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Tout et n'importe quoi: The Total Artwork and the Aesthetics of Chance

Danielle Follett

► **To cite this version:**

Danielle Follett. Tout et n'importe quoi: The Total Artwork and the Aesthetics of Chance. Johns Hopkins University Press. The Aesthetics of the Total Artwork: On Borders and Fragments, , pp.86-109, 2011, 9780801895821. halshs-01421725


HAL Id: halshs-01421725

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Submitted on 11 Oct 2018

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The Aesthetics of the Total Artwork
On Borders and Fragments

Edited by
ANKE FINGER *and* DANIELLE FOLLETT

The Johns Hopkins University Press
Baltimore

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The Johns Hopkins University Press
2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218-4363
www.press.jhu.edu

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The aesthetics of the total artwork : on borders and fragments / edited by Anke Finger and Danielle Follett.

p. cm. — (Rethinking theory)

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8018-9582-1 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8018-9582-0 (hardcover : alk. paper)

I. Arts—Philosophy. I. Finger, Anke K. II. Follett, Danielle, 1971–

NX620.A355 2010

700.1—dc22 2010001248

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Special discounts are available for bulk purchases of this book. For more information, please contact Special Sales at 410-516-6936 or specialsales@press.jhu.edu.

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Tout et N'importe Quoi

The Total Artwork and the Aesthetics of Chance

DANIELLE FOLLETT

THIS CHAPTER tells the story of the introduction of a simple trick into creative work, a little moment of *folie utile* (“useful madness”), that allows or is intended to allow for the exponential opening up of an artwork toward infinity, that is meant to extend the capacity, compass, and grasp of a given creation and permit a work to transcend itself and its physical or perceptual boundaries.¹ It recounts the perhaps surprising relation of two aesthetics—that of the total artwork and that of chance—in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and argues that the adoption of chance methods in creative activity is inseparable from the continued late- and postromantic desire for infinity, if not totality.

That is, one can make out two general artistic paths taken to reach infinity and totality: the direct road and the indirect road. The direct path aspires to the real manifestation of a synthetic overcoming of alienation through art, whether the disunity be found in the separation of the arts, societal division, or metaphysical loss and disenchantment. The indirect path, while aiming for the same resolution, the healing of the fragmentation of modernity, begins with the more or less painful recognition that totality is impossible to attain within the scope of a finite artwork, that infinity by definition lies outside of art’s and perhaps life’s real grasp and is in fact incompatible with unity, and that disjunction and chance can never be abolished. However, a measured dose of discord and fragmentation, paradoxically, may perhaps catapult the work closer to its goal of attaining infinity. This chapter proposes to follow the development of this logic.

The total artwork should be considered an aesthetic project whose aim is transformative, and even redemptive, on the individual, collective, and

metaphysical levels. It is perhaps the most developed version of the romantic aspiration to overcome through art the division and alienation of the human and natural condition. To generalize, the fundamental dynamic within romantic philosophy, from Schiller to Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, is a myth of lost innocence and search for redemption through a new synthesis. The profound feeling of loss that motivates this movement contrasts sharply with earlier philosophies of preestablished harmony; for the romantics, harmony, if it can exist, must be created. For certain thinkers, such as Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and Schelling, who were friends in Jena during the years around the turn of the century, the means to this unity is art. The idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the artistic project par excellence whose goal is to repair the divisions between humanity and nature and within the self and society, far from constituting an aesthetic of simple and direct unity, totality, or synthesis, is born of a deep original experience of alienation and disintegration. Its motivating discord is inseparable from its unifying grasp.

This felt disunity exists on several levels that mirror one another: contradiction between free subjectivity and determined objectivity, tension within the self between intellect and feeling, societal alienation due to the division of labor, specialization, exploitation, and competition, profound separation between humanity and nature because of what is seen as rationality's deadening domination. Again generalizing, the idealist approach to healing these multiple forms of alienation lies in a free consciousness or subjectivity that transcends divisive rationality and is capable of encompassing its opposite, objectivity or nature, in such a way that both will be redeemed through the unification. It may be argued that in regard to this drama, which posits a present fissure and future (possible) seam, two general attitudes prevail: one that posits the possibility of the creation of real unity through art and strives toward this full resolution even when the pain of the division be acutely felt, and one that accepts and to a certain degree embraces the unmistakable discord of actuality, recognizing that totality and unity will never be fully achieved, though without renouncing the quest for redemption. The embrace of the broken becomes a sort of aesthetic version of the Christian myth of the fortunate fall. The conscious invitation of a degree of fragmentation and disharmony that ensues from accepting the impossibility of closed and total synthesis may thus serve as a powerful tool, driving toward the manifestation or at least the

suggestion of an open totality and all-embracing infinity. Often, these two tendencies, the search for a closed totality and the search for an open totality, intermingle in varying proportions. And generalizing further, we can trace through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a distinct shift from the former to the latter.

The first approach, that of seeking ultimate total synthesis, can be read clearly in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, in which art is portrayed as the conscious activity into which nonconscious nature is resolved. The idealist equilibrium of this activity remains very abstract:

[What] has been postulated so far is simply an identity of the non-conscious activity that has brought forth nature, and the conscious activity expressed in willing, without it being decided where the principle of this activity belongs, whether in nature or in ourselves. But now the system of knowledge can only be regarded as complete if it reverts back into its own principle. Thus the transcendental philosophy would be completed only if it could demonstrate this *identity*—the highest solution of its whole problem—in *its own principle* (namely the self). It is therefore postulated that this simultaneously conscious and non-conscious activity will be exhibited in the subjective, *in consciousness itself*. There is but one such activity, namely the *aesthetic*, and every work of art can be conceived only as a product of such activity. . . . The objective world is simply the original, as yet unconscious, poetry of the spirit; the universal organon of philosophy—and the keystone of its entire arch—is *the philosophy of art*.²

In asserting that “this simultaneously conscious and non-conscious activity will be exhibited in the subjective, *in consciousness itself*,” Schelling posits a process that would lead to the ultimate synthetic resolution of the original divide. He goes on to argue that “art . . . opens . . . the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart.”³ Art's redemptive power unifies conscious and unconscious activity, humanity and nature, subject and object by bringing all ultimately within the compass of subjective consciousness. It is important to note that, for Schelling, without this unifying ideal creation, without art's “single flame,” nature, history, life, action and even thought are “rent asunder” and scattered.

