

The background of the slide features a person in a shiny, metallic green suit performing on stage. The stage is bathed in vibrant, colorful lights, including shades of orange, red, and purple, which create a dynamic and futuristic atmosphere. The performer is captured in various stages of motion, some looking towards the camera and others looking down, suggesting a dance or theatrical performance.

# IDEA 120: Week 3

January 25, 2021:

A Brief History of (Digital, and other)  
Media in Art

- Take note of the following TERMS:

- Festspielhaus
- Bühnenfestspiel
- "Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft" ("The Artwork of the Future," 1849)
- Gesamtkunstwerk
- Italian Futurism
- Russian Futurism
- counterreliefs
- Constructivism
- Grosses Schauspielhaus, "The Theater for 5000"
- thrust stage
- Dada

This week's readings: Chris Salter, *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance*, Chapter 1:  
<https://github.com/IDEA-120/Course-Materials/blob/Spring2021/SCHEDULE.md>

- Take note of the following PEOPLE:

- Richard Wagner
- Adolphe Appia
- Filippo Tommaso Marinetti
- Giacomo Balla
- Kasimir Malevich
- Vladimir Tatlin
- Vsevolod Meyerhold and Lyubov Popova
- El Lissitzky
- Sergei Eisenstein
- Max Reinhardt
- Bruno Taut
- Kurt Schwitters
- László Moholy-Nagy
- Antonin Artaud

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- Take note of the following ARTWORKS:
- Richard Wagner, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring of the Nibelung), 1851-1876
- Adolphe Appia, *Hall of Syntheses*
- Kasimir Malevich stage design, *Victory Over the Sun*, 1913
- Vsevolod Meyerhold and Lyubov Popova stage design, *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, 1928
- El Lissitzky set model, *I Want a Child*, 1929
- Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbühne*
- László Moholy-Nagy, *The Light Space Modulator*, 1930

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- This is a monochrome photograph taken of Hoffman's 14 set designs (number 1) for Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* opera in 1876.

Performance has always been reliant on new technologies. Just as culture has shaped, and been shaped by, technology, performance arts (from opera, theater, and music productions) have been entangled with new modes of presentation and audience engagement from the very beginning.

Chris Salter, a writer about media art, claims that Richard Wagner, the composer, was particularly fascinated with how new technologies could be embedded in performance to create what he thought was "The Total Work of Art." This was the GESAMTKUNSTWERK (which translates from the German, literally, as "total work of art").

