testament Trinity*, as dirt, dark varnish and overpaint were

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Colette-Joly Dees, ed. Gerol′d Ivanovich Vzdornov and Nancy McDarby (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 13.

[554] The synergy between the Russian avant-garde and ancient religious visual culture has been the subject of a number of recent publications: Spira, *Avant-Garde Icon*; Jefferson J.A. Gatrall and Douglas Greenfield, *Alter Icons: The Russian Icon and Modernity* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010) and, most recently, Louise Hardiman and Nicola Kozicharow, *Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art: New Perspectives* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017). Broadly speaking, these publications offer nationalist and formalist accounts of the Russian avant-garde's revived interest in this subject matter.

[555] 'The interest in icons is explained by the national situation. Russia's relationship with its own traditions, which since the foundation of St Petersburg had been almost abolished by law in favour of a *dirigiste* Europeanisation, was again being debated. The crisis of identity fostered reflection on the Russian past in the nineteenth century, including specifically attention on the icon, which, before the country had come under Western influence, was its only form of panel painting'. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 19. This sensibility was epitomised in the writing of the critic Vladimir Stasov, the paintings of the *Peredvizhniki*, or Wanderers, a group of realist painters who seceded from the Imperial Academy of Arts, and the music of a band of composers known as the *Moguchaya kuchka* or the Mighty Handful, comprising Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Alexander Borodin and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (the latter was the teacher of Goncharova's *Liturgie* collaborator, Igor Stravinsky).

[556] 'the discovery of "primitives" had been in the air ever since modern artists had begun to herald them as their forbears'. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 20. The forward to Goncharova's 1913 exhibition catalogue is much-cited as evidence of her neo-primitivist and nationalist programme: 'I have studied all that the West could give me, but in fact, my country has created everything that derives from the West. Now I shake the dust from my feet and leave the West, considering its vulgarising significance trivial and insignificant – my path is toward the source of all arts, the East.' Nina Gourianova, *The Aesthetics of Anarchy: Art and Ideology in the Early Russian Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 81.

[557] Bowlt, Hardiman and Kozicharow all provide accounts of the icon's newfound high-art status. As Bowlt puts the sustained aesthetic reengagement with icons down to: 'the collecting and curatorial activities of patrons such as Nikolai Likhachev, Ilia Ostroukhov, and Stepan Riabushinskii, to the scholarly analyses by art critics such as Igor Grabar and Nikolai Punin, and to the series of Moscow and St. Petersburg exhibitions… that brought… items of ecclesiastical use… outside of their religious context'. Bowlt, 'Orthodoxy and the Avant-Garde', 145.

[558] Hardiman and Kozicharow, *Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art*, 26.

removed to reveal the chromatic luminosity of Rublev's fifteenth-century original.[559] As Russian art critic Maximilian Voloshin described

> It now seems so radiant, so contemporary, and it provides so many clear and direct answers for the contemporary task of painting, that it not only allows, but it even requires that we approach it not archeologically, but aesthetically, without mediation.[560]

Bowlt states that it was the formal qualities of icons 'and not the Orthodox purpose' that appealed to Goncharova and her colleagues Larionov, Kazimir Malevich and Alexander Shevchenko.[561] Here I propose the opposite. Reducing the impact of the icon on the avant-garde to the influence of 'perspective, proportion, colour harmonies'[562] excludes the significance of its function as a stimulus towards a higher kind of perception and its contextual position in relation to other media. Closer to the Ballets Russes' relationship with the icon is Joseph Masheck's sense of it as a 'paradigm of organisation and meaning' in the work of the Russian Suprematists, which operated as a 'broadly applicable model, especially as concerns representation and non-representation'.[563] Yve-Alain Bois, meanwhile, has offered an iconic context for El Lissitzky's non-representational *Proun* paintings. The Ballets Russes therefore figure as part of a wider Russian tendency to use an ancient medial context to navigate a modern one.

Distraction

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[559] Jefferson J.A Gatrall, 'Introduction', *Alter Icons*, 4.
[560] Robert Bird, 'Tarkovsky and the Celluloid Icon', *Alter Icons*, 229.
[561] Bowlt substantiates this claim with Shevchenko's 1913 neo-primitivist manifesto: 'For the point of departure in our art we take the *lubok*, the primitive art form, the icon, since we find in them the most acute, most direct perception of life – and a pure painterly one, at that': Bowlt, 'Orthodoxy and the Avant-Garde', 147.
[562] Bowlt, 'Orthodoxy and the Avant-Garde', 147.
[563] Joseph Masheck, 'Iconicity', *Artforum*, 17 (1979), 30-41 (30).

The Ballets Russes' activity between 1909 and 1929 coincided with another European cultural debate: that of attention in modern experience.[564] Under the conditions of industrialisation and through mass entertainment and consumer culture, the modern subject was characterised as one constantly bombarded by different stimuli. The discourse of contemplation was exemplified by the situation in Weimar Germany.[565] Critics' disillusionment with contemplation evolved into the affirmation of 'distraction' (*Zerstreuung*) as the principal quality of urban experience by the early 1920s.[566] In the aesthetic realm, the issue of attention was largely constructed around the new medium of film. As early as 1912, the *Kino-Debatte* prepared the ground for the theoretical debates of the 1920s and 1930s, which deemed contemplative experience irrelevant under the conditions of modernity.[567] Scrutinised in the sociological analyses of Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Theodor W. Adorno, modern experience became inextricably linked with distraction. In the discussions which pitted contemplative and distracted modes of perception against one another, the subject's cognitive state was at stake: was it being actively or passively engaged? A position equating contemplation with a passive cognition was powerfully expressed by Georg Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). The subject's contemplative stance was, for Lukács, a symptom of capitalism which seeped into all parts of society. [568] The industrial factory illustrated the broader situation. As the individual tasks of the worker were

[564] The issue of attention under the conditions of modernity has been brought to the fore by the art historian Jonathan Crary, who correlates shifting notions of perception and attention with the proliferation of new media technology in the late-nineteenth century. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT, 1999).

[565] Frederic J. Schwartz has identified Benjamin's distinctive positive and active sense of distraction in visual experience against more traditional positions as well as that of Siegfried Kracauer, a colleague working on the independent left. *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 73-85.

[566] David C. Durst, 'Introduction', *Weimar Modernism: Philosophy, Politics, and Culture in Germany 1918-1933* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), p. xxviii.

[567] The *Kino-Debatte* is a term given by Anton Kaes to denote the proliferation of discussions on the new media of cinema in circulation around 1912; see Scott Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship: Art, Science, and Early Cinema in Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 17.

[568] 'we witness, illuminatingly, how the *contemplative* nature of man under capitalism makes its appearance on a broader, deeper, and more universal scale'. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 97.

diminished by the reified systems of production, the worker becomes disengaged and is transformed into the passive observer of a mechanism over which he believes he exercises no agency: ‘As labour is progressively rationalised and mechanised his lack of will is reinforced by the way in which his activity becomes less and less active and more and more contemplative’.[569] Contemplation enabled the individual’s disconnection from public life and thus deadened their ability to perceive the need for drastic social change. Passive spectatorship, for Lukács, was inimical to social revolution.

Lukács’s critique of contemplation was not unanimously accepted. In his 1926 essay on cinematic experience ‘Cult of Distraction’, Siegfried Kracauer equated film, distraction and mental inactivity, claiming ‘the stimulations of the senses succeed each other with such rapidity that there is no room left for even the slightest contemplation to squeeze in between them’.[570] Here contemplative thought is deemed more desirable than distraction. Kracauer’s issue with distraction is not to do with traditional ideas about cultural experience but is instead with distraction’s passivity and accompanying political paralysis. Distraction could not be a progressive quality in film as it subjected the listening observer to the singular, uncritical experience of the art work which produced a false totality. Yet Kracauer was cautious not to come down too heavily on distraction; he considered it an inevitable, ‘compensatory splendour’ for the masses who had little choice but to participate in the mechanical conditions of city living.[571] Adorno’s position on sound film similarly singles out its denial of contemplation: ‘sustained thought is out of the question’.[572] Despite their respective critiques of contemplation and distraction, these theorists shared a sense that, under

[569] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 89.
[570] Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Cult of Distraction: On Berlin’s Picture Palaces’, *New German Critique,* trans. Thomas Y. Levin, 40 (1987), 91-96 (94).
[571] Schwartz, *Blind Spots*, 73-76.
[572] Adorno, Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Cumming, 127 (emphasis my own).

the conditions of modernity, the subject's capacity for critical thought had been inhibited: for Lukács this occurred through a dulling and numbing of cognition faculties through passive, repetitive labour, whereas for Kracauer and Adorno, the filling of the subject's leisure time with a barrage of moving images prevented contemplative reflection upon his or her situation.

Yet, distraction as a passive and pernicious experience was not uncontested. In his 'Artwork' essay of 1935, Benjamin recognised distraction's cognitive potential, which he saw as exemplified in the filmic mode of perception:

> Let us compare the screen on which a film unfolds with the canvas of a painting. The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested.[573]

Film's constantly moving image generated a jolting effect in the viewer, one which heightened their perceptual faculties and created a distracted, and yet active experience:

> The spectator's process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film, which, like all shocks, should be cushioned by heightened presence of mind. By means of its technical structure, the film has taken the physical shock effect out of the wrappers in which Dadaism had, as it were, kept it inside the moral shock effect.[574]

Benjamin's active perceptual claims for film are echoed by Brecht's advocacy of epic theatre which emerged from a critique of nineteenth-century opera:

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[573] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969) 238.
[574] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art', trans. Zohn, 238.

> The great struggle for supremacy between words, music and production – which always brings up the question 'which is the pretext for what?': is the music the pretext for the events on stage, or are these the pretext for the music? etc. – can simply be bypassed by radically separating the elements. So long as the expression 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (or 'integrated work of art') means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be 'fused' together, the various elements will all be degraded, and each will act as a mere 'feed' to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art.[575]

Brecht's case against *Gesamtkunstwerk* resembles Benjamin's critique of information in 'The Storyteller': as information presents events with undue amounts of explanation, so Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* over-determines relationships between media, a situation that, as we will see in the next chapter, was equally at stake for Kurt Schwitters. Neither situation gives the listening observer opportunity for their own active interpretation. The independence of text, music and spectacle which Brecht advocated was emulated by the Ballets Russes when they commenced *Liturgie*'s choreography rehearsals without a musical score. The deceleration of movement expressed through Goncharova's unwieldy costumes, meanwhile, suggests both an anti and pro-filmic mode of perception: it at once gives time for contemplation to assimilate spectacle, text and music, while at the same time, it mimics the camera's ability to manipulate everyday movement and to mechanically alter speed, drawing attention to what the human eye cannot perceive. Lukács, Kracauer, Adorno, Benjamin and Brecht offer a range of positions on modern modes of perception: contemplative and passive (Lukács, Brecht); distracted and passive (Kracauer, Adorno); and distracted and active (Benjamin). Here I would like to suggest that the remaining and least intuitive combination, a contemplative and

[575] Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre', *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Bloomsbury, 1966), 37-38.

active mode of perception, is presented by the Ballets Russes in *Liturgie*, their remediation of film.

The Ballets Russes' use of religious ritual was not completely at odds with early-twentieth century criticism which did occasionally allude to religious modes of perception. Kracauer paralleled the cinematic with the liturgical as he described early film's audience as a 'community of worshipers', locating their commonality in their passivity of experience.[576] A more positive view, closer to the Ballets Russes' active conception of spiritual contemplation, is discernible in Benjamin's thought articulated before the 'Artwork' essay. Carolin Duttlinger has described how, in praise of religious contemplation, Benjamin devised a 'constructive dialectical interplay' of different modes of attention.[577] In his fragment 'Über das Grauen' (On Horror) of 1920-22, Benjamin advocated a dual kind of attention that he claimed was fostered by religious devotion and prayer in which a focus on the divine could be combined with a persistent sense of self-consciousness, an approach he set against a secular one. In spite of Benjamin's later shift in thought, Duttlinger claims he more generally discards 'solipsistic contemplation' for 'a more flexible, perpetually alert presence of mind'.[578]

My intention is not to align Diaghilev with the social and political imperatives of these thinkers: a revolutionary he was not. Rather, he absorbed the issues of his cultural milieu to recast opera against its rival media. Diaghilev's attempt cut two ways: in the first instance, it defended contemplation, a traditional mode of aesthetic perception associated with the old medium of painting as identified by Benjamin, and thus defended opera and ballet's high art

[576] Kracauer, 'Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces', *New German Critique*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin, 40 (1987), 92.
[577] Carolin Duttlinger, 'Between Contemplation and Distraction: Configurations of Attention in Walter Benjamin', *German Studies Review*, 30 (2007), 33-54.
[578] Duttlinger, 51.

status; in the second, it reanimated old-fashioned opera and ballet as distinctly modern, active genres which could engage in montage and abstraction and thus resist accusations of outmoded passivity levelled by the likes of Benjamin, Brecht and the Dadaists. Summoning an ancient tradition to defend contemplation as a superior cognitive state, Diaghilev rode the wave of late-nineteenth-century attitudes which held premodern perceptual modes in higher esteem.[579] Medieval Russia summoned this lost way of perceiving the world.

Yet what of the specific workings of the icon paintings which Goncharova so consciously replicated in *Liturgie*'s designs? Derived from the Greek word *eikona*, meaning image, an icon is a holy image of Christ or a biblical figure, represented typically in a frontal format, painted in tempera on wood and used in the rites of the Byzantine and Eastern Orthodox Churches. Fundamental to the icon's theology is the direct encounter it creates between man and the Divine: the holy figure is presented not as a symbol but as a metaphysical reality. [580] The Divine is made present through the material support of the icon or, as Andrew Spira puts it, Christ is not the 'subject matter' but instead appears in 'extended material form'.[581] The iconic mode of perception requires, therefore, the suspension of disbelief to accept the unabashedly material and non-naturalistic icon as an incarnation of the Holy. This leap of faith demands a special kind of cognition, one that transcends an everyday mode of perception or, as Jonathan Crary puts it: 'The state of being suspended, a looking or listening so rapt that it is an exemption of ordinary conditions, that it becomes a suspended temporality, a hovering out of time'.[582] The icon demands the same state that has long characterised opera

[579] Crary gives the example of the German art historian Konrad Fiedler, who considered this historic way of perceiving as 'either implicitly or explicitly predicated as richer, deeper, or more valuable'; see Jonathan Crary 'Modernity and the Problem of Attention', *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, 1998), 29-44 (48).
[580] 'It is not merely a symbol of the archetype, but the represented becomes present through the icon': George Galavaris, *The Icon in the Life of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 3.
[581] Spira, *Avant-Garde Icon*, 13.
[582] Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 10.

and its abstraction of speech through song. While early audiences struggled with song's violation of ordinary communication, the suspension of disbelief became widely accepted as the genre stabilised.[583]

In its transcendence of the everyday, the icon helped Diaghilev maintain the space between the realm of high art and mass culture at the level of reception. Both leaps of faith, whether in the material support of the icon as an incarnation of the Holy, or in sung text and stylised gestures as real Biblical figures, took place among a mediascape of music, movement, text and design. In both instances, everyday representation was violated: the icon remained unapologetically two-dimensional while normal human communication is refused through song and dance. The dancers' bodies in *Liturgie* were intended to be covered by costumes constructed from wood which took on the materiality of the icon. The decelerated movements and abstracted stage picture similarly reflected opera's already non-naturalistic representation, while the elliptical narrative of the life of Christ left a certain amount of hermeneutic ambiguity between the scenes. In the case of the icon and the Ballets Russes' ballet-opera, this suspension of disbelief did not deny the viewer's capacity for thought but rather provoked it.

The suspension of disbelief challenged contemplation as a passive state. As Roland Barthes and Giorgio Agamben have concluded, a state of suspension 'keeps the reader active and

[583] Tom Sutcliffe gives an account of the operatic suspension of disbelief: 'the point of theatre is, after all, what happens in the minds of the audience, what they/we believe. The purpose of the performers is to make believe, and the believing that goes with operatic performances is affected by a wider array of elements than in the case of any other art-form… One may be profoundly influenced and affected by the music. Opera is *prima facie* music. But what one believes and how one is led to believe is a consequence of the staging, with its physical images and designs, its sense of a period or none, its manipulation of time. Believing precedes feeling, and believing (or the suspension of disbelief, the acceptance of convenient conventions – such as that plump Pavarotti is in fact a young peasant, with romantic dreams, named Nemorino) is the purpose of everything that is done'. *Believing in Opera* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 4-5.

engenders the absorption of total concentration'.[584] Here, the suspension of disbelief does not mean for the reader to abandon her or his critical faculties, but rather to remain engaged in the process of comprehending. Conversely, early cinema invited the opposite mode of perception, one in which the viewer had to suspend *belief* as its initial uncannily naturalistic effect is eventually recognised as artificial. Tsivian explains the experience of early cinema's audiences thus:

> The impression that moving images left on their first spectators was a unique combination of mutually exclusive effects. On the one hand, the Lumières' audiences were struck by what they believed to be the excessive naturalism of the image. The spectator of the 1890s felt that within the new medium the habitual balance between image and object was tilted in favour of the latter. On the other hand, to repeat a contemporary account already quoted, "although you know that the scene has a mechanical and intimate correspondence with the truth, you recognise its essential and inherent falsity.[585]

It is significant that iconic perception did not occur in isolation but rather as part of the multimedial Orthodox rite. Combining the smell of incense, the sound of chant or scripture and the flickering of candlelight, the icon's position might seem to risk Kracauer's critique of cinematic experience, where a sensory overload leaves no space for contemplation. However, Benjamin's early sense of religious communion in fact suggests that this milieu allows for, rather than precludes, active contemplation. As Duttlinger elucidates:

> …this form of religious contemplation does not dissolve boundaries between man and God but provides the basis for a different form of awareness, resulting in a presence of mind that protects the subject against distracting disruptions. In prayer, then, the

[584] Bird, 'Tarkovsky and the Celluloid Icon', 241.
[585] Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russian and its Cultural Reception*, 149.

> individual's contemplative focus on the divine does not preclude a continual awareness both of himself and of the world at large.[586]

Though a church's low light level might appear evocative of Wagner's dimmed *Festspielhaus* where Brecht's spectator becomes passive and suffering, the iconic experience entails the spoken text or sung chant of the liturgy which emanates not from the icon but rather a source distinct from it, separating out the elements of sight and sound, provoking the mental process of recognising and considering these contrasting medial inputs. Put another way, agency is granted to the worshipper in the Orthodox liturgy based upon their ability to choose their focus among the separate and yet simultaneously occurring medial elements. *Liturgie*'s iconic costumed dancers were similarly intended to be separated from the source of sound, enabling the audience to attend to these separated elements during the spectacle.[587]

Masheck has paralleled early twentieth-century painting's confrontation with mechanical reproduction with the historic situation of iconic representation under iconoclasm: 'In modern times, the split is between those who acknowledge the capacity of art to deal with transcendent, abstract or otherwise extraordinary matters, and those who want pictures of the appearance of the real world (or none at all)'.[588] Thus the stakes of the Suprematists' iconic borrowings were also perceptual as they sought an antidote to mechanical and representational reproduction and its cult of distraction.[589] What the icon did for opera in the face of film, it did similarly for the painting in the face of photography. In the case of the icon, abstraction was not merely an ambivalent alternative to naturalism, but rather a mode of

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[586] Duttlinger, 'Between Contemplation and Distraction', 35.
[587] This spatial device is consistent with Goncharova's first Diaghilev collaboration, the 1914 opera-ballet *Le Coq d'Or* in which the singers were separated from the dancers, flanking them at either side of the stage; see Bowlt, 'Stage Design and the Ballets Russes', 38.
[588] Masheck, 'Iconicity', 34.
[589] As Masheck puts it: 'intervention, by one tradition (old religious art) upon another (self-consciously new painting) could not have occurred if this logic of the new, creative, receiving tradition had not demanded it'; Masheck, 'Iconicity', 32.

representation which actively strove towards something else. This something else has been variously described as 'transcendental' or, in the words of the Russian religious philosopher Prince Eugene Trubetskoy, 'anagogic', pertaining to the moral or idealistic striving of the unconscious in an aspirational or upward direction.[590]

Rather than its formal scheme, it was the icon's transcendental purpose as manifested through this scheme that fascinated the Russian avant-garde painters. Iconic abstraction enabled the Suprematists to 'approach the issue of transcendent value directly, confronting the privileged place that painting may have with respect to the outside reality in which it exists and on which it critically comments'.[591] The matter of 'transcendent value' was thus bound up with the need to distinguish painting from the external reality of everyday life and thought, a modality comparable to that of *Liturgie*. Art's transcendental potential feeds back into wider twentieth-century debates concerning art's function. The commitment to the cognitive potential of art, its crucial role as a particular form of knowledge, figures significantly in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* in which he insists on art's enigmatic status.[592] For Adorno, the so-called 'question mark' of art exists to alter the subject's consciousness and to offer striking alternatives to the familiar status quo.[593] Consistent with Adorno's aesthetics, active contemplation provoked by an abstract mode of representation had the potential to awaken in the subject a new way of perceiving their reality. While social revolution was not at stake for Diaghilev, a defence

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[590] Prince Eugene Trubetskoy's description reads thus: 'having a religious theme… does not suffice to make… an icon an object suitable for liturgical use. Its mode of expression must be spiritual, that is, such as to make it anagogic, pointing to a reality beyond the physical which is why expressive "distortions" may even be desirable. In icons "mountains, trees, buildings and so on" are able to be "schematic, abstract"; besides, the mundane is transcended further "by reducing space to a minimum, and by suppressing perspective and physical light"'; in Masheck, 'Iconicity', 34-35.
[591] Masheck, 'Iconicity', 30.
[592] Adorno phrases this idea thus: 'All artworks-and art altogether-are enigmas'. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno, Robert Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 120.
[593] James Hellings, *Adorno and Art: Aesthetic Theory Contra Critical Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 3.

against mass media was and, through active contemplation, opera's status as both modern and high art was granted.

The Russian artist El Lissitzky (1890-1941) deployed painterly abstraction for its cognitive properties as a means of resisting the mechanical aesthetic paradigm of 'factography'. As Masheck suggests with Malevich, so Bois asserts with Lissitzky that, this time in an unambiguously political gesture, abstraction was intended to provoke the viewer's *active* engagement with the image. In Lissitzky's case, the self-conscious prolongation of *faktura*, a term associated with icon painting which denoted the materiality and skill demanded by the medium,[594] offered a means of validating his return to the old medium.[595] Lissitzky pursued this approach in the face of factography, a post-revolutionary tendency towards 'objective-witness journalism' in Russia. Visible in the films of Dziga Vertov and the photomontages of Rodchenko, Lissitzky and others, factography rejected medium specificity to recast visual aesthetics as the expression of 'mere "facts" registered by the "mechanical" eye of the camera'.[596]

Keen to express solidarity with the 1917 October Revolution, pro-revolutionary artists like Lissitzky were challenged to justify the protraction of painterly abstraction which, through its internal self-referentiality, was deemed elusive to the masses they were addressing. The abstract idiom became untenable for some and provoked a shift from *faktura* to factography. Yet via Brecht and through a study of Lissitzky's *Proun* paintings initiated in 1919, Bois

[594] The Russian term *faktura* had its origins in Russian icon painting. As Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has explained, 'Vladimir Markov's 1914 text "Icon Painting" – after Burliuk and Larionov the third to address faktura explicitly – had established this specifically Russian source, arguing that "through the resonance of the colours, the sound of the materials, the assemblage of textures (faktura) we call the people to beauty, to religion, to God… The real world is introduced into the icon's creation only through the assemblage and incrustation of real tangible objects and this seems to produce a combat between two worlds, the inner and the outer.' Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'From Faktura to Factography', *October* 30 (Fall 1984), 82-119 (86).
[595] Yve-Alain Bois, 'El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility', *Art in America*, 76 (1988), 160-181.
[596] Bois, 'El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility', 166.

identifies a cognitive revolutionary programme at work in Lissitzky's persistence with painterly *faktura*. An acronym for the Russian translation of 'Project for the Affirmation of the New', Lissitzky invented the term *Proun* as a label for his abstract paintings.[597] Rather than locating Lissitzky's revolutionary politics in his propagandistic, factographic photomontages, Bois reads Lissitzky against the grain and identifies a political impetus in his earlier *Prouns*. As Lissitzky grappled with the task of aligning the modernist aesthetic programme to his political moment, Bois draws Lissitzky as a Brechtian who resisted illusion and catharsis in order to present the spectator with a riddle. As an alternative to representing overt political dictum, or depicting a character to win the viewer's empathy, Brecht advocated a kind of puzzle which would throw the hermeneutic responsibility back to the viewer: 'Without the riddle they would not have the means to link the situation described in the play with their own situation in history'.[598] Indeed, the Brechtian riddle recalls the debates of French film critics of the 1910s in which fixing meaning onto images and narrative through intertitles was contested. It also summons Benjamin's 'Storyteller' in which elliptical narrative offered the listener space to activate their own imagination.

Through techniques of axonometry (a non-linear, parallel perspective which works to frustrate the viewer's orientation) and reversibility (paintings created to be presented at different alignments), Bois characterises the Brechtian riddles at play in the *Proun*s in terms of their disorienting experience. 'Eliminating the spectator's point of view via the means of his specific take on perspective, axonometry, Lissitzky creates an ambiguity to force spectators to interpret what he or she sees'.[599] Lissitzky presents a constant switch of projection and recession. The information required to ascertain whether a form is receding into the canvas, or

[597] Bois, 'El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility', 162.
[598] Bois, 'El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility', 167.
[599] Bois, 'El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility', 172.

projecting out from it, is absent, and the viewer is forced to go back and forth in an active mode of viewing.[600] The painting *8 Position Proun* (1923) (fig. 63), meanwhile, invites readings at any alignment with its points or sides variously functioning as the base of the image. Since the origins of photography can be located in the Renaissance discovery of linear perspective, photography is nothing if not a way of automatically creating images in exact perspective.[601] In his 1925 essay ‘A. and Pangeometry’, as with his *Proun* paintings, Lissitzky overtly challenged linear perspective, and implicitly, photography.[602]

At stake for Lissitzky, was the destruction of the bourgeois and old-fashioned mode of perception contemplation through the removal of this ‘vis-à-vis relationship’, the unambiguous orientation of linear perspective which was the root of the observer’s contemplative approach.[603] In the Oxford English Dictionary, contemplation is variously defined as: ‘The action of beholding, or looking at with attention and thought’; ‘The action of contemplating or mentally viewing; the action of thinking about a thing continuously; attentive consideration, study’; and ‘Religious musing, devout meditation’.[604] While the third definition indicates the devotional context of contemplation Benjamin took to task in his ‘Artwork’ essay, it is the second definition, with its temporal aspect, that is pertinent here. In its explication as a *continuous* process of considering something, the temporal quality of contemplation is revealed. The terms of Bois’ argument reveal Lissitzky’s disoriented mode of spectatorship as a defiantly contemplative one as he emphasises the prolonged looking

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[600] Bois, 172.

[601] Peter Galassi, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography* (New York: MoMA, 1981), 12.

[602] ‘It is commonly assumed that perspective representation of space is objective, unequivocal, and obvious’: El Lissitzky, ‘A. and Pangeometry’, *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, ed. by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 304.

[603] Bois, ‘El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility’, 174.

[604] The Oxford English Dictionary, ‘Contemplation’, <https://www-oed-com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/40094?redirectedFrom=contemplation#eid> [accessed 9 December 2021]

involved. Lissitzky's enigmatic image puts the viewer in a position of making '*constant* decisions about how to interpret what he or she sees'; 'the viewer should no longer have a base of operations, but must be made *continually* to choose the coordinates of his or her visual field'.[605] Constant and continual, this mode of perception sounds remarkably like Adorno's plea for sustained thought in his critique of the sound film. While Adorno decries that 'no scope is left for the imagination',[606] I would like to suggest that the scope to which he is referring is in fact time.

In his Brechtian riddle, Lissitzky injected time into the process of looking. Time was the precondition for the kind of active, cognitive spectatorship he strove to elicit from his observer. Writing principally about the medium of theatre rather than the plastic arts, Brecht took the temporal element of active perception for granted. For Lissitzky, the techniques employed in the *Proun*s emphasised the temporal property traditionally excluded from the ontology of visual art, and in doing so, demonstrated his ambivalence to the modernist strategies which, from the mid-twentieth century onwards, would be retrospectively read into abstract painting. While for Bois, Lissitzky must hold a negative approach to contemplation, associated as it was in the bourgeois art tradition's linear perspective and its unchallenged acceptance as an objective world view, I would like to suggest that, on the contrary, with its place in the Russian icon tradition, contemplation was a self-conscious part of the *Proun*'s spectatorship. When read apart from early twentieth-century discourse on contemplation as a bourgeois mode of perception, abstraction's significant medial offering to the old medium of painting was time. The shared Russian context and cognitive interests of Lissitzky and the Ballets Russes point towards their recognition of time as a key structural tenet of the icon.

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[605] Bois, 'El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility', 172 and 174.
[606] Adorno, Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Cumming, 126-127.

The art historian Clemena Antonova has described how, in the wake of a renewed engagement with icons, the time-based qualities of images became a dominant discussion point for early twentieth-century Russian thinkers and artists. As a temporal picture *par excellence*, the icon encompassed three types of time in pictorial art which Antonova categorises as that which is '*external* (to the picture)', the temporal dimension '*internal* (to the picture)' and an 'internal-external' pictorial time.[607] Indeed, Florensky's description of the optimum conditions for viewing icons in their 'complete' context appears to be getting at the same point:

> But if the wholeness of a work of art expressed in this primitive form is generally acknowledged, the general binding force and scope of this precondition for artistic content is by no means so clear to everyone. Of course, everyone knows that the aesthetic phenomenon of painting or statue needs light, that music needs silence, and architecture space. But not everyone remembers with an equal degree of charity that these general conditions should have in addition several qualitative determinants and that these determinants in no way constitute a service beyond the call of duty, or an act of charity on the viewer's part.[608]

In Florensky's terms therefore, giving time to the icon is essential.

According to Antonova, Florensky's concept of 'reverse time', developed in his 1922 'The Church Ritual as a Synthesis of the Arts', is the only previous attempt at theorising pictorial time in the icon.[609] Florensky identified a qualitative temporality in icon reception which he likened to that of dreams: 'What from an outside, empirical point of view may seem relatively short in time (minutes, hours) inside dreams might cover a much longer period (years,

[607] Antonova, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon,* 10-11.
[608] Florensky, 'The Church Ritual', *Beyond Vision*, 106.
[609] Antonova, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon*, 15.

decades)'.[610] Florensky suggests that the nature of perception during icon veneration, like sleep, is a deep one in which greater psychological depths can be reached than would be expected under normal conditions in real time. Florensky's iconic interpretation points again to this degree of absorption, or lack of distraction, in the perception of an icon but, more significantly, this state demands minutes and hours rather than seconds. Schooled in the Orthodox rite, the Ballets Russes drew upon its tradition of divine presence to conceive multimedia performance as not an experience of distraction, but one of active contemplation through invoking the icon in their visual theatrical idiom. An alternative to the Brechtian technique of shocks to jolt a viewer into a critical state of awareness, the iconic suspension of disbelief engages the viewer in a different kind of perceptual vigilance. In rejecting the Western Christian image tradition, with its tendency toward representation and narrative, the Ballets Russes found an alternative justification for discarding the illusion of cinema and naturalistic theatre.

[610] Antonova, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon*, 21.