A less abstract formulation is found in Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, which gives perhaps the first romantic statement of the aesthetic path toward overcoming the fragmentation and alienation of the self and of society. He makes an argument against the specialization of human faculties; left to itself, reason leads to the domination of nature and thus only further alienates humanity. On the other hand, nature on its own is characterized by disorder, which must be overcome by a higher human function, one higher than reason, the aesthetic: "It must be false that the cultivation of individual powers necessitates the sacrifice of their totality, or however much the law of Nature did have that tendency, we must be at liberty to restore by means of a higher Art this wholeness in our nature which art has destroyed."⁴ Only creativity can resolve the divisions within the individual and, by extension, within society, because it is alone capable of uniting both the sensuous (objective) and intellectual (subjective) sides of the self: "Though need may drive Man into society, and Reason implant social principles in him, Beauty alone can confer on him a *social character*. Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it establishes harmony in the individual. All other forms of perception divide a man, because they are exclusively based either on the sensuous or on the intellectual part of his Being."⁵ Despite his emphasis on the need for the unity of the *Stofftrieb* (sometimes rendered as "sense impulse" or "sensuous drive" but better translated as "material drive") with the *Formtrieb* ("form impulse" or "formal drive"), and his insistence on the "reconciliation of becoming with absolute being, of variation with identity," Schiller maintained that disharmony and conflict may constitute an essential "instrument" in attaining final unity: "The antagonism of powers is the great instrument of culture, but it is only the instrument; for as long as it persists we are only on our way towards culture."⁶ The role of discord here is rather limited, but it does have a part to play.

The equilibrium of such abstract formulations of reconciliation as may be maintained in theory becomes somewhat less tenable when one directly involves the aesthetic materials in question, which are necessarily related to the sensuous, material, "becoming," nonconscious, and objective side of the equation. In the romantic dualism that posits harmony in subjectivity and consciousness, objective nature is necessarily understood as chaotic and disharmonious, since on some level it needs redemption. This is true even if it has its own logic, for that logic is likewise understood as

mechanistic and materialist, and therefore nature is as random in its empty automatism as it is in its chaos and discord. However, an acceptance and even limited embrace of its chaos, which is a step in the direction of achieving open totality, is already present in the aesthetic and poetic philosophy of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis. Accompanied by the feeling that ideal unity or totality may not be ever fully attainable and that every attempt to achieve it must remain unfinished, this acceptance is expressed in the omnipresent fragment. Fragmentation, variation, and individuality are felt to be inseparable from the whole that is sought, expressive simultaneously of the disunity to be overcome and the path to take to overcome it, even if the goal be unrealizable. A fragment, understood as a fragment of a broken whole and not as a simple object, symbolizes the absent totality. When the disorder of natural reality is faced and not immediately synthesized into its opposite, then it displays its infinite diversity in constant becoming and is as chaotic as “absolute being” is calm. Chaos is for Schlegel and Novalis inseparable from the romantic aspiration toward totality, since it embodies infinity. This includes not only everyday variation but also aberrant monstrosity, as Schlegel wrote in one of his *Athenaeum* fragments of 1798: “From the romantic point of view, even the vagaries of poetry have their value as raw materials and preliminaries for universality, even when they’re eccentric and monstrous, provided they have some saving grace, provided they are original.”⁷ Like the conflict that is an “instrument” for Schiller, here vagaries and monstrosities have a useful “value as raw materials and preliminaries for universality.” An expression of open totality via infinity as opposed to a closed equilibrium of opposites need not, perhaps, *synthesize* its diverse elements but rather only somehow simply bring them together, offer them in list form, as permutations and variations. Such is the goal of the romantic fragment, reflected, for example, in Novalis’s *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopedia*. This tendency can be said to represent the shifting of weight from the “formal drive,” in Schiller’s terms, to the “material drive,” from conscious forming to the expression of natural or unconscious contents.⁸

Now, the works and writings of Richard Wagner have often been considered to represent an aesthetic of centered or centralized totality, closed on itself, absolute in its aspiration to unity, and even perhaps violent in its megalomaniacal and dictatorial attempt to force the unification of its elements; thus in this reading he would seem to participate unmistakably

in the first, direct avenue toward totality. Theodor Adorno, for example, argued that far from expressing a free synthesis of diverse arts and elements, Wagner's music allows no place for the particularity of its individual components, as it is overdetermined by the egotistical subjectivity of the author, and any diversity is forcibly harmonized into an all-encompassing, unifying wash. In this interpretation, the total artwork ultimately fails because it negates particularity:

The Wagnerian totality, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, is doomed to failure. . . . The whole no longer achieves unity, because its expressive elements are made to harmonize 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.⁹

Adorno indicts Wagner for offering the promise without the real possibility of revolution. His influential criticism is related to his general condemnation of fulfilled totality and unity, which he associates with rationality, the supposedly deadening and protofascist force of the Enlightenment: "[Wagner's techniques] prepare the ground for the technical, rational work of art."¹⁰ The accusation here is essentially that Wagner's unity is dictated by divisive rationality that dominates the object, disingenuously claiming but unable to achieve a higher subjective synthesis. Note that this reading of rationality is purely romantic and thus quite similar to Wagner's own. Adorno—and his followers—retrospectively projects the concerns of the 1930s and 1940s on the Third Reich hero and takes Wagner quite out of his historical context, which was much more complex than the Hitlerian caricature of romantic ideology. Rather than standing as an instance of an aesthetics that enforces unity and synthesis at any cost, Wagner's aesthetics—with Baudelaire's—constitutes the first major example of an insecure combination of closed and open form, reflecting thereby a properly modern indecisiveness between the two roads to totality, if you will: the yearning for manifest resolution of disunity and the simultaneous sincere acceptance and direct expression of the inevitable dissonance and disjunction of the world.

This ambivalence, which in part explains the continuing fascination of Wagner's music, can be seen in the fact that the sheer quantity of music

and other elements brought together in his works as well as their overwhelming temporal duration are not an expression of “totality” or synthesis as such but rather one of longing. His embrace of harmonic dissonance, the natural discord within the materials of his art, reveals his true “revolutionary” importance, which lies beyond his theorization of the total artwork. In contrast to contemporaries such as Chopin, Berlioz, and Liszt, whose musical experimentations introduced lovely but comparatively tame harmonic and structural innovations, Wagner clearly favors the “material drive” (*Stofftrieb*) over the “formal drive.” His structuring of his operas by way of the extramusical drama translated through leitmotifs is comparatively a rather weak formal musical device, as Adorno does not hesitate to remind us, but their structure is also determined by the apparent need for continuous internal harmonic driving. This seemingly perpetual structural extension is essential to the goal of allowing the chaotic musical matter to take priority. Most important to Wagner is the chromatic writhing toward an ever-postponed cadence, refusing resolution when it could be achieved, leaning into the discord through a series of unresolving appoggiaturas, augmenting the tension that is produced by the difference between halftones, or two adjacent but not identical tones, when heard simultaneously. The particularity of the individual tones and harmonies is not in fact subsumed into a simple, ambiguous flood—as inattentive listeners may think or as Adorno believed because the operas lack a “properly musical” structural principle—in that the dissonance between them is emphasized at every turn, resolving only into new dissonance. The final cadences, coming at times after hours of music, do indeed occasionally feel somewhat arbitrary; his is very much an art of longing and nonresolution, a yearning for infinity, rather than the realization of synthesis.

Wagner’s compositional technique, of course, leaves nothing to chance; all is planned in advance by a rather exacting master. But we should see this predetermination in the context of his era, when this sort of authorial “domination” was simply standard practice. The fact that he uses a highly determined compositional strategy to express the immolation of consciousness in the unconscious, has led critics like Adorno to accuse him of disingenuity and hypocrisy and of creating a bourgeois phantasmagoria that dissimulates its nature as a product of consciousness and work. Adorno seems to scold Wagner for not having accomplished the Schoen-

bergian atonal emancipation of the dissonance—a revolution only made possible because of Wagnerian chromaticism.¹¹ The indictment of course is not fair, since it disregards the historical context of late romanticism in which Wagner was working.