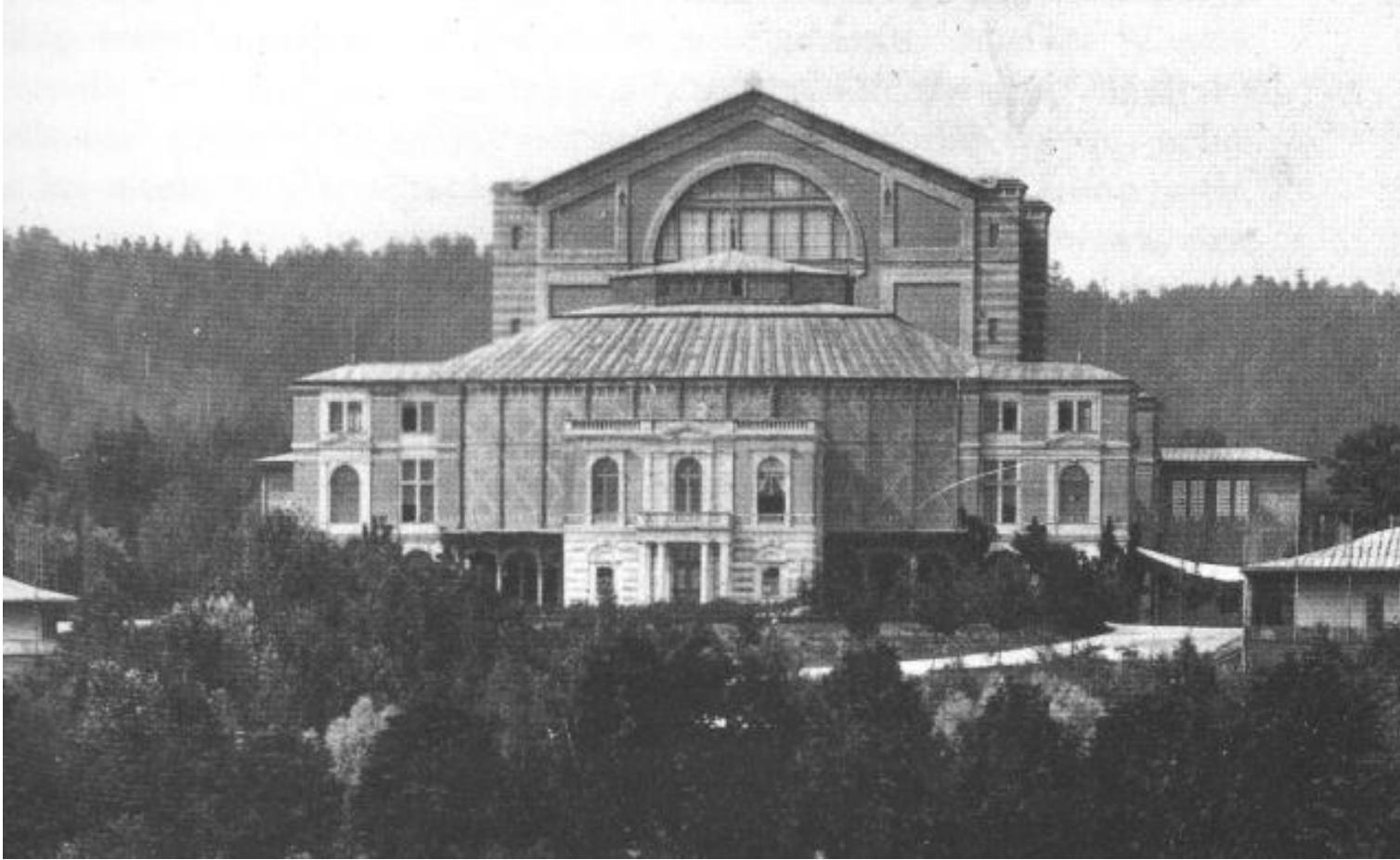
Chris Salter, from his book Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance:

"G is for Gesamtkunstwerk. Wagner couldn't spell it – he wrote "Gesammtkunstwerk" – but he knew what he meant by it, and the word could be said to sum up his entire aesthetic philosophy once he had decided to cast off what he came to see as the shackles of Italianate opera. It means "total work of art," and Wagner introduced the term in 1849 in a series of essays in which he decried the fragmentation of the arts and argued it had been downhill all the way since the Greeks."

