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Memory and hypnotism in Wagner's musical discourse

Jonathan C. Gentry
Portland State University

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THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Jonathan C. Gentry for the Master of Arts in History were presented May 11, 2007, and accepted by the thesis committee and the department.

COMMITTEE APPROVALS:

[REDACTED]
Richard H. Beyler, Chair

[REDACTED]
Victoria C. Belco

[REDACTED]
Thomas M. Lockett

[REDACTED]
Steven Fuller, Representative of
the Office of Graduate Studies

DEPARTMENTAL APPROVAL:

[REDACTED]
Thomas M. Lockett, Chair
Department of History

ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Jonathan C. Gentry for the Master of Arts in History presented May 11, 2007.

Title: Memory and Hypnotism in Wagner's Musical Discourse

A rich relationship unites the composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883) and the history of psychology, especially if one considers his attempt to make music speak with the clarity of verbal language. Wagner's musical discourse participated in the development of psychology in the nineteenth century in three distinct areas. First, Wagner shared in the non-reductive materialist discourse on mind that characterized many of the thinkers who made psychology into an autonomous intellectual pursuit. Second, Wagner's theories and theatrical productions directly influenced two important psychologists – Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Christian von Ehrenfels (1859-1932). Finally, the experiences of music achieved by Wagner at his Bayreuth festivals created greater sensitivity toward psychology, especially among the more sympathetic participants.

In tracing a narrative from Wagner's first conception of a festival in 1849 to the premiere of *Parsifal* in 1882, one can also see several arcs in the evolution of Wagner's musical discourse. These include the shift from mnemonic to hypnotic techniques for giving music a voice, as well as the transition from a socially critical

festival to one of personal affirmation. Connected to both of these augmentations of musical discourse was the volatile relationship between music and text in Wagner's compositions. Important in facilitating these transformations was not only Wagner's discovery of Schopenhauer's philosophy, but also the larger contingencies of instituting a festival in the *Gründerzeit*. In looking at the reception side of theatrical productions, in addition to their staging, this thesis has been able to identify psychologically-related links important to the history of music, science, and culture.

MEMORY AND HYPNOTISM IN WAGNER'S MUSICAL DISCOURSE

by

JONATHAN C. GENTRY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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in
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INTRODUCTION

Wagner and Psychology

Traditional historical accounts mark Wilhelm Wundt's (1832-1920) establishment of his Leipzig laboratory in 1879 as the beginning of modern psychology. Trained as a physiologist, Wundt brought his experimental background, as well as his own rigorous method of observation, to bear on the "problematic" scientific pursuit of mind.¹ Recent publications have challenged the notion of 1879 as *the* monumental flashpoint of psychology's development into an independent field of thought, pointing to both earlier and later events important to our modern conception of mind.² Regardless of when one pinpoints the emergence of psychology, in the 1870s Germany experienced a distinct upsurge of interest in and new methods for exploring the psyche. The composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883) is not traditionally counted among the pioneers of psychology, but his aesthetic theories and music festival experiments constitute an important and neglected chapter in the history of psychology. One might consider Wagner's

¹ A good introduction to the history of nineteenth-century psychology is William R. Woodward and Mitchell G. Ash, eds., *The Problematic Science: Psychology in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (New York: Praeger, 1982).

² On Wundt and the recent revisions in the history of psychology see Mitchell G. Ash, "Academic Politics in the History of Science: Experimental Psychology in Germany, 1879-1941," *Central European History* 13, no. 3 (1980): 255-286; Adrian C. Brock, Johann Louw, and Willem van Hoorn, eds., *Rediscovering the History of Psychology: Essays Inspired by the Work of Kurt Danziger* (New York: Kluwer Academic, 2004); Kurt Danziger, *Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Gary Hatfield, "Wundt and Psychology as Science: Disciplinary Transformations," *Perspectives on Science* 5, no. 3 (1997): 349-382; Mary Henle, ed., *1879 and All That: Essays in the Theory and History of Psychology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

Festspielhaus (festival theater), completed in 1876, as a kind of laboratory and the Bayreuth festival an experiment with musical articulation and perception.³

The interpenetrating histories of Wagner and psychological thought connect on a broad number of topics of which this thesis chooses but a few. I primarily focus on Wagner's musical discourse (a conceptual category to be later defined) and its relationship with nineteenth-century ideas of tone perception, levels of consciousness, memory, and hypnotism. Wagner's aesthetic theories and theatrical productions adjoined with these aspects of psychology on at least three distinct surfaces. First, Wagner's belief that one could express mental functions tangibly paralleled the concurrent interests of certain non-reductive scientists. Second, participation in Wagner's theatrical discourse directly influenced notable figures in the history of depth and Gestalt psychology – Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Christian von Ehrenfels (1859-1932) respectively. Finally, Wagner's attempt to make music speak created a greater sensitivity to states of consciousness amongst those who listened, and thereby a greater interest in psychology.

This triangular approach to cultural history uses three separate analytical categories: discourse, influence, and experience. Wagner participated in the larger societal and scientific *discourse* on mind, *influenced* at least two important psychologists, and created an avenue of psychological *experience*. Yet, because of the connection between these categories, it is worthwhile to integrate the three.

³ The comparison of Wundt and Wagner is largely discursive in nature, as their institutions in Leipzig and Bayreuth occupied separate spheres of interest in psychology, with generally little crossover. However, the proximity of their chronologies and challenges in institutionalization suggest the prevalence of new ways of thinking about the mind in the late nineteenth century.

Discourse reigns-in over-exaggerated causal claims of influence and reminds us that Wagner was not the only one creating sensitivity to the subconscious.

Similarly, focusing on experience can expand the borders of what constitutes intellectual influence. For example, the contingencies of Wagner's own life directed his theories of music, while the musical experiences he created laid the groundwork for the future reception of the psychologists his ideas directly affected. I use this tripartite methodology, among other reasons, to overcome the simplistic models of intellectual history that analyze individuals as isolated purveyors and receptors of ideas.

Wagnerian Theatrical and Musical Discourse

Similarly, I introduce the vocabulary of Wagner's 'theatrical discourse' and 'musical discourse' in an attempt to retrieve the scholarly discussion of Wagner's music-dramas from trans-temporal abstraction and to place it in an experiential context of historical contingency. Wagnerian theatrical discourse was a network of the planning, performance, and experience of Wagner's compositions. Representing this distinct theatrical culture as a network highlights the inseparability of Wagner the man, Wagner's music, Wagnerites, and the Wagnerian experience, and my use of theatrical discourse refers to their synergetic entirety. With every step Wagner made toward staging his theoretical theatrical discourse his devotees and detractors informed the actualized form. Although it is quite obvious that Wagner did not compose or stage his works in isolation, scholarship often conveys this impression by failing to adequately take social context into account.

Historians generally characterize the group of devotees around Wagner as a movement or a phenomenon of Wagnerism. The use of theatrical discourse endeavors in part to dig under the superficiality of ‘ism’ and retranslate it as the collective creation of shared experience, and that experience as a conversation. ‘Movement’ is an equally problematic and vague term. Who is moving what and where? As an alternative I suggest participation, with its varying degrees, in a theater-based discussion occurring before, during, and after the performance. The movement is the exchange of some form of language among the members involved in the discourse – the composer, the performers, and the audience. Wagner designed his festival experience to be a pedagogical movement of ideas, desiring response from a participatory audience. In some very real sense a dialogue passed between the composer and the spectator.

Within this larger theatrical cacophony, my research spotlights the voice of music. Wagner assigned to his music distinctly linguistic faculties and considered music an essential part of the theatrical dialogue. In fact, one could distill much of Wagner’s theoretical concerns and staging activities down to his desire to use music to communicate ideas with equal or greater clarity than written language.⁴ In other words the Bayreuth festival was a kind of experiment with giving music the capacity for more precise prosody. The importance of this experiment for the

⁴ I am by no means the first person to note Wagner’s desire to make music “speak,” but by camping genealogically on this idea I expand on what is usually a secondary topic in other scholars’ research. See Thomas S. Grey, *Wagner’s Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Michael P. Steinberg, *Listening to Reason: Culture, Subjectivity, and Nineteenth-Century Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

history of psychology lies in the fact that when Wagner's music *speaks*, it largely talks about the mind, directly to the subconscious of the listener.

Other connections exist between Wagner and psychology, especially if one considers the content of his at times controversial narratives of Eros and Thanatos. However, my research focuses on Wagner's music, in part because so much attention has already been given to the exegesis of his libretti, often to the neglect of the music.⁵ Sound in general has been a comparatively neglected primary source and topic in historical inquiry, though recent scholarship has begun to alter this trend.⁶ I am using music, then, as a *text* for inquiring into late-nineteenth-century psychological and Germanic culture. This works especially well in studying Wagner, because he himself wished to use music as a text – a vessel of ideas exchanged and interpreted between persons. In this exploration of musical discourse I am ironically limited to written texts about music, since I am dealing with a pre-phonographic society. Such lack of recorded sound also had a tremendous impact on that culture's experience of music, a factor that must be kept in mind when considering musical discourse. In a pre-phonographic sound-scape,

⁵ Given the relationship between music and text in Wagner's drama it will be impossible to ignore the libretti, but I include them and their interpretations only so far as is necessary to discuss the music.

⁶ Recent publications include Nora M. Alter and Lutz Koepnick, eds., *Sound Matters: Essays on the Acoustics of Modern German Culture* (New York: Berghahn, 2004); Michael Bull and Les Back, eds., *The Auditory Culture Reader* (New York: Berg, 2003); Charles Burnett et al., eds., *The Second Sense: Studies in Hearing and Musical Judgment* (New York: Warburg Institute, 1991); Paolo Gozzo, ed., *From Number to Sound: The Musical Way in the Scientific Revolution* (Boston: Kluwer, 2000); James A. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999); Jonathan Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

no definitive versions of any work existed, making musical listening an inherently social and unique affair. As far as possible then, every performance should be analyzed individually, because every musical experience was different and contingent on larger theatrical conditions – further reasons for considering Wagner’s operas in terms of theatrical discourse.

Historiography

My topic is interdisciplinary in bridging music history with the history of science through a methodology of cultural history, and in doing so speaks to a variety of fields. Given the often incoherent nature of Wagner’s writings and ideas, intellectual and cultural historians have generally attended little to Wagner, leaving the treatment of his ideas to biographers and musicologists. When intellectual histories do reference Wagner, he usually figures as an auxiliary figure in discussions of Nietzsche or anti-Semitism.⁷ While we will certainly explore further the connection with Nietzsche, Wagner’s anti-Semitic attitudes are somewhat auxiliary in this discussion of his musical discourse. This is not to deny or excuse Wagner’s anti-Semitism, but as significant attention has recently been paid to these prejudices, I investigate other aspects of his intellectual oeuvre, including Wagner’s

⁷ See Matthew Jefferies, *Imperial Culture in Germany, 1871-1918* (New York: Palgrave, 2003); Roland N. Stromberg, *European Intellectual History Since 1789* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966); James A. Winders, *European Culture Since 1848: From Modern to Postmodern and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). Important exceptions exist, including J. W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), which uses Wagner in the vignette and then recurrently throughout the rest of the work. Burrow considers the role of Wagner as an aesthetician, in addition to Wagner’s connections to Nietzsche and anti-Semitism.

theories of mind and musical discourse.⁸

Biographers who have undertaken intellectual histories of Wagner generally do not consider the roles of musical discourse and psychology in his thought. As a professor of philosophy and a popular music critic, Bryan Magee interprets Wagner's ideas almost entirely in terms of Schopenhauer, ignoring the autonomous features of Wagner's philosophy.⁹ Historian Alan David Aberbach gives a more exhaustive and critical account of Wagner's ideas, but like Magee does not place Wagner within a larger landscape of ideas, including psychology.¹⁰ Additionally, as intellectual histories, these works tend to ignore the primary medium of Wagner's expression – the theater – and the cultural praxes of theatrical production.

Cultural historians like Carl Schorske and those following in his footsteps have used musical culture in comparative studies as one of several different categories of analysis, but few write works predominantly on the history of music.¹¹ Historian Michael Steinberg notes this hesitancy of cultural historians to engage music as the stuff of history, citing its marginalization by factors of technical expertise and elite associations.¹² As one of the few historians who cross-over, Peter

⁸ On Wagner's anti-Semitism see Milton E. Brener, *Richard Wagner and the Jews* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2006); Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Paul Lawrence Rose, *Wagner: Race and Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

⁹ Bryan Magee, *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy* (New York: Metropolitan, 2000).

¹⁰ Alan David Aberbach, *The Ideas of Richard Wagner: An Examination and Analysis* (Lanham, M.D.: University Press of America, 2003).

¹¹ Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1980).

Jelavich's work on modernism has the potential to incorporate Wagner, but in circumscribing him as a naturalistic and *völkisch* composer, excludes Wagner from analysis, a move considered in the conclusion.¹³

In juxtaposition to the reservations of many intellectual historians, historians of science have been eager to embrace the cultural contexts of their subjects. Mitchell Ash's, Kurt Danziger's, and Anne Harrington's publications on the history of psychology demonstrate the importance of institutional and national politics in the professionalization of psychology.¹⁴ However, as with most historians of science, they have only hinted at the role of aesthetics and aestheticians like Wagner in promoting the explicability of the mind. Corinna Treitel's research on the intersection of German science and the occult comes closer to Wagnerism than any other histories of science by making connections between disparate cultural concerns for psychology, but does not include Wagner among these associations.¹⁵ Although my research informs these fields of history, the scholarly discussion with which I am most directly engaged is that of the musicologists and historians of music.

¹² Steinberg, 1.

¹³ Peter Jelavich, *Munich and Theatrical Modernism: Politics, Playwriting, and Performance, 1890-1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

¹⁴ Mitchell Ash, *Gestalt Psychology in German Culture, 1890-1967: Holism and the Quest for Objectivity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Danziger, *Constructing*; Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

Wagnerian scholars often reiterate the observation that the attention given to Wagner parallels only gods and demi-gods.¹⁶ Despite a large body of Wagnerian literature – and perhaps because of the tendency toward disciplinary tunnel vision by historians of music – references to psychology are scarce. While some scholars have taken to interpreting Wagner's dramas in various psychological terms, such as Robert Donington's Jungian interpretation of the *Ring*, most work at the confluence of Wagner and psychology is actually psycho-biography of the composer.¹⁷ Aesthetician and psychologist Isolde Vetter treats the composer in "Wagner in the History of Psychology" as a mad genius in psychiatric treatment, but recognizes the need for future research to analyze Wagner's work from the perspective of the listener.¹⁸ One such attempt comes from Jerome Schulster, who argues that Wagner was aware of somnambulant states and aimed through his dramas to induce such hypnotism toward collectivist ends.¹⁹ My research confirms many of Schulster's

¹⁶ In these overblown arguments the only people usually attributed to having more literature about them are Jesus, Napoleon, and sometimes Karl Marx.

¹⁷ Robert Donington, *Wagner's "Ring" and its Symbols: The Music and the Myth* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963). The best psycho-biographies are Robert W. Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968); Joachim Köhler, *Richard Wagner: The Last of the Titans*, trans. Stewart Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Isolde Vetter, "Wagner in the History of Psychology," trans. Stewart Spencer, in *Wagner Handbook*, ed. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 143.

¹⁹ Jerome Schulster, "The Role of Altered States of Consciousness in the Life, Theater, and Theories of Richard Wagner," *Journal of Altered States of Consciousness* 5 (1979/80): 235-258. Schulster's analysis of Wagner's music-dramas "from the perspective of the listeners' experience" actually only considers two reports from participants, and in general just addresses Wagner's theories of altered states of consciousness.

conclusions about Wagner's theories, but further seeks to place those ideas within the context of their application and the history of psychological thought.

The other major subset of Wagner scholarship addressed by my thesis is that on the Bayreuth festival. Although popular histories exist in abundance, their cultural analyses generally lack thoroughness and tend to focus on twentieth-century developments. Specifically, Bayreuth historians do not seem to have undertaken thorough and comparative explorations of the numerous accounts from festival participants. Such is the case with the canonical treatment from Frederic Spotts, who improves the depth, analysis, and literary grace of Geoffrey Skelton's *Wagner at Bayreuth*.²⁰ Nonetheless, both works have little concern for the musical experiences of the first two festivals in 1876 and 1882, and are more intent through their longer chronologies on divorcing Wagner from Nazism. In Robert Hartford's introductory essay to a collection of festival reactions, he traces adequately the development of Wagner's festival idea, but unfortunately this piece is limited by its brevity.²¹ The best work dealing specifically with the evolution of Wagner's theatrical discourse (though not using that terminology) is Simon Williams's *Richard Wagner and Festival Theater*.²² Through the lens of psychology my exploration of the festival

²⁰ Geoffrey Skelton, *Wagner at Bayreuth: Experiment and Tradition* (New York: G. Braziller, 1965); Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

²¹ Robert Hartford, ed., *Bayreuth, the Early Years: An Account of the Early Decades of the Wagner Festival as Seen by the Celebrated Visitors and Participants* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

²² Simon Williams, *Richard Wagner and Festival Theatre* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994). Unfortunately, Williams sites few sources and in doing so makes not only factual mistakes, but seems to misunderstand nuances in the evolution of Wagner's aesthetic theory.

discourse adds depth to and poses questions for these histories of Bayreuth by looking at the differences between the development of Wagner's festival plans, their implementation, and their reception.

Outline of the Argument

I have organized my chapters symmetrically in order to analyze two aspects of cultural history. The first two chapters consider primarily the production of Wagner's psychological ideas and experiments, while the last two chapters look at the reception side of this cultural production in the context of the first two Bayreuth festivals. Chapter one specifically analyzes the origination and development of the theories and plans underpinning Wagner's musical discourse from 1848 through 1851. Of the four chapters it is the most purely intellectual history, which examines Wagner's theories and their historical context. I categorize the texts produced during this time into two distinct phases, dubbed the artwork and drama stages.

During the artwork stage, Wagner proposed the holding of theatrical festivals as a political act of critical social discussion in the context of the failures of the revolutions of 1848-49. In the dialogue Wagner thought music intelligent enough to articulate unconscious motives and speak to international communities against the self reliance he perceived to be society's central ill. This concern for psychological functions shown by Wagner actually paralleled the ideas of other non-reductive materialists important in the development of modern theories of mind. With the onset of the drama stage Wagner developed specific plans for a more nationalist festival showcasing the *Ring*. Theoretically, Wagner envisioned a

mnemonic system of musical signs for infusing melody with concepts. This essentially made his festival an experiment with memory and pedagogy.