Thus, far from dictatorially and overhastily synthesizing difference into a subjectively forced identity, as Adorno and his followers believe, Wagner in fact puts much more emphasis than any of his predecessors on what the romantics considered as the direct expression of objective nature in all its chaos and dissonant particularity. Rather than imposing a closed totality, he stretched and expanded the traditional Western closed-form work to its utmost point, almost breaking it open, in his desire to encompass infinity. His music represents the opposite of a subjective mastery over nature; rather it is a romantic drowning of the conscious subject in what is felt to be the overwhelming, seething, tumultuous sea of discordant nature and a prioritizing of the sensuous, the object, the nonconscious (Schelling), the *Stofftrieb* (Schiller), or above all, the *Wille*, as expressed by a thinker who influenced him greatly, Schopenhauer.

Wagner himself desired his music to be the direct expression of spontaneous and instinctive nature, the Schopenhauerian *Wille*, or thing-in-itself. For Schopenhauer, music “is as immediate an objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself is.”¹² Wagner’s conception of nature, like Schopenhauer’s, is based in an extension of romantic metaphysics. On this view, the objective and natural world is ruled by necessity and stands opposed to subjective freedom; for Schopenhauer this powerful unconscious force strives blindly in constant, chaotic, involuntary becoming. The reflecting and choosing mind, alienated from nature, is capable only of caprice and arbitrary division, not even dominance; however, in the experience of aesthetic contemplation, the subject may lose itself and cease to feel its separation with the world. In a variation of the romantic drama of redemption of alienation through art, the estrangement between subject and object is overcome in the aesthetic experience, where the mind is engulfed in the movement of natural force. For Wagner, then, the very loss of self within the ocean of music that he intended to provide for his audience constituted a means toward metaphysical reconciliation.

But this redemption is not, at least for the young Wagner, an individual experience; rather it is possible only in the context of a communal creation porously open unto life itself. Acquaintance with the Schopen-

hauerian terminology about nature that Wagner appeals to helps us understand his rather cryptic description of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*:

In common, too, shall we close the last link in the bond of holy Necessity; and the brother-kiss that seals this bond, will be the *mutual Art-work of the Future*. But in this, also, our great redeemer and well-doer, Necessity's vicegerent in the flesh,—*the Folk*, will no longer be a severed and peculiar class; for in this Art-work we shall all be *one*,—heralds and supporters of Necessity, knowers of the unconscious, willers of the unwilful, betokeners of Nature,—*blissful men*.¹³

In the artwork of the future, participants will be “knowers of the unconscious, willers of the unwilful,” who unite conscious subject with unconscious nature and willful creative action (as “willers”) with the spontaneous, involuntary force of nature (the “unwilful,” an awkward translation of the original *unwillkürlich*, or “involuntary, necessary,” which refers to Schopenhauerian nature that contrasts with arbitrary choice). In this early essay of 1849, “The Artwork of the Future,” as well as in “Art and Revolution” from the same year, written just after participating in the Dresden uprisings, Wagner lays out his revolutionary aesthetic project, which has come to be known as the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and can be understood as a late-romantic concretization of the abstract formulations of aesthetic redemption theorized by his predecessors. He clearly sketches art's importance in the future overcoming of present disunity and adds to this a revolutionary socialist desire to surmount the alienation of the division of labor through the free and communal activity of art.

The agent of this aesthetic redemption is “the Folk,” and much ink has been spilled discussing Wagner's Germanic nationalism. Later in life, Wagner certainly became a rabid nationalist, but in these early essays he is distinctly internationalist, and “the Folk” refers to class and not race: “The idea of ‘the People’ has so far broadened out, or even evaporated, that we may either include in it mankind in general, or, upon the arbitrary political hypothesis, a certain, and generally the propertyless portion of the Commonwealth.”¹⁴ He romanticizes the working class as the spontaneous, direct agent of instinctive nature in its will to liberation, for it is the working class who feels collective “want” and “need,” and thus “it is *the Folk alone that acts according to Necessity's behests*, and therefore irresistibly, victoriously, and right as none besides. Who now are they who

belong *not* to this People, and who are its sworn foes? All those *who feel no Want*; whose life-spring . . . is artificial, untrue, and egoistic.”¹⁵ In his unique socialist rereading of Schopenhauer, he looks back to “the great unitarian Art-work of Greece,” following classical tradition, and to the Greek embodiment of free humanity, although not without criticism, because that freedom was not universal:

The Slave, by sheer reason of the assumed necessity of his slavery, has exposed the null and fleeting nature of all the strength and beauty of exclusive Grecian manhood, and has shown to all time that *Beauty and Strength, as attributes of public life, can then alone prove lasting blessings, when they are the common gifts of all mankind*. . . . When *all men cannot be free alike and happy*—all men must *suffer alike as slaves*. . . . If the Grecian Art-work embraced the spirit of a fair and noble nation, the Art-work of the Future must embrace the spirit of a free mankind, delivered from every shackle of hampering nationality; its racial imprint must be no more than an embellishment, the individual charm of manifold diversity, and not a cramping barrier. We have thus quite other work to do, than to tinker at the resuscitation of old Greece.¹⁶

The “people,” the agents of revolutionary change who usher in a society freed from both economic slavery and political nationality, are said to act both spontaneously and necessarily, as the direct expression of nature’s “will.” Nature’s movement is antithetical to that of “culture,” which is divided arbitrarily and serves only commerce and the caprice of those who have no “common need”:

In the man-destroying march of Culture, however, there looms before us this happy result: the heavy load with which she presses Nature down, will one day grow so ponderous that it lends at last to down-trod, never-dying Nature the necessary impetus to hurl the whole cramping burden from her, with one sole thrust; and this heaping up of Culture will thus have *taught* to Nature her own gigantic force. The releasing of this force is—*Revolution*. . . . It is for Art therefore, and Art above all else, to teach this social impulse its noblest meaning, and guide it toward its true direction. Only on the shoulders of this great social movement can true Art lift itself from its present state of civilised barbarianism, and take its post of honour. Each has a

