

PREFACE

THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

I am a concert pianist and teacher who, since the age of thirteen, has had a love of philosophy. This book is largely a musician's reflection on the spectacle of the arts, and an attempt to find out what they all have in common, discoveries that might then shed light on how one differs from another.

Most of the ideas in this book stem from a single experience I had when a teenager. I am from Brooklyn, a fact about which I am inordinately proud. When I was young my main interests were astronomy and jet airplanes, and my ambition was to become a jet pilot for the Air Force, something that proved rather inconvenient when at fifteen I joined the peace movement. On my thirteenth birthday I asked my father if there were any books he thought I might enjoy reading. My dad was a scholar who through a series of life's twists and turns became director of Carnegie Hall in New York. His suggestions for some fun reading included the "Critique of Pure Reason" by Kant, "How We Know" by John Dewey, "The Problems of Philosophy" by Bertrand Russell, "The Tragic Sense of Life" by Miguel de Unamuno and various of Plato's dialogues. It amuses me now that at the time I saw nothing odd or lopsided about the choices. I started with the Kant and read through it at a breakneck pace, hardly understanding a word of it, which did not prevent me from being filled with a strange sense of exhilaration over the subject matter. Some of the other books I managed to understand a little better.

As I continued to read philosophy over the years two philosophers became my favorites, Henri Bergson and Arthur Schopenhauer. It was what they had to say in particular on the subjects of time and space that laid the basis of the thesis I develop in this book, namely that in our experience, time and space can be mixed together in different proportions, and each such mixture forms the basis of how we perceive a different one of the arts.

Brooklyn was a great place in which to grow up, a place of civility and wonderment, a balance of urbanity and nature. Nature entered my life through such special places as Prospect Park, whose lake was my Walden pond, and the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens. One place, that spoke eloquently of both of man and nature stood in a class of its own, the Brooklyn Bridge. "And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced as though the sun took step of thee". "O Harp and altar, of the fury fused (How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)"¹ The scale of the Brooklyn Bridge is quintessentially human and yet monumental. It can be walked in about a half an hour, long enough to give one a sense of grandeur and short enough for it to feel comprehensible in terms of human strides.

I walked the bridge often, either by myself or with my high school friends. One particular night I was alone. I saw the fires glowing in the windows of the old skyscrapers in lower Manhattan. The air was filled with magical sounds from fog horns and boats in the harbor. I looked at the sweep of the bridge and how the vertical cables taken together looked like it formed a giant harp. I imagined an invisible titan strumming its strings and being able to hear its ethereal sounds. I closed my eyes to try to hear the sounds myself. I didn't hear the titan's harp, but I did hear the sounds of the harbor intensified beyond how they sounded moments earlier with my eyes open. Voluntarily blind, the night's sounds appeared unencumbered as at the same time I lost my awareness of space. The

sounds did not need to come from space at all, they were just present in my heightened consciousness. There was nothing about them that had to do with size or dimension. They were real without being in space. All they needed was to endure through time. How different then, I thought, an art such as music, which uses sounds, must be from an art like painting or sculpture in which space plays a dominant role.

Those moments on the bridge saw the birth of the essential insight of this book: that time and space function in radically different ways in the arts. That some arts owe more to space than to time, and some owe more to time than space. Somehow space and time become linked in both the everyday world about me and in my experience of the various arts. This linking, though, did not always occur in one way. Different proportions were possible, and each one brought to me the experience of a different art. It is as if some demiurge, given the assignment of creating the arts, stood on Mount Parnassus and said "Today, I'll mix a plethora of time with perhaps two soupcons of space, and voila, I have created the world of poetry". "Tomorrow, as an encore, I will mix a preponderance of space to a somewhat lesser amount of time, and painting will come into existence" The title of the book, "The Spectrum of the Arts", suggests that if we sum up all these different proportions, a specific order results among the arts deriving from gradually changing proportion of space to time.

That night on the Brooklyn Bridge, when I did away with sight and focused on hearing alone, I had my first instinct to untie the senses one from another. Before I tied them back together again I rather enjoyed holding them aloof from each other. In doing this I may have been reproducing something that was the case when I was an infant, before my brain learned to forge a reality out of the confusingly different inputs of the different senses. Could art be a second chance at returning to this newborn state, to start over again with the raw materials out of which perception is created, to recreate the birth of reality in our consciousness? That art, by creating, is able to uncreate what the past has given us, and to allow the present to become something genuinely new?

I feel that I have been fortunate in coming upon the idea that there can be a spectrum of the arts that is based solely on the changing proportionality of time and space in our experience. The result was that much of the book wrote itself, once I followed the ramifications of the thesis. I invite the reader now to cross the spectrum of the arts with me, and see the many ways that space and time work within our experience of the arts. First, though, in chapter one, I want to introduce more thoroughly the idea of how the arts form the spectrum.

Notes

¹ "To Brooklyn Bridge", from "The Bridge", by Hart Crane