REIMAGINING THE *GESAMTKUNSTWERK*: GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE'S

A QUELLE HEURE PARTIRA-T-IL UN TRAIN POUR PARIS?

By

Caitlin Glosser

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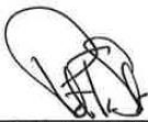
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Chair:

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Professor Juliet Bellow, Ph.D.

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Professor Kim Butler, Ph.D.

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Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

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To the memory of my stepfather,
Jim Nemeth

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ABSTRACT

Guillaume Apollinaire has long played a central role in the history of modern art as a critic who championed several of the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. However, his own artistic production—his poetic *calligrammes* and his multimedia theatrical spectacles—rarely play more than an ancillary role in art-historical scholarship on this period. Traditionally placed within the framework of literary studies, these works straddle, and even at times collapse, the boundaries between artistic genres. This thesis traces Apollinaire's experimentation with the fusion of artistic media through a close reading of one such work, *A quelle heure partira-t-il un train pour Paris?* (*What Time Does a Train Leave for Paris?*). Written in 1914, this theatrical work uses an intermedial structure to disrupt conventional art forms and to directly engage its imagined spectators—even to invest viewers with an authorial role in the co-creation of the work. I argue that Apollinaire's synthesis of artistic genres should be considered a modern reimagining of Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* or "total artwork." Examining the development of Apollinaire's ideal total artwork from his *calligrammes* to the play, I demonstrate how *A quelle heure* merges multiple artistic genres to construct a paradoxically simultaneous, yet fragmented theatrical experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Guillaume Apollinaire has long occupied a central position in the history of modern art as a critic who championed several of the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. However, his own works rarely play more than an ancillary role in art-historical scholarship on this period. In part, this is because these works generally are considered as poems, plays, or novels—that is to say, literary works. This thesis will argue that Apollinaire's works straddle and even at times collapse the boundaries between artistic genres. Thus, scholars should not limit themselves to a discussion of the literary aspects of his oeuvre, as if all other media have been filtered out of his works. The intermedial nature of his works necessitates an interdisciplinary interpretive approach and demands to be framed in consideration of all of its synthesized parts.

In order to explore how Apollinaire conceived his ideal intermedial artwork, this thesis presents a close reading of one such work. Conventionally thought of as a play, *A quelle heure partira-t-il un train pour Paris?* (*What Time Does a Train Leave for Paris?*, 1914) employs an intermedial structure that, through the very mechanism of synthesis, works to disrupt traditional art forms. Though never performed during Apollinaire's lifetime, the surviving scenario displays his intention to combine media with the aim of inducing a wide variety of sensorial experiences that engage spectators in the work, even vesting them with a quasi-authorial role. His contradictory impulse to construct a theatrical work that conveys an all-encompassing experience of life through the fragmentation of the physical and imaginary structures of the theater— Wagnerian in its drive to synthesize artistic genres in order to enhance individual media— represents an attempt to negotiate art for the modern spectator through the language of the

Gesamtkunstwerk. While Apollinaire's untimely death may have cut his production of a truly intermedial theatrical work short, *A quelle heure* nevertheless instantiated his vision for such an ideal total artwork.

In regards to scholarship, *A quelle heure* had gone almost entirely unnoticed by both literary and art-historical researchers until the play's revival in 1982 by the literary scholar Willard Bohn. Bohn's investigation, presented in his book *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man*, provides a full and complex analysis of the development of the play, with particular emphasis on iconographic interpretation of its symbolic devices.[1] While such an intensive examination successfully disentangles the work's layers of meaning, Bohn's analysis nevertheless fails to fully acknowledge the intermedial and multi-sensory aspects of Apollinaire's theatrical program. By taking into account not only the literary aspects of the play, but also its visual and aural elements, I will reframe *A quelle heure* not as a literary work—as Bohn treats it—but as an artwork that Apollinaire intended to transcend conventional divisions between artistic genres, to more effectively engage all the spectator's senses.

Experimentation with intermedialilty—the joining or merging of artistic genres—was by no means uncommon within the milieu of the early twentieth-century avant-garde. However, Apollinaire's works stand apart in their consistent and wide-ranging investment in the use of multiple genres. His invention of such hybrid artistic genres began early in 1913 with forms of visual poetry, alternately termed *idéogrammes* and *calligrammes*. Later, this experimentation broadened to include multi-media theatrical spectacles such as *A quelle heure partira-t-il un train pour Paris?* and *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (*The Breasts of Tirésias*, 1917). These works, I argue, demonstrate Apollinaire's belief that art could only become relevant to contemporary

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[1] Willard Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man : The Creation and Evolution of a Modern Motif* (Rutherford, London, and Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1991).

viewers if individual artistic genres were bound together in the creation of a new art for the modern age.

Apollinaire's position in the European art world—known widely in avant-garde circles both for his own artistic production as well as for his writings on art—provided him with the means and knowledge to produce such intermedial works. In order to realize *A quelle heure*, Apollinaire invited several peers to collaborate with him. He recruited two visual artists, Francis Picabia and Marius de Zayas, to produce the stage décor; the musician Alberto Savinio, the brother of the painter Giorgio de Chirico, was to compose the score. By July of 1914, the group had already secured the support of photographer/gallery owner Alfred Stieglitz to debut the play in New York in the upcoming season. In his *Souvenirs de la Grand Guerre* (*Memories of the Great War*), Apollinaire stated that Stieglitz had intended to produce *A quelle heure* because of the American public's rising interest in the new aesthetics offered by these artists:

> Les frais devaient être faits par Stieglitz qui serait facilement rentré dans ses fonds à cause de la curiosité que nos noms auraient excitée à Manhattan sur les bords de l'Hudson.

> The expenses were to be paid by Stieglitz who would have easily advanced the necessary sum due to the curiosity that our names would have aroused in Manhattan on the Hudson.[2]

Unfortunately, the outbreak of World War I on 28 July 1914 halted the progress of *A quelle heure* from conception to realization, and no preliminary sketches or notes by Picabia, de Zayas, or Savinio documenting their contributions to the production have survived. We do find mention of the play in written correspondence between members of the group, but these brief comments give very little detail concerning their vision for the stage production. My examination of *A quelle heure* thus will rely on Apollinaire's text and his descriptions of what sorts of media

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[2] Guillaume Apollinaire, *Souvenirs de la Grand Guerre*, ed. Pierre Caizergues (Montpellier : Fata Morgana, 1980), 17. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

would have been employed to convey the themes, characters, and the overall experience of the play as a total artwork. This circumstance inevitably narrows my discussion of what ultimately would have been a collaborative process, and privileges Apollinaire's vision of the work over those of his interlocutors. Nevertheless, I intend to address the issue of collaboration—to the extent that the circumstances of the play's production permit—before proceeding to a discussion of Apollinaire's intention for the construction of *A quelle heure* as a total artwork.

A quelle heure's narrative structure originated in Apollinaire's poem "Le Musicien de Saint Merry." Published in the avant-garde journal *Les Soirées de Paris* on 25 February 1914, the poem tells the story of a faceless musician who entices an array of women, some described as having fragmented or distorted bodies, to follow him with his music. Like a sort of Pied Piper, he leads these women through the streets of Paris into an abandoned house where they disappear. Apollinaire periodically interjects this basic narrative with moments that occur elsewhere in space and time. The title of *A quelle heure* comes from one such interruption:

> Unconcerned he [the faceless musician] strolled along playing his tune
> He strolled along terribly
>
> And elsewhere
> What time does a train leave for Paris?[3]

The poem is narrated in the first person by an unidentified speaker—possibly Apollinaire himself—who passively watches as the faceless musician weaves through the streets. Only once does the narrator himself engage in the action. Accompanied by a priest, he decides to enter the old house only to find that he is too late and the women have already vanished. Afterwards, the poem concludes with the narrator's lamentation over the women as the faceless musician's flute recedes in the distance.

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[3] Guillaume Apollinaire, "Le Musicien de Saint Merry," in *Selected Writings by Guillaume Apollinaire*, intro and trans. by Roger Shattuck (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1971), 152-159.

Overall, the six scenes of the play remain fairly faithful to the poem, containing only a few adjustments. Apollinaire features the narrative of the faceless musician's procession in three of the scenes in *A quelle heure*. The remaining three scenes reflect his efforts to create the effect of the simultaneous moments in space and time—mimicking the interruptions in the flow of the narrative in the original poem. However, he also imposed significant changes on the original poem, including Apollinaire's identification of the figure of the narrator as a poet who is sometimes accompanied by a soldier rather than a priest. Moreover, Apollinaire adds the characters of Napoleon III and several servants. Where the poem ends with the faceless musician's flute dying away, the play closes with Napoleon III committing suicide.

The most substantial difference between the play and the poem is the way in which Apollinaire creates the experience of simultaneity. Rather than simply describing the events in the play as taking place "elsewhere" or "at the same moment," Apollinaire attempts to transport the audience to those other places (or rather to bring those places to his audience). For example, in scene four he uses film to project a quick and jarring succession of images into the space of the audience—images that reveal a variety of places in order to suggest a fragmented and constantly shifting environment. He does not employ traditional stage décor and action to evoke these alternate, yet simultaneous moments. Rather, he uses unconventional theatrical means in order to fill the space of the audience, thereby attempting to position the spectators at the center of these moments. These scenes in particular, through their intermedial endeavor for spectatorial engagement, exemplify Apollinaire's negotiation of the theater in the construction of his ideal total artwork.

Through an examination of the roles that different media play in relation to each other in *A quelle heure*, I argue that Apollinaire's synthesis of artistic genres should be considered a

twentieth-century reimagining of Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* or "total artwork." In

"The Art-Work of the Future" (1849), Wagner posited a new, synthetic form of art: based in lyric

drama, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* would combine poetry, dance, and music to create "*Art*, the

universal, undivided."[4] In her examination of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Juliet Koss contends that

Wagner's unification of the arts stemmed from a utopian vision for the German nation. Writing

in Dresden, in the wake of the failed political revolution the prior year, Wagner believed that his

Gesamtkunstwerk would transform the German people: experiencing this unified work,

spectators would join together, united through the common experience of art.[5] However, as Koss

reveals, though the political success of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was predicated on Wagner's

capacity to synthesize poetry, dance, and music, he somewhat paradoxically championed the

discovery of each "sister art's" distinct capabilities. [6] He wrote that only through unification

could each art find its own identity: "In order to will to be the whole thing which of and in

himself he [the art] is, the individual must learn to be absolutely not the thing he is not."[7] Thus,

the *Gesamtkunstwerk* equally served to define the sister arts in contradistinction to each other,

thereby permitting them to achieve their full, autonomous forms. Following Wagner's

conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in 1849, artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and groups like

the Vienna Secession and the Ballets Russes envisioned ways of bringing a variety of media

together, unified in form, process, or both. Apollinaire's oeuvre, therefore, represents one

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[4] Richard Wagner, "From *The Art-Work of the Future*," in *What Is Dance? Readings in Theory and Criticism*, ed. Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 191. Originally published in 1849.

[5] Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 5-9, 20-22.

[6] Koss, *Modernism after Wagner*, 16-17.

[7] Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, 193.

significant example of a broader turn-of-the-century interest in the intermedial paradigm inherited from Wagner.

Apollinaire's "Wagnerian" theater pieces did not strictly follow Wagner's theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Apollinaire substituted spoken for lyric drama, and he did not limit his total artwork to the three media of poetry, music, and dance. Instead, he employed whatever artistic materials he thought would best convey each moment of the play—including poetry, painting, music, noise, light effects, and film. Nevertheless, like Wagner, Apollinaire wrestled with the conflicting desires for synthesis and division. The unification that Apollinaire hoped to achieve in his modern total artwork ultimately and paradoxically aimed to disrupt and disorder the conventional structures of artistic genres. By bringing together multiple media in one work, he hoped to dissolve the illusionism of the stage, collapsing not only the imaginary "fourth wall" separating the stage from the audience, but also the literal and metaphorical walls dividing the theater from the world outside. That is to say, the breakdown of conventional artistic structures permitted the opening of the theater into everyday life and all of its available temporal and geographical experiences. The synthesis of media, therefore, serves not only to disrupt the boundaries of the theater, but also to evoke the multi-sensory experiences offered by, as Apollinaire wrote in scene four, "life in its variety."

Despite Apollinaire's clear intention to construct an intermedial artwork, scholars tend to assimilate him to existing movements within their respective, medium-specific academic disciplines. In an attempt to come to terms with the visual aspects of Apollinaire's work, art historians often compare Apollinaire's interest in synthetic works to the Futurist concept of

simultaneity.[8] In their poetry and painting, Futurists juxtaposed diverse and often dissonant

aspects of modern life in order to convey the speed and dynamism of the urban environment.