In chapter two I trace the further evolution of this experiment with the linguistic capabilities of music from its theoretical birth in chapter one to the rehearsals for the first Bayreuth festival, essentially from 1851 to 1876. Since this chapter covers so much time and well-known historical ground, my aim has been to focus genealogically on ideas of musical discourse and to organize the material concisely and unique to the historiography. I divide the chronology into four separate phases: the writing of the libretto (1851-52), the first composition of music (1853-57), the second composition of music (1869-74), and the construction of the *Festspielhaus* (1872-76). Over each of these phases presided distinct patrons and supporters who shaped the theatrical discourse. Additionally, I end each phase of actualization by showing the changes to Wagner's theories of musical discourse, which evolved through two other stages: nomadic and dream.

With a stipend from Julie Ritter, Wagner was able to complete the lengthy libretto of the *Ring*, a process and source of funding that did not alter his drama stage aesthetics. In Zurich, with help from the Wesendonks, Wagner began to compose the music for the *Ring*, but the proximity of his patrons complicated his plans, resulting in the indefinite abandonment of the festival experiment. Along with the Wesendonks, the process of composition and the contact with Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788-1860) philosophy moved Wagner's theory of musical discourse into a transitional, nomadic stage in which he questioned the aims and

techniques of his mnemonic project. After Wagner himself wandered for a time through Europe, King Ludwig II of Bavaria revived hope in the possibility of a *Ring* festival, but sharp disagreements between them injured their collaboration. When Wagner returned to composing the music of the *Ring*, he liberated the music from the text in accordance with the aesthetic of his dream stage. In this stage Wagner's theories, under the influence of Schopenhauer, granted music new linguistic capabilities and sought to unleash them by hypnotizing the audience. Finally, with the backing of an influential society of patrons, Wagner and his supporters constructed the *Festspielhaus* and staged the *Ring* so as to simulate a waking dream. At this time the aims of Wagner and his patrons became simultaneously more nationalistic and individualistic, corresponding to the festival's mnemonic and hypnotic techniques for making music speak.

While chapters one and two follow a chronological organization, chapters three and four are more thematic, centering on the experiences of and reactions to the first two festivals in 1876 and 1882. After opening with either theoretical or theatrical context, these chapters explore visitors' experiences of first the theatrical discourse and then the voice of music in that discussion. These comparative summaries then look at specific reactions to the festivals by Nietzsche and Ehrenfels and the relationship between these experiences and their development as psychologists. Each chapter ends by analyzing the role of the festival in fostering identities and how that reflected either the success or failure of the experiment with musical discourse.

At the first festival Wagner largely failed to induce a state of hypnosis among the participants due to a lack of preparation on the part of both the audience and the stage craft. Additionally, social contingencies, such as which performance one attended and with whom, had decided effect on the audience's festival experience. In general participants described the *Ring* in terms of magical and physiological effect, but on the whole did not report somnambulant feelings. Consequently, listeners considered the music well-adapted to painting, but not to speaking. For Nietzsche music's inability to speak suggested that Wagner's means of musical prosody were purely effect. This conclusion and phenomenon became a jumping off point for Nietzsche's psychoanalysis of decadence. By comparison, experimental psychologists were able to procure more effective results than Wagner through tighter control of mediating conditions and more sympathetic subjects. In part this failure of musical discourse and the *Ring* festival in 1876 can be accounted for by the clash between Wagner's mnemonic and hypnotic means.

By contrast, the second festival in 1882 provided a unified front of aims, with means better adapted to provide avenues for trance-like states of consciousness. This hypnotic success corresponded with a renaissance of interest in magnetic demonstrations and clinical applications of hypnotism. On the whole participants also described the theatrical experience of *Parsifal* in sacred, mystic, and psychological terms. The more prepared spectators and Wagnerian festival atmosphere enabled Wagner to achieve his ideal theatrical discourse, and as a result many more listeners reported understanding the language of the music. The self-

selecting parallelism between 'hearing the music' and 'being an insider' created an *avant-garde* of supporters with a greater interest in the psyche and sensitivity to states of the mind. Such impregnation of music with ideas gave Ehrenfels a conception of musical perception that became the foundation for his Gestalt psychology. Although Wagner had originally set out to infuse music with collectivist ideas, by the time he was able to make music speak, for those who heard, the music rather reaffirmed the perspective of a self-constituting individual.

CHAPTER I:

WAGNER'S FESTIVAL AS A MNEMONIC PROJECT

Two pillars of revolution dominated Wagner's last concert in Dresden: Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876). On an evening in 1849, which was both Palm Sunday and April Fools Day, Wagner conducted an annual benefit concert for the state chapel, his employer. Once the applause died down, Bakunin, who was in town to incite revolution, approached Wagner and praised the symphony saying, "if all the other music ever written were to be destroyed in the coming world-conflagration, this work at any rate ought to be saved, even at the peril of their lives."¹ Though different in both physical stature and personal disposition, Wagner and Bakunin struck up a friendship, the latter pressing the former into the service of the revolution. Despite later attempts to dismiss the extent of his involvement, Wagner quite actively wrote, delivered messages, and fought for the May Uprising in Dresden. He only escaped a death sentence by incidentally lodging at a different hotel than Bakunin and sneaking into Switzerland with a fake passport.

As an exile in Zurich, having lost his prominent position as *Kapellmeister*, Wagner had time to reflect upon the ineffectiveness of the armed rebellion. For Wagner the Dresden revolution, like the imagined German nation, had collapsed

¹ Quoted in Ernst Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner* (New York: Knopf, 1933-46), 2:49. On Wagner's involvement in the revolutions of 1848-49, see 2:34-103.

from a lack of communication and cohesion.² Wagner's fascination with the necessity of revolution lingered throughout his life, but for his own part he committed himself to first reforming culture, considered by him a prerequisite for larger social upheaval. The agent of this reform was to be a revolutionary type of music in the mold of Beethoven's *Ninth*, which controversially had integrated choral singing into symphonic music in 1824. In Wagner's mind, Beethoven had raised symphonic music's descriptive ability to the verge of verbal articulation and shown the need to incorporate text. In order for music to gain its socially efficacious edge, Wagner conceived of new methods and forms of composition and staging. From Zurich, Wagner chronicled these reflections between 1849 and 1851 in extensive works of theory and made plans to increase music's capacity to speak through the form of a festival.

Although some scholars have stressed the unity of Wagner's thought during these years of writing prose, it would be more accurate to divide them into two distinct stages, each corresponding sharply with two major theoretical works – *Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (*The Artwork of the Future*) in 1849 and *Oper und Drama* (*Opera and Drama*) in 1851.³ These theoretical cornerstones were further

² For insightful treatments of the various internal antagonisms in Germany see Hans Joachim Hahn, *The 1848 Revolutions in German-Speaking Europe* (New York: Longman, 2001); Wolfram Siemann, *Die deutsche Revolution von 1848/49* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985); Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848-1851* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

³ In analyzing Wagner's aesthetic theory apart from his theatrical plans Jean-Jacques Nattiez fails to take into account Wagner's dramatic change in late 1850. See Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Wagner Androgyny: A Study in Interpretation*, trans. Stewart Spencer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Nattiez stresses the unity of thought in the Zurich's prose as a justification for using Wagner's metaphors interchangeably from one stage to another. However, given the comparative

accompanied by shorter, more direct statements of purpose: *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (*Art and Revolution*) and *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde* (*A Communication to my Friends*). For the sake of clarity, we will call them the artwork stage and the drama stage. What lay between these phases was a year that saw Wagner's last attempt for almost a decade to stage his work outside the German-speaking world and the premiere of *Lohengrin*, which made him the most important composer within it. Although these works form a comparably contiguous body of thought, important emphases should be noted in differentiating the concepts of each stage.

This chapter analyzes the artwork and drama stages by looking at both stage's biographical and socio-political context, ideas of theatrical reform, and theories of the mind. During the artwork stage, memories of the revolutions informed much of the social concerns, including the determination of societal problems and their proposed solutions. Later the struggles of living in exile formed the context of the less optimistic and more concrete theory of the drama stage.

After looking at the social context and application of these aesthetic phases, the chapter turns to Wagner's writings on how musical expression communicated the insights of inner psychical activity, theories that added an element of psychological inquiry to political discussions. Finally, this chapter explores Wagner's concepts of mental functions in the light of the contemporary philosophers and physiologists who shared similar ideas. In the move from artwork

continuity between the phases, Nattiez's claim is not without validity, but in analyzing theatrical and music discourse in terms of the festival I have discovered distinct differences.

to drama stages Wagner developed specifically memory-based techniques for making music speak, and in analyzing that shift this first chapter shows the connections between Wagner's reflections on the revolutions, festival plans, experiments with musical discourse, and theories of memory.

The Artwork Stage: Revolution and Festival

Historical Context: Individualism and the Failure of Revolution

The specter of the revolutions of 1848-49, and their failure, hung heavy over Wagner's conception the *Ring* and of festive musical drama. Consequently, Wagner's subsequent development of a festival program should be seen in the light of the revolutions and the role which festive culture had played in the politization of the public. A Parisian banquet campaign effectively forced Louis Philippe to resign, which proved to be the first domino of monarchical concessions that led all the way to Dresden. In Metternich's Europe, especially in the German states, festivals were an important space of public reflection, and highly political. In regions where direct agitation and protest against the existing regimes were illegal, festivals like carnival worked, according to historian James Brophy, as "communicative networks" that "often became the only public gatherings that connected regional cultures with the oppositional ideas of the political public sphere."⁴ That Wagner latched on so

⁴ James Brophy, "The Politicization of Traditional Festivals in Germany, 1815-48," in *Festive Culture in Germany and Europe From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Karin Friedrich (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 80. The theatrical and celebratory nature of these regular meetings gave license to participants to act out (even politically) in ways not normally tolerated.

strongly to the festival idea in 1849 should not come as a surprise, since the strength of the revolutions and the political traditions of Germany rested on such social spaces, and in the light of the revolutions the Wagnerian festival must be seen in its theoretical foundation to be a political event, designed as a space of social reform and dialogue.

Wagner also drew festival inspiration from the historical model of Ancient Greek tragedy. He first expressed this antecedent in *Kunst und Revolution's* theoretical exposition on the socializing role of Attic tragedy in Ancient Greece. Wagner's high estimation of Hellenic culture is evident throughout his literary canon and was a point of later intellectual camaraderie with the young Nietzsche.⁵ Like Nietzsche, Wagner held tragedy to be the perfect artistic expression, due to the religious and instructive nature of its production, which embraced community and reaffirmed national spirit.⁶ For Wagner a revived festival culture would be a bulwark against parasitical drains on social harmony, most especially the pursuit of wealth and its accompanying individualism.

It was most clearly around the point of individualism that Wagner's social and aesthetic critiques intersected. For Wagner, libertarian individuals lacked

⁵ On Wagner's understanding and appropriation of Hellenic culture see M. Owen Lee, *Athena Sings: Wagner and the Greeks* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Ulrich Müller, "Wagner and Antiquity," trans. Stewart Spencer, in Müller and Wapnewski; Wolfgang Schadewaldt and David C. Durst, "Richard Wagner and the Greeks," *Dialogos: Hellenic Studies Review* 6, (1999): 108-113. Understanding Wagner's perception of Hellenic theater is paramount for analyzing his aesthetic theory.

⁶ Richard Wagner, *Kunst und Revolution*, in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen* (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1900-1925), 3:23-9. All quotations from Wagner's prose come from this collection and will be cited hereafter as SSD. Additionally, all translations of Wagner's prose are by William Ashton Ellis unless otherwise noted. See Richard Wagner, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, ed. and trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895-1912).

freedom precisely because they lacked the social bonds, particularly love, necessary for the full realization of the solitary unit's potential.⁷ Here Wagner blamed the factory and the market for the isolation of modernity.⁸ In a parallel, the art industry encouraged the isolated production of music, theater, poetry, and the plastic arts. Wagner considered 'absolute music' – that separated from theatrical drama – an unnatural and egoistic expression, militating against the true essence of music in the interest of financial speculation. In his Zurich writings, a tirade against the "ruling religion of egoism" formed the central theme of his reflections about the failed revolutions.⁹ In the world of the *Ring*, such unhealthy pursuits of individual glorification lead ultimately to a pursuit of wealth, which brings into the world a curse on both self-realization and its necessary social bonds.

Like many of his contemporaries caught in a vise of modernization, where the traditions of a guild culture and new market demands uneasily coexisted, Wagner remained extremely critical of industrial capitalism all his life. Fashion's volatile influence on industrial undertakings particularly disturbed his vision of ideal production, which included most importantly the production of art. The pejoratively termed "modern art" was in essence industrial with the two-fold purpose of generating wealth and entertaining.¹⁰ Consequently, forms of collectivism popular

⁷ Wagner, *Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, in *SSD*, 3:68.

⁸ Also Wagner associated Jewishness with the social dislocation of finance capitalism, one cause of his anti-Semitism.

⁹ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:123: "...die herrschende Religion des Egoismus...."

¹⁰ Wagner, *Revolution*, in *SSD*, 3:20-24. For Wagner when art ceased to be an ends and degenerated into a means of profit, it ceased to be art and became handicraft.

during the revolutions had a strong influence on Wagner and his desire to return a sense of nobility to economic and artistic production, disconnected from the aims of profit.¹¹

In opposing self-seeking and entrepreneurial motives in society Wagner maligned the alternate strains of hyper-criticism and luxuriant disinterest he perceived in theatrical productions. Where the telescoping intrusion of overly-analytical pursuits prevailed, life was “dethroned” and “swallowed up,” giving birth to modern art.¹² Wagner despised the affluent “Philistines” who had not appreciated either the styles or the redemptive messages of *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser*.¹³ For several years the Dresden audiences had urged him to return to the grand operatic idiom and constrained production time of *Rienzi*, his only commercial success prior to 1850, while Wagner himself wished to extend the length of his operas, the limits of their musical expression, and the seriousness of their messages. Such conflicts with and concerns over the contemporary condition of operatic production remained constant in Wagner’s career. His solution was an Attic-style festival as a discursive venue of reform, designed to address the interpenetrating political, economic, and artistic constrictions of fashion and egoism.

¹¹ One should note Wagner’s notorious and life-long position of indebtedness as another factor in his antipathy to the monetary system.

¹² Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:46.

¹³ *Rienzi* premiered in 1842, *The Flying Dutchman* in 1843, and *Tannhäuser* in 1845.

The Theatrical Discourse of the Future

In the theory of the artwork stage, as well as in the later drama stage, the public festival was to unite community through an expression of unified art. Almost above all Wagner stressed the “Volk” experience in that all of society should participate in the drama, not just the wealthy and disinterested.¹⁴ One traditional structure which militated against Wagner’s ideal theatrical discourse was the theater itself, which led to a “parceling of out of the public into the most diverse categories of class and civil station.”¹⁵ As a remedy he proposed that the theater of the future be based on the Greek amphitheater in its uniformity and size. The Wagnerian aesthetic magnified the seriousness, scale of production, size of orchestra, number of participants, and even length of performances. Mirroring the socializing function of the Attic festival Wagner’s theatrical *hours* were to be spent in concentrated meditation over the community, the self, and the message of the performance.

In this process of identification Wagner’s theory of social unity emphasized the dissolution of the boundary between performers and audience, which tended to move theatrical experience into a realm of discourse.¹⁶ In the theory of his artwork stage Wagner explicitly imagined for his ideal theater and theatrical experience a combination of visual and aural effects necessary to “transplant” the spectator to the

¹⁴ In the words of Jack Stein, *Kunstwerk* proclaimed “the doctrine of an art of the people, by the people, and for the people.” Jack M. Stein, *Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960), 62.

¹⁵ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:151n: “...die durch die Trennung unsres Publikums in die unterschiedensten Stände und Staatsbürgerkategorien gebotene....”

¹⁶ See Wagner’s interpretation of the citizen’s role in Greek tragedy in *Revolution*, in *SSD*, 3:23-24.

stage. Additionally, the nature of the acting was to be such that the performer would be “completely absorbed” into the audience.¹⁷ Dieter Borchmeyer notes that while Wagner was never able to create his ideal society of citizen artists, such an aesthetic utopia remained his vision, even manifested in the eventual insularity of Bayreuth.¹⁸ Although this ideal only ever existed on paper, one can still see this envelopment of reality by theatricality in the goals of Wagner’s theatrical discourse.

In Wagner’s opinion the blurring between stage and society was not, as in the case of traditional opera, an escape from politics, but a dialogue about the political situation. Although more universally applicable than nationally focused, the politics of the artwork stage urged for national unity in the face of claims of provincial and individual autonomy.¹⁹ In Wagner’s view a proliferation of festival operas would unite a public, highly divided in terms of both class and geography, as well as make art the moral yardstick of civilization. Citizens’ contributions would aid and be consumed by “the glory of general manhood in art.”²⁰ However, in Wagner’s view it was not just any art that could do this, but only a unified expression, that in purifying the essence of art could do the same for human

¹⁷ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:151. Wagner had much to say on acting and was himself apparently superb.

¹⁸ Dieter Borchmeyer, *Richard Wagner: Theory and Theatre*, trans. Stewart Spencer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

¹⁹ On similar cultural projects see George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (New York: H. Fertig, 1975).

²⁰ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:150: “...die Berherrlichung des Menschen in der Kunst....”

participants. Culture's redemption could only come from participation in his theatrical discourse, set in the context of a collective work of art – the proposed music-drama.

The Aesthetics of Music-Drama

The artwork stage (1849-50) marks Wagner's first articulation of the theory of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (complete work of art), the union of every branch of art under the rubric of 'music-drama.' Just as eliminating the individualist values of modern society would lead to an ideal political situation, so also eliminating the "egoistic" production of music, theater, poetry, painting, sculpture and architecture in isolation would lead to an ideal expression of art.²¹ In order for the art of the future to progress to that ideal, each branch of expression was to enter into a sort of social contract with the others. Although music was not considered above this law, i.e., did not have a preeminent social distinction in the community of art, its communicative and mediatory functions made it unique.²²

As his aesthetic evolved, Wagner varied his metaphors for the role of music in drama, but in the artwork stage he used a vast ocean. This metaphor referred not only to the unbounded nature of musical expression, but also its binding function in

²¹ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:100.

²² The place of music in Wagner's thought is highly debated, not the least because of his ambiguous treatment of the subject. It is never quite clear what "rights" music loses in the subordination to the community of music-drama. Additionally Wagner's aesthetic changed with time, further complicating the question. Nevertheless it has led to an industry of scholarship and is a debate this thesis cannot wholly engage. The important works specifically on Wagner's ideas of music, music-drama, and musical discourse (my language) are Grey; and Stein.

uniting the two land masses of poetry (libretto) and dance (acting).²³ In the artwork stage music clearly had the agency to unite the arts with each other, the audience with one another, and the art with the audience. Music was the heart that binds the head and the limbs.²⁴ Wagner argued for this special and active function of music in uniting the other arts from specific historical reasons.

