Article

The Russian Symbolist Viacheslav Ivanov on Aesthetic Experience as Religious

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Abstract: Viacheslav Ivanov (1866, Moscow–1949, Rome) is one of the most prominent Russian symbolist poets and a leading theorist of symbolism at the beginning of the twentieth century. The article demonstrates that Ivanov understood art (and, more broadly, aesthetic experience) as one of the most effective forms of contact between the human being and the spiritual world, as well as with its first cause. Ivanov distinguishes between three “aesthetic principles” of the universe, which all together constitute “the beautiful”—the sublime, beauty, and the chaotic—and links them to the three stages of being of the artist in the process of creative activity. The artist first passes through the chthonian, subconscious stage of demonic chaos. Next, artists undergo the process of *ascent* into the ideal, spiritual sphere, where they gain experience, which cannot be expressed in words. After that, the process of the *descent* of the artist towards the earth takes place, where artists attempt to express in the form of artistic symbols the experience that they have acquired. Ivanov sees the artistic symbol as a materially given structure, which nevertheless cannot be described in words. This structure not only expresses a spiritual essence, but also really and energetically manifests it. Hence, Ivanov sees the creator of high, symbolic art (“realist symbolism”) as an artist-theurge (*theurgy* is the art of the future, of the future mystery on the basis of a synthesis of the arts that receives divine assistance), who contributes to the augmentation of being. For the recipient, the artistic symbol is anagogical (from the Greek ἀναγωγή, “leading up”). It leads one up from the real world to a more real one (*a realibus ad realiora*). According to Ivanov, both the symbol and its content, myth, are of divine origin; they are “embodiments of the divine truth.” Therefore, high art is one of the principal ways of one’s ascent to spiritual reality by means of sensory reality.

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As is widely assumed, the Western world has entered a “post-secular” stage.¹ One is no longer satisfied by a scientific, technological, and atheistic picture of the world that provides little spiritual sustenance. However, many are no longer able to participate in traditional organized religions either, as their forms of spiritual communication with the divine are gradually slipping into the past. Thus one’s longing for the infinite takes various alternative forms. It has come to the point that corporations hire “divinity consultants,” “spiritual consultants,” “ritual consultants,” or “sacred designers” to help them promote “soul-centered” corporate rituals that meet their employees’ spiritual needs outside of organized religion. There is a proliferation of agencies that assist with providing employees with “spiritually inflected services” and “ritual design.”² One of the widely discussed forms of alternative spirituality is giving oneself over to wonder in the face of reality, which is often reminiscent of what was described in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European

¹ On the concept and origin of the post-secular, see (Warner et al. 2010; Taylor 2011; Bennett 2001).

² Cf. Sacred Design Lab (sacred.design) or Ritual Design Lab (<https://www.ritualdesignlab.org/>).

philosophy as aesthetic emotion, specifically in its variation called “the sublime.”³ What is often missing in either efforts to provide an alternative spirituality through the aesthetic or quasi-aesthetic emotion of wonder or in academic studies of these efforts is that the topic is not new, and there were heated discussions of similar ideas among Russian philosophers and artists at the turn of the twentieth century. It seems, then, that their ideas about art as an alternative spirituality might come in handy right now. This study, thus, intends to fill the gap in the literature on the post-secular appropriation of aesthetic experience as quasi-religious by introducing the reader to the religious aesthetics of Viacheslav Ivanov, which is little known to the audience that consumes literature on the post-secular and which sketches the way the human being can partake in the highest levels of spirituality by means of the arts and aesthetic experience.

Viacheslav Ivanov (1866, Moscow–1949, Rome), a prominent Russian symbolist poet, classical philologist, thinker, and theorist of symbolism, was one of the most prominent figures in discussions of aesthetic experience and art as new spirituality in Russian circles at the turn of the twentieth century. Ivanov has written no fundamental treatise specifically on aesthetics. At the same time, all of his numerous reflections on art, symbolism, artistic creativity, and spiritual experience essentially constitute fragments of an implicit philosophy of art, or even, broadly speaking, aesthetics. Nor did Ivanov disregard the discipline of aesthetics explicitly. On the contrary, he did think and write about the main aesthetic principles of art and devoted one of his articles from 1905 titled “The Symbolism of Aesthetic Principles” to the aesthetic principles of the universe.