Christine Poggi compared the synthesis of the visual and the verbal in Apollinaire's

calligrammes to F.T. Marinetti's desire for synaesthetic simultaneity in his invented poetic genre

of *parole in libertà* ("words in freedom"). She writes:

> The ideal, for Apollinaire and the Futurists, was perceptual simultaneity—the poetic sign
> fully motivated and charged with the chaotic immediacy of life itself. Insofar as a
> Futurist *tavola parolibera* was successful in putting the spectator in the center of the
> work, traditional perceptual boundaries would necessarily collapse, the viewer's ego
> dissolved into the work, and the work as sign dissolved into pure energy.[9]

While Poggi's assertion that Apollinaire shared with the Futurists the goal of perceptual

simultaneity holds, the nature of Apollinaire's simultaneity differs significantly. We can see

similarities between the visual manipulation of text in works such as Marinetti's 1915 *After the*

Marne, Joffre Visited the Front in an Automobile (fig. 1) and Apollinaire's 1914 "Lettre-Océan"

("Letter-Ocean") (fig. 2). Both works indeed attempt to collapse traditional perceptual

boundaries as well as division between poetry and painting. However, while Marinetti's swirling

letters and symbols seem intended to provoke the spectator, Apollinaire's carefully arranged

schema works to draw the spectator in, enveloping her in the sights and sounds elicited by the

merging of word and image. Marinetti also deployed the simultaneity of his *parole in libertà*

with specific, political intentions: to incite the spectator to fight in the war. Apollinaire's

simultaneity was directed to decidedly less political and less particular results. He wanted the

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[8] Apollinaire was familiar with the Futurists, though there is some debate over whether he supported or opposed their works. This debate is exemplified by Marjorie Perloff's discussion of Apollinaire's "L'Antitradition futuriste" (1913). Though he adopted the language of the Futurist manifesto in this work, it is unclear as to whether he did it with the intention of championing or mocking the technique. Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment, Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago and London: Unifersity of Chicago Press, 1986), 96-101.

[9] Christine Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism and the Invention of Collage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 225.

simultaneity of his *calligramme* to produce the effect of all of the potential sensorial experiences of life in Paris, swathing the spectator in the urban environment and thereby bringing the experience of the artwork closer to that of life. Nevertheless, the Futurist ideal of simultaneity has some bearing on *A quelle heure*. In order to locate the audience at the center of the work, the perceptual boundaries of the theater—the fourth wall as well as the four walls of the perimeter— must be dissolved. Only then can audience members experience the artwork as they would experience life—the terms of which now appear to be blurred. In the play, as in the earlier *calligrammes*, both the collapsing of perceptual boundaries and the blurring of art and life result from the synthesis of artistic genres.

However, the *calligrammes* were not sufficient to incarnate Apollinaire's vision. The transposition from poem to stage—from a static, two-dimensional page to a three-dimensional, multi-media theatrical space—enabled Apollinaire to construct an artwork in which the audience's physical presence inside the artwork becomes integral to the completion of the play. By deploying media in such a way as to encircle the audience in the artwork, the spectators can better recognize their potential to adopt an active role. The spectators' relocation to the literal and metaphorical center of the artwork permits them the possibility to interact more fully with the work and therefore to partake in its production. Thus, the roles of artist and audience begin to resemble each other—through their participation in the play's unfolding, both share the capacity to change the meaning of the artwork. Without the engagement of both in the production of the artwork, the play could never fully come to fruition. In this way, artist and audience bear some creative responsibility in the final product.

In my analysis of *A quelle heure*, I will not only show how Apollinaire hoped to redefine the theater, but also point to the ways in which this process of redefinition awakened the author's

anxiety about the capacity of contemporary audiences to comprehend his new theatrical genre. The insistent absurdity of *A quelle heure*'s narrative reveals a tension between Apollinaire's desire to both lead the audience through the unfamiliar space of the total artwork, and to intentionally obscure its meaning so as to leave the experience and its ultimate interpretation to the individual. The transition between intermedial simultaneity and traditional narrative suggests that this anxiety equally concerned the status of poetry in the total artwork. On the one hand, Apollinaire sought a means of breaking with artistic conventions and producing a simultaneous, multi-sensory experience of life that would demand audience participation. Conversely, his play at times remains mired in the presentation of the textual narrative derived from the earlier poem "Le Musicien de Saint Merry." By maintaining some semblance of a traditional narrative structure, Apollinaire not only provided his audience with a foothold—an element of art that they were familiar with—but also ensured that his preferred genre would maintain a more prominent position than the others. Of course, we cannot determine whether the reliance on "Le Musicien" stemmed primarily from anxiety over audience comprehension and financial success, or from a desire to see poetry elevated by the support of other media. Nevertheless, Apollinaire's negotiation of poetry's significant role in *A quelle heure* suggests that he did not want to stray too far from accepted and generally understood modes of art making. Consequently, *A quelle heure* hinges on the paradoxical vision of the total artwork born from a poet's text.

Over the course of this thesis, I will develop these ideas through a detailed analysis of *A quelle heure*'s conception, content, and pre-production process. In Chapter Two, I consider the significance of the play as a collaborative undertaking. The manner in which Apollinaire involved Picabia, de Zayas, and Savinio suggests that he was open to their interpretations of the characters and themes of the play to the extent that there seems to have been no single, unified

idea about what the production should look like. Thus, even in its earliest stages, *A quelle heure* precipitated the partial abdication of authorial control. In this chapter, I will also briefly discuss the implications of the collaborators' desire to debut the play in the United States. Why was it so important to these men that a play set in Paris (for the most part) be produced in the theaters of New York? And what might it have meant for an American audience to experience Apollinaire's total artwork? While this chapter deals with many unresolvable questions and uncertain details, a discussion of the development of the total artwork from a collaborative process is nevertheless necessary.

Chapter Three examines Apollinaire's use of a variety of media in an attempt to combat the boundaries created by both the physical space of the theater and theatrical conventions. It focuses on the three scenes of *A quelle heure*—scenes one, two, and four—that incorporate materials not conventionally awarded prominence in a theatrical setting, such as film and noises. The choices Apollinaire makes in regards to the materials employed are dictated by his desire to furnish a more complete sensorial experience for the audience—one that evokes the modern urban environment. In this multisensory experience, diverse spaces and times converge through a constant barrage of sounds and images. In this way, the totality that Apollinaire hoped to achieve is equally reflected in the synthesis of media as well as in the expression of the simultaneity of life. I will also discuss the manner in which these three scenes dispense entirely with narrative. The rejection of a standard plot, combined with the use of unconventional theatrical materials, intentionally disorders the boundaries of the theater, permitting the construction of an artwork that gives the effect of its closeness to the world outside.

Chapter Four analyzes the remaining three scenes—scenes three, five, and six. Unlike the scenes of the previous chapter, these follow a more traditional narrative structure.

Apollinaire's use of conventional theatrical devices, including a plot expressed through action and stage setting, sits uneasily alongside his total reimagining of the structure and function of the theater in the other scenes. This paradoxical return to the staging of a scenario suggests an anxiety over constructing a play that may not be recognizable as such. Perhaps Apollinaire was hesitant to completely collapse the boundaries of the theater for fear that his audience would not understand the language of the total artwork. On the other hand, by retaining a narrative, Apollinaire privileges poetry over the other media involved in the work. Nevertheless, Apollinaire does manage to disorder the poetic narrative of the faceless musician through the constant use of absurdity and ambiguity. Like the unconventional materials in the earlier scenes, these devices invite active audience participation. By dissolving the clarity of the narrative and thus hindering interpretation, Apollinaire retains his aim of engaging the audience in the creative process and therefore synthesizing artist, artwork, and audience.

In the years following the failed production of *A quelle heure*, Apollinaire continued to produce works in the spirit of his total artwork. In the conclusion of the Prologue to *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (*The Breasts of Tirésias*), the narrator extolls a new type of play:

> For the play must be an entire universe
> With its creator
> That is to say nature itself
> And not only
> Representation of a little part
> Of what surrounds us or has already passed
>
> Pardon me my friends my company…
>
> But out there there's still a fire
> Where they're putting out the smoking stars
> And those who light them again demand that you
> Lift yourselves to the height of those great flames
> And also burn
>
> O public

Be the unquenchable torch of the new fire[10]

The play here described is Apollinaire's ideal total artwork—a play that encompasses the full temporal and geographical space of the universe, born from the agency of the audience, "the unquenchable torch." While neither *Les Mamelles* nor *A quelle heure* fully achieve this lofty vision, they both reflect responses to growing anxieties concerning the relevance of traditional art forms to the modern age and the desire to revise those art forms to better embody the perspectives and experiences offered by the modern world.

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[10] Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, in *Modern French Theatre : An Anthology of Plays*, edited by Michael Benedikt and George E. Wellwarth (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1966), 67.

CHAPTER 2

MAKING THE TOTAL ARTWORK

As implemented in *A quelle heure*, the concept of the "total artwork" extended beyond

the fusion of separate art forms; its collective dimensions influenced Apollinaire's desire to make

the production process itself collaborative, bringing together artists specializing in different

media. Having written the scenario himself, Apollinaire was joined by the composer Alberto

Savinio as well as two painters, Francis Picabia and Marius de Zayas. Unfortunately, however,

beyond a few passing references to the collaborative effort in written correspondence, we have

no extant evidence of Savinio, Picabia, or de Zayas's contributions. About one month after

Apollinaire initiated the collaboration, Austria-Hungary officially declared war on the Kingdom

of Serbia. Shortly after, Europe's major economic powers—Germany, Russia, France, and

Britain—took sides in the conflict, bringing about the start of World War I. The war necessarily

demanded that the production of *A quelle heure* be halted. Therefore, it is entirely possible that

the play never progressed beyond preliminary ideas primarily furnished by Apollinaire.[11]

Nevertheless, the circumstances of the pre-production process contribute to our understanding of

the evolution of Apollinaire's ideal total artwork.

In this chapter, I will focus on the significance of the *calligrammes*, or visual poems, that

Apollinaire used as the starting-point for *A quelle heure*. After having selected his co-authors,

Apollinaire gave each a manuscript for a different *calligramme*: "Lettre-Océan" (fig. 2) for

Picabia, "Paysage animé" ("Animated Landscape") (fig. 3) for de Zayas, and "Coeur couronne et

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[11] During the war, Picabia and de Zayas relocated to New York. Savinio returned to Italy with his brother, both of whom enlisted in the Italian army. Savinio was stationed first at the military hospital in Ferrara, Italy and later served as a translator in Greece. Apollinaire fought for France at the front in Champagne until he received a shrapnel wound to the head in 1916.

miroir" ("Heart Crown and Mirror") (fig. 4) for Savinio.[12] As I will show, these *calligrammes*

represent some of Apollinaire's earliest experiments with the principles of intermediality—and

thus it would seem that the gesture of giving a *calligramme* to his collaborators was mean to

indicate that they should consider the play a theatrical staging of the visual poetry. However, my

analysis of the *calligrammes* will also indicate the limitations of the genre. These visual poems

attempt a synthesis of artistic media and an abdication of full authorial control, but these works

never fully achieve those two elusive goals. The *calligrammes*, in other words, furnished

Apollinaire and the other participants in *A quelle heure* with an incomplete example of the "total

artwork." Only in a theatrical setting, Apollinaire apparently concluded, could the synthesis of

media and the conflation of author and spectator that he attempted in the *calligrammes* come to

full fruition.

At the same time, the fact that the play stemmed from Apollinaire's visual poetry

suggests that from the very beginning *A quelle heure* was plagued by the same limitations as his

earlier *calligrammes*. In particular, we can see a tension between the single-author model (a play

instigated by Apollinaire and his poems) and the collaborative model (a play jointly written by

all involved). This hierarchy of authorship is further complicated by Apollinaire's desire to

construct a point of entry for audience members into the total artwork, a move that would

provide them with a certain degree of creative impetus for the play as well. The struggle to

engage the audience in active participation was one significant reason for his transition from

visual poetry to theater. The inherent two-dimensionality of the *calligrammes* prevented the kind

of merging of artwork and audience that could be enacted by the collapse of the imaginary fourth

wall in the theater. Ultimately, such a collapse, and the resulting spectatorial participation,

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[12] Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man*, 47.

would lead to the widespread sharing of authorial power. This would produce an artwork that is constantly in the process of production, always expanding to include each new audience member as a collaborator.   In this way, meaning and form in *A quelle heure* precariously straddle their foundation in Apollinaire's *calligrammes* and their capacity to change and grow with each new collaborator.

Originally publishing his *calligrammes* in *Les Soirées de Paris*, a literary and artistic journal that he helped to found in 1912, Apollinaire ultimately intended them to be a part of a collection entitled *Et moi aussi je suis peintre* (*And I Too Am a Painter*). The publication of the collection was, like *A quelle heure*, halted by the war.[13] For Apollinaire, the fusion of poetry with painting in his *calligrammes* enabled him to challenge both the conventions of illusionistic representation and of authorship. He manipulated conventional standards of art, such as mimetic qualities in painting and syntactical structures in poetry, in order to expose the artifice of those devices. Moreover, he revealed that the relationship between the poet, the work, and the reader was not based on a chronological progression of conception, production, and reception. Rather, he construed the relationship as a constantly transforming entity in which the identity of each component can never be fixed. He not only blurred the boundaries between poet and painter, reader and viewer, but also further destabilized these roles by inviting the reader-viewer to act simultaneously as poet-painter.[14] In the spirit of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, he synthesized painting and poetry to create a third genre, a hybrid artwork. But he synthesized them in such a way that they become totally dependent on each other to form a coherent whole, while still

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[13] The volume only appeared recently, in 2006: Guillaume Apollinaire, *Et moi aussi je suis peintre* (Cognac: Le temps qu'il fait, 2006). Originally published in *Les Soirées de Paris* as individual works, 1914.

[14] Throughout this chapter I will continue to refer to Apollinaire's audience as the reader-viewer in order to emphasize that the synthesis which occurs on the page necessitates a similar merge between audience types. You will also notice that the order of reader and viewer in the hyphenation alternates so as to avoid any suggestion of a hierarchy.

maintaining the individual characteristics of their independent genres. Unless the arts combined

in some fashion, they would remain mired in conventional forms that Apollinaire believed were

no longer relevant to the modern viewer-reader.

