Wagner Beyond Established Differences

Rethinking Controversial Aspects of Wagner's Music Dramas in the Light of Contemporary Culture

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Abstract

This dissertation concentrates on the philosophical-ideological debate about Wagner centred around the question of whether proto-Nazi tendencies are intrinsic to the artist's music dramas. It examines aspects of Wagner's mature body of work that, according to its Adornoian critics, coincide with core features of National Socialism, namely the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and leitmotif technique, the music's overwhelming sensuousness, Germanness, and the idea of regeneration. By reconceptualising these aspects in the context of new cultural-historical circumstances as well as Roger Scruton's and Alain Badiou's universalist readings of Wagner, a Nietzschean conception of Wagner's work can be developed that resists the racism, bigotry and nationalism with which it has often been associated.

Kurzfassung

Diese Dissertation konzentriert sich auf die philosophisch-ideologische Diskussion über Richard Wagner. Im Zentrum steht die Frage, ob den Musikdramen des Künstlers proto-nazistische Tendenzen intrinsisch sind. Untersucht werden in der Arbeit Aspekte der Musikdramen, die – laut Theodor W. Adorno und Kritikern in der von ihm ausgehenden Tradition – zusammenfallen mit wesentlichen Elementen des Nazismus: das Konzept des Gesamtkunstwerks und die Leitmotivtechnik, die überwältigende Sensualität der Musik, das Deutschtum und die Idee der Regeneration. Diese Aspekte werden zum einen im Kontext der historisch-kulturellen Situation zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts rekonzeptualisiert. Zum andern werden sie auf Roger Scrutons und Alain Badious universalistische Interpretation von Wagners Werk bezogen, die dieses für die Gegenwart besser erschließen als das auf den Nationalsozialismus fixierte Paradigma Adornos. So ergibt sich eine Nietzscheanische Konzeption von Wagners Werk, die immun ist gegen die – oft mit Wagner assoziierten – Ideologeme des Nationalismus, Rassismus und einer geschlossenen Weltanschauung.

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Introduction

In Search of a Universal Meaning in Wagner

Ever since the publication of Theodor W. Adorno's *Versuch über Wagner* in 1952, the view that Wagner's work anticipated key elements of Nazi ideology has dominated the philosophical-ideological reception of the composer. Yet, at the same time, contemporary criticism of Wagner has shown little or no regard for Adorno's complementary premise that the artist's work would acquire a new significance under changed historical circumstances – meaning, possibly, that it would lose its proto-Nazi tendencies.[1] Even though the world has profoundly changed since the end of the Second World War, Wagner's art is still predominantly viewed by its critics through the prism of the Third Reich and the Holocaust. If we accept Adorno's premise that a contemporary assessment of Wagner must take into consideration new historical circumstances and their effects on the artist's music dramas, it becomes clear that today's Wagner reception lacks a proper framing context, confronting us with a long-neglected question: how can the contemporary world serve as a framework for developing a new conception of Wagner's work?

The present study aims to explore this question. As it pertains to the philosophical debate about the composer's ideological bearing, two major voices in contemporary philosophy thrust themselves to the forefront of the discussion, namely Sir Roger Scruton and Alain Badiou, both of whom have called for a philosophical reappraisal of Wagner's artistic legacy.[2] By stressing the universal significance of the artist's music dramas, the two thinkers in question have created a counter-current with respect to the Adornoian view of Wagner as a proto-Nazi. However, universality means something different for Badiou than it does for Scruton. In the context of his Marxist-communist philosophy,[3] Badiou seeks to reconstruct the optimistic, revolutionary

[1] See Theodor Adorno, 'Wagner's Relevance Today', in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 315, 317. See also Karin Bauer, 'Adorno's Wagner: History and the Potential of the Artwork', *Cultural Critique* 60 (2005), 69.
[2] See Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010); Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004) and *The Ring of Truth: The Wisdom of Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).
[3] To gain insight into Badiou's communist worldview, see Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. David Macey and Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2010); Alain Badiou and Peter Engelmann, *Philosophy and the Idea of Communism: Alain Badiou in Conversation with Peter Engelmann*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015); Alain Badiou and Marcel Gauchet, *What Is to Be Done?: A Dialogue on Communism, Capitalism, and the Future of Democracy*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

worldview espoused by the young Wagner who stood under the influence of the Young Hegelians. From an opposing conservative point of view,[4] Scruton endeavours to uncover the pessimistic or tragic worldview the mature composer adopted under the influence of Schopenhauer. Both philosophers thus seek to reconstruct the genesis of Wagner's work, which belongs to the nineteenth century. However, two significantly different strands of thought are being emphasised: a revolutionary, optimistic strand on the one hand, and a pessimistic one on the other.[5] This raises the question of how the gap between these two different strands can be bridged so that we can move towards a unified conception of Wagner's universality, one that has its philosophical origin in the nineteenth century.

We are thus faced with the following two questions: (1) Can contemporary culture serve as a framework for developing a new conception of Wagner's art that, as Adorno envisioned it, defies the notion of Wagner as a proto-Nazi? (2) Can we develop a coherent philosophical conception of Wagner's universality on the basis of nineteenth-century thought? Since the objective of question 1 coincides with the objective of question 2, the questions can be considered as supplementary to each other. Hence, they can be combined in such a way that they constitute one coherent research question aimed at resolving both issues simultaneously. The research question is as follows: how can contemporary culture serve as a framework for developing a unified conception of Wagner's universality stemming from nineteenth-century philosophies?

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[4] To gain insight into Scruton's conservative worldview, see Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (London: Macmillan, 1980); *Arguments for Conservatism: A Political Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2006); *Culture Counts: Faith and Feeling in a World Besieged* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2007); *The Uses of Pessimism and the Danger of False Hope* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010); *Green Philosophy: How to Think Seriously About the Planet* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012); *How to Be a Conservative* (London: Continuum, 2014).

[5] This opposition brings into focus the opposition between Badiou's and Scruton's respective philosophical projects. Although Badiou's leftist worldview and Scruton's conservative one strikingly resonate with the revolutionary and pessimistic modes of thought that are both present in Wagner, neither Badiou nor Scruton has yet engaged with the other's interpretation of the composer. Badiou's *Five Lessons on Wagner* (2010) makes no mention of Scruton's *Death-Devoted Heart* (2004), and there are no references to Badiou's work in Scruton's *Ring of Truth* (2016). The two intellectuals are certainly familiar with each other, though, having both participated in the 2012 Nexus Conference, How to Change the World? (see the Nexus Institute website: https://nexus-instituut.nl/en/activity/how-to-change-the-world/?noredirect=en_US). While Badiou has never mentioned Scruton in his writings, Scruton, in his book *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands* (2015), has critically discussed Badiou's theory of the Event in relation to radical political thought (see chapter 8, 240–259), pointing out that Badiou's dangerously idealistic philosophy 'serves one purpose, which is to turn attention away from the actual world, from real people and from ordinary moral and political reasoning' (Roger Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left*. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015, 272).

As my research starts from the premise that a contemporary assessment of Wagner must take into consideration new historical circumstances, this dissertation can be considered a continuation of Adorno's search for a new conception of Wagner. At the same time, however, my research establishes a break with the work of Adorno. While Adorno argues that the nineteenth-century figure (*Gestalt*) of Wagner has to be dismantled in order to liberate the artist's work from proto-Nazi tendencies, I make the case that it is precisely this nineteenth-century figure of Wagner that needs to be recovered in order to achieve this end. For this reason, I won't consider new historical circumstances, in an Adornoian manner, as a vehicle for constructing a new, de-Germanised notion of Wagner but as a framework for rediscovering the spirit in which Wagner's works were made. What I ultimately seek to show is that this spirit is consonant with Nietzsche's Dionysian worldview wherein pessimism and optimism are inextricably entwined. By elucidating the kinship between Wagner's music dramas and Nietzsche's thinking, a unified conception of Wagner's universal significance will finally come into view.

The following sections further elaborate the above points. In section 1, I analyse Adorno's *Versuch* with a view to identifying the aspects of Wagner that allegedly coincide with key elements of Nazi ideology. This is followed by an explanation of how Wagner's work, according to Adorno, can be liberated from its proto-Nazi tendencies. Section 2 discusses whether or not anti-Semitism is an aspect of Wagner's art. While arguing that anti-Semitic elements cannot be objectively detected in Wagner's artistic work, I point out that a discussion of Wagner's anti-Semitic tendencies can nevertheless be helpful in determining to what extent Wagner's intentions must be taken into account when assessing his works. I argue that by approaching Wagner as a partial intentionalist, meaning that Wagner's intentions will be considered insofar as they pertain to his work and the broader intellectual context from which it arose, the universalist ideal that underlies Wagner's artistic enterprise but has been eclipsed by the composer's anti-Semitism can be rediscovered. Section 3 then sets out to clarify how contemporary culture can serve as a framework for recovering the universalist ideal that underlies the music dramas. Finally, in section 4, I present a theoretical framework for defining Wagner's universality in Nietzschean terms.

1. Adorno's *Versuch* and the Search for a New Figure of Wagner

Adorno's book stands out as a landmark in Wagner literature because it is the first attempt at a description of how the composer's aesthetic innovations coincide with core features of Nazism.[6] Considering the fact that the relationship between Wagner and Nazism was hardly discussed in the first decades after World War II, Adorno's *Versuch* proved paradigmatic for it anticipated the anti-Wagnerian trend that arose in the 1980s and 1990s, when a whole series of books appeared in which Wagner is portrayed as the ideological forefather of National Socialism.[7] Now, the aspects of Wagner that, according to the composer's critics, coincide with core features of National Socialism have already been denoted as such in Adorno's *Versuch*. Thus, by examining Adorno's reception of Wagner, one gets a clear idea of what is generally seen as problematic about the composer.

Adorno centres his criticism on the premise that Wagner contributed to laying the foundations of the culture industry, i.e. mass culture, which are the foundations of Nazism, too. The notion of the culture industry was introduced in the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944; co-authored with Max Horkheimer), in the chapter 'Kulturindustrie – Aufklärung als Massenbetrug'. Adorno's suspicion of mass culture, which he sees as tantamount to Fascism and/or Nazism (Adorno does not explicitly make the necessary distinction between the two), originated in pre-World War II Europe, where the philosopher witnessed the rise of Nazism in Germany and the Third Reich's propaganda machine. This undoubtedly influenced Adorno's assessment of Wagner. A brief examination of the theatrical way in which the Nazis orchestrated public life is therefore a useful way to gain an understanding of how, according to Adorno and his successor critics, Wagner and Nazism are related.

Adorno witnessed how grand spectacles like the Nuremberg rallies marked public life in Nazi Germany and how the mass media played a central role in amplifying these massive events

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[6] Granted, two years prior to the release of Adorno's *Versuch über Wagner*, Leon Stein's *The Racial Thinking of Richard Wagner* (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1950) had been published. Yet Adorno had already published four essays in 1939 in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, which formed the basis for his later book.

[7] See, for example, Jacob Katz, *The Darker Side of Genius: Richard Wagner's Anti-Semitism* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986); Paul Lawrence Rose, *Wagner: Race and Revolution* (London: Faber, 1992); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta: Figures of Wagner*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Joachim Köhler, *Wagners Hitler: Der Prophet und sein Vollstrecker* (München: Karl Blessing, 1997); Dieter David Scholz, *Richard Wagners Antisemitismus: Jahrhundertgenie im Zwielicht: eine Korrektur* (Berlin: Parthas, 2000); Milton E. Brener, *Richard Wagner and the Jews* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006) and Christopher Nicholson, *Richard and Adolf: Did Richard Wagner Incite Adolf Hitler to Commit the Holocaust?* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2007).

for the sole purpose of manipulating and mobilising public opinion and of subjugating the will of the masses to the will of the Führer.[8] As Frederic Spotts explicates in *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (2002), the Nazi spectacles were staged in such a manner that they would 'seduce the subconscious of an audience'.[9] To this end, visuals had to express a sense of unity. Hence the importance of uniforms in 'obliterating individuality and the hierarchic order of society while manifesting the encompassing power of the party and state'.[10] Another way to seduce audiences was to stage events at night, for 'night is the realm of the senses rather than reason, intuition rather than logic'.[11] Whereas 'during the day people's will power was strong enough to withstand new ideas, at night people succumb more easily to the dominating force of a stronger will'.[12] Recognising 'the potent psychological effect of darkness', Spotts writes, Hitler 'made a point of staging his greatest visual events at a time when he could play with controlled lighting effects'.[13] In this way, he could draw the audience 'into a mystical realm in which the individual surrendered himself totally'.[14] To 'entice people into his phantasmal world',[15] Hitler chose to combine the arts like a *Gesamtkunstwerk* so he could create overwhelming effects that 'pummelled the participants nearly senseless'.[16]

Probably the most powerful feature of the Nazi aesthetic aimed at persuading the masses was Hitler's magnetic rhetoric. His ability to mesmerise audiences through his passionate speeches is well known. 'Like a religious evangelist', Spotts remarks, 'he could convert crowds and he could convert individuals.'[17] For this purpose, Hitler 'pitched his appeal not to the mind but to the senses, to emotion rather than reason. Psychological manipulation, not political logic was the essence of his technique.'[18] Many have attested to the hypnotising effect of Hitler's speeches. Kurt Lüdecke, for example, declared that his 'critical faculty was swept away' and

[8] Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935), a film record of the sixth national rally of the Nazi Party in Nuremberg in 1934, epitomises this practise. Riefenstahl's film shows the typical characteristics of the Nazi aesthetic: the Führer cult, parades, marches, symbols referring to a mythical German past and the emphasis on uniformity, and of course the technological effects are eye-catching. Riefenstahl applied the most advanced techniques to create a larger-than-life image of the imagined German community that was seen everywhere in Germany and beyond.

[9] Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (New York, NY: Overlook Press, 2009), 53.

[10] Ibid., 52.

[11] Ibid., 53.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 54.

[16] Ibid., 59.

[17] Ibid., 44.

[18] Ibid.

that he 'experienced an exaltation that could only be likened to religious conversion'.[19] After hearing Hitler speak, he 'had found himself, his leader, and his cause'.[20] Leni Riefenstahl, on hearing Hitler at a Berlin Sports Palace rally in 1932, declared: 'It seemed as if the earth's surface were spreading out in front of me…spewing out an enormous jet of water, so powerful that it touched the sky and shook the earth. I felt quite paralysed.'[21] And Philip Johnson said of the 1938 Nuremberg rally: 'Like *The Ring of the Nibelung*, even if you were at first indifferent, you were at last overcome, and if you were a believer to begin with, the effect was even more staggering.'[22]

Due to his unique ability to sense the feelings of the crowd – its hopes, fears, frustration and anger – Hitler was able to play on the emotions of his listeners and to take possession of their minds. To this end, he commonly began his speech with a long pause to build up tension until he finally started to speak, softly and slowly, gradually increasing the tempo and volume of his speech and gesticulating more and more dramatically as he ventured into the grand finale of his address. There thus was a musical quality to Hitler's speeches, and according to prominent exiles like Heinrich, Thomas and Klaus Mann, Emil Ludwig, Ludwig Marcuse and Bert Brecht, 'there was something Wagnerian about it'.[23] 'What he [Hitler] learned from Wagner he inserted in his speeches – the pompous and the nebulous, brutality and innocence; these are what give his speeches such resonance for Germans', Emil Ludwig claimed.[24] Another so-called Wagnerian feature of Hitler's symphony-like speeches was the endless repetition of the same ideas, which has been likened to Wagner's leitmotif technique. Comparing the *Meistersinger* prelude to Hitler's speeches, Ernst Hanfstaengl claimed that 'the whole interweaving of leitmotifs […] was exactly mirrored in the pattern of his speeches, which were symphonic in construction and ended in a great climax, like the blare of Wagner's trombones'.[25]

The central idea put forward in the speeches as well as the visual elements of the rallies was the exclusivity and superiority of the German identity. Hence the decision to organise the annual rally of the NSDAP in Nuremberg, a city that symbolised Germanness. According to Spotts, Hitler sought to 'reinforce the impression that the Third Reich was rooted in the oldest, most

[19] Quoted ibid.
[20] Quoted ibid.
[21] Quoted ibid., 44–45.
[22] Quoted ibid., 69.
[23] Quoted ibid., 49–50.
[24] Quoted ibid.
[25] Quoted in Sherree Owens Zalampas, *Adolf Hitler: A Psychological Interpretation of His Views on Architecture, Art, and Music* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990), 42.

authentic German tradition going back to the First Reich of the Middle Ages'[26] by staging his rallies in Nuremberg, which had been described by Hitler as 'an outstanding shrine of German art and German culture'.[27] Since the rallies were intended to emphasise the immutable essence of the German *Volk*, materials and symbols that suggested tradition and indestructability were put on display.[28] This practise occasionally entailed the utilisation of Wagner's music. Themes from the overture to *Rienzi* were included in the Nuremberg rallies, but the unquestionable highlight of the event was a gala performance of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in the city's Staatstheater.[29] For obvious reasons, no work was more suitable for celebrating Germany and its ideological capital than Wagner's comedy, which, in the eyes of many contemporaries, both opponents and supporters of Hitler, resonated flawlessly with the *Blut und Boden*-ideology of the Nazis.

If we now look at the criticism levelled against Wagner in Adorno's *Versuch*, we see immediately how it correlates with the above description of Nazi aesthetics. The Nazi tendency to unify, equalise, totalise and suppress individuality is Wagnerian indeed, at least if one takes Adorno's description of the monumental *Gesamtkunstwerk* at face value. At the heart of Wagner's total work of art, Adorno claims, lies a musical procedure aimed at achieving 'the ideal of the absolute phenomenon'.[30] To this end, Wagner 'negates everything with an individual stamp'[31] and 'blurs all dividing lines between the different arts'[32] as well as the different works: 'Forms and symbols', Adorno writes, 'become intermingled until Sachs becomes Mark, the Grail becomes the Nibelungs hoard and Nibelungs become Wibelungs.'[33] Due to this 'tendency to dissolve everything definite and specific into an undifferentiated mass',[34] 'everything can come to mean the same as everything else',[35] and everything thus becomes interchangeable.

In order to make things interchangeable, i.e. to rob things of their individuality, the origin and process of their production must be concealed. This notion, Adorno claims, lies at the heart of Wagner's artistic enterprise. The artist's 'hostility towards the division of labour, on which

[26] Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (New York, NY: Overlook Press, 2009), 62.
[27] Quoted ibid., 62.
[28] Ibid., 71.
[29] Ibid., 63–64.
[30] Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 87.
[31] Ibid., 90.
[32] Ibid., 89–90.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 43–44.
[35] Ibid., 89–90.

it is agreed that the culture industry is based, is the foundation of the whole conception of music drama'.[36] According to Adorno, Wagner 'rejected the division of labour in terms that recall National Socialist phrases about the subordination of private interests to the public good'.[37] Hence the portrayal of Beckmesser and Mime as 'experts'.[38] While Beckmesser fails as a musician due to a profusion of knowledge about compositional rules, Mime fails to reforge the sword Nothung because he is 'too wise'.[39] By portraying Beckmesser and Mime as such, Adorno argues that 'Wagner pours scorn on reflective reason'.[40] By contrast, Walther and Siegfried come across as virtuous as they 'stand for an undivided primordial world that is to be irrational, like the role of music in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*'[41] – music that, like Hitler's incantatory speech, is aimed at persuading the listener through its appeal to emotion instead of reason.

This appeal would then explain the hypnotising effect of Wagner's music that 'overwhelms the listener with a passion and excitement that does not even pause for breath'.[42] Just as hostility to reason is intrinsic to Hitler's inflammatory oratory and Nazi aesthetics at large (reflective reasoning would lead to a dismantling of the sham of Aryan unity), so too 'in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, intoxication, ecstasy, is an inescapable principle of style' as 'a moment of reflection would suffice to shatter its illusion of ideal unity'.[43] As we recall, Hitler preferred to stage his spectacles at night because then audiences would be more receptive to sense impressions. In the darkness of night, it was easier to trick the crowd into believing the Nazi blood myth put on display. This technique brings to mind the darkened auditorium of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. Wagner wanted the audience to be fully immersed in the music and action on stage, which prompted him to perform his music dramas in a totally dark auditorium. Yet Wagner's endeavour to maximise the sensual effect of his art was seen by Adorno as an attempt to rob the listener of his critical faculties so as to take control of his psyche and mind: 'Technological hostility to consciousness is the very foundation of the music drama',[44] just as it is for the Nazi spectacle.

[36] Ibid., 97.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 101.
[43] Ibid., 93.
[44] Ibid., 89–90.

As mentioned before, Hitler began his speeches with a silence, gradually building up the emotion to a frenzied climax. Similarly, works like *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Ring* begin pianissimo but ultimately 'culminate in ecstatic passages like Isolde's last song, the Siegfried-Brünnhilde scene at the end of *Siegfried* or Brünnhilde's lamentation in *Twilight of the Gods*'[45] that put the listener into a state of total rapture, into a state of utter surrender. This, Adorno contends, is the inevitable consequence of the music drama's ongoing assault on the audience's critical faculties, whereby Wagner's leitmotif technique proves most effective in subjugating the listener.

We remember that the endless repetition of certain themes was a powerful speech technique that Hitler used to persuade his audiences. Although Adorno does not tie Wagner's leitmotifs to Hitler's speaking style but to 'the commodity function of an advertisement',[46] the purpose of the ever-occurring, 'compulsive'[47] leitmotifs is the same as that of Hitler's rhetoric, namely to turn the audience into passive and thoughtless recipients. 'Infected by allegorical rigidity like a disease',[48] the static leitmotif is the main cause of the ego weakness affecting the audiences after exposure to Wagner's pathological music. Described by Adorno as 'a sign that transmits a particle of congealed meaning',[49] the Wagnerian leitmotif thrusts itself upon the listener over and over again. Due to its forcefulness and persistence, one has no alternative but to surrender to the all-absorbing flow of Wagner's tempestuous music, to submit oneself to the will of the totalitarian artist – the will to total integration, eternal sameness.

Due to its cyclical character, Wagner's music does not allow change, newness and historical development and so resonates with 'the ideology of Fascism which repudiates the concept of progress', Adorno maintains.[50] Instead of creating a sense of openness with a view to enabling change, the music dramas conjure up a closed myth in which everything remains the same and from which there is no escape – a myth that keeps reaffirming and reinforcing its own immutable essence. A similar complacent affirmation of identity characterised the Nuremberg rallies that sought to give expression to the immutable essence of the German nation by stressing its unbroken ties to Germany's past and its fidelity to national traditions – for example, as we have seen, by including *Die Meistersinger* in Nazi propaganda events. It is therefore no surprise that Adorno describes the work as a blueprint for the Nazi Party rallies aimed at

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 21.
[47] Ibid., 27.
[48] Ibid., 36.
[49] Ibid., 34.
[50] Ibid., 51.

celebrating the *Volk*'s nostalgic bond with the homeland. In *Die Meistersinger*, a work of 'nationalist self-idolisation',[51] 'every element of the present sounds as if it were a reminiscence'.[52] Adorno observes that 'the expression of sweet nostalgia merges with the allure of the familiar, the promise of security at home, together with the feeling, "When was I here before?"'[53] In this manner, the work awakens a sense of being intimately connected to the lives of one's remote ancestors, a sense of being part of their long-lost world – a sense of having restored an ancient bond, of finally returning to one's origin, of reuniting with one's essence, of having retrieved one's identity. When listening to *Die Meistersinger*, one 'has the feeling that it belongs to him alone, that it is a communication from his long-forgotten childhood, and from this shared déjà vu the phantasmagoria of the collective is constructed'[54] – the illusory notion of being an indivisible part of one's nation and fatherland. By 'fraudulently presenting the historical German past as its essence', Adorno writes, Wagner 'has invested concepts such as "ancestors" and "the people" with that absoluteness which was subsequently unleashed in an outburst of absolute horror'.[55]

Here Adorno is referring to the Final Solution to the Jewish question (*die Endlösung der Judenfrage*): the attempt by the Nazi regime to achieve racial purification and to regenerate and redeem the German people through the extermination of the Jews. What the Nazis eventually practiced had already been preached by Wagner, both in his theoretical writings and in his works. For 'all the rejects of Wagner's works are caricatures of Jews', Adorno writes, and 'they stir up the oldest sources of the German hatred of the Jews'.[56] Adorno's description of Alberich and Mime as Jewish figures displayed as 'misshapen dwarfs'[57] reminds us of anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda. Similarly, in the author's description of the humiliation and physical abuse to which Mime is exposed in the *Ring*,[58] one sees a foreshadowing of the Nazis' violent treatment of Jewish people, even their destruction. According to Adorno, Wagner 'had even conceived the notion of the annihilation of the Jews'[59] as he allegedly made jokes about a fire in the Ringtheater in Vienna that had killed four hundred Jewish citizens.[60] Adorno explains that Jews,

[51] Ibid., 109.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 13.
[57] Ibid., 10.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 16.
[60] Ibid. Adorno refers to Carl Glasenapp (1847–1915) who recorded this alleged statement by Wagner in his biography on the composer, *Das Leben Richard Wagners* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1905).

in Wagner's view, were artificial and unnatural as opposed to the natural community of Germans. The German community, however, was in decline due to the Jewish takeover of society, most notably the art world. Because Jews like Giacomo Meyerbeer had made music artificial, the German race had lost touch with its true nature – one that was unchangeable and fundamentally different from the Jewish nature, as Wagner stressed in the second act of *Siegfried*:

> Every thing has its own nature;
> And these you cannot change.
> This spot I cede to you: take a strong stand
> Contend with your brother Mime;
> You may fare better with his kind.[61]

These words, Adorno claims, exemplify the racism central to the *Ring*, in which an 'absolute distinction is drawn between the different natural kinds',[62] that is to say an absolute distinction between Jews like Mime and Aryans like Siegfried. And this absolute distinction between the two, the philosopher contends, 'becomes the basis of the life and death struggle'.[63] In other words, in order for Jews or Aryans to survive, either the Jews or the Aryans must be annihilated. The annihilation of the one means the salvation of the other. Now, in Wagner's eyes, the Jews had the upper hand. Due to Jewish influences, the German community had become disconnected from its nature and was thus in danger of dying out, waiting to be 'destroyed by the Jews'.[64] Hence, to 'regenerate itself', the German *Volk* had to 'find its way back to its unsullied origins'.[65] By reuniting with their nature, the Germans could regain racial purity and achieve national redemption. According to Adorno, this ideal found its way into Wagner's swansong, *Parsifal*, in which 'the regeneration theory emerges as a theory of a master caste',[66] a theory that was put into practice several decades later when the Nazi movement arose – a movement that resembled 'the glorified blood-brotherhood of *Parsifal*'[67] and sought to fulfil Wagner's aim to revive the German people and to redeem Germany from its Jewish reign.

That, in a nutshell, is the relevant content of Adorno's *Versuch*. In Adorno's interpretation, the following four aspects of Wagner can be distinguished as aspects that coincide with core

[61] Ibid., 15.
[62] Ibid., 15–16.
[63] Ibid., 16.
[64] Ibid., 17.
[65] Ibid., 120.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 129.

features of National Socialism, aspects that Adorno's successor critics have deemed Nazi-like and/or generally regard as suspicious or controversial aspects:

- The concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in which are at work unifying and totalising musical forces, most notably the system of leitmotifs, that render the listener passive and docile.
- The sensuous power of Wagner's music – music that overpowers both reason and senses and is able to generate the strongest emotions and that has an effect similar to alcohol, drugs, or sex. It is a dangerous music that, like Hitler's speeches, brings audiences into a Dionysian ecstasy that robs individuals of self-awareness and immerses them in a suspicious collectivity.
- Wagner's German nationalist character. Wagner's art, to paraphrase Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, constitutes a celebration of the *Volk*.[68] It celebrates Germany's superior culture, deifies the German people, and expresses hostility towards foreign identities.
- The idea of regeneration. Wagner's art expresses the ideal of racial purity and proclaims a vision of national redemption, i.e. the idea of national rebirth as the regeneration of the Aryan race, which is central to the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*.

Today's critics, drawing on Adorno's criticism, continue to bring up these points in their charges against Wagner as if they are self-evident, unshakable facts. Adorno, however, argued that Wagner's art could acquire a different meaning in a new age. In his later years, as Karin Bauer points out, the philosopher stressed that 'the historical circumstances had changed and with it the effect and reception of Wagner's work as well as the work itself ("*das Werk selber, an sich*")'.[69] Hence, Adorno's argument is that 'a contemporary critique of Wagner must account for this change and for that which arises anew under these changed historical circumstances'.[70] Although later in his life Adorno placed more focus on the progressive elements in Wagner's work (e.g. by stressing the link between Wagner and the Second Viennese School),[71] his suspicion towards Wagner remained, as the following passage from his lecture 'Wagners Aktualität' (1963/64) demonstrates:

[68] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta: Figures of Wagner*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 100.
[69] Karin Bauer, 'Adorno's Wagner: History and the Potential of the Artwork', *Cultural Critique* 60 (2005), 69.
[70] Ibid.
[71] See Theodor Adorno, 'Wagner's Relevance Today', in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 316–117, 320–321.

> The spirit of nationalism he embodied, particularly in his works, which was transmitted to National Socialism via Houston Stewart Chamberlain[72] and Alfred Rosenberg, who were able to appeal to him explicitly, has now exploded, or, with the integration of the nations into power blocs, it has at least become less threatening. This means that it has also begun to recede in the works. Of course, this change should not be overestimated. The National Socialist potential continues to smoulder dangerously in Germany, and so it is still present in Wagner, too. That gives us an idea of the most serious difficulty in appreciating his function for the contemporary consciousness. The thunderous applause that can still be met with after a performance of *Die Meistersinger*, the feeling of confirmation that the audience can glean from listening to him, still has something of the old virulence. The question of whether to perform Wagner, and how, can be separated only with difficulty from the awareness of such demagogy.[73]

Adorno's ongoing distrust of Wagner was due to his observation that post-World War II Germany (and Europe at large) had not yet come to terms with its past and had not changed enough to prevent the rise of a new National Socialist movement. An entirely new society was required to destroy the still lurking National Socialist potential, and only in a radically new society could Wagner's art be free from totalitarian tendencies. But how did Adorno think a society devoid of National Socialist tendencies would come into existence?

The answer is found in Adorno's magnum opus, *Negative Dialektik* (1966), in which the philosopher formulates a new categorical imperative, namely that Hitler's barbarism has imposed a duty to humanity to change its thinking in such a way that Auschwitz will never repeat itself.[74] Adorno believed that a new type of thinking needed to be developed, a type of thinking that is concerned with the preservation of differences and the non-identical. In order to understand what is meant by this, it is instructive to look at Alain Badiou's explanation of Adorno's post-war philosophy in *Five Lessons on Wagner* (2010).[75] Not only is Badiou's explanation clear and succinct, it will also prove useful in the treatment of this topic in Chapter 1, in which I will elaborate on Badiou's claim that Adorno's *Negative Dialektik* provides a suitable theoretical framework from which a new understanding of Wagner can be constituted.

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[72] After Wagner's death in 1883, Bayreuth turned into a bastion of ultra-nationalism and anti-Semitism, attracting figures whose names are inextricably linked with the National Socialist ideology and movement, such as the racialist thinker Houston Stewart Chamberlain. After his marriage to Eva Maria von Bülow in 1908, Chamberlain settled in Bayreuth where he, together with Cosima Wagner (1837–1930), gave an ethnic-nationalist twist to the Wagner cult.

[73] Theodor Adorno, 'Wagner's Relevance Today', in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 315.

[74] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 2000), 365.

[75] For a detailed study of Adorno's negative dialectics, see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1977) and Brian O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

'The key reference for Adorno's whole undertaking', Badiou writes, 'is a break in history. The very possibility for his philosophy is linked to a set of historical facts represented by Nazism and the concentration camps, and this rupture in history is called *Auschwitz*.'[76] Auschwitz stands for the total annihilation of the Other. It is the brutal outcome of the identity principle central to Enlightenment rationalism. This identity principle, being 'the primal form of ideology',[77] culminated in the National Socialist ideology, which is marked by 'identitarian disrespect of differences'[78] and imposes identity on what it seeks to include. While those included (those who are considered to be real Germans) are reduced to oneness, the excluded, i.e. different ones (the Jews), are destroyed. Since identity thinking lies at the heart of the Nazi ideology, to fight National Socialism at its core, one has to combat identity. One does so by thinking in terms of negative dialectics, which is a type of thinking that constantly seeks contradictions and that, as it were, turns against itself, criticises itself continuously and always aims to achieve a negative outcome instead of a positive one, an antithesis instead of a synthesis. In this manner, one can prevent differences from being repressed, preserve a space for the non-identical in society and avoid the recurrence of a phenomenon like Auschwitz. This historic breaking point should serve as a constant reminder of what can happen when the method of negative dialectics is insufficiently applied and one repeats 'the mistake in traditional thinking which is that identity is taken for the goal'.[79] Thinking after Auschwitz should be a perpetual 'force that shatters the appearance of identity and establishes non-identity as *telos*'.[80]

To maintain this force, one should be constantly aware of one's historical guilt, the atrocities of the past caused by identity thinking. Instead of trying to forget the past or to cover it up, one should precisely expose and emphasise history's wrongs so as to create awareness of the root cause of mankind's wrongdoings, namely identity thinking. As we have pointed out, Adorno believed that identity thinking lies at the heart of Wagner's art. In other words, man's historical guilt is deeply ingrained in Wagner's works. Hence, when it came to the post-World War II treatment of Wagner's works on stage, it was imperative that producers and directors 'open up his historical core by displaying its debt to history'.[81] This meant that the historical trend of National Socialism had to be exposed to the audience in a radical manner. 'For this reason',

[76] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 30.
[77] Ibid., 32.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 33.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Theodor Adorno, 'Wagner's Relevance Today', in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 331.

Adorno writes, 'only experimental solutions will do nowadays; the only true productions are those that offend against Wagnerian orthodoxy.'[82] The original productions based on Wagner's instructions concealed the shameful historical elements in Wagner's art still present in post-war society. Post-war directors therefore were supposed to reveal these elements by amplifying them. Wagner's nationalism, dominating 'passages as Hans Sachs's final speech',[83] as well as his virulent anti-Semitism, as evidenced by 'the shameful anti-Jewish caricatures of Mime and Beckmesser',[84] had to be exposed so that the audience would become aware of the identity thinking that permeated Wagner's art as well as post-war society. In this way, Wagner's art itself would become a means to combat the historical trend of National Socialism – a trend, Adorno believed, that had not yet been resolved in post-war Europe and America. A rehabilitation of Wagner, however, would not be the result. After all, Wagner served as a *negative* example: only *because* his art reflected proto-Nazi tendencies could it be of value in the 1960s, when those same tendencies were still suspiciously alive. Thus, Adorno ultimately did not succeed in his attempt to rescue Wagner from history's regressive forces. This means that there is a task for contemporary thinkers to continue Adorno's quest for a new figure of Wagner. The question at hand is how Wagner can serve as a *positive* example in the world today, as a figure free from Nazi tendencies.

2. Anti-Semitism and the Eclipse of Wagner's Ideal of a Universal Artwork

Before turning to this question, let me first address the aspect of anti-Semitism, emphasised emphatically by Adorno and yet conspicuously absent in the enumeration of controversial aspects in Wagner's art: the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*/leitmotif-technique, the music's overwhelming sensuousness, Germanness, and the idea of regeneration. Granted, it can be argued that anti-Semitism is an intrinsic part of these very aspects, particularly the last two in which intolerance towards otherness comes to the fore explicitly, at least according to Wagner's critics. However, those same critics, meaning those who believe proto-Nazi dimensions are an integral part of the composer's oeuvre, insist that anti-Semitism is a distinct feature of Wagner's works as well. Since this dissertation seeks to examine controversial aspects of the artist's music dramas, why would we not include it in our list? After all, as Barry Millington puts it, 'no aspect

[82] Ibid., 331.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

of Wagner has caused more controversy either in his own lifetime or in the century and more since his death than the composer's anti-Semitism'.[85]

Although this is undeniably true, there is no reason to examine Wagner's anti-Semitism when one seeks, as I do, to examine controversial aspects that are *actually present in the music dramas*. While the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is practically applied to the music dramas, the system of leitmotifs is virtually operative, the sensuous power of Wagner's music is perceptible to listeners and a sense of German identity and the theme of regeneration feature demonstrably in Wagner's art as well, the presence of anti-Semitic elements in Wagner's work cannot be proven. Even though esteemed scholars such as Millington argue that characters like Beckmesser and Mime 'incorporate negative traits that are stereotypically anti-Semitic',[86] none of the texts of the music dramas indicates the presence of a specifically Jewish character. Whereas in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice,* the presence of Jews (Shylock and Tubal) is a *fact,* the presence of Jewish figures in Wagner is speculation based upon knowledge of the artist's attitude towards Jews derived from the composer's infamous treatise 'Das Judenthum in der Musik' (published in 1850 under the pseudonym K. Freigedank and revised in 1869 under the author's own name). Because Wagner held anti-Semitic and nationalist views, the reasoning goes, those views must somehow be enshrined in Wagner's works, too, if not explicitly, then implicitly. This fallacy informs the interpretations of Beckmesser's and Mime's physical appearances and personality traits that could easily be viewed as something other than stereotypically Jewish depending on the viewer's frame of reference. Someone unfamiliar with Wagner's anti-Semitism and the historical link between the composer and Nazi Germany would certainly not recognise Beckmesser or Mime as Jewish. It is clear, therefore, that this aspect of anti-Semitism is being projected on Wagner's art instead of being detected in it. Such an approach to Wagner can never result in a fair assessment of his art. To that end, one should focus solely on aspects that are actually present – aspects that can be interpreted in different ways but are nonetheless effectively there. Hence my decision not to include the aspect of anti-Semitism. For an examination of this particular aspect, one should limit oneself to biographical information about Wagner and the composer's prose works, in which anti-Semitism is actually present.

But does this imply that any endeavour to properly examine Wagner's music dramas (or, by the same token, his writings) should involve a radical separation between the artist and his art,

[85] Barry Millington, *Richard Wagner: The Sorcerer of Bayreuth* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013), *Kindle* e-book file, chapter 19 ('Grit in the Oyster: The Role of Anti-Semitism in Wagner's Life and Work'), para. 1.
[86] Ibid., chapter 19, para. 11.

a separation between Wagner's thinking as recorded in his writings and his music dramas? This is an often-debated question. In response to Wagner's adversaries, who argue that the composer's anti-Jewish and nationalistic thinking forms the bedrock of his art, Wagner's advocates often come up with the counterargument that the man and his ideas should be strictly separated from his artistic output. Wagner, we often hear, was a horrible man, but the work of this man possesses beauty of an otherworldly kind. Therefore, they argue, our attention must be given exclusively to Wagner's artistic creations.[87] While critics fixate on the anti-Semitic aspect of Wagner's thinking and consider this single aspect to be the fundamental trait of Wagner's highly versatile body of work, supporters of the composer are inclined to ignore Wagner's thinking entirely.

Both stances are problematic, however. As Paisley Livingston argues in *Art and Intention* (2005), with respect to the intentionalist stance (taken by Wagner's critics), 'an exclusive focus on the artist's self-understanding and psychology can obscure crucial dimensions of the context of creation, and it is not a good idea to try to reduce complex fictions to the status of psychological symptoms'.[88] Despite the fact that Wagner had anti-Semitic thoughts, one cannot infer that his art contains those thoughts, too. After all, when it comes to producing a work of fiction, as Wagner did, an artist 'can choose not to adopt background beliefs drawn from those of a local belief community or premises he or she holds to be sound in actuality'.[89] As Livingston points out, 'a contemporary writer who does not believe in ghosts, and who writes for an audience that is similarly lacking in such convictions, may nonetheless chose to create a neo-Gothic or fantastic fiction in which various hackneyed supernaturalist premises help to furnish what it is convenient to call the "world" of the story'.[90] The same is true for Wagner. The latter did not believe in gods, dwarfs, giants and Valkyries, and yet with his *Ring*, he created a world where such supernatural beings exist. Similarly, the composer may have sincerely believed in anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, but in his fictional world of the *Ring*, such theories are absent. Now, this is not only an argument against intentionalism, it is also an argument

[87] A prominent representative of this position is Daniel Barenboim who, in conversation with Edward Saïd at Columbia University in 1998, stated that 'Wagner, the person, is absolutely appalling, despicable, and, in a way, very difficult to put together with the music he wrote, which so often has exactly the opposite kind of feelings. It is noble, generous, etc'. The conversation appeared in the Summer 1998 issue of *Raritan*, a quarterly publication of Rutgers University. For an edited version of the conversation, see: http://danielbarenboim.com/wagner-and-ideology/.

[88] Paisley Livingston, *Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), ix.

[89] Ibid., 198.

[90] Ibid.

against the anti-intentionalist stance of Wagner's advocates, who claim the man and the art should be strictly separated. After all, by choosing to include gods and Valkyries, the composer, to borrow Livingston's words, 'intentionally expressed imaginings and invited others to engage in correlative make-believe'.[91] Yet Livingston points out that this does not mean that an artist always succeeds in realising his intentions. Furthermore, besides intended meanings, a work can also contain unintended ones. Thus, although intentions 'play a crucial role in the making of works of art',[92] this role is not absolute. Instead, 'the artist's intentions are partly constitutive of some of the work's meanings, and thus are necessary to "work meaning" taken globally'.[93] So besides placing focus on the artist's intentions, one should also take into account the wider context of creation, such as features of the work itself, and 'aspects of the historical and artistic context in which the work was created'.[94]

Following Livingston, I will approach Wagner as a partial intentionalist. This means that I will consider Wagner's intentions insofar as these intentions pertain to his works and the context, i.e. the intellectual climate, in which his works came into existence. Herewith I establish a middle ground between critics who reduce Wagner's works to the artist's anti-Semitic thoughts and the anti-intentionalist advocates of the composer, who shy away from Wagner's thinking altogether. But how does one determine which parts and elements of Wagner's thinking rightfully pertain to the discernible aspects of his works?

Since anti-Semitic elements are not present in the music dramas, one can justifiably ignore the composer's utterances on the Jews. Germanness, on the other hand, is a core aspect of Wagner's art, and thus his ideas about German identity, as expounded in several of his articles, do indeed apply to the music dramas. But what if Wagner's writings on Germany contain anti-Semitic passages? For, indeed, the essay 'Was ist deutsch?' (1865/1878) does contain some negative remarks about Jews.[95] Do these remarks then nullify the essay in its entirety?

The answer is no. Bear in mind that Wagner has gone down in history as a brilliant composer and a musical innovator but certainly not as an original thinker. The only reason Wagner is still discussed today is his art. If Wagner had merely been a writer, he would have been forgotten by history a long time ago. Although the artist was an intellectual who pondered the social

[91] Ibid., 211.
[92] Ibid., 208.
[93] Ibid., 142.
[94] Ibid.
[95] In the essay, Wagner claims that the 'true German spirit', deemed as apolitical and anti-capitalist, is in decline due to the economic behaviour of Jews. See Richard Wagner, 'What is German?', in *Art and Politics*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 158.

issues of his time and meditated on the question concerning the essence of human life, he did not invent new philosophical concepts or principles. In his writings, he drew heavily on the insights of others, amongst them Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) and most notably Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). Hence, by focusing on the elements in Wagner's texts that coincide with the ideas of his philosophical masters, who, moreover, are still being discussed today, one can make the transition from Wagner's idiosyncrasies, such as his obsession with the Jewish question, which is inextricably linked to a particular viewpoint and location in time, to the dimensions of his spiritual life that have a universal appeal and thus remain actual, such as Schopenhauer's concept of the will to live as the ultimate reality that unites all living beings.

From the moment Wagner discovered Schopenhauer in 1854, the latter's concept of the will became central to the composer's outlook on life and all his mature works (the *Ring*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Parsifal*) were conceived and brought to fruition with Schopenhauer's doctrine prominently in mind. Obviously, this doctrine defies any racist conviction for it tells us that all beings are ultimately one. Now, despite Wagner's anti-Semitic tendencies, the artist's writings clearly show adherence to the anti-racist doctrine of the will.[96]

[96] Note that Schopenhauer, too, had anti-Semitic tendencies – tendencies, thus, that conflicted with his own anti-racist philosophy. Robert Wicks explains that 'Schopenhauer's published remarks about Judaism and Jews […] were usually derogatory'. And yet, Schopenhauer's best friend (the lawyer Martin Emden) was Jewish and Schopenhauer 'suffered considerably when his friend died'. Other Jewish friends and acquaintances included 'enthusiastic students of his philosophy such as Josef Gans and David Asher, who was an active member of the Frankfurt Jewish community', and Julius Frauenstädt (1813–1879), who was one of Schopenhauer's 'most devoted admirers' (Robert Wicks, 'Schopenhauer and Judaism', in *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook*, ed. Sandra Shapshay. Bloomington, IN: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 345). 'Schopenhauer's disparaging comments about Judaism and Jewish people in general do not easily cohere with his warm relationships with people such as Martin Emden', Wicks writes (Wicks, 2018, 346). But the scholar rightly points out that

> a mitigating feature of his philosophy helps explain his friendships and allows a better understanding of his conflicted behaviour. When describing the differences between humans and other living beings, Schopenhauer states that unlike dogs and cats, for instance, which display a more generic quality from individual to individual, each person is a unique individual with a specific intelligible character. Since 'the character of any particular person is thoroughly individual and not entirely subsumed under that of the species' (WWR I, 183), Schopenhauer could clearly have appreciated in his daily affairs and friendships that he was dealing always with unique individuals, rather than mere representatives of social groups, whether those groups happened to be national, religious, or philosophical.
>
> Historical contingencies ultimately do not matter for Schopenhauer, for he maintains that a person's intelligible character remains the same, no matter where or when that person might happen to be born. In this regard, one can imagine that during his more insightful and philosophical moments, Schopenhauer was aware that his socially and historically derived prejudices and accompanying stereotypes did not touch upon the true substance of either people or reality. (Wicks, 2018, 347)

Now, we can similarly imagine that Wagner – who, like Schopenhauer, had many Jewish friends – was aware of his idiosyncrasies and capable of separating them from his (Schopenhauerian) philosophical beliefs, and from his art that was meant to express those very beliefs.

To prove this point, let us consider Wagner's notorious regeneration essays,[97] in which the composer allegedly expounds ideals of racial purity that correspond with the racist theories of Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), Paul de Lagarde (1827–1891) and Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), which inspired the National Socialist movement.[98] The reason that Wagner is structurally linked with the racist ideology that inspired Nazism is not only due to his anti-Semitic statements and Chamberlain's involvement with the Wagner family but also due to the fact that the composer, in the last years of his life, maintained correspondence with Lagarde and Gobineau. The relationship with Gobineau especially has resulted in charges against the composer and his work. In his *Versuch*, Adorno refers to the Wagner-Gobineau connection by stating that 'Wagner needed no lessons on race theory from Gobineau' because a racist frame of mind was already enshrined in *Siegfried*.[99] Later critics, such as Robert Gutman,[100] also claimed to have detected a close connection between *Parsifal* and the Frenchman's race theory, even though the poem for Wagner's swansong had been completed more than three years before the composer first read the *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853).[101] Thus, Gobineau could never have influenced Wagner's work. However, Wagner does indeed take into consideration the racist views of the French author in several of his late writings, including 'Zur Einführung der Arbeit des Grafen Gobineau: Ein Urteil über die jetzige Weltlage' (1881), 'Erkenne dich selbst' (1881) and 'Heldenthum und Christenthum' (1881). In these ambiguous writings, Wagner oscillates between appreciation and criticism of Gobineau's theories. Although he agrees with Gobineau that mankind is falling into decay, Wagner emphatically rejects Gobineau's contention that there exists a superior (Germanic) race. In 'Heldenthum und Christenthum', Wagner criticises Brahmanism because its doctrine would be aimed at the redemption of one favoured race instead of the redemption of all mankind. According to Wagner:

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[97] *Religion und Kunst* (1880), '"Was nützt diese Erkenntniss?" Ein Nachtrag zu: *Religion und Kunst*' (1880); 'Erkenne dich selbst' (1881); 'Heldenthum und Christenthum' (1881).

[98] For an account of Lagarde's and Chamberlain's influence on Nazi ideology, see Fritz R. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1974) and Geoffrey G. Field, *Evangelist of Race: The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1981).

[99] Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Verso, 2005), 15.

[100] See Robert W. Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968).

[101] In April 1877 Wagner completed the text for *Parsifal*, but it was not until late 1880 that he began reading Gobineau's work.

> The blood of suffering Mankind, as sublimated in that wondrous birth, could never flow in the interest of howsoever favoured a single race; no, it shed itself on all the human family, for noblest cleansing of Man's blood from every stain. Hence the sublime simplicity of the pure Christian religion, whereas the Brahminic, for instance, applying its knowledge of the world to the ensurance of supremacy for one advantaged race, became lost in artificiality and sank to the extreme of the absurd.[102]

Despite this criticism, Wagner praises Brahmanism because it denotes suffering as the essence of life and condemns the killing of living beings. This doctrine, Wagner asserts in *Religion und Kunst* (1880), lies at the heart of every true religious conviction for it acknowledges the unity of all living things. In a Schopenhauerian fashion, Wagner states that 'when the Brahmin pointed to the manifold appearances of the animate world and said "This is thyself!" there woke in us the consciousness that in sacrificing one of our fellow-creatures we mangled and devoured ourselves'.[103] The belief in a superior race or caste, Wagner argues, is incompatible with the notion of the unity of everything that lives. This notion, after all, should compel one to act in a compassionate manner towards all people and not exclude or discriminate against other human beings. Through the compassion that arises from the insight that all sentient beings are ultimately one and the same, mankind could be regenerated, Wagner believes.[104] Therefore he lauds both Christianity, meaning the original teachings of Jesus, and Buddhism as these two religions unfold the idea of universal compassion: compassion for all human beings instead of a particular group of people. Thus, not a triumphant *Herrenvolk* but a shared morality centred

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[102] Richard Wagner, 'Hero-Dom and Christendom', in *Religion and Art*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 283.

[103] Richard Wagner, *Religion and Art*, in *Religion and Art*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 226.

[104] Let us stress that Wagner's Schopenhauerian universalist ideal, which lies at the heart of the artist's entire mature output, is rooted in the notion that *all* sentient beings, that is to say humans *and* animals, are one. This notion is the starting point for cultivating compassion for others and for creating a compassionate society. According to Wagner, one's treatment of animals reflects one's humanity or lack thereof. As the composer writes in his essay 'Offenes Schreiben an Herrn Ernst von Weber, Verfasser der Schrift *Die Folterkammern der Wissenschaft*' (1879):

> Who needs another motive for the protection of an animal from wilfully protracted sufferings than that of pure humanity, can never have felt a genuine right to stop another man's beast-torture. Everyone who revolts at the sight of an animal's torment, is prompted solely by compassion; and he who joins with others to protect dumb animals, is moved by naught save pity […]. But, that we have not the courage to set our only motive, this of Pity, in the forefront of our appeals and admonitions to the Folk, is the curse of our civilisation. (Richard Wagner, 'Against Vivisection', in *Religion and Art*, trans. William Ashton Ellis. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994, 196–197)

In *Parsifal*, the notion that one's treatment of animals is indicative of how compassionate one is as a human being comes to the fore in Act 1, when Parsifal, who is still ignorant and hence pitiless, is scolded by Gurnemanz for killing the swan.

on compassionate insight is the key to man's regeneration, by which is meant the realisation of the unity of mankind through (Wagner's) art.

When we look at the artistic and social vision Wagner developed around 1850, before he discovered Schopenhauer – and, indeed, around the time he wrote 'Das Judenthum in der Musik' – we see that the ideal of a united humanity was already the main focus of Wagner's reflections on art and society, as evidenced by the essays *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (1849), *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1849) and *Oper und Drama* (1851). In these essays, Wagner heralds the advent of a new musical dramatic art form grafted onto Greek tragedy. But contrary to the tragic drama of the Greeks, the artwork of the future would encompass the spirit of all mankind. Under the influence of Hegel's conception of freedom,[105] Wagner criticises Greek tragedy for merely representing the Greek people and not humanity as a whole.[106] Due to this shortcoming stemming from a moral deficiency, namely the inability to see that not some but *all* men should be free, the great united artwork of the Greeks ultimately declined and splintered into its individual parts, with the consequence that art lost its ability to give expression to a collective consciousness – a consciousness of freedom – as a result of which humanity fell into decline. Therefore, in order to regenerate art and humanity, the artwork of the future would have to become a universal work of art that transcends cultural and ethnic differences and expresses the spirit of a free, united humanity. 'Hellenic art', Wagner proclaims in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, has to become 'a Universal art'.[107] And this 'great and universal artwork of the Future'[108] was supposed to become known as the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

But exactly the opposite happened. Instead of being commonly recognised as a universal work of art, Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* is often unjustly regarded as a blueprint for the Nazis' totalitarian society. However, truth be told, Wagner himself was in large part responsible for the eclipse of his universalist tendencies. After all, if it weren't for his virulent anti-Semitism, his intention to create art directed at and giving voice to all mankind would not have been obscured. In order to uncover the universalist aspiration inscribed in Wagner's writings, it is imperative to discard the anti-Semitic elements present in the texts and to emphasise the kinship between the composer's central ideas and the ones invented by the great minds of Wagner's

[105] See Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), especially 54–56.
[106] See Richard Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).
[107] Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, in *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 90.
[108] Ibid.

time. Schopenhauer has already been mentioned as Wagner's main philosophical influence, but other thinkers shall be considered, too. For instance, when it comes to the examination of Wagner's Germanness in Chapter 3, I will draw the connection between Wagner's take on German identity, as revealed in the aforementioned essay 'Was ist deutsch?' as well as other writings, and the ideas about Germany developed, amongst others, by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), Goethe (1749–1832), Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) and Novalis (1772–1801) so as to clarify the universalist ideal that underlies Wagner's artistic enterprise and, as I set out to demonstrate in this dissertation, permeates the very aspects of his art that his critics view as inherently National Socialist. But how exactly does Wagner's universalist ideal manifest itself in the works? And how can we perceive it?

3. Contemporary Culture as a Framework for Recovering Wagner's Universality

The eagerness with which today's Wagner critics adopt and reinforce Adorno's arguments against the composer is in stark contrast with their utter disregard for the philosopher's key premise that Wagner's art can acquire a different meaning in a new age. A contemporary assessment of Wagner, according to Adorno, must take into consideration new historical circumstances and their effects on Wagner's art. And yet, Wagner's art is still predominantly viewed by its critics through the prism of the Third Reich, even though the world has profoundly changed since the end of World War II. We live in a multimedia age; an age where we are becoming increasingly dependent on technology; an age, moreover, that is marked by a changed social and political climate and new cultural tendencies. This impacts the way in which Wagner appears in the world and consequently changes the way we might perceive and conceive of his works.

Following Adorno, I shall take the changed historical circumstances as a starting point for scrutinising Wagner's works, yet I won't claim, as Adorno did, that the works themselves change as a result of historical changes. Certainly, the *appearance* and *appeal* of Wagner's works can be different in different ages but not their intrinsic meaning.[109] For that would imply

[109] This stance is consonant with Stephen Davies's ontology of musical works. Davies argues that 'the features crucial to a work of art's nature depend on its relation to its setting, especially to its art-historical location'. While according to Adorno a (musical) work's identity changes as a result of historical changes, Davies claims that 'a musical work's identity is fixed at the time of its creation and that this identity is shaped in crucial ways by the

that when Wagner's art appeared in the context of the Third Reich, it indeed resonated with the National Socialist ideology. I claim precisely the opposite, namely that Wagner's art has always had a universal significance regardless of the place and time where it appeared but that this significance became *eclipsed*, firstly due to Wagner's anti-Semitism, secondly because of Wagner's co-option by Nazism and thirdly because of the prejudice towards the composer that arose in the twentieth century as a result of this Nazi past – a prejudice that still lingers. So instead of trying to discover or construct an entirely new conception of Wagner, my aim is to *recover* an original nineteenth-century conception of Wagner in the new situation. Hereby I shall not only argue that today's culture, and Wagner's appearance therein, provides a fruitful context for restoring and defining the universalist ideal as enshrined in Wagner's work, I will also elucidate how and why his art proves relevant to the contemporary world.

As we begin our enquiry in the context of today's world, it is important to designate aspects of the contemporary world that pertain to the aspects of Wagner we seek to examine with a view to recovering Wagner's universal significance, viz. the *Gesamtkunstwerk*/leitmotif technique, sensuousness, Germanness, and the idea of regeneration. Since these are aspects of Wagner's works and thus appear in the world by means of his works, the best way to examine these aspects in light of today's world is to tie them to works in which they come to the fore most emphatically – works that, if you will, embody the controversial aspects in question. It is fair to say, for instance, that *Der Ring des Nibelungen* more than any other of Wagner's music dramas embodies the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* due to its comprehensive scale and monumental character. The same is true for the leitmotifs; although we can find them throughout Wagner's body of work, nowhere is their application so extensive, diverse and distinct as in the *Ring*. When it comes to the sensuous power of Wagner's music, a feature that applies to all of the composer's works, the quintessential example is *Tristan und Isolde*, a work that has always been notorious for bringing audiences into a frenzied state of ecstasy. Regarding Wagner's Germanness, a work that immediately comes to mind as an illustrative case is *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* due to the comedy's explicitly German subject matter. And finally, concerning the theme of regeneration, no work serves as a better representation than Wagner's swansong, *Parsifal*.

Now that we have tied the controversial aspects of Wagner to specific works – that is to say, the composer's entire mature output commonly referred to as the music dramas – it is a matter

piece's relation to its natal setting' (Stephen Davies, *Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001, 72).

of pointing out some defining features of the contemporary world that apply to each of the four aspects in question as subsequently embodied by the *Ring*, *Tristan*, *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*. Features I would suggest here include (1) the omnipresence of media; (2) oikophobia, meaning the tendency amongst cultural elites in the West to repudiate their own culture and inheritance (a tendency that coincides with the West's guilt culture); and (3) a nihilistic zeitgeist.

Feature 1 applies in particular to the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*/leitmotif as well as the aspect of sensuousness; it forms the basis of Chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation. Feature 2 applies to Germanness and forms the basis of Chapter 3, and feature 3 applies specifically to the idea of regeneration and forms the basis of Chapter 4. Although I discuss the cultural features in conjunction with specific aspects of Wagner, that does not imply that there are no affinities between the different cultural features and aspects of Wagner's music dramas. Feature 2 (oikophobia) and feature 3 (nihilism), for instance, are inextricably linked, and this connection will be elucidated in the individual chapters. Note also that in my description of the contemporary world, I confine myself to the West. Certainly, the notion that we live in a media age applies to the world at large, but when it comes to the characterisation of today's culture as a culture based on a guilty conscience and marked by nihilism, I am primarily talking about the Western world. I confine myself to the West simply because Wagner's works originated in Europe and are still primarily performed in Europe and the US, even though recent years have seen an increase in the occasional Wagner performance outside Europe and America, for example in countries such as China, Japan, Cuba, Brazil and the United Arab Emirates. In order to develop a more detailed understanding of the connection between the designated aspects of Wagner and the defining features of contemporary culture as delineated above – this, remember, with a view to recovering Wagner's universal significance – let me now give you an overview of the individual chapters, each of which centres around a controversial aspect of Wagner.

Chapter 1 builds on the notion that today's media age deeply influences how Wagner appears in the world.[110] After World War II, Wagner increasingly started to function as an aesthetic operator in the context of mass culture and mass communication. Wagner's themes, most famously the *Ring*'s 'Ride of the Valkyries', emerge extensively in mediatised contexts, ranging from cinema, video games and advertising to numerous musical subcultures and new media,

[110] This chapter has been published as 'Reframing the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: On the Multiplicity of *The Ring*'s Leitmotifs in the Age of Global Media', in *Music Glocalization: Heritage and Innovation in a Digital Age*, ed. David Hebert and Mikolaj Rykowski (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 61–104.

and sounds and images of Wagner's versatile global presence can be evoked anywhere and anytime. In countless forms, attached to numerous musical and (sub)cultural identities, in a variety of different everyday contexts, the Wagner phenomenon emerges everywhere in the world. Although this is also true for other composers, the media age is particularly significant for Wagner. Adorno, remember, conceived of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a totalitarian system, a system that served as a blueprint for the culture industry, meaning the contemporary mass media society that the philosopher deemed the foundation of Nazism. As mentioned before, Adorno argued that the functionality of the Wagnerian leitmotif is akin to 'the commodity function of an advertisement', for both leitmotifs and advertisements are being deployed to deprive the audience of its critical faculty. Yet Adorno's prophecy that mass media culture would inevitably result in a Nazi-like society inhabited by submissive, de-individualised denizens did not come true. Many people today have developed their own communication networks and purposely evade the mainstream media through video-sharing websites such as YouTube and social media, used to provide audiences with alternative information.

So contrary to what Adorno believed, citizens living in a media age are pre-eminently capable of undermining prevailing structures of domination. This ascertainment indirectly undermines Adorno's claim that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* served as a model for the Third Reich's totalitarian society. After all, Wagner's total work of art *understood as a blueprint for the mass media society* functioned as such. Since our media age proves to provide the means to combat totalitarian tendencies, we can thus conceive of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – regarded as being the equivalent of a mediatised context – as a model for a society where individuals are being encouraged to think critically, to defy oppressive authoritarian forces and to take destiny into their own hands. This reconceptualisation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* on the basis of today's media age moreover allows us to rethink the functionality of the leitmotif, which is an integral part of Wagner's total work of art and has been deemed by Adorno as a unifying and totalising musical force. Considering the fact that a motif such as the 'Ride of the Valkyries' appears in our media age in countless different forms, in a great variety of contexts and in connection with a multitude of different identities, the notion of the leitmotif as being a means to achieve total sameness and enslave listeners loses its credibility. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 1, today's media age (understood to be the equivalent of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*) can serve as a fruitful framework for developing an understanding of the *Ring*'s system of leitmotifs as a vehicle for transforming the mind and achieving personal autonomy. Herewith the Wagnerian leitmotif is the key to defining the *Ring* cycle's universal significance.

Today's media age can also function as a starting point to rethink the aspect of sensuousness, which will be dealt with in Chapter 2. The link between the structure of today's global media machinery and the sensuous power of Wagner's music is not a direct one as in the case of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept and leitmotif technique. To make the notion of a media age applicable to Wagnerian sensuousness, it is imperative to denote a specific societal context that is significant for Wagner's presence and status in today's world. Such a context is the State of Israel (which I consider to be part of the Western world). Since 1938 (when the State of Israel did not yet exist and the country was known as Mandatory Palestine), Israel has observed an informal yet effective ban on public performances of Wagner's music, which makes Israel the only country in the world where Wagner is publicly forbidden. However, thanks to global communication networks, Wagner's music appears in Israeli society through the radio, internet and portable media players – anywhere in the private and public space. This indicates that there clearly exists an interest in and love for Wagner's music in Israel – a love, however, that is taboo. For to love Wagner's art is to love art that would coincide with the National Socialist worldview.

But what is it exactly about Wagner's art that resonated with the Nazis? At the symposium Wagner's Musical Religion: Art, Politics, and Genocide,[111] organised by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for the two-hundred-year anniversary of Wagner's birth, Margaret Brearley and Robert S. Wistrich (†) brought up the sensuous power of Wagner's music. They argued in an Adornoian fashion that Wagner's music, overwhelming both the senses and reason, has served to entice the masses into believing in the superiority of the German people. Herewith Wagner's music, especially the music of *Tristan*, affirms identity and excludes and denies the existence of the non-identical individual, that is to say the Jew. Instigating identity thinking, Wagner's music contributed to creating the mindset that made the Holocaust possible.[112] Hence, it goes without saying that Israel maintains a ban on public performances of works that are inherently anti-Semitic.

Yet if this were true, how does one account for the fact that Wagner is being heard and watched through the media by many Israelis? They clearly have an appreciative view of Wagner

[111] See website Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism: http://sicsa.huji.ac.il/conferences.html, and Hebrew University of Jerusalem YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqiiO_ri7Ro.

[112] See also Robert S. Wistrich, 'Wagner at 200: Not Your Garden-Variety Jew Hater', *The Times of Israel*, 22 May 2013, http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/richard-wagner-the-taint-of-genius/, and Margaret Brearley, '"They Say of Them, Let the Sacrificers of Men Kiss Calves" (Hosea, 13.2)', in *Holocaust and Nature*, ed. Didier Pollefeyt (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2013), 60–71.

– a view, however, that opposes the semi-official opinion and is therefore pushed to the margins. Wagner's appearance in and through the media illuminates that the ban on Wagner is not based on an immutable truth but based on the power of a particularistic idea. The composer's mediatised appearance thus shows a separation between the status quo and the thinking that contests the prevailing situation. It creates a contradictory social and cultural climate in which the maintenance of an unofficial but effective law that prohibits public performances of Wagner's works clashes with a love of and demand for the artist's music. And yet, paradoxical as it may seem, the State of Israel therewith provides a suitable space in which to recover Wagner's universal significance.

An anecdote by Daniel Barenboim exemplifies this point. In 2001, while at a news conference in Jerusalem, the conductor suddenly heard the sound of the 'Ride of the Valkyries' as a ringtone.[113] Recognising that Israeli citizens were already listening to Wagner's music, he decided to defy the Wagner ban, which obscures and denies the reality of Wagner's presence in Israel. After the Israel Festival concert that took place in Jerusalem on 7 July 2001, Barenboim surprised the audience by asking if they wanted to hear Wagner. Although some people protested and walked out, the majority of the audience stayed in the concert hall to listen to Barenboim playing the Prelude and *Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde*. The conductor's act of defiance against the Wagner ban caused a great scandal in Israel, and many dismissed Barenboim's performance as nothing but a blunt provocation. But as I will show in Chapter 2, Barenboim's ringtone-inspired performance of *Tristan* in Jerusalem has great philosophical significance. It can be seen as a proclamation of what Wagner's mediatised appearance in Israel already indicated, namely that there exists a love of and demand for the artist in Israel. By uncovering this existing yet clandestine love, the musical event destabilised the prevailing view of Wagner as a proto-Nazi and thus called into question the very foundation of the ban – a foundation that is formed by an opinion about the composer and not a truth. This has already been elucidated through Wagner's role in mediatised contexts, yet Barenboim's performance reveals something more as it provides clues as to what the truth of Wagner consists of.

Note that the conductor chose to perform music from *Tristan und Isolde*. The story of this work strikingly resonates with the situation in Israel as well as the significance of Barenboim's endeavour to break the ban. The story of *Tristan*, after all, deals with a love that is both forbidden and life transforming. Just like Tristan and Isolde, who, by staying true to their love,

[113] Sumanth Gopinath, *The Ringtone Dialectic: Economy and Cultural Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 100.

created a new reality for themselves that defied the laws and customs of their time, so too Barenboim allowed love to thrive as he deployed it as a force that effectively created a new musical reality in Israel, a new musical life outside the range of the ruling powers. By applying the music of *Tristan* as a means to construct a new musical reality, Barenboim diverted attention from the fatal outcome of Tristan and Isolde's bond and placed exclusive focus on the transformative power of their love, which serves as a force to create a new reality – a force that defies the powers that suppress differences, the non-identical, change and freedom. In this way, I claim, Barenboim opened a mental path to a conception of Wagner that dismantles the prevailing notion of Wagner in Israel. The purpose of Chapter 2 is to further explore this path and to show how it can lead to a reappraisal of Wagner's sensuousness as embodied by the music of *Tristan*. Contrary to the critics' claim that Wagner's sensuous music affirms identity and denies otherness, I will show that the music of *Tristan* dismantles precisely the notion of identity, shatters any absolutist worldview and unsettles our most settled presuppositions. This music is thus the antipode of the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, and as such it nullifies the arguments underlying the ban on Wagner that Israel maintains.

Chapter 3 is centred on the notion that there is a tendency amongst cultural and political elites in the West to repudiate their own culture and inheritance. Roger Scruton was amongst the first to define this controversial tendency. In *England and the Need for Nations* (2004), Scruton writes that today's culture of repudiation

> is the result of a peculiar frame of mind that has arisen throughout the Western world since the second world war, and which is particularly prevalent among the intellectual and political elites. No adequate word exists for this attitude, though its symptoms are instantly recognised: namely, the disposition, in any conflict, to side with 'them' against 'us', and the felt need to denigrate the customs, culture and institutions that are identifiably 'ours'. Being the opposite of xenophobia, I propose to call this state of mind oikophobia, by which I mean the repudiation of inheritance and home.[114]

Scruton's cultural critique is increasingly resonating with Western intellectuals. On 7 October 2017, a group of conservative European scholars and thinkers, including Scruton, released 'The Paris Statement: A Europe We Can Believe In'.[115] In the statement, which says that 'a culture of repudiation has taken hold' and that 'we are losing our home', the thinkers in question give voice to 'their common concern about the current state of European politics, culture, society –

[114] Roger Scruton, *England and the Need for Nations* (Suffolk: St Edmundsbury Press, 2004), 36.

[115] Its authors are Roger Scruton, Philippe Bénéton, Rémi Brague, Chantal Delsol, Roman Joch, Lánczi András, Ryszard Legutko, Pierre Manent, Dalmacio Negro Pavón, Robert Spaemann, Bart Jan Spruyt, and Matthias Storme.

and above all the state of the European mind and imagination'. 'Through delusion and self-deception and ideological distortion', it is claimed, 'Europe is dissipating her great civilisational inheritance.'[116]

A number of cultural critics, such as Alexandre del Valle[117] and Pascal Bruckner, have identified historical guilt as the cause behind the contemporary phenomenon of oikophobia. In his book *The Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism* (2010), the French philosopher Pascal Bruckner writes:

> Since 1945 our continent has been obsessed by torments of repentance. Ruminating on its past abominations – wars, religious persecutions, slavery, imperialism, fascism, communism – it views its history as nothing more than a long series of massacres and sackings that led to two world wars, that is, to an enthusiastic suicide. Unparalleled horrors, the industrialisation of death on a grand scale in the Nazi and Soviet camps, the promotion of bloodthirsty clowns to the rank of mass idols, and the experience of radical evil transformed into bureaucratic routine: that is what we have achieved.[118]

Viewing their history as a concatenation of crimes against humanity, the West's leftist cultural elites in the post-war era began to espouse and promote an attitude of self-hatred, manifesting itself, amongst other things, in the form of political correctness and cultural relativism. Although these two attitudes seem contradictory (the first attitude, after all, entails a sense of moral indifference, whereas the second one is highly moralistic), in the context of contemporary culture, they are actually allying with each other. For cultural relativism, Bruckner points outs, 'commands that Western values are mere prejudices'[119] that are oppressive to minority groups (especially Muslims) whose values (that often clash with the hard-fought progressive values of the West, such as gender equality) may therefore not be criticised (political correctness) as that would be offensive towards the minority group in question, which, moreover, is deemed victimised by Western culture, that is to say the culture of 'the white man' who 'has sown grief and ruin wherever he has gone', who is 'genetically determined to kill, massacre, rape' and who 'has split himself off from the rest of humanity in order to enslave it'.[120] This combination of cultural relativism and political correctness has given rise to a social and political climate in which it is practically obligatory to 'emphasise the West's hypocrisy, violence, and

[116] See: https://thetrueeurope.eu/.
[117] See Alexandre del Valle, *Le Complexe occidental: Petit traité de déculpabilisation* (Paris: L'artilleur, 2014).
[118] Pascal Bruckner, *The Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 6.
[119] Ibid., 48.
[120] Ibid., 23.

abomination'.[121] This frame of mind, according to Bruckner, threatens the very survival of European culture. 'Europe', the philosopher writes, 'has no worse enemy than itself, its hectoring guilt complex, scruples pushed to the point of paralysis. How do we expect to be respected if we no longer respect ourselves, if we never cease to describe ourselves, in the media and literature, in the most negative terms?'[122]

When self-hatred begins to rule a culture, it loses its resiliency against forces that seek to destroy it, both from within and from without. The EU's attempt to demolish the nation state and to shatter the fundamental substructure of Western civilisation formed by Christianity[123] undermines the social cohesion and stability in Europe and thus endangers the continent's unity. Populist movements and radical forms of nationalism have emerged in recent years, and anti-Semitism is rising in Europe once more, which is largely a result of the fact that (unassimilated) Muslim populations are growing in Europe.[124] The continent is witnessing political friction between different countries[125] and social tensions *within* the multicultural nation states and between different cultural, ethnic and religious groups, most notably between natives and people with an Islamic background. Islamic terrorism has become a day-to-day reality for life in Europe.[126] And the fact that radical Islamic forces have been given the chance to thrive in the Western world is precisely due to the attitude of cultural self-denial or, as Scruton puts it, 'the "down with us" mentality'.[127]

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[121] Ibid., 2.

[122] Ibid., 92.

[123] The fact that the draft EU Constitution did not include a reference to Christian values in its preamble is illustrative in this regard.

[124] To gain insight into this problematic development see, for example, Pierre-Andre Taguieff, *Rising from the Muck: The New Anti-Semitism in Europe* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2004); Andrew Bostom, *The Islamization of European Anti-Semitism*, *American Thinker*, 7 September 2006; Günther Jikeli, *European Muslim Antisemitism: Why Young Urban Males Say They Don't Like Jews* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015) and Raphael Israeli, *Muslim Anti-Semitism in Christian Europe: Elemental and Residual Anti-Semitism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).

[125] On Europe's political disunity and an impending disintegration of the EU, see Ivan Krastev, *After Europe* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

[126] Some would argue that it is better to speak of 'Islamist terrorism' to avoid associations with the religion of Islam. After all, since Islamism stands for the endeavour to impose Islamic law upon society through Jihad, it is this political striving, rather than the religious teachings of Islam, that motivates terror attacks. This argument, however, is feeble. Political Islam, that is to say the application of Sharia law, cannot be divorced from Islam because it is *rooted in* the Islamic belief and an *essential practice* of it. Moreover, these terrorist deeds are committed *in the name of* Islam. Thus, it is justified to speak of Islamic terrorism. In this chapter, therefore, terrorist attacks committed in the name of Islam will be denoted by the term 'Islamic terrorism'.

[127] Roger Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2002), 73.

Considering the dominance and tenaciousness of this frame of mind, some critics argue that the future of Europe is doomed.[128] Besides guilt and self-hatred, Douglas Murray detects 'an existential tiredness and a feeling that perhaps for Europe the story has run out'.[129] Europe's greatest problem is that it lacks a sense of collective identity and hence does not see a future for itself. And the reason behind this state of confusion, disorientation and defeatism, according to Murray, is Europe's denial of its cultural foundations that 'call on the deeper loyalties that societies must be able to reach if they are going to survive for long'.[130] In denial of its past, 'for Europe there seems finally to be no decent answers to the future, which is how the fatal blow will finally land'.[131]

Now, how does this guilt-ridden, disoriented cultural state pertain to Wagner's Germanness as embodied by *Die Meistersinger*? As we recall from section 1 of this introduction, Adorno advocated disclosure of Germany's historical guilt embedded in Wagner's music dramas with the aim of eliminating identity thinking. Stage directors were supposed to reveal the historical trend of National Socialism by 'offending against Wagnerian orthodoxy', that is to say Germanness. In this way the audience would become aware of the identity thinking that permeates Wagner's work as well as post-war society. Unmasked, bereft of its questionable sham, Wagner's art would become a means to combat totalitarian tendencies and identity thinking. Does history prove Adorno right?

Certainly, post-war directors heeded Adorno's call to take on Wagner. In the decades after World War II, but particularly from the 1980s onwards, it became customary for stage directors to mock, caricature and desecrate Wagner's music dramas, and this tendency still lingers, particularly in Germany. This is not surprising. After all, historical guilt for the atrocities of the Third Reich is weighing down Germans more than the people of any other nation. As Bernhard Schlink writes, 'after the Third Reich, the burden of guilt about the past became a German experience and a topic of German cultural life and remains so today'.[132] The treatment of Wagner's works on the German stage reflects how Germany's dark past still dictates the present. Many contemporary producers choose to problematise and/or ridicule the relationship

[128] See, for example, Theodore Dalrymple, *Our Culture, What's Left of It: The Mandarins and the Masses* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2005); *Not with a Bang but a Whimper: The Politics and Culture of Decline* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2008) and Alexander Boot, *How the West Was Lost* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).
[129] Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2017), 11.
[130] Ibid., 16.
[131] Ibid., 320.
[132] Bernhard Schlink, *Guilt About the Past* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2010), 1.

between Wagner and Germany,[133] either by deriding the German aspects of Wagner's works or by placing primary focus on the alleged link between the artist and Nazism.[134]

Although this is a trend that still prevails in opera houses throughout Germany,[135] it especially characterises recent stagings of Wagner's works at the Bayreuther Festspiele. This has everything to do with the historical relationship between the Wagner family and Hitler, a relationship that was forged decades *after* the composer's death in 1883 but for which Wagner is nonetheless held accountable. If it weren't for Wagner's nationalist Germanness, so the argument goes, Hitler never would have felt drawn to what Alfred Rosenberg deemed 'the Bayreuth idea', which, according to the Nazi ideologue, rose 'as a guide to our times, reaching beyond into the future of the coming German Reich'.[136] Hence, in order to be able to come to terms with Wagner and the tainted legacy of Bayreuth after World War II and the Holocaust, it became imperative for directors to ban the Germanic/German national elements from the stage that resonated with the National Socialist worldview. This 'de-Germanisation of Wagner', as I choose to call it, started with the reopening of the Bayreuther Festspiele in the summer of 1951. The staging of *Parsifal* in what was called the 'New Bayreuth' involved a radical break with the old performance tradition as Wieland Wagner stripped Wagner's work of all visual Germanic elements. Wieland's abstract and minimalist production of *Parsifal* (1951) as well as his productions of the *Ring* (1951) and *Die Meistersinger* (1956), known as 'The Mastersingers *without* Nuremberg',[137] were cleansed of historical particularities. With his de-Germanisation of *Parsifal*, *Die Meistersinger* and the *Ring*, Wieland heralded a new era in Wagnerian staging,

[133] One might argue that once a producer or stage director ridicules this relationship, an outside stance is taken towards the guilt, meaning that the director in question no longer identifies with it, no longer considers it as something that *he* bears.

[134] Paradigmatic in this regard is Burkhard C. Kosminski's highly controversial production of *Tannhäuser* at Düsseldorf's Deutsche Oper am Rhein in 2013. Kosminski's Nazi-themed production caused a scandal due to depictions of a concentration camp, swastikas, scenes of shootings and allusions to the gas chambers. See 'Skandal bei *Tannhäuser*-Premiere: Gaskammer auf der Opernbühne', *Spiegel Online*, 5 May 2013, http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/musik/tannhaeuser-von-wagner-skandal-wegen-gaskammer-auf-der-buehne-a-898162.html.

[135] On the trend to juxtapose Wagner with Nazism on stage, see Bernd Weikl, *Swastikas on Stage: Trends in the Production of Richard Wagner's Operas in German Theaters Today*, trans. Susan Salms-Moss (Berlin: Pro Business, 2015).

[136] Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, chapter 4 ('The Aesthetic Will'). Retrieved from Internet Archive website https://ia800501.us.archive.org/15/items/TheMythOfTheTwentiethCentury_400/MythOfThe20thCentury.pdf.

[137] See Stephen C. McClatchie, 'Performing Germany in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 149.

where directors felt increasingly free to ignore Wagner's original stage directions and to relocate the story to entirely different spheres and periods.[138]

Many contemporary directors have taken this opportunity to reintroduce the aspect of Germanness, not with the intention to explore this aspect in a serious and respectful manner so as to develop a better understanding of the Wagner phenomenon but to frame his Germanness in a way that allowed one to repudiate Wagner's legacy in its entirety. As a figure who stands for the worst excesses of German history and Western civilisation at large, Wagner serves as a perfect tool to emphasise how bad and abominable the West is. Of all Wagner's works, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* is probably the most suitable vehicle for showing disregard for one's cultural heritage. After all, the work puts the importance of being appreciative of one's country and of preserving one's ties to one's cultural heritage centre stage. Herewith the work would not only resonate with the Nazi ideology (a claim supported by the fact that the Nazis eagerly appropriated the comedy for propagandistic reasons), which would prove Wagner's historical guilt, it is also diametrically opposed to today's spirit of oikophobia, and it is therefore no surprise that the work has brought upon itself the wrath of many a stage director. For instance, in Chapter 3 I will refer to Katharina Wagner's staging of *Die Meistersinger* (2007–11), which set out to defile and dishonour the oikos of the Nuremberg Masters and to cast a shadow over the national tradition in which Wagner worked. Yet I will pay particular attention to the 2017 staging of *Die Meistersinger* at the Bayreuth Festival by Barrie Kosky. In his production, Kosky portrayed Wagner as a defendant at the Nuremberg trials, thus equating the composer with Nazi war criminals and hence suggesting that Wagner bears responsibility for the Holocaust.

Despite this deceitful and misleading characterisation of Wagner, Kosky's staging perfectly lays bare the origin of today's culture of repudiation, i.e. oikophobia, namely the guilty conscience that arose after World War II. However, this guilty conscience, as we have seen, lies at the heart of Europe's social and political problems. The ideology of self-denial and ceaseless self-criticism that has been ruling the social and political climate in Europe for decades now has begun to take its toll in recent years, as the current rise of nationalism and populism in the West shows. The attitude of repudiation, which emerged from the will to defy

[138] Ambivalently enough, Wieland was not only a precursor of *Regietheater*, which has given leeway to anti-Wagnerian stagings, but also proved to be a great defender of Wagner's artistic legacy in that he sought to preserve the universal significance of Wagner's work. Badiou highlights this point in his *Five Lessons on Wagner*, arguing that Wieland's minimalist productions demonstrate that works like *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* are not necessarily in the service of national mythology but can also disclose something 'transnational and timeless' (Badiou, 2010, 5).

nationalist tendencies, has now become a generator of the very tendencies it seeks to combat. Consequently, when staged in an 'oikophobic' fashion, Wagner's works have paradoxically come to serve as a means to sustain Europe's political turmoil.