Traditionally, the principal aesthetic category for Ivanov is the beautiful. At the same time, the “three principles of the beautiful”—the sublime, beauty, and the chaotic—are not particularly traditional for classical aesthetics. However, it is those principles that form the foundation of Ivanov’s unsystematized aesthetics. The aforesaid article, just as the majority of Ivanov’s theoretical works, is written in an imaginative and metaphorical style, which is rather typical of creative writing than of a theoretical treatise. This is why he describes the aesthetic principles of being and human experience by employing a number of artistic symbols, beginning with the “ascending, soaring line,” which expresses the human soul overcoming its limitations and *ascending* to the divine heights of its true origin. Ivanov describes this state of the human spirit by means of the category of the *sublime*. He stresses that, technically speaking, the sublime, as a religious phenomenon, goes beyond the boundaries of aesthetics proper, because the feat of the ascent allows human beings to leave themselves and their native earth for the sake of something higher. “In fact, the feat of the ascent is a feat of parting, alienation, loss, giving up, and renunciation of oneself and what is one’s own for the sake of something that so far has been alien [to them] and for the sake of a different self” (Ivanov 1971, p. 824). In its ascent into empyreal heights, the human spirit loses all that has been its own and partakes of heavenly beauty.

At the same time, no common, down to earth person can gain access to this beauty. It is this beauty itself that turns its countenance back from “empyreal thrones” and “smiles at the earth.” Thus begins the process of the *descent* of heavenly beauty to earth: beauty is clothed “in the visible,” and it is only then that it becomes the true *beauty* that is accessible to the aesthetic perception of a human being. “We, the earthborn, are capable of perceiving Beauty only in the categories of earthly beauty. The soul of the earth is out Beauty” (Ivanov 1971, p. 826).

The inclusion of the term “symbolism” into the title of his—supposedly theoretical—article allows Ivanov—as a true symbolist poet—to play freely with meanings in his text. Thus he understands “aesthetic principles” in a number of ways: as symbols of the ascent and descent of the spirit of an artistic personality in the process of creative activity; as cosmogonic principles of classical mythology (something we will address later); and as movements of the soul within the spaces of the Christian world view. Hence the choice of the term “symbolism,” as Ivanov engages polysemantic, multi-level symbols.

³ On the concept of wonder, especially as relevant to aesthetics, see (Costa 2011; Vasalou 2015; Willmott 2018; Levine 2006).

Turning to the metaphors of Orthodox liturgical hymnography, Ivanov declaims with pathos: “the ascent: the breaking up and the parting; the descent: the return and the good news of a victory. The former is ‘glory to God in the highest’; the latter is ‘peace on earth.’ The ascent is a *No* to the earth; the descent is a ‘gentle ray of a mysterious *Yes*’” (Ivanov 1971, p. 826). “The Beauty of Christianity is a beauty of the descent” (Ivanov 1971, p. 827). It is also the beauty of art, or its aesthetic quality. All art is founded first of all upon this earthly beauty of the descent, or the *beauty of the visible*.

However, the descent does not always turn out to be beauty, the graciousness of the world, and a “blessed return.” “There is a sort of descent, which is like a breaking up” (Ivanov 1971, p. 828), which goes deeper than the earth, past the earth into a bottomless “abyss, which is bubbling with the cloudy eyes of madness,” where Dionysus is “the god of the descent and a breaking up” (ibid.). In this descent “past the earth” Ivanov sees the third aesthetic principle: “after the ‘sublime,’ in the aforesaid sense, and after the ‘beautiful,’ the principle of which is the graciousness of the descent, [follows] the third, demonic, principle of our aesthetic emotions: its name is the chaotic.... This is the realm not of golden-sunny and diamond-white ascents into the blue and not of rose-colored and emerald returns to earth, but of the dark purple of hell” (Ivanov 1971, pp. 828–29).

Ivanov gains his understanding of the chaotic as a potential principle of both the universe and artistic creativity—and an aesthetic one at that—from the theory of chaos of the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov’ev, who considered chaos to be the eternal, disorderly, and irrational element of the world and of the “world’s soul.” Developing the poet Fedor Tiutchev’s idea about “ancient, dear chaos,” Solov’ev writes that “chaos—i.e., negative limitlessness, the gaping abyss of every sort of madness and ugliness, demonic urges, which rise up against everything positive and necessary—is the deepest essence of the world’s soul and the foundation of the entire world” (Solov’ev 1966b, p. 126). At the same time, the Russian philosopher was convinced that the cosmogonic process does not destroy chaos by introducing it into the ordered channel of beauty. Solov’ev writes that “chaos, i.e., ugliness itself, is the necessary background of every earthly beauty, and such phenomena as a stormy sea or a night lightning storm acquire aesthetic significance precisely because ‘chaos stirs under them’” (Solov’ev 1966b, p. 127).