Wagner's Hegelian view of history consistently wove its way through his artwork stage view of music history, a heavily dialect interpretation that saw in Beethoven the synthesis and crisis brought about by music's world historical task. Despite the fact that Wagner escaped a university education, he did not escape the tradition of Hegelian philosophy. In Wagner's view Beethoven had explored the vastness of the musical ocean like a Columbus. In Beethoven's symphonies the egoist expression of music, in both its articulate confidence and courage, had expanded but exhausted the ability of music to speak. However, by the 1840s Wagner detected decadence in the untamed romantic melodies. Having brought music to its climactic individualism, Beethoven exposed its inability to garner any more specific narrative or philosophical articulation apart from drama.

Wagner's desire to make music into an agent of thought – both more philosophical and political – fueled much of his theory and dramaturgical practice.²⁵

²³ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:81: "Durch die Tonkunst verstehen sich Tanz- und Dichtkunst."

²⁴ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:97.

²⁵ Steinberg considers Wagner's infusing of music with ideology to have brought about a crisis in "musical integrity." Since Mozart musical listening had the potential to engender subjectivity – an experience of the self that remains self-critiquing and resists ossification into identity – but Wagner's crisis of musical discourse (my language), according to Steinberg,

His first task was to conscript acting and poetry as interpretive aids for music, which could also help the other art forms maximize their expressive potential. In Wagner's art of the future music was to fulfill and bring to life the latent power of acting by making it a more rhythmical expression of the ideal human body, both immediately visceral and constrained.²⁶ However, Wagner's union of tones with words was, at least according to Jack Stein, his more important and extensive contribution to the history of aesthetics.²⁷ Although many of the details were not worked out until 1851 and the drama stage, it was already clear to Wagner in 1849 that rather than the abstract lyric-less music of symphonic productions or the kitsch libretti of grand opera, his future works as music-dramas would intimately yoke the acting, narrative, and music. Music is perfected – it actually becomes music, in Wagner's view – by being able to speak directly into life through poetry and thereby leave behind absolute music for participation in music-drama.

Although Wagner developed his vocabulary independently, he used *absolute music* in the pejorative way Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) used *absolute philosophy* to refer to Hegelian metaphysics as a philosophy veiled off from the materiality of life.²⁸ Feuerbach's Young Hegelian materialism reached its peak of popularity in the 1840s, a fact illustrated by Wagner's initial dedication of

exchanged subjectivity for national identity. See Steinberg, 161, 193. Later I suggest the ideology of Wagner's music to also contain self-reifying and cultic identities in addition to that of nationalist ideology.

²⁶ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:67-72.

²⁷ Stein, 71.

²⁸ Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 20.

Kunstwerk to him.²⁹ Similarly, Wagner condemned absolute, symphonic music for its lack of traction with social concerns. In the transmutation to music-drama, opera gained an ideological, indeed revolutionary edge, communicated by both drama and music. As point and counterpoint, poetry and music worked together to tell two parts of the same story. In the artwork stage theatrical and musical discourses have the social and aesthetic task of unity. In this process the role of music is largely to break down barriers of individualism through its psychological voice.

Psychology of the Artwork Stage: Music and the Unconscious

Staging the Psyche

During the artwork stage Wagner assigned music a high but unspecified ability to describe and communicate subconscious desires.³⁰ In the composition of music-drama the orchestra functioned as a Greek chorus, providing side commentary on the motivations of the dramatic characters. Similarly, in festival theater the orchestra dialogued directly with the spectator and, as the music revealed the psychology of the actors, put the audience in contact with the activity of their own unconscious.³¹ Wagner was not alone in conceiving of a separate and thinking subconscious, but with others, who fused aspects of idealism and materialism, saw

²⁹ On the popularity of Feuerbach in the 1840s see Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1977).

³⁰ Stein likewise sees Wagner's desire to express the psyche as a driving force behind the post-1848 aesthetic theories. See Stein, 61.

³¹ On how this worked with the Hellenic festival see Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:141-45.

the mind and its hidden operations as something less ethereal than soul or spirit.

Despite the fact that Wagner had little contact with academic and scientific studies of the mind, he saw himself, as an artist, well adapted to be a psychologist. In Wagner's historical dialectic of consciousness, just as music had developed its hermeneutic antithesis in the frustrated expressions of Beethoven, the pursuit of knowledge embodied in science had also exhausted its usefulness. As music-drama was to supplant music, art was to supplant science. In Wagner's opinion the scientific pursuit had brought knowledge and even the idea of consciousness to the Western mind, but ultimately also a consciousness "of the unconscious, instinctive, and therefore real, inevitable, and physical."³² Science as practiced by many scientists had hit or else built a wall in the pursuit of mind, especially the unconscious.³³ However, because Wagner associated at this stage the unconscious with the physical and instinctive, rather than with metaphysical idealism and mystic transcendence, he considered the psyche artistically pursuable and reproducible through the excitement of bodily mechanisms.

In contrast to both the exhaustion of science and the abstractions of absolute philosophy, Wagner suggested an immersion in the senses as a pathway to access the unconscious. For Wagner the cessation of scientific practices and perspectives

³² Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:45: "Unbewußten, Unwillkürlichen, daher Notwendigen, Wirklichen, Sinnlichen."

³³ Wagner seems surprisingly cognizant of the fact that most of the influential natural scientists of the 1840-1860s accepted the existence of mind but considered it the realm of speculative philosophy, as it was beyond their methodologies and therefore beyond knowing. On this mid-century research embargo on mind see Keith M. Anderton, "The Limits of Science: A Social, Political and Moral Agenda for Epistemology in Nineteenth Century Germany," (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1993); Timothy Lenoir, *Instituting Science: The Cultural Production of Scientific Disciplines* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

was “the justifying of the unconscious, the giving of self-consciousness to life, the re-instatement of the senses in their perspective rights.”³⁴ But while science was actually too conscious to perceive the depth of the world’s materiality, idealist philosophy did not focus enough on sensations:

But so soon as thought abstracts from actuality...it can no longer bring forth *knowledge*; but utters itself as *fancy*, which forcibly dissevers itself from *the unconscious*. Only when it can fathom physicality...can it take its share in the activity [*Tätigkeit*] of the unconscious.”³⁵

In positing his art between perceived extremes, Wagner suggested a fathoming of physicality – or of art – as a balance between microscopic and macrocosmic world views, between science and philosophy. Wagner perceived the unconscious as a positive and active force with which one’s conscious self should actively unite. However, he did not think this possible through science, due to its disinterested disconnection from the unconscious, while philosophy applied the wrong methodology. By taking scientific interest in the physical world to its logical conclusion, according to Wagner, the unconscious could be revived through art, particularly music-drama.

³⁴ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:45: “Das Ende der Wissenschaft ist das gerechtfertigte Unbewußte, das sich bewußte Leben, die als sinnig erkannte Sinnlichkeit.”

³⁵ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:52: “Sobald das Denken aber, von der Wirklichkeit abstrahierend, das zukünftige Wirkliche konstruieren will, vermag es nicht das *Wissen* zu produzieren, sondern es äußert sich als *Wähnen*, das sich gewaltig unterscheidet vom *Unbewußtsein*: erst wenn es sich in die Sinnlichkeit, in das wirklich sinnliche Bedürfnis sympathetisch und rückhaltlos zu versenken vermag, kann es an der Tätigkeit des Unbewußtseins teil nehmen.” Although Ellis translates *Tätigkeit* as energy, I think it would be more accurately translated as ‘activity.’

In Wagner's dramas he intended music to reveal the staged subconscious narrative.³⁶ Although Wagner's ideas on the psychological revelations of music-drama remained vague and undeveloped during the artwork stage, he clearly gave music a broad dexterity to form concepts apart from the text. In his theory stage action drove the narrative, but the coupled music commented on the action and explained the motivation of the characters.³⁷ The orchestra was able to materialize and emotionalize complicated thoughts into a language palpable for the spectator.³⁸ Music's stream of energy could articulate the depths of normally inaccessible reaches of the subconscious. However, the voice of music was still somewhat dependent on its relationship with the libretto, which at the very least introduced the general topic of discourse.

In the artwork stage Wagner was adamant about music-drama's ability to connect the spectators with unconsciousness, though he seems at this stage to think of it as a universal, collective essence. Through both sight and sound Wagner designed his aesthetic to transport the spectator to the stage, so that they might share in the emotions, ideas, mythos, and psyche of the performers and Wagner himself.³⁹ In that theatrical proximity music not only spoke about the unconscious, but from it

³⁶ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:156-59.

³⁷ According to Carl Dahlhaus Wagner wished his music to "externalize" the poet's intentions for the sense faculties. See Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 196.

³⁸ On Wagner's unprecedented use of music to project the drama into unconsciously symbolic realms of experience see Williams, 72.

³⁹ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:156-58. Here music is efficacious in "dissolving" the boundary between reality and theatricality.

and to it. Wagner made clear his belief that only music, through the ear, could contact the inner self.⁴⁰ The composition was Wagner's expression of his own psyche and he hoped it would speak directly to the unconscious of the spectators, inasmuch as they were actively participating in the theatrical discourse. In the course of the theatrical discussion of unconscious topics, the spectators would develop a uniform understanding of and sympathy for this life-ennobling energy.⁴¹

Wagner aimed to engender social unity by making the unconscious conscious. Although initially in the context of a universal unconsciousness, Wagner seems to have been one of the first thinkers to suggest the repression of the subconscious as a cause of social problems, and its release – in this case through art – as a solution.⁴² He considered the very fountainhead of artistic expression “the impulse to bring the unconscious, instinctive principles of life to understanding and acknowledgement as necessity.”⁴³ Consequently, Wagner designed the psychology and politics of music-drama to reflect the Volk spirit and subconsciously undermine ideas individuals would have for division. Ultimately these sentiments, Wagner asserted, already existed and were only in need being released. Indeed one of the initial aims of Wagner's art and festival was to unite a fractured German revolution through a form of what would be later called psycho-therapy.

⁴⁰ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:63-64.

⁴¹ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:66-67.

⁴² L. J. Rather, *The Dream of Self-Destruction: Wagner's Ring and the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).

⁴³ Wagner, *Kunstwerk*, in *SSD*, 3:162.

The Non-Reductive Materialist Discourse on Mind

Although interest in topics that one might categorize as ‘psychology’ dates back at least to Ancient Greek philosophy, the study of the mind in mid-nineteenth-century Germany had a more recent and distinct heritage in the tradition of idealism and the reactions to it.⁴⁴ Despite Immanuel Kant’s (1724-1804) opposition to applying the methods of natural science to the mind, and to making psychology a separate branch of inquiry, his Copernican revolution in philosophy reoriented research toward the subject, by suggesting that the mind had innate structures and functions.⁴⁵ The following two generations of post-Kantian idealists contributed significantly to the history of psychology, above all through an emphasis on the philosophical importance of consciousness, but also by suggesting its ability to be mathematically quantified. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854), and Georg Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831) were convinced that psychology could become *more scientific* as an aid to philosophy, but opposed its disciplinary autonomy.⁴⁶ However, a younger group of more empirically oriented idealist philosophers helped create the 1840s and 1850s milieu of what David Leary calls *Idealrealismus*, or in the words of Michael Heidelberger: “nonreductive

⁴⁴ On the idealist roots of modern psychology see David E. Leary, “Immanuel Kant and the Development of Modern Psychology,” in Woodward and Ash; Alexander Jacob, *De Naturae Natura: A Study of Idealistic Conceptions of Nature and the Unconscious* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992); Daniel N. Robinson, *An Intellectual History of Psychology* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

⁴⁵ Leary, “Kant,” in Woodward and Ash, 31.

⁴⁶ Leary, “Kant,” in Woodward and Ash, 31-34.

materialism.”⁴⁷ Its most influential and important adherents included Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869), Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-1894), Gustav Fechner (1801-1887), Johann Herbart (1776-1841), and Arthur Schopenhauer.

The work of the physiologist and painter Carl Gustav Carus dominated the discussion of the unconscious circa 1850 and shared considerable similarity with Wagner’s theories.⁴⁸ Carus’s book *Psyche: Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Seele* (*Toward a History of the Soul’s Development*) was published in 1846 while both he and Wagner were living in Dresden, and since both were prominent artists it is hard to imagine that they were not personally acquainted.⁴⁹ Schelling’s emphases on developmental theories of nature and consciousness highly influenced Wagner and Carus, which can be seen in the aspects of their psychology promoting the temporal unfolding of mind.⁵⁰ Although Schelling was more interested in consciousness, he also thought unconsciousness to be “a necessary antecedent and corollary of consciousness,” an important contribution to the ideas of Carus and later

⁴⁷ Michael Heidelberger, *Nature from Within: Gustav Theodor Fechner and his Psychophysical Worldview*, trans. Cynthia Kloor (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 73; Leary, “Kant,” in Woodward and Ash, 34. *Idealrealismus* is not a commonly used historical or philosophical term, but characterizes well various nineteenth-century thinkers that cannot be rightly categorized as idealist or materialist. These thinkers generally had sympathy for the efficacy of natural science, but opposed philosophical systems that reduced all knowledge and ethics to the revelations of science.

⁴⁸ On Carus see Douwe Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas About the Mind*, trans. Paul Vincent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jacob. With Wagner, Carus agreed that rationality arises out of an irrational or supra-rational unconsciousness as a tool to be used and discarded in the return to Absolute Consciousness.

⁴⁹ However, Wagner did not have a copy of Carus’s *Psyche* in his Dresden library. For a list of what books Wagner did have see Curt von Westerhagen, *Richard Wagners Dresdener Bibliothek, 1842-1849* (Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1966).

⁵⁰ Leary, “Kant,” in Woodward and Ash, 32. Despite being past his most influential years Schelling’s philosophy of the unity of mind and body lingered as the preeminent feature of 1850’s psycho-physics.

psychologists.⁵¹ For Carus life was characterized by the soul's oscillation between consciousness and unconsciousness, an interaction that could be intellectually explored due to the soul's residual impact on the physicality of the conscious mind, which was easier methodologically to quantify than the unconscious.⁵² While psycho-physicists took this discrepancy in ease of quantification as a cue for further research, most physiologists such as Helmholtz took it as warning flag.

Even though he considered mind in the first decades of his career outside the limits of science, Hermann von Helmholtz was one of the few reduction-oriented researchers who made significant contributions to the history of psychology.⁵³ Because of his polymathic research interests, the fields of physics, physiology, and psychology claim Helmholtz as a disciplinary pioneer.⁵⁴ His 1847 publication on the conservation of energy initially made him a towering figure in the scientific community. This work arguably marks the most distinctive landmark in the

⁵¹ Leary, "Kant," in Woodward and Ash, 32.

⁵² Jacob, 117-123.

⁵³ Although the scholarship has produced a large body of Helmholtz literature, his work in psychology is the least researched. For example the multigraph edited by David Cahan, which in general is a good introduction to Helmholtz, is divided in Helmholtz as physicist, physiologist, and philosopher, but none of the philosophical articles deal with him as a psychological researcher. The best path to Helmholtz's psychology is through his epistemology and physiology. See Anderton; Youn Kim, "Theories of Musical Hearing, 1863-1931: Helmholtz, Stumpf, Riemann and Kurth in Historical Context," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2004); R. Steven Turner, "Helmholtz, Sensory Physiology, and the Disciplinary Development of German Psychology," in Woodward and Ash; Stephan Vogel, "Sensation of Tone, Perception of Sound, and Empiricism: Helmholtz's Physiological Acoustics," in *Hermann von Helmholtz and the Foundations of Nineteenth Century Science*, ed. David Cahan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁵⁴ Kim notes that this diverse appropriation makes it difficult to place Helmholtz historically. See Kim, 90. On some issues Helmholtz is more reductionist than others issues. Additionally, these various interests warrant Helmholtz's recurrence throughout this thesis in regard to several issues.

transformation from conceptions of vitalist force to those of energy, which ultimately amounted to a transition from soul to mind.⁵⁵ Helmholtz's argument for a non-vitalist, closed-circuit energy system suggested that mental conversions of energy could likewise be quantified. Particularly, as Richard Lowry argues, Fechner took to the measurability of mental kinetic energy as a direct result of these thermodynamic postulations.⁵⁶

Gustav Fechner was a Leipzig professor of physics, but perhaps more influential than any other German thinker of the nineteenth century in making psychology 'scientific.'⁵⁷ As with Carus, Fechner was a remote disciple of Schelling and personified *Idealrealismus* by combining mathematical formulas with an aesthetic and empirical *Naturphilosophie*. While still in bed on October 22, 1850 – or so it is apocryphally told – he hit upon the idea that one could possibly construct acts of mind and body logarithmically. Fechner then pursued such formulization for the rest of his career. After publishing an initial measurement formula in 1851, he spent the following decade trying to prove it, the results of which appeared in his highly influential *Elemente der Psychophysik* (*Elements of Psycho-Physics*).⁵⁸ Psycho-physics, designed to be an exact science rooted in the immediate ability to

⁵⁵ Kim, 39-40; 44-45.

⁵⁶ Noted in Marilyn E. Marshall, "Physics, Metaphysics, and Fechner," in Woodward and Ash, 75.

⁵⁷ For works on Fechner see Heidelberger; Jakob; Marshall, in Woodward and Ash; Woodward, "Fechner's Panpsychism: A Scientific Solution to the Mind-Body Problem," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 8, no. 4 (1972): 367-386.

⁵⁸ Marshall, in Woodward and Ash, 78-82.

observe the physical world, envisioned an 'ensouled' world where psychological and physical activities monistically paralleled one another.

In addition to the lingering influence of idealist philosophy, the organic physics of Helmholtz and E. H. Weber (1795-1878) highly informed Fechner's psycho-physics, as well as the mathematics of Johann Herbart. In complete opposition to the methodology of Kant's psychology, Herbart urged researchers of the necessity to discover not only the laws of nature, but also the laws of the mind. In *Psychologie als Wissenschaft (Psychology as a Science)*, published in 1824-25, he proposed researching "the soul in the same way that we research nature."⁵⁹ Rather than proceeding experimentally, which would not be done for another generation or two, Herbart used mathematics to express an atomist perception of mental functions, but was more suggestive than successful.⁶⁰ Having read Herbart since the 1820s, Fechner was quite inspired by his ideals, but took his cue for quantification from Weber and Helmholtz. The former's 1834 ratios for sense perception and the latter's 1847 conception of energy became the basis of a formula for the nonlinear relationship between mind and body.⁶¹ At the same time that Wagner sought to express psychology in inherently mathematical medium of music, Fechner also wished to express the activity of the mind in mathematical terms.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Heidelberger, 32.