Essential to a new understanding of Apollinaire's *Et moi aussi je suis peintre* as a total

artwork is an analysis of the way he chose to frame the *calligrammes* for his audience. The

intended title itself evokes multiple and contradictory meanings concerning the role and identity

of the painter. It could be taken to suggest that what Apollinaire is doing is painting, rather than

writing or reciting poetry. If so, he may be signaling to the reader that she should not overlook

the visual qualities of the *calligrammes* as she consumes the text. However, the title arguably

makes an even bolder claim: it suggests that painting is not a practice limited to painters. Just as

the boundaries between artistic genres are dissolved in the *calligramme*, so should the divisions

between poet and painter be lifted. Another possibility is that the title claims the reader as a

painter. If the title is read aloud, the reader becomes the "I" to which the title refers. She is

invited to place herself in Apollinaire's position, recreating the work as she rehearses it. This

potential blurring of the artist and the reader-viewer—a breach of the division between artwork

and life—implies a greater level of participation than conventionally required of the reader. As I

will show in my analysis of one *calligramme*, "Coeur couronne et miroir" (given to de Zayas in

the production of *A quelle heure*), the active engagement of the reader in the work is central to

the experience of Apollinaire's total artwork.

Another way in which Apollinaire attempts to disrupt our understanding of the work and

its authorship is through his choice of frontispiece (fig. 4-5). For this initial image, he

commissioned an engraving from the artist Pierre Roy after a painting by Giorgio de Chirico—a

disorienting arrangement of objects and figures in space. The mysterious figure in profile may

be, as some scholars have claimed, a portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire. [15] Its dark color and lack

of detail evokes a silhouette or shadow, perhaps suggesting that the image is a shadow cast into

the page by Apollinaire himself, standing in front of the page. However, just as the viewer-

reader may become the painter when she reads *Et moi aussi je suis peintre* aloud, here the viewer

may assume the same position as Apollinaire in front of the work. Thus, the shadow either

becomes the viewer's, or the viewer becomes Apollinaire.

What might Apollinaire have intended for his collaborators to glean from the

calligrammes in conjunction with their consideration of *A quelle heure*? Their distribution

suggests, first of all, that they are structurally related to the play. The *calligrammes* and play

share common objectives such as the thwarting of conventional structural devices. In the

calligrammes, the rejection of traditional versification and pictorial illusionism serves to

heighten the engagement of the viewer-reader in the construction of the total artwork. For

example, despite the seeming ease with which we recognize the visual forms in "Coeur couronne

et miroir" (fig. 4) Apollinaire's marriage of text and image constitutes an affront to the way in

which we consume both poetry and painting. The rejection of conventional horizontal rows of

text leaves the reader wondering where she should begin. Moreover, the sporadic use of bold-

face, enlarged letters causes the eye to jump back and forth across the page. At first glance, the

crown seems to be made of solitary letters rather than coherent words. The division of words

into syllables in the contour of the mirror creates a linguistic puzzle for the reader. Word order

flows up, down, side to side and around the page; this disturbance not only permits Apollinaire to

create shapes, but also to recognize the space of the page as critical to the overall work. Poggi

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[15] Several scholars who have dealt with this frontispiece in depth have contested the status of the bust and the profile as portraits of Apollinaire, citing a lack of physical resemblance in both. See, for instance, Willard Bohn, "Giorgio de Chirico's *Portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire* of 1914," *The Burlington Magazine* 147, no. 1232 (2005). For my purposes, the issue of physical resemblance is less important than the idea that either Apollinaire or de Chirico wants the viewer to understand the work as a portrait.

compares this activation of the page to the Futurist poetry practice of *parole in libertà* ("words in freedom"). Invented by the movement's leader F. T. Marinetti, words in freedom abandoned traditional versification and homogeneity of form in favor of the plasticity of words. In this way, the page is no longer simply a neutral ground for the poem, but functions as an integral part of the work like the background of a painting.[16]

But Apollinaire does not simply use painting to disrupt conventional poetic form; he also uses poetic devices to disrupt viewers' expectations about painting. Like the work of contemporary painters he admired, Apollinaire asks the viewer to recognize the artifice of mimesis in conventional painting practices. Although we may be able to recognize the shape of a heart, crown, and mirror, none of these objects are rendered in a naturalistic manner. Apollinaire refuses to create a semblance of their presence on the page: there is no sense of deep space, perspectival illusion, or even any suggestion of fore, middle, or background. While readers would anticipate this two-dimensionality, the flatness unsettles viewers' conventional conception of painting.

Apollinaire continues to destabilize the viewer-reader by weaving complex and contrasting layers of signification. In *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry*, Bohn argues that "Coeur couronne et miroir" functions like a painting whereby the images of heart, crown, and mirror combine to signify the apotheosis of the poet from man to king to saint. Bohn claims this pictorial narrative of transformation is implied by the order given in the title. If we interpret the mirror as a mandorla, or halo, then the progression suggests the divine transcendence of the poet.[17] However, as Timothy Mathews demonstrates, the text plays an equally significant role, at

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[16] Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting*, 195.

[17] Willard Bohn, *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry, 1914-1928* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 56-58.

times contradicting or undermining the associations conjured by the visual symbols.[18] For example, the words that make up the heart read, "My heart like an inverted flame." While the textual reference to heart coalesces with its visual form, its comparison to an inverted flame invites us to see both a heart and flame. Similarly, the text of the crown puts forward a complex definition of kingship. "The kings who die one by one are reborn in the hearts of poets." Kingship, it would seem, is of the past; the modern-day king resides in the poet's heart. Although Bohn's argument suggests that the viewer could understand this metaphor of transformation without reading the text, I believe his argument in fact depends on this text. The text is not simply an elaboration on the image; rather it complicates the meaning of the image. Apollinaire disrupts the visual equation of crown with king to add the potential equation of crown with poet. The transformation of the poet therefore hinges on our ability to recognize the transformation of the images themselves: the heart dissolves into flame and the crown passes from king to poet.

Finally, the mirror completes this destabilization of meaning by producing a tension between the presence and absence of both Guilluame Apollinaire and his mirrored reflection. The text reads, "In this mirror I am enclosed living and real as one imagines angels and not like a reflection." This mirror then does not operate as we would expect. Its reflected image of Guillaume Apollinaire is neither living nor real, but an angel-like illusion. As Mathews suggests, while Apollinaire's naming evokes a sense of immediacy, it also exposes the lack of real presence; the words "Guillaume Apollinaire" replace the physical person with another self

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[18] Timothy Mathews, *Reading Apollinaire : Theories of Poetic Language* (Manchester, UK and Wolfeboro, NH: Manchester University Press, 1987), 178-181.

that emerges through image and text.[19] In her article "Reflecting on the Text: Apollinaire's Mirror," Katherine Shingler argues that the use of a mirror alludes to the standards of conventional painting while simultaneously exposing their constructed nature.[20] The mirror thus represents the traditional concept of painting as a window onto the world—a precisely rendered reflection of the subject. Here, the substitution of Apollinaire's physical being with words distorts the process, revealing the manipulation of the image. Furthermore, as Shingler demonstrates, the fact that Guillaume Apollinaire was a pseudonym suggests that Apollinaire employs the mirror to produce an identity for himself.[21] Apollinaire emphasizes the artifice of this identity by writing his name correctly from left to right, rather than reversing it as would be expected in a mirror image. He hints at the desired perfect reflection, but then refuses to complete the *trompe l'oeil*. He gives the spectacle of his presence in the text "Guillaume Apollinaire," as in a signature, but then refuses a "real and living" reflection of himself by encasing it in the shape of a mirror. He literally draws a boundary around his identity, limiting what the viewer can see. But as the viewer engages with the *calligramme*, she occupies the space in front of the mirror. In this way, the mirror also reflects the identity of the viewer. Therefore, if as the signature-like text in the mirror indicates, "Guillaume Apollinaire" is the author of the *calligramme*, then the viewer too becomes the painter.

Ultimately, "Coeur couronne et miroir" exemplifies Apollinaire's struggle to engage the reader-viewer in the work while simultaneously expressing his personal vision. As we have already seen, the intricate weaving of text and image demands much effort from the consumer.

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[19] Ibid., 181-182.

[20] Katherine Shingler, "Reflecting on the Text: Apollinaire's Mirror," in *The Book of the Mirror : An Interdisciplinary Collection Exploring the Cultural History of the Mirror*, ed. Miranda Anderson (Newcastle, UK: Scholars Press, 2007), 168-169.

[21] Ibid., 175.

The viewer-reader must come to grips with both the disrupted pictorial codes and the unsettling

of syntax and grammar. Only when the roles of viewer and reader join will the complex system

of meaning created by the interplay of image and text be revealed. Once the reader-viewer

recognizes the constructed nature of the illusion perpetuated by artistic conventions, then she can

better engage with the work. As Shingler maintains, the refusal to represent the world

naturalistically does not imply a full refusal of that world.[22] Rather, the space of the work itself

expands to encompass the viewer-reader.

Apollinaire enacts a comparable dissolution of theatrical conventions in *A quelle heure*.

One of the staples of theatrical performance that he worked to combat is the imaginary fourth

wall. In order to disrupt the audience's expectations concerning the illusion of the staged

narrative, Apollinaire employs the entire space of the theater for his total artwork. Rather than

confining the play to the stage, he intentionally surrounds the audience in images and sounds. At

the opening of the play, he permits a character simply named the poet to gesture to the spectators

as if welcoming them to the artwork. Elements such as this contribute to the collapsing of the

fourth wall, and with it the audience's conventional role as detached spectators. Like the reader-

viewer of the *calligrammes*, audience members are no longer secure in their understanding of

how to interact with and interpret *A quelle heure*.

A quelle heure similarly destabilizes Apollinaire's authorial role. Having dissolved the

fourth wall and welcomed the audience into the artwork, Apollinaire invites spectators to

relinquish their traditionally passive role. Encircled by images and sounds, the spectator's

physical presence has become an integral part of the action. No longer able to remain separate

from the performance—as if watching something happen through a window or theatrical

proscenium—the audience might be tempted to interact with the ensuing performance. Should

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[22] Ibid., 177.

the spectators accept this new potential for engagement, then their participation would inevitably change the play to a certain extent. Whether that be in meaning or appearance, the audience member would effectively claim some authorial control. Thus, the collaborative process extends beyond the one between Apollinaire and his co-authors to include the audience.

Apollinaire takes up this blurring of artist and viewer to a greater degree in other works in *Et moi aussi*. For example, in "Lettre-Océan" (fig. 2), he appropriated the materials of daily life– postcards, bits of conversation, and ambient noises—as his subject. He uses these elements to create the contours of the Eiffel Tower. Shown from above, as if looking down on the tower from an airplane, the onomatopoeic text spirals around a central axis. Both the perspective and the text emphasize the power gained from technological progress—the ability to fly over and survey the city, as well as the tower's capability to transmit and receive information transnationally.[23] The perspective also creates a space on the page for the viewer-reader to access the experience of the modern urban environment. The swirling text draws the reader-viewer into the center of the depicted tower. From this space, the text enshrouds the viewer-reader as if she too was a center of transmission, taking in all of the sensorial information offered by the environs. This is akin to the audience member's experience of the collapsed fourth wall and the play's ensuing invasion of the entire space of the theater. Apollinaire even revisits the motif of the Eiffel Tower in *A quelle heure.* In scene four, he employs a projector affixed to the apex of the tower to throw images into the space of the audience. This results in a similar effect wherein a variety of disjunctive sensory information enshrouds the audience just as the spiraling text encircles the reader-viewer. In both cases, Apollinaire brings the viewer-reader and the audience member into the center of the artwork. This results in a necessary abdication of some

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[23] This conflation of the Eiffel Tower and the space of the city is reminiscent of Robert Delaunay's use of the Eiffel Tower in works such as *Eiffel Tower* (1911) and *Champs de Mars: The Red Tower* (1911-1923).

of his authorial control. Once the spectator becomes an integral part of the artwork, the original author can no longer stabilize the meaning of the work. In this way, the collaboration between Apollinaire and the audience produces a constantly shifting theatrical spectacle.

However, another question arises: if Apollinaire hoped his collaborators would understand his intention to base the play on the form of the *calligramme*, why would he provide each with a separate prompt? Though the notion of a "total artwork" traditionally connotes unity, Apollinaire's intentional obfuscation of the play's exact form and meaning suggests that he favored heterogeneity. Arguably, by guiding the contributors' understanding of the play through several *calligrammes* rather than a single source, Apollinaire made certain that each person's interpretation of the play would vary according to the *calligramme* he had received. When combined, their different interpretations would either create something entirely new, or would result in a highly fluid and ambiguous artwork open to multiple and diverse readings.

Already in this early stage of the play we can see how Apollinaire negotiated a balance between his authorial power and that of his co-authors as well as his audience. From this process it is clear that he never intended to construct an artwork unified in form. The play's comprehensive collection of the collaborators', and later the spectators', ideas and interpretations would inevitably result in a fragmented artwork.

Despite the inevitable divergence of the co-authors' interpretations, they seem to have easily come to a decision concerning where to debut *A quelle heure*. Writing for the art column *Paris-Journal* on 25 July 1914, Apollinaire commented:

> Aussitôt sa toile achevée, Picabia est aussitôt parti pour le Jura afin d'y préparer dans la paix des montagnes en collaboration avec Marius de Zayas, des décors pour une pièce qui doit être jouée en Amérique pendant la saison prochaine.

As soon as his canvas was finished, Picabia left for the Jura region to prepare in this peaceful setting, together, with Marius de Zayas, the sets for a play that will be performed in America during the coming season.[24]

Later, in his account of the collaborative efforts, Savinio echoed this desire to bring the play to America:

Tratteggiavamo le scene di una teatralità che avrebbe intonacato cinque fra le più cospicue città degli U. S. A.: « à quelle heure un train partira-t-il pour Paris » ?...