In his aesthetics, Ivanov goes farther than Solov’ev by turning *the chaotic* into one of the key aesthetic principles. He equates the chaotic with two other principles—the sublime and beauty—and sees commonality between the three in that all three wrest human beings who live within the aesthetic element out of their personal essence: “every aesthetic emotion wrests the spirit out of the aspects of the personal. The delight of the ascent establishes the supra-personal. The descent, as the principle of artistic inspiration (using Pushkin’s turn of phrase), turns the spirit toward that, which is beyond the personal. The chaotic, which is revealed within the psychological category of ecstasy, is impersonal. It abolishes completely all aspects” (Ivanov 1971, p. 829). As a rule, the majority of the arts focus on the expression of beauty or the sublime, and only music, which is “the most powerful of the arts..., sings to us mightily by those voices of the nocturnal Sirens of the deep, in order to lift us up from their depths later on a whim (as ‘chaos gives birth to a star’) by means of a soaring line of the sublime and return us—purified and strengthened—to the earth through a gracious descent of Beauty” (Ivanov 1971, p. 829).

Throughout various historical epochs and stages of their own creative activity, artists pass all levels of cosmo-anthropic being, which is described, according to Ivanov, by the three principal aesthetic categories: beginning with a Dionysian purification in chaotic, ecstatic depths, which is characteristic of ancient mysteries, which is followed by an ascent to divine heights, and ending with a descent to their dear earth in the process of creating works of art.

Ivanov thinks that antiquity expressed those profound truths of aesthetic experience in the mythology of Aphrodite, whom the Russian poet interprets in this context as a symbol of the *eternal feminine*, which encircles the entire cosmos: “Ancient insight combined all three principles of the beautiful in the image of ‘foam-born’ Aphrodite. A goddess—

Afrogenia, Anadyomene—emerges from frothy chaos as a world flower that grows toward the heavens. Having been generated by the depths, she rises up and already encircles the heavens as ‘Ourania,’ ‘Asteria.’ Next, as ‘gold-throned,’ she has already turned her gracious face toward the earth; ‘smiling’ and light-footed, she approaches the mortals And the enamored world on its knees glorifies the divine descent of the ‘All-people’s’ (Πάνδημος)” (Ivanov 1971, p. 830).

Ivanov’s principal aesthetic triad of aesthetic principles functions at once both as the principles of being in its creative cosmourgic mode and as the principles of the spiritual and equally creative existence of humans in the universe. These principles are tightly intertwined and even melded together in the aesthetic consciousness of the Russian symbolist. We are beginning to understand the reason why. In his semi-poetic text, Ivanov uses images that are akin to poetic as he attempts to clarify to us the multi-level symbolism of the aesthetic principles that form the foundation of every type of creative activity—beginning with cosmourgic and ending with the human arts—which, according to Ivanov, of itself is symbolic.

This triad of aesthetic principles that Ivanov introduces in 1905 forms a foundation of sorts, upon which he bases both his theoretical aesthetics and his practical application of it (in poetry). He never revisits this issue directly. However, we cannot escape the persistent feeling that in his reflections on music and on the synthesis of the arts in the coming mystery, Ivanov’s spirit immerses itself into the Dionysian element of the chaotic and then pushes off of it in order to soar into the heavenly spaces of the divine.

Despite Ivanov’s broad understanding of the range of aesthetics, almost all of his reflections and articles on aesthetics are devoted to art. Therefore, returning directly to Ivanov’s assessment of art, one must stress that genuine art, i.e., *high art* for Ivanov, just as for many French and Russian symbolists, is always symbolic. As a result of the process of descent of the artist’s soul from empyreal heights to the realm of sensory beauty, i.e., in the process of concrete handiwork of creating an artwork, the soul of an artist realizes in the form of symbols its aesthetic experience of the ascent, as well as the special ineffable knowledge that it has acquired in the process of its ascent. This is why the genuine content of an “artistic depiction” is always expressed in the form of symbols and is much broader than the object that is depicted. Using his typical poetic and spiritual pathos, Ivanov claims that the deep meaning of a genuine work of art is far removed from that which can be communicated by using common speech: “A work of genius tells us of something different, deeper, more beautiful, more tragic, more divine than that, which it expresses directly. In this sense, it is always symbolic. However, that which it encompasses with its symbols remains inaccessible to the human mind and ineffable by the human word. In order for an artwork to exercise its full aesthetic impact on us, we must feel this inscrutability and incommensurability of its ultimate meaning. This generates our longing for the ineffable, which is what the life and soul of aesthetic delight consist in: and this will, this impulse is music” (Ivanov 1974, p. 93). Nowadays, we would call this “music” that resides in the depths of every genuine work of art its aesthetic quality or *artisticity*.