Thus, Adorno was wrong to assume that by offending against Wagner's Germanness as a way of confessing historical guilt, Wagner's work could turn into a vehicle for combating identity thinking. To this end, I propose precisely the opposite of what Adorno thought should be done: Wagner's Germanness should not be scorned and nullified but nourished and amplified. I will make the case that by re-examining this aspect in the light of contemporary culture, marked by oikophobia on the one hand and bigoted identity thinking (in the form of neo-nationalism, a new wave of anti-Semitism and absolutist Islam) on the other, one can readily learn to recognise its right meaning and its proper value. For *Die Meistersinger,* as the embodiment of Wagner's Germanness, stresses the importance of cherishing one's oikos, one's history and one's cultural traditions, with the purpose of discovering the universal connection with the Other and innovating for the future. Rejecting both oikophobia and bigotry, *Die Meistersinger* thus stands in stark contrast with today's Europe, which denies its past and is uncertain about its future. This contrast, however, helps us to focus on the relevance of Wagner's *Meistersinger* for Europe. Considered in relation to European culture, the work's central tenet 'not to scorn but to honour one's Masters' shall prove to have a European significance rather than a particularly German one. To honour your masters means to acknowledge and express indebtedness to ancient sources originating in Jerusalem and Athens, the cornerstones of Western culture to which Europe has always returned in order to renew itself. As the West's cornerstones lie beyond Europe's borders, one's sense of indebtedness goes hand in hand with the notion that one's essence lies outside oneself, and it is this very notion that, as I will demonstrate throughout the third chapter, defines Wagner's Germanness.

Chapter 4 deals with the theme of regeneration, which I will reconsider in light of today's nihilist zeitgeist. I choose to define nihilism against the backdrop of the current clash between the West and Islam and more specifically the threat of Islamic terrorism in Europe. A number of authors have drawn attention to the link between the rise of radical Islam in Europe and the continent's state of nihilism. Arguing that Europe's nihilism is interlocked with the culture of repudiation described above, Stephen Pax Leonard claims that due to today's 'down with us' mentality that 'undermines the highest values posited in Western culture, but also its

foundations',[139] militant Islam 'has been allowed to take hold in Europe'.[140] Leonard's point of view is congruent with the belief that the rise of Islam in Europe is due to the loss of belief in core Christian values, most importantly the belief in the Christian God, which used to give people a sense of purpose and direction, something to live and to fight for, something worth defending. The surge of radical Islam, according to Roger Scruton, is a response to the moral void that has arisen in the Western world. Describing radicalised Muslims as nihilists, Scruton claims that the reason why they are bent on destroying the West is because they are unable to live with the loss of God.[141] Bruce Thornton, by contrast, does not believe that Europe's godlessness has unsettled the Muslims' faith. On the contrary, the continent's cultural and spiritual weakness only makes them more confident in their religious faith, which they believe will conquer decadent Europe.[142] Although Alain Badiou would agree with Scruton and Thornton that Europe is culturally and spiritually weak, he would not ascribe this weakness to the loss of Christian values but to the inability to develop a new cultural ideal that involves all denizens of Europe, whether they be Christian or Muslim, theist or atheist, French or German. Badiou attributes this inability to Europe's subjugation to global capitalism, which sustains the social and economic marginalisation of Muslim youths, who, embittered by being left out of society, resort to radical Islam with the purpose of destroying the society that has rejected them. In other words, it is not religious feelings that inspire these youths to embrace Islam but a 'nihilist subjectivity of revenge and destruction'.[143] To undo this nihilist subjectivity, Badiou argues, a new international frame of mind has to be invented, one that includes all human beings and hence opens the perspective of a society united by a collective cultural ideal.

Regardless of the differences between the aforementioned thinkers, they all agree on what they deem the root cause of the surge of radical Islam in Europe, namely the lack of a unifying belief that could regenerate European culture, the absence of a new vision of life by which Europe could overcome its nihilism. As Bruce Thornton points out, the great question for

[139] Stephen Pax Leonard, *Travels in Cultural Nihilism: Some Essays* (London: Arktos, 2017), *Kindle* e-book file, Introduction, para. 4.
[140] Ibid., chapter 11 ('Terrifying Caliphates'), para. 14.
[141] See Roger Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2002).
[142] Bruce Thornton, *Decline and Fall: Europe's Slow-Motion Suicide* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2007), 78-79.
[143] Alain Badiou, *Our Wound Is Not So Recent: Thinking the Paris Killings of 13 November*, trans. Robin Mackay (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 50.

Europe is, 'If traditional Christianity is discarded, what values, ideals, beliefs will then unify Europeans?'[144]

Today's philosophical debate, centred as it is on the question of how to regenerate European culture, is strikingly resonant of Wagner's *Parsifal*, which, after all, tells the story of a declining community awaiting the arrival of a saviour bound to regenerate the community's realm. As previously explained, the notion of regeneration in the context of Wagner is often viewed with suspicion as it would match with the Nazis' notion of national rebirth, meaning the regeneration of the Aryan race. However, when viewed in the light of today's cultural crisis, marked by nihilism and colliding identities, that is to say the moribund Christian West versus Islam, a very different notion of *Parsifal*'s regeneration theme arises, one that applies to all identities. The universal significance of Wagner's conception of regeneration as developed in *Parsifal* lies in the fact that it is inextricably linked with the idea of universal compassion. The moral imperative pronounced in Wagner's swansong is that one's compassion should not be confined to one's own kind but to all living beings. Yet compassion in *Parsifal* entails more than merely cultivating empathy for others. Wagner's conception of compassion should above all be understood as a creative faculty enabling one to identify with and adapt to different cultural and/or religious spheres – say, Christianity and Islam – with the intent to commence an exchange between both spheres aimed at discarding worn-out values and reinforcing vital ones. In this way, conflicting spheres can complement each other, as a result of which both spheres progress. But most importantly, through the tension that occurs as a consequence of such an interaction, new insights can emerge – new ways of thinking about religion, culture and life.

They key notion that ultimately arises in *Parsifal* is that man's solidified belief in God and transcendence has estranged him from the natural world, which prevents him not only from recognising a connection with his fellow beings but also from recognising the true causes behind the suffering in the world – the causes behind the inner strife of human beings, social conflicts, religious wars and so on. By ascribing such discord to supernatural forces or by trying to understand it on the basis of the absolute and immutable laws of God, one remains mentally stuck in a superstitious notion of reality that impedes finding solutions to the problems one faces. However, by reconciling oneself with nature through the espousal of an inquiring frame of mind, *Parsifal* tells us, one can develop a proper understanding of the struggles of life and consequently invent better solutions to deal with them.

[144] Bruce Thornton, *Decline and Fall: Europe's Slow-Motion Suicide* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2007), 134.

Since insights are always changing, one's quest for knowledge is never-ending. Although this may seem unfulfilling at first glance, on closer inspection one will find that by being engaged in the pursuit of knowledge about life in the natural world, one's life is being fulfilled in the present. And what is more, in order to make sense of life, one no longer needs to look to God or a transcendental realm beyond earthly existence. When Parsifal returns to the realm of the Grail to become ruler, he pronounces the end of God's law in the kingdom, therewith clearing the way for the members of the Grail community to embark on a quest for knowledge that will enable them to overcome their struggles in life, provided they embrace the spirit of enlightenment Parsifal heralds. Although Parsifal demonstrates that the pursuit of knowledge is first and foremost an individual enterprise, he nonetheless declares it as a unifying principle of life, a principle that transcends one's individuality, that appeals to one's critical and creative abilities and enables one to create new values and to make ongoing progress.

This principle, which applies to all people and transcends time, place and culture, is Parsifal's remedy for a community that has found itself trapped in worn-out beliefs, a community haunted by its sinful past, paralysed by guilt, uncertain about its future and no longer resilient against hostile alien powers – a community, indeed, that strikingly resembles today's nihilist Europe. Through this resemblance, *Parsifal* could offer, to borrow Ortega y Gasset's words, 'a new European code, the inspiration towards a new programme of life',[145] one beyond organised religion, beyond Christianity and Islam, and towards a unifying belief that would regenerate European culture. Yet I do not set out to speculate about the future of Europe. The purpose of my research is not to present a solution to the problem of nihilism (or oikophobia, for that matter) but to recover the universal significance of core aspects of Wagner's music dramas through their correspondence with defining features of the contemporary world. Hence, I do not see nihilism as a problem to be solved but rather as a means to solve a problem, in this case the misconception about *Parsifal*'s theme of regeneration, which I will continue to dismantle in Chapter 4.

[145] José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 186.

4. Towards a Unified Conception of Wagner's Universality

Now that I have explained how contemporary culture can serve as a framework for developing a new conception of Wagner's art, one that defies the notion of Wagner as a proto-Nazi, I will go on to explain how we can develop a unified conception of Wagner's universality on the basis of nineteenth-century thought, meaning Nietzsche's Dionysian frame of mind. Before turning to Nietzsche, however, it must be clarified how Roger Scruton and Alain Badiou bring Nietzsche's tragic thought into view.

As previously mentioned, both philosophers contradict the commonplace idea that Wagner's art expresses and/or instigates ethnonationalist views by stressing the universal significance of Wagner's music dramas. To understand this significance, they argue, it is imperative to reconstruct the genesis of Wagner's work, which belongs to the nineteenth century. In doing so, however, the two respective thinkers focus on two different strands of thought underlying Wagner's work: a revolutionary, optimistic strand on the one hand and a tragic, pessimistic strand on the other. In Badiou's eyes, Wagner's works render a space in which the possibility of a new world can be explored. Scruton, by contrast, considers Wagner's art a disclosure of knowledge about the world as it is and as it always will be. While both thinkers underline the universal significance of Wagner, Badiou emphasises the presentation of something radically new in Wagner's body of work. It shows the presence of something that is not predetermined by the laws of a particular world, something that is not represented within the framework of an existing society or politics whereby predetermined social, political or religious identities are assumed, 'something that is *beyond established differences*'[146] – in other words, something that applies to everyone and directs itself to everyone as a new possibility to establish something new that is not yet part of this world, i.e. the status quo, and therefore has universal significance. Scruton, on the other hand, firmly rejects the utopian notion that the creation of a new man is possible because reality has proven that any attempt to radically change the world leads to humanitarian disasters. Human nature is unchangeable, and so are the universal truths about the human condition, he argues. For this reason, universality does not involve a radical rupture with the status quo and the creation of something new; it involves features of life that are eternal. Consequently, the appearance of the universal is not congruent with a break with tradition but, on the contrary, with the conservation and continuation of tradition. This continuity is safeguarded by myths, legends and religion that convey knowledge about the human condition.

[146] Adam S. Miller, 'Universal Truths and the Question of Religion. An Interview with Alain Badiou', *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2005): 38.

Continuing the tradition of Greek theatre, complemented by Germanic mythology, medieval legends and religious themes, Wagner's music dramas contain truths about life that have been handed down from generation to generation – universal truths that transcend cultures but nonetheless depend on the preservation of culture as a requisite for the expression of those eternal truths.

Emphasising the historical origins of the great cultural monuments that we have inherited, Scruton seeks to explain the proximity of Wagner's artistic views concerning the *Ring* to the particular cultural sphere from which they emerged, namely early and mid-nineteenth century Germany, the intellectual climate of which was determined by, amongst others, Kant, Goethe, Schiller, Fichte, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Feuerbach and Marx.[147] In this connection, Scruton gives voice to his appreciation for Wagner as 'a philosophical thinker, whose ideas, expressed with hectic impetuosity in his letters and prose writings, were delivered with a concentrated steadiness in his works of art'.[148] Badiou's reading of Wagner, on the other hand, hardly takes into account the composer's statements of intention on the basis of the premise that artistic creations cannot simply be reduced to the intentions and views of the artist.[149] Although a work of art is connected to the world out of which it arises, it does not form a direct representation of that world; it also presents something beyond the familiar, and in this way, it creates its own truth. Rather than a representation, the truth in art should be thought of as 'an Event' – an appearance of something we are not yet familiar with, of something that we cannot really identify or categorise.[150] This means that the truth of an artwork can never be a representation of an ideology or a group identity.[151] Hence, the truth, i.e. the universal, in Wagner's art bears no relation to the composer's anti-Semitic and nationalist statements, which stem from the particular age in which his beliefs and works came into being. Even if it were true that, as some critics believe, there are anti-Semitic messages present in some of Wagner's music dramas, these messages should not be considered as elements of truth in the artist's work. After all, there

[147] See Roger Scruton, *The Ring of Truth: The Wisdom of Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung* (London: Allen Lane, 2016) and Scruton's article *Wagner and German Idealism* (2013), aired on BBC Radio 3 as part of the series 'Wagner's Philosophers', 20 May 2013, https://www.roger-scruton.com/articles/275-wagner-and-german-idealism.

[148] Roger Scruton, *The Ring of Truth: The Wisdom of Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 41.

[149] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 15.

[150] 'Event' is the central concept of Badiou's philosophy, expounded in Badiou's magnum opus, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005). See also Alain Badiou and Fabien Tarby, *Philosophy and the Event*, trans. Louise Burchill (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

[151] See Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

is nothing unfamiliar about anti-Semitism, and thus, when it is displayed in a work of art, it merely confirms a long and despicable tradition. Similarly, certain pan-Germanic features or allusions to the ideal of racial purity,[152] allegedly imported under the influence of Arthur de Gobineau, are not related to the dimensions of truth in Wagner's works. These elements do not constitute the newness his music dramas entail but are mere historical contingencies, possibly fashionable or acceptable in Wagner's own time but utterly vulgar, questionable or outright detestable in ours. Our task today, Badiou suggests, is to discard the historically particular characteristics of Wagner's works that are no longer useful and relevant to contemporary society in order to reveal the universal aspects of his art that are inherently progressive and promising.

Throughout this dissertation, I will seek to bridge the two opposing views of Badiou and Scruton with the aim of achieving a more complete understanding of Wagner's universal meaning, one that involves the progressive and optimistic strands that permeate Wagner's art, stressed by Badiou, as well as the music dramas' conservative and pessimistic dimensions, on which Scruton places particular emphasis. An application of Badiou's theory of universality (centred on the concept of 'the Event') as a generic theoretical framework will enable us to differentiate between the universal thinking that transcends Wagner's individual personality and the particularistic thinking that is confined to a historical period. Since the universal necessarily appears in a particular context and can be interpreted only in relation to historical particularities, we follow in the footsteps of Scruton by examining the intellectual influences that the composer absorbed (most prominently Schopenhauer), the way in which these influences determined his thinking and how his views on the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the role and meaning of music, the being and destination of Germany and the question of regeneration, as recorded in his writings, lay bare these influences. By combining Badiou's perspective, aimed at combating reactionary historical forces, with Scruton's perspective, focused on the preservation of the nineteenth-century Wagnerian monument that contains eternal truths about the human condition, we can rediscover and reconstruct the tragic spirit from which Wagner's music dramas emerged – a tragic thinking that resonates with the Dionysian philosophy of

[152] According to Badiou 'there's no getting around' the fact that 'there are whiffs of racialism' present in *Parsifal*. With respect to this work Badiou furthermore writes in *Five Lessons on Wagner*: '[…] it was even alleged that "Redemption to the Redeemer" meant that Christ himself needed to be redeemed because he was Jewish. But even without going that far, there are things in *Parsifal* having to do with blood, with the question of the purity of blood' (Badiou, 2010, 137).

Nietzsche, in which a pessimistic view of existence by means of tragic art can be answered with a cheerful and optimistic yes to life.

But why Nietzsche? The overall purpose of this study, remember, is to recover the original universal appeal of Wagner's art that has been eclipsed by regressive historical forces. This means that, as previously stressed, pathways should be created that lead to the genesis of Wagner's music dramas, which belongs to the early part of the nineteenth century – pathways, thus, to the composer's conception of a universal artwork that resonates with Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will. But since artworks, as Badiou points outs, cannot be reduced to the intentions and views of the artist, a search for an original conception of Wagner's music dramas should also include pathways to the philosophical reception of the composer in the nineteenth century. When thinking about this topic, the first name that comes to mind is Friedrich Nietzsche. As Karol Berger puts it, 'Nietzsche was undoubtedly the most interesting among the contemporary witnesses and critics of Wagner and arguably the single most indispensable figure in the whole history of the reception of the composer's work'.[153] What is more, Berger writes, 'the whole history of European culture offers no other example of such a prolonged and intense encounter between a truly major composer and a philosopher'.[154]

As is well known, the philosopher in his young years had an intimate relationship with Wagner, who exerted great influence on Nietzsche's thinking. From May 1869 to April 1872, the latter frequently visited the artist in Tribschen, where they discussed, amongst other things, the philosophy of Schopenhauer, music and the drama of the ancient Greeks. Through his youthful conversations and correspondence with Wagner, Nietzsche came to develop his tragic philosophy of art and life, which found its first expression in *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872), wherein he claims that the tragic worldview of Aeschylus and Sophocles realised its rebirth in Wagner's music dramas. The Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which revitalised the Dionysian vision of the world, would inspire the peoples of Europe to adopt the long-lost tragic view of life, as a result of which European culture would witness a revival after centuries of decline. Even though Nietzsche later proclaimed that he distanced himself from Wagner, the Dionysian worldview he espoused under the influence of the composer continued to dominate his thinking until the end of his (sane) life. Throughout his philosophical career, it functioned as a prism with which to discern the ills of society, to wit nationalism, anti-Semitism, decadence and cultural nihilism. Indeed, Nietzsche grappled with

[153] Karol Berger, *Beyond Reason: Wagner Contra Nietzsche* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 363.
[154] Ibid.

the same social issues we are grappling with today. Nietzsche's philosophy can therefore serve as a suitable framework for examining the relationship between Wagner and contemporary culture, moreover because Nietzsche in his reflections on the artist continuously sought the connection between questionable aspects of Wagner, such as his Germanness, anti-Semitism and nihilism, and cultural tendencies that resonated with these aspects, namely the surge of nationalism and anti-Semitism in late-nineteenth-century Europe as well as the continent's nihilism in the form of an adherence to Christian metaphysical doctrines that, according to Nietzsche, were no longer credible.[155] These tendencies, Nietzsche believed, thwarted the diffusion of the tragic worldview and hence undermined the progress and development of mankind. The Dionysian frame of mind – indeed, the frame of mind that Nietzsche originally perceived in Wagner's art – thus opposed nationalist, anti-Semitic and nihilist views, which means that Wagner's music dramas, imbued with a Dionysian spirit, oppose these views, too. If this is true, however, how then should Nietzsche's determination to tie Wagner to the regressive views in question be understood?

To gain insight into this question, let us consider some different perspectives on Nietzsche's critique of Wagner. Amongst Wagner's antagonists, Nietzsche is often seen as the first critic who recognised the Nazi germ in Wagner's art, long before the advent of Hitler.[156] According to Robert S. Wistrich, for example, Nietzsche's 'scathing portrait of Wagner as a master of hypnotic trickery, a neurotic tyrant with an actor's genius, an incomparable histrionic personality – seems at some points to uncannily prefigure Hitler'.[157] Wagner's advocates, on the other hand, are often apt to dismiss Nietzsche's criticisms of the composer as perfidious, abusive and unconscionable. According to Bryan Magee, for instance, Nietzsche's criticisms are 'profoundly disappointing' and 'to anyone to whom Wagner's work really speaks, none of

[155] As Karin Bauer points out, Nietzsche's treatment of Wagner as a vehicle for cultural critique anticipated Adorno's meditations on the composer. See Karin Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives: Critiques of Ideology, Readings of Wagner* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999).

[156] It should be noted here that Nietzsche too has been associated with Nazism due to Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche's notorious reworkings of some of the philosopher's writings and the subsequent mobilisation of supposed Nietzschean ideas by Nazi ideologists such as Alfred Rosenberg and Heinrich Härtle, who presented Nietzsche as the philosopher of the Aryan master race. Today, however, there is a broad consensus amongst Nietzsche scholars that Nietzsche's philosophy is incompatible with Nazi ideology. See, for example, Steven E. Aschheim, 'Nietzsche, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust', in *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture*, ed. Jacob Golomb (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 3–20; Weaver Santaniello, 'A Post-Holocaust Re-Examination of Nietzsche and the Jews: Vis-à-vis Christendom and Nazism', in *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture*, ed. Jacob Golomb (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 21–54; *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism?: On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy*, ed. Jacob Golomb and Robert S. Wistrich (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[157] Robert S. Wistrich, 'Wagner at 200: Not Your Garden-Variety Jew Hater', *The Times of Israel*, 22 May 2013, http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/richard-wagner-the-taint-of-genius/.

Nietzsche's criticism of it has much validity or even a great deal of interest as serious criticism'.[158] Nietzsche's criticisms of Wagner, Magee claims, ultimately fail to 'make contact with the works, and are thus in a very deep way inapplicable, invalid'.[159] In a similar vein, Scruton has argued that in Nietzsche's critique the 'heroic fortitude, generous love and world-redeeming renunciation' that one can detect in Wagner's characters is mistaken for 'attention-seeking neurosis and an inability to accept the world as it is'.[160] Nietzsche wrongfully portrays Wagner's dramas as unrealistic, describing the Wagnerian world of myths and legends as fake. Herewith the philosopher displays a lack of understanding of the dramatic purpose of placing characters in a mythological setting, which is 'to create the kind of distance between audience and drama that would endow the drama with a universal significance'.[161] Precisely because Wagner departed from realism through the application of myths and legends, he was able to reveal 'universal truths about the human condition'.[162] The unrealistic dimension of myth thus serves to illuminate the reality of life. Yet this was something Nietzsche failed to see, according to Scruton.[163]

Examples of authors that have come up with positive assessments of Nietzsche's critical reflections on Wagner can be given, too. Julian Young and Karol Berger, for instance, argue that the philosopher's critique can actually help us to achieve a better understanding of the Wagnerian enterprise. In *The Philosophies of Richard Wagner* (2014), Young makes the case that Nietzsche attacked Wagner because the latter had 'betrayed the noble idea of "the rebirth of Greek tragedy"'.[164] The composer had abnegated his initial Dionysian, life-affirming view of the world that forms the bedrock of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* and eventually became a life-denying Schopenhauerian pessimist. This left Nietzsche as 'the remaining flag-bearer' of the tragic worldview.[165] For this reason, Young writes, Nietzsche asserts that 'the task for himself and likeminded people is to "become better Wagnerians than Wagner," to remain, that is, true to the ideal Wagner himself has betrayed'.[166] Berger, by contrast, places focus on the question as to how Nietzsche's critique relates to Wagner's works rather than Wagner's

[158] Bryan Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 2000), 320.
[159] Ibid., 326.
[160] Roger Scruton, 'Man and Superman', *The Guardian*, 12 April 2003, https://www.theguardian.com/music/ 2003 /apr/12/classicalmusicandopera.artsfeatures1.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] See also Scruton, *The Ring of Truth: The Wisdom of Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 296–308.
[164] Julian Young, *The Philosophies of Richard Wagner* (London: Lexington Books, 2014), 137.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid., 135.

personal philosophical views. Although appreciative of 'Nietzsche's critical acumen',[167] Berger argues that 'Wagner's works can defend themselves surprisingly effectively against some of the philosopher's central strictures'.[168] What is more, Berger claims, 'these works implicitly offer an unexpectedly perceptive critique of a number of Nietzsche's most cherished doctrines'.[169] For example, *Die Meistersinger*'s message that 'individual creativity and social traditions are indissolubly linked, that a tradition gets sterile if not fertilised by innovation, while creativity quickly runs dry if it does not grow on the soil of tradition' would 'implicitly challenge Nietzsche's radical project of self-creation *ex nihilo*'.[170]

Now, one can certainly take issue with some of the claims made above. I for one would question Berger's claim that Nietzsche disregarded tradition and community in his advocacy of individual authenticity. However, whether or not the claims made above are right is not our concern here. I merely want to point out that the authors above, regardless of their individual stances towards Wagner and Nietzsche, portray the philosopher as the artist's antipode, his adversary. Nietzsche's thinking would be incompatible with Wagner's art. In this dissertation, I claim the very opposite, namely that Wagner's music dramas coincide with Nietzsche's Dionysian frame of mind. What is more, I argue that Nietzsche's criticism can serve as a fruitful framework to recover the tragic thinking that permeates Wagner's works, which is, I repeat, a thinking that is in sync with the tragic philosophy of Nietzsche himself.

Nietzsche, remember, tied his critique of nationalism, anti-Semitism, decadence and nihilism to aspects of Wagner – aspects characteristic of Nietzsche's own age and precisely the aspects that Nietzsche sought to overcome in himself. In *Der Fall Wagner* (1888), Nietzsche writes that 'the first thing and last thing that a philosopher demands of himself is to overcome his age in himself, to become timeless'.[171] Just as he saw it as his philosophical duty to struggle against that which made him a child of his time, he also felt the need to safeguard that which is timeless. Nietzsche aimed to achieve this by criticising aspects of Wagner's art that resonated with the anti-Semitic and nationalist spirit of the late nineteenth century that he detested, such as its implementation of Germanic myth. Nietzsche took a dim view of the appropriation of Wagner by chauvinist groups on the basis of the idea that, paraphrasing Hans von Wolzogen,

[167] Karol Berger, *Beyond Reason: Wagner Contra Nietzsche* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), xiii.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid., 411.
[171] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 155.

the German spirit found its purest expression in Wagner's music.[172] Mocking the so-called Wagnerians who believed that Wagner's art was German par excellence, Nietzsche playfully placed his Wagner in a variety of different contexts, such as Paris or Rome, therewith showing the relativity of each and every particular context and laying bare the Dionysian primal force he originally recognised in Wagner – a musical force that breaks through each and every Apollonian world of appearance and destroys every worldly facade.

Yet, what Nietzsche witnessed during the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876 was anything but a revival of the Dionysian frame of mind. Instead of embracing the long-forgotten tragic view of life, the audiences in Bayreuth indulged in hero worship and idolatry. Horrified by the pomp and mass behaviour he saw in Bayreuth, the philosopher took the task upon himself to debunk the great surmise that something otherworldly and sublime lay behind the enigmatic appearance of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Hence Nietzsche's joking assertion that he preferred the lighthearted Bizet to the ponderous Wagner. In contrast with Bizet's 'African cheerfulness', the Wagnerian solemnity appears rather ridiculous and grotesque.[173] The real-life qualities that Nietzsche professed to admire in Bizet, namely the raw sensuality and the 'cynical, cruel and fatal love' in *Carmen*, were precisely the qualities the Bayreuth spectacle lacked.[174] Indeed, the coarse and nasty sneers at the composer in *Der Fall Wagner* come across as an attempt to bring the disharmonious, that is to say the Dionysian, back into the conception of Wagner's art that was being worshipped like a holy relic. By characterising Wagner as a sly, 'old magician', Nietzsche sought to convince his readers that Wagner was not some kind of holy redeemer but a mere actor performing magic tricks.[175]

In his endeavour to unmask the cunning enchanter, the philosopher aimed to uncover the hidden techniques of Wagner's all too seductive art. Nietzsche ascertained that Wagner, 'as our greatest miniaturist in music', was uniquely able to 'crowd into the smallest space an infinity of sense and sweetness'.[176] While he expressed his admiration for this unique ability, Nietzsche also pointed out its danger. For Wagner's 'wealth of colours, of half shadows, of the secrecies of dying light' is so addictive that the audience gets mesmerised by it, with the result that the all too magnificent appearance is mistaken for the revelation of a deeper essence and a higher

[172] Hans von Wolzogen, *Erinnerungen an Richard Wagner* (Leipzig, 1891), in *Wagner Remembered*, ed. Stewart Spencer (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 259.
[173] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 158.
[174] Ibid., 158–159.
[175] Ibid., 160.
[176] Ibid., 171.

purpose.[177] Not only did this effect resonate with the idea of redemption, i.e. regeneration, that dominated the spirit of the age, it was also related to the root cause of European decadence and nihilism, namely the world-negating Socratic-Christian worldview, which Nietzsche expected to crumble due to the rebirth of tragedy in Europe in the form of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

It may therefore come as no surprise that the first work to be unmasked and accused of perfidiousness was *Parsifal*, described by Nietzsche as 'the stroke of genius in seduction'.[178] As Christian themes of compassion, hope and salvation were sublimated in Wagner's swansong, *Parsifal* was the ultimate means to combat the nihilist spirit of the time and the Christian hatred against life. In his essay *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* (1888–1889), the philosopher describes *Parsifal* as 'a work of perfidy, of vindictiveness, of a secret attempt to poison the presuppositions of life – a bad work', whose 'preaching of chastity remains an incitement to anti-nature'.[179] But in the same essay, Nietzsche also asks whether we 'must really see in *Parsifal* a rejection of life, a reversion to sickly Christian and obscurantist ideals'.[180] He challenges his readers to view the work as a parody of the chastity ideal, as a caricature of the promise of salvation from earthly suffering. As such, namely as satire on the ethics of world renunciation, which *Parsifal* preaches, Wagner's *Bühnenweihfestspiel* contradicts Christianity and is tragic through and through. After all, as satire the work reveals the terrifying Greek insight that the universe is meaningless and that hope of redemption is idle. Hence arose the notion that Nietzsche explicated for the first time in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and reaffirmed in the last years of his philosophical career, namely that we need the lie, meaning art, to be able to handle life, meaning truth. For this reason, 'art is of far greater value than the truth',[181] because whereas the truth compels us to deny the will to live, art evokes in us the will to say yes to life. This lesson, as Nietzsche teaches his readers, albeit indirectly, is pre-eminently central to *Parsifal*, which conveys the pessimistic message of world renunciation and yet encourages its audience to say yes to life by means of, amongst other things, some of the most enticing music ever written.

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[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid., 184.

[179] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 675.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (London: Penguin, 2017), 485.

In defiance of his time, where nationalism, anti-Semitism, bigotry and nihilism increasingly determined the social and political direction of Europe, Nietzsche presented to his contemporaries a desecrated image of Wagner with a view to combating the regressive tendencies above – tendencies that had gotten conflated with Wagner's persona and consequently eclipsed the tragic vision of life Nietzsche originally perceived in the artist's work. Hence, Nietzsche's critique of Wagner should not be understood as an attack on the composer but as an attack on the nationalists and zealots – the Wagnerians – who misappropriated Wagner as well as an attempt to recover the original yet obscured notion of Wagner's music as 'an expression of a Dionysian power of the soul',[182] music in which one can hear 'the earthquake with which a primordial force of life, dammed up from time immemorial, finally vents itself, indifferent to the possibility that everything that calls itself culture today might start tottering'.[183] Deployed by Nietzsche as a weapon to combat the ills of late-nineteenth-century European culture, Wagner in a sense realised the promise of becoming a force that Nietzsche hoped would demolish the nihilistic spirit of the age: a Dionysian force with which to shatter dubious idols (e.g. Wagner as a German national hero) and absolutisms such as *Volk* and Fatherland with the intention of establishing a culture free from stifling dogmas and essentialist views – a culture imbued with the tragic, i.e. Dionysian, view of life, which unsettles settled beliefs, dismantles the notion of fixed identities, repels any particular zeitgeist and defies totalitarian certainties. Ascertaining that this view of life is enshrined in Wagner's art, how can we conceive of it? How does it come to the fore in the music dramas? And how does it have a universal significance?

Before answering, let me stress that I, as both the title of this introduction and the heading of this section indicate, intend to abstain from giving a clear-cut formula for defining Wagner's universality. The reason for this is that we are dealing with four – or actually seven, if we divide the *Ring* into its four constitutive parts – quite different works, each of which has its own unique subject matter, poetic character, compositional style and orchestral timbre. What is more, each work can be considered a kaleidoscope of different philosophical viewpoints, mythological concepts, religious orientations and mental attitudes. It is clear, therefore, that the diversity of one work, say *Die Meistersinger*, cannot be reduced to uniformity, that is a homogeneous conception of the music drama in question, let alone the diversity of Wagner's entire mature output. Hence, instead of presenting an all-encompassing definition of Wagner's universality,

[182] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 669.
[183] Ibid., 669.

which could obscure the immense versatility of the artist's works, I aim to show a number of different aspects of the music dramas that, each in their own particular way, attest to Wagner's universal significance. These aspects are *Gesamtkunstwerk*/leitmotif, sensuousness, Germanness, and the idea of regeneration – indeed, the very aspects that would legitimise the idea that Wagner's work is consonant with Nazi ideology. As explained before, each of the four chapters centres around one of the four aspects in question. All aspects will ultimately prove to be consonant with Nietzsche's Dionysian worldview – a worldview, to be sure, that is as complex and ambiguous as Wagner's artistic enterprise. This further supports the proposition that one should abstain from giving a clear-cut formula for defining Wagner's universality. That being said, I do believe that giving the reader some general idea of how Wagner's art and Nietzsche's thinking coincide may be helpful in understanding the chapter outline below.

I propose to describe the Wagner–Nietzsche connection as follows: Wagner's music dramas confront us with the tragic insights that life is transient, that the world of appearances is illusory, that there is no longer a God to rely upon and that life is ultimately meaningless. Yet these insights are constructed in the works as necessary prerequisites or as incentives to affirm life, to change and improve oneself and to give purpose to an inherently purposeless existence. Herewith Wagner's art gives voice to a spirit of tragic optimism that Nietzsche believed could spiritually unify the different nations in Europe,[184] despite their differences, for it is a spirit *beyond established differences* – one that transcends national, cultural, sexual, political, religious and ethnic differences and thus appeals to all of humanity.[185]

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[184] On Nietzsche's ideal of a united, Dionysian Europe, see *The Gay Science*, book 5, especially sections 362, 370 and 380; *Beyond Good and Evil*, chapter 8 ('Peoples and Fatherlands') and *The Will to Power*, book 3, part 3 ('The Will to Power as Society and Individual'), especially section 748, and book 4, part 2 ('Dionysus'), especially section 1051.

[185] As referred to earlier, the phrase 'beyond established differences' is taken from an interview that Alain Badiou did with the *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* on his notion of universality, as expounded in the book *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (2003). In the interview Badiou describes his conception of the universal as follows:

> Something is universal if it is something that is beyond established differences. We have differences that seem absolutely natural to us. In the context of these differences, the sign of a new truth is that these differences become indifferent. So we have an absorption of an evident natural difference into something that is beyond that difference. (Adam S. Miller, 'Universal Truths and the Question of Religion: An Interview with Alain Badiou', *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2005: 38)

As will be explained in more detail in Chapter 1, Badiou's notion of the universal centres on the idea of the Event, whereby something new appears in the world – a new truth – that cannot be reduced to any historical particularity and thus applies to all mankind. Although Badiou's concept of the event applies to several key aspects of Wagner's music dramas, most notably the functionality of the leitmotif, it does not define Wagner's works. As previously stressed, other conceptions of universality, such as that of Scruton, apply to Wagner as well. Yet Badiou's description of the universal as 'something that is beyond established differences' captures well the general notion

With this brief description in mind, let me now provide an overview of how the designated aspects of Wagner display a sense of tragic optimism in the context of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Parsifal*.

In Chapter 1, which examines the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and Wagnerian leitmotif, I aim to demonstrate how in the *Ring*, the tragic view of life erupts at the end of the cycle. The downfall of Valhalla heralds the end of God(s), the end of transcendence. Mankind is confronted with the inherent meaninglessness of the world, facing the beginning of a new era in which one is solely responsible for one's own life. The great question that arises is how after the death of God, a new life, new values and purposes can be invented. Since it is unclear how to live, how to move forward, the past can easily repeat itself. Hence the return, by means of the leitmotif, of memories of the old corrupted world in the final scene of *Götterdämmerung*. By applying Nietzsche's thought of eternal return, it becomes clear, however, that the thought that the horrifying past might repeat itself is a prerequisite to our being able to change our lives. The thought of eternal return incites one to question settled beliefs, solidified ideas, mental habits – beliefs, ideas and habits that have determined one's life so far and possibly keep one trapped in an unfulfilled, unhappy life. The return of the same thus effectuates the creation of something new. The Wagnerian leitmotif operates in congruence with this concept. Through its continuity – its perpetual recurrence – it can evoke discontinuity, i.e. acquire new significance, evoke new associations, new perspectives and new thoughts. In other words, contrary to what Adorno believed, namely that due to its cyclical nature, the leitmotif effectuates sameness and thus oppresses differences and blocks newness, the leitmotif's repetitive character is the very key to difference and change, the key to emancipation of the individual. Precisely because the leitmotif bestirs the tragic awareness that one cannot escape from the eternal recurrence of the same life – an awareness enhanced by the closed mythic universe that is the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – it can effectively compel one to change that same life into one that is qualitatively different, of a higher order – a life one would want to relive time and time again as long as one seeks to renew it.

Chapter 2 centres around the sensuousness of *Tristan und Isolde*'s music, which, as it is uniquely capable of giving expression to an incessant desire and hence creates awareness about the will to live, evokes what Schopenhauer deemed the spirit of resignation. This, however, is not a world-renouncing spirit; it does not involve a renunciation *of* life but a renunciation *in*

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of Wagner's work as art that, through its tragic optimism, transcends differences – differences that, as Badiou puts it, 'seem absolutely natural to us', such as national, cultural, sexual, political, religious and ethnic differences. Hence the dissertation title, 'Wagner Beyond Established Differences'.

life, meaning the renunciation of powers that suppress change, progress, creativity and personal autonomy in the name of so-called immutable truths of religious beliefs or nationalist convictions. Whereas Wagner's critics argue that the composer's overwhelming sensuousness effectuates the loss of one's critical faculties and affirms identity at the cost of the non-identical individual, I claim that the sensuous power of Wagner's music compels one to espouse a Dionysian frame of mind. As it appeals to one's desires, the depths of one's emotional life, Wagner's music enhances one's sense of self, with all the particular views and attitudes that it entails. But as the music creates awareness of the will, which unites the self with the other, one's sense of otherness is enhanced, too. Precisely because *Tristan*'s music appeals so strongly to *my* identity due to its appeal to *my* will, i.e. the will of the other, my identity loses its absolute value. My identity, my world, reveals itself as a mere appearance amongst other appearances. The way I see the world is just one perspective amongst countless other ones. As I recognise the relativity and evanescence of my particular stance, I acquire what Nietzsche calls tragic knowledge, namely the knowledge that everything in life that we cherish and view as objective, eternal and absolute is eventually nothing more than a man-made construction, a temporary sham that sooner or later shall be swept away by the sands of time. One can either be put off by this frightening insight and espouse the spirit of resignation or consider it an opportunity to enhance one's life and adopt a Dionysian frame of mind aimed at becoming one with the world's primal flow of perpetual change and becoming. The final scene of *Tristan*, when Isolde undergoes her Transfiguration, epitomises the Nietzschean notion of tragic awakening and the espousal of the Dionysian spirit. As Isolde turns herself to the members of the audience, asking them to view reality through her eyes, the listener-spectator – who, in a sense, is unified with Isolde – witnesses the dismantling of the Apollonian world of appearances – the world of culture, ideology, morality, customs, values and laws. Together with Isolde, one abandons the worldly realm of historical particularities and readily succumbs to the Dionysian flux of the music. But while Isolde renounces the world and dies, the listener affirms life as he indulges in the experience of *Tristan*'s beautifully tragic music – music one longs to listen to time and again, despite the notion that it destroys the foundation to which one owes one's sense of identity. For as one comes to know the Dionysiac in and through art, the destructive primal force in question reveals itself as a life-giving force, too – a force one can espouse to liberate oneself from worn-out views and values and create new ones that can regenerate one's life.

Chapter 3 deals with the aspect of Germanness as embodied by *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. While Wagner's antagonists claim that this work celebrates national identity, I show that the comedy stresses the importance of fostering an outward-looking attitude for the

preservation of one's culture. This tenet coincides with Nietzsche's notion of the 'good European': a cosmopolitan individual who does not confine himself to his own national sphere but is prone to acquaint himself with foreign and/or long-forgotten traditions, with a view to creating new ideas and values to achieve personal growth and enrich and enhance European culture, which, as a consequence, is preserved and renewed at the same time.[186] Wagner's *Meistersinger* is congruent with this mode of thought. When we look at the overture, for example, we see that it emphasises the achievements of modern music through the application of *Tristan* chromaticism while simultaneously displaying fidelity to the musical past by means of its polyphonic combination of themes, which is reminiscent of Bach's compositional style. In this way, the overture reactivates history, reviving elements from the past that prove to be a constructive force in a new historical context. This frame of mind then continues to permeate the whole music drama that draws extensively on sources originating in Jerusalem and Athens – sources, thus, that originate from *outside* Germany and to which German culture is indebted. Herewith *Die Meistersinger* defies the notion that it would give expression to an exclusive German essence. Instead of expressing a sense of nationalist complacency, the work gives voice to the notion that Germany's true value is to be found beyond itself. For German culture to flourish, Wagner tells us, it should not absolutise itself but look beyond its own borders.

In Chapter 4, the claim that *Parsifal*'s message of regeneration applies to a favoured race or nation is rejected at the outset. As William Kinderman[187] and Karol Berger[188] already have successfully demonstrated, this notion can only arise when *Parsifal*'s theme of regeneration is divorced from the work's theme of compassion. However, Kinderman and Berger have overlooked the question as to how regeneration and compassion are related in Wagner's swansong. Examining this relationship in the fourth and final chapter, I begin by demonstrating that the compassion preached in *Parsifal* is Nietzschean, for it is a kind of compassion whereby setback is used as an opportunity to renew, i.e. regenerate, the mind and to increase the will to undertake action in the world. This affirmative type of compassion must thus be distinguished from pity, which Nietzsche loathed as it would 'negate life and persuade men to nothingness'.[189] The compassionate insight arising in *Parsifal*, however, does not involve the idea that the will

[186] On Nietzsche's notion of the 'good European', see *The Gay Science*, book 5, especially section 377, and *Beyond Good and Evil*, chapter 8 ('Peoples and Fatherlands').

[187] See William Kinderman, *Wagner's Parsifal* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[188] See Karol Berger, *Beyond Reason: Wagner Contra Nietzsche* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017).

[189] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 573.

to live/desire is something that should be denied but entails the notion that the will should be affirmed properly. I then show that this insight serves to effectuate a spiritual regeneration, meaning a reconciliation with life in the natural world. In this world, where 'all is flux and nothing stays still', one is bound to continuously question and re-evaluate one's knowledge. At first glance, this might seem like a recipe for an unsatisfying life. The opposite, however, is true. The never-ending pursuit of knowledge proves very empowering for it continuously opens up new horizons for personal growth and development. To find value in life, one no longer needs to be focused on God, an afterlife or the coming of a promised messiah. Value can be found instantly, in the present, as soon as one is engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. That is the redemptive idea that is ultimately crystallised in *Parsifal*, which provides an answer to the question of how to overcome nihilism after the death of God.

1

Gesamtkunstwerk and Leitmotif

1. The *Ring*'s Leitmotifs in a Media Age

The widespread idea that the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* served as a blueprint for the totalitarian regime of the Third Reich and, in particular, the theatrical way in which the Nazis orchestrated public life can be traced to Adorno's critique of the social, internal-compositional and aesthetic aspects of Wagner's art. Adorno's critique of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, however, should be understood in the light of the philosopher's critique of mass culture. The core idea of Adorno's *Versuch über Wagner* is that the composer has contributed to laying the foundations of the culture industry which are also considered to be the foundations of Nazism. It is for this reason that in the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944; co-authored with Max Horkheimer), Adorno brought Nazi Germany into juxtaposition with the American film industry. For him, Hollywood represented the totalitarian mass media society that would have been modelled after Wagner's total work of art. According to Adorno, advertising and Nazi propaganda function in the same way as the Wagnerian leitmotif, that is, with the intention of making the audience passive and docile. The effect of both the leitmotif technique and propaganda, i.e. advertising, Adorno argued, is that we lose the very thing that makes us human, namely the ability to think critically.

Yet Adorno's belief that mass media would rob people in modern society of their personal autonomy has often been challenged in the last decades. Although few would argue that the overwhelming impact of media does not affect society in any negative way, it can scarcely be denied that the media has played an important role in the democratisation of societies. Moreover, in today's media age, we find citizens who do not just act as passive recipients but who have started to create their own media, their own non-commercial networks of meaning and signification.

Taking this new situation into account, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that by means of a reconceptualisation of the media age, we can come to a new understanding of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Today, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* should not be considered a closed system in which unifying and totalising musical forces overpowering the listener are operative. On the

contrary, in light of Badiou's reading of Wagner, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* can be considered a context that creates the conditions for the emergence of an event – a rupture with the status quo. The leitmotifs play a key role herein by creating unpredictable moments by which the possibility arises to change the situation, to construct a new truth in the world. However, besides being able to effectuate discontinuity, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* also manages to safeguard continuity, as Scruton emphasises. He stresses that the leitmotifs are carriers of memories, capturing and transmitting the past while continuously adapting to the present.[190] By examining the *Ring*'s leitmotifs in today's realm of mediatised contexts on the basis of the dialectical relationship between Badiou's focus on futurity and progress and Scruton's focus on history and preservation, we can ultimately create a space which makes visible the tragic yet optimistic vision of life that Nietzsche originally perceived in Wagner – a vision that comes to the fore most strongly in the final scene of *Götterdämmerung*. Coinciding with Nietzsche's thought of eternal recurrence, the ending of the *Ring* cycle annuls the Adornoian perspective on Wagnerian art, for it encourages one to critically reflect on one's existence with a view to creating new perspectives and values that enable one to change one's life for the better.

But before we will examine how this affirmative attitude to life manifests itself in Wagner, let us first, for the sake of clarity, look more closely at Adorno's anti-Wagnerian perspective.

2. The Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a Totalitarian System

As mentioned earlier, Adorno's critique of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* cannot be separated from his critique of mass culture. According to Adorno, the capitalist mass society has led to a culture that oppresses the non-identical and systematically removes authentic elements from society.[191] Our whole culture has become a comprehensive industry, whereby one's thinking is brought under full control in order to maintain it. To this end, the masses are offered many different types and forms of entertainment that seem to be extremely varied and diverse but in reality can all be reduced to the same uniform principle, meaning that all products manufactured by the culture industry are basically identical to each other. As a result, there is no longer any

[190] See Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 137; *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 99; *The Ring of Truth* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 149, 154–155.

[191] A similar analysis of mass culture is given by Herbert Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964). By contrast, Adorno's friend and intellectual colleague Walter Benjamin argues in *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (1935/36) that mass culture/media culture (especially film) offers a space of resistance.

difference between the general and the particular. It is merely the illusion of diversity that is conjured up so that the culture industry can maintain its grip on society.

Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* served as a blueprint for this totalitarian system, Adorno argues. Just as the *Gesamtkunstwerk* integrates each art form into an encompassing whole, so all mass-produced products get linked to each other to constitute an undifferentiated totality. This is possible due to the similarity of the products, which, for this very reason, fit seamlessly together. The method used to connect everything and to achieve sameness consists of taking elements from an existing product and subsequently incorporating them into another product. The arts get similarly subjected to this radical integration process. In the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, the example is given of 'a movement from a Beethoven symphony which is crudely "adapted" for a film soundtrack in the same way as a Tolstoy novel is garbled in a film script'.[192] As a consequence of this practice, the original masterpieces lose their uniqueness. Appropriated by the culture industry and blended in with the uniform surroundings, the origin of the production of these works is being eclipsed.

This method of equalisation, obscuration – of turning authentic art forms into overblown mass spectacles and commercialised, bourgeois shams – is the quintessence of the Wagnerian music practice, Adorno believes. In his analysis, Adorno follows Marx, who had argued that commodity fetishism is a result of separating commodities from the labour that produces them. Because the production process is concealed, people fail to see commodities as the result of their work and start believing that value resides within the commodities themselves instead of human labour. This leads to a mystification of commodities, meaning that commodities are treated as if they have an otherworldly quality not related to any history of human toil and effort.[193]

The Wagnerian music practice also consists of a structural concealment of the presence of human labour. The covered orchestra pit used in the Bayreuth Festspielhaus ensures that the audience does not see the musicians who produce the music. Seated in the darkened auditorium, the audience waits until suddenly the music magically begins from nowhere, creating a sense

[192] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York, NY: Herder & Herder, 1972), 122.

[193] The first sentence of chapter 6 ('Phantasmagoria') of Adorno's *Versuch* reads: 'The occultation of production by means of the outward appearance of the product – that is the formal law governing the works of Richard Wagner'. Rodney Livingstone explains that Adorno's use of the term 'phantasmagoria' originates from Marx's *Capital* (vol. 1, Harmondsworth 1976, 165) in which Marx applies the term in the context of his discussion of commodity fetishism. See Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 74.

of remoteness of place and time – an effect that particularly the overtures to *Lohengrin*, *Das Rheingold*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal* manage to create through their shared pianissimo beginnings. The sunken orchestra pit also ensures that the sounds produced by the individual instruments intermingle with each other, with the result that the specific and unique sounds of the individual instruments vanish. The individual instruments can no longer be distinguished from each other and the sounds that ultimately arise give no indication of how they have been created. Instead of being able to perceive how the music is produced, the listener is overwhelmed by an enchanting sound that does not reveal its origin.[194] The integration of the different elements in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, therefore, takes place at the expense of the integrity of the composition.[195] It is this very practice of 'making works of art into magical objects', Adorno claims, 'that makes his works pure appearance – an absolutely immediate, as it were, spatial phenomenon'.[196] Adorno thus negatively interprets Wagner's musical sense of remoteness in the overture to *Parsifal*, for instance, as having been characteristically created through a series of syncopations and arpeggios that make it seem as if the music is devoid of rhythm, floating, as it were, above the harsh realities of our world. In this way, the spectator is 'encouraged to adopt a passive role, is relieved of the burden of labour and hence reduced to the mere object of the artistic effect, he is thereby prevented from perceiving the labour that is contained in the work'.[197] The concealment of labour and hence the denial of the sufferings of our world are what truly characterise the unjust Wagnerian musical practice, the philosopher maintains.

The fascist tendency of mass society to suppress individual voices, to enforce identity at the expense of the non-identical, was considered to be intrinsic to Wagner's art. In his *Versuch*, Adorno refers to Richard Strauss, who 'speaks of Wagner's *al fresco* treatment of the strings in the Fire Music [*Die Walküre*, Act 3], which contains figures that can no longer be played precisely in time by a single violin and which yet resound in the chorus because there the inadequacies of individual playing disappear'.[198] Wagner's music 'sacrifices individual spontaneities among the string players and obliterates the traces of living labour, of the individual human being'.[199] The aversion that composers in the Wagnerian tradition allegedly had to 'the naked sound of the solo instrument from amidst the orchestra' had to do with 'the

[194] Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 62–72.
[195] Ibid., 68.
[196] Ibid., 72.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid., 69.
[199] Ibid.

fear of being reminded of the obliteration of the individual human being' and of 'the element of injustice implicit in the totality itself'.[200]

Adorno considered a detail in a work of art as the individual in society. Just as a work of art is realised by details that make up the composition, so too is a society established by individuals. The tendency of Wagner's art to conceal the musical detail rather than reveal it reflects the tendency of the totalitarian culture industry to suppress the individual. In the same way the individual voices in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* abide by the totality, Adorno suggests, the individual in mass culture conforms to the masses, the mindless herd. The concealment of labour in the creation of Wagner's characteristic *Mischklang* was seen as a means to that end, and the application of the leitmotif was intended to curb the individual and sustain uniformity.

The functionality of the Wagnerian leitmotif was believed to correspond to the intention of the culture industry to tame the masses. To this end, easily digestible cultural products are offered. Movies and music should, by all means, not be too complicated but straightforward and predictable. Designed to control the masses, the culture industry leaves nothing to chance. Each product is created according to a meticulous plan, including products within the artistic domain such as movies and (popular) music. These are constructed on the basis of predefined schedules designed to accommodate the consumer's innate desire for convenience. The consumer should particularly not be encouraged to think, and if he has the feeling to do so, it is the producers' intent. When something looks like chance or spontaneity, like a joke or an indignant reaction, it was in fact pre-planned.

Adorno views Wagner as a precursor to this manipulative practice. As mentioned, in his eyes, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is a rational system in which totalising and unifying techniques are applied that render the spectator thoughtless – techniques, thus, that do not encourage critical thinking but, on the contrary, discourage it. The central mechanism allegedly responsible for undermining critical thinking is the system of leitmotifs. Arguing that the leitmotif has 'a commodity function, rather like that of an advertisement',[201] Adorno claims that the constantly recurring leitmotif corresponds with the repetition technique used by advertisers to inculcate the advertising message in the minds of the people. A key element herein is the use of music, more specifically the advertising jingle: a short, simple and catchy musical motif written with the goal to be remembered. The music makes one remember the advertising message better. Characteristically, there is something very mechanical and lifeless about the jingle; time and

[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid., 21.

time again, the jingle is played on the radio and/or on television, appearing always in exactly the same way, as something one cannot escape from, something that has no history and does not allow development. Always linked to the same fixed image, one can associate the tune with nothing but the clear-cut commercial in question. Equating the functionality of the leitmotif with that of an advertisement, Adorno describes the leitmotif as 'a sign that transmits a particle of congealed meaning'.[202] The clearly defined and definite leitmotifs are like 'miniature pictures', 'like inscriptions that provide the key to the allegorical pictures to which they are attached'.[203]

The compulsive effect of advertising Adorno also perceived in Wagner. It was not for nothing that 'the immediate predecessor of the leitmotif', namely Berlioz's *idée fixe*, functions in the *Symphonie fantastique* as 'the sign of an obsession'.[204] After all, as the leitmotif keeps occurring, over and over again, it complies with obsessive-compulsive thinking and behaviour that is very hard to change. Due to the forcefulness and persistence with which the motifs thrust themselves upon the listener, one has no choice but to capitulate, to surrender thoughtlessly to the violence of Wagner's overpowering music, which, just like an advertising jingle, is beaten into the listener's head – 'conceived in terms of the gesture of striking a blow, the whole idea of beating is fundamental to Wagner's music'.[205]

This brings us to the core of Adorno's critique of Wagner: the idea that Wagner's art is unhistorical or mythological,[206] which means that 'the element of freedom, of open possibility, which is essential to drama, does not exist'.[207] Instead of opening up new horizons, a *promesse du bonheur*, Wagner merely delivers a narrative of what happened in the past and will continue to happen again and again infinitely. Adorno sees this aspect of cyclical progression as 'the kernel of Wagner's musical conception, inseparable from his aesthetic weakness that arises in

[202] Ibid., 34.
[203] Ibid., 35.
[204] Ibid., 21.
[205] Ibid., 20.
[206] Carl Dahlhaus describes the core of Adorno's critique of Wagner as follows: 'Theodor W. Adornos Wagnerkritik […] entzündet sich an der Stoffwahl, an Wagners Abkehr von der Geschichte und der Rückwendung zum Mythos, die Adorno als "Regression" interpretiert. Was sich als Darstellung des "allgemein Menschlichen", als Antizipation der Zukunft präsentiere, sei in Wahrheit ein Rückfall.' According to Dahlhaus, 'das zentrale Motiv in Adornos Wagnerkritik ist der Argwohn, daß Wagners Musik, so dynamisch und drängend sie sich gebärdet, im Innersten entwicklungslos sei; sie münde ins immer Gleiche, statt aus dem, was zu Anfang war, herauszuführen' (Carl Dahlhaus, 'Soziologische Dechiffrierung von Musik. Zu Theodor W. Adornos Wagnerkritik', *International Review of Music, Aesthetics and Sociology*, 1/2 (1970): 137, 139–140).
[207] Theodor Adorno, 'Wagner's Relevance Today', in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 328.

the metaphysics of repetition'[208] that pre-eminently determines the character of the *Ring*, in which, due to the cyclical element of the tetralogy, 'everything qualitatively different or novel is blocked from the outset'.[209] In the closed universe of the *Ring*, Adorno maintains, one is condemned to the eternal recurrence of the same.[210]

In contrast with Beethoven, Wagner's music has turned away from time and the construction of the historical. While the repetition of motifs in Beethoven involves change and development of the motifs in question (through which they become temporal), in Wagner, by contrast, the repeated motifs are not thematically developed but merely transposed or reversed and sometimes also rhythmically or melodically altered slightly.[211] Wagner's music, herewith, is 'as script is to words',[212] and to conceal this very notion – to cover up the fact that actually nothing new happens – he provides his music with its characteristic 'intensity and emphasis'.[213] The forceful and eternally sustained movement that propels the music forward merely gives the impression of incessant transition. Feigning a sense of perpetual change and becoming the *unendliche Melodie* effectuates a static totality by abolishing all differences: the difference between recitative and aria; the difference between the individual melodic lines that constantly flow into one another with the result that the distinction between the different melodies is barely audible; the difference between individual timbres; and the difference between the individual leitmotifs that, regardless of their unambiguous appearance, get swallowed up by the all-engulfing stream of the infinite melody through which they (especially in *Tristan*) dissolve into a turbid whole in which contrasts are completely absent. Contrasting themes, such as those found in Beethoven, can hardly be found in Wagner, Adorno insists.[214] In Wagner, the illusion of ceaseless change, created by the *unendliche Melodie*, ends in sameness, in a desolate uniformity.

As the individual voice is not allowed to speak in the music, so too are Wagner's characters denied true individuality, Adorno claims. Wagner's characters are not real individuals but rather representatives of Wagner's ideas, and, as such, they are empty in and of themselves and have nothing to express.[215] Herewith, Wagner shows himself to be indifferent to the inner lives of

[208] Ibid., 330.
[209] Ibid., 329.
[210] Ibid., 330.
[211] Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Music* (London: Routledge, 1998), 83.
[212] Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 35.
[213] Ibid., 34–35.
[214] Theodor Adorno, 'Wagner's Relevance Today', in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 328.
[215] Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Music* (London: Routledge, 1998), 80.

the individual characters who appear in his works.[216] Wagner's characters hardly have an identity and do not develop themselves, and if they do change their behaviour, then this happens all of a sudden, in no time, without any seeming development prior to the occurring change of conduct. After all, Adorno argues, Wagner's music dramas are devoid of a context in which the characters can develop themselves since the composer 'banned authentic historical conflicts from his work after *Lohengrin*'.[217] Without historical insight, there is no foundation for social change. Lacking this foundation, Wagner's characters subsequently know nothing of change and development. In this sense, his characters are similar to the standardised and isolated people shaped by the culture industry. Unable to relate himself to others, the isolated subject cannot grow as an individual because only in relation to others can the self undergo real change.[218] Thus, personal freedom (which is, after all, tied to the possibility of change) is only possible through the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. But since free and independent individuals undermine the totalitarian system, it is in the system's interest to take away the basis for self-other relations, which is time. Therefore, Wagner's mythological *Gesamtkunstwerk*, inhabited as it is by empty subjects, forms the ultimate blueprint for a standardised mass culture where the Other is not allowed to exist.

The core of Wagner's musical conception, permeating every aspect of the music dramas, is inseparable from Wagner's social character – a character corresponding to the fascist and/or Nazi personality. The 'implicit anti-democratic tendencies and fascist potential',[219] which Adorno in the late 1930s had already perceived in Wagner's art, would ultimately serve as a yardstick for measuring the fascist tendencies of the so-called authoritarian personality. The Wagnerian music practice coincided with the tendency to blindly accede to conventions and to slavishly obey the orders of an authority figure, the tendency to use violence towards non-identical individuals and groups and to use stereotypical thinking.[220] Although Adorno never claims that Wagner's music contains anti-Semitic elements (unlike the libretti, which,

[216] Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 106.
[217] Ibid., 104.
[218] Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Music* (London: Routledge, 1998), 83.
[219] The so-called F-scale (Fascism scale) designed in 1950 by Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford to identify fascist modes of thinking. See Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1950).
[220] The criticism Adorno voiced in *Versuch über Wagner* with regard to the personality of the composer, such as Wagner's 'blind intolerance' towards the Jews, his 'sadistic desire to humiliate the Jewish conductor of *Parsifal*, Hermann Levi' and 'his fantasy of the universal power of the Jews', coincides with the description of features of the alleged authoritarian personality, such as generalised hostility towards outgroups, finding pleasure in dragging others down and cherishing the conviction that there is an absolute and clearly identifiable evil in the world – in Wagner's case, the Jews.

according to Adorno, contain various caricatures of Jews), the philosopher certainly does argue, as we have seen, that Wagner's music stimulates identity thinking and encourages group narcissism. For this reason, he considers it music that has the potential to evoke or support anti-Semitic feelings as it is music that does not allow otherness to thrive and persistently eradicates differences due to its insatiable urge to unify and totalise.

3. Reframing the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the System of Leitmotifs

The pre-war years in Europe, during which Adorno witnessed the rise of Nazi Germany and the aesthetics of the Third Reich's propaganda machinery, clearly influenced Adorno's assessment of Wagner and mass media. While living in American exile during World War II, Hollywood's culture industry only confirmed and reinforced the ideas Adorno had developed in the 1930s,[221] and his distrust of Wagner remained in the years after the war. But in the context of today, Badiou argues, we can understand Wagner in an entirely different way. The Wagner we can see today stands for 'greatness uncoupled from totality'.[222] Wagner's art does not demonstrate a final gesture and is not based on a unifying musical language, on structures that discard differences under pressure of a formal totality. To the contrary, it certainly maintains a space for difference, de-totalisation and reduction of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, ensures the ideal of openness and contains elements of its own disintegration. Wagner is a reservoir from which de-totalising meanings can be drawn. And contrary to what Adorno claimed, it is precisely by means of the functionality of the leitmotif that discontinuity, openness and difference are created in the context of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which Adorno viewed as the equivalent of the totalitarian mass media society.

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[221] It should be noted, however, that Adorno's writings during the early 1930s were not unambiguously opposed to the nascent Nazi regime. In his book *Adorno and the Political* (2006), Espen Hammer refers to a review that appeared in *Die Musik* (a journal of musicology taken over by the Nazis) in 1934. In this review, Adorno

> praised Herbert Müntzel, a composer Adorno felt the need to support, for having written a cycle of songs, *The Banner of the Persecuted*, that 'was marked out as consciously National Socialist'. The cycle, he continues, whose texts were selected from poems by the Nazi leader Baldur von Schirach, evokes 'the image of a new Romanticism… perhaps of the type which Goebbels has defined as "Romantic Realism"' (Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. XIX, 332).
>
> Shocking as it no doubt is to come across this passage in Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften*, the impact this review had when quoted in an attack on him in *Diskus*, the students newspaper at the University of Frankfurt, in 1963, was considerable. Suddenly there seemed to be reason not only to ascribe opportunism to Adorno but to dismiss his position as a critic of fascist and anti-Semitic potential in West Germany. (Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2006, 51)

[222] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 83.

Pointing out that Wagner's meaning lies in 'the accomplishments that we can discern today',[223] Badiou refers in the first instance to the change that took place in Bayreuth after World War II, when Wieland Wagner, through his innovative *Regietheater*, broke radically with the recent Nazi past by stripping Wagner's work of visual Germanic elements. Wieland's abstract and minimalist production of *Parsifal* (1951) as well as his production of *Die Meistersinger* (1956) were 'cleansed' of all historical particularities, demonstrating that these works are not necessarily in the service of national mythology but can also disclose something 'transnational and timeless'.[224]

With respect to *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Badiou refers to Patrice Chéreau's centenary staging (1976). Chéreau took Wagner's *Ring* out of the pre-war Germanic atmosphere as well as the symbolic ambience that Wieland had created after the war. Instead, he moved the action to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from the beginning of the industrial revolution to New York in the years before the Wall Street crash of 1929. Herewith Chéreau's staging was congruent with Bernard Shaw's conception of the *Ring* (1898) as the director didn't show 'gods, giants and Valkyries'[225] but human beings in an industrialised world, revealing a play of opposing forces in a dynamic historical society instead of a static mythological one. Chéreau's production especially forms the key to a sound interpretation of Wagner's tetralogy, Badiou suggests, because it reveals the concealed revolutionary essence of the work.[226] It revives the first version of Brünnhilde's final song in *Götterdämmerung*, which had an openly revolutionary character. The intrinsic message of the *Ring* that Chéreau managed to uncover is that the gods are dead and that only humanity remains. It entails the notion that all striving for power ends badly, and therefore not power but freedom should be the only true aspiration of mankind. This notion, Badiou argues, is put forward most strongly in the music.[227]

Yet with respect to the music, and more particularly the leitmotifs, Badiou does not concretely refer to new renditions or new musical situations such as the contemporary media age. Nevertheless, at the outset of the first chapter of *Five Lessons on Wagner*, he explores Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's thesis that the contemporary idolatry of music is due to Wagner's invention of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, with which he anticipated the contemporary role of music

[223] Ibid., 129.
[224] Ibid., 5.
[225] Bernard Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Niblung's Ring* (Overland Park, KS: Digireads, 2012), 7.
[226] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 101–106.
[227] Ibid., 117.

as ideological operator.[228] Badiou then briefly discusses the popular role of music in today's multimedia society, which he links to the rise of techniques of mass production. Music is omnipresent in today's society, and because of the prominent role of music within communication networks, it has played a crucial role in crushing the classic boundaries between art and non-art. The word 'music' no longer designates only art music but encompasses all sorts of lowbrow music styles and genres. Today, Badiou concludes, music is an egalitarian term that understands music in its plurality and accessibility.[229]

Let us take this observation as a starting point for our inquiry into the question of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the leitmotifs in the media age.

Over the past decades, Adorno's claim that mass media would cause a homogenisation of society has often been refuted, including by Gianni Vattimo. In *The Transparent Society* (1992), Vattimo writes that instead of an Orwellian dystopia, the development of mass media has led to 'a general explosion and proliferation of *Weltanschauungen*, of world views'.[230] The philosopher observes that 'minorities of every kind take to the microphones' and that 'cultures and subcultures of all sorts have stepped into the limelight of public opinion'.[231] Thus, according to Vattimo, the mass media do not bring about uniformity but diversity.[232]

The question now is how this notion can determine our conception of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In Adorno's eyes, after all, the total work of art was synonymous with the homogeneous mass society. Now that this society shows itself to be heterogeneous, chaotic and complex, can we then perhaps consider the *Gesamtkunstwerk* anti-totalitarian, a context in which openness and difference are created? To gain insight into this question, let us first take a look at how Wagner appears in the contemporary context of mass media.

Wagner's themes emerge extensively in mediatised contexts, ranging from cinema, the video game and advertising industries, numerous musical subcultures and new media, whereby sounds and images of Wagner's versatile global presence can be evoked anywhere and anytime. In countless forms, attached to numerous musical and (sub)cultural identities and in a variety

[228] Ibid., 1–4.
[229] Ibid., 2–3.
[230] Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 5.
[231] Ibid.
[232] In defence of Adorno's claim, one may object to Vattimo's assertion that subcultures, not unlike totalitarian societies and organised religions, are inclined to impose uniformity of thought, appearance and lifestyle. In other words, subcultures encourage the individual to conform to a collective identity and to adopt an 'us vs. them' mentality. A society that appears to be pluriform and diverse due to a high number of different and narrowly defined groups might actually be a society that is largely inhabited by conformist individuals espousing group views rather than nonconformist individuals who think for themselves and live their lives on their own terms.

of different everyday contexts, the phenomenon Wagner emerges anywhere in the world. The mass media facilitate, channel, validate and showcase this enormous diversity.

While Adorno compared the function and effect of the leitmotif to that of advertisements, it seems today that the leitmotif has a multiple function that does not necessarily lead to the dulling of the mind but may stimulate one's associative faculties. In today's world of new media, the multiple function of the leitmotif, with its enormous associative strength, is emphasised. Wagner's themes have been picked up by many different artists working in a variety of musical and (sub)cultural fields. Emile Wennekes has pointed out that Wagner's themes have become part of a 'creative recycling process' and have become tropes for many different aesthetic and cultural identities.[233] The 'Ride of the Valkyries', for example, has been appropriated by the movie industry, advertisements, video games, rock and metal bands, hip-hop artists and Latin and jazz musicians. Furthermore, dance and dubstep remixes have been made of the 'Ride' and the theme can be heard as a ringtone. Thus, Wagner's theme has been disseminated throughout popular culture and consequently has become part of a complex global network of musical associations. And as 'the relational web grows denser and denser and all references lose their clean-cut focus', Wennekes explains, Wagner's motifs increasingly become 'receptively ambiguous'.[234]

As mentioned earlier, Gianni Vattimo argues that the development of mass media and the proliferation of means of mass communication have not resulted in a more transparent society but one that is increasingly complex and opaque. The present presence of Wagner's leitmotifs in the context of global mass media can then constitute 'news as a way of abstaining from attributing eternal qualities to the (Wagnerian) monument'.[235] However, according to Vattimo, this pluralism of worldviews inevitably leads to value relativism as it incites a type of thinking in which essence and authenticity no longer exist, in which no vision can claim absolute truth.[236]

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[233] Emile Wennekes, '(Re)mediating Wagner: Productive Reception in Visual and Virtual Media', keynote lecture 'Media and Film'. Wagner World Wide Conference, University of Bayreuth, 11 January 2012, https://www.youtube. com/watch?v=O7dYu7SblJo.

[234] Ibid.

[235] Gianni Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, trans. Luca D'Isanto (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008), 162.

[236] Yet there has been a tremendous rise in fundamentalism in the contemporary world, most notably the rise of nationalism and radical Islamism. Needless to say, neither nationalists nor Islamic extremists believe that their values are relative. On the contrary, they consider them to be absolute and hence superior to the values of other groups. So, clearly, the confrontation with a pluralism of worldviews does not necessarily incite value relativism. Reality shows that it can also impel people to cling vehemently to absolutist views of life. Amongst today's intellectual and political elites, however, value relativism is the norm indeed – a form of relativism that involves a 'down with us' mentality, i.e. oikophobia. The connection between this particular frame of mind and Wagner will be examined in Chapter 3.

According to this view, one can talk about justification but not about truth. What we call truths are merely beliefs justified on the basis of their utility. No opinion or interpretation, therefore, is truer than another. According to this pragmatic view, the belief that Wagner's art contains proto-Nazi tendencies would be no less true than the belief that contradicts this. Depending on the usability, both views can be justified.

Badiou, however, strongly opposes this 'anything goes' attitude. As a Platonist, he argues that philosophy should commit itself to eternal truths instead of opinions. Whereas an opinion is mostly a repetition of the laws of a world, a repetition of the dominant views, 'a truth can never be reduced to an opinion because it has a transworldly value'.[237] Badiou's reading of Wagner, moreover, should be understood in the light of Badiou's universalism. Now, following Badiou, how would it be possible to create a space in our fragmented media age in which we can conceive the universality of Wagner's art? How can we connect Wagner's presence in the media age to Wagner's works and the truth of those works? After all, Wagner did not just write motifs; he wrote comprehensive music dramas. And his leitmotifs are an integral part of those dramas, in which certain dramatic, philosophical and religious ideas seem essential. Once these motifs are placed into a new context, they might tell more about the artist applying Wagner's motifs than about Wagner's actual works. As Emile Wennekes has made clear, the aforementioned example of the 'Ride of the Valkyries' shows that every remediation of the theme tells its own story, with no remaining relation with the plot of *Die Walküre*.

Badiou, nevertheless, offers a theoretical framework in which we can examine our question. This framework is formed by his ideas on cinema that he links to opera in general and *Parsifal* in particular. Badiou describes Wagner's swansong as a hodgepodge of Christian and sexual symbols, even containing 'whiffs of racialism'.[238] The work consists of all sorts of contradictory motifs and symbols that do not correlate with each other, such as Christian symbols clashing with sexual symbols and so on. The individual symbols, motifs and images stem from a wide range of particular convictions and ideologies, but as they intertwine with one another within the confines of the work, they fail to produce a clear-cut message; instead, they form a turbid mishmash of ideological remnants altogether – a totality that doesn't form a real totality. Herewith opera was a precursor of cinema, both of them described by Badiou as 'impure art forms'.[239]

[237] Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Louise Burchill (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 22.
[238] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 137.
[239] Ibid., 135.

As a 'composite art form, with extremely complex, overlapping materials',[240] cinema cannot be reduced to an elementary conceptual definition such as, for instance, 'the art of the moving images' because it also contains sets, costumes, actors, dance, texts, speech, sounds, noise, narrative structures and historical, theatrical, poetic and novelistic elements. As such, cinema is connected to all other art forms, forming a totality thereof. In contrast to other forms of art, Badiou claims, it is impossible to give a clear definition of cinema. It could at best be described as a composition, as a complex structure with numerous dimensions.

Due to this intrinsic impurity, there is something present in cinema that is infinite.[241] And 'the history of cinema forms the history of the progressive constitution of this infinity'[242] – the transition from silent film to sound film, from black and white to colour, from analogue technologies to digital technologies and so on. Therewithal the number of perceptual dimensions has also increased in the course of time, from watching movies on a big screen in the cinema to watching movies on a TV screen in the living room, from the TV screen to the screen of a laptop, tablet or smartphone anywhere in public space. And it's not one or the other; we watch movies in the cinema *and* in the train, and black-and-white films *and* movies packed with digital animations.

Wagner, like no other composer, forms a constitutive part of the history of cinema. Not only did his leitmotif technique soon attract the attention of many early filmmakers,[243] Wagner's music dramas were amongst the first operas to be translated into movies.[244] With the rise of the sound film Wagner's presence in cinema only increased, ranging from Alfred Hitchcock's thriller *Murder!* (1930)[245] to Karl Ritter's Nazi propaganda film *Stukas* (1941),[246] from Charlie Chaplin's satire *The Great Dictator* (1940)[247] to Chuck Jones' cartoon 'What's Opera, Doc?' (1957), from Francis Ford Coppola's war movie *Apocalypse Now* (1979) to Brad Silberling's

[240] Ibid.

[241] Alain Badiou, *Cinema*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 225–232.

[242] Alain Badiou, 'Cinema and Philosophy', lecture at UNSW Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of New South Wales, Australia, 27 November 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Arwso3fy50M.

[243] According to Erno Rapée, editor of the *Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures* (1925), 'Leit motif …is the one which can best be applied in scoring pictures'. In Jeongwon Joe, Sander L. Gilman, *Wagner and Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 4.

[244] Notable examples include Edwin S. Porter's *Parsifal* (1904), Franz Porten's *Lohengrin* (1907), Albert Cappelani's *Tristan et Yseult* (1909), Mario Caserini's *Parsifal* (1912) and *Sigfrido* (1912), Max Reinhardt's *Parzifal, a Kinoweihfestspiel* (1921). See Jeongwon Joe, Sander L. Gilman, *Wagner and Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 4.

[245] Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*.

[246] Fragment from *Götterdämmerung*.

[247] Fragment from *Lohengrin*.

fantasy film *Casper* (1995),[248] from Jonathan Glazer's drama *Birth* (2004)[249] to Lars von Triers' art film *Melancholia* (2011)[250] and so on. These films are displayed on different media and at different locations and are viewed in a variety of contexts – and moreover, we watch *Stukas* as well as 'What's Opera, Doc?'

Wagner's appearance in cinema is synonymous with Wagner's appearance in the global and comprehensive context of mass media and new media, where all media are connected with each other, forming one big heterogeneous web in which Wagner's themes appear in numerous capacities, varying from audio copies of the earliest Wagner recordings captured on the Mapleson cylinders[251] and later put on YouTube to the accidental sound of a ringtone of the 'Ride of The Valkyries' somewhere on the street. Wagner thus appears in an era where people are constantly exposed to an eclectic stream of images and sounds.

According to Badiou, this situation has led to a unique relationship between cinema (thus understood as something that manifests itself everywhere in society) and philosophy.[252] At first glance, this seems like a relationship that should be described as an opposition. Philosophy, after all, has a long tradition of thinkers deeply suspicious of images. With his allegory of the cave, Plato already criticised cinema, Badiou says.[253] Plato's message was to get out of the cave in order to escape from the power and influence of images, which allegedly create a false reality, an illusion. But in the context of today, it is simply impossible to escape from the totalised cave of images. Contemporary society is like one big cinema, and more than ever, we seem to find ourselves within Plato's cave.[254]

Yet in the context of today, one cannot really speak of a strict opposition between images and philosophy, Badiou argues. After all, cinema does not claim to present the true reality. Rather, it establishes a new relationship between images and the real. We are not like the prisoners in the cave, thinking that the images constitute the one and only form of truth. On the contrary, the images produced by cinema can say 'something new regarding the real in absence

[248] 'Ride of the Valkyries'.
[249] Fragment from the first act of *Die Walküre*.
[250] Fragment from *Tristan und Isolde*.
[251] The first audio recordings made between 1900 and 1904 by means of the Mapleson cylinders were only very short live fragments of popular themes that were recorded during performances, for example, the *Ring* cycle at the Metropolitan Opera. See: http://digilib.nypl.org/dynaweb/millennium/mapleson.
[252] Alain Badiou, *Cinema*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 202–222.
[253] In Badiou's 'hyper-translation' of Plato's *Republic*, the latter's cave is transformed into a contemporary movie theatre. See Alain Badiou, *Plato's Republic: A Dialogue in 16 Chapters*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).
[254] Alain Badiou, *Cinema*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 196–200.

of the real'.[255] In this way, cinema can be 'a new source of knowledge' as it presents a form of thinking that creates 'a new opportunity for philosophical thought'.[256]

This kind of thinking intrinsic to cinema is defined by Badiou as a 'fight' between pointless images and meaningful ones.[257] Because cinema is an impure art form, it always contains elements that are uninteresting, contingent, cliché or outright vulgar. Because cinema is a totalising art form and hence automatically incorporates elements from everyday life, even films that contain valuable ideas and images also contain banal and nugatory elements. But cinema offers the possibility to combat those elements, namely by showing the fight between good and bad images. Cinema can be seen as a battle between the construction of the visibility of something that is valuable and important to us and something that is incompatible therewith, something that we do not need, something that is undesirable or even harmful. The battle taking place on the screen, the contradictions that are showcased on-screen, are the contradictions that exist in the real world.

Herewith the relationship between cinema and philosophy becomes clear. The fight against Plato's cave takes place in the cave itself. Cinema is not something that merely produces images; it also combats false images and can thereby confirm the true ones. To be sure, the so-called true image is not a representation of something but an image that is being generated by the fight between images, the becoming of a new image that is breaking through the status quo. It is an image that is produced by the dialectic between the images, a construction in which different images enter into a dialectical relationship with one another. Due to the tension between the images, new meanings are created, and a new understanding can be developed.

There can also be tension between images and music. When a Wagner fragment is played in a movie, then it is not merely a quotation of the music but also the formation of a possibility to experience the music in a different way and to achieve a new critical evaluation of that music. The music, after all, is being confronted with something different than itself, with images (or texts or sounds, etc.) that seem to be consistent or at variance with itself. And so, the image that emerges in the context of cinema is, as it were, split in two, a torn image. Not a serene picture of a harmonious world is being displayed but the presence of elements that do not appear to be compatible with each other.[258] Therewith cinema produces, as an art of contradictions, an

[255] Alain Badiou, 'Cinema and Philosophy', lecture at UNSW Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of New South Wales, Australia, 27 November 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Arwso3fy50M.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Alain Badiou, *Cinema*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 230–231.
[258] Ibid., 258–260.

internal critique of the perfidious and naught images that constitute a false representation of something (for instance Wagner) with which it produces a space for a clearer perspective on reality, a perspective on 'the real world'.

As we recall, Adorno saw the media age, and consequently the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as a context where the constant flux of unambiguous (sound) images impair one's ability to think critically, a context where one becomes blind to the suffering and injustices in the world. In Adorno's eyes, the phenomenon of cinema was the pinnacle of the culture industry's full-scale propaganda machinery, the ultimate tool to induce mass conformity. As mentioned earlier, Adorno's negative assessment of mass media had been influenced by the Third Reich's use of radio and cinema to indoctrinate the masses, a practice whereby occasional references were made to Wagner in order to sustain the Nazi-message. In Leni Riefenstahl's infamous *Triumph des Willens* (1935), for instance, the blood-and-soil imagery put on display is accompanied by music from *Die Meistersinger* (an extract from the prelude to Act 3). And not only Wagner's music but also his alleged political message was conveyed through the mass media. In the notorious anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda film *Der Ewige Jude* (1940), demonising images of Jews living in vermin-infested Polish ghettos are commented on as follows:

> Richard Wagner once said: The Jew is the demon behind the corruption of mankind. And these pictures prove it (Richard Wagner hat einmal gesagt: Der Jude ist der plastische Dämon des Verfalls der Menschheit. Und diese Bilder bestätigen die Richtigkeit seines Ausspruchs).[259]

While living in America during the Second World War, Adorno came to believe that there were many similarities between the Nazi propaganda machine and Hollywood's practices of film production. This incited him to tie his critique of Nazism to America's mass media culture industry, whereby Hollywood, moreover, helped him to sustain his idea that Wagner had anticipated both phenomena. One of the movies that would vindicate this idea was Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940). In this film, we hear music from *Lohengrin*, namely in the famous globe scene, in which Wagner's music is connected with dreams of world domination; in the last scene of the movie, we hear the *Lohengrin* overture again, but this time it is combined with the image of Hannah, who is filled with joy after hearing Chaplin's famous speech against Nazism. In this speech, Chaplin optimistically exclaims that 'you the people have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure!',[260] and furthermore he exuberantly calls on humanity to 'use that power' 'to do away with national

[259] *Der Ewige Jude*, dir. Fritz Hippler (Deutsche Film Gesellschaft, 1940), 00:02:36–00:02:48.
[260] *The Great Dictator*, dir. Charlie Chaplin (Charles Chaplin Productions, 1940),1:56:23–1:56:28.

barriers, to do away with greed, hate and intolerance, to fight for a new and decent world: a world where science and progress will lead to all man's happiness!'[261] Adorno, however, claimed to see right through this image of a happy ending; in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, in the chapter on the culture industry ('Kulturindustrie – Aufklärung als Massenbetrug'), we read:

> The ears of corn blowing in the wind at the end of Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* give the lie to the anti-Fascist plea for freedom. They are like the blond hair of the German girl whose camp life is photographed by the Nazi film company in the summer breeze.[262]

Adorno's post-war reflections on culture and art illuminate his criticism of Chaplin's film. As Badiou points out in *Five Lessons on Wagner*, 'the key reference for Adorno's post-war philosophical undertaking is a break in history, namely Auschwitz'.[263] In this regard, Badiou refers to Adorno's assertion in *Negative Dialektik* (1966) that 'a new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself'.[264] That Auschwitz could happen proves that human existence is ontologically incomplete. It proves that we are fallible beings and that our existential state is one of perennial suffering. Therefore, the task we must set for ourselves after Auschwitz, Adorno claims, is to give voice to human suffering by means of a type of thinking that is concerned with the preservation of differences and contradictions and by means of art that expresses that happiness cannot yet be achieved.[265] Although art should express the longing for a redeemed world in which suffering no longer exists, it should not create the illusion that utopia is within reach. In order for post-Auschwitz art to maintain a utopian reach, it should first of all renounce clear-cut utopian visions. Instead of immersing the audience in a make-believe world, works of art should invite one to see the world as it really is, namely full of pain, suffering and ugliness – hence Adorno's penchant for the work of Samuel Beckett.