common goal, and the twain can only reach it when they recognise it jointly.¹⁷

For the purposes of the present chapter, these passages serve less to bring out several largely misunderstood political elements of Wagner's thought—although that is certainly useful—than to elaborate on Wagner's notion of nature. Nature's movement is *unwillkürlich*: nonarbitrary, spontaneous, instinctive, involuntary, automatic, and necessary, as opposed to *willkürlich*, or arbitrary, haphazard, random, and “willful” in the sense of capricious choice. Nature is understood as both “necessary” and liberating, in the progressive, unstoppable, and unconscious movement of humanity away from the alienation and oppression of rationality, the division of labor and the slavery of the working class. In his preface to his collected works published in 1872, Wagner apologized for the communism, among other embarrassments, of his early writings. He referred to his confusing use of Schopenhauerian terms as an “impassioned tangle of ideas.”¹⁸ Notwithstanding the truth of this admission, his use does reveal an interesting development in the drama we are sketching, for Wagner clearly participates in the Schillerian and romantic project of human redemption through art, and yet in his version it is the objective, not the subjective, element that takes the active role. Resolution lies in the synthesis of subject and object, but here it is not the discordant unconscious world that needs to be surmounted, but rather alienated consciousness, which can only be accomplished by the loss of itself within the dynamic “necessity” of nature. It should be remembered that the earlier romantics distinguished two subjective elements, the lower and the higher: rational choice (“understanding” [*Verstand*]) and consciousness itself (“reason” [*Vernunft*]). In early Wagner and Schopenhauer, consciousness is reduced to rationality and arbitrary caprice; the redemptive and liberating force is not found in consciousness but in unconscious, infinitely diverse, and dissonant nature. Wagner, then, is one of the first artists to seek the direct artistic expression of nature and the unconscious, as a means not only of encompassing infinity but also of redeeming humanity.

We will return to this, after examining Stéphane Mallarmé's response to Wagner and his own late theorizing and sketching of a total artwork, for Mallarmé (with Baudelaire and others, it may be argued) contributed a key element to this history: the role of chance. His work known as *The Book*, a project that he left unfinished at his death, sustains a more or less

explicit, more or less tense relationship with Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and constitutes his response to what he called the "challenge . . . inflicted on poets, whose duty is usurped, with the most candid and splendid bravura, by Richard Wagner!"¹⁹ Wagner's project provided a fertile tension for Mallarmé: "The feelings—transports, veneration—grow complicated toward this foreigner, also uneasiness that everything has been done."²⁰ For him, though, the "totality" sought by Wagner is undermined by his choice of legend, the limited and rather quaint particularity of the Wagnerian drama of gods and heroes, which certainly do not evoke in him the deep mythical and universal resonance that they were intended to inspire in a German audience; he calls them "woodsmen," and the legend itself "anecdote." Although Mallarmé admires Wagner's music, the Wagnerian artwork remains for him only a pleasant rest stop "halfway up the sacred mountain."²¹ The goal, however, that of an aesthetic performance with communal and metaphysical significance, bringing together the totality of human experience in a redemptive act, converges with Mallarmé's own. Mallarmé proposes rather a sort of poetic, civic, and religious theater: "The City, which gave, for this experience of the sacred, a theater, imprints on the earth its universal seal."²² This experience "require[s] the ministry of the poet," and the theater in which it is enacted should not be the Parisian or the Wagnerian kind, with specific stories and actors, whose vulgarity expresses the opposite of totality.²³

The theater institutes prominent characters who act and are seen so as to block metaphysics, just as the actor makes one not see the presence of the *lustre* [stage lamp]. They will not turn toward anything outside themselves except through the elemental and obscure cry of passion. Without this rule, one would succeed too easily, through scholastic or analytical illuminations, in naming the absolute: the invocation addressed to it by the woodsmen seems to me to proceed too directly.²⁴

The simple and direct particularity of the legend and its characters vulgarly attempts to name the absolute. Wagner, with his sumptuous harmonies and decorations, is "blinded by such cohesion or a whole artform."²⁵ What poetic theater should do, in contrast, is invite all of the arts and human experience into the "inner stage" of a book, to be read aloud in a sort of ceremony that does not attempt to secure absolute cohesion or a "whole artform." Mallarmé elaborates his conception of this event

in direct counterposition to Wagner's musical dramas: "Does this mean that the traditional writer of verse, he who works with the humble and sacred artifices of language alone, will try, crowned somehow by those very constraints, to compete? Yes, like an opera without orchestra or song, just spoken; at present now the book will try to suffice to open up the inner stage and whisper echoes into it."²⁶

The Book was to constitute a series of readings organized via a complex ceremony. A certain musicality and plasticity is seen by Mallarmé to be inherent in poetry's sonority and imaginative value, and this interiorized synesthesia is consistently evoked as superior to the outward, vulgar sort. The only way to totality and true infinity is not via the turbulent and ever-shifting harmonic colors and characters that pretend to universality but rather through emptiness, virginity, openness, allowing for the possibility of the realization of multiplicity, of absolutely anything—and therefore everything.

The Fable—virgin of anything: place, time, or known characters. . . .
What! The century or our country, which exalts myths, dissolved them through thought, in order to make them anew! Theater calls for them—no! not fixed ones, neither ancient nor famous, but one, stripped of all personality, for it is based on our multiplicity [*il compose notre aspect multiple*]. . . . A type without prior designation [*dénomination*], so that it can provoke pure surprise.²⁷

The overdetermination of Wagner's production and of his drama of nationally grounded gods and heroes, even in a myth of archetypal pretensions, is a too rude *prima materia*. Mallarmé's critique of determinacy is made on the grounds that such determinacy does not sufficiently allow for ideality, totality, infinity. Hence he introduces indeterminacy.

Mallarmé answers Wagner's "singular challenge" through the creation of a new theater, *The Book*. Mimicking the structure of Wagner's tetralogy, *The Book* was to be composed of many loose pages, collected into four sections, each of which were to have had five volumes or acts whose pages' order would have been interchangeable, to be read aloud by an "operator," whose identity is not presented as that of an author but an anonymous reader, during a ceremonial in multiple sessions. The work contained a latent redemptive function in its masslike event; Mallarmé often spoke of the religious function of poetry and is reported to have said that the

world would be saved by a better literature.²⁸ The content is archetypal and universal without being based in legend and personality—references are made to the drama of “soi, foi, loi, moi, roi, toi” or “self, faith, law, myself, king, you,” invoking an emptiness of particularity, so to speak, that then is intended to become all-encompassing. A work with pretensions of anonymity and a certain ghost of synesthesia, a civic performance with religious overtones, it clearly relates to the tradition of the total artwork. However, it opens onto totality or infinity in a markedly different way from Wagner’s works.

The interchangeability of the pages incorporates a certain limited dose of indeterminacy or chance into the work, thus “foreseeing” the unforeseen, allowing for surprise, and triggering infinity. Mallarmé’s tangled embrace of chance late in his life, which finds its clearest expression in *A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*, suggests that although he recognizes that chance cannot be abolished, he does not intend to open the door wide to it either; far from it. Only a small amount of indeterminacy is necessary to invite an infinity of possibilities. In the administering of a homeopathic dose of chance, as is recounted in the tale of “Igitur,” perhaps infinity and totality may be attained. Mallarmé began “Igitur,” also an unfinished work, in 1869 in order to help him overcome a major personal and poetic crisis. It is the story of man (Igitur) who casts dice, within a mythological and fantastic decor, in an effort to vanquish chance itself and somehow arrive at the absolute: a “useful madness” (“folie utile”).²⁹ This folly, or insanity, refers to the use of chance to attain chance’s opposite, as in the homeopathic formula, *similia similibus*, which Mallarmé mentions in a letter at that time describing the tale.³⁰ There are indications—but it remains unproven—that Mallarmé was reading Hegel during this time, in which case he would have internalized some of the German tradition of the unification of opposites that we are tracing. It is possible to read the story of Igitur as a thesis (the character of Igitur, or that which follows necessarily) embracing an antithesis (chance, or that which has no antecedent) in order to overcome it in a new synthesis (poetic freedom). But even if he had read Hegel, his idea of the deploying chance as a springboard to infinity and the absolute is much more irrational and uncertain than the early German romantics’ synthesis of opposites. The admission of chance into the artwork, although utilitarian in a sense, is considered truly mad. Mallarmé put this into artistic practice only in his plans for *The*