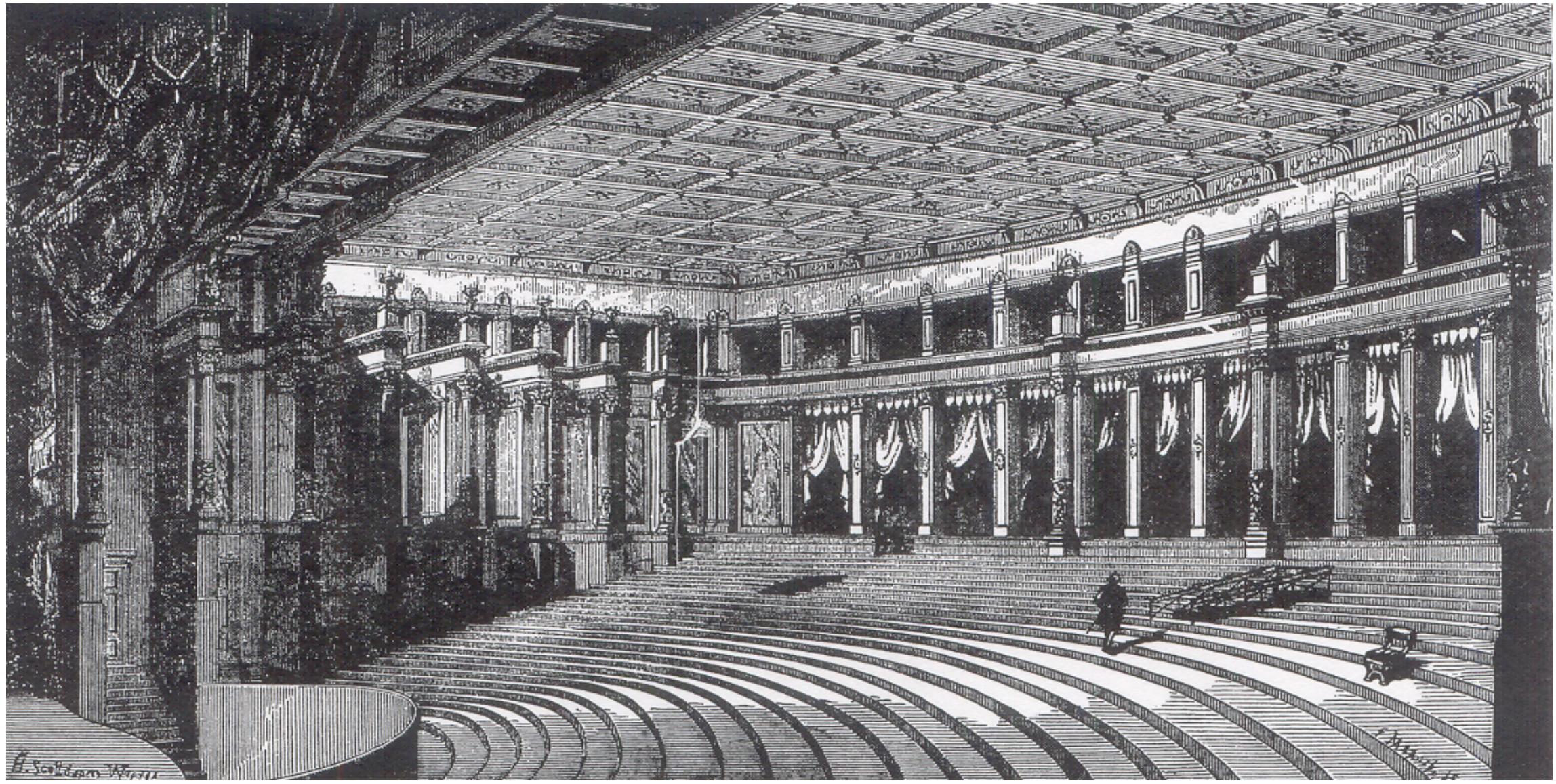


## Facade of Bayreuth Festspielhaus

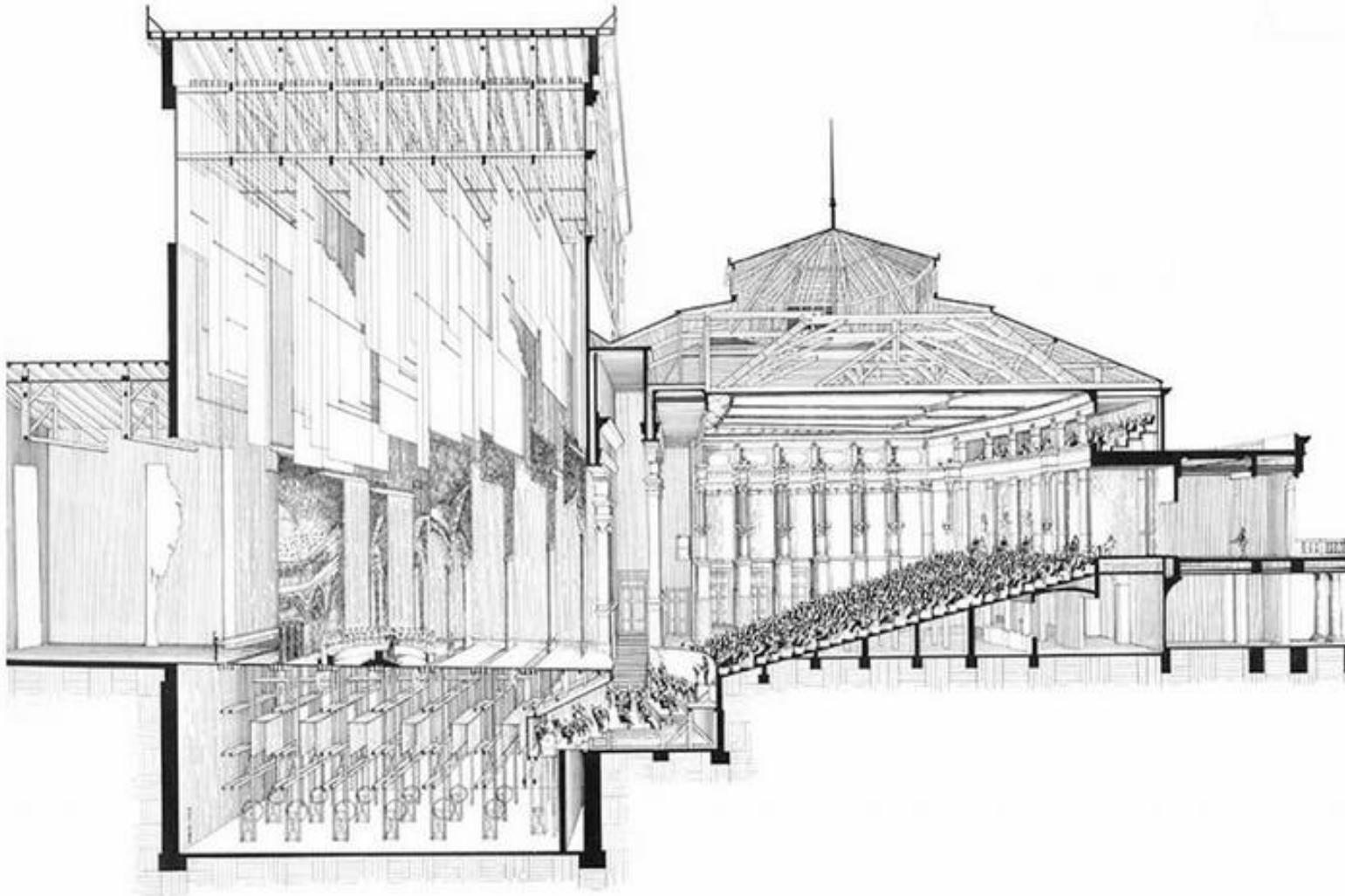
The Festspielhaus, designed by Otto Brückwald to Wagner's precise specifications, opened on 13 August 1876 with *Das Rheingold*. Early festivals were intermittent because of Wagner's perpetual financial problems, but eventually they became annual and were hugely oversubscribed. Wagner also built a house in Bayreuth, and is buried there, at the bottom of the garden.



Though it might not seem like it, both images are of the same structure, but from different angles: the technological expertise of constructing the architecture of the Festspielhaus mimicked the fantastical illusions of the interior. Approaching the building, one could not see the enormous back end of the building that housed the scenography and mechanisms of the Opera itself.