Chapter 3. Constellated experience: Kurt Schwitters' Merz and *Regieoper*

This chapter connects two coordinates on Weimar Germany's complex media map, the visual artist Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) and Berlin's Kroll Opera House (1927-1931). Though principally remembered for his idiosyncratic collages and assemblages, the Hanover-based artist also wrote the libretto for *Zusammenstoss* (Collision) a 'comic opera in banalities' in 1927.[611] Unrealised in his lifetime, *Zusammenstoss* positions Schwitters in a constellation of visual artists orbiting opera, yet its ambitions pale in comparison to Schwitters' multimedia experiments of the early 20s, the *Merzbühne* (Merz Stage) and *Normalbühne Merz* (Standard Merz Stage). In his vision for the *Merzbühne,* Schiwtters takes the listening observer on an overstimulated journey from factory to street corner and back again. Machines, the scenic protagonists, enter the stage space, perform gestures and sounds, are illuminated, revolve and recede, before being interrupted by taglines from commercial advertisements and snippets of human conversation, which unfold in individual and nonsense words rather than full sentences. *Zusammenstoss* brings the human interactions, only experienced as snippets in the *Merzbühne*, to the fore and presents a more conventional narrative about the collision of a green globe with planet earth. From scene to scene, the listening observer is transported from the streets of Berlin to a planet with aliens, and back again, thus lurching between the banalities of the everyday and cosimic visions. Scholarship has not satisfactorily addressed

[611] The libretto for *Zusammenstoss* has been translated into English. Kate Trauman Steinitz, *Kurt Schwitters: A Portrait From Life*, trans. Robert Bartlett Haas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 149-202. In short episodes across three acts, *Zusammenstoss* tells the tale of a fragmented German society and its reaction to impending cosmic doom, the collision of the Green Globe with planet earth. In her memoirs, Schwitters' collaborator, the artist and art historian Kate Steinitz, captures the libretto's eclecticism and ambivalence: '*Zusammenstoss* was a very grotesque story about the end of the world. It was neither sad nor violent. In fact, I remember a happy ending, or at least a philosophical one – stretching out into an unending horizon, an invitation into the realms of science fiction. It envisioned a new kind of perspective, a kind of space-time fantasy. It was not yet really science fiction but a piece of prose concocted out of an extraordinary mixture of words, music, and rhythm.' Steinitz, 49.

Schwitters' stage works. Gwendolen Webster's detailed biography and Isabel Schulz's recent *Color and Collage* catalogue barely mention the artist's theatrical activities. Roger Cardinal and Webster, meanwhile, consider Schwitters' Merz stage a product of the political and theatrical ferment of Berlin in 1919, one merely derivative of the theatrical initiatives of the *Sturm* circle.[612] Elderfield offers the most detailed account but, while he briefly situates Schwitters contributions in the contemporary situation of German theatre, he does not consider their affinity as 'multimedia' with German opera, nor does he note the resemblance between the strategies of the *Normalbühne Merz* and the Kroll. Moreover, Elderfield principally considers Schwitters' media synthesis from a formal, as opposed to a spectatorial, point of view and the key issue of perception, which I argue was at stake in Schwitters' foray into theatre, and its grounding in German thought, is neglected.[613] Closer to my line of inquiry is that of Megan Luke, whose brief description of the Merz stage highlights two issues to which I will return: the *Merzbühne*'s 'quasi cinematic qualities' and the way in which its operations demonstrate Schwitters' 'abdication of his creative subjectivity'.[614] While cautious to mention Schwitters' work as a commercial designer in the same breath as his artistic output, I build on the literature that seeks to consider the way in which his participation in mass media informed his artistic practice. My aim is to stress something hitherto unexplored: the synergy between Merz theatre and techniques from commercial advertising. Though Schwitters did not label them operas as such, the artist framed his *Merzbühne* in terms of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a word closely associated with the composer Richard Wagner.[615] Existing

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[612] Roger Cardinal and Gwendolen Webster, *Kurt Schwitters*, trans. Agnès Cardinal, Sarah Cardinal-Bartmann and Hans Otto Schwacke (Osterfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 122-124.

[613] John Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 106-114, 141-143 (107).

[614] Megan Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 80, 84-86 (86).

[615] In 1919, Schwitters published two articles, 'Die Merzbühne' (the Merz stage) and 'Erklärungen Meiner Forderungen Zur Merzbühne' (explaining my demands for the Merz stage) in the *Sturm-Bühne: Jahrbuch Des Theaters Der Expressionisten* (October, 1919), 3. When the texts were reprinted a year later, Schwitters added an introduction which invoked Wagner: 'My aim is the total work of art [Gesamtkunstwerk], which combines all branches of art into an artistic unit.' Schwitters, 'MERZ (written for the Ararat, 19 December 1920)', *Der Ararat,* 2 (January, 1921), 3-9 (6). Quoted in Elderfield, 44. Also quoted in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An*

accounts of the *Merzbühne* have either taken Schwitters' Wagnerian allusions at face value and considered it a formal Wagnerian synthesis, or have emphasised its playful Dadaist adoption of non-artistic materials.[616] Yet neither Wagner nor Dada adequately represent Schwitters' stage projects which, in the context of the Kroll, exemplify the stakes of combining media in Weimar. Indeed, the distance between Schwitters' *Merzbühne* and Wagner's practical application of *Gesamtkunstwerk* is best expressed through their relationship to technology and the city. As Matthew Wilson Smith has argued, Wagner, was concerned like Schwitters by the impacts of modernity on human experience, and similarly used modern technology to reverse its own enfeebling effects. Yet at performances in his purpose-built *Festspielhaus* in Bayreuth, he took pains to hide the technological means of production. Indeed, Wagner felt his music dramas should be performed away from the city in what he described to Liszt in 1852 as a 'beautiful wilderness', away from the 'smoke and revolting industrial smell of our urban civilisation'.[617] As we will see in the case of Schwitters, the troubling aspects of modern life were best confronted directly as a visible part of the production and its experience.

Wagner loomed large in Weimar opera. The composer stood for some as an emblem of decadent pre-war values and for others, a stable figure of German cultural identity.[618] In spite of the 'opera crisis' invoked in criticism after the First World War, Weimar's state-sponsored

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Anthology, trans. Ralph Manheim, ed. Robert Motherwell, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 55-66; and *Myself and My Aims: Writings on Art and Criticism* ed. Megan Luke, trans. Timothy Grundy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 69-76.

[616] Elderfield, 104-107. Annabelle Melzer, *Dada and Surrealist Performance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 199-209.

[617] Matthew Wilson Smith, 'Total Stage: Wagner's Festspielhaus', *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 22-47 (29 & 35).

[618] The divide does not appear to have been generational: Hans Pfitzner (1869-1949) and Erich Korngold (1897-1957) proceeded in a Wagnerian vein, while Ferrucio Busioni (1866-1924) and Kurt Weill (1900-1950) explicitly rejected Wagnerian techniques as a means of generating new music. Others, meanwhile, looked to a more distant past for national protagonists of music history, a position exemplified by the enthusiastic revival of Handel in student productions at the University of Göttingen. Susan C. Cook, *Opera for a New Republic: The Zeitopern of Krenek, Weill, and Hindemith* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1988), 10-11.

houses presented more new operas than ever before.[619] *Zeitoper* or 'topical opera' pushed back against Wagner, staging contemporary life as satire and parody, and borrowing cinematic techniques, jazz and American dance music.[620] The Kroll championed new writing, including *Zeitoper*, but the institution was equally committed to the new presentation of traditional operas and gave stage directors and designers unprecedented agency to interpret the music and libretto, an approach I define as *Regieoper* (or director's opera). It was the Kroll's unorthodox approach to staging standard repertory, rather than its promotion of unfamiliar new music, that led to its closure under political pressure in 1931.[621] Schwitters' *Normalbühne Merz* pursues the same radical staging strategies underway at the Kroll. This chapter aims to ascertain the conditions which enabled the peculiar montaging of operatic music and text, with unexpected staging, to emerge in different pockets of the Weimar mediascape. The strategy of montage was also engaged in newly-written operas of the period. Instead of juxtaposing mise-en-scène with well-known music and text, this type of montage occurred in the new writing process as tensional relationships were created between text and music. The collaborations of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht are typical of this scenario which, though fascinating, are not my focus.[622]

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[619] This culminated in the 1927/8 season when sixty new operas premiered in state and municipal institutions. Cook, 3.

[620] Cook, 4-5. In 1929 the Kroll's dramaturg, Hans Curjel, added the quality of *Alltäglichkeit* or 'everydayness' as a defining feature of *Zeitoper*. As such, Cook has considered *Zeitoper* to be an expression of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Cook, 23.

[621] Cook, 2-3. The Kroll's commitment reinterpreting traditional operas stood in stark contrast to the interest in historical performance practice which emerged in 1920s Germany. Consistent with the positivist currents in Weimar thought, critics and musicologists advocated an objective and historically-informed standard to which performers should strive. Robert Hill, '"Overcoming Romanticism": On the Modernity of Twentieth-Century Performance Practice', *Music and Performance During the Weimar Republic*, ed. Bryan Gilliam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 37-58. Christopher Hailey has illuminated the role of sound reproduction technology in setting these standards of objectivity in performance practice. 'Rethinking Sound: Music and Radio in Weimar Germany', *Music and Performance*, ed. Gilliam, 13-36 (35).

[622] As Rowland Cotterill has observed, Weill's scores are not simple reflections of Brecht's textual libretti, rather 'the two exist side by side, each heightening our awareness of the other'. 'In defence of Mahagonny', *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Keith Bullivant (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 190-200 (196). In *Die neue Oper* (1926) Weill explicitly framed the independence of music and text in anti-Wagnerian terms. Gilliam, 'Stage and Screen: Kurt Weill and Operatic Reform in the 1920s', *Music and Performance*, ed. Gilliam, 5.

Following the scandal of his production of Verdi's *Aida* in Frankfurt, the German auteur, film and opera director Hans Neuenfels reasserted opera's role in 1982:

> The opera stage must challenge spectators in such a way that they are drawn to the very edge of their seats, wide awake, and are each compelled to risk a private debate with what they see and hear, with every aria, every fugue, and movement.[623]

Opera, for Neuenfels, must demand an active and intellectual mode of spectatorship, one which provoked observers to enter into an extended internal argument with themselves. *Aida*'s premiere was halted twice by audience heckling, another performance provoked a bomb threat. An incendiary scene in Neuenfels's staging came at the start of the second act which is set in the regal chamber of an Ancient Egyptian kingdom. Samuel Weber has characterised Neuenfels's take on it thus: '[T]he rising curtain reveals, or rather, confronts the audience with something like its mirror image: the original first-night audience of the opera's European premiere at La Scala in 1872'.[624] In a visual gesture disassociated from both the locus of the drama, Ancient Egypt, and any straightforward narrative cause, the fact of nineteenth-century opera-going presented itself to the audience, seemingly arbitrarily, as a riddle to be figured out. For Clemens Risi, Neuenfels's *Aida* is the foundation of *Regietheater* in opera, a tradition in which core operatic repertoire – Mozart, Verdi and Wagner in particular – are continuously remade in novel presentations:

> [T]hese are in general well-known works – the works of the classical operatic canon – that regulate the question of authorship through the two poles of composer and director, while producing a horizon of expectation located between recognition and

[623] Hans Neuenfels quoted in Klaus Umbach, '"Oper muß wieder anstrengend warden": Regisseur Hans Neuenfels über Probleme und Skandale des Musiktheaters', *Der Spiegel*, 15 November 1982, 249. Quoted in Clemens Risi, 'Opera in Performance: "Regietheater" and the Performative Turn', trans. Jake Fraser, *The Opera Quarterly*, 35 (2019), 7-19 (7).
[624] Samuel Weber, 'Taking Place: Toward a Theater of Dislocation', *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David J. Levin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 107-146 (107-8).

> surprise through divergence. (New musical compositions and "rediscoveries" are generally not the focal point of this performance praxis). The production of such stagings directs attention in particular to the relationship between auditory and visual elements, and to the question of how the musical plane interacts with the scenic one.[625]

As we have seen, emphasis on the direct encounter between auditory and visual media was already a trope in experimental multimedia.[626] Though he does not articulate it as such, Risi defines *Regieoper* as a form of montage, predicated on a juxtaposition of media which combines the old, historically relatively consistent (music and text) with the new (staging) to test, fulfil and subvert the audience's expectations. Neuenfels's insistence on opera as a challenging experience is affirmed by Risi's emphasis on *Regieoper*'s engagement of the intellect.[627]

Dismissed as 'Eurotrash' in some Anglophone circles, *Regieoper* remains a German phenomenon. Fredric Jameson has located its roots in GDR theatre,[628] while David J. Levin names the Kroll *Regieoper*'s initial testing ground.[629] Ernst Bloch was among associates of the Frankfurt School who supported the Kroll,[630] and defined its operations thus: 'old works were presented as if they were new, and new works were presented as if in recognition that

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[625] Risi, 'Opera in Performance', 8.
[626] The cases of Kandinsky's *Der gelbe Klang* in Chapter 1 and the Ballets Russes' *Liturgie* in Chapter 2 explore the possibilities of such medial encounters which, in the process, usurp the dominant position of the literary text in operatic production.
[627] Risi, 'Opera in Performance', 8.
[628] Fredric Jameson, 'Eurotrash or Regieoper?', *The Ancients and the Postmoderns: On the Historicity of Forms* (London: Verso, 2015), 195-196.
[629] David J. Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 22-23.
[630] Bloch gave music a special ethical and social position in his theory as it was an experience which required the subject's emotional and interpretive faculties, and yet could be boiled down to neither single attitude. Beth M. Snyder, 'The-Not-Yet-Conscious: Music as a Way of Knowing', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 70 (2017), 825-829 (826). Notated music exemplified the significance of Bloch's historic artefacts, as a 'message in a bottle' from the past, waiting for its 'subjective moment' to be revivified in performance for those willing to listen. Benjamin M. Korstvedt, 'Is Something Missing? Music History as Reality and *Geist*', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 70 (2017), 840-846 (841).

their contemporaneity was not of the cheap and easy sort'.[631] Bringing the category of difficulty into the operatic equation, Bloch's analysis has an affinity with Neuenfels's cri de cœur: 'not of the cheap and *easy* sort'. *Regieoper,* moreover, which resurrected the old and montaged it with the new, bears traces of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (non-contemporaneity), a theory Bloch developed in his inquiry into the success of fascism, *Heritage of Our Times* (1935). In a section entitled 'Non-Contemporaneity and Obligation to its Dialectic', Bloch examined the subjective experience of the present in which he identified the coexistence of conflicting temporalities. Drawing upon young people, the peasantry and the urban middle class, Bloch considered how age, class and geography shaped these contrasting 'nows' in which anachronistic social and cultural systems persisted alongside capitalism.[632] Fascism, according to Bloch, had already capitalised on the power of these contradictions by representing the multiplicity of German subjective experience in its adoption of ideological aspects of the past.[633] To galvanise the masses, the left must also attend to the temporal contradictions experienced across society, but in a manner distinct from the right.[634] That the left had not recognised the vital potential of dreams, myth and utopian thinking as a means of appealing to the German people had left them susceptible to fascism.[635] Rather than

[631] 'Altes wurde dort aufgeführt, als sei es neu, und Neues als eine Ahnung drin, daß eine Aktualität nicht zu der billigen gehöre'. Ernst Bloch, 'Die Oper. Ganz anders', *Experiment Krolloper 1927-1931: Aus dem Nachlaß herausgegeben von Eigel Kruttge,* ed. Hans Curjel (Munich: Prestel, 1975), 7. Quoted in Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 22.
[632] The illuminating passage reads: 'Not all people exist in the same Now… Depending on where someone stands physically, and above all in terms of class, he has his times. Older times than the modern ones continue to have an effect in older strata; it is easy to make or dream one's way back into older ones here… Various years in general beat in the one which is just being counted and prevails. Nor do they flourish in obscurity as in the past, but contradict the Now; very strangely, crookedly, from behind'. Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 97. Frederic J. Schwartz has elucidated Bloch's notion of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* which he translates as 'nonsimultaneity', locating its origins in German art history and the work of Wilhelm Pinder. Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 103-136.
[633] Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, 97.
[634] As Anson Rabinbach articulates it, Bloch addressed 'those ideological remnants of past epochs that have been appropriated by fascism not, however, to reveal their illusory character, but to restore them to their genuine place in a powerful, but fragmentary anti-capitalist heritage'. 'Unclaimed Heritage: Ernst Bloch's Heritage of Our Times and the Theory of Fascism', *New German Critique* (Spring, 1977), 5-21 (5).
[635] Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, 60.

considering fairytales, fairs and adventurous *colportage* (pulp literature) as a passive form of escapism, Bloch saw their potential as a means of enlivening minds deadened by the present, opening them up to alternative possibilities.[636] Bloch's Marxist aesthetics aimed to activate the political subject, not via techniques of a socialist realism but through utopian images revealed through fragmented cultural forms. Artefacts of previous generations were not useless heirlooms but instead contained promises which pointed beyond the present. This notion of utopia was a dialectical one in which the torch of the past threw light onto possibilities which had yet to reveal themselves in the present.

The Kroll's and Schwitters' prolonging of antiquated opera in a media constellation of past and present is a Blochian utopian project.[637] Inspired by the Kroll's 1930 modern-dress staging of Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* (*The Flying Dutchman*), Bloch's 'Rescuing Wagner through Surrealistic Colportage', demonstrates this point. Though aware of Wagner's retrogressive elements, Bloch felt it possible to identify utopian qualities through illuminating latent fragments of Offenbach and colportage.

> To view *Der fliegende Holländer* as an adventure story, such as might have come from the pen of Captain Marryat yet with surrealist elements, appeared to him as offering a means of stripping the work of the 'Traumkitsch' in which, as he felt, Wagner had subsequently encased it.[638]

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[636] Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, 161.

[637] We cannot rule out a causal relationship between Bloch's aesthetic theory and that of the Kroll's management. The artistic director, the conductor Otto Klemperer, counted Bloch among his closest friends and invited Bloch to combine his love of music and skills as an essayist to write programme notes for the institution. Peter Heyworth, *Otto Klemperer: His Life and Times Volume 1 1885-1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 436. Klemperer first encountered Bloch's writing while recuperating in the Königstein sanatorium in 1916 when Georg Simmel, Bloch's teacher, posted him the manuscript of *Gesit der Utopie*, which Klemperer enthusiastically received. Heyworth, *Otto Klemperer*, I, 111.

[638] Heyworth, *Otto Klemperer*, 279. On Bloch's reception of Wagner, see Benjamin M. Korstvedt, *Listening for Utopia in Ernst Bloch's Musical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 97-124.

The goal of saving Wagner from his right-wing devotees was achieved when the Nazis denounced the production an extreme desecration of culture.[639] Bloch demonstrates the usefulness of considering *Regieoper* in the expanded field of Weimar media history and thought. Operating across media, the formal strategy of montage situates *Regieoper* within a broader cultural phenomenon, and the Kroll's employment of visual artists rather than professional stage designers reiterates its cross-media situation: was *Regieoper* derived from outside the operatic apparatus?

Rapid industrialisation opened up possibilities in German theatre, yet its impacts were not universally approved. In the emerging discipline of sociology, Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936), Georg Simmel (1858-1918) and Max Weber (1864-1920),[640] considered the consequences of modernity on human experience. An exponent of 'disenchantment', Weber treated the prevailing positivist faith in reason and science, and its assumption of objectivity and detachment, with scepticism. Instead, he highlighted how a world explainable only in rational terms was drained of its spiritual and mystical qualities.[641] Tönnies's 1887 *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Society) focussed on the demographic shift of rural populations to urban centres necessitated by industrialisation.[642] The defining

[639] Hepworth, *Otto Klemperer*, 283.
[640] Though Max Weber tends to be considered the principal thinker of this new discipline, David Frisby has relativised Weber's contributions in a study of three other theorists of modernity, Georg Simmel, Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin. In contrast to Weber's focus on the ramifications of rationalisation, Frisby's thinkers concentrate on the essentially interrupted, disjointed and fragmented quality of modern experience and, in this respect, owe much to Baudelaire's concept of *modernité*. Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin (*Abingdon: Routledge, 1986).
[641] An example of 'disenchantment' is the religious scepticism generated by Darwinism at the end of the nineteenth century. Weber explained the term 'disenchantment' in his 1917 lecture 'Science as Vocation'. Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 1-31.
[642] While in 1871 two thirds of the population lived in the countryside, by 1910 sixty percent of the population inhabited cities and conurbations. In 1871 there were only eight German cities with a population in excess of 100,000 people, but by 1910 there were forty-eight. Hans-Georg Betz, 'Elites and Class Structure', *The Cambridge Companion to Modern German Culture*, ed. Eva Kolinsky and Wilfried van der Will (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67-85 (69). The demographic situation of early twentieth-century Germany is outlined in Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (London: Penguin, 1991), 7-9.

difference between rural communities and urban capitalist societies for Tönnies, was the way in which relationships were pursued. In a rural context, bonds were forged through the *Wesenwille* (natural will), an instinctive interaction motivated by the traditional rules of religion and kinship. In an urban situation, and especially in the context of large and bureaucratic governmental or industrial organisations, relations were guided by *Kürwille* (rational will), a reasoned self-interest driven by economic and political considerations which produced impersonal relations.[643] *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* betrayed a nostalgia which has led Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre to include Tönnies under their rubric of 'Romantic anti-capitalism', a rejection of capitalism for the sake of pre-capitalist values. Defining Romanticism as a push back against the conditions of capitalist society, Löwy and Sayre illustrate how the Romantic worldview persisted into the twentieth century.[644] The educated bourgeoisie's (*Bildungsbürgertum*) dwindling sense of relevance among a competing entrepreneurial class continued after the war; that *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* surged in popularity in the Weimar period is testament to a persistent anxiety of modernity.[645]

Fritz Ringer has chronicled the ideology of Romantic anti-capitalism in the German academic community between 1890 and 1933. An elite whose status was contingent on intellectual rather than financial or hereditary privilege, the so-called 'mandarins' demonstrated a defensive anti-modern pessimism.[646] The First World War only intensified the situation. In

[643] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society* (1887), trans. and ed. Charles Price Loomis (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2002).
[644] The breadth of anti-capitalist feeling is emphasised by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre in their types of Romantic anti-capitalism: Restitutionist, Conservative, Fascist, Resigned, Liberal, revolutionary and/or Utopian. They consider Tönnies as 'resigned". Sayre and Löwy, 'Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism', *New German Critique* (Spring-Summer, 1984), 42-92 (46, 60, 73, 74). Schwartz has similarly considered Romanticism as the significant point of reference in discussions of culture, especially for those seeking to defend it, in pre-war Germany. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 13-17.
[645] Despite being over three decades old, the book's juxtaposition of a harmonious community with a splintered and materialistic society resonated with the intellectual community. Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (London: Penguin Books, 1974), 83.
[646] As Ringer puts it '…the specter of a "soulless" modern age came to haunt everything they said and wrote, no matter what the subject'. Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic*

1918, the November Revolution marked the end of the war, the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the establishment of a democratic parliamentary republic.[647] As Germany grappled with crippling reparations, the early years of the republic were defined by privations, mass unemployment, hyperinflation and political extremism. Inflation, which peaked in 1923, exerted extreme economic pressures which fuelled society's reverence for power and wealth and elevated the position of scientific and technical training.[648] By the 1920s, the mandarins decried a '"crisis of culture," of "learning," of "values," or of the "spirit"'.[649] Attuned to a decline in their social standing, they defined their own model of learning and, relatedly, culture, against utilitarian knowledge which they articulated in the terms *Bildung* (cultivation) and *Kultur*.[650] Here I would like to draw attention to this shift in the definition of culture which offers a productive context for the intellectual experience promoted by twentieth-century exponents of *Regieoper*. The purpose of culture was redefined as one of individual spiritual edification: culture and learning came to be inextricably linked. That the mandarin's position was partially absorbed by the Frankfurt School, who themselves recognised the value of the Kroll's project, only strengthens the constellation of German intellectual history, and the activities of the Kroll and Schwitters, all of whom advocated art's separate, higher experiential realm.[651]

Community, 1890-1933 (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969; repr. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1990), 5, 3.

[647] The Weimar Republic lasted for fourteen years between 1919 and 1933.

[648] Bernd Widdig has highlighted the profound impact of inflation on the *Bildungsbürgertum* (educated bourgeoisie), writers, academics and artists who, without the support of trade unions, saw both their material wealth and status decline. Bernd Widdig, *Culture and Inflation in Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 169-195. Some academics had to find alternative forms of employment and sell their book collections to support their families. Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 138.

[649] Ringer, *The Decline*, 3.

[650] Ringer, *The Decline*, 86.

[651] Martin Jay has provided a nuanced discussion of those characteristics shared by the mandarins and the Frankfurt School. Though the philosophical grounds of their analyses and relation to the university establishment were not the same, a distinct mood of cultural pessimism was common to both groups. Jay distinguishes this first in the language of the Frankfurt School, which was imbued with the vocabulary of decay and loss rather than that of anticipatory optimism; their discomfort with capitalist society and its positivistic faith in science and technology; their dissatisfaction with the disciplinary splintering of the university; a suspicion of the enlightenment; and their ultimately apolitical attitude which persisted even when praxis figured as a galvanising

Though cultural anxiety was widespread in Europe at the fin-de-siècle, the case Ringer makes for the intensity of feeling in Germany helps to account for the distinct trajectory that German opera would take:

> Above all, the Germans went further than anyone else in tracing the cultural problems of the day to the shortcomings of higher education and to the decline of learning itself. The revulsion against positivism and against the enlightenment was most pronounced in Germany, where neither positivism nor the Enlightenment had ever been popular.[652]

Ringer traces the singularity of the German position back to Kant, who differentiated between civilisation and culture by identifying the former with 'good manners and social niceties' and the latter with 'art, learning, and morality'. Neo-Kantianism was, according to Ringer, a strong current in the German academy's definition of culture. The dichotomy was even couched in national terms: '…by the time of Napoleon at any rate, culture was German and civilisation was French'.[653] Subjective aesthetic experience concerned a number of strands of European artistic modernism. Yet while Surrealism, which aspired to circumvent conscious thought in order to penetrate into the unconscious, emerged in France, the conscious and active reflection that *Regieoper* and Schwitters strove to elicit could only have happened in Germany where, as Thomas E. Willey has highlighted, the revival of Kantianism was well underway.

Willey summarises Neo-Kantianism from 1848 to the First World War succinctly: the philosophical movement sought to reaffirm the impact of human consciousness in the process

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force in their theory. *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute for Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston: Little Brown, 1973; repr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 293-295.

[652] Ringer, *The Decline*, 258.

[653] Ringer, *The Decline*, 88.

of history, to create a method for the humanities distinct from that of the physical sciences, and to push against the application of economic determinism in public life by reasserting the value of moral aspiration.[654] Though the Neo-Kantians attempted to address liberalism, socialism and the contemporary situation of mass industrial society, their discourse was more powerful in academic than political circles and their efforts at social praxis are considered to have failed.[655] Yet the Kantian dictum so valued by the Neo-Kantians – 'have the courage to use your own reason' – stands just as well for the aims of the Kroll and Schwitters. In the context of artistic production, Willey's conclusion that Neo-Kantianism fell short because no one external to it was listening, takes on a different complexion.

Merz and the thoughtful category of art

Schwitters' method of Merz sought to apply 'all conceivable materials for artistic purposes',[656] and thus challenged traditional notions of artistic materials and crossed media boundaries. Through his enduring experimentation with collage, Schwitters collected the detritus of mass culture, of *Zivilization* – bus tickets, playing cards, chocolate wrappers, string, newspaper, nails and other fragments from the urban environment – which he regarded as valuable artistic resources for his creations.[657] Germany's dire economic situation and Schwitters' modest financial means point to Merz as a material necessity, but the artist expressed it otherwise:

[654] Thomas Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860-1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), 9.
[655] Willey identifies Weber an advocate of Neo-Kantian liberalism which was neither able to forge meaningful ties with the left, nor to convince German society of the value of individual liberty.
[656] Schwitters, 'Die Merz Malerei' (Merz-Painting), 1919. Quoted in Dorothea Dietrich, 'Hannover', *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York*, *Paris*, ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington DC/New York: National Gallery of Art/Distributed Art Publishers, 2005), 157-178 (169).
[657] According to the artist Raoul Hausmann: 'he always kept his eyes to the ground…He was looking for objects, material for his collages. Anything would do: old and new tram tickets, bits of cardboard, cuttings of material, crumpled boxes'; meanwhile the sculptor Naum Gabo recalled: 'He would carefully and lovingly clean it up and then triumphantly show it to you. Only then would one realise what an exquisite piece of colour was contained in this ragged scrap.' Cardinal and Webster, *Kurt Schwitters*, trans. Cardinal, Cardinal-Bartmann and Schwacke, 17.

> I could not, in fact, see the reason why old tickets, driftwood, cloakroom tabs, wires and parts of wheels, buttons and old rubbish found in attics and refuse dumps should not be as suitable a material for painting as the paints made in factories. This was, as it were, a social attitude, and artistically speaking, a private enjoyment, but particularly the latter... I called my new works utilising such material *Merz*.[658]

The descriptor 'Merz' was appropriated by Schwitters in the same way he sourced his collage materials. The printed letters were physically torn from a piece of paper advertising 'Kommerz-und Privatbank" (Commerce Bank) and the shred was glued to what became his 1919 assemblage painting *Merzbild 1* (Merz Picture 1).[659] In a Dadaist manoeuvre, the nonsensical found word that came to define Schwitters' project gently poked fun at traditional artistic institutions and the tenets they upheld:

> I looked for a collective term for this new style, since I could not fit my pictures into the older categories… So I called all my work as a species Merz, first my poetry, which I have written since 1917, and finally to all my related activities. Now I call myself Merz.[660]

The incorporation of the materials of *Zivilization* into Schwitters' practice has an affinity with the Cubists and Dadaists before him but there are important distinctions to be made.

Where Picasso and Braque held on to representation as a compositional guide, dismantling scenes from life – landscapes, still lifes and human figures – to be partially reconstructed in

[658] Schwitters, 'Die Merzmalerei' (Merz-Painting), *Der Sturm*, 10 (July 1919), 61. Quoted in William S. Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1968), 53.
[659] Unfortunately, this picture is now lost. Dietrich, 'Hannover', *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover*, ed. Dickerman, 159.
[660] Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism*, 53.

fragments, Schwitters' compositions tend not to be taken from life.[661] Collage for him was not a representational practice but one that celebrated the endless compositional possibilities of fragments. Never entirely relinquishing their specific semantic associations, Schwitters' collage elements hold each other in tension and hint at new alternative, oblique interrelationships.[662] Schwitters dressed his method in the utopian language of the expressionists when he claimed it strove to 'create connections, if possible, between everything in the world'.[663] The question of what, or more precisely, who, was working to actively make those associations, is significant: the method of Merz engaged in nothing if not the activation of the observer. As Merz, art was first an active and intellectual supposition of artistic experience. Schwitters, who was part of a generation slightly older than George Grosz and thus in Bloch's terms, non-contemporaneous with him, held an unerring belief in artistic experience as aloof from that of mass media, yet his dialectical adherence to *Kultur* as distinct from – and yet partly constructed out of – *Zivilization*, baffled his critics and contributed to his one-man movement status.