Book. The logic is that the interchangeability of the pages allows for a mobile structure, which “absorbs” chance rather than abolishing it (“the dice—chance absorbed”).³¹ By inviting a limited amount of inadvertence into the work, the artist opens the scope of the work and its possible significations exponentially. Jacques Scherer, who in 1957 first published Mallarmé’s fragments of a total artwork, writes: “[This is] a theater emptied of concrete reality and is nothing but allusion to the totality of the world.”³² Thus *The Book* importantly contributes both to the history of the total artwork and to the history of the arts in being perhaps the first alternative theater project that intentionally incorporates chance procedures.

As elements of chance are invited and increasingly shoveled into art in the twentieth century, especially through avant-garde theater experiments, they remain very often inextricably related to the aspirations we have been describing toward totality and toward a form of societal change, if not human redemption. We should at this point define chance procedures and what we are calling the aesthetics of chance, for the concept may cause some confusion. Chance in art is the intentional use of unintentionally or randomly produced aesthetic elements. As in every human activity, artistic work always and inevitably contains elements or moments that are uncontrolled—as Mallarmé put it, chance will never be abolished. However, these fortuitous or unfortunate unsolicited happenings are not what is designated here by the idea of aesthetic chance. Rather, aesthetic chance refers to the conscious invitation of the unforeseen, the planned incorporation of unplanned elements, or the advertent use of inadvertence. The methods used toward this end are many and various, and involve differing degrees of randomness, from slacking on the reins a bit—such as giving a wider than usual interpretive/creative latitude to musicians, a strategy used by Pierre Boulez and others—to creating musical scores by tossing coins, as practiced by John Cage and his followers.

The first general movements that incorporated chance into art were of course Dada and surrealism, whose experiments in alternative performances and events show some similarities with total art. They attempt to abolish the distinction not only between the arts but between art and life and often carry an underlying metaphysical signification, despite the tendency toward destruction. It could be argued that the violence of the destruction is proportional to the desire to express or experience a totality that goes beyond traditional unity or synthesis. These movements privi-

lege the truth of nature and the unconscious, linking mythology to madness and randomness, often through artistic practices involving chance, such as automatic writing. This constitutes an effort to access a deeper truth and even unity of nature beyond the dissonance and to transform life as well as, or rather than, art. Jean Weisgerber explains:

Mining, in its own way, the age-old vein of original unity, a large part of the avant-garde sees these *polarities* and *contradictions* in a *unitary and totalizing perspective*, which is rather surprising at first glance. Totality is the matrix where dualities appear and disappear in the interior of a unity that is always remaking itself, the nodal point of divergences and convergences, source of every virtuality. . . . Dada was the first to discover the idea of a return, after the destruction of existing forms, to the amorphous state before creation . . . where “all is unified,” where all is still possible, and where we can envision a new synthesis. . . . The restorative “totality” that follows the final debacle preoccupies, among others, Tzara, and above all surrealism.³³

The surrealists joined the idea of the synthesis of opposites, now regarded as a very irrational idea, even though it was inherited from their Hegelian Marxism, with a Dadaist sense of the violent discord of the opposites to be unified. Weisgerber continues: “Two contradictory attitudes confront one another, in an extreme tension whose abolition requires an equal sign, and hence unity.”³⁴ He evokes Breton’s frequent references to “primordial unity,” which, especially in his Marxist phase, “rest upon the principle of ‘contradictory complementarity,’ beyond any idea of non-contradiction. It is the product of a real reconciliation between antinomies. . . . The (logical) notion of contradiction is thus liquidated and the universal identity of opposites is finally established.”³⁵ Objects are equalized through the simple annulling of the contradiction or dissonance between them, and thus a new and more profound kind of “unity,” transcending order or coherence, is imposed. Martin Jay observes that “instead of a dialectical interplay of mediations culminating in a final synthesis of contradictions, the surrealists argued for an immediated juxtaposition of seemingly discordant elements. Through such an unexpected convergence of the dissimilar, they argued, a new whole, what Breton called the ‘marvelous,’ would be revealed.”³⁶

These elements help establish the logic of what we have been calling the

“indirect” path by which to reach totality and infinity. We can witness this logic more directly by turning to Antonin Artaud’s “theater of cruelty,” since it perhaps most concretely illustrates the relationship between surrealist-inspired creations and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Artaud envisions a theater that brings together simultaneously

cries, groans, apparitions, surprises, theatricalities of all kinds, magic beauty of costumes taken from certain ritual models; resplendent lighting, incantational beauty of voices, the charms of harmony, rare notes of music, colors of objects, physical rhythm of movements whose crescendo and decrescendo will accord exactly with the pulsation of movements familiar to everyone, concrete appearances of new and surprising objects, masks, effigies yards high, sudden changes of light, the physical action of light which arouses sensations of heat and cold, etc.³⁷

He continues: “Practically speaking, we want to resuscitate an idea of total spectacle by which the theater would recover from the cinema, the music hall, the circus, and from life itself what has always belonged to it.”³⁸ The invitation to everything, everything possible, in its utmost extremity seeks a form of totality precisely through dissonance and violence. No physical shock, no glorious or inglorious surprise, no unconscious content is unwelcome. He writes that “there is an idea of integral spectacles which must be regenerated. The problem is to make space speak, to feed and furnish it; like mines laid in a wall of rock which all of a sudden turns into geysers and bouquets of stone.”³⁹ In the dominance of dissonance, and in “the power which nature has of suddenly hurling everything into chaos,” we can witness the supremacy of Schiller’s *Stofftrieb* (material drive) over *Formtrieb* (formal drive) as well as echoes of Wagnerian and Schopenhauerian *Wille*.⁴⁰ Artaud’s rock walls themselves release geysers of stone, in a demonstration of the irrational power of nature’s own movement. This involves the ultimate rejection of the Wagnerian indecisive double path to totality, through infinite longing for a delayed but final harmonic synthesis. While Wagner could be said to combine the two paths—the one that aspires to a unified harmony between subject and object and the one that embraces the true dissonance, irrationality, and conflict within the objective or natural side of the equation—surrealism and Artaud renounce the hope for harmony entirely in favor

of a disunified, but no less redemptive, totality. “To link the theater to the expressive possibilities of forms, to everything in the domain of gestures, noises, colors, movements, etc., is to restore it to its original direction, to reinstate it in its religious and metaphysical aspect, to reconcile it with the universe.”⁴¹

In its privileging of dreams and the unconscious, surrealism considers these “random,” which challenges both Freud’s view as well Wagner’s Schopenhauerian understanding of nature and the unconscious as motivated by necessity. Although Wagner’s and Artaud’s aesthetics appear very different on the exterior, there are in fact many more similarities than Adorno, for example, would be willing to acknowledge. One may argue that Wagner’s “necessity” is in fact closely related to the surrealists’ “chance,” perhaps paradoxically, for both are opposed to the same other pole: human intellect and rational choice. The key common term is described by the German *unwillkürlich*, which for Wagner and Schopenhauer refers to nature and the *Wille*. *Wille* is spontaneous, instinctive, involuntary, automatic—hence necessary and thus the opposite of rational choice. For the surrealists and Cage after them, as we shall see, nature can be described with the same set of adjectives: spontaneous, instinctive, involuntary, automatic; it is hence random and thus equally opposed to rational choice. The change in nature’s valency from necessary to random, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, participates in a general shift from a stoic to an epicurean view of nature that we can witness also in contemporaneous science and philosophy.