⁶⁰ David Leary, "The Philosophical Development of the Conception of Psychology in Germany, 1780-1850," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 14, no.2 (Apr 1978), 117-8.

⁶¹ David Hothersall, *History of Psychology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 133-36.

Influential psychological ideas not only emanated from bio- and psychophysicists, but also from metaphysicians.⁶² Chief among these was the late, but rising star of Arthur Schopenhauer.⁶³ Although he had published his most substantive work in the 1810s, he first gained a significant following in the mid 1850s, in England and then in Germany. Schopenhauer's metaphysical philosophy of the 'will' laid important foundations for ideas of the subconscious. For Schopenhauer the will was irrational and the primary driving force behind our actions, yet we remain mostly unaware of its influence.⁶⁴ Schopenhauer became a key influence on many important psychological thinkers, including Wagner, Nietzsche, Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906), and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Despite belonging to an older generation of idealists, by the 1850s Schopenhauer's emphasis on the research of animal magnetism as "practical metaphysics" suggests a discursive unity with the other *idealrealistischen* proto-psychologists.⁶⁵ As with the parallelism of psycho-physicists Schopenhauer considered electro-magnetism to be a likely manifestation of metaphysical forces. For researchers at the confluence of materialism and metaphysical idealism, interest in the accessibility of the mind

⁶² See Klaus C. Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy Between Idealism and Positivism*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁶³ On Schopenhauer see R. K. Gupta "Freud and Schopenhauer," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36, no. 4 (1975): 721-728; Christopher Janaway, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially Sebastian Gardener, "Schopenhauer, Will, and the Unconscious."

⁶⁴ Gupta, 721-23.

⁶⁵ Treitel, 36. On Schopenhauer's popularity Treitel writes, "Although still poorly understood by historians, Schopenhauer's impact on the intellectual and cultural life of German-speaking Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century was immense."

generated important foundations for the development of an autonomous field of psychology and planted cultural seeds for its reception.

Wagner belonged to this group of thinkers whose affinities one might either perceive as confused or balanced, as they equally shunned and accepted both idealism and materialism. An idealist heritage grafts itself to the roots Wagner's work. He clearly borrowed Friedrich Schiller's (1759-1805) regeneration through art, while Wagner's writings also reveal Schelling's emphases on consciousness and imitation of nature. Although Wagner did not learn of Schopenhauer until 1854, until that discovery Schopenhauer's rival, Hegel, was an important influence for Wagner, especially in the cosmology of *The Ring*.⁶⁶

However, the strongest philosophical resources for Wagner circa 1850 came from more materialistic thinkers, Young Hegelians such as Feuerbach. While Wagner was not one to reduce the world to atomic collisions, the impetus behind the artwork stage was a glorification of the body, the senses, and the empirical experiences of physicality. In the words of Stein, Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* combined "Feuerbach's materialistic sensationalism and Romantic emotionalism."⁶⁷ However, it is more than Romantic emotionalism that Wagner 'forded through a river of fire,' but the idealist concern for consciousness and unconsciousness. As a materialist Wagner, like other *idealrealistischen* thinkers, conceived of the mind not so much as a metaphysical soul, but as something physiological, to be accessed

⁶⁶ George G. Windell, "Hegel, Feuerbach, and Wagner's *Ring*," *Central European History* 9, no. 1 (1976): 27-57; Sandra Corse, *Wagner and the New Consciousness: Language and Love in the Ring* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990).

⁶⁷ Stein, 68.

through the senses.⁶⁸ Along with Carus, Helmholtz, Fechner, and Schopenhauer, Wagner participated in a comparatively non-reductive, but materialist, approach to the problem of mind. Out of this discourse emerged the first generation of experimental and literary psychologists.

The Drama Stage: Exile and Fantasy

Historical Context: From *Lohengrin* to the *Ring* Project

Few scholars have taken notice of the tremor which divided the two halves of Wagner's prose production from 1849-1851. On August 28, 1850 Franz Liszt (1811-1886) successfully premiered *Lohengrin* in Weimar, an event which established Wagner, according to biographer Robert Gutman, "as the most significant German operatic composer of the day."⁶⁹ This victory followed Wagner's own attempt through much of early 1850 to stage the opera in Paris, a foray that actually lost Wagner important Parisian financiers and soured him on the non-Germanic world. Having seen his last two operas fail at the box office, the success of *Lohengrin* came as somewhat of a surprise.⁷⁰ With this popular success, fueled by his exilic and theoretical writings, the tone of Wagner's letters changed, as

⁶⁸ In the context of dreams, which will be examined in the coming chapters, Eduard Lippman sees Wagner in terms of the shift away from soul: "But even more broadly considered, his interest in the dream seems to mark a new conception of inner life that belongs to the development of volitional and existential thought and that is concerned with states of consciousness rather than with faculties of the soul." Eduard A. Lippman, "Wagner's Conception of the Dream," *Journal of Musicology* 8, no. 1 (Winter, 1990), 79.

⁶⁹ Gutman, 204.

⁷⁰ However, Wagner was unable to hear this or any other of his compositions for another decade.

well as the direction of his career. In late 1850 he began to speak exclusively of a festival to perform his Siegfried content rather than other potential operas.⁷¹ The Wagnerian aesthetic theory had moved from festival theater in general to a festival for the *Ring*.

Wagner first penned narrative and poetic drafts of what was to eventually become *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*) during late 1848 and early 1849, in that reflective winter between the years of revolution. However, Wagner put the story down to work on other dramas until his participation in the May Uprising and exile. The end of *Kunstwerk* in 1849 reflected Wagner's other interests at the time with its summary of the story of Wieland the Smith, material Wagner had considered for a full-length drama. This vacillation over theatrical plans came to an end in 1851 when he settled on *Siegfrieds Tod* (*Siegfried's Death*) as his exclusive festival drama.⁷²

Initially, the Siegfried material was to be performed in one opera, but the breadth of back story proved problematic. Wagner's first solution was to create a prequel entitled *Junge Siegfried* (*Young Siegfried*), which he began writing in May 1851. However by November 1851 he decided on four parts, essentially finishing

⁷¹ In a letter Wagner mentioned for the first time in writing his intention, though somewhat jokingly, to erect a rural festival house specifically for his own music, specifically for *Siegfrieds Tod* (*Siegfried's Death*). Richard Wagner to Ernst Kietz, 14 September 1850, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, trans. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 216-17. Hereafter cited as *SLRW*.

⁷² It should be noted that "Wieland the Smith" reinvigorated Wagner's interest in Siegfried: Richard Wagner to Theodor Uhlig, 16 September 1849, *SLRW*, 176-177. But this was short lived as in early 1850 in Paris, where *Lohengrin* gave Wagner other options. With all the changes to Wagner's theories and his on and off again approach to the *Ring* it is extremely difficult to get the timing right with its composition and relation to festival theater. However, Simon Williams gets the timing plain wrong when he says that Wagner was still writing *Opera and Drama* and returned to the Nibelung material in May 1851.

the final two libretti in 1852, even though Wagner continued to tweak the ending for several years.⁷³ Despite these changes, the plan was set by 1851 to stage *Das Rheingold* (*Rhinegold*), *Die Walküre* (*The Valkyrie*), *Siegfried* (dropping the “Junge”), and *Siegfrieds Tod* (which was changed in 1863 to *Götterdämmerung* – *Twilight of the Gods*) in four successive evenings and to premiere them simultaneously in a festival setting.⁷⁴

In November 1851, as *Oper und Drama* was being published, Wagner wrote as a preface to his earlier works – a piece called in its shorted form *Eine Mittheilung* (*A Communication*).⁷⁵ As always, Wagner’s primary purpose was to critique modern theater and suggest reforms. More uniquely, *Eine Mittheilung* proclaimed in print for the first time his resolution to stage the Ring Cycle at a festival under the conditions of his choosing. It was an announcement of his break with traditional theater and a confession of the radical and idealist nature of his new aesthetic. *Eine Mittheilung* amounted to a call for support, but with the understanding that it would be some time before he would complete the epic and until the finances could be raised. This comparatively short essay expressed the height of the drama stage and his final reflections of the “prose years.”

⁷³ Richard Wagner to Franz Liszt, 20 November 1851, in *SLRW*, 234-38.

⁷⁴ Barry Millington, *Wagner* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1984), 195-96.

⁷⁵ Richard Wagner, *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde*, in *SSD*, vol. 4.

The Drama of the Future

Concomitant with this narrowing of festive expression, Wagner refined his aesthetic theory. Much of the shift lay in Wagner's new-found boldness and specificity of theatrical plans. More than anything *Oper und Drama* – the central document of the drama stage – expanded on and gave more precision to the artwork stage theories. Wagner more fully explained his non-reductive materialism, music's ability to articulate, and the use of memory in that enunciation. In general though, one could summarize the most notable theoretical shifts as a stricter adherence to the tone poetics of music-drama.

Wagner's relegation of music to the servitude of drama – overtly making music a means to an end – has generated a plethora of responses, both then and now. Rather than the vision of music as a binding force in the artwork stage, submission of music to drama formed the main theme and metaphor of the drama stage.⁷⁶ Ultimately this did not entail the diminution of music, but an attempt to achieve a greater balance of theater, music and poetry. As the title reflects *Oper und Drama* repeatedly juxtaposed music-drama's tight union of text and tone with the music of opera, which he characterized as entertainingly emotional, but without serious textual or ideological content. In opera the drama is a means to music.

Although Wagner used music, drama, and music-drama somewhat ambiguously, clearly narrative communication was the goal. In this increased

⁷⁶ In boldface in the introduction to *Oper und Drama* Wagner writes describing opera in bold faced lettering: "that a means of expression (music) has been made the end, while the end of expression (the drama) has been made a means." Richard Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, in *SSD*, 3:231: "das ein Mittel des Ausdrucks (die Musik) zum Zwecke der Zweck des Ausdrucks (das Drama) aber zum Mittel gemacht war."

emphasis on drama, Wagner also increased the role of music in telling the story.

Stein considers *Oper und Drama*'s greatest shift to be the absence of spoken word, which is prominently featured as chorus-like in the more Hellenic artwork stage.⁷⁷

With a tighter union of poetry and music in the drama stage the 'endless melody' of music continually provided such commentary. Even in making music a means, Wagner was trying to infuse it with speaking capacities through the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Although the expositions on acting and dancing took a back seat to poetry and music, *Oper und Drama* was still Wagner's most comprehensive articulation of his ideal collective work of art. Commentators often translate *Gesamtkunstwerk* misleadingly as "total work of art." Wagner never really intended it to be exhaustive, but a total gathering and interpenetration of those arts collected. Williams describes this as "[e]quality between all elements and the seamlessness of their conjunction."⁷⁸ Generally speaking it signified the melodic blending of the singers and orchestra into one expression. In more detailed terms the *Gesamtkunstwerk* theorized uniting consonants and vowels alliteratively with the tones anthropologically considered by Wagner to be the historical root of the word. In the drama stage, Wagner argued for the birth of language out of the spirit of music, and therefore the philological return to the primeval union of now sundered tones and words as an artistic return to the essence of humanity.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Stein, 65.

⁷⁸ Williams, 66

⁷⁹ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:91-95.

The Aesthetics of Myth

Like the balance of tones and words, for Wagner immersion in (musically) dramatic myth was the middle ground between the perceived extremes of science and opera, in their oscillating hyperbole of knowledge and emotion. Whereas in the more Hegelian artwork stage science, like music, had outstripped its usefulness for comprehending the world and bequeathed the mantle to art in general, in the drama stage mythological music-drama specifically had the task of returning the pursuit of knowledge to its irrational roots. {In Wagner's cyclical cosmology, intellectual knowledge arose historically and otherwise out of the pool of Dionysian emotion, but then ultimately led one back.⁸⁰} The drama should not be too "scientific" in making the authorial intent too observable, but must let understanding proceed out of feeling. Apart from the wellspring of feeling, knowledge was for Wagner "chilling" and "embarrassing."⁸¹

Wagner considered a mythical theme in the music-drama necessary for a modern mediation between intellect and emotion. Lacking the interpretive element of music, the poet (scientist in drama stage terms) described the action and drove the narrative forward. However, the corruption of society disallowed a narrative based in the present or even in history, most especially in light of Wagner's insistence that the story have a decided moral. In order for the audience to have full emotional engagement, the historical world and its associations must not become an obstacle –

⁸⁰ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:44.

⁸¹ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:78-79.

hence the necessity for fantasy.⁸² For Wagner, every action in the world of myth and in the historical world was laden with a deep significance, only to be arrived at when imagination deconstructed the dramatic object and the instinct reconstructed its significance. Thus, “[o]nly through fantasy, can understanding have commerce with feeling.”⁸³ In light of this more focused view of music-drama, Wagner discarded his more historically-based material in late 1850 and became decisively committed staging his Siegfried tragedy.⁸⁴

But while by 1851 Wagner was somewhat disconnected from the immediacy of the revolution, he still envisioned festival theater as a venue of social reform. Through devotion to the *Ring*, he intended to remedy the perceived greed and individualism of modernity, which had caused the revolutions to fail. However, the drama stage also implied a shift from a more general spirit of revolution to nationalism. Siegfried had become a Germanic hero, especially in the context of Wagner’s recurrent inability to stage works successfully in Paris, *Lohengrin* in 1850 being only the latest example. Wagner wished to create a myth of national reform. By October 1851, or even sooner, Wagner’s intention solidified to stage the Ring Cycle in the German-speaking world, but under the festival conditions of his

⁸² Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:79-80.

⁸³ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:81: “Nur durch die *Phantasie* vermag der Verstand mit dem Gefühle zu verkehren.”

⁸⁴ It is not clear to what degree the material or the theory came first, but the theoretical gravitation toward myth and decision to stage the story of Siegfried went hand in hand. At the time of the artwork stage Wagner was considering staging dramas about Barbarossa, Jesus, Achilles, and Wieland the Smith, as well as Siegfried, with no preference for either. Despite thematic similarities, Siegfried was the least historical and mired in preconceptions that would prevent a correct, emotional, and psychological communication to the post-revolutionary public.

choosing, so that the nation could dialogically engage the mythological themes of love and redemption.

Psychology of the Drama Stage: Mnemonics

Restaging the Psyche

Just as Wagner's theatrical plans gained specificity between 1849 and 1851, so also did his theories of musical perception and articulation. Wagner proposed a mental function that converted the tone-poetics into distinct emotions, later retrievable by the human mind. In his drama stage he outlined a theory for and plan to use leitmotifs in his future music-dramas as mnemonic techniques. With leitmotifs Wagner had a device to experiment with the psyche of fantasy and to craft the music of the *Ring*. As he had hoped through sound to communicate psychologically a message of cultural reform, the composer now had a method.

With the drama stage Wagner reaffirmed his commitment to the idea that music spoke from, to, and about the unconscious, but true to the dogmatic theory of *Oper und Drama* did not all together delineate the role of music from that of the libretto. Wagner consistently blurred the difference by reaffirming the point that one cannot speak of music apart from poetry. Often when he mentioned music or poetry seemingly independently, he actually meant music-drama. In Wagner's view, if the poet dug deep enough, he or she would discover that tones lie at the root

of words, so much so that actualizing their meaning entailed the rebirth of authentic music and the realization of the potential of words for the musical poet.⁸⁵

For Wagner the music-poet revealed the unconsciousness of instinctive feelings and of nature, but in unbarring the path from consciousness reached a limit through the purely textual. Lyrics could concentrate expression palatable for the conscious mind, but at the cost of the full emotional and hermeneutic flavor. At this point melody “redeemed” the poet by making conscious the highest emotional expression, “proclaiming the unconscious,” and thereby fulfilling the poet’s revelatory mission.⁸⁶ The Wagnerian ideal consistently used music as a means to communicate ideas in both the artwork and drama stages, and even beyond. Wagner varied his use of metaphors, causing some confusion, but music always functioned as a messenger between the forms of art forms and occupants of the theater.⁸⁷

The drama stage thus provides a clearer view of Wagner’s theory of musical perception. It involved a tripartite view of mind in which music, as a catalyst, initiated the *conversion* of a conscious idea into an emotion. This emotive self, or preconsciousness, could then be understood or read by the active unconscious. In Wagner’s words music “can materialize thoughts, i.e. she can give forth their

⁸⁵ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:128-29.

⁸⁶ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:138-142. It should also be noted that in the mythological and symbolic orientation of the drama stage theory, the musical poet creates nothing particularly new, but reveals the unconscious nature of the object. See Wagner, *Drama*, 4:204-5.

⁸⁷ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:178.

emotional-contents.”⁸⁸ Upon the perception of music-drama, music converted the drama into a mental category that permitted “true” understanding, thus allowing Wagner’s genre of the future to ideally unite emotions with the intellect.⁸⁹ Wagner’s statement that “Music cannot think,” does not seem to indicate that music could not communicate ideas at all, but rather that music converted, clarified, intensified, and ossified existing thoughts.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, Wagner’s statement affirmed music’s dependence on text and marked the limits on music’s ability to comment on the drama. Although the drama staged stifled music’s independence, it expanded music’s communicative possibilities through stronger links to the text and spectator.

Wagner further used this aesthetic and conception of the brain to engage the audience’s memory in the theatrical experience. When music, together with the mind, translated (or materialized) the vocal line of the drama into an emotion, the audience then had preconscious associations with the events, symbols, characters, or ideas. These mnemonic associations could be recalled by the orchestra’s recurring melodies and applied to new situations. As the drama unfolded, especially a lengthy one like the *Ring*, the stockpile of thoughts that music could materialize grew to the point of continual commentary on the drama. In fact, it seems one reason that Wagner expanded the back story of *Götterdämmerung* into three entire music-

⁸⁸ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:184: “Die Musik kann nicht denken, sie kann aber Gedanken verwirklichen, d. h. ihren Empfindungsgehalt als einen nicht mehr erinnerten, sondern vergegenwärtigten kundtun.”

⁸⁹ Wagner, *Eine Mittheilung*, in *SSD*, 4:343. I interpret this as a limitation on symphonic music’s ability to articulate precise ideas and narrative, but not a complete invalidation of symphonic music’s ability to speak.

⁹⁰ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:184.

dramas was so that by the time the listener reached its prelude the Norns' scene would be thoroughly pregnant with associations. Likely, Wagner gravitated toward staging such a long and mythical epic, the plan of the drama stage, because of these new theories of musical association. At the very least the tetralogy only became feasible with such mnemonic techniques.