Now, according to Ivanov, this “music,” i.e., the aesthetic content of an artistic symbol, has an unequivocally *anagogical* nature (from the Greek ἀναγωγή, “leading up”). If artists create high (=symbolic) art in the process of the *descent* in order to express in it their ineffable knowledge about the “most real,” then the recipient of this art moves in the opposite direction, upwards. The energy of artistic form *leads* them *up* to the same “invisible reality” that those artists contemplated in the act of their ascent from the real world to the “more real” one (*a realibus ad realiora*; Ivanov 1974, p. 638, etc.), from the symbol to what it symbolizes, from the earthly to the heavenly.

The aforesaid energetic–anagogical function of the symbol is one of the key points of Ivanov’s theory of the symbol. The symbol is a special kind of “sign of alternative reality.” Although this sign is materialized with the help of an artist, in fact it is not the artist’s own creation. “As a ray of the sun, the symbol cuts through all the levels of being and all spheres of consciousness; at each level it signifies different essences and in each sphere it

fulfills a different function" (Ivanov 1974, p. 537). According to Ivanov, the symbol is not a human invention but a sort of energetic testimony, which like a ray emanates from the divine depths (i.e., it has a divine origin) and signifies something that belongs to divine reality.

Artistic symbols possess their own being and a number of meanings, which are disclosed in different ways at different levels of being and consciousness. They are most fully disclosed in myth. In 1913, Ivanov clarifies that "every true symbol is some sort of a realization of living, divine truth." For this reason, the symbol is a *reality* and "real life," which possesses, as it were, relative being: "conditionally ontological" being as regards lower levels of being and "meonic" being (from the Greek *μη ὄν*, i.e., characteristic of non-being) as regards higher levels of being. The symbol is a sort of a mediating form, "through which reality flows, now flaring up and now dying down in it; it is a conduit for divine revelations that stream through it" (Ivanov 1974, pp. 646–47).

The symbol in art is inexhaustible in terms of its meaning; it is polysemic, hieratic, and endowed with sacred energy. In essence, this is what distinguishes it from allegory, which is rationalistically given. "A symbol is true only when it is inexhaustible and limitless in its meaning, when it utters something ineffable, something that is not adequate to external words in its concealed (hieratic and magical) language of hint and suggestion. It has many faces, it is polysemic and always obscure at its ultimate depth. It is an organic formation, a crystal. Moreover, it is a sort of a monad, and this is where it is different from allegory, parable, or comparison, which are compound and can be taken apart" (Ivanov 1971, p. 713).

According to Ivanov, formal logical thinking is practically incapable of grasping symbols. The essence of the symbol in principle is contradictory (it is a *σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον*, or a contradictory, antinomial sign) and defies description. The symbol is a sign, through which reality flows, but at the same time it is *this very reality itself*. This is the reason for Ivanov's particular focus on so-called "realist symbolism," which deals with the *real* symbol, which is partly endowed with the very reality that it signifies, as opposed to the idealist symbol, which has a purely psychological, and not onto-anagogical function. Within realist symbolism, which is professed by the Russian symbolist, the symbol is understood as the "goal of artistic disclosure: to the extent that every thing is a concealed reality, it is already a symbol; and the more closely and directly this thing partakes in absolute reality, the deeper this symbol is and the less likely is its ultimate content to be discovered" (Ivanov 1974, p. 552). It is the *ontologism* of the symbol that forms the foundation of this type of symbolism. In idealist symbolism, the symbol is essentially *psychological*; it serves merely as an artistic means of communicating information about a subjective emotion of a certain person to someone else. In realist symbolism, the symbol also links consciousnesses of different persons, but on a totally different basis: the symbol produces a union of persons "by means of a common, mystical contemplation of an objective essence that is one and the same for all" (ibid.). The realist symbol opens up a way to seeing mysteries.