The perceptual demands Schwitters made of his observer appear less isolated when considered in dialogue with associates of the Frankfurt School. Walter Benjamin's montage book *One-Way Street*, written between 1924 and 1926 and published in 1928, has an affinity with Merz, especially in its structural borrowings from urban visual material such as mass-produced signs and adverts. Like Schwitters, Benjamin was preoccupied with fragments of the everyday and their cognitive potential. Via the cognisant reader, his equivalent to the

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[661] In the collages of Picasso and Braque, their discrete components still fulfilled a referential function, imaging a 'memory trace of a perspectival view'. Dickerman, 'Introduction', *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover*, ed. Dickerman, 1-15 (8).
[662] As Luke puts it: 'Schwitters emphasised the relationships between elements, over and above their intrinsic qualities'. *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*, 21.
[663] Schwitters, 'Merz' (1924) quoted in Isabel Schulz, 'Kurt Schwitters: Color and Collage', *Kurt Schwitters: Color and Collage* ed. Isabel Schulz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 51-63 (61).

roving eye of Schwitters' observer, textual fragments were brought into relation with one another through constellations. Jumping from short textual episodes, on topics ranging from the Mexican Embassy to the Planetarium via the Watchmaker and Jeweller, Benjamin's urban snapshots throw the reader the task of forming indirect and ambiguous connections. Not a linear reading experience, *One-Way Street* promotes a 'roundabout' approach in which reading is constellating, that same active and generative process at play in Merz pictures.[664]

Michael Jennings has considered *One-Way Street* not in terms of Merz but in relation to the tenets of photomontage. Pioneered by the Berlin Dadaists in the early 1920s, photomontage comprised pasted pictures (*Klebebilder*) sourced from illustrated newspapers and reconfigured into subversive new compositions. Photomontage necessitated a new type of spectatorship: without any single-point perspective reference point, the observer must create an internal image of the picture themselves.[665] So far, so Schwitters. Yet other accounts of photomontage, not least Benjamin's own, emphasise its shock tactics which, like the shock therapy administered to casualties of the war, aimed to push the observer into a new realm of consciousness through attrition. In his *Artwork* essay of 1936, Benjamin deemed Dadaist art anathema to contemplation, the experience of being at one with a unique work of art. Dada instead offered a novel antagonistic and militaristic mode of spectatorship:

> In the hands of the Dadaists the work of art, from being a sight that seduced the eye or a sound that persuaded the ear, became a bullet. It flew towards the viewer, striking him down. It assumed a tactile quality.[666]

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[664] Michael W. Jennings, 'Introduction', Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 1-20 (7).
[665] As Jennings puts it: 'If photomontage confronted the viewer with the imperative to see differently, Benjamin's use of the montage principle in a literary text demands the reader *read differently*'. Jennings, 'Introduction', 6.
[666] Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), trans. J.A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008), 32.

The spiritual nature of artistic experience had, according to Benjamin, been killed off by Dada.

One-Way Street combines the prolonged process of reading with the mental task of making sense of its episodes, those essential components of contemplation. The eye of Schwitters' observer, meanwhile, moves across the picture plane over time and synthesises its disparate parts which are not exclusively drawn from the illustrated press but from a variety of other sources. General accounts of early twentieth-century montage are quick to highlight its rejection of contemplation. Patrizia McBride is typical of this trend:

> In harnessing the shock of anti-naturalistic compositions, the aesthetics of montage further liquidated the demand that art conform to values of harmony, wholeness, reconciliation, and beauty as disclosed by the immersive, contemplative reception demanded by a late-idealistic aesthetics.[667]

Yet in the case of the montage adopted by *One-Way Street* and Merz, contemplation does not shrink into the immersive passivity that McBride and others attach to it, but instead persists as a mentally and temporally-engaged practice. Benjamin's and Schwitters' process summons Neuenfels's conditions for opera, challenging their reader and observer to an internal discussion with themselves in a process of mental reflection.[668] The values of wholeness and harmony that McBride claims are liquidated in montage do not disappear in *One-Way Street* and Merz, but are instead transferred elsewhere. No longer presented in formal composition, the artwork is rendered whole by the synthesising observer.

Shock tactics, therefore, do not entirely account for those deployed in *One-Way Street*.

[667] Patrizia McBride, *The Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2016), 4.
[668] Risi, 'Opera in Performance', 7.

Instead, the text, which is presented in full sentences and paragraphs rather than a shock of splintered letters and words, demands durational looking and a deeper kind of thought. The perceptual mode Schwitters and Benjamin elicit here is illuminated by the French surrealists, whose work Benjamin encountered as early as 1924 and whose radical notion of freedom and attention to the world of everyday objects he admired. Uwe Steiner and others have noted how 'Filling Station', the opening aphorism of *One-Way Street*, is a direct borrowing from Louis Aragon's surrealist novella *Paysan de Paris* (1926) which elevates gas pumps as icons of modernity. Seen surrealistically through Aragon's 'imaged thinking', the gas pump's use value is discarded and it is afforded new qualities as a phenomenological artefact. As Aragon describes, gas pumps line the road as stations of the cross had once done for pilgrims.[669] Thus the mundane is released into the realm of the marvellous. Aragon here paved the way for Benjamin's own tendency to see a new political or perceptual possibility in otherwise discredited objects or, as Jennnings puts it, 'a doubleness… in all things, to their devastating effect on human consciousness and to their critical potential'.[670]

Surrealism, as analysed by Benjamin, could promote an intoxicating, oneiric experience, in which the world of things could be considered anew in 'profane illuminations'. Unlike the 'lower' orders of intoxication, those induced by drugs or religion, 'profane illuminations' were non-religious magical experiences driven by a political 'materialistic, anthropological inspiration'.[671] This category of experience is neither the non-contemplative Dadaist situation, nor the quasi-religious contemplation of traditional art works, yet its trance-like

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[669] Uwe Steiner, *Walter Benjamin: An Introduction to his Work and Thought*, trans. Michael Winkler (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2010), 82.
[670] Jennings, 15.
[671] Löwy, 'Walter Benjamin and Surrealism: The Story of a Revolutionary Spell', trans. David Macey, *Radical Philosophy* (Nov/Dec, 1996) 17-23 (19).

continuity brings it closer to the latter contemplative kind of experience as duration offers time for reflection. That the surrealists combined communist activism with libertarianism and magic enabled them, according to Benjamin, to perform a distinctive function: 'to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution – this is the project about which surrealism circles in all its books and enterprises. This it may call its most particular task'.[672] Benjamin's sense that the revolution required intoxicating energies is not unlike Bloch's emphasis on Marxism's need to present utopian visions of possible futures via the fantastical, dream-like and kitsch, in short, through that which captures the imagination and is at the same time relatable.

The surrealists' focus on the obsolete and outmoded also caught Benjamin's attention: 'the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photographs, the objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them'.[673] While Benjamin does not expand upon the particular significance of historic artefacts to revolution, Löwy has hazarded a guess: 'Is it a sign of the precariousness, the historicity or morality of bourgeois structures, monuments and institutions? Or is it an ironic and subversive commentary on the bourgeoisie's pretentions to being "new" and "modern"?'[674] Either way, Benjamin's specification of the magical, along with the thought-provoking qualities of old-fashioned objects, does not feel far from Bloch's project, in which fragments of the past offer hopeful projections of the future in the present, and in which non-contemporaneous social groups still operating within anachronistic systems can see something of their reality represented.

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[672] Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligensia', trans. Edmund Jephcott, *New Left Review* (March, 1978), 47-56 (51).
[673] Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot', 50.
[674] Löwy, 'Walter Benjamin and Surrealism', 18.

The difference between Schwitters' and Berlin Dadaist spectatorship is exemplified in their performance practices. Andrew DeShong has emphasised the antagonistic quality of Dadaist performance and its 'nonparticipating' public; Grosz's recollections are instructive: 'I would go out into the audience and say to one man, "You idiot. Pay attention". Sometimes I'd slap them with my glove and sometimes I'd say, "You reek with corruption, and now five hundred marks please"'.[675] The quick, improvisatory quality of this episode shocks the observer awake, yet does not afford him or her time after the assault to consider what has occurred and why. A vignette of a Club Dada matinee in 1919 is similarly revealing: 'Entertainment terminated in an exchange of insults: the Dada chorus linked arms and descended from the podium to do battle with the inhabitants of the orchestra seats'.[676] The audience's nonparticipation here is not to do with a lack of gestural participation, they are involved in the performance at close range and respond with quick reactions to its stimuluses. Instead, their nonparticipation manifests itself in their lack of a slower kind of cerebral engagement: they produce snap reactions to Dadaistic shocks, rather than slower responses following their internal synthesis of the action.

These scenes stand in stark contrast to a Schwitters performance on tour in Holland with Theo van Doesburg in 1923:

> Then Schwitters recited his poem, 'An Anna Blume,' followed - to everybody's surprise, by some Heine, accompanied at Schwitters' insistence by a Chopin Etude. But when Schwitters changed back to sound poems again, reciting them so as to mimic the melody of the Chopin, the audience disturbances started again. It was

[675] Andrew DeShong, *The Theatrical Designs of George Grosz* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), 15.
[676] DeShong, 17.

> finally quietened, however, by some sharp words from Van Doesburg and the evening ended with a brisk ‘Rag-time Dada’ on the piano (in fact, the jazz section of Satie’s score from *Parade*).[677]

Here the new, *An Anna Blume*, Schwitters’ parody of kitsch sentimental love poetry (which Huelsenbeck remarked erred more towards tribute than critique),[678] is programmed next to the traditional and familiar, Heine and Chopin, before one is superimposed on top of the other (a sound poem delivered to the tune of the Chopin). The Merz performance is cast as a conventional *Liederabend* whose episodes of a longer duration allow more thinking time than Grosz’s rapid Dadaistic gestures. Schwitters’ sound poem treats the Chopin as a found object in the same way that a director approaches the musical score in *Regieoper*. The power of the Chopin lies in its familiarity (as with a canonic opera of Verdi, Wagner or Puccini), and the extent to which this familiarity is subverted, heightening the listening observer’s mode of attention as they differentiate between the original they know and its alternative treatment. The performance suggests a Blochian kind of utopianism in which the non-contemporaneous nineteenth-century *Liederabend* is treated playfully, and summons Bloch’s 1929 ‘Rescuing Wagner’ essay in which he encouraged the energy of colportage to revive old art works whose cultural excesses had atrophied by the preservation of traditional structures of reception. Schwitters puts Chopin and Heine forward for the treatment Bloch claims Wagner must be given: ‘we must learn to listen to Wagner, as we devour Karl May, go with him to the fair’.[679]

Unlike many of the Berlin Dadaists, Schwitters did not abandon the traditional media of paint

[677] Elderfield, 106.
[678] Barchan, Stina, ‘The House and the Archive: Hannah Höch and Kurt Schwitters’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2009), 144. *An Anna Blume* (1919) was first published in *Der Sturm*, 10 (1919), then published as part of the collection *Anna Blume Dichtungen* (Hannover: Paul Steegemann Verlag, 1919).
[679] Bloch, ‘Rescuing Wagner Through Surrealistic Colportage’ (1929), *Heritage of Our Times*, 345.

and canvas but instead embraced all possible media non-hierarchically, an approach he termed *Gleichgültigkeit*, the equal validity of all materials for artistic application.[680] *Gleichgültigkeit* shares the dynamics of experimental opera production as it inclined towards a more egalitarian relationship between visual, musical and textual media, a phenomenon expressed most clearly in the incipient role of the stage director. As the director emerged out of the availability of new media technologies, electric illumination and mechanical staging, as well as from the need to compete with the visually-driven and eventually electrically-illuminated mass medium of film, so Merz was fashioned out of Weimar's mass mediascape, with its high circulation of mechanically reproduced texts and images.

Clinging to the discredited idea of aesthetic autonomy, the necessity of art to be remote from life, Schwitters figures in Peter Bürger's terms as a modernist rather than a member of the avant-garde.[681] According to his Berlin Dada colleagues, Schwitters' inclusive practice shirked its social responsibility: he earned the epithet the 'Kaspar David Friedrich of the Dadaists' courtesy of Huelsenbeck, and was criticised by Grosz and others for not embracing political art.[682] Yet Schwitters dismissed politically-motivated art outright: 'Art is too precious to be misused as a tool, I prefer to distance myself from contemporary events... But I am more deeply rooted in my time than the politicians who hover over the decade'.[683] This rejection came from neither a place of moral ambivalence nor a squeamishness about art's engagement with the stuff of the everyday. On the contrary, art for Schwitters had an urgent ethical imperative, one of resistance. In the years that Schwitters pioneered Merz, the

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[680] Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*, 16.
[681] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shawn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
[682] Elderfield, 40. See also Jack Zipes, 'Kurt Schwitters, Politics, and the Merz Fairy Tale', Kurt Schwitters, *Lucky Hans and Other Merz Fairy Tales*, trans. Jack Zipes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 1-38 (9).
[683] Schwitters, 'Ich und meine Ziele' (Myself and My Aims), *Merz*, 21 (1931), 113-117. Quoted in Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris, 'Introduction', Kurt Schwitters, *PPPPPP: Poems, Performance, Pieces, Proses, Plays, Poetics*, ed. and trans. Rothenberg and Joris (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2002), xv-xxxiii (xxvi).

susceptibility of mass media to manipulation became all too apparent. Weimar witnessed a peak in media conglomerates exemplified by the businessman Alfred Hugenberg who, in 1914, established an advertising agency, purchased the film production companies the *Deutscher Lichtbild Gessellschaft* and *Universum Film-Aktien Gesellschaft* (*UFA*) and at the same time, managed a vast series of local newspapers, all of which allowed for the wide dissemination of his right-wing views.[684] Conceived against mass media's suppression, manipulation and instrumentalisation of the subject's perceptive faculties, Schwitters aspired to activate the imagination of his observer.

Schwitters' resistance to the uncomplicatedly political in art hints at Adorno's position, which rejected the application of art for political ends on the grounds that it would be no better than the world of instrumental reason, exemplified by Hugenberg's media channels. At issue for Adorno was ideology and its eliciting of psychological 'conformity' over 'consciousness', something that was similarly at stake for Schwitters.[685] That Schwitters claimed to be a member of his own political party, the *Kaiserliche Anna Blume Partei Deutschlands* (KAPD, which also alluded to the real KAPD, the *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands* or Communist Workers' Party of Germany, active from 1920-33), playfully named after the protagonist of his nonsense parody love poem, has masked its more serious significance. The subject, according to Schwitters, must above all be free to think for itself,[686] and this was a position he shared with the Neo-Kantians. Though Schwitters and Adorno both paid rigorous

[684] Hugenberg backed Hitler on his journey to German leadership. Holger Briel, 'The Media of Mass Communication: the Press, Radio and Television', *The Cambridge Companion to Modern German Culture*, ed. Kolinsky, van der Will, 322-337 (324).
[685] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Culture Industry Reconsidered', trans. Rabinbach, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), 104. Describing Schwitters' literary fairytales, Zipes frames his strategy in Adornian terms: the stories provoked their readers to 'think outside those socially constructed boxes'. Zipes, 'Kurt Schwitters, Politics, and the Merz Fairy Tale', 2.
[686] Stephen C. Foster, 'Merz: A Transactional Model for Culture', *Dada Cologne Hannover: Crisis and the Arts The History of Dada, Volume 3*, ed. Charlotte Stokes and Stephen. C. Foster (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1998), 103-108 (106).

attention to media, their similarities stall at Schwitters' amenity to kitsch and fragments of mass media which for Adorno would always be manipulative and could never be redeemed. In this sense, Bloch's aesthetic theory interacts with Merz more productively and exerts pressure on claims that Schwitters was apolitical; his position had an affinity with Bloch's unorthodox utopian Marxist one.

Merz, machines and mechanical reproduction

Schwitters' position vis-à-vis technology was not unequivocal. Though the artist claimed to have discovered his passion for the wheel as a machine draftsman at the Wülfel ironworks from 1917-18,[687] Elderfield has argued that the 'Machine Esthetic' troubled Schwitters, and reads the mechanistic elements of his early Merz pictures as critical gestures from an 'anti-machinist' point of view.[688] I would like to suggest that both positions could in fact be true. As initial investigations of Merz have suggested, contradictions were the guiding force in Schwitters' worldview. Indeed, when it came to mechanised modernity, the artist is rivalled only by Benjamin in his ability to switch freely between a pessimistic caution and a utopian hope, reacting to the rapid innovations which characterised his age. Benjamin and Schwitters shared an unerring engagement in technologised modernity and its depletion of, as well as potential for, experience. These two poles are represented in the case of Benjamin nowhere more clearly than in his *Artwork* and *Storyteller* essays which were published within a year of one another and at once celebrated and lamented the impact of technologised modernity on experience. A similar kind of dialectic is at play in Schwitters' parallel activities as an artist and commercial designer.

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[687] Dietrich, 'Merz and the Longing for Wholeness', *Dada Cologne Hannover*, ed. Stokes and Foster, 109-135 (110).
[688] Hans Arp noted how Schwitters despised the manner in which materialism was 'denaturing' humanity. Arp, 'Kurt Schwitters' (1949), *Arp on Arp: Poems, Essays, Memories* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 251. Quoted in Elderfield, 136.

The introduction to Schwitters' 1924 *Merz* 8/9 journal collaboration with El Lissitzky, entitled *Nasci* (fig. 64) exemplifies this position:

'We have had ENOUGH of perpetually having MACHINE,
MACHINE,
MACHINE,
when it comes to modern art production'.[689]

Rather ironically, the repetitive layout of this statement is a direct appropriation of the principles of the nascent discipline of advertising which were being theorised in the early 1920s. Kurt Friedlaender's 1923 *Der Weg zum Käufer, eine Theorie der praktischen Reklame* (*The road to the buyer, a theory of practical advertising*) was one of the first publications to introduce marketing techniques into a pedagogical German design context. Friedlaender identified the application of repetition, alongside humour, alliteration and verse as a means of making a strong impression on the advert's audience.[690] Schwitters knew more than anyone that advertising was itself a direct product of the machine age and yet, in a Merzian move, he borrowed from the industry's psychological strategies as a means of expanding his own artistic-perceptual arsenal.

Nasci for Elderfield is not an assault on the machine *per se* but rather a critique of the elevation of 'technical over esthetic principles'.[691] *Nasci*'s argument that artefacts of technology were in fact all made up of basic natural forms – cones, spirals, rods, strips, planes, spheres and crystals (fig. 65) – has led Dietrich to consider it an attempt to render

[689] Elderfield, 136. On the Lissitzky-Schwitters collaboration see Nancy Perloff, 'Two Visions of the Universal: The Collaboration of Kurt Schwitters and El Lissitzky', *Dada Cologne Hannover*, ed. Stokes and Foster, 174-192.
[690] Jeremy Aynsley, *Graphic Design in Germany, 1890-1945* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 81-82.
[691] For Lissitzky mechanical methods were not to be privileged over natural ones. Elderfield, 136.

technology more palatable by including it in an organicist discourse, laying the ground for what she terms Schwitters' 'vital, non-destructive modernity'.[692] Dietrich has also discerned an engagement with the relationship between man and machine in a survey of Schwitters' 'machinist' paintings. *Merzbild 1 A (Der Irrenartz*) (The Alienist) (fig. 66) of 1919, which renders a human profile in oil paint and found materials – wire, metal disks from a dismantled mechanism, a coin and a cigarette – exemplifies this body of work. That the mechanical materials are formally contained within the painted outline of the psychiatrist's profile points, for Dietrich, to the psychiatrist's limitation of the damaging aspects of modern life. Yet in a Benjaminian turn, could Schwitters' figure of the psychiatrist not dually suggest the idea of modernity as an affliction, while at the same time offering its products as a therapy?[693] Schwitters' indication that the assemblage was a self-portrait strengthens the idea of the artist as psychiatrist, and hints at his belief in art's healing and redemptive capacity in the machine age: could art be complicit with the mechanical to achieve these ends?

Dietrich has attributed Schwitters' artistic handling of technology, exemplified in *Merzbild 1 A*, to the critical tenets of the art historian Adolf Behne, who was an advocate of Schwitters' work. In his 1919 publication *Die Wiederkehr der Kunst* (The Return of Art), Behne called for art to reclaim *Erlebnis*, that spiritual experience fundamental to artistic reception which stood apart from the rational, technologised reality of everyday life. Art's purpose, according to Behne, was to free the subject from rational thought's tight grasp.[694] Behne at that time advocated a return to the 'primitive', by which he meant not ancient art but contemporary

[692] Dietrich, 'Hannover', *Dada: Zurich, Berlin,* ed. Dickerman,170.
[693] Dietrich, 'Merz and the Longing for Wholeness', 115.
[694] 'The world of technology flourishes. Her power is derived entirely at the expense of the withering of experience. We must shake off the shackles of technology. We must once again become primitive. If we voluntarily restrict ourselves to the realm of experience, the inevitable result will be the weakening of technology's despotism'. Adolf Behne trans. Dietrich, 'Merz and the Longing for Wholeness', 115. For the original German, see Behne, *Die Wiederkehr der Kunst* (The Return of Art) (Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Krauss Reprints, 1973), 110-111.

abstraction, particularly the achievements of Expressionism and Cubism which, in their refusal to be cowed by the disenchanted rational thought of *Zivilization*, helped the observer attain *Erlebnis*, a reenchanted, higher kind of experience. Behne's position has a clear affinity with Schwitters' rejection of the programmatically political in art and his protection of art as a distinctive experience.[695] More striking still, however, is Behne's conviction that meaningful 'primitive' forms of expression could be found in the urban products of the masses:

> Even where it seems to be most lost, in the chaos of our cities, one can still find here and there manifestations of the primordial desire of the *Volk*, of the masses, for expression, as for example in the garden plots just outside the city-gates.[696]

The potential Behne noticed in the kitsch décor gardenhouses, Schwitters also observed in his embrace of mass-produced materials in Merz.

Merz insisted on the combination of all possible artistic materials, including elements of deconstructed machines, however the reproductive technologies of film and photography are conspicuously absent from Schwitters' output.[697] Unlike his colleague and one-time studio partner László Moholy-Nagy, who championed the artistic and abstract possibilities of photography and film, Schwitters' interaction with both media was remarkably tentative.[698] An early encounter with photography demonstrates Schwitters' sense of its threat to artistic experience. In a 1909 letter to R. Schlösser, Schwitters reacts to a photography exhibition

[695] Schwitters' affinity with Behne is most explicit in 'Manifest Proletkunst' (Manifesto of Proletarian Art), *Merz*, 2 (April 1923), 24-25. Schwitters articulates art as a kind of *Erlebnis*. Dietrich has translated an illuminating phrase as 'Art is a spiritual function of man'; Grundy reads it as 'At is an intellectual function of man'. Either way, the spiritual and intellectual tenets of art, which resembles the Neo-Kantian redefinition of culture, is at stake. Quoted and trans. Dietrich, 'Merz and the Longing for Wholeness', 119. Quoted in *Myself and My Aims*, ed. Luke, trans. Grundy, 154-155.
[696] Dietrich, 'Merz and the Longing for Wholeness', 116. For the original German see Behne, *Die Wiederkehr der Kunst*, 101.
[697] Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*, 12.
[698] Moholy-Nagy and Schwitters shared a studio in Berlin during the winter of 1922-23. Schwitters experimented with photography in the late 20s and contributed photograms to the exhibition *Film und Foto* in Stuttgart in 1927. Webster, *Kurt Merz Schwitters* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 144, 204. Photography came to be an important part of Schwitters' archive: had he not had his Hanover Merzbau professionally photographed before it was destroyed by allied bombings, its legacy would be much diminished.

held at his Dresden art school: 'At first I was surprised how painterly photography can be. I was envious and worried about competition'. A subsequent comment takes a more imperious tone: '…now I have realised that there is something missing in photography that will always be missing; it lacks the personal touch; the perception'.[699] Schwitters' early reflections laid the foundations for his practice, which treated photography with scepticism.

Excursus: Schwitters and advertising

Industrialisation necessitated advertising. As manufacturing companies generated a greater quantity and range of goods, expanding infrastructure enabled them to transport those goods to consumers further afield. This compelled manufacturers to mobilise the information networks of mechanically-reproduced media, newspapers and magazines, and later packaging and posters, to promote their products.[700] During the industrialisation of printing, meanwhile, design was wrested from its artisanal roots and separated from the printing process. Under the conditions of mass reproduction, designers directed the printers from afar and as such, graphic design emerged in the twentieth century as a new profession.[701] Yet the new discipline in Germany was conflicted: was it commerce or art? The terminology inherited from the German printing tradition incorporated the term 'artist', and commercial designers tended to train at art schools.[702] Like early twentieth-century opera and film, advertising was a constellation of art and industry, one which was most energetically explored in theory and practice by the Werkbund, founded in Munich in 1907, and later at the

[699] Schwitters, Letter to R. Schlösser, 2 May 1909, trans. Webster, 14-15.
[700] Aynsley, 53.
[701] Germany's leading companies started to advertise their goods in the 1890s. The first independent ad agency was established in Berlin in 1897 and by 1900, the first trade publications and associations for advertisers were created. Pamela Swett, S. Jonathan Wiesen, and Jonathan R. Zatlin, 'Introduction', *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century German Culture*, ed. Swett, Wiesen, and. Zatlin (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 1-26 (7).
[702] For example: *Schriftkünstler* (letter artist), *Buchkünstler* (book artist), *Plakatkünstler* (poster artist) and *Reklamekünstler* (advertising artist). Aynsley, 12-13.

Bauhaus school which, by 1927, had established an advertising department.[703]

In 1924 Schwitters established his own graphic design company, the Merz Werbezentrale, and held membership of the Association of German Commercial Artists from 1927-35.[704] *He went on to found the ring neue werbegestalter (The Ring of New Advertising Designers, or NWG) as a means of connecting a whole community of artists active in the area of commercial design. The graphic output of the NWG adhered to the New Typography and photomontage, produced publications and arranged over twenty exhibitions between 1928 and 1931.*[705] *The tendency of New Typography emerged from art rather than commerce.*[706] *As groups like De Stijl and the Constructivists aspired to merge art with life, graphic and typographic design provided a viable alternative to traditional artistic media. In a media-conscious definition of its principles in 1923, Lissitzky emphasised the New Typography's focus on vision: 'the words on the printed surface are taken in by seeing, not by hearing'.*[707] *The designer Jan Tschichold, who would become a member of Schwitters' group, defined the project in his 1925 'Elemental Typography': 'the purpose of any piece of typography is communication (the means of which it displays). The communication must appear in the briefest, simplest, most urgent form'.*[708] *Driven by a faith in technology to promote a more equal society, Tschichold emphasised the*

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[703] Schwartz, 'Utopia for Sale: The Bauhaus and Weimar Germany's Consumer Culture', *Bauhaus Culture From Weimar to the Cold War* ed. Kathleen James-Chakraborty (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 115-138 (123).
[704] Isabel Schulz, *Kurt Schwitters: Merz Art* (Munich: Hirmer, 2020), 67.
[705] On the neue ring werbegestalter see Robin Kinross, 'Introduction', Jan Tschichold, *The New Typography: a Handbook for Modern Designers*, trans. Ruari McLean (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1995), xv-xliv (xxiv); Aynsley, 156-162; Maud Lavin, 'Photomontage, Mass Culture, and Modernity: Utopianism in the Circle of New Advertising', *Montage and Modern Life: 1919-1942*, ed. Matthew Teitelbaum (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 36-59; and Kees Broos, 'Das kurze, aber heftige Leben des Rings ‚neue werbegestalter', *Typografie kann unter Umständen Kunst sein,* ed. Volker Rattemeyer, Dietrich Helms and Konrad Matschke (Wiesbaden: Landesmuseum Wiesbaden, 1990) 7-10.
[706] When he came to codify the group in 1928, the designer Tschichold described the New Typography as simply 'the practical application of laws of design discovered by the new painters'. Tschichold, *The New Typography*, trans. McLean, 86.
[707] Kinross, *Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History* (London: Hyphen Press, 1992), 87. From El Lissitzsky, 'Topographie der Typographie', originally published in *Merz*, 4 (Hanover: 1923).
[708] Kinross, *Modern Typography,* 87. 'Elemental Typography' was published in a magazine of the educational branch of the German printing trade union.

necessity for typography to be universally legible, something which the standardised practice of sanserif letters and the exclusion of capitals could foster.

While financial imperatives might account for Schwitters' move into commercial design, Maud Lavin has emphasised the political and ideological motivations at stake for the NWG, their desire to connect with a mass audience and to be involved in modern mass communication.[709] *Indeed, the artists's various manifestos on design mixed the utopian possibilities of capitalism and socialism. There is no doubt of the seriousness with which Schwitters explored mass culture and engaged with the functional imperatives of New Typography: he created a phonetic alphabet and associated typeface, Systemschrift, as a typographic esperanto.*[710] *Yet since Schwitters insisted on the apolitical nature of his art and avoided party politics, his embrace of commercial design on ideological grounds is unconvincing. Instead, I would like to suggest that Schwitters' participation in commercial advertising was a means not only of earning a living but also of keeping up with a contemporary discourse on how visual experience worked, gathering techniques of modern mass communication to feed back into his artistic practice. The state of mass media perception outlined by Tschichold in his 1928* The New Typography *was, after all, the state of all visual media and perception:*

> *Modern man has to absorb every day a mass of printed matter which, whether he has asked for it or not, is delivered through his letter-box or confronts him everywhere out of doors. At first, today's printing differed from that of previous times less in form than in quantity. But as the quantity increased, the "form" also began to change: the speed with which the modern consumer of printing has to absorb it means that the form of printing also must adapt itself to the conditions of modern life. As a rule we no*

[709] Lavin, 'Photomontage, Mass Culture, and Modernity', *Montage and Modern Life*, ed. Teitelbaum, 36-59.
[710] Lavin, 'Advertising Utopia: Schwitters as Commercial Designer', *Art in America*, 73 (1985), 135-139 (136).

> *longer read quietly line by line, but glance quickly over the whole, and only if our interest is awakened do we study it in detail.*[711]

Indeed, Tschichold's assessment, that the many claims on the modern subject's attention demanded new ways of representing, is redolent of the conclusions Benjamin drew when he borrowed forms from advertising in One-Way Street.[712]

Schwitters' career in advertising was therefore not necessarily in conflict with his parallel creation of autonomous works of art. On the contrary, it ideally placed him to define the two practices against one another, while at the same time equipping him with mass media's techniques of attention, if to meet different ends. Through commissions from firms such as the Hanover-based stationery company Pelikan, and biscuit company Bahlsen, Schwitters became well versed in the imperatives of advertising; his theoretical reflections on commercial graphic design attest to a mode of spectatorship conceived in antithesis to that of artistic experience. Rather than offering a montage of images, letters, colours and textures which, fragmented and displaced from their original contexts, were stripped of their utilitarian purpose, advertisements were designed to be sleek and readable, taken in at a glance. Instead of inviting the observer on a complex Merzian thought-journey which, depending on their associative power, could end up in a number of destinations, advertisements set the observer on a direct perceptual path to a fixed endpoint, a purchase. As we have seen in his disagreements with the Dadaists, Schwitters railed against the application of art as a means to any premeditated end. We can therefore be in no doubt that, in its treatment of visual media as a commercial call to action, Schwitters discounted advertising from the category of art.

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[711] Tschichold, *The New Typography*, 64.

[712] Schwartz has discussed the relationship between Benjamin and the New Typographers, as well as the professionalisation of artists as graphic designers in *Blind Spots*, 89-95.

