



On Stage Composition by Kandinsky

Each art has its own language, that is, its own methods.

Each art is something complete in itself. Each art leads a life of its own. It is an empire in itself. [103]

Therefore the methods of the various arts are completely different externally. Sound, color, word! . . .

In their innermost core these methods are wholly identical: their final goal obliterates external differences and reveals their inner identity.

The *final* goal (knowledge) is reached through delicate vibrations of the human soul. These delicate vibrations are ultimately identical, although their inner motions are different.

The undefinable and still distinct spiritual action (vibration) is the goal of the various methods of art.

A distinctive complex of vibrations is the goal of a work.

The refinement of the soul through the accumulation of distinctive complexes—this is the goal of art.

Art is, therefore, indispensable and *practical*.

When the artist finds the appropriate means, it is a material form of his soul's vibration, which he is forced to express. [104]

If the method is appropriate, it causes an almost identical vibration in the soul of the audience.

This is inevitable. But this secondary vibration is complicated. It may be strong or weak; this depends on the audience's level of development and on the influence of the times (the absorbed soul). Second, these vibrations in the audience's soul will also cause other strings to vibrate in turn. This is a stimulation of the audience's "fantasy," which "continues to create" the work.¹ These strings of the soul, which vibrate frequently, will also vibrate when other strings are sounded. And sometimes so intensely that they drown out the original sound. Some people are moved to tears when listening to "happy" music and vice versa. Therefore particular effects of a work are more or less colored by their different receptions.

But in this case the original sound is not destroyed. It lives on and continues—even if unnoticed—to work on the soul.²

There is no man who does not respond to art. Each work and each method of work causes in every man without exception a vibration fundamentally identical to that felt by the artist. [105]

The inner, eventually discoverable identity of the separate methods in the various arts has been the basis for an attempt to strengthen a specific sound in one art with an identical sound in another art, to reinforce it and thus to obtain an especially powerful effect. This is one way of producing effect.

But the repetition of one method of one art (e.g., music) by means of an identical method of another art (e.g., painting) is only *one* case,

¹This "collaboration" is counted on especially in theatrical productions nowadays, although it has naturally always been planned for by the artist. This produces the desire for a certain free space between the work and its ultimate expression. This "do-not-utter-the-ultimate" was demanded by Lessing and Delacroix, among others. Space is left free for the work of fantasy.

²Therefore each work is correctly "understood" in the course of time.



only *one* possibility. When this possibility is also used as an inner method (e.g., in Scriabin),³ we first consider the sphere of contrast and complicated composition as the opposite of this repetition and later as a series of possibilities that lie between effect and counter-effect. The material is inexhaustible.

The nineteenth century is distinguished as a period that lay far from inner creation. Its concentration on material appearances and on the material aspects of appearances logically caused internal creative powers to decline to the point of their virtual disappearance.

³See L. Sabaneiev's article in this volume.



H. Arp

This one-dimensionality naturally caused other manifestations of one-dimensionality to develop.

So it was also with the theater:

1. Here perforce (as in other fields) already existing parts (created earlier) were minutely elaborated and distinctly separated from one another, because it seemed convenient to do so. This reflects the specialization that always arises immediately when no new forms are being created, and

2. The positive character of the spirit of the time could lead only to a form of combination that was likewise positive. People thought: two is more than one, and they tried to strengthen each effect by repeating it. With inner effects this may be reversed, and often one is more than



Egyptian

two. In mathematics $1 + 1 = 2$. In the soul it is possible that $1 - 1 = 2$. [106]

Elaboration to 1. Specialization and the further external elaboration of parts is the *first consequence of materialism*. As a result three groups of stage works arose and became petrified, separated from one another by high walls: (a) drama, (b) opera, (c) ballet.

(a) Drama of the nineteenth century is, in general, a more or less subtle and profound account of events of a more or less personal character. Usually it is a description of external life; the spiritual life played a part only when it was connected with the external life.⁴ *The cosmic element was entirely missing.*

The external action and the external connection of the plot is the form of contemporary drama.

(b) Opera is drama to which music has been added as the principal element, causing the subtlety and profundity of the dramatic aspect to suffer severely. The two parts are connected only externally. This means that either the music illustrates (or strengthens) the dramatic action, or the dramatic action helps to explain the music. [107]

This sore spot was recognized by Wagner, and he tried to improve it by various means. His basic idea was to connect the parts organically and in this way to create a monumental work.⁵

⁴There are few exceptions. Even these few (e.g., Maeterlinck, Ibsen's *Ghosts*, Andreyev's *Life of Man*, etc.) are under the spell of external events.