Wagner's stockpiles of emotively materialized ideas are known as leitmotifs – recurring themes that represent a character, place, or concept, and are most often used in connection with music, especially in opera or cinema. Although Wagner was not the first composer to consciously utilize leitmotifs, his extensive use of them popularized this trope and associated his name with the concept.⁹¹ In Wagner's work motive and motif, undifferentiated in the German *Motiv*, interconnected as the leitmotifs developed associations with characters' intentions.⁹² Furthermore these *Motive* (either motives or motifs) variously cross referenced each other and invested each scene with additional and initially unconscious meanings derived from relationships with the whole of the narrative. Through the orchestra's use of recurring themes, which could be variously hinted at or hammered home, the leitmotif could refer after the fact to dramatic material.

In addition to the reminiscence of the leitmotif Wagner envisioned and later used motifs of presentiment. A specific example of presentiment was “foreboding”

⁹¹ Wagner did not coin the phrase leitmotif (that was Wagnerite Hans von Wolzogen), nor was Wagner the first composer to use motifs of reminiscence, as was fairly common in Romantic opera. Yet, to make these reminiscences the essential structure of the composition and use them to associate more than very deliberate key moments was original to Wagner. See Millington, *Wagner*, 127.

⁹² Stein, 319-20.

in which the composer let the audience in on a secret by making them “recognize that the seeming quietude of his *dramatis personae* is merely a self-illusion.”⁹³ The composer made this possible through an apparent incongruous union of motif and libretto. In contrast to textbook leitmotifs, which originated in the vocal line, presentiment seemed at times to presuppose a linguistic capability for absolute music, a holdover from the artwork stage. This ambiguity speaks to Wagner’s layering of theories and established the precedent of the drama stage’s susceptibility to change. On the other hand presentiment was similarly a mnemonic function that used leitmotifs to foreshadow. Through the articulations and epistemological conversions of absolute music, and through Wagner’s participatory use of memory in music-drama, he expanded the scope of his psychological experiment with music.

The Physiological Discourse on Mind

Despite contributions from aestheticians, non-reductive materialists, and neo-Kantian philosophers, the future of the science of psychology in 1850 was in the hands of physiologists, who primarily rejected the excavation of mind as the concern of vitalists and philosophers. Most physiologists in the 1850s and 1860s, in rejecting the metaphysical speculations of psychology, regarded (if at all) the functions of the psyche as a foundation to be taken for granted, but not explored.⁹⁴ Despite this self-imposed barrier Helmholtz put forward an influential psychology of perception.

⁹³ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:220-21.

⁹⁴ See Anderton; Lenoir.

Through much of the 1850s and 1860s Helmholtz worked on optical and aural perception, developing a highly controversial theory of perception called ‘unconscious inference.’⁹⁵ Utilizing the trope of conversion the unconscious inference shared some similarity with Wagner’s theory of musical perception in which the mind materialized imperceptible ideas into more graspable emotions. By appropriating Fichte’s philosophy concerning the subject’s creation of the outside world Helmholtz suggested that perception required the mind’s active integration of disparate sensations.⁹⁶ For Helmholtz sensation did not equal perception, but rather the latter required the psychic function of unconscious inference; however, this process acted like a black box, whose operations were outside accessibility of biophysics. Like the participation in Wagner’s theatrical discourse, unconscious inference occurred without the observer’s active participation, though could be accentuated by actions of apperception. Helmholtz considered this function something to be assumed *a priori*, but not researched.

Wilhelm Wundt, on the other hand – likewise a physiologist and for a time one of Helmholtz’s lab assistants in Heidelberg – began in the 1860s to explore the unconscious inference through a methodology of meticulous experimental

⁹⁵ The best summary on Helmholtz’s epistemology in light of work in sense perception is Vogel, in Cahan. Kim also gives a good summary of unconscious inference and quotes Helmholtz as saying “I later avoided the name of unconscious inference so as to circumvent confusion with – so it seems to me – the completely unclear and unjustified idea which Schopenhauer and his followers designate by this name.” Kim, 58. Despite the associations and controversy of Helmholtz’s sign theory of perception he remained committed to it.

⁹⁶ Leary, “Kant,” in Woodward and Ash, 31.

introspection, aided by laboratory apparatus.⁹⁷ However, Wundt's most significant contributions to psychology did not come until the 1870s, a decade that saw an explosion in psychological research.⁹⁸

When Wundt began to analyze mental functions besides unconscious inference, he did not include memory in his research agenda. By most standards, the psychologists and physiologists of the early and even mid-nineteenth century did not regard the concept of memory as an autonomous, important, or researchable field. Herbart considered memory too abstract a term to be counted among the central concepts of psychology.⁹⁹ However, Carus provides us with an important exception. As early as 1829 he lectured on memory as the preservation of images, enhanced in clarity through an increase in consciousness.¹⁰⁰ He also found the clarity and interrelation of some memories to be indeterminate and unfathomable, because they belonged to a realm of unconsciousness not retrievable through introspection.¹⁰¹ As with the associations of Wagner's leitmotifs, Carus considered an increase in psychic sensitivity a precondition for new mnemonic combinations.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Hothersall, 86-89.

⁹⁸ Wundt's contributions the psychology in the 1870s will be considered in more detail in chapter three.

⁹⁹ Kurt Danziger, "Sealing Off the Discipline: Wilhelm Wundt and the Psychology of Memory," in *The Transformation of Psychology: Influences of 19th-Century Philosophy, Technology, and Natural Science*, ed. Christopher Green et al. (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2001), 53.

¹⁰⁰ Draaisma, 75.

¹⁰¹ Draaisma, 76.

¹⁰² Draaisma, 75.

Given the similarity of their ideas about the unconscious it is not surprising that Wagner and Carus shared theories of memory.

For Wagner the idea of memory was also intimately tied to the task of helping music think and therefore to a definition of thought.¹⁰³ Just as Carus conceptualized memory in terms of images, so also Wagner considered all of thought to be impressions of images. Consequently for Wagner “[t]hinking of” and ‘remembering,’ then, are one and the same thing,” and keeping in mind his function of conversion, all thoughts and memories made their impression on the emotions.¹⁰⁴ In this sense Wagner’s memories were quite physiological, appropriate in an era of organic memory, which often considered these impressions in atavistic or proto-genetic terms.¹⁰⁵ Yet the stuff of Wagner’s memories was not passed down through Lamarckian mechanisms or even racially. The commonalities of association and memory stemmed more from the conception of a universal framework of emotions and how the mind made conversions.

In Wagner’s schema for musical memory, he was not necessarily concerned with the conscious mind’s active retrieval of these packets of thought-emotions. Rather, it was the role of orchestral music to call forth memories at the appropriate

¹⁰³ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:181.

¹⁰⁴ 4:182: “Gedenken und Erinnerung ist somit dasselbe...”

¹⁰⁵ On organic memory see Laura Otis, “Organic Memory and Psychoanalysis,” *History of Psychiatry* 4, no. 3 (1993): 349-372; Idem, *Organic Memory: History and the Body in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Daniel L. Schacter, *Forgotten Ideas, Neglected Pioneers: Richard Semon and the Story of Memory* (Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2001); Idem, “Implicit Memory: History and Current Status,” 13, no. 3 (1987): 501-518; Idem, *Stranger Behind the Engram: Theories of Memory and the Psychology of Science* (Hillsdale, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1982).

time.¹⁰⁶ As the leitmotifs recurred through the drama they “materialized” old emotions (thoughts) and combined them with new ones, thus increasing each melody’s associations and pregnancy of thought.¹⁰⁷ As a consequence “we give to it [music] the faculty of thinking: nay, we here give it a faculty of higher rank than thinking, to wit, the instinctive *knowledge* of a thought made real in emotion.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, in the drama stage Wagner predicates music’s “faculty of thinking” on these previous theories of memory. Through the cumulative and corporate capacity of memory the audience could hear such melodies think and speak.

In thinking about memory in 1851 as a higher mental function with such specificity of meaning Wagner seems to have predated the interest and practice of later scientists, though undoubtedly lacking their precision. Despite the mid-century ambivalence of Herbart, Fechner, and Wundt toward the feasibility of using memory as an autonomous concept, the later nineteenth century in all disciplines saw “almost an obsession with memory,” fueled by the nexus of rapid industrialization and nationalization.¹⁰⁹ However, most of this interest, such as that in organic memory, was a concern for long-term retention and national history. Wagner’s experiment, on the other, concerned short term retrieval and learning, more akin to educational projects. Although neither Fechner nor Wundt could find

¹⁰⁶ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:182-83.

¹⁰⁷ Wagner, *Drama*, in *SSD*, 4:183-84.

¹⁰⁸ Wagner, *Drama*, 4:185: “...geben wir unserm Gefühle das Vermögen des Denkens, d. h. hier aber: das über das Denken erhöhte, unwillkürliche Wissen des in der Empfindung verwirklichten Gedankens.”

¹⁰⁹ Marlene Shore, “Psychology and Memory in the Midst of Change: The Social Concerns of Late-19th-Century North American Psychologists,” in Green et al., 68, 82.

effective means for experimenting with short term memory, their younger colleague Hermann von Ebbinghaus (1850-1909), motivated by issues of pedagogy, constructed successful experiments in the late 1870s – in the same time frame that Wagner premiered the Ring Cycle.

By the necessity of the pedagogical project, the *Ring* needed to be staged in four successive evenings so that the musical memories – the ideas riding on the melodies – could remain fresh. Apparently, Wagner had some notion of a learning curve, a concept pioneered by Ebbinghaus, and the limits of short term memory. Yet, Wagner assumed that his audience would have a high and universal capacity to remember, an assumption he planned put to the test in the attempt to make music speak.

Using such theories of memory and learning Wagner envisioned the festival as a venue for teaching ideas of social reform. In the early stages of Wagner's theories of theatrical discourse, the most important ideas to be discussed by the music involved the supremacy of the group, especially the nation, and the need for the individual to become subsumed into the cause of a collective community and artwork. Similarly, in Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, music was to be, like the individual, dependent on the (con)text for its ability to articulate. These themes of memory, social contract, and music-drama all hung together in Wagner's drama stage attempt to make music speak. Consequently, when the historical contingencies began to challenge this socio-aesthetic formula, so also would the aims of theatrical discourse have to change.

CHAPTER II: WAGNER'S FESTIVAL AS A HYPNOTIC PROJECT

1854 was a landmark year in the evolution of Wagner's musical discourse, a year in which he 'discovered' Schopenhauer, wrote much of *Die Walküre*, and received an "everlasting" gold pen from Mathilde Wesendonk.¹ Wagner found converting his pencil sketches of *Das Rheingold* to a final copy of the score so laborious that it drained him of creative energy. The smooth workings of Mathilde's pen allowed him to progress the cycle in a timely manner and also renewed Wagner's inspiration – a function that Mathilde as muse would increasingly play. Mathilde and her husband Otto formed the core of Wagner's social circle in Zurich and represented the new types of Wagnerian fans who could impact the composition of the music and the nature of its staging. After he received the gold pen, and more causally after he became embroiled in a romantic engagement with Mathilde, Wagner granted the music of the *Ring* increasing communicative ability apart from the text and apart from the musical-poetic balance of the drama stage.

Mathilde's gold pen depicts how Wagner depended on his supporters and how their assistance led the *Ring* to take its specific form. The relationships between patron and artist point to the role of extra-artistic forces in shaping the manifested reality of Wagner's festival theories. During this period, Wagner had

¹ Newman, 2:396.

more artistic freedom than ever, able to compose the dramas he wished without having to cater to the needs of an institution. However, this freedom was linked to support from a select group of patrons, whose devotion often demanded a proximity to Wagner's projects that bordered on co-creation. These practical realities of instituting a new experience of music in the *Gründerzeit*, along with new intellectual influences, impacted the ideas, techniques, audience, and language of Wagner's musical discourse.

This chapter covers four periods in the actualization of Wagner's festival: the writing of the text of the *Ring* (1851-52), the first period of the *Ring*'s musical composition (1853-57), the completion of the *Ring* (1869-1874), and the construction of the *Festspielhaus* (1872-76). I am analyzing each period through the framework of Wagner's different financiers – Julie Ritter, the Wesendonks, King Ludwig II of Bavaria, and the patron societies of Bayreuth – whose support left impressions on the practice and theory of musical discourse. Their patronage often overlapped and so these divisions are somewhat arbitrary, but nevertheless this organization provides us with a parsimonious way of conceptualizing and compressing a protracted history.

In each case we see how the conditions of patronage variously brought supporters into contact with Wagner, so as to either to magnify or clash with the ideals of his drama stage. Influential factors included not just levels of independence, but also both what patrons gave and sometimes did not give. The particular financiers we look at were all extremely devoted to Wagner and to what

he could provide for them, investing them deeply in the final product. In managing the sometimes conflicting demands of his patrons, his artistic processes, theatrical realities, and intellectual honesty, Wagner's dramaturgical theories evolved into what I call his dream stage.

Casting the *Ring*: Writing the Text (1851-1852)

Financiers: Laussot and Ritter

Having recently solidified his plans for a festival, Wagner wrote to his Dresden friend Theodor Uhlig regarding the composition of the *Ring*: "I am thus placing myself entirely in the Ritters' hands: I pray to God that they *remain unswervingly loyal to me!*"² This statement summarizes well Wagner's dependence on his new financiers, but also the freedom they afforded him. After he went into exile in 1849 Wagner was able to pursue a new artistic direction because of the generous stipend and critical distance of his new patrons. During this period several women from Dresden, whom one might rightly consider the first Wagnerites, kept the composer financially afloat. Most notable among them was Julie Ritter, the English mother of Wagner's close friend Karl Ritter.³

Julie Ritter for several years became the cornerstone of Wagner's livelihood.⁴ Also a younger lady who had lived with Ritter, Jessie Laussot, used her

² Wagner to Uhlig, 12 November 1851, in *SLRW*, 233-34.

³ Gutman, 168.

⁴ Newman, 2:500.

mother's fortune to allow Wagner to create "in complete accord with the inspiration of his soul."⁵ These two women conspired together in 1849 to support Wagner during his exile. However, after the exposure of Wager's affair in Paris with the married Laussot, he had to forgo her support, but was able to proceed with the *Ring* rather than running away with Jessie to Greece as had been planned.⁶ Despite being close with the Laussot family, Ritter continued her support, because she greatly desired to see the *Ring* staged, a wish never granted.

The Laussot-Ritter combination allowed Wagner to pursue the possibilities of musical discourse by supporting him during his prose years and through the completion of the *Ring*'s libretto in November 1852.⁷ During the year that Wagner wrote these lyrics his drama stage aesthetics remained essentially unchanged, even while he became politically and personally more resigned. Although this period of the *Ring*'s realization did not significantly alter Wagner's theories of and plans for infusing music with ideas, it is important that we review the narrative and ideas of the *Ring*, as they were essentially the building blocks of the music. It is not my intent to interpret or focus on the text of the *Ring*, but given the relationship of Wagner's music with his libretti, a review of the *Ring*'s text will give us an idea of potential concepts communicated by the music.

⁵ Quoted in Gutman, 199.

⁶ Gutman, 200.

⁷ Millington, *Wagner*, 196.

The Text

In *Das Rheingold* the dwarf Alberich steals gold from the Rhine when the river's maidens will not succumb to his propositioning. Alberich renounces love and forges a ring from the gold, bringing a curse on love and enslaving his Nibelung race. However, the god Wotan takes the ring to maintain his power and pay two giants for constructing his castle Valhalla. The giant Fafner, after killing his brother, returns to earth with the ring, while Wotan retires uneasily to Valhalla.

In *Die Walküre* Sieglinde and Siegmund, earthly children of Wotan and twins separated from birth, fall in love and run off together. Although Wotan had been protecting Siegmund throughout his life, the goddess Fricka demands the siblings be punished for incest. Wotan orders his Valkyrie daughter, Brünnhilde, to cause Siegmund to be killed in a battle with Hunding, Sieglinde's husband, but Brünnhilde defies her father, forcing Wotan to kill Siegmund himself. In upholding order, Wotan reluctantly abandons Brünnhilde to a fiery, mountaintop slumber, but not after she helps him to realize that his pursuit of power has been alienating him from his true desires.

Between *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*, Sieglinde has given birth to Siegfried in the forest and died. After being raised by Mime – Alberich's brother – Siegfried reforges his father's sword, kills Fafner, takes the ring, kills Mime, and follows a bird into the mountains. Here he meets Wotan in disguise, breaks his spear, and awakens Brünnhilde.

In the prelude to *Götterdämmerung*, we learn that Wotan's source of power came from the spear, which he fashioned from a branch of the World Ash Tree. In the first act Siegfried gives the ring to Brünnhilde as a symbol of his love, and she sends him into society for the first time. He meets Hagen – Alberich's son – who poisons him into forgetting Brünnhilde and falling in love with the Gibichung princess Gutrune. Hagen also persuades Siegfried to get Brünnhilde as a bride for Gutrune's brother Gunther. Upon his return Hagen kills Siegfried, while Brünnhilde learns of the innocence of his seeming betrayal. At Siegfried's cremation, Brünnhilde throws herself on the funeral pyre. In an apocalypse the fire spreads, the Rhine overflows, the Rhine maidens regain possession of the ring, and the world is relieved of its curse on love. Meanwhile, Wotan stacks the rotten pieces of the World Ash Tree around Valhalla and ignites the heavenly fortress, consuming the gods and ending his own curse.

For some time the details of the conclusion concerned Wagner, who vacillated among no less than six different endings, three of which were directly inspired by either Hegel, Feuerbach, or Schopenhauer.⁸ As an adjustment in overall aim, the search for a proper ending itself formed an interesting part of the evolution of the musical discourse. It seems initially in *Siegfrieds Tod* that only Siegfried dies and is brought to Valhalla by Brünnhilde as a lesson to the gods on better governance. Although some scholars consider this a Feuerbach-inspired ending of optimism, David Windell has shown that before Wagner wrote his first draft of the

⁸ Millington, *Wagner*, 225.

Siegfried story he had not yet encountered Feuerbach's philosophy.⁹ Rather, Wagner was concurrently reading Hegel's *Philosophie der Geschichte* (*Philosophy of History*), more appropriately making this the Hegelian ending. Siegfried is the Hegelian hero who through Brünnhilde's love gains consciousness of self and of World Spirit. However, this was written before Wagner's participation in the revolutions of 1848-49 and before their outcome became known.

Upon his return to the Siegfried material in the drama stage and after writing the text of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, Wagner revised his last two dramas and changed the ending drastically. In 1852 Wagner introduced into his story the Norse *Ragnarök* – the apocalyptic twilight of the gods. Important practical, political, and personal reasons led to this change.¹⁰ From the perspective of narrative, the expansion into a tetralogy essentially made Wotan the main character, as the only one to appear in all four dramas. As a story of sacrifice and in part as an artistic monument to how Wagner wished the revolutions of 1848-49 would have gone, it made sense for Wotan – as a representative of conservative political power – to be the one sacrificing.