Ivanov describes the "pathos of realist symbolism" as "through Augustine's *transcendite ipsum* ("transcend yourself") to the slogan *a realibus ad realiora* ("from the real to what is more real"). Its alchemist puzzle, its theurgic attempt at religious creativity is to establish, get to know, and disclose in reality an alternative, more actual actuality. This is the pathos of a mystical striving for *ens realissimum* ("the most real being"), the eros of the divine" (Ivanov 1974, p. 553). It is true that the symbol really possesses this sort of erotic energy of *leading up* a recipient of an artwork to the highest spheres of being. It is Fr. Pavel Florenskii, who had been influenced by Ivanov's aesthetics in this respect, who at a later date formulated more precisely Ivanov's idea about the presence of the energy of that which is symbolized in the symbol: "the symbol is the sort of essence, whose energy is fused, or, to be more precise, merged with the energy of some other essence that is more valuable in this respect, and in this way it carries in itself that latter essence" (Florenskii 1999, p. 257).⁴

⁴ See (Bychkov 1993) about the symbolic meaning of art in Fr. P. Florenskii in more detail.

Realist symbolism, Ivanov sums up, originates with the “mystical realism of the Middle Ages through the mediation of Romanticism and with participation of Goethe’s symbolism.” Its main principles are objectivity and its mystical character; the symbol—as the highest reality—is its goal. In 1936, Ivanov stresses in particular that as realist symbolism strives to leave behind external, visible, and objectively existing reality and reach a reality that is higher and more real in an ontological sense, it realizes in its own way the “anagogical behest of medieval aesthetics”: to lead the human being from the sensory and by means of the sensory up to spiritual reality (Ivanov 1974, p. 665).

Ivanov is convinced that realist symbolism is the only contemporary form of preserving and—in some form—developing *myth* as the deep content of the symbol that is understood as reality. “Realist symbolism travels toward myth by way of the symbol; the myth is already contained in the symbol and immanent to the latter; a contemplation of the symbol reveals the myth in the symbol” (Ivanov 1974, p. 554). As for myth, in Ivanov’s mind, it is the objective reality that contains in itself truth about “the reality that is more real.” Its higher ontological status compared to the symbol is determined by the fact that it is “a result not of personal but of collective, *sobornyi* consciousness” (Ivanov 1974, p. 567). Now myth (as a sacred reality) opened itself up to this *sobornyi* consciousness (or “*sobornyi* soul,” Ivanov 1974, p. 572) in the performances of most ancient mysteries (Eleusinian, Samothracian, etc.), which were dominated by the Dionysian element of the chaotic. Subsequently, myth became the property of the people, was surrounded by various accretions and distortions in the historical memory of the people, and it is in this folk form that myth became what it is in the full sense of the word (Ivanov 1974, p. 560).

A genuine myth is deprived of all personal characteristics. It is an objective form of storing knowledge about reality, which has been acquired as a result of mystical experience. A genuine myth is taken on faith until such time when new knowledge of a higher level will be discovered in this same reality in the course of a new breakthrough (i.e., a new ascent) to it. At this point, old myths are replaced by new ones, which take the place of the old ones in the religious consciousness and spiritual experience of the people. Therefore, Ivanov sees the overarching task of symbolism—which, according to him, is very far from having been accomplished—in *creating myths*. However, this task does not amount to reworking old myths in an artistic way or to writing new fantastic tales—which is what, he thinks, idealist symbolism is involved in—but in *creating genuine myths*, which Ivanov understands as a “spiritual feat of the artist him- or herself.” Artists “must stop creating outside of their link with divine all-unity; they must educate themselves in order to be able to realize this link in a creative way. Before a myth is experienced by everybody, it must become an event within [the artist’s] inner experience, which is personal in terms of how it is localized but transcends personality in terms of its content” (Ivanov 1974, p. 558). This is precisely what the “*theurgic* goal” of symbolism consists in, which many Russian symbolists of that time dreamed of. Speaking of artistic–*theurgic* action, Ivanov thinks that ideally myths must be realized within a special form of art of the future—within a new mystery, which can emerge and develop on the basis of theater by leaving its confines, transcending the limits of the stage, and returning into the bosom of religious consciousness.