⁵It has taken Wagner's idea more than half a century to cross the Alps. Now it is authoritatively expressed there in the form of articles. Take the musical "manifesto"



N. Goncharova

Wagner tried to intensify the means and bring the work to a monumental height by repeating one and the same external movement in two concrete forms. His mistake was to believe that he had a universal method at his command. Actually his method is only one of a series of even more powerful possibilities of monumental art.

Parallel repetition is only *one* method, and an external repetition at that. Wagner nonetheless gave it a new form that had to lead to other forms. Before Wagner movement, for example, was entirely external and superficial in opera (perhaps only decadent). It was a naive appendage to opera: pressing the hands against the chest—love; lifting the arms—prayer; extending the arms—strong emotion, etc. Such childlike forms (which can still be seen every night) were externally connected with the libretto, which again was illustrated by the music. Wagner connected movement and musical beat directly (artistically): the movement was subordinated to the beat.

of the futurists: "We proclaim as an absolute necessity that the composer must be the author of a dramatic or tragic poem that he has to set to music" (May 1911, Milan).



G. Münter

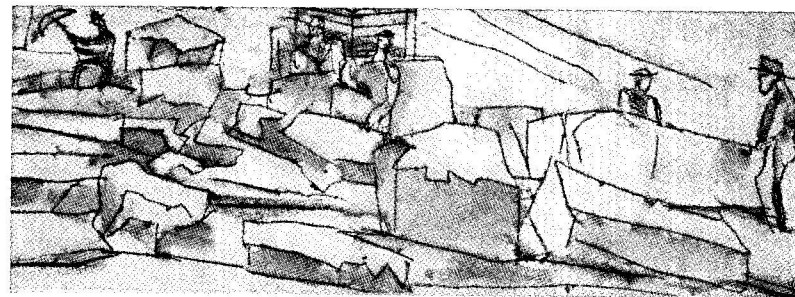
This connection is still external. The inner sound of the movement plays no part. [108]

In the same artistic but still external fashion Wagner subordinated the music to the libretto, that is, to the movement in a broad sense. He represented musically the hissing of glowing iron in water, the beating of a hammer in the smithy, etc.

This *interchanged* subordination increased the methods, leading thereby to further combinations.

On the one hand Wagner increased the effect of one method, and on the other hand he decreased the inner sense, the purely artistic inner meaning, of the auxiliary method.

These forms are only mechanical reproductions (not internal parallel effects) of purposeful actions in the plot. The second connection of music and movement (in the broad sense of the word) is similar; it is the musical "characterization" of various roles. The stubborn recurrence of a motif whenever the protagonist appears on the stage is finally losing its power. It affects the ear in the same way as a well-known label on a bottle affects the eye. Feeling ultimately



P. Klee

rebels against such a consistent programmatic use of one and the same form.⁶

Finally Wagner uses the word to tell the story or to express his thoughts. However, he does not create an appropriate milieu for his purposes, because the words are usually drowned out by the orchestra. It is not enough to let the word sound in numerous recitatives. But the attempt to interrupt the incessant singing has already dealt a powerful blow to the "unity." Nevertheless, the external action remains untouched by it.

Despite Wagner's efforts to create a libretto (movement), he still completely followed the old tradition of the external, and he did not consider the third element, which is sporadically used today in a still-primitive form⁷—color and, connected with it, pictorial form (decoration). [109]

The external action, the external connection of the various parts and of the two methods (drama and music) is the form of contemporary opera.

(c) Ballet is a drama with all the characteristics mentioned above and with the same content. The seriousness of the drama is lost, even more so than in opera. Opera has themes other than love: religious, political, and social relationships are the grounds for enthusiasm, despair, honesty, hate, and similar feelings. Ballet contents itself with love in a childlike fairy-tale form. Besides music, single and group movements are made use of. Everything remains in a naive

⁶This programmatic use penetrates Wagner's work. Probably it may be explained not only by the artist's character, but also by his intention to discover a precise form for his new kind of creativity. The spirit of the nineteenth century gave it the "positive" stamp.

⁷See Sabaneiev's article.