Precisely the opposite happens in Chaplin's film, Adorno claims. Through his anti-fascist plea for freedom with which the movie ends, Chaplin makes his viewers believe that an ideal and peaceful world is already within reach, while in reality the world is confronted with the brutal realities of World War II and the impending physical extermination of the European

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[261] Ibid. 1:56:31–1:57:10.

[262] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York, NY: Herder & Herder, 1972), 149.

[263] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 30.

[264] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 2000), 365.

[265] For a detailed exploration of the question of thought, action, and morality after Auschwitz, see also Rolf Zimmermann, *Philosophie nach Auschwitz: Eine Neubestimmung von Moral in Politik und Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2005).

Jews. Considering these historical facts, Chaplin should not have pronounced the possibility of a utopian world. He should have denounced it instead. He should have refuted the promise of happiness; a promise that was enhanced by use of the fairy tale-like music from *Lohengrin*, which would persuade viewers into believing the lie presented on screen.

In Adorno's eyes, Chaplin's *Great Dictator* exemplifies how cinema took the mendacious, phantasmagorical practice of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* to an even more advanced level, not only because of the fact that, through new technologies, film producers were able to give shape to a perfect illusion but also because cinema was reaching the masses and thus pre-eminently capable of sustaining deeply rooted, collective stereotypical perceptions of life. Like myths, legends and fairy tales, films present a simplified image of reality with stereotypical opposites and clear-cut manifestations of good and evil. Instead of offering a perspective on a new reality, a new destination for mankind, cinema simply affirms the status quo, making belief that reality as we know it, with its innate and immutable stereotypes, can and will never change.

Adorno's description of the characters displayed on the movie screen is thus very similar to his description of the characters who appear in Wagner's mythological *Gesamtkunstwerk*; characters who, according to Adorno, hardly have an identity and do not change or develop themselves – characters, thus, that reflect the empty, standardised subjects shaped by the culture industry. As the culture industry's most powerful instrument to shape man in its image and likeness, 'film has succeeded in transforming subjects so indistinguishably into social functions that those wholly encompassed enjoy their own dehumanisation as something human, as the joy of warmth'.[266] To turn the masses into an obedient herd of slaves while making them feel free and satisfied, now that was the greatest trick ever pulled by the so-called art of cinema, Adorno claims, professing that 'every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider and worse'.[267]

Whereas Adorno argues that cinema deprives us of our ability to think critically and hence robs us of our humanity, Badiou, as we have seen, is highly appreciative of cinema, precisely because it is what he calls 'a mass art'.[268] Chaplin's films, Badiou points out, 'were seen all over the world, even by the Eskimos'.[269] According to the philosopher, 'these films were speaking about generic humanity, that is to say about humanity beyond its differences'.[270] Even

[266] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 206.
[267] Ibid., 25.
[268] Alain Badiou, *Cinema*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 207.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Ibid.

though Chaplin's character 'is perfectly situated in a particular context, it is representative of generic humanity for an African, a Japanese or an Eskimo',[271] Badiou maintains. All these individual spectators, who themselves are situated in a particular context, get acquainted with a variety of particular contexts through cinema as it captures and conveys different languages, social situations and cultural circumstances.[272] Seated in, for instance, a movie theatre in Paris, 'we have the chance to see a Kazakh, Armenian, Kurdish, Syrian, or Senegalese film, or a film from Bangladesh or Indonesia, through which we learn that we're contemporaries of Kazakhstanis or Bangladeshis'.[273] For this reason, Badiou describes cinema as 'a new thinking of the Other, a new way of making the Other exist'.[274] Badiou points out that 'there are entire situations today that we only know about through cinema'.[275] According to the philosopher, we would hardly know anything about countries like Iran or Japan if it weren't for film directors like Abbas Kiarostami and Yasujirō Ozu, who presented the Iranian and Japanese Other 'in his private life and in terms of his relationship with the world'.[276] 'Cinema', Badiou concludes, 'thus expands the possibility of thinking the Other enormously.'[277]

So instead of merely numbing the viewers' minds by affirming well-known stereotypes, cinema can also acquaint us with the unknown and therewith excite our imagination and expand our minds. This effect is significantly increased by the fact that we, as viewers, get confronted with contrasting realities that are present in the world. After all, we watch a variety of conflicting social and cultural spheres that incite us to, in Badiou's words, 'invent new syntheses'.[278] Just as in one single film new syntheses are invented by means of a dialectical interplay of images, words and music, so too can new syntheses be created through the interplay of different, apparently incompatible films, or fragments thereof, to which we are exposed in our age of global media. And just as one single film, through the contradictions it presents, can produce an internal critique of what is portrayed in the film, so too does our media society – contrary to what Adorno believed – offer a space for criticism towards certain depictions of things in the media throughout society. With the use of Badiou's theory of cinema, the contemporary media society – and therewith the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – can be defined as a multimedia version of Plato's cave, where sounds and images continue to oppose one another

[271] Ibid.
[272] Ibid., 2.
[273] Ibid.
[274] Ibid., 221.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid., 221–222.
[277] Ibid., 222.
[278] Ibid., 216.

and encourage one to think critically. In this way, as we have previously expounded, a space is being created in which a truthful vision of reality can be created, on the basis of which a new synthesis or a new truth can be constructed in the world.

Let us illustrate this notion by means of an example pertaining to Wagner. In the media, the artist's name is often mentioned in the same breath as Hitler and the Third Reich. The notorious image of Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting the overture to *Die Meistersinger* on a stage decorated with a huge swastika flag[279] seems to validate this sinister association. But when we immediately thereafter look at Glenn Gould performing his piano transcription of the same overture,[280] then a dialectical tension is noticeable. The image of Wagner in the service of the totalitarian Nazi regime is in conflict with the image of Wagner who, in a non-political and free artistic context, instigates a new artistic creation. A contradiction that exists in the world becomes visible; in this case, a conflict between the prevailing opinion (governed by the laws of the world) and the creative thinking that shatters any particular qualification. We could also describe it as a conflict between the power of the public opinion and the love of Wagner's music, or simply as a conflict between the ruling power and the eternal truths.

However, whether or not a conflict concerning Wagner shall arise depends on knowledge and context. Because one knows that Wagner played a role in the Third Reich, such images may cause a tension. Particularly in Germany and Israel, where the ideological content of Wagner is still heavily debated, these images will probably cause a greater fuss than elsewhere in the world, where Nazism and the Holocaust determine to a lesser extent or even barely the historical consciousness. It is precisely due to Wagner's role in the Third Reich and the alleged influence of the composer on Nazism that Israel maintains an informal ban on public performances of Wagner's work. However, there is no media ban, and Wagner's music is disseminated throughout Israeli society via the radio, the internet and portable media players. Thus, interestingly, Wagner's art appears in an environment where the opinion reigns that Wagner's art inspired Hitler and where power is exercised on the basis of this opinion through the unofficial but effective law that structurally prohibits public performances of Wagner's works.

This prominently visible distance between the power of the convention and that which is also truly alive and present in Israeli society but suppressed by law has been investigated by the Israeli choreographer Saar Magal in the Israeli-German dance co-production *Hacking Wagner*

[279] The *Deutsche Wochenschau*-film (broadcasted on 4 April 1942) of Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting a Berlin Philharmonic performance of the overture to *Die Meistersinger* in the Berlin AEG factory on 26 February 1942.
[280] *32 Short Films about Glenn Gould: The Sound of Genius*, DVD ed. Francois Girard (Sony Classical, 2012).

(2012).[281] The performance was meant as an 'attempt to unpack Israel's ambivalence, and Germany's obsession, with the composer'.[282] For the choreographer 'it has become increasingly clear that the "Wagner ban" is not quite about Holocaust survivors, but a kind of social norm which the public enforces without giving it a second thought'.[283] The goal of *Hacking Wagner* was therefore to question the established positions and attitudes towards Wagner. In Magal's words, 'in this piece, we take it on ourselves to hack icons, symbols, phenomena, ideas, social axioms, sacred cows, and all those "obvious" things which have become mental habits'.[284] According to Magal

> it has become 'obvious' that Wagner must not be played, but the question is not asked, 'Why this is the case?' or whether it is time to revisit the question, let alone whether there should have been such a ban to begin with. The norm became a habit, and habits slip by us unnoticed.[285]

In the performance, the dominant opinion was put to the test through a clash of images. There was an exhibition of filmed interviews with proponents and opponents of the ban on various screens, often simultaneously displayed. There was also a clash of musical motifs. Fragments from different operas were played and mixed together. In the words of Moritz Gagern, the composer involved in the project, 'We do a Wagner remix, like a DJ. We cut him into little pieces and build something new.'[286] Thereby the music clashed, amongst other things, with a dance modelled on a 1933 speech by Hitler, a fashion show of Wagner heroes and heroines in which the heroic Teutonic symbols were ridiculed and a recitation of Wagner's infamous essay 'Das Judenthum in der Musik' that was read out while concurrently music from *Tannhäuser* was played. Magal's multimedia production was basically like Plato's cave, a presentation of our contemporary fragmented media society on a microscale, where opinions, images, sounds and arts intermingled with each other and formed an impure and indefinable totality.

Hacking Wagner showed the battle of images, the battle of views and how the State of Israel is divided on this point. But how can this battle being put on display provoke a battle against Plato's cave, meaning a battle against the power of the opinions in order to arrive at the truth,

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[281] Premiered on 27 July 2012 in Haus der Kunst, Munich.

[282] Shoshana Liessmann, 'Hacking Richard Wagner: A New Israeli-German Dance Co-Production Attempts to Delve into the Sacred and Profane Surrounding the Emblematic Anti-Semitic Composer', *The Times of Israel*, 30 July 2012, http://www.timesofisrael.com/hacking- richard-wagner/.

[283] Ibid.

[284] Ibid.

[285] Ibid.

[286] A.J. Goldmann, 'For the Right to Face Anti-Semitism', *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 July 2012, http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10000872396390443570904577547473008159492.

in this case the truth of Wagner's art? The purpose of the production was to generate a critical discussion amongst the audience, not to present a judgement or argument against the ban. Hence, the question of whether a ban based on the argument that Wagner paved the way for Nazism can be justified remained unanswered. However, perhaps the answer came to the fore in the dynamics of the production itself, in which the fragmented and multiple presence of Wagner in contemporary mass media was presented – a presence that is so complex that it cannot be reduced to a simple definition. The versatility with which Wagner appears produces a continuous tension between images, by which Wagner is subject to a continuous critique that does not dissolve in a synthesis but endures as a dialectical tension between images. Due to the continuous dialectic at work in the context of mass media, Wagner constantly changes shape. One moment he is part of a certain particular musical or (sub)cultural identity; the other moment he is part of another. Therewith Wagner's appearance could be described as what Badiou calls a 'tolerant indifference to differences',[287] which is an attitude or outlook that is needed to think the universal as opposed to the particular. Because Wagner constantly adjusts to different particular (musical) customs that exist in the world and continuously takes part in new differences and particularities, the very process of dismantling particularities is displayed. By presenting this process, Magal's production demonstrated that the identification of Wagner's art as a proto-Nazi particularity is perfidious. In the multimedia context of *Hacking Wagner*, the image of the composer as a precursor of the Third Reich comes across as shallow and simplistic. Moreover, this particularistic image shows that the ban on Wagner is based on the power of a particularistic view and not based on truth. It shows a separation between the status quo and the thinking that contests the prevailing situation.

A central point that has emerged in our examination so far is that music nowadays almost always appears in combination with images, a tendency mirrored by contemporary opera productions that incorporate video projections as a design element. Images influence the way we experience music and vice versa. We associate certain images with certain music and the other way around. Earlier in this chapter, we referred to the fact that the 'Ride of the Valkyries' has spread across the whole range of popular culture. From 1915, when the theme was included in the American film *The Birth of a Nation* (dir. D. W. Griffith), the 'Ride' made a one-hundred-year journey through a world of ever-accumulating systems of communication, whereby the theme attached itself to countless media images. Detached and disconnected from *Die Walküre*

[287] Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 99.

and the larger context of Wagner's tetralogy, the 'Ride' is constantly wrapped up in different sonic guises and recombined with new images. For example, in the hands of the Randy Waldman Trio, the 'Ride of the Valkyries' turns into a jazz theme in 7/8 time, with improvised piano solos and entirely new timbres added to it due to a jazz instrumentation including, amongst other instruments, an upright bass, a flute, chimes, vibraphones, marimbas, a xylophone, cymbals and a complete drum set.[288] By contrast, in an improvised piano arrangement by Richard Grayson, Wagner's 'Ride' is reminiscent of an Argentinian tango piece, coming across as sensual, seductive, sentimental and melancholic.[289] Chris Goulstone, on the other hand, makes the 'Ride' sound wild and audacious as he plays the theme in a neoclassical shred guitar style, thereby exerting virtuoso techniques like sweep picking, thrills and fast legato playing, accompanied by intense power chords in heavy distortion and pounding drums.[290] The 'Ride', however, instantly loses its heavy metal pomp and bombast when we switch to the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain gently strumming Wagner's theme on nylon strings, making it sound mellow and cheerful, folkloric and intimate.[291] Yet in the movie *Apocalypse Now*, the theme (played in its original orchestral version) blends in perfectly with horrific war scenes, whereas in 'What's Opera, Doc?', the very same theme, albeit distorted, is comical and frivolous, as it is once more in Gore Verbinski's computer-animated film *Rango* (2011), where the orchestral version is complemented with banjos by which a parodistic effect is achieved.

As these examples show, one and the same theme can transform into an infinite number of different characters and accordingly evoke countless associations. They can bring the listener in many different contexts far beyond the confines of the original music drama from which the motif originates and invite him to draw all sorts of creative connections between things that are or seem unrelated, as a result of which new insights can be gained. But they are equally able to evoke associations that are disruptive, alarming and conflictual. In a media age where one finds himself unceasingly exposed to audio-visual shocks, the sounding of the 'Ride of the Valkyries' can, at any given time, activate the vast associative network wherein the motif functions, therewith setting out a mental path towards previous experiences.

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[288] See Randy Waldman Trio, *Wigged Out* (CD, Whirlybird Records, 1998).

[289] See video excerpts from Richard Grayson's Improvisation Concerts on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/user/improvelectronic.

[290] Goulstone's *Ride* appeared as a demo track on a CD that came with an issue of the British *Total Guitar* magazine (1996).

[291] See The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain, *Prom Night: Live at the Royal Albert Hall – BBC Proms 2009* (DVD, UOGB, 2009).

In the essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (1935/36), Walter Benjamin has already made his readers aware of the consequences of the continuous shock effects produced by the nascent media age. The physical shock effect, Benjamin points out in the text, is particularly characteristic of cinema whereby images follow one another in rapid succession to which the spectator must readapt.[292] In his essay 'Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire' (1939), Benjamin continues his analysis of the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation on people's lives. Although citizens find themselves increasingly exposed to sense impressions, Benjamin tells us, this does not enhance the quality of their experiences. On the contrary, the quality of their experiences actually diminishes since modern life's abundant and incessant shock sensations undermine one's ability to create a coherent narrative.[293] According to Benjamin, this decline started in the industrial society in the nineteenth century – the society in which Wagner's works came into being and, as we recall, the society in which Chéreau's *Ring* was set.

In 'Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire', the philosopher draws on Marcel Proust, who in *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27), interpreted the changing nature of human experience in modern life on the basis of the distinction between *mémoire involontaire* and *mémoire volontaire*. The last type of memory involves conscious memories, which, like a song on an iPod, can be evoked at any time. Because these conscious memories are called upon so often, they get jaded over time and lose their vitality and liveliness. By contrast, *mémoire involontaire* entails images that are both vivid and startling; it effectuates a sudden recurrence of a past experience that has been forgotten. When Proust's narrator drinks a cup of lime blossom tea together with a madeleine biscuit, this taste sensation evokes an unexpected flow of images from his childhood in Combray. In *A la recherche du temps perdu*, however, a wide array of sensations bring into play the *mémoire involontaire*, such as smells, sounds (a spoon touching a plate or a hammer striking a wheel) and music. During a soirée, Proust's character M. Swann

[292] Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 49.

[293] However, Benjamin viewed the 'shocks' one experiences in modern society positively, too. As Gianni Vattimo notes, in *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* 'one perceives a generally positive evaluation of technology' (Vattimo, 1992, 54). For Benjamin, 'the end of the cult and aural value of the work of art represents a clear opportunity of liberating ourselves from the art of superstition and alienation' (Vattimo, 1992, 54). Unlike what Adorno believed

> standardisation, uniformity, the manipulation of consensus and the errors of totalitarianism *are not* the only possible outcome of the advent of generalised communication, the mass media and reproduction. Alongside these possibilities – which are objects of political choice – there opens an alternative possible outcome. The advent of the media enhances the inconstancy and superficiality of experience. In doing so, it runs counter to the generalisation of domination. (Vattimo, 1992, 59)

rediscovers music heard a year before. Upon hearing it for the first time, Swann was affected by the immediate perception of the music. But one year later, the same musical piece suddenly triggers memories of painful events that had taken place in the intervening year.[294] As Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries' motif, which, for more than a century, has been journeying through a multitude of mediatised realms and continuously transforming in the process as it adapts to ever-new (sub)cultural and technological contexts and infrastructures and intermingles with ever-new material, so too does a recurring motif in Proust's novel become intertwined with new elements – elements, however, that stem from the past and arise unexpectedly, bringing 'lost time' back into the living present, where it takes on a new meaning.

Proust's reflections on memory profoundly influenced Benjamin's understanding of history, but the latter also drew on Freud, who, in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920), argued that human consciousness is first and foremost a defence mechanism against shocks. This led Benjamin to conclude that in modern life, fewer and fewer experiences can enter into memory.[295] Our conscious memories that make up the historical canon represent only a small part of history. History consists largely of unconscious memories that are not included in the historical canon. These unconscious memories, the lost time, can only be retrieved by chance – by means of a taste sensation, a sound or a melody. It makes clear that history can no longer be understood as a continuum, a totality whereby the past constitutes a fixed and stable image. After all, at any moment, lost time can be recovered, resulting in the past having a completely different meaning. Thus, Benjamin argues, since every present can change the past, history should be considered discontinuous, composed of moments that do not constitute a unified whole and whose breaks or sudden interruptions are more meaningful than any seeming homogeneity.[296]

As it moves cyclically through our media age and in this process connects itself to numerous images, a motif such as the 'Ride' is pre-eminently capable of bringing lost time back into the present when it suddenly sounds, whether in the private or public space. Precisely because the motif has been heard previously, it possesses the power to cause a shock and evoke involuntary memories – memories that, because they are not constantly evoked, have not become jaded and have thus kept the liveliness that makes them urgent and topical. Exactly because the motif is

[294] Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Proust as Musician*, trans. Derrick Puffett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 50.

[295] See Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingston, and Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[296] See Stéphane Mosès, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 65–126.

repeated, a dialectical tension can arise between the involuntary memory, i.e. lost time, and the present time (or between different mental images at large) by which a forgotten foreshadowing or a previously unseen possibility can reveal itself as something new and valuable in the context of the present, where the past suddenly gains new life. Considered as such, the leitmotif possesses an emancipatory power – a power it possesses due to the very fact that it moves cyclically.

While in Adorno's analysis, the analogy between mass culture and the *Gesamtkunstwerk* led to an assessment of the leitmotif as a 'fixed miniature picture', the same analogy now leads to an understanding of the leitmotif as, in the words of Roger Scruton, a 'musical magnet',[297] 'a fragment of music with a memory'.[298] In *The Ring of Truth*, Scruton further develops this idea.[299] Focusing himself exclusively on the functionality of the leitmotifs in the context of the *Ring* cycle, the philosopher describes how 'the leitmotif appears in the course of things', as 'a natural outgrowth of the musical development, in just the way that a thought is sparked off in the flow of ordinary experience and then submerged by it'.[300] In defence against Adorno's claim that Wagner was not able to develop his themes the way Beethoven did, Scruton argues that a purely symphonic treatment of the leitmotifs would rob them of their most important feature and function, namely their memory.[301] Whereas Beethoven's themes have 'a purely musical memory', 'the Wagnerian leitmotif remembers other things besides music, such as events, emotions, ideas, encounters and characters'.[302]

The Wagnerian leitmotif is not isolated and self-contained, Scruton tells us, but functions in constant connection with the elements that determine the situation in question and undergoes a development through and because of its musical, textual and scenic surroundings. The example of the Sword motif serves as a striking illustration of Scruton's conception of the Wagnerian leitmotif. Looking at the Sword motif, we see how it goes through the four works of the *Ring* cycle, linking three characters and three generations, from Wotan to Siegmund and from Siegmund to Siegfried. When the motif is played for the very first time by trumpets and

[297] Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 137.
[298] Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 99.
[299] A similar view is offered by Thomas S. Grey who also designates memory as the most important faculty of the leitmotif. A leitmotif, he argues, 'is not just the musical labelling of people and things, it is also a matter of musical memory, of recalling things dimly remembered and seeing what sense we can make of them in a new context' (Thomas S. Grey, 'Leitmotif, Temporality, and Musical Design in the *Ring*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, ed. Thomas S. Grey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 114).
[300] Roger Scruton, *The Ring of Truth* (London: Allen Lane, 2016.), 149.
[301] Ibid., 154–155.
[302] Ibid.

trombones at the end of *Das Rheingold*, the motif is part of Wotan's grand idea, the eureka moment in which Wotan suddenly understands how Alberich's curse on the ring can be broken. At this time, the Sword motif only has an anticipatory function, namely to foreshadow the creation of the free hero Siegfried. At this moment, there is no reference to the sword whatsoever. The very first time that the motif can be heard in direct connection with the sword is in the first act of *Die Walküre*, when Sieglinde fixes her gaze on the ash tree while the motif is played by the bass trumpet. Now, the past and the present are experienced simultaneously as the memory of Wotan's grand idea is connected to the image of the sword that we consider from the perspective of Sieglinde's nascent love for Siegmund, who finds himself immersed in melancholy thoughts, memorising the promise of his father that he would find a special sword in time of great need. Hereupon the Sword motif is played again, this time by a solo trumpet, and is then repeated several times whereby new colourations are added to the motif through various combinations of flute, oboe, clarinet and horn. As it undergoes swift changes in rhythm and tessitura and expresses a variety of moods along the way, the Sword motif is ultimately played in combination with the Wälsungs' motif, by which the Sword motif is connected to Sieglinde's wish that Hunding be defeated. With the subsequent sounding of the Sword motif in combination with the Valhalla motif, the motif is tied to the prehistory of the sword that was thrusted into the ash tree by Wotan during Hunding's wedding. Shortly hereafter, when the Sword motif has finished its journey through the first act of *Die Walküre*, a variation of this motif (now played in a lyrical 9/8 time) occurs again in the prelude to the second act, where it anticipates the theme of the 'Ride of the Valkyries', which makes its first appearance in the tetralogy.

The example of the Sword motif illustrates how the leitmotifs in Wagner's *Ring* transform all the time and, moreover, how they flow seamlessly into one another in spite of their individual differences. This is pre-eminently shown by the ominous Ring motif, which, in an almost imperceptible manner, transforms into the majestic Valhalla motif between the first and second scene of *Das Rheingold*. Although these two motifs express two very different moods, they are able to merge fluently due to their similar musical forms. One could add that the Ring motif and the Valhalla motif also coincide on a symbolic level since they both give expression to the idea that the pursuit of power contradicts the pursuit of love and freedom. Yet the meanings of the individual leitmotifs constantly change due to the (often simultaneous) presence of other motifs, which, in their turn, also lead a life of their own; like the Sword motif, they too make a journey through the *Ring* cycle, collecting memories along the way by which they remind the listener of previously heard music and previously experienced events. For example, when

Siegmund in the first act of *Die Walküre* pulls Nothung out of the ash tree, the Sword motif sounds in combination with the Rhinegold motif, which began its journey through the *Ring* at the very beginning of the cycle, in the first scene of the first act of *Das Rheingold* to be precise. However, in the meantime, the Rhinegold motif has appeared in varying forms and in several crucial dramatic contexts and situations, such as the moment in which Loge tells the gods that Alberich has stolen the gold from the Rhinemaidens or the moment when Wotan takes away the ring from Alberich, who then flies into a rage. As the Rhinegold motif (or any other motif for that matter) occurs in one of these moments, it adapts flawlessly to the mood of the particular situation in question through changes in colour, scale, rhythm, tempo and dynamics. The Rhinegold motif exemplifies the notion that although a leitmotif is static in the sense that it is always recognisable as a specific motif, it is at the same time dynamic because its character changes continually as per the plot. Due to their recognisability the leitmotifs are easy to identify, and yet it remains rather difficult to attach labels to them because, as Scruton puts it, 'the meaning of the leitmotifs arises from the events, emotions and actions to which they are attached, and each recurrence adds something more to the accumulated association of ideas'.[303]

To this we should add that the complexity of the associative network of the *Ring* further increases because some elements and/or characters in the tetralogy are linked to a variety of leitmotifs. Loge, for instance, does not only occasionally change his form by turning into a flame, but he is also related to at least six different leitmotifs. Yet the Tarnhelm, which enables Alberich, Fafner and Siegfried to undergo transmutation, most strongly embodies the transformative power at work in the *Ring*. In Scruton's words, it 'represents a primal force as ubiquitous as any element, the force of *Verwandlung*, or "Mutabilitie" – the mysterious ability to assume disguises, to change shape, to undergo metamorphosis from one mode of being to another'.[304] This notion of transmutation, Scruton points out, 'is captured by the Tarnhelm motif, which alternates unrelated triads – A flat minor and E minor – before settling on an open fifth that could belong to either key, the note C flat having sounded throughout, magically transformed from C flat to B and back again while remaining the same'.[305] Herewith 'Wagner exploits our imaginative capacity to hear one thing in another'.[306] Moreover, the Tarnhelm motif's ambiguity is enhanced by the fact that it interacts, fuses and collides with a variety of other motifs, chords and tonalities, each of which in turn is associated with a number of different

[303] Ibid., 149.
[304] Ibid., 239.
[305] Ibid., 159.
[306] Ibid.

elements, characters and groups of characters. The Valkyries, for instance, are identified with B minor, but we also associate the Curse motif with B minor as well as the Tarnhelm motif.[307] Thus, put succinctly, we can conclude that one and the same leitmotif, which constitutes and manifests itself in various psychological spheres and dramatic situations, can be associated with many different things, and therefore its meaning cannot be reduced to a proper name.[308]

In addition to Scruton's conception of the leitmotif as 'a musical idea with a memory', we should point out that the leitmotifs not only carry along memories, which implies continuity, but also effectuate discontinuous moments. After all, the leitmotifs are not like memory cards that store memories as recorded facts. On the contrary, the leitmotifs have an associative effect. Within the highly complex associative network formed by the mythological realm of the *Ring*, new connections between leitmotifs and surrounding musical, lyrical, dramatic and scenic elements are continuously being forged.

Now, what is true for a motif like the 'Ride of the Valkyries' in the context of global media is also true for the motifs in the context of the *Ring*: as the leitmotifs move cyclically through the tetralogy and collect an abundance of memories of which only a part enters consciousness, they are pre-eminently capable of bringing lost time back into the present when they make their reappearance in the cycle, whereby they can effectuate a dialectical tension between different memories or different mental images, as a result of which new insights can arise in the present that interrupt the continuity. Just as in the context of global media Wagner's decontextualised themes are constantly subjected to different social, cultural or artistic roles, so too in the context of the *Ring* cycle do Wagner's themes constantly change roles – roles which are far more varied in the context of the music drama because herein the motifs are not merely tied to a psychologically and dramatically sophisticated libretto but also interwoven with the complex structure and form of the score, in which the transformation of an individual motif often goes hand in hand with the combination of leitmotifs, as exemplified by the moment when Wotan speaks his last words ('He who fears the point of my spear shall never cross the fire!'), which are accompanied by an augmented version of the Siegfried motif while simultaneously Brünnhilde's Slumber motif is played repetitively in combination with the rhythm pattern of

[307] Barry Millington, 'Wagner's Revolutionary Musical Reforms', in *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion*, ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2000), 16.

[308] For an in-depth analysis regarding the question of whether it is better to give the leitmotifs a numbering rather than names, see Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, 'Naming Wagner's Themes', in *Richard Wagner for the New Millennium: Essays in Music and Culture*, ed. Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, Alex Lubet, and Gottfried Wagner (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 91–110. See also Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif: From Wagner to Hollywood Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Loge's fire motif.[309] The dense sound texture that is produced in this scene through alternating combinations of flutes, oboes and clarinets, occasionally supplemented by the English horn, with incessant slight changes in tone colour,[310] well illustrates what Adorno critically describes as 'the rounded, encompassing feel of the Wagnerian sound'.[311] However, the result of Wagner's orchestral method, supposedly aimed at achieving a totality, is not sameness but ambiguity. Incessantly changing their colours, the motifs in the *Ring* are, like Heraclitus' river, embedded in a stream of ceaseless change and always in opposition to something else.[312] Although they are linked to particular characters, things and ideas, they do not convey a clear-cut message. Instead, they incite a multitude of symbols, images and mythological elements to contradict each other, as a result of which an impure symbiosis is produced that defies any appropriation or categorisation. Hence, the leitmotifs permeating the whole cycle make every scene in the work ambiguous and consequently unsettle the *Ring* in its totality.

In his reading of Wagner, Alain Badiou stresses that a key aspect of Wagner's artistic procedure is to create moments where contradictions are not getting resolved but persistently maintained. Wagner's art is therefore fundamentally non-dialectic, he argues; it doesn't upheave old situations by replacing them with new ones, but it creates permanent states of uncertainty. In Wagner we constantly find ourselves somewhere in between an old and a new situation, in an indefinable place somewhere between a bygone world and a world to come. For example, in *Tannhäuser*, Heinrich von Ofterdingen oscillates between antiquity and the Middle Ages, between pagan and Christian conceptions of love.[313] In *Die Meistersinger*, Hans Sachs and Eva stand in between the Mastersinger guild, with strict rules for composing and performing songs, and Walther von Stolzing, who wants to break with the Mastersinger guild's rules and conventions.[314] And in *Parsifal*, the Grail community is poised between the old Christian world order and a world to come, a new world beyond Christianity.[315] In this way, a

[309] Leon Plantinga, *Romantic Music: A History of Musical Style in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York, NY: Norton, 1984), 279.
[310] Ibid., 280.
[311] Theodor Adorno, 'Wagner's Relevance Today', in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 325.
[312] In the essay 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' (*Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, 1876), Nietzsche draws a connection between Wagner's music and Heraclitus, arguing that 'Wagner's music as a whole is an image of the world as it was understood by the great Ephesian philosopher: a harmony produced by conflict, the unity of justice and enmity' (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 242).
[313] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 92.
[314] Ibid., 86.
[315] Ibid., 103.

unique experience of time is created in Wagner's art – a time that neither describes a prospective continuity towards a particular goal (e.g. a classless society, a world without private ownership and without nation states, as advocated by communism) nor a retrospective continuity that describes the history of an exclusive ethnic group or nation (as propagated by Nazism). Rather, the work shows us the world from the perspective of the oppressed, the unseen. After all, from their viewpoint, every notion of time that explains history in terms of continuity is unjustifiable. All the suffering that takes place before the goal is realised would either be dismissed as a necessary evil or deemed insignificant as it would fall outside history. From the standpoint of the oppressed, it is thus imperative to maintain a central focus on the experience of suffering, as is realised throughout Wagner's oeuvre. For instance, Badiou reminds us of all those restless, wandering characters who make their appearance: the Dutchman, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, Wotan – they are all wandering through the world as outsiders who are not able to settle down and find peace.[316] If we take a look at the *Ring*, we see that the experience of suffering is expressed most strongly by Siegmund, Sieglinde and Brünnhilde, who are under the yoke of law in a loveless world – a world, however, that is about to be destroyed…

4. The Ending of *Götterdämmerung* and the Thought of Eternal Recurrence

In the *Ring* cycle, the Wagnerian in-between time is most strongly pronounced in the final scene of *Götterdämmerung*. In the finale, more than twenty out of the ninety or so different motifs appear, whereby each motif carries along its own memories.[317] From this integration, there arises a tension between conflicting motifs, which resolve one by one in the process of Valhalla's destruction. As we hear the tumultuous sounding of the Magic Fire motif, we see how Brünnhilde throws herself into the flames, whereupon the Rhine overflows and the Rhine daughters grab the ring. Hagen, who, accompanied by the Curse of the Ring motif, makes a last miserable attempt to get the ring, is dragged into the river. The gold is finally back in the depths of the Rhine. As the Magic Fire has done its destructive work, the Fire motif resolves, followed

[316] Ibid., 93.

[317] The leitmotif count roughly varies from 73 (see William Mann, *Wagner's The Ring Introduction and Translation*. London: Friends of Covent Garden, 1964) to 178 motifs (see Allen B. Dunning, *A Thematic Guide to the Musical Themes of Richard Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen*, http://allenbdunningmd.com/RingThemes .htm, or http://www.wagnerheim.com/page/15). In search of middle ground, I stick to the notable counts by Hans von Wolzogen who identified 90 motifs (see Hans von Wolzogen, *Guide Through the Music of R. Wagner's The Ring of the Nibelung*, trans. Ernst von Wolzogen; 3rd edn. Boston: Arthur P. Schmidt, c. 1898) and Robert Donington who identified 91 motifs (see *Wagner's Ring and its Symbols*. London: Faber and Faber, 1974).

by the Valhalla motif. The destruction of the gods is accomplished, and the goal of Brünnhilde's self-sacrifice has been reached. The Redemption Through Love motif has the last say. This motif brings back the memory of the moment when Brünnhilde tells Sieglinde that she is pregnant with Siegmund's child. According to Robert Donington, it makes us realise that 'Sieglinde's motherhood brought her own death, so that she was herself a redeeming sacrifice, though less consciously and therefore less effectively than Brünnhilde'.[318] As this 'motif of redemption i.e. transformation' recurs in the finale, 'we can think of Brünnhilde now as pregnant not literally but symbolically with the future of the psyche' guided by the notion that 'life can be transformed without becoming disembodied'.[319] As this notion arises, we watch how Valhalla goes up in flames. The world is redeemed by love, the gods are dead and, as Badiou points out, only mankind remains, with the questions 'what now?' and 'how do we move on from here?'[320] We are trapped in an in-between place, in a place that cannot be clearly defined and offers no prospects for the future. The old world is destroyed, but what the world will look like in the future is entirely unknown. Everything is uncertain; we find ourselves in a no man's land between destruction and a new beginning.

For Adorno, however, the end of *Götterdämmerung* epitomises the in his view perfidious nature of Wagner's art. With his depiction of the twilight of the gods, the composer does not bring true redemption from myth but merely offers a simulacrum of redemption to his audience. By presenting the ending of the *Ring* cycle as the happy ending of some kitschy Hollywood movie, including soothing, sugar-coated harp sounds, Wagner accomplishes an affirmation of myth that precisely exists by the grace of brilliance, splendour and beauty. Only when the glittering veil of illusion is taken away and the impossibility of redemption is expressed can myth be broken. By maintaining the sham, Wagner allows myth to triumph. The false image of redemption from myth *is* the essence of myth, Adorno argues. Hence the philosopher's claim that in the *Ring*, 'the redemption from myth is possible only as a reprise'.[321] Because redemption in Wagner's work is presented as the *fulfilment* of redemption, Wagner condemns his audience to the cycle of eternal return from which there is no escape.

In Badiou's eyes, on the other hand, the ending of *Götterdämmerung* embodies that which makes Wagner meaningful today. Instead of affirming or creating a new myth, the ending of

[318] Robert Donington, *Wagner's Ring and its Symbols* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), 272.
[319] Ibid.
[320] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 105.
[321] Theodor Adorno, 'Wagner's Relevance Today', in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 330.

the *Ring* stands for 'the destruction of *all* mythologies'.[322] The gods are dead and gone, and from now on, man is responsible for his own fate. What remains is 'humanity's gazing out over the scene of destruction, over the end of mythology. Everything will have to be begun anew starting from this gaze.'[323] This is a 'gaze without a fixed content',[324] which indicates that the future is open. According to Badiou, the fact that the Redemption Through Love motif is the only remaining theme means that besides humanity, 'the possibility of love' also remains.[325] Now, love is a key concept in Badiou's philosophy as it is considered the power by which a subject and a world can be changed. Thus, in Badiou's view, the ending of the *Ring* stands for the possibility to change the world.

Whereas Adorno feels that Wagner's promise of redemption in the final scene of the tetralogy is mendacious, Badiou sees the indefinable and unpredictable place between the abolished world of the past and the unknown world of the future as a place from which the escape from myth, i.e. the status quo, is possible. In the Immolation Scene, the conditions for the emergence of an event are created. According to Badiou, in and through an event something universal arises, 'something that is beyond established differences'.[326] The world has many different identities – national, cultural, sexual, political, religious and ethnic identities. We often hold these identities to be self-evident, and we are prone to define ourselves in terms of a group membership. The particular identities in question, moreover, all have a describable structure. A national identity, for instance, can be described on the basis of the shared language, certain customs, norms and values, convictions about how to govern the state, geographical location and the physical boundaries of the nation. Thus, we are talking about particular qualities because they only apply to a particular population. Such particular qualities of a national, cultural or religious group, therefore, have no universal significance since the universal should concern all of humanity. The universal traverses all particular qualities, evades any predicative description and is therefore called 'singular'.[327] Therefore, the event in which the universal arises is not related to the particularities of the local situation and could never have been predicted on the basis thereof. According to Badiou, it is 'the essence of the event not to be

[322] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 105.
[323] Ibid.
[324] Ibid., 106.
[325] Ibid., 105.
[326] Adam S. Miller, 'Universal Truths and the Question of Religion. An Interview with Alain Badiou', *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2005): 38.
[327] Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 29.

preceded by any sign'.[328] By definition, an event happens suddenly and unexpectedly. It takes us by surprise and produces a situation in which everything is unsettled and undetermined; it shows the presence of something that is not predetermined by the laws of a particular world, the presence of something that is not represented within the framework of an existing society or politics whereby pre-determined social, political or religious identities are assumed, hence something that applies to everyone and directs itself to everyone as a new possibility to establish something new that is not yet part of this world, i.e. the status quo, and therefore has universal significance. The French Revolution of 1792, heralding the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, had universal significance, as did the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917,[329] which was grafted onto Marx's and Engels's international creeds 'abolish countries and nationality', 'the working men have no country' and 'workers of all countries, unite!'[330] The National Socialist revolution, on the other hand, merely entailed a liberating message for the German or so-called Aryan people. For this reason, Badiou claims, the so-called National Socialist revolution was not an event but a *simulacrum* of an event.[331] The Nazis, after all, did not have the intention of going beyond the existing differences but based their whole revolution precisely on the difference between the particularity of the German community and everything that did not fit into that exclusive category: Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, communists and so on. A veritable, i.e. universal, event, on the other hand, by definition has no foundational basis in any particular property. No one is excluded; it applies to everybody as an eternal call to transform, to change one's way of thinking and acting, to establish something new and to change the world.

An event always takes place in and from the position of the non-existent, that which Adorno would describe as the non-identical. From Badiou's point of view, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* could then be defined as an 'evental site': a context in and from which an event can take place. In his *Theory of the Subject* (2009), Badiou talks about the evental site as being a 'horlieu'.[332] The term designates a so-called outplace, a place outside the established order.[333] The outplace is

[328] Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 111.

[329] Regarding the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, one could argue that this is not a Badiouian Event in the strict sense of the term. This revolution, after all, did not happen suddenly and unexpectedly but was preceded by clear signs, such as the Russian Revolution of 1905 and World War I.

[330] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 29, 52.

[331] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 74 –80.

[332] Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (New York, NY: Continuum, 2009), 39.

[333] Ibid. xxxii. Bruno Bosteels describes the term horlieu in the translator's introduction as 'a neologism or portemanteau word based on a contradiction of *hors-lieu*, "out of place" or "out of site", as when someone is *hors-jeu*, "off-side", in soccer'.

undetermined and unidentified, immeasurable and incalculable. For this reason, the outplace brings about a situation that incites real thinking, which, according to Badiou, is by definition aimed at the non-existent, aimed at that which is alien to the existing representations, namely the universal, which applies to everyone and directs itself to everyone as a new possibility to establish something that is not yet part of the status quo. In the finale of *Götterdämmerung*, the presence is shown of something that is not represented within the framework of any existing society or politics. We find ourselves in a place that is not yet a particular world. The ending of the *Ring* cycle gives shape to the presentation of the unrepresentable real, the break with the familiar *as* break. That which appears is not determined by the laws of the old world because the world of heroes and gods has been destroyed. We are present in the void where nothing has a descriptive name and everything appears as generic multiplicity. At this point, the world is 'being handed over to generic humanity since no specific nation is mentioned. Neither Germany nor anything else of the sort is involved. Instead, it is really humanity, stripped of all transcendence and left to its own devices, that will have to take responsibility for its own fate.'[334] The finale of the *Ring*, therefore, is not really a finale, that is to say a closure, but the heralding of a new beginning as being an incentive to establish a new world that is not rooted in the world as we know it.

In this context, the role of the transformative leitmotif is highly significant. As it continually adapts to new roles and adjusts to the differences and particularities that exist in the domain of the *Ring*, the Wagnerian leitmotif not only displays the process of the becoming of a new subject but also the very process of the dismantling of the particularities to which the motif briefly ties itself during the course of events. During this course, as we have seen, it effectuates discontinuous moments that cause a break in the continuum. The leitmotifs, which we could describe as 'evental motifs', induce microscopic events within the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that interrupt the incessant flow of the infinite melody perpetuating the cycle. Herewith they yield unpredictable moments, moments of non-identity – points beyond established differences, perspectives from which differences become irrelevant. From these perspectives, one can consider different things as the same thing and in this way bring about unity between the different things, without discarding the differences. Thus, the possibility to create unity is achieved by means of discontinuity; within the heterogeneous, unpredictable situation that establishes a rupture with the status quo, a point of unity is being reached. And this unity does

[334] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 101.

not lie in sameness or uniformity but in non-identity, in the non-existent, in the possibility of change as such.

Besides the music, Wagner's characters also strongly reflect this notion of change and transformation. Warren Darcy, for instance, has stressed the importance of the idea of rebirth in the *Ring*, hereby pointing at 'Sieglinde's rebirth from the living death of her loveless marriage to Hunding, reborn with the knowledge that she carries within herself new life, and Wotan who undergoes a transformation in Loge's fire and is reborn as the Wanderer'.[335] But more than any other character, Brünnhilde embodies the notion of transformation as the quintessence of the music drama. Adorno's claim that Wagner's characters do not develop themselves does not appear credible when we observe Brünnhilde's personal development and witness how she transforms on the basis of her own experiences.[336] She develops compassion and understanding for Siegmund and Sieglinde, who are victims of abuse of power. Precisely this awareness leads to the emancipation from the deterministic realm of myth. Her sympathy for Siegmund's loyalty to Wälse and his unconditional love for Sieglinde motivates Brünnhilde to disobey Wotan's commandments. By choosing for love and by resisting law and power, Brünnhilde changes as a subject and becomes willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of a better world. Driven by love and focused on a higher purpose, she finally decides to abolish the old, corrupt empire of the gods at the end of the *Ring* cycle, as a result of which an outplace appears and hence the possibility for the remaining subjects and subsequently the world to change.

According to Badiou, the Feuerbachian thinking of Wagner's Dresden years has remained central to the *Ring*, despite Wagner's later pessimism and nationalist leanings. Indeed, Brünnhilde brings about a radical reversal of the prevailing social order. In fact, she brings about the end of everything. The only thing that occurs and remains after her act of total annihilation is the possibility to establish a new world – a radically different world no longer based on law and power but on love and freedom.

Scruton's interpretation of the final scene of *Götterdämmerung*, by contrast, challenges the understanding of the end of the *Ring* as a revolutionary political event, which entails a radical upheaval of the existing order, the complete destruction of the old world. Although Scruton argues that the end of the *Ring* cycle certainly involves a moment of liberation, he nonetheless

[335] Warren Darcy, 'Redeemed from Rebirth: The Evolving Meaning of Wagner's *Ring*', in *Wagner in Retrospect, A Centennial Reappraisal*, ed. Leroy R. Shaw, Nancy R. Cirillo, Marion S. Miller (Amsterdam: Ropodi, 1987), 52–53.

[336] For a detailed account of Brünnhilde's progress and transformation, see Philip Kitcher and Richard Schacht, *Finding an Ending: Reflections on Wagner's Ring* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 157–176.

points out that it is 'liberation *from* the old enslavement, and not liberation *to* the free order that will replace it'.[337] According to Scruton, the *Ring* does not tell us that redemption consists of 'entering another and better life, but of rearranging this one'.[338] And rearranging this life, with the aim of achieving liberation, is first and foremost a reflective deed, 'a spiritual process instead of a political one'.[339]

The end of *Götterdämmerung* pre-eminently signifies this point at the moment when Brünnhilde accuses Wotan of sacrificing Siegfried to the curse, before acknowledging that 'this purest of beings had to betray me, so that I should become wise'.[340] Stressing the ambiguity of Brünnhilde's address to Wotan, Scruton asks 'what it exactly is that she is saying to Wotan'; 'is she accusing or forgiving? Is she accepting of rejecting?'[341] Indeed, what we can conclude from her words is a sense of repudiation as well as a sense of appreciation. Of course, Brünnhilde has been mercilessly betrayed by Siegfried, but it is precisely due to this evil act of betrayal that she became aware of what it is that destroys love, namely a world based on power and determined by contracts, treaties and laws, a world to which even the free hero Siegfried would ultimately succumb – precisely he who, more than anyone else, would be capable of ending this old, corrupted word and was moreover expected to do so. This very awareness prompts Brünnhilde to sacrifice herself for the sake of a better world.

It is not for nothing that at the end of *Götterdämmerung*, as Scruton points out, the music brings back the two decisive moments in Brünnhilde's previous life through a synthesis of the fate motif and the purity motif, namely the moment in which she loses her godhead (Act 3, *Die Walküre*) and the subsequent moment when she becomes 'accountable for Wotan's world'.[342] Just as the painful experience of seeing Siegfried yielding to power incited Brünnhilde to destroy the corrupted world of Valhalla, so too does the painful experience of being confronted with Siegmund's sorrow as a result of Wotan's reign incite her to defy Wotan's directive to kill Siegfried, with the consequence that she loses her godhead. In both cases, Brünnhilde personally experiences that it is the instrumental world of Valhalla, whose inhabitants are used as mere means to an end instead of ends in themselves, that undermines love – the love between Siegmund and Sieglinde and the love between her and Siegfried. Through this experience, Brünnhilde comes to know power as the antipode of love and the root cause of Siegmund's and

[337] Roger Scruton, *The Ring of Truth* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 187.
[338] Ibid.
[339] Ibid.
[340] Ibid., 176.
[341] Ibid.
[342] Ibid.

her own sorrow. By saying that she 'had to be betrayed by the purest of being in order to become wise', Brünnhilde makes it clear that she is aware that her wisdom, compassion and ultimately her self-sacrifice emanate from this very experience, from the fate (underlined by the repeated Fate motif) she had to endure in order to arrive at her redemptive deed. And so, her self-development and heroic self-sacrifice are inseparable from the power-hungry world that has been conjured up by Wotan. In other words, Brünnhilde has to be part of Wotan's world in order to become knowing and to be able to do good. For being part of this world, she condemns herself, but as this world prompts her to choose for love, she is able to forgive herself as well.[343]

The lesson that we are being taught here, according to Scruton, is that 'we are no more trustworthy than the gods from whom we have freed ourselves'.[344] Like Brünnhilde, we have freed ourselves from the world of the gods, but like the former goddess, we are still part of that world. After all, as Feuerbach stresses, it was man who created the gods in his image and his likeness. And so all the flaws and errors they possess, we possess, too. Their lust for power is ours, and as this insatiable craving has led to their doom, it can lead to our downfall as well. Thus, the world of the gods, full of power, greed, manipulation and control, is still our world.[345] Because the *Ring* makes us aware of our world as such, as a world sustained by affirmative behaviour that stems from lust for power, its appeal to mankind is timeless, Scruton argues; moreover, because the work shows us how to offer resistance against the eternal evils of this world through selfless acts of renunciation, undertaken on the basis of the insight that we as human beings are accountable for this world and the life we live in it.

Besides the possibility of establishing a new world on the basis of love rather than power, the end of *Götterdämmerung* also entails the pressing question of whether this world will ever come, the question of whether or not the beginning of a new world will turn into a repetition of the old one. As Scruton reminds us, 'the song of the Rhine-daughters, which leads us into the enchanted world of *Das Rheingold*, sounds in its original accents – to miraculous effect – at the end of *Götterdämmerung*'.[346] Also, Alberich stays alive. We are reminded of the theft of the gold. Brünnhilde's lesson of redemption through love involves the warning that the gold can be stolen again from the Rhine and that the cycle of greed and power will start once more. But can we handle the thought that everything will come back again?

[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid., 294.
[345] Ibid.
[346] Ibid., 54.

Here we come across a question pertaining to the tension between optimism and pessimism, which Nietzsche addressed in *Der Fall Wagner* (1888) with respect to the *Ring*. In section 4 of this text, he describes how 'Wagner's ship' sailed along the course of optimism for years on end. 'The twilight of the gods for the old morality' could be effectuated and evil could be 'abolished', until Wagner's ship 'struck a reef', namely Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy. Although Wagner had already set 'optimism' to music and Brünnhilde was about to end the *Ring* cycle with a cheerful utopian vision by means of a 'song in honour of free love', Wagner ultimately decided to set sail towards the total destruction of everything[347] on the basis of the pessimistic insight that 'the new world is as bad as the old'.[348]

Since Nietzsche in the subsequent sections ties this analysis to Wagner's alleged key role in sustaining Europe's decadent Christian culture, one may be inclined to interpret Nietzsche's words as a critique of Wagner, who, with his ending of *Götterdämmerung*, would have said no to life. However, Nietzsche did not reproach the decadents for their pessimism but for drawing the wrong conclusion from the insight that life is suffering. This pessimistic insight has motivated the decadents to reject life and to cowardly flee into death, where instead they ought to say, 'Was that life? Well then! Once more!'[349] Is not this exactly what is expressed at the end of the *Ring*? As mentioned earlier, Alberich survives,[350] and the music from *Das Rheingold* meets us again as an uncanny but magnificent reprise through which Wagner retains true life with its indissoluble contrasts and tensions.[351] Not in the least do we see 'the beckoning of the

[347] Wagner had already envisioned this apocalyptic ending before reading Schopenhauer; he completed the libretto of the *Ring* in 1852 and read Schopenhauer in 1854. He did not go back and change the text.

[348] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 163–164.

[349] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 269.

[350] The significance of Alberich's survival is stressed by M. Owen Lee who says the following about Alberich in *Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Round* (1998):

> In some ways, this Nibelung dwarf is the main character in the *Ring*. In fact the whole cycle is called *The Ring of the Nibelung* – that is to say, *The Ring of Alberich*, or, if you want to translate the word 'Nibelung', *The Ring of the One Who Dwells in Mist*. […] At the end of the cycle, when all the other main characters are gone, he survives. The three Rhine maidens have their gold again, and possibly the whole cycle can start over. If Alberich comes back. Will he? Wagner's title, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, could also mean 'the endless cycle the Nibelung begins'. It's hard to get rid of Alberich. (M. Owen Lee, *Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Round. An Introduction to The Ring of the Nibelung*. New York, NY: Limelight Editions, 1998, 90)

[351] T.K. Seung, for one, argues that the finale of the *Ring* entails 'a return to Mother Nature'. The end of the *Ring* does neither represent 'the naïve Feuerbachian optimism' Wagner espoused in his youth, nor 'the harsh pessimism of Schopenhauer' the composer embraced later in life which would have resulted in 'a Buddhist ending, whereby Brünnhilde and Siegfried are released from the land of desire and delusion and depart for the holiest land free from desire and delusion'. Instead, the end of the *Ring* is 'truly Spinozan', Seung insists, for it displays a reconciliation

nothing, the Indian Circe'[352] at the end of the *Ring* cycle. Instead, we witness the affirmation of life in all its fullness – life in which evil has a place, too. Indeed, from the standpoint of Nietzsche, we see how in the final scene of *Götterdämmerung* also the terrifying aspects of life return, which undeniably indicates the presence of a Dionysian will to life – the desire for 'eternal life, the eternal return of life; the future promised and hallowed in the past'.[353]

In *Götzen-Dämmerung* (1889), Nietzsche debunks the idols of his time and denounces questionable ideologies, such as nationalism and anti-Semitism, that depict nations and identities as being objective and invariable and speak of 'the German' and 'the Jew'. Supporters of these ideas do not see that the reality that they cherish is nothing but an illusion, that the idols that they worship will be swept away sooner or later by the relentless stream of life, to return again, alter and wither once more. Only a few people have the courage to look this austere, harsh reality of life straight in the eye. The masses, on the other hand, avoid this confrontation and choose to worship idols that they view as representations of the Truth. One of the idols of the late nineteenth century was Wagner, revered by the, in Nietzsche's eyes, preposterous Wagnerians. Yet Wagner's art, although Nietzsche does not say this out loud, does not display a tendency towards venerating mere appearances as immutable truths. On the contrary, Wagner's art contains a Dionysian force and gives expression to a tragic view of life. In *Götzen-Dämmerung*, right before he lets the hammer speak in the final section, Nietzsche concludes with a reflection on the tragic Dionysian philosophy aimed at combating ideologies such as Christianity, German nationalism, and anti-Semitism that present transient, man-made cultural constructions as eternal truths. Affirming life 'even in its strangest and hardest problems' and 'to be *oneself* the eternal joy of becoming – that joy which included even joy in destroying', that is the Dionysian attitude towards life, Nietzsche proclaims,[354] after which concluding:

> And herewith I again touch that point from which I once went forth: *The Birth of Tragedy* was my first revaluation of all values. Herewith I again stand on the soil out of which my intention, my *ability* grows – I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus – I, the teacher of the eternal recurrence.[355]

with the natural world in which 'there is no land free from desire and delusion' (T.K. Seung, *Goethe, Nietzsche, and Wagner: Their Spinozan Epics of Love and Power*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006, 359–360).

[352] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 164.

[353] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 561.

[354] Ibid., 562–563.

[355] Ibid., 563.

In his debut, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872), Nietzsche claims that the tragic worldview of Aeschylus and Sophocles realised its rebirth in Wagner's music dramas. Wagner had brought back the Dionysian element in art by means of his *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which would inspire the European nations to adopt the long-lost tragic view of life, as a result of which the Occident would witness a cultural revival after centuries of decline. Whereas Nietzsche later proclaimed that he had distanced himself from Wagner, that is to say the Wagnerians, the tragic Dionysian view of life continued to dominate his thinking until the end of his (sane) life. It is not for nothing that the philosopher republished his first book in 1886 as *Die Geburt der Tragödie. Oder: Griechenthum und Pessimismus*, including an introductory critical self-reflection ('Versuch einer Selbstkritik') in which he nevertheless writes that 'this book contains an answer to the question: what is Dionysian?'[356] In the next chapter, we will look more closely at the Dionysian, intoxicating element in Wagner's 'dangerous' music. At this point in our inquiry, in the context of our examination of the alleged questionable functionality of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the Wagnerian leitmotif, it is of importance to reflect on the thought of eternal recurrence that arises from the Dionysian vision that the young Nietzsche recognised as the quintessence of Wagner's art.

We have already noted that the ending of *Götterdämmerung* does not voice the message of world renunciation since the destruction of Valhalla is at the same time the dawn of a new beginning, the possibility of a new world. But what if the old world returns in exactly the same way as before? This question arises at the end. As Martin Heidegger has already argued in his reflections on Nietzsche, the thought of eternal recurrence should not be considered as a scientific hypothesis that one can test and prove. Rather, Heidegger points out, the parable of the eternal return forms a 'possibility of thought and decision'.[357] In aphorism 341 ('Das grösste Schwergewicht') of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882), the thought of eternal recurrence is formulated as a hypothetical question: '*what if* this life as you now live it and have lived it, with every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more?'[358] Not for nothing is this question asked by a demon – it is a terrifying thought that one can either curse or embrace. Once you are gripped by this thought, Nietzsche

[356] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, Or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 20.
[357] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 1, *The Will to Power as Art*, vol 2. *The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1991), xv.
[358] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1974), 273.

suggests, it will change you as you are, and it will henceforth determine your actions.[359] The thought of eternal recurrence encourages the individual to change himself, incites him to reinvent himself, to create a new life. After all, the frightening thought that everything – the very same pain, deception and failure – will return in exactly the same way as before generates the question: how can I live differently, in such a way that I will want to say yes to life, yes to an eternal recurrence of this life?

At the end of *Götterdämmerung*, where we look back on the old life and where the possibility of a new life arises in view of the impending recurrence of the past, this is the question that thrusts itself upon us. It is a question that presents us with a choice, that appeals to our individual freedom and responsibility after the death of (the) God(s). Now that the idols are dead and gone, man can rely on nothing but himself in an inherently meaningless world. Yet, the demise of old values after the death of God and the subsequent loss of clarity regarding our future also offers opportunities, Nietzsche argues. In between a lost world dominated by theocentrism and an unknown world to come, humanity can create new horizons. The possibility arises to create new values, and, as if we are artists, give shape to our own lives according to our own personal creative visions instead of conforming blindly to dogmatic systems of thought. The individual is encouraged to look beyond his own borders, to get acquainted with other cultural spheres with a view to discovering new values and perspectives – new angles from which he can view himself and the world around him, inspiring him to continuously transfigure himself and his surroundings, to remain exceptional and never to conform to any particular identity.

This liberating call to the individual human being that wells up from the site of destruction that constitutes the ending of *Götterdämmerung* undeniably resonates with Adorno's description of the only real counter-force against the Auschwitz phenomenon, namely personal autonomy, entailing the capacity for reflection, self-determination, the courage not to conform to mass movements and being an independent spirit instead of a characterless individual. By means of these anti-authoritarian personality traits, one can offer resistance against the fascist mass culture that invariably degenerates into war, genocide and destruction. But instead of perceiving in *Götterdämmerung* an intrinsic resistance against the destructive tendencies of the masses, Adorno describes the work in *Minima Moralia* (1951) as 'the beginning of German imperialism'.[360] Composed in the glorious spirit of the Franco-German War of 1870–71, Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* gave voice to the 'inflamed prophecy of the nation's own doom'

[359] Ibid., 273.

[360] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 104.

that became reality during the Second World War.[361] In his analysis of the destructiveness of mass culture, Adorno clearly shows his debt to Nietzsche's concept of the 'last man' (*der letzte Mensch*): a human being who is part of the docile and unthinking herd that only finds pleasure in shallow entertainment and the acquisition of consumer goods and submits willingly to demagogues and national movements. Yet no two things can form a greater contrast to each other than Adorno's idea that Wagner's art contributed to the creation of the last man and the Nietzschean perspective on *Götterdämmerung* that recognises the promise of a new man who, after the death of God, will withstand any kind of totalitarianism. Even when Nietzsche had already turned his back on Wagner and written his 'Versuch einer Selbstkritik', he did not wish to deny that his anti-totalitarian Dionysian philosophy was born from the spirit of Wagner's music and that his youthful ode to the composer of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was written not in the spirit of the Franco-German War but in spite of it.[362]

[361] Ibid.

[362] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, Or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 17.

2

Sensuousness

1. *Tristan*'s Sensuous Power in Light of the Israeli Ban on Wagner

Wagner's music has always been recognised as music that has the capacity to provoke strong emotional responses in listeners. Although the overwhelming nature of Wagner's highly affective music has been lauded by audiences and commentators throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and up to the present time, it has also been criticised and even feared because of its ability to overpower the senses, potentially sending individual spectators into a frenzied state beyond their ability to control.

The ambiguous stance towards Wagner's delightful yet dangerous sensuousness is best represented by the work of Nietzsche, who, in his assessment of Wagnerian sensuousness, oscillates between praise and criticism. While the young Nietzsche praised the intoxicating effect of Wagner's music through which one can achieve an understanding of 'the joy involved in the annihilation of the individual'[363] and hence an understanding of the Dionysian vision of the world, the later Nietzsche took a more critical stance towards Wagner's 'success with nerves',[364] which the philosopher considered to be a dangerous factor in the late nineteenth century, which was marked by cultural decadence and increasing nationalist tendencies.

After the Second World War, Nietzsche's (physiological) objections to Wagnerian art came to be seen as prophetic in the eyes of some commentators who deemed the sensual power of Wagner's music a proto-Nazi element.[365] As it became known to cause the loss of the individual's self-awareness and subsequent immersion in a homogeneous collectivity, Wagner's music seemed to uncannily foreshadow the Third Reich's unifying and totalising aesthetic and political practice aimed at eradicating individual differences. According to

[363] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, Or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 104.
[364] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 166.
[365] David Trippett, *Wagner's Melodies: Aesthetics and Materialism in German Musical Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 397.

Adorno, Nietzsche 'rightly suspected' the dangerous 'design and practice of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*' in which 'intoxication, ecstasy is an inescapable principle of style' intended to thwart 'moments of reflection that could shatter its illusion of ideal unity'.[366] As delineated in the previous chapter, Adorno argued that the Wagnerian musical practice was aimed at undermining one's ability to think critically, and therefore the core aspect of this practice was to 'overwhelm the listener with a passion and excitement that does not even pause for breath'.[367] Adorno, remember, asserted that the individual in mass society is being deprived of the possibility to contemplate life due to incessant exposure to sense impressions (developed and launched by the culture industry), as a result of which the individual is being isolated and dissolved into a monolithic whole. Now, similarly, individual subjects who are exposed to Wagner's musical violence will not have the chance to think critically since they are brought into a state of rapture that will alienate them from the harsh realities of the world and separate them from others. Herewith the basis for self-other relations would disappear with the dire consequence that one starts to adopt the qualities of the authoritarian personality, including the tendency to blindly accede to conventions and to slavishly obey the orders of an authority figure, the tendency to use violence towards non-identical individuals and groups and to use stereotypical thinking – tendencies, thus, that form the breeding ground for Nazism.

As we have stressed previously, Adorno's reception of the overwhelming nature of Wagner's music was strongly bound to the philosopher's experience with Nazi Germany and the aftermath of the Jewish Holocaust. Adorno would be the first to emphasise this connection as he argued that works of art, including those produced by Wagner, change with subsequent historical events. Although Adorno stated that 'gestures of demagogy, persuasion, and collective narcissism enter deeply into the internal complexion of Wagner's music',[368] with which the composer would have anticipated the inherently National Socialist culture industry, the philosopher also suggested that in a different or new historical context, Wagner's music can acquire a whole new meaning. Hence Adorno's statement that because 'the National Socialist potential continues to smoulder dangerously in Germany, it is still present in Wagner, too'.[369] Adorno's distrust of Wagner in the post-war years was due to his observation that post-war Germany (and Europe at large) had not yet finally reckoned with its horrific past, had not yet

[366] Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 89, 93, 102.
[367] Ibid., 101.
[368] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Wagner's Relevance Today', in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 317.
[369] Ibid.

changed enough to prevent a new rise of Nazism. An entirely new society was required to achieve this end, and only in a new society could Wagner's music be free from totalitarian tendencies, Adorno argued. Thus, Adorno held it possible that in a new situation, certain aspects of Wagner may signify something different. But even though today's world offers a variety of new contexts in which Wagner (re)appears and that challenge us to re-evaluate certain features of his art, Adorno's perception of the overwhelming effect of Wagner's music still dominates the Wagner debate, particularly in Germany[370] and Israel.

On 28 May 2013, in the context of the two hundredth anniversary of Wagner's birth, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem organised a symposium entitled Wagner's Musical Religion: Art, Politics, and Genocide, which took place at the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, with the aim of exploring Wagner's impact on Nazism.[371] The keynote speakers were Margaret Brearley and Robert S. Wistrich (†), who both sought the link between Wagner and Nazism in the hypnotic, narcotic, overpowering effect of Wagner's music. In his lecture, Wistrich elaborated on the points he had made in a small article published in the *Times of Israel* a few days prior to the event, in which the scholar referred to the later Nietzsche, who, in *Der Fall Wagner*, had 'denounced Wagner's art as diseased, narcotic, morbid, hysterical and brutal' and would have 'divined as early as 1888 the possible consequences of the Wagner-cult at Bayreuth'.[372]

The alleged link between Wagner's intoxicating music and the rise of Nazism was also the central theme of Margaret Brearley's paper about Wagner's 'musical religion'. Like Wistrich, Brearly drew on previously published work, a contribution to the book *Holocaust and Nature* (ed. Didier Pollefeyt, 2013) entitled '"They Say of Them, Let the Sacrificers of Men Kiss

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[370] Christian Thielemann, for example, addresses the issue in *Mein Leben mit Wagner* (2012) by asking whether 'the overpowering nature of Wagner's scores kindled megalomania in Hitler's mind' (Christian Thielemann, *My Life with Wagner*, trans. Anthea Bell. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2017, 81). An article in *Der Spiegel* dedicated to the two hundredth anniversary of Wagner's birth in 2013 brought up the theme, too. It contains remarks by interviewed Wagner enthusiasts, among them Markus Käbisch, a Leipzig-based entrepreneur. The article says:

> Käbisch liebt die Musik Wagners, aber er könnte sie 'nicht jeden Tag ertragen'. Sie sei 'extrem vereinnahmend, beim Zuhören löst sich das Ich auf, das Individuum, man kommt in einen Rausch, in einen ekstatischen Zustand'. Es sei 'Überwältigungsmusik', sagt Käbisch. 'Das ist das Gefährliche, deshalb war diese Musik für die Politik im Dritten Reich so gut geeignet.' (Dirk Kurbjuweit, 'Wagners Schatten', *Der Spiegel* 14/2013, http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-91768540.html)

[371] See website Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism: http://sicsa.huji.ac.il/conferences.html, and Hebrew University of Jerusalem YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqiiO_ri7Ro.

[372] Robert S. Wistrich, 'Wagner at 200: Not Your Garden-Variety Jew Hater', *The Times of Israel*, 22 May 2013, http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/richard-wagner-the-taint-of-genius/.

Calves" (Hosea, 13.2)'.[373] Brearley's paper claims that Wagner's music invoked the destructive ecstasy and terror of the Greek Dionysiac, which intoxicated the German audiences and aroused in the German elite the will to destroy the existence of orthodox Christianity, the Jewish God and ultimately the Jews. Designating Nietzsche as the ideal interpreter and philosophical equivalent of Wagner's Dionysian music, Brearley refers to the philosopher's early characterisation of Wagner's art in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* as the resurrection of the Dionysian spirit in modern Germany, a spirit that, according to Brearley, ultimately inspired the barbaric deeds of the Nazis. And it was the music of *Tristan und Isolde* that, more than any other music that Wagner had written, evoked this destructive Dionysian spirit as it has the power to lead the listeners into a state of ecstasy so intense that it demolishes the principle of individuation and effectuates a feeling of unity with nature.[374] It was due to this effect that 'Nietzsche saw the music of *Tristan* as the healing of the Judeo-Christian break with nature, as the spirit of Wagner's music contains the essence of the Dionysian return to nature that enables one to "understand a joy in the annihilation of the individual"'.[375] The Nietzschean idea of unification with nature and destruction of the individual got interpreted and carried out by the Nazis on the basis of their *Blut-und-Boden* ideology. Unification with nature came to mean unification with the *Volk*, i.e. the German people, through instinct and the replacement of Judaism with the paganism peculiar to the Aryan race. The annihilation of the individual came to mean the annihilation of the enemy of the *Volk*, namely the Jew, who, according to the National Socialist doctrine, sought to uproot the Germans from their soil in order to destroy the German nature. For the sake of self-preservation, the Nazis believed that the Jew, who did not belong to the national community of Aryans and was therefore alien to nature, had to be destroyed.[376] Because Wagner's music would have incited a return to nature, meaning a unification with the *Volk*, and would have aroused the will to annihilate the individual, that is to say the Jew who

[373] Margaret Brearley, '"They Say of Them, Let the Sacrificers of Men Kiss Calves" (Hosea, 13.2)', in *Holocaust and Nature*, ed. Didier Pollefeyt (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2013), 60–71.

[374] Note that Adorno, despite his critical stance towards Wagner's sensuousness, was appreciative of *Tristan*'s music. Mark Berry points out that Adorno viewed the music of *Tristan* 'as a progenitor of Schoenberg and in particular, Alban Berg'. In 'the opening of *Tristan*, Wagner was able to draw "progressive Konstruktion", which almost inevitably has one think of Bauhaus-like early dodecaphonic Schoenberg'. Adorno furthermore 'noted approvingly that "though traces of *Tristan* can always be detected in Berg, those of *Die Meistersinger* cannot", for "Berg's music . . . never affirms itself", unlike, presumably *Die Meistersinger*' (Mark Berry, 'Adorno's Essay on Wagner: Rescuing an Inverted Panegyric', *The Opera Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 2-3, 2014: 215–217).

[375] Margaret Brearley, '"They Say of Them, Let the Sacrificers of Men Kiss Calves" (Hosea, 13.2)', in *Holocaust and Nature*, ed. Didier Pollefeyt (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2013), 67.

[376] Ibid., 68–71.

does not belong to the monolithic Aryan collective, Brearley believes that Wagner's music and the Holocaust are deeply connected.

Regardless of whether or not Brearley's theory is right, the possibility that Wagner's Dionysian music could symbolise something else in a different or new historical context was not taken into consideration during the symposium in Jerusalem, but the State of Israel does provide a unique contemporary context for examining the possible effects of Wagner's Dionysian music. After all, an unofficial ban has been placed on Wagner since 1938, which makes Israel the only country in the world where Wagner is publicly forbidden. This ban has been successfully maintained until today, which shows that Wagner is at least not being taken for granted in Israel. The topic of Wagner can lead to fiery, emotional discussions, and one cannot simply declare one's love of Wagner's music without having to explain or justify oneself. Furthermore, any attempt so far to organise a public performance of Wagner's works has been vigorously counteracted. And yet, at the same time, as we have pointed out in the previous chapter, Wagner's music appears in Israeli society through the radio, the internet and portable media players, anywhere in the private and public space. Herewith a contradictory social and cultural climate has been established in which the maintenance of an unofficial but effective law that prohibits public performances of Wagner's works clashes with a love of and demand for the composer's music.

This chapter demonstrates that precisely due to this very conflict between love and power, Israeli society offers a unique space in which we can rethink the overwhelming sensuousness that characterises Wagner's forbidden art, most notably the music of *Tristan* – a work that, as Richard Taruskin puts it, is 'the ultimate bearer of psychic contagion'.[377] It incites us to revisit Nietzsche's reflections on this supposedly questionable musical trait. Although Nietzsche considered this trait to be quintessential for the worst excesses of Wagnerism that manifested themselves in the form of German nationalism and religious bigotry, the philosopher's reflections also display the notion of Wagnerian sensuousness as a powerful means to combat the societal ills in question because it can evoke a Dionysian spirit that, contrary to what Margaret Brearley claims, annuls any absolutisation of thought.

In our quest for this powerful yet neglected spirit in Wagner, we shall take our previous analysis of Wagner's presence in the media age as a starting point as it applies to the way in which Wagner's music appears in today's Israel.

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[377] Richard Taruskin, 'Dispelling the Contagious Wagnerian Mist' (first published in the *New York Times*, 28 January 1996), in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 83.

2. Prelude and *Liebestod* in Jerusalem; or, Forbidden Love as a Transformative Power

In our examination of the Wagnerian leitmotif in the context of global media, we explored the Israeli-German dance co-production *Hacking Wagner* by the Israeli choreographer Saar Magal, who, in her production, examined Israel's ambiguous stance towards the composer. In Magal's performance, the dominant opinion that Wagner's music should never be performed in Israel was put to the test by means of a multimedia production that mirrored the reality of Israeli society, where Wagner's music appears freely through the media amidst heated discussions between proponents and opponents of the ban. We subsequently described Magal's production as a modern-day Plato's cave, as a representation of the contemporary fragmented media society on a microscale, in which fragments from Wagner's works, images, messages and opinions dialectically oppose each other. By displaying how Wagner in today's multimedia context continuously adjusts to different particular customs and situations, Magal's production demonstrated that the identification of Wagner's art as something that intrinsically bears proto-Nazi qualities is highly perfidious. In the multimedia context of *Hacking Wagner* (and global media at large), we thus concluded, the portrayal of Wagner as a precursor of the Third Reich shows that the ban on Wagner is based on the power of a particularistic view and not based on truth. It shows, moreover, a separation between the status quo and the thinking that contests the prevailing situation.

Even though Magal's performance challenged the prevailing perception of Wagner as a proto-Nazi, the question that remained was the question of how to change the situation in Israel, the question of how to establish a new truth in Israeli society that effectively defies the ban as well as the idea on which the ban is based. After all, by merely presenting different opinions and perspectives, the status quo will not change. In fact, Magal's performance, in a sense, reflected the status quo as it displayed the variety of opinions, both contra and pro Wagner, that already exist in Israeli society. Certainly not everyone in Israel believes that Wagner's art contains proto-Nazi dimensions and not everyone approves of the (partial) censorship of Wagner's music. Yet there is no place for this view in Israeli music policy, wherein Wagner is kept in the taboo zone.[378] The question, therefore, is how to break through its defensive wall

[378] A thorough analysis of the history and development of Israel's Wagner controversy is provided by Na'ama Sheffi, who, in her book *The Ring of Myth: The Israelis, Wagner and the Nazis* (2013), points out that from the 1970s onwards political authorities have become increasingly involved in the Wagner issue, which initially 'was reserved for the decisions of the artistic bodies'. Although 'it seems that Israeli democracy has remained sufficiently open not to leave the decision on playing Wagner to the country's arms of government (in precedential legislation or ruling), the forces that drive society stopped most of the attempts to play his music'. Na'ama Sheffi,

and bring about an event that breaks the status quo and leads to a change of the situation, the establishment of a new truth in the situation, a construction of a new figure of Wagner in Israel.

This question leads us back to Alain Badiou's conception of the functionality of the Wagnerian leitmotif applied to the presence of Wagner's motifs in mediatised contexts. This presence, as we have seen in the previous chapter, can help us to develop an understanding of the leitmotif as something that creates unpredictable moments through which the possibility arises to change the situation, to construct a new truth in the world.

First of all, it is important to elaborate the term 'construction' when talking about establishing a new truth, i.e. a new figure of Wagner. Badiou draws a distinction between an ontological definition of truth and an existential definition of truth. Ontological truth in Badiou's philosophy means that 'the universal is for everyone' and thus 'cannot be the result of having an identity, of possessing any particular property or any particular determination'.[379] While Badiou's concept of ontological truth is abstract and formal, his concept of existential truth concerns the appearance and development of a truth in a concrete world – truth in the form of what Badiou calls subjectivisable bodies, or bodies of truth.[380] Thus, we are dealing with a distinction between *being* and *existence*. For instance, there can *be* a universal figure of Wagner that applies to all people, but within the political confines of the Third Reich, such a figure was not allowed to *exist*.

Now, we know that events bring about something universal, bring about truth. However, the event itself is not the same as a truth. The event is merely the creation of the possibility of a truth. After an event has taken place, the construction of a new truth could or should take place in and through the subject through thinking and acting. This means that one has to invent the possible consequences of the event by constructing a new political body that does justice to the universal significance of the event.

The power that leads to a renewal of thought and action, the power by which the situation can be changed, is the power of love. Love, according to Badiou, means committing oneself to the consequences of an event – to 'construct' a new life, or to 're-invent life', on the basis of it.[381] When an event takes place, something happens that is not related to the particularities of the local situation. It therefore forms a break with the status quo and produces a new situation

The Ring of Myth: The Israelis, Wagner and the Nazis, trans. Martha Grenzeback and Miriam Talisman (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), 182–183.

[379] Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 46.

[380] See Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (New York, NY: Continuum, 2009), 449–477.

[381] Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (London: Serpent's Tail, 2012), 28–33.

in which the particular laws, customs and (national, cultural, sexual, political, religious and ethnic) differences that determine the old, prevailing situation become irrelevant. In *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (2003), Badiou refers in this regard to Paul's maxim that in the Lord Jesus Christ there is 'neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female'. Badiou suggests that Paul is not saying that there are in fact no more Jews or Greeks, or that there should be none. Paul's maxim is precisely aimed at pointing out that these differences are unimportant and irrelevant in light of the event, namely the resurrection of Christ – a resurrection that Paul would have experienced within himself on the road to Damascus, a life-changing event that happened all of a sudden and by which Paul suddenly changed, becoming a new subject.[382] The event is thus a moment in which the perspective changes and one sees things differently, where the possibility of a new life presents itself.

This is not something that we have chosen, but rather something that befalls us, a change we could never have predicted. Here Badiou is close to Heidegger, who describes such a change with the term *Ereignis*.[383] In Heidegger's view, however, such a change takes place so close to us that we actually do not really notice that this change is indeed taking place. Silently, almost imperceptibly, the context in which we perceive things is being altered. Until all of a sudden, we find ourselves in a new paradigm where things are seen in a new light. With the Badiouian event, on the other hand, a break with the old state becomes clearly visible *as* a radical break. Gripped by the event, the subject undergoes a profound and radical change, a sudden conversion. Central to this notion of an event is Paul's motto 'not to conform to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind'.[384] This motto presupposes that one's thinking, regardless of one's particular beliefs and practices, is capable of tolerating and transcending differences without having to abandon the differences by which we recognise each other in the world. After all, the universal, which appears through the event, appears as a possibility for everyone because it cannot be reduced to the particular order of being, the status quo. Due to the event, therefore, a life beyond the self-evident separation of different people becomes conceivable, a life beyond established differences – a life in which a point of unity is achieved by overcoming differences instead of discarding them.

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[382] Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 17.

[383] Michael Watts, *The Philosophy of Heidegger* (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 151.

[384] Romans 12:2.

However, although love always starts with an event, love cannot be reduced to the moment of rupture. After the event has taken place, it is a question of being faithful to the insights drawn from the event. It is essential to think and act according to these new insights, and to persist in doing so, instead of falling back into one's old, pre-evental behaviour pattern, which would betray the promise of change intrinsic to the event. As it pertains to Wagner, the figure of Siegfried illustrates this point well, for he fails to maintain fidelity to the event: his encounter with Brünnhilde, an encounter that involves the promise of a new world based on love and freedom instead of power and control. Succumbing to the corrupt, power-based world of the Gibichungs, Siegfried betrays this promise, falling back into his old ruthless and selfish ways as he violently robs Brünnhilde of her ring and forces her to marry Gunther.

History teaches us that betrayal to the promise of events is the rule rather than the exception. For example, the European Revolutions of 1848 reinforced Jewish emancipation in the German-speaking world. In the years and decades after the revolution, Jews were granted legal equality in a number of German states and ultimately in the German Empire, Austria-Hungary and Switzerland. And yet, in the late nineteenth century, the German-speaking countries (and Europe at large) witnessed a surge of racial anti-Semitism fed by nationalism, obscuring the promise of liberal reforms and the general emancipatory vision enshrined in the event of 1848.

Similarly, the attempt to establish a new collective society on the basis of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 degenerated into a barbaric political system that betrayed the universal promise of the event by eliminating everyone and everything that did not fit into the system. Analogous to the ideology and politics of the Nazis, anti-Semitic policies were implemented under Stalin's rule, albeit concealed under the term 'anti-Zionist' measures to avoid associations with Nazism.[385] While Bolshevik leadership in the first years after the October Revolution offered resistance against the anti-Semitism that was so deeply rooted in Russian culture, the Bolshevik movement quickly fell back into an old pattern of anti-Semitic nationalism,[386] therewith betraying the revolution's promise of an egalitarian society.

A striking contemporary example is the so-called Arab Spring. Badiou believes that Muslims and Christians during the uprising in the Arab world and the Middle East reached a point of unity in their universal struggle for political and social freedom; their differences would be

[385] Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution,* vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clio, 2005), 27–28.
[386] William Korey, *Russian Antisemitism, Pamyat, and the Demonology of Zionism* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 7.

irrelevant in the context of the global emancipatory vision.[387] However, this noble vision of unity beyond established differences was quickly shattered after the uprisings. The hope cherished by Christians that their position would improve as a result of the change in leadership soon turned into grave disillusionment. The Islamist seizure of power, such as by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, led to a huge increase in violence against Christian minorities. The genocide against Christians, Yazidis and Shia Muslims in Syria and Iraq committed by the Islamic State (which, like the Muslim Brotherhood, arose from the ashes of the Arab Spring) can be regarded as the most bitter betrayal of the promise of universal freedom and equality that the revolutions in the Arab world allegedly entailed.