However, having witnessed the worst of the counter-revolutions by 1852 Wagner's hope in Wotan as a symbol of enlightened monarchy seemed incongruous with the realities of *Realpolitik*. Robert Gutman cites Wagner's increased political

⁹ On Hegelian interpretations of the *Ring* see Windell, 32; Corse, 22.

¹⁰ M. Owen Lee, *Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Around* (New York: Summit, 1990), 26. It is important to note that Wagner introduced themes of resignation before his exposure to Schopenhauer.

disillusionment as a result of Napoleon III's coup in December 1851.¹¹ In some ways Wotan's death was Wagner's sublimated revenge on the rulers of Europe, especially the King of Saxony. When Wagner first wrote what became *Götterdämmerung*, he was receiving patronage from the state of Saxony. However, after petitioning unsuccessfully several times for political amnesty, the seriousness and duration of Wagner's exile status finally became clear to him.¹² Once under the financial care of Julie Ritter, Wagner was willing to kill off the primary political ruler of the *Ring*. Genuinely exhibiting the spirit of Feuerbach, this 1852 ending contained, of all the endings, the most radical politics and obvious glorification of humanity.¹³

With the reading of Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The World as Will and Representation*) in 1854, and with the process of composing the *Ring*, Wagner made two more significant changes. The downfall of the gods remained fixed and increasingly important to Wagner's understanding of his artwork, but in the Schopenhauer ending Brünnhilde's closing monologue transfigured into the resignation of a Buddhist monk reaching Nirvana. Yet, twenty years later, in the final evolution of the *Ring*'s ending Wagner dropped Brünnhilde's lines and gave the last word to the orchestra.¹⁴ In the explosion of musical prosody

¹¹ Gutman, 231.

¹² Williams, 58.

¹³ Williams, 71. Wagner changed Brünnhilde's final speech to reflect the glories of eternal love and initially interpreted the death of the gods to represent the redirection of the divine into the material world.

¹⁴ Millington, *Wagner*, 225-27.

something of each of the endings – Hegelian, Feuerbachian, and Schopenhaurian – remained and was further altered by Wagner’s introduction of an underlying motif of renewal.¹⁵ Rather than bringing the music back to the opening E-flat arpeggio of the Rhine motif the music modulates into D flat and what Owen Lee calls the “mightiest of miracles” theme. Recalling a promise to Sieglinde of Siegfried’s birth, the apocalypse of the *Ring*’s ending similarly suggests a new beginning.¹⁶ Before looking more in depth at the composition of the music we will look at the range of myth’s interpretations.

Barry Millington claims that well over one hundred viable interpretations of the *Ring* have been put forward, but that equally none can claim authority.¹⁷ Despite claims that the *Ring* lacks a single coherent ideology, Dieter Borchmeyer sees Wagner’s intention with the *Ring* having a rigorously consistent internal logic, even past the 1854 Schopenhauer threshold.¹⁸ Borchmeyer goes on to say: “The twofold nature of the mythological music drama, as both socio-political parable and psychological exemplar, was made possible for Wagner...by his synoptical

¹⁵ Donnington, 272.

¹⁶ Lee, *Ring*, 91.

¹⁷ Millington, *Wagner*, 222-23. Certainly some renderings come closer to the authorial intent, but it is precisely around the question of Wagner’s intention where the waters remain most murky. Adorno reads Wagner’s openly cryptic approach as indecisiveness and genuine confusion over artistic direction. See Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1981). Cooke agrees with Adorno about Wagner’s lack of self consciousness, but interprets it more sympathetically. He sees Wagner as one that “delved so deep into the springs of human action that they have been unable to make their findings absolutely clear.” See Deryck Cooke, *I Saw the World End: A Study of Wagner’s Ring* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 13.

¹⁸ Borchmeyer, 304.

treatment of classical Greek and Germanic myth.”¹⁹ Just as the Attic festival ideal was both a political event and an experiment with tone psychology, so also the content of that experiment, according to most interpretations, had both social and philosophical meanings.²⁰

Given the 1848 background, clearly the initial foreground of Siegfried’s life and death concerned very immediate political exigencies. Although the narrative does not proceed in the traditional revolutionary triumph, the character of Siegfried is nonetheless the naïve man of action, the engine of political upheaval. In the first ending rather than entirely overthrowing the existing power structures, Siegfried’s and Brünnhilde’s heroism only destroys Nibelheim economics, while at the same time enlightening and purging the ruling classes.²¹ Wagner’s introduction of the *Ragnarök* only heightened this revolutionary nature of the myth. Brünnhilde’s immolation sends the social contract up in smoke and frees the world from divine fate and aristocratic law. So despite the fact that Wagner’s politics shifted over time, the *Ring* at its foundation was a monument to social upheaval.²²

¹⁹ Borchmeyer, 325.

²⁰ Though scholars may emphasize one aspect, most agree that the *Ring* operates on multiple levels, a conclusion consistent with what is known about Wagner’s conception of it.

²¹ This is in keeping with Wagner’s 1848 political ideals and the speech he gave for the *Vaterlandsverein*, calling for the King of Saxony to unite with the revolutionaries.

²² Although Bayreuth developed conservative associations, until his death, and to the chagrin of his second wife Cosima, Wagner considered the socialist revolution inevitable and favorable, if only because it might be able to erase the traditional structures of society. See Borchmeyer, 322.

One of the most famous socio-political interpretations of the *Ring* came from British playwright George Bernard Shaw in 1901.²³ Although Wagner's conception was in reality more anarchist, Shaw famously interpreted the *Ring* as an aborted allegory of Fabian socialism. For Shaw, and to some degree for Wagner, the gods represented the aristocracy and political power, the Nibelung the bourgeoisie and economic power, and humanity the socialists. In all the possible endings, Shaw saw the death of Siegfried as a concession to the reactionaries. Regardless of whether the *Ring* is monarchist, anarchist, or socialist, it spoke into the tensions of nineteenth-century Europe. However, with the cosmological status of the *Ring* brought about by the inclusion of dangerous knowledge stories and the *Ragnarök*, Wagner's *Ring* also became a symbolic representation of archetypal themes in world history.

In addition to these intentional allusions to world and recent history, Wagner's *Ring* had for both him and commentators, from its conception onward, psychological significance for the individual. The most famous psychological interpretation of the *Ring*, though in some sense the least helpful for the historian, comes from Robert Donington who analyzes the whole of the drama in terms of Jungian archetypes. Millington summarizes Donington's position succinctly: "The willful dominance of the ego, represented by Wotan and his spear, has to be overcome in the wider interests of the whole personality; the *Ring* is the story of the struggle to work through unconscious mother-longings and other obstructions in

²³ George Bernard Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Nibelung's Ring* (London: Constable and Co., 1901).

order to uncover and achieve the underlying purpose of the self.”²⁴ Since Donington’s work the industry has boomed with psychological interpretations, though few as comprehensive as his. Deryck Cooke sees Siegfried not as an inciter of revolution, but as Wagner’s vision of a future society based on a law of love.²⁵ Citing quotes from Wagner, Owen Lee, Philip Kitcher, and Richard Schacht all interpret the *Ring* as a message of how to imbue life and death with meaning, explaining Wagner’s multiple ending’s as his own wrestling with that question.²⁶

To conclude this summary of the orthodox interpretations of the *Ring* we should consider key observations from Millington and Cooke. Millington identifies the common themes of scholarly interpretation as: “the lust for power and the compromises and alliances we are forced to make in our lives threaten our capacity to true, selfless love.”²⁷ Yet, ultimately Millington champions individualized interpretations, a position that reflects later developments in Wagner’s musical discourse. Similarly, Cooke notes that the narrative of the *Ring* moves gradually from the social realm to that of the human psyche, a shift not in the text so much as in the music.²⁸ As the spectrum of interpretations bears out, the discourse of the

²⁴ Millington, *Wagner*, 224-5.

²⁵ Cooke, 273-75. On the other hand Sandra Corse sees Siegfried as the Rousseauvian man overcoming Hegel’s sentimentality with self consciousness wrought from selfless love that goes beyond Feuerbach’s simple love and the failure of love in a patriarchal society. This selfless, but self-determining individual must then destroy the state that would inhibit such self realization. See Corse, 13-38.

²⁶ Lee, *Ring*; Philip Kitcher and Richard Schacht, *Finding an Ending: Reflections on Wagner’s Ring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). The finale duet between Brünnhilde and the orchestra, in its changes, materializes Wagner’s reflections on this idea.

²⁷ Millington, *Wagner*, 227.

Ring as a whole, including the voice of music, had the flexibility to speak to society or the psyche. As we will see it was exactly this musical voice that proved to be the most volatile in shaping conceptions of the *Ring*.

Theory: Reaffirming the Drama Stage

In its comparatively narrow chronological scope, this first period of the actualization of Wagner's festival – the writing of the *Ring*'s libretto – did not affect Wagner's theory of musical discourse. Rather, the process of writing the lyrics seemed to reinforce the drama stage aesthetic, as outlined in the last half of chapter one. One should also consider Julie Ritter's nearly unconditional financial support of Wagner as a factor in the immutable condition of his theory. Receiving patronage from a distance, Wagner was able to work in isolation without the expectations and pressure of his later, more neighboring patrons. Finally, Ritter's support – as opposed to that of the Saxon state – seems to have made possible a more radical ending to the *Ring*.

As Wagner was happy to be done with writing prose, we have significantly fewer records of his theories in the 1850s and 1860s. Nevertheless, a prolific correspondence supplies us with access to his ideas in times of transition. In a letter to Theodor Uhlig about conducting Wagner discussed his opinions on performing works of Beethoven and clarified his position on absolute music, music-drama, and

²⁸ Cooke, 275; Cooke also correctly emphasizes the vast importance of the role of music and motifs in accurately understanding the *Ring*, a sentiment shared by Wagner. See a quote from Wagner in Cooke, 2.

musical expression.²⁹ It reads as a concise summary of the drama stage: “Indeed, the truly absolute musician, i.e. the variationalist of absolute music, could not understand Beethoven any longer, since he was concerned only with the ‘How?’ and not with the ‘What?’”³⁰ In this summary, which included a reiteration of music’s dependence on poetry, we can more clearly see the genetic makeup of those theories, revealed to be an intense concern with making music able to talk about the “what” (the idea) as opposed to the “how” (the effect).

In the same letter to Uhlig, Wagner wrote more frankly of his audience and its particular need for music-drama. Rather than portraying a Volk in tune with the voice of nature (music) Wagner expressed concern over the non-musical listener’s inability to understand the language of the music. A fellow composer such as himself might comprehend the meaning of Beethoven’s melodies, but to the “layman” it is as if the

poem is delivered in a language with neither the reciter [musician]... nor the listener can comprehend...but if what is expressed by the language of music is determined by a poetic object, this language especially will be utterly unintelligible as long as the poetic object itself is not at the same time precisely described by other means of expression than those of absolute music.³¹

At a time Wagner was only writing words, he considered them the cornerstones of theatrical discourse. However, the symbiotic bonds of the drama stage

²⁹ Wagner to Uhlig, 13 February 1852, in *SLRW*, 249-53. In some sense Wagner’s sentiments about Beethoven provide a consistent measure of his ideas of musical discourse.

³⁰ Wagner to Uhlig, 13 February 1852, in *SLRW*, 250.

³¹ Wagner to Uhlig, 13, February 1852, in *SLRW*, 251.

Gesamtkunstwerk eventually eroded theoretically and theatrically with the composition of the music of the *Ring*.

Forging the *Ring*: Writing the Music (1853-1857)

Financiers: The Wesendonks

In early 1852 while writing the text for *Die Walküre* and becoming immersed in the Zurich community, Wagner met Otto and Mathilde Wesendonk. Wagner described them initially as having “forced themselves upon” him like a spear.³² The Wesendonk couple, each in their own way, guided the development of the *Ring* and Wagnerian musical discourse. Though the Dresden Wagnerites had existed before Mathilde, her enthusiasm for Wagner and his music made her an artistic and romantic collaborator, encouraging the redirection of Wagner’s plans. Her interests did much to separate Wagner’s musical idiom from the framework of the drama stage.

Otto provided Wagner with various and important financial support in addition to what his few royalties and the Ritter stipend provided him. If Mrs. Ritter allowed Wagner to write and compose, Otto provided the hope to realize the festival. Otto bought the rights to the first half of the *Ring* (which Wagner later also sold to the King of Bavaria) and considered buying land for Wagner’s *Festspielhaus*.³³ As the festival house would not in reality be built for another

³² Wagner to Uhlig, 26 February 1852, in *SLRW*, 255.

³³ Wagner to Julie Ritter, 29 December 1852, in *SLRW*, 277.

twenty years, Otto mainly helped Wagner by saving him periodically from creditors and giving him a house. Otto represented a new type of patron who, while giving Wagner artistic license, lived within the radius necessary to direct the presentation of the artwork. The Wesendonks requested and paid for Wagner to conduct works in Zurich, and in bringing Wagner onto their own property disrupted the composition of the *Ring*. By being in such close habitation to his patrons Wagner had to walk a more careful line to keep that funding, something he certainly failed to do.

In April 1857 Wagner moved in next door to the Wesendonks' own new house. At the urging of Mathilde, Otto purchased a new property with a neighboring villa for his wife's hobby and idol, but tightened his other funding for the composer. Once the Wesendonks moved in Mathilde became the only artistic collaborator of Wagner's life, though the intimacy of their romantic affair remains unclear.³⁴ However, clearly the intensity and irony of their relationship incited in Wagner a desire to dedicate an entire drama to love. On the eve of becoming neighbors with Mathilde, Wagner wrote to Franz Liszt that he planned to write and stage *Tristan und Isolde*, an idea which had come to him while composing *Die Walküre*.³⁵ It seems that in anticipation of being in such contact with unrequited love Wagner could not write a comic ending where Siegfried and Brünnhilde sing a joyous duet.

³⁴ Wagner set several of her poems to music. See Gutman, 258-62.

³⁵ Wagner to Franz Liszt, 28 June 1857, in *SLRW*, 370-72.

A noticeable depression went hand in hand with Wagner's love for the married Mathilde. As far back as November 1856 the pessimism rising with exile and the affair with Mathilde began to affect his ability to write the *Ring*. In a letter to Otto he wrote: "I can no longer attune myself to Siegfried, and my musical perception already roams far beyond it into the realm of melancholy befitting my mood."³⁶ Although Wagner's first wife Minna had finally moved down from Dresden, he felt increasingly lonely with the dispersion of his community of exiles, which had included such close friends as poet Georg Herwegh and architect Gottfried Semper.³⁷ In a mental state that encompassed intense fits of joy and sadness Wagner could no longer endure writing a work that might never be staged.

Rather than focusing on these abject personal and political disruptions, most scholars pin Wagner's aesthetic change of heart to the influence of Schopenhauer.³⁸ Certainly the increasing weight Wagner put on the musical half of music-drama can in part be attributed to the aesthetic theories of Schopenhauer. However, just because Schopenhauer *came* to have such an important part in Wagner's life and music, especially after 1857, does not mean he was the sole reason for Wagner's break from the *Ring*.³⁹ It might be more accurate to say that Wagner found

³⁶ Quoted in Gutman, 241.

³⁷ Wagner to Liszt, 28 June 1857, in *SLRW*, 370-72.

³⁸ See John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus, *The New Grove Wagner* (New York: Norton, 1984), 153; Gutman, 257; Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 370; Millington, *Wagner*, 202; Williams, 80-81.

³⁹ Typically the story of the *Ring* is told saying that it was begun out of Feuerbach's inspiration and was completed under that Schopenhauer. But just as Wagner conceived of the *Ring*

retrospectively in Schopenhauer an explanation and justification for his new emphasis on music's articulation of the unconscious.⁴⁰ More causally in explaining the break from the *Ring* one should take into account the proximity of the Wesendonks. After writing songs with Mathilde, Wagner wanted to write a drama about her – *Tristan* – which not only diverted his attention from the task of the *Ring*, but also from its musical theories and techniques.

The Music

Wagner completed the libretto for *Das Rheingold* on November 3, 1852, but did not begin to compose the music until September 1853. Although he spent some of this time reworking the text of the last two dramas of the cycle and writing a short sonata for Mathilde, much of the lag can be attributed to sickness and artistic block. Finally, while taking the waters in Spezia, the E-flat arpeggios of the Rhine theme came to him quite literally in his sleep.⁴¹ By January 1854 a musical sketch was prepared and the whole of the drama scored by May. Wagner had not composed any music of substance for well over five years, considered by many the longest dry spell of any major historical composer. In keeping with that break Stein

apart from Feuerbach, so also he broke from the *Ring* apart from Schopenhauer. As we will see later in this chapter, even by 1860 Wagner's theories had not yet embraced Schopenhauer's aesthetic.

⁴⁰ Schopenhauer's ascetic renunciation of will also became a comfort for Wagner during his depression of the mid 1850s. In a letter to Franz Liszt recommending Schopenhauer's philosophy Wagner notes that it has helped him sleep at night. See Wagner to Liszt, 16 December 1854, *SLRW*, 323.

⁴¹ See Wagner, *My Life*, trans. Andrew Gray and Mary Whittal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 499; Millington suggests it might have been the flushing of a toilet. See Millington, "After the Revolution: The *Ring* in Light of Wagner's Dresden and Zurich Projects," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2005), 677.

considers the “stylistic gulf” between Wagner’s old and new work to “differ more strikingly than any consecutive creations of any other composer or writer known to me.”⁴² Although much of the *Ring* diverges from the theory of the drama stage, *Das Rheingold* as a whole can be said to be the work that most strictly adheres to the musical poetics of *Oper und Drama*.⁴³

In the purest sense *Das Rheingold* can be said to be dramatic. Many consider it too tightly jammed with interpenetrating, action-driven plots that lack the character development and psychological insights of Wagner’s other works.⁴⁴ Stylistically, Wagner fit the music within the stricture of the *Stabreim* verse, an effect that gave the vocal melodies rather than the orchestra the emotive force of this work. In *Das Rheingold*’s at times forced combination of lyric and music, Stein concludes, the verse is the more effective half of the union. However, despite mostly following the pattern set out in *Oper und Drama*, Wagner did not link consonant usage with the musical motifs so as to expand the poetic meaning.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the libretto’s lack of traditional rhythm and rhyme freed Wagner to use leitmotifs as the central pillars of the architectonic.⁴⁶

Although not the smoothest integration of music and text, *Das Rheingold* used more leitmotifs than any other opera previously composed. In the first work of

⁴² Stein, 81.

⁴³ Most commentators and fans consider this both its greatest accomplishment and shortcoming.

⁴⁴ Gutman, 243-44.

⁴⁵ Stein, 90.