Schwitters' own treatises on advertising and typography are instructive: his 1925 brochure Die Neue Gestaltung in der Typographie *(Modern Typographical Design) advocated a combination of the 'information principle' and the 'persuasion principle'. The former conveyed the necessary data, while the latter positively influenced the observer's judgement. An effective advert, he concluded, powerfully blended the information and persuasion principles into a harmonious whole, where image-text relations mutually reinforced one another through the formal principle of unity.*[713] *This relationship between media and the perceptual effect it was understood to engender is also a strikingly Wagnerian one, echoing the practices implemented on stage at Bayreuth from the 1870s onwards.*

Yet in his 1925 Thesen über Typographie *(Theses on Typography), which referred specifically to typography in the context of advertising, Schwitters acknowledged that 'under certain circumstances, typography can be art'. Indeed, he elaborated that 'typographic form-creation does not reproduce textual content… the typographic poster is the result of the combination of the demands made by typography and the demands made by textual content'.*[714] *Typography's bid for art status was therefore bound up with its formal ability to capture the attention of the viewer. As his concluding statement reads: 'After all, the reader bases his opinion of the product not on the textual content of the advertisement, but on the impact it makes'.*[715] *The situation Schwitters suggests is a one-way street: typography which powerfully demands the viewer's attention can be art, under circumstances Schwitters does not detail but that one suspects could be a decontextualised art gallery. However, art, which must also capture the*

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[713] D.A. Steel, 'DADA-ADAD Kurt Schwitters, poetry, collage, typography and the advert', *Word & Image*, 6 (1990), 198-209 (201).
[714] Schwitters, *Thesen über Typographie* (Theses on typography), *Myself and My Aims: Writings on Art and Criticism,* ed. Luke, trans. Grundy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 204-205 (204). Originally published in *Merz*, 11 (1925), 91.
[715]Schwitters, *Thesen über Typographie*, 205.

viewer's attention in order to do its work, necessarily pushes against rationalised thinking and therefore cannot be mistaken for typography. In a saturated mass mediascape, creators faced the challenge of engaging potential viewers. The 'persuasion principle' of typography, tempting the observer to give their attention, was the desideratum of art and advertising alike. After an observer's initial attention was caught, however, the trajectories of the artistic and typographical experience diverged.

Kurt Schwitters and theatre

Beyond informal Merz performances, Schwitters' relationship with a larger theatrical apparatus was limited. His involvement with the *Städtische Bühnen Hannover* (Hanover Municipal Theatre), for example, was more typographical than it was scenographic. A poster he designed in 1930 (fig. 67) to advertise subscription tickets for its opera and theatre season is typical. Unlike his associate Moholy-Nagy, who designed for the Kroll from 1929-30, and his antagonist Grosz, who designed for the cabaret basement of Reinhardt's *Grosse Schauspielhaus*, the *Berlin Volksbühne* and the *Piscator-Bühne* (Theater am Nollendorfplatz) from 1919-28, Schwitters designed neither for theatrical institutions, nor for the plays and revues he scripted himself, instead his contributions were written texts, theoretical treatises, poetry and prose for performance, and a few plays.[716] Through his *Merzbau* – the spatial, architectural and electrically-illuminated 'abstract (cubist) sculpture into which people can

[716] Though they occupy one volume in his five-volume literary output, few of Schwitters' plays, which he scripted from the mid-1920s onwards, were ever staged and many were left incomplete. Webster identifies the problem in the 'disappointingly conventional' plays themselves. The 1925 play *Schattenspiel* (Shadow Play) which was performed at an avant-garde theatre in Prague in May 1927 is an exception in this respect. According to Webster, the production possessed 'unconventional, monochromatic scenery and garish costumes' and was described as a 'charade' by the press, though few documents pertaining to the production survive. Webster, 182, 203. Schultz, conversely, implies that the experimental qualities of Schwitters' plays and puts their lack of performance down to the conservatism of theatrical institutions, namely the Städtische Bühnen Hannover, Schwitters' local theatre. Schulz, *Kurt Schwitters: Merz Art,* 90. All the same, Schwitters was a frequent attendee at his local theatre, as Steinitz remembered: 'wasn't he the Municipal Theater's most enthusiastic visitor on free tickets?' Steinitz, 60.

go' –[717] Schwitters demonstrated the skills to design and build for the stage. However, this was not something he pursued. Schwitters' textual and theoretical approach distinguishes him from Lothar Schreyer, Oskar Schlemmer and other members of the theatrical avant-garde, but aligns him with Kandinsky, whose handling of theatrical media was similarly concept and text, rather than image, based.

Opening artistic production up to all materials, Merz was from the outset a multimedia project, naturally close to the genres of opera and theatre. Schwitters acknowledged the theatrical possibilities of Merz early in its inception. In 1919, he published two articles which appeared side by side, 'The Merz Stage' and 'Explanations for my Demands for the Merz Stage' in the *Sturm* journal's theatrical offshoot *Storm Stage: Yearbook of the Expressionist Theatre*.[718] In these articles, Schwitters outlines the scenario for the Merz stage, a non-narrative montage of banal scenic and mechanical gestures combined into a riotous cacophony. When the texts were reprinted a year later, Schwitters added an introduction which invoked Wagner: 'My aim is the total work of art [Gesamtkunstwerk], which combines all branches of art into an artistic unit...'.[719]

Yet the Merz stage appears such a radical departure from Wagnerian music drama that one wonders whether Schwitters' declaration was intended to be delivered with a wry smile. In its antidote to the illusionistic music dramas at Bayreuth, and given the active perceptual stakes of Merz, Schwitters' aversion to Wagner appears to be formulated along the same lines as

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[717] Schwitters, 'Letter to Alfred Barr, 1936' quoted in Dietrich, 'Hannover', *Dada: Zurich, Berlin,* ed. Dickerman, 177.
[718] The *Sturm-Bühne* was a series of special journal issues concentrated on theatre published by the Sturm gallery between January 1918 and October 1919. Having first exhibited with the gallery in 1918, Schwitters' involvement with the Sturm coincided with the institution's most vigorous engagement with theatre: the *Sturm-Bühne* journal accompanied the founding of an experimental theatre company by its gallerist Herwarth Walden and the Sturm's foremost theatre theorist and practitioner Lothar Schreyer, who went on to lead the stage workshop at the Bauhaus between 1921 and 1923.
[719] Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920), 6-7. Quoted in Elderfield, 44.

Adorno's, who put his own reservations succinctly: 'This technological hostility to consciousness is the very foundation of the music drama. It combines the arts in order to produce an intoxicating brew'.[720] At issue for both artist and theorist was the use of technology to elicit an immersive passivity in the listening observer. Where Wagner presented narratives from an ancient mythic past accompanied by a dense symphonic sound and scenic technology, Schwitters offered a non-narrative montage of sounds, images and gestures. Appropriating found objects from his contemporary urban environment, Schwitters employed innumerable mechanised apparatuses, from sewing machines to dentist's drills, and a diminutive cast of performers whose appearances are incidental: the protagonist of his fictional parody love poem, *An Anna Blume*, is featured, as well as a clergyman and two nameless men.

The *Merzbühne* and Wagnerian music drama both exploit the technological innovations of the theatre. 'Take gigantic surfaces', Schwitters instructs, 'conceived as infinite, cloak them in colour, shift them menacingly'.[721] Schwitters here suggests the new flexibility of electric light to change in colour and intensity; his call for objects to 'move and revolve' would only have been achievable through the new kinetic stage apparatuses of the revolving stage, while a modern fly system would have enabled the slick insertion and removal of different set elements, another condition of his mise-en-scène. A wind machine, like that called for in the score of Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, would be necessary to make the *Merzbühne*'s 'veils blow', while Schwitters' direction for 'steam boilers to make railroad mist' is reminiscent of the actual locomotive boilers used at Bayreuth to mask onstage transformation sequences.[722] As discussed earlier in the chapter, however, Schwitters diverges significantly

[720] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2005), 89.
[721] Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920), *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology, Second Edition*, ed. Robert Motherwell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 62.
[722] Patrick Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 85 and 91.

from Wagner in his visible rendering of the technological means of production.

Schwitters' reception of Wagner tends to be located in his critical writings which, like Kandinsky's before him, consider Wagnerian multimedia with scepticism.[723] Yet Schwitters also appears to have critiqued Wagner in his collages. *Ohne Titel (Wagner und Wien)* (Untitled (Wagner and Vienna)) (fig. 68) dates from 1923, the period Schwitters was also working out his theatrical theories. *Ohne Titel* presents Merzian fragments scattered across the picture plane, this time with scraps originating from the promotional material of ink, paint and stationery company, Pelikan, for whom Schwitters worked as a graphic designer.[724] In the bottom left quadrant, a paper fragment repeatedly stamped with 'PELIKAN' is positioned next to and overlapping the texts, '..inder' and '(p)apier'. On another scrap on the right-hand side of the image, the words 'Pe(likan K)ohlenp' are just about discernible. The pieces of printed text are mostly positioned upside down or partially covered by layers of paper or ink, thus hindering their quick or easy readability and undermining the at-a-glance perceptual mode of advertising that, as we have seen, Schwitters himself theorised. Visible in the centre left of the image is the inverted text, 'R WAGNER', 'R UND WIEN'. Given its initial Pelikan purpose, the paper wrapping likely originally read 'GÜNTHER WAGNER', 'HANNOVER UND WIEN', naming the chemist who managed the Pelikan company from 1878. Presented in an art gallery in the 1920s, however, Schwitters' 'R WAGNER' wordplay suggested only one thing. Rather than handling Wagner in a manner commensurate with his exalted position in German cultural life, Schwitters juxtaposes his name with a kitsch decoupage cat. The collage asks, 'what unifies R Wagner and mass-produced kitsch?'. The doubling of the two R Wagners points to an answer: could the perceptual mode of Wagnerian

[723] Elderfield, 106-108.
[724] D.A. Steel, 'DADA-ADAD', 201.

music drama in fact be no different from Günther Wagner's promotional material, a thoughtless, means-end one, generated by an overdetermined, formal unity?

This position is strengthened by the scrap 'Pe(likan K)ohlenp' ripped from packaging for *Kohlepapier* or 'carbon paper', the significant rationalising innovation in office technology of the period. Carbon copying, which tended to be used with a typewriter, allowed administrators to produce multiple copies of a document and thus merge many tasks into one.[725] Did Wagner reduce and simplify thought in the way that carbon paper reduced and simplified administrative labour, with music a carbon copy of the drama, and staging a carbon copy of the music? Schwitters' collage is suggestive of all these questions yet at the same time, the decoupage cat points to the possibilities of a Wagner presented differently, the way Bloch's advocacy of Wagner in the spirit of colportage had done. In spite of their shared technological effects, the media paradigm of Schwitters' *Merzbühne* explicitly rejects a Wagnerian one, where text determines the music and staging. As the opening of the *Merzbühne* explains:

> The Merz stage serves for the performance of the Merz drama. The Merz drama is an abstract work of art. The drama and the opera grow, as a rule, out of the form of the written text, which is a well-rounded work in itself, without the stage. Stage-set, music and performance serve only to illustrate this text, which is itself an illustration of the action. In contrast to the drama or the opera, all parts of the Merz stage-work are inseparably bound up together; it cannot be written, read or listened to, it can only be produced in the theatre. Up until now, a distinction was made between stage-set, text, and score in theatrical performances. Each factor was

[725] In addition to his work for Pelikan, Schwitters would have likely designed standardised forms for carbon copying during the typographic contract he completed for Hanover Town Council between 1929 and 1934. Werner Heine, '"Futura" without a Future: Kurt Schwitters' Typography for Hanover Town Council, 1929-1934', *Journal of Design History*, 7 (1994), 127-140 (127).

> separately prepared and could also be separately enjoyed. The Merz stage knows only the fusing of all factors into a composite work.[726]

According to Annabelle Melzer, Schwitters' refusal to combine the media of the *Merzbühne* into an organic Wagnerian whole suggests the influence of the Dadaists. Its 'anarchic confusion' and employment of silence and noise are indeed redolent of both Dadaist and Futurist experiments.[727] Schwitters' sewing machine is an especially Dadaist gesture. The domestic apparatus is as close as one gets to a protagonist in the *Merzbühne*: it provides material for the musical score, its yawns, beheads itself, and 'rattles along in the lead'.[728] Schwitters' descriptions resemble those of a 1919 Club Dada Sunday matinee, in which Walter Mehring and Grosz competed in a race between a sewing machine (driven by Grosz), and a typewriter (handled by Mehring). Since the winner was to be the contestant who produced the greatest volume of noise, the race descended into the combined clamour of mechanical repetitions and nonsensical human cries: 'Schnurre, schnurre-baselurre (H. C. Andersen!)' and 'Tacktacktack! Bumsti! Ping, ping!'[729] While this playful encounter might seem proximate to Schwitters' own reflections on the relationship between man and machine, there are some critical differences. Contrary to the improvisatory quality of the Dadaist's mock sport event, Schwitters in the *Merzbühne* calls for formal precision over arbitrary chance:

> Take petticoats and other kindred articles, shows and false hair, also ice skates and throw them *into place where they belong, and always at the right time*. For all, I

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[726] Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920), *The Dada Painters and Poets* ed. Motherwell, 62.
[727] Annabelle Melzer, 'Appendix 1: A Note on Kurt Schwitters and Berlin Dada Performance', *Dada and Surrealist Performance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 199-209 (200). Rubin's account of the *Merzbühne* is similarly focussed on its Dadaist precepts: 'While theatre has always been the locus of a fusion of the arts, it is only in the nineteenth-century, Wagnerian conception of the Gesamtkunstwerk that such a notion was spelled out. However, Schwitters' *Gesamtkunstmerz*, if the word may be coined for him, differed from the Gesamtkunstwerk in being not an orderly synthesis of genres but a Dadaistic confusion of them'. Rubin, 57.
[728] Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920), *The Dada Painters and Poets* ed. Motherwell, 63.
[729] DeShong, 16-17.

> care, take man-traps, automatic pistols, infernal machines, the tinfish and the funnel, all of course *in an artistically deformed condition*. Inner tubes are highly recommended. Take in short everything from the hairnet of the high class lady to the propeller of the S.S. *Leviathan*, *always bearing in mind the dimensions required by the work*.[730]

The *Merzbühne*'s non-narrative was not an arbitrary one of Dadaist improvisations, but instead one crafted from a precise formal logic which, as we will see, aligns him more closely with Kandinsky. Schwitters did not reject unity wholesale in the Dadaist sense, but instead rethought its category. Unity was not a formal quality found in Wagner and advertising, but instead a perceptual one, in which a listening observer generated a perceptual whole out of ambiguous, artistically arranged fragments. As Schwitters articulated it in *Merzbühne*:

> Materials for the text are all experiences that provoke the intelligence and emotions. The materials are not to be used logically in their objective relationships, but only within the logic of the work of art. The more intensively the work of art destroys rational objective logic, the greater become the possibilities of artistic building. As in poetry word is played off against word, here factor is played against factor, material against material…The movement of the set takes place silently or accompanied by notes or music.[731]

Schwitters' explanation amounts to a multimedia montage; constellated media activate the listening observer by stimulating non-rational, intuitive thought patterns.

Labelled by Annkathrin Sonder as the first project to break 'with all the theatrical dispositives

[730] Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920), *The Dada Painters and Poets* ed. Motherwell, 63 (emphasis my own).
[731] Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920), *The Dada Painters and Poets* ed. Motherwell, 62.

of the time',[732] the *Merzbühne* thus assuaged the modern condition of fragmented attention through formal fragments, positioned in tensional combinations. The strategy worked as a corrective to Adorno's, and Schwitters', critique of Wagnerian multimedia:

> The whole no longer achieves unity, because its expressive elements are made to harmonise with each other according to a pre-arranged design, possibly of a conventional nature. Instead, the different arts which are now alienated from each other and cannot be reconciled by any meaning, are yoked together at the arbitrary fiat of the isolated artist. The formal premises of an internal logic are replaced by a seamless external principle in which disparate procedures are simply aggregated in such a way as to make them appear collectively binding.

The whole for Adorno ends up in a state of 'tautology' and 'permanent over-determination' as the music 'repeats what the words have already said and the more it pushes itself to the fore the more superfluous it becomes, when measured against the meaning it is supposed to express'.[733] While Schwitters' *Merzbühne* was not yet consistent with *Regieoper*'s excavation of a pre-existing operatic score, the seed of its intellectually engaged operagoer had germinated.

Kandinsky's reception of Wagner was likely known to Schwitters, and Schwitter's relationship with the theories of the older painter have been well documented.[734] Elderfield has illuminated the inspiration Schwitters drew from Kandinsky's 'On Stage Composition' and libretto *Der gelbe Klang*. In the two texts, Kandinsky redraws Wagnerian synthesis and calls for media that do not passively reflect a dominant medium but are free to assume a

[732] Annkathrin Sonder, 'Kurt Schwitters' Merz- und Normalbühne zwischen "explodierenden Dampfkesseln" und funktionaler Gestaltung', *Schlagkraft der Form*: *Kurt Schwitters Theater und Typographie,* ed. Schulz (Hannover: Niedersächsische Staatstheater Hannover, 2018), 101.
[733] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Livingstone, 91-92.
[734] Rothenberg and Joris, 'Introduction', xx. Dietrich, 'Hannover', *Dada: Zurich, Berlin*, ed. Dickerman, 164.

frictional or contradictory relationship, precisely the media paradigm outlined in the opening paragraph of *Merzbühne*.[735] The specificity of Schwitters' constellated audio and visual media read like passages from *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.[736] In the latter essay, Kandinsky sought to restore the spiritual quality to life that the industrial age had emptied out. Through activating the observer's imagination via direct, artistic means, the instrumentalised nature of *Zivilisation* and rational thought was overcome and a specifically artistic mode of spectatorship was forged. Kandinsky's argument certainly informed Behne's sense of *Erlebnis*, which we have seen was known to Schwitters. Schwitters, in turn, adopted the language of Kandinsky and *Lebensphilosophie* when he too insisted upon art's spiritual function as a means of accessing a higher form of cognition.[737]

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, Kandinsky's sense of the perceptual potential of tensional media relationships was close to the theories of the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand, who outlined a specifically artistic cognitive state in his 1893 essay *The Problem of Form in Fine Arts*. Hildebrand established *Einfühlung* (feeling in to), a mode of spectatorship which was 'temporal, spatial and embodied', and which operated through the dualisms of a 'distant and near view', 'seeing and scanning' and 'effective and inherent form'.[738] The eye's navigation

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735 Elderfield, 107-108.

736 Compare the following sections from Schwitters' *Merzbühne* and Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*: 'A stream of ice cold water runs down the back of the man in one wing and into a pot. In accompaniment he sings c-sharp d, d-sharp e-flat, the whole proletarian song. Under the pot a gas flame has been lit to boil the water and a melody of violins shimmers pure and virgin tender. A veil spreads breaths. The centre cooks up a deep dark-red flame. A soft rustling. Long sighs violins swell and expire. Light darkens stage, even the sewing machine is dark'. Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920), *The Dada Painters and Poets* ed. Motherwell, 63-64. 'In music, light blue is like a flute…a still darker (blue) a thunderous double bass… Light warm red has a certain similarity to medium yellow…In music, it is a sound of trumpets, strong, harsh and ringing… Deepened red… the sad, middle tones of a cello… Orange is like a man, convinced of his own powers. Its note is that of the angelus, or of an old violin… Violet is therefore both in the physical and the material sense a cooled red. It is consequently rather sad and ailing… In music it is an English horn, or the deep notes of woodwind instruments (e.g. a bassoon).' Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M.T.H. Sadler (London: Dover Editions, 1977), 38-41.

737 Schwitters, 'Manifest Proletkunst', *Merz*, 2 (April 1923), 24-25. Cited in Dietrich, 'Hannover', *Dada: Zurich, Berlin*, ed. Dickerman, 168.

738 Juliet Koss, *Modernism After Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 72. Adolf Hildebrand, 'The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts', *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German*

of these dichotomies resulted in an active mode of visual reception, one epitomised for Hildebrand by the relief sculpture. More than painting and sculpture, the relief at once merged two and three-dimensionality which allowed the observer to activate their spatial and creative faculties to determine the whole themselves, merging a still viewpoint to absorb a distant flatness, with a mobile one to skim the more proximate, three-dimensional surface. This process instilled, Hildebrand thought, a powerful and specifically aesthetic response of active, creative thought and spatial awareness. Schwitters' introductory description to his Gesamtkunstwerk-Merz project strikingly champions Hildebrand's paragon art form: 'I have driven nails into pictures so as to produce a plastic relief apart from the pictorial quality of the paintings'.[739] Megan Luke has observed a further dualism in Schwitters' assemblages, one that I would like to suggest is Hildebrand-like:

> We continue to recognise and hunt for real-world contexts of these materials - indeed, the lingering suspicion that they cannot be completely reconciled to the arbitrarily dictated demands of the image largely contributes to their hold on our attention. Our looking shunts from a harmoniously balanced, unified composition made out of a seemingly random assortment of materials to a close inspection of individual real-world fragments that have only incompletely been "deformed".[740]

Luke here describes an optical-cognitive process akin to Hildebrand's 'seeing and scanning' which could be labelled 'contextual and de-contextual seeing'. When taking in a discrete fragment on the picture plane, the observer's focus shifts between two states: locating its previous function as a material of mass media, and considering its new role in terms of the decontextualised Merz collage.

Aesthetics, 1873-1893, ed. Robert Vischer and Harry Francis Mallgrave, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave, Eleftherios Ikonomou and Heinrich Wölfflin (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 227-280.

[739] Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920). Quoted in Elderfield, 44.

[740] Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*, 20.

As Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou have outlined, Hildebrand's theories were part of a wider discourse of *Einfühlung*, the definition of an embodied kind of perception, a singularly German theory of modern art and architecture.[741] The question of how the subject perceived form and space subtly transformed into the psychological issue of how the subject came to take pleasure in certain aspects of form and space. Suggested in this altered line of inquiry was the problem of how pure form and space might be artistically manipulated as aesthetic media in their own right. As such, the link between Hildebrand's *Einfühlung* and Schwitters' Merz is not necessarily causal, but rather mediated through a diffuse network of ideas across the arts and sciences pertaining to the human sensorium. In his student years from 1910-18, Schwitters probed the nature of vision and more specifically, colour perception, through absorbing theoretical studies of optics, physiology, and psychology; he consulted Georg Hirth's 1897 *Aufgaben der Kunstphysiologie* (Problems with the Physiology of Art) and read experiments on the therapeutic effects of coloured light.[742] From Goethe's colour theory to tracts on music, Schwitters' notebooks demonstrate his workings out of which pictorial components could most engage the observer and show attempts to create analogies between the colour spectrum and musical scale.[743] The construction of Merz as a way of perceiving appears rooted in Schwitters' early research into

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[741] Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou, *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893*, 1-85 (2). The writer and philosopher Friedrich Theodor Vischer and his philosopher son, Robert, tend to be seen as the inventors of *Einfühlungstheorie* (empathy theory). The term *Einfühlung* emerged for the first time in the younger Vischer's 1873 dissertation *Ueber das optische Formgefühl. Ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik* (On the optical sense of form. A contribution to aesthetics). Wilhelm Perpeet has highlighted the role of Vischer the elder in developing the concept of Einfühlung; by appropriating the term in his dissertation, the son synthesised his father's various definitions of Einfühlung: '"passing into," "putting oneself entirely in," "giving," "lending," "conferring contemplation," "looking in," "reading into," "understanding," "animating," a "surmising" or "symbolic feeling into," "carrying over," "imagining the manifestations," "immersing oneself in," "immersion"'. Robin Curtis, 'An Introduction to Einfühlung', trans. Richard George Elliott, *Art in Translation*, 6 (2014), 353-376 (361).

[742] Schulz, 'Kurt Schwitters, Colour and Collage', *Kurt Schwitters, Colour and Collage*, ed. Schulz, 60.

[743] 'Red is the basic colour of life, perhaps because people's insides are almost all red', 'Everyone hungers after certain colours; those in towns seek green'. 'The essence of art is not merely beauty; the essence of art is the capacity to liberate'. Webster, 16-17.

the experience of the viewing subject. Indeed, Schwitters continued to engage intellectually with the affective qualities of colour, form and sound, and their potential combination, in parallel with his Merz creations, well into the 20s. In 1927, Schwitters began to write a treatise that was to remain unfinished, *Elementarkenntnisse in der Malerei* (Fundamental Insights in Painting), and was in contact with Kandinsky about its contents, including the possible parallels between the laws and techniques of music and painting.[744] While Schwitters ultimately rejected any programmatic theory of colour, his keen engagement with theories of optics, psychology and physiology, and the discourse of *Einfühlung* to which they contributed, set him on a creative path that would inform his practice well into the 20s.

Schwitters, Endell and urban *Einfühlung*

The purpose of Merz was to overcome those everyday forms of perception exemplified by urban existence. That Schwitters sought to achieve this end with materials of urban existence distinguishes him from Hildebrand and Kandinsky, who adhered to traditional artistic media. Yet Schwitters' idiosyncratic concern – urban fragments to stimulate a distinctly artistic experience – resembles the way in which Impressionism was discussed in Germany in the 1910s.[745] Pushing against a flurry of anti-urbanist literature and Impressionism's negative connotations in Germany, however, the architect August Endell (1871-1925) reclaimed the

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[744] Schwitters, 'Letter to Wassily Kandinsky' (April 1927) and 'Elementary Knowledge in Painting' (ca. 1927), *Myself and My Aims: Writings on Art and Criticism*, ed. Luke, trans. Grundy, 259-268.

[745] Frederic J. Schwartz has examined the application of the term Impressionism in early twentieth-century Germany. The word was not exclusively applied to French painting which presented fleeting modern existence. Instead, the subjective sense of Impressionism was extended to include works one might call Post-Impressionist, Symbolist and Aestheticist. More importantly, Impressionism was considered as closely linked to the material conditions of society, it was 'a way of discussing form under liberal capitalism'. Significant in Schwartz's discussion is the economic historian Karl Lamprecht, who used Impressionism as a blanket term for contemporary culture and the critic and art historian Richard Hamann, whose 1907 *Der Impressionismus in Leben und Kunst* (Impressionism in Life and Art) meanwhile associated the term with the liberal economics of the nineteenth century. The discourse of Impressionism ultimately took on a sceptical position which considered the social and aesthetic condition an 'evil effect of Commerce'. Impressionist art's failing was its concession to the detached, cursory look of the consumer. Schwartz, *Werkbund*, 92-95. Frisby, meanwhile, has traced the terms of Hamann's critique back to Simmel's description of modernity. As Hamann put it himself, Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* was an 'impressionistic philosophy'. Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, 83-85.

city as stimulus for, rather than anathema to, aesthetic experience.[746] Endell's formal training had been in psychology and philosophy at the University of Munich, where he pursued doctoral studies under Theodor Lipps, a psychologist, philosopher and significant contributor to the concept of *Einfühlung*.[747] In 1898, Endell published a table in the journal *Dekorative Kunst* which associated forms and affects, 'metrics of experience', not unlike those later attempted by Schwitters and Kandinsky.[748] As discussed in Chapter 1, Endell and Kandinsky moved in the same Munich circles and so a social encounter and discussion between the two is plausible.[749] After moving from Munich to Berlin, Endell published his 1908 essay, *Die Schönheit der großen Stadt* (The Beauty of the Metropolis). Referring explicitly to Berlin, that city in which beauty had purportedly been cast brutally aside in the name of modernity, Endell theorised a distinctly urban yet aesthetic sense of sight, one that has much to bear on Schwitters' conception of Merz, whose debt to *Einfühlung* has been discussed. The dynamic shows that Schwitters, Endell and Kandinsky were looking for answers to the same questions and, all roughly of the same generation, using a shared theoretical frame of reference.[750]

[746] *Einfühlung* also circulated in theories of architecture which we can assume Schwitters had an awareness of these. Schwitters studied architecture for two semesters at the Technical University of Hanover between 1917 and 1918 and remained attuned to architectural criticism in the 20s. Schulz, *Merz Art*, 90. The architectural Expressionist's utopian championing of the pre-industrial cathedral, as a building with no purpose other than spiritual contemplation, is hinted at in an architectural model Schwitters created in 1920, entitled *Castle and Cathedral with Courtyard Well*. A photograph of Schwitters' model was published in the third edition of Bruno Taut's journal *Frülicht* (First Light) (1922). Certainly, their belief that new technologies could be put to the task of constructing the spiritual experience that mechanised modernity had allegedly destroyed, is one that Schwitters shared. Dietmar Elger, 'The Merzbau and Expressionist Architecture', *Merz World: Processing the Complicated Order*, ed. Adrian Notz and Hans Ulrich Obrist (Zurich: JRP-Ringier, 2007), 15-32.

[747] Examining the dynamic between subject and object, Lipps concluded that: 'the form of an object has always… been formed by me, by my inner activity'. Alexander Eisenschmidt, 'Visual discoveries of an urban wanderer: August Endell's perception of a beautiful metropolis', *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 11 (2007), 71-80 (73).

[748] Zeynep Çelik Alexander, 'Metrics of Experience: August Endell's Phenomenology of Architecture, *Grey Room* (Summer, 2010), 51-83.

[749] On the commonalities of Endell and Kandinsky's thought see Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich: the Formative Jugendstil Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 34-40.

[750] Kandinsky was born in 1866, Endell in 1871 and Schwitters in 1887.

Endell opens by calling for 'the here and the now'[751] in artistic production, a dictum to which Schwitters firmly adhered. The essay describes the ambient sensations of Berlin through short vignettes. Conceived in a structure anticipating Benjamin's *One-Way Street*, the paragraphs focus on specific areas of the city, for example 'The Romanesque Church', 'Friedrichstraße Train Station' and 'Potsdamer Platz'. Endell and Benjamin even identify the same visual effect peculiar to urbanity, that of wet asphalt. [752] Both writers imply an observer who, attentive to the cityscape and its disparate sensations, constellates them. As Endell describes:

> One must look for beauty. And that is more difficult, because [the metropolis] is unlike the natural landscape whose beauty has been painted or described a thousand times before. Often one will find tiny bits of beauty, as the reflective streetcar tracks in the grey asphalt or the recess of a balcony whose red wall, half-lit by the sun and half in shadow, contrasts with the grey wall of the house, producing a delightful play of colours.[753]

Endell's urban walker must actively look for those shards of urban media to conjure aesthetic experience.

The section 'The City: A Fairytale' represents the terms of Endell's argument and his poetic style:

[751] This claim was accompanied by the denunciation of those who held on to depictions of a past, false, non-industrial world. August Endell, 'The Beauty of the Metropolis', trans. Zeynep Çelik Alexander, *Grey Room* (Summer, 2014), 116–138. (117).

[752] In his section addressing 'The Rain', Endell describes: 'The effect of the rain is entirely different. It does not blur the colours but makes them heavier, darker, more saturated. The light grey asphalt becomes a rich brown; the outlines become harder, the air becomes more visible, depths appear deeper; everything receives definiteness, massiveness. But above this the marvel of luster and reflections covers everything in a glittering web and creates out of the rationally functional street a shimmering fairy tale, a glittering dream'. Endell, 'The Beauty of the Metropolis', trans. Çelik, 121. Meanwhile, in Benjamin's vignette 'These Spaces for Rent', he considers: 'What, in the end, makes advertisements so superior to criticism? Not what the moving red neon sign says— but the fiery pool reflecting it in the asphalt'. Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, ed. Jennings, trans. Jephcott, 77.

[753] Endell, 'The Beauty of the Metropolis', trans. Çelik, 121.

For what is astonishing is that the metropolis, despite all its ugly buildings, despite its noise, despite everything that deserves criticism in it, is, *for those who want to see*, a wonder of beauty and poetry, a fairy tale more colourful and manifold than any tale told by a poet; a home [Heimat], a mother who everyday showers her children extravagantly with ever-new happiness. This may sound paradoxical; it may sound exaggerated. But he who is not blinded by prejudice, who understands how to dedicate himself, who *busies himself attentively and insistently* with the city, soon becomes aware that the metropolis embraces in its streets thousands of beauties, numerous wonders, an endless richness that lays exposed before everyone's eyes and yet is barely noticed.[754]

As relief sculptures for Hildebrandt, so the city for Endell could stimulate a distinctive mode of perception.