The examples in question display a contrast between the idea of freedom and equality, which is inscribed in the event, and the ruling powers that annul the egalitarian insight and do not want to heed the call of the event. Badiou therefore argues that it is essential to make a decision with respect to the event, in the first instance by declaring (as opposed to denying) that there has been one. Since an event, such as the Arab Spring, is not seen by everyone as an event but often viewed as a mere disruption of the existing order, the event is not simply a fact but rather a call to the subject to make a decision. An event is thus a creative moment, a moment in which the consequences of the event must be invented by constructing a new political body that does justice to the universal significance of the event. Fidelity to the event, therefore, implies labour. It is a question of consistently constructing a new life in the real, constructing a new truth in the world on the basis of the novel views, insights and thoughts the event provides.

Now, according to Badiou, 'love is what makes of thought a power'; it instils the faith and conviction to put the thinking evoked by the event into practice.[388] Thus, love has the character of a public declaration. It 'effectuates the unity of thought and action'[389] and is therefore the force that brings new life into the world; it incites one to go out and strive and to construct a life according to one's thinking. This act of constructing, out of fidelity to the event and in accordance with the thinking inspired by the event, is what ultimately defines love, Badiou argues.[390]

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[387] See Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2012).

[388] Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 90.

[389] Ibid., 91.

[390] On Badiou's philosophy of love, see also Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008), 177–199.

When applied to Wagner's presence in mass media (considered a context that creates the conditions for the emergence of an event), this conception of love, combined with Badiou's conception of the functionality of the leitmotif, can function as a conceptual framework to examine the question of how it would be possible to construct a new figure of Wagner in Israel.

The following example demonstrates this point. It concerns an anecdote by Daniel Barenboim, who, in 2001, while at a news conference in Jerusalem, suddenly heard the sound of the 'Ride of the Valkyries' as a ringtone.[391] Recognising that Israeli citizens were already listening to Wagner's music, he decided to break the Wagner ban, which obscures and denies the reality of Wagner's presence in Israel.[392] Random as this situation may seem, we could argue that precisely this random situation could give us an excellent insight into the question of the relationship between Wagner's presence in the context of mass media and the universal signification of Wagner's art, signifying the possibility for a subject and subsequently a world to change. The local event of the accidental sound of the ringtone shows how something with universal significance can emerge out of the use of media in ordinary everyday life. As the motif of the 'Ride of the Valkyries' occurred, a new subjective possibility emerged, that is to say the possibility to renew one's thinking, to be seized by a new thought. In the context of Israeli society, where the performance of Wagner's music is unofficially but effectively banned, this new thought arose in the form of a question: 'if it can be heard on the ring of a telephone, why can't it be played in a concert hall?'[393] The sudden, unpredictable sound of the ringtone aroused a thought that questions the order of the world as it is known and advocates for a new one instead.[394] Of course, not only Wagner's tunes but in principle any other tune could bring

[391] Sumanth Gopinath, *The Ringtone Dialectic: Economy and Cultural Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 100.

[392] Barenboim was not the first musician who tried to break the ban. In 1981 Zubin Mehta attempted to perform an excerpt from *Tristan und Isolde* with the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra (IPO) in Tel Aviv. In 1988 the pianist Gilead Mishory included a transcription by Liszt of *Tristan*'s *Liebestod* in a series of recitals. In December 1991 Barenboim himself, in collaboration with the IPO, attempted in vain to organise a public concert of Wagner's works (which was supposed to include the overture to *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Tristan*'s Prelude and *Liebestod*). And in October 2000 the Rishon LeZion Symphony Orchestra included the *Siegfried Idyll* in a Friday matinée in Rishon LeZion. See Na'ama Sheffi, *The Ring of Myth: The Israelis, Wagner and the Nazis*, trans. Martha Grenzeback and Miriam Talisman (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), 7, 138, 148.

[393] Inigo Gilmore, 'Barenboim Shatters Israel Taboo on Wagner', *The Telegraph*, 9 July 2001, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/1333350/Barenboim-shatters-Israel-taboo-on-Wagner.html.

[394] It is worth noting that the 'ringtone event' took place during a time in which, as Na'ama Sheffi has observed, Wagner's appearance in the mainstream media started to decline. Delineating the development of media in relation to Wagner's presence in Israel, Sheffi points out that in the 1970s and 1980s, when the amount of radio channels rapidly increased, Wagner's appearance on the radio increased, too. Attempts 'to integrate excerpts from Wagner's works into the regular broadcast listings' became 'progressively frequent in the 1990s, to the point that the boycott no longer had any significance'. Due to 'the pluralistic climate of Israeli radio broadcasting of the time, the networks would be hard-pressed to limit broadcasts of works considered problematic; the large number of local

about such an effect, but it is precisely this unique effect of rupture, of interruption of the thoughtless repetition, that is also so characteristic of Wagner's system of leitmotifs.

The ringtone event not only caused a renewal of thought but also a renewal of practice. After the Israel Festival concert that took place in Jerusalem on 7 July 2001, Barenboim, who had agreed to refrain from playing Wagner in the festival concert, surprised the members of the audience by asking if they wanted to hear Wagner. An emotional debate amongst the audience followed. Many walked out. But most people stayed, and Barenboim played an extract from *Tristan und Isolde*: the Prelude and *Liebestod*.[395] This caused a huge riot in Israeli society. Barenboim was fiercely condemned by state officials[396] and close to forever being banned himself from the Israeli concert stage.[397]

Some critics, like Richard Taruskin, have dismissed Barenboim's act as a blunt and highly insensitive 'provocation' intended to advance his career.[398] After all, as Taruskin remarks, 'breaching the taboo on Wagner performances in Israel makes headlines'.[399] But according to Taruskin, there was nothing constructive about Barenboim's act in the sense that it would enhance (musical) life in Israel. It merely evoked 'a great din of public protest and righteous

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broadcasting stations, both legal and pirate, made it impossible'. However, 'it seems that the early 2000s saw a decline in the number of such public broadcasts. This may have to do with the less pluralistic and tenser political and social climate in Israel, as well as the tightening supervision of the state channels by government officials' (Na'ama Sheffi, *The Ring of Myth: The Israelis, Wagner and the Nazis*, trans. Martha Grenzeback and Miriam Talisman. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2013, 9). This stifling social environment added to the subversive effect of the 'Ride of the Valkyries' ringtone (appearing, moreover, through a media device that is not controlled by the Israeli state), enhancing the capacity of the ringtone to evoke critical thinking.

[395] Daniel Barenboim, *Die Musik: Mein Leben* (München: Ullstein, 2002), 322–325.

[396] Israel's then prime minister, Ariel Sharon, responded: 'I would rather it hadn't been played. There are a lot of people in Israel for whom this issue is very hard'. And according to the former mayor of Jerusalem, Ehud Omert, Barenboim's decision was 'arrogant, uncultured and unacceptable', adding that Israel would have to reconsider its relations with Barenboim. According to Omer, 'it's not his job to determine whether the State of Israel decides to allow Wagner to be heard or not. As a musician he is great, but as a human being I could say a few other things'. See Ewen MacAskill, 'Barenboim Stirs Up Israeli Storm by Playing Wagner', *The Guardian*, 9 July 2001, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/jul/09/ewenmacaskill.

[397] In Na'ama Sheffi's *The Ring of Myth* we read that the Knesset's Education and Culture Committee

> adopted a firm approach. […] The committee decided that Barenboim had taken advantage of the opportunity, which was 'deceitful'. The committee admonished the heads of the festival and called upon them to reach personal conclusions, expressed surprise that 'senior people in the legal world chose to remain in the hall while the Wagner encore was played, behaviour that might be interpreted as justification of the foolish decision of Daniel Barenboim', and called the cultural institutions in Israel to see in Barenboim 'a cultural persona non grata' until he apologised for his actions. This was the first time the state chose to overtly intervene in the controversy and propose an unequivocal standpoint. (Sheffi, 2013, 171–172)

[398] Richard Taruskin, 'The Danger of Music and the Case for Control' (first published in the *New York Times*, 9 December 2001), in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 171.

[399] Ibid., 170.

indignation'.[400] And if anything, Barenboim's selfish act displayed a lack of 'self-control',[401] meaning a lack of willingness to act 'out of consideration for people's feelings'.[402]

However, considered in the light of Badiou's philosophy, the conductor's initiative to perform Wagner proves far more significant than Taruskin suggests. Firstly, in response to Barenboim's alleged careerism, we should note that the conductor brought himself into a highly unpredictable situation by initiating this event. After all, he could not have foreseen the response of the audience. Members of the audience could have turned hostile towards him or they could even have become violent. Yet Barenboim persisted in his endeavour to bring about change in Israel's musical life in spite of the risk of being attacked and condemned. By showing fidelity to the new insight the sound of the ringtone evoked in him, the conductor subordinated his personal interest to the universal call of the event to change the world. Instead of succumbing to the power of the prevailing laws of a particular world, Barenboim followed the laws of his own thinking, establishing a new truth in the world in the aftermath of the local ringtone event in Jerusalem. The musician's rebellious act should therefore be understood as 'the realisation in the present of a hitherto unknown possibility'.[403] Barenboim established a new real in the old, i.e. present, situation by presenting an alternative to the norm that dominates Israeli musical life. Instead of merely criticising the prevailing norm from the sidelines, Barenboim was actively showing the possibility of a different musical life in Israel as he, while discussing Wagner with the audience and performing the Prelude and *Liebestod*, virtually constructed a new musical life within the current reigning one. The conductor realised the inadmissible idea of publicly displaying something that was already part of the real situation but was concealed: the fact that Wagner is indeed being listened to in Israel, the fact that despite the dominant attitude of hatred towards the composer, there also exists a love of his music, a love, however, that is taboo.

It is therefore significant that Barenboim played music from *Tristan und Isolde*. This work, after all, is all about a forbidden love, a love, moreover, that is life changing. After Tristan and Isolde have fallen in love with each other, the two lovers are no longer able to abide by the rules and customs of the society in which they live. There simply is no common ground between Tristan and Isolde's love on the one hand and the laws and customs of feudal society on the other. By following the immanent rules of their love, they remain outside the range of the ruling

[400] Ibid., 171.
[401] Ibid., 173.
[402] Ibid., 171.
[403] Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (New York, NY: Continuum, 2009), 52.

powers and create a new real in the situation, which is something Barenboim did as well, in a new era, in a new place and with entirely different means.

By doing so, moreover, the conductor challenged the prevailing Romantic interpretation of Tristan and Isolde's love whereby love is fulfilled in death. In his book *In Praise of Love* (2012), Badiou designates Wagner's *Tristan* as the pinnacle of the Romantic interpretation of love because in the story of *Tristan*, 'love is consumed in the ineffable, exceptional moment of the encounter, after which it is impossible to go back to a world that remains external to the relationship'.[404] However, Badiou argues that this Romantic interpretation needs to be challenged since love cannot be reduced to the event of the love encounter but is a construction that takes place in the world, a construction whereby life is reinvented. Barenboim's action clearly coheres with this viewpoint. The love that motivated the conductor in his endeavour was a love that was obviously not aimed at an escape into death but aimed at a reinvention of life as it led to a musical event that challenged the established law – an event, moreover, that entailed the actual construction of a new musical reality in Israel, during and by means of the performance of the prelude to *Tristan*. As the music of *Tristan* served as a means to construct a new musical reality, the focus shifted from the eventual unification of the lovers in death to the transformative power of the love between Tristan and Isolde – a love that is not merely forbidden and therefore arouses the will to reject life but a love, moreover, that also creates a new perspective on life and that therefore is a force to create a new reality. Due to this focus on the transformative power of love, we come to see the love between Tristan and Isolde not as a renunciation *of* life but as a renunciation *in* life, meaning the renunciation of powers that suppress change, progression, diversity, creativity and freedom.

3. The Meaning of Erotic Love/Desire

The highly sensual, erotic music of *Tristan* is primarily responsible for expressing the transformative, life-affirming power of the love between Tristan and Isolde. It is thus the music of this drama that pre-eminently challenges the widespread notion that *Tristan und Isolde* embodies Schopenhauer's philosophy of world renunciation. This philosophy is marked by a great mistrust of sensuality in general and erotic desire in particular. Before delving into the music, let us first take into consideration Schopenhauer's theory of erotic love or sexual desire in relation to Wagner's conception of human sexuality.

[404] Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (London: Serpent's Tail, 2012), 31.

Schopenhauer took the sexual impulse to be the focal point or most intense manifestation of the will to live, and hence he deemed the sex drive as the ultimate source of human suffering. According to the philosopher, the cessation of suffering can only be attained through the denial of the will. Thus, in order to end human misery, the sexual impulse ought to be denied. Although Wagner followed Schopenhauer in perceiving the will to live as the root cause of all pain and strife and agreed with him that renunciation was the ultimate way to combat suffering, he did not believe that renouncing sex was a solution to human misery. As a matter of fact, Wagner argued that precisely through the very act of sex itself the denial of the will could be achieved.[405] Through sex one gets into a state of ecstatic bliss whereby one is temporarily released from the burden of life and can break free from the all-pervasive, enslaving will. For this reason, Wagner equated the sexual experience with the aesthetic one, which was similarly seen as a state of mind whereby one is detached from the will to live.

Schopenhauer argued that when one has an aesthetic experience whereby one is temporarily freed from the will, one does behold the world in a disinterested, pure and objective manner. Schopenhauer agreed with Kant that the aesthetic attitude is disinterested, contrary to the attitude one has in everyday reality. Walking through a shopping mall, for instance, one sees the displayed commodities as things one can buy and use. Similarly, at a food market, one sees the foods as things that one can eat, as things with which one can satisfy one's hunger and one's desire to consume the delicious foods at hand. And when seeing someone attractive somewhere in the streets, one often looks with a sense of personal interest as well, that is to say with a lust for that person. Thus, in all these everyday cases, the attitude is egoistic, aimed at fulfilling one's own desire. By contrast, when beholding a still-life painting depicting musical instruments (e.g. Anne Vallayer-Coster's *Attributes of Music*, 1770), food (e.g. Jan Davidszoon de Heem's *Still Life with Fruit and Ham*, 1648–49) or a naked body (e.g. Francisco Goya's *La maja desnuda*, 1797–1800), one views the instruments, foods and the scene of nudity in an impersonal, objective and disinterested manner. Absorbed and immersed in the work of art, one's desire is appeased and one is devoid of any egoistic motives or impulses. The experience of beauty is not based on and aimed at a goal that lies outside the art object but is based solely on the art object that is an end in itself.

[405] Wagner explicated this idea in a letter to Schopenhauer, written in December 1858, which the composer decided not to send. In his letter Wagner states that one should understand 'the predisposition for sexual love as a path of salvation, towards self-knowledge and self-denial of the will' (in Adrian Daub, *Tristan's Shadow: Sexuality and the Total Work of Art after Wagner*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2014, 3–4).

Although Wagner adhered faithfully to this aesthetic theory, the composer nonetheless added the sexual experience to Schopenhauer's theoretical framework. For Wagner, the act of sex was not necessarily egoistic, aimed at using the other as a means to fulfil one's selfish needs. On the contrary, through sex two partners could recognise each other as ends in themselves. Illuminating the unique role and meaning of sex in Wagner's *Tristan* in *Death-Devoted Heart*, Roger Scruton explains that 'what is valued in erotic love is the other person as an individual'.[406] When Tristan and Isolde look into each other's eyes, they see 'the irreplaceable incarnate subjectivity of the other, as the other is in himself or herself'.[407] Precisely this recognition of the other as a unique, irreplaceable being makes erotic love so deeply tragic, Scruton argues, since the beloved, irreplaceable other is, after all, a mortal being. Therefore Scruton defines erotic love as 'a relation between dying things', a relation between two beings who recognise each other as being mortal.[408] Since only human beings can recognise each other as such, erotic love is a quintessentially human experience. It does not unite us with the rest of nature but distinguishes us from the other animals, which are, unlike us, not aware of their mortality.

Since erotic love makes us so painfully aware of our mortality, it provides us with an essential insight about the human condition, namely that everything that we hold dear depends upon our mortality. Everything that we deem meaningful and valuable can only be found in life, through our attachment to life as we venture towards our inevitable death. Nowhere is the attachment to life greater than in erotic love, in which one experiences the greatest possible ecstasy and joy, the ultimate feeling of being alive – unified as one with the other and yet fully recognised as a unique individual, in a state of physical ecstasy and yet released from the physical world of objects. As erotic love brings us into a state of pure subjectivity, in which we are briefly freed from the blind, objective will to live, erotic love is the ultimate 'defiance of death'.[409] And yet, again, it is due to death that this very state of redemption can be achieved.

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[406] Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 130. This point is also made in Scruton's book *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (1986). Concerning the human being as an object of desire, Scruton writes that 'the object of desire must have, not just human flesh, but also the first-person perspective which serves to individualise him in his own eyes and in the eyes of his pursuer'. 'Unlike hunger', Scruton claims, 'sexual desire is interested in the *embodiment* of the other, and not in his body'. Central to sexual desire is 'interpersonal intentionality', meaning that 'the other's perspective' is 'a fundamental part of the object of desire' because 'it is the perspective of the other that is made real to us in his embodiment, and which provides our most immediate image of his irreplaceable individuality' (Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation*. London: Continuum, 2006, 82).

[407] Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 130.

[408] Roger Scruton, *Understanding Music: Philosophy and Interpretation* (London: Continuum, 2009), 130.

[409] Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 130.

This, according to Scruton, is what makes erotic love 'both tragic and consoling'[410] – tragic because all our striving is ultimately futile and consoling because there is a way to reconcile with this terrifying notion, a reconciliation that does not merely consist of a temporary denial of the will through the act of sex but also, and most importantly, consists of self-knowledge, meaning knowledge of the truth about the world and our existence that we can only find within ourselves, in our bodies. The truth we can discover within ourselves, moreover, has a moral significance that is crucial for understanding the construction and effect of Wagner's musical art. But what does it exactly mean to find the truth within ourselves, in our bodies, and what does it imply in terms of ethics? Since Wagner derived his notion of truth and morality directly from Schopenhauer, the answer to this question can be found in the latter's philosophy. Given the great importance of this philosophy with respect to Wagner's entire mature output, the following section should also be considered a conceptual frame for the following two chapters, in which Wagner's Germanness (as it is embodied by *Die Meistersinger*) and the idea of regeneration (as embodied by *Parsifal*) are examined.

4. The Will to Live and the Spirit of Resignation

Schopenhauer developed his philosophy of the will through a critical examination of Kant's transcendental idealism.[411] Stressing the limits of cognition in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781), Kant argues that everything we experience is experienced through our senses and through our minds. What we can experience, therefore, does not merely depend upon the things that can be experienced but also upon the nature of our senses and our mental faculties – thus, upon the way in which we can experience things. This means that all experience and all knowledge is subject-bound. On this basis, Kant makes a distinction between the (noumenal) reality of things as they exist in themselves and the (phenomenal) reality as it presents itself to us. Only with respect to the phenomenal reality, that is to say the world in which we live, can

[410] Ibid., 133.

[411] Ideally, of course, in order to arrive at a proper understanding of Kant's transcendental idealism and subsequently Schopenhauer's notion of 'the world as representation', one should also develop an understanding of John Locke's 'partial idealism', as Julian Young deems it, and George Berkeley's so-called 'radical idealism' (or immaterialism), as well as David Hume's conception of 'impressions' and 'ideas'. A discussion of these subjects, however, falls beyond the scope of this chapter. We have to confine ourselves to a very brief general description of Kant's theory of knowledge so as to introduce Schopenhauer's main ideas concerning the will to live. For a clear and insightful description of Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant in relation to Schopenhauer, see Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) and Julian Young, *Schopenhauer* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005).

we make assertions because the noumenal reality is outside our cognitive limits. How the things are in themselves, we cannot know. We can only know how things appear to us.

Contrary to Kant, Schopenhauer argues that it is indeed possible to gain insight into the reality behind the phenomenal reality on the basis of the world of experiences in which we live. He starts from the assumption that the underlying (noumenal) reality must be one and indivisible. Schopenhauer criticises Kant's assertion that there would exist a multitude of things in themselves. After all, it is impossible to make a distinction between different things without reference to space, time and causality. Therefore, multiplicity belongs only to the phenomenal reality. Differentiation is possible only in the phenomenal world of our experience. A reality that transcends space, time and causality is necessarily one and undifferentiated, Schopenhauer reasons.[412]

Whereas Kant argues that the human body, like the mind/the mental apparatus, blocks access to the noumenal world, Schopenhauer argues that it is precisely the human body that provides access to the ultimate, underlying reality. As mentioned earlier, we perceive the things in our world by means of our senses and our minds. This is the way in which we can conceive of a representation of the world. Yet we are talking here about an image of the outside world, an image of the world as it appears – the world, thus, as representation. For instance, I can perceive and know my own body as a material object amongst other material objects that are present in the world; it is an object that, like any other material object or physical body in space, has a certain size, shape, weight, mass, colours and textures – an object, thus, that can be seen, smelled, tasted, touched and heard.[413] So, as Bryan Magee puts it in *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (1983), 'it can be thoroughly established that our bodies are material objects in the fullest, unqualified sense, made of the same stuff as other material objects, and knowable by perceiving subjects in all the ways in which other material objects are knowable'.[414] But unlike all other objects in the world that I can know only from the outside and thus indirectly, I can know myself as an object in a direct way, namely from inside, from within myself. This inner experience is not a representation formed on the basis of outer manifestations but a direct contact with the inner essence of things that Schopenhauer describes as the will: an unconscious and unbridled primal force or primal energy that shapes, permeates and propels everything that exists in the material universe.[415] This primal energy or primal will is something we can

[412] Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 128–130.
[413] Ibid., 121.
[414] Ibid., 122.
[415] Ibid., 139.

experience in our bodies as an unconscious and incessant striving to exist, to live, to survive, to reproduce. Within ourselves, we experience the ultimate reality: the will to live.

The experience of the will can lead to only one conclusion, Schopenhauer insists, and that is that life is suffering. As a product and expression of the will to live, the entire world is subject to an omnipresent primal force that is senseless and amoral, a force that is striving without reason and without purpose, without ever being able to be satisfied and to be put to rest. At all levels of need, the will exerts its influence, but we feel its presence most strongly when it is felt as a primary need, such as hunger or sexual desire. Once such a need is satisfied, another need swiftly arises. We are plagued by a continuing restlessness, an endless desire. A permanent feeling of satisfaction and fulfilment can never be achieved, which makes life's quest for happiness a futile pursuit.

What is more, due to its relentless striving, the will even combats itself, which is why the world is such a violent and remorseless place, a true hell. Wanting life, the will (as the primary cause of the physical universe) has objectified itself in the multiplicity of phenomena according to the principle of individuation (*principium individuationis*). Rising up through the ranks of the representations, i.e. the objectifications, of the will, the will manifests itself in micro-organisms, plants and animals to eventually achieve the highest level of its individuation in the human intellect (which means that, as David Hume had already pointed out and Nietzsche would emphasise as well, reason too is 'the slave of the passions', or the servant of the will). Divided into a plurality of individual manifestations, all of which are subject to the same will to live, each and all of these individual manifestations of the will brutally attack one another as each and every individual manifestation seeks to survive and flourish. This results in a brutal spectacle in which bodies are destroyed by deadly viruses and bacteria, in which plants are gobbled up by herbivores that in turn are devoured by carnivores that are the subsequent prey of man, who is equally inclined to harm his fellow human beings due to greed and an insatiable desire for power and control, which leads to theft, deceit, betrayal, war and murder – a world of pain. And so, Schopenhauer tells his readers, 'the life of the individual is a constant struggle'.[416] Just as 'history shows us the life of nations and finds nothing to narrate but wars and tumults', so too the individual 'lives in continual conflict and dies with sword in hand'.[417]

However, since man, unlike plants and animals, has the ability to reflect on his life, he can become aware of the will as the root cause of all the suffering in the world. Schopenhauer's *Die*

[416] Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On the Suffering of the World', in *Essays and Aphorisms*, ed. and trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1970), 5.
[417] Ibid.

Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (1818), for instance, as well as the Upanishads and the Tripiṭaka bear witness to this awareness. On the basis of the insight that suffering is caused by our submission to desire, Buddhist teachings prescribe an ascetic way of life in order to break free from desire and achieve the end of suffering. The ultimate goal of the Buddhist is to achieve Nirvana, a state of bliss in which there is no more longing, in which one is freed from the will and enlightened, knowing that the world is an illusion and that the universe is inherently meaningless.

Schopenhauer's thinking is similarly focused on breaking free from the will, and, as we have previously seen, in his philosophy the aesthetic experience is considered a state of mind whereby one detaches oneself from the will and whereby one beholds the world in a disinterested, objective way. Although this is a temporary condition, a temporary release from our terrible existence, art does nevertheless provide us with a lasting understanding of the suffering of the world. Two art forms in particular are considered to have the ability to illuminate nature's mechanism behind our worldly misery, namely tragedy and music.

Tragedy is one of the highest forms of art in Schopenhauer's eyes because it depicts in an exemplary manner that all our striving is in vain. 'In tragedy', Schopenhauer asserts, 'the noblest men, after a long conflict and suffering, finally renounce for ever all the pleasures of life and the aims till then pursued so keenly, or cheerfully and willingly give up life itself.'[418] Modern tragedies such as Goethe's *Faust* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* especially manage to successfully reflect the misery of mankind. For in these tragedies, misfortune is not so much caused by 'a colossal error, an unheard-of accident, or a character reaching the bounds of human possibility in wickedness', that is to say a grand and easily recognisable force, but by 'characters as they usually are in a moral regard in circumstances that frequently occur' – characters who are 'so situated with regard to one another that their position forces them, knowingly and with their eyes open, to do one another the greatest injury, without any of them being entirely in the wrong'.[419] Schopenhauer has a higher opinion of *Faust* and *Hamlet* than Greek tragedies such as Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King* because in the latter works 'we look on the prodigious fate and frightful wickedness as terrible powers threatening us only from a distance'.[420] By contrast, a modern tragedy such as *Faust*

[418] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* vol. 1, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York, NY: Dover, 1969), 253.
[419] Ibid., 254.
[420] Ibid., 254–255.

> shows us those powers that destroy happiness and life, and in such a way that the path to them is at any moment open even to us. We see the greatest suffering brought about by entanglements whose essence could be assumed even by our own fate, and by actions that perhaps even we might be capable of committing, and so we cannot complain of injustice. Then, shuddering, we feel ourselves already in the midst of hell.[421]

The spirit of resignation emanating from this realisation comes to the fore strongly in Goethe and Shakespeare, who conceived their works in the Christian paradigm. In Greek tragedy, however, the thought that renounces life is rarely expressed.[422] Even though heroes like Oedipus, Iphigenia and Cassandra die willingly, at the moment of death they are still attached to life due to a thirst for vengeance or sentimentality for the homeland.[423] By giving a prominent role to the spirit of resignation, Goethe and Shakespeare perfected the tragedy because they did not merely express the insight that life is suffering, as Euripides and Sophocles had already done, but they added to the work of the Greeks by giving voice to the spirit of resignation, which Schopenhauer considers the inevitable and only reasonable consequence of the realisation that all our striving will ultimately lead us to our doom.

As it illuminates the truth about life, tragedy is held in high esteem by Schopenhauer. Yet, there is one art form he believes to be exalted above all other arts, and that is music. In contrast to the other arts, music does not depict the objectifications of the will, that is to say concrete things, but is the direct and immediate expression of the will itself. When music, as in opera, sounds in combination with a theatrical scenery, actors, acts, words and images, then music shows itself indifferent to the actual content of the story and outward appearances on stage. This is because it only gives voice to the inner meaning of the events, the passions and feelings behind the actions[424] – the striving of the will itself, which is the driving force behind everything

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[421] Ibid., 255.

[422] For this reason, Schopenhauer preferred the 'spirit of Christianity' to 'the spirit of Graeco-Roman paganism'. Comparing the two, Schopenhauer argues that 'between the spirit of Graeco-Roman paganism and the spirit of Christianity the real antithesis is that of affirmation and denial of the will to live – in which regard Christianity is in the last resort fundamentally in the right' (Schopenhauer, 'On Affirmation and Denial of the Will to Live', in *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin, 1970), 33–34).

[423] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* vol. 2, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York, NY: Dover, 1966), 434.

[424] It is worth observing that Wagner, many years before discovering Schopenhauer, expressed similar thoughts about music in the stories and essays he wrote in 1840 and 1841 while living in Paris. In 'Une visite à Beethoven: Episode de la vie d'un musicien allemand' (1840), for instance, Wagner writes that the orchestra's 'instruments represent the rudimentary organs of creation and nature; what they express can never be clearly defined or put into words, for they reproduce the primitive feelings themselves'. And railing against program music in the essay 'Une soirée heureuse: Fantaisie sur la musique pittoresque' (1841), the composer argues that a 'stereotype interpretation' of a musical piece is 'inadmissible' since instrumental music (e.g. Beethoven's *Eroica*) can never refer to concrete, individual things, figures or events, or represent specific things that occur in the everyday world of appearances. Instead, it expresses the universal feelings behind particular events and appearances. Music, the young Wagner

that takes place. 'In its connection with the incidents, characters, and words', Schopenhauer writes, 'music becomes the expression of the inner significance of all those incidents, and of their ultimate and secret necessity that rests on this significance.'[425] 'Music', he further stresses, 'acts directly on the will, i.e., the feelings, passions, and emotions of the hearer.'[426] As music appeals to our inner lives, and hence makes us experience the inner cause or motivation behind actions and appearances (and thus reveals to us how the will works), it brings us into contact with the ultimate underlying reality, the true essence of things. And so, Schopenhauer believes, it is music that is capable of revealing the fundamental truth of life. Through its sheer indifference to the countless different phenomena that occur frequently in everyday life, music shows that the phenomenal world is merely an illusion, a delusion sprung from the will to live; it is a delusion that in turn conceals the very origin of suffering, namely the will – an origin, however, that music manages to disclose.

Together, tragedy and music provide crucial moral insights. Both arts demonstrate the effect of the will to live, and both arts reveal that the will is the root cause of all suffering. The unique additional insight provided by tragedy is that the recognition of the cause of suffering awakens the spirit of resignation. The unique additional insight provided by music is that due to the illusory nature of the world, one does not see the root cause of suffering. The combination of these insights, derived from knowledge about the aesthetic experience, forms the basis of Schopenhauer's ethics that would inspire Wagner, who in turn sought to express this ethics through his music.

The basis of this ethics is the realisation that there is only one ultimate reality, namely the will, which means that everyone and everything is identical with the will to live. Essentially, we are all one and the same, one with the will. Compassion for our fellow humans, and also for animals and nature at large, emanates from the realisation that the self is like the other,[427] that

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insists, 'expresses not the passion, love, desire, of this or that individual in this or that condition, but Passion, Love, Desire itself, and in such infinitely varied phases as lie in her unique possession and are foreign and unknown to any other tongue'. See Richard Wagner, 'A Pilgrimage to Beethoven' and 'A Happy Evening', in *Pilgrimage to Beethoven and Other Essays*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 41, 76, 81.

[425] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* vol. 2, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York, NY: Dover, 1966), 449.

[426] Ibid., 448.

[427] In *Parerga und Paralipomena*, Schopenhauer formulates this essential point as follows: 'Readers of my ethical philosophy will know that with me the foundation of morality ultimately rests on the truth which is in the Veda and Vedanta expressed in the mystical formula *tat twam asi* (This art Thou), by which is meant every living thing, whether man or animal' (Schopenhauer, 'On Ethics', in *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin, 1970, 149–150).

the pain of the other is essentially the pain of the self, too. This insight leads Schopenhauer to rail against vivisection and other atrocities committed against animals. After all, as manifestations of the will, man and animal (and the whole of nature) are fundamentally equal. However, humans are the only species capable of achieving this very insight and the only species able to act accordingly. This means that one should not continuously affirm one's own will, for instance, by pursuing power and wealth without restraint and self-control, since any unscrupulous and uninhibited pursuit of self-interest is always at the expense of others. The egoism characterising affirmative behaviour is a direct result of the delusion of self whereby one holds on to the *principium individuationis*, which prevents the individual from seeing the things and his connection with his fellow beings the way they really are. Enveloped in the veil of Maya, the individual makes a distinction between himself and all other beings, considering himself different from all others. Consequently, the individual will accord greater importance to himself than to others and won't hesitate to affirm his own will at the expense of someone else. An enlightened person, on the other hand, knows that the difference between himself and other creatures is just an illusion – the veil of Maya concealing the fundamental truth that behind diversity there is an underlying unity. One who has reached self-knowledge 'perceives that the distinction between himself and others […] belongs only to a fleeting, deceptive phenomenon', and 'he recognises […] that the in-itself of his own phenomenon is also that of others, namely that will to live which constitutes the inner nature of everything, and lives in all'.[428] Such an individual, moreover, knows that due to the phenomenal illusion, which stimulates affirmative behaviour, suffering is maintained in the world. This insight will inevitably incite an aversion to the misleading world of appearances and lead one to renunciation. Because 'the man who sees through the *principium individuationis*'[429] considers the suffering of all other living beings as his own suffering and knows that the will to live is the cause of suffering, he will come to embrace the ascetic imperative, which says that the will ought to turn against itself so as to abolish it. Repulsed by the will, i.e. 'inner nature', the individual 'ceases to will anything, guards against attaching his will to anything, tries to establish firmly in himself the greatest indifference to all things'.[430] Through a denial of the will to live, one's suffering can ultimately be terminated, and since the suffering of one is the suffering of all, the acetic imperative is aimed at ending the sufferings of the entire world. This is why the asceticism of, for example,

[428] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* vol. 1, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York, NY: Dover, 1969), 372.
[429] Ibid., 380.
[430] Ibid.

Buddhist monks and hermits is not merely focused on individual redemption but also aimed at the salvation of the world, of nature. The idea is that if the maxim of the denial of the will would become universal, espoused by all mankind, mankind would cease to exist, and consequently the animal world, nature, would cease to exist, too. As Schopenhauer argues, 'with the complete abolition of knowledge the rest of the world would of itself also vanish into nothing, for there can be no object without a subject'.[431] Thus, the key to world redemption is the denial of the will within oneself because the denial of the will within the knowing subject implies the denial of the will in the phenomenal world, which leads to the end of the world. After all, 'no will: no representation, no world'[432] – and consequently no more suffering, i.e. redemption. Yet the key to the end of suffering, as we have seen, lies in suffering itself; first, in the recognition that life is suffering, the recognition that the entire world is united in suffering, and then through acts of self-sacrifice, renunciation, acts that arise from consideration for the suffering of the world as a whole, that is to say from compassion – the knowledge that you are the other, one with the world through the will.

5. The Musical Expression of the Will

Wagner considered the discovery of Schopenhauer's philosophy in 1854 a life-changing event, and all his mature works were conceived with Schopenhauer's doctrine of the will prominently in mind.[433] The conception of the will as the ultimate reality behind outward appearances fit in well with Wagner's intention to create a new universal artwork that could restore man's long-lost connection to nature that Christianity and capitalism had broken.[434]

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[431] Ibid.

[432] Ibid., 411.

[433] For an insightful description of Wagner's discovery of Schopenhauer, see Bryan Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 2000), 126–173.

[434] Nevertheless, in many ways, Wagner's views deviated from Schopenhauer's philosophy. While the idea of the (German) nation, as we will discuss in the following chapter on Germanness and *Die Meistersinger*, was an important aspect of Wagner's (cosmopolitan/universalist) worldview, Schopenhauer, unlike Fichte or Hegel, had no sense of community at all and disregarded the category of the nation. Instead, Schopenhauer focused on the individual human being – man's internal world as opposed to the external world of particularities. And whereas Wagner believed that capitalism was a curse to society, Schopenhauer did not oppose the idea of a capitalist economic order; whatever system man chooses, the world remains a cold and evil place. And unlike Wagner, Schopenhauer, despite rejecting the Jewish/Christian God and religious law, did not seek to go beyond the Christian paradigm. He actually sought to affirm Christendom's essence, namely the spirit of resignation. 'My ethics', Schopenhauer declared, 'is actually in the spirit of the New Testament.' The 'true soul of the New Testament is undoubtedly the spirit of asceticism', and 'this spirit of asceticism', Schopenhauer maintained, 'is precisely denial of the will to live' (Schopenhauer, 'On Affirmation and Denial of the Will to Live', in *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin, 1970, 34–35).

To achieve this ideal, Wagner believed that it was imperative to refocus on an art form that had once successfully managed to establish unity between man and nature. That art form was Greek tragedy. In Wagner's eyes, Greek tragedy was the greatest art form ever invented by man because it managed to successfully integrate elements of the individual art forms into full dramatic performances. Furthermore, tragedy drew on myths that profoundly illuminated the cultural consciousness of the Greeks. Tragedy, Wagner believed, was the mirror of the nation; the Greeks and Greek art were one. Yet there was one grave mistake the Greeks had made. Greek tragedy merely represented the Greek people and not humanity as a whole. The Greeks owned slaves who were deemed inferior and who were not represented by Greek art. Thus, Greek tragedy, representing a particular people, was not a universal art.[435] Due to this shortcoming stemming from a moral deficiency, namely the inability to see that we are all one, the great united artwork of the Greeks ultimately declined and splintered into its individual parts, with the consequence that art forever lost its ability to give expression to a collective consciousness.

In order for art to be truly able to give voice to a collective consciousness, it had to draw on something that all people have in common instead of qualities that only a particular group of people possesses. Since the universal can only be found in human nature and not in any particular culture, the artwork of the future, that is to say the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, had to be the expression of something purely human, which is feeling.[436] Music is therefore central to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as it does not express concrete things but can give voice to universal feelings and emotions. Hence the notion that the Wagnerian drama, as the rebirth of Greek tragedy, had to be born 'out of the spirit of music'. Only then could the Wagnerian drama be the expression of all mankind. And as such, the music drama would be able to acquaint the listener with the true being of the world, the ultimate reality behind the world of appearances – a reality that Wagner, following in the footsteps of Schopenhauer, would ultimately conceive of as the will to live.

In light of Wagner's adherence to Schopenhauer's philosophy, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* should be understood as a means to become aware of the indivisible will as the root cause of all suffering, wherein all beings are one. This insight reveals that the separation between self and

[435] See Richard Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

[436] See Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994) and *Opera and Drama*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

other is an illusion. This separation is undone by Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* technique, which consists of ending the separation between the human and instrumental voice, between aria and recitative and between the sounds of different instruments, resulting in the typical Wagnerian *Mischklang*. In this manner, the total work of art expresses the idea of the elimination of the delusion of self. Hence, the moral lesson emanating from the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is this: learn to see the connection with your fellow beings.

Of all Wagner's works, none establishes such intimate entanglement between action, words and music as *Tristan und Isolde*. The love duet immediately comes to mind as a key example. The respective parts sung by Tristan and Isolde overlap and ultimately fully merge, with the result that the intelligibility of their words becomes frustrated, and the whole duet turns into a total musical experience in which every gesture, every word and every musical motif becomes increasingly ambiguous and hence ceases to function as a signifier referring to objects present in the phenomenal world. Instead, as these elements fuse together into a single, overwhelmingly powerful expressive force, we no longer experience the drama as a concrete, describable event but abstractly, as tone, timbre, rhythm, mood and temper – as a direct appeal to our emotional lives, the domain of the will, the ultimate reality behind the world of appearances.[437]

The music of the prelude to Act 1 well illustrates the drama's overall emphasis on inwardness. This is because it does not merely introduce the main musical themes of the drama but, most importantly, reveals the key insight that the drama as a whole provides, namely that the will residing within us is the root cause of all suffering but simultaneously also the source of our redemption. This insight is revealed through music that gives voice to an unfulfilled erotic desire, an everlasting longing that finds its musical embodiment in the famous Tristan chord, which refrains from progressing into a harmonic resolution as it continuously evolves into another unresolved discord, leaving one out of two dissonances structurally unresolved until the very end of the drama. Since this procedure lasts for hours on end, the music builds up a tension that becomes increasingly unbearable for the listener. Every time we think that a resolution is at hand, when chromatically rising scales prepare us emotionally for a fulfilling climax, we end up being disappointed. This is most notably the case at the end of the love duet, when Kurwenal rushes in, shouting, 'Save yourself, Tristan!', exactly at the moment when the consummation of the lovers' passion is about to reach its culmination point.

[437] On the notion of *Tristan* as an expression of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, see Eric Chafe, *The Tragic and the Ecstatic: The Musical Revolution of Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).

The sense of dissatisfaction that is created in the music is furthermore emphasised by its harmonic ambiguity. It is often not clear to which key the chords belong due to Wagner's structural avoidance of cadences. Herewith the music creates a sense of unpredictability, as it is never quite obvious in which direction the music is going to move. Instead of settling down, the music remains in a perpetual state of irresolution, of uncertainty. And instead of establishing keys, Wagner alludes to a variety of different tonal areas, which gives the music its suggestive, impressionistic character. Stressing the 'deep relationship between Wagner and Manet', Oswald Spengler describes Wagner's unprecedented ability to 'paint in the few tones of a motif' a wide array of impressions: 'colours of starry midnight, of sweeping clouds, of autumn, of the day dawning in fear and sorrow, sudden glimpses of sunlit distances, world-fear, impending doom, despair and its fierce effort, hopeless hope'.[438] Due to its harmonic ambiguity, Wagner's music indeed manages to evoke such a rich variety of moods, feelings, atmospheres, associations and impressions, therewith appealing to the ambivalent reality of one's inner world, where conflicting emotions continuously alternate and mingle with each other.

At the very beginning of the music drama, this appeal to one's contradictory, incongruous inner life is immediately made as one hears the cellos play a descending motif that signifies grief or sorrow, a motif that then fuses with a motif that represents desire, played by the oboes, which organically reverses the course of the grief motif as the desire theme chromatically moves upwards, driven by the infinitely striving will to live. As the motifs of grief and desire intermingle, tone colours are ingeniously varied in the harmony underneath, where the English horn and two bassoons are alternately complemented by a clarinet and oboe, which almost imperceptibly double the chords and the top-line melody. As Joseph Kerman argues, 'the dark, mysterious yearning quality of *Tristan*'s opening passage is due not only to its chromatic lines, harmony and orchestration, but also to its disjointed rhythm'.[439] With respect to the opening passage, Kerman points out that 'the phrases or cells formed as the two motifs converge are disjointed by silences which feel, at this slow tempo, unmeasured, though only the last of them is literally so (that is, marked with a fermata)'.[440] Also, the prelude's first downbeat is 'placed in time somewhat enigmatically', Kerman remarks, pointing out that 'the five slow quaver beats of crescendo on the cello in F in bar 1 are hard to count and construe, just as the rests in bars

[438] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, ed. Helmut Werner, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 157.
[439] Joseph Kerman, 'The Prelude and the Play', in *Cambridge Opera Handbooks. Richard Wagner, Tristan und Isolde*, ed. Arthur Groos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 55.
[440] Ibid.

3–4 and 7–8, leading up to the moment when the music falters after bar 11 as one fermata follows another'.[441] This elusive rhythmic procedure, combined with Wagner's unique chromaticism, the equivocal nature of his harmonies and highly subtle orchestral colouration make sure that already in the first few opening bars of *Tristan* an atmosphere is being created that touches upon a multitude of conflicting mental states and moral associations.

The Tristan chord, which makes its first appearance in the opening phrase, adds to the instantly established ambiguity. Since the chord could belong to a number of different keys, it alludes to a variety of opposed tonal directions, and consequently it appeals to a variety of emotional states. Laurence Dreyfus's survey of the application of the half-diminished chord in Wagner's earlier works illuminates the vastness of the chord's appeal to our inner lives. Dreyfus points out that the first serious use of the chord is noticeable in the opening music of the second act of *Lohengrin*, where it creates 'a harmonic ambiguity that serves well to prognosticate the evil and plotting'[442] one is about to witness in the first scene of the second act, where Friedrich of Telramund is raging about the loss of his honour and expresses suspicion towards his wife, Ortrud, who ultimately manages to persuade her husband to join her in a revenge plot against Elsa. Similarly, in *Das Rheingold*, the half-diminished chord indicates evil as it appears at the moment when Alberich curses love and proclaims his desire to achieve world domination by forging a magic ring. Yet in Scene 4 of the second act of *Die Walküre*, the chord acquires a new significance when it appears in the Fate motif and the Annunciation of Death motif. In this context, Brünnhilde approaches Siegmund to tell him that he is bound to die. According to Dreyfus, 'this may be the first time that Wagner foregoes the evil connotation of the half-diminished chord, here to express the noble tragedy of Siegmund's fate as he is commanded by Brünnhilde to foreswear love and retreat to Valhalla'.[443]

To this, however, we should add that precisely because Siegmund refuses to follow Brünnhilde to Valhalla (as Sieglinde won't be there), Brünnhilde gets confronted with Siegmund's genuine love for Sieglinde, which motivates Brünnhilde to choose for love, to protect Siegmund and to reject Wotan's relentless pursuit of power. In the Annunciation of Death scene, the half-diminished chord is part of a situation where the awareness rises that evil is tantamount to the lust for power. In *Lohengrin* and *Das Rheingold*, the chord already indicated an aversion to love coinciding with the attempt to achieve supremacy: Friedrich and Oltrud, who seek to destroy the love between Elsa and Lohengrin in order to gain power over

[441] Ibid., 54–55.
[442] Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 102.
[443] Ibid.

Brabant, and Alberich, who forswears love in order to focus on achieving world domination. But it is only in *Die Walküre* that the pursuit of power and control is truly recognised as something that undermines love. By witnessing Siegmund's torment, Brünnhilde experiences that the ban on love leads to suffering, an experience that leads to the insight that the pursuit of power is the cause of Siegmund's sorrow. It is due to this insight that Brünnhilde decides to defy Wotan's orders and to protect Siegmund from the forces that seek to destroy him in order to end the forbidden love between him and Sieglinde. So, what Brünnhilde shows is that knowledge about the root cause of suffering, namely the lust for power, is needed in order to protect love. And this knowledge has been gained through her experience of the destructive impact of power, through her experience of evil. This implies that the source of one's suffering, in a sense, becomes the source of one's redemption, too (as expressed in the words of Parsifal: 'only the Spear that smote you can heal your wound'). The appearance of the half-diminished chord in *Lohengrin* and the *Ring* ingeniously displays this duality as it signifies power as a force of evil as well as the awareness that power is such a force, through which it triggers the will to combat the pursuit of power for the sake of love.

In *Tristan und Isolde*, the chord (as the Tristan chord) maintains its dual role as the key marker of unfulfilled desire, which, as soon as it is played in the opening phrase, dictates the entire course of the drama. Until it finally resolves in the last bars of the work, it gives voice to the all-permeating, unceasing longing within us – that is to say, the everlasting will that governs our existence and produces our suffering. Yet as an expression of erotic desire, the Tristan chord, and the music of the work at large, also signifies a notion of redemption. After all, when two individuals become one through the act of sex, the spell of the *principium individuationis* can be broken and the separation between self and other can be undone. As an expression of endless desire, i.e. the will, the music embodies the thing in life in which we are all one, the thing that unites the self with the other. However, as we recall Scruton's explanation of erotic love, what unites the self with the other is not the blind, abstract, irrational will that lies underneath all appearances but the unique appearance, the individuality of the other. By seeing the irreplaceable subjectivity of the other, one becomes aware of the truth about our existence, aware of the suffering that defines the human condition. But again, this insight can only be reached through love for another individual. It is the unique subjectivity of the other that forms the pathway to the universal truth of life.

Scruton argues that by listening to the music of *Tristan*, 'we are acquiring a first-person perspective on the state of mind of its protagonists'.[444] Pointing out that 'the drama plays out almost entirely in the subjective realm',[445] Scruton argues that 'the meaning of Tristan and Isolde's love can be conveyed only if we can be led into the inner regions where it grows and flourishes, and this we can do through music'.[446] As an example, Scruton refers to the moment in the third act when Tristan lapses into delirium, convinced as he is that Isolde is coming. In his imagination, her ship is approaching ('The ship! The ship! There it goes past the reef!'), and he forcefully asks Kurwenal whether he sees it too ('Can't you see it?! Kurwenal, can't you see it?!'), wanting him to see what he sees in his mind. However, Kurwenal hesitantly has to tell his lord that there is still no ship in sight. As he responds to Tristan, the rapid tremolo on the violins that accompanied Tristan's rapturous outburst is all of a sudden replaced by an English horn playing the shepherd's 'old, sad tune', which, at the beginning of the third act, had awakened the wounded Tristan, who recognised the melody from long ago. When the shepherd's yearning tune was played at that moment, Scruton points out, it was part of 'the outward furniture of Kareol'.[447] Now, however, as the melody merges with Tristan's reflections on the meaning of this melody in his life, 'we are starting to hear the music in the way in which Tristan hears it and consequently we are getting to know Tristan from within'.[448] We learn that he first heard the shepherd's melody when he was told of his father's death and that he had heard it once more when his mother passed away. Tristan mournfully asks what this ancient tune is trying to tell him. Is it his mere fate to yearn and to die? As the shepherd's tune merges with Tristan's gloomy meditation, Scruton observes, fragments derived from the melody are dispersed throughout the orchestra, by which the music expresses that Tristan's sorrow is omnipresent and inescapable.[449] Scruton further points out that through a transformation of the shepherd's tune, the individuality of Tristan's grief is emphasised.[450] What happens is that gradually the focus shifts to the opening phrase of the shepherd's melody, captured by a continuously shifting and chromatic bass line that causes the tune to lose its folk-like character. Instead, it begins to display the inner discord that plagues Tristan, who, while impatiently

[444] Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 77.
[445] Ibid., 77.
[446] Ibid., 77–78.
[447] Ibid., 117.
[448] Ibid.
[449] Ibid., 116.
[450] Ibid.

awaiting his beloved Isolde, rails against the very source of his love: the longing within, the will that has brought him in this state of suffering.[451]

Through the music, we become one with Tristan, and through him as a unique subject, as we suffer together with him, we get to experience the universal truth that affects us all, and that is the will. It is in this will that we can recognise ourselves, and therefore it is the will that connects us with Tristan. As we witness and experience his fate, we get to know the will as the source of his and our own suffering. Yet we also get to know the will as a source of empathy and compassion towards the other, and as such the will has a redeeming value as it ends the separation between the self and the other. But in order to really get to know the will (which is imperative to be able to end the separation between self and other), we have to truly feel the will at work within us, in our bodies. This explains why Wagner wrote such incredibly sensual, overwhelming music for *Tristan*, music that overpowers one's senses and mind. Audiences ought to feel what Tristan feels – a longing of the most intense kind and the pain that flows from it, as well as the bliss erotic love can bring us. The musical qualities that we have previously discussed, like the harmonic ambiguity and structural avoidance of resolutions, serve to appeal as strongly as possible to our emotional lives, our inner world. By doing so, the music is pre-eminently able to measure up to Schopenhauer's moral imperative as it makes us immerse ourselves in the oneness of our reality, through which we come to see that the separation between self and other is based on an illusion and that we are ultimately one with the will, united in suffering. But Schopenhauer also argued that this insight ideally should lead to a change in attitude towards life. As we recall, the philosopher lauded Shakespearean tragedy and Goethe's *Faust* for giving voice to the spirit of resignation, which, after one has come to understand that the will is the root cause of all suffering and all striving is in vain, would be the soundest attitude towards life one could adopt. The question now is how knowledge of the will, acquired through the experience of Wagner's music, can lead to the spirit of resignation, a spirit that does not entail a renunciation *of* life but a renunciation *in* life, that is to say a renunciation of powers that oppress love and freedom – the spirit of Brünnhilde, who stood up against the oppressive force that sought to destroy Siegmund's life and love for Sieglinde. How could Wagner's music by means of its overpowering sensuousness evoke this critical spirit? By emphasising the notion that the music of *Tristan* invites us to listen to it from the perspective of the protagonists, Scruton points in the direction of Nietzsche's conception of the tragic view

[451] Ibid., 116–117.

of life that can serve as a framework for recovering the life-affirming spirit of resignation that Wagner's music entails.

6. Wagnerian Sensuousness and the Dionysian Spirit

Nietzsche's conception of the tragic should be understood against the backdrop of Schopenhauer's assessment of tragedy based on the latter's theory of the will.

In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche argues that Greek tragedy has developed from the dynamics of two fundamental principles or modes of thought: the Apollonian (order, control, rationality) and the Dionysian (intoxication, chaos, irrationality). Whereas epic poetry and sculpture represent the Apollonian concept, music represents the Dionysian idea. By weaving together these two conflicting modes of thought, Aeschylus and Sophocles gave birth to tragedy as an art form. In this art form, Nietzsche argues, the Apollonian and the Dionysian were in perfect balance. While the Apollonian element would bring the principle of individuation to the stage (*principium individuationis*), an orderly realm differentiated by individual appearances in the form of masks, costumes, texts, signs and symbols, the Dionysian principle supplied the element of self-dissolution by unleashing an undifferentiated force of chaos, intoxication, ecstasy and madness by means of dance but most eminently through music. This Dionysian musical force would wipe away the illusion of culture represented by the Apollonian presence on stage. As the audience witnessed this process and, moreover, actively participated in this act of ruthless annihilation by joining the chorus in singing the dithyrambs, the awareness would arise that despite all our lofty ideas and theories, created in order to be able to maintain control of ourselves and our world, man is ultimately subject to a force he can neither control nor fathom. As tragedy reveals the truth about life, the harsh truth about our human condition, Nietzsche considers it to be the greatest of all art forms, the greatest achievement of man, especially because tragedy enables one to look the terrifying truth of life straight in the eye, to the effect that one becomes capable of dealing with the harshness of life, becomes willing to say yes to life and all the pain and suffering that life contains. Tragedy, as Nietzsche puts it in *Ecce Homo*, was a means for the Greeks 'to get over their pessimism, to overcome it'.[452]

However, tragedy declined when Euripides removed the Dionysian element from it. Herewith Greek drama lost its ability to display the ultimate reality and to inspire the people to behold the world through a Dionysian lens. Instead of encouraging its spectators to confront

[452] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 270.

reality as it really is, Greek drama encouraged its audience to cowardly deny the frightening truth of life and to flee into an Apollonian world of illusions. To be sure, Nietzsche does not reject the Apollonian frame of mind. On the contrary, the philosopher argues that the Apollonian is a necessary element in tragedy. This is because the concrete Apollonian channels the abstract Dionysian; it structures and configures the undifferentiated, shapeless Dionysian life-giving force. And thus, it is due to the Apollonian that we are able to conceive of the Dionysian. Through the individual, particular appearance that the Apollonian provides, we can perceive the universal Dionysian. And thus, to perceive the world through a Dionysian lens means to perceive the world in and through an Apollonian guise, with the knowledge that the guise is ultimately a mere sham, a particular, relative and exchangeable appearance – an appearance, nevertheless, we cherish most deeply, for it is the pathway to the truth of life, the source from which we can gain our strength to live: the Dionysian.

Hence Nietzsche argues that there must be a balance between the Apollonian and the Dionysian mode of thinking, and Attic tragedy, the philosopher believes, taught its spectator-participants how to maintain such a balance in their lives. However, with the rise of Euripidean drama, the balance shifted to the Apollonian mode of thinking, which Nietzsche equates with the Socratic worldview, that is to say a worldview that distrusts sensuality and rejects everything that flows from our feelings and instincts. Instead, it reflects a blind faith in science, in scientific knowledge and progress, in objective truth. The optimistic Socratic worldview would henceforth dominate the entire culture of the Occident and in doing so marginalise the Dionysian mode of thinking, which as a consequence would weaken man's mind.

Yet Nietzsche observed that the tide was about to turn due to the philosophies of Kant and Schopenhauer, who confronted their readers with the limits of man's knowledge. Herewith they paved the way for the revaluation of the Dionysian *Weltanschauung*, meaning a revaluation of the notion that life is ultimately uncontrollable and will sooner or later demolish all securities, that all our certainties are nothing more than man-made constructions and that our ideals and (Christian) morals are mere illusions. This notion, stemming from the Dionysian frame of mind, would ultimately lead to a perspectival worldview whereby every absolute truth claim or absolutist attitude would be repudiated. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche lauds Schopenhauer for re-establishing the awareness of the Dionysian through his conception of the will, that unconscious, irrational and unbridled primal force that shapes, permeates and propels everything that exists in the material universe – a force, moreover, that reveals itself through music.

While Schopenhauer provides a theoretical framework in which to reaffirm the Dionysian, Wagner provides the artistic frame to this end by means of the creation of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which Nietzsche considers to be the rebirth of tragedy. In the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the long-lost tragic worldview is brought back to life through music. But how does the Dionysian manifest itself in music?

In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche remains close to Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music, wherein music is considered as an art form that does not depict the objectifications of the will, that is to say Apollonian appearances, but is the direct and immediate expression of the will itself. Following in Schopenhauer's footsteps, Nietzsche argues that music, as it exceeds language, is pre-eminently capable of provoking strong emotional responses through which the listener experiences the heart of things. Like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche contends that music remains indifferent to outward appearances and that it therefore reveals the illusory character of the phenomenal world. Yet Nietzsche increasingly emphasises the interdependence of music, appearing as the Dionysian will, and the Apollonian appearances. Arguing that the power of music lies in its capacity to ignite one's imagination, to provoke a multitude of images and associations in the mind of the listener, Nietzsche points out that composers feel inclined to connect their compositions to all sorts of picturesque images, giving their works (or parts thereof) descriptive names like 'scene by the brook', or 'merry gathering of rustics'.[453] Furthermore, he gives the example of a Beethoven symphony, which 'time and time again compels its listeners to use figurative speech to describe it'.[454]

Now, the same goes for Wagner's music. We recall Spengler's description of Wagner's unprecedented capacity to crowd into merely a few bars 'colours of starry midnight, of sweeping clouds, of autumn, and sudden glimpses of sunlit distances'. Here Spengler explicitly indicates that he drew on Nietzsche's description of this unique feature of Wagner's music in *Der Fall Wagner*. In this work, the philosopher calls Wagner the 'greatest miniaturist in music who crowds into the smallest space an infinity of sense and sweetness' and whose 'wealth of colours, of half shadows, of the secrecies of dying light' is peerless.[455] Rather than a musician in the traditional sense of the word, Wagner should be considered a 'scenic artist' whose musical innovations serve the purpose of developing 'theatrical rhetoric, a means of expression,

[453] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, Or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 54.
[454] Ibid.
[455] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 171.

of underscoring gestures, of suggestion, of the psychologically picturesque'.[456] Hence Wagner's exclusive focus on 'what is elementary, namely sound, movement, colour, in brief the sensuousness of the music'.[457] According to Nietzsche, this shows that Wagner's artistic consciousness is not musical but theatrical: 'what he wants is effect, nothing but effect'.[458] By means of effect, the overwhelming sensuousness of the music, Wagner manages to seduce his audience into believing that what is being heard and seen is true when in actuality this is not the case. 'Wagner's music', Nietzsche writes, 'is never true.'[459]

Although Nietzsche's words have often been interpreted as an attack on Wagner's art, the opposite is true. What the philosopher actually does in *Der Fall Wagner* is explain what it is that makes Wagner's music so Dionysian, namely its unsurpassed capacity to portray visual effects that overwhelm our senses. Due to this capacity, the music is able to maximally appeal to our emotional lives, subsequently evoking in the listener an immeasurable range of particular moods, images and impressions. Like Beethoven's music, Wagner's compositions incite listeners to use figurative speech to describe them. However, as Nietzsche argues in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, such descriptions 'are only symbolical representations born of music, and not the imitated objects of music', which means that 'these representations can teach us nothing whatsoever concerning the Dionysian content of music'.[460] But precisely because of this very notion that language and images are unable to 'disclose the innermost heart of music',[461] and due to the subsequent insight that the images that we attach to music *are not* Dionysian but *evoked by* the Dionysian, we get to know the otherwise utterly opaque Dionysian force of life. The figurative images evoked by music function in the same manner as the Apollonian appearances in Greek theatre: they structure and configure the indefinable Dionysian force, wrapping it up in a variety of guises that bear resemblance to the music yet fail to capture its deeper significance. Through this notion, we come to understand that the Dionysian is the generator of the Apollonian appearances, whose relativity and transience become as strikingly apparent as the inevitability of their appearance as such, since, after all, it has become equally clear that the Dionysian only manifests itself in the Apollonian imagination.

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[456] Ibid., 172–173.
[457] Ibid., 173.
[458] Ibid.
[459] Ibid.
[460] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, Or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 54.
[461] Ibid., 55.

This leads Nietzsche to the startling conclusion that ultimately there is nothing but appearances, nothing but shams – a notion he stressed more emphatically in his later publications. In *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (1878), for instance, the philosopher writes that 'no music is in itself deep and full of meaning'.[462] Music itself does not contain the truth (e.g. the Schopenhauerian will or the Kantian thing in itself). It is us who 'project such meaning into the sound'.[463] Hence Nietzsche's remark that Wagner's music (like any other music) is never true. This in itself is not a problem in Nietzsche's eyes. What is problematic, though, is that many fail to see that Wagner's sublime veil of sound is *nothing but* a veil of sound.

In the previous chapter, we pointed out that Nietzsche in his *Götzen-Dämmerung* (as well as in his other writings) debunks the idols of his time and denounces questionable ideologies, such as nationalism and anti-Semitism, that depict nations and identities as being objective and immutable. The philosopher rails against the fact that proponents of these ideas do not see that the reality that they cherish is an illusion, that the idols that they worship will be swept away sooner or later by the relentless stream of life. While only a few dare to confront themselves with this harsh notion, the majority of people avoid facing the facts and spend their lives worshipping idols that they consider representations of the truth. One of these idols is Wagner, who in the late nineteenth century was appropriated by decadents, religious bigots, anti-Semites and German nationalists. 'The Germans', Nietzsche writes in *Der Fall Wagner*, 'had constructed a Wagner for themselves whom they could revere.'[464] Nietzsche's hope that Wagner's music dramas would inspire Germany to embrace the long-forgotten tragic view of life had been rudely shattered. 'What had happened?',[465] the philosopher reflects in *Ecce Homo*: 'Wagner had been translated into German! The Wagnerian had become master over Wagner – German art. The German master. German beer.'[466]

Ironically, this appropriation of Wagner was due to the very Dionysian power of Wagner's music, due to its overwhelming power to arouse the most vivid, make-believe visions in one's mind. The capacity of Wagner's music to illuminate the illusory character of the Apollonian world, precisely by demonstrating to the listener-spectator *how* music, i.e. the Dionysian, gives

[462] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (London: Penguin, 1984), 128.
[463] Ibid.
[464] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 165.
[465] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 284.
[466] Ibid., 284.

birth to a phantasmagoria of images, tilts over into a practice of persuasion whereby the all-too-perfect sham is taken for real instead of being recognised as an illusion.

The key term in this successful practice of persuasion is sensuousness. Wagner's music is uniquely able to excite the nerves. Herewith, Nietzsche writes in his postscript to *Der Fall Wagner*, it 'flatters everything Christian, every religious expression of decadence',[467] to which he adds that 'never before has there been such a deadly hatred of the search of knowledge!'[468] By persuading the senses, Wagner's music blocks the mental path towards knowledge, by which Nietzsche means the tragic knowledge the Dionysian provides – that everything in life that we hold dear and perceive as objective, eternal and true is eventually nothing more than a man-made construction, a temporary sham that sooner or later will be swept away by the sands of time. This knowledge, which is grounded in the terrifying insight that the universe is ultimately meaningless and hope of redemption is idle, is not complete without the complementary Dionysian attitude to life that wishes to affirm life 'even in its strangest and hardest problems' and 'to be *oneself* the eternal joy of becoming – that joy which included even joy in destroying'.[469]

But did we not ascertain that Wagner's music, particularly *Tristan*, is the ultimate bearer of this tragic knowledge? After all, it evokes the insight that the sham is nothing but a sham, displaying the relativity of the world of appearances, its alterability, transience and hence its meaninglessness, through which we come to see that the foundation of life is an endless state of suffering. Moreover, the music of *Tristan*, with its disjointed rhythm, persistent avoidance of cadences and its harmonic ambiguity due to the centrality of the Tristan chord, is pre-eminently capable of arousing contradictory images and associations, through which we learn that the source of these opposing Apollonian appearances, namely the Dionysian, ultimately remains inaccessible to us, remains something beyond our grasp and control. And so, as we become aware that we cannot master the Dionysian force of life, i.e. the source of suffering, we become aware that we are subject to the Dionysian, subject to suffering. The state of suffering is something we cannot get away from, not even temporarily, as Schopenhauer believed, by seeking momentary refuge in art, preferably music. What we *can* control, however, is our *attitude* towards this insight. We can either live in denial of it, for instance by embracing a

[467] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 183.
[468] Ibid., 184.
[469] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 562–563.

theistic worldview, or live in accord with this tragic knowledge, by affirming life regardless of its contradictions – the constructive and the destructive, the good and the bad it has in store for us. In this way, one becomes one with the Dionysian force of life, one with the eternal force of becoming – a force that entails creation as well as destruction. To do so is very empowering. One can't get away from life, i.e. suffering, but by maximally affirming it, one can triumph over it. The tragic view of life, although grounded in pessimism, offers an optimistic perspective on life; the very awareness that life is suffering triggers the will to say yes to life in order to overcome suffering.

Wagner's music, as we have seen, reflects this pessimistic yet optimistic worldview. We recall, for instance, the appearance of the half-diminished chord in *Lohengrin* and the *Ring* and eventually *Tristan* and how it manages to simultaneously constitute notions of good and evil, signifying power as a force of evil as well as the awareness that power is such a force, through which it triggers the will to combat the pursuit of power for the sake of love. The source of one's suffering, we herewith learn from the music, becomes the source of one's redemption, too. Through this notion, moreover, we come to understand this music as a transformative power, inciting one to change one's thinking and acting.

However, we recognise this life-affirming signification of the half-diminished chord in Wagner's work from a Dionysian point of view. From another point of view, one might interpret this music differently. After all, the true content of music (i.e. the Dionysian) remains unknown to us since music does not signify anything outside itself. Music thus persuades us to ascribe meaning to it on the basis of our personal experiences, our personal belief systems. Wagner's music especially, due to its sensual power, is able to seduce us to project meaning into it. As Nietzsche points out, Wagner's music has seduced all sorts of figures who clung to dogmatic worldviews, such as nationalists, anti-Semites and religious decadents, who projected their views on Wagner's art. Nietzsche's objection is that Wagner's music is perceived from an exclusive Apollonian perspective whereby reality is considered immutable, objective and absolute. As a result of this appropriation, the Dionysian significance of Wagner's music is obscured. And yet, the co-option of Wagner by these questionable groups simultaneously illuminates the composer's Dionysian power. This is due to the following notion: Wagner's music has been able to physically affect its listeners, has been able to effectuate a sensual experience that stimulates the Apollonian imagination such that it instigated the listeners to appropriate the music from a particularistic perspective, a perspective that serves as the source for the figurative descriptions that the music manages to elicit from its listeners – descriptions

by which the listeners affirm their own identities, which they subsequently attribute to Wagner's inherently meaningless music.

What becomes clear here is that when one has an aesthetic experience, contrary to what Kant and Schopenhauer have argued, one does *not* behold the world in a disinterested manner different to the attitude one has in everyday reality but rather in an interested and subjective way, fully in sync with one's attitude in everyday life. This is first of all evidenced by the fact that art physically affects us. Art, especially music, affects our bodies directly while we are present and active in the world, physically involved in things we are attracted to, that is to say involved with an *interest*. There is no possible way that we can take a truly objective stance towards things or establish a critical, ideal distance towards the things we encounter because we are always already automatically involved in things, assessing things in view of our personal interests. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche points out that the practice of Greek tragedy had already displayed awareness of this aesthetics of immersion as 'the spectators did not allow the world of the drama to act on them aesthetically, but corporally and empirically'.[470] The spectators identified with the mythical figures on stage, and they appropriated the identities of their culture's gods and titans, such as Prometheus, who appeared before them as 'bodily present and real'.[471] On the one hand, the spectators underwent a transformation since they adopted the identities of mythological heroes. But on the other hand, the spectators did not change but rather affirmed their own Greek identity since they took on the identities of gods and titans from *their* particular culture. The notion of transformation or becoming goes hand in hand with the notion that one experiences things on the basis of a particular interest, that is to say from a particular perspective. In this way, Greek tragedy virtually dismantles the idea that there is something like an objective and invariable truth. Simultaneously, it emphasises how pleasurable it nonetheless is to take on a particular Apollonian guise simply because it empowers us and helps us to cope with life. Thus, it is in our strategic interest to choose a guise to our liking, which means that every Apollonian guise, i.e. 'Truth', is established on the basis of a *will to life*, utilised on the basis of the will to empower oneself in life and hence aimed at affirming life.

This implies that ascetic values, too, are essentially life-affirming. The Schopenhauerian message of world renunciation is therefore considered perfidious by Nietzsche. In his essay 'Was bedeuten asketische Ideale?' (the third treatise of *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 1887),

[470] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, Or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 57.
[471] Ibid.

Nietzsche points out that Schopenhauer loved to hate life. Schopenhauer was the kind of man who 'needed enemies' in order to be happy.[472] He thrived on combating adversaries, on raging against the things by which he felt disgusted. Animosity was his life's fuel, the source of his energy, inspiration and bliss, his reason to exist and to keep on existing, which, in Schopenhauer's case, was synonymous with writing philosophical reflections in which the thinker railed against sensuality. Yet the eloquence and vivaciousness with which Schopenhauer expressed his pessimistic ideas prove that the writer was not a pessimist at all.[473] On the contrary, his writings betray a tremendous joy in using 'bilious, black-green words'.[474] His anti-sensual message, therefore, was mendacious since this message was by all means the product of a deep love of sensuality. The very reason for his life was sensual, aesthetic. He was, as Nietzsche had put it in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882/1887), 'like the Greeks; an adorer of form, of tones, of words, and therefore an artist'.[475] Hence, Schopenhauer's assertion that one can temporarily be freed from the will through aesthetic contemplation is deemed fallacious by Nietzsche. Beauty does not 'give us pleasure without interest', the latter stresses; on the contrary, it arouses our will, that is to say our interest.[476] As Stendhal teaches his readers, beauty promises happiness.[477]

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[472] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?', in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 106.

[473] Not just the form but also the content of Schopenhauer's writings betrays an affirmative attitude to life in the sense that Schopenhauer, like Nietzsche, encouraged his readers to find a way to live a meaningful life despite the knowledge that the world, due to the will, is actually a hell and that man is ultimately better off dead. It is not for nothing that Schopenhauer did not consider suicide to be a fruitful means to end suffering. The act of suicide, after all, leads to the death of an individual body or organism, an individual manifestation of the will, but it does not obliterate the will itself – the source of suffering. In order to redeem oneself from the enslavement of the will, one should invest (through music, art, literature, philosophy, etc.) in one's inner world, the subjective life of the mind, and refrain from the sensual pleasures of the external/objective world – the world of things where one, like an animal, lives in service of the will, continuously stirring one's passions/interests with the result that one ends up living a life full of boredom and pain. In contrast, the life of the mind enables one to 'take a vivid interest in things by way of mere cognition, without any interference of the will'. Through this (disinterested) interest, one will be 'transported to a region where pain is essentially alien, into the atmosphere of the lightly living gods' (Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life', in *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Sabine Roehr and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 295). An intellectual life is thus the key to happiness for it is a way of life whereby one is not enslaved by the will. It is a life in the face of suffering and yet a life where one overcomes it, a life whereby one espouses a pessimistic frame of mind (by acknowledging that life is essentially suffering) so as to live a cheerful life.

[474] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?', in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 106.

[475] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1974), 38.

[476] Ibid., 104.

[477] Ibid., 105.

The height of irony is reached when artists start to preach ascetic values. Hence Nietzsche's criticism of Wagner's 'homage to chastity' in *Parsifal*.[478] While the overarching theme of this work is the Schopenhauerian message of resignation, the highly sensual music, as well as the at times truly excitatory text, lures us to life. When the Flower maidens come on the scene in the second act in order to seduce the chaste Parsifal, music of the most seductive kind accompanies the erotic allusions of the beautiful girls who fail to seduce the future redeemer of mankind, who ultimately decides to adopt a worldview of resignation.[479] Instead of the opera's hero, it is the audience who is seduced. Nietzsche witnessed large numbers of Christians visiting Bayreuth to admire Wagner's swansong that, in Nietzsche's day, was widely seen as a Christian work of art par excellence. This notion, moreover, was shared by some prominent members of the *Bayreuther Kreis*, such as Hans von Wolzogen and Ludwig Schemann, who viewed Parsifal as the representation of Jesus Christ.[480] And yet, Nietzsche observed, these life-rejecting Christians, who viewed *Parsifal* as a means to escape this wretched and sinful world, indulged in the beauty of the forms, tones and words intended to convey the message of world renunciation – a message expressed so beautifully that they wished to receive it time and time again out of sheer lust for life. For this reason, Nietzsche wrote that 'in the art of seduction, *Parsifal* will always retain its rank – as *the stroke of genius* in seduction'.[481] *Parsifal*, after all, brilliantly managed to conceal from its Christian listeners the real reason for their beholding of the work, namely their will to life. The work thus managed to conceal the fact that one listens with an interest, subjectively, from a certain perspective.

Parsifal contains all the elements that appealed to its decadent audience, Nietzsche contended. Christian symbolism pervaded the outer layers of the work: the Holy Chalice, the Last Supper, the Holy Spear that pierced the side of Jesus, Amfortas's wound as a reference to the wound of Christ, Good Friday. These symbols were seen in combination with mesmerising

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[478] Ibid., 98.

[479] Strikingly, it is precisely due to a sensual, erotic gesture that Parsifal comes to this decision. After all, it is Kundry's kiss that enlightens the young man, who suddenly recalls Amfortas's wound and then realises that the root cause of all suffering is the blind, uncontrolled affirmation of one's will – the will that led Amfortas to succumb to sexual temptation (which led to the wound) and that led Parsifal to kill a harmless fellow creature (the swan). Because of this insight, the future redeemer decides to adopt an attitude of resignation, which prompts him to act considerately towards his fellow beings, as a result of which he changes the world for the better. In this manner, Wagner subtly emphasised the ambiguity of the erotic impulse, embodied by the music, as it effectuates a mindset that is aimed both at resignation and affirmation, pro and contra life.

[480] See Mary A. Cicora, *Parsifal Reception in the Bayreuther Blätter* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 1987).

[481] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 184.

music that seemed to be devoid of measure and rhythm due to Wagner's use of the *unendliche Melodie*, which had the effect of 'entering the sea'.[482] When listening to Wagner, Nietzsche noted, 'one gradually loses one's footing until one surrenders to the fury of the elements'.[483]

Nietzsche's characterisation of Wagner's musical art corresponds with Baudelaire's description of the effect of Wagner's music, which made the poet feel 'swept up and subjugated' and gave him 'a truly sensual pleasure, recalling that of floating through the air or rolling on the sea'.[484] Stressing the addictiveness of this overwhelming listening experience, Baudelaire wrote that the 'rapture had been so strong, so awe-inspiring, that [he] could not resist the desire to return to it again and again'.[485] Additionally, he compared the effect of Wagner's music to drugs, writing that 'those deep harmonies seemed comparable to those stimulants that speed up the pulse of the imagination'[486] and that 'the sound of that ardent despotic music seems to recapture for the listener the vertiginous imaginings of the opium smoker'.[487] Due to its 'nervous intensity, violence in passion and will-power', Baudelaire wrote, 'Wagner's music expresses, now in the suavest, now in the most strident tones, all that lies most deeply hidden in the heart of man'.[488] It was for this reason that Baudelaire felt that he could truly identify himself with the music. As he confided in a personal letter to Wagner himself, 'it seemed to me that the music was my own'.[489]

Baudelaire's words are illustrative of late-nineteenth-century accounts of the physical effects of Wagner's music, in which the listener's response is often described as overwhelming, rapturous, hypnotic, addictive, self-revelatory and introspective. Hence Nietzsche's description of Wagner's music as 'a danger'.[490] After all, as it pertains to *Parsifal*, the combination of this

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[482] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1954), 666.

[483] Ibid.

[484] Charles Baudelaire wrote these words in an exalted letter to Wagner in which the poet famously expounded his impression of Wagner's music. The letter was written shortly after witnessing a concert in February 1860 at the Théâtre des Italiens in Paris where excerpts from *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and *Tristan* were performed. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta: Figures of Wagner*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 2.

[485] Charles Baudelaire, 'Richard Wagner and *Tannhäuser* in Paris', in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. by P.E. Charvet (London: Penguin, 2006), 332.

[486] In the letter to Wagner. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta: Figures of Wagner*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 2.

[487] Charles Baudelaire, 'Richard Wagner and *Tannhäuser* in Paris', in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. by P.E. Charvet (London: Penguin, 2006), 332.

[488] Ibid., 355.

[489] See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta: Figures of Wagner*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 2.

[490] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 666.

hypnotic, ultra-Dionysian music with Christian symbols created such a powerful effect that it made the spectators believe that there was a deeper truth behind the appearance of the artwork, while what they actually saw was merely a product of words, symbols and sounds – nothing but a sham. Since *Parsifal* resonated so strongly with their personal worldview, they failed to realise that it was they who projected their worldview on *Parsifal* instead of the other way around. In other words, they failed to see the perspective from which they viewed the work, and consequently, they failed to see that they viewed the work from a certain perspective in the first place. This is the reason why they believed that what they saw was something absolute, timeless and objective – something omnipotent that cannot be contradicted instead of something relative and subjective, just one perspective amongst countless other perspectives and therefore always in opposition to something else.

Now, Nietzsche did not scold the Wagnerians for beholding *Parsifal* from a particular point of view or for enjoying the Christian sham enveloping the work. He criticised them for absolutising the sham, for their cowardly refusal to recognise the relativity and evanescence of their particular stance in order to evade the confrontation with the Heraclitian notion of universal flux, through which they would become painfully aware of the inherent futility of their existence and thus acquire tragic knowledge. This tragic knowledge first and foremost entails the notion that 'there is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing"', which implies that 'the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity", be'.[491]

In order to gain a better understanding of Wagner, one should not cling to the perspective of one's own rigid, self-evident paradigm – the perspective of the culture and time in which one has grown up, the perspective one takes for granted. On the contrary, one should always be in pursuit of new and different perspectives from which Wagner can be viewed and (re)interpreted. This is an ongoing, never-ending process. Once a perspective is established, one should seek to counteract it by finding an opposing perspective in order to make sure that no perspective becomes all-powerful and absolute. In this manner, one becomes one with the Dionysian flux in which everything always changes and nothing remains.

Yet, the reception of *Parsifal*, from the late nineteenth century until today, shows that this is easier said than done. This work has proved appealing to a variety of individuals and groups,

[491] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?', in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 119.

who have defined the *Bühnenweihfestspiel*'s so-called essence according to their personal beliefs. Apart from the already mentioned Christian interpretation,[492] the work has been described as pre-eminently Theosophical,[493] Mystic,[494] Aryan,[495] Buddhist[496] and even Islamic.[497] Some of these interpretations clearly demonstrate a lack of willingness to understand or accept any perspective other than one's own. Robert W. Gutman, for example, insists that *Parsifal* is 'the gospel of National Socialism',[498] and Ian Dallas, also known as Abdalqadir as-Sufi, claims that Wagner's grail is 'nothing other than the Black Stone of the Ka'aba, the central shrine of the world's last religion, purified judaeo-christianity, Islam'.[499]

From a Nietzschean perspective, such dogmatic and intolerant appropriations of a phenomenon as ambiguous as Wagner are simply contemptible. Nietzsche spoke scornfully of the religious bigots but most of all the German nationalists, who created a figure of Wagner in their own image: 'Wagnerians who think they are honouring Wagner by finding him similar to themselves.'[500] In order to counteract the dominant German image of Wagner, Nietzsche presented a variety of highly contrasting perspectives on the composer in *Der Fall Wagner*, a variety of 'different eyes' we can use to observe the phenomenon Wagner. For example,

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[492] See, for example, Albert Ross Parsons, *Parsifal, The Finding of Christ Through Art: Or, Richard Wagner as Theologian* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1890); Oliver Huckel, *Parsifal: A Mystical Drama by Richard Wagner Retold in the Spirit of the Bayreuth Interpretation* (New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1903); Richard Heber Newton, *Parsifal: An Ethical and Spiritual Interpretation* (Oscawana-on Hudson, NY: Upland Farms Alliance, 1904); Hugh Reginald Haweis, *Parsifal: Story and Analysis of Wagner's Great Opera* (London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1905); Hermann Beckh, *The Parsifal=Christ=Experience in Wagner's Music Drama*, trans. Alan Stott (Leominster, Herefordshire: Anastasi Ltd, 2014); Lucy Beckett, *Parsifal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Richard H. Bell, *Wagner's Parsifal: An Appreciation in the light of His Theological Journey* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013).

[493] e.g. Alice Leighton Cleather and Basil Crump, *Parsifal, Lohengrin and The Legend of the Holy Grail: Described and Interpreted in Accordance with Wagner's Own Writings* (London: Methuen & Co., 1904).

[493] e.g. Max Heindel, *Parsifal: Wagner's Mystic Music Drama*, in *Mysteries of the Great Operas: Faust, Parsifal, The Ring of the Nibelung, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin* (Oceanside, CA: Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1921) and W. L. Wilmshurst, *Parsifal: A Study of Wagner's Music Drama* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co, 1922).

[494] e.g. Max Heindel, *Parsifal: Wagner's Mystic Music Drama*, in *Mysteries of the Great Operas: Faust, Parsifal, The Ring of the Nibelung, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin* (Oceanside, CA: Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1921) and W. L. Wilmshurst, *Parsifal: A Study of Wagner's Music Drama* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co, 1922).