⁴⁶ Williams, 73n.

the cycle these recurring melodies are relatively short and easy for the listener to distinguish, keeping more to the drama stage aesthetic than any of Wagner's works. Still, only about half of the leitmotifs originate in the vocal melody.⁴⁷ It is problematic to label and number these motifs, given that Wagner himself did not and that the motifs exist in familial relationships that have slight variations. In the entirety of the *Ring* there are between 100 and 200 separate leitmotifs.⁴⁸ Despite some compositional challenges, *Das Rheingold* can generally be said to adhere to the spirit and often letter of the theory of the drama stage.

With *Die Walküre* Wagner's musical-poetic balance reached its aesthetic apogee, but also in the later acts began to seriously depart from the theory of *Oper und Drama*. Wagner attained this more successful *Gesamtkunstwerk* by using content more congenial to an emotional outpouring – the love of the Walsung twins rather than merely the global politics of the gods. As life imitated art Wagner himself was in love with Mathilde, who as a married woman provided important inspiration for the first act of *Die Walküre*. By most accounts the first act most highly conformed to the tenets of *Oper und Drama* and was dramatically the most effective of the entire cycle.⁴⁹ Although the verse was still faithful to the drama stage recipe, it did not hinder musical articulation as in *Das Rheingold*, in part because of this romantic content and context of composition.⁵⁰ Despite the general

⁴⁷ Stein, 94.

⁴⁸ Additionally, according to Millington, there is a danger in simplifying a technique that is intended to create psychological and narrative complexity. See Millington, *Wagner*, 210.

⁴⁹ Millington, *Wagner*, 204-6; Stein, 104.

praise for the balance of *Die Walküre*, it should be noted that the motifs originated even less in the melody than the previous drama, suggesting a further crumbling of the drama stage.

As the process of composition became extended the orchestra's expressive potential received more and more emphasis, the Flight of the Valkyrie theme being an important example. In part this was inevitable that as the motivic associations piled up the music would have more to say. The moment of Wagner's departure from the theory of *Oper und Drama* is highly debated by scholars. At times they draw the line in the first act of *Die Walküre* or the second, or equally in the first or third acts of *Siegfried*.⁵¹ Regardless of where one draws the line, the existence of division shows Wagner departing from the drama stage, but slowly and for a variety of reasons. Whether or not *Die Walküre* is the transitional work in the *Ring*, according to both Magee and Gutman, it is in this work that Wagner's dramas became psychological thrillers, speaking from the unconscious about the unconscious.⁵² Compared to the rather speedy composition of the first quarter of the tetralogy, work on *Die Walküre* dragged out until spring of 1856 for reasons of the drama's length and artistic complexity, as well as Wagner's suffering income.

With *Siegfried*, its trajectory of personal development and rather limited number of characters necessitated in some ways music's outside commentary and

⁵⁰ Stein, 104.

⁵¹ Stein and Bryan Magee consider act I of *Siegfried* the break. See Stein, 126; Magee, *Schopenhauer*, 353.

⁵² Corse, 68; Gutman, 244.

shouldering momentum. According to Magee the orchestra in *Siegfried* begins to attain the individuation of a character that can communicate with the audience independent of the drama.⁵³ However, Wagner did not entirely renounce the motivic technique of the drama stage, but in some sense redoubled it so as to move the perception of musical themes and their association from the realm of apperception to unconscious inference. The barrage of motifs narrating Siegfried's journey of self discovery revealed Wagner's new estimation of music's ability, independent of text, to dialogue with the spectator. In an internal feedback loop, this liberation of music paralleled changes in Wagner's conceptions of mind and musical listening, though in the late 1850s it remained unclear what these changes were. Throughout the composition of the *Ring*, on account of both the material itself and the Zurich context of Wagner's life, both the content and method gradually moved his aesthetic theory back to an ambiguity reminiscent of the artwork stage.

Despite the new ground broken by *Die Walküre* and the first two acts of *Siegfried*, and also because of it, in the summer of 1857 after six years of writing Wagner left Brünnhilde wreathed in her fiery sleep and *Siegfried* and the *Ring* unfinished. Like everything in Wagner's life the reasons for this are multifarious and points of scholarly contention. Wagner was losing interest in his titanic project, but such a simple explanation masks deeper roots of the break. On some level nearly everything in his life including theory, practice, marriage, love, and finances had reached crisis.

⁵³ Magee, *Schopenhauer*, 353.

Of all the reasons for the break most scholars emphasize an aesthetic contradiction facilitated by the philosophy of Schopenhauer, but one should also consider, in addition to the influence of patrons, the construction of the *Ring*'s associational tapestry.⁵⁴ As the epic progressed and the leitmotifs piled up, it required increasingly sophisticated chromatic techniques to interweave and modulate between them. In part this could only be achieved by first hearing the effectiveness of his motif-based architectonic. By the time of Wagner's break from the *Ring* he had heard less than half of his lifetime compositions in a theater, and even those which he had heard were often not performed to his standard. Having received a sense that his fame would allow him to produce his next work according to his aesthetic taste, Wagner felt little shame in postponing festival plans and returning to the traditional theaters. By 1857 he was far less doctrinaire regarding his theories and maxims of the artwork and drama stages.⁵⁵

In addition to the practical aesthetic exigencies, the return to the traditional theaters from 1858-1864 had very real financial reasons. Wagner took up *Tristan* because of Mathilde on two accounts. First it was an artistic monument to her, and second their intrigues required Wagner to find funding apart from her husband. Wagner immensely appreciated his new villa, but the closeness of Mathilde, the cost of Otto's pay check, prohibited furtherance of the *Ring*. As an example of Wagner's

⁵⁴ See Deathridge and Dahlhaus, 153; Gutman, 257; Magee, *Schopenhauer*, 370; Millington, *Wagner*, 202; and Williams, 80-81.

⁵⁵ In 1860 Wagner wrote that by 1857 he had outstripped his system. See Wagner, *Zukunftsmusik*, in *SSD*, 7:119. Also regardless of whether Wagner needed to put down the *Ring*, Magee and Millington agree that more time was needed to work out a new system focused around the music. See Magee, *Schopenhauer*, 370; Millington, *Wagner*, 202.

desperate financial position he even tried to sell the *Ring* to the publishers Breitkopf and Härtel in order to secure resources for the festival, but they pulled out on the plan, further disillusioning Wagner's festival hopes. This attempt to sell the *Ring*, though evidence of a willingness to compromise the festival idea, was also an example of Wagner's dedication to his project. He would rather stop the *Ring* than divide it piecemeal. When any immediate actualization of the *Ring* appeared hopeless Wagner returned for over five years to the traditional theaters with little anticipation of being able to eventually create his ideal musical discourse.

Theory: The Nomadic Stage

During these "wandering years" Wagner returned several times to Paris in attempts to stage *Tristan* and premiere a Parisian *Tannhäuser*.⁵⁶ Although Wagner never rearticulated his changing aesthetics in the quite same way as in the artwork and drama stages, sporadic publications during this period of wandering give us an idea of the evolution of musical discourse's theoretical underpinnings. Having clearly rejected the rigidity of his previous system of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Wagner nonetheless left the new role of music and its relation with the other arts ambiguous. Most commentators cite the influence of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music as a disrupting force on this system. However, in Wagner's 1860 essay *Zukunftsmusik* (*The Music of the Future*), he clearly had *not* integrated the aesthetics of Schopenhauer into his theoretical foundation. Thus pressures from patrons and the

⁵⁶ Scholars often characterize Wagner's life between Zurich and royal patronage as "*Wanderjahre*." See Gutman, 292-328.

very experience of writing the complex structure of the *Ring* seem to have disrupted the drama stage.

Mirroring the transitory condition of Wagner's life, in the late 1850s and early 1860s his theories remained ambiguously in flux and unsettled. It is for this reason that I call this period Wagner's nomadic stage. One can clearly see what his theories were not – dogmatic support of drama stage aesthetics. In *Zukunftsmusik* Wagner portrayed his drama stage theories as abnormal and alien to the artistic spirit, having become to him only abstractions, only conditionally applied to the dramas. Wagner referred to his prose years as something of an illness, which only actual composition could cure.⁵⁷ In keeping with this disdain for the conscious articulation of prose, Wagner did not give the public much theoretical justification for his compositional techniques used in the newer works – *Tristan, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and *Siegfried*. Yet, Wagner's nomadic stage concepts of musical and theatrical discourse resembled in some ways those of the artwork stage.

Much of *Zukunftsmusik* reads like *Kunstwerk der Zukunft* with its emphases on internationalism, Hellenic tragedy, and the unconscious. In temporarily abandoning the *Ring* project and the festival plans, Wagner's life became more cosmopolitan and his outlook less nationalist. After all the reason for writing *Zukunftsmusik* was an attempt to stage his works in Paris again. In 1860 Wagner returned to the orchestra as a modern version of the Greek chorus, an idea he had seemingly gone away from. This makes sense in light of the individuation and

⁵⁷ Wagner, *Zukunftsmusik*, in *SSD*, 7:113-14, 118, 122-23.

voice the music had developed in the composition of *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*.

Similarly, although Wagner's general concern for revealing the unconscious had cooled off somewhat in the drama stage, in *Zukunftsmusik* he reaffirmed the framing idea of *Kunstwerk* that life can be distilled to the "evolutionary march from unconsciousness to consciousness."⁵⁸ In this arc between similar stages the drama stage appears now as a mere phase, broken by Schopenhauer, Mathilde, and the process of composing monumental structures of leitmotifs, themselves the product of the drama stage.

As demonstrated by the ever-presence of leitmotifs, many aspects of Wagner's drama stage, however, did not go away. He still considered music a means to drama, the essential thesis of the drama stage.⁵⁹ Wagner was very clear even in 1860 that music still needed words and stage action in order to speak clearly as a language.⁶⁰ This affirmation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* stood in direct opposition to Schopenhauer's conception of music a direct language of the will, independent of mediating factors. Nonetheless, Wagner was equally comfortable in 1860 with giving music a greater share of the communicative responsibility.⁶¹ What Wagner found was that to accomplish the original task of musical prosody a greater

⁵⁸ Wagner, *Zukunftsmusik*, in *SSD*, 7:88: "Entwicklungsgang vom Unbewußtsein zum Bewußtsein."

⁵⁹ Wagner, *Zukunftsmusik*, in *SSD*, 7:136.

⁶⁰ Wagner, *Zukunftsmusik*, in *SSD*, 7:127-29.

⁶¹ In 1860, having written the music for the most textually introspective parts of the *Ring*, Wagner reintroduces the idea of the music as outside commentary, which will become an important tool in the finishing *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. In theory this returns to music an ability to materialize thoughts and speak them, though still in some relation with the text.

articulation by the music was necessary than had been initially conceived.

Essentially, the drama stage end (drama) remained the same, while the means (music) changed only its method and role in supporting that dramatic end.

As Wagner's means of musical and dramatic expression began to outstrip the drama stage, so also his theories of musical perception searched for new footing. In this quest Wagner used the terminology of mental conversion with increased confidence, a move which points to his persistently psychological perspective. Just as Helmholtz and Wundt were incorporating the unconscious inference, wherein the mind converted sensations to perceptions, Wagner discussed the mind as converting ideologically pregnant melodies into more perceptible feelings.⁶² Whereas in the drama stage the music had allowed the mind to convert the text into an emotion, with the nomadic stage Wagner's music is translatable apart from a one-to-one relationship with the text. Largely this entailed a shift from textbook leitmotifs to motifs with dramatic associations. No longer were there clear moments of a motifs' articulation by the vocal line, later picked up by the orchestra, but a looser affiliation between musical and dramatic expressions. At this stage, Wagner had not departed from his reliance on the spectators' memory and the ability, by either the self or the orchestra, to recall these emotively solidified thoughts. In fact, the nexus of theory and composition in the nomadic stage could be seen to aid the remembrance of melodies by making the associations looser and more unconscious.

The nomadic stage was by no means a regression in Wagner's theoretical development. As the generalizations of the artwork stage laid important foundations

⁶² Wagner, *Zukunftsmusik*, in *SSD*, 7:112.

for drama stage specifics, so also the nomadic stage laid groundwork for Wagner's final dream stage. The individuation of the music necessitated new aesthetic, psychological, and social directions. Given the listeners' ability to somewhat personalize the melodies' meanings apart from clear and intellectually patronizing leitmotifs, Wagner's theatrical discourse began to move into a space of greater self-generation. Although Wagner did not clearly articulate these new ideas in 1860, his aesthetics and social philosophy always paralleled each other. Consequently, the concession to the "egoism" of music, witnessed in the erosion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, suggested a concession to individualism. In the artwork stage Wagner had conceived of a more collective unconscious. However, in the nomadic stage Wagner was finally clear that art revealed a personal subconscious.⁶³ Nevertheless, Wagner's outright promulgation of the self and of music would not come until he finished the *Ring*.

Closing the *Ring*: Finishing the Music (1869-1874)

Financiers: King of Bavaria

In April 1864, almost the first thing eighteen-year-old Ludwig II did after assuming the throne of Bavaria was to summon Wagner to his court. Ludwig sent one of his closest advisors, cabinet secretary Franz von Pfistermeister, to find the composer. It took some time to contact the elusive Wagner, as he thought Ludwig's ministers at first to be among the many creditors seeking their due. Rather it was

⁶³ Wagner, *Zukunftsmusik*, in *SSD*, 7:88-89.

quite the opposite. Ludwig was to become Wagner's most generous patron.

Once Wagner received the call of the king and a ruby ring as token of good will, he pawned a valuable Russian snuffbox and borrowed enough money to catch a train from Stuttgart to Munich.⁶⁴ Since 1858, Wagner had been wandering through Europe, in as many places as his exile status would allow, trying to stage his new, non-festival dramas. After unsuccessful bids in Paris and Vienna, the blank check waiting in Munich was a dream come true. With the ruby ring came the king's promise that he would marshal all his resources to have the Ring Cycle performed in Munich.

The exilic, Wesendonk, and wandering years had certainly softened the rigidity of Wagner's original festival ideal. In some sense, the metropolis of Munich epitomized both the fashion and critics Wagner wanted to avoid and supplant with his festival, but being quite seriously at the end of his rope, the opportunity to realize his tetralogy, even under compromised terms, came like a godsend. Less than a month before Ludwig's intervention, Wagner describe his artistic endeavors as being on the edge of a knife, and that if someone did not intervene soon to help him, it might quickly become too late to salvage his festival plans.⁶⁵ However, once in Munich, if the festival had to be there, Wagner used his good graces with the king to work towards as pristine a musical discourse as

⁶⁴ For an account of Wagner's calling to Munich and general relationship with Ludwig see Manfred Eger, "The Patronage of King Ludwig II," trans. Stewart Spencer, in Müller and Wapnewski. Greg King, *The Mad King: The Life and Times of the Ludwig II of Bavaria* (Secaucus, N.J.: Carol Publishing Group, 1996); Christopher McIntosh, *The Swan King: Ludwig II of Bavaria* (London: Allen Lane, 1982).

⁶⁵ Wagner to Peter Cornelius, 4 April 1864, in *SLRW*, 582.

possible. Wagner soon convinced Ludwig of the necessity of building a more suitable theater and establishing a school to train singers.⁶⁶

However, this seemingly ideal pairing of patron and artist strained under the realities of politics and public criticism. Wagner became hated by almost every segment of Munich society.⁶⁷ Under the heat he unequivocally gave up on staging the festival in Munich, no longer a conducive environment for Wagner's psycho-social dialogue.⁶⁸ Yet, Ludwig persisted against Wagner's urges with plans to build a new multi-use theater on the Isar. As a sign of his resignation from the plan, Wagner moved permanently out of the city to Lake Lucerne. Ludwig might have continued with his plans without Wagner had the king not become embroiled in the Seven Weeks War against Prussia and in an equally ill-fated marriage plan.⁶⁹

Even during the early, idyllic stages of Wagner's royal patronage Ludwig flexed his financial muscles and exerted a decisive influence on Wagner's musical discourse. One might view Ludwig as a composite figure of both Otto and Mathilde Wesendonk, acting as both keeper of the purse and co-creator. From the beginning Ludwig spoke and wrote to Wagner about "their music," for in owning its rights

⁶⁶ King, 83.

⁶⁷ The hostility began with criticism over the amount of public spending that was going toward the monetarily irresponsible composer. Additionally, by 1865 Wagner was under fire for his political influence on Ludwig – for filling his head with anti-constitutional ideas about monarchy, for addressing Ludwig informally in public, and for his affair with Cosima von Bülow.

⁶⁸ Additionally, Wagner did not like Ludwig's "childish" plans for the theater. As early as September 1865 Wagner "hated" the projected theater in Munich. See Eger, "Patronage," in Müller and Wapnewski, 319-20.

⁶⁹ Eger, "Patronage," in Müller and Wapnewski, 320. In the Seven Weeks War Bavaria sided with Austria against Prussia and lost. As a result, the Bavarian government had to pay reparations of 51 million marks to Prussia. See Eger, "Patronage," in Müller and Wapnewski, 325.

Ludwig could legally command performances apart from the composer. This power came at a price. Ludwig biographer Greg King estimates that the entirety of the king's lifetime expenditures on Wagner and his performances topped out at just under one million gulden, a third of which had to be paid back. Yet in comparison with Ludwig's other artistic endeavors and with what other top composers commanded at the box office, it was not an inordinate amount.⁷⁰

But not only was Ludwig Wagner's financial supporter, he was also the composer's biggest fan and most willing to listen to the musical discourse with the seriousness Wagner intended. In fact Ludwig took it so seriously that it became a narcissistic hobby, divorced from its social setting. Despite the fact that the court theater was composed primarily of boxes that Wagner found all too convenient for chatting and hissing, Ludwig sat alone in his box for the 1865 premiere of Wagner's *Tristan* glued to the music-drama. Accounts exist of him edging closer to the stage with hands on the railing and tears streaming down his face.⁷¹ Ludwig was the perfect Wagnerite. Not only did he give his utmost attention to the performance, but he took the discourse pensively enough to contemplate its message following the show. After one performance of *Tristan* while riding to back to Berg he had the trained stopped in the middle of the forest and then proceeded to wander alone until dawn.⁷²

⁷⁰ King, 85. Wagner's artistic adversary Giacomo Meyerbeer earned almost 1.5 million gulden for *La Prophete*'s 100 performances in Berlin.

⁷¹ King, 102.

⁷² King, 103. In an authentic Wagnerian vein Ludwig was hearing the call back to nature.