Now, Artaud’s writings on theater had a great influence on the artists involved in the first “happening” at Black Mountain College in 1952. In this forty-five minute event, Merce Cunningham, Robert Rauschenberg, David Tudor, M. C. Richards, Charles Olsen, John Cage and an anonymous dog simultaneously projected films and slides, read poetry, played music, danced, shouted, ran around, and barked, among other things. The event brought avant-garde theater experimentation into the postwar American context and initiated an entirely new practice, the happening. Although Cage remained principally a composer throughout his life, he created many theatrical works and events and at times described his entire creative activity as happenings or “theater.” In a 1968 interview, he stated that after the Black Mountain experience, “I have been doing nothing else since.”⁴² Like Artaud, Cage often followed the pro-

cedure of inviting everything possible into the scope of his compositions. He introduced chance methods into almost every piece he wrote after 1950, even those that used traditional instruments, techniques such as determining the parameters of a sound by tossing coins, superpositioning star charts onto a blank score, placing notes on imperfections in the paper of the score, and allowing the performers a great autonomy of interpretation, which effectively served as a randomizing technique. Increasingly Cage incorporated other media into his compositions—film, visual arts, dance, poetry. Along with many other artists in his circle and in the generations he influenced, such as his students who became Fluxus, he explicitly sought a collapse of the boundaries between art and life. According to Cage, his art assumes the function of ameliorating the world: by allowing the world to speak in its own, raucous, dissonant voice, his music will make us better hear and appreciate the beauty of the real and thus redeem both the world and alienated, overreflective mankind.

Clearly, Cage's multimedia spectacles—*HPSCHD* and *Musicircus*, for example—follow along the lines of the “total spectacle” described by Artaud. *HPSCHD* was a five-hour performance of slides, films, strobe and colored lights, fifty-eight simultaneous sources of taped sound material of varying volume (each based in a different microtonality), and seven amplified harpsichordists, at a sports arena at the University of Illinois in Urbana, in May 1969. *Musicircus* consisted in a group of composers performing amplified sound creations simultaneously, alongside dance and theater performances, films, slides, and colored lights, accompanied by popcorn, doughnuts and cider, and a construction on which the audience could make amplified sounds, also at Urbana in 1967. But Mallarmé showed that a total artwork need not be maximal or chaotic, and Cage's most indeterminate works may also be said to participate in this tradition. *4'33"* is a “piano” work dating from 1952 consisting in four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence, in which a performer sits before a piano, raising and lowering the keyboard lid at set intervals suggesting three movements, and in which, Cage repeatedly asserted, the real music arises from the ambient noises perceived by the audience in the silence. In this silence, the voice of the world and nature itself is said to speak. *0'00"*, dating from 1962, is a score consisting of the sentence “In a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback), perform a disciplined

action.” This “work” takes part in the practice of event-score happenings associated with Fluxus and others at this time.

While they do not involve the chaotic totality of Artaud’s theater, these minimal pieces clearly take aesthetic “indeterminacy” far beyond the homeopathic dose of chance prescribed by Mallarmé. Like Mallarmé in his search for the purity of the ideal work, Cage rejects determinacy but not to a mitigated degree: Cage, like Mallarmé, envisions “a type without prior designation [*dénomination*], so that it can provoke pure surprise.”⁴³ In Cage’s critique of determinacy one can hear an echo of Mallarmé’s, in which determinations cannot yield (enough) ideality. No embrace is more totalizing, that is, has more potential for the realization of totality, than one entirely empty, open to absolutely all things. In *4’33”*, the car horns and sneezes heard during the four minutes and thirty-three seconds of the performance symbolize all other possible sounds that could have but did not arise. The means toward this form of totality is the “liquidation” (in Weisgerber’s terminology) of the contradiction between juxtaposed elements through the imposition of a simple equal sign—an equalization that is related to randomization. Aesthetic chance is the result of the conscious act, in the context of either composition or performance or both, of neutralizing the values and the particular identities of the elements that may appear in the work, making them interchangeable and replaceable with others. In even the slightest open potential may reside infinity, if one wants, and the unification of opposites may thus be achieved through simply annulling their contradiction.

This dynamic may allow us to understand how aesthetic chance is inherently related to the romantic search for totality, infinity, and human redemption through art. Through the use of chance, a work embraces totality *symbolically*, that is, “anything” stands for “everything.” There is no more economic way of attaining infinity than by saying that “anything is possible” and *therefore* “everything is possible” or that “since this could be otherwise, then *all* possibilities are already present virtually.” Between omnipossibility and omnipotence is but a slight step. This process follows the logic of ritual, in which a concrete object substitutes for an absent absolute, to an extreme: in aesthetic chance, symbolic substitutions devolve into a state of absolute interchangeability, and the identity of the objects is liquidated entirely—the better to manifest totality. As in *o’oo’*, if an infinite number of actual and disparate eventualities can count as instanti-

ations of a particular score or performances of a particular work, the result is a work that reaches symbolically toward infinity. Chance then is a powerful tool, a magic trick that makes an object signify much more than itself, a lever for reaching the absolute, its opposite. It is a homeopathic or large dose of *folie utile*—or, as Schiller said, the “instrument” of antagonism that allows the possibility of final unity, or in Schlegel’s terms, the “value” of “eccentric and monstrous vagaries of poetry,” as the “raw materials and preliminaries for universality.”⁴⁴ Postwar experiments in absolute randomness, or as close as one may come to it, such as in *o’oo*, participate in the same romantic search for the realization of totality. It is the dose of discord that has changed, not the medicinal logic.