[495] e.g. Alfred Lorenz, *Der Musikalische Aufbau von Richard Wagners Parsifal* (Berlin: Max Hesses Verlag, 1933) and Johannes Bertram, *Der Seher von Bayreuth: Deutung des Lebens und Werkes Richard Wagners* (Berlin: Buchmeister-Verlag, 1943).

[496] e.g. Pandit Bhikkhu, 'Kundry - the Personification of the Role of Desire in the Holy Life', in: *wagnerspectrum* 2 (2007): 97–113.

[497] See Ian Dallas, *The New Wagnerian* (Cape Town: Budgate Press, 2013).

[498] Robert W. Gutman, *Richard Wagner. The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), 431.

[499] Ian Dallas, *The New Wagnerian* (Cape Town: Budgate Press, 2013), 243–244.

[500] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 247.

Wagnerian art is contrasted with Bizet's *Carmen*, with its 'African cheerfulness', raw sensuality and 'cynical, cruel and fatal love'; the question 'what Goethe might have thought of Wagner' is raised; Wagner is juxtaposed with the Italian magician Alessandro Cagliostro; his melodic treatment is compared to that of Palestrina; he is labelled 'the Victor Hugo of music as language', placed amongst Parisian decadents, portrayed as the Minotaur and viewed from the perspective of Brahms, the conservative antipode of the New German School.[501]

In light of the philosopher's motto of perspectivism, *Der Fall Wagner*, contrary to common belief, certainly does not come across as a final reckoning with the composer but rather as an attempt to shatter the absolutised, i.e. Germanised/Christianised, figure of Wagner and to replace it with a contradictory one – a figure that appeals to a multitude of subjective viewpoints and whose meaning is not fixed but depends entirely on the physical context and changes with time. Herewith Nietzsche created a framework in which to understand Wagner in a Dionysian manner, as a figure who always changes and never abides. Moreover, this framework serves to emphasise the Dionysian significance of Wagner's music, which is in itself meaningless but, as we have seen, manages to persuade one to believe any Apollonian sphere that it accompanies. As Roger Scruton points out with respect to *Tristan*, the music of this work enables us to acquire a first-person perspective on the state of mind of its protagonists, meaning that we become one with Tristan during the performance in the same way that the Greeks became one with their Prometheus, who appeared before them as real. In order to explain the way in which 'the Apollonian tears man from his orgiastic self-annihilation and blinds him to the universality of the Dionysian process, deluding him into the belief that he is seeing a single image of the world',[502] Nietzsche gives the example of *Tristan und Isolde* in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* as an Apollonian dramatic appearance that one gets to see clearer and more profoundly due to the music. In other words, the drama comes alive thanks to the music that makes us sympathise with the characters and their fate as it unfolds on stage. Because the music illuminates the drama from within, it compels us to look further than what the Apollonian surface allows. Music thus encourages us to *see through* the Apollonian appearance and to behold its veil from the inside, that is to say from a musical, i.e. Dionysian, perspective from which the drama is seen as a mere reflection of the inner world of the drama. The effect of music is so powerful that it 'transcends all Apollonian artistic effects' and consequently exposes the Apollonian appearance as being a

[501] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 158–159, 162, 173.
[502] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, Or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 128.

mere appearance: 'the veiling during the performance of the tragedy of the real Dionysian effect'.[503] Music thus 'breaks and annihilates the Apollonian illusion', and in this way, the Dionysian gets the last word in tragedy as it 'forces the Apollonian drama into a sphere where it begins to speak with Dionysian wisdom', which means that the Apollonian 'denies itself and its Apollonian visibility'.[504] We, as spectators, come to understand the tragic myth as 'a symbolisation of Dionysian wisdom through Apollonian artifices'.[505] We see that 'the myth leads the world of phenomena to its limits where it denies itself and seeks to flee back again into the womb of the true and only reality'.[506]

To illustrate the moment in which we gain this Dionysian wisdom, the moment we witness the destruction of Apollonian illusions, the moment we get confronted with the terrifying insight that all is flux and nothing remains, the same moment in which we nonetheless adopt the Dionysian attitude to life, the moment we want to say yes to life and wish 'to realise in ourselves the eternal joy of becoming' – to illustrate that very moment, Nietzsche designates the ending of *Tristan*, when Isolde sings her last words:

> In the rapture ocean's
> billowing roll,
> in the fragrance waves'
> ringing sound,
> in the world breath's
> wafting whole –
> to drown, to sink –
> unconscious – highest joy![507]

This tragic moment, when Isolde renounces the phenomenal world for good and unites with Tristan in death, is a moment that is both frightening and beautiful, both desolate and consoling. It is a moment of such astounding artistic beauty that it persuades us time and time again to experience it – to enjoy the beauty of its tones, its words and its image of two lovers uniting. This moment in which life is most firmly rejected is simultaneously a moment in which life is affirmed with the utmost conviction. It is a moment of intense rapture, a moment of ecstasy whereby we lose ourselves in the hypnotic music that overwhelms our senses and minds and makes us lose our individuality. But is it a moment to be suspicious of? Is it, as Adorno argued,

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[503] Ibid., 130.
[504] Ibid.
[505] Ibid., 131.
[506] Ibid.
[507] Quoted in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, Or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 131.

the quintessence of the 'dangerous practice of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which ecstasy is a core feature intended to thwart moments of reflection that could shatter its illusion of ideal unity?'[508] Does it coincide with the Third Reich's unifying and totalising practice aimed at eradicating individual differences? Does it, as Margaret Brearley claims, effectuate a return to nature, that is to say a unification with one's own particular identity (the collective identity of the *Volk*) at the expense of the non-identical individual, the Other (the Jew)?

Viewed in light of Nietzsche's interpretation of the tragic and Wagner, the answer is unequivocally no. After all, the end of *Tristan* is precisely the moment when the Apollonian world is revealed as a sham – the moment when identity, i.e. 'our illusion of ideal unity',[509] gets shattered instead of affirmed. At this point in the music drama, similar to what happens at the end of *Götterdämmerung*, a moment of non-identity is produced, a moment of difference and yet also a moment of unity as we in this final scene find ourselves on the fault line between the Dionysian and the Apollonian when Isolde undergoes her Transfiguration.

From the start of the *Liebestod*, Isolde, directing herself to the audience, invites us to see Tristan the way she sees him: 'How softly and gently he smiles and how his eyes are opened; can you see, my friends, do you not see it?' 'How he glows ever brighter, raising himself high amidst the stars; do you not see it?', Isolde insists. 'How his heart swells with courage, gushing full and majestic in his breast. How in tender bliss sweet breath gently wafts from his lips; friends! look! do you not feel and see it?', she exclaims once more. But in the meantime, Isolde is no longer alone in hearing 'this melody so wondrously and gently sounding from within him'. We have become one with her, seeing reality through her eyes; a reality in which the visual surroundings are increasingly fading to make room for an ever-surging aural dimension. Although the 'wondrous melody' sounding from within Tristan corresponds with the prelude's motifs of grief and desire, the previous sense of torment has vanished and been replaced by a sense of exultation, expressed by means of a radiant blend of woodwinds and horns, harp arpeggios and tremolando strings moving the music further and further upwards, carrying us away from the Apollonian world. Together with Isolde, we abandon the earthly realm of appearances as we willingly yield to the Dionysian flux. Precisely at this point, where we cling most strongly to life, we let go of the settled image of our existence and the perspective to which we are accustomed in order to become one with the Dionysian force that makes every absolute

[508] Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 93, 102.
[509] Ibid., 93.

truth claim falter, unsettles all our presuppositions, frustrates everything we rely upon in our lives – our whole safe and secure Apollonian world order.

So instead of affirming our particular identity, we come to deny it as we enter a dimension in which the separation between self and the Other ceases to exist. Here we fully embrace the musical Dionysian spirit that has been governing the drama from the very start, by letting human and instrumental voices merge as well as the colours of different instruments, by structurally avoiding cadences, by alluding to various tonal areas rather than firmly establishing keys – thus, by creating a continuous sense of unpredictability and ambiguity, that is to say a sense of being in defiance of identity. This music never *is* but always *becomes*. In its refusal to settle, Wagner's music gives voice to an everlasting striving that signifies lust for life as well as dissatisfaction, joy as well as pain. The music thus reflects the affirmation of life with all its contradictions, not in spite of them but because of them, since precisely these so-called contradictions lure us to life. This mode of thought is perfectly embodied by the ambiguous Tristan chord that leaves one out of two dissonances structurally unresolved, therewith maintaining an unbearable yet irresistible tension until the very end of the drama. And yet, the moment we start to embrace the Dionysian spirit while partaking in Isolde's Transfiguration, the music starts to move towards a final resolution. As we are reaching the end of the music drama, alternating brass, horns and woodwind effectuate changes in orchestral colour, and the bass line starts to revolve around F#, bringing the harmony to rest. Subsequently the motif of desire and the Tristan chord finally resolve as the work ends in B major. Although it seems that a resolution has now been achieved, exactly the opposite has happened. With the sounding of the cadence, a gesture of affirmation, our Apollonian realm is denied. For indeed, the resolution sounds in the presence of the prevailing Dionysian spirit that contradicts any affirmation of identity. The silence that follows the final B major chord involves the pessimistic realisation that the reality we cherish is nothing but an illusion, a mere cultural guise that has been ruthlessly swept away by a force impossible for us to control. This terrifying notion would make us want to execrate and renounce life were it not for the fact that we have become one with the Dionysian force through the music – one with that ultimate force that creates and destroys all there is and ever will be. There is nothing more satisfying and empowering than that. It is a state of mind that we want to relive time and time again, which is why we keep returning to the art of tragedy, to the beautifully tragic *Tristan und Isolde*, to life!

Nietzsche had hoped that this experience of Wagnerian tragedy would inspire Germany (and Europe at large) to embrace the long-forgotten tragic view of life. But to his dismay, he

ascertained that Wagner's audience did not draw any lessons from the Dionysian experience that Wagner's music entails. Instead of freeing themselves from the shackles of identity thinking, Nietzsche witnessed how many of Wagner's followers interpreted their experience in such a way that it suited their own narrow-minded religious, nationalist and racial presuppositions. Instead of a new tragic age where people would pursue a perspectivist approach to life as opposed to oppressive black-and-white thinking patterns, Nietzsche witnessed the dawn of a nationalist era in which the masses adhered to the stance of an absolutised, immutable self. Nietzsche therefore argued that Wagner's music had failed in fulfilling its promise of awakening the Dionysian spirit in the minds of its listeners – the spirit that would reveal to them the illusory character of their bigoted, intolerant beliefs. As mentioned previously, Nietzsche claimed that the sensuous effect of Wagner's art was so overwhelmingly strong that it persuaded its spectators into believing that what they saw was a revelation of Truth instead of a mere reflection of their personal worldview. Wagner's art thus made them 'forget' the perspective from which they beheld it. Intoxicated by Wagner's all-too-beautiful music, the listeners got, as it were, trapped in their own Apollonian imagination. Because of this, they were unable to get into a Dionysian frame of mind and, as a result, were unable to grasp the illusory nature of the Apollonian realm.

Reading *Der Fall Wagner* in light of this observation, it seems that Nietzsche was attempting to fulfil the promise of a Dionysian, i.e. perspectivist, awakening that Wagner's art apparently was unable to accomplish by itself. Nietzsche thus provided his readers with a complementary philosophical framework in which to interpret Wagnerian art in a Dionysian manner. As we stressed in the previous chapter, the tragic Dionysian view of life continued to dominate Nietzsche's thinking until the end of his writing career, which is evidenced by the fact that he republished *Die Geburt der Tragödie* in 1886 for the sole reason that, as he wrote in the introduction, 'this book contains an answer to the question: what is Dionysian?'[510] Nietzsche's contemporaries, however, did not have much consideration for the Dionysian frame of mind as Nietzsche defined it. Their view of reality and their experience of Wagner's music was vastly different from Nietzsche's. Painfully aware of this, he wrote in *Ecce Homo*:

[510] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, Or: Hellenism and Pessimism*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 20.

> What I heard as a young man listening to Wagnerian music really had nothing to do with Wagner. When I described Dionysian music I described what *I* had heard. I had to transpose and transfigure everything into the new spirit I carried in me.[511]

Nietzsche then went on to say that his essay 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' (*Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, 1876) was all about himself, that his description of Wagnerian art had nothing to do with 'the Wagnerian reality' and that he projected his tragic vision of life on Wagner and his music.[512] At odds with his time, Nietzsche invited his (few) readers to listen to Wagner the way *he* listened to it, namely, as he described it in 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', 'with a sense for the tragic'.[513] In order to 'guarantee the unity and continuance of mankind', Nietzsche stressed, it is essential to retain this tragic sense of life.[514] This alarming proclamation, nevertheless, went hand in hand with a great notion of joy stemming from the ascertainment that 'the tragic idea has again been born into the world'.[515] Although Nietzsche claimed to have reintroduced the tragic philosophy in European culture, it would have been impossible for him to deny that it was Wagner's music, first and foremost the music of *Tristan*, which epitomises the core Wagnerian trait of sensuousness, that ignited this tragic spirit in him.

Nietzsche's tragic philosophy was born 'out of the spirit of Wagner's music', music that, as we have seen, is uniquely capable of unsettling settled beliefs precisely through its maximum appeal to the universal human emotions that constitute those very beliefs. Wagner's music drives us to the edge of our world, so to speak, and this might be the reason why it incites many listeners to hold on tight to their beliefs rather than to question them, let alone discard the primary presuppositions of their worldview. This explains why Nietzsche's Dionysian take on Wagner has largely been ignored, from the moment of its conception until today. The aforementioned *Parsifal* reception, for instance, as well as the ever-enduring view of Wagner as a proto-Nazi, confirms this point. Nietzsche's tragic understanding of Wagnerian art is therefore still relevant today and deserves to be revisited, moreover, because it has never been properly assimilated.

As we demonstrate in each chapter of this dissertation, today's world offers a variety of new contexts and situations that challenge us to re-evaluate certain features of Wagner's art in such

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[511] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 274.
[512] Ibid.
[513] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 213.
[514] Ibid.
[515] Ibid.

a way that we can recover the tragic view of Wagner. This view, as will be particularly stressed in the following two chapters, is perhaps more relevant than ever, considering the current cultural crisis of the West – a culture that is socially, politically, religiously, and artistically disoriented, a culture that lacks self-confidence and betrays indifference to its identity. This notion, however, does not apply to the State of Israel, the context we have used as a starting point for this chapter's reassessment of Wagnerian sensuousness. Born out of the ashes of the Holocaust, this young state, which is facing a permanent existential threat, does not take its existence and hence its cultural heritage for granted. It is due to this attitude that 'the case of Wagner' is still a case in Israel, as the ongoing ban shows. Regardless of whether or not this ban is justified, from a philosophical point of view, this ban has turned out to be a blessing; banned from the stage yet displayed and conveyed through the media, officially forbidden yet privately often loved and admired, this paradoxical place for Wagner in Israel prompted Daniel Barenboim to initiate a musical event that challenged us to rethink one of Wagner's most significant musical qualities, his sensuousness, which is so often referred to as a self-evident feature of Wagnerian art – a feature, though, that has rarely been thoroughly thought through. Our conclusion is one that defies the widespread prejudice towards Wagner's most 'dangerous' of traits. After all, we have seen the close alignment between Wagnerian sensuousness and the Dionysian spirit that crushes all enslaving absolutisms. This spirit, as Nietzsche tells us, does not annihilate one's individuality but, on the contrary, strengthens it. It liberates one from restrictive categories such as *Volk* and Fatherland. Since the State of Israel has provided us with a space in which to rediscover this long-lost tragic spirit, we won't conclude that the Israeli ban on Wagner, albeit based on a false premise, is reprehensible. Rather, it makes us look at the ban, in a Nietzschean fashion, with a sense of gratitude.

3

Germanness

1. *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in an Age of Oikophobia

The appearance of Wagner's work has changed significantly throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While early Wagner productions portrayed Germanic gods and heroes, contemporary renditions portray inhabitants of a demythologised, disenchanted world of everyday experience. Although this practice of updating operatic masterpieces concerns the entire Western operatic canon, the changing appearance of Wagner has an ideological significance that is unparalleled. This is due to the association of the composer with German nationalism. After the Second World War, a tendency arose to reckon with the proto-Nazi ideology of Germanness (*Deutschtum*) that Wagner supposedly embodied, and this is a tendency that still lingers today. After Germanic/German national elements were banned from the stage in the post-war years, Wagner's works increasingly started to express a derisive, mocking attitude towards their original signification. As Roger Scruton observes, today's producers 'strive to distract the audience from Wagner's message, and to mock every heroic gesture'.[516] According to Scruton, 'sarcasm and satire run riot on the stage'.[517] In modern Wagner productions, 'the action is invariably caricatured […] and reduced to the dimensions of a television sitcom'.[518] The reason behind what Scruton deems to be 'the desecration of Wagner'[519] is the loss of the sacred in modern society: 'in contemporary Wagner productions', Scruton asserts, 'we see exactly what the transition from modernism to the "post-modern" world

[516] Roger Scruton, *Modern Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 69.

[517] Ibid.

[518] Ibid. In this context Scruton refers to Michael Tanner's *Wagner* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002) in which Tanner, amongst other things, talks about the tendency among contemporary producers to 'domesticate' Wagner.

[519] Roger Scruton, 'Desecrating Wagner', *Prospect Magazine*, 20 April 2003. As an example of Wagner's desecration, Scruton refers in this article to Richard Jones's 1994–6 Covent Carden production of the *Ring*. In this production Jones depicted the Rhinegold as a bucket of women's shoes, put the Rhinemaidens in latex nude suits and turned Wotan into the keeper of a lunatic asylum who, dressed in a white surgeon's goat, surgically removed his eye before the crowd.

involves, namely, the final rejection of high culture as a redemptive force and the ruination of the sacred in its last imagined form'.[520]

In addition to this characterisation of contemporary Wagner productions, it can be argued that the artistic tendency to 'desecrate' Wagner coincides with a cultural tendency of oikophobia, a term used by Scruton to refer to the political and cultural elite's inclination to repudiate its own (Western) culture and praise alien ones. Today's Wagner productions are in sync with this tendency, and this is especially true of performances of Wagner on the Festspielhaus stage. In Christoph Schlingensief's *Parsifal* (2004–7), for instance, the Christian symbolism that played a key role in Wagner's original staging was ignored. Instead, the director chose to let African and Islamic elements dominate the stage. Recent *Ring* productions,[521] most notably the latest Bayreuth *Ring* by Frank Castorf (2013–17), are similarly characterised by travesties meant to defy the *Ring*'s original mythological landscape.[522] Yet the notion of oikophobia is particularly relevant when it comes to staging *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, for this is a work that revolves around a particular German oikos: Nuremberg.[523] In Katharina Wagner's *Meistersinger* (2007–11), the traditional oikos of the Nuremberg Masters was desecrated by Walther von Stolzing recklessly spraying paint on the city's cultural remnants as well as its inhabitants. In this production, Hans Sachs's call to 'honour your German Masters' was furthermore defied as the town's respected poet and shoemaker (portrayed as a chain-smoking typist) was captured and molested by some of Germany's most illustrious cultural figures, including Goethe, Schiller, Bach, Beethoven and Richard Wagner himself. Appearing on stage with gigantic cartoonish heads, Germany's cultural heroes danced around in their underwear, additionally even flaunting their phalluses.[524]

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[520] Roger Scruton, *Modern Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 69.

[521] e.g. Alfred Kirchner's *Ring* (1994–9), Jürgen Flimm's Millennium production of the *Ring* (2000–04), and Tankred Dorst's *Ring* (2006–10).

[522] Castorf's *Rheingold*, for example, is set in a motel, a bar and a petrol station, shrouded in flashy colours, therewith creating a shallow, plastic sort of pop culture atmosphere in which furniture is thrown around and liquids are wildly sprayed all over the place. And not only the setting is ridiculed but also the characters, who appear in the guise of pimps, whores and criminal gang members and whose faces, moreover, are occasionally smeared with mustard, oil and other substances. On top of that, Mime's dead body is dishonoured as Siegfried empties a garbage can over him. Siegfried, once a Germanic hero, is now deprived of all heroic qualities and portrayed as a ruthless psychopath, a mere basket case whose key moments in the drama get structurally mocked, such as his love duet with Brünnhilde, which is accompanied with copulating crocodiles. Dramatically, of course, these crocodiles signify nothing, but what they do signify is the disoriented state of Wagner productions today – a state that is best illustrated by the grotesque döner-kebab booth occupying the stage in *Götterdämmerung*.

[523] Note that this is the only work by Wagner that has a place in its title.

[524] See *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, DVD, dir. Katharina Wagner (Opus Arte, 2008).

Given Bayreuth's historical ties to Nazism and the notion that Wagner's *Meistersinger* is viewed more suspiciously than any of his other works, an 'oikophobic' staging of what Joseph Goebbels called 'the most German of all German operas'[525] is less surprising than a derisive rendition of, say, *Tristan und Isolde*. Goebbels's appreciation of *Die Meistersinger*, as well as the fact that musical excerpts from this work occasionally appeared in Nazi propaganda,[526] led many to believe that there existed a constitutive relationship between *Die Meistersinger* and Nazism. That Hitler chose Nuremberg as a stage for his mass gatherings was anything but a coincidence according to Joachim Köhler, who claims that Wagner's comedy, set in sixteenth-century Nuremberg, inspired the theatrical way in which the Nazis orchestrated public life.[527] Even in Karol Berger's nuanced and thoughtful account of *Die Meistersinger*, the deeply rooted suspicion towards the work's ideological bearing ultimately prevails. Although Berger recognises 'Wagner's clear preference for Germany as a cultural rather than political nation as well as his equally clear and explicit opposition to violence, militarism, and imperialism', the scholar nonetheless claims that 'the composer's aesthetic metapolitical utopia has proto-totalitarian features and hence should trouble rather than console us'.[528]

Memories of Nazi Germany still cast a shadow over *Die Meistersinger*, shaping the perspective from which the work is commonly viewed, namely from a post-war perspective that obscures the work's original signification and results in productions that misrepresent the work's historical connection with Germany. Barrie Kosky's staging of *Die Meistersinger* at the 2017 Bayreuth Festival illustrates this point well. Instead of making references to Hans Sachs's sixteenth-century Nuremberg, Kosky's production referred to the city's courthouse, where the Nuremberg trials took place after World War II. Focusing on the anti-Semitism allegedly enshrined in the work, Kosky's *Meistersinger* displayed Beckmesser as a Jewish stereotype, who, moreover, was beaten up in the Riot Scene for being Jewish.[529] Finally, Hans Sachs was

[525] 'Richard Wagner und das Kunstempfinden unserer Zeit: Rundfunkrede von Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels', *Völkischer Beobachter*, 8 August 1933. Quoted in David B. Dennis, 'The Most German of All German Operas: *Die Meistersinger* Through the Lens of the Third Reich', in *Wagner's Meistersinger: Performance, History, Representation*, ed. Nicholas Vazsonyi (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 98.

[526] In Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens*, for example, one hears an extract from the prelude to Act 3. Another well-known example is the *Deutsche Wochenschau* film (broadcasted on 4 April 1942) of Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting a Berlin Philharmonic performance of the overture to *Die Meistersinger* in the Berlin AEG factory on 26 February 1942.

[527] Joachim Köhler, *Wagners Hitler: Der Prophet und sein Vollstrecker* (München: Karl Blessing, 1997), 347–183.

[528] Karol Berger, *Beyond Reason: Wagner Contra Nietzsche* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 290.

[529] Martin Kettle, '*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* Review – Riveting Restaging Puts Wagner on Trial', *The Guardian*, 27 July 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/jul/27/die-meistersinger-von-nurnberg-

merged with the historical figure of Richard Wagner[530] and appeared as a defendant at the Nuremberg trials, where Nazi leaders, including Hermann Göring and Rudolf Hess, were indicted for crimes against humanity. Wagner was thus equated with Nazi war criminals and had to answer for deeds committed by the Nazis. In this way, Kosky's *Meistersinger* suggested that Wagner bears responsibility for the Holocaust.

As Martin Kettle asserts in the title of his review of Kosky's production, the staging 'puts Wagner on trial'.[531] And the main question raised in this trial is: 'how far does Wagner's anti-Semitism invalidate his artistic achievement?'[532] 'That question', Kettle writes, 'still hangs over Bayreuth and Wagner alike.'[533] Yet let us note that this question is inspired by twentieth-century events: the National Socialist revolution in Germany, World War II and the Holocaust. Hence, Kosky's 'trial' is not fair. Needless to say, it is unjust to put someone on trial for crimes he did not commit. Certainly, one can look at Wagner's *Meistersinger* from the perspective of post-World War II culture and interpret the work in light of certain historical events, in this case the National Socialist revolution in Germany. But if one seeks to put Wagner on trial, and if one seeks to judge *Die Meistersinger* by assessing its maker, the post-war context of the Nuremberg trials is simply off-limits. The Nuremberg trials, after all, were meant to prosecute Nazi leaders for crimes they *actually* committed in *their lives* in twentieth-century Europe. Wagner, by contrast, lived in the nineteenth century, and thus, any endeavour to come to a fair or reasonable assessment of the historical figure of Wagner should concentrate on his actual life in nineteenth-century Germany. However, when it comes to staging Wagner's works, the artist's origin is largely ignored.[534]

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bayreuth-wagner-antisemitism. See also Zachary Woolfe, 'A New *Meistersinger* in Bayreuth Stars Wagner', *The New York Times*, 1 August 2017.

[530] In Act 1 of Kosky's staging, Richard Wagner and his inner circle, who have gathered in Haus Wahnfried, merge with the fictional characters of the music drama. Franz Liszt, for instance, takes over the role of Veit Pogner, Cosima Wagner becomes Eva, the Jewish conductor Hermann Levi (who conducted the premiere of *Parsifal* at the Bayreuth Festival in 1882) becomes (the allegedly Jewish) Beckmesser, and Wagner himself plays the role of Hans Sachs.

[531] Martin Kettle, '*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* Review – Riveting Restaging Puts Wagner on Trial', *The Guardian*, 27 July 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/jul/27/die-meistersinger-von-nurnberg-bayreuth-wagner-antisemitism.

[532] Ibid.

[533] Ibid.

[534] Let it be noted that of course not all contemporary productions coincide with the current state of oikophobia. The point here is to delineate a general tendency, a trend. And trends always evoke counter-reactions. Amongst philosophers, Roger Scruton, as we have seen, goes against the grain. Amongst artists, David McVicar can be counted as one of the few stage directors to defy the blind habit of deconstructing Wagner, based on his 2011 production of *Die Meistersinger* in Glyndebourne, a staging that the Glyndebourne Festival revived in 2016. The value of McVicar's production lies in the fact that Wagner's comedy is placed in a new yet old light; instead of approaching the work from the standpoint of a worldview forged in post-World War II Europe, McVicar explores

Although the image of Wagner being prosecuted at the Nuremberg trials is perfidious, it can nonetheless provide an important insight. In the same way that Auschwitz was considered by Adorno as a historical breaking point after which our thinking was supposed to change, the Nuremberg trials symbolise the historical shift in the perception of Wagner. And just as Auschwitz was designated by Adorno as an event after which one was bound to live a guilt-ridden life, so too did the Nuremberg trials mark a point after which we look back at our history with a sense of guilt – indeed, as if we stand on trial. Herewith Kosky's image of the Nuremberg trials lays bare the root cause of today's oikophobia, its genesis.

After all, with his production Kosky appealed to Germany's guilty conscience, which lies behind the tendency to defy Wagner's Germanness. In the post-war years, the belief arose that the traditions and values of Western culture were inseparably linked to the sociopolitical adversities of the recent past. The first half of the twentieth century had been a concatenation of disastrous events. A better future, therefore, could not be built on the past. It had to be built from scratch. After the tragic experiences of the twentieth century, Western culture had lost its credibility. Western culture was a guilty culture – a culture of Christian crusades, imperialism, colonialism and genocide. And so the cultural heritage of the West was bound to be taunted, mocked and denigrated, particularly Wagner's legacy, which is intertwined with Germany's sinful past. Allegedly grounded and immersed in this past, an effective way to reckon with the artist's tainted body of work is to caricature and ridicule its content. Hence the current anti-Wagnerian production culture that directors like the late Christoph Schlingensief, Frank Castorf, Katharina Wagner and Barrie Kosky represent.

Now, to observe that today's Wagner productions reflect our age of oikophobia is one thing, but to answer the question as to why this would actually be undesirable is yet another. What can be an objection against 'oikophobic' productions? Well, it can be argued that due to such productions, Wagner ceases to be relevant to the contemporary world. What was meant as a

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the meaning of *Die Meistersinger* from a pre-war perspective, meaning a perspective that avoids Nazi connotations without avoiding the German national origins of the work in question, namely the long-forgotten Germany of Wagner's youth, the realm of Goethe, Schiller and Beethoven. David McVicar's production is therefore a welcome exception to the trend as it can be considered as an attempt to re-Germanise Wagner in a positive and constructive manner. While many producers choose to problematise and/or ridicule the relationship between Wagner and Germany by focusing on the history of the appropriation of Wagner by the Nazis, McVicar has chosen to examine the link between Wagner and Germany by focusing on the historical context in which Wagner actually played a part (the Nuremberg the audience sees was part of the Kingdom of Bavaria, which was a state of the German Confederation, 1815–66). He thus gives us the opportunity to view Wagner and *Die Meistersinger* from the perspective of a context that predates the tragic twentieth century, inciting us to rediscover the worldview behind *Die Meistersinger* and therewith the original significance of this work. See *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, DVD, dir. François Roussillon (Opus Arte, Glyndebourne Productions, 2012).

reckoning with the Nazi past, meant to make amends for the so-called link between Wagner's Germanness and Nazism, has now – in the context of today – become an adherence to one of the root causes of the current problems in Europe, namely oikophobia. As Scruton points out, oikophobia goes hand in hand with a structural attack on the nation state by means of ever-increasing European political integration. This is why Euroscepticism (meaning scepticism towards the EU, not Europe) is surging, why many people believe they have lost their national sovereignty and are concerned that they are losing their oikos, their home. This tendency coheres with the rise of nationalism and populism in today's Europe (and America), which, just like the culture of repudiation maintained by Europe's cultural and political elites, can be considered as an undesirable development.

Therefore, our objection to 'oikophobic' Wagner productions is that, by conforming to the spirit of oikophobia, modern-day Wagner productions appeal to two extreme frames of mind: a repudiation of self and a blind and intolerant praise of one's own identity with the refusal to look beyond one's own borders. By appealing to these two attitudes, the Wagner productions in question not only enhance Europe's sociopolitical crisis, but they also block access to an alternative frame of mind, a third way if you will, that is neither marked by self-repudiation nor marked by bigoted self-affirmation – a frame of mind, thus, that defies the status quo of today's world, where oikophobia and bigoted identity thinking (in the form of neo-nationalism, a new wave of anti-Semitism and Islamism) oppose each other. Yielding to the status quo instead, today's Wagner productions, such as Barrie Kosky's *Meistersinger*, fail to provide lessons for today, fail to convey valuable insights or produce new and meaningful perspectives on our lives. Consequently, Wagner shall cease to be relevant to the contemporary world.

How then can Wagner be rendered more meaningful to audiences in today's world? The answer is, by restoring Wagner's Germanness, his *Deutschtum* as enshrined in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. This chapter demonstrates that Wagner's Germanness, contrary to popular belief, stands for emphasising the culture of one's own *oikos* while simultaneously demonstrating the universal connection of human beings with each other. This idea is highly valuable today because it rejects the self-denial and exclusive focus on otherness that characterise our age of oikophobia but also rejects a blind and intolerant praise of one's own identity and the refusal to look beyond one's own borders – traits, thus, that typify some of the nationalist movements that have surged in recent years. Both extremes, as we have seen in the past and see again today, are destructive and dangerous. As *Die Meistersinger* bridges the two opposing stances by advocating the necessity of preserving one's traditions while innovating

for the future, the work offers a new perspective on today's Europe, a new sociopolitical reality and a new artistic reality.

This chapter, however, does not set out to speculate about the future or to create a vision of a new social and artistic reality. That would be beyond the scope of our research, which, remember, is solely aimed at recovering the universal significance of Wagner's music dramas in the context of contemporary culture. As it pertains to *Die Meistersinger,* how can we achieve this endeavour?

Section 2 sets out to establish a generic framework for examining *Die Meistersinger* and its Germanness from a perspective that is not shackled by European history of the first half of the twentieth century so as to come to a fair assessment of Wagner and the genesis of his works, which belongs to the early part of the nineteenth century. Viewing the composer's ideas on German identity in this context, it will become clear that not politics but the pursuit of art for the sake of spiritual growth is central to Wagner's Germanness. Instead of the deification of Germany and its people, Wagner's Germanness stands for the development of one's inner world, with a view to discovering the universal connection with one's fellow human beings. But in order to achieve this universal bond, a strong oikos is necessary. The oikos is the foundation of universalism. To maintain this foundation, one should find a balance between cultural preservation and innovation. This is the main insight *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* provides, both in the tale of the work and through the work as a work of art conceived and produced in nineteenth-century Germany/Europe. The question as to how the right balance between preservation and innovation can be maintained will be explored in the following two sections.

Section 3 argues that this balance is only possible through fidelity to a particular cultural tradition. This creates the conditions for inner growth and hence universality. The notion of developing one's inner world will be explicated with the aid of Schopenhauer's philosophy. Schopenhauer's theory of the will epitomises the essence of Wagner's Germanness. For knowledge of the will to live is to be obtained within oneself, and the will is the universal force that unites us all. However, Schopenhauer disregards the notion of oikos/oikophilia, and his philosophy lacks any sense of community. Wagner's *Meistersinger*, on the contrary, tells us that inner growth and the forging of a universal connection with the other is only possible through a well-developed notion of community and oikophilia – a love of home. And yet, conversely, *Die Meistersinger* tells us that in order to enhance oikophilia, which is needed to maintain a strong oikos, i.e. the foundation of universalism, it is imperative to espouse Schopenhauer's insight that there is ultimately no difference between self and other, that the

notion of an isolated self is a grave illusion that leads people to hurt each other. The art tradition of the Mastersingers can instil this insight into the hearts and minds of the people of Nuremberg precisely because it is a tradition that involves the whole community. But nevertheless, it takes an exceptional individual, namely the reflective, Schopenhauerian Hans Sachs, to make sure that the artistic tradition is guided in the right direction, such that it helps to enhance the oikos. To this end, Nuremberg's Sachs advocates a worldview wherein one oscillates between oikos and xenos, between self and other, so as to excite the imagination needed to discover the ultimate reality, knowledge of which is a precondition for establishing and maintaining a strong oikos and culture.

Section 4 argues that the notion of commuting between oikos and xenos, as advocated by *Die Meistersinger*, fits in with Nietzsche's concept of Europeanness. This concept entails an ongoing interaction with foreign and/or long-forgotten traditions that enable one to continuously revitalise oneself and one's surroundings, as a result of which European culture, being simultaneously preserved and renewed in the process, is strengthened. *Die Meistersinger* is congruent with Nietzsche's mode of thought because the work, by drawing on Greek and Jewish cultural models rather than typically German ones, displays a sense of indebtedness to ancient sources beyond Europe's borders, sources that we can never truly possess or grasp, sources that remain distant from us. Due to this distance, those sources remain enigmatic, elusive and hence interesting – they maintain the capacity to excite the imagination and to evoke a cultural renaissance. By returning to the past in order to revitalise the present, the past is preserved. But since there is an unbridgeable distance between us and our cultural roots, we always have to reassess and recalibrate them, which results in a renewal of culture. Thus, to maintain fidelity to European culture is to simultaneously preserve and innovate it. There is no preservation without innovation, and vice versa, innovation is not possible without preservation. So, by fostering oikophobia, i.e. hate of Europe's cultural heritage (in the name of progress and innovation), one actually thwarts the very possibility of cultural renewal. *Die Meistersinger*'s relevance for today's Europe is therefore unmistakable. After all, the work's ultimate message is 'not to scorn but to honour one's Masters' – our cultural predecessors on whose shoulders we stand and on whom our future depends.

Having delineated our focus and set the direction, let us now discuss the aforementioned issues and ideas in more detail.

2. On the Patriotic yet Cosmopolitan Worldview Behind *Die Meistersinger*

It is well known that the question of Germany preoccupied Wagner throughout his life.[535] This is evident from the composer's artistic production, particularly *Die Meistersinger*, as well as his theoretical writings, namely 'Über deutsches Musikwesen' (1840), *Deutsche Kunst und Deutsche Politik* (1867) and 'Was ist deutsch?' (1865/1878). The main idea put forward in these essays is that the uniqueness of German culture lies in its universal reach. Since this idea does not originate with Wagner, let us first trace its origin and development before delving into Wagner's conception of Germanness.

As mentioned previously, the idea of Germanness, more particularly German nationalism and patriotism, is viewed with distrust. This has everything to do with the atrocities committed in the name of Germany in the first half of the twentieth century. German nationalism (like any other form of nationalism) would be incompatible with cosmopolitan values such as human rights, tolerance, cultural exchange and international peace and cooperation. However, during a great part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, German nationalism and patriotism were perfectly compatible with cosmopolitan ideals.

In *Kant and Cosmopolitanism* (2012), Pauline Kleingeld shows that Immanuel Kant and Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813) espoused a form of patriotism connected to 'a just political system and not to an exclusive cultural or ethnic community'.[536] The state, they argued, should not stimulate feelings of national superiority but, on the contrary, encourage its citizens to criticise the fatherland. In their eyes, to denounce certain political wrongs precisely demonstrates public spirit since criticism and pleas for social reform would be aimed at improving one's country.[537] The patriotism Kant and Wieland advocated, therefore, was

[535] Badiou notes that 'this is an old question for the Germans, who can be defined as the people for whom the question of Germany is critical'. Whereas the French 'never interrogate themselves about France and can be defined as those who claim to know what France is, the Germans can be defined as those who do not know what Germany is'. Badiou furthermore claims that 'the great German philosophers are all philosophers who explain that the only thing that matters, when all is said and done, is the question of Germany' (which, let it be noted, is questionable, since neither Kant nor Schopenhauer – as opposed to, amongst others, Fichte – were interested in Germanness). And 'Wagner is of this school, too', Badiou writes, arguing that Wagner 'can be considered one of the great artistic interpreters of the question of Germany'. As to *how* Wagner can be considered as such, though, Badiou reveals very little. Yet he succinctly defines the valid core of Wagner's Germanness by positing that the key insight *Die Meistersinger* provides is that 'the essence of Germany is German art and *not* an aestheticisation of politics'. See Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 73, 101–102.
[536] Pauline Kleingeld, *Kant and Cosmopolitanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 20.
[537] Ibid., 20–21.

progressive and in no way aimed at the protection and preservation of supposedly unique and immutable cultural characteristics and qualities.

Dismissing the notion that 'one's "patria" had to be the country of one's birth',[538] Wieland defined patriotism as 'the natural product of the contentment of the people with its situation, a contentment which is based on the justice of the laws and reliability of their enforcement'.[539] One should have no a priori partiality towards one's own national or cultural group. Instead, one's patriotism should be motivated by the quality of the political system.[540] Wieland argued that Germans certainly had 'good reasons to be patriotic', not because of a sublime, God-given national character but merely because of 'the loose and pluralistic political system of the Holy Roman Empire'.[541]

According to Kant, the reason why the empire had a cosmopolitan character was because it knew how to adapt to sociopolitical and cultural developments. This had a positive effect on its inhabitants. Kant observed that 'Germans are model cosmopolitans because they are hospitable toward foreigners, they easily recognise the merits of other peoples, they are modest in their dealings with others, they readily learn foreign languages, and they are not passionately bound to their fatherland'.[542] This notion of connectedness to humanity, transcending national and regional ties, was considered by Kant a typically German virtue – a virtue that is not in the blood of the Germans but arises from the circumstances and conditions that the state creates by ensuring peace, justice and societal openness and by showing interest in other cultures and peoples as part of a European and global community.[543]

It is for this reason that Kant argued that 'patriotism is a cosmopolitan duty'.[544] After all, the open, cosmopolitan attitude to life has its roots in the just state, and thus, in order to retain a cosmopolitan frame of mind, one should actively support the particular state (the political system of the Holy Roman Empire) that enables the cosmopolitan attitude to thrive in the first place. This attitude, in turn, strengthens one's country because as a consequence of the cosmopolitan aspiration to achieve perpetual peace, it is unlikely that a country or state will get involved in a war.[545] For instance, the Greek state declined because the Greeks, according to

[538] Ibid., 21.
[539] Ibid., 24.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Ibid.
[542] Ibid., 1.
[543] Ibid.
[544] Ibid., 19.
[545] Ibid., 33.

Kant, 'expressed no benevolence towards foreigners, labelling them as enemies'.[546] Thus, a cosmopolitan attitude is essential in order to protect the security of one's state, but since this attitude is a product of that very state, one should first and foremost be loyal to one's own country.

Despite the cosmopolitan tendencies that marked the intellectual climate in late-eighteenth-century Germany, the quest for a national identity became increasingly important for German thinkers and writers, many of whom felt subjected to the French Enlightenment. One of its fiercest opponents was Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) who vehemently defied the Enlightenment's tendency to subordinate human experience to dogmatic reason.[547] Logic and analysis constituted an obstacle to finding truth, which, according to the deeply religious Hamann, could not be found by using the scientific method but only through personal, i.e. emotional, experiences, most importantly the experience of one's own language. This was the most important aspect of our humanity, Hamann argued, because language would govern our thoughts and shape our reality.[548]

Hamann's conception of language as a vehicle for discovering the truth and the meaning of life greatly influenced Johann Gottfried Herder, who embarked on a search for the cultural roots of the peoples of the world. Herder proposed his theory of *Volksgeist* against the French Enlightenment's ideal of equality, arguing that nations have a unique identity and, therefore, differ from each other.[549] Different cultures cannot be judged by the same yardstick, Herder argued. Hence his critical attitude towards the tendency to consider one's own society and culture superior to other ones. In keeping with this thought, Herder denounced any form of domination of one nation over another[550] and rejected political centralisation as well as cultural pluralism,[551] for this would subvert the natural harmony of each individual nation that was believed to be an organic whole. According to Herder, the main cohesive force within a nation is the nation's language, which coheres with the national character of the community in question. It is therefore important to cherish one's own language, Herder claimed, because by preserving one's language, one preserves one's cultural community.[552] Whereas Kant and Wieland did not consider the German language a fundamental component in the construction

[546] Ibid.
[547] Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 288.
[548] Ibid., 319.
[549] Ibid., 168.
[550] Ibid., 181–182.
[551] Ibid., 176–177.
[552] Ibid., 191–193.

of the German cultural community, nor did they argue that language determines the identity of its members, Herder considered the German language an integral part of the German identity.[553] And while Kant and Wieland tied their notion of patriotism to a just political system rather than putative exclusive features of the nation, Herder's patriotism indicated the exact opposite. Not the mechanical state but the German nation as a living organic whole shaped the cultural unity of Germany. It should be stressed that Herder's patriotism was not political but exclusively focused on the creative activity of the German people: folk songs, poetry, myths and legends in which the common beliefs of the nation were expressed. As Isaiah Berlin has pointed out, 'political nationalism would have been too unrealistic an outlook in a feeble and divided country governed by several hundred hereditary despots'.[554] Because the political unification of Germany was inconceivable, national unity was sought in language, history, culture and the arts.

As one of the main representatives of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, Herder exerted great influence on the young Goethe, who, in his tragedy *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773) and the essay 'Von Deutscher Baukunst' (1773), opposed the French Enlightenment ideals and pursued freedom of artistic expression. Yet instead of becoming a romantic, Goethe developed himself as a proponent of classicism who sought to tie classicist values to the concept of Germany as a cultural entity. The Greek polis, imagined as a community of free citizens, was considered to be an ideal model for the German country, which consisted of numerous small states and principalities. But Greek culture especially was seen by Goethe as an example for German society, which had become increasingly exposed to the effects of the French Revolution of 1789. Troubled by this new development, Goethe's spiritual companion Schiller began reassessing the cultural achievements of ancient Greece in light of the radical social and political upheaval in France. In *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* (1795), the poet-philosopher argues that the French Revolution has failed in humanising society. Although he praises the upheaval as an attempt to establish a state where reason is the sole legislator, he also ascertains that the revolution has proven to be a failure. The abrupt and radical reform of French society did not result in the liberation of the masses but to injustice and cruelty towards them. This led Schiller to believe that social prosperity cannot be achieved through political means but only through art and aesthetics. The fact that the revolution had degenerated into atrocities and terror was due to the undeveloped emotional life

[553] Ibid., 207.
[554] Ibid., 181.

of its culprits. Yet art has the power to instil moral awareness in society, Schiller contends, and so, by cultivating an aesthetic way of life, the establishment of a state built on laws of reason will eventually come into view.

Now, the reason why Greek culture provides a fruitful model for developing an enlightened society is that the Greeks were pre-eminently capable of maintaining an ideal balance between reason and emotion,[555] thereby proving that nature is not necessarily incompatible with reason. To view the two as antagonists to one another is not a sign of moral progress but rather a sign of moral deterioration. In order to revive morality, Schiller insists, nature and reason must be reunited, and in the process, beauty should function as a binding agent. With his concept of beauty, Schiller distances himself from Kant's view that natural inclinations and spiritual inclinations are irreconcilable. Morality does not require the submission of one's natural predisposition to one's rational aptitude but the harmonisation of nature and reason through beauty and art.

As Schiller overcame Kant's critical dichotomy, the idea came into vogue that the unity of nature and spirit, the general and the particular, is the foundation of all knowledge and hence an essential guide to life. In Johann Gottlieb Fichte's philosophy, this notion is tied directly to the fate of the German nation. Although Fichte, like Schiller, praised the liberating promise of the French Revolution, he felt that this promise had been betrayed by Napoleon, who, in the years after the revolution, conquered almost all of Europe.[556] Napoleon's invasion of Europe led to the end of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, after which the German states were placed under French rule. This evoked nationalist feelings amongst many German citizens, including Fichte, who developed the idea that the universal promise of individual freedom offered by the French Revolution had to be fulfilled by Germany. According to Fichte, the history of Germany was characterised by a resistance against foreign rulers – against the Romans (Arminius), against the Roman Catholic Church (through the Reformation) and against Napoleon, even though the latter ultimately crushed the resistance and triumphed militarily.

This German resistance against foreign oppression, whether successful or not, was seen by Fichte as an example to the global historical process. In his *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (1808), Fichte equates the German nation with Kant's autonomous individual who recognises

[555] About the Greeks, Schiller wrote: 'We see that remarkable people uniting at once fullness of form and fullness of substance, both philosophising and creating, both tender and energetic, uniting a youthful fancy to the virility of reason in a glorious humanity'. Friedrich Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. Charles W. Eliot (Leander, TX: Grindl Press, 2015), 27.

[556] Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, ed. Gregory Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xxii.

the moral limits of his personal freedom as well as the importance of the freedom and equality of his fellow man.[557] Individuals are part of a larger whole, Fichte contends, and therefore the freedom of the individual and the nation are one and the same. To be German and to think like a German means striving for freedom, for yourself and for others. Fichte's *Deutschtum* thus transcends the interests of the German nation and involves an effort to reach a state of freedom and peace for all mankind.[558] Fichte emphasises that this is about achieving a spiritual destination and not a political one. After all, what has always characterised and defined the German nation throughout history is its resistance against political oppression. Germany, moreover, lacks the political power needed to coerce global unity. Yet precisely for this reason, the German nation, considered as a *Kulturnation*, can be an example to the world community. Whereas the French nation coerced global unity by conquering and subjecting other nation states, the German nation achieved national unity in and through the spiritual products of the German people: the common language, music, art, philosophy, etc. The *Kulturnation*, Fichte claims, is a blueprint for a peaceful world order that guarantees the autonomy of individual nation states and achieves unity between different states by forging a spiritual connection with the nations of the world.[559] The German nation is leading the universal fight for freedom, which is not fought with 'weapons of steel'[560] but with a powerful spiritual weapon, namely the German spirit – 'a spirit', as Fichte puts it, 'not narrow-minded and exclusive, but universal and cosmopolitan'[561] – a spirit that has the power to achieve world domination as a universal spirit of freedom.[562]

Fichte's philosophy illustrates the tendency amongst German intellectuals of the early nineteenth century to compensate for the lack of political power by emphasising the superiority of their culture. The lack of national unity was considered a virtue, and political matters were looked down upon. As a matter of fact, Germany's poets and thinkers eagerly flaunted their aversion to political nationalism. In *Das Deutsche Reich*, a text in *Xenien* (1797), Schiller famously wrote: 'Deutschland? aber wo liegt es? Ich weiß das Land nicht zu finden. Wo das gelehrte beginnt, hört das politische auf.'[563] The true German was precisely not purely and exclusively German. The term 'German' was seen as an open concept involving numerous

[557] Ibid., xvi–xviii.
[558] Ibid., xii.
[559] Ibid., xxvii–xxix.
[560] Ibid., 193.
[561] Ibid., 91.
[562] Ibid., 193–194.
[563] Hans Ester, Hans Hecker, Erika Poettgens, *Deutschland, aber wo liegt es?: Deutschland und Mitteleuropa: Analysen und historische Dokumente* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), 7.

spiritual traditions, a concept, moreover, that was believed to function as a pathway to the universal. A major aspect herein was learning foreign languages and translating foreign literature into German. Christoph Martin Wieland, who translated works by Lucian, Cicero, Horace and Shakespeare, is credited with coming up with the idea of *Weltliteratur*, a term adopted by Goethe to establish the notion of literature as a means of access to different worlds. Thus, not only did the German language form a spiritual connection between Germans, through translations it also formed a connection between different people from different nations. According to August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845), the purpose of translating was 'to combine the merits of all different nations, to think with them and feel with them, and so to create a cosmopolitan centre for mankind'.[564] This cosmopolitan centre was shaped by German culture, whereby the German language was considered to be a world language with which to pursue the ideal of *Bildung*.

This ideal, Pauline Kleingeld explains, is an ideal of self-development that, according to Novalis, stood for 'the comprehensive personal development of the individual', a development that 'crucially involves the development of felt bonds to others', and that 'is not completed unless one feels connected to all other humans, as part of a cosmopolitan community'.[565] Unification, Novalis argued, cannot be achieved through a 'collective submission to the laws of a state'.[566] Not laws but faith and love are the requirements for a lasting bond between people, for a cohesive and lasting state, and ultimately for a peaceful, harmonious world. In Novalis's eyes, an ideal state is inhabited by citizens who feel emotionally and spiritually connected to their country. A profound love of one's country and one's compatriots is necessary in order to be able to develop a love of one's fellow human beings.[567] Thus, the first step towards a united mankind is a united country – a country united through feeling. While Europe was in turmoil due to the French Revolution and the French invasion of the continent, Germany was like a light for mankind as it demonstrated that the unification of people could be achieved through aesthetics and through 'the exploration of one's own inner world'[568] rather than through political measures and military force. It was for this reason Novalis believed that 'the traces of

[564] André Lefevere, *Translating Literature: The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1977), 54.
[565] Pauline Kleingeld, *Kant and Cosmopolitanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 155.
[566] Ibid., 156.
[567] Ibid., 156–158.
[568] Ibid., 155.

a new world'[569] could already be perceived in Germany as it endeavoured the inner spiritual change needed to unify the citizens of the fatherland and subsequently the citizens of the world.

If we now look at Wagner's ideas about Germany, we see that they strongly resemble the ideas delineated above. Clearly, the patriotic yet cosmopolitan worldview of figures like Kant, Fichte and Novalis deeply influenced Wagner's social outlook, which, let it be stressed, remained strikingly consistent. Although Wagner's essays on Germany were written over a period of nearly four decades (1840–1878), the main idea put forward in his first essay, 'Über deutsches Musikwesen', remains central to his work. The idea is that the German identity quintessentially involves an artistic approach to life aimed at developing one's inner world as opposed to the utilitarian frame of mind wherein the focus lies on the external world of money, power and politics.

Let us now be more specific as to what Wagner's Germanness entails, starting off with 'Über deutsches Musikwesen'. Like the aforementioned writers who emphasised the link between the political situation in Germany and the depth, i.e. universality, of German culture, Wagner delineates how a profound musical culture has emerged in Germany as a result of political disunity. The composer observes that it is impossible for a German musician to make a name for himself (inter)nationally because all musical activities take place locally. For this reason, most musicians choose not to pursue a career in music but to get involved in leisure-time music making. Musical life thus flourishes in the private sphere rather than in the public sphere. Music is considered to be an end in itself and not a means to ends that lie outside music, such as wealth and fame. Consequently, music produced in Germany is profound in character, for it is devoid of bravado, unnecessary frills and sensational effects intended to impress large audiences. Since Germany does not offer a national stage, music can only be used as a vehicle for spiritual deepening, as a means to deepen one's inner life. Restricted by political boundaries, the German seeks his freedom in music, preferably instrumental music, because therein he can let his imagination go unrestrained. Not in the everyday world, Wagner writes, but in the realm of a Beethoven symphony, 'the German feels truly free and in his fatherland'.[570]

The essay 'Was ist deutsch?' places explicit emphasis on the pre-eminently German ability to deduce essence from foreign art and foreign cultures. Not a unique *Weltanschauung* is characteristic of Germany, Wagner asserts, but rather a unique attitude towards foreign cultures and artefacts, one that demonstrates a sense of dependency on cultural treasures of old. The

[569] Ibid., 159.

[570] Richard Wagner, 'On German Music', in *Pilgrimage to Beethoven and other essays*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 91.

German is therefore conservative: 'his treasure bears the stamp of all the ages; he hoards the old, and well knows how to use it. Fonder is he of keeping, than of winning: the gathered new has value for him only when it serves to deck the old.'[571] Indeed, Wagner claims, it is thanks to this German sense of indebtedness that the culture of the Ancient Greeks has not been forgotten. While the Italians merely copied and remodelled Greek artefacts, and the French selectively incorporated the Greek heritage into their own culture, the Germans (most notably Johann Winckelmann) were the first to attribute a value to Greek art that did not concern its mere utility but was derived from the meaning of art itself as an expression of 'the purely human'.[572] In his attempt to fathom the purely human, the German gladly undertakes journeys to faraway lands and dedicates his time and effort to studying foreign cultures. In order to gain 'inner knowledge' of foreign poems, he translates them into German, whereby he strips the original works of local idiosyncrasies and uncovers their universal, purely human motives.[573] *Parzival* and *Tristan*, for instance, have been re-created by Germans (Wolfram von Eschenbach, Gottfried von Strassburg, and Wagner himself) in such a way that these works have come to be seen as works possessing eternal value, whereas the original versions by Chretien de Troyes and Thomas of Britain 'have become mere curiosities, of no importance for world literature'.[574]

The essay *Deutsche Kunst und Deutsche Politik* argues that the true German being is artistic and in no way political. Yet the German spirit has been affected by political issues, Wagner laments. The state and the Prussian military embody power, and power is diametrically opposed to the German art-spirit that is related to the spirit of the ancient Greeks. Johann Winckelmann and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing deserve all the praise for disclosing this kinship through their scholarly contributions. However, it required an artist to truly affirm the Greek-German connection, namely Goethe, who tied Helena, the Greek ideal, to Faust: the German spirit. This spirit should permeate all levels of society in order to improve personal and social morality. But the materialistic and utilitarian state (as well as the Catholic Church) stands in the way of societal progress. In its lust for power, the state undermines the spiritual development of the people and hence makes it impossible for an aesthetic culture to arise. While technical universities are held in high regard, studies centred around the ideal of *Bildung* rather than usefulness are deemed inferior. Due to its hostile attitude towards art and culture, the new

[571] Richard Wagner, 'What is German?', in *Art and Politics*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 160.
[572] Ibid., 155.
[573] Ibid., 160.
[574] Ibid., 159–160.

German state (the North German Confederation, founded in 1867) is un-German, Wagner claims. The German state is the enemy of the German spirit, for it is utilitarian through and through and thus refuses to concern itself with issues that do not directly serve a useful purpose. What is truly German, however, is the attitude of Wilhelm Meister. In an attempt to ward off his mother's criticism that he is wasting his time visiting the theatre daily, Goethe's character exclaims, 'for Heaven's sake, mother, is nothing, then, of use but what immediately puts money in our purse?'[575] In the theatre, one can learn lessons no curriculum could ever offer because on the stage, the great problems of life are presented – existential issues that cannot be illuminated through scientific formulas but only through the refined way of aesthetic contemplation. Indeed, in the theatre, one can gain true insight into the question, 'what is German?', which is 'the thing one does for its own sake, for the very joy of doing it; whereas utilitarianism, namely the principle whereby a thing is done for sake of some personal end, ulterior to the thing itself, is shown to be un-German'.[576]

This way of thinking, based on Kant's categorical imperative, which says that one should treat humanity as an end and not as a means only, permeates all aspects of Wagner's artistic and social views and serves as a yardstick for measuring the Germanness of cultural artefacts and political systems. It is, moreover, a way of thinking that opposes the lust for power, which explains Wagner's distrust of church and state as well as his aversion to political movements.

Wagner concludes his essay 'Was ist deutsch?' with a statement on what he views as explicitly un-German, namely the abuse of the term 'German' by his revolutionary compatriots, who, in their struggle for democratic rights, cram their nationalist propaganda messages with the word 'Deutsch' in order to win the hearts of the gullible masses. This demagogy not only makes people dumb, careless and docile, Wagner observes, but also dangerously proud and complacent. Goethe and Schiller, he adds, brought the German spirit alive without talking about its being 'German'. With much trepidation, the thoughtful German beholds the national celebrations, including theatrical processions, inflammatory speeches and nationalistic songs, utilised to make the German people believe that they are a special breed of humans.[577]

In a postscript to 'Was ist deutsch?', which was republished in 1878, Wagner proclaims that his notion of Germanness does not fit in with Bismarck's new German Empire. He increasingly

[575] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels*, trans. Thomas Carlyle (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2015), 6.
[576] Richard Wagner, *German Art and German Policy*, in *Art and Politics*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 107.
[577] Richard Wagner, 'What is German?', in *Art and Politics*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 166–167.

'feels odd'[578] in unified Germany and professes that he finds himself 'unqualified for further answering the question: was ist Deutsch'.[579] The Germany Wagner cherished, after all, was in a sense imaginary, a spiritual realm inhabited by Goethe, Schiller, Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. Bismarck's Germany, on the other hand, was dominated by *Realpolitik*. National unity was not achieved through a spiritual bond but through 'iron and blood'. But a culture that celebrates military grandeur would not be able to guarantee a lasting and secure existence of the German state, Wagner prophetically suggested. For this to be the case, it would have been necessary to implement Germany's sophisticated art-spirit, which, however, was not a founding principle of the utilitarian Second Reich.

Before examining how this quintessentially German spirit specifically arises in *Die Meistersinger*, let us look at an aspect of Wagner's Germanness that has so far remained undiscussed, namely the application of Germanic myth,[580] most notably in the *Ring*. The meaning behind the appearance of Germanic myth in the *Ring* largely coincides with the meaning behind *Die Meistersinger* and may therefore help us to understand better Wagner's Germanness, the central feature of which is the exploration of one's inner world with the purpose of connecting and identifying with all of humanity.

To this end, one should first of all connect with one's own cultural heritage – one's own language, one's history, the artworks, myths, legends and sagas of one's cultural tradition that make up one's identity and determine one's inner life. Compare, for instance, reading a novel in a foreign language with reading one in your mother tongue. Although in both cases one can comprehend the content of the story, one notices that it feels more natural to read in one's first language. One feels more emotionally involved, more connected to the characters in the story, more compassionate towards them. The same is true for cultural contexts. In a context where one is surrounded by elements that bear the roots of one's existence, one feels more alive, more fully human than in a context where those elements are absent. In one's own oikos, one feels happier and more fulfilled than in a place where one feels like an outsider. Caught in such a place, feeling lost and detached, out of touch with oneself, one's ability to empathise with others is heavily undermined, whereas in a place where one can identity oneself with one's surroundings, feeling secure and attached to the world, one's ability to empathise is sustained.

[578] Ibid., 168.
[579] Ibid., 169.
[580] Let it be stressed that Germanic myth does not specifically concern Germany or the German people. Germanic mythology is in fact Nordic/Scandinavian mythology; pagan sagas, myths and legends that have spread throughout Northwestern Europe.

Thus, the more securely one is plugged into one's own culture, the better able one will be to connect with the other.

Now, plugging his audience into its culture is precisely what Wagner intended to do. It explains why he wrote his 'Dichtungen' (the Wagnerian equivalent of libretti) in German and why he drew on Germanic myth. With respect to both language and myth, Wagner was heavily influenced by the works of Grimm. In *The Ring of Truth*, Roger Scruton points out that Wagner was inspired by the notion that stories conveyed by Teutonic myths and legends are deeply connected with the original forms of the Indo-European language.[581] By reviving these original forms through the application of alliterative verse (*Stabreim*), Wagner believed we could 'purify our vision, discover the world as it appeared to our forebears, when the corruptions of civilisation had not rubbed away its clear emotional contours'.[582] Concerning Wagner's discovery in 1843 of Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835), Scruton furthermore explains:

> Like Grimm, he believed that he was discovering an older form of knowledge, one implanted in the unconscious memory of the Germans and preserved in their language and in the stories of dimly remembered heroes. For Wagner, therefore, the gods and goblins of the *Ring* cycle were not simply representatives of religion and its place in the human psyche. They were ancestral voices, speaking of values and aspirations that the German people had to repossess as their own, if they were to emerge as a unified nation.[583]

In Wagner's eyes, a unified nation was a nation unified in the German spirit. His dedication of the *Ring* to Ludwig II of Bavaria declared: 'Im Vertrauen auf den deutschen Geist entworfen' ('Composed out of confidence in the German spirit').[584] As mentioned before, this spirit was not the spirit of Bismarck's Second Reich. Wagner's understanding of Germanness was not political but primarily artistic. Having been born in the early nineteenth century, Wagner had grown up in a divided country, amongst philosophers and poets who distrusted political means and who believed that national unity could only be achieved through the spiritual products of the German people: the common language, religious traditions, music, art, philosophy. Because of their home country's disunity, the Germans were more or less forced to adapt a somewhat introspective view of life, which allegedly enabled them to grasp and illuminate the purely human. The means to discover the purely human was German art and, as such, German art was

[581] Roger Scruton, *The Ring of Truth: The Wisdom of Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 34–35.
[582] Ibid., 35.
[583] Ibid., 33.
[584] Ronald Gray, *The German Tradition in Literature 1871–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 20.

a means to unify mankind. Germany, not as a political power but as a *Kulturnation*, was therefore considered a promise of freedom. After all, while the French had betrayed the liberating promise of the French Revolution by conquering almost all of Europe, the German nation had demonstrated that unity could be achieved without political and military power, namely through culture and art. So it was art that defined Germany and not politics or state. As Alain Badiou rightly points out, this notion comes to the fore at the end of *Die Meistersinger*. It becomes clear then that Germany's essence 'has no hope whatsoever of being realised either politically or imperially; it resides and subsists in German art'.[585] Hence Hans Sachs's final words: 'Even should the Holy Roman Empire dissolve in mist [which it actually did in 1806 due to the French invasion] for us there would yet remain holy German art!' German art was seen as the bearer of the German spirit, and this German spirit was the universal spirit of freedom.

It was with confidence in this very spirit that Wagner composed the *Ring*, and the work's mythological guise served to capture it. Germanic, Icelandic and Nordic mythologies were the ideal means to (re)connect the people with their cultural roots and thus the ideal means to establish a universal connection of human beings with each other. The pre-eminently human character of the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Völsunga saga* and the Eddic poems makes them suitable for this purpose. Although these myths and sagas are ahistorical and contain supernatural elements, they nonetheless manage to illuminate the human condition, our human fate, in a highly realistic manner. More than Greek mythology, Germanic myth is capable of illuminating the human condition. Germanic gods, for instance, contrary to their Greek counterparts, become morally guilty. It is for this reason that the Germanic gods are confronted with the end of everything, their own mortality and their own decline. Whereas Greek gods are immortal, Germanic gods face the Ragnarök, the annihilation of their world. This resonated with Wagner's adherence to the philosophy of Feuerbach, in which gods and their qualities are seen as projections of our own human nature. Germanic myth is very close to this train of thought since it places emphasis on the qualities of gods and heroes with which we see ourselves intimately connected. Therefore Germanic myth reflects real life.

Although Germanic myth was seen as the pathway to the universal, the purely human, Wagner himself was not really satisfied with the *Ring* production of 1876. The characters almost disappeared into the scenery, which was considered to be too abundant, as were the looks of the characters, who were dressed in multiple layers of bearskin, eagle feathers, buffalo

[585] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 102.

horns, hatchets, swords and spears. When Malwida von Meysenbug used her opera glasses during the 1876 performance, Wagner allegedly said to her, 'Don't look so much at what is going on. Listen!'[586] The inner world of the drama was what Wagner wanted to display, and the abundant stage imagery, inspired by standard nineteenth-century depictions of Nordic mythology (such as those by, for example, Wilhelm von Kaulbach[587] and Peter Nicolai Arbo[588]), prevented the audience from beholding that inner essence.[589] A far more abstract and less particular, that is to say less Germanic, presentation was what Wagner ultimately had in mind, and yet, seemingly paradoxically, Wagner believed that his *Ring* was German par excellence.

This had everything to do with the work's potential to illuminate one's inner world, to reveal the purely human, and, hence, realise a spiritual connection with all mankind. This was considered to be a pre-eminently German duty and vocation, which the aforementioned thinkers, including Wagner, underlined by comparing the peaceful, spiritual realm of Germany with the militaristic society of France or the exclusive society of Ancient Greece. Although Wagner, in sync with the spirit of the age, believed to be an heir to the Greek civilisation, he, like Kant, criticised the Greeks for lacking a universalist frame of mind. As delineated in the previous chapter, Wagner aimed to correct and/or complete Greek tragedy by means of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which was supposed to give expression to all mankind rather than a single nation. Through a direct and intense appeal to the listener's emotional life, the promise of Greek drama could be fulfilled. Hence the centrality of music in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a force revealing the reality behind outward appearances – a reality Wagner, under the influence of

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[586] Gerald Abraham, *Slavonic and Romantic Music: Essays and Studies* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 319.

[587] e.g. *Siegfried's fight with the Dragon* (1848).

[588] e.g. *Valkyrie* (1864).

[589] That Wagner was not a visual person is stressed by Thomas Mann in 'Leiden und Größe Richard Wagners' (1933). In this essay, the writer remarks that 'the visual arts left Wagner completely cold'. To Mathilde Wesendonck in Rome the composer wrote that when it comes to beholding the visual arts he is 'rather peculiar'. Although he can be 'much exited by some lively impression made upon his eye, it never lasts for long'. To Wagner it seemed that 'the eye as an organ for perceiving the world is simply not enough'. And 'to the same correspondent from Paris', Mann tells us, the composer wrote:

> Oh, how the child revels in Raphael and painting! How lovely, delightful and reassuring! But as for me – *it leaves me totally unmoved*. I am still the old heathen who has lived in Paris for a year and never yet set foot in the Louvre. Doesn't that tell you everything??

Wagner, according to Mann, is 'a man who lives through his ears, a musician and a poet'. Even 'the great glory of French Impressionist painting, which grew to maturity alongside his own work, he scarcely even noticed: it did not concern him'. See Thomas Mann, 'The Sorrows and Grandeur of Richard Wagner', in *Pro and Contra Wagner*, trans. Allan Blunden (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 103–104.

Schopenhauer, conceived of as the will to live that resides within each and every one of us and in which we are all one. Through our examination of *Tristan* in the previous chapter, we have already acquainted ourselves with the *Gesamtkunstwerk*'s emphasis on inwardness that we now come to identify as a key aspect of Wagner's Germanness.

Yet there is another aspect that defines the composer's Germanness, namely a unique attitude towards foreign cultures and artefacts – an attitude that, as stated before, demonstrates a sense of dependency on cultural treasures of old, a sense of indebtedness to one's cultural past. As opposed to the revolutionary attitude of the French, the German mindset does not seek newness through a radical rupture with the past but through a thoughtful and respectful reconsideration of one's cultural heritage. The new can be found by renewing the old in such a manner that the relevance of a certain tradition or art form to the world is sustained and enhanced. Wagner's penchant for revitalising old traditions is apparent from his entire body of work: *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, the *Ring*, *Tristan*, *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* are all based on medieval myths and legends or legendary historical figures, namely Cola di Rienzo (c. 1313–1354) and Hans Sachs (1494–1576). These works, moreover, came to fruition through a process whereby Wagner reconsidered Greek tragedy as an artistic practice that he believed deserved to be regenerated, not through slavish restoration but through a reinterpretation of the Greek original in light of the knowledge and needs of the present situation.

'Hellenic art', Wagner realised after taking into account the violent history of mankind, must become 'Human art', i.e. 'a Universal art'.[590] The reason that Greek tragedy, i.e. Greek culture, had declined, according to Wagner, was that it had failed to address all mankind. In other words, for a particular culture to survive it should not isolate or close off its oikos but include pathways to otherness, include an element of openness as a founding principle within its boundaries. But the path towards otherness, leading up to the eventual unification and liberation of mankind, starts within the self, in one's own oikos. After all, as we have stressed before, the more securely one is plugged into one's own culture, the better able one will be to connect with the other. With the destruction of one's cultural heritage, as revolutionary movements aim to achieve, the foundation for such a connection will be shattered. But by absolutising one's culture, as so many nationalist movements do, and without modernising and improving one's heritage, this foundation shall crumble as well. Hence, one should find a balance between preservation and

[590] Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, in *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 90.

innovation in order to maintain the foundation of universalism. This is the key insight Wagner's Germanness provides, an insight put forward most emphatically in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

3. *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* as a Tale of a Place Animated by Oikophilia

Die Meistersinger's subject matter as well as its substance is art. The work deals with the question of how it is possible to renew an artistic and/or cultural tradition without destroying it. Intriguingly, the answer to this question is given both *within* the work, as an imaginary tale that takes place in sixteenth-century Nuremberg, and by the work *as* a work of art constructed in nineteenth-century Europe, a work that makes references to defining features of Western culture. Before examining the relationship between *Die Meistersinger*'s quintessentially European character and the question of how tradition can simultaneously be preserved and innovated, let us first look at *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* as a tale of a place animated by oikophilia and the manner in which it addresses the issue at hand.

Entering the world of Wagner's *Meistersinger*, we find ourselves amongst the members of Nuremberg's guild of Mastersingers. This guild consists of common citizens, most of them artisans, who draw on the tradition of the medieval *Minnesänger* (an aristocratic tradition of song-writing that has evolved into a burgher tradition) and produce their songs on the basis of the strict lyrical and musical rules of the Mastersinger-Tabulatur, which Walther von Stolzing is being taught by David and Kothner before his song trial in Act 1. However, despite this lesson, Walther fails tremendously when he auditions in the song school in front of the stern Masters, who, and this is especially true of Sixtus Beckmesser, cannot make any sense of Walther's all-too-eccentric and improvisatory singing. 'There was no word nor sound that would fit', the Masters unanimously conclude after listening to Walther's song. Except for one Master: the cobbler Hans Sachs.

Lauding 'the singer's bold intention', he has found Walter's song to be like a breath of fresh air. The young knight's singing displayed a passion and liveliness that the rather routinely performed art of the Mastersingers cannot do without for its development. The rules of their music, Sachs argues, should tolerate exceptions. What is more, the rules themselves should once a year be matched up against experience in order to find out whether the art of the Mastersingers is still in sync with nature and in touch with the reality of life rather than a

soulless formality. The performance of Walther, an outsider who is completely ignorant about the rules of the Tabulatur, is valuable in this regard. As a pupil of Walther von der Vogelweide (c.1170–c.1230), the knight is still in touch with the origin of the art of the Mastersingers: the medieval *Minnesang* that was more loose and dynamic than the art of the Nuremberg Masters, which is somewhat inanimate by comparison.

That is not to say, however, that Sachs does not respect the rules and norms of the guild's tradition or that the guild in his view needs radical reform. On the contrary, Sachs emphasises that tradition is the foundation for newness. One's tradition provides a link to the past, which contains cultural treasures that feed the imagination today. Such a treasure is the long-lost singing art of Walther von der Vogelweide, which is suddenly brought back to the present and so manages to excite the imagination of Sachs, who, while reflecting back on Walther von Stolzing's song, muses that 'it sounded so old, and yet was so new'.

To innovate is to rediscover a forgotten treasure of the past, to rethink its value in light of the present and to renew it in such a way that the relevance of the tradition is sustained and its magnitude increased. The extent to which a certain artistic tradition, art form or particular artwork is relevant to the world, however, coincides with the extent to which it is able to give expression to the being of man and the being of the world.

To understand what is meant by this, we have to turn once more to Schopenhauer. But before doing so, let us first address the following question: why Schopenhauer? His relevance to *Tristan* is obvious considering the work's centrality of sexual desire. Described by Thomas Mann as a 'cosmogonical myth in which the longing motif summons the world into being',[591] *Tristan*, contrary to *Die Meistersinger*, predates culture and civilisation. In *Tristan*, 'there is only erotic philosophy',[592] Mann observed, and since Schopenhauer's 'philosophy of the will is fundamentally erotic in character, Wagner's *Tristan* is replete with it, steeped in it',[593] steeped thus in an abstract, prehistoric vision of the world: the world as will, without a clearly identifiable representation. *Die Meistersinger*, by contrast, is set in a specific time in history, in a particular location, portraying a particular community rooted in a particular culture. For this reason, one may ask whether Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will is relevant or suitable as a conceptual framework to examine the meaning of *Die Meistersinger*. After all, Schopenhauer's philosophy does not betray any sense of community nor does it advocate loyalty or attachment

[591] Thomas Mann, 'The Sorrows and Grandeur of Richard Wagner', in *Pro and Contra Wagner*, trans. Allan Blunden (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 128.
[592] Ibid., 128.
[593] Ibid., 126.

to a specific oikos (hence Schopenhauer's absence in the previous section). As a matter of fact, the philosopher in question wrote disapprovingly about national pride. In his 'Aphorismen zur Lebensweisheit' (*Parerga und Paralipomena*, 1851), for instance, he describes national pride as 'the cheapest kind of pride for it betrays in those affected by it the lack of individual qualities of which they could be proud'.[594] According to Schopenhauer, 'individuality deserves a thousand times more consideration than national character', which 'speaks of the masses' and hence stands for 'stupidity, perversity and depravity'.[595] While the writings of Fichte and Hegel are often directed to Germans, Schopenhauer's works are solely directed to the individual, whom the philosopher encourages not to conform to the ways of the external world of social status, (national) pride, fame, career, power, wealth, etc., but to live an individualistic life dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, the development of one's intellectual abilities – a life dedicated to the 'cultivation of the mind'.[596] It is far more wise to invest in one's inner world than in the outer world, Schopenhauer argues, because 'human beings are happiest who are content with their inner riches and need little or nothing from the outside for their entertainment'.[597] Whereas '*inner* wealth, the wealth of the mind'[598] leads to happiness, outward wealth leads to boredom, deception, frustration, pain and so forth. And so, 'to possess an excellent and a rich individuality, and especially great intellect, is without doubt the happiest lot on earth',[599] Schopenhauer maintains.

The writer thus renounces the external world where material considerations reign, the world where the masses seek their bliss. 'An ordinary human being', Schopenhauer observes, 'depends on things *outside of him* in regard to enjoying life, on property, rank, wife and children, friends, society, and the like; these prop up his life's happiness.'[600] So while the common man, whose life 'is merely practical, merely aimed at personal welfare',[601] nourishes a great sense of community in order to create outer wealth, the individual who is 'primarily occupied with the intellectual life' and who 'through continuous insight and knowledge'[602] attains more and more inner wealth, is prone to disengage himself from the community and

[594] Arthur Schopenhauer, 'Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life', in *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Sabine Roehr and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 315.
[595] Ibid., 316.
[596] Ibid., 280.
[597] Ibid., 290.
[598] Ibid., 288.
[599] Ibid., 291.
[600] Ibid., 296–297.
[601] Ibid., 296.
[602] Ibid.

society. Such a person is prone to 'seek a quiet, modest life, as undisturbed as possible' because 'the more somebody has in himself, the less he needs from the outside and the less others can be to him'.[603] And thus, 'intellectual distinction leads to unsociability'.[604] For the man engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, on a quest to discover the 'essence of things in their entirety and absoluteness through art, poetry, or philosophy',[605] 'for this kind of human being solitude is welcome, leisure the highest good, and everything else expendable, indeed, when present, often merely a burden', which explains why such individuals 'do not show that intimate and unlimited sympathy for friends, family, and community of which some others are capable; for in the end they can console themselves about anything if only they have themselves'.[606] The only thing 'an inwardly rich person' needs from the outside world, Schopenhauer contends, is 'a negative gift, namely undisturbed leisure, in order to be able to cultivate and develop his intellectual abilities and to enjoy his inner wealth'.[607] So a person who seeks to pursue the life of the mind 'actually needs the permission to be entirely himself throughout his whole life, every day and hour'.[608]

Schopenhauer thus stresses the importance of creating the right conditions for intellectual development, inner growth, but he disregards the question as to how it can be achieved, which is a question that pertains to the question of community as well as the question of culture – questions that Schopenhauer, contrary to figures like Kant, Herder, Fichte, Novalis and Wagner, did not take into consideration in his writings. But as we have demonstrated in the previous section, in order to arrive at the universal kernel of life, to discover the purely human, it is imperative to be plugged into a strong culture, a culture like Wagner's beloved *Kulturnation* – indeed, the realm of Schopenhauer's beloved Wilhelm Meister – which is appreciative of the pursuit of art and philosophy, as opposed to Bismarck's utilitarian Reich that deemed such endeavours futile and refused to open the way for a lifestyle focused on *Bildung*, as Wagner lamented. So the extent to which one can engage in the life of the mind depends upon the cultural climate and the willingness of one's cultural community to enable one to lead an intellectual and spiritual life. Moreover, only a thriving culture can provide the wide array of cultural products (*Weltliteratur*, music, visual arts, philosophy and so on) needed to perpetually enrich one's inner world, for one's inner wealth, needless to say, depends on wealth coming

[603] Ibid, 288.
[604] Ibid.
[605] Ibid., 297.
[606] Ibid.
[607] Ibid., 298.
[608] Ibid.

from without. Schopenhauer seems to have taken this for granted. So why then would Schopenhauer's thoughts be relevant when it comes to the question of community/culture as present in *Die Meistersinger*?

The answer is that Schopenhauer's notion of cultivating the life of the mind and developing one's inner world for the purpose of achieving knowledge about the essence of human existence is congruent with the notion of Germanness as delineated in the previous section, namely Germanness as an artistic and reflective approach to life aimed at developing one's inner world, as opposed to the utilitarian outlook on life whereby one's focus lies on the external world of money, power and politics. Moreover, with his philosophy of the will, Schopenhauer gives substance to the notion of universality and the purely human and, furthermore, explicates the very purpose of art, namely to provide insight into the truth of the world. Herewith Schopenhauer epitomises the very essence of Germanness as Wagner understood it, namely to be engaged in one's inner world in order to see reality as it is and to free oneself from one's delusions and illusions, one's *Wahn*. *Die Meistersinger*, as we shall demonstrate later on, gives expression to this pursuit – a pursuit deemed in and by the work as an artistic pursuit par excellence. However, by explicating this pursuit as an artistic pursuit that *takes place within a tradition*, Wagner's *Meistersinger* makes clear that the truth of the world, that is to say the interconnectedness of everything, can only be obtained in a sphere that, as Roger Scruton describes it, is 'animated by *oikophilia*: the love of the oikos, which means not only the home but the people contained in it'.[609] But as we shall see as well, oikophilia is not self-evident. To maintain it, simultaneous preservation and innovation of the oikos is required. This lesson is provided by 'holy German art', which forms the heart of Nuremberg's society as it is art produced by the people and for the people. And yet, it is thanks to the endeavours of one single man, the individualistic and philosophical Hans Sachs, that the art of the Nuremberg Masters can provide this insight, an insight rooted in the notion that the difference between self and other is an illusion causing people to harm each other. Herewith the illusion of self undermines the social cohesion that subsequently impairs the love of the oikos, thus thwarting the very goal of Germanness, which is to discover true reality and to eliminate one's *Wahn* in order to achieve the cessation of suffering. Since this notion of Germanness coincides with the pursuit of art, and since art forms the heart of Nuremberg's society – meaning that it determines the hearts and minds of its people – it is imperative for art to give expression to the being of the world so

[609] Roger Scruton, *How to Be a Conservative* (London: Continuum, 2014), 24–25.

as to shatter the *principium individuationis* that undermines the love of one's community and therewith the foundation for intellectual growth, which is the foundation for happiness, too.

Now, as previously mentioned, the extent to which art is capable of expressing the truth determines art's degree of relevance. Since the fundamental truth of life is that the will permeates all aspects of the universe and causes nothing but suffering, it follows that in order for art to be considered relevant, it must bear witness to the truth. Hence Schopenhauer's penchant for tragedy and music – tragedy because it gives voice to the spirit of resignation, arising as a result of the realisation that all our striving is in vain and will ultimately lead us to our doom, and music because it shows that the phenomenal world is merely an illusion, a delusion sprung from the will to live. Both tragedy and music awaken the moral insight that there is only one ultimate reality, namely the will, which implies that everyone and everything is identical to it. The realisation that we are all one, one with the will, and subsequently the realisation that the self is like the other, that the pain of the other is tantamount to the pain of the self, should make us compassionate towards our fellow man. Acting in a compassionate manner means that, as Hans Sachs demonstrates, one does not constantly affirm one's own will, for any unrestrained pursuit of self-interest is always at the expense of others. The selfishness that marks affirmative behaviour emanates from the delusion of self, whereby one clings to the *principium individuationis* that prevents the individual from seeing the things and his connection with his fellow beings the way they really are.