Ludwig was just wealthy enough to purchase the transcendence Wagner intended to give away. In May 1867 Ludwig wanted to hear *Lohengrin* again and offered Wagner a hand in its production, but the composer refused to enter again into the Munich spotlight. Instead he conducted at a distance through his disciple Hans von Bülow, the husband of Wagner's mistress. Against both of their wishes Ludwig forced a casting change for the two leads just five days before the first show. In protest of this show of the king's theatrical power Wagner did not attend. However, he did attend one showing of his *Meistersinger*, which premiered in Munich the following year, even joining Ludwig in his box.⁷³ Despite the success of *Meistersinger*, the frustrations of sharing theatrical management led Wagner to resign himself once again to a hermitage life of writing, until he could have a theater of his own.

The largest infringement on Wagner's envisioned musical discourse, however, came the following year when Ludwig became impatient with the progress of the *Ring*. Owning the rights to and scores of the first half of the tetralogy Ludwig decided to try and have it staged in 1869, if possible under the blessing and guidance of Wagner. Again the composer would only direct from Tribschen on Lake Lucerne, this time through the baton of Hans Richter. When it came to Wagner's attention that *Das Rheingold* – especially its stage effects – was not ready for production he demanded its postponement. In response to this criticism, like the cast change of *Lohengrin*, Ludwig had Richter replaced with the court conductor, going ahead with the premiere as scheduled. In the opinion of Greg King, "The

⁷³ Eger, "Patronage," in Müller and Wapnewski, 323.

scandal over the staging of *Das Rheingold* showed once and for all that for Ludwig the composer's art came first, before the man himself."⁷⁴ In June 1870 Ludwig followed with *Die Walküre*, while Wagner continued to ignore what he considered to be the slaughtering of his art. During this time Wagner went ahead with the composition of *Siegfried*, after an almost twelve-year hiatus, and in light of Ludwig's plans sought out a new festival location.

Although Wagner, after the Munich debacles, retreated further into his Tribschen abode and gave up the idea of an urban festival, Ludwig's attempt to stage the *Ring* piecemeal intensified Wagner's urgency in finding a new festival local, if not a new patron. No doubt Wagner's obstinacy about the conditions of his work contributed to Ludwig's resistance to fully funding the composer's project, a feat easily attainable were it not for Ludwig's other cultural undertakings.⁷⁵ Yet, in a way this insufficient funding liberated Wagner from having to defer to the king's vision of the festival. In 1869, against the backdrop of Ludwig's premiere of *Das Rheingold*, Wagner not only returned to the composition of *Siegfried*, but began seeking out additional patronage and possible locations. Among other towns Bayreuth came to mind.

Although the scholarship has no sharp disagreements, Wagner's choice of Bayreuth remains a much discussed topic.⁷⁶ In general it met all of Wagner's

⁷⁴ King, 150.

⁷⁵ Eger, "Patronage," in Müller and Wapnewski, 325. Ludwig spent over 60 million gulden of his own royal purse on his castle projects.

⁷⁶ David Large, "Political Background of the Foundation of the Bayreuth Festival, 1876," *Central European History* 11, no. 2 (1978): 162-72; Spotts, 39-40.

longstanding preferences for a festival site, boosted by additional socio-economic benefits. In a retrospective letter to his business manager after the first festival Wagner recollected that he wanted to create “a kind of Washington of art.”⁷⁷ As the American government designed Washington D.C. from scratch to be a city devoted to politics, Wagner wanted to create his art capital in a town without the existing distractions of a metropolis, a spa retreat, or theatrical competition. People would only come to the isolation of Bayreuth to participate in the festival.

Strategically, Bayreuth was located in about the middle of the new German Empire, halfway between Ludwig and Bismarck.⁷⁸ Since Wagner was still drawing a stipend from Ludwig and was on comparatively good terms with the powerful monarch, it made sense to stay within the borders of Bavaria. Yet, Wagner did not initially tell Ludwig about his plans for Bayreuth and even lied about the having finished *Siegfried*, because Wagner did not want Ludwig to stage it independently. Wagner was contractually bound to give Ludwig the score of the *Ring*, but before Ludwig was able to press his rights Prussia’s conflict with France caught Bavaria up in another war. As the nation’s political and cultural power was being siphoned into Berlin, Wagner hoped to be on the personal terms with the chancellor that he was with Ludwig.

The conditions of Wagner’s royal patronage from Ludwig shifted the theatrical discourse into a more nationalist and commoditized form. Wagner’s

⁷⁷ Wager to Friedrich Feustel, 14 June 1877, in *SLRW*, 867.

⁷⁸ See Large, “Background.” However, Large tends to over-emphasize the nationalist intentions of the Bayreuth festival.

willingness to sell the *Ring* to the state of Bavaria and Ludwig's treatment of Wagner's music-dramas as something consumable set a precedent and opened up participation in Wagner's festival to the market. By selling the rights to the *Ring*, Wagner was able to finish it. However, Ludwig's ambivalent festival funding for a time paralyzed Wagner's project by keeping it both dependent and impotent. At the same time, because Ludwig tried to stage his own tetralogy and did not fully fund Wagner's festival, Wagner was forced and freed to look elsewhere for support. His logical choice in 1870 was to sell the festival idea (literally and metaphorically) to Prussia and the emerging German nation. Wagner had few qualms about tying his first Bayreuth festival with the new Reich. Similarly, Wagner opened up to the entire nation the ability to buy into the festival and purchase the theatrical experience as a commodity.

The Music

In many ways the new material only intensified trends we saw developing at the end of *Die Walküre* and the beginning of *Siegfried*. One of the most dynamic features of the *Ring* was the continuity between the two eras of composition. Given the motivic structure of the music this is not entirely surprising, since much of the music was quite literally the same. However, with the new motifs Wagner further liberated them from the text without losing communicative agency. In the third act of *Siegfried* and all of *Götterdämmerung* the number of motifs that originate in the vocal melody – actual textbook leitmotifs – plummeted to just one.⁷⁹ Yet, the new

⁷⁹ Millington, *Wagner*, 209-10.

use of motifs had a much thicker quality and broader structure, growing to enormous lengths that defied the standard definition of a motif as a short phrase. Not only were the motifs in the new material longer, but Wagner layered and intertwined them, sometimes three and four at a time. According to Millington:

There is such a riot of motifs and they are combined in such bewildering and breathtaking profusion and with such contrapuntal virtuosity... Wagner seems to be anticipation the Expressionist scores (e.g. Schoenberg's *Erwartung*) in which textural density reflects extreme psychological conflict.⁸⁰

In the vocal melodies even, Wagner broke finally the actual letter of his theoretical law in *Oper und Drama* by resuming the use of duets and chorus singing. Having experimented with such polyphonic methods in *Tristan* and *Meistersinger*, Wagner integrated them into the *Ring* and its already existing motivic architectonics.

The music of *Götterdämmerung* continued much in the spirit of the new *Siegfried* music. However, being both the first and last composition it had some significant differences. Despite later revisions Wagner wrote most of the text of *Götterdämmerung* before the drama stage, leaving it lacking in the mythological narrative, alliterative verse, and philosophically heavy monologues of the rest of the *Ring*.⁸¹ As in *Das Rheingold* the plot required many new characters, scene changes, and dramatic intrigues. However, rather than casting aside the intense internal struggles, Wagner brought the full weight of the musical associations to bear on the drama in a dizzying side commentary. It is hard to imagine that he had any other

⁸⁰ Millington, *Wagner*, 211.

⁸¹ Having been written directly after the completion of *Lohengrin*, the Shakespearean plot of *Götterdämmerung* was in the context of the *Ring* a return to the emotive and active idiom of grand opera.

plan from the beginning, but the extent of the musical prose's intricacy was probably not imagined in earlier theoretical stages.

As a commentator the music of *Götterdämmerung* intruded more and more on the drama until the end, told exclusively by the orchestra. After Brünnhilde plunges onto the fire the music tells the catastrophe of Gibichungs's Hall and Valhalla in a five-minute modulation between a score of motifs. The Curse of the Ring theme sinks down into the Rhine theme, which then oscillates between the Valhalla and Sublime Wonder (Sieglinde's hope at her death) motifs, as the focus shifts to the twilight of the gods. The last Valhalla theme then breaks into a leitmotif from Wotan carving his spear, but it is broken by a Hero theme. Finally another Curse theme, related to the Ring Curse, comes in and is subsumed by the Sublime Wonder, which ends after modulating into a new key.⁸² After the longstanding vacillations over the ending, Wagner gave the last word to the music, a choice consistent with his later aesthetic principles. In effect the music of the *Ring* became the most important character, a narrator of sorts with the most independence.

The further Wagner proceeded with the composing of *Götterdämmerung* the more the festival in Bayreuth finally looked to be a reality, which had some salient effects on its score. No longer would Wagner have to contend with the limitations and politics of public theater – its resources, building, or staff. This gave *Götterdämmerung* a close alliance with Wagner's ideal musical discourse through a

⁸² See Stewart Spencer, ed., *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 351.

confidence in stage direction and in the kind and color of music to use. For example, given Wagner's plans for a larger, dampened orchestra pit, the size of the orchestra ballooned, especially in the brass section for which Wagner is famous. In accordance with Wagnerian ideals everything in this finale was large. Even the "riot of motifs" reached its peak, appearing on average well over three times per minute, more than twice as many as *Die Walküre*, and at that longer motifs.⁸³ Wagner was to some degree able to use this new musical style, or at least found justification for it, through his new theories of mind and musical listening.

Theory: The Dream Stage

The final phase of *Ring's* composition represented a clean and conscious break from the musical aesthetics of the drama stage.⁸⁴ By 1870 Wagner embraced unapologetically Schopenhauer's metaphysical view of music's expressive independence and preeminence in the community of art. Most importantly, according to Schopenhauer, music spoke directly to the will. This transition was smoothed by pre-existing similarities between Schopenhauer's and Wagner's ideas.⁸⁵ On many points, Schopenhauer's philosophy seemed to give clarity to Wagner's theories, especially those of perception and unconscious articulation. Wagner already had ideas about the unconscious, but Schopenhauer's conceptions of will brought a further nuanced categorization of mental functions.

⁸³ Williams, 123.

⁸⁴ Stein also notes the vividness of Wagner's theoretical departure. See Stein, 163.

⁸⁵ Wagner to August Röckel, 23 August 1856, in *SLRW*, 358.

In the artwork stage Wagner had given music a different role than the other arts of the union, because music had first reached a heroic state of crisis. Yet he did not grant music a preeminent status for communicating universal essences. But in his 1870 essay on Beethoven's symphonies Wagner went a step further than the artwork or nomadic stages in giving music a privileged position in the society of art forms by making it a self-determining individual with a separate legal status. Recalling the social contract metaphor for Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in *Beethoven* he asserted that music "must be subject to aesthetic laws quite distinct from those of every other [art]." ⁸⁶ Music as that which communicated from the unconscious to the unconscious no longer required a textual crutch given the perceived structure of the human brain.

In Wagner's new scheme the mind had two sides, one conscious of the outside world and one conscious of will, a concept akin to unconsciousness with desires and an independent logic. The outward focusing side, the consciousness, could understand ideas and even sense tones, but the understanding of the concepts communicated by the music could only be understood by the "inward facing consciousness" – the will. ⁸⁷ Although music affected and could be heard by the conscious mind, only the unconscious side could perceive the ideas of the music. Without the need for mediation, conversion, or text (think society) music spoke directly to the will. With this new theory of mind Wagner completely unhinged, or

⁸⁶ Wagner, *Beethoven*, in *SSD*, 9:71-72: "...so leuchtet es zuwörderst ein, daß diese ganz anderen ästhetischen Geseßen unterworfen sein muß, als jede andere Kunst."

⁸⁷ Wagner, *Beethoven*, in *SSD*, 9:67-68.

had justification for unhinging, music's linguistic dependence on the plastic arts and asserted that music in itself could communicate the thing in itself.⁸⁸

During all the earlier stages Wagner had asserted that in the perception of the music the mind converted ideas (with or without text) into emotions, which could then seep *down* into an emotive-based pre-consciousness. In this last stage Wagner conceived that music could dialogue directly with the unconsciousness.⁸⁹ Only afterwards, in certain mental states, did the ideas float *up* from the unconscious in a post-perceptual conversion. Despite the metaphysics of Wagner's new aesthetic, he considered a very cerebral process to bring the ideas into a midpoint space between consciousness and unconsciousness.⁹⁰ Wagner himself did not escape the emphasis of the 1850s and 1860s on physiology as the main intellectual tradition from which one could gain an understanding of the psyche. Using the scientific language of functions (*Funktionen*), Wagner appealed to a type of musical organ analogous to Schopenhauer's dream organ.

Wagner's new Schopenhauerian stage might aptly be denominated the dream stage.⁹¹ Under patronage of the 'dream king,' Wagner embraced absolute music as an avenue for the conscious self to become aware of the desires of the will

⁸⁸ Wagner, *Beethoven*, in *SSD*, 9:68-69.

⁸⁹ Stein notes that in the dream stage (my language) musical perception is more intellectual than emotional. See Stein, 161.

⁹⁰ Wagner, *Beethoven*, in *SSD*, 9:68-69.

⁹¹ On Wagner and dreaming see Lippman; Schulster. They quote liberally from Wagner's *Beethoven* essay, but do not analyze it in much depth.

through the dream organ's orientation toward the subconscious.⁹² The process of listening to the language of the music, not consciously or directly, but through the mind's subconscious translation, led to contact with that unconsciousness from which the message of the music came. According to Wagner the experience of musical discourse lets "us gaze into the inmost essence of ourselves and all things."⁹³ In addition to talking with the mind's depths, music in the dream stage also had the double task of creating the conditions necessary for the unconscious to be able to dialogue with the music – the conditions which activate the dream organ.

In *Beethoven* Wagner complained about modern theater's construction and culture, of how the social and mechanical diversions took away from the dream-like effect created by even symphonic music. Despite these drawbacks – which Wagner attempted to eliminate in the theatrical discourse of Bayreuth – he assessed the state of sympathetic hearing as "a state essentially similar to that of somnambulant clairvoyance."⁹⁴ Wagner suggested that in this experience the conscious mind preserved a revelatory record of the inner essence of things communicated through the music, during the hypnotized state. Wagner's not entirely metaphorical use of hypnotism and clairvoyance, even if in the context of the metaphysics of music, shared many similarities with other theories of double consciousness in the late

⁹² Wagner, *Beethoven*, in *SSD*, 9:72-73.

⁹³ Wagner, *Beethoven*, in *SSD*, 9:78: "Dagegen nun uns einzig in unser Inneres, wie in das innere Wesen aller Dinge blacken läßt."

⁹⁴ Wagner, *Beethoven*, in *SSD*, 9:75: "Daß dieser Anblick, welcher den nicht von der Musik Ergiffenen einzig beschäftigt, den von ihr Gefesselten endlich gar nicht mehr stört, zeigt uns deutlich, daß wir ihn nicht mehr mit Bewußtsein gewahr werden, dagegen nun mit offenen Augen in den Zustand greaten, welcher mit dem des somnambulen Hellsehens eine wesentliche Ähnlichkeit hat."

nineteenth century. For many people such a bifurcation of the mind provided explanations for paranormal and hypnotic activity.⁹⁵ In the dream stage Wagner emphasized the necessity of theatrically simulating hypnotism as a means to musical and theatrical discourse, an idea pursued further at the end of this chapter.

Unfortunately, Wagner's 1870 essay was more concerned with Beethoven's symphonies and did not give a clear application of how his new conception of music related to his own music-dramas. However, because Wagner's schema of the mind was the engine behind his new theory, these theories were not limited to the experience of symphonic music. In the dream stage the two parts of the brain perceived different things, with little crossover, making the comprehension of music-drama a parallel experience. Generally speaking the mind perceived drama with the conscious mind and music with the unconsciousness. In the drama stage Wagner was unclear about any independent faculties of poetry and music, but in the dream stage he became cryptic about their dependence, if the music revealed anything about the text and vice versa. Regardless, given Wagner's history it is unlikely that his old theories were entirely shelved. In fact the theories of dream states and organs can be seen along side older drama stage theories in the actual staging of Wagnerian theatrical discourse.

⁹⁵ Robin Waterfield, *Hidden Depths: The Story of Hypnosis* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002), 283.

Dramatizing a Dreamscape: The *Festspielhaus* (1872-1876)

Financiers: Patron Societies

In 1871 the Wagner family, which now included Wagner's second wife Cosima and their children, made a trip to Bayreuth, initially to inspect the Margravian opera house, the largest in Germany, but its Baroque opulence, size, and design proved beyond alterability. However, Wagner's pleasant experience and warm reception by city leaders resolved him to stake out the Franconian town as the new heart of Wagnerism. They would have to build a new theater, but the town offered enough free land that Wagner eventually gave some back because he did not have the time or money to develop it.⁹⁶ In short order Wagner prepared to move in the spring of 1872, despite the fact that it would take almost two years to build his new home. Hartford suggests that Wagner moved so soon from his idyllic abode on Lake Lucerne because he wanted to personally oversee the construction of the *Festspielhaus*, a move consistent with the composer's meticulous regard for the totality of his artistic expression.⁹⁷ On Wagner's fifty-ninth birthday, May 22, 1872, the foundation stone of Wagner's long held aspiration was laid.

Present at this cornerstone ceremony were many persons important in the Wagnerian enterprise, including the Baroness Marie von Schleinitz. As an old friend of Cosima, the influential courtier and salon host became the central

⁹⁶ Spotts, 52.

⁹⁷ Hartford, 25.

Wagnerite in Berlin after the death of Wagner's friend Carl Tausig.⁹⁸ Initially, Tausig had been Wagner's representative in the imperial capital, having instituted a patronage system for the festival based in Berlin, which gave the whole endeavor a sharper nationalist edge.⁹⁹ Schleinitz later assumed the responsibility of nationalizing Bayreuth and collecting funds for the *Festspielhaus*. As member of high society she had close ties with the Kaiser and successfully persuaded him to attend the first festival, even if she was unable to get him to finance it. Ultimately, the main source of new funding was Tausig's system of patronage.

Previously, Wagner had simply conceived of patrons as those who had or would donate without qualification to the cause. However, prior even to Wagner's move to Bayreuth, but with his blessing, supporters initiated a system of patron certificates as a more orderly and efficient method for raising the estimated 300,000 thalers necessarily to pull off the festival.¹⁰⁰ As a compromise between outright selling tickets to a still distant premiere and waiting for the slow trickle of donations, Tausig's method offered 1000 certificates at 300 thalers each (a steep sum) as way to buy into the festival. Michael Karbaum notes the similarities between Tausig's plan and the typical joint stock ventures of this period.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Large, "Background," 167.

⁹⁹ Hartford, 37. The best source of information on patron organization comes from the commentary of Emil Heckel's edited correspondence with Wagner and Tausig. Richard Wagner and Karl Heckel, *Letters of Richard