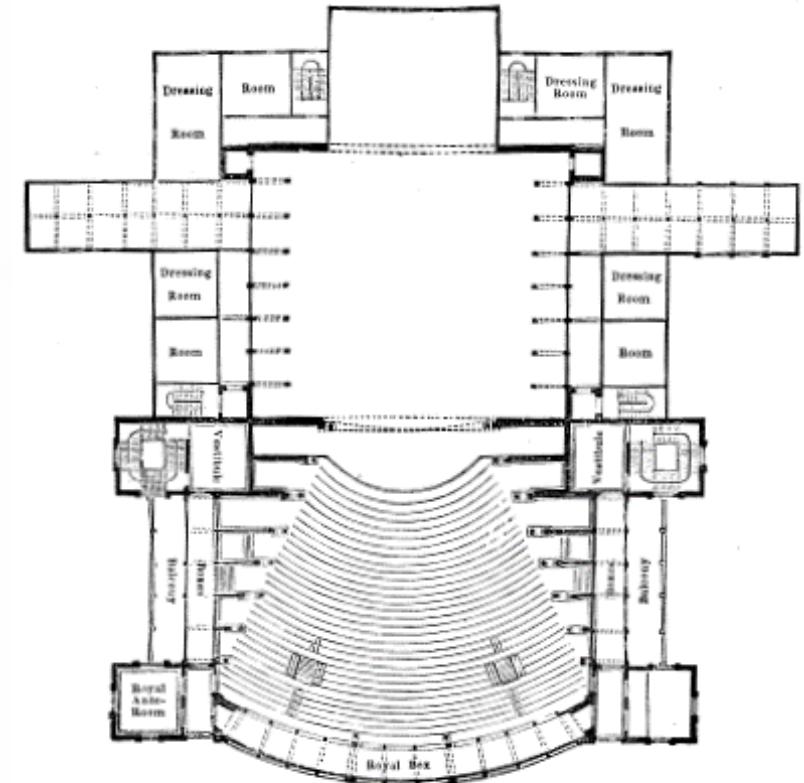


The interior of the Festspielhaus did not allow one to see beyond the proscenium - the illusion of the performance was paramount. Outside light was completely blocked, and lighting from the stage used gas lanterns.



### Interior of the Festspielhaus:

Notice how the depth of the stage and backdrops is nearly as long as the seating area of the amphitheater.



GROUND-PLAN OF THE BAYREUTH OPERA HOUSE.

A significant feature of the Festspielhaus is its unusual orchestra pit. It is recessed under the stage and covered by a hood, so that the orchestra is completely invisible to the audience. This feature was a central preoccupation for Wagner, since it made the audience concentrate on the drama onstage, rather than the distracting motion of the conductor and musicians. The design also corrected the balance of volume between singers and orchestra, creating ideal acoustics for Wagner's operas, which are the only operas performed at the Festspielhaus.