Berlin had an equally formative effect on Schwitters, who associates the genesis of Merz with his exploration of the metropolis.[755] Meanwhile, his distinctly ambivalent and pragmatic approach to technologised modernity is echoed by Endell, who concedes the adverse effects of urban life while still advocating its redemption:

It can certainly be considered a worthwhile goal to make cities disappear from the face of the earth. For the time being, however, cities exist and their existence is necessary if our entire economy is not to fall into ruin. Hundreds of thousands have to live in cities, and instead of implanting in people an unhealthy and hopeless

[754] Endell, 'The Beauty of the Metropolis', trans. Çelik, 119 (emphasis added).
[755] Schwitters, 'Facts from My Life' (1929) 'Everything was in ruins anyway, and something new had to be won from these shreds. That is Merz. I painted, nailed, glued, wrote, and experienced the world in Berlin'. Quoted in in Rothenberg and Joris, 'Introduction', xxiii.

> longing, it would be smarter to teach them to see their city genuinely for once and to create out of their surroundings as much joy and vigour as is possible.[756]

Beyond their comparable positions vis-à-vis modernity, the projects of Endell and Schwitters interact at a more granular level. A close reading of Schwitters' *Merzbühne* alongside Endell's *Die Schönheit der großen Stadt* reveals strikingly similar details and effects. If the *Merzbühne* presented elements of the city on stage, Endell conceived the city as a stage: in both cases, urban material tested out the modern sensorium.

Endell introduces Berlin in scenographic terms; he highlights effects and technologies which were also being pioneered on the German stage. Berlin's 'veils of the day', 'twilight' and 'veils of the night' are presented as theatrical lighting states:

> If the day has a thousand colourful veils, the night in the city has even more. Starry skies and moonlight hardly ever show to advantage, but the artificial lights bring about infinite plays of colour. Already in twilight their presence is felt. It looks lovely when the long rows of green street lamps emerge in the blue glistening street, under the glimmering pink sky in fine chiaroscuro, all colours sound muffled: first barely visible, then as coloured dots, and only then with their own lives in the falling darkness.[757]

As the effects of coloured artificial illumination are brought to the fore, the night time state is shown to be particularly powerful, as the tendency in theatre towards dimmed lights and artificial darkness.[758] Schwitters similarly revels in darkness in a description that reads like a light show:

[756] Endell, 'The Beauty of the Metropolis', trans. Çelik, 118.
[757] Endell, 'The Beauty of the Metropolis', trans. Çelik, 125.
[758] Noam Elcott has discussed the significance of artificial darkness in regard to the productions of the Triadic Ballet pioneered by Oskar Schlemmer at the Bauhaus. Elcott concludes that, contrary to the modernist discourse of light and enlightenment, Schlemmer demonstrates artificial darkness to be another affirmative and vital facet of modernism, teeming with life. Elcott, *Artificial Darkness*, 165-228.

> Make lines fight together and caress one another in generous tenderness. Let points burst like stars among them, dance a whirling round, and realise each other to form a line. Bend the lines, crack and smash angles, choking revolving around a point. In waves of whirling storm let a line rush by, tangible in wire. Roll globes whirling air they touch one another.[759]

The cosmic starbursts and globes summon darkness and evoke early animated films which, as we will see, often comprised coloured forms dancing against black backgrounds.[760]

Schwitters establishes his scenographic materials as 'solid, liquid and gaseous bodies', and calls for water and steam in the *Merzbühne*: 'Make veils blow, soft folds fall, make cotton drip and water gush. Hurl up air soft and white through thousand candle power arc lamps'.[761] Endell too thematises the effects of 'The Fog', 'The Air' and 'The Rain' which he also feels are rendered especially powerful when combined with light. The fog 'changes a street completely. It covers the buildings with a thin veil; grey, whenever the clouds above hide the sun; warm, golden, and colourful, whenever the sky above is free'. The air, on the other hand 'almost constantly wraps a thin, hazy veil over everything in our surroundings, has an effect that is gentler and less conspicuous. Its density changes, and so does this veil every day…'. Meanwhile the effect of the rain, Endell assures us, is

> …entirely different. It does not blur the colours but makes them heavier, darker, more saturated. The light grey asphalt becomes a rich brown; the outlines become harder, the air becomes more visible, depths appear deeper; everything receives definiteness, massiveness. But above this the marvel of luster and reflections covers

[759] Kurt Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920), *The Dada Painters and Poets* ed. Motherwell, 62-63.
[760] Two significant early animated films of 1924 follow this scheme: Walter Ruttmann's *Opus III* and Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924).
[761] Kurt Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920), *The Dada Painters and Poets* ed. Motherwell, 63.

> everything in a glittering web and creates out of the rationally functional street a shimmering fairy tale, a glittering dream.[762]

At once darkening surfaces and decorating them with light-catching reflections, rain created those indeterminate, non-representative effects of painterly abstraction.

Lothar Müller has noted Endell's negligence of those areas of the city that might be considered conventionally beautiful. Overlooking squares, old houses and green spaces, Endell privileges iron constructions, machines and factories.[763] So the *Merzbühne* focuses too upon elements of mechanised urban modernity:

> Axles dance mid-wheel roll globes barrel. Cogs flair teeth, find a sewing machine that yawns… Take a dentist's drill, a meat grinder, a car-track scraper, take buses and pleasure cars, bicycles, tandems and their tires, also war-time ersatz tires and deform them. Take lights and deform them as brutally as you can. Make locomotives crash into one another…Explode steamboilers to make railroad mist…For all I care, take mantraps, automatic pistols, infernal machines, the tinfish and the funnel… a streetcar conductor's whistle gleams bright.[764]

Here Schwitters prefigures Max Brand's opera *Maschinist Hopkins* (Hopkins the Engineer), which premiered in Duisburg in 1929. The opera's depiction of a factory with blinking lights, thrumming gears, machine-like workers and a utilitarian office tends to be considered a borrowing from Fritz Lang's 1927 film *Metropolis*.[765] *Maschinist Hopkins*

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[762] Endell, Endell, 'The Beauty of the Metropolis', trans. Çelik, 121.
[763] Lothar Müller, 'The Beauty of the Metropolis', *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis*, ed. Haxthausen and Suhr, 37-57 (50).
[764] Kurt Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920), *The Dada Painters and Poets* ed. Motherwell, 63.
[765] Evan Baker, *From the Score to the Stage: An Illustrated History of Continental Opera Production and Staging* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 301-302. Alexandra Monchick, 'German Silent Film and the 'Zeitoper': The Case of Max Brand's Maschinist Hopkins', *German Life and Letters*, 70 (2017), 211-225.

(fig. 69) is often positioned as part of the genre of *Zeitoper* (topical opera), exemplified in the late 20s by Krenek, Weill and Hindemith, who felt opera could be reinvented by staging the signature features of their contemporary urban environment. The *Merzbühne* offers an earlier context for *Zeitoper*'s staging of machinery.

Women's fashion, which was newly produced for a mass market in Germany, was a further facet of urban modernity that both Endell and Schwitters employed. The *Merzbühne* requires

> …petticoats and other kindred articles, shoes and false hair, also ice skates and throw them into place where they belong, and always at the right time… Take in short everything from the hairnet of a high class lady to the propeller of the S.S. Leviathan...[766]

Endell's section 'Women's Clothing' reclaims the 'much-maligned women's fashion' in order to celebrate its ephemeral nature and ability to bring subtle tones and colours to the street.[767] The fleeting chromatic variation of fashionable women about town evokes theatrical quick changes, in which performers reappear across a production in novel outfits. While women's fashion offered contrasting textures, from petticoats to false hair, to Schwitters' moving *Merzbild*, for Endell, it brought kaleidoscopic colour to the city's mise-en-scène.

Schwitters' fascination with found words and phrases seen and heard on the street is

[766] Kurt Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920), *The Dada Painters and Poets* ed. Motherwell, 63.
[767] As Endell puts it: 'For fashion is but a symbol for life itself, which is always passing, changing, which pours out its gifts lavishly without calculating anxiously whether the expenditure has a reasonable relation to gain. Nature scatters thousands of seeds all over, even if only one should bear fruit; and it is this extravagance of thought, this eternal start, this colourful richness that makes fashion so enjoyable… [Conventional fashion] is still far superior in terms of sense of colour, elegance, charm, and casualness. Here, too, the sense of colour—the only thing that we have acquired from the culture of the eye in recent years—asserts itself pleasantly. And instead of morosely reprimanding failures, we should recognise how much more attractive materials have become, how much subtler their tonality, how much more our day has developed the ability to put together colours, arrange them, and fine-tune them'. Endell, 'The Beauty of the Metropolis', trans. Çelik, 129.

represented in the *Merzbühne*: ‘A man in the wings says: ‘Bah’. Another suddenly enters and says: ‘I am stupid.’ (All rights reserved).’[768] The affective potential of conversations out of context is echoed by Endell: ‘Few things are nicer than sitting in silence in the tram and watching strangers, not in order to eavesdrop on them surreptitiously, but rather in order to experience in an observing, feeling way, to enjoy’.[769] Indeed, the found vignettes of human activity Endell honours are also celebrated in the contingency and surprise of early reels of documentary film footage, as well as later filmic practices, like the use of untrained actors and location shooting exemplified by films such as *Menschen am Sonntag* (People on Sunday, 1930).[770] The silent, which recounts a summer’s day spent by four young Berliners, was made with amateurs whose actual day jobs were depicted in the film. The film was subtitled ‘a film without actors’.

Endell describes his own untrained urban actors, in this case a group of construction workers, thus:

> …walking slowly and heavily over a path formed by the planks, each carrying on his back a heavy brown sack of concrete, and this slow-moving line gave the desolate, tall space an incomprehensible ceremoniousness.[771]

Intriguingly, it is in this context that Endell decides to introduce, rather disdainfully, the idea of theatre:

> These workers did not walk with strained muscles, with which an actor postures effort and strength; instead they walked bearing weight cautiously with the knowledge of experienced people who understand that it is a while until the end of the day and that even the strongest must save his strength to make it last. And

[768] Kurt Schwitters, ‘Merz’ (1920), *The Dada Painters and Poets* ed. Motherwell, 63.
[769] Endell, ‘The Beauty of the Metropolis’, trans. Çelik, 128.
[770] *Menschen am Sonntag* was written by Billy Wilder and directed by Robert Siodmak and Edgar G. Ulmer.
[771] Endell, ‘The Beauty of the Metropolis’, trans. Çelik, 133.

> precisely this slow, peculiar motion, of which we know nothing in the theatre, had beauty and charm; it filled the room with a solemnity that was all the more immense because it had never been seen or felt in that manner before.[772]

Published in 1908, the year the mass medium of film came to meaningfully compete with the live medium of theatre,[773] Endell favourably compared a documentary filmic-artistic situation to a theatrical one. While Endell does not explain what troubled him about on-stage acting, the grounds upon which he dismissed the theatre are pertinent. Was theatre simply outmoded and behind the times? And with its similarly filmic snippets of 'found' gestures, where might Schwitters' *Merzbühne* stand vis-à-vis the medium? As film vied for artistic status in the 1910s, the mass medium borrowed liberally from the literary impetus of conventional, narrative-driven stage drama, that which Schwitters overtly rejects in the *Merzbühne*. What emerges in the messy Weimar mediascape, then, is not a simple question of old theatre versus new film, so much as narrative versus non-narrative, on location versus theatre/studio, overdetermined versus ambiguous, active versus passive. When repositioned outside of the category of 1920s experimental theatre, the *Merzbühne* can be productively understood in alternative constellations of thought. The discourse of *Einfühlung* is one, the early reception of German film is another.

The *Merzbühne* and/as film

The articles introducing the *Merzbühne* were combined in 1921 and printed in *Der Ararat*, the journal of a Munich art gallery of the same name.[774] Schwitters added a postscript: 'this publication aroused the interest of the actor and theatrical director Franz Rolan… We proceed

[772] Endell, 'The Beauty of the Metropolis', trans. Çelik, 133.
[773] In 1914, the German sociologist Emilie Altenloh claimed that 1908 was the last year in which the theatre was in a position to avoid the existence of film. Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, 186-187.
[774] *Der Ararat* was a Munich-based art journal edited by the art dealer Hans Goltz. The *Merzbühne* articles also appear in Schwitters' first collection of Merz poetry.

to work out in detail the idea of the Merz stage in relation to its practical possibilities, theoretically for the present'.[775] That Schwitters' collaboration with Rolan never reached the stage affirms Roger Cardinal and Gwendolen Webster's sense of the *Merzbühne* as a series of 'unworkable instructions',[776] yet it is nevertheless productive to probe its practicalities. Though its sheer number of scene changes would challenge even the most modern of theatres, its technical demands could, with an unlimited budget and many technical agents, be realised. The difficulty instead lay in the lack of timings or cues with which to coordinate the *Merzbühne*'s scenic effects. While the *livret* and *Regiebuch* of the mainstream operatic apparatus provided a notation for operatic staging, their texts and diagrams always referred back to the time-based continuity of the musical score, something absent from Schwitters' experiment. Had a team of technical and performing agents been corralled to realise it, how would their inputs have been synchronised?

Excursus: Schreyer and notation

The quest for a notation system suitable for avant-garde multimedia was pursued by the artist and Der Sturm *magazine editor, Lothar Schreyer, whose play* Kreuzigung *(Crucifixion, 1921) was expressed in a single, non-musical score. Despairing of theatre as a 'maid to the dead and living poets',[777] Schreyer attempted a non-representational theatre made up of 'pure sound, pure movement, pure colour, pure form'. [778] Schreyer's notation system or Spielgang, a fusion of Spiel (play) and Gang (course or path), broke with the textual form of literary drama by deploying colours, symbols and shapes to convey visual, sonic and kinetic gestures on stage. Presented in a large coloured book of woodcuts, a medium associated with a pre-*

[775] Franz Rolan was an actor and director of the Hannover Schauspielhaus. Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*, 84.
[776] Cardinal and Webster, *Kurt Schwitters*, trans. Cardinal, Cardinal-Bartmann and Schwacke, 122.
[777] Jennifer Buckley, 'The Bühnenkunstwerk and the Book: Lothar Schreyer's Theatre Notation', Modernism/modernity, 21 (2014), 407-424 (407).
[778] Mel Gordon, 'Lothar Schreyer and the Sturmbühne', *The Drama Review*, 24 (1980), 85-102 (86).

industrial age, Schreyer's Kreuzigung *pushed up against modern technological reproduction.*[779] *Schreyer addressed the synchrony lacking in Schwitters'* Merzbühne *by way of rhythm, an 'ur-medium' that could combine the heterogeneous aspects of the theatre. Schreyer vertically aligned three staves (fig. 70): 'tones' (words and sounds) on top, the 'tone sequence' (vocal rhythm, pitch and volume) in the middle, and physical gestures and movements, their velocity and angles, on the bottom, all conveyed through text and signs.*[780]

Film, on the other hand, could have offered Schwitters a more efficient means of producing his vision, without the technical contingencies of a live performance. The technique of animation could conjure the *Merzbühne*'s sequences of moving geometric forms, while Schwitters' whirring machines and human actors could have been captured in live action footage. Indeed, the *Merzbühne* was being worked out as the first abstract experimental films were pioneered in Germany. The kinetic shapes in the films by painters Hans Richter (*Rhythmus 21*, 1921), Walter Ruttmann (*Lichtspiel Opus I*, 1921) and Viking Eggeling (*Symphonie Diagonale*, 1924) (fig. 71) have an immediate affinity with Schwitters' *Merzbühne* instructions:

> Take gigantic surfaces conceived as infinite, cloak them in colour, shift them menacingly… Shatter and embroil finite parts and bend drilling parts of the void infinitely together. Paste smooth surfaces over one another… Flaming lines, creeping lines, surfacing lines.[781]

Fernand Léger's 1924 film *Ballet Mécanique*, meanwhile, powerfully exploited the splicing of animated sequences with live footage, precisely the form a filmic *Merzbühne* might take. Like the *Merzbühne*, the *Ballet Mécanique* rejected narrative and boasted of being 'the first

[779] Buckley, 'The Bühnenkunstwerk and the Book', 410.
[780] Buckley, 'The Bühnenkunstwerk and the Book', 411.
[781] Schwitters, 'Merz' (1920), *The Dada Painters and Poets* ed. Motherwell, 62.

film without a scenario' in its opening titles. In the years following his conception of the *Merzbühne*, Schwitters could have used film to animate his multimedia vision, yet he chose not to. Why?

Schwitters elaborated his plans for the *Merzbühne* in 1923 in 'Aus der Welt Merz' (From the World of Merz), a fictional dialogue on Merz theatre with Rolan in *Der Sturm*. Then in 1924, he followed up with a scenic model named the *Normalbühne Merz* (standard Merz stage) which I address later. Both the model and publication featured in the exhibition and catalogue of Frederick Kiesler's 1924 *Internationale Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik* (International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques) in Vienna,[782] which was where Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* premiered. In 'Aus der Welt Merz', Schwitters emphasised the importance of a hostile audience reception. The playful dialogue begins with the artist giving a lecture on Merz theatre to an audience; he outlines the creative possibilities of live audience participation before darkening the room and presenting 'a transparent, huge advertisement' entitled: '!The most modern men's hats are pressed from women's hats!'.[783] Allowing the audience time to react, which they do with laughter, complaints and critiques of the advert's spelling, Schwitters announces that they have just participated in a piece of Merz theatre. Unlike Schreyer, who prohibited critics from his performances by inviting only those predisposed to experiments, Schwitters welcomed uninitiates since their disgruntled reactions could be woven into the performance and responded to in real time by the Merz artist.[784] Indeed, negative reactions were a measure of the performance's efficacy: belying their outcries and objections was the active attempt on the part of the audience to interpret the perplexing experience. In this way, Schwitters' indiscriminate embrace of audience reactions

[782] The *Normalbühne Merz* model was also exhibited in 1927 in the Magdeburg Theatre Exhibition. Webster, 200.
[783] Schwitters, 'Aus der Welt Merz', *Der Sturm*, Volume 14, Number 5, 1 May 1923.
[784] Cardinal and Webster, *Kurt Schwitters*, trans. Cardinal, Cardinal-Bartmann and Schwacke, 123.

contains the kernel of Neuenfels's need for opera to challenge, a statement he issued after the uproar of his 1980 *Aida* premiere. The defence of live theatre against film as a principally auratic form in the sense of Benjamin, was an argument established by others before Schwitters. The critic Paul Ernst's 1913 'Die Möglichkeiten einer Kinokunst' (The Possibilities of a Film Art) critiqued the lack of a spiritual relationship between performers and audience, a position that theatre reformers like Georg Fuchs also upheld.[785] Schwitters' desire for this participatory feedback loop seems therefore a plausible factor in his resistance to film.[786]

Contemporary with Schwitters' Merz activities in the late 1910s and early 1920s, the German film industry gathered momentum. Following the first public demonstration to a ticketed audience in Berlin in 1895, films were increasingly presented in *Wanderkino* (travelling shows) in German cities and eventually, in 1910, specially-designed theatres were built for screenings. [787] According to Anton Kaes, the construction of the first purpose-built film theatres, and more refined projection and recording technologies, forced film into a confrontational relationship with literature and theatre.[788] While the burgeoning mass medium presented new opportunities for some theatre artists, it posed an existential threat to theatres. Celebrated actors and directors defected to the new medium, while theatres had to vie with cinemas for the leisure time and disposable income of the middle classes. Film's distribution model meant its tickets were not so costly and could be procured at the last minute, and thus the cinema began to encroach upon theatre audiences.[789] Yet the financial threat of film to

[785] Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, 187.
[786] Buckley has observed how a discourse on the phenomenon of 'liveness', a term later theorised by the critic Philip Auslander, emerged from early twentieth-century discussions on theatre versus the 'photoplay'. Buckley, 408.
[787] Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*,185. Miriam Hansen, 'Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?', *New German Critique* (Spring-Summer, 1983), 147-184 (162).
[788] Anton Kaes, 'The Debate about Cinema: Charting a Controversy (1909-1929)', *New German Critique* (Winter, 1987) 7-33 (9).
[789] Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, 186.

theatre does not seem to have been a concern for Schwitters, whose livelihood was not dependant on the theatrical apparatus. Instead, Schwitters' avoidance of the medium points towards other concerns.[790]

In 1919, almost five hundred feature films were made in Germany and, following the disintegration of the *Kaiserreich* and removal of censorship, a multiplicity of styles, genres and subjects exploded into the public sphere.[791] In these early years, theatre exerted a powerful hold over the new medium.[792] While scenographic experiments were underway on the German stage, theatrical productions for the most part remained wedded to nineteenth century naturalism. Film was attuned to these practices in mainstream theatre and the deluge of German historical films produced between 1919 and 1924, what Siegfried Kracauer would term 'historical pageants', exemplify a process of remediation which invited the beleaguered German people to escape into a lavish historical past on screen.[793]As UFA (*Universum Film-Aktien Gesellschaft*) opened the doors to its permanent Palast am Zoo with the premiere of Ernst Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry*,[794] the term *Schundfilm*, or 'trashy film', circulated. The *Schundfilm* denoted those filmed dramas with predictable melodramatic or romantic plots, stock characters, reductive moral frameworks and deterministic views of society which stripped the protagonist of their agency.[795] In short, these films were exemplars of mass

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[790] A lone exception to this rule is Schwitters' *In the Middle of the World a House Stands: Sketch for a Movie* (1929), *Kurt Schwitters PPPPPP: Poems, Performance Pieces, Proses, Plays, Poetics*, ed. and trans. Rothenberg and Joris, 187-190.

[791] Christian Rogowski, 'From Ernst Lubitsch to Joe May: Challenging Kracauer's Demonology with Weimar Popular Film', *Light Motives: German Popular Film in Perspective*, ed. Randall Halle and Margaret McCarthy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 1-23 (8).

[792] Lotte Eisner has illuminated the impact of the stage director Max Reinhardt, whose influence is discernible as early as 1913. Reinhardt's performance troupe generated the main film actors of the day, while his use of light and choreography of crowd scenes were quickly borrowed by the younger medium. Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, trans. Roger Greaves (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), 44, 47.

[793] Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, trans. Greaves, 75.

[794] Marc Silberman, *German Cinema: Texts in Context* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 3.

[795] Sabine Hake frames the *Schundfilm* as part of the *Kinoreformbewegung*, or cinema reform movement, which emerged in criticism in the 1910s. Sabine Hake, 'The Cinema Reform Movement', *The Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907-1933* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 27-42.

culture, compelled by commercial over artistic imperatives. The *Schundfilm* discourse presaged the astute and sociological film criticism of Kracauer in the 20s and 30s, which emerged from a deep-rooted cultural anxiety towards mass media products more generally. Indeed, such pushback from the German cultural elite was nothing new.

Corey Ross has observed that the attack on *Schund* had its foundations in the German educational establishment of the 1870s and 1880s. Pushing against popular reading material newly created for the mass market, educators bemoaned their dearth of literary aspiration and the adverse impact they might have on the youth. The *Hintertreppenromane* (backstairs novels), *Backfischromane* (teenage girl novels) and later the *Groschenhefte* (a borrowing from the American dime novel), were indeed money-spinners for the growing book industry, motivated by commercial rather than literary imperatives. In an attempt to improve the reading practices of elementary school students, educators propagated a selection of approved titles. [796] At stake for German educators of the late nineteenth century, and early film critics of the twentieth, was also at stake for Schwitters' Merz: artistic media needed to be tethered to the German concept *Bildung*, the belief in the educational value of high culture as an end in itself.

Kracauer's critique of Weimar film built upon these cultural concerns, but was specifically driven by his conviction that the interests of the film industry perniciously seeped into its products.[797] As he put it in 1932:

[796] Corey Ross, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford Univeriary Press, 2010), 65-66.
[797] Siegfried Kracauer, 'Film' (1928), *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 307-320 (319).

> Film in a capitalist economy is one commodity among others. With the exception of a small number of outsiders, producers make films neither in the interest of art nor to enlighten the masses but for the sake of the profits they promise to yield.[798]

Embedded as they were in the capitalist economic system, film producers were invested in maintaining the social status quo and thus projected their own social interests into the fiction features they sold to a mass public. Kracauer took it upon himself to unmask the 'social images and ideologies' disguised in commercial films and strove to subvert the effects of the films themselves.[799] In what Kracauer termed their 'daring escape attempts', fiction features desisted from displaying the dull daily reality of the German people, and instead crafted narratives which reaffirmed existing power relations.[800] The cinematic tropes – twists of fate and happy endings – diluted any sense of inequity that might otherwise be stirred in an audience. At stake for Kracauer was the perceptual experience of film. As he put it in 'The Little Shop Girls Go to the Movies': 'crying is sometimes easier than contemplation'.[801] Emotive narratives inhibited an audience's critical reaction to the film.

Kracauer's critique of a film contemporary with Schwitters' *Merzbühne*, Lubitsch's highly theatrical historical pageant of 1919, *Madame Dubarry* (titled *Passion* for American distribution), is typical of his position.[802] Centred on the life of the mistress of the French King Louis XV, *Madame Dubarry*, Kracauer maintained that the narrative robbed the French Revolution of its real historical significance:

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[798] Kracauer 'The Task of the Film Critic' (1932), *The Weimar Republic Source Book*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 634-640 (634).
[799] Kracauer 'The Task of the Film Critic', 634.
[800] Kracauer, 'Film' (1928), 308.
[801] Kracauer, 'The Little Shop Girls Go to the Movies' in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, 291-304 (302-303).
[802] *Madame Dubarry* was co-written by Hans Kräly and Norbert Falk. Previously a member of Max Reinhardt's troupe, the director Ernst Lubitsch championed the *Kostümfilm* (costume film) and created what film critic Paul Rotha termed 'commercial products of the property-room and Reinhardt' in his films *Madame Dubarry*, *Sumurun* (1920), *Anna Boleyn* (1920), *Danton* (1921), and *Othello* (1922). Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, trans. Greaves, 75, 79.

> Instead of tracing all revolutionary events to their economic and ideal causes, it persistently presents them as the outcome of psychological conflicts. It is a deceived lover who, animated by the desire for retaliation, talks the masses into capturing the Bastille. Similarly, Madame Dubarry's execution is related not so much to political reasons as to motives of personal revenge. Passion does not exploit the passions inherent in Revolution, but reduces the Revolution to a derivative of private passions. If it were otherwise, the tragic death of a both lovers would hardly overshadow the victorious rising of the people.[803]

Papering over the political with the personal by masking class struggle with the whims of lovers, *Madame Dubarry* peddled a false account of the historical process. Yet alarmingly for Kracauer, Lubtisch's historical films were taken as truth in their American reception. Lauding the films for their 'authenticity' and 'historical realism', American critics were convinced that the fiction features displayed history as 'naked and real and unromanticised in all its grandeur and its barbarism'.[804] While Schwitters' Merz did not depict historical or contemporary reality in a representational or a political sense, the artist was as sensitive as Kracauer to the presence of ideology in art works. Could Schwitters' resistance to film have been grounded in those same terms as Kracauer? Possibly. But not entirely since, as we will see, the commercially-driven *Schundfilm* did not represent the whole situation of Weimar film.

Certain critics saw through film's 'trashy' handling to imagine its alternative potential. As the art historian Konrad Lange put it in 1918, the trashy film was 'the worthy child of a father of ill-repute, namely the backstage or trashy novel [*Kolportageroman*]'.[805] Film's

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[803] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947), ed. Leonardo Quaresima (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 49.
[804] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 51.
[805] Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine*, 36.

dependence on literary drama was, in fact, the problem. 'I am still a friend of the cinema and an enemy of the cinema drama [*Kinodrama*]' stated Lange in 1920.[806] Lange's sentiment has a synergy with Schwitters' *Merzbühne* which favoured onstage action over dialogue, and strove to 'forget the written word'.[807] Meanwhile Paul Wegener, a former member of Reinhardt's troupe and a well-known film actor, claimed in 1916 that film had so far only managed to produce substitutions of bad theatre, but was convinced there were alternative approaches:

> You have all seen films in which a line appears, then curves and changes. This line gives birth to faces, then disappears. Nobody has ever thought of attempting an experiment of this order in a full-length film. I can imagine a kind of cinema which would impinge events that would still participate in the natural world but transcend the lines and volumes of the natural.[808]

Conjuring Schwitters' projection-like gestures in the *Merzbühne*, Wegener sets up a feature-length pattern for abstract animation and even suggests techniques for its realisation:

> Microscopic particles of fermenting chemical substances could be filmed together with small plants of various sizes. It would be impossible to distinguish the natural elements from the artificial ones. In this way we could enter a new fantastic domain of *pure kinetics*, the universe of optical lyricism.[809]

Though Wegener's position has been considered film's striving to inhabit the condition of music,[810] more at stake in his argument is that definition of specifically artistic experience. Wegener describes the affective goal of this new kind of film: 'This would give rise to

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[806] Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine*, 37.
[807] Schwitters 'Über die Merzbühne' (1923) quoted in Melzer, 200.
[808] Paul Wegener, 'Die künstlerischen Möglichkeiten des Films' (The Artistic Possibilities of Film) (1916). Quoted in Eisner, 33.
[809] Eisner, 36.
[810] Joel Westerdale, 'The Musical Promise of Abstract Film', *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema: Rediscovering Germany's Filmic Legacy* ed. Christian Rogowski (Rochester: Camden House, 2010), 153-166.

fantastic images which would provoke absolutely novel associations of ideas in the spectator'.[811] Though Wegener's call was answered in the early twenties by the painters Ruttmann, Richter and Eggeling, who probed the possibilities of non-narrative and non-representative absolute film, their contributions only briefly interrupted film's progression towards an almost entirely narrative repertory.[812] Thus the moment critics recognised film as film, a principally visual rather than literary medium, collided with the moment Schwitters', Schreyer's and others' attempted to create theatre as theatre.

While film is notably absent from Schwitters' conception of the *Merzbühne*, he does rather ambivalently suggest the medium in his sci-fi opera libretto, *Zusammenstoss*. At the Prelude to Act II, the libretto reads: 'The curtain is closed. It is up to the composer and stage director whether to accompany the song with film projections, such as a play of planets orbiting'.[813] As if an insignificant detail, Schwitters defers the question of film to others. That Schwitters was open to the use of film on stage, but ultimately resistant to the dissolution of the stage into the medium of film, points to the potential for theatre to function as a 'hypermedium'.[814] As a constellation that allows all media to co-exist unchanged in their natural state, theatre has an edge over film, which necessarily flattens and distorts that which it captures. Ultimately, theatre was better equipped than film, in the same way that collage was better equipped than

[811] Eisner, 36.
[812] Members of the *Novembergruppe* of artists and architects managed to programme a matinee 'Der absolute Film' (Absolute Film), including the work of Ruttmann, Richter and Eggeling, at a small Berlin theatre in partnership with UFA in May 1925. The programme, which was intended as a one-off event, was repeated the following Sunday due to popular demand. Yet this flowering of the animated art film was not to last: Eggeling died a few weeks later and Richter and Ruttmann moved on from abstract animation and, in the case of Richter, left Germany for good in 1933.Westerdale, 'The Musical Promise', *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema*, ed. Rogowski, 162-163.
[813] Steinitz, 173.
[814] For a definition of 'hypermedium' see Chiel Kattenbelt, 'Intermediality in Theatre and Performance: Definitions, Perceptions and Medial Relationships', *Culture, Language and Representation*, 6 (2008), 19-29 (23).

photomontage, to convey the idiosyncratic montage and artistic structure of perception Schwitters aspired to.