The ultimate purpose of art is to disclose this insight, the insight that the difference between self and other is merely an illusion sustained by the veil of Maya, which conceals the underlying unity behind the phenomenal diversity. Additionally, art should convey the notion that due to the veil of illusion, which stimulates affirmative behaviour, suffering is maintained in the world. As several commentators have pointed out, the figure of Hans Sachs explicitly reveals this insight through his *Wahn* monologue.[610] In this monologue (Act 3, Scene 1), the cobbler, reflecting back on the riot, bemoans mankind's lot, lamenting that all over the world people hurt each other. Blinded by their illusions, Sachs laments, people do not realise that when they hurt others, they hurt themselves, too. But besides illuminating that man's *Wahn* leads to suffering, Sachs also reveals how one ought to act upon that insight, namely through his act of resignation, which is not only aimed at achieving inner peace but also aimed at achieving peace in the community at large. Sachs shows us that self-denial for the sake of a better world stems

[610] See, for example, Lucy Beckett, 'Sachs and Schopenhauer', in *Cambridge Opera Handbooks. Richard Wagner: Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, ed. John Warrack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 66–82; and Bryan Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 2000), 251–252.

from compassion for the suffering of the world as a whole, from the realisation that the self is the other. But *how* is art able to awaken this insight?

According to Schopenhauer, art can only reveal the true being of the world, its innermost reality, when it manages to excite the imagination. To this end, a work of art should not display too much and should not be too explicit. Instead, an artwork should leave something to one's imagination; it should leave something open, something to guess, something to reflect upon and to think about. This is why, according to Schopenhauer, preliminary sketches of great masters often make a bigger impression on us than their completed paintings.[611] The incomplete sketch, after all, provides more room for the imagination than the fully developed version thereof. Similarly, the reason wax figures do not excite one's imagination is that they do not give one's imagination broad scope. While sculpture merely displays form and not the colour, and painting displays colour but only a vague depiction of the form, wax images display both form and colour to the effect that they create an impression of being real, thereby sidelining the spectator's imagination. Poetry, by contrast, aims itself solely at the spectator's imagination as it only uses words to trigger the mind.[612]

Another way in which a work of art can trigger the imagination is when it is made in one go, at the very moment of conception. Schopenhauer asks his readers to think about the sketch of a painter, who, almost unconsciously, in a moment of inspiration, sketches the work's entire design in one fell swoop. One can similarly picture a musician creating a melody or a song while improvising, capturing the mood of the moment, unhindered by reflection. Precisely because they are made on the spur of the moment, without interference from reason and intentionality, the sketch and improvisatory song appeal more strongly to our imagination than most history plays, epic poems and operas, which are the products of deliberation.[613]

A work of art that maintains openness, ambiguity and which allows inspiration to thrive within its confines is capable of displaying insight into art's true purpose. On the other hand, a work of art that is based on a clear-cut concept is by definition untrue. Beholding a work that is based on an utterly clear, literal understanding of something (propagandistic art, for instance), fencing out everything that could oppose the vision it bluntly puts on display, one feels betrayed

[611] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation,* vol. 2, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York, NY: Dover, 1966), 408.
[612] Ibid., 408.
[613] Ibid., 409–410.

and discontented. Precisely when we cannot reduce an artwork to a clear-cut concept, despite all our efforts to figure out its meaning, only then is art able to satisfy the viewer.[614]

Thus, if art wants to fulfil its true purpose, Schopenhauer suggests, its identity should not be too particular or particularistic. Hence the importance of appealing to the imagination. We recall from the previous chapter that Schopenhauer argued that during an aesthetic experience one sees the world in a disinterested manner. This means that one sees the world in the way a genius sees it, meaning from an objective rather than a subjective point of view, whereby the direction of one's focus is centrally aimed at one's own egoistic interests and desires. Obviously, the 'interested' point of view is the viewpoint of the majority. As mere slaves of their will, the masses are not interested in anything outside or beyond their personal interests and desires – desires that can easily be satisfied within the particular everyday realm where the common man resides. By contrast, the genius, who possesses the capability to see the things independent of the will and who is focused on the true being of the world and thus prone to see through the veil of Maya, is precisely eager to rise above the particular everyday realm to which he is unfortunately bound. Therefore the genius needs imagination in order to see beyond the local sphere of particular appearances. Imagination enlarges the scope, expands the vision of the genius beyond the objects that he as a mere individual sees. Imagination, therefore, is the pathway leading from the outside world of particular appearances to the inner world of true reality where the thing in itself can be found: the universal will.[615]

The notion that art should not be too particularistic, however, does not imply that it would be acceptable for art to be devoid of an underlying vision. Besides disapproving of art that simply reflects clear-cut ideas, Schopenhauer objects to artists who arbitrarily play with artistic means without substantial knowledge of the purpose of art, which is to reveal the essence of the world. In 'bad architecture', for instance, such a lack of knowledge is evidenced by 'purposeless volutes, prominences, and projections'.[616] And in 'bad music', similarly, it is put forward through 'meaningless runs, figures and aimless noise'.[617] Although Schopenhauer does not make clear where exactly the dividing line between (objectionable) arbitrariness and (necessary) imaginative freedom lies, his take on the role and purpose of history, as opposed to the role and aim of philosophy, can nevertheless help us determine art's boundaries.

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[614] Ibid., 409.

[615] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York, NY: Dover, 1969), 186–188.

[616] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York, NY: Dover, 1966), 408.

[617] Ibid.

Stressing history's inability to provide objective knowledge, Schopenhauer contends that 'whereas history teaches us that at each time something different has been, philosophy endeavours to assist us to the insight that at all times exactly the same was, is, and will be'.[618] Although our world is constantly changing and evolving, we are in fact always dealing with the same, identical and immutable being that is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But it requires a philosophical frame of mind to see through the particular historical surface and to grasp that 'the chapters of the history of nations are at bottom different only through the names and dates' and that 'the really essential content is everywhere the same'.[619] History should thus be a matter of discovering the identical in all historical events, whether they took place in Ancient times or today, or whether they occurred in the Orient or in the Occident. Despite the differences between people of different backgrounds and cultures, one should learn to recognise the same mankind – a mankind united in the will, which, despite all outward changes, always remains the same and governs every man's head and heart.[620]

Although Schopenhauer stresses the importance of being able to see through historical particularities, he emphasises the importance of having knowledge of one's history, too. For only when one knows one's past, to which the present is closely tied and out of which the present evolves, can one fully understand the present and make predictions about the future.[621] And thus, Schopenhauer asserts, 'only through history does a nation become completely conscious of itself'.[622] The same is true for all mankind: 'history is to be regarded as the rational self-consciousness, or the reflected consciousness of the human race – it takes the place of a self-consciousness directly common to the whole race; so that only by virtue of history does this actually become a whole, a humanity'.[623] Since history is conveyed through the writings, artefacts and works of art that the great civilisations of the past have left behind, a united consciousness can only be achieved if we preserve the monuments of the past. To destroy, maim or disfigure the cultural treasures that we have inherited is thus a great shame,[624] because by destroying one's heritage one destroys the possibility of achieving a 'consciousness of mankind',[625] that is to say a consciousness that stems from the knowledge that all mankind is one, one with the will. Since humans are the only species capable of achieving this insight, it is

[618] Ibid., 441.
[619] Ibid., 442.
[620] Ibid., 444.
[621] Ibid., 445.
[622] Ibid.
[623] Ibid.
[624] Ibid., 446.
[625] Ibid.

this very insight that makes us fully human. And because one's cultural heritage bears the consciousness required to achieve this insight, its preservation is imperative to preserve our humanity.

Just as it is history's purpose to reveal the world essence, so too is it art's purpose to reveal the world as will. Now, when it comes to the aforementioned question as to how art can awaken this insight, it has become clear that art should neither be too particularistic and literal nor too arbitrary and capricious. But how to maintain a balance between artistic rigidity and artistic looseness? Considering the mutual goal of art and history, namely to disclose the world essence, the answer is tradition. After all, as Schopenhauer teaches his readers, the link with one's past should be maintained in order to be able to acquire knowledge about the world essence. The way to maintain this link is through tradition. Tradition is therefore the key to discovering the being of man; it is the pathway to the universal. Moreover, since tradition is never static, it allows one to stay connected to the past while simultaneously venturing into the future, to preserve and innovate at the same time. Thus, as long as an artist *stays within a tradition*, the ability to reveal the world essence is maintained. As soon as an artist rejects or abandons it, however, the pathway to the universal crumbles. Strikingly enough, despite Schopenhauer's disregard for national pride and the notion of community, his thoughts on the importance of preserving cultural monuments imply that attachment to a particular oikos is crucial for preserving the means to obtain knowledge of the will – the means, thus, to tear down the wall between self and other. Although the importance of oikophilia has never been explicitly pointed out by the philosopher, his ideas on how works of art can reveal the world essence, combined with his ideas on history, are the key to enhancing the love of the oikos. In Wagner's tale about Hans Sachs and the tradition of Nuremberg's Mastersinger guild, this insight comes clearly to the fore. How?

When Walther sings his Trial Song during the audition (*Fanget an! So rief der Lenz in den Wald*), he fails to find favour with the Masters because his unschooled and improvisatory song is too far removed from the particular, centuries-old tradition of the guild. However, precisely because Walther does not blindly accede to the guild's clear-cut scheme but instead draws on the inspiration of the moment, inventing his song on the spot, unhampered by reflection, he manages to excite Sachs's imagination. In Act 2, Scene 3, Sachs reflects upon Walther's song (*Wie duftet doch der Flieder*), wondering about the extraordinary thing that he heard that has made such a deep impression on him. Although he feels touched by Walther's song, he admits that he doesn't quite understand it. He is unable to get a grip on it, but he can't forget the song either. And although he ascertains that 'no rule seems to fit Walther's song', he nonetheless has

to admit that 'there is no fault in it'. He feels that Walther's song conveys something profound, something eternal. Intrigued by the wayward knight's musical skills, he decides to take Walther under his wing, encouraging him to stay true to his inner word, his dreams and imagination in his pursuit of winning Eva's hand at the singing contest.

But besides stimulating his creativity, Sachs also urges Walther to follow the rules and to make a song in the tradition of the Masters. In Act 3, Sachs lets Walther improvise freely to come up with a Prize Song (*Morgenlich leuchtend in rosigem Schein*) while giving structure to Walther's flow of inspiration on the basis of the Mastersingers' rules. After Walther produces one stanza (*Stollen*), Sachs asks him to make another one in a similar fashion (*Wonnig entragend dem seligen Raum*) and then to compose an *Abgesang* (after-song). In contrast with Walther's first song, which was totally improvisational and basically in an all-too-free style, the second song meets the requirements of the Mastersinger tradition, and yet, it also somewhat stifles Walther's true artistic being.

At the song contest, however, Walther manages to achieve the right balance between freedom of expression and self-restraint as he improvises and even breaks the rules (moving from a tonic of C into B major in the second stanza) within the confines of the traditional Mastersinger song. As a result, Walther is awarded the prize, which enables him to marry Eva, but, more profoundly, what his victory signifies is that he has managed to fulfil the true purpose of art. After all, Walther's song cannot simply be reduced to the concept of the particular Mastersinger song; it displays something highly individualistic and non-identical as well, something we are not yet familiar with and hence succeeds in exciting our imagination and expanding our vision of life. But Walther would not have been able to achieve this effect on the Masters and the townsfolk if he had not adjusted to their musical tradition. While his first song was not understood by the majority of Masters and therefore failed to excite their imagination, his second song appealed to *their* history and collective consciousness – that which helps them to comprehend their earthly existence and from which they derive their humanity. By appealing to *them*, to the experiences that have defined their particular lives, Walther appeals to their innermost being by which he, paradoxically, breaks through their *principium individuationis* and reaches the essence of the world in which the people of Nuremberg are one with all other nations.

That Walther's song could achieve this unifying effect and thus fulfil the Schopenhauerian purpose of art is thanks to the contemplative Hans Sachs, who not only had to guide the Dionysian Walther in order to preserve peace, but, to this end, also had to steer Beckmesser's malicious conduct in the right direction. Nuremberg's town clerk, who, moreover, is also the

guild's proud Marker, is Walther's fiercest critic and the absolute antipode of the headstrong Franconian knight. Whereas the latter, at least initially, disrespects the rules of the tradition and aspires to total artistic independence, the former displays an obstinate belief in the impeccability of the guild's technical rules and intolerance towards any view or approach that differs from the established norm. Although Beckmesser comes across as arrogant and bigoted, refusing to even consider the slightest form of innovation, Walther does not appear to be very sympathetic either. Coming to Nuremberg as a guest, he is not willing to adjust to the rules, values and traditions of the city's Mastersingers, which would be a mark of humility and respect; instead, he disdains them.

Both the attitudes of Beckmesser and Walther are harmful to society, as the comic as well as profound Riot Scene at the end of Act 2 demonstrates. In the evening before the day of the singing contest, Beckmesser decides to serenade Eva (*Den Tag seh' ich erscheinen*). Yet he fails terribly in his endeavour to woo Pogner's daughter. This is not merely due to the fact that, as Carl Dahlhaus points out, his serenade is given 'some obvious outmoded characteristics like mechanical coloratura, modal melodies and perfunctory accompaniment, by which Beckmesser's song sounds terribly outmoded and obsolete'[626] but most of all because Sachs's hammering infuriates him so badly that he starts to create a scene underneath the window. As he begins to sing louder and louder in order to drown out Sachs's hammering, he wakes up the residents of neighbouring homes, including David, Sachs's apprentice. David mistakenly believes that Beckmesser is wooing his beloved Magdalena, who is standing at the window to trick Beckmesser into believing that it is indeed Eva whom he serenades. Seized by a violent rage, David then rushes down and assaults the town clerk, threatening to 'break his bones'. Goaded by the consternation, the other inhabitants start to fight each other as well, unleashing a massive street riot that does not stop until the nightwatchman arrives.

Although it is undeniable that Beckmesser agitated the neighbourhood with his blustering street performance, it can neither be denied that due to Walther's attempt to elope with Eva, Magdalena was forced to sit in Eva's window with all the violent consequences it entailed. Walther's motives to escape should be sought in the knight's attitude to art; he disdains the musical tradition of Nuremberg and is not willing to put effort into learning the noble craft of the Mastersingers. He wants to win the city's favour, its admiration and greatest prize, namely Eva, on his terms and his terms only. When he realises that this is not going to happen, he

[626] Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 74.

cowardly tries to ‘steal’ Nuremberg’s prize instead of trying to earn it fairly. The vigilant Sachs, however, prevents this from happening. Beckmesser’s conduct can similarly be explained from his attitude to art; he identifies himself too much with the Mastersingers’ tradition, to the point of extreme intolerance towards anything that is different. This intolerance goes hand in hand with strong envy towards others, particularly Walther, whom he recognises as a formidable rival. He not only begrudges Walther any credit for his innovative song but also envies the knight for his success with Eva. Hence his attempt to outwit Walther by serenading the goldsmith’s daughter. It is due to his self-absorbed nature that Beckmesser flies into a rage when Sachs thwarts his malicious scheme. The narrow-mindedness and egoism that characterise the town clerk’s understanding of art similarly characterise his social attitude, which has helped to erupt the riot.

Art that is overly heteronomous and springs from a particularistic vision that is all too certain and all too clear does not depict the world as it really is and thus fails to convey the essence of the world – the oneness behind the world’s particular appearances. Such art, historically exemplified by socialist realism and the art of the Third Reich, corresponds with an egoistic, self-centred attitude to life whereby one is incapable of or unwilling to move beyond one’s own position. Instead, one is inclined to isolate and shut off one’s own oikos, considering everything that comes from without a threat that should be remedied. Beckmesser, with his hostility towards the innovative outsider Walther, clearly represents this intolerant frame of mind. Although he nobly cherishes and defends the traditions of his beloved Nuremberg, he is pushing it too far. He exaggerates his role as insider and guardian of the city’s conventions and demonstrates excessive pride in his identity as a citizen of Nuremberg. Incapable of looking beyond this particular identity, Beckmesser’s oikophilia tilts over into bigotry, an attitude of repudiating otherness. Walther, on the other hand, is too different, too strongly focused on otherness as he does not want to adapt to Nuremberg’s cultural traditions. Worse still, he scorns the norms and values of the city’s Masters. It is therefore no wonder that the Franconian knight is somewhat distrusted by the town folk. He, like Beckmesser, disrupts society, and the Riot Scene is the moment when the two destructive attitudes in question, represented by Beckmesser and Walter respectively, together stir up tensions that take on such epic proportions that in no time at all the situation in Nuremberg boils over.

What the Riot Scene makes clear is that both attitudes have the same destructive effect on both art and society. Although Beckmesser proudly thinks of himself as a defender of a tradition that is bound to die if changes are allowed, the very opposite is true. Precisely because Beckmesser clings to established rules too firmly, he effectuates a stiffening of the Mastersinger

art, as a result of which it loses its relevance and turns into a museum piece. The very attempt to preserve art becomes an act of cultural suicide as the art of the Mastersingers ceases to be part of the continuation of society and consequently shall cease to exist. Beckmesser's so-called defence of tradition, therefore, is actually a break with the tradition. What underlies his attitude towards the tradition of Nuremberg is the will that this very tradition ends – the art of the Mastersingers is the art of the past, not of the present. It is an art that sooner or later no one will understand anymore, an art that will no longer appeal to one's consciousness and hence will no longer be able to reveal the being of the world to its audiences. Herewith Beckmesser is paradoxically just as anti-conservative and anti-historical as Walther initially is. Walther, however, does not break the tradition from within but from without. He brings to Nuremberg an art that does not refer to any tradition at all; his first song leaves the listeners bewildered and disoriented. Disconnected from Nuremberg's historically grown culture, Walther's audition song is meaningless to those who are part of this culture. Therefore Walther's overly progressive song, a song that conflicts with Beckmesser's artistic views but corresponds with the consequences of the latter's treatment of art, fails to awaken the self-consciousness of its listeners and thus it fails to make them conscious about the being of the world. The lack of this consciousness ultimately leads to a weakening of one's society.

As Hans Sachs observes in his reflection on the riot at the beginning of Act 3, it is due to the *Wahn*, meaning the delusion of self whereby one clings to the *principium individuationis* that prevents the individual from seeing his connection with his fellow beings, that the riot has broken out. As previously stressed, the purpose of art is to reveal the notion that the difference between self and other is merely an illusion, an illusion that stirs egoistic, affirmative deeds by which man's suffering is sustained. The question as to how art can awaken this insight is answered in the closing scene of *Die Meistersinger*. Walther has finally won the hearts of the people of Nuremberg, and consequently the singing contest, by means of a song that is rule-bound and yet rule-transcending, a song that thus maintains Nuremberg's musical tradition and simultaneously renews it – a song that manages to preserve the continuity of the tradition precisely by interpreting it in a personal and contemporary way. Walther's song conveys the insight that if an artistic tradition, or any other tradition for that matter, wants to survive, one has to pursue it from a dual point of view: from the perspective of the self as well as from the perspective of the other. In other words, one should stand somewhere between oikos and xenos.

Although Walther's song bears witness to this notion, Walther himself refuses to acknowledge it. When Pogner invites him to become a member of the guild of Masters, Walther answers: 'Not Master! No! I will be happy without Masterhood!' The knight values his

independence, yet he fails to see that it is not because of his independent spirit alone that he won the prize but due to the coupling of artistic freedom *and* the guild's artistic discipline. Not from the outside but only within the boundaries of Nuremberg's tradition, Walther is able to excel as a musician and thus able to win the hand of the woman he loves. The fact that the knight gladly accepts the prize, namely his beloved Eva, but repudiates the very tradition that enabled him to achieve happiness proves that Walther is still trapped in a delusion of self. By being exclusively focused on being non-identical, Walther is just as egoistic as Beckmesser, who, in his turn, is exclusively focused on being identical. The knight's self-centredness, moreover, once more threatens to disturb the social peace and harmony in Nuremberg's community. After all, by rejecting Pogner's honourable offer, Walther deeply insults the Masters, who have achieved their esteemed position in the guild through toil and effort. But it is also an insult to the people of Nuremberg, who finally decided to choose the outsider Walther as their champion instead of the insider Beckmesser. It is for this reason that Sachs immediately intervenes, bidding the stubborn knight 'not to scorn the Masters, and to honour their art' instead. It would be appropriate for the winner of the contest, Sachs exclaims reprimandingly, to show some gratitude to the Masters considering the great fortune that befell him. They, after all, have always fostered and protected the artistic tradition that has enabled Walther to thrive. If it weren't for the Masters' endless devotion to their holy German art, renewal of this art would not have been possible. What is more, by preserving their art, the Masters have safeguarded the historical consciousness and cultural awareness of the community needed to preserve the German oikos at large. If one day Germany is placed under the control of a foreign ruler (which, as we recall, actually happened in 1806 when the French seized power in many German states) who does not understand the land and the people he rules, it will be because of the art of the German Masters that the collective consciousness of the German nation, anchored in German culture and art, remains to exist. It is therefore imperative to stay in touch with one's cultural heritage because only when one is securely plugged into one's own culture is one able to connect with the other and thus capable of renewing, i.e. preserving, one's culture and art.

In Sachs's view, tradition and innovation do not oppose each other but depend on each other. Without the preservation of tradition, innovation is not possible and vice versa. This explains why Sachs thwarts Beckmesser's cunning attempts to undermine Walther's innovative efforts and why he reproaches Walther for scorning the Masters' tradition. Yet, Sachs's endeavour to unite the two opposing stances is ultimately motivated by an ideal that transcends the cobbler's local artistic and social goals and applies to the whole of humanity. As we have stressed throughout this section, the Schopenhauerian Sachs is concerned with man's *Wahn*, man's

delusion of self, which separates people and divides them and leads to misery and strife. However, through his consistent advocacy of efforts to maintain a balance between preservation and innovation, Sachs creates a foundation of universalism. Both Beckmesser's absolutisation of tradition and Walther's denial thereof separate self and other, as we have seen, but through a junction of the two opposing perspectives, this separation can be undone. Yet, in his final address to Walther and the people of Nuremberg, Sachs leaves the gathered townsfolk in no doubt as to where the pathway towards otherness leading up to the unification of mankind begins, namely in one's own oikos, one's own home, with an attitude of love and respect for those who helped build it throughout the ages. Hence Sachs's call to the crowd to 'honour your German Masters!', a call that is met with praise from the townspeople, who have opened their hearts and home to a stranger while singing the praises of a man they proudly claim as one of their own: 'Hail, Sachs! Nuremberg's dear Sachs!'

4. *Die Meistersinger* as a European Rather Than a German Work of Art

The finale of *Die Meistersinger*, however, is often interpreted as a glorification of the German *Volk*, with Sachs's final address to the townsfolk displaying hostility to foreign peoples as he exclaims:

> Beware! Evil tricks threaten us:
> if the German people and kingdom should one day decay,
> under a false, foreign rule
> soon no prince would understand his people;
> and foreign mists with foreign vanities[627]
> they would plant in our German land;
> what is German and true none would know,
> if it did not live in the honour of German Masters.
> Therefore I say to you:
> honour your German Masters

Sachs's words allegedly epitomise Wagner's Germanness in the ultra-nationalistic, xenophobic sense of the word, testifying, moreover, to *Die Meistersinger*'s quintessentially German

[627] In German the sentence reads: 'und wälschen Dunst mit wälschem Tand'. Referring to Sachs's final speech in *Die Erfindung des Bösen: Der Welsche*, Ute Schneider explains that the term 'Welschen' was frequently used in nineteenth-century German literature and art to designate and demonise outlandish/alien (*Fremdländisch*) characteristics, particularly French and Italian ones, as opposed to virtuous German qualities. See Ute Schneider, 'Die Erfindung des Bösen: Der Welsche', in *"Gott mit uns": Nation, Religion und Gewalt im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Gerd Krumeich and Hartmut Lehmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 35–51.

character. In this section, however, we will demonstrate that Wagner's comedy is not a nationalist work at all in the sense that it expresses an essentialist view of Germany and proclaims a so-called German essence or the superiority of German qualities. For Germany, in Wagner's spiritual world, stands for German art, and Wagner's holy German art, as embodied by *Die Meistersinger*, draws on sources far beyond Germany, namely sources originating in Athens and Jerusalem. Thus, it is a work that looks beyond its own borders, an outward-looking work. As such, *Die Meistersinger* is congruent with Nietzsche's Europeanness, meaning his view of what Europe is supposed to be: a realm marked by cultural diversity and yet united by the will to transcend national differences through a universal, life-affirming spiritual idea aimed at perpetual cultural renewal, growth and expansion so as to effectuate an increase of life, create new openings and perspectives, ever new modes of existence. To gain a proper understanding of the connection between *Die Meistersinger* and Nietzsche's Europeanness, let us begin by looking at Nietzsche's reflections on the role of Wagner's comedy in Europe's history and future.

In section 8 of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (1886), Nietzsche connects his analysis of the overture to *Die Meistersinger* with his notion of what makes a 'good European': a cosmopolitan human being who is not exclusively tied to one particular nation but adapts to many different groups of people and appropriates the best qualities from a variety of countries and cultures, within Europe and beyond, in order to become more fully human. A 'good European' constantly seeks to view himself and the world from new perspectives and strives continuously to transfigure life, to create new forms. Being focused on constant improvement, growth and incessant becoming, the 'good European' is the very antipode of the nationalist. While the latter holds a static view of reality and feels contempt for those who are supposedly different, the former has a dynamic view of the world and recognises himself in any cultural sphere the world has to offer.

This open-minded approach to life, Nietzsche believed, was the best weapon against the nationalist tendencies that threatened the peace of Europe. Nietzsche, who, like Wagner, was inspired by Goethe's apolitical and outward-looking Germany, watched with a heavy heart how the German nationalist movement started to thrive in the late nineteenth century. Germanness no longer stood for openness but for closed-mindedness, for an exclusive focus on the self at the expense of the other. Through his dynamic and candid nature, the 'good European' was pre-eminently capable of defusing the explosive forces of nationalism, anti-Semitism and militarism that Nietzsche believed would ultimately harm everyone involved, both self and other. The ideal culture the philosopher envisaged would be a culture free from such forces: a

culture that conceives of itself as a dynamic synthesis of different local spheres and influences that mutually inspire and strengthen each other in order to improve the European culture as a whole, a culture for which Nietzsche preferred to use the umbrella term 'Europe'.

It must be emphasised that Nietzsche did not reflect on Europe in political or economic terms but in aesthetic ones. What truly defined Europe, Nietzsche believed, was its artistic spirit stemming from Greek culture, Roman civilisation, Judaism and Christendom.[628] Not unlike his philosophical predecessors who highlighted the supposed artistic essence of Germany to oppose political power and militaristic nationalism, Nietzsche stressed the artistic essence of Europe to remonstrate with the nationalism and militarism that arose in his day.[629] Following the poets, writers and thinkers of Goethe's Germany, who defined Germanness in terms of being capable of looking beyond one's own borders and incorporating foreign elements into one's own world, Nietzsche defined Europeanness as an interplay between different cultures that willingly mix with one another. Europe's strength, Nietzsche maintained, lies in its cultural diversity, being a patchwork of different nations. Yet these nations should not remain divided since 'the lunacy of nationality has produced and continues to produce a morbid estrangement between the peoples of Europe'.[630]

The philosopher witnessed how demagogues throughout Europe managed to set peoples against each other, tricking them into believing that they belonged solely and exclusively to their fatherland and nation, a nation that would be radically different from any other nation and, moreover, better than all the other nations, which were subsequently viewed with contempt. He observed, for instance, how the French in the 1880s suddenly turned hostile towards Wagner while in reality 'French late romanticism of the 1840s and Wagner belong most closely and intimately together'.[631] Wagner, together with 'figures such as Goethe, Beethoven, Stendhal, Heinrich Heine and Schopenhauer', belonged to 'the more profound and comprehensive men of this century', who 'prepared the way to a new European synthesis and anticipated experimentally the European of the future'.[632]

Whereas Nietzsche described a composer such as Robert Schumann as 'a merely German event in music' instead of 'a European event' – a composer who 'threatened German music with its greatest danger', namely 'that of losing *the voice for the soul of Europe* and sinking

[628] Martine Prange, *Nietzsche, Wagner, Europe* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2013), 5.
[629] Ibid.
[630] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1973), 188–189.
[631] Ibid., 189.
[632] Ibid.

into a merely national affair'[633] – Wagner (like Mozart, Beethoven and Felix Mendelssohn) was to him a European phenomenon since the composer endeavoured to achieve a new means of expression by crossing the boundaries of the individual arts and their national origin and mixing them together. Transcending artistic and national boundaries, Wagner was 'as a poet among musicians and as a musician among painters', with Eugène Delacroix[634] as his 'closest relation'.[635] The 'German friends of Richard Wagner', who had co-opted the composer for their nationalist cause, should have therefore better considered 'whether there is in Wagnerian art anything simply German, or whether it is not precisely its distinction that it derives from *supra-German* sources and impulses'.[636] For this very reason, Wagner's art was seen as the art of the future; it was not German but European, not a local but a global form of art.[637] Instead of being

[633] Ibid., 178.

[634] In 'Leiden und Größe Richard Wagners', Thomas Mann ties the Wagner – Delacroix connection to the 'kinship' between Wagner and Baudelaire that Nietzsche would have predicted on the basis of Baudelaire's appreciation for Delacroix:

> This prediction, astonishing in its accuracy, was born of ardent love, kindred passion, and it is a mark of Nietzsche's critical genius that he was able to recognise this kinship without knowing of its utterances. 'Since Baudelaire was the first in his day to champion the unknown Delacroix', he writes in the sketches for *Der Fall Wagner*, 'perhaps he would now be the first Wagnerian in Paris. There is a lot of Wagner in Baudelaire'. It was not until years later that he saw the letter in which Wagner thanks the French poet for his words of tribute; and he enjoyed his triumph. Yes, Baudelaire, the earliest admirer of Delacroix – that Wagner of painting – was indeed the first Wagnerian in Paris, and one of the first genuine, deeply affected and artistically sympathetic Wagnerians to be found anywhere. His *Tannhäuser* essay of 1861 was the first crucial and epoch-making discussion of Wagner, and it has remained the most significant in historical terms. (Thomas Mann, 'The Sorrows and Grandeur of Richard Wagner', in *Pro and Contra Wagner*, trans. Allan Blunden. London: Faber and Faber, 1985, 145–146)

[635] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1973), 189–190.

[636] Ibid., 190.

[637] In Nietzsche's vein, Thomas Mann would stress Wagner's European/cosmopolitan character, too – a character Wagner shared with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. In his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (1918) Mann writes:

> In art and literature my love of things German begins at the point where they become possible and valid in European terms, capable of making a European impact, and accessible to every European. The three names that come to mind when I think about the roots of my own intellectual and artistic development, names that form a bright constellation of eternally united minds, shedding its glorious light across the German heavens – these names designate phenomena, not of a parochially German, but of European import: Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Wagner. (Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Non-political Man*, in *Pro and Contra Wagner*, trans. Allan Blunden. London: Faber and Faber, 1985, 51)

Referring to the book *Richard Wagner als Kulturerscheinung* ('Richard Wagner as Cultural Phenomenon') by the Swedish author W. Peterson-Berger, Mann furthermore comments:

> The Swede writes of Wagner's nationalism, of his art as a national German art, and observes that the only genre not absorbed into his great synthesis is German folk music. Although he is capable of sounding a folksy German note from time to time for purposes of characterisation, as in *Die Meistersinger* and *Siegfried*, this never constitutes the basis and starting point of his musical writing – is never the source from which it wells up spontaneously, as in the work of Schumann, Schubert and Brahms. There is a necessary distinction to be made, he argues, between folk art and national art; the former is aimed at a domestic audience, the latter at an international one. Wagner's music is

a Germanic hero, Siegfried was a European one, symbolizing a '*very free* human being'[638] who redeemed himself from the shackles of Catholicism and rigid national ties, loving the world and himself unapologetically and without (Christian) shame. Although Nietzsche recognised Christianity as one of Europe's cultural cornerstones, he envisaged a Europe beyond Christianity, a Europe no longer ruled by an absolutised view of the world.

While Wagner had courageously moved in the direction of this new Europe with his creation of the figure of Siegfried, with *Parsifal* he made a regressive move back to Christian times, betraying the ideal of a post-Christian, free-spirited Europe. Nietzsche thus believed that Wagner turned back when he should have moved forward. But did Wagner not precisely go back in order to move forward? After all, innovation is not possible without the continuation of a tradition. How this pertains to *Parsifal* will be examined in the next chapter. Instead, let us now concentrate on the question of how Nietzsche's analysis of the overture to *Die Meistersinger* relates to the philosopher's vision of Europe.

Reading the opening paragraph of part eight of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, we see that Nietzsche's criticism of *Parsifal* also applies to *Die Meistersinger*. Its prelude similarly displays the tendency to succumb to ills of the past. While in *Parsifal* Wagner reverted back to Christendom, in *Die Meistersinger* the composer did not manage to break away entirely from the regressive aspects of Germanness. Another way of putting it is that *Die Meistersinger* was not European enough, a borderline case if you will. This is not to say that Nietzsche repudiated the work. His stance on its content and signification was by all means ambiguous. Pointing out that the overture encompasses centuries of music, Nietzsche describes it as a unique blend of countless different 'seasons and zones' that sounds 'archaic and young' at the same time.[639] (With these words Nietzsche clearly alludes to the *Meistersinger* text, Act 1, Scene 3, when Sachs utters in response to Walter's singing, 'It sounded so old, and yet was so new') Although the prelude is 'not infrequently puckish', it is 'still more often rough and uncouth', and although 'it has fire and spirit', at the same time it has 'the loose yellow skin of fruits which ripen too late'.[640] Ultimately the philosopher concludes that the overture to *Die Meistersinger* expresses 'something German in the best and worst sense of the word, something which is at once young

> more national than popular; to the foreigner as such it may appear typically German in many respects, but at the same time it has an unmistakably cosmopolitan cachet. (Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Non-political Man*, in *Pro and Contra Wagner*, trans. Allan Blunden. London: Faber and Faber, 1985, 54)

[638] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1973), 191.
[639] Ibid., 170.
[640] Ibid.

and aged, over-mellow and still too rich in future'.[641] Although Nietzsche herewith hints at the positive potential of Wagner's pre-eminently German music, he nevertheless emphasises the regressive tendency of Wagner's Germanness.

As already explained in previous chapters, Nietzsche's attack on Wagner should be understood as an attack on the bigots and nationalists who co-opted the composer in the name of their particularistic *Deutschtum*. In this light, Nietzsche describes the *Meistersinger* prelude with its archaic tendencies as an example of music that could stir 'nationalist ebullitions' and 'atavistic attacks of patriotism'[642] – music, thus, that opposes Nietzsche's concept of Europe. But can we not consider *Die Meistersinger*'s archaism such that it coincides with Nietzsche's concept of Europe?

As Nietzsche observes, the prelude sounds new and old at the same time.[643] While the application of *Tristan* chromaticism betrays the prelude's modern origin, the prelude, with its polyphonic combination of themes, is also reminiscent of Bach's polyphonic compositional style. The prelude, moreover, contains references to specific historical periods, such as the third theme in the overture, the so-called King David motif, which presumably stems from an actual Mastersinger fanfare from the Middle Ages.[644] However, not only the prelude but the entire work is filled with references to the past, references that do not merely pertain to Germany's particular cultural history but the history of European culture. Carl Dahlhaus, for instance, points out that 'the "old German" style of the Mastersinger's theme echoes an international or French style grafted on the slow sections in Bach's French overtures'.[645] The musical forms also, according to Dahlhaus, are affected by 'the archaising tendency that colours the work as a whole'.[646] Whereas the *Ring* shows no traces of formal types of earlier opera, *Die Meistersinger* clearly draws on grand opera, which is evidenced by its vast inclusion of monologues, songs, ensembles, choruses and dances and the fact that all three acts end with a massed finale.[647]

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[641] Ibid., 170–171.
[642] Ibid., 171.
[643] The same is true for the music of *Parsifal* in which elements from older church music (e.g. the Dresden Amen formula and the polyphonic Faith motive) are combined with elements from modern music.
[644] Peter Schneider, 'Climbing Mount Everest: On Conducting *Die Meistersinger*', in *Wagner's Meistersinger: Performance, History, Representation*, ed. Nicholas Vazsonyi (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 25–26.
[645] Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 72.
[646] Ibid., 75.
[647] Ibid.

In addition to this observation, we should also note that *Die Meistersinger* conforms to the (neo)classical unities: unity of pace, time (2 x 24 hours) and action. And not only is the form classical but also the story and its characters are based on classical plays. According to M. Owen Lee, *Die Meistersinger* is very similar to the comedies of Menander as well as the comedies of the Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence.[648] Each of Wagner's characters in *Die Meistersinger*, despite of their individual qualities, is a recognisable comic type, Lee claims. Walther, for instance, is the *adolescens*, i.e. 'the inexperienced young hero who has till morning to win his girl, and who is lectured at from all sides'; Eva is the *mulier*, i.e. 'the girl who is going to be given away in the morning'; Hans Sachs is the *senex*, i.e. 'the philosophising old man, often secretly in love himself with the girl'; and Beckmesser is the *miles gloriosus*, i.e. 'the ridiculously overconfident braggart soldier, who hopes to buy the girl in the morning'.[649] Lee therefore argues that *Die Meistersinger* ought to be placed 'in the great comic tradition of the West, from Greek Menander to the Romans Plautus and Terence, to Renaissance Italy, to Lope de Vega, Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, Molière in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, and Beaumarchais, Mozart, and Rossini in the Figaro plays'.[650]

Besides tying itself to the cultural heritage of Greece and Rome, *Die Meistersinger* also incorporates the symbolism of another cornerstone of Western civilisation, namely Christianity. The presence of Christian elements is hard to miss since Act 1 opens in the St. Catherine's Church in Nuremberg with the congregation singing a hymn (a variation on the first theme of the prelude) lauding John the Baptist. What is more, the entire action of *Die Meistersinger* takes place on the eve and feast of this saint.[651] In light of the question concerning the relation between tradition and innovation, the prominent presence of John the Baptist in the work proves highly significant. First of all, the hymn sung by the congregation at the outset of Act 1 is actually a German version of the Latin hymn to John the Baptist called *Ut queant laxis*. The names of the seven-note diatonic musical scale stem from the opening syllables of this Latin hymn that was written by Paul the Deacon (c.720–799). It was Guido of Arezzo (991–1033), the inventor of modern musical notation, who later took the names of the first notes of the musical scale (ut-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-ut) from the opening syllables of *Ut queant laxis*. Since the

[648] M. Owen Lee, *Wagner and the Wonder of Art: An Introduction to Die Meistersinger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 23.
[649] Ibid., 24. Other types discerned by Lee are the *servos* i.e. David as 'the experienced slave who does most of the lecturing but gets into a lot of trouble himself; the *nutrix* i.e. Magdalene as the confidante who tries to help the boy get the girl, and the *leno* i.e. Pogner as the procurer who puts the girl up for sale'.
[650] Ibid., 24–25.
[651] Ibid., 14.

congregation sings a hymn based on *Ut queant laxis*, Wagner's Nuremberg shows itself as a city that values the maintenance of its cultural roots.[652] A second reason why the centrality of John the Baptist day in the work is significant is that, in Lee's words, 'the Baptist is a figure who bestrides and bridges the Old and New Testaments, summing up the Old, heralding the new'.[653] As Lee rightly points out, 'in *Die Meistersinger* too the old is fulfilled in the new – old and new testaments of song'.[654] In between the old and new testaments of song, in between Beckmesser and Walther, stands Hans Sachs, who represents the figure of the Baptist. At the beginning of Act 3, their connection becomes explicitly clear when David sings 'Am Jordan Sankt Johannes stand, all' Volk der Welt zu taufen' and in the course of the song recalls that it is Hans's name day and exclaims: 'Herr Meister! 's ist heut' eu'r Namenstag!' Sachs then goes on to 'baptise Walther's newborn song', heralding a new testament of song.[655]

Lee furthermore explains that the link between song making and shoemaking established in *Die Meistersinger* has a Biblical origin as well. In Act 2, Sachs prevents Walther and Eva from eloping together by means of a song in which he refers to Adam and Eve, who fled from paradise, thereby hurting their feet on the rough soil. This led God to ask an angel to make the couple shoes before the devil could do so. While Walther wonders what Sachs's song is precisely about, Eva immediately understands that the song is 'meant for all of us'. Walther, after all, represents Adam, Eva embodies Eve, Beckmesser (trying his hand at song making with the serenade) can be seen as the devil, and Sachs is like the angel in service of God, protecting the art of song making for the sake of future generations (Walther and Eva) before the devilish Beckmesser can start to rule the art of song. The making of shoes, therefore, is tantamount to the making of songs.[656] In addition to this notion, it can also be noted that Sachs, with his song about Adam and Eve, admonishes Walther and Eva for eloping, making clear to them that leaving Nuremberg would be tantamount to leaving paradise and hence original sin.[657]

Drawing on both Greek and Biblical symbolism, *Die Meistersinger* maintains a distinct tension between secularity and religiosity, which is particularly evident in Walther's Prize Song. Its first section, sung in Sachs's workshop (Act 3, Scene 2), is sacred in subject and inspired by Genesis's Garden of Eden. Recalling his 'beautiful dream', Walther describes in his

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[652] Ibid., 15.

[653] M. Owen Lee, 'Some Metaphors in the Text of *Die Meistersinger*', in *Wagner in Retrospect: A Centennial Reappraisal*, ed. Leroy R. Shaw, Nancy R. Cirillo, Marion S. Miller (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), 64.

[654] Ibid.

[655] M. Owen Lee, *Wagner and the Wonder of Art: An Introduction to Die Meistersinger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 57.

[656] Ibid., 59.

[657] See Stephen Brockmann, *Nuremberg: The Imaginary Capital* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), 106.

song how on 'a joyous morning of rosy light and air heavy with blossom and scent a garden invited him to be its guest'. There he was accompanied by 'a woman of astounding beauty offering him the golden fruits of the glorious tree of life'. Yet, after Sachs asks Walther to compose a second section, the latter starts to refer to secular sources, namely Apollo's laurel tree and a woman's shining gaze like 'two light stars'. At the singing contest, when performing the final version of his song, Walther explicitly reveals the identity of both 'wonderful women': the first is 'Eve in paradise', and the second is 'the Muse of Parnassus'.[658]

It is not for nothing that both the Biblical Eve and the Greek Muse have inspired the prize-winning song – a composition that won precisely because it brought newness through a revival of the old. When Walther performs the final version of his song at the contest, he does so in the hope of marrying Eva. Lee points out that Walther's final song 'calls to mind German medieval and baroque representations of the Virgin Mary, with stars circling her head, born in grace ('Huld-geboren'), chosen as in a Magnificat ('Ruhm-erkoren')'.[659] In medieval Germany, the 'Ave' of the Catholic prayer Ave Maria stood for the reverse of 'Eva', meaning the reversal of 'the destructive pattern begun by Eve' after Mary conceded Gabriel's announcement, with which 'the whole process of redemption' commenced.[660] Therefore Mary was called the new Eve; through her, the mother of Jesus, redemption from original sin became possible.[661] Eva thus represents Mary, who, as Lee stresses, plays an important part in *Tannhäuser* and, as a representation of what in Goethe's *Faust* is called 'das ewig Weibliche' – that is a force that inspires and redeems man – permeates Wagner's entire body of work.[662] According to Lee, Mary redeems us from what Hans Sachs refers to as *Wahn*: succumbing to the blind, irrational will through which we hurt ourselves and others. *Wahn*, therefore, is the root cause of all the misery in the world. Lee, however, designates original sin as the root cause of man's suffering and *Wahn* as its 'evil effect'.[663] *Wahn*, thus, has emanated from Eve, who committed the original sin, and it can therefore be seen as 'a flaw in our nature, the irrational, potentially destructive force within us'.[664] However, through Mary this destructive force can become a force of creation, of new life, too. But for this primal force to be good, it has to be directed, or

[658] M. Owen Lee, *Wagner and the Wonder of Art: An Introduction to Die Meistersinger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 59–60.
[659] Ibid., 60.
[660] Ibid.
[661] Ibid.
[662] Ibid., 61.
[663] Ibid., 60.
[664] Ibid., 61.

'baptised' and redeemed, as happens in *Die Meistersinger*.[665] Walther finally wins the contest because his song, initially too free and hence disruptive, through the guidance of Hans Sachs and within the confines of the tradition becomes a creative force, renewing the tradition that was worn out and bound to die.

In this context, it should be noted that Walther ends his Prize Song at the contest with the words: 'Through victory in song, I had won Parnassus and Paradise!' Eva, who is seen as a Mary figure who turns Eve's destructive force into something constructive, also carries within herself the Muse of Parnassus, a goddess who brings artistic inspiration. Eva thus embodies inspiration and order, love and discipline. She inspires Walther to compose his innovative song, but as Walther's future bride, she also ties the knight to the tradition of Nuremberg. Baptising or canonising the newness that Walther brings, she allows the knight's creative force to renew the musical tradition of the Mastersingers.

Yet, the junction of Parnassus and Paradise in Walther's Prize Song means something more when it is considered in light of *Die Meistersinger*'s place in Europe. Wagner, after all, has drawn here on two models, namely a Greek model and a Jewish one. While the muse is taken from Greek mythology, Eve comes from the Hebrew Bible. Both models come together in the figure of Eva, who represents Mary, the most venerated saint in Roman Catholicism. Through the figure of Mary, the Greek muse and the Jewish Eve bring about an artistic renaissance in the heart of Europe.

This structure can be explained on the basis of Rémi Brague's theory of Europe, as developed in *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization* (2002). The thesis of this book is that European culture lies beyond or on the edge of the continent, meaning that culturally Europe has been defined by Jerusalem and Athens, that is to say the Jewish tradition on the one hand and the tradition of Ancient Greece on the other.[666] Yet neither the Christian Occident nor other civilisations conceived of Europe as Jewish or Greek but rather as Roman.[667] What is meant by this is a unique attitude towards both the Jewish and Greek tradition. The 'Roman attitude' is an attitude we should 'characterise in a general way as that of one who is conscious of a call to renew the ancient'.[668] This attitude is pre-eminently characteristic of Europe, Brague contends. As he puts it, 'Europe is essentially Roman'.[669]

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[665] Ibid.

[666] Rémi Brague, *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 24 –25.

[667] Ibid., 22.

[668] Ibid., 35.

[669] Ibid., 22.

A key feature of the Roman attitude is a sense of dependency on the Jewish and Greek tradition respectively and therewith a sense of 'secondarity' in relation to the heritage of Jerusalem and Athens to which Europe is indebted.[670] This constitutes the notion in Europe that there is a higher norm or ideal outside itself that one has to imitate in order to subdue the barbarity within oneself.[671] This notion has governed Europe's relation to its sources such that Europe has always preserved the original Jewish and Greek heritage as a source to be revisited and reinterpreted time and time again, without ever being able to own or surpass it.[672] The Romans, rather than being focused on translating Greek texts as knowledge to be incorporated, let themselves be inspired by Greek models, 'adapting, rewriting, and rethinking Greek texts in transposing them into their own cultural world'.[673] The Christians in Roman Catholic Europe, in their turn, knew that the New Testament, as a literary text, was mediocre in comparison with the Old Testament, referring to the apostle's language as 'a "language of fishermen" (*sermo piscatorius*) or of a "humble speech"'.[674] This sense of inferiority with respect to the Hebrew Bible explains why the Marcionic attempt to separate the New Testament from the Old Testament failed. Just as the Romans were inextricably linked to the Greeks, so the Christians were tied to the Jews.[675]

Conscious of its secondarity, European culture is 'marked by a melancholic feeling of alienation or inferiority in relation to its sources, which provokes a sense of nostalgia'.[676] Even after the optimistic Age of Enlightenment, this tendency remained present, particularly in German culture, albeit as an undercurrent. Nietzsche, nevertheless, gave voice to Europe's eternal longing for the past most emphatically, as the following words illustrate:

> German philosophy taken as a whole…is the gravest kind of *romanticism* and nostalgia that has ever existed: a demand for the very best that ever existed. Since then, one is not at all at home – one demands, at bottom, to return to where one can feel at home in one way or another, because it is there alone that one would like to be at home, and that is – in the Greek world! Only all the bridges leading there are collapsed – with the exception of the rainbows of concepts! And they

[670] Ibid., 43.
[671] Ibid., 39–40.
[672] Islamic culture is very different in this respect. Brague points out that Islamic culture is not characterised by a tendency to *assimilate* to foreign sources but to *appropriate* them instead. A sense of dependency on traditions to which Islam is indebted, namely Judaism and Christianity, is absent in Islam. Islam does not come second but first. Compared to the Roman culture of the West, Islamic culture is self-absorbed.
[673] Rémi Brague, *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 83.
[674] Ibid., 95.
[675] Ibid., 54.
[676] Ibid., 100.

> lead everywhere, toward all the hometowns and 'fatherlands' that have ever been given to Greek souls.[677]

However, the doleful notion that there exists an unbridgeable distance between Europe and its supposedly superior sources, in Nietzsche's case the Greek world, surely did not cripple Europe's culture. On the contrary, it has always incited renaissances. Since the original sources (e.g. ancient texts) were preserved in their literalness and hence remained foreign to Europe, these sources have kept their sovereignty as well as an aura of inconceivability. In other words, the original sources have always remained interesting. Elusive as they are, they have always seemed to appeal to Europeans in different ways, in different situations or eras, enabling them to draw new lessons from the classics at hand, time after time. Europe's eccentric sources, moreover, have always served to correct Europe in times of decline. When the Catholic Church began to decay in the late Middle Ages, the Italian Humanists (e.g. Albertino Mussato, Francesco Petrarca, and Giovanni Boccaccio) reverted back to the ancient classics in order to revitalise the Christian civilisation. In the sixteenth century, once more in response to the Church's corruption, Protestant Reformers from Central Europe (Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldrych Zwingli) were able to bring about a cultural revival by rediscovering the Bible. And in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Germany, as we have delineated in section 4.3, artists and thinkers once again drew inspiration from Hellenism in response to the (French) Enlightenment, the French Revolution and Napoleon's conquest of Europe, as a result of which Europe reached new literary, musical and philosophical peaks. Unlike Byzantium and Islam, which are both 'cultures without renaissances',[678] 'one can describe the intellectual history of Europe as an almost uninterrupted train of renaissances'.[679]

Now, the question that comes to mind is whether Europe is still European, that is to say Roman. The answer is unequivocally no. After all, the culture of today's Europe is one of self-hatred. Since European heritage is considered evil, the wish to associate oneself with one's cultural past barely exists, let alone the will to revert back to old traditions. No one wants to be the heir of a sinful past. Hence the widespread desire to break with traditions, to break radically with the past. There is nothing positive our past has to offer us, so it is believed. Brague rightly observes that 'it is now fashionable to hurl at European culture the adjective "eurocentric"'.[680] Those who have their eyes fixed on the past and wish to preserve Europe's Judeo-Christian

[677] Ibid., 101–102.
[678] Ibid., 124–125.
[679] Ibid., 114.
[680] Ibid., 133.

heritage would thus be exclusively focused on themselves and their own so-called exceptionality. But this accusation is as perfidious as the oikophobia from which it stems. As Brague points out, 'no culture was ever so little centred on itself and so interested in the other ones as Europe'.[681] Whereas China conceived of itself as the Middle Kingdom, 'European culture must look elsewhere than in itself for what defines it'.[682]

Wagner's *Meistersinger* pre-eminently exhibits this notion, not merely through its extensive implementation of Jewish and Greek models but most notably through the dynamics between the two within the boundaries of the work, which can be considered as a Roman model of Europe. The work shows the process of creating conditions for generating a cultural renaissance. In this process, to borrow Maurice Merleau-Ponty's words, 'history turns back on itself'[683] in order to rethink and renew itself. The development of Walther's Prize Song, as we have seen, well illustrates this process. The same is true for the prelude Nietzsche thought might evoke nationalist sentiments undermining the 'process of the becoming European'.[684]

However, the prelude's archaic yet progressive structure (and that of *Die Meistersinger* at large) strongly coincides with Nietzsche's second untimely meditation, 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben' (*Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, 1874), wherein the philosopher elucidates which attitude towards history one should adopt in order to revitalise one's life and effectuate a cultural renaissance. Although historical knowledge is needed, Nietzsche argues that we need history 'for the sake of life and action', history, thus, which 'serves life' and incites us to act.[685] An accumulation of historical facts ultimately has a crippling effect on our ability to create something new and original. When the historical awareness of a society becomes too great, Nietzsche argues, people tend to lose the very thing that makes them human, namely their creative ability. Instead of submitting history to their needs, using it as a source of inspiration to renew their lives and thus to *make* history, they themselves submit to history, acting as reproducers of dead knowledge, as mere copyists of historical information. Modern man, Nietzsche observes, is no longer the master of history but has turned into history's slave, a 'creation of historical culture, spiritually and culturally

[681] Ibid., 133–134.
[682] Ibid., 148.
[683] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 24.
[684] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1973), 173.
[685] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 59.

infertile'.[686] As such, modern man blindly conforms to his own time – a time, however, without a future.

So how then can history serve life, inspire us to make history? According to Nietzsche, one has to maintain the right balance between the historical and unhistorical. One should know what to preserve and what not. One should preserve what suits the present. To explain this point, Nietzsche refers to Pythagoras' conception of the cyclical nature of the cosmos.[687] Pythagoras taught that every event occurs again after a certain period of time and that therefore nothing is absolutely new.[688] We have seen how the thought of eternal return applies to the *Ring*'s system of leitmotifs and particularly the ending of the *Ring* cycle, where this thought thrusts itself upon us, encouraging us to change ourselves, to reinvent ourselves and to create a new life. When memories of the past return at the end of *Götterdämmerung,* telling us that history is bound to repeat itself, we feel the urge to change life such that we would welcome its recurrence. In his notebooks of the 1880s, Nietzsche describes the thought of eternal recurrence as 'the great *cultivating* idea'.[689] Although all things are transient and inherently meaningless, that is not to say that one should detach oneself from life, for instance by adopting a Stoic attitude or by becoming a Buddhist practitioner. It is a matter of attaching properly, meaning that one *attributes* meaning and value to meaningless things because one *wants* things to be meaningful and valuable. In spite of the transience of all things, one should 'seek an eternity for everything'[690] by espousing the thought of eternal recurrence, for 'the thought of recurrence is a principle of *selection* in the service of *power*',[691] that is to say the enhancement of one's life. Now, since the thought of recurrence is first and foremost an incentive to change one's life for the better so that this life may return forevermore, one is encouraged to select and incorporate those things that can indeed ameliorate one's life – things, thus, one would love to see return, time and time again. In his untimely meditation, Nietzsche suggests something similar, namely that we should focus on and select those parts of history that inspire us, that can improve our existence. History's wrongs, however, should be discarded. One should learn from the good things history has to offer and disregard history's flaws and errors. One should preserve what

[686] Ibid., 86.
[687] Ibid., 70.
[688] Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie, *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library: An Anthology of Ancient Writings Which Relate to Pythagoras and Pythagorean Philosophy*, ed. David R. Fideler (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1987), 126.
[689] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (London: Penguin, 2017), 579.
[690] Ibid., 583.
[691] Ibid., 580.

is valuable and disregard what is not. So what Nietzsche proposes is to delve into history and re-activate certain parts of history that can benefit us in the present, inspire us to create something new today.

The overture to *Die Meistersinger* can be considered as the musical equivalent of this concept as it brings back old spheres and styles to the present, where they acquire a new meaning. The prelude thus reactivates history, reviving and reinterpreting elements from the past (Bach's polyphonic style, for instance) that prove to be a constructive force in a new historical context. Displaying a cyclical view of time, the prelude also defies the Hegelian understanding of history as a continuum or totality that, according to Nietzsche, was crippling German culture as it placed the Germans in a natural, autonomous and unavoidable world-historical process and hence deprived them of any incentive to act.[692] This totalitarian conception of history, moreover, rendered his countrymen proud and arrogant, Nietzsche believed. Hegelian philosophy, after all, taught that the Germanic realm was the fulfilment of the world-historical process, the final stage, the very end of world history. Such a *Weltanschauung* obviously has a numbing effect on the minds of those who espouse it. For if the book is already written, who would feel encouraged to change and renew his life? If anything, it would evoke the will in Germans to affirm the self-centred (and ultimately self-defeating) presuppositions of their time.

Not a teleological outlook of reality but a certain nostalgia is needed to be able to create, a sense of nostalgia that characterises Europe's original relation with its sources as well as Nietzsche's description of the prelude to *Die Meistersinger*. One has to look back with a certain longing, a longing for something long lost and unreachable, such as the tragic culture of the Greeks. This culture is elusive, obscure, mysterious and therefore interesting. It excites the imagination and arouses creativity, which then can lead to a cultural revival, a renaissance. Hence Nietzsche's following remark:

> The thought of being epigones, which can often be a painful thought, is also capable of evoking great effects and grand hopes for the future in both an individual and in a nation, provided we regard ourselves as the heirs and successors of the astonishing powers of antiquity and see in this our honour and our spur.[693]

[692] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 104.
[693] Ibid., 103.

This, as stressed before, does not mean that we should live as 'antiquarians',[694] merely copying and repeating old, dead knowledge. No, we should revitalise the old. Thus, we should refocus on the Greeks but reinterpret and renew their heritage. This, however, can only be done if that heritage is not too clear, if our understanding of it is not too scholarly, not too learned. So, we need history (e.g. Greek culture) to be able to feel inspired, but one's 'historical sense' should not 'reign without restraint' because this would precisely kill one's inspiration – 'it uproots the future because it destroys illusions and robs the things that exist of the atmosphere in which alone they can live'.[695] A certain distance and a sense of vagueness, inaccessibility and illusoriness with respect to the historical source is required to excite the imagination and to produce a substitute, as it were, for the beloved and desired source in question. In Nietzsche's words:

> All living things require an atmosphere around them, a mysterious misty vapour; if they are deprived of this envelope, if a religion, an art, a genius is condemned to revolve as a star without atmosphere, we should no longer be surprised if they quickly wither and grow hard and unfruitful. It is the same thing with all great things, 'which never succeed without some illusion', as Hans Sachs says in the *Meistersinger*.[696]

Indeed, Sachs's creed applies to *Die Meistersinger*'s prelude, in which heterogeneous allusions to distant spheres are being made rather than being presented as *faits accomplis*, but also to the rest of the work, which is filled with subtle, ambiguous references to the eccentric roots of Western civilisation. Now, just as art is dependent on a sense of illusion to thrive, a nation 'requires a similar enveloping illusion, a similar protective and veiling cloud'.[697]

But against what exactly should art and nation be protected? Against 'the danger of being overwhelmed by what was past and foreign, of perishing through history'.[698] According to Nietzsche, 'historical verification always brings to light so much that is false, crude, inhuman, absurd, violent that the mood of pious illusion in which alone anything that wants to live can live necessarily crumbles away'.[699] In other words, the confrontation with the evils of history cripples culture; it takes away the drive to construct something new – in fact, it robs us of the very possibility of creation since the past is the only foundation for newness. If the past is known to be evil, innovation will not be possible and a society and culture will ultimately decline.

[694] Ibid., 104.
[695] Ibid., 95.
[696] Ibid., 97.
[697] Ibid.
[698] Ibid., 122.
[699] Ibid., 95.

Nietzsche's view strikingly applies to contemporary European (and American) culture, which is marked by the tendency to repudiate one's history and heritage. For as we have seen in section 1, oikophobia stems from a sense of historical guilt that arose in the post-World War II period. As today's oikophobic Wagner productions cogently illustrate, this frame of mind destroys the creative imagination and takes away the possibility of giving shape to a new form of life. By fearing and condemning its past, Europe denies itself access to the future.

In section 1, we argued that Wagner ceases to be relevant to the contemporary world if his works are continued to be assessed through the prism of the Holocaust and staged in a guilt-ridden, desacralising manner, with no regard for the genesis of his works, which belongs to the early part of the nineteenth century. The ideology of self-denial and ceaseless self-criticism that has been ruling the social and political climate in Europe for decades now has begun to take its toll in recent years as the current rise of nationalism and populism in the West shows. The attitude of repudiation, which has emerged from the will to defy nationalist tendencies, has now become a generator of the very tendencies it seeks to combat. Consequently, Wagner's works, when staged in an oikophobic fashion, paradoxically have come to serve as a means to sustain Europe's political turmoil.

In our analysis of the cultural crisis of the West, we referred to Scruton, who points out that oikophobia goes hand in hand with a structural attack on the nation state by means of ever-increasing European political integration. According to Scruton, the EU leadership fails to grasp that people do not identify themselves with a supranational form of government and are not prone to abide by laws that they did not make themselves. As Scruton remarks, people 'define their identity in terms of the place where they belong',[700] in terms, thus, of a shared culture and a shared territory. It is commitment to this realm we call *ours* that impels us to accept the rule of law and participate in the political process that serves to protect our oikos, that is to say the nation state. It is the nation state, therefore, that is needed to protect democracy. It offers the essential means (a common language, history, customs, culture and territory) through which we can gradually reach consensus on issues that affect our daily lives. Thus, without the sovereignty of a nation state, Scruton claims, democracy cannot exist.[701]

[700] Roger Scruton, *How to Be a Conservative* (London: Continuum, 2014), 36.

[701] Ibid., 33–37. For an in-depth analysis of the EU's ongoing attempt to create a federal Europe through ever-increasing European political integration, which undermines democracy in the individual member states, see also John Laughland, *The Tainted Source: The Undemocratic Origins of the European Idea* (London: Little Brown, 1997) and Thierry Baudet, *The Significance of Borders: Why Representative Government and the Rule of Law Require Nation States* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2012).

Persuasive as Scruton's argument for national sovereignty may be, there is still a widespread suspicion towards the idea of the nation state due to our historical experiences with nationalism. As a matter of fact, the original intention behind the creation of the European Union was to suppress nationalism and to prevent war between European nations. For a convincing argument in favour of a politically united Europe, it is worth considering Stefan Zweig's essay 'Der europäische Gedanke in seiner historischen Entwicklung' (1932), written one year before Hitler became chancellor of Germany.

Witnessing the rise of Nazism first hand, and with the First World War still fresh in the memory, Zweig raises the question of how it would be possible to fulfil the ancient dream enshrined in the legend of the Tower of Babel, which is 'a dream of a united world, a unified humanity'.[702] Applying this vision to the European continent, Zweig explores the possibilities for a unified Europe by looking at the historical traces of European unity left behind by the Roman Empire, Christendom, Humanism, Enlightenment and Nietzsche. 'With Rome', Zweig writes, 'Europe had for the first time a unified format – and for the last time, for never was the world so unified as in that distant epoch.'[703] Thanks to 'a single system of administration, of finances, military organisations, justice, morals, science, and a single language, Latin, Europe's chaos was replaced by unified order, and a new idea came into being, the idea of civilisation, of humanity managed according to moral principle'.[704] But when Rome fell, Europe was plunged into chaos once more and had to rebuild its civilisation from scratch. Several cultural renaissances followed that opened promising perspectives for the construction of a united Europe: the Catholic Church succeeded in regenerating 'Latin, the language of unity, the mother tongue of all European cultures',[705] and during the Renaissance, Europe witnessed 'a rebirth of the spirit'[706] through science, philosophy, literature and art. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, musicians proved to be great unifiers. Composers such as Heinrich Schütz, Händel, Gluck, Mozart, Piccinni and Cherubini travelled all across Europe to learn, to teach and to compose works that transcended national boundaries. But the cosmopolitan spirit that had imbued Europe in the age of Enlightenment waned as a result of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars and was replaced by a patriotic frame of mind. 'Art and thought take on a national character', Zweig writes, and 'with Beethoven and Schubert, and still more with

[702] Stefan Zweig, 'European Thought in its Historical Development', in *Messages from a Lost World: Europe on the Brink*, trans. Will Stone (London: Pushkin Press, 2017), 90.
[703] Ibid., 91.
[704] Ibid., 91–92.
[705] Ibid., 94.
[706] Ibid., 96.

Wagner, Chopin or Mussorgsky, Rossini and Verdi, the supranational in music becomes national'.[707] As Europe grew increasingly nationalistic in the late nineteenth century, the continent had to rely on the voices of a few remarkable individuals for its promise of spiritual unity. Such an individual was Nietzsche, who, 'first among contemporary thinkers, declared resolutely that we must be done with the "fatherlanders" and create a supranational consciousness, the patriotic sentiment of a new Europe'.[708] Yet Nietzsche's words fell on deaf ears. The dream of a united Europe was shattered with the outbreak of the First World War. 'Once again our spiritual Rome was destroyed, once again our Tower of Babel was left abandoned by its artisans',[709] Zweig laments, concluding that ever since the fall of Rome, there has been an unbridgeable tension between the national and the supranational – a tension that could only be resolved 'through complete union, a superstate'.[710] Zweig believes that only a European state could save Europe from destruction by nationalist forces, for it would be able to nurture the people's love of the European idea, a love that would trump the love of the fatherland. Thus reflected Zweig in 1932, at the dawn of the Third Reich and less than a decade removed from the deadliest war in human history to date.

After World War II, Zweig's argument for a United States of Europe seemed impeccable, and in the decades after the war, the construction of a superstate indeed became a reality – a reality that, as it turns out, is a far cry from Zweig's ideal of a Europe united by a spiritual idea that transcends borders, Europe as a brotherhood of nations sharing a conception of a collective identity. Today's Europe is heavily divided, not only politically and economically, but also culturally and spiritually. As it has transpired, a federal European superstate cannot fulfil its promise of spiritual unity. The reason for this is that the EU is not a cultural union but a political and economic one.

Die Meistersinger's relevance for today's Europe becomes immediately clear. For as we have seen in this chapter, *Die Meistersinger* expresses the importance of establishing global unity by means of a shared, overarching idea while making it emphatically clear that such a unity can only be based on a spiritual foundation and not a political one. And what is that spiritual foundation? The oikos. As *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* shows, love for Europe and for humanity at large starts in a place called home, in a place animated by oikophilia.

[707] Ibid., 100.
[708] Ibid., 102.
[709] Ibid., 107.
[710] Ibid., 109. Zweig makes this argument too in his essay 'Einigung Europas. Eine Rede' (1934). See Stefan Zweig, 'The Unification of Europe: A Discourse', in *Messages from a Lost World: Europe on the Brink*, trans. Will Stone (London: Pushkin Press, 2017), 115–123.

Preserving the culture of one's own oikos does not exclude the possibility of transcending differences and establishing a universal connection of human beings with each other. On the contrary, to have clear and strong cultural and territorial boundaries is precisely a requisite to connect with the other and to achieve freedom, peace and prosperity within one's own borders and beyond. By emphasising their musical tradition, the people of Nuremberg did not trap themselves in a particular, collective identity. Quite the opposite, it enabled them to look beyond the familiar, both artistically and socially.

The same is true for the *Die Meistersinger*, considered as a work of art conceived and produced in nineteenth-century Germany/Europe. The work does not express a self-contained conception of Germany nor an exclusive German essence. On the contrary, by drawing on sources originating in Jerusalem and Athens, the cornerstones of European culture, the work shows that Germany's essence lies outside itself; its self is yet the other, the other to which the self is indebted, the other on which the self depends, the other that does not cease to mesmerise the self for it cannot be fully grasped – the other, therefore, to which the self always returns with admiration, curiosity, humility and respect. Herewith *Die Meistersinger* tells us that one should neither deny nor absolutise one's culture; it rejects the oikophobic denial of self and exclusive focus on otherness, but it also rejects a blind and intolerant praise of one's own identity and the refusal to look beyond one's own borders. Both stances are not only a very long way from the truth but also form a threat to society. By bridging the two opposing stances, Wagner's *Meistersinger* opens perspectives for establishing spiritual unity amongst nations, and herewith the work offers crucial lessons for today's Europe, which, in an age of oikophobia, denies itself a future by denying its past.

4

Regeneration

1. *Parsifal* in an Age of Nihilism

In the context of Wagner, the word 'regeneration' is an unsettling word. It immediately brings to mind Wagner's so-called regeneration essays[711] in which the composer allegedly expounds ideals of racial purity. These ideals would have subsequently found their way into the artist's final creation: *Parsifal*. Understood as a work centred on the question of holy blood and the redemption of a community in decline, Wagner's swansong is regarded as a harbinger of the attempt by the Nazi regime to achieve racial purification so as to regenerate and redeem the German people.

This view of *Parsifal*, however, has been thoroughly debunked in recent years by William Kinderman[712] and Karol Berger.[713] Both scholars have pointed out that the notion of *Parsifal* as a work containing a racist ideology can only arise when its central theme of compassion is disregarded.[714] While the Nazi party sought to discard the element of compassion so that the work would suit their ideological framework, post-war critics like Robert Gutman ignored this theme to make it suit the conception of Wagner as the primal, unsurpassed paradigm of Nazi art.[715]

To this end, exclusive attention has been given to the theme of regeneration, which is one of *Parsifal*'s main themes, too. Berger stresses that *Parsifal*'s regeneration theme can only be

[711] *Religion und Kunst* (1880), '"Was nützt diese Erkenntniss?" Ein Nachtrag zu: *Religion und Kunst*' (1880), 'Erkenne dich selbst' (1881), 'Heldenthum und Christenthum' (1881).

[712] William Kinderman, *Wagner's Parsifal* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[713] Karol Berger, *Beyond Reason: Wagner Contra Nietzsche* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017).

[714] Kinderman points out that there is a 'striking congruence' between the racist interpretation of *Parsifal* by Alfred Lorenz (*Der Musikalische Aufbau von Richard Wagners Parsifal*, 1933) and Johannes Bertram (*Der Seher von Bayreuth: Deutung des Lebens und Werkes Richard Wagners*, 1943) who gave voice to their Nazi-friendly perception during Hitler's reign, and the interpretation by Robert Gutman who describes *Parsifal* as 'a gospel of National Socialism' (Gutman, 1968, 431). What is more striking, however, is that the Nazi party itself did not perceive *Parsifal* as a work that embodied their racist and militaristic ideology. As a matter of fact, there were strong doubts with respect to 'the political suitability of *Parsifal*' (Kinderman, 2013, 26). According to Kinderman, 'the problem had to do with the prominent theme of compassion in Wagner's work' (Kinderman, 2013, 26).

[715] See Robert Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968).

linked to Fascism and/or Nazism when it is divorced from the work's theme of compassion.[716] Berger writes that 'Fascist identity is built on the narrative of society's degeneration that can and should be reversed by extreme measures, in particular redemptive violence, to produce a regeneration that links *Parsifal* to later Fascist ideologies'.[717] Yet, this alleged link proves to be rather feeble, Berger claims, since *Parsifal* does not preach or encourage violence in any way.[718] On the contrary, the work emphasises the importance of compassion in improving humanity. It is the theme of compassion, therefore, that determines 'the specific content' of *Parsifal*'s theme of regeneration.[719]

Although Berger rightly points out that in *Parsifal* compassion is inseparably linked to regeneration, he does not further elaborate upon this connection. The question therefore arises as to *how* the themes relate to each other in Wagner's final work. How does compassion determine the content and meaning of *Parsifal*'s theme of regeneration?[720]

The first step towards gaining insight into this question is to ascertain that the relationship between *Parsifal* and society has changed profoundly since the end of World War II. That is to say that the world has undergone an enormous sociopolitical change, which implies that *Parsifal*'s signification has changed, too. Yet the work's theme of regeneration has so far only been discussed in connection with Nazi Germany's striving for national renewal. This has proven very insightful indeed. After all, through knowledge of Nazi Germany's notion of regeneration, our understanding of *Parsifal*'s regeneration theme has improved, meaning that it must be acknowledged that in the work regeneration and compassion are inseparable. Since it is still unclear how these two themes relate to each other, it is fair to say, however, that the context of Nazi Germany only allows for a limited understanding of *Parsifal*'s regeneration

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[716] Ignoring the idea of compassion, Gutman's focus is aimed at the theme of regeneration. Regeneration in *Parsifal*, according to Gutman, stands for the regeneration of the Aryan race, which Wagner believed was degenerating. According to Gutman, the suffering Monsalvat community represents the Aryan people plagued by racial degeneration as a result of miscegenation, a flaw represented by Amfortas, who had been seduced by the Jewish Kundry (Berger, 2017, 353). Guided by the racially pure saviour Parsifal, however, the community shall eventually be able to purify its blood and hence effectuate its regeneration (Berger, 2017, 353).

[717] Karol Berger, *Beyond Reason: Wagner Contra Nietzsche* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 356. Even though the following point does not undermine the strength of Berger's argument, let it be noted that he barely differentiates between Fascism and Nazism, yet there is a broad consensus among historians that one should not conflate the two.

[718] Ibid., 356.

[719] Ibid.

[720] *Parsifal*'s theme of regeneration is less explicit than its theme of compassion. While the notion of compassion permeates the entire work through the maxim 'enlightened through compassion' (*Durch Mitleid wissend*), there is no explicit mention of regeneration. In a subtler sense, however, we acquire an understanding of this theme through the work's allusions to redemption (*Erlösung*).

theme. This ascertainment therefore calls for a new and different context in which we can explore the theme in question for the purpose of improving our understanding of it.

That would be the context of today's world, the post-Cold War era. *Parsifal* has not yet been considered in light of this age, which is remarkable considering the work's actuality in the post-Cold War world, where cultural and religious identities, as Samuel P. Huntington astutely observed, are 'shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict'.[721] What defines the post-Cold War world is the discovery of old identities and the revival of old conflicts, most notably the conflict between the Christian West and Islam. This conflict, Huntington asserted, is the greatest challenge facing Western civilisation in the post-Cold War era, an assertion that is hard to refute, considering the West's current struggle with Islamic terror. But what could be the cause behind this conflict manifesting itself through terrorist attacks?

Let it be noted that this chapter does not seek to examine aspects of the Islamic religion to answer these questions. Although there is no doubt that the attacks are inspired by Islam and cannot be seen as separate from it, it should also be acknowledged that the terrorist deeds occur in response to the West, as acts of hatred towards Western society. So, there must be something about the West that arouses the Muslim terrorists' lust for destruction, the will to annihilate themselves and the world around them. A critical look at Western society is thus required to gain insight into the question at hand, moreover because not Islam but Western culture is the context that pertains to *Parsifal*, a work that was created in the West and appears primarily in the West.

Considering these points, the following two perspectives on the question of how today's terrorism can be explained are worthy of our consideration. The first one is offered by Roger Scruton in his book *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat* (2002), in which the philosopher analyses the reasons behind the September 11 attacks. The second is offered by Alain Badiou in the book *Our Wound Is Not So Recent: Thinking the Paris Killings of 13 November* (2016), which is, as the title indicates, a reflection on the November 2015 Paris attacks. Not only do both thinkers provide valuable insights into the causes behind Islamic terror on Western soil, their insights also correlate with their respective notions of Wagner's relevance to the contemporary world. Before delving into this correlation, let us first concentrate on Scruton's and Badiou's perception of the modern Western world.

[721] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 20.

In Scruton's analysis, the roots of Islamic terror are traced to the 'moral void'[722] that has arisen in the West due to globalisation and a culture of repudiation that seeks to shatter the foundations of Western culture and, by extension, its traditions and cultural heritage. This has resulted in an atomised society where it is increasingly difficult to experience the world as a shared home. It is a society where one is deprived of the sacred and condemned to live an alienated life instead. Such a society, Scruton claims, 'offers a breeding ground for Islamic terrorists',[723] who find in Islam everything missing in the West today, namely a sense of belonging, cultural consciousness, absolute (moral) values and a comprehensive worldview centred on God. However, by espousing Islam, many radicalised Muslims find an answer to the West's moral void but not a cure to the existential vacuum it has caused. Scruton observes that 'many terrorists are nihilists, who wish to vent their disappointment by destroying the sham society by which they are surrounded'.[724] And 'nihilism', Scruton asserts, 'is the other side of religion: it is the disappointed howl of the believer on discovering that God is dead'.[725] This 'leaves only one remaining absolute, which is Nothingness'.[726] When God is gone 'the duty to annihilate is the last remaining glimpse of the transcendental in the heart of the one who has lost all belief in it and who cannot live with the loss'.[727]

Contemplating the roots of terror from an opposing ideological perspective, Badiou arrives at a similar conclusion. The latter designates global capitalism as one of the root causes behind the rise of terrorism. From the point of view of capitalism, Badiou explains, the world's masses 'count for nothing' for they are neither employee nor consumer.[728] Since they have no access to work nor the market, 'they are as if non-existent'.[729] In a certain sense, this arouses a 'desire for the West: the desire to possess, to share in what is represented, what is vaunted everywhere as the luxury of the West'.[730] But since this luxury is beyond reach, there is also a 'desire for revenge and destruction' of the Western world.[731] This desire is prevalent amongst the Muslim youths of France who are poor and have no place in society. This, according to Badiou, explains

[722] Roger Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2002), 82.
[723] Ibid., 155–156.
[724] Ibid., 157.
[725] Ibid.
[726] Ibid.
[727] Ibid.
[728] Alain Badiou, *Our Wound Is Not So Recent: Thinking the Paris Killings of 13 November*, trans. Robin Mackay (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 36–37.
[729] Ibid., 37.
[730] Ibid., 48–49.
[731] Ibid., 49.

why they turn to Islam, for it is the very antipode of the capitalist Western way of life.[732] The fact that many young Muslims radicalise and even become willing to commit suicide attacks not only shows that religion is not the solution to their social problems; it also makes clear that they have nothing else to turn to. There is no other subjectivity available apart from 'the subjectivity of desire for the West and the nihilist subjectivity of revenge and destruction'.[733] According to Badiou, 'there is no proposal for any sort of collective uprising that would affirm and organise the perspective of another structuring of the world'.[734] Thus, the crisis behind the crisis of Islamic terror is a subjective crisis that goes hand in hand with the objective crisis of capitalism. The 'victory of capitalism' has led to 'the total eradication of the very idea of any other path'.[735] Because capitalism is widely believed to be the best of all possible worlds, there is no alternative in sight. Moreover, due to the disastrous experiences with communism, the idea of a collective, i.e. communist, society is no longer considered useful. But global capitalism cannot lead mankind towards a brighter future, as evidenced by its evocation of nihilism, which, in turn, evokes terrorism. Badiou therefore claims that the true war on terror would be to wage war on the subjective crisis, that is to say our inability to develop a vision for the future of mankind. Through the invention of a new frame of mind a new way of life and ultimately a new world can become conceivable, which will end the subjective crisis, i.e. the terror-evoking nihilism, that is plaguing society.

Now, both Scruton and Badiou, as we have seen, claim that nihilism is the root cause of Islamic terrorism. Scruton defines nihilism in this context as the inability to live with the loss of God, an inability that arouses the will to destroy oneself and one's godforsaken world. Badiou in turn describes nihilism as a consequence of 'the blind emptiness of globalised capitalism, of its inability to count everyone in the world that it has shaped'.[736] Although Scruton and Badiou approach the problem of nihilism from opposing worldviews (conservatism vs. Marxism/communism) and consequently, as we shall discuss later on, propose different solutions to solve it, both thinkers, while stressing that the terrorists with an Islamic background are struggling to find a place in Western society, define today's nihilism in terms of social disorientation and despair.

[732] Ibid., 55.
[733] Ibid., 50.
[734] Ibid.
[735] Ibid., 20. The classic formula for this is Margaret Thatcher's slogan, 'There is no alternative' (abbreviated as TINA).
[736] Ibid., 58.

For this reason, Nietzsche's ideas on nihilism are worth taking into account. Pointing out that 'Nietzsche's philosophical project consists in determining whether there is a way to overcome nihilism',[737] Bernard Reginster distinguishes two 'forms of Nietzschean nihilism',[738] namely disorientation and despair. Due to the loss of objective values, which is a consequence of the death of God, life becomes perceived as essentially meaningless and purposeless, and 'for human beings who need their lives to have meaning, this lack of normative guidance spawns nihilism, understood as disorientation'.[739] Despair in this connection 'is the conviction that our highest values cannot be realised in this world, and that there is no other world in which they can'.[740] Although 'the nihilism Nietzsche's philosophy addresses results in large part from the demise of the Christian worldview, particularly the dissolution of any credible hope for an "eternal life" in another world',[741] nihilism, according to Nietzsche, is not a direct or necessary consequence of the death of God. It is rather a consequence of the notion that life can only be meaningful if there is a God, the notion that our highest values can only be realised if God or a metaphysical world exists. This notion implies that life in this world does not offer the possibility to realise our highest values. It is therefore a world-renouncing, life-negating notion – indeed, a notion stemming from the Christian worldview, from Christian values. Although God is dead, the life-negating attitude originating in Christendom's theistic worldview is maintained. Thus, nihilism does not mean having no faith in God; it means having a life-negating attitude – an attitude coinciding with worn-out Christian values that weaken our ability to reach our full potential as human beings. By clinging to those life-negating values, Nietzsche argues, people remain trapped in a state of disorientation and nihilist despair, as a result of which they fail to achieve their highest values.

So, to overcome this weakening state, it is imperative to replace the old, dominant Christian values with new ones. The life-negating worldview has to be replaced by a life-affirming frame of mind. Now, the first step towards achieving an affirmative outlook on life is to endorse the death of God, meaning that one espouses nihilism in the sense that one acknowledges that the universe is inherently meaningless and purposeless. This, however, as can be read in *Der Wille zur Macht*, is 'only a transitional stage'.[742] After all, the goal is to create life-affirming values,

[737] Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 8.
[738] Ibid., 54.
[739] Ibid., 8.
[740] Ibid.
[741] Ibid., 7–8.
[742] Quoted ibid., 54.

and since nihilism is intrinsically life-negating, one has to overcome nihilism in order to be able to create life-affirming values, values not stemming from despair but from the conviction that our highest values can indeed be realised in this world, for this is the only world we have – values not stemming from a state of disorientation but from the knowledge that not God but human beings are responsible for creating the values that should give direction to their lives.