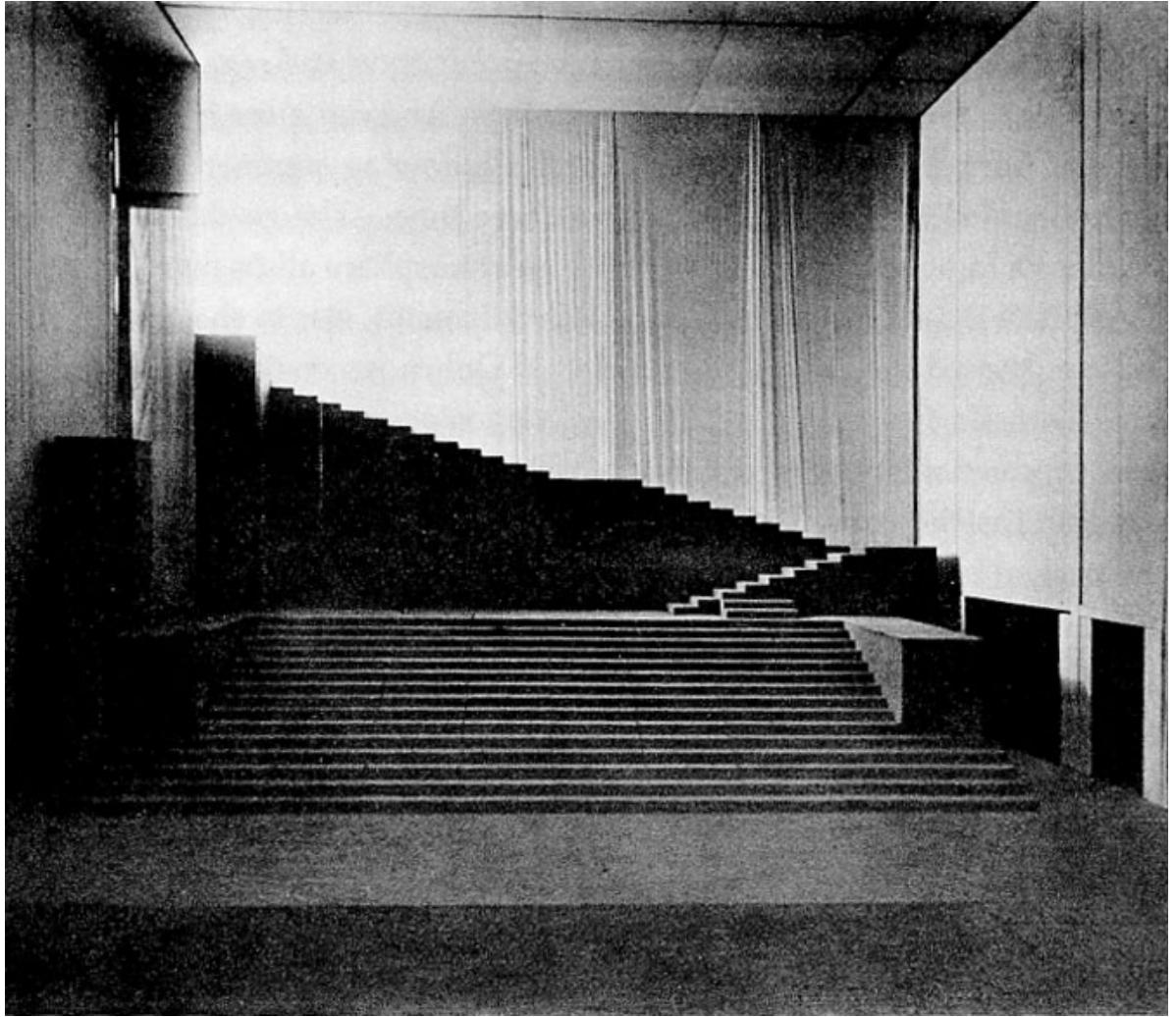




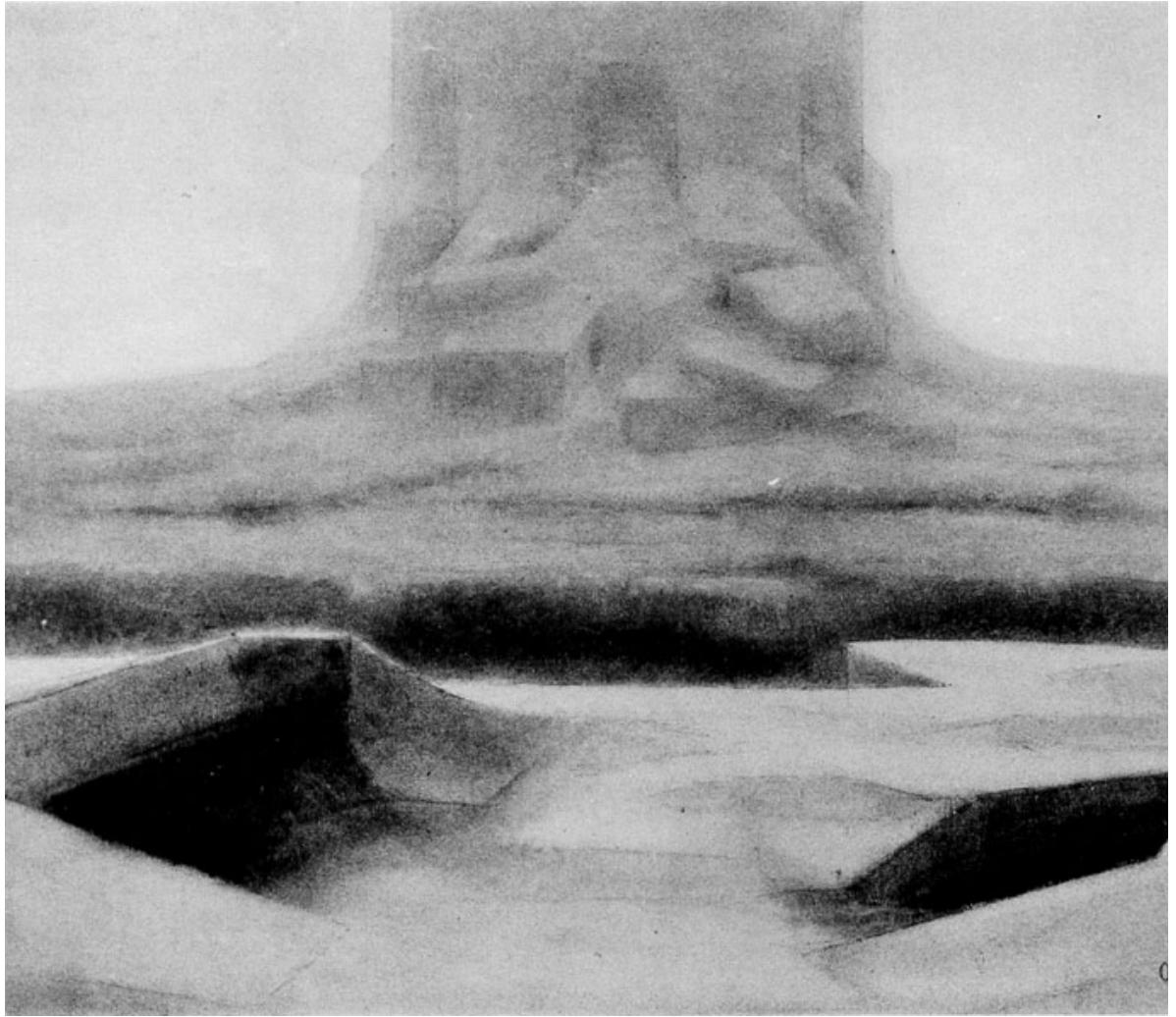
- “Quick Guide to *The Ring*”:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykO7jc09OAk>



■ Adolphe Appia, plans for the set design for *Orpheus*, Hellerau, 1913



- Adolphe Appia, the resulting set design for *Orpheus*, Hellerau, 1913



■ Adolphe Appia, set design for *Das Rheingold*, Basel, 1924



Metropolitan Opera Orchestra recording, 2010

Appia's influence on modern set design is obvious: the Metropolitan Opera in New York's *Das Rheingold* production clearly uses some of his key design elements, employing shapes in suggestion of landscape and light to sculpt space.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xeRwBiu4wfQ>



Think about the last music/theater/festival performance you went to or watched on television. How are these contemporary performances influenced by some of these earlier productions? What other contemporary experiences are influenced by these experiences? How does the internet relate to the gesamtkunstwerk?

(Links to Rob Zombie Superbeast Live Show and Cirque du Soleil “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” performances)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bsw8koMaZXU>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Lmh98z3O9M>



Some other things/facts to consider as you read:

- “**agitprop theater/film**” refers to the use of media as propaganda. While we’re pretty familiar with how television and film can affect us politically, think about how social media has influenced the past two elections.
- **Piscator's concept of theater as a "workshop"** directly influenced the way in which the film industry works. Think Disney animation studios, Jim Hensen's Workshop, Dreamworks, Pixar, LucasArts, etc.
- **The Bauhaus** (German: “building house”), was a German art school operational from 1919 to 1933 that combined crafts and the fine arts. The school became famous for its approach to design, which attempted to unify the principles of mass production with individual artistic vision and strove to combine aesthetics with everyday function. Relevant to us here in Chicago, the Bauhaus served as a model for arts/design education in the U.S. as well. László Maholy-Nagy founded the Illinois Institute of Technology.
- To the left: “the new Bauhaus” building before the American School of Design was renamed the Illinois Institute of Technology.