Opera as a found object: Schwitters and the Krolloper

At the 1924 International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques, Schwitters presented a model for a transportable, cheap and flexible stage, the *Normalbühne Merz*. Overlooked in favour of Schwitters' written treatises, the one existing account by Elderfield deems the *Normalbühne Merz* merely a practicable version of the *Merzbühne* treatise, a position I do not share.[815] Rather than presenting a multimedia montage in which many scenic gestures are spliced together thick and fast, the *Normalbühne* reinstates the sustained flow of a pre-existing narrative. Influenced by his collaboration with Lissitzky and the utilitarian precepts of Constructivism, Schwitters' model demonstrates a spatial stage which exposes its mechanisms (see figs. 72, 73 and 74). Schwitters explained in 1925:

> The stage is an accompaniment to the action of the play. It should be as simple and inconspicuous as possible, so that the action comes to the fore. The normal stage employs the simplest forms and colours – straight lines, the circle, the flat surface, cubes, parts of cubes – black, grey, white, red. The parts are constructed and painted so simply that it is easy to relate them to one another… Everything should be built as lightly as possible. The normal stage should provide a background and accompaniment for any play that, as good drama ought to be, is essentially action… The normal stage is objective, is practical, is inexpensive.[816]

[815] Elderfield, 141.
[816] Kurt Schwitters, 'Normalbühne Merz', mimeographed handwritten manuscript dated 'Gohrenm Juli 1925'. Quoted in Melzer, 201.

The *Normalbühne* figures as a compromise between Schwitters' anti-Wagnerian desire for tensional relationships between media, as outlined in the *Merzbühne*, and a more traditional operatic production model, which draws its productions from an existing libretto and score. However, Schwitters' description of the *Normalbühne* as an 'accompaniment' to the drama is curious: if combined with a nineteenth-century play, for example, its design would be anything but 'inconspicuous' and instead would highlight those moments of the drama which, antiquated by 1920s standards, would jump to the fore when juxtaposed with the visual aesthetic of a technologised new world. In his experimentation with, on the one hand, non-narrative multimedia, and on the other, traditional narrative contrasted with radical design, Schwitters and his *Merzbühne* and *Normalbühne* re-rehearse the experiments of Kandinsky and Fuchs at the Munich Artists' Theatre, as they too grappled with the idea of an active and artistic mode of spectatorship in the theatre. Melzer considers the *Normalbühne* less radical than Schwitters' earlier experiments and, in relinquishing his auteur-director position, she is not wrong. More easily realisable than the notation-less *Merzbühne*, the *Normalbühne* still held on to montage and its ability to provoke audiences' active perception. At a time where the majority of opera productions in Germany, like the spoken-word theatre, remained wedded to naturalistic, nineteenth-century staging, a classical drama or opera realised on a constructivist stage opened the performance up to alternative interpretations, as two radically different styles embodied by different media ran in parallel.

Excursus: Leopold Jessner

The Normalbühne *is suggestive of Weimar director Leopold Jessner, who also produced traditional and contemporary dramas on an emptied spatial stage. Borrowing from Appia's experiments at Hellerau in the 1910s, Jessner's sets comprised platforms and flights of stairs, or* Jessnertreppen *(fig. 76), as they were known. The difference between Jessner and the*

operatic experiments of Schwitters and the Kroll, however, is in their emblematic over symbolic handling of media. Jessner's Wilhelm Tell *(1919),* Richard III *(1920) and modern-dress* Hamlet *(1926) directly critiqued contemporary German society through what David F. Kuhns has described as 'emblematic' form. In* Wilhelm Tell*, for example, the antagonist Gessler was not presented as the fourteenth-century governor of Schiller's play, but was instead costumed in a black uniform, knee boots and covered with military medals, the quintessence of Wilhelminian militarism. Caricaturing 'the bestial Junker', Peter Gay maintains that even the most imperceptive of observers could not have missed the political statement presented on stage.*[817] *Distinguishing the 'symbolic' from the 'emblematic' in expressionist drama, Kuhns's rubric determines the degree of ambiguity attached to each mode of signification: the 'symbolic' tends towards the elliptical and suggestive, whereas the 'emblematic' denotes something 'more imagistically literal and conceptually precise'.*[818] *In the case of Jessner, but also arguably Piscator and Brecht, the political impetus of the drama necessarily manifested itself as 'emblematic' and therefore instrumental. Seeking to avoid programmatic ideology masquerading as art, Schwitters' position must be distinguished from Jessner's.*

In the light of *Regieoper*, in which the core operatic repertoire is remade in novel presentations, combining the old (music and text) with the new (design, movement, gesture) to challenge the audience through montage, Schwitters' *Normalbühne* figures as an early example.[819] Recasting and redeeming old texts, rather than writing new ones, *Regieoper*'s strategies are proximate to those of Schwitters: 'Everything was ruined anyway; it was

[817] Gay, *Weimar Culture*, 117.
[818] David F. Kuhns, 'Expressionism, Monumentalism, Politics: Emblematic Acting in Jessner's 'Wilhelm Tell' and 'Richard III', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 7 (1991), 35-48 (35).
[819] Risi, 'Opera in Performance', 8.

necessary to build something new from the broken shards. But this is Merz'.[820] The artists engaged at the Kroll treated opera not as a relic but as a found object to which arresting, tensional stagings were added. In the case of Moholy-Nagy's 1929 *The Tales of Hoffmann*, which radically parachuted Offenbach's grand opera into the sleek, technologised world of constructivist design, the production may not even have occurred without Schwitters' *Normalbühne*. The artists shared a studio in Berlin in the winter of 1922-3, precisely those years in which Schwitters developed the Merz stage, and so mutual influence is indeed plausible.[821]

Active for just four years, the Kroll (1927-31) left an indelible mark on German opera. Under the artistic direction of conductor Otto Klemperer, the institution ambitiously combined artistic innovation with public accessibility through the Volksbühne's subsidised subscription scheme.[822] Klemperer's personal campaign for operas that challenged was established some years before his arrival at the Kroll. Working as music director at the opera house in Cologne from 1917-24, Klemperer decided to take the institutional position, which celebrated opera's popularity 'precisely because it so rarely provoked thought', to task.[823] The Kroll programmed new writing alongside well-known operas, the latter of which were presented, as Bloch put it, in a 'zeitgültig' manner, one valid for the times. In its first year, the Kroll performed Smetana, Verdi, Mozart, Weber, Cimarosa, Bizet, Stravinsky, Puccini and

[820] Schulz, *Kurt Schwitters: Merz Art*, 43.
[821] Webster, 144.
[822] Established as a beer hall and pleasure garden in 1844 by the entrepreneur Joseph Kroll, the site was transformed into a theatre in 1851. The theatre was taken over by the state in 1896 and converted into an opera house. In an attempt to open opera up to a wider public after the First World War, the government formed the Volksbühne audience organisation which sought to make theatre more affordable to workers by selling tickets at vastly reduced prices. The Kroll was leased to the Volksbühne in 1920 for the purpose of staging opera and the auditorium duly renovated. When the project encountered financial problems in 1924, the Staatsoper took over the theatre while its own building was modernised and instead offered subsidised tickets to the Volksbühne members. Only in 1927 did Klemperer and his team of chief designer Ewald Dülberg and Chefdramaturg Hans Curjel break from the Staatsoper as a distinct creative institution. Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, 308-309.
[823] Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art*, 249.

Hindemith.[824] Unlike their spoken-word counterparts, operatic institutions in 1920s Germany remained scenically conservative and continued to privilege music over staging. Financial resources were channelled into keeping vocal standards high rather than commissioning new sets and costumes and, as such, scenery was drawn from the generic, reusable items in the opera house's store.[825]

The Kroll was remarkable in its willingness to experiment with visually arresting productions, liberally costuming performers in modern dress. By all accounts, musical concerns did not dictate productions. Critics repeatedly alluded to a lower, presumably less costly, calibre of singer. In his review of *Fidelio* (1927), Hans Eisler tactfully described 'provincial singers who had been excellently rehearsed'.[826] Other reviews of the production, which was presented in a spare setting by Ewald Dülberg, detected a 'cerebral' interpretation and lamented the emphasis on staging at the cost of musical imperatives.[827] The Kroll's 1929 production of Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, meanwhile, provoked complaints from the singers due to its staging which took no account of their comfort or breathing.[828]

Der fliegende Holländer demonstrated Klemperer's irreverence towards the Bayreuth style and, in anticipation of the audacious staging of an opera by the still revered Wagner, police were positioned around the auditorium during the premiere.[829] Dülberg's set, like Schwitters'

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[824] Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art*, 254

[825] Baker offers an instructive survey of the Berlin opera scene: 'With the exceptions of Panos Aravantinos's productions of Alban Berg's Wozzeck and the operas of Franz Schreker at the Staatsoper with Erich Kleiber's best efforts, the genre remained primarily a vocal fest with opulent stagings. The Städtische Oper, with Bruno Walter as Generalmusikdirektor, could not match the financial and artistic resources of the Staatsoper. While maintaining a relatively high standard for singers, the Städtische Oper drew much of its scenery and costumes from a central stock. Its repertory remained conservative, consisting primarily of the works of Wagner, Mozart, Verdi, and Puccini'. Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, 309 and 311.

[826] *Rote Fahne*, 22 November 1927. Quoted in Heyworth, *Otto Klemperer*, I, 260.

[827] Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, 311.

[828] In response to the singers' protests, the director Jürgen Fehling said: 'It doesn't matter, it's basically just a real person, a living creature'. Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art*, 258.

[829] Heyworth, *Otto Klemperer*, I, 280.

Normalbühne, was stripped-back and spatial: ramps, steps and platforms conveyed the ship in its most basic form (fig. 77). The staging did not adopt Wagner's overdetermined approach, but instead left the musical effects of wind, creaking ships and the choppy seas as solely sonic ones, without gluing them to visual correlates on stage.[830] This instance of operatic montage has an affinity with the *Normalbühne* but also the constellated thinking promoted by the associates of the Frankfurt School. That Adorno, Benjamin and Bloch were advocates of the Kroll is hardly a surprise: montage here insisted upon a critically engaged way of perceiving, and one that cut across media.

The performers, meanwhile, were costumed in modern dress. As Alfred Einstein noted:

> Daland, the Steuermann, the Norwegian crew were just ordinary seamen… the Dutchman had lost his handsome, melancholic beard, wore a black Havelock and looked like a proper ghost... Senta herself was no longer a heroine… but a redhead peasant girl who might have been drawn by Käthe Kollwitz.[831]

Heyworth has observed how, in spite of Klemperer's care to avoid projecting a political programme, the characters' modern dress was quickly cast in politicised terms. The editor of the *Allgemeine Musikzeitung*, Paul Schwers, gave the most searing review:

> The Dutchman, naturally beardless, looks like a Bolshevist agitator, Senta, like a fanatical… Communist harridan. Daland's crew resemble port vagabonds of recent times, the wretched spinning chamber a workshop in a woman's prison… this proletarianised *Ur-Höllander*…[is] an artistic betrayal of the people...[832]

[830] Einstein described it thus: 'The sea, the wind, the breeze of Wagner's stormy crossing from Riga to London were clearly heard in the music but played not the slightest role in the staging…'. Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art,* 258.
[831] Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art,* 257-258.
[832] Heyworth, *Otto Klemperer*, I, 283.

As predicted, the conservative Wagnerians were shocked by the production and called for the German parliament to initiate an investigation.[833] An anonymous writer struck out at the protesters in a sarcastic article: ‘No hand on heart or swimming movement, no magical atmosphere, no traditional romanticism to lift the heart and banish the grey mundanity of everyday life’.[834] This latter, positive emphasis on the staging of life in all its dullness, demonstrates the Kroll enacting what Kracauer had hoped film would do. Carnegy has acknowledged the Kroll’s competition with Berlin’s two hundred and fifty film theatres in this period and,[835] while *Der fliegende Holländer* actively recast its Wagnerian model, was it also turning away from a mainstream filmic one? The Kroll’s combination of well-known works with new stagings judiciously balanced familiarity with novelty. Why this combination should be any more appealing to a mass audience than brand new opera points back, I would like to argue, to film. Now accustomed to the well-established and ultimately repetitive repertory of the new medium, the Weimar audience’s threshold for newness of both form and content had been lowered. Given his commitment to bringing a mass audience to opera, Klemperer walked the tightrope of pursuing the new without alienating audiences.

The shared strategies of the Kroll and Schwitters’ *Normalbühne* relativise experimental opera’s pre-eminently institutional history. This chapter has sought to offer an antidote to Thomas Mann’s enthusiastic but essentialist assertion in 1930 that ‘If opera today is still or has once again become an intellectual issue and a subject of intellectual discussion, that is in the first place the merit of *this* institution’.[836] The redefinition of culture as intellectual was a

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[833] Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, 314.
[834] Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art*, 259. Kurjel, *Krolloper*, 257.
[835] Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art,* 236.
[836] The original German reads: ‘Wenn das Problem der Oper heute noch oder wieder eine geistige Angelegenheit und ein Gegenstand geistiger Auseinandersetzung ist, so ist das in erster Linie das Verdienst *dieses* Instituts’. The quotation features in a paragraph Mann wrote as part of an appeal to preserve the Kroll which was threatened with closure. The paragraph was published alongside those of other cultural figures, including Kurt Weill and Hans Poelzig, in the German political-literary weekly journal *Das Tagebuch*. Thomas Mann,

pervasive one, which persisted across media and manifested itself outside of the Kroll. Klemperer, like Schwitters, insisted upon an intellectual and inclusive artistic experience, and actively sought to protect his productions from projecting ideology, in spite of the best efforts of the press to suggest otherwise.[837] While enthused by new writing, both artists approached opera with a level of pragmatism which led them to the same formula, the recasting of old, well-known works in unexpected ways. While there may be no causal link between Schwitters and Klemperer, what matters is the typicality of their responses in artistic multimedia to the Weimar mediascape. Klemperer's formula for a stimulating operatic experience was the same kind of montage Schwitters presented in the *Normalbühne*: well-known operas would be given an exactingly musical rendition, while maintaining a frictional relationship with an arresting staging which might not bear any visual resemblance to the historical period or locale of the drama. Unlike the messy montage of Schwitters' *Merzbühne*, Kroll productions and the *Normalbühne* presented operatic media which were cleanly and consistently at odds with one another. Thus, the dual perceptual experience of Hildebrand's *Einfühlung* as expressed in the relief took root in an institutional, operatic context.

'RETTET DIE KROLL-OPER', *Das Tagebuch*, 11 (1930), 1833-1835 (1833). Quoted in Heyworth, *Otto Klemperer*, I, 349.

[837] In the wake of *Fidelio*, Anatoly Lunacharsky described Klemperer as 'the Piscator of the opera'. Heyworth, 261.

Afterword

At the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019, the Golden Lion for Best National Participation was awarded to an opera. *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, which was presented by the Lithuanian Pavilion, did not take place in an opera house but instead in a remote warehouse in the Venetian district of Castello; it was durational, presented on loop between 10.00am and 6.00pm on performance days; it was produced with the assumption that no audience member would see the performance in its entirety (visitors were discouraged from lingering to optimise the number of visitors able to experience the performance) and as such, the work discarded any conventionally-defined narrative arc in favour of a fragmented and episodic structure. The performance comprised live singing with a quality somewhere between an operatic and a music theatre style of vocal delivery. Going against mainstream operatic practice which is proudly acoustic, microphones were carefully hidden in the singers' garments and discreetly taped to their bodies. The singing was not accompanied by a live orchestra but instead by an electronic, pre-recorded sound track which emanated from a hidden source. Not all of the performers were singers, however. Some were non-singing volunteers drafted in to make the project viable, adding their costumed appearance to the beach environment in the absence of a built set. Positioned in an upper viewing gallery running around the full rectangular footprint of the stage, the audience experienced a perspective on the action from above. That the *Sun & Sea (Marina)* performance space was opened to visitors even outside of performance days and times attests to the overriding visual and spatial impetus of the work.

Previously reserved for entertaining the crowds of Venice's La Fenice, opera moved in 2019 into a different kind of institutional apparatus. Opera's representation in the Art Biennale, as opposed to the significantly less-trumpeted Venice Theatre or Venice Music Biennale, is an indicator of the phenomenon this thesis seeks to elucidate, opera's visual turn. That this

situation is still in process begs for scholarship to explore the digital conditions of the twenty-first century observer. Contrary to Theodor W. Adorno's declaration of opera's total obsolescence in 1976,[838] the allegedly outdated genre persists in different apparatuses. Adding to the prevalence of 'intermedia' in art galleries, which Clement Greenberg observed in 1981,[839] the Lithuanian Pavilion actively labelled its multimedia installation 'opera' even if its operatic claims were somewhat specious. Might their adoption of the term 'opera', instead, be wilfully misleading? In his 1967 essay 'Art and the Arts', Adorno noted the productive potential of the 'erosion' of the boundaries between different art forms.[840] Indeed, he considered art's survival as contingent upon its rebellion against any preconceived expectations of it. Thus, the division of art into predetermined art forms was one of the firm tenets from which art pressingly needed to free itself. In a similar vein, *Sun & Sea (Marina)* sets the expectation of opera, only to present something distinctly unoperatic and, in an Adornian way, complicates generic and institutional expectations of art. The stage has been set for opera's re-evaluation in an expanded field of media, but also for multimedia's evaluation alongside the genre of opera.

[838] 'Neither from the musical nor from the esthetic point of view can we avoid the impression that the operatic form is obsolete.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), 71.
[839] Clement Greenberg, 'Intermedia' (1981), *Late Writings*, ed. Robert C. Morgan (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 93-98.
[840] Adorno, 'Art and the Arts', trans. Rodney Livingstone, *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2003), 368-387.

Appendix 1: *Der gelbe Klang* Performance

Der gelbe Klang (The Yellow Sound), a colour opera by Wassily Kandinsky and Thomas de Hartmann (1909), arr. Gunther Schuller (1981), performed by Spectra Ensemble at the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, St Hilda's College, Oxford, 12 and 13 May 2015.

Live performance of *Der gelbe Klang*
Running time: 00:43:56 minutes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOMHT-8v_Vo&t=13s [accessed 10 December 2021]

Scenes
Prelude
Picture 1
Picture 2
Picture 3
Picture 4
Picture 5
Picture 6

Production team

Director	Cecilia Stinton
Choreographer	Camille Jetzer
Designer	Holly Muir
Puppet maker	Lucie Dawkins
Lighting Designer	James Percival
Projection Designer	Ruth Spencer Jolly
Conductor	Matthew F. Reese
Stage Manager	Jennifer Hurd

Cast

Yellow Flower	Colin Strong
Leaf	Camille Jetzer
A Child	Clare Batterton
A Man	Colin Strong

Five Giants
Ben Christopher, Antoni Czerwinski, Patch Harvey, Anna Sands, Anna Zanetti

Vague Creatures, People in Flowing Robes, People in Tights
Clare Batterton, Veronica Corsi, Christine Gou, Jennifer Hurd, Camille Jetzer, Catriona Kerr, Chloe Wakelin

Chorus
Aoife Dudley, Ellie Hargreaves, Ellie Hicks, Rachel Maton, Gabriella Noble, Josie Perry, Ollie Dinwoodie, Rory Green, James McEvoy-Stevenson, John Paul

Orchestra

Violins	Jordan Strobach-Morris, Donald Taylor, Holly Unwin, Henry Webster
Violas	Ruth Elliot, James Orrel
Cellos	Susannah Lyness, Doris Nikolic, Samuel Whitby
Basses	Samuel Adamson, Jack Adler
Flute, Piccolo	Helen Ashcroft
Flute	Daniel Shao
Oboe	Meredith Hughes
Clarinet	Harry Palmer, Daniel Mort, Rachel Sears
Bassoon	Angharad Thomas, Charlotte Wyatt
Horn	Emily Bell
Trumpet	Tobias Gehring
Trombone	William Foster
Tuba	George Haggett, Cameron Alsop
Percussion	Miranda Davies, John Warner
Piano, Celeste, Harmonium	Elizabeth Jones, Finn Shields, Julia Tubilewicz

Supporters
St Hilda's College Graduate Seminar Fund, Dr Georgina Paul, Dr Julia Schnabel, Professor Peter Franklin, Joel Baldwin, Maoliosa Kelly, Dr Camille Mathieu, University of Oxford Music Faculty, Macha Daniel at the Centre Pompidou, Suzanne Lovejoy at the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University.

Appendix 2: *Liturgie* Performance

Liturgie (Liturgy), a ballet-opera with a concept and designs by Diaghilev, Massine, Goncharova, Larionov and Stravinsky, and music by Daniel Lee Chappell (2016), premiered by Spectra Ensemble at By Other Means Gallery, London, 15, 16 and 17 December 2016 and at Tête à Tête Opera Festival, The Place, London on 25 July 2017.
https://www.spectraensemble.co.uk/liturgie [accessed 10 December 2021]

Live performances of *Liturgie*
By Other Means Gallery, 2016. Running time: 00:40:51 minutes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_bxeDkEzAs [accessed 10 December 2021]
Tête à Tête Opera Festival, 2017. Running time: 00:41:38 minutes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tdrm-P4lb9s [accessed 10 December 2021]

Scenes
Introit (Text: O Virgin Pure or Agni Parthene)
1. Annunciation
2. Nativity
3. Sermon on the Mount (Text: The Beatitudes from the Gospel of Matthew)
4. Last Supper - Garden of Gethsemane
5. Crucifixion
6. Resurrection
7. Assumption (Text: O Virgin Pure or Agni Parthene)

Production team

Composer	Daniel Lee Chappell
Director	Cecilia Stinton
Choreographer	Camille Jetzer
Costume Designer	Clare McGarrigle
Set Designer	Holly Muir
Conductor	Oliver Till
Graphic Designer, Videographer	Ruth Spencer Jolly
Producer	Jessie Anand

Cast

The Virgin Mary	Marlene Hell Mary Sol Martín Del Castillo
The Angel of the Annunciation	Kudakwashe Mushava
Joseph	Fran Mangiacasale
Shepherds	Ed Addison, Elle Anthimidou
Magi	Lavinia Johnson, Esther Kigozii, Anna Zanetti
Men of the People / Soldiers	Elle Anthimidou, Esther Kigozii, Kudakwashe Mushava, Anna Zanetti
Judas	Fran Mangiacasale
Saints	Ed Addison, Sam Rayner, Claire Smith, Feliciana Robles-Acosta

Angelic Host
Fiona Hymns, Aimee Presswood, Lara-Clare Bourdeaux, Rosie Middleton, Peter Martin, Tim Edlin, Quintin Beer

Band

Flute	Claire Wickes
Clarinet	Seb Marshall
French Horn	Joel Roberts
Violin	Isabella Fleming
Cello	Hannah Chappell
Piano	Daniel Lee Chappell

Supporters
The London Arts and Humanities Partnership.

Appendix 3: *Zusammenstoss* Performance

Der Zusammenstoss (Collision) 'a comic opera in banalities' written by Kurt Schwitters and Kate Stenitz (1928), with music by Lewis Coenen-Rowe (2016), presented by Spectra Ensemble at The Greenwood Theatre, London on 24 and 25 May 2017, and at the Grimeborn Opera Festival, Arcola Theatre, London on 17, 18 and 19 August 2017.
https://www.spectraensemble.co.uk/collision [accessed 10 December 2021]

Live performance of Schwitters, Steinitz/Coenen-Rowe's *Collision* 1927/2016 at The Greenwood Theatre, 2017.
Act 1 running time: 00:30:15 minutes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZT5QDscoZqc&list=PLbpoQPrAoCnGX_WIuDoIFEECFYWZuc54l&ab_channel=PaulRichardson [accessed 10 December 2021]

Act 2 running time: 00:23:56 minutes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oS-U_DXuYI8&list=PLbpoQPrAoCnGX_WIuDoIFEECFYWZuc54l&index=3&ab_channel=PaulRichardson [accessed 10 December 2021]

Act 3 running time: 00:32:02 minutes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d20hSierrl0&list=PLbpoQPrAoCnGX_WIuDoIFEECFYWZuc54l&index=4&ab_channel=PaulRichardson [accessed 10 December 2021]

Scenes
Scene 1 An Observatory in Berlin
Scene 2 A Broadcasting Station
Scene 3 Potsdamer Platz
Scene 4 Small village square in front of a church near Berlin
Scene 5 City airport

Production team

Director	Cecilia Stinton
Composer	Lewis Coenen-Rowe
Musical Director	Sean Morris
Graphic Designer, Videographer	Ruth Spencer Jolly
Designer	Holly Muir
Lighting Designer	John Pham
Producer	Jessie Anand
Production Assistant	Isabella Hubbard
Production Assistant	Sophia Stern
Stage Manager	Ines Cufflin Florido

Cast

Masterly	Juliet Wallace
Alma / Paperboy / Saleslady	Olivia Sjöberg
Taa	Bethany Horak-Hallett
Paulsen	Sharang Sharma / Alexander Gebhard
Virmula / The Voice / The Jailbird	Barnaby Beer
Rommel / Schmitt	Henry George Page

Crowd / Congregation / Police
Miles Ashdown, Claudia Chapman, Kathleen Greene, Fabian Helmrich, Nicholas Hennell-Foley, Freya Morgan, Alessia Naccarato, Tom Rushton, Beatrix Swanson Scott.

Band

Violin	Carlos Yeung, Nick Lau
Viola	Benedict Ng
Cello	Harvey Gibbons
Double bass	Eloise Riddell
Trombone	Nicolas Kent
Trumpet	Laura Wormington
Clarinet	Robert Winup
Saxophone	Claudia Baum
Piano	Erchao Gu
Percussion	Justin Tambini
Répétiteur	Emas Au, Lantian Gu

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Illustrations

1. Theodor Josef Hubert Hoffbauer, Construction de la galerie d'Orléans (1829), 1875.

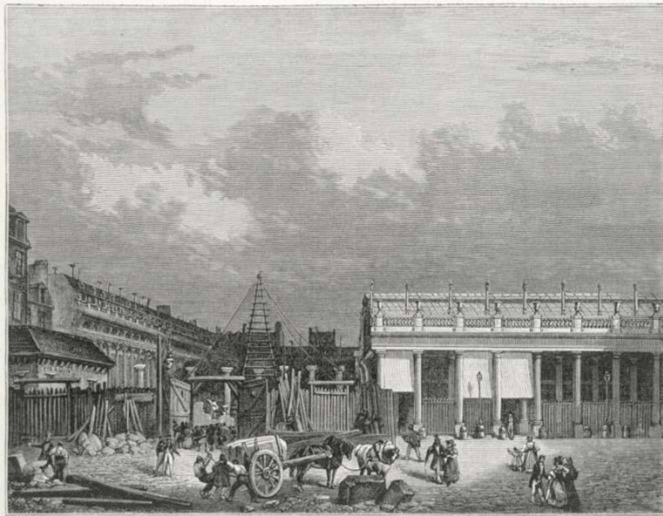
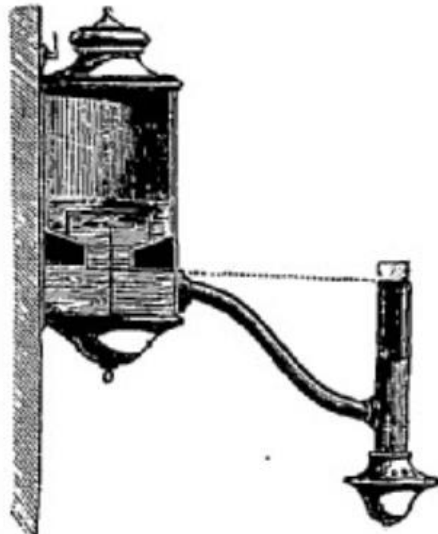


Fig. 38. — Construction de la galerie d'Orléans (1829).

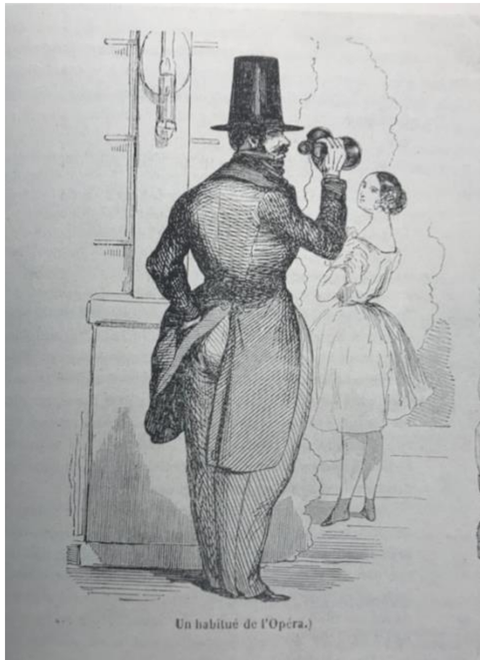
2. Galerie of the Palais Royal: interior, 1831.

3. Vue de la nouvelle salle de l'Opéra prise de la rue de Provence, 1821.

4. Arthur Pougin, Argand lamp, 1885.



5. ‘A regular at the Opéra’, *L’Illustration*, 1844.



Un habitué de l'Opéra.)

6. Act III Scene 2, *La Muette de Portici*, staging manual, 1928.

28 LA MUETTE DE PORTICI.

napolitain, un Pantalon, une Colombine font la parade : des groupes d'enfans les regardent. A droite et à gauche sur une ligne, depuis le fond jusqu'au salon qui a disparu, on voit une partie des femmes du second acte; elles sont assises sur des escabelles, et ont devant elles les provisions qu'elles portaient. Sitôt le changement, elles s'approchent dans le même ordre jusqu'à l'avant-scène, les autres se joignent à elles en ce moment. Les pêcheurs viennent de toutes parts se placer sur trois lignes; d'autres, avec de grands paniers de poissons, forment une allée dans le fond, en face du public. Quand tout est arrivé, le chœur commence; Fenella est arrivée avec Piétro, qui la pose côté droit à la tête des femmes, elle s'assied sur une escabelle; elle est triste, pensive, et ne prend aucune part à ce qui se passe autour d'elle.

POSE DE LA SCÈNE II.

Le marché.

La ferme.

La parade.

Les pêcheurs, avec les grands paniers devant eux.

Marchands.

Marchandes.

Fenella assise.

Marchands de fruits.

Chœur. Hommes.

Marchands de poisson.

Chœur. Hommes.

Marchands de poisson.

Chœur. Hommes.

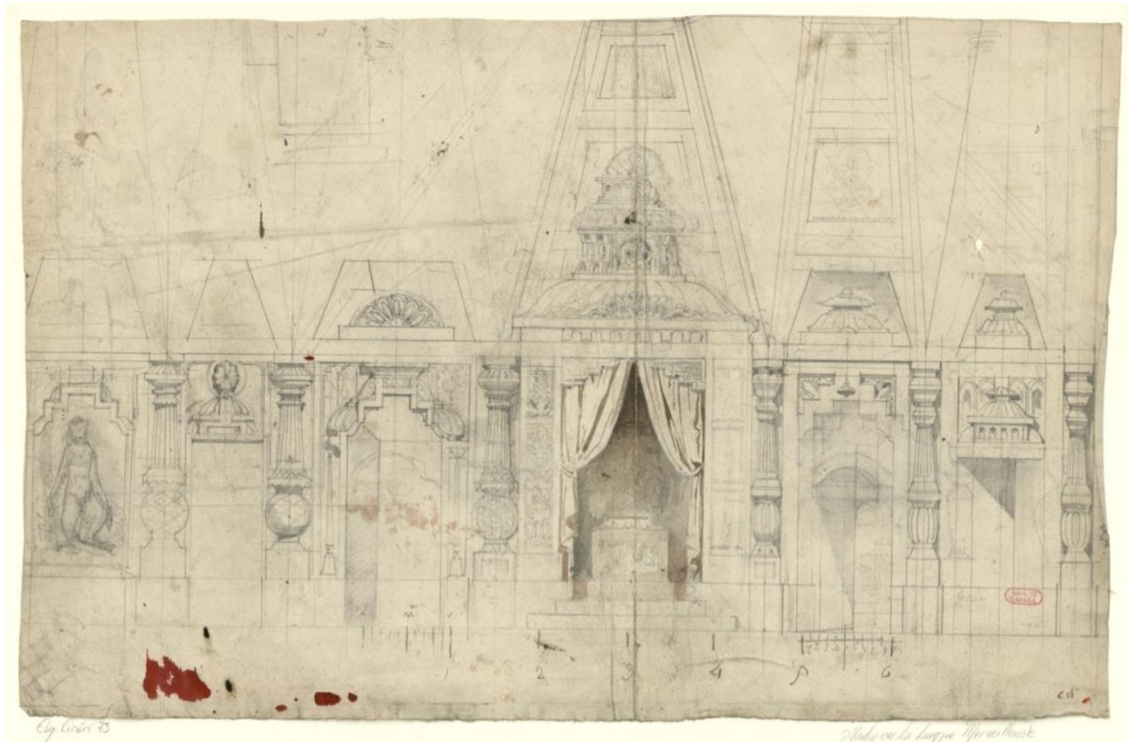
Marchandes d'oranges.