Thus “open totality,” if we may call it that, takes two forms, the maximal and the minimal: the extremely loud and chaotic and the extremely quiet and empty. Mallarmé criticized what he felt was Wagner’s use of the maximal sort, since as far as he was concerned it resulted only in rather arbitrary manifestations of Germanic heroes, and it is true that without knowing Wagner’s theories, one would not immediately recognize in such a work an attempt to achieve infinite totality, except perhaps in its sheer length. Minimal “totality” is perhaps most closely approximated in *4’33*” and *o’oo*”, for they consist almost entirely of “a type without prior designation,” inviting surprise. The aesthetic use of chance functions like an open and empty frame, a void consciously posited the better to welcome everything. Jacques Scherer’s description of Mallarmé’s *Book* also quite aptly describes Cage’s minimal work: “[This is] a theater emptied of concrete reality and is nothing but allusion to the totality of the world.”⁴⁵ In relation to a certain finite object or structure, such as that of the work of art, “anything” slips into “everything”: the real and open omnipossibility of life is relayed into the symbolic, but concretely bounded, omnipotence offered by the artwork. In the collapsing of art and life, the totality sought by the work exists as virtual and uncoalesced, slipping insensibly between the real infinity of life and the finitude of art.

But neither kind of dice-throw—the maximal or the minimal—will ever abolish determinacy. For we cannot forget the other element of artworks that can never be annulled: their real boundedness, their inescapable determination in time and place, no matter how much we are fascinated by the homeopathic magic of the *folie utile* that seems to reveal infinity within the most common object. Absolute chance and “indeterminacy” is im-

possible in a work that carries the determination of a title and that is concretely manifested in actual performances. There is a tension within the total artwork between the inevitable finitude of human creation and the apparently infinite world, with which it would like to unite. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* is an artwork that denies its own frame, rejects its own nature as an artwork, and aspires to the framelessness of life—just as Cage and others avoid determinacy by way of elaborate chance procedures. This frame-denial facilitates the slippage from anything to everything, from random found object to totality. Yet the frame is necessary and inescapable, as it is the sine qua non of art. One may argue that art is fundamentally, before it is other things, the posing or the positing of a “frame.” It is the frame that permits, in this case, the very illusion of totality within its embrace, by offering a *site* or a situatedness that may enter into tension with the infinite. The total artwork is in fact a frame on the edge of explosion, unable to attain its impossible ambition of both containing everything and eliminating itself as an obstacle between art and life. Thus Cage’s most open pieces inevitably retain a certain essential or nominal self-identity or frame, which, after the late fifties when he often dropped the practice of giving a specific time frame to his works, becomes sometimes almost literally nominal, in that the title given to the piece constitutes almost its only determinate or iterable element. This nominal and inescapable self-identity still keeps the work a “work,” a “creation,” and prevents it from slipping into the wash of life, in which case it would no longer be capable of containing life and totality or of redeeming what it aspires to embrace. In attempting to deny the frame, aesthetic chance posits a frame only to empty or overfill it, that is, allow it only minimal real relation with its contents. In this aesthetic chance actually isolates the frame. Indeed, Cage would be a rather more realistic target for Adorno’s accusation against Wagner that his music dissimulates the human effort and work that went into it. Cage wrote: “My composing is actually unnecessary. Music never stops, it is we who turn away. . . . All that’s needed is a frame, a change of mental attitude, amplification. Waiting for the bus, we’re present at a concert. Suddenly we stand on a work of art, the pavement.”⁴⁶ Far from losing or exploding the frame it denies, the indeterminate total artwork actually comes to exist almost as nothing but a nominal frame, since its contents are entirely exchangeable, through the “amplification” of anything, without regard to object. As Mallarmé wrote, referring to the roll of the dice,

“Nothing will have taken place but the place” (“Rien n’aura eu lieu que le lieu”).⁴⁷

This unavoidable and unabolishable place, site, frame, or situatedness is in fact related to the same “subject,” or consciousness, that the German romantics called on to serve as the agent for the unification of discordant opposites. To return to Schelling’s words, “It is therefore postulated that this simultaneously conscious and non-conscious activity will be exhibited in the subjective, *in consciousness itself*.”⁴⁸ Although twentieth-century artworks have significantly upped the dose of dissonance, its role remains the same as in romanticism, functioning as the non-conscious element necessary for a higher, redemptive unity. And indeed, we can even see in the current aesthetic proclivity for “recuperating” trash and lost materials that then become “found” objects, and in the invitation into art of the most alienated elements of our world, the desire to bring them into the fold, so to speak, and redeem them by allowing them the place provided by the simple consciousness of an audience’s attention. Even outside of museums and concert halls, in informal happenings or one-time events, where the work intends to fuse as fully as possible with life, it is the simple fact of human attention that seems to allow for a transformation. And ultimately it is the idealistic yearning for transformation that seeks “discordant” objects to redeem, defining them as random in order to invoke the magic of the *folie utile*.

From early romanticism on and especially around the mid-nineteenth century, a sense of the unqualified interchangeability of things began not only to be felt and experienced with modernity but also aesthetically cultivated, invited, provoked. This phenomenon must be understood in light of the relation of chance to romantic idealism. Chance may be seen to operate as a proxy absolute, the immanent infinite. It is a tool that facilitates our attempt to attain infinity, after the death of God, without leaving the material world. As Mallarmé put it succinctly, “As for the Act [of rolling the dice], it is perfectly absurd: but infinity is finally grasped [*fixé*].”⁴⁹ Baudelaire as well had both longed for a higher unity and had sought it in “modernity”: “Modernity is what is transitory, fugitive, contingent.”⁵⁰ But modernity, and especially postwar modernity (often called postmodernity), is very romantic and changes the means but not the goal of the romantic drama of redemption through art.

In guise of conclusion, we quote Pierre Boulez. At the time quite influ-

enced by Mallarmé's notes for *The Book* that had just been published posthumously, he discusses in his 1957 essay "Alea" his generation's "obsession" with chance. He asks,

introduce chance into composition? Is this not madness, or at best a vain endeavour? Madness, perhaps, but useful madness [*folie utile*]. . . . I offer this passage from "Igitur": "[Chance] . . . contains the Absurd—implies it, but latently, while preventing its existence: which permits the Infinite to exist." . . .

But is that not the only way to *grasp the Infinite*?⁵¹

in *Das Junge Deutschland: Texte und Dokumente*, ed. Jost Hermand (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1979), 186.

67. Friedrich Hölderlin, "Über die Verfahrungsweise des poetischen Geistes," in *Sämtliche Werke*, 4:251ff.

68. Rainer Maria Rilke, "Duineser Elegien: Die erste Elegie," in *Sämtliche Werke*, 1:685; "Denn das Schöne ist nichts/als des Schrecklichen Anfang."

69. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, and The Genealogy of Morals*, 10.

70. Heraklit, *Fragmente*, 10th ed., ed. Bruno Snell (Munich: Artemis, 1989), B 51 (*palintonos harmoniä*), B8.

71. Martin Kessel, "Mein erster Roman," in *Herrn Brechers Fiasko*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Schöfling, 2001), 554; Friedrich Schiller, "Prolog zu Wallensteins Lager," in *Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992), 64.

72. Kessel, "Mein erster Roman," 554.

73. Karl Philipp Moritz, "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen," in *Werke*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Aufbau, 1973), 1:286.

74. Moritz, "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen," 1:288–89.

Chapter 5: Tout et N'importe Quoi

1. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Igitur," in *Oeuvres complètes*, 2 vols., ed. Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Gallimard, 1998–2001), 1:476.

2. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 12 (his emphasis).

3. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 231.

4. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, trans. Reginald Snell (New York: Dover, 1965), 45.

5. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, 138 (his emphasis).

6. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, 74, 43.

7. Friedrich von Schlegel, *Athenium* fragment 139, in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1981), 36.

8. For a discussion of the relation between the total artwork and the open-form aesthetics of Schlegel and Novalis, see Charles Le Blanc, Laurent Margantin, and Olivier Schefer, introduction, in *La forme poétique du monde: Anthologie du romantisme allemand*, ed. Charles Le Blanc, Laurent Margantin, and Olivier Schefer (Paris: José Corti, 2003), 92–97, and Olivier Schefer, "Fragments d'un art total: Novalis et le *Gesamtkunstwerk*," in *Résonances du romantisme* (Brussels: La Lettre Volée, 2005), 21–37.

9. Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: NLB, 1981), 102.

10. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 49. See also his and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

11. Adorno writes: "But whereas dissonance is regularly deployed in the mature works as the bearer of expression, its actual expressive value continues to exploit the contrast with the triad; the chords are expressive not in any absolute way but only in their implied distance from consonance, by which they are measured even where consonance is omitted. In the overall conception, the supremacy of tonality remains unchallenged, and to apply the concept of progress to harmony everywhere in Wagner where novel chord patterns appeared would be to take an over-simple view of the matter. Wagner no more deviates significantly from the dominant musical idiom than he does from the immanent reality of bourgeois society, and his innovations are largely absorbed into the tradition, however much their ultimate effect is to undermine it. Wagner's achievements have modified the language of music only indirectly, by extending tonal space, rather than directly, by suspending it" (*In Search of Wagner*, 68).

12. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols. trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 1:257.

13. Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, 8 vols., trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, 1892-99), 1:77 (his emphasis).

14. Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, 1:74-75.

15. Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, 1:75 (his emphasis).

16. Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, 1:52, 1:50-51, 1:53-54 (his emphasis).

17. Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, 1:55-56 (his emphasis).

18. Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, 1:25. He continues: "Only those who have learnt from *Schopenhauer* the true meaning and significance of the *Will*, can thoroughly appreciate the abuse that had resulted from this mixing up of words; he who has enjoyed this unspeakable benefit, however, knows well that that misused '*Unwillkür*' should really be named '*Der Wille*' (the Will); whilst the term *Willkür* (Choice or Caprice) is here employed to signify the so-called Intellectual or Brain Will, influenced by the guidance of reflection. Since the latter is more concerned with the properties of Knowledge,—which may easily be led astray by the purely individual aim,—it is attainted with the evil qualities with which it is charged in the following pages, under the name of *Willkür* whereas the pure *Will*, as the '*Thing-in-itself*' that comes to consciousness in man, is credited with those true productive qualities which are here—apparently the result of a confusion

sprung from the popular misuse of the term—assigned to the negative expression, ‘*Unwillkür*’ (1:26 [his emphasis]).

19. Stéphane Mallarmé, “Richard Wagner: The Reverie of a French Poet,” in *Divagations*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 108.

20. Mallarmé, “Richard Wagner,” 108.

21. Mallarmé, “Richard Wagner,” 113.

22. Mallarmé, “Richard Wagner,” 112.

23. Mallarmé, “Richard Wagner,” 170.

24. Mallarmé, “Richard Wagner,” 159.

25. Mallarmé, “Richard Wagner,” 160.

26. Mallarmé, “Richard Wagner,” 160.

27. Mallarmé, “Richard Wagner,” 111 (translation modified).

28. Jean Royère reported that Mallarmé said this to Jules Barbey d’Aureville (qtd. in Jacques Scherer, “*Le Livre*” de Mallarmé [Paris: Gallimard, 1957], xxii [translation mine]).

29. Mallarmé, “Igitur,” 1:474.

30. Stéphane Mallarmé to Henri Cazalis, Nov. 14, 1869, in *Correspondance complète, 1862–1871: Suivi de lettres sur la poésie, 1872–1898*, ed. Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 452.

31. Mallarmé, “Igitur,” 1:478.

32. Scherer, “*Le Livre*” de Mallarmé, 27 (translation mine).

33. Jean Weisgerber, *Les avant-gardes littéraires au XXe siècle* 2 vols. (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1984), 1:773 (translation mine).

34. Weisgerber, *Les avant-gardes littéraires au XXe siècle*, 773 (translation mine).

34. Weisgerber, *Les avant-gardes littéraires au XXe siècle*, 773, quoting André Breton’s *Les vases communicants* (translation mine).

36. Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 287.

37. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 93.

38. Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 85.

39. Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 98.

40. Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 62.

41. Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 72.

42. John Cage, interview with Richard Kostelanetz, in Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theater of Mixed Means: An Introduction to Happenings, Kinetic Environments, and other Mixed-Means Performances* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 57.

43. Mallarmé, *Divagations*, 111 (translation modified).

44. Schlegel, *Atheneum* fragment 139, 36.
45. Scherer, "Le Livre" de Mallarmé, 27.
46. John Cage, "Indeterminacy," in *I-VI* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 431.
47. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard," in *Oeuvres complètes* 1:367-83 (translation mine).
48. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 12.
49. Mallarmé, "Igitur," 1:477 (translation mine).
50. Charles Baudelaire, "Le peintre de la vie moderne," in *Oeuvres complètes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 2:695 (translation mine).
51. Pierre Boulez, "Alea," in *Notes of an Apprenticeship*, trans. Herbert Weinstock (New York: Knopf, 1968), 30, 38, quoting Mallarmé's "Igitur," 1:476 (his emphasis; translation of Mallarmé modified).

Chapter 6: Idea/Imagination/Dialogue

1. I use this biblical metaphor, the breath of life, with entirely secular intentions. In one of his interviews Vilém Flusser defines the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a *Lebenswelt* created by multiple authors of which God is simply one of many, whose creations can be improved on: "It is said in *Genesis* that we are artworks, we have a creator, an author, and are part of a total artwork [*Gesamtkunstwerk*], that is, a creation. The creator has equipped this total artwork with an odd rearview mirror that permits us to arrive at how the whole [*das Ganze*] was fabricated [*hergestellt*]. You can use it to look inside, then we arrive at the author inside us; or to look to the outside, then we arrive at the author all around us. In short, we have arrived at the fact that the 'creator' has generated only one among many virtualities of space [*Raum*], and now we imitate him and generate others. With that we have distinguished [*uns abgesetzt*] ourselves and have become our own author. God is, thus, *one* virtual creator of space, and now there are others" (*Zwiegespräche: Interviews, 1967-1991*, ed. Klaus Sander [Göttingen: European Photography, 1996], 122 [translation mine]).

2. Michael Newman and Jon Bird, introduction, *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion, 1999), 6. See also *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, ed. Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 527-37, and Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art* (New York: Phaidon, 1998).

3. In the late 1920s, Egon Friedell met Wagner's total artwork with a distrust similar to Adorno's: "The truth, quite obvious to everyone[,] . . . is that Wagner was neither a musician who made poems nor a poet who made music, but a 'the-