A. Kubin

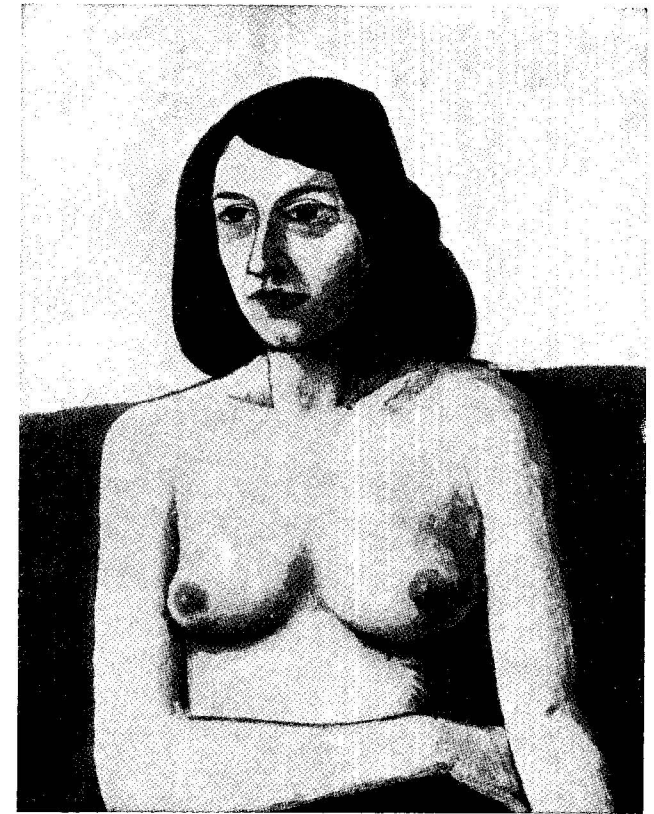
form of external connection. It is even customary for various dances to be inserted or omitted at will. The “whole” is so problematic that such practices go entirely unnoticed.

The external action, the external connection of the various parts and of the three methods (drama, music, and dance) is the form of contemporary ballet.

Elaboration to 2. Through the *second consequence of materialism*, i.e., positive addition ($1 + 1 = 2$, $2 + 1 = 3$), only one form of combination (or intensification) was brought about, and this demanded the same kind of methods. Thus powerful emotion was instantly underlined by a fortissimo in music. *This mathematical principle constructs the forms of effect on an entirely external basis.* [110]

All the *forms* mentioned, which I call forms of substance (drama—word, opera—sound, ballet—movement), and the combination of various methods, which I call methods for effect, were constructed to form an *external unity*. *All these forms originated from the principle of external necessity.*

The logical result of this is the limitation, the one-dimensionality (= impoverishment) of forms and methods. Gradually they become orthodox and each tiny change appears to be revolutionary.



P. P. Girieud:
Half Nude

Let us start on the basis of the internal. The whole state of affairs changes fundamentally.

1. Suddenly the external appearance of each element vanishes, and its inner value sounds fully.

2. Clearly, when the criterion of the inner sound is applied, the outer action obviously is not only unimportant but also creates harmful obscurity.

3. The external connection appears in its proper value, i.e., setting up unnecessary limits and weakening the inner effect.

4. Automatically the feeling of the necessity of *internal unity* is aroused. This is supported and even caused by external irregularities.



S. LUCAS EVANGEL. 3.
1800.

Bavarian Glass Painting



Egyptian

5. It opens up the possibility for each element to keep its own external life, even if it contradicts the external life of another element. [111]

If we make practical discoveries out of these abstract ones, we see that it is possible:

Elaboration to 1. To use as a method the inner sound of only one element.

Elaboration to 2. To eliminate the external action (= plot) so that

Elaboration to 3. The external connection collapses of its own accord, just like

Elaboration to 4. The external unity, and

Elaboration to 5. That the inner unity gives rise to an endless series of methods that earlier could not exist.

The inner necessity becomes the only source.