The relevance and urgency of Nietzsche's philosophical project aimed at overcoming nihilism is evident, considering the analyses of the contemporary world by Scruton and Badiou. Yet the relevance of Nietzsche's strategy for overcoming nihilism becomes especially clear when we take a look at both Scruton and Badiou's proposed solutions to today's nihilism, understood as the root cause of Islamic terrorism.

Although both thinkers agree that the West has become socially, politically and culturally disoriented and has descended into a valueless and purposeless society, they stress different reasons for this state of decline. From a conservative point of view, Scruton argues that the West jeopardises its future because it disregards its foundational values. In order for the Western world to regain a sense of purpose, it should rediscover its cultural heritage, reinstate its core values and regain territorial sovereignty so as to revive one's sense of belonging and consequently overcome the nihilism from which the Islamic terror stems.

Although Badiou, too, wishes to establish an inclusive society where people 'belong', he rejects the idea of the nation state as a means to this end. In order 'to construct a different way of thinking'[743] and develop 'a politics of emancipation, detached from the schema of the contemporary world',[744] it is imperative to get rid of national identity and the idea of a national space since these divide people. 'As far as the space defined as "France" and the phantoms of the "French" are concerned', Badiou claims, 'we should replace them, mentally and practically, with an international space, a way of thinking internationally that would be able to measure up to capitalist globalisation.'[745] It is only by means of a universalist frame of mind that differences can be traversed, which will end the terror-inducing nihilism that originates in the division of people into groups based on national identity, social class, ethnicity and religion.

Of all the differences, religion is by far the hardest one to overcome for it appeals to our deepest existential fears, most importantly the fear of death. Religion enables one to reduce this fear, and so, when religious certainties, such as the idea of an afterlife, crumble, and the belief

[743] Alain Badiou, *Our Wound Is Not So Recent: Thinking the Paris Killings of 13 November*, trans. Robin Mackay (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 68.
[744] Ibid.
[745] Ibid., 68–69.

in God (in the case of a theistic religion) ceases to be credible, one loses the means to combat the fear of death. This explains why, as Scruton points out, nihilism and religious fanaticism often coincide; when confronted with the unbearable prospect of having to live an ultimately meaningless life, many decide to cling vehemently to God as their last and only hope in what is seen as an inherently hopeless world, the last source from which to derive a sense of purpose in life. Anything or anyone that poses a threat to that final source of happiness deserves to be condemned and destroyed. It is clear, therefore, that the belief in God leads to division; it separates 'true believers' from those who worship the wrong God, multiple Gods or no God at all. The belief in God instigates identity thinking and thwarts the universalist frame of mind that Badiou seeks to create. So if we want to overcome the nihilism that evokes a fanatical adherence to God and frustrates the possibility of developing a new vision for the future of mankind, we, as Nietzsche proposed, have to go beyond theism and find an alternative to the belief in God.[746]

It is here where Wagner's relevance to the contemporary world becomes evident. Both Scruton and Badiou recognise Wagner as a composer who sought to replace theistic religion by a non-theistic worldview centred on art. Describing Wagner as 'a humanist […] who recognised humanity's religious need and tried to make man his own redeemer, so as to ennoble the human beyond the divine',[747] Scruton points out that, according to Wagner, 'the core religious phenomenon […] is not the idea of God, but the sense of the sacred'.[748] And Wagner's great

[746] Scruton, who is a member of the Anglican Church, would not endorse this view. The notion of God, Scruton argues in *The Soul of the World* (2014), makes us aware of the incompleteness of the world, aware that there is something greater than it, something on which it depends and towards which it strives. This awareness determines one's attitude towards the world, 'one that refuses to rest content with the contingency of nature' (Scruton, 2014, 192). This awareness of God's presence motivates us to build a world where we feel at home, where we feel connected with ourselves and with others, a world where life is viewed as sacred – a world in which we can experience God's presence and shape our relationship with the Godhead through art, culture and the bond with one's community. Hence, the notion of God is not inherently divisive but has a unifying power. It gives rise to our *Lebenswelt*, it strengthens our relationships with our fellow human beings, and it gives us a sense of meaning and purpose in life, because it is through the notion of God that we can develop answers to the questions of '*why* we suffer, *why* we live, and *why* we die' (Scruton, 2014, 191). Whereas 'within the envelope of nature there are only causes, for the eye of faith the envelope has a *telos*, a reason for its being as it is' (Scruton, 2014, 191). So through God we can develop a sense of direction in life, a sense of meaning, judgement, hope and trust. By turning away from God, Scruton believes, we will lose those very faculties and fall prey to a state of disorientation and despair (a state that Nietzsche sought to overcome precisely by leaving God behind). See Roger Scruton, *The Soul of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). For another exploration of the place of God in the contemporary world, see Roger Scruton, *The Face of God: The Gifford Lectures 2010* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2012.).

[747] Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.

[748] Roger Scruton, *The Ring of Truth* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 40.

music dramas, Scruton claims, are endowed with that belief. The experience of the sacred is rooted in what Scruton deems 'the I-You encounter',[749] which lies at the heart of the world in which we live, our '*Lebenswelt*, which is a world of appearances, made present to us in experience'.[750] This world 'is understood through concepts of functional, moral, and aesthetic kinds, through the interests that unite and divide us, and in terms that are open at every point to the ideas of "I," "you," and "why?" as these are deployed in our mutual dialogue'.[751] Art is therefore central to our *Lebenswelt* because it gives voice to a shared experience; it tells us what it means to be a human being in the world. Reflecting on works by Poussin, Guardì, Turner, Corot and Cézanne, Scruton writes that their landscape paintings 'show us death and decay in the very heart of things: the light on their hills is a fading light; the walls of their houses are patched and crumbling like the stucco on the villages of Guardì'.[752] And yet, we find great happiness in their works because 'their images point to the joy that lies incipient in decay, and to the eternal that is implied in the transient'.[753] Art thus makes us aware of our mortality; it provides us with an essential insight into the human condition, namely that everything that we hold dear depends upon our mortality. As we recall from Chapter 2, Scruton argues that in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, this fundamental insight is expressed through the music. Through the music we become one with Tristan, and through him as a unique subject, as we suffer together with him, we get to experience the universal truth that affects us all, which is the will. It is in the will that we can recognise ourselves, and therefore it is the will that connects us with Tristan. As we witness and experience his fate, we get to know the will as the source of his and our suffering. But we also get to know it as a source of (erotic) love towards the other. As such, the will has a redeeming value, too, for it ends the separation between the self and the other. Thus, as becomes clear in *Tristan*, the sacred experience ultimately centres on the recognition of the interconnectedness of mankind, the recognition that we are bound together in suffering and that we share a common destiny in death. Through this compassionate insight, we can come to terms with our finitude. If it weren't for our mortality, after all, we would not be capable of love or able to experience true joy in our lives. This means that through love, kindness and the creation of beauty in one's surroundings, one can, in a sense, embrace one's mortality. Once that awareness takes root, one no longer needs God or the prospect of life after death to render

[749] Roger Scruton, *The Soul of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 77.
[750] Ibid.
[751] Ibid.
[752] Roger Scruton, *Beauty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 176.
[753] Ibid.

life meaningful. As we can derive from Scruton's reflections on *Tristan*, compassion alone, rooted in our shared humanity, can be the basis for a purposeful and, indeed, sacred life in modern times.[754]

In Badiou's reflections on Wagner, the message of compassion is recognised as a starting point for a world beyond God, too. And what is more, according to Badiou, this point comes especially to the fore in *Parsifal*. Badiou argues that Wagner's swansong is built around the notion that Christianity can no longer provide a future for mankind, as evidenced by the fact that the religious rituals of the Grail fail to cure Amfortas and regenerate the perishing Grail community. Not through particular laws and customs but through universal compassion can redemption be achieved. Compassion is the core of Christianity that remains alive after the death of God. Because metaphysical beliefs and practices have obscured this core, Parsifal returns to Monsalvat in order to recover it. His message to the Grail community, according to Badiou, is that compassion is the 'infinite' element of Christianity that is still valuable and should be foregrounded so as to achieve regeneration.[755] It is for this reason that 'Parsifal, in his speech at the end of the opera, will speak of "compassion's highest power"'.[756] Parsifal's return thus consists of an affirmation of Christianity since its eternal truth, namely compassion, is recovered and preserved. But at the same time, Parsifal heralds 'a world or universe that will be beyond Christianity'[757] for he shatters the metaphysical premises that constitute the Christian belief system. It nevertheless remains unclear what this new, post-Christian world will be like. Badiou observes that when Parsifal returns to the Grail castle as the redeemer and future king of a realm beyond Christianity, he does not change the protocol of the Grail ceremony. In fact, he repeats the ceremony as it always has been: '*formally*, he does exactly the same thing: he uncovers the Grail and shows it to the Knights'.[758] So the only thing that changes in the end, Badiou notes, is the celebrant. Parsifal takes over Amfortas's role as king. But what will happen next? The question arising at the end of *Parsifal* is 'the question as to whether a modern ceremony is possible'.[759] That is to say, a ceremony no longer centred on God but universal compassion, a ceremony, thus, that includes all mankind – in Badiou's words, 'a ceremony of the generic'.[760] According to Badiou this question ultimately remains unanswered in the work.

[754] Note that *Tristan* is the only work by Wagner in which the word 'God' does not appear a single time. This resonates with Scruton's notion of a non-theistic sense of the sacred.
[755] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 146.
[756] Ibid.
[757] Ibid., 103.
[758] Ibid., 153.
[759] Ibid., 147.
[760] Ibid., 150.

Although it tells us that the Christian belief system is no longer tenable, the work gives us no further clues as to what the future ceremony will look like. *Parsifal* is therefore marked by 'a certain indeterminacy between restoration and innovation',[761] Badiou argues. The notion that there is 'an undecidability between the two'[762] leads him to conclude that 'it is perhaps precisely *this* that is the subject, all things considered; it is the idea that, concerning the question of the new ceremony, there is no clear distinction between restoration and innovation, or between nostalgia and the creation of something new'.[763] In this way, *Parsifal* expresses a certain distrust of ceremony. For this reason, the work resonates with the contemporary world, where the belief rules 'that any time there was a ceremony or an attempt at a ceremony, totalitarianism reared its head'.[764] Badiou, however, believes that 'humanity and politics cannot do without ceremony in the long run'.[765] Global capitalism, he asserts, 'does not constitute a sustainable model of human relations'.[766] Therefore, the question raised in *Parsifal* as to how a generic ceremony, based on compassion instead of God, would be possible remains urgent, and 'it is in this sense that *Parsifal* is contemporary'.[767]

But is *Parsifal* merely raising the question concerning the possibility of the creation of a new reality? The following two sections will attempt to demonstrate that the work, besides posing this question, indeed holds out the prospect of the creation of a new way of life whereby one no longer has to depend on God in order to find meaning and value. The context of today's nihilistic age, marked by a confrontation with radical Islam, will prove to be a fruitful framework to (re)discover this prospect on the basis of Scruton's and Badiou's insights concerning Wagner's quest for a life beyond theism, founded on the idea of compassion. We shall see that their insights, considered in light of their take on today's nihilism, bring back to life Nietzsche's ideas on how to overcome nihilism. As previously mentioned, Nietzsche sought to replace the Christian, i.e. life-negating, worldview by a life-affirming frame of mind. But how exactly can such a frame of mind be developed? Through compassion. Although Nietzsche rejected the kind of (Christian) compassion that weakens one's vitality, he nevertheless endorsed a form of compassion whereby setbacks are used as an opportunity to renew, i.e.

[761] Ibid., 155.
[762] Ibid.
[763] Ibid., 155–156. This observation brings back to mind the key insight *Die Meistersinger* provides, namely that innovation is not possible without preservation, and vice versa. Whereas *Die Meistersinger* shows that this notion applies to artistic traditions, *Parsifal* shows that it applies to religious traditions, too.
[764] Ibid., 158.
[765] Ibid.
[766] Ibid.
[767] Ibid.

regenerate, the mind and to increase the will to undertake action in the world. This life-enhancing form of compassion, as we shall see in section 2, lies at the heart of Parsifal's quest to regenerate the Grail community and to establish a new world redeemed from the reign of God. This quest, however, as Badiou rightly observed, does not result in a new generic ceremony or a politics of redemption directed to all mankind. Parsifal's message of regeneration, as we will discover in section 3, is a message aimed at the individual human being, the individual members of the Grail community and the individual listener-spectator. It is the individual's task to find redemption in life through the pursuit of knowledge based on life in the natural world, a life that is transient, just as the world in which it is lived.

2. Regeneration Through Compassion

As mentioned above, this section argues that compassion in *Parsifal* involves the renewal and development of one's life through an affirmative attitude towards the world. Regeneration can thus be achieved through compassion. But how? This question requires that we first develop a deeper understanding of the meaning of compassion in the context of Wagner's artistic enterprise.

In his unremitting quest for the purely human, Wagner increasingly explored and emphasised the religious dimensions of life. But that is not to say that the composer suddenly came to embrace organised religion. On the contrary, he remained largely true to Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of religion, which he had espoused in the 1840s.[768] This critique centres on the idea that God is a mere projection of man. In *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841), Feuerbach asserts that it was not God that had created man in his own image but the other way around. By studying religion, therefore, we do not learn anything about the supernatural but learn much about ourselves. Knowledge of God, that is to say man, makes us self-conscious. One of the main lessons Wagner picked up from Feuerbach is that mankind is on its own. There is no supernatural realm nor an afterlife nor a God. Ourselves and the earth are all we have.

[768] In *Wagner and Philosophy* (2000), Bryan Magee notes that 'Wagner's autobiography tells us that it was during his Dresden years that he discovered Feuerbach, though some scholars believe that the discovery happened earlier, in Paris' (Magee, 2000, 50). Yet 'it was not until the failure of the 1849 Dresden insurrection, and Wagner's flight to Switzerland, that he fully immersed himself in Feuerbach's writings' (Magee, 2000, 51). Magee furthermore remarks that 'it is a centrally important fact about Wagner's mental life that once he had absorbed Feuerbach's philosophy he never thereafter ceased to take a Feuerbachian attitude to the understanding of religion. He never regarded any of the established religions as true, but he nevertheless approached them with the utmost interest as being profoundly revelatory of important truths' (Magee, 2000, 54).

This notion, as we recall from Chapter 1, comes to the fore in the final scene of *Götterdämmerung*.[769] And this notion goes hand in hand with the realisation that if one clings to God, one remains estranged from oneself and consequently estranged from one's fellow man. The belief in God as an extramundane being radically different from man undermines one's love for humanity. Yet, if one acknowledges that God does not differ from man, one can free oneself from one's inner division and (re)unite with one's humanity and hence one's fellow human beings.

The Feuerbachian insight that our shared humanity should be at the centre of our worldview remained central to Wagner's philosophy of life. In later years, however, he supplemented it with Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion, with which Wagner criticised the Christian Church for obscuring 'the deepest basis of religion', which 'we find in recognition of the frailty of this world, and the consequent charge to free ourselves therefrom'.[770] To cultivate a literal understanding of Biblical teachings so as to 'instigate a blind obedience',[771] the Christian Church produced an abundance of 'dogmatic symbols', complicated myths and allegories, 'fetishes and idols', and complex metaphysical explanations of the world that do not apply to

[769] That is not to say that the ending of *Götterdämmerung* is essentially Feuerbachian. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Badiou argues, in the vein of George Bernard Shaw, that the Feuerbachian thinking of Wagner's revolutionary years has remained central to the *Ring*, as shown by Brünnhilde's sacrifice, which brings about a radical reversal of the prevailing social order. Scruton's interpretation of the work's finale in *The Ring of Truth* (2016), however, challenges Badiou's understanding of the end of the cycle as a revolutionary political event entailing a radical upheaval of the existing order. Scruton acknowledges that 'it can be fairly said that when Wagner composed the poem of *Siegfrieds Tod*, his initial libretto for what was eventually was to become the *Ring* cycle, he was a Feuerbachian, who saw the task of the artist as complementing that of the political revolutionary' (Scruton, 2016, 46). Moreover, he argues that the end of the *Ring* cycle certainly involves a moment of liberation, yet he nonetheless points out that it is 'liberation *from* the old enslavement, and not liberation *to* the free order that will replace it' (Scruton, 2016, 187). According to Scruton, the *Ring* does not tell us that redemption consists of 'entering another and better life, but of rearranging this one' (Scruton, 2016, 187). And rearranging this life, with the aim of achieving liberation, is first and foremost a reflective deed, 'a spiritual process instead of a political one' (Scruton, 2016, 187). This is particularly expressed through the music, Scruton claims, writing that 'musically speaking, the cycle ends in a spirit of resigned acceptance' (Scruton, 2016, 47). Herewith the *Ring*'s finale would resonate more with Schopenhauer than with Feuerbach. Kitcher and Schacht, on the other hand, have argued in *Finding an Ending: Reflections on Wagner's Ring* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004) that the music with which the *Ring* ends 'is as far from delivering a Schopenhauerian negative judgement upon life and the world as Wagner could have written' (Kitcher and Schacht, 2004, 23). The ending of *Götterdämmerung* 'bespeaks a fundamental affirmation rather than negation of life – and of life rather than nirvana, notwithstanding life's tragic character even at its very best, and the suffering and destruction that are inseparable from it despite our best efforts and intentions' (Kitcher and Schacht, 2004, 24). Despite Wagner's 'famous turn to Schopenhauer', which led the composer to rewrite the original Feuerbachian ending of the text, 'the words he set and the extraordinary orchestral music he composed negate both the "Feuerbach" and "Schopenhauer" endings, while drawing on elements from them in a new synthesis' (Kitcher and Schacht, 2004, 194–195).

[770] Richard Wagner, *Religion and Art*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, in *Religion and Art* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.), 213.

[771] Ibid., 215.

real life.[772] Due to a religious practice fixated on unrealistic dogmas and outward appearances, 'religion has sunk into an artificial life',[773] which has led to an eclipse of 'the root of all true religious conviction',[774] namely compassionate insight, i.e. the 'recognition of the unity of all that lives' and 'the consciousness that in sacrificing one of our fellow creatures we mangle and devour ourselves'[775] – a consciousness that evokes 'the most scrupulous practice of gentleness and sympathy toward all that lives'.[776]

The absence of this compassionate awareness is the rule rather than the exception. Throughout history man has barely been able to resist his blind, egoistic will that drives him to wage war, to conquer lands, to enslave and murder his fellow beings and to exploit nature.[777] It is because of mankind's lack of compassion, Wagner argued, that it has entered a state of 'degeneration'.[778] The reason for Christianity's failure to bring about mankind's regeneration was its lust for power and control, as evidenced by 'the Church's principle of literal credence'.[779] As we have pointed out in the previous chapter, Wagner distrusted state power for it would undermine the spiritual development of the people. Now, by establishing a Church, a religious organisation, Christianity precisely conformed to the principle of worldly power, the violent principle of states and empires that thwarts the possibility of creating a compassionate culture.[780] Christendom moreover had adopted the Jewish God, 'a wrathful God of Punishment who seemed to promise greater power than the self-offering, all-loving Saviour of the Poor',[781] meaning Jesus. That the Jewish God is intrinsically violent, domineering and hostile to life has not only been convincingly proven by Christianity but also by Islam, which, according to Wagner, 'in particular seemed called to carry out the work of total extirpation, for it took to itself the Jewish God, as Creator of heaven and earth, to raise him up by fire and sword as one and only god of all that breathes'.[782]

[772] Ibid., 213–214.
[773] Ibid., 213.
[774] Ibid., 226.
[775] Ibid.
[776] Ibid.
[777] Ibid., 227–228.
[778] Ibid., 231.
[779] Ibid., 221.
[780] Ibid., 232.
[781] Ibid., 217.
[782] Ibid., 232.

Hence the composer's sympathy towards Buddhism.[783] Wagner's predilection for Buddhism, which had been aroused by Schopenhauer,[784] is not only significant for the composer's quest for the universal core of religion; it also illuminates his critique of the Christian Church as an oppressive institution. The universal message of compassion that was proclaimed and practiced by Jesus but repudiated by the Church was still being proclaimed and practiced by Buddhism.[785] The Church and the worship of God were regressive elements in Wagner's eyes, the Church because of its power structure and the theistic worldview for disregarding life on earth. Buddhism, on the other hand, has no overarching church and Buddha's teachings, centred on the insight that redemption from suffering can only be achieved through a meticulous practice of kindness to everything that lives, were focused on the worship of life on earth instead of a transcendent, jealous God. And whereas Buddhism teaches mankind to see through the world's appearances, Christianity 'would have us believe its mythic symbols in their literal sense'.[786] In this way, Buddhism functioned as a framework for Wagner to reconsider Christianity; it helped him to separate the questionable particularities of the Christian Church from the universal core of religion, namely compassionate insight,[787] described by Wagner as 'the deep soil of a true Religion' – the only soil from which 'all effective power to bring about the great Regeneration can spring'.[788]

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[783] For a succinct and assessible account of Wagner's appreciation of Buddhism, see Urs App, *Richard Wagner and Buddhism* (Rorschach: UniversityMedia, 2011). For a comprehensive study, see Carl Suneson, *Richard Wagner und die Indische Geisteswelt*, trans. Gert Kreutzer (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989).

[784] For an account of the relationship between Schopenhauer and the classical religions of India (Hinduism and Buddhism), see Christopher Ryan, *Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Religion: The Death of God and the Oriental Renaissance* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010); David E. Cooper, 'Schopenhauer and Indian Philosophy', in *A Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Bart Vandenabeele (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Moira Nicholls, 'The Influences of Eastern Thought on Schopenhauer's Doctrine of the Thing-in-Itself', in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[785] It should be noted that Wagner recognised Jesus as the antipode of the Christian Church before discovering Buddhism. This is evidenced by a dramatic sketch he wrote in 1848–9 entitled *Jesus von Nazareth*. Wagner made this sketch during his revolutionary period in Dresden, when he was still largely under the influence of Feuerbach. In 'Eine Mittheilung an Meine Freunde' (1851), Wagner wrote that instead of the symbolic Jesus, he sought to portray Jesus the man who, in the last few weeks of his life, rebelled against the materialistic Romans and brought the message of love into a loveless world. When, several years later, Wagner began to read the Mahābhārata and the Ramayana, as well as standard works on the history of Buddhism, including Adolf Holtzmann's *Indische Sagen* (1845–7), Eugène Burnhouf's *Introduction à l'histoire du buddhisme indien* (1844) and C.F. Koeppen's *Die Religion des Buddhismus und ihre Entstehung* (1857–59), the idea arose to compose a Buddhist music drama called *Die Sieger*. But apart from a draft sketch, written between 1856 and 1858, the plan remained unfinished.

[786] Richard Wagner, *Religion and Art*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, in *Religion and Art* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 213.

[787] See Dieter Borchmeyer, '"… sehnsüchtig blicke ich oft nach dem Land Nirwana" … Richard Wagners buddhistisches Christentum', in *wagnerspectrum* 2 (2007): 15–34.

[788] Richard Wagner, *Religion and Art*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, in *Religion and Art* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 243.

It was therefore a matter of reacquainting mankind with compassion, i.e. 'the recognition of the unity of all that lives', which Wagner believed could be achieved by means of his art.[789] As previously explained, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* should be understood as a means to create the awareness that all life is interrelated. In order to achieve this end, the interconnectedness of all things was not so much a message to be preached as an insight to be demonstrated.

When it came to the performance of *Parsifal*, every act, every gesture and every note produced by the singer-actors had to be expressed with a view to performing the work as a unified whole. Precisely due to the subordination of the parts to the whole, each and every part could come into its own. The singers had to pronounce their words as clearly as possible so that the drama could be understood as a whole and also because otherwise their individual voices would dissolve in the music. The idea was that every voice, every musical part and every scenic element could only fully exist when, in every step of the process, they were aimed at the whole of the work, with the purpose of establishing unity. It is for this reason that the singers were not allowed to separate themselves from the rest of the cast by directly addressing the audience so as to draw attention to themselves and to distract attention from the whole. Instead of the audience, the singers had to focus on their interlocutors, meaning the other actors, because the dialogue, according to Wagner, formed the unique basis for a dramatic performance. It was essential to depict the drama as realistically as possible. Emotions were to be expressed in a lifelike manner, and all sorts of theatrical and bombastic gestures were to be omitted. The audience was supposed to feel as though it had been watching a natural interaction between people. Only in this way would the spectator be able to identify himself with the characters on stage, feel compassion for these characters and hence become 'knowing through compassion', meaning that he would discover the truth about our existence – the will to live in which we are

[789] Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to reconstruct the whole intellectual background of Wagner's theory of religion and art, it is, nonetheless, worth noting that the latter's idea that art could save the essence of religion, i.e. life, coincides with Friedrich Schleiermacher's early insights concerning religion as expounded in *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799). In this work Schleiermacher argues that the reason many people misunderstand religion is that they fixate on its outward appearances; Bible stories, dogmas, symbolism, etc. Consequently, they fail to arrive at the heart of religion, the ultimate reality that lies behind all appearances. According to Schleiermacher, they do not recognise that religion's appearances are the expression of that ultimate reality in which all things are united. In order to find the truth about religion, Schleiermacher argued, one has to learn to see through religion's appearances so as to discover the essence of the universe. Being familiar with Kant's philosophy, Schleiermacher knew that the ultimate reality cannot be fully known. Yet it can be 'revealed' to us through sensory experiences, most notably through the experience of art. Art was therefore seen as the pathway to the heart of religion, i.e. the ultimate reality. And as such, the young Schleiermacher believed, art would be pre-eminently capable of reviving religion, which had lost its credibility in the eyes of those who took its appearances literally.

all one. But again, to be capable of achieving this effect, it was imperative for the music drama to be lifelike, to display real-life dynamics.[790]

Although Wagner stressed the realism of the *Parsifal* premiere, the drama is nonetheless filled with magic and supernatural elements and, above all, Christian symbolism. This seems to contradict Wagner's critique of Christianity and Christian art as well as his goal to reveal the inner core of religion, namely compassion, that would have been eclipsed by depictions of unrealistic Christian doctrines. On closer inspection, however, one can see that the implementation of Christian symbols is not at odds with Wagner's intention to rediscover compassion (i.e. the interconnectedness of all things) through his art. This is due to the role of music in the *Bühnenweihfestspiel* and the fact that the symbols applied in *Parsifal* exceed the Christian context and meaning. Before we elaborate this second point, let us first briefly concentrate on the music.

Whereas Wagner claimed that the figurative arts and poetry had largely been corrupted by the Church, he argued that music had maintained its autonomy. Because of its abstraction, music could never represent any religious doctrine. Even Church music had remained unstained by the Christian belief system. Although Church music was set to words expressing dogmas and glorifying God, while being sung, these words would dissolve into tones and be carried along by the musical stream, conveying feelings rather than an intelligible message. Freed from all concepts and far removed from the world of physical appearances, music had always maintained its independence and resisted Christianity's absolutist truth claims.[791] Music can thus serve to unmask religion, enabling one to see through its particularistic appearances, presented by the Church as absolute truths

Following this line of thought, *Parsifal*'s music can be considered a means to dismantle the Christian symbolism put on display, rather than a means to sustain it. It is not for nothing that the music of *Parsifal* has the tendency to, in Adorno's words, 'retreat from appearance'.[792] As previously mentioned, in the overture to *Parsifal*, a sense of remoteness is created through a series of syncopations and arpeggios that make it seem as if the music is devoid of rhythm, floating, as it were, above the harsh realities of our world, the world of mere appearances.

[790] See Wagner's article 'Das Bühnenweihfestspiel in Bayreuth 1882' (1882) in which the composer reflects on the first performance of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth.

[791] See Richard Wagner, *Religion and Art*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, in *Religion and Art* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 222–224.

[792] Quoted in William Kinderman, *Wagner's Parsifal* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 196. Kinderman refers to Adorno's essay 'Zur Partitur des *Parsifal*' (1956/57). See 'On the Score of *Parsifal*', trans. Anthony Barone. *Music & Letters* 76, no. 3 (1995): 384–397.

Furthermore, *Parsifal* is characterised by an extensive implementation of invisible instruments[793] and unseen voices; the *Knaben* chorus of sopranos and altos as well as the *Jünglinge* chorus of altos and tenors sing from above the stage, while Titurel's voice is heard from the back of the stage.[794] Adorno, as we recall, distrusted this musical trait. Music, he argued in a Marxist fashion, should not conceal but reveal its worldly origin: the labour, i.e. human suffering, behind the creation of the magical Wagnerian sound. In the light of Wagner's aim to arrive at the heart of religion, however, one sees that *Parsifal*'s tendency to 'retreat from appearance' is not a dehumanising feature at all. On the contrary, it is a way to defy the dogmatic symbols and allegories that limit one's mind, a way to encourage the spectator to see beyond the boundaries of the self.

This opens the path towards understanding the interconnectedness of all things. Musically this is explicated through a process in which the differentiation of motifs is gradually reversed until their unity is completely restored. William Kinderman points out that Wagner, instead of immediately combining the principal themes associated with the Grail in the first-act prelude, starts by juxtaposing these themes in the overture. And it is not until the end of the *Bühnenweihfestspiel*, when Parsifal becomes the new king, that the Grail themes finally integrate with each other.[795] Until this moment of unification, the motifs are part of a 'cyclical, repetitive process' that is deemed by Warren Darcy as 'rotational form'.[796] In this process, motifs are introduced as minor, differentiated cells or units that gradually unfold as the story develops and increasingly start to interconnect with other motifs and hence elucidate how the events taking place in the drama are interrelated.

In the first scene of the work, for instance, a part of the Prophecy theme, signifying the pure fool, can be heard when Gurnemanz utters, 'We are fools to hope for relief' while the suffering Amfortas is getting ready for a bath that should give him some relief from his excruciating pain, which Gawan's healing herb did not manage to take away. Not herbs and potions can cure the sick king, Gurnemanz laments, only 'the one', meaning the pure fool. A few moments later, the

[793] Note that Wagner composed *Parsifal* with the Bayreuth Festspielhaus in mind. The covered orchestra pit used in the Festspielhaus ensures that the audience does not see the musicians playing the music. Because the Festspielhaus offers the necessary features for a proper performance of the *Bühnenweihfestspiel*, the work was originally meant to be performed only at Bayreuth.

[794] Katherine R. Syer, 'Unseen Voices: Wagner's Musical-Dramatic Shaping of the Grail Scene of Act 1', in *A Companion to Wagner's Parsifal*, ed. William Kinderman and Katherine R. Syer (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 177–178.

[795] William Kinderman, *Wagner's Parsifal* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 197.

[796] Warren Darcy, '"Die Zeit ist da": Rotational Form and Hexatonic Magic in Act 2, Scene 1 of *Parsifal*', in *A Companion to Wagner's Parsifal*, ed. William Kinderman and Katherine R. Syer (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 216.

Prophecy theme appears again, after Amfortas curses Gawan for leaving the Grail community and says, 'Enlightened through compassion', as he makes clear that 'he shall await the one appointed to him'. When, moments later, Gurnemanz recollects the time when the Prophecy was revealed to Amfortas during a prayer, the entire theme is played, accompanying the holy Grail's 'message in words of fire: Enlightened through compassion, the innocent fool'.[797] As the four squires solemnly repeat the words of the revelation, the Prophecy motif sounds once more, foreshadowing Parsifal's first appearance on stage a few seconds later, heralded by the sudden, audacious sound of the Parsifal motif, which startles the dreamy and melancholic knights.

At the beginning of Act 2, the Prophecy theme again heralds Parsifal's impending appearance when Klingsor observes that the pure fool is approaching the magic castle, saying, 'My magic castle lures the fool, whom I see approaching from afar, shouting boyishly'. The motif is repeated when Klingsor tells Kundry that he now must face his most dangerous enemy, who is 'shielded by his foolishness'. When Klingsor, a few moments later, mounts the tower wall, we hear the Parsifal motif, which changes continuously as the music drama unfolds and Parsifal comes of age. Kinderman points out that here, amongst other moments in the music drama, 'one can distinguish rotations of musical-dramatic units: Parsifal's theme in B♭ major preceding Klingsor's "Jetzt schon erklimmt er die Burg" anticipates the later rotational statement of Parsifal's theme in E♭ major at Klingsor's words "Sie weichen! Sie fliehen!", referring to the rout of his knights by Parsifal'.[798] When Klingsor then says that 'Each takes home a wound', the Prophecy theme appears again as a run-up to Parsifal's theme in E♭, which sounds when Klingsor pronounces that 'now Parsifal proudly stands on the rampart'.[799] At this moment, the Prophecy motif and the Parsifal motif merge, and their connection becomes clear; as Parsifal stands on the rampart, his appearance as redeemer becomes manifest to us.

The Parsifal motif appears again during the redeemer's entrance into the hall of the Grail, bringing back the long-lost spear. Whereas the motif was previously associated with B♭ major, it now sounds in a majestic D major. As the Parsifal motif here reaches its final majestic form, it becomes clear that Parsifal is bound to be the new king of the Grail. After Parsifal has touched Amfortas's side with the point of the spear, the actual leadership transition takes place. 'Be whole, absolved and atoned!', Parsifal commands Amfortas, adding that he shall from now on

[797] Innocent (fool) and pure (fool) are both renderings of the German word 'rein' ('der reine Tor').
[798] William Kinderman, *Wagner's Parsifal* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 234–235.
[799] Ibid.

perform the latter's task. As he blesses the former king's suffering that evoked the compassion through which the pure fool could finally become wise, the Parsifal motif sounds one last time in a victorious D major, which then turns to D minor, leading up to a modulation to A♭ major at the moment when the new king proclaims, 'Open the shrine!' At this point, the work's main opposition between A♭ and D (major and minor) is resolved through an integration of the two scales.[800]

What seemed separated ultimately proves to be inseparable. Realms or spheres that appear as each other's opposites turn out to be interrelated. The music retreats from appearance, and yet, by creating a distance to the world, the music does not seek to move closer to God. On the contrary, by moving away from the earthly realm it creates a bird's-eye view of the world through which one gets a more comprehensive view of it – a proper view of the shapes and patterns of its elements and their interconnectedness. It becomes clear from this perspective that all the individual things that we see owe their existence to other things.

This is also true for *Parsifal*'s Christian symbols pertaining to the legend of the Holy Grail. Examining the origins of the Arthurian/Grail legends in *The Redeemer Reborn: Parsifal as the Fifth Opera of Wagner's Ring* (2007), Paul Schofield points out that 'the symbols that we find in the traditional legends have their origin in ancient fertility rites and Mystery initiations, as well as the Hindu Rig Veda'.[801] It was not until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the Grail stories became 'Christianised, their pre-Christian or "pagan" symbols and symbolism reinterpreted in the context of Christianity'.[802] What the pre-Christian and Christian Grail stories have in common, however, is that they are all 'symbolic representations of the path to enlightenment and salvation'.[803]

The reason why Wagner chose to apply Christian symbols in *Parsifal* was that these would be readily understood by his contemporaries. Like in *Die Meistersinger*, the symbolism characteristic of the Western *oikos* served as a means to attain a universal notion of redemption. But at the same time, the particularity, relativity and transience of one's own (Christian/Western) identity (a cultural identity that, as we have seen in the previous chapter, originates from Western Asia) got emphasised as it becomes clear that the origins of one's own

[800] Barry Millington, '*Parsifal*', in *Wagner and His Operas*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2000), 145.
[801] Paul Schofield, *The Redeemer Reborn: Parsifal as the Fifth Opera of Wagner's Ring* (New York, NY: Amadeus Press, 2007), 78.
[802] Ibid.
[803] Ibid., 123.

culture and identity lie beyond the realm of the self. Herewith *Parsifal* offers resistance against essentialist thinking, against a black and white way of seeing things.

In Chapter 2, however, we pointed out how *Parsifal* has been appropriated by various groups. The work has proven attractive to a variety of individuals and groups that have defined the *Bühnenweihfestspiel*'s so-called essence according to their personal beliefs. In Wagner's time, *Parsifal* was generally considered a Christian work, but it has also been described as pre-eminently Rosicrucian, Theosophical, Aryan, Buddhist and Islamic. Some of these interpretations clearly display a lack of willingness to understand or accept any perspective other than one's own. Robert Gutman's conception of *Parsifal* as a proto-Nazi work of art is one example. Another is Ian Dallas's Islamic interpretation of *Parsifal*, which claims that Wagner's Grail is 'nothing other than the Black Stone of the Ka'aba, the central shrine of the world's last religion, purified judaeo-christianity, Islam'.[804]

From a Nietzschean point of view, such dogmatic and intolerant appropriations of a work as ambiguous and complex as *Parsifal* are contemptible. We recall from Chapter 2 that Nietzsche scolded the Wagnerians not for beholding *Parsifal* from a particular point of view or for enjoying the Christian sham that enveloped the work but for absolutising the sham, for their cowardly refusal to recognise the relativity and evanescence of their particular stance in order to evade the confrontation with the Heraclitian notion of universal flux through which they would become painfully aware of the inherent futility of their existence – aware that there is no Being, only becoming.

Although Nietzsche advocated nihilism to overcome the Christian belief in an immutable God, he sought to overcome nihilism, too. Foreseeing the dangers posed by nihilism to society, Nietzsche stressed the importance of creating new values. The philosopher's call for spiritual and cultural renewal remains relevant today for we are still facing the challenge of nihilism. As we recall from section 1, both Roger Scruton and Alain Badiou argue that nihilism is the root cause of the Islamic terrorism that is currently plaguing the Western world. The West is going through an identity crisis and finds itself challenged by Islam, which seems emboldened by the West's lack of self-confidence. Since Islam has massively increased its presence in Europe over recent years, critics warn of the 'Islamisation of Europe'. Strikingly enough, this situation is reflected in today's *Parsifal* reception. In Chapter 3, we referred to Christoph Schlingensief's staging of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth containing Arabic and Islamic symbols. Yet a far more powerful example of what we could consider the Islamisation of *Parsifal* is the aforementioned

[804] Ian Dallas, *The New Wagnerian* (Cape Town: Budgate Press, 2013), 243–244.

interpretation of Wagner's swansong by Ian Dallas,[805] better known as Shaykh Dr Abdalqadir as-Sufi, founder of the Islamist Murabitun World Movement.[806]

Rejecting parliamentary democracy and global capitalism, Abdalqadir as-Sufi advocates for the Islamic takeover of the Western world. In his book *The Time of the Bedouin: On the Politics of Power* (2006), the author claims that this will be the inevitable outcome of a process of decline that started with the French Revolution of 1789. The revolution brought with it a loss of religion, and in its place came a godless, nihilist state ruled by a capitalist financial elite. But the capitalist world order is about to come to an end. Drawing on the work of Ibn Khaldun, Abdalqadir as-Sufi argues that history is moving towards a global Islamic rule, as evidenced by the works and insights of, amongst others, Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger and Carl Schmitt. The ideas developed by these writers are, as it were, signs of an impending Islamic takeover. Heidegger and Jünger, for instance, criticised the omnipresence of technology dominating every aspect of our lives. In an industrialised, technologised state, one grows increasingly out of touch with reality, and one is bound to lose one's individuality, i.e. humanity. At some point, therefore, this dehumanising state will collapse, and this collapse shall be effectuated by Islam, which henceforth will take over.

In describing this process, Abdalqadir as-Sufi draws an analogy between the Muslim population in Europe and Ernst Jünger's *Waldgänger*. Like the *Waldgänger*, who has broken with society, Muslims, too, will separate themselves from Western society and unite so as to counteract the power of the existing social and political order. As their numbers grow, they will ultimately become a force bent on the destruction of the Western world. This, according to the writer, 'will be the third irradiation of Europe by a settled force inside its established borders'.[807] The first 'irradiation' was 'the Barbarian invasion which ended and absorbed the Roman Empire', 'the second was the dynamic Viking power', which, among other things, gave Danish law to 'the primitive Anglo-Saxons' and 'the third hegemonic power to revive Europe and drag it out from its abysmal nihilism […] – this power will be that of the millions of Muslims who

[805] Note that Dallas does not claim that his reading of *Parsifal* is in accordance with Wagner's own views. According to Dallas, 'it would be patently false, and a worthless task, to suggest that what is here analysed was what Wagner "meant"'. Ian Dallas, *The New Wagnerian* (Cape Town: Budgate Press, 2013), 234.

[806] Camila Pastor de Maria y Campos, 'Guests of Islam: Conversion and the Institutionalization of Islam in Mexico', in *Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA*, ed. Maria del Mar, Logroño Narbona, Paulo G. Pinto and John Tofik Karam (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015), 145–146.

[807] Ian Dallas, *The Time of the Bedouin: On the Politics of Power* (Cape Town: Budgate Press, 2013), 285.

already live there'.[808] Islam 'will end the long night of nihilism',[809] and 'its success will finish that long period of darkness from 1789'.[810]

According to Abdalqadir as-Sufi, the impending collapse of the capitalist age has already been proclaimed by Wagner's *Ring*. Referring to the ending of *Götterdämmerung*, the author remarks:

> The end of a whole social order, its gods, its heroes, its evaluations – everything is swept away. The amazing, cathartic finale to the epic comes with the vast relief that it is all over, the Age is finished. Yet it is a vision of hope, for while Brünnhilde in her immolation leaps in an oblivion to re-unite with her lover, so the people, the masses, turn to face a new beginning, a new order, what Carl Schmitt designated as a new Nomos on the earth.[811]

This new Nomos, according to the writer, is Islam: 'Islam […] is already the Nomos that will end the long night of nihilism.'[812]

While the *Ring* would give expression to hope for a new world order, *Parsifal* would give voice to the fulfilment of this promise, namely Islam as the inevitable outcome of a process of decay in the West. In the libretto, we are told that Monsalvat is located in the northern mountains of Gothic Spain, whereas Klingsor's castle is placed on the southern mountains, looking towards Moorish Spain. This means that 'the action of *Parsifal* is located on the frontier of Christianity, on its edge, facing Islamic Spain'.[813] While the work displays that 'the Christian Grail community is sick, trapped in the cult of atonement and guilt',[814] the domain of Islam is portrayed subtly as a healing force: the 'balsam brought by Kundry is Arabian, the country's nearness is felt, present, in the events'.[815] It is made clear that 'the end of the Christian world is imminent'.[816]

After having described Act 1 as 'the domain of a dying Christianity',[817] Abdalqadir as-Sufi goes on to describe Act 2 as 'the last enclave of a doomed Kabbalistic Judaism'.[818] Klingsor is labelled a 'necromantic rabbi' who 'rules by curses in the Talmudic tradition – for his is not the

[808] Ibid., 285–286.
[809] Ibid., 286.
[810] Ibid., 290.
[811] Ibid., 256.
[812] Ibid., 286.
[813] Ian Dallas, *The New Wagnerian* (Cape Town: Budgate Press, 2013), 235.
[814] Ibid.
[815] Ibid.
[816] Ibid.
[817] Ibid., 236.
[818] Ibid.

Judaism of Moses with its legality and justice, but a perverted religion that sets its followers apart from the rest of mankind which can only be tolerated once it is totally controlled'.[819] In the service of the Jewish ruler Klingsor are the 'enchanting Flower Maidens who sing and dance to lure their victims to distraction from the real world'.[820] As such, the Flower Maidens represent the modern entertainment industry that, according to the anti-Semitic myth, would be controlled by Jews with the purpose of deluding and perverting the minds of the gentile masses. According to the author, the relevance of Act 2 to the modern world is impeccable because it has indeed 'witnessed a generation of Flower Children enchant the world to the dictates of its Klingsors while the Christian civilisation stood by, bereft of moral authority, exhausted by wars, watching the world's wealth being taken out of its hands'.[821] Instead of fighting himself, the cowardly Klingsor 'gets the drugged Christian warriors to do his fighting for him'.[822] Klingsor's 'real desire is that all the Christian knights should mutually destroy each other' so that he ends up 'possessing the Grail itself and thus conquer the Christian world utterly'.[823] His evil scheme, however, is thwarted by Parsifal, who suddenly awakens while receiving Kundry's kiss. Parsifal 'suddenly understands the trap – he has dredged out of his own being the very cause of the Christians' failure to rule, and the reason for the power of the Hollywood dream factory, that is, Klingsor's Magic Garden, over their culture and life'.[824] Now, the 'trap' or the cause of the demise of the Christian society is 'what Nietzsche termed ressentiment, the pact between the guilty Christian and the punishing rabbi'.[825] When Kundry then asks Parsifal to redeem her at the end of Act 2, Parsifal answers that 'she will be granted both love and redemption if she takes him to Amfortas', after which he 'declares the end of the guilt transaction of the Eucharist as a magical procedure to assure redemption from guilt'.[826] Herewith Parsifal brings an end to 'Pauline (Jewish) Christianity and the way is open to pure religion'.[827]

In Act 3, 'pure religion', meaning Islam, is introduced in the decaying Grail community. Parsifal enters the Christian domain as 'a man and a warrior, superbly accoutred in black armour'.[828] Parsifal 'has found his way back to Monsalvat in order to liberate its inhabitants

[819] Ibid.
[820] Ibid.
[821] Ibid., 236–237.
[822] Ibid., 237.
[823] Ibid.
[824] Ibid., 238.
[825] Ibid., 238–239.
[826] Ibid., 239.
[827] Ibid.
[828] Ibid., 240.

and institute the new religion'.[829] This new religion is actually the first religion, 'the primal religion, prior to rabbinical and priestly corruptions',[830] and a truly universal one: 'the final religion which was for all mankind, designed to replace the state and confer freedom on men – Wagner's longed-for "one religion and no state"'.[831] When Gurnemanz 'steps in to activate the hero into taking on his role as their saviour, everything becomes transformed'.[832] We witness

> the transformation of all the Christian rites into their Islamic equivalent. Firstly Parsifal declares himself King. Islam being law is founded on leadership. He bathes himself in water – the act of baptism is transformed into the act of wudhu' or ritual purification by water before prayer. Parsifal, following Qur'anic instruction, bathes his face and head, arms and feet. The act is completed by an anointing which in turn is the perfuming of the Muslim. The 'Good' Friday of the calendar becomes the Friday instituted as the day of public worship, for the magical act of blood-sacrifice is abolished and what remains to be celebrated is the blessing of the compassionate community. Holy blood is no longer elevated thus the vision of the Grail as 'Cup' is no longer required. Parsifal heals Amfortas of his wound – which was guilt itself, or if you like, the Christian aberration. Kundry too is saved. She enters the Christian community, for she cannot reach the pure religion until she has made her peace with them and become one of them, which means the end of separatist Judaism. Then, and only then Parsifal takes up his final duty.[833]

This duty consists in commanding the knights to 'uncover the Grail, and open the shrine'. With these words, we have reached the end of the Judeo-Christian reign for the insight arises that 'religion is for all mankind without intermediary or meta-history or race-magic'.[834] Consequently, 'the Grail-veil can be made to reveal its true identity'.[835] Noting that the Grail once was a black stone instead of a cup, representing 'the source of human religion in its original pure form',[836] Abdalqadir as-Sufi arrives at the notion that, as previously mentioned, 'the Grail was nothing other than the Black Stone of the Ka'aba, the central shrine of the world's last religion, purified judaeo-christianity, Islam'.[837] The author concludes:

> Makkah is named in the Qur'an as the Mother of Cities, and thus the 'birthplace of all nations' and the Ka'aba is named the 'primal shrine of all mankind'. Embedded in one corner of the Ka'aba stands the Black Stone which every Muslim raises his lips to and kisses when he arrives dusty and exhausted as a pilgrim, kisses as if quenching his thirst. This is the extraordinary tale

[829] Ibid.
[830] Ibid., 241.
[831] Ibid.
[832] Ibid., 240.
[833] Ibid., 241.
[834] Ibid., 242.
[835] Ibid.
[836] Ibid., 243.
[837] Ibid., 243–244.

> that Wagner has, partly despite himself, and partly aware, chosen to tell the world in his farewell revolutionary message. […] When *Parsifal* ends in its vast serenity, 'One of the most beautiful edifices in sound ever raised to the glory of music' as Debussy described it, a white dove descends and hovers over Parsifal – symbol of peace which in Arabic bears the same root 'S-L-M' as pure religion itself, Islam.[838]

So, in Abdalqadir as-Sufi's eyes, the key insight *Parsifal* provides is that Islam is the solution for the nihilistic West. Only through an Islamic takeover can the sick Occident be regenerated. Although many cultural critics in the West will agree with the Islamic author that Western culture is going through a crisis, few will agree that Islam is the way to overcome it. As a matter of fact, precisely in response to the rise of Islam in the West, as well as the culture of repudiation from which it is inseparable, a tendency has emerged to reconsider Christianity as a means for cultural renewal. Conservative intellectuals like Roger Scruton are of the opinion that a return to core Christian values and a revival of Christendom's cultural heritage are essential to developing a new sense of direction in the Western world.

The clash between Islamic and Christian perspectives in the debate on cultural renewal can be observed in the reception of *Parsifal*, too. We have just presented Abdalqadir as-Sufi's take on the work. *Parsifal*, he believes, should be understood as a call to Islam.[839] By contrast, Richard H. Bell argues that *Parsifal* promotes a fundamentally Christian message to the world, namely Christ crucified. According to Bell, Wagner's alleged 'dislike of religious pluralism is found not only in his many utterances on the issue but also in the way representatives of non-Christian religions are negatively portrayed in his dramas such as *Parsifal*'.[840] While

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[838] Ibid., 244.

[839] Let it be stressed, however, that in order to be able to arrive at an interpretation of *Parsifal* that could be deemed 'Islamic', one must either severely distort key aspects of the music drama (e.g. identifying Klingsor as a 'punishing rabbi') or exclude them. For instance, Abdalqadir as-Sufi utterly disregards the killing of the swan, a key moment in the music drama. This is not surprising, because in the Islamic worldview (as in Christian culture), animals have a low status in comparison with humans. By contrast, within a Buddhist framework, one can easily account for Gurnemanz reprimanding Parsifal for killing a harmless swan. After all, showing compassion towards animals is central to the Buddhist way of life. But most importantly, when it comes to pointing out the contradictions between *Parsifal* and the doctrines of Islam, one should consider the fact that Wagner's swansong is a very *lifelike* work of art. This, of course, is highly problematic from an Islamic point of view. In the Islamic tradition, there is deep suspicion of depictions of both human and animal forms as these may open the door to idolatry – hence the extensive use of calligraphy in Islamic art. *Parsifal*'s sensual character conflicts with the Islamic tradition, which is marked by an aversion to sensual elements in art. This explains Islam's hostility to music, which, of all the arts, is the most sensual one. Christian, i.e. Western, culture, on the other hand, has always been very music-friendly. As a matter of fact, music as a full-fledged art form came to fruition in the Christian age, and it is thus fair to say that music is pre-eminently a Christian, i.e. Western, art. Ergo, as one of the great works of the Western musical canon, Wagner's *Parsifal* is irreconcilably opposed to the teachings of Islam.

[840] Richard H. Bell, *Wagner's Parsifal: An Appreciation in the light of His Theological Journey* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 267–268.

Abdalqadir as-Sufi claims that the force of Judaism is being destroyed in the *Bühnenweihfestspiel*, Bell argues (to be sure, not in response to the Islamic author) that 'Wagner's "target" in *Parsifal* is not so much Judaism but more likely Islam'.[841] Pointing out that 'Wagner had contempt for this religion, a view strengthened by Schopenhauer', Bell argues that 'one *possible* way of interpreting an aspect of the drama of Act 2 of *Parsifal* is to see the victory of "Christianity" over "Islam"'.[842] Basing himself on Wagner's libretto, Bell writes:

> Whereas the domain and castle (Monsalvat) of the Guardians of the Grail is in a landscape in the style of the northern Mountains of Gothic Spain, Klingsor's magic castle is on the southern slope of the same mountain range, facing Moorish Spain. Klingsor's magic garden has a rich Arabian style of terraces and the Flower Maidens are clad in soft-coloured veils. Kundry, on appearing to Parsifal in Act 2, is on a couch of flowers, wearing a light, fantastic, veil like robe of Arabian style. This kingdom, which Klingsor (in Arabic costume!) rules, is destroyed at the end of Act 2 as Parsifal makes the sign of the cross with the holy spear.[843]

According to Bell, 'Wagner shared the view of St. Paul that those of non-Christian religions are following a counterfeit religion and the natural desire of the Christian is to see them convert to the Christian faith'.[844] Kundry's conversion would be modelled on the conversion of Feirefiz in Wolfram's *Parzifal*, but while Feirefiz ('a pagan who appears to be a Muslim'[845]) had 'mixed motives for wanting to become a Christian',[846] Kundry's conversion is 'genuine and one from within'.[847] It is 'a conversion involving a union with Christ and a death with him in baptism; and her union with Christ is consummated in those final moments of the drama when she falls to the ground "entseelt" (indicating the departure of her soul)'.[848] Although Wagner's art is often ambivalent, Bell claims that 'when it comes to aspects of redemption', it is clear that Wagner presents unambiguously a form of Christian redemption.[849] The notion of the death of Christ is at the heart of *Parsifal*, the writer believes. And even though the work does not portray the resurrection of Christ, it would crystallise the idea that Jesus 'lives in us through his death'.[850]

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[841] Ibid., 268.
[842] Ibid.
[843] Ibid.
[844] Ibid.
[845] Ibid.
[846] Ibid., 269.
[847] Ibid.
[848] Ibid.
[849] Ibid.
[850] Ibid., 318.

Although we can take issue with the idea that Wagner's *Parsifal* is pre-eminently Christian, we have to acknowledge that the notion of Christ crucified as the work's central message is credible insofar as it embodies the universal idea of resurrection: an idea that transcends religious particularities.

Christ died for our sins while he was not guilty. But thanks to his sacrifice, we can *become aware* of our sins, atone and *change* ourselves into better human beings and consequently change the world for the better. This is precisely the development that Parsifal undergoes; through guilt and repentance, the fool evolves into an enlightened human being. Unlike Jesus, however, who is free from sin, Parsifal (from a Christian point of view) *had sinned* – by killing the innocent swan, he had committed the same sin as those who, out of ignorance, condemned and crucified the innocent Jesus. Like Jesus' murderers, who were actors in a not yet Christian era, Parsifal (being brought up in total isolation), too, came from an un-Christian world and committed his crime while just having entered the Christian realm of the Grail. There, right after he shot the swan, the pious Christian Gurnemanz made Parsifal aware of what he had done by letting him view his deed through Christian eyes. For this reason, Parsifal can never be considered a Christ-like figure or representation of Jesus. After all, the ignorance that led to the death of Jesus is something Parsifal must overcome. Jesus' death, with which Parsifal (through Gurnemanz) indirectly acquaints himself, is a backdrop, a starting point for his further development.

The moment Gurnemanz confronts Parsifal in Act 1, the first step towards change is taken. But it is not until Kundry's kiss in Act 2 that Parsifal becomes truly 'aware' and enlightened. Kundry's kiss, as opposed to Gurnemanz's lecture, is not inspired by kind-hearted Christian ethics. In Act 2, operating in Klingsor's domain, Kundry is under the spell of Klingsor, who seeks Parsifal's downfall. Now let us hold on to Wagner's libretto, in which Monsalvat is a Christian domain located in Northern Spain and Klingor's magic castle is located on the border with the Islamic world. In this very domain, via Kundry, Parsifal learns to see the root cause of Amfortas's wound, i.e. the suffering and decline of the Grail community. Of course, it was Klingsor who injured Amfortas, as a result of which the Grail community fell into decay. But why did Amfortas get wounded? Because he lacked vigilance, and because he was mentally and emotionally weak and hence could not resist Kundry's seduction. So the community is threatened with extinction due to the weakness of their own king, who was incapable of offering resistance against the force emanating from the (Islamic) enemy state. After their Christian king has fallen from grace, the members of the Grail community are holding on to their (Christian)

rituals, hoping that these will somehow effectuate a revival, a regeneration of their lives. But all their efforts are in vain. The king remains sick, and the community is slowly dying.

But then, in Act 3, Parsifal returns to the realm of the Grail. He has come to save the Grail community. When he appears, it is Good Friday: the day when Christians commemorate the crucifixion and death of Christ. Good Friday, as we know, is followed by Easter, which celebrates Jesus' resurrection. In this context, Parsifal's second coming to Monsalvat signifies the death of the old, worn-out Christian faith and the birth of a new frame of mind that has arisen from Christianity. As Badiou observed, when Parsifal returns, he goes beyond Christianity in order to proclaim the idea of universal compassion. What happened was that the violent and destructive force coming from Klingsor's (Islamic) realm had been demolished at the end of the second act after the sign of the cross, meaning that the *oikos* of the Christian Grail community remained protected and was preserved. But contrary to what Bell claims, Parsifal does not reaffirm Christendom but goes beyond it as he replaces the sick old Christian King Amfortas. And contrary to what Abdalqadir as-Sufi asserts, the new king Parsifal does not establish the already existing religion of Islam in the realm of the Grail but offers a new possibility for the future, a new prospect, not something that is already guaranteed. We can only say with certainty that Parsifal goes beyond organised religion, beyond Christianity and Islam, and brings the promise of regeneration through compassion. But how can this promise be fulfilled? With the help of Nietzsche, we can answer this question.

We know that Nietzsche criticised *Parsifal*'s supposedly Christian message of compassion. With *Parsifal*, Wagner would have 'suddenly sank down, helpless and broken, before the Christian cross'.[851] Nietzsche's main objection against Christianity is its centrality of compassion. Compassion or pity would weaken man and culture because it would be *a force against life*. In *Der Antichrist* (1895) we read:

> Pity stands opposed to the tonic emotions which heighten our vitality: it has a depressing effect. We are deprived of strength when we feel pity. […] Pity crosses the law of development, which is the law of *selection*. It preserves what is ripe for destruction. […] Pity negates life and renders it *more deserving of negation*. Pity is the *practice* of nihilism. […] This depressive and contagious instinct crosses those instincts which aim at the preservation of life and at the enhancement of its value. It multiplies misery and conserves all that is miserable, and is thus a prime instrument of the advancement of decadence: pity persuades men to *nothingness*![852]

[851] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 676.

[852] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 572–573.

Does Nietzsche's description of pity or compassion apply to *Parsifal*? Or, to put it differently, does *Parsifal* resonate with Christianity as 'the religion of pity'?[853] First of all, an objection could be that Wagner's swansong, in terms of music, text and visuals, is far too sensual to be considered a paradigmatic example of Christian art. But the content of the work is also not Christian in the sense that it calls for world renunciation. Parsifal, after having discovered compassion, does not renounce life and resort to nothingness but decides to save the Grail community and start a new culture, a culture beyond Christendom. Karol Berger rightly points out that although *Parsifal* promotes 'compassionate insight into the inescapable and unjustifiable suffering of all will-driven nature, and the resulting renunciation of all willing as the only sensible answer to the senselessness of the world, Wagner […] clearly goes beyond Schopenhauer'.[854] Wagner's Parsifal

> elects in the end not to withdraw from the world. On the contrary, he assumes the role of a leader to a revitalised, regenerated community. There is no place for any hope of social regeneration in Schopenhauer, but there is one in late Wagner.[855]

Despite his suspicion of Wagner's final work and characterisation of the music drama as 'a work of perfidy, of vindictiveness, of a secret attempt to poison the presuppositions of life – a bad work', whose 'preaching of chastity remains an incitement to anti-nature',[856] Nietzsche seems to mistrust the characterisation of *Parsifal* as a Christian, life-negating work of art, too. This is evidenced by the fact that the philosopher in *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* ties the work to the life-negating, ascetic ideal in the form of a series of questions. Nietzsche asks in section 3:

> […] What could that male (yet so unmasculine) 'innocence from the country' really be to him, that poor devil and child of nature, Parsifal, whom Wagner finally makes a Catholic by such captious means? How now? Was this Parsifal meant at all *seriously*?
>
> […] Is Wagner's *Parsifal* his secretly superior laughter at himself, the triumph of his ultimate artistic freedom, his artistic *non plus ultra* – Wagner able to *laugh* at himself?
>
> Clearly, one should wish that; for what would *Parsifal* amount to if intended a *serious* piece? Must we really see in it (as somebody has expressed it against me) 'the abortion gone mad of a hatred of knowledge, spirit, and sensuality?' A curse on the senses and the spirit in a single hatred and breath? An apostasy and reversion to sickly Christian and obscurantist ideals? And in the end even a self-abnegation, a self-crossing-out on the part of an artist who had previously

[853] Ibid., 572.

[854] Karol Berger, *Beyond Reason: Wagner Contra Nietzsche* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 345.

[855] Ibid., 345.

[856] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 675.

> aimed at the very opposite of this, striving with all the power of his will to achieve the highest spiritualisation and sensualisation in his art?
>
> […] Had he learned differently in the end? […] Did the *hatred against life* become dominant in him, as in Flaubert?[857]

In Chapter 2, we saw that Nietzsche argued in 'Was bedeuten asketische Ideale?' that ascetic values, too, are essentially life-affirming. The Schopenhauerian message of world renunciation was therefore considered perfidious by Nietzsche. But the height of irony is reached when artists start to preach ascetic values. Hence Nietzsche's criticism of Wagner's 'homage to chastity' in *Parsifal*.[858] However, as we delineated in Chapter 2, in the context of the discussion on Wagnerian sensuousness, *Parsifal* – despite its Schopenhauerian message of resignation – lures us to life through its highly sensual music as well as the at times truly excitatory text. We have established an understanding of Wagner's sensuousness as a musical force that, as Roger Scruton puts it with respect to *Tristan und Isolde*, enables us to acquire a first-person perspective on the state of mind of its protagonists, meaning that in a sense we become one with Tristan during the performance. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche explains with respect to *Tristan und Isolde* that the drama comes alive thanks to the music that makes us sympathise with the characters and their fate as it unfolds on stage. In the finale of *Tristan*, for instance, Isolde, while singing the *Liebestod*, invites us to see Tristan the way she sees him. We are seeing reality through her eyes, a reality in which the visual surroundings increasingly fade to make room for an ever-surging aural dimension. We remember how the music carried us away from the Apollonian world. Together with Isolde, we abandoned the earthly realm of appearances as we willingly yielded to the Dionysian flux – that force of destruction and creation we experienced while we underwent Isolde's transfiguration. So Wagner's sensuousness is first and foremost a means to evoke compassion. After all, it unites us with Tristan and Isolde, meaning that we have a profound sense of empathy for the characters we behold, a strong emotional connection to them, a deep sense of compassion; beholding Tristan and Isolde's tragic fate, we suffer *with* them (not *as* them), we experience their lives. Through this compassion, we can become one with the Dionysian – the ultimate force of life and creation – and subsequently transfigure together with Isolde. Compassion is thus a creative and transformative power, a force for change, a life-giving and life-affirming force.

[857] Ibid., 674–675.
[858] Ibid., 98.

The fact that in *Parsifal* compassion is related to Schopenhauerian resignation[859] does not contradict this notion. As we remember, true insight into the Schopenhauerian will to live, the root cause of all suffering in the world in which all living beings are one and indivisible, evokes a type of behaviour whereby one does not constantly affirm one's own will, for instance, by pursuing power and wealth without restraint and self-control, since any unscrupulous and uninhibited pursuit of self-interest is always at the expense of others. This is not to say that one necessarily has to withdraw from the world once he becomes 'enlightened through compassion'. There are different levels or degrees of renunciation; one can indeed withdraw from the world and pursue monastic life, but one can also be engaged in worldly affairs while trying to act with consideration for others. In other words, compassion can lead to both resignation and affirmation. The figure of Parsifal clearly embodies this dual role of compassion; after having become enlightened, he no longer kills harmless animals like the swan (renunciation) but acts with consideration for his fellow beings. With this considerate attitude to life, he is determined to create a better world (affirmation). So, the compassionate attitude to life, whereby one has an eye for others, is a life-enhancing and life-giving power.

This, moreover, can be explained from an evolutionary perspective. Pointing out the evolutionary advantages of empathy in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), Charles Darwin writes that 'those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring'.[860]

From Nietzsche's point of view, however, a Darwinian explanation of compassion is problematic. A Darwinian approach to the evolution of man would not lead to the development of a higher type of human being – the *Übermensch* – but would, on the contrary, undermine the development of humanity. Although Nietzsche appreciates Darwin's theory of natural selection for shattering the Christian illusion of man's divine origin, with which Darwin created a new perspective on the future of mankind on the basis of life on earth, he fiercely rejects Darwin's optimistic conclusion in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) that 'natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress

[859] Parsifal gains knowledge through compassion (*Durch Mitleid wissend*), meaning that he recognises that the Schopenhauerian will is the cause of all suffering. This insight is gained when Kundry kisses him in Act 2. Parsifal suddenly understands that the will/sexual desire caused Amfortas's wound, one that now 'burns within his heart'. Feeling Amfortas's pain, and knowing what caused it, namely 'the terrible longing which seizes and grips all his senses', Parsifal is repulsed by the will, by that 'sinful desire!' Detesting the 'torment of love', he pushes Kundry away from him with the words 'Corrupter! Get away from me! Forever, forever away from me!' By withstanding the seductive Kundry, Parsifal denies the will to live, which is an act of Schopenhauerian resignation.

[860] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin, 2004), 130.

towards perfection'.[861] This view of life, Nietzsche argues, robs man of the incentive to develop and improve himself. The theory of natural selection denies man's capacity to create values that enable him to grow, thrive and become more human as it reduces man to a mere animal, a mere object amongst other objects in the material world, 'a creature of nature and nothing else'.[862] Placing man in the mechanical and deterministic cause-and-effect realm of nature, Darwinism deprives us of the very thing that makes us human, namely our capacity to think critically and creatively and to produce values that help us to evolve. Instead, Darwin's theory of evolution evokes nihilism because it essentially says that nature determines man's destiny. Consequently, the motivation to create (new) values disappears and therewith the possibility for man to elevate himself, to become a 'superman' – 'a higher type which arises and flourishes under conditions different from those of the common man'.[863]

According to the theory of natural selection, the species that make the most progress are the ones that successfully adapt to the surrounding environment, obtain the most food, procreate the most and avoid pain and privation. Although this may apply to non-human animals, Nietzsche argues that it certainly does not apply to man.[864] While animals are bound to adapt to the conditions of natural environments, human beings are capable of doing the exact opposite, namely adapting environments to themselves (think for example of urban settlements) so as to improve the quality of their lives. Thus, the Nietzschean concept of the will to power rather than the Darwinian notion of adaptation applies to the human quest for progress. Man's will to power not only involves the will to impose order on the natural world, that is to say plant and animal life, but also the will to impose order on himself. The highest types of human beings, contrary to ordinary people, 'maintain their superiority at great cost to themselves', Nietzsche writes.[865] In order to evolve beyond the animal world, man should not complacently adapt to his environment but undergo hardship and constraints and experience adversity and difficult situations. It is not for nothing that man has always 'imposed strict laws upon himself'.[866] This

[861] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: Penguin, 2009), 426.
[862] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer', in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 31.
[863] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (London: Penguin, 2017), 495-496.
[864] See Robert G. Morrison, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 80–81.
[865] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (London: Penguin, 2017), 388.
[866] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (London: Penguin, 1994), 45.

capacity distinguishes man from other animals. By imposing laws and restrictions on man, cultures were able to produce exceptional human beings: men of letters, philosophers and artists. If one goes against nature through self-imposed laws, one can elevate oneself above the animalistic realm of nature and become a sovereign individual. Darwinism, on the other hand, does not urge one to go against nature through man-made laws. It rather encourages one to abide by nature, to give in to one's most base, animalistic instincts: the 'gregarious instincts' of the majority, the herd.[867] Therefore Darwinism 'is never in favour of the exceptions'.[868] It only favours the masses – humans as a *species* – and threatens the exceptional individual that needs *culture*, as opposed the herd's nature, in order to flourish.[869]

Since a Darwinian worldview would be unable to provide the right environment for the individual to evolve into a higher human being, Nietzsche does not want Darwinism to replace Christianity as the new leading paradigm.[870] Again, the strength and usefulness of Darwinism (and science at large) lies in its ability to debunk old, worn-out metaphysical and religious beliefs and values – and therewith it paves the way for a new paradigm to arise. Yet a Darwinian worldview is incapable of instigating the creation of new cultural values. By condemning man to a deterministic universe, degrading him to an unthinking, unwilling, unconscious object and thus depriving him of the incentive to impose laws upon himself, Darwinism deprives man of the possibility to give life meaning, value and purpose.

What paradigm, then, can replace Christianity? What would be the right way to go beyond it? A strong culture is required, but one that is not based on metaphysical beliefs but man's life on earth. The first step towards such a culture is to espouse nihilism, meaning that we have to confront ourselves with the hard truth that life is essentially meaningless. The second step is to overcome nihilism by creating and establishing new values.

Darwinism proves fruitful when it comes to step one (shattering old illusions) but does not enable one to realise step two: overcoming the state of nihilism. Yet another 'hammer' that, according to Nietzsche, can be used against Christianity is Buddhism. In *Der Antichrist* the philosopher writes that

[867] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (London: Penguin, 2017), 389.
[868] Ibid.
[869] See Robert G. Morrison, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 82–87.
[870] Ibid., 86.

> Buddhism is hundred times more realistic than Christianity: posing problems objectively and coolly is part of its inheritance, for Buddhism comes after a philosophic movement which spanned centuries. The concept of 'God' had long been disposed of when it arrived. Buddhism is the only genuinely positivistic religion in history. This applies even to its theory of knowledge (a strict phenomenalism): it no longer says 'struggle against *sin*' but, duly respectful of reality, 'struggle against *suffering*'. Buddhism is profoundly distinguished from Christianity by the fact that the self-deception of the moral concepts lies far behind it. In my terms, it stands *beyond* good and evil.[871]

From Nietzsche, we learn that Buddhism can serve as a means to expose Christianity's self-deception for it opposes the Christian belief in God and the immortal soul, the entire fictitious worldview Christianity constructed to give meaning, value and purpose to life – a worldview, however, that is no longer tenable and is in dire need of replacement.[872] By confronting man with the hard reality that all flows and nothing stays, Buddhism can help us make the first step towards revitalising culture – a step that consists of discarding old theistic values and temporarily espousing nihilism. But according to Nietzsche, Buddhism does not enable us to make the crucial second step, which consists of overcoming nihilism and the creation of new cultural values, because Buddhism is intrinsically nihilistic.[873] Although Nietzsche believes that the philosophy of Buddhism is useful as 'a hammer',[874] it is nonetheless a philosophy that dismisses man's life on earth as illusory and not worth living. Hence it is a philosophy that remains stuck in its own nihilism. So if Europe were to adopt Buddhism as a new worldview, it would remain trapped in its nihilistic state. Nietzsche claims that Buddhism is ultimately a nihilistic and decadent religion, just like Christianity: 'both belong together as nihilistic religions – they are religions of decadence'.[875] Both religions, after all, contradict life, and both religions place emphasis on compassion.

We recall that Nietzsche argues that compassion/pity weakens man and culture because it is a force against life. 'Pity negates life' and it is therefore 'the practice of nihilism' as it 'persuades men to nothingness'.[876] Although both Christian and Buddhist compassion would

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[871] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 586–587.

[872] See Robert G. Morrison, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 28–29. See also Freny Mistry, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: Prolegomenon to a Comparative Study* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1981), 43–50.

[873] See Robert G. Morrison, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 21–27.

[874] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (London: Penguin, 2017), 86.

[875] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 586.

[876] Ibid., 573.

result in nothingness, the respective motivations of the two religions differ significantly. 'In Christianity', Nietzsche claims, 'the instincts of the subjugated and oppressed come to the fore: here the lowest classes seek their salvation.'[877] They do so by seeking revenge on the highest classes: 'Christian […] is mortal enmity against the lords of the earth, against the "noble".'[878] 'Christian too is a certain sense of cruelty against oneself and against others; hatred of all who think differently; the will to persecute.'[879] Christianity is driven by ressentiment and its compassion is merely a way to drag the noble, strong and healthy ones down, since it 'crosses those instincts which aim at the preservation of life and at the enhancement of its value' and 'multiplies misery and conserves all that is miserable'.[880]

Buddhism, on the other hand, vehemently opposes any form of ressentiment. The Buddha 'does not ask his followers to fight those who think otherwise: there is nothing to which his doctrine is more opposed than the feeling of revenge, antipathy, ressentiment ("it is not by enmity that enmity is ended" – that is the stirring refrain of all Buddhism)'.[881] Unlike Christianity, which violently seeks to destroy the higher classes, 'Buddhism presupposes customs of great gentleness and liberality, and the absence of militarism'.[882] What is more, according to Nietzsche, the Buddhist movement 'had to originate among the higher classes', for 'cheerfulness, calm, and freedom from desire are the highest goal, and the goal is *attained*'.[883] In other words, 'Buddhism is not a religion in which one merely aspires to perfection: perfection is the normal case'.[884]

To achieve perfection – a state of Nirvana – the Buddhist seeks to avoid stimuli. The Buddha recommends

> moderation in eating and a careful selection of foods; wariness of all intoxicants; wariness also of all emotions that activate the gall bladder or heat the blood; no *worry* either for oneself or for others. He prescribes ideas which are either soothing or cheering, and he invents means for weaning oneself from all the others. He understands goodness and graciousness as health-promoting.[885]

[877] Ibid., 588.
[878] Ibid., 589.
[879] Ibid.
[880] Ibid., 573.
[881] Ibid., 587–588.
[882] Ibid., 588.
[883] Ibid.
[884] Ibid.
[885] Ibid., 587.

Buddhist compassion thus entails the structural avoidance of pressure, adversity, and hardship. It is a passive form of compassion that, unlike Christianity, does not seek to intervene in world affairs. This is because the Buddhist goal is detachment from the world by removing desire, or what Schopenhauer calls the will to live. Nietzsche, however, does not wish to remove desire or the will but to direct the will to use it for good. The will should not be denied but affirmed to enhance life, to create more life. Since Buddhism seeks the end of the world and hence does not seek to overcome nihilism, Nietzsche believes that it could never help to regenerate European culture. A philosophy that promotes the actual avoidance of constraints, struggle and adversity, Nietzsche believes, would not be able to evoke the 'stern laws' needed to give rise to great individuals – the *Übermenschen* that can elevate humanity and establish a higher form of life.

One can take issues with Nietzsche's claim that Buddhist compassion is nihilistic. Antoine Panaïoti, for instance, points out in his book *Nietzsche and Buddhist Philosophy* (2013) that the Buddha's compassion was not so passive and meek as Nietzsche suggests. To prove his point, Panaïoti refers to the Buddhist story of Kisagotami as told by Dhammapāla. The story tells that after Kisagotami lost her son, she was 'maddened by sorrow'.[886] In an attempt to bring her son back to life, she went to visit the Buddha with the question of whether he might 'know of a medicine for her'.[887] The Buddha spoke to her: 'Go! Enter the city and bring me a mustard seed from a house which has never known death.'[888] Kisagotami left and sought in vain for such a house. At last she concluded: 'Certainly this will hold in the whole city. The lord will have seen this out of compassion and concern for my welfare.'[889] At this point, 'she developed *saṃvega*', which is a Buddhist term 'that designates the kind of agitation caused by the realisation of the impermanence of all things, which leads to the taking up of the Buddhist path'.[890]

Thanks to the very *shock* Kisagotami experienced, while realising the impermanence and meaninglessness of life, she could take up the path towards redemption. Panaïoti points out that the Buddha's decision to 'send her off with the false hope that her son will be cured from death if she can find the right mustard seed' at first seems like a 'cold-hearted, almost unsympathetic intervention'.[891] 'The supposedly compassionate Buddha appears inhuman, unsympathetic, and

[886] Antoine Panaïoti, *Nietzsche and Buddhist Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 199.
[887] Ibid., 200.
[888] Ibid.
[889] Ibid.
[890] Ibid.
[891] Ibid., 201.

almost cruel.'[892] However, the very opposite is true. The Buddha's compassion, Panaïoti explains

> does not manifest itself as commiseration or consolation. Rather, it translates into cool, dispassionate, straightforward, and ultimately effective action. What is more, he does not do anything directly for Kisagotami. He only orchestrates the conditions in which she will come to help herself. Kisagotami's suffering is her responsibility alone. No one can put an end to it other than Kisagotami herself.[893]

Contrary to what Nietzsche believes, Buddhist compassion is not passive at all in the sense that it would avoid any sense of dismay or moments of hardship. On the contrary, precisely by creating a sense of dismay, the Buddha challenged Kisagotami to think. Through her confrontation with the hard truth of life, she attained knowledge and gained mental strength, became a stronger person, acquired more power and enhanced her life. According to Panaïoti, Buddhist compassion therefore coincides with Nietzsche's conception of 'genuine compassion'.[894] This is a 'compassion of strength' that 'looks out for what is active in human beings and will seek to assist these active forces against the onslaught of reactive forces'.[895] In other words, Nietzsche's compassion is an active and creative kind of compassion whereby adversity is met as a challenge that one can overcome. In this frame of mind, adversity becomes 'an opportunity actively to engage in the world'.[896] It gives someone an opportunity to 'to act, to expand his strength and power'.[897] It strengthens the mind as it encourages one to 'strive against enfeeblement and despair'.[898] As such, compassion appeals to 'the creator in man'.[899] As an example, Panaïoti refers to Nietzsche's concern with 'modern Europe and the deep nihilism in which it wallows',[900] making clear that precisely this troublesome state provides the opportunity to overcome nihilism, to invent a solution to the cultural crisis.

Although it is needless to say that the goal of this chapter is not to examine the relationship between Nietzsche's take on compassion and Buddhist compassion, a brief comparison between the two, as demonstrated above, helps us not only to establish a better understanding of Nietzsche's life-affirming philosophy, it also enables us to reconcile the life-enhancing view

[892] Ibid.
[893] Ibid.
[894] Ibid., 188.
[895] Ibid., 189.
[896] Ibid., 190.
[897] Ibid., 192.
[898] Ibid.
[899] Ibid.
[900] Ibid., 189.

of compassion with the compassion that is practiced in *Parsifal*, deemed by Nietzsche – albeit with a sense of doubt – as a life-negating work of art. Buddhist compassion can thus be considered a conceptual link between Nietzsche and Wagner. The latter, as we know, was highly interested in Buddhism and even planned to embark on a Buddhist opera project, which led to a draft sketch for an opera scenario called *Die Sieger* that was based on an Indian Buddha legend. The extent to which elements of *Die Sieger* are present in *Parsifal* is not a matter of our concern because a possible connection between *Die Sieger* and *Parsifal* hinges on the concept of karma and rebirth with which we are not concerned here.[901] Moreover, when it comes to the subject of our focus, namely the concept of compassion, the connection between *Parsifal* and Buddhism is immediately evident. As explained earlier, Buddhism served as a generic framework in which Wagner could reconsider Christianity's universal message of compassion that had been eclipsed by the Church's corruption and aversion to life on earth. The reason Wagner appreciated the Buddha's teachings was that these, contrary to Church teachings, were *aimed at worshiping life on earth* instead of a supernatural god. The universal message of compassion was reconsidered in connection with Buddhism's life-affirming philosophy.

This is clearly reflected by *Parsifal*. Like Kisagotami, Parsifal awakens through hardship. First he is scolded by Gurnemanz, a painful experience that evokes in the hero his very first feeling of remorse. The second moment where Parsifal has to endure dismay is halfway through the first act, when Kundry tells him in a rather crude and abusive manner that his mother is dead: 'As I rode by I saw her dying: she bade me greet you, fool.' Upon hearing these words, Parsifal jumps up and attacks Kundry. Gurnemanz, however, manages to prevent the young fool from doing Kundry harm and again reprimands him: 'Insane youth! Again violent? What has the woman done to you? She spoke the truth; for Kundry never lies, though she has seen much.' Parsifal, in the meantime, is caught in a state of stunned confusion and has started to tremble severely. In a state of shock, the suffering young man utters: 'I am fainting!', after which Kundry brings him water for relief (which is also an act of active compassion). At the end of Act 1, Parsifal is again challenged. He has just witnessed the ritual of the Grail and is completely baffled by what he has seen. As he fails to answer Gurnemanz's question ('Do you know what you have seen?'), the hero presses his heart and shakes his head with sorrow. Disappointed and annoyed by Parsifal's ignorance, Gurnemanz exclaims: 'So you are only a

[901] For an examination of this connection, see Wolfgang Osthoff, *Richard Wagner's Buddha-Project Die Sieger (The Victors): Its Traces in Ideas and Structures of The Ring and Parsifal*, trans William Buchanan (Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 1996) and Paul Schofield, *The Redeemer Reborn: Parsifal as the Fifth Opera of Wagner's Ring* (New York, NY: Amadeus Press, 2007).

fool then!' He then opens a side door and cries: 'Off with you, and go on your way! But heed Gurnemanz: in future leave the swans here in peace; a gander should look for a goose!', after which he pushes Parsifal out and shuts the door upon him with a bang.

The young fool is left to his own devices. All alone, he has to embark on 'the path of suffering'. Like Kisagotami, Parsifal, too, must save himself. Only he – the future redeemer King – can bring about his own redemption, bring about the 'miracle of supreme salvation: the redemption of the redeemer'. In order to achieve this, Parsifal has to undergo one more decisive shock: Kundry's kiss. As he receives her kiss, he suddenly rises. His face betrays great anguish, and by pressing his heart, he reveals the excruciating pain he feels inside. And then he shouts:

> Amfortas!
> The wound! The wound!
> It burns within my heart!
> O sorrow, sorrow!
> Fearful sorrow!
> From the depths of my heart it cries aloud.
> Oh! Oh!
> Most wretched!
> Most pitiable!
> I saw the wound bleeding:
> now it bleeds in me!