According to Ivanov, *symbol*, *myth*, *mystery* are not inventions of human consciousness, but mystical realities, or phenomena of the collective, historically given, artistic–religious experience of the human kind, which preserve sacred knowledge of sublime matters and facilitate the ascent of humans to this knowledge. At the same time, the human being of the future, having been purified by passing through chaotic, collective, ecstatic madness, will ascend to a higher form of knowledge and—what is more important—to the new, highest form of being by living a life that is *theurgically* organized according to the laws of art. Therefore, *theurgy* as the highest goal of aesthetic experience occupies such a prominent place in reflections of Russian symbolists, and first of all in Viacheslav Ivanov.

Ivanov’s understanding of *theurgy* is based on V.I. Solov’ev’s idea that the art of the future must establish a new, independent link with religion. According to Solov’ev, “painters and poets once again must become priests and prophets, but in a different, even

more important and elevated sense: it is not only that a religious idea will possess them, but they themselves will possess it and with full awareness control its earthly realizations" (Solov'ev 1966a, p. 190). Based on this quotation, Ivanov calls such artists *theurges*, or carriers of divine revelation. Ivanov thinks that it is precisely such artists who are genuine creators of myth and symbolists in the highest and truest sense of this word.

According to Ivanov, art is one of the essential forms of "impact of higher realities upon lower ones." However, he is wary about using the "glorious and holy" term "theurgy" to describe this essential trait of art in works of art that have been created so far. In his mind, theurgy is an "action that is marked by the seal of the divine Name" (Ivanov 1974, p. 646), and it has not been realized yet in the full sense of this word. However, it is precisely theurgy that symbolists aspire to achieve in their practical activity. The art of theurgy will ascend to the new level of "seeing mysteries" and turn into a "sacred mystery of love, which conquers formal divisions, or into a theurgic, transformative 'Be!'" (Ivanov 1974, p. 601). In other words, the artist will become a true instrument of God the Word in the process of a real transformation of the world. The artist will transcend the limits of art in the proper sense, in the sense of the modern European "fine arts," or art as a specifically aesthetic form of activity.⁵

According to Ivanov, "theurgic longing," or an aspiration to breathe real life into matter is a trait of art that is present in it from the very beginning. From time immemorial, artists attempted to rival nature in this respect. Two potential paths were open in front of them in this direction: the false path of magic and the true path of theurgy. This "theurgic transition" or "transcending" of art beyond the boundaries that the current state of nature is "forbidden" to transgress is possible when mutual aspirations of the artist's soul and the higher principle meet and harmonize with each other. "This transcending, which is impossible within the limits of the world that is currently given, is defined as a direct assistance of the spirit to nature that has a potential of being animated (Ivanov has in mind the material of art—V.B.) in order for it to achieve actual existence. The aspiration to achieve this miracle in art is the right one, and the art's egress into this sphere, which lies beyond the limits of every art that has been known to us so far, its egress beyond the fence of symbols... is the egress that is also desirable for the artist as such, because in this egress the symbol becomes flesh, the word becomes life-giving life, and music becomes the harmony of the spheres" (Ivanov 1974, p. 649).

The theurgic creativity of the art of the future that Ivanov expected "requires of artists at every step of their artistic activity to ascend up to a direct encounter with the higher essences. In other words, every strike of the artist's chisel or brush must be such an encounter; it must be directed not by the artist, but by the spirits of the divine hierarchies, who guide his or her hand" (Ivanov 1974, p. 650).

Having sketched an original concept of theurgy, the essence of which consists in creating a future world through a cooperation between the human being and divine energies, Ivanov assigns the principal role in this co-creation to aesthetic principles. In fact, Ivanov sees aesthetic consciousness as coinciding with religious, if understood in his own way, because according to Ivanov, the symbol and myth—the two main principles of aesthetic consciousness—also double as principles of religious existence. Ivanov thinks that the symbol—just as its content, myth—is of divine origin; it is an "embodiment of divine truth." For this reason, high art is one of the principal ways the human being can ascend to spiritual, divine reality by means of sensory reality. If art and aesthetic experience are understood in this way, in many ways, they can replace sacred experience for the person of the post-secular age. For a post-secular person, then, Viacheslav Ivanov's aesthetics opens up new vistas of spiritual existence, which are not identical to liturgical experience but are a close match.

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⁵ On Ivanov's discussion of a peculiar, mystical aspect of art becoming "practice," see (Bird 2002, pp. 289–301).

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