Femmes assises.

Souffleur.

[40] [AUBER]

7. Pierre-Luc-Charles Cicéri, Design for *Aladin*, boudoir, Act IV (?), 1822.

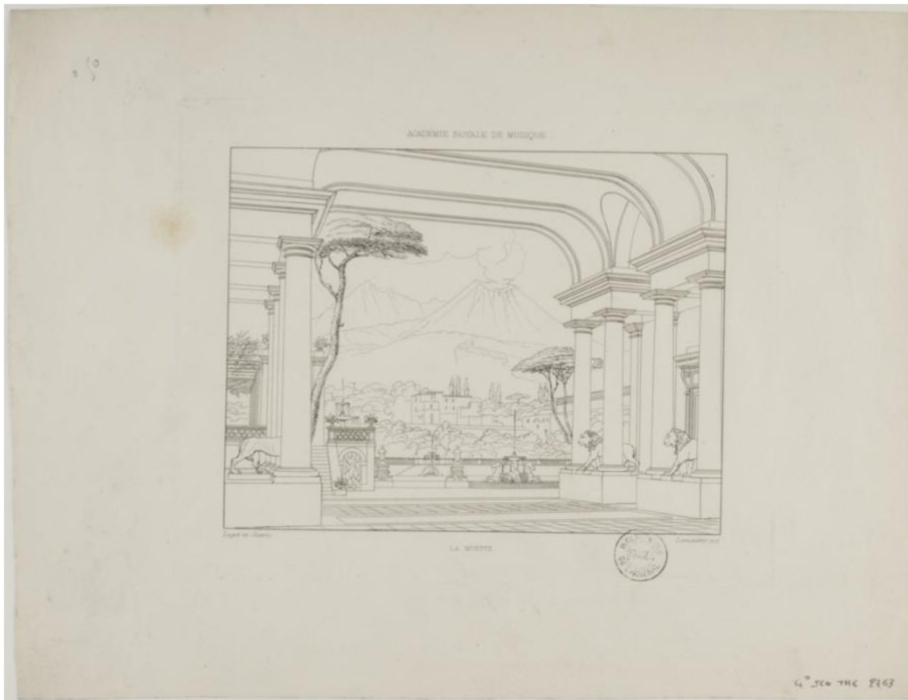


8. The Théâtre Historique on the Boulevard du Temple, *L'Illustration* 12 April 1862.

9. Costume design for Beurg (Grosbec) from *Zazezizozu*, 1835.

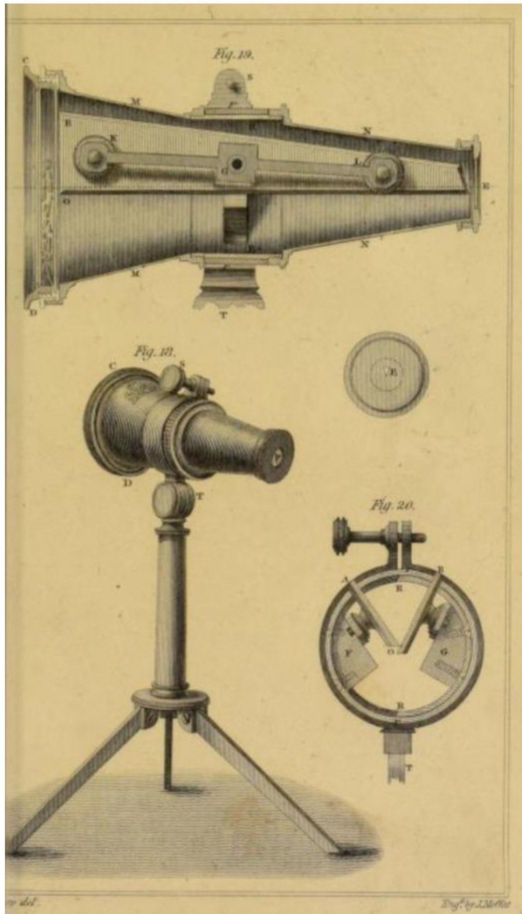
10. Ferdinand Laloue, Anicet Bourgeois and Laurent, 'Les Pilules du diable', *Magasin Théatral,* 1839.

11. Cicéri, Set design for *La Muette de Portici*, Act V, 1828.



12. Cicéri, Costume design for Melle Noblet (in the role of Fenella), *La Muette de Portici*, 1828.

13. David Brewster, Kaleidoscopic instruments in *A Treatise on the Kaleidoscope*, 1819.

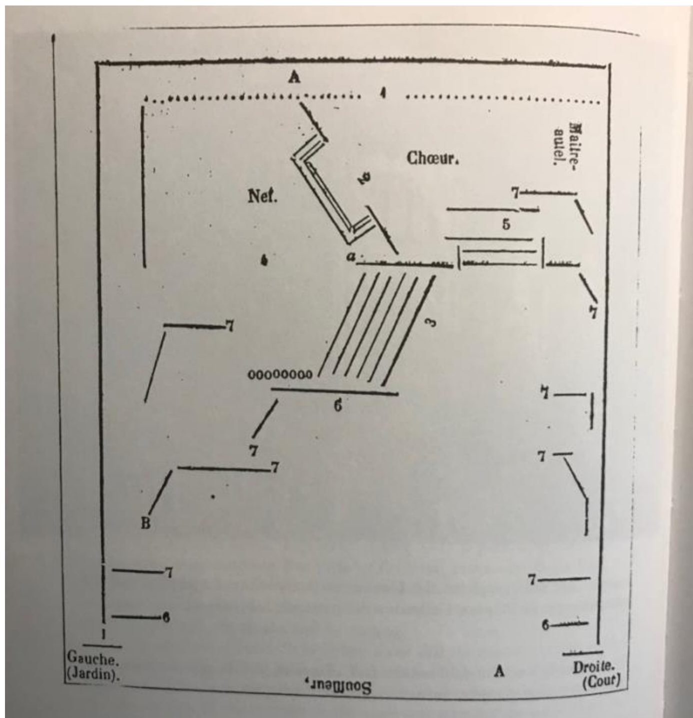


14. Leopold Kupelwieser, *Das Kaleidoskop und die Draisine* (The Kaleidoscope and the Draisine) 1818.

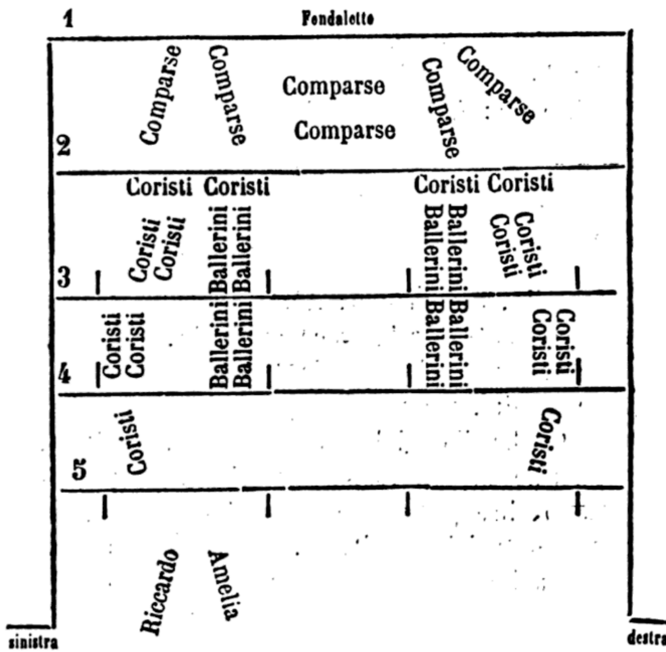
15. Programme des Théâtres, *Les Coulisses*, 13 December 1840.

16. Giacomo Meyerbeer, Les Huguenots: Opera in 5 Acts. Corrected proof copy of the complete orchestra score, 1836.

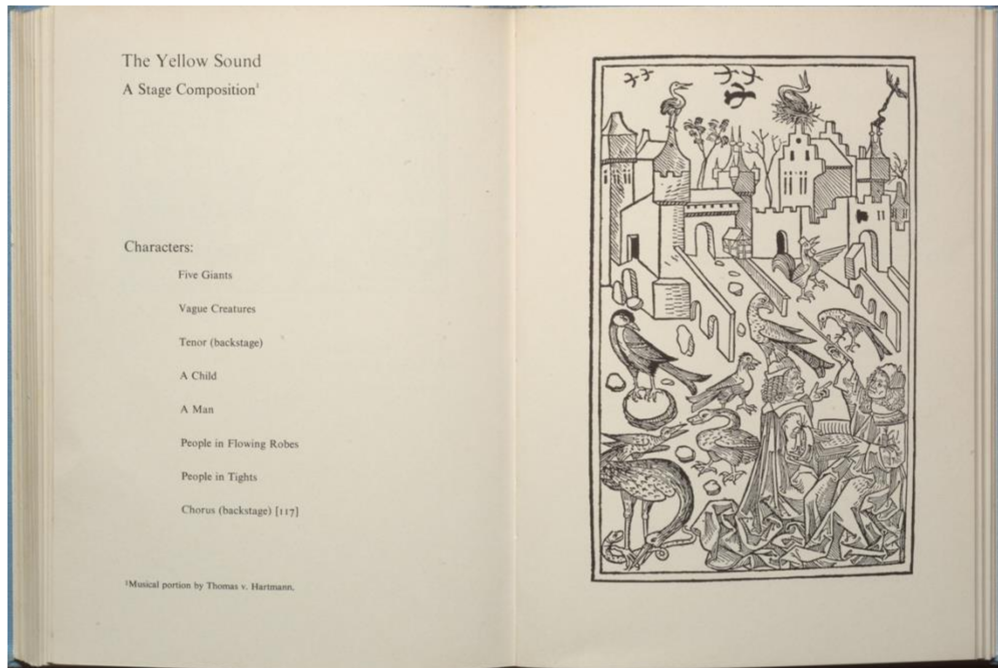
17. Act IV, *Le Prophète,* staging manual, 1849.



18. Giuseppe Cencetti, *Un Ballo in Maschera*, staging manual, 1859.



19. Wassily Kandinsky, cast list for *Der gelbe Klang* (The Yellow Sound) in *The Blue Rider Almanac*, 1912.



The Yellow Sound

A Stage Composition[1]

Characters:

Five Giants

Vague Creatures

Tenor (backstage)

A Child

A Man

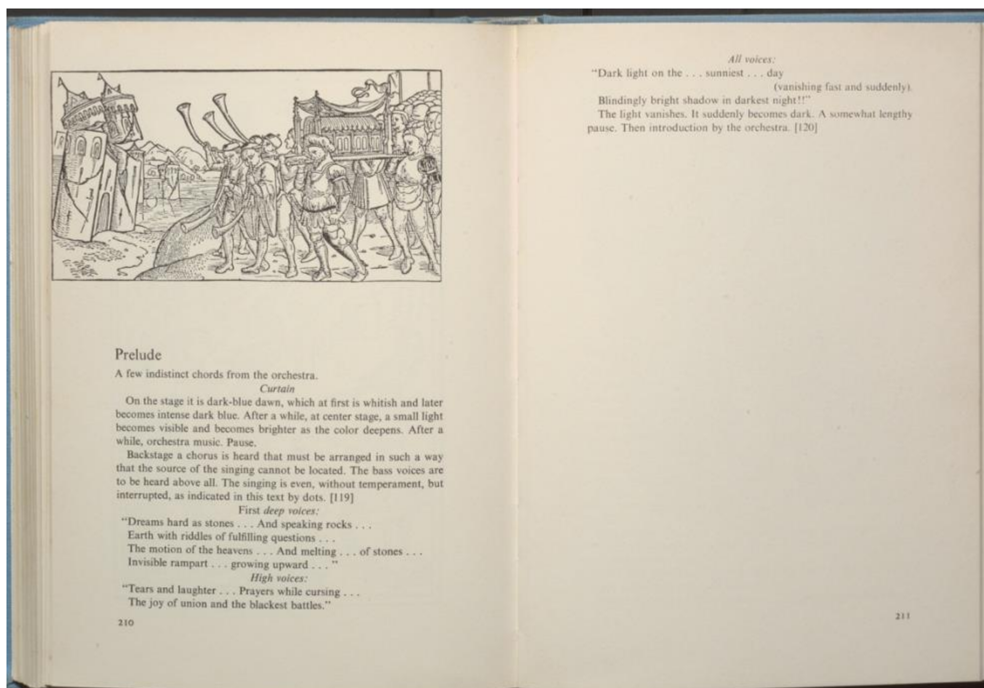
People in Flowing Robes

People in Tights

Chorus (backstage) [117]

[1]Musical portion by Thomas v. Hartmann.

20. Kandinsky, Prelude to *Der gelbe Klang*, 1912.



Prelude

A few indistinct chords from the orchestra.

Curtain

On the stage it is dark-blue dawn, which at first is whitish and later becomes intense dark blue. After a while, at center stage, a small light becomes visible and becomes brighter as the color deepens. After a while, orchestra music. Pause.

Backstage a chorus is heard that must be arranged in such a way that the source of the singing cannot be located. The bass voices are to be heard above all. The singing is even, without temperament, but interrupted, as indicated in this text by dots. [119]

First *deep voices:*

"Dreams hard as stones . . . And speaking rocks . . .
Earth with riddles of fulfilling questions . . .
The motion of the heavens . . . And melting . . . of stones . . .
Invisible rampart . . . growing upward . . . "

High voices:

"Tears and laughter . . . Prayers while cursing . . .
The joy of union and the blackest battles."

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All voices:

"Dark light on the . . . sunniest . . . day
(vanishing fast and suddenly).
Blindingly bright shadow in darkest night!!"

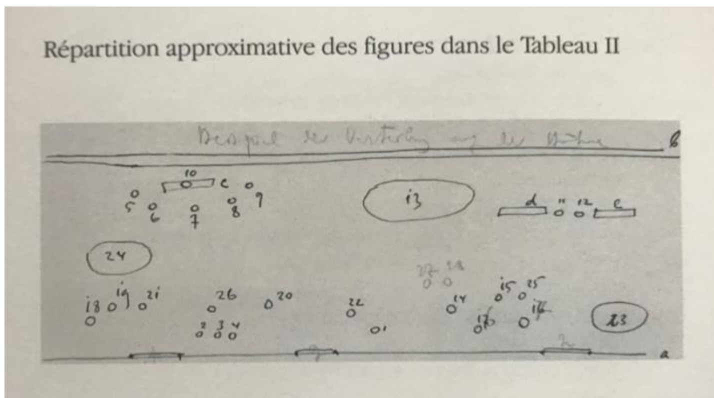
The light vanishes. It suddenly becomes dark. A somewhat lengthy pause. Then introduction by the orchestra. [120]

211

21. Mask of the demon of disease, Maha-cola-sanni-yaksaya, Ceylon in Kandinsky, *Der gelbe Klang*, 1912.

22. Figures from an Egyptian Shadow Play, *Der gelbe Klang*, 1912.

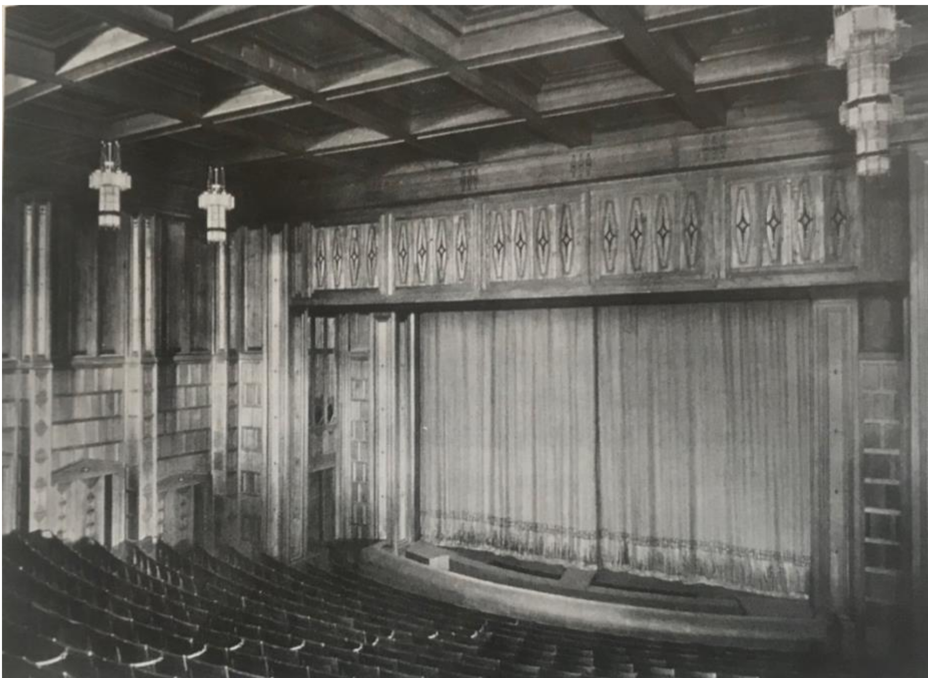
23. Kandinsky, Staging diagram for *Violett* Tableau II, 1914.



24. Kandinsky, Set design for *Violett* Tableau II, 1914.

25. Kandinsky, Set design for *Violett* Tableau III, 1914.

26. Max Littman, Munich Artists' Theatre, auditorium photograph, 1908.



27. Littman, Munich Artists' Theatre, auditorium photograph taken from the stage, 1908.

28. Munich Artists' Theatre, performances of Aristophanes' *The Birds*, 1908
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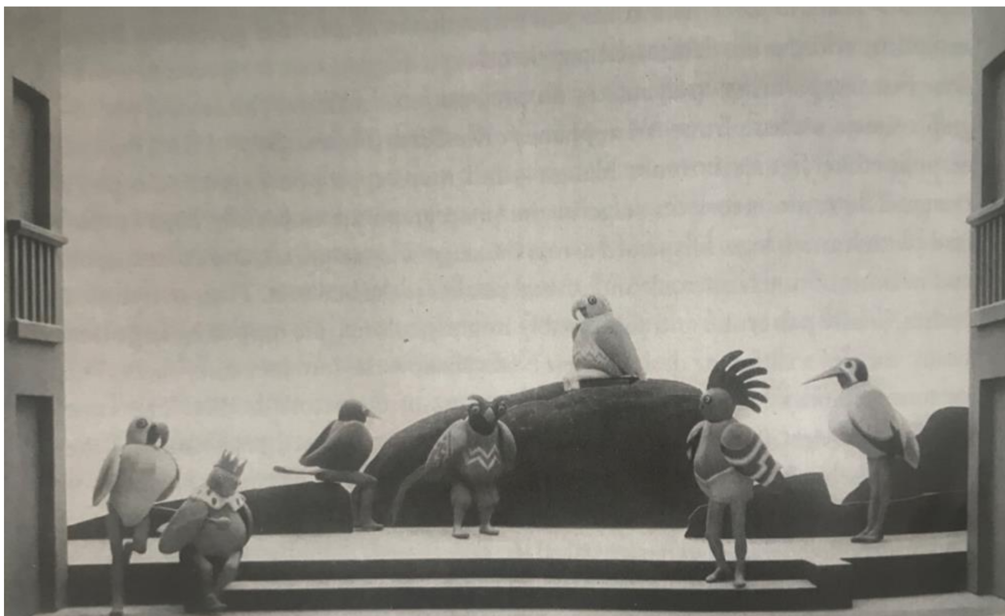
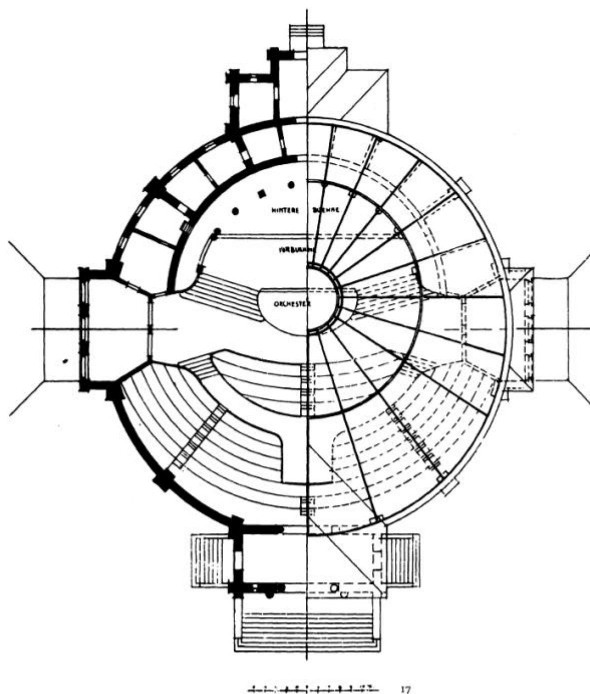
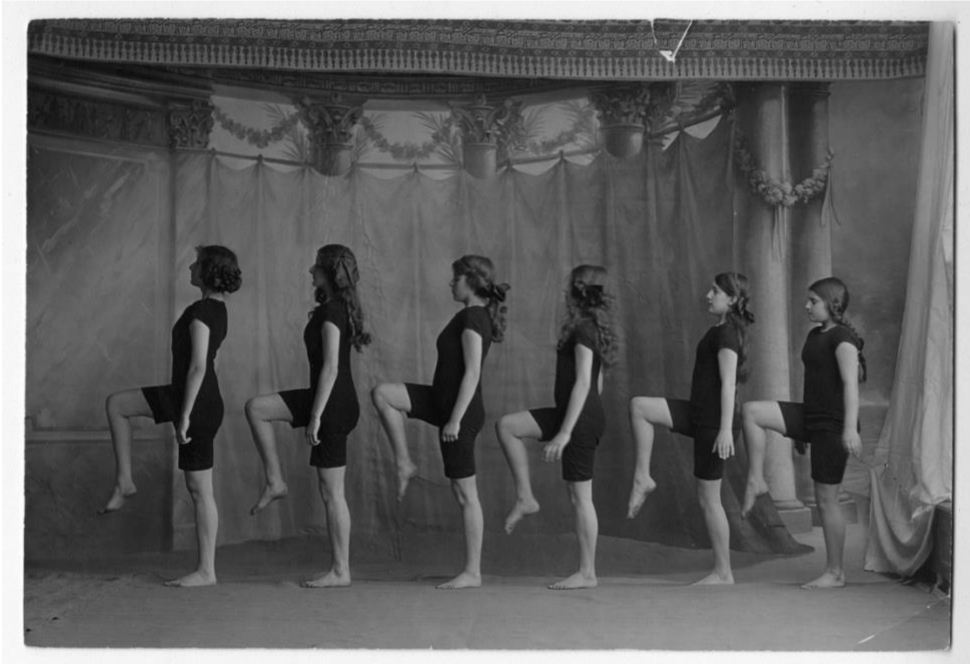


29. Peter Behrens, Poster for the Darmstadt Artists’ Colony, 1901.

30. Peter Behrens, Plan for a theatre, unbuilt, 1900.



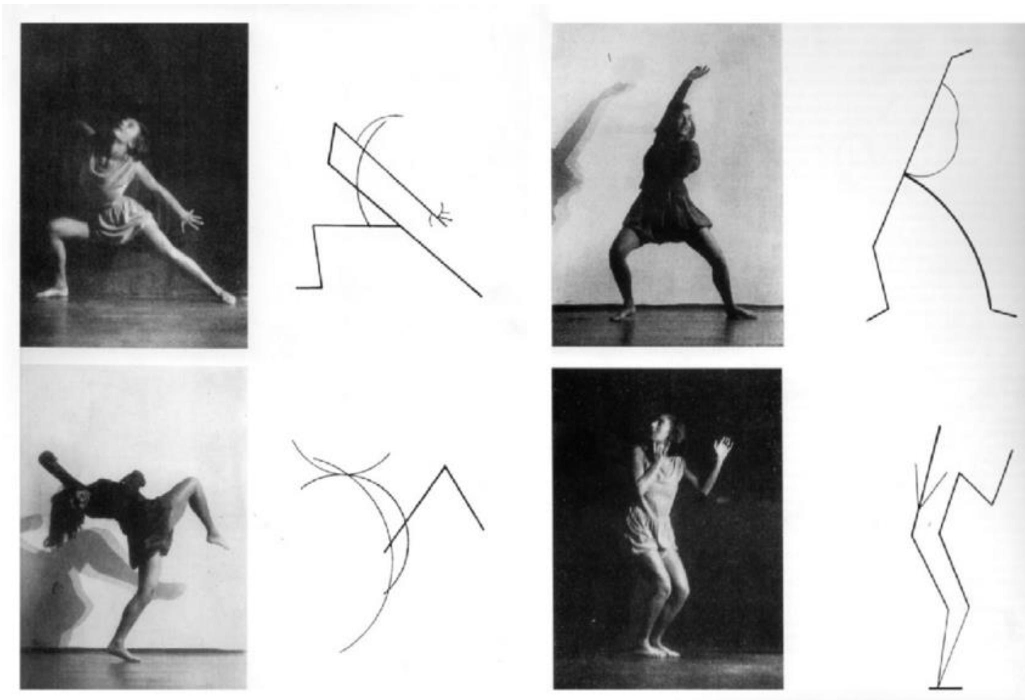
31. Fred Boissonnas, Pupils of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze practising eurhythmic exercises, between 1909 and 1910, Geneva.



32. Set for *Orfeo* by Adolphe Appia, 1912, Hellerau.

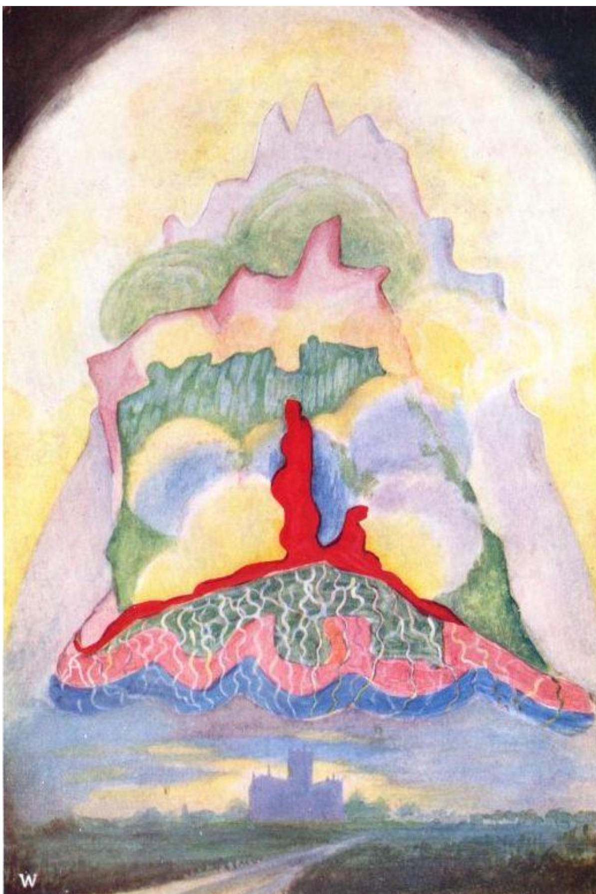
33. Performance of Orfeo, Act 2, Orpheus approaches the Furies, between 1912 and 1914, Hellerau.

34. Kandinsky, ‘Dance Curves: On the Dances of Palucca’, 1926.

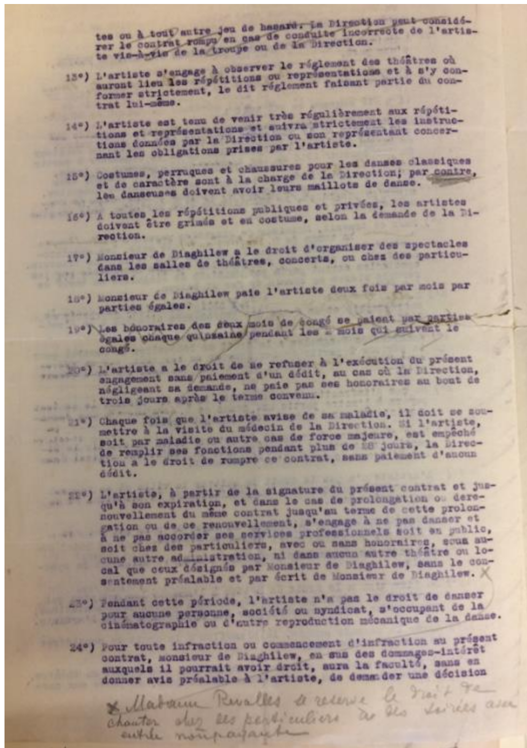


35. Rehearsal for Orfeo in the Grand Salle at the Festspielhaus, 1913, Hellerau.

36. Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, *Music of Wagner*, 1901.



37. Termination of a contract between between Sergei Diaghilev and Denise Boyer, 7 July 1915.



tes ou à tout autre jeu de hasard. La Direction peut considé-
rer le contrat rompu en cas de conduite incorrecte de l'artis-
te vis-à-vis de la troupe ou de la Direction.

13°) L'artiste s'engage à observer le réglement des théâtres où
auront lieu les répétitions ou représentations et à s'y con-
former strictement, le dit réglement faisant partie du con-
trat lui-même.

14°) L'artiste est tenu de venir très régulièrement aux répéti-
tions et représentations et suivra strictement les instruc-
tions données par la Direction ou son représentant concer-
nant les obligations prises par l'artiste.

15°) Costumes, perruques et chaussures pour les danses classiques
et de caractère sont à la charge de la Direction; par contre,
les danseuses doivent avoir leurs maillots de danse.

16°) A toutes les répétitions publiques et privées, les artistes
doivent être grimés et en costume, selon la demande de la Di-
rection.

17°) Monsieur de Diaghilew a le droit d'organiser des spectacles
dans les salles de théâtres, concerts, ou chez des particu-
liers.

18°) Monsieur de Diaghilew paie l'artiste deux fois par mois par
parties égales.

19°) Les honoraires des deux mois de congé se paient par parties
égales chaque quinzaine pendant les 2 mois qui suivent le
congé.

20°) L'artiste a le droit de se refuser à l'exécution du présent
engagement sans paiement d'un dédit, au cas où la Direction,
négligeant sa demande, ne paie pas ses honoraires au bout de
trois jours après le terme convenu.

21°) Chaque fois que l'artiste avise de sa maladie, il doit se sou-
mettre à la visite du médecin de la Direction. Si l'artiste,
soit par maladie ou autre cas de force majeure, est empêché
de remplir ses fonctions pendant plus de 28 jours, la Direc-
tion a le droit de rompre ce contrat, sans paiement d'aucun
dédit.