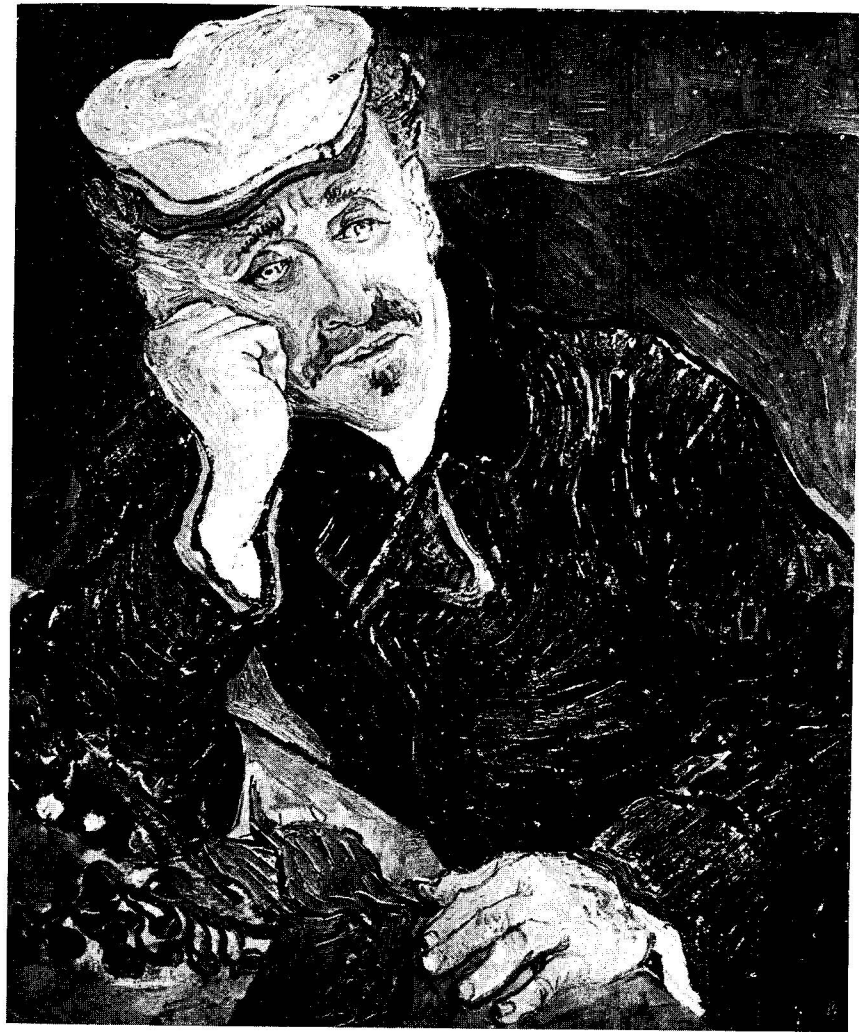
The following little stage composition is an attempt to draw upon this source.

There are three elements that as external methods serve the *inner value*:

1. The musical sound and its movement,
2. The physical-psychical sound and its movement, expressed through people and objects,
3. The colored tone and its movement (a special possibility for the stage).



Kandinsky: *Composition No. 5*



Van Gogh: *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*



Japanese Woodcut (Fragment)



Bavarian Glass Painting

The drama finally consists of the complex of inner experiences (soul = vibrations) of the audience.

Elaboration to 1. Music, the main element and source of the inner sound, was taken from opera. It should never be externally subordinated to the action.

Elaboration to 2. Dance was taken from ballet. It is involved with inner sound as abstract effective movement.

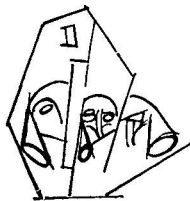
Elaboration to 3. The colored tone has an independent importance and is treated as a method with equal rights. [112]

All three elements play equally important roles; they remain externally independent and are treated equally, i.e., they are subordinated to the inner goal.

Music, for example, may be entirely pushed into the background or played offstage when the effect of the movement is expressive enough, and powerful musical collaboration would only weaken it. An increase of musical movement may correspond to a decrease of dance movement; in this way both movements (the positive and the negative) enhance their inner value. There are numerous combinations between these two poles: collaboration and contrast. Graphically speaking, the three movements could run in entirely separate, externally independent directions.

The word, independent or in sentences, was used to create a certain "atmosphere" that frees the soul and makes it receptive. The sound of the human voice was also used pure, i.e., without being obscured by words, or by the meaning of words.

The reader is asked to attribute the weaknesses of the following little composition, *The Yellow Sound*, not to the principle of stage compositions, but to its author's account. [113]



The Yellow Sound
A Stage Composition
by Kandinsky