This moment of utmost distress is simultaneously the moment of Parsifal's awakening. Here he discovers the cause of all suffering in the world: blind desire, i.e. the will to live. Just as Kisagotami can take up the Buddhist path after gaining the painful insight that all life is impermanent, so can Parsifal take up the path towards redemption thanks to the insight that desire leads to suffering. But unlike Kisagotami, Parsifal does not give voice to the nihilist notion that life is impermanent and ultimately meaningless. Instead, he designates desire as the cause of the world's sorrow and, moreover, *his share* in the sorrow of the world. Parsifal points out that *he too* has caused misery ('And I – fool, coward, fled hither to wild childish deeds!') and expresses *the will to make amends* for his wrongdoings or (since it is put in Christian terms) his 'sins', saying: 'How can I, a sinner, purge my guilt?'

Not only does Parsifal become enlightened during this moment of dismay, he also decides to take responsibility for his actions. He does not feel prone to withdraw from the world but, on the contrary, is determined to make his mark in it. He feels sincere compassion for Amfortas; he literally feels his pain. But this does not weaken him, does not rob him of any lust for life, does not persuade him to nothingness – quite the contrary. Parsifal is not inclined to negate his desire or will but seeks to direct his will to use it for good. So compassion does not lead him to

deny or negate life but to enhance life through conscious willing. Herewith Parsifal's compassion coincides with Nietzsche's compassion of strength that, as we recall, is an active kind of compassion whereby adversity is considered an opportunity to become responsibly engaged in the world – a kind of compassion that provides the opportunity to overcome nihilism. Yet all we have at this point is an opportunity, a promise. Now the question is whether the work provides pointers as to how to fulfil this promise of overcoming nihilism. Considering the fact that *Parsifal* is about the redemption of a society, i.e. community, does its compassion of strength enable one to invent a solution to Europe's cultural crisis, its nihilism?

Again, Europe's cultural crisis was Nietzsche's great concern. However, Nietzsche chose to view this difficult situation as an opportunity to overcome nihilism rather than an irredeemable burden. This attitude not only exemplifies what Panaïoti deems Nietzsche's 'compassion of strength', but it also applies to Nietzsche's concept of the 'good European', which follows on from Nietzsche's decision to consider Europe's hardship a constructive force, as evolutionary pressure that can be used to evolve. As we recall from the previous chapter, the concept of the 'good European' was developed with the aim of counteracting the regressive nationalist tendencies that threatened the peace of Europe. Characterising 'good Europeans' in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882) as 'homeless, manifold, and racially mixed modern men', Nietzsche remarks that they 'do not feel tempted to participate in the mendacious racial self-admiration and racial indecency that parades in Germany today as a sign of a German way of thinking'.[902] Endowed with a 'historical sense', 'good Europeans' do not view themselves as heirs of a certain fatherland but as 'heirs of Europe' – 'rich, oversupplied, but also overly obligated heirs of thousands of years of European spirit',[903] a spirit that is not homogeneous, transparent and immutable but heterogeneous, multifarious, hybrid and ever-changing. A 'good European', Nietzsche believed, would be capable of instilling the notion into society that there exists no such thing as a national essence that radically separates one nation from another, let alone one that would make a certain nation superior to all others. Yet as an individual, one could indeed be superior to the masses by appropriating the best qualities from different countries and cultures in order to improve as a person and hence become an exceptional individual, an *Übermensch*.

The *Übermensch* is therefore a compassionate being in the Nietzschean sense of the term. He is capable of putting himself in someone else's position, capable of adopting new and

[902] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1974), 340.
[903] Ibid., 340.

different cultural customs and values, capable of recognising himself in alien cultural spheres. This requires empathy and, moreover, great mental dynamics, resilience and perspicacity; one should be able to distinguish active forces from reactive ones and be willing to magnify the first and minimise the latter for the sake of improving oneself and one's culture. Besides nationalism, Nietzsche considers Christianity, too, a reactive force. What nationalism and Christianity have in common is their essentialism; whether concerning the belief in a national identity or an eternal God, in both cases the belief in something absolute, timeless and objective predominates – the belief in something omnipotent that may not be contradicted. This absolutism does not only weaken one's mind but threatens one's culture as the nationalist outburst in the late nineteenth century proved. A much healthier outlook on life, Nietzsche argues, is perspectivism. Perspectivism not only relativises and nuances one's own standpoint, with the result that one's hostility towards the so-called Other atrophies, but it also strengthens one's mind. Since one's perspective is a mere perspective amongst countless other perspectives, and hence always in opposition to something else, one always finds oneself challenged to reconsider one's views, which implies that one seeks new perspectives from which to perceive one's stance. The notion that 'there is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing"' implies that 'the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity", be'.[904]

In Chapter 2, we demonstrated how this can be applied to Wagner. In order to counteract the dominant German and/or Christian image of Wagner, Nietzsche presented a variety of highly contrasting perspectives on the composer in *Der Fall Wagner*, a variety of 'different eyes' we can use to observe the phenomenon Wagner. In this chapter, we have seen how Nietzsche does something similar with respect to Christian Europe. In *Der Antichrist*, decadent Europe is viewed from the perspective of Buddhism in order to arrive at a better understanding (or diagnosis) of Europe's nihilism. Yet another perspective from which Christian Europe is viewed in *Der Antichrist* is Islam.

By looking at Europe from the perspective of Islam, Nietzsche can better emphasise Europe's weakness, namely its lack of life-affirming instincts, its hatred of sensuality, the Christian aversion to the human body. Hence Nietzsche's remark that the Christian church fathers 'are not even men'.[905] This is something that becomes even more clear from the

[904] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?', in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 119.
[905] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 651.

perspective of Islamic culture, which contrasts sharply with Christian culture. Islam, as opposed to Christianity, is life-affirming and does not cultivate hatred of the human body. 'Islam', according to Nietzsche, 'presupposes *men*'.[906] Considering the supposedly life-affirming frame of mind of Muslim culture, 'Islam is a thousand times right in despising Christianity'.[907]

That is not to say that Nietzsche saw Islam as an alternative to Christianity. Being an Abrahamic religion, Islam worships the exclusive, transcendent God that Nietzsche had declared dead and is every bit as essentialist as Christianity. For this reason, Nietzsche would never have considered Islam *the* answer to European decadence. However, Islam gave *an* answer, and a crucial one. It offered a key element that, according to Nietzsche, was missing in Christian Europe, namely the aforementioned life-affirming outlook on the world that was required to generate European culture, to create new values in a world that had lost its belief but still clung to Christendom by default.

Above all else, Nietzsche's sympathy for Islam betrayed a profound love of European culture that the philosopher intended to save. Instead of considering Islam a blueprint for a new society, Nietzsche used it to hold a mirror up to European society and recognise its inadequacies. Islam was thus used as a means to strengthen Europe, not by incorporating Islam into society but by considering Islam as a challenger to Western civilisation that would compel the West to reconsider its own values that it had long taken for granted. How should the West consider its own heritage? What should be preserved and what should be disregarded? How should the West respond to the global rise of Islam (which is not only the world's fastest-growing religion but also one that actively seeks to challenge Western culture and calls for its demise)? These are the great questions of our time, questions that are inspired by the confrontation with Islam.

This confrontation tends to tip us into defensive mode; it arouses the will to stand up for our cultural values and defend our traditions. One may also ask, however, whether there is something the Western world could learn from Islam, ask whether Islam contains elements that can be useful. This, by all means, would be Nietzsche's approach. As previously mentioned, in Nietzsche's eyes, what the Islamic culture has to offer is an affirmative attitude to life, an attitude that defined the culture of Nietzsche's beloved Ancient Greece, the life-embracing, creative attitude that Christendom had twice demolished: 'Christianity has cheated us out of the harvest of ancient culture; later it cheated us again, out of the harvest of the culture of *Islam*.'[908]

[906] Ibid.
[907] Ibid.
[908] Ibid., 652.

This harvest was the life-affirming frame of mind that gave birth to the superior tragic culture of the Greeks as well as 'the wonderful world of the Moorish culture of Spain', which 'owed its origin to noble, to *male* instincts,[909] because it said Yes to life'.[910] The fact that Nietzsche speaks of a 'harvest' implies that something has been taken over from a different culture (Ancient Greece, Islam) that is desired, attractive and useful. Harvest implies profit, something society has gained from a fruitful soil. And this soil is recognised as such, recognised as something conducive to building a flourishing society.

The recognition of something foreign as valuable and worthy of adopting implies a 'compassionate' frame of mind as possessed by the 'good European' capable of adopting new and different cultural customs and values – capable of appropriating the best qualities from different countries and cultures in order to improve as a person and to elevate his culture. An example of such an elevated culture, according to Nietzsche, was 'the Moorish culture of Spain' – a culture that had emerged on the European continent and yet was based on the sensual, affirmative attitude to life that the rest of Christian Europe lacked. The idealised vision of Al-Andalus represented that what Nietzsche was looking for in European culture and coincides with the ideal of Europeanism that the philosopher had developed in defiance of the nationalism haunting Europe. Al-Andalus was known to be a hybrid culture, yet one that was unified by an overarching sense of life. It was, moreover, a culture that was highly confident and conscious of its Islamic identity and yet did not ward off Jewish and Christian influences. On the contrary, it allowed contrasting perspectives on the world to blossom in its realm, which explains the enormous creative power of Al-Andalus, as evidenced by its architecture and arts that display a heterogeneous mix of cultural influences, contexts and circumstances. A multitude of different perspectives were enshrined in Al-Andalus's eclectic artefacts, perspectives that opposed one another and hence effectuated a dialectical tension between different perspectives, as a result of which new perspectives (in the form of new artistic forms and expressions) arose through which the culture would continuously regenerate itself and continuously expand through creative, life-affirming actions. Herewith the Moorish culture of Spain, as imagined by

[909] Notice that Wagner in the last phase of his life came to the opposite conclusion. Whereas Nietzsche believed that European culture would benefit from adopting Islam's 'masculine' instincts (for, indeed, Islam is a male-dominated religion) so as to combat so-called effeminate Christian attitudes such as pity and forgiveness, Wagner precisely advocated for the cultivation of feminine instincts, as is evidenced by his last essay, 'Über das Weibliche im Menschlichen' (1883). Nietzsche believed that an increase of feminine instincts would make Europe, and mankind at large, weaker. Wagner, on the other hand, believed such an increase would only strengthen it, would help to improve mankind's lot.

[910] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 652.

Nietzsche, showed 'in which the real value and significance of contemporary culture lies', namely 'in hybridisation and cross-fertilisation!'[911] Al-Andalus thus symbolised the compassion of strength that Nietzsche hoped would inspire Europe and bring about its revival. Europe, in a sense, had to become a new Al-Andalus: a diverse yet united culture, spiritually unified by an artistic, life-affirming frame of mind.

Parsifal strongly resonates with Nietzsche's quest for spiritual unity. What is more, from the perspective of today's world, in which the nihilistic West finds itself challenged by an emboldened Islam, the interaction between the realm of the Grail and Klingsor's realm can be understood, in congruence with Nietzsche's thought, as an interaction whose dynamics is guided by a compassion of strength. We have seen that the realm of the Grail, which represents the West, is too nihilistic to focus on a new spiritual ideal that could regenerate its culture; the Grail community, like the West, is exhausted, disoriented and incapable of developing a vision for the future. Conscious of the Grail community's weakness, Klingsor confidently embarks on a campaign to defeat the Knights of the Grail and conquer Monsalvat. Klingsor's magic castle, as we know, is located on the southern mountains of Gothic Spain, looking towards Moorish Spain. Placed on the border between the West and Al-Andalus, Klingsor's castle offers the West a perspective on Islam, while the Islamic world, in its turn, is offered a perspective on the West. Klingsor's castle thus allows the Occident and Orient to interact with one another and learn from each other. While one can argue that the West is too nihilistic and lacks self-confidence, it is equally fair to say that Islam is too absolutist and overconfident. But unlike the West, Islam does not relativise itself; it carries out its beliefs unapologetically and with a great sense of pride. This is something the culturally feeble West could learn from Islam.[912] Islam, on the other hand, could profit from a Western sense of relativism and nihilism; an excess of relativism might be self-defeating, but an absolutist worldview is equally destructive.

Through such a critical exchange, both cultural spheres can complement each other in a way that both spheres gain strength. Moreover, the tension between the Western perspective and the Islamic one can lead to new perspectives, new insights and a new way of thinking about religion, culture and life. In this context, Kundry's kiss is symbolically highly significant.

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[911] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (London: Penguin, 2017), 421.

[912] This is not to say that the Islamic beliefs themselves contain valuable lessons for Western society. When it comes to the emancipation of women, for instance, the West has advanced far ahead of the Muslim world. This is due to Western ideals of gender equality – progressive ideals that are incompatible with the view of women in Islam. Considering the fact that the West is still facing great challenges concerning economic, political and social equality between men and women, the espousal of Islamic viewpoints regarding gender roles (think, for example, of gender segregation) would be detrimental to the West's progress towards gender equality.

Kundry serves the Grail community, i.e. the West, *and* Klingsor, i.e. Islam. She kisses Parsifal in Act 2. This is when the young knight is wandering in Klingor's domain, where Kundry serves Klingsor only. However, her kiss awakens Parsifal. Due to her kiss, he becomes enlightened, meaning that he discovers a compassion that enables him to achieve knowledge. Kundry's supposedly evil deed in service of the bold challenger called Islam becomes the very source of knowledge about compassion, knowledge that underlies the insight that something new must be found, something beyond both Christendom and Islam – a universal idea that includes, unites and redeems all mankind. As the mediator between the Grail community and Klingsor, Kundry demonstrates that through the communication between the West and Islam, through critical encounters between these two opposing spheres, this insight can arise. In other words, the key to spiritual unity is the communication between worlds, compassion between spheres that are alien to each other.

This awareness is put forward by *Parsifal*'s music, too. William Kinderman points to the end of Act 2, where C major and B minor 'ram into one another'[913] after Parsifal exclaims, 'may it crush your lying splendour into mourning and ruin!', and subsequently swings the spear in the sign of the cross. According to Kinderman, 'the C major sphere is deeply invested with the spiritualised ritualism of the Grail Scene in Act 1, whereas the B minor realm is bound up with the wild, agitated music heard from the very beginning of Act 2'.[914] The sound reminiscent of the righteous kingdom of the Grail does not merge with the sound coming from Klingsor's evil realm – it clashes with it. But despite the incompatibility of both worlds, they exist mutually dependent on each other. Klingsor's realm cannot exist without the suffering Grail community. The Grail community, on the other hand, can only be redeemed through the suffering that Klingsor's realm emanates. Only through his encounter with Klingsor's realm, and through his struggle in Klingsor's realm, can Parsifal become wise and hence become the redeemer of the world of the Grail. Klingsor's disruptive force did not happen *to* Parsifal and the Grail knights but *for* them. It created an opening that made it possible for Parsifal to change. The pain and strife, the life crisis that Parsifal went through, allowed the latter to awaken, to become a new subject and to start a new life. The setback experienced in Klingsor's realm formed the opportunity to end the old paradigm and start a new one. This is symbolised by the collision between C major and B minor, after which Klingsor's magic garden withers away and the road towards a new world is opened up. So even though the C major realm of the Grail is

[913] William Kinderman, *Wagner's Parsifal* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 250–251.
[914] Ibid., 251.

incompatible with Klingsor's B minor realm, the good and evil that these two realms represent are not radically opposed to each other.

This is best shown by Kundry, who stands in between these two spheres. She, as previously stressed, is both a force for good (the Grail community) *and* bad (Klingsor). The music illuminates this ambiguous, dual role. When she is under the spell of Klingsor's evil scheme, we hear the *Zaubermotiv*. A fragmented, premature version of the *Zaubermotiv* can be heard for the first time in Act I , when Kundry tells Gurnemanz that the balsam comes from a place far beyond the latter's grasp, namely Arabia (where Klingsor's magic castle is located). Moments later, when Gurnemanz reflects on how Kundry inflicted suffering on the Grail community, we hear an elaborate version of the *Zaubermotiv* as Gurnemanz recalls that Titurel 'while building the castle, found Kundry asleep in the undergrowth in the wood, numb, lifeless as if dead'. Gurnemanz's reference to Klingsor as 'that evildoer beyond the mountains' is accompanied by the *Zaubermotiv* too. This motif, which clearly designates evil, also sounds, however, when Kundry kisses Parsifal halfway through the second act. Her kiss induces the evolutionary pressure to evolve into a new being: the redeemer of the world of the Grail. But this was not Kundry's intention. Under Klingsor's spell, she sought to seduce Parsifal, as she had seduced Amfortas, in order to defeat the pure fool. Yet the effect or outcome was positive. Thanks to her evil act, Parsifal would change for the better. It enabled him to break Klingsor's power, to destroy the latter's realm and to return to the Grail Order as the redeemer.

The *Zaubermotiv* thus resonates with both good and evil. Although we associate it with Klingsor and Kundry's seduction, we also find that it originates from the descending semitone of the Communion theme in A♭ major with which the work begins (and to which many motifs relate and from which many motifs derive). Since the *Zaubermotiv* signifies the seduction of Amfortas, which took place before the drama starts, the Communion theme can be considered a derivation of the *Zaubermotiv*. The connection between Amfortas's wound (which is the result of Kundry's seduction) and the descending semitone of the Communion theme is stressed when Parsifal, in his moment of awakening, exclaims, 'How can I, a sinner, purge my guilt?' The music accompanying this phrase coincides with the music that accompanies Amfortas's supplication to God in Act 1 – to be precise, the moment when the kings asks for his wound to heal.[915] According to Kinderman, 'both passages in turn arise as a development of the semitone

[915] Ibid., 240.

motif first heard at the end of the prelude, which in *its* turn is derived from the dissonant inflection within the Communion theme and, ultimately, from Kundry's poisoned kiss'.[916]

What this means is that the new communion rite, the 'new ceremony' as Badiou deems it, should be based on the insight evoked by Kundry's kiss. This insight that causes Parsifal to reject desire, i.e. the blind will, is tied to the notion that Parsifal is drawn to the Grail. This connection, according to Kinderman, is evidenced by the fact that the appearance of the Communion theme at the moment when Parsifal, during his awakening in Act 2, exclaims, 'Redeem me, rescue me from hands defiled by sin!' (in the keys of C minor and A♭ minor) 'corresponds exactly, in key and orchestration to Amfortas's description of the communion service in Act One'.[917] 'At the same time', Kinderman points out, 'the F♭–E semitone set to "Redeem me" and "rescue me" corresponds enharmonically to the melodic peak on E–D♯ of Kundry's "serpentine" motif at the kiss, reminding us that it is through her embrace that Parsifal becomes "hellsichtig", realising his potential for compassionate insight.'[918] The Holy Grail is this very insight. It is not a cup or a ritual but compassionate insight that consists of the capacity to see things as they really are, to see how everything is interconnected.

This vision of unity is embodied in the musical ending of the work, too. According to Kinderman, 'it is as if different and distinct elements in the motivic world of *Parsifal* became indivisibly fused in the closing minutes'.[919] Drawing an analogy between *Parsifal*'s ending and Pangaea, which 'once held together the present continents in a unified configuration', Kinderman argues that 'the end of *Parsifal* seems to expose some such prehistory of components, assembling the pieces to reveal a larger whole'.[920] 'Once Parsifal opens the shrine', Kinderman explains, 'the differences between the motivic units associated with the Grail are largely effaced, as these elements are blended together while their harmonic implications are spun out, drifting upward in rising sequences.'[921] The unity has been restored; the *principium individuationis* has been undone.

Significant in this regard is that in the final passages, we hear the Prophecy, Communion, Grail, Faith and Spear motifs – motifs signifying the realm of the Grail and its community as a whole rather than specific individuals. Even the Parsifal theme does not appear in the final passages, even though it signifies the redeemer. The reason for this is that ultimately the

[916] Ibid.
[917] Ibid., 241.
[918] Ibid., 242.
[919] Ibid., 279.
[920] Ibid.
[921] Ibid.

Bühnenweihfestspiel is not about Parsifal. It is not an individual person, an idol, who redeems but an insight centred on the idea of universal compassion – an insight that transcends the individual and applies to all members of the community as a means to improve themselves and their world.

Although *Parsifal*'s universal message corresponds to the quest for spiritual unity in the modern world, the twentieth century (the bloodiest century so far) and the nascent twenty-first century (marked by global Islamic terrorism, nuclear threats and so forth) have not provided signs indicating that spiritual unity is on the horizon. The current world situation foreshadows apocalyptic events rather than world peace, mankind's redemption in the form of a utopian world. A better world, let alone a perfect one, is nowhere in sight. Beyond the notion that mankind is in dire need of spiritual unity, there is a void.

Parsifal strikingly corresponds to this assessment of today's world. Ultimately the work merely gives voice to the need for spiritual unity, meaning that it does not present a vision for the future, a blueprint for a new world. Certainly, Kundry's kiss induces the evolutionary pressure that enables Parsifal to evolve into a new and higher human being. He thus undergoes inner change, a change of mind, and as a result of this change, he marches off to Monsalvat to regenerate the Grail community. But the actual regeneration of the community and its society does not come to pass. All we finally witness is how Parsifal delivers his message of compassion and that he becomes the new king. But then it stops. Like the Knights of the Grail, we are left with the message of compassion and the insight that regeneration is possible on the basis of compassion.

This indicates that regeneration does not primarily concern the world but the mind. *Parsifal* ultimately tells us that by regenerating the mind, one can create the possibility of redemption. Hence the distinction must be made between regeneration on the one hand and redemption on the other. Redemption, after all, follows on from spiritual regeneration. It is the possible consequence of regeneration. Regeneration, in its turn, is the result of compassion, which is the source of both spiritual renewal and eventual redemption. However, there is no direct link between compassion and redemption. Compassion leads to spiritual renewal, but through spiritual regeneration, the possibility of redemption is created. In other words, through compassion one achieves knowledge and through knowledge one can achieve redemption. *Parsifal*'s central maxim, 'enlightened through compassion' (*Durch Mitleid wissend*), should therefore be complemented with another maxim, namely *redemption through knowledge*. This raises the question of *how* redemption can be achieved through knowledge. Which brings us to the third and final section of this chapter.

3. Redemption Through the Pursuit of Knowledge

Let us begin our examination of the question of redemption with the following observation regarding the reception history of *Parsifal*. As mentioned earlier, the ambiguity that characterises *Parsifal*, due to a peculiar interweaving of motives stemming from Christianity, the Arabic world, Buddhism and Western philosophy, has made the work appealing to a variety of individuals and groups, from the day of its premiere until today; in the course of its history, the work has been described as Christian, Mystic, Theosophical, Aryan, Buddhist and Islamic. In the context of Islam's presence in today's Europe, we even spoke of an 'Islamisation of *Parsifal*'. This, however, is a *contradictio in terminis* because an Islamisation of *Parsifal* would effectively mean the very abolition of the work. This is obviously not the case. Thus, as soon Islam starts to engage in the work, Islam is already beyond itself. The same is true for all other religions or worldviews that call on *Parsifal*. The reception history of *Parsifal* shows that the work is capable of adjusting to a wide variety of different and conflicting worldviews. Herewith *Parsifal* exposes the relativity of the beliefs and worldviews in question and consequently the transience of the particular cultures from which those beliefs and worldviews stem. In short, the reception history of *Parsifal* confronts us with the loss of identity, the loss of culture.

And so does the work itself. Alain Badiou rightly claims that *Parsifal* 'does not succeed […] in changing the ceremony into something new, in really displacing the new ceremony'.[922] In *Parsifal* we find ourselves on a threshold we cannot cross. The work displays how the old world is withering away, but it does not provide any clues as to what the future will look like (which reminds us of the ending of *Götterdämmerung*: the *Ring* cycle ends with a question rather than an answer, thus urging us to seek answers for ourselves). The Christian symbolism that surrounds us appears like a faded fresco that will soon disappear forever. The effect of this experience can be best described as sacred in Roger Scruton's sense of the term. Scruton's idea of the sacred, after all, coincides with the insight that everything that we hold dear depends upon our mortality. *Parsifal* indeed provides the image of a culture that is dying or perhaps has already died. This is one of the main reasons that the work manages to evoke such a powerful sentiment of awe through which the truth of life is revealed, namely that all things are impermanent and life is ultimately meaningless. Due to this combination of beauty and knowledge, Wagner's *Bühnenweihfestspiel* can rightly be deemed a work for the end of the world, a work for the last stage of human life. In order to illuminate this thought, a brief

[922] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 159.

comparison with the sacred art of the Sand Mandala can prove to be helpful. In this Tibetan Buddhist art, beauty and knowledge merge, too. Yet, the two are not equally important. Beauty is a vehicle for human knowledge. The mandala is not meant to evoke or enable a naive experience of beauty whereby one merely enjoys the mandala's bright colours. On the contrary, it should encourage one to see through or beyond the mandala's wonderful appearance, meaning that one learns to see things as they really are, namely transient. Hence the ritualistic destruction of the mandala once it has been completed. The art of the sand mandala is thus not for art's sake but for the sake of knowledge.

Similarly, in *Parsifal*, knowledge ultimately prevails over beauty. The work demands that we behold and listen with a purpose. In spite of Nietzsche's claim that *Parsifal*, as 'the stroke of genius in seduction',[923] would deprive one of the possibility to gain access to knowledge due to its overwhelming sensuality, *Parsifal* actually corresponds with Nietzsche's take on the purpose of art as expounded in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (1878). In this book, the philosopher applauds the notion that 'the artistic development of modern music has forced the intellect to undergo an extraordinary training', through which 'our ears have become increasingly intellectual', which means that 'we are much better trained than our forefathers were to listen for the *reason in it*'.[924] As a result of this changed mode of listening, aesthetic enjoyment is no longer based on 'the basely sensual' but 'is transferred to the brain'.[925] Art no longer presumes 'a metaphysical meaning in the art object'.[926] Instead, art teaches us 'to regard human life as a part of nature'.[927] As a consequence of this insight that art provides, 'we could give art up',[928] (that is to say the idea of transcendence in art) without 'forfeiting what it has taught us to do',[929] namely to find joy in *this* life rather than in the illusion of an otherworldly realm. Art should thus be a vehicle for knowledge, a means to evolve from an 'artistic man' into a 'scientific man'.[930]

The need for this development is expressed by *Parsifal*, too. Moreover, the work explains that through this development one creates the possibility of redemption. But does *Parsifal*'s

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[923] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967), 184.
[924] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (London: Penguin, 1994.), 129–130.
[925] Ibid.
[926] Ibid., 132.
[927] Ibid., 136.
[928] Ibid., 137.
[929] Ibid.
[930] Ibid.

vision of redemption not give voice to a longing for renunciation, a desire to leave *this* world? We do not see Parsifal changing Amfortas's society when he returns to Monsalvat to redeem the Grail community. Could this perhaps indicate that Parsifal's task is to redeem the community from this world of ongoing suffering and to launch them into a state of Nirvana, a state of nothingness? The answer is no. Although Parsifal's enlightenment consists in the insight that the will to live is the cause of suffering and therefore should be constrained, Parsifal's goal is not to deny the will but to sublimate it. Parsifal's victory is not the annihilation of the will but the transformation of the will into a force of knowledge. Knowledge of the will allows Parsifal to achieve self-overcoming, to improve his mind, to see reality as it is.

To arrive at a proper understanding of this claim, we should start by re-evaluating the concept of Parsifal as 'the pure fool'. The settled notion of Parsifal being an innocent fool encompasses the idea that the fearless youth that appears in Act 1 is not yet emotionally mature in the sense that he does not know what compassion is. He simply does not recognise the pain and suffering of other beings. He initially responded cheerfully to the death of the swan, and while witnessing Amfortas's torment, he just remains standing, not understanding the nature of the king's suffering. Through Kundry's kiss, however, he finally awakens. Parsifal has evolved from a fool into an enlightened human being. He has lost his innocence and has come to know the reason why there is suffering in the world, namely because of a lack of compassion, i.e. selfish, affirmative behaviour rooted in ignorance, that is to say the delusion of self, which prevents the individual from seeing that all life is interrelated. Realising that he himself was once ignorant, and realising that because of his ignorance other beings have suffered, Parsifal is determined to take up his role as redeemer. But what does this role actually consist of? In other words, what is it that Parsifal does that could lead to redemption? He combats ignorance by demonstrating how we err, how we remain trapped in our *Wahn* and fail to see reality as it is.

It is important, in this regard, to note that Parsifal's awakening actually means that he learned to see *the cause* of Amfortas's suffering. To become enlightened thus means that one learns to see *the right causes*. Most people, Nietzsche noticed, fail miserably in designating the true cause behind their actions. In *Götzen-Dämmerung,* Nietzsche elaborates his view that mankind is inclined to 'mistake the effect for the cause'.[931] As an example, he refers to Lodovico Cornaro who, in his famous *Discorsi della vita sobria* (1558), prescribed his restricted diet as the key to

[931] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 492.

longevity, a claim that was widely regarded as plausible since Cornaro himself had reached extraordinary age. Yet Nietzsche points out that Cornaro's diet was not the cause of his long life but his slow metabolism. His dietary choice was precisely the effect of this cause. Cornaro's physical constitution simply prevented him from practicing other, say more abundant, eating habits. Thus, 'his frugality was not a matter of "free will": he became sick when he ate more'.[932] Cornaro's crucial mistake was that he failed to see that his will to pursue that particular diet was not a matter of free will but actually originated in the sheer physical properties and/or circumstances that he did not choose and could never have chosen.

According to Nietzsche, the reason for this delusion is the separation of existence into a transient world of appearances, on the one hand, and an eternal ream of ideas, the so-called true reality, on the other. Christianity has tricked man into believing that only this latter, inaccessible world is important and valuable to us, while the world in which we actually live is worthless. As a result, man has become estranged from the natural world, including his own human nature. This alienation prevents him from seeing where his so-called free will actually stems from, namely the chaotic, intricate domain of the natural world that creates the conditions for our thoughts and actions. So instead of seeking explanations for his physical and mental state in nature, man seeks causality in the domain of that other world, a world governed by religion and morality.

This imaginary world offers an explanation for everything we encounter in life. On the basis of the divine revelation of the word of God, it has revealed to man the difference between good and evil, and it has explained which thoughts and feelings are right and which ones are wrong. Born and raised in such a religious sphere, say the Christian or the Islamic world, one's (indoctrinated) mind becomes naturally accustomed to the dogmatic explanations at hand, and therefore one automatically seeks to explain life's events in terms of God and sin. This provides a great sense of comfort since these clear-cut 'causes' enable one to cope better with difficult and unknown things. For example, when it comes to 'the "explanation" of *disagreeable* general feelings', morality and religion make us belief that 'they are produced by beings that are hostile to us (evil spirits: the most famous case – the misunderstanding of the hysterical as witches)'.[933] It is believed that these disagreeable feelings are 'produced by acts which cannot be approved, […] they are produced as punishments, as payment for something we should not have done, for what we should not have *been*'.[934]

[932] Ibid.
[933] Ibid., 498.
[934] Ibid.

The religious law that tells you what you are not allowed or supposed to be (e.g. a homosexual or a disbeliever in God) is the same law that tells you what you are or should be, e.g. a 'proper Jew', a 'good Christian', or a 'true Muslim'. Since religion (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) teaches the absolute Truth and claims that every explanation, every cause and every moral rule it offers is based on that very Truth, i.e. the eternal, immutable word of God, it suggests that one can live in accordance with God's Truth, His divine will, which implies that, conversely, one can also go against God's will. In this way, religion suggests that one can choose between good and evil, choose between a life of virtue and a life of vice.

The delusion of free will is precisely rooted in this rigid, black-and-white thinking that religion has taught mankind. Because you can choose between good and evil, you are responsible and therefore punishable. This is a prerequisite for any system that seeks to enslave its subjects. And so, it is in religion's best interest to consider men free. In Nietzsche's words:

> Men were considered 'free' so that they might be judged and punished – so that they might become *guilty*: consequently, every act had to be considered as willed, and the origin of every act had to be considered as lying within the consciousness.[935]

Hence the delusion of self, which is a necessary prerequisite of believing in free will. The belief in the self and free will constitute a locus of moral responsibility: the individual who, by clinging to the notion of self and free will, remains intellectually trapped, caught between guilt and punishment and hence incapable of seeing the real causality behind one's deeds, which is far too complex to be captured in terms of mere good and evil. Nothing could be further from the truth than to designate a single doer behind the deed. One is part of a whole containing infinitely complex patterns and thus an infinitely complex of causes one can never fully unravel and comprehend, moreover because one is entangled in this very whole beyond which there is nothing, no transcendent realm of ideas, no objective God view, no 'outside'. This means that there can never be a final judgement, a final answer, an ultimate cause. Reality is simply too chaotic and too complex for us to grasp in its entirety.

Although we can never attain full understanding of reality, we can nevertheless achieve a better understanding of it. The first step towards a better understanding is to discard the belief in a transcendent order, a 'true reality' outside the natural world. And the first step towards a better grasp of the causes behind deeds is to acknowledge that the natural world, the fragmented world in which we live, is the only source of knowledge and the only source of value. To acknowledge this is to acknowledge that our knowledge will never be complete and that our

[935] Ibid., 499–500.

values will be subject to continuous change. It therefore takes a resilient, dynamic and free spirit to espouse such a frame of mind – a spirit that only a few exceptional individuals possess. Hence, enlightenment can only be attained by a singular being who has an unbound spirit, a being whose mind is not controlled by religious beliefs, a being beyond good and evil – that is to say a being like Parsifal.

As previously mentioned, Parsifal fulfils his role of redeemer by combatting ignorance, meaning that he demonstrates how we err, how we fail to see reality as it is. Now, precisely by being a fool in the sense that he does not know any fact about his life and is completely unfamiliar with established norms and customs, Parsifal can lay bare our delusions. The following remark by Alain Badiou with respect to Parsifal's lack of individuality is an excellent starting point for the elaboration of this point:

> It should be noted […] that Parsifal is not really a *character* at all. As soon as you try to imagine him as a character you run into trouble. [...] Ultimately, Parsifal does not do much of anything; in fact, he basically does nothing at all. He says 'no' at a certain moment, and that's about it. As a character, he is flat. […] So I think the idea of Parsifal as a character should be entirely abandoned and he should actually be regarded as a *signifier*. The '*Rein*', or 'pure', signifier is what he embodies.[936]

Parsifal's purity can be explained on the basis of Badiou's understanding of the void as a condition for openness and universality. 'The void', according to Badiou, 'neither excludes nor constrains anyone. It is the absolute neutrality of being.'[937] Because Parsifal possesses such neutrality, he can be regarded as a universal signifier, signifying openness, the possibility for a subject to change, or, in Nietzsche's terms, achieve self-overcoming.

As soon as Parsifal appears in Act 1, his 'foolishness', i.e. openness, is evident. When Gurnemanz asks a few simple background-related questions, the only answer he receives is a dumb 'I don't know'. Parsifal does not even know his own name and appears to lack any sense of identity, any sense of self. This, however, is precisely his redeeming quality. While the members of the Grail community are trapped by their Christian beliefs and rely on God's grace for their salvation, Parsifal's mind is not burdened by any notion of a divine creator or a transcendental realm of truth beyond earthly existence. The only world that Parsifal knows is the world in which he lives: the natural world, a world without God. Since he is unfamiliar with religion and morality, his thinking cannot be dictated by superstitious laws of faith. It is only

[936] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 139–140.
[937] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 31.

natural for Parsifal to rely on his instincts and to think for himself, and since he does not know what God is, he won't look to another world or another life for his redemption but is bound to seek redemption in this world and in this life only. By being committed solely to the natural world, Parsifal is pre-eminently capable of creating a better understanding of causality and hence reality, moreover so because he does not have a cultural identity. Instead of being part of a cultural construction, such as the Christian realm of the Grail, he is intertwined with nature, which explains why the hero, as Badiou remarks, 'has very little singing to do'.[938] Unfamiliar with culture, Parsifal lacks the language skills to express his mind. Nature, after all, is not a realm of words but one of deeds, of physical action. Coming from nature, Parsifal is thus not inclined to preach his views. Rather, he is prone to *demonstrate* them.

Parsifal's intervention in the realm of Monsalvat consists primarily of dismantling the religious presuppositions on which the Grail society is based. Trapped in a domain dominated by theocentrism, the members of the Grail community evaluate their lives in terms of good and evil, sin and punishment. The prevailing idea is that Amfortas is guilty of having committed a sin. Because he succumbed to temptation, he now must suffer unbearable pain. That is his punishment for disobeying God's divine will. He could have resisted Kundry, but he chose not to do so. In other words, while he did have the possibility to choose good, Amfortas decided to choose evil. Therefore he is responsible for his deed, and consequently his punishment is justified. This mode of thinking obviously betrays belief in free will and the self. Amfortas is guilty because he was free. And so, he – as the single doer behind the deed – bears moral responsibility. But when Parsifal enters the Grail Order, its devout members are confronted with an opposing frame of mind. Unlike the Grail community, Parsifal does not project his identity onto the causes of things since he does not have an identity. Therefore, to put it in Nietzsche's words, he is incapable of having 'faith in the ego as cause'.[939] As a result, Parsifal is able to display a more objective perspective on the causes behind the deeds. He does so by demonstrating that what he does and what he becomes is not merely the result of *his* will or intention but is due to external factors beyond his control, too. Herewith Parsifal elucidates what, according to Nietzsche, applies to all men, namely

> that no one *gives* man his qualities – neither God, nor society, nor his parents and ancestors, nor he himself. […] No one is responsible for man's being there at all, for his being such-and-such, or for his being in these circumstances or in this environment. The fatality of his essence is not

[938] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 139–140.
[939] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 495.

> to be disentangled from the fatality of all that has been and will be. Man is not the effect of some special purpose, of a will, and end; nor is he the object of an attempt to attain an 'ideal of humanity' or an 'ideal of happiness' or an 'ideal of morality'. It is absurd to wish to devolve one's essence on some end or other. We have invented the concept of 'end': in reality there is no end.[940]

But is the coming of an innocent fool who shall redeem Amfortas not prophesied, and is Parsifal, then, not the effect of a special purpose, a divine will? And is it not Parsifal's vocation to fulfil his duty as redeemer, meaning that he is destined to attain an ideal of humanity, highest bliss and morality? Yes, it is, but only in the eyes of the Christian community members. *They* see Parsifal like that. Parsifal himself, on the other hand, does not consider himself a tool of God. And, as we shall later see, the redemption Parsifal will fulfil is far from a Christian redemption. Actually, it is by all means a redemption *from* the Christian belief system.

That Parsifal himself did not choose to be an innocent fool and was not given the qualities that define one, but instead accidentally grew into a fool due to exceptional external circumstances is clear from the outset. As explained in Act 1, Parsifal was raised in isolation because his mother, Herzeleide, did not want her son to become a warrior like his father, Gamuret, who died in battle. That is not to say that Herzeleide's goal was to turn Parsifal into a fool. Her goal was simply to protect him from a life of warfare. Being a worried mother, she did not want her son to die like his father did. The result of his isolation, however, was that Parsifal did not learn anything about the world. Hence, when one day a group of knights came on horses 'along the forest's edge', the young Parsifal did not recognise them as knights but as 'a glittering array of men'. Because he felt instinctively drawn to their impressive appearance, he decided to follow them, not with the slightest sense of purpose but out of sheer curiosity. As he lost their track, he finally ended up alone in the wilderness, where he found himself surrounded by 'wild beasts and giants'. These circumstances forced Parsifal to toughen up and desensitise himself, and for the sake of his own protection (and to be able to hunt for food), he had to make a weapon: the bow with which he killed the swan.

Although it was Parsifal who shot the arrow that pierced the swan's breast, he is not the single doer behind the deed. He was just one of the many factors that led to the animal's death. The fact that his first response upon hearing about his deadly shot was cheerful shows that Parsifal did not think of himself as a morally responsible agent. When he shot his arrow, he was fully immersed in nature, and in the context of nature, morality does not exist. But in the context of culture, it does, and that was exactly the context where he accidentally found himself the

[940] Ibid., 500.

moment when he was on the hunt for prey. By sheer chance, he encountered Gurnemanz and his men, who confronted him with an entirely new way of viewing his 'deed', namely in a way in which Parsifal could be held accountable for what he had done – a way in which Parsifal's action could be judged in terms of good and evil.

This confrontation, as we know, had an enormous impact on the young man and paved the way towards enlightenment. However, neither the confrontation with Gurnemanz nor his later encounter with Kundry was initiated or consciously willed by Parsifal. After Gurnemanz banned him from Monsalvat, Parsifal was once more bound to wander through the wilderness, where Klingsor lured him to his magic castle so that he could destroy him. Kundry's kiss was meant as the last step towards the hero's downfall, but instead of destroying him, the kiss led to his awakening – the awakening needed to become the redeemer. What becomes unmistakably clear at this point is that Parsifal's awakening was not the effect of someone's will but the effect of a confluence of events. Neither Klingsor nor Parsifal intended to create or cause a moment of enlightenment. In other words, the origin of Parsifal's awakening does not lie within the consciousness. Klingsor's scheme just happened to relate to Parsifal's previous experiences in such a way that Kundry's kiss – which could have had seduced Parsifal at an earlier stage – could function as a means to trigger those memories in Parsifal's mind that enabled him to see the causality behind Amfortas's suffering. By seeing the cause of Amfortas's wound, Parsifal got to know compassion. And it is out of compassion that he decides to return to Monsalvat to redeem the Grail community.

Yet the redemption he is about to bring is not of a Christian kind. But is Parsifal's outcry after Kundry's kiss not interspersed with Christian terminology? He recalls 'the Saviour's lament' and reflects on his own foolishness in terms of sin, and ultimately he even invokes God with the words 'Redeemer! Saviour! Lord of grace! How can I, a sinner, purge my guilt?' We cannot deny that here Parsifal is repenting as a Christian. The reason for this, however, is that during this moment Parsifal fully identifies with Amfortas's suffering and therefore mimics the king's lament he witnessed in the hall of Monsalvat, where the Christian Grail ritual took place. There Parsifal had heard Amfortas referring to himself as 'the only sinner of all my people' and learned that the spear that inflicted the king's wound was 'the same Spear which pierced the Saviour'. Through Amfortas, Parsifal can thus identify with the pain of Jesus Christ, the alleged saviour and redeemer of the world. But besides Amfortas's lamentation, Parsifal also witnessed how from halfway up the dome, voices sang, 'Enlightened through compassion, the innocent fool: wait for him, the appointed one!' Acknowledging his own previous foolishness ('And I – fool, coward, fled hither to wild childish deeds!') and aware of his awakening through

compassion ('Amfortas! – The wound! The wound! It burns within my heart!'), Parsifal suddenly identifies himself with the prophecy proclaimed in the hall. He is 'the appointed one' bound to redeem the community of the Grail. Now, Parsifal does not concretely tell us how he is going to fulfil 'his mission', But he does reveal the focal point of his quest for redemption, namely that the unconscious will to live must become a conscious will – a will directed by reason.

During his awakening, Parsifal condemns 'the longing, the terrible longing which seizes and grips all my senses!' Parsifal understands that unrestrained longing had caused the degeneration of the Grail Order and not Kundry's seductive deeds. Kundry is not the cause of regression but weakmindedness, the inability to master one's drives. Thus, (sexual) desire is not bad. What is harmful is one's inability to guide desire properly. Or, to put it differently, the will is not something that should be denied but confined, that is to say affirmed in the right way. What made Parsifal a 'fool' was not that he was one with nature, i.e. the will to live (and hence ignorant about culture), but that he was unaware of his nature/will and unable to direct it properly. So, his task as redeemer is not to annihilate his natural passions by following the Christian path of asceticism. Not at all. Parsifal's task is to cultivate his will in such a way that it ceases to be a source of degeneration and becomes a regenerative force instead.

Parsifal's insight coincides with Nietzsche's notion of self-overcoming whereby aspects of our nature are transformed in such a way that those aspects help us to evolve. The human sex drive is a key example of an innate drive that has been sublimated in the course of history. Both the concept of Platonic love and Agape served to direct the sex drive in a way that it became a force that helped us evolve intellectually. Since Christianity has elevated the sex drive to a higher level of existence, it would be false to consider Christianity altogether regressive. The problem, however, is that it deems the sex drive to be evil. This, according to Nietzsche, is a crucial error. After all, it is thanks to the sex drive that Platonic love and Agape came into being. They 'have grown out of the same roots which are thought to hold the evil poisons'.[941] Since Christianity fails to recognise this and thus maintains a hostile stance towards nature, it has ceased to be a means to achieve progress. On the contrary, despite the contributions Christianity has made to human progress, it has become a driving force behind the process of man's degeneration as symbolised by the sick Grail community.

[941] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (London: Penguin, 1994), 75.

Nevertheless, if it hadn't been for the Grail knights, Parsifal would not have achieved this insight. The Grail Order offered a moral framework that enabled Parsifal to become conscious of his will. Moreover, the Grail community made it clear to Parsifal that culture is needed to tame nature. Yet the Grail community pushed it too far. In their Christian belief system, natural passions are considered altogether questionable. Parsifal, on the other hand, does not advocate vigilance towards one's passions but towards the quality of one's mind since the mind determines whether or not one's drives are steered in the right direction, meaning a direction that leads to an enhancement of life. The Grail community clearly has not been practicing the right frame of mind considering the state of decline that they are in. Parsifal's redemption to the Grail community therefore consists of introducing a new frame of mind, a new way of thinking whereby nature and culture are not mutually exclusive but mutually dependent.

By suppressing nature (the will, the passions), one undermines life (as the decaying Grail community shows). But when one leaves nature unrestrained (like the young and reckless Parsifal, who was fully immersed in nature), one's life can never be elevated; Parsifal, as we have seen, needed culture in order to become enlightened. Standing in between nature and the ascetic Grail Order, the enlightened Parsifal represents the reconciliation of nature and culture through what could be called a kind of middle way whereby one refuses to succumb to the chaos of nature and simultaneously rejects a rigorous denial of nature.

Since the Grail Order's hostility towards human passions stems from fundamental misconceptions about the natural world, its community has to attain a veritable perception of reality in order to bring about a unification of nature and culture and hence their redemption. The reason the Grail community remains trapped in a state of suffering is because it clings to a belief in God and the sinfulness of mankind. Due to this belief, the bifurcation between man and nature is maintained, which prevents the members of the Grail community from seeing reality as it is. Contrary to their belief that the natural world makes one deviate from the path towards the truth, i.e. God (which explains their aversion to nature), nature precisely provides insight into true reality. Once they finally learn to see this, which implies that they acknowledge that there is no world beyond life on earth, they can finally embrace the natural world, adopt a life-affirming frame of mind and subsequently improve their existence. This means, however, that the Grail community has to discard the metaphysical premises of its belief system and go beyond Christianity. In other words, the Christian knights of the Grail have to achieve self-overcoming, achieve intellectual growth. However, they can't reach this goal without a teacher, a guide. Hence Parsifal's return to Monsalvat in Act 3. But how is he going to teach them, show them the path to redemption?

In our analysis of the final act, it is important to bear the following three points in mind. First, as previously mentioned, due to Parsifal's lack of character, he signifies openness, the possibility for a subject to change. Second, coming from the natural world, Parsifal is not inclined to preach his views but rather inclined to demonstrate them. Third, Parsifal's intervention in the realm of the Grail does not consist in proclaiming a new doctrine but in effectively dismantling the religious presuppositions (such as the myth of free will and the self) on which the Grail society is based.

The first point concerning Parsifal's openness pertains to the beginning of Act 3. Strikingly, the Parsifal we see here reminds us of the foolish boy from Act 1 who was unable to answer Gurnemanz's simple questions. We see how history repeats itself. When Gurnemanz, upon welcoming the stranger, asks whether Parsifal has 'lost his way' and perhaps could 'offer him a greeting', Parsifal remains silent and bows his head apathetically. As in Act 1, Gurnemanz loses his temper when being confronted with Parsifal's display of ignorance, moreover because the latter does not even know that it is Good Friday and, what makes it even worse, has appeared 'armed, with visored helmet, shield and spear' on this 'holy day'.

It is clear, therefore, that Parsifal has not returned as a Christian, even though at the end of the second act, after his awakening, he announced his mission of redemption in terms of sin and guilt. The reason for this, as we have explained, is that Parsifal identified with Amfortas's suffering. He felt his pain and so, in a sense, he became one with Amfortas. This notion of identification is crucial for our understanding of Parsifal's performance in Act 3. Let us now, in order to elaborate this point, have a look at Parsifal's response to Gurnemanz's narrative of the death of Titurel. Upon hearing him say, 'Titurel, my holy hero, whom the sight of the Grail no longer revived, is dead – a man like all men!', Parsifal exclaims:

> And it is I, I,
> who caused all this woe!
> Ah! what transgression,
> what burden of guilt
> must my foolish head
> have borne from eternity,
> since no repentance, no atonement
> can free me of my blindness;
> though I was appointed for deliverance,
> the last path of deliverance escapes me,
> lost as I am in hopeless error!

At first glance, it seems that Parsifal expresses guilt over the Grail community's downfall. During his first visit to Monsalvat, he had the opportunity to bring about a regeneration of their order, but he had failed to recognise the cause behind Amfortas's pain. This failure is Parsifal's eternal 'burden of guilt'. Since Titurel has died, Parsifal feels that he has failed in his redemptive task. Despite the fact that he had previously expressed 'repentance' (after receiving Kundry's kiss, when he cried 'Amfortas! – The wound! The wound! It burns within my heart!'), he had not been freed from his blindness, that is to say ignorance. He feels that he, although 'appointed for deliverance', is still the same fool, still 'lost in hopeless error' and thus unable to guide the Grail community on the 'path of deliverance'.

This confession of guilt, however, heavily contradicts Parsifal's scheme of redemption. The very purpose of his return, after all, is precisely to overcome Christian guilt. Why then would Parsifal assume that he bears moral responsibility for the Grail community's situation? The answer is that Parsifal at this point already assumes the role of king. This explains why Parsifal speaks in Christian terms of guilt and sin. At this moment, the kingdom of the Grail is still Christian, which means that the role Parsifal has to take over is a Christian one. This role, as we know, is still fulfilled by Amfortas, with whom Parsifal strongly identifies. As previously mentioned, the latter shared in Amfortas's sufferings and in this way became one with the king of the Grail. This explains why Parsifal initially speaks as if he were Amfortas. By becoming one with Amfortas, Parsifal, in a sense, becomes king. But since Parsifal's purpose is to go beyond Christianity, he must go beyond Amfortas, too. Therefore Parsifal must change the role of king, meaning that the Christian king has to de-Christianise. Amfortas's voice of faith thus has to transform into Parsifal's voice of knowledge. The very process of this transformation is revealed in the text above. We see how Parsifal first adopts Amfortas's Christian voice and then, almost imperceptibly, starts to speak as the enlightened future king, dismantling the doctrine of sin that governs the mind of his predecessor.

Looking at the first lines once more, we can indeed see that Parsifal's words coincide more with Amfortas's 'sinful' act (letting himself be seduced by Kundry) than with Parsifal's failure to recognise the cause of suffering. It was not Parsifal but Amfortas who had caused the decline of the Grail Order. And it is Amfortas who, being a Christian, reflects on his past in terms of sin and guilt. Since the wound won't heal and the pain lingers, Amfortas concludes that his sin has incurred a debt of eternal punishment. But Amfortas's conclusion is wrong. His suffering remains not because of having committed a sin but because of the *belief* in sin. Due to this belief, Amfortas is unable to end the pain experienced as a punishment from God. In order to end his suffering, he must therefore stop believing in the doctrine of sin and the existence of

God. Hence Amfortas's remark that 'no repentance, no atonement can free me of [his] blindness'. By maintaining the idea of penance and reconciliation, one necessarily maintains the doctrine of sin. The idea of sin blocks access to enlightenment; sin prevents one from seeing and knowing things as they really are. The idea of sin can thus be considered a blindness that prevents one from seeing the path to redemption. This blindness, which is caused by the belief in sin and guilt, is of course the belief preached by Jesus Christ, the alleged son of God. It was Jesus who 'was appointed for deliverance'. He was the one who would redeem the world. But redemption never came. Christendom has failed to fulfil its promise of redemption which is symbolised by Amfortas's wound that will not heal. And this wound does not heal because the king is trapped by the belief in man's sin. Therefore, by maintaining the Christian faith, one remains lost, 'lost in a hopeless error'. This error, once again, is the belief in sin, which blocks access to a proper understanding of reality and hence redemption. It is for this reason that Amfortas says: 'the last path of deliverance escapes me'. In other words, Christianity is unable to offer 'the last path of deliverance', the path to redemption.

That Parsifal, after completing his response to Gurnemanz, has actually delivered an anti-Christian message is obvious to those who know with what intention Parsifal has returned to the realm of the Grail, namely to liberate it from the irrational religious beliefs that govern the kingdom. Knowing what Parsifal is up to, we understand why Parsifal's message is a message in disguise. At this stage of the process of de-Christianisation, it is too early to proclaim the end of a Christian era. Parsifal must first be brought to Monsalvat, where he is expected to heal the sick king. That this will effectively entail the heralding of a new culture is known only to Parsifal and the watchful spectator familiar with the hero's spiritual development. In the meantime, he has to conform to the prevailing cultural norms of the Grail community, which is in sync with Parsifal's strategy to assume the role of king. After letting Kundry wash his feet, he allows Gurnemanz to baptise him. This official conversion to Christianity allows Parsifal to emphasise and amplify his role as king, as evidenced by the redeemer saying, 'let Titurel's knight anoint my head, that he may greet me today as king!' Whereas Parsifal previously assumed the role of king in a clandestine manner, he now assumes this role explicitly. Gurnemanz, in his turn, not only accepts Parsifal as his new king ('thus do I bless your head, as king to greet you'), he also seems to recognise and acknowledge that 'the change of celebrant',[942] as Badiou deems the transfer of power from Amfortas to Parsifal, will entail a change of celebration, too. After having greeted the 'pitying sufferer and enlightened healer as

[942] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 154.

king', Gurnemanz euphorically exclaims: 'As you have endured the sufferings of the redeemed, lift the last burden from his head!'

Gurnemanz acknowledges that *a change of mind* is needed in order to achieve redemption. What is more, he seems to affirm Parsifal's redemptive insight that the doctrine of sin should be discarded. By speaking of 'the sufferings of the redeemed', Gurnemanz considers Amfortas already redeemed, while in fact the latter is still in pain, still waiting for redemption to come. Yet Parsifal has 'endured the sufferings of Amfortas', meaning that Parsifal has become one with Amfortas, sharing his pain and sharing his guilt. Amfortas's guilt has become Parsifal's guilt, too. But precisely through the experience of Amfortas's guilt has Parsifal become enlightened, meaning that he has come to the realisation that by disregarding the doctrine of sin, redemption can be achieved. So, having adopted Amfortas's guilt, Parsifal takes this guilt away. Being freed from his guilt, Amfortas can be considered already redeemed, as he is to Gurnemanz. The latter therefore acknowledges that the Christian belief in sin should be discarded in order for the Grail Order to be redeemed. In other words, the members of the Grail community, including Amfortas, have to change their way of thinking in order to attain redemption. So Amfortas's redemption ultimately consists of a change of mind. But is he capable of letting go of his belief in sin? Will he be able to see that redemption cannot be found through the identification with Christ but only through a reconciliation with the natural world?

While this insight began to arise in Gurnemanz's mind, the nature in the realm of the Grail changed accordingly, depicting the reconciliation between the kingdom and the natural world. Parsifal observes that the 'magic flowers that [he] once came upon' never looked as 'fresh and charming, nor smelled so sweet of youth or spoke with such tender love' as 'the grass, the blossoms and flowers' he sees today. Nature does not look unnatural anymore, which means that an anti-natural view of life has given way to a worldview compatible with nature – a worldview, moreover, that effectively enhances life as the 'fair meadows' display. Gurnemanz's suggestion that today's beautiful state of nature is due to 'the magic of Good Friday' does not contradict this notion. The death of Christ is followed by his resurrection on Easter. As we have previously pointed out, in the context of Parsifal's return, Good Friday signifies the death of the old paradigm and the rise of a new frame of mind from the ashes of Christianity. But it is not Parsifal's aim to impose a new ideology on the Grail community in the sense that he, as the new leader, will dictate new laws to obey or new rules to live by. Instead of lecturing others what to think and what to do in terms of 'Thy shall!', Parsifal seeks to challenge the members of the Grail Order in such a way that they will enlighten themselves. Since the mind is the pathway to redemption, it is the task of the individual to redeem himself

through his own thinking. This is why Parsifal assumes his role as a Christian saviour until Gurnemanz attains enlightenment for himself and by himself. In response to Gurnemanz's remark that the thriving nature is due to 'the magic of Good Friday', Parsifal exclaims in an overly Christian fashion:

> Alas for that day of utmost grief!
> Now, I feel, should all that blooms,
> that breathes, lives and lives anew
> only mourn and weep!

These words of sheer resignation clearly contradict the life-affirming attitude that Parsifal wishes to introduce in the kingdom. However, to create a sense of contradiction is exactly Parsifal's intention. If Gurnemanz will agree with these words that reflect a Christian, life-negating frame of mind, he will certainly say 'yes, indeed!' in response. That would be a sign to Parsifal that Gurnemanz has not yet attained enlightenment and is still trapped by the doctrine of sin. In case of disagreement, on the other hand, Gurnemanz will surely contradict the words in question. That, in turn, will be a sign that Gurnemanz has freed his mind from the Christian belief. Luckily enough, his answer to Parsifal proves that indeed he has. Nature is not shrouded in sorrow, Gurnemanz exclaims. On the contrary, 'all creation rejoices' because 'man redeemed no longer can see him himself on the cross but feels freed from the burden of sin and terror'. The fact that the natural world around them is flourishing is a sign that nature is 'absolved from sin'. 'Today', Gurnemanz pronounces, is the day that nature 'gains its day of innocence.'

Now that Gurnemanz has openly declared the end of the Christian era, the kingdom of the grail is officially undergoing a paradigm shift. A sorrowful nature has turned into a joyful one. To Kundry, who is filled with grief, Parsifal explains: 'Your tears too are a dew of blessing: you weep – and see, the meadow smiles.' Nature, previously considered a source of suffering, can finally be considered a source of happiness. Since Gurnemanz (who has the highest authority amongst the Grail knights) has publicly embraced this life principle, Parsifal's lesson can be enshrined in the Grail ceremony. As bells ring to indicate midday, Gurnemanz announces that 'the hour has come'. The kingdom of Man is at hand. The theocentric worldview must give way to a *Weltanschauung* based on life in the natural world, a life free from sin. But is Amfortas willing to espouse this redemptive frame of mind, willing to say yes to *this* life?

The king's demand is unambiguous; his only wish is to die. 'Death', Amfortas laments, is 'the lightest atonement for sin.' At the sight of his dead father, Amfortas is overwhelmed with guilt. Not only does he feel responsible for Titurel's death, he also feels guilty for not being

able to vitalise his community. Believing that his beloved father is in heaven now, in the divine presence of Jesus the Lord, he prays that Titurel may 'entreat of Him that His holy blood, if once more today His blessing, shall revive these my brothers, as it gives them new life'. He himself, however, should be denied the life-enhancing blood of Christ. Titurel's call to Jesus should be, 'Redeemer, grant my son repose!' Shocked by Amfortas's reluctance to perform his service, the knights exhort him to 'uncover the Grail' since that is his plight as king. But Amfortas vehemently refuses to keep on living. Confronted with the prospect of continuing life, Amfortas exclaims:

> No! No more! Ha!
> Already I feel the darkness of death enshroud me,
> and must I yet again return to life?
> Madmen!
> Who would force me to live?
> Could you but grant me death!
>
> Here I am - here is the open wound!
> Here flows my blood, that poisons me.
> Draw your weapons! Plunge your swords
> in deep - deep, up to the hilt!
> Up, you heroes!
> Slay the sinner with his agony,
> then once more the Grail shall shine clear on you!

Yet, not the sinner but the belief in sin must be slayed in order to regenerate the Grail. For someone convinced of his own guilt, this is a well-nigh impossible task. Haunted by regret, Amfortas feels that life has lost its value and is no longer worth living. Due to this spirit of resignation, the Christian king is unfit to lead, let alone able to regenerate his community, as evidenced by his unwillingness to perform the ceremony. Amfortas proves to be the embodiment par excellence of the Christian denial of life, as opposed to Parsifal, who embodies the spirit of affirmation. It is clear, therefore, that there could not be a greater difference between two kings than between Amfortas and Parsifal. This is all the more striking because Parsifal has endured the sufferings of his predecessor. He suffered with him, *as him*, bearing Amfortas's pain and guilt as if it were his own. However, whereas Amfortas wishes to die, Parsifal wants to live.

In order to properly understand the distinction between these two disparate outlooks on life (one world-negating, the other affirmative), we must concentrate once more on Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence. The frightening thought that one's life, with all of its sufferings,

deceptions and failures, will return in exactly the same way as before, time and again, can either incite the will to renounce one's life or to embrace it. If someone who believes in God and an afterlife would apply this thought experiment, asking himself whether or not he wants his life to occur, time and again for all eternity, it is more likely that he will be inclined to say no to this life and instead look with hope to the afterlife, to a transcendental realm beyond his own world. But if someone who is aware that this life on earth is the only life were to do the same thought experiment, this person would probably be disposed to respond in an affirmative manner. After all, there is no next life to pin one's hope on, so if there is a life to be cherished, it is this one. And since life is filled with hardships and misfortunes that one would prefer not to endure again, the thought of eternal recurrence encourages the individual to change his life for the better, to always improve himself so that if he were asked: 'Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?',[943] he would say yes without hesitation.

The individual who is willing to embrace the doctrine of eternal recurrence is a strong human being; not only is he unafraid to face reality as it is, not clinging to God and a transcendental realm in order to cope with the present, he is also motivated to undertake action to improve and enhance (his) life. Therefore, by espousing the doctrine of eternal recurrence, a human being can go from strength to strength, whereas the doctrine of sin increasingly weakens man. The doctrine of eternal recurrence separates those who put their faith in God to deal with life from those who rely on themselves in order to do so. It thus separates Amfortas from Parsifal. Although both figures experience a great deal of suffering in their respective lives, the first prays to God in heaven for his redemption while the latter relies on his own power to save himself. This is because in Parsifal's eyes only the natural world exists and everything that occurs in this world only he can judge, not God. Only Parsifal can save himself from his past sufferings. He can either succumb to his painful past or draw power from it by rethinking the past in such a manner that the past proves to be worthwhile. In other words, in order to achieve redemption, Parsifal has to 'recreate all "it was" into a "thus I willed it"'.[944] He has to rely on the power of his intellect to find redemption, which implies that he is responsible for his own redemption. And so is anyone else, including Amfortas. The question therefore arises whether and how Parsifal will be able to incite Amfortas to achieve enlightenment and redemption by himself.

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[943] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1974), 273.

[944] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 251.

The answer lies in the fact that Parsifal returns with the spear that once wounded Amfortas. That is to say that he returns with a relic enshrined with the cause of the king's suffering, the suffering Parsifal endured, too. The spear ties the cause of Amfortas's pain with that of Parsifal. It embodies the cause behind both Amfortas's and Parsifal's sufferings, namely the will left unrestrained. But it also signifies two very different outcomes; whereas Amfortas interpreted the cause of his pain in terms of sin, which led him to renounce life, Parsifal chose to consider the same cause as an opportunity to strengthen himself, to embrace life and overcome its difficulties. The centrality of the spear in the final scene is all the more significant because the spear is both a symbol of power and futility; the spear inflicted great suffering, but from this suffering, one can gain power with which to revitalise one's life. By bringing back the spear, Parsifal reveals to Amfortas the possibility of an alternative outcome of this painful past. The same burden that incites one to resign can also incite one to affirm life.

This, however, presupposes a mind unburdened by the doctrine of sin, a mind reconciled with the natural world. Therefore Parsifal encourages Amfortas to be 'absolved and atoned'. Only if one discards the doctrine of sin and reconciles with nature will one be able to draw power from one's suffering. But the extent to which one can gain strength through hardship is determined by the power of one's intellect. Although nature's drives and passions cannot possibly be deemed wicked, they can nevertheless be detrimental to one's life if left unrestrained. It takes a powerful mind to turn chance into necessity and to interpret a painful event so that it serves to strengthen and enhance one's life rather than weaken it. This was the insight Parsifal attained when he felt Amfortas's wound 'burning within his heart'. Hence Parsifal's gratitude to Amfortas's suffering 'that gave pity's mighty power and purest wisdom's might to the timorous fool!'

Compassion's power is that it can evoke a type of thinking needed to turn suffering into a source of strength. This is a type of thinking that acknowledges the natural world as its sole origin and hence recognises that reason can neither be separated from the body nor the circumstances and influences to which the body is exposed. At the same time, it is a type of thinking that refuses to blindly submit to nature's random drives. It precisely seeks to do the opposite, namely to submit nature to its own will by restraining the affects that prevent one from fulfilling one's potential and amplifying those that help one to increase his power. To this end, one has to be engaged in an unremitting pursuit of knowledge about one's life in the world. One's quest for knowledge consequently takes place *in* the world. Like Parsifal, one should be fully immersed, active and involved in it, both physically and intellectually. Since everything in the natural world (the only world, hence the only world knowledge can be derived from) is

always changing, one should continuously question and re-evaluate one's knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge is therefore never finished. Moreover, since it serves to enhance life, one should continuously seek new challenges, new oppositions and new difficulties to overcome, that is to say new sources of knowledge, new ways to attain new insights.

These are to be found in both the present and the past. In the context of the present, the past can reveal itself as a forgotten foreshadowing or a previously unseen possibility and prove to be useful and valuable when (re)considered in light of the present situation. Amfortas's wound, for instance, gained new significance in Act 2 when Parsifal reflected on what he had seen in the past but had not then understood or at least had understood differently. Parsifal could never have arrived at a new understanding of the wound if it weren't for the variety of experiences he collected throughout his life's journey, full of obstacles and setbacks he had to overcome. To put it more succinctly, the close and exclusive connection to the natural world enabled Parsifal to reinterpret Amfortas's wound. Lacking this connection, Amfortas himself has not been able to do so. His Christian belief prevented him from developing a new understanding or new assessment of his burden. Whereas knowledge based on the natural world is dynamic and subject to change, religious knowledge proves to be static instead. Hinging on the eternal word of God, religious knowledge barely adapts to changing circumstances, resists re-evaluation, and certainly does not invite one to question its metaphysical claims. So as long as Amfortas abides by his faith, his wound will be marked by sin and hence linger. For the wound to heal, it is therefore imperative that Amfortas renounce religious knowledge and start to engage in the pursuit of knowledge based on life in the natural world – a world where the human body is free from sin.

The religious frame of mind that reigns in Monsalvat therefore must be replaced by a spirit of enlightenment, that is to say reason compatible with human nature. In the final scene, we see how Parsifal openly discards the metaphysical premises that have determined life in the kingdom of the Grail up to now. Parsifal has returned with the holy spear that was used to pierce Jesus' side and injured Amfortas, too. The latter's wound could only be healed by someone who is pure – not of pure blood but of pure spirit, a spirit that originates in the natural world and is unaffected by the Christian doctrine of sin (the name 'fool' ['Tor'] is therefore not a disparaging name; Parsifal's ignorance of religious dogmas precisely enabled him to think for himself). The spear's return, as we recall, underlines the importance of renouncing this doctrine for the sake of Amfortas's healing and the regeneration of his people. By discarding the doctrine of sin, one automatically discards the superstitious belief that Jesus' blood is capable of reviving lives. Legend has it that Joseph of Arimathea caught Jesus' blood on the cross in the chalice,

i.e. the Holy Grail, that Jesus used during the Last Supper.[945] But since the idea of blood has evolved into a spirit of enlightenment, it is no longer holy blood 'which flows and wells within the Grail' but 'holy blood's kindred fount', namely the spirit of enlightenment – a spirit related to Jesus' blood insofar as it indicates the same purpose, which is to regenerate life. In order to fulfil this purpose, however, the spirit of enlightenment may 'no longer remain hidden', may no longer remain eclipsed by the myth of blood that keeps its adherents trapped by the belief in man's sinful nature. This belief prevents them from achieving its promise of regeneration for it demands submission to God's unalterable will. It thus forbids people from thinking for themselves, from examining life on their own terms and from finding solutions to life's challenges on the basis of evidence and experience instead of divine law – the very law that keeps Amfortas from finding a solution to his pain. By taking over the role as king and by pronouncing the end of God's law in the kingdom, Parsifal clears the way for Amfortas to embark on a quest for knowledge that can enable him to overcome his struggles in life, provided that he embraces the spirit of enlightenment that is for the taking now that the new king has finally proclaimed: 'Uncover the Grail, open the shrine!' (in other words, unleash the spirit of enlightenment that can redeem mankind!)

Whether or not Amfortas espouses this spirit, let alone achieves redemption, remains unclear. Since he kneels before Parsifal in worship, it is safe to assume that Amfortas accepts Parsifal as his new king. But that is not to say that Amfortas has been redeemed at the end of Wagner's swansong. All that we finally know is that Parsifal has presented to him the possibility of redemption. It is up to Amfortas to fulfil it. The final line of the work, 'Redemption to the Redeemer!', is significant in this regard. However, due to its elusiveness, it can lend itself to various interpretations. Dieter Borchmeyer, for one, has argued that 'redemption comes about when Parsifal, having resisted Kundry's attempts to seduce him, brings back the sacred lance and replaces Amfortas as leader of the Grail community. Thus he brings "Redemption to the Redeemer".'[946] On this interpretation, redemption means 'a restitutio in integrum',[947] a return to the Grail Order's original state: 'The Grail community is restored, Klingsor's alternative world is exorcised, and nature returns to its paradisiacal innocence. Christianity is stripped of its historicity in *Parsifal* and restored to the iterative structures of myth.'[948]

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[945] Paul Schofield, *The Redeemer Reborn: Parsifal as the Fifth Opera of Wagner's Ring* (New York, NY: Amadeus Press, 2007), 79.
[946] Dieter Borchmeyer, *Drama and the World of Richard Wagner*, trans. Daphne Ellis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 240.
[947] Ibid., 239.
[948] Ibid.

But as we have firmly ascertained, Parsifal does not aim to recover or reaffirm the roots of Christianity but to go beyond them. This view is also held by Alain Badiou, according to whom '"Redemption to the Redeemer" means: Christianity has ceased being a doctrine of salvation, and it is only through the figural or aesthetic reaffirmation of the Christian totality […] that something beyond Christianity can be found.'[949] By arguing that only Christianity's aesthetic dimension remains, Badiou hints at the idea of *Kunstreligion*, which, as Glenn Stanley points out, 'has often been advanced as the aesthetic foundation of *Parsifal*'.[950] For example, by Carl Dahlhaus, who has claimed that '*Parsifal* is undeniably a document of the nineteenth-century "religion of art"', which 'does not mean that art should be venerated as religion […] and works of art worshipped as religious icons, but that religion – or its truth – has passed from the form of myth into the forms of art'.[951] A similar interpretation has recently been given by Andrew Huddleston. The latter asserts:

> What we see gestured toward throughout *Parsifal* is not the need for a restitution of the *original* Grail Order, but rather the far more dire need to move from a problematic, ascetic form of the Christian religion to something else. And the opera, it seems to me, implicitly suggests itself *to be* that something else, in keeping with the 19th-century ambition that art might fill that gap that crumbling religion left behind.[952]

Huddleston thus claims that *Parsifal*, i.e. the work of art *itself*, replaces religion. And this would be signified by the work's final words, 'Redemption to the Redeemer'. 'Those final words', Huddleston writes

> float up ethereally, and to the sound of twinkling harps, the opera performance itself and the fictional world within it come together at last: What was a church choir singing in exultation in Monsalvat we now come to see as an opera chorus in Bayreuth, one whose hymn fills us, and them, with the hope that the Knights' Christianity can heal the wound it smote by raising itself to *Kunstreligion*.'[953]

Although Huddleston is quite right in claiming that the Grail Order, as this chapter claims, too, 'stands in need of redemption *from* their perceived redeemer',[954] namely 'the strenuously anti-

[949] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 103.
[950] Glenn Stanley, '*Parsifal*: Redemption and Kunstreligion', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 154.
[951] Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 143–144.
[952] Andrew Huddleston, 'Kunstreligion Redeemed: From Religion to Art in *Parsifal*', in *Nietzsche und Wagner: Perspektiven ihrer Auseinandersetzung*, ed. Jutta Georg and Renate Reschke (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 277.
[953] Ibid.
[954] Ibid., 269.

sexual form of asceticism',[955] he wrongly asserts that *Parsifal,* i.e. the work of art itself, *is* the redemptive message, that is to say the actual *fulfilment* of redemption. The work, after all, does not bring redemption; it merely proclaims a *promise* of redemption – a promise, moreover, that *you* have to fulfil. *Parsifal*'s final line, which reads 'Redemption *to* the Redeemer!', underlines this notion of self-redemption. Not only does the formula indicate that Parsifal, the redeemer, has redeemed himself, it is also an announcement about the future, an announcement that says that the redeemer *shall* redeem himself. As such, the final sentence reads like an encouragement to follow in Parsifal's footsteps. Wagner's *Bühnenweihfestspiel* urges the individual spectator to save himself. To find redemption in life is your responsibility and yours alone.[956]

Depending on whom you ask, *Parsifal*'s message is either liberating or terrifying. Nietzsche, for one, heralded the death of God with a great sense of liberation and pointed out that the end of God offered great opportunities for mankind. Yet he also observed how hard it was for most people to actually distance themselves from God. In *Götzen-Dämmerung*, Nietzsche remarks that the entire Christian belief system 'stands and falls with faith in God'.[957] By discarding God, Nietzsche argued, one would necessarily also have to discard divine law. The consequence would be that people would virtually lose everything on which they depend, including their moral beliefs, convictions, norms and values; in short, their certainties would crumble. This is a terrifying prospect, which explains why the masses hold on to their religious views even when these are no longer credible. Besides the sense of dismay that follows on from the loss of one's values, the prospect of having to invent new values all by oneself is off-putting as well for it requires great mental effort, resilience and courage. Such demands, as Nietzsche frequently stressed, apply to rare individuals only: individuals that strive to become 'higher men'. The masses, on the other hand, prefer to indulge in comfort; instead of thinking for themselves, they let religion dictate their thoughts, and instead of seeking challenges to overcome, the 'last men' choose to wallow in pleasures that soothe their nerves. The future of mankind, therefore, can never depend on the actions of the herd but depends solely on the efforts of exceptional individuals whose creative endeavours can elevate man to a heightened state of existence. But a society centred on God (or any other dogmatic worldview for that matter) is thwarting efforts to realise this. Only a society centred on man, Nietzsche believed, could provide the necessary

[955] Ibid.

[956] *Parsifal*, with its emphasis on self-redemption, is thus closely aligned with Buddhism, which stresses emphatically that one has to redeem oneself. Christianity and Islam, by contrast, teach that only God has redemptive power.

[957] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin, 1982), 516.

conditions for one to effectively engage in the pursuit of knowledge about one's life in the world, a pursuit that is crucial for developing new insights, new values and hence a new way of life – a life beyond good and evil, beyond theism of an irrational kind.

By giving voice to this insight, too, Wagner's *Parsifal* proves to be closely related to Nietzsche's thought. What is more, like Nietzsche's philosophy, *Parsifal*'s message also proves to be highly relevant to today's world, where belief in God is still omnipresent. Even though the Christian God has largely disappeared in the West (particularly Western Europe), the Christian deity has been largely replaced by his Islamic counterpart in whose name terrorist attacks are conducted on an unprecedented scale, with the sole purpose of destroying those unfaithful to 'the only true religion', Islam. The nihilism in which this religious terror is rooted simultaneously manifests itself through an opposing attitude of indifference and resignation that has been adopted by many living in the West today. As discussed in the previous chapter, Western culture lacks self-confidence and seems to be overcome by fatigue. The state of the West, therefore, resembles the state of the sick and tired Amfortas, who was incapable of recognising the cause behind his life crisis and unable to develop a vision through which he could render life meaningful once more.

Yet Amfortas was offered a way out, and so is the individual in today's nihilistic age. Parsifal's appeal to his predecessor to espouse a spirit of enlightenment and to evolve from a religious man into a 'scientific' being, opened a pathway to a life in which one no longer needs to look to God, an afterlife or some ideal future in order to make sense of the present and/or to create a fulfilled and meaningful existence. This explains why *Parsifal* does not present a vision for the future, a blueprint for an ideal world to come. Badiou is thus quite right in observing that in *Parsifal* we find ourselves 'poised between nostalgia and intrusion',[958] in between an old world and a new world to come. However, in Badiou's eyes, there is something rather dissatisfying about the notion that the work does not succeed in breaking through the impasse, 'in changing the old, Christian ceremony into something new'.[959] According to Badiou, 'humanity and politics ultimately cannot do without ceremony',[960] cannot do without a great collective ideal.

Parsifal tells us otherwise. Its message to the modern world, contrary to what Abdalqadir as-Sufi and Richard H. Bell claim, is that the purpose of life does not lie in trying to reach for a final destination or to achieve an ultimate end. On the contrary, the work teaches us that

[958] Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London: Verso, 2010), 159.
[959] Ibid.
[960] Ibid., 158.

purpose can be found right now, in the present, provided that one renounces the belief in God and transcendence and reconciles with the natural world. This is a world without miracles, a world where one can no longer come up with superstitious explanations for things one does not really understand. It is a world where insights are always changing and where one is bound to change one's mind all the time. In this world, there is never a definitive answer nor a final outcome, and hence one's search in this world for understanding is never-ending. And yet, it is far from unsettling to live in this realm devoid of absolute certainties. It actually offers tremendous solace. By being engaged in the pursuit of knowledge about one's life in the natural world, one lives in sync with the reality that 'all is flux and nothing stays still'. This implies that one has reconciled with reality as it is, including the transience of one's own existence. Pursuing knowledge, therefore, is a way to reconcile oneself with one's mortality, a way to beat the fear of death. The pursuit of knowledge is thus very empowering. By improving one's understanding of things, one becomes more resilient, better able to deal with suffering and accept hard truths about life. So the more knowledge one attains, the more redemption one can achieve. The confrontation with hardship can precisely be an incentive or encouragement to become engaged in the pursuit of knowledge or to intensify this pursuit as it can turn suffering into joy. Without having to deny the burdensome consequences of hardship, one can nevertheless look at it with a sense of gratitude, too, since it proves to be a source of power when it incites one to pursue knowledge. Because knowledge is never complete, total redemption – a fixed and final heaven-like state of ultimate bliss – can never be achieved. The good news, however, is that one no longer has to look beyond this life for redemption. As *Parsifal* has made us understand, redemption can be found in the present as long as one's will to knowledge prevails.

Epilogue

A Brief Reflection on Wagner's Relevance to the Contemporary World

The purpose of this study was to investigate how contemporary culture can serve as a framework to recover Wagner's universality and to develop a unified conception thereof. As I hope to have shown, the universality of Wagner's work lies in its congruence with Nietzsche's tragic worldview, wherein the pessimistic insight that life is ultimately meaningless is seen as an incentive to take full responsibility for one's life, to empower oneself by treading untrodden paths – indeed, to place emphasis on what is *not* known so as to create the possibility of spiritual/existential transformation, the possibility, thus, of rendering an inherently purposeless existence purposeful. The merits of this transformative approach to thinking and acting can hardly be overstated; it is an approach that defies totalitarian certainties and allows one to outgrow one's spiritual provincialism and to overcome ethnic, geographical, cultural and philosophical-religious isolation. Yet, it is already very difficult for an individual human being to incorporate such an outward mindset into his life, let alone a community of people. Which raises the question as to how the spirit of tragic optimism as enshrined in Wagner's music dramas could ever take root in modern society.

Nietzsche, as we have seen, grappled with this question. While he initially believed that Wagner's artistic enterprise would imbue Western culture with a tragic view of life, he soon became disillusioned with the Wagner phenomenon as he witnessed its co-option by mass movements and dubious pseudo-religious cults that arose precisely as a consequence of society's inability to overcome the nihilism resulting from 'the death of God', meaning the loss of a fundamental underpinning, a transcendent foundation for life. Nietzsche prophetically foresaw that this inability would eventually result in totalitarian states, warfare, bloodshed and destruction. Now, almost 150 years have passed since Nietzsche in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* heralded the coming of a cultural revival evoked by the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Yet we have not moved any closer to establishing a tragic culture that transcends national boundaries and spiritually unifies the nations. As I have expounded in Chapters 3 and 4, it seems that we have somehow remained stuck in the state of disorientation Nietzsche already detected in his

time and that we, like the philosopher's contemporaries, seem utterly incapable of creating values that might regenerate cultural life in the West.

It is clear, therefore, that Wagner's body of work, understood in Nietzschean terms, continues to be highly topical. Just as Nietzsche seemed to have written his books for the future, so too was Wagner well ahead of his time with his music dramas. Indeed, as I sought to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, many of the insights his works provide ring true now more than ever. It remains to be seen, though, whether there will ever come a day when mankind becomes receptive to the philosopher's and the artist's plea for a tragic way of life, which is a life without God, without an absolute morality that supersedes time and place – a life without the notion of a supernatural *telos*, a higher purpose. In the eyes of many, these are precisely the necessary prerequisites for building a civilisation or maintaining one. When deprived of its metaphysical foundations, it is believed, a civilisation will inevitably crumble, as the murderous twentieth century with its atheist totalitarian regimes in Europe, Russia and China would have proved. A discussion about whether this argument is valid – it might very well be! – is beyond the scope of this study, which was mainly aimed at reclaiming the Wagnerian-Nietzschean spirit of tragic optimism that emerged so triumphantly in nineteenth-century Germany as a great liberating vision for all mankind. Only time will tell if it suits the way of the world.

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