22°) L'artiste, à partir de la signature du présent contrat et jus-
qu'à son expiration, et dans le cas de prolongation ou de re-
nouvellement du même contrat jusqu'au terme de cette prolon-
gation ou de ce renouvellement, s'engage à ne pas danser et
à ne pas accorder ses services professionnels soit en public,
soit chez des particuliers, avec ou sans honoraires, sous au-
cune autre administration, ni dans aucun autre théâtre ou lo-
cal que ceux désignés par Monsieur de Diaghilew, sans le con-
sentement préalable et par écrit de Monsieur de Diaghilew. X

23°) Pendant cette période, l'artiste n'a pas le droit de danser
pour aucune personne, société ou syndicat, s'occupant de la
cinématographie ou d'autre reproduction mécanique de la danse.

24°) Pour toute infraction ou commencement d'infraction au présent
contrat, monsieur de Diaghilew, en sus des dommages-intérêt
auxquels il pourrait avoir droit, aura la faculté, sans en
donner avis préalable à l'artiste, de demander une décision

X Madame Rovalles se réserve le droit de chanter chez les particuliers [illegible]

38. Maria Chabelska in plie as the ‘Little American Girl’ in the ballet *Parade*, 1917.

39. Lois Weber, Phillips Smalley, *Suspense*, 1913.

40. Elio Marchegiani, Reconstruction to scale of Giacomo Balla's designs for *Feu d'artifice* (1917) in 1997.

41. Fernand Léger, Dudley Murphy, *Ballet Mécanique*, 1924.

42. Ticket prices for the Ballets Russes at the Opéra, May-June 1914.

PRIX DES PLACES

Abonnements

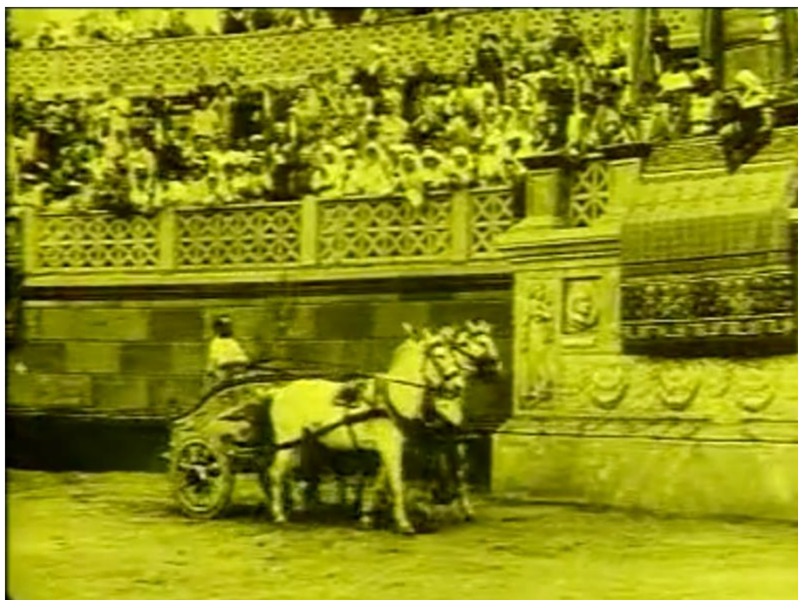
	La Place	1er Abonnem. 4 Spectacles	2e et 3e Abonnements 3 Spectacles
Fauteuils de Balcon	50. „	200. „	150. „
Fauteuils d'Orchestre	40. „	160. „	120. „
Stalles de Parterre	30. „	120. „	90. „
Baignoires / Premières Loges	40. „	160. „	120. „
Deuxièmes Loges de Face	30. „	120. „	90. „
Deuxièmes Loges de Côté	25. „	100. „	75. „
Troisièmes Loges de Face	20. „	„	„
Troisièmes Loges de Côté	18. „	„	„
Quatrièmes Loges de Face	15. „	„	„
Quatrièmes Loges de Côté	12. „	„	„
Fauteuils des Quatrièmes	12. „	„	„
Stalles des Quatrièmes de Face	10. „	„	„
Stalles des Quatrièmes de Côté	5. „	„	„
Cinquièmes Loges	10. „	„	„

La location sera ouverte à l'Opéra à partir du **Lundi 27 Avril.**

Les inscriptions pour l'abonnement sont reçues à l'Opéra et à l'**Office International des Théâtres et Concerts,** 30, rue Drouot. (Téléphone : Bergère 50-73).

43. Programme for the Electric Palace cinema, Paris, 15-21 May 1914.

44. Enrico Guazzoni, *Quo Vadis?,* 1913, Cines.



45. Enrico Guazzoni, *Quo Vadis?,* 1913, Cines.

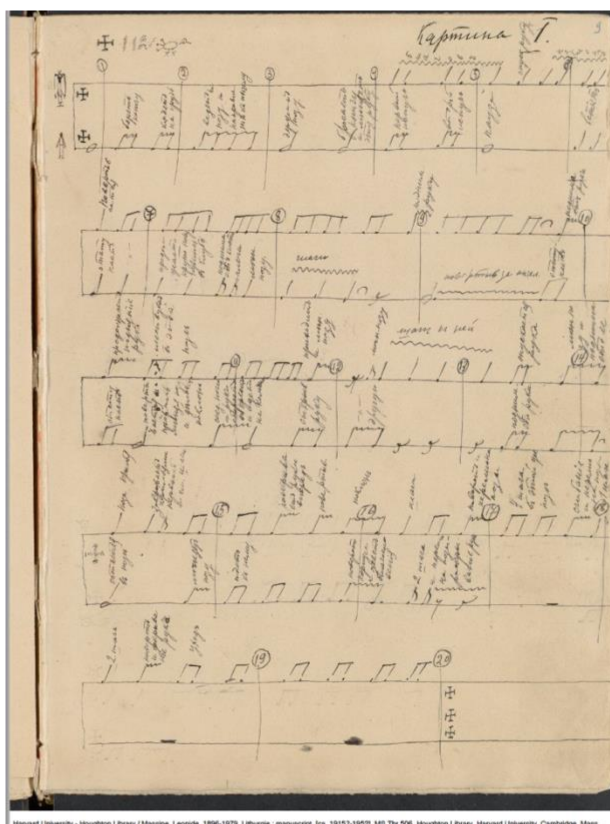
46. Léonid Massine, Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, Igor Stravinsky and Léon Bakst, 1915, Switzerland.

47. Goncharova, *Magus* design for *Liturgie*, 1915.

48. 'Annunication' scene with Massine and Lydia Sokolova from a rehearsal for *Liturgie*, Bellerive, Switzerland, 1915.

49. Interior, Pathé's Studio, 1914.

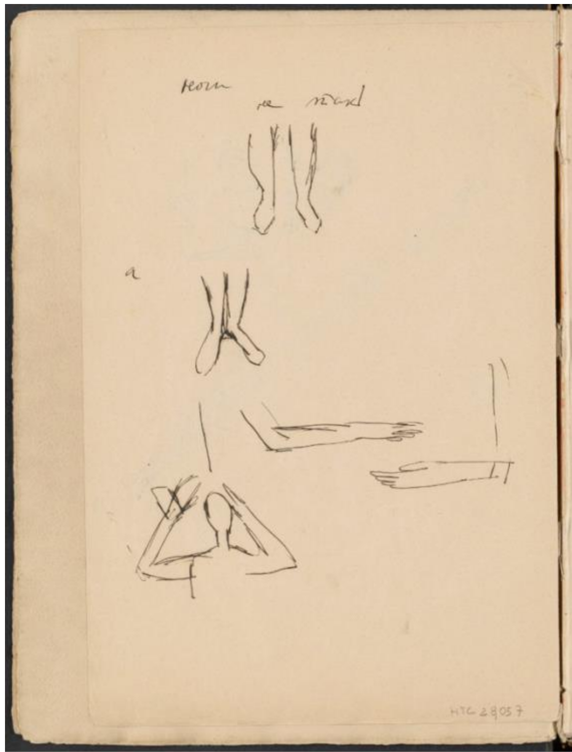
50. Massine, Notation for *Liturgie*, Choreographic notebooks, 1915.



51. Massine, Notation for *Liturgie*, Choreographic notebooks, 1915.

52. Goncharova, Design for *Liturgie*, Massine's choreographic notebooks, 1915.

53. Goncharova, Choreographic poses for *Liturgie*, Massine's choreographic notebooks, 1915.



54. Scene of the meeting of Mercury (Massine) and Apollo (Boris Lissanevitch) from the 1927 revival of *Mercure* (ballet) first presented by the Soirées de Paris 1924.

55. Goncharova, Magus and Cherub designs for *Liturgie*, 1915.

56. Goncharova, Saint Matthew costume design for *Liturgie*, 1915 / 1927.

57. Andrei Rublev, Saint John the Baptist, early 1400s.

58. Rublev, Saint Paul, c. 1410.

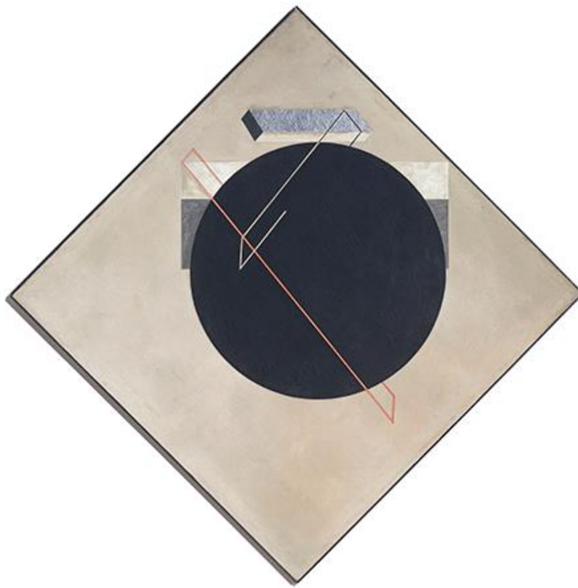
59. Goncharova, Saint Luke costume design for *Liturgie*, 1915 / 1927.

60. Goncharova, Saint Andrew costume design for *Liturgie*, 1915 / 1927.

61. Goncharova, Saint John costume design for *Liturgie*, 1915 / 1927.

62. The Director in *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, staged by the Ballets Suédois, 1921.

63. El Lissitzky, *Proun 8 Stellungen* (Proun 8 Positions), 1923.



64. Kurt Schwitters and El Lissitzky, Nasci, *Merz* No. 8/9: Nature (Nasci), April-July 1924.

Es ist schon GENUG immer MASCHINE
MASCHINE
MASCHINE,

wenn man bei der modernen Kunstproduktion anlangt.

Die Maschine ist nicht mehr als ein Pinsel, und sogar ein sehr primitiver, mit dem die Leinwand des Weltbildes gestaltet wird. Alle Werkzeuge bringen Kräfte in Bewegung, die darauf gerichtet sind, die amorphe Natur zu kristallisieren, – das ist das Ziel der Natur selbst.

Es wäre zum mindesten unproduktiver Zeitverlust, wenn man heute beweisen wollte, daß man nicht mit eigenem Blut und einer Gänsefeder zu schreiben braucht, wenn die Schreibmaschine existiert. Heute zu beweisen, daß die Aufgabe jedes Schaffens, so auch der Kunst, nicht Darstellen, sondern Dastellen ist, ist ebenfalls unproduktiver Zeitverlust.

Die Maschine hat uns nicht von der Natur getrennt. Durch sie haben wir eine neue, vorher nicht geahnte Natur entdeckt.

Die moderne Kunst ist auf ganz intuitiven und selbständigen Wegen zu denselben Resultaten gekommen wie die moderne Wissenschaft. Sie hat, wie die Wissenschaft, die Form bis auf ihre Grundelemente zerlegt, um sie nach den universellen Gesetzen der Natur wieder aufzubauen. Und dabei sind beide zu derselben Formel gekommen:

JEDE FORM IST DAS ERSTARRTE MOMENTBILD EINES PROZESSES.

ALSO IST DAS WERK HALTESTELLE DES WERDENS, UND NICHT ERSTARRTES ZIEL.

Wir erkennen Werke an, die in sich ein System enthalten, aber ein System das nicht vor, sondern in der Arbeit bewußt geworden ist.

Wir wollen die Ruhe gestalten, die Ruhe der Natur, in der ungeheure Spannungen die gleichmäßige Rotation der Weltkörper im Gleichgewicht halten.

Unser Werk ist keine Philosophie und kein System der Naturerkenntnis, es ist ein Glied der Natur und kann als solches selbst nur Gegenstand der Erkenntnis sein.

ASSEZ DE LA MACHINE
MACHINE
RIEN QUE MACHINE,

en parlant de la production artistique d'aujourd'hui.

La machine n'est rien de plus qu'un pinceau, même un des plus primitifs, avec lequel la toile de la face du monde est peinte.

Tous les outils mettent en mouvement des forces dont le but est de former la nature amorphe, c'est le but de la nature même.

Ce serait une perte de temps que de chercher à prouver aujourd'hui, qu'on n'a besoin ni de plume d'oie ni de goutte de sang pour écrire, quand on est en possession d'une machine à écrire. De même que ce serait une perte de temps que de chercher à prouver que le devoir de toute production, y compris dans l'art, n'est pas de représenter mais de mettre en évidence.

La machine ne nous a pas séparés de la nature. Par elle, nous avons découvert une nouvelle nature, jusqu'alors inconnue. L'art moderne est arrivé au même résultat que la science moderne par des voies indépendantes tracées par l'intuition. Comme la science, il a décomposé la forme en ses éléments fondamentaux, pour les recomposer d'après les lois universelles de la nature. Tous les deux sont arrivés à la même formule.

TOUTE FORME EST UN MOMENT CONCRÉTÉ D'UNE ÉVOLUTION.

CE QUI FAIT QUE L'ŒUVRE N'EST PAS LE BUT FIXÉ, MAIS UN POINT STATIONNAIRE DU DÉVELEPPEMENT.

Nous reconnaissons comme œuvres, tout ce qui en soi, contient un système — mais un système qui a pris conscience de lui-même non avant, mais dans l'exécution.

Nous voulons représenter le calme, le calme de la nature, dans lequel des tensions incroyables tiennent en équilibre la rotation régulière des mondes.

Notre œuvre n'est ni une philosophie, ni un système de connaissance de la nature; c'est un membre de la nature et, par cela ne peut être elle même qu'un objet de la révélation.

Hier ist ein Versuch den kollektiven Willen aufzuzeigen, der die internationale Kunstproduktion der Gegenwart schon zu leiten anfängt. Es ist noch ein Bürgerkrieg von Gegensätzen. Heute ist dieser Bürgerkrieg der Lebenskampf der Kunst.

Voici un essai de montrer la volonté collective qui commence déjà à diriger la production de l'art internationale. C'est encore une guerre civile des contraires. Mais aujourd'hui cette guerre civile est la lutte d'existence de l'art.

IM JAHRE 1924 WIRD DIE WURZEL – V‾ – AUS DEM UNENDLICHEN – ∞ – GESCHEHEN DAS ZWISCHEN SINNVOLL – + – UND SINNLOS – ▬ – PENDELT, GENANNT: NASCI.

1924

+ ∞ – : NASCI

EN 1924 LA RACINE – V‾ – DE TOUT CE QUI SE PASSE INCESSAMMENT – ∞ –, DE TOUT CE QUI OSCILLE ENTRE LE SENSÉ, – + – ET L'INSENSÉ – ▬ – SERA NOMMÉ: NASCI.

EL LISSITZKY
LOCARNO
OSPEDALE

65. Schwitters and Lissitzky, *Merz* No. 8/9: Nature (Nasci), April-July 1924.

R. H. FRANCÉ

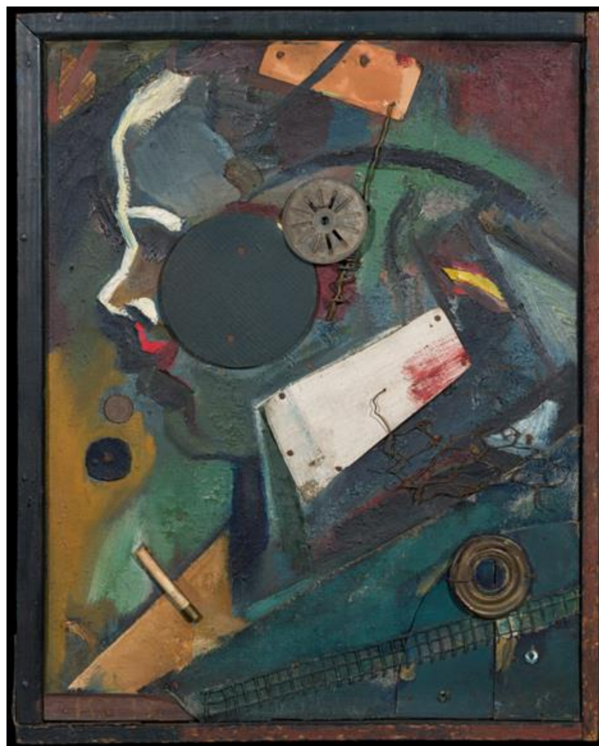
DAUPHINÉER QUARZ

\+ KRISTALL
cristal
KUGEL
sphère
FLÄCHE
étendue
STAB
barre
BAND
ruban
SCHRAUBE
spirale
KEGEL
cône

dAS SIND DIE GRUNDLEGENDEN TECHNISCHEN FORMEN DER GANZEN WELT. SIE GENÜGEN SÄMTLICHEN VORGÄNGEN DES GESAMTEN WELTPROZESSES, UM SIE ZU IHREM OPTIMUM ZU GELEITEN. ALLES, WAS IST, SIND WOHL KOMBINATIONEN DIESER SIEBEN URFORMEN.
SIE SIND DAS GANZE UM UND AUF
DER ARCHITEKTUR
DER MASCHINENELEMENTE
DER KRISTALLOGRAPHIE UND CHEMIE
DER GEOGRAPHIE UND ASTRONOMIE
DER KUNST
JEDER TECHNIK
JA DER GANZEN WELT.

Ce sont les formes techniques fondamentales de l'univers. Elles suffisent à toutes les opérations de la formation du monde pour les conduire à leur développement extrême. Tout ce qui est, est combinaison de ces sept formes primitives. C'est sur elles que reposent toute l'architecture, les éléments de la méchanique, la cristallographie, la chimie, la géographie, l'astronomie, l'art, toute technique et le monde entier.

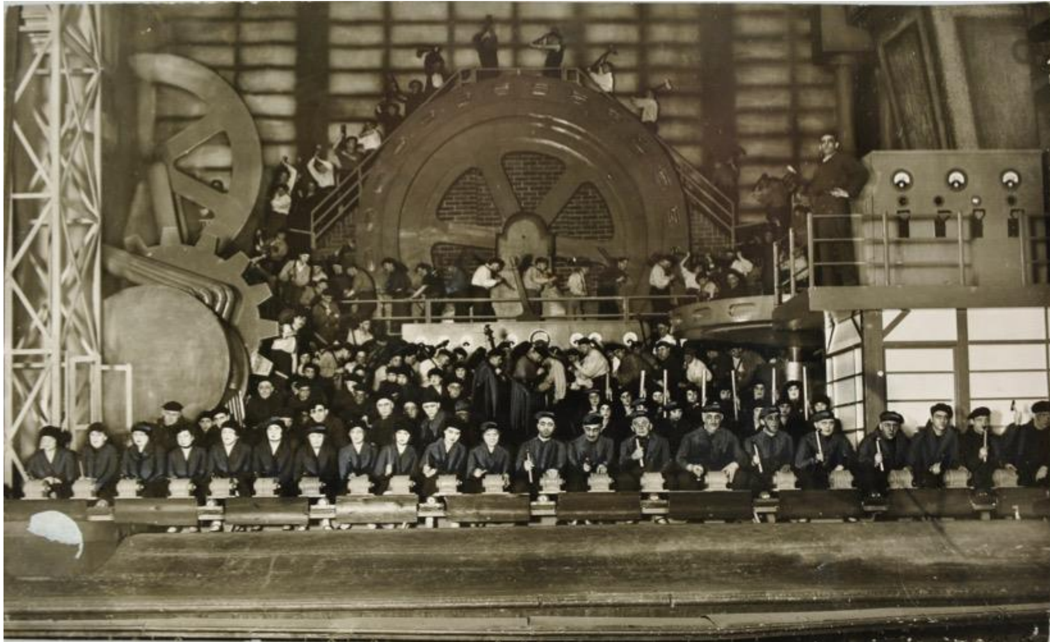
66. Schwitters, *Merzbild 1A/Der Irrenarzt* (*Merz* Picture 1A/The Alienist), 1919.



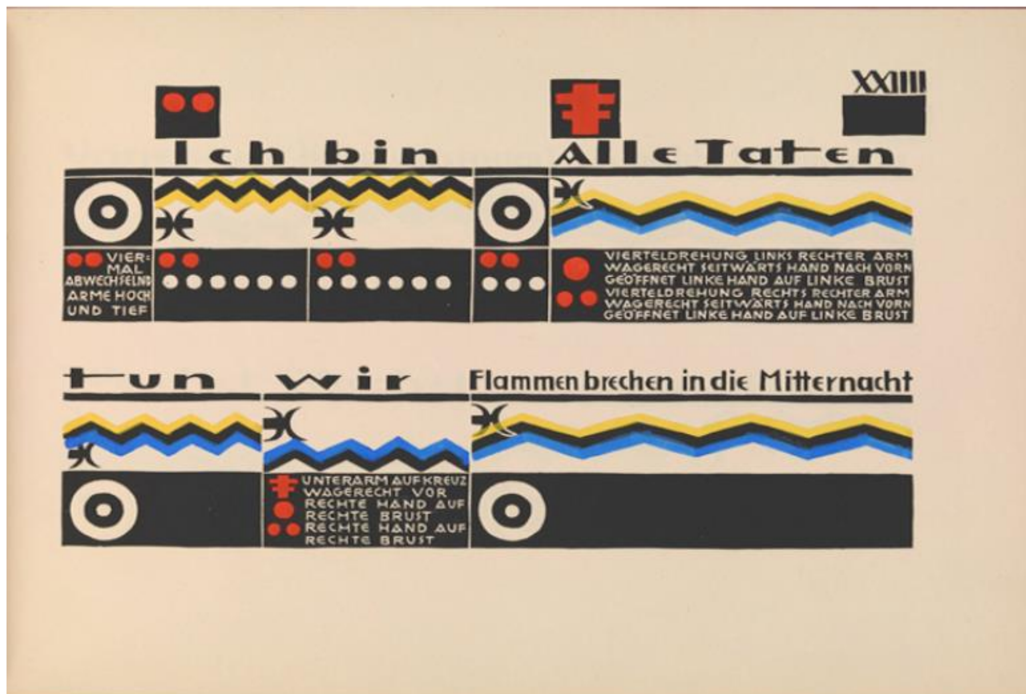
67. Schwitters, Poster promoting subscription tickets for the Städtische Bühnen Hannover (Hanover Civic theatre), 1930.

68. Schwitters, *OHNE TITEL (WAGNER UND WIEN)* (UNTITLED [WAGNER AND VIENNA]), 1923-1925.

69. Premiere of Max Brand's *Maschinist Hopkins*, Duisburg, 1929.

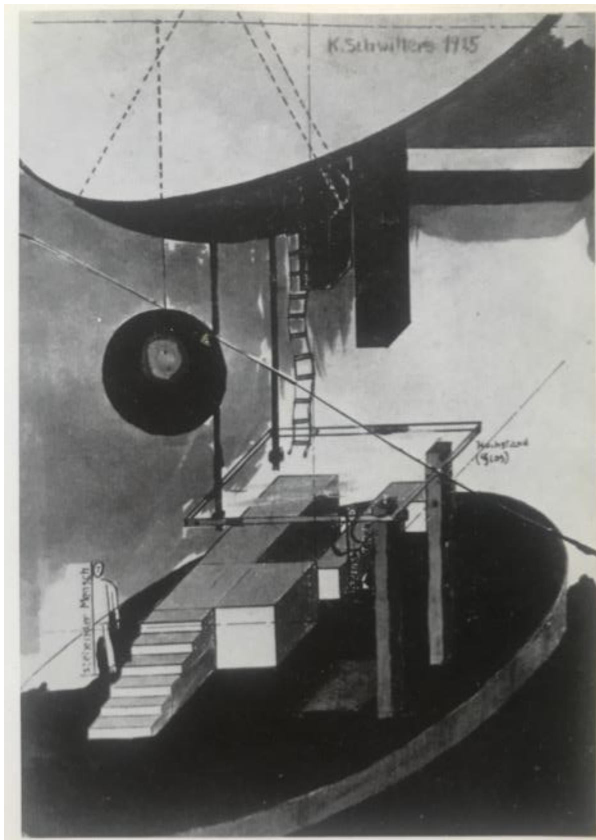


70. Lothar Schreyer, *Kreuzigung: Spielgang Werk VII* (Crucifixion: Notated Work VII), 1921),

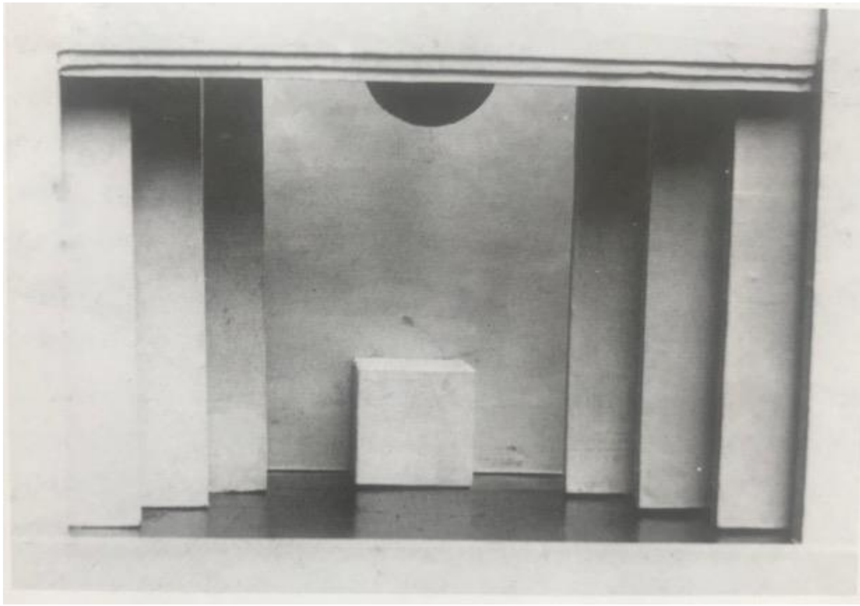


71. Viking Eggeling, Still from *Symphonie Diagonale*, 1924.

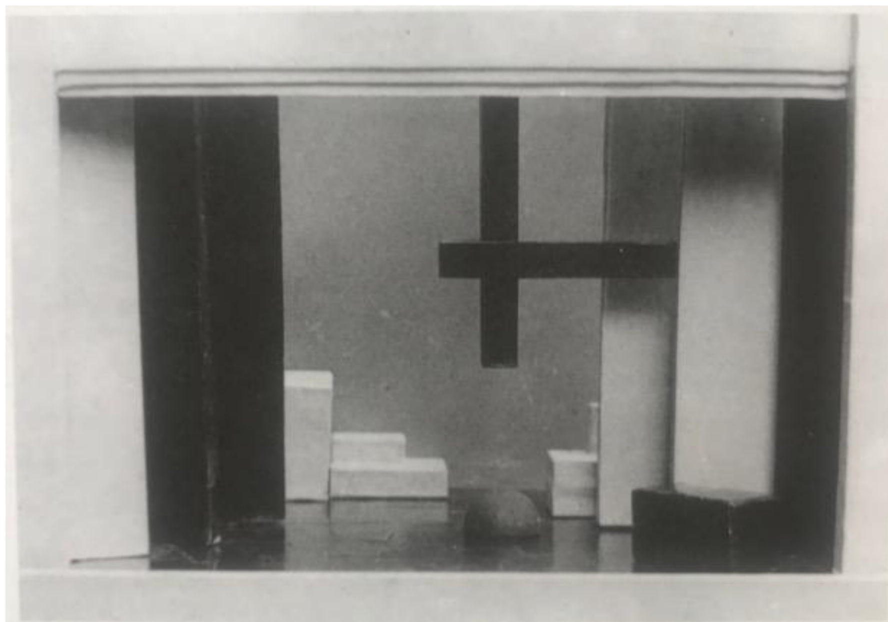
72. Schwitters, Design for the *Normalbühne Merz* (Standard Merz Stage), 1925.



73. Schwitters, Model for the *Normalbühne Merz* (Standard Merz Stage), 1924.

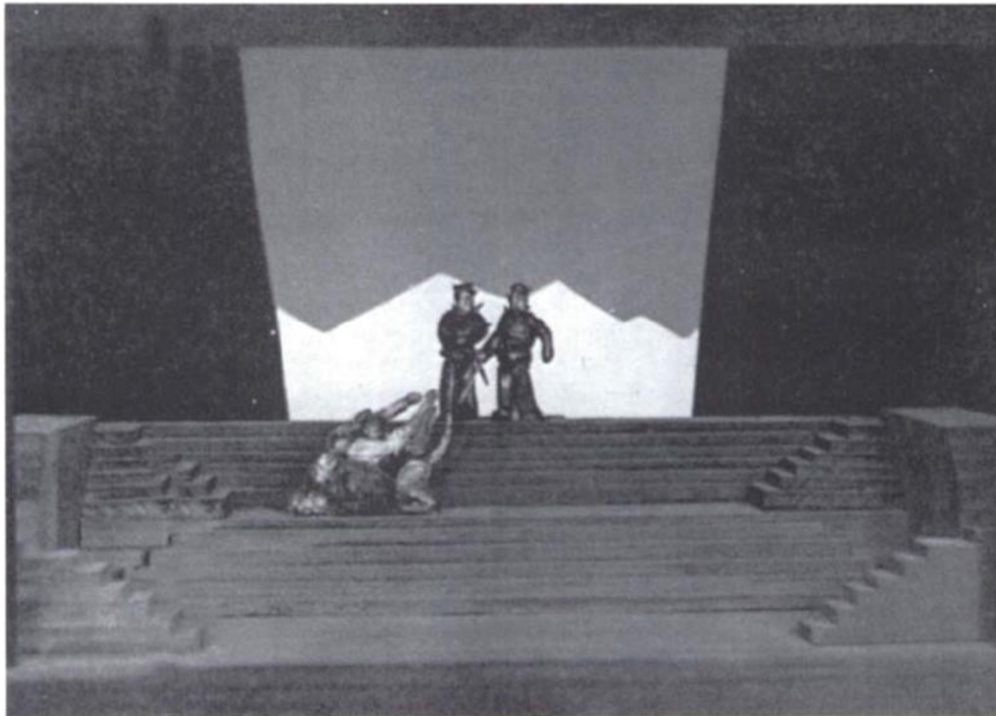


74. Schwitters, Model for the *Normalbühne Merz* (Standard Merz Stage), 1924.



75. Laszló Moholy-Nagy, Stage set for *Hoffmanns Erzählungen* (The Tales of Hoffmann), at the Kroll Oper Berlin, 1929.

76. Emil Pirchan and Leopold Jessner, Model of the setting for Act IV, Scene 3 of *Wilhelm Tell*, 1919.



77. Ewald Dülberg, Stage design for *Der fliegende Holländer* (*The Flying Dutchman*) at the Kroll Oper Berlin, 1929.