We were sketching the scenes of a theatrical event that would have amazed five of the most important cities in the U. S. A.: *What Time Does the Train Leave for Paris?*[25]

What significance can we draw about the question of the performance's location—the United States, as opposed to Paris? Logistically, de Zayas had already been able to procure financial backing from Alfred Stieglitz to bring the play to New York. De Zayas had been working with Stieglitz to put together exhibitions and other projects for Stieglitz's gallery 291. Stieglitz opened 291 in 1905 as a space for exhibiting photography with the hope of raising the medium's status as a fine art. After achieving much success in the first few years, Stieglitz decided to broaden the type of artwork promoted by the gallery, ultimately turning to modern artists working in both Europe and the U.S. Bohn suggests that the play would have been held in conjunction with 291 exhibitions.[26] In addition to the promise of Stieglitz's financial backing, the group had to consider the complexities involved in the international politics of this moment: with the threat of war brewing on the continent, the collaborators had good reason to believe that the play would be more economically and socially viable in the United States. Chiefly, debuting in New York would have given them the opportunity to expose their work, and European avant-

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[24] Guillaume Apollinaire, "Pour le Salon d'Automne," *Paris-Journal*, 25 July 1914. Reprinted in Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man*, 53-54.

[25] Alberto Savinio, "Il poeta assassinato," *La Voce*, vol. 8, nos. 11-12 (31 December 1916), 439. Reprinted in Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man*, 62.

[26] Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man*, 55.

garde art in general, to a broader audience. In her discussion of Paris-based artists' fascination

with New York in the early twentieth-century, Wanda Corn posits that though these artists

viewed the U.S. as a growing industrial and technological power, they nevertheless perceived

American art as inferior to French art. This produced a paradoxical situation in which these

artists desired both to immerse themselves in the amenities offered by the urban monolith of

New York and to rescue its stymied artistic culture.[27] Corn specifically cites Apollinaire who,

writing in 1917, described France and its poets as artistic "missionaries" of sorts to the US:

> France, the guardian of the whole secret of civilization, a secret only because of the imperfection of those who strive to divine it, has for this very reason become for the greater part of the world a seminary of poets and artists who daily increase the patrimony of civilization.
> And through the truth and the joy they spread, they will make this civilization, if not adaptable to any nation whatever, at least supremely agreeable to all.

He went on to list all of the places where France had bestowed or would bestow its gift of poetry

to foreign peoples, ending with North America:

> To North American, to which in recognition of Edgar Poe and Walt Whitman, French missionaries are carrying during the war the fertile elements destined to nourish a new production of which we have as yet no idea, but which will doubtless not be inferior to those two great pioneers of poetry.[28]

Thus, Apollinaire, Picabia, de Zayas, and Savinio likely understood themselves as ambassadors

importing a new, modern theatrical experience to the American public (or at least those living in

New York).

Though the co-authors anticipated an eager and perhaps even appreciative reception from

the American public, audiences in the U.S. may not necessarily have been prepared to experience

Apollinaire's total artwork. While Parisian viewers had been privy to the development of such

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[27] Wanda M. Corn, *American Thing 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 49-56.

[28] Guillaume Apollinaire, "The New Spirit and the Poets," in *The Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire*, intro and trans. Roger Shattuck (New York: New Directions Books, 1971), 235-236.

modern theatrical works as those performed by the Ballets Russes, the type of modernity offered

by a play like *A quelle heure* had yet to make it to the stages of New York.[29] In this way, the

collaborators secured themselves a theatrical niche with an eager, but unwitting audience.

Having yet to be exposed to vanguard and intentionally controversial forms of dance already

well known on the Continent, such as the Ballets Russes' *L'après-midi d'un faune* (*Afternoon of

a Faun*), with its unnatural, grotesque poses and erotic content, or *Le sacre du printemps* (*The

Rite of Spring*), with its jarring music and provocatively graceless choreography, New York

audiences would have served as the perfect test subjects.[30] Perhaps an audience that had not

developed expectations for what modern theater should, or should not, consist of would have

been more open to Apollinaire's total artwork. On the other hand, an audience so unfamiliar

with the language of such avant-garde performances might have been more shocked than the

jaded Parisian audiences.

The move to New York would also have served to enhance one of the main themes of the

play—the simultaneous experience of life in its temporal and geographical variety. The play, set

primarily in Paris in 1913, but intended to be performed in New York in 1914-15, would

essentially have taken place in two different cities, at two different times, all at once. In other

words, the collapsing of the bounding structures of the theater would result in a compression of

time and space between the setting of the play and the physical environment of the theater. This

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[29] The Ballets Russes debuted in Paris in 1909. Though it never performed in Russia, the company owed its national tie to its founder, Sergei Diaghilev. The ballet company was similarly known for its collaborative efforts. At various times it employed such composers and artists as Igor Stravinsky, Claude Debussy, Léon Bakst, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Natalia Goncharova along with famed choreographers such as Michel Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, and Léonide Massine. For a comprehensive look at the company's history, see Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1998), and for a complex examination of its ballets see Juliet Bellow, *Modernism on Stage*: *The Ballets Russes and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, *1917-1929*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012).

[30] Though not performed in New York, the controversy caused by *Le sacre*'s premiere was reported in the New York Times several days after the Parisian performance on 7 June 1913. During the war, the Ballets Russes relocated to the U.S. where audiences received their performances with open disdain.

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would produce a dissonant effect in which the audience would simultaneously experience 1913 Paris and 1914-15 New York. Thus, the decision to debut in New York would permit an opportunity to exaggerate the blurring of the distinction between artwork and "life in its variety" that already existed within the play—a possibility that certainly would have appealed to Apollinaire.

Ultimately, the connection the collaborators drew between Paris and New York recognized the significance of these cities as modern urban centers. Moreover, it indicates that these artists saw the potential for the expansion of the artistic and popular culture center of the western world, one which might work in their favor. Though the collaborators were forced to halt the production early on in the process, they clearly had envisioned grand plans for *A quelle heure* and for themselves as ambassadors of the avant-garde art to the U.S.

CHAPTER 3

COLLAPSING THE THEATER: *A QUELLE*

HEURE AND SIMULTANEITY

The development of Apollinaire's ideal total artwork depended on a synthesis of media akin to Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but one that would trigger a breakdown in theatrical conventions rather than reinforcing the illusionism of the operatic experience. This collapse of theatrical conventions was crucial to achieving Apollinaire's goal of repositioning the spectator at the center of artwork. He shared this adaptive version of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* with the Futurists, who (as I note above) also believed that the achievement of perceptual, temporal and geographic simultaneity was key to involving the spectator in the work. For Apollinaire, as for the Futurists—although they approached this goal with different motivations—simultaneity ultimately would activate the blurring of the artwork with life outside the space of theater. In this chapter I explore this aspect of Apollinaire's total artwork with a close analysis of scenes one, two, and four of *A quelle heure*, structured around the sensorial bombardment of the spectator through the use not simply of traditional theatrical devices, but also of visual and aural effects. As I will show, these scenes serve to collapse artistic conventions and deploy the constantly shifting, simultaneous experience of the total artwork.

A quelle heure's introduction of a broad variety of artistic materials to the theater thus serves a larger purpose than simply to synthesize multiple arts. In an extension of the principle at work in Apollinaire's *calligrammes*, this synthesis results in a tenuous, divided, and inconstant authorial identity. Intending this synthetic artwork to envelop the audience, Apollinaire hoped that audience members would abandon a passive spectatorial position and become a part of the artwork unfolding around them. His unconventional approach to composition was aimed at

directly engaging the audience, transforming spectators into participants and even creators, in a sense, who have the capacity to interact with and interpret the artwork as they see fit. This openness to the audience member's (re)imagination of form and meaning results in a highly fluid work that always being created anew.

From the beginning, *A quelle heure* launches into a program of disruption and discontinuity. As noted above, the opening scenes reject the conventional structures of theatrical performance. They contain no identifiable, linear plot, nor are they restricted to the space of the stage—their action takes place throughout the physical space of the theater. Furthermore, they rely on artistic materials that traditionally played secondary roles in theatrical productions, such as light effects and ambient noises, or were entirely foreign to the stage, such as film. Apollinaire purposefully turned to such unconventional devices and materials in order to dispel the illusion that a boundary—an entity both physical and metaphorical—separates the audience from the stage. Throughout scenes one, two, and four, Apollinaire attempts to collapse this boundary.[31] He also works to break through the walls of the theater geographically and temporally. For Apollinaire, the theater is no longer a static space with clear divisions among the stage, audience, and outside world. Encircling the audience with the sights and sounds of the modern urban environment—things that could be found just beyond the doors of the theater—he makes it difficult for his imagined audience members to distinguish between the experience of the play and life. In this way, Apollinaire unsettles, disorients, and blurs these boundaries, creating an artwork that is equally a synthesis of media and a synthesis of artwork, audience, and the everyday world.

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[31] I am including scene four with scenes one and two because it is structurally and stylistically similar to the opening scenes.

While this description might conjure Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the latter's

conception of the ideal theater, it departs significantly from Wagner's concern for "creating a

sense of sublime illusion."[32] Where Wagner intended to recreate life in the form of art,

Apollinaire wanted to converge the spaces of art and life—to allow art and life to occur together,

in the same moment. Thus, though Apollinaire and Wagner employed similar language, both

calling for a narrowing of the space between art and life, ultimately their aims were in

opposition. For Wagner, bringing art closer to life meant constructing a theater that would better

convey an illusionistic representation of life. In a speech describing his vision for a new type of

theater space at the laying of the foundation for the *Festspielhaus* at Bayreuth on 22 May 1872,

Wagner declared:

> …the stage picture appearing in consequence to be located in the unapproachable world
> of dreams, while the music, rising up spectrally from the 'mystic abyss' and as such
> resembling the vapours ascending from Gaia's sacred primeval womb beneath the
> Pythia's tripod, transports him [audience member] to that inspired state of clairvoyance in
> which the stage picture that he sees before him becomes the truest reflection of life
> itself.[33]

The specially-designed *Festspielhaus* at Bayreuth, built in 1872-76, provided Wagner with the

opportunity to realize his *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[34] Physical changes to the arena, such as the raked

and darkened audience space and the recessed orchestra, helped the audience members to lose

themselves in the illusion, and to forget that the opera was an artificial construct. Being

immersed in the opera meant being distracted from the outside world, and being permitted to

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[32] Richard Wagner, "The Bayreuth Festival Theatre: containing Wagner's on the laying of the foundation stone of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus on 22 May 1872." Translated in the "Documents" section of Bayreuth Festspiele website http://www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/documents/_the_bayreuth_festival_theatre_341.html.

[33] Wagner, "The Bayreuth Festival Theatre."

[34] Wagner adapted a design that was originally intended for an opera house in Munich by the architect Gottfried Semper. While construction was principally funded by Ludwig II of Bavaria, lack of funds forced Wagner to raise money by performing concerts throughout Europe. The *Festspielhaus* opened in August 1876, with the premiere of Wagner's four opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of Nibelungen*).

fully, or at least psychically, enter into a transcendent "reflection" of that world. The stage, like

a dream, promises the potential to fulfill life's truest desires, at least for the length of the opera's

duration.

Unlike Wagner, Apollinaire did not aspire to construct an illusionistic representation of

the outside world on the stage. On the contrary, he worked to make the artifice of the stage

visible, and to combat the devices for perpetuation illusion like those carefully instituted by

Wagner. By exposing the falsity of a theatrical "ideal world of dreams," Apollinaire hoped to

achieve a sort of meta-theater in which the spectator cannot distinguish between artwork and

life.[35] Though—again, unlike Wagner—Apollinaire never had the opportunity to construct a

theater suited to his new form of stage composition, he nevertheless imagined what that theater

might look like. In the prologue of his 1917 play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (*The Breasts of*

Tirésias), Apollinaire wrote:

> A circular theater with two stages
> One in the middle the other like a ring
> Around the spectators permitting
> The full unfolding of our modern art
> Often connecting in unseen ways as in life
> Sounds gestures colors cries tumults
> Music dancing acrobatics poetry painting
> Choruses actions and multiple sets[36]

Apollinaire proposes a theater akin to a circus, with several activities happening

simultaneously—but here, the audience is wedged between two differently-configured stages.

The stage at the center recalls more traditional theatrical structures, such as an amphitheater; the

second stage, which follows the circumference of the theater, physically surrounds the audience.

This imaginary layout forces spectators to divide their attention: multiple actions could occur on

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[35] Wagner, "The Bayreuth Festival Theatre."

[36] Apollinaire, *Les Mamelles*, 66.

all sides of the audience at any moment, as Apollinaire's description suggests. The spectator's

senses will be overwhelmed with sounds, colors, music, dancing, poetry, acrobatics (the list, with

its intentional lack of punctuation, seems endless) from all directions and at all times. In this

immersive quality, Apollinaire's vision of his ideal theater calls to mind an exaggerated version

of the constant sensory stimulation experienced in modern urban life. Again, it bears noting the

distinction between this vision and Wagner's realization of "a space that exists for no other

purpose than for looking."[37] Wagner presented his audience with a tableau, bolstered by sung

and instrumental music, that would entrance the spectator. Apollinaire wanted his artwork to

reach out from the stage and meet the spectator—to engulf the audience in a kinetic, multi-

sensory experience. In this way, Apollinaire extended Wagner's vision of bringing art closer to

life by expanding the realm of the artwork into the space of life and, in effect, building bridges

between the stage and audience and between the theater and the outside world.

     As noted above, Apollinaire did not have the means or the opportunity to build the

structure he described in *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. However, the script for *A quelle heure*

shows that Apollinaire attempted to use the artwork itself to produce the effects that this new

theater would have permitted, centering the spectator in the artwork and blurring the boundaries

between artwork and life outside. To accomplish this, he drew upon a wide range of media: *A*

quelle heure in this way prefigures the list of materials in *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, which I have

characterized as a description of his ideal total artwork The synthesis of the materials listed

permitted Apollinaire to (re)construct the simultaneous sensorial experiences of daily life within

the confines of a still conventional theatrical setting, in which the proscenium frame literally and

metaphorically separates the space of the stage from that of the audience.

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[37] Wagner, "The Bayreuth Festival Theatre."

A brief synopsis of each scene will provide the basis for an analysis of these three scenes.[38] Scene one opens on a white screen spanning the length of the stage which contains a single occupant—a poet who stands in the narrow space left between the screen and the footlights. The illuminated screen reveals dark silhouettes that appear to greet the poet as they pass. Then, a black curtain falls in front of the screen and the poet, obscuring all light in the theater. A powerful voice shouts through a megaphone:

> Je ne chante pas ce monde ni les autres astres
> Je chante toutes les possibilités de moi-même
>   hors de ce monde et des astres
> Je chante la joie d'errer et le plaisir d'en mourir.

> I sing not of this world nor of other stars
> I sing of all the possibilities of myself
>   beyond this world and the stars
> I sing of the joy of wandering and of the pleasure of a wanderer's death.[39]

This opening scene serves to initiate the process of breaking down the imaginary fourth wall. Apollinaire deploys effects such as the darkening of the entire theater, expanding on Wagner's institution of the darkening of the audience, in order to suggest to the spectators that the spaces of the stage and the audience are not separate, but in fact flow one into the other.

Scene two furthers the dissolution of the boundary between stage and audience. With the black curtain still lowered, a strip of white canvas, inscribed with the date "the 21st of the month of May 1913," passes across the length of the curtain. For the first time, the audience hears the sound of the faceless musician's flute, as if from far away. The black curtain then rises to reveal millions of flies surrounding an illuminated column. But, suddenly, the stage is thrown into darkness. As the lights are raised, the audience begins to make out the form of a city with

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[38] Though I paraphrase my accounts, I attempt to keep faithful to the language and syntax of Apollinaire's descriptions.

[39] Apollinaire, *A quelle heure*, 9. These lines were taken verbatim from "Le Musicien de Saint-Merry."

sidewalks, fuming chimneys, and trees. Recognizable landmarks include the Eiffel Tower, the

Arc de Triomphe, Notre-Dame, and the smokestack of a tall factory: we are in modern Paris.

The dark profile of a hand, printed on the wall near the right wing, points to a street sign that

reads "rue Aubry-le-Boucher." The faceless musician enters on the left, slowly making his way

across the stage, then enters the street and disappears. The Eiffel Tower begins to project images

into the audience. Noises of the city are heard, including car horns, bells, bugles, the crackling

of the wireless telegraphy, and shouting voices:

> « Dans mon enfance il n'y avait pas d'automobiles ».
> > « Au secours ! »
> « Un aéroplane bourdonne ».
> > « Vive la liberté ! »
> « Nous partirons pour l'Amérique ».
>
> "When I was a child there weren't any automobiles."
> > "Help!"
> "An airplane whirs."
> > "Long live liberty!"
> "We will leave for America."[40]

The combination of the projected images and sounds whirling around the space of the audience

reflects a total collapse of the fourth wall. Apollinaire launches the artwork into the audience,

surrounding the spectator with the sights and noises of a modern urban environment in an

attempt to shrink the space between life inside and outside the theater.

While scene three (discussed in the next chapter) interrupts this process of merging the

stage and audience, providing an interlude that follows the narrative of the faceless musician,

scene four revisits the use of projections, this time in order to dissolve the boundaries of time and

space. The scene opens with the curtain falling in front of the Parisian monuments, as the music

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[40] Apollinaire, *A quelle heure*, 14.

of the faceless musician dissipates. "Through the use of lights or projections," Apollinaire

writes,

> on exprime la vie et sa variété: Départs de chemins de fer — La végétation et les oiseaux
> aux tropiques — La vie religieuse et panique de l'Afrique Equatoriale — La douceur des
> fleuves européens — La vie dans les fraiches petites villes du centre de la France — La
> nuit européenne traversée de trains de marchandises — Vie urbain européenne — Et des
> paysages de hautes cheminées.
>   Puis, par musique et projection, l'histoire de Paris avec ses cortèges anciens. Troupe
> de casquettiers, marchands de bananes et — surtout ! — des soldats de la Grande
> Républicaine. Passage du roi, costume moderne : Napoléon III avec deux suivants.
>
> we are shown life in its variety: railway departures—tropical vegetation and birds—
> religious life and panic in Equatorial Africa—the gentle flowing of European rivers—life
> in the small, fresh villages in the center of France—the European night traversed by
> freight trains—urban, European life—and landscapes of tall chimneys.
>   Then, with music and projections, the history of Paris with its ancient processions: a
> troupe of hatters, banana merchants and—especially!—the soldiers of the Republican
> Guard. The king passes wearing a modern costume: Napoléon III with his two servants.[41]

Here, Apollinaire employs a series of disjunctive images, perhaps in evocation of a filmed

travelogue, common during this period, to reveal life in its broadest sense—past and present,

near and far, old and new. He opens the artwork to include not only the audience in the here and

now, but also all available moments in time and space. The simultaneity of time and space

evoked by the projections suggests a corresponding convergence of the outside world and the

artwork.

The purpose of these three scenes is to gradually work towards enacting the blurring of

life and *A quelle heure*. In order to successfully achieve the total simultaneity that he eventually

presents in scene four, Apollinaire must first break down the conventional structures dividing the

space of the artwork and audience. He initiates this process from the very beginning of *A quelle*

heure through the figure of the poet who opens the work's first scene. The choice of beginning

the play with a sole figure on stage—the poet—harkens back to ancient Greek theater, which

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[41] Apollinaire, *A quelle heure*, 21.

often comprised a prologue with a single speaker who provides the context and sets the tone for the story to follow. However, Apollinaire's poet thwarts the audience's expectations through his silence: he refuses audience members any hope that this character might provide some comprehensible context, or insight into what Apollinaire has in store for them. Instead, the poet simply directs the spectators' attention to the illuminated screen. He watches as dark silhouettes cross the length of the stage. Apollinaire describes these silhouettes as "des êtres que le poète ne connaît pas mais qu'il a droit enfin de saluer" ("beings whom the poet does not know but who he finally has the right to greet").[42] The passing, darkened silhouettes could evoke two aspects of a cinematic experience: they conjure up the black-and-white figures of the period's films, or the image of an audience member who, having risen from her seat mid-film, unintentionally throws her shadowy profile across the screen. Thus, in an evocation of the beginning of Apollinaire's *Et moi aussi*, which also begins with an image of a shadow cast by either Apollinaire the poet, or by the reader, the unfamiliar silhouettes that commence *A quelle heure* may be intended to implicate the audience in the action on stage.   Apollinaire invites the spectators to imagine themselves as the owners of those shadows moving silently across the screen. The poet (possibly a stand-in for Apollinaire) therefore eagerly greets the shadowy spectators who, though unfamiliar to him, finally occupy a space alongside him on the stage. The poet's greeting, an acknowledgement of their presence, no matter how tenuous the forms, forces the spectators to recognize their embodied relation to the physical world of the stage. His welcoming gesture eagerly embraces them, inviting their participation in the artwork.

Apollinaire reinforces this invitation to participate when he subsequently throws the entire theater into darkness. Obscuring the visible divisions between stage and audience, this

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[42] Apollinaire, *A quelle heure*, 9. This closely resembles the opening line in "Le Musicien de Saint-Merry: « J'ai enfin le droit de saluer des êtres que je ne connais pas » ("I finally have the right to greet unfamiliar beings").

gesture gives the sense that the theater is boundless, extending in all directions at once. The artwork, like the blackness, swallows the spectators who now appear to physically inhabit the realm of the play.[43] The call through the megaphone further enhances this effect. The megaphone would magnify the voice in such a way that it would bounce off the walls of the theater. Unable to locate the source of the declaration, the audience would feel surrounded by the voice. Thus, Apollinaire has essentially recreated the effect of an audience enclosed by the circular stage of *Les Mamelles*, but using only the play itself. Echoing through the dark, the voice—and therefore the stage—is both everywhere and nowhere.

After having completely destabilized the audience's expectations about the physical configuration of the theater in *A quelle heure*'s initial scene, Apollinaire returns to a rather conventional mode of scenery in scene two. The use of textual and visual representations of landmarks to denote the setting on stage contrasts dramatically with the holistic, darkened environment. Perhaps realizing this contradiction, Apollinaire found a means to compensate by envisioning the possibility of projecting images from the top of the Eiffel Tower into the space of the audience. These projections are accompanied by the sounds of the city, specifically the sounds created by technology and industry, as well as the disjointed exclamations of passersby. This reversal of the theatrical space, wherein effects are projected from the stage into the theater rather than vice versa, once again allows the spectators to experience the play as if from inside.

Furthermore, in employing the motif of the Eiffel Tower as a mechanism to reposition the spectator at the center of the artwork, Apollinaire returned to a poetic device he had employed in his *calligramme* "Lettre-Océan" (fig. 2). At first glance, the right side of the *calligramme* appears to depict a spiral of onomatopoeic words flanked by phrases organized into lines

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[43] Wagner was the first to institute the darkened audience in hopes of enhancing the illusion that the spectators were being transported to the world of the opera. In this way, Apollinaire expanded on Wagner's idea by using the effect of darkness to unite the audience and stage.

projecting outward from the spiral. A further look at the words in the center of the spiral, "Haute de 300 métres" ("From a height of 300 meters"), reveals that the sun-like shape is actually meant to serve as a representation of the Eiffel Tower, as if seen from above. The central structure of the tower consists of the sounds of sirens, buses, gramophones, and the poet's squeaky new shoes. The legs of the tower are built from fragmented conversations, interrupted thoughts, and the broken cries of street vendors. This appeal to the viewer-reader's senses within the structure of the Eiffel Tower resembles Apollinaire's use of the tower as the source of similar sensory effects in scene two.

In *A quelle heure*, Apollinaire transposed the motif of the Eiffel Tower as the locus of the modern urban environment from the two-dimensional page of the *calligramme* to the live space of the stage. While the noises and shouts remain silently affixed to the page of "Lettre-Océan," dependent on the reader-viewer to activate them by reading aloud, they reverberate freely across the room of the theater in *A quelle heure*. Approaching the *calligramme*, the viewer-reader must imagine or give voice to the "cré cré cré" of the shoes or the "hou ou ou" of the siren in order to immerse herself in the urban environment. In contrast, during the play, Apollinaire activates the sensory effects himself through the use of a variety of materials, plunging the audience member into the center of modern Paris. He provides the iconic sites, the endless din, and the constant motion and light of the city for his audience. In this way, the total artwork as a stimulating sensory experience is potentially more successful as a theatrical endeavor than as a two-dimensional poem. Where poetry is inherently limited to word and page (with the potential for sound), theater can deploy images and sounds using multiple media. Moreover, theater has the capacity to more fully realize an embodied spectatorial experience. Thus, by drawing from a

wide number of media, *A quelle heure* engages the audience in a multisensory, simultaneous, and

perhaps even totalizing experience of all of the facets of modern urban life.

In making a "simultaneous" experience of the urban environment key to the development

of his ideal total artwork, Apollinaire appropriated the idea of a totalizing experience from others

besides Wagner—particularly members of the Futurist circle, whose ideas had circulated widely

in the Parisian art world from the publication of the "Founding Manifesto of Futurism" in the

French daily *Le Figaro* in 1909. In an address to the public concerning the exhibition of their

works, Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, and Gino Severini

presented this aim of Futurist art:

> The simultaneousness of states of mind in the work of art: that is the intoxicating aim of
> our art…In order to make the spectator live in the center of the picture, as we express it in
> our manifesto, the picture must be the synthesis of *what one remembers* and of *what one
> sees*. You must render the invisible which stirs and lives beyond intervening obstacles,
> what we have on the right, on the left, and behind us, and not merely the small square of
> life artificially compressed, as it were, by the wings of the stage.[44]

For these artists, simultaneity represented the possibility of combining the past, the present, and

the future in all capacities. They desired to collapse temporal and geographic boundaries—to

make any and all moments, any and all spaces available in a single instance. The metaphor of

the compression of life between the "wings of the stage" seems appropriate here. Like the

Futurists, Apollinaire was determined to shatter such limiting structures—and as a result, to

widen the possibilities of what theater could present to the audience.

Other similarities between Apollinaire's use of simultaneity in his total artwork and

Futurism can be found in F. T. Marinetti's manifesto on "The Variety Theater." Written in 1913,

the manifesto enumerates the qualities that Marinetti championed in his ideal Futurist theater,

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[44] Balla, Giacomo et al. "The Exhibitors to the Public," in *Futurism An Anthology*, eds. Lawrence Rainey et al. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 106-107. Originally published February 1912.

derived from popular sources such as variety and music-hall shows. In point six Marinetti

writes,

> The Variety Theater, therefore, is the synthesis of everything that humanity up till now
> has refined within its nervous system in order to amuse itself …it is the seething fusion of
> all the laughter and all the smiles, all the guffaws, all the contortions, all the smirks of
> humanity to come.[45]

This excerpt reinforces the idea of simultaneity as a synthesis of the past, present, and future.

Here though, Marinetti limits this synthesis to forms of amusement. In point seven, Marinetti

echoes Apollinaire's list of the materials of life in *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*: "…the Variety

Theater is the most hygienic by virtue of the dynamism of its forms and colors (simultaneous

movements of jugglers, ballerinas, gymnasts, colorful riding masters, spiraling cyclones of

dancers spinning on the points of their feet)."[46] Unlike Apollinaire, Marinetti limits his materials

to dynamic forms of popular entertainment. Finally, point eight of the manifesto discusses

audience collaboration and the expansion of action beyond the stage. Marinetti writes:

> The public is not static like a stupid voyeur, but joins noisily in the action, singing
> along with songs, accompanying the orchestra, communicating with the actors by
> speaking up at will or engaging in bizarre dialogues. The actors even bicker clownishly
> with musicians.
> The Variety Theater uses the smoke of cigars and cigarettes to merge the
> atmosphere of the audience with that of the stage. And since the audience collaborates in
> this way with the actors' imaginations, the action develops simultaneously on the stage,
> in the boxes, and in the orchestra.[47]

Marinetti's desire for spectators to become an integral part of the action clearly parallels

Apollinaire's vision of a theater in which the audience is literally at the center. Marinetti simply

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[45] F. T. Marinetti, "The Variety Theater," in *Futurism: An Anthology*, eds. Lawrence Rainey et al. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 160. Originally published in an independent leaflet (September 1913). Republished in *Lacerba* 1, no. 19 (October 1913).

[46] Marinetti, "The Variety Theater," 160.

[47] Marinetti, "The Variety Theater," 160-161.

replaces the effect of darkness with the smoke of cigars and cigarettes to join the separate areas of the theater.

However, there exist significant differences between the Variety Theater and Apollinaire's total artwork, stemming from Marinetti's insistence on dynamism, amusement, and the generally boisterous behavior of the spectators. Marinetti envisioned a lively crowd reacting to a highly kinetic, chaotic performance—possibly reacting in opposition to what they see. In contrast, Apollinaire wanted spectators to immerse themselves in his theatrical piece, making it their own. Moreover, where Marinetti championed popular entertainments, Apollinaire largely retained traditional artistic devices, such as the poetic narrative, in order to preserve a sense of conventional aesthetic value. Thus, while the jarring immediacy of the images and sounds produced by the Eiffel Tower resembles the Futurist effect of simultaneity, Apollinaire's goal of a totalizing experience ultimately diverged from Marinetti's appeal for a chaotic invasion of the theater.

We see Apollinaire's distinctive conception of simultaneity in scene four of *A quelle heure*, where his vision of this principle culminates. The curtain falls on the stage and the audience's attention is drawn to projections of "life in its variety." Film (or something resembling a filmic travelogue) sweeps the audience back and forth in time and between places. Images of railroads are quickly replaced by images of tropical birds, European rivers, and soldiers in jarring succession. Music accompanies scenes of the history of Paris, with banana sellers, the Republican Guard, and Napoleon III. Apollinaire employs film to transport the audience not only beyond the walls of the theater, but also beyond the space and time of modern Paris. This scenario resembles Apollinaire's discussion of painting in *Méditations esthétiques:*

les peintres cubistes, where he identified a new plasticity of space and time as the propagation of

a fourth dimension in art:

> …it (fourth dimension) represents the immensity of space eternalizing itself in all
> directions at any given moment. It is space itself, the dimension of the infinite; the fourth
> dimension endows objects with plasticity. It gives the object its right proportion on the
> whole, whereas in Greek art, for instance, a somewhat mechanical rhythm constantly
> destroys the proportions. Greek art had a purely human conception of beauty. It took
> man as the measure of perfection. But the art of the new painters takes the infinite
> universe as its ideal, and it is to this ideal that we owe a new norm of the perfect, one
> which permits the painter to proportion objects in accordance with the degree of plasticity
> he desires to have.[48]

Once again, Apollinaire rejects traditional illusionism and ideal beauty in favor of a

multiplication of the audience's perspective. David LeHardy Sweet posits that this is precisely

what Apollinaire's *calligrammes* attempted to achieve—the two-dimensional portrayal of the

space around an object and all that that space contains.[49] This recalls the image of the Eiffel

Tower in "Lettre-Océan," where Apollinaire gives the sense of the sights and sounds one might

hear while walking around the tower as the viewer-reader peers down from above. Moreover,

the text references places—Havana—and objects—Chirimoya—from outside of Paris that both

allude to the tower's function as a center of transnational communication and suggest that the

viewer-reader might be experiencing multiple environments simultaneously.[50]

The theatrical environment allowed Apollinaire to further the effect initially attempted in

the *calligramme*. The motif of the Eiffel Tower as the locus of the convergence of space and

time in "Lettre-Océan" resembles the jarring succession of projected images found in scene four

of *A quelle heure*. Film gives the effect of the plasticity of time and space precisely because it

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[48] Guillaume Apollinaire, *Méditations esthétiques: les peintres cubistes*, eds. L.C. Breunig and J.-Cl.
Chevalier (Paris: Hermann, 1965).

[49] David LeHardy Sweet, *Savage Sight/Constructed Noise : Poetic Adaptations of Painterly Techniques in
the French and American Avant-Gardes* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 57.

[50] The Eiffel Tower has been used for broadcasting since the beginning of the 20th century. Initially it was
employed as a wireless telegraphy station and had the capacity to exchange signals internationally.

has the capacity to montage a multitude of images depicting different times and places within a matter of seconds.[51] The convergence of spaces and times through film and music both unsettles the audience's sense of a static self and produces the sensation of omnipresence.

Herein lies the contradictory nature of the total artwork, as Apollinaire imagines it: even in its temporal, geographical, and sensorial simultaneity, the total artwork lacks unity. Although audience members may experience the power that comes with imaginary access to all times and spaces at once, they equally may be overwhelmed by the discontinuity and dissonance that results from this experience. In this way, though Apollinaire's theater permits the synthesis of artist, artwork, audience, and life through the combination of various, different media, it nevertheless produces a work that is undeniably fragmented and constantly in flux. Thus, in Apollinaire's vision of the total artwork, the genre develops not from a coherent or complete collaboration among artistic genres, but rather from the disorder produced by the amalgamation of poetry, stage decoration, music, text, film, noise, motion, light, and anything else Apollinaire can fit into the given space of the theater. For Apollinaire, the paradoxical aim of this totality is disruption manifested through collaboration, synthesis, and simultaneity. The disordering of the boundaries of the theater—the construction of a theater made of two stages—necessitates a play with parts that refuse the formation of a single, whole, fixed image. Even with its notable sum of artistic genres, Apollinaire's ideal total artwork must therefore always appear incomplete.

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[51] Juliet Bellow discusses a similar matter in the context of the 1917 ballet *Parade* in "Moving Pictures: Pablo Picasso and *Parade*," *Modernism on Stage*, 87-128.

CHAPTER 4

ABSURDITY AND AMBIGUITY: INTERPRETING

THE POETIC NARRATIVE?

The challenges Apollinaire presented to conventional theater in the opening scenes of *A quelle heure*, with the dissolution of the fourth wall and his innovative reversal of stage and audience, laid the foundation for a complete assimilation of spectators into the play. However, temporarily halting the intermedial program of scenes one, two, and four, he inconsistently returns the play to the physical and metaphorical boundaries of the stage in order to produce a somewhat traditional narrative in scenes three, five, and six. These scenes address the character the faceless musician in a relatively conventional manner, driven by a plot that viewers could follow. Yet despite the seeming linearity of the plot, Apollinaire complicated the narrative with absurd actions and ambiguous moments: rather than contradicting or opposing the "simultaneity" of the other portions of the work, these seemingly traditional scenes actually reinforce the fluid, tenuous nature of *A quelle heure* and thus help in the process of "encircling" and involving the spectator in the work.

Transposing the text of scenes three, five, and six into live action, Apollinaire confined actors, scenery, and visual effects to the stage. This choice, confusing at best, seems to undermine his earlier strides toward a total artwork. Nonetheless, it suggests that the construction of a new, synthesized genre posed several problems that Apollinaire felt he needed to solve. First, the audience might not comprehend the experience offered by the total artwork, which could lead to the play's aesthetic and commercial failure. By incorporating some aspects of a traditional narrative structure within *A quelle heure*, Apollinaire ensured that he was meeting some of the audience's expectations. The financial success of the venture certainly provided an

impetus to compromise on the complete dissolution of traditional theater in order to reassure spectators and to attract new audiences. Perhaps Apollinaire thought he might be able to temper the shock of the opening scenes by briefly reinstating the fourth wall. However, his return to the more radical, intermedial structure in scene four, as well as the insistent uncertainty imbued throughout the narrative of the faceless musician, suggests that perhaps Apollinaire wanted to make the spectators uncomfortably aware of the fourth wall and his purposeful collapsing of it in his total artwork.

Another issue Apollinaire had to consider was the terms of the relationship he was drawing between the synthesized genres, and the potential creation of a hierarchy. While synthesis implies that each genre would be combined and deployed on equal terms, *A quelle heure*'s use of a staged narrative implies a championing of one genre—poetry— over the others included in the work. As previously discussed, the play was generated from two poetic sources: "Le Musicien de Saint Merry" and the *calligrammes*. Thus, despite Apollinaire's overarching desire to bring multiple genres together in a unified goal, he still chose, at least to some degree, to highlight or to privilege his preferred medium. This choice suggests a certain amount of anxiety over poetry's potential loss of aesthetic significance if it were to be merged with other genres. This concern recalls Wagner's paradoxical assertion that only through the commonality required by the *Gesamtkunstwerk* can the sister arts achieve their transcendent and truly individual forms.[52] Both Wagner and Apollinaire were hesitant to assimilate the arts to the point where individual genres could no longer be distinguished. For Apollinaire, this hesitation predominantly concerned the potential demise of poetry in the process of constructing a new, synthesized genre.

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[52] Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, 193

However, as noted above, in spite of the more conventional narrative structure of scenes three, five, and six, Apollinaire did not construct a cohesive story that spectators could easily follow. In order to maintain the abdication of authorial control that he instituted in both his *calligrammes* and scenes one, two, and four of *A quelle heure*, and to reengage audience participation, Apollinaire turned to ambiguity and absurdity. The story of the faceless musician is fraught with confusing imagery, perplexing action, and frankly shocking moments. Much of the narrative offers the potential for multiple and often contradictory interpretations, deliberately creating a lack of clarity that lends itself to audience participation: Apollinaire invites spectators to creatively engage with the narrative, drawing on their individual knowledge and experiences to derive meaning from the play. To a certain extent, this allows spectators to adopt something akin to the authorial role that they were afforded by the collapse of the fourth wall in the other scenes. More significantly, it ensures that each spectator will interpret the narrative of the faceless musician differently. As with the play's collaborative pre-production process, the potential for a variety of interpretations results in an artwork that can never be fixed in meaning. Apollinaire thus retains some of the disruptive qualities of the play's other scenes, aspects key to the operation of his ideal total artwork.

Apollinaire packs numerous disparate elements into his brief descriptions of the plot. The central action revolves around the figure of the faceless musician. Through the hypnotic power of his flute, the faceless musician lures a group of women, many of whom have discolored skin or missing limbs, through the Marais, a historic district in the center of Paris. They follow the faceless musician into an old, abandoned house with broken windows. Just before entering, each woman shouts her name. Having heard the noise, two men—a soldier and a poet—enter from opposite sides of the stage and watch the procession with apprehension and shock. As

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night falls, the music fades. The soldier and poet approach the house. Finding it sealed, they force the door open, only to find that the women have vanished. The final scene returns to the small square where the musician first appeared. The musician stands to the right, while the soldier and poet enter from a door on the left. Napoleon III, described as "*le souverain automatique*" (the automatic sovereign) crosses the stage with his entourage who blow their noses. The sovereign commits suicide by revolver and the play draws to an end.

In his examination of the figure of the faceless musician, Willard Bohn has enumerated the diverse array of sources from which Apollinaire may have adapted the character. The narrative has ties to ancient Greek myths, including those concerning Dionysus, Pan, and Orpheus, as well as other folkloric characters, particularly the Pied Piper of Hamelin.[53] Despite the clear allusions to each of these figures, Apollinaire's faceless musician cannot be precisely linked to any one single referent. The figure also clearly evolved from Apollinaire's poem "Le Musicien de Saint Merry." In both works, Apollinaire describes the faceless musician as "un homme sans yeux sans nez et sans oreilles" ("a man without eyes without a nose and without ears").[54] Between this intertextual reference and the literary sources, spectators were sure to find familiar characteristics in the narrative of the faceless musician—that is, except for his facelessness.

Although Apollinaire's faceless musician does then seem to derive from some combination of literary sources, he also references pictorial precedents. Bohn compares the character to contemporaneous paintings by Giorgio de Chirico that depict faceless, mannequin-like figures. De Chirico returned to this stock figure throughout the duration of his career in

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[53] Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless* Man, 31-40. Bohn, "A New Play," 76.

[54] Apollinaire, "Le Musicien de Saint Merry), 152. Apollinaire, *A quelle heure*, 14.

works such as *The Duo* (1914-15), *The Painters Family* (1926), and *Il Trovatore* (1948-1949). However, it is unclear whether de Chirico, Apollinaire, or perhaps even Savinio originated the motif. [55] More important to our understanding of these faceless figures than the identity of their original author are the contradictory terms of a figure who, though lacking conventional senses, assumes a greater, prophetic power. We find one such example in de Chirico's 1914 *Portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire* (fig. 4). The painting depicts two figures: a bust of a man wearing sunglasses and a profile view of a mysterious figure hidden in the shadows. As Bohn demonstrates in his discussion of the portrait, though the sunglasses could signify blindness, their masking of the figure's eyes may hint at a furtively probing gaze. He compares the bust's disguised ability to the blind poet—a visionary who, despite his blindness to the present, can glimpse the future by looking inward.[56] The shadowy profile presents a similar paradox. Though the viewer cannot make out the figure's eyes, his voyeur-like position, peering out from the recesses of the painting, implies that the silhouette can see more of the viewer than she can of him. Moreover, the manner in which the figure hovers above the bust, looking down as if from a bird's eye view into the unstable space created by upturned walls, adds to our sense that his viewing position is privileged. Thus, while de Chirico has effaced the eyes of both figures, he has simultaneously endowed them with what could be construed as a superior or advantageous form of sight (or insight).

Apollinaire imbues his character in *A quelle heure* with similarly contradictory features. Like the blinded figures in de Chirico's paintings, the faceless musician lacks the sensory

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[55] For an in depth discussion of this issue see Bohn, "Giorgio de Chirico among the Mannequins," *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man*, 96-131. Giorgio de Chirico was Alberto Savinio's older brother, and is known to have previously met Apollinaire who often supported de Chirico in his art criticism.

[56] Willard Bohn, "Giorgio de Chirico's *Portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire* of 1914," *The Burlington Magazine* 147, No. 1232 (November, 2005): 753-54.

apparatus that allows humans to engage with the world. Relieved of at least three of his five

senses, we might assume that he could not perform everyday tasks on his own. His inability to

receive almost all sensory information should, for example, severely inhibit his capacity to walk

through the city unaided. Yet not only can Apollinaire's character stroll effortlessly through the

streets of Paris, but he can also produce a melody that entices others to join him—to the point

where his followers appear to relinquish their sense of independent will. Clearly the faceless

musician cannot be human, for his seeming limitations pose no issue whatsoever. In addition, he

appears to thrive on an inexplicable, other-worldly source of power that grants him control over

the Parisian women, as well as, possibly, the members of the audience who are similarly led

through the narrative by the character. His lack of a face may therefore be attributed to the fact

that he has no need for a face in order to function and even perform spectacles far beyond the

capacity of the average human. In this way, his facelessness can be understood as a signifier of

his higher powers. However, the referents for the figure identified by Bohn, both literary and

pictorial, do not account for the character's decidedly modern source of power.

Apollinaire's description of the faceless musician suggests that the figure's sensorial

limitations are derived from mechanical origins:

> L'homme sans yeux, sans nez et sans oreilles s'avance lentement, venant de droite, jouant de la flûte. Il n'a pas de bouche mais joue de la flûte par une ouverture qu'il porte à la gorge et où est appliquée une rondelle de caoutchouc ou bien de métal, semblable à celle que l'on met aux chevaux opérés dans leurs voies respiratoires.

> The man without eyes, nose and ears advances slowly, entering from the right, playing the flute. He does not have a mouth but instead plays the flute through an opening in his throat where a rubber or metal ring, resembling that which we put in the respiratory tracts of horses during operations, has been placed. [57]

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[57] Apollinaire, *A quelle* heure, 17.

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Apollinaire's description of the character emphasizes his machine-like qualities in a variety of ways: by noting his sensory deprivation; his slow, purposeful movement; and the conflation of his body with inorganic objects. In referencing an opening in the throat made during a surgical operation, Apollinaire conjures up recent advancements in the medical sciences. Specifically, he evokes developments achieved through the incorporation of machine-produced materials into surgical practice in the early years of the twentieth-century.[58] Whatever the positive implications of such developments may have been, the image of a faceless man with a hole in his throat, a hole forcibly held open by a rubber or metal ring, seems meant to disturb in its intentional dehumanization of the body.

This dehumanization extends to the manner in which the character produces his entrancing melody. Deprived of the necessary physical attributes humans employ to play a flute, the musician instead positions the instrument at an opening in his throat. The flute thus functions like an attachment that fuses to the body—musician and instrument become one. The synthesis of man and machine renders the source of the music—instrument or mind—unidentifiable. Does the faceless musician have the intellectual capacity to make decisions about the melody he plays? Or, is he a purely mechanical being who emits the melody automatically once the flute is in place? And how was this equation of music to technology intended? The hybridity of the character lends itself to multiple and contradictory understandings. If we consider longstanding debates concerning the hierarchy of artistic genres, many have championed music above other arts as the art best capable of leading listeners to a transcendent state because it employs purely

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[58] Tracheostomies or tracheotomies have been a part of medical practices since ancient times, though the first documented successful case was not until 1546 by the Italian physician Antonio Musa Brasavola. Despite this, mortality rates after this type of surgery remained high until the procedure was standardized by Chevalier Jackson in the early 1900s. While today's tracheostomy tubes are commonly made of plastic and other similar materials, earlier tubes were made of steel, silver, or rubber as referenced here. O. Rajesh and R. Meher, "Historical Review of Tracheostomy," *The Internet Journal of Otorhinolaryngology* 4, No. 2 (2005).

formal means. Therefore, Apollinaire's conflation of music with technology may be viewed

positively—technology, like music, has the ability to advance civilization to a progressed state.

However, the notion of a human body made unrecognizable by technology rings pessimistic.

Whether or not the musician's loss of ears, eyes, nose, and mouth directly resulted from the

incorporation of the metal ring is unclear. Nevertheless, the combination of the two suggests that

there are physically detrimental consequences to society's progressively increasing reliance on

technology. This negative tone is enhanced by the procession of women who follow the

mechanical being as if thoughtlessly entrusting their course to his whim, becoming machine-like

in their own right. This procession extends metaphorically to the spectators who follow

Apollinaire into the space of the total artwork just as the women trail the faceless musician into

the house. Thus, perhaps Apollinaire is also pointing out the potential pitfalls of the total

artwork. Ultimately, the tension created by the hybrid characteristics of the faceless musician

produces an ambiguity that encourages multiple interpretations. By constructing a figure that is

neither human nor robot, Apollinaire generated an uncertainty that would allow each spectator to

understand the faceless musician differently. As the author of their personal interpretation of the

figure, each spectator's experience of *A quelle heure*'s narrative would vary slightly. When

taken into account with the fragmented and tenuous experience of the intermedial scenes, the

multivalence of the figure of the faceless musician reinforces the fluidity of the play as a whole.

     The character's plasticity, in fact, proved to be both effective and challenging during the

production process. In the collaborative group's alternative manifestations of the faceless

musician, the merging of body and machine becomes even more explicit. Writing for the literary

periodical *La Voce*, Savinio recalled the group's dispute over the appearance of the figure:

> Non ci s'accomunava nemmeno sulla figura del protagonist: farlo apparire con il viso imbottito di stoppa, con la cucitura che gli scendesse giù dall'occipite sino alla ganascia come una grossa vena?... oppure sintetizzarlo in un grappolo di lampadine volitanti?...

> We couldn't even agree on the protagonist's appearance: should he appear on stage with his face stuffed with oakum and a seam running from his occiput to his jawline like a large vein?...or should he be represented by a fluttering cluster of light bulbs?...[59]

Due to the intervention of World War I, the collaborators never came to a consensus on the final physical form of the faceless musician. Nevertheless, this debate highlights the level of fluidity that Apollinaire permitted in his co-authors' conceptions of the play. Savinio's account suggests that each had a significant amount of input in the visual reconstruction of the text. It also reveals that there was not one clear vision as to what the resulting production should look like, but rather several competing ideas. Perhaps the variation of their descriptions of the character was a result of Apollinaire's intentional obfuscation of his own vision for the production. As previously demonstrated by his dissemination of different *calligrammes* among the group as a means of informing their interpretations of the play, Apollinaire engaged his peers in a process that was as concerned with individual imagination as it was with collaboration. Ultimately, Apollinaire intended to extend the same interpretive flexibility experienced by Savinio, Picabia, and de Zayas during the production process to his audience members. The ambiguity inherent in the figure of the faceless musician helped him to achieve his goal of a multivalent narrative.

Apollinaire perpetuated the openness of the narrative in his conception of the Parisian women. In his description of the women who gather around the faceless musician, he conveys a similar sense of uncertainty:

> Tandis qu'il continue de jouer, peu à peu des *femmes* de toutes sortes viennent autour de lui : femme sans tête, femme sans bras, femme bleue, femme rouge, femme chauve, femme chic, petite fille, vieille femme. Plusieurs jolies filles, femmes en-cheveux, femmes nues (en maillot).

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[59] Savinio, "Il poeta assassinato," 439. Reprinted by Bohn, *Faceless Man*, 62.

> While he continues to play, little by little women of all sorts surround him: a woman without a head, a woman without arms, a blue woman, a red woman, a bald woman, a chic woman, a little girl, an old woman. Several pretty girls, women with uncovered hair, nude women (in bathing suits). [60]

Here though, bodily distortion does not appear to be mechanically induced. Some women are fragmented, discolored, or made vulnerable through bared head and skin, while others remain whole and even idealized or chic. The juxtaposition of distorted and idealized bodies evokes a tension between fear and pleasure. The violence enacted upon the women missing appendages and the women whose skin has adopted a sickly blue or a blood red hue inevitably invites viewers to think about the fragility of their own bodies. At the same time, viewers can still gaze upon the whole bodies as objects of desire, particularly the nude women whose exposed forms recall the tradition of the female nude in painting. Thus, the diverse array of female figures provokes a sense of unease.

The image of a man employing a flute to entice and lure women is an explicitly erotic one, but one that evokes desire and anxiety simultaneously through the motif of the body made unrecognizable. Despite the extreme physical differences among them, all of the women succumb to the power of the faceless musician and his flute. Bohn compares this image to African fertility rites and Dionysian processions in which women march behind objects symbolizing the phallus. [61] In this case, the flute and the faceless musician himself resemble phallic forms. Bohn posits that for Apollinaire, the procession allows him to enact a sexual fantasy of "irresistible phallic magnetism" in which he adopts the role of the musician as he is

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[60] Apollinaire, *A quelle heure*, 17-18.

[61] Bohn, "A New Play," 76-77. Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man*, 36-37.

trailed by women who both worship him and relinquish full control to him.[62] This fantasy is

later echoed in *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* when the character of the Husband proclaims:

> I'm changing my program no more useless mouths
> Economize economize
> First of all I'll make a little tailor
> When I'm dressed up I can take a walk
> And as I'm not so bad to look at
> Attract a lot of pretty girls[63]

The Husband's daydream of taking a walk during which his own physical form becomes a

magnet for "a lot of pretty girls" parallels the musician's procession. Unlike the musician,

however, the Husband possesses no mystical ability to control the women whom he hopes to

attract. Rather, his fantasy belies his anxiety concerning his own attractiveness as a heterosexual

man. This anxiety does not come as a surprise given the role he feels he must adopt since

Thérèse, his wife, has transformed into a man:

> Really he's right
> Since my wife is a man
> It's right for me to be a woman[64]

In this way, his desire to dress up and take a walk is a desire to reassert his masculinity—to

prove that he can still attract "pretty girls." For the musician, his lack of physical features masks

any potential anxiety over the result of his procession. His pseudo-mechanical-divine being

dissolves any expectation of human emotion such as apprehension. Instead, such anxiety over

virility and masculine identity has been relocated to the bodies of the women.

The refusal of complete, coherent bodies in most of *A quelle heure*'s characters parallels

Apollinaire's desire to upset the traditional structures of the theater. In "The Variety Theater,"

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[62] Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man*, 29.

[63] Apollinaire, *Les Mamelles*, 87.

[64] Apollinaire, *Les Mamelles*, 76.

Marinetti drew a connection between the disruption of the theater and the construction of a fragmented, chaotic environment—"a theater of astonishment, record-setting, and body-madness."[65] One of the suggestions he provided for achieving this theater was to "require the *chanteuses* to dye their décolletage, their arms, and especially their hair, in all the colors hitherto neglected as means of seduction. Green hair, purple arms, blue décolletage, an orange chignon, etc."[66] Apollinaire adopted this idea in *A quelle heure*, presumably with a similar intention of confusing the space of stage. His juxtaposition of colorful and fragmented bodies with whole and even idealized bodies enhances this confusion because of the way in which it combines the reality of Parisian streets with the dream world of the stage. Though he limits all of the action to the stage, Apollinaire hints at the collapse of the fourth wall and the resulting merging of the familiar with the unfamiliar, the desirable with the shocking. The absurdity of such an amalgamation galvanizes the spectators into having a strong reaction, dismissing their conventionally passive positions in the audience.

In their absurdity, the women also serve to provide the spectators with the potential for multivalent and even contradictory meanings. Like the faceless musician, the figures of the women cannot be traced back to one clear literary or pictorial source. Assuming a common background for these characters, Bohn suggests several possibilities as to who the women might be. First, because the quarter where the action takes place had been a known center of prostitution since the Middle Ages, the women could represent prostitutes actively pursuing a client—the musician.[67] However, the idea that a large group of prostitutes would chase a single

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[65] Marinetti, "The Variety Theater," 163.

[66] Marinetti, "The Variety Theater," 163.

[67] Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man*, 25.

potential customer, particularly one who can neither see nor hear them, seems a fruitless practice

for most of them. Perhaps rather than pursuing the musician, the women appear to be paraded

through the streets by the musician like a spectacle, attracting new clients such as the soldier and

the poet.[68] Bohn's second interpretation relates the history of a strike that occurred during the

Middle Ages in which only two bakeries in this quarter remained open. In this scenario, the old

house represents the abandoned bakeries, while the procession of women symbolizes the long

lines of "housewives" waiting for bread.[69] Finally, Bohn recounts a tour given by Apollinaire

himself through the quarter on behalf of the Société des Amis du Paris Picttoresque on 4 May

1913. Thus, the procession serves as a reenactment of the guided tour, with Apollinaire cast in

the role of the musician.[70]

    Each of these potential references adds a new layer of meaning to the narrative, none of

which take precedence above the other. Rather, the fact that the narrative can be framed in

multiple and diverse ways provides a solution to the challenge of negotiating between traditional

theater and the ideal total artwork. Though perhaps surprisingly, Apollinaire resists actually

parading the women through the space of the audience—thereby disrupting the fourth wall—he

multiplies the potential meanings of the parade of women, thus granting the spectators a certain

level of authorial control, insofar as each spectator can assign a different interpretation to the

women based on their individual knowledge. However, despite the plausibility of these

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[68] Apollinaire describes the house that the women are led into as a "vieille maison à vendre" or an old house for sale. This implies that the house itself can be purchased. Moreover, now that the house has come to be occupied by the women, it might also suggest that they too can be bought. If we ascribe to the interpretation of the women as prostitutes, then this description of the house promotes the idea that the procession is intended to attract male viewers rather than women.

[69] Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless* Man, 25. He notes that one type of French bread is called a *flûte*—conveniently, the musician's instrument of choice.

[70] Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man*, 25-27.

interpretations, none of them fully account for the women's purposefully distorted bodies. This significant detail unsettles Bohn's hypotheses. The absurdity of the parade, therefore, resists even the individual spectator's capacity to select a single interpretation, ensuring that the narrative's meaning can never be fixed.

The house into which the faceless musician leads the women reiterates this language of ambiguity through its unintelligible function—it could be construed alternately as a place of death, or of salvation. The motif of the old house recalls the house in the *calligramme* "Paysage animé" ("Animated Landscape") (fig. 3). The text that forms the contours of the depicted house reads, "voiCi la maison ou naissent les étoiles et les divinités?" (Is this the house where the stars and the gods are born?). The idea that a divine being emerged from such a mundane structure as this simplified, almost child-like tracing of a house is difficult to believe. The text forming the left boundary of the house rises above the length of the roof, save for the question mark which has been transplanted from its conventional location at the end of the sentence to a prominent position on the roof. Together, these two raised structures bring to mind something other than a residence. Perhaps Apollinaire has given us the profile view of a church with several towers—a suitable location for the birth of the stars and the gods. However, the towering structures equally conjure up a factory's smokestacks. Here, Apollinaire blurs the lines between human, divinity, and machinery. This recalls the figure of the faceless musician and his uncertain status as a quasi-mechanical, other-worldly being: like the faceless musician, the stars and the gods of "Paysage" exhibit ambiguous origins. Unlike the house in "Paysage," the house in *A quelle heure* produces neither divine nor mechanized beings. On the contrary, the faceless musician guides people *into* the house. But why? The procession's evocation of a mystical ritual brings to mind images of human sacrifice wherein the faceless musician leads the women to their deaths.

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At the other end of the spectrum, the faceless musician could equally be leading them to their salvation. Whether they have attained this salvation (or death) by music or machinery is, once again, unclear. In this way, the spectators' ability to comprehend the narrative continues to succumb to the play's persistent and intentional abstruseness.

The witnesses to the end of the procession, the soldier and the poet, provide a further indication that Apollinaire's goal in *A quelle heure* is ultimately the activation and immersion of the audience in the work. These characters may function allegorically, representing the theater-going audience itself, and hinting at the potential to transgress that role. Though the soldier and the poet express surprise at the sight of the faceless musician, and fear as the women begin to disappear into the old house, they hesitate. Neither makes an effort to halt the procession nor to rescue the women from the music's hypnotic melody. Instead, they watch from the margins, only approaching the old house after the music has receded and the door has been sealed shut. This inaction parallels the detachment of the audience in a conventional theater setting. With the imaginary fourth wall separating the stage from the audience intact, the spectators experience the space of the stage as separate from their own. Therefore, they feel that their participation in the action on stage would be not only unnecessary, but also disruptive. Limited by their location on the other side of the proscenium, the spectators' sole modest means of engagement resides in their capacity to react emotionally. Like the soldier and the poet, they may feel shocked or afraid, but for the sake of propriety most would nevertheless remain seated. Though the soldier and the poet eventually approach the old house, they are too late. Driven by guilt or curiosity, they find the courage to force open the sealed door, effectively dissolving their detachment from the scene. The act of throwing the door open symbolizes the potential for the audience to do the same—to break through the fourth wall and actively engage with the action on stage. In this

way, Apollinaire presents the possibility of an art that breaks through traditional structures in order to exist alongside life rather than one which demands a space geographically and temporally beyond the reach of the audience.

In the final scene of *A quelle heure*, the soldier and the poet's actions continue to parallel the conventionally detached role of the audience. The two men gaze at Napoleon III as he traverses the stage and raises the revolver. Like an audience member, the soldier and the poet remain passive, feeling either unwilling or unable to prevent the sovereign's suicide. As the final event in the play, Napoleon III's suicide both astonishes and confounds the spectators. Bohn posits that the absurdity of the moment exemplifies the absurdity of death as the ultimate, yet paradoxical goal of life.[71] But it is not his suicide alone that makes the scene illogical or ridiculous. In 1913, the year in which the play takes place, Napoleon III had already been dead for 40 years. Thus, his bodily presence alone would create confusion. Moreover, his historical death was not self-inflicted, but rather a result of post-surgical complications. Therefore, Napoleon III's reappearance and (re)death in the play does not seem to be intended as a reenactment of historical events. Instead, Apollinaire has constructed a symbolic scene of transformation and transference reminiscent of that in "Coeur couronne et miroir" ("Heart Crown and Mirror") in which the deaths of kings signify the passing of power from ruler to poet.

In Apollinaire's *calligramme* (fig. 4), the text constructing the contours of a crown reads, "Les Rois Qui MeuRent Tour A tour Renaissent au Coeur des PoèteS" (The kings who die one by one are reborn in the heart of poets). Napoleon III was France's last monarch, and thus his image symbolizes the close of the Second Empire and the end of monarchical rule. In the context of the *calligramme*, his death therefore signifies the final transposition of kingship to the hearts of poets—poets such as the one who remains standing on stage during the sovereign's

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[71] Bohn, *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man*, 69.

suicide. However, the poet is not alone. He is joined by the soldier, Napoleon III's servants, as

well as the faceless musician, and finally, the audience. Their attendance suggests that the king

will be reborn in the hearts of everyone present. Thus, following the logic of the *calligramme*,

everyone present must be a poet. This is perhaps Apollinaire's final push to convince the

spectators that they do not exist separately from the artwork, but rather are integral to its

creation. By raising their awareness of their complicity in the construction and experience of an

artwork, he might persuade them to seek a more active role.

In the prologue of *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, Apollinaire expresses this desire to engage

the audience with a metaphorical anecdote concerning war. Here, he revisits the idea of gunfire

as both an instrument of death and a mechanism for animation:

> From the flashes of the enemy guns
> Their angle of fire had stated
> That the range of those guns was so great
> That the bursts no longer could be heard
> And all my gunners watching their posts
> Announced the stars were darkening one by one
> Then loud shouts arose from the whole army
> > THEY'RE PUTTING OUT THE STARS
> > WITH SHELLFIRE
>
> …But in a great voice out of a megaphone
> The mouth of which emerged
> From some sort of supreme headquarters
> The voice of the unknown captain who always saves us cried
> > THE TIME HAS COME TO LIGHT THE STARS AGAIN
> And the whole French front shouted together
> > FIRE AT WILL.
> The gunners hastened
> The layers calculated
> The marksmen fired
> And the sublime stars lit up again one by one
> Our shells rekindled their eternal ardor
> The enemy guns were silent dazzled
> By the scintillating of all the stars[72]

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[72] Apollinaire, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, 64-65.

This battle demonstrates that though gunfire has the ability to put out the stars—to end life—it equally has the capacity to relight the stars and revive humanity. This image recalls Marinetti's desire for a utopia that emerges from a sudden moment of violence. In "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism," Marinetti describes an exhilarating moment of rebirth that is precipitated by the crash of his speeding car into a watery ditch. [73] He and his car are pulled from the ditch by a group of fishermen who then join Marinetti in his declaration of Futurism's intentions as if in a proclamation of solidarity for change. The violence that hurled Marinetti toward an end therefore also triggered a revolutionary spirit among the crowd. Like the gunshots that reignited the stars, the car's reemergence from its watery grave appears to reinvigorate the crowd, motiving them to take up Marinetti's call to transform society. [74] Though Apollinaire's play does not carry the explicitly political intentions of Marinetti's manifesto, Apollinaire similarly appeals to the audience—the crowd—to participate. Apollinaire closes the prologue of *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* with one final appeal to engage the spectators:

> …But out there there's still a fire
> Where they're putting out the smoking stars
> And those who light them again demand that you
> Lift yourselves to the height of those great flames
> And also burn
>
> O public

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[73] F.T. Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism," in *Art in Theory 1900-2000*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 146-147. Originally published in *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909. For an in depth analysis of the manifesto see Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism : the Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[74] It should be noted that Marinetti describes the incident as if he is revived and reborn from factory run-off: "O maternal ditch, almost full of muddy water! Fair factory drain! I gulped down your nourishing sludge…When I came up—torn, filthy and stinking—from under the capsized car, I felt the white-hot iron of joy deliciously pass through my heart!" (Marinetti, "The Foundation, 147). In this way his description of this experience recalls Apollinaire's description of the faceless musician, both evoke what seems to be interchangeably religious and mechanical imagery.

Be the unquenchable torch of the new fire.[75]

For both Marinetti and Apollinaire, the contribution of the active, and potentially violent, crowd/audience was the key to the transformation and revitalization of art and society. In the context of *A quelle heure*, Napoleon III's death can thus be understood as an extreme metaphor for what Apollinaire requires of the audience. If the spectators can "assassinate" their role as conventional theater-goers—as passive spectators—then they can be reborn as poets—as creators actively involved in the production and experience of the artwork.

Although, at first, Apollinaire's choice to limit the poetry-based narrative of the faceless musician to the stage could be seen to undermine the intermedial program of *A quelle heure*'s opening scenes, he persisted in finding means of developing the total artwork within the given limitations. Widespread use of ambiguous imagery and absurd action effectively refused the audience's expectation of fixed forms and meanings. The fluidity of the narrative, therefore, necessitated the active engagement of spectators' imaginations in order to attempt to derive an interpretation from the disparate elements. Ultimately, Apollinaire hoped that this initial, if only superficial type of engagement might lead to the spectators' desire for an even more immersive and participatory experience such as the one offered by his ideal total artwork.

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[75] Apollinaire, *Les Mamelles*, 67.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

A quelle heure partira- t-il un train pour Paris? offers a modern reimagining of

Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which the artwork's synthesis of media results in a

simultaneously totalizing, yet fragmented theatrical experience. Apollinaire's desire to

restructure the space of the theater, in the process relinquishing the formal conventions imposed

on artistic genres, led him to seek out new ways of deploying artistic genres and materials. He

employed materials both common to and previously foreign to the theatrical setting, combining

their individual capabilities to reach a shared goal—the immersion of the audience in the

artwork. The act of breaking with the traditional illusionism of the stage and inundating the

space of the audience with sights and sounds proved one means of repositioning the viewer-

reader-listener to the center of the artwork, a goal of his earlier poetic ca*lligrammes*. By

constructing a play that would encircle the audience in all senses, Apollinaire presented the

audience with the opportunity to participate. Refusing to recognize the space of the audience as

disengaged from the stage, he effectively invited the audience to actively occupy the scene

unfolding around them. In this way, the totalizing effect of the play manifests through both the

artwork's synthesis of media as well as its embrace of the entire space of the theater.

This totality extends further to the way in which Apollinaire encouraged the audience to

assert an authorial role. Though the play offers the vision of its original author, it also remains

open to—and incomplete without—the interpretation of each new creator. Each audience

member brings different ideas and experiences that would result in the construction of a slightly

different artwork. *A quelle heure* results from the merging of Apollinaire's intermedial program

with every individual reception of the artwork. Thus, the play remains constantly in a state of

unfinish, waiting for each new audience member to complete it, its form never fully fixed and always shifting.

Apollinaire offered one more level of totality in this play—its simultaneous expression of the temporal and geographic variety of life. He worked to collapse the physical structures of theater as a whole in order to suggest to his audience the endless expanse of knowledge and experiences both past and yet to take place in the world. This simultaneity of life was intended to evoke the enhanced perspectives offered by modern technology and communication. This helped Apollinaire to suggest that the lived moment need not be narrowed to a single, limited fraction of human experience. In the same way, the aesthetic moment need not be restricted to the illusionistic space of the traditional artwork. Rather, it should reflect another experience among the many offered by the variety of life.

Despite this pervasive insistence on the development of a total artwork in every nuance of the term, the play does not neatly uphold the promise of totality. The use of a narrative, for example, implies a hierarchy of genres in which poetry takes precedence over the visual and aural elements of the work. Here, Apollinaire perpetuates the paradox of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*—that even in their synthesis, the arts must retain the original or inherent qualities of their individual genres. The combining of artistic genres must in some way help each individual genre to transcend, achieving its full, true form. For Apollinaire, the championing of his poetry suggests that perhaps he hoped the synthesis of media would elevate his genre of choice.

The inherently contradictory nature of his total artwork extends beyond the narrative to the larger implications of an artwork that inhabits the same space as life. Apollinaire's emphasis on simultaneity produces a paradoxical effect: in order to evoke multiple and diverse times and

places at once he cannot focus on any one moment for too long. This results in a highly

fragmented artwork in which images and sounds are constantly displaced and interrupted.

Simultaneity begets discontinuity. *A quelle heure*, therefore, produces an experience that is

whole in its insistence on broken, shifting parts and total in its emphasis on unification through

disorder. From disruption, fragmentation, and ambiguity rises Apollinaire's ideal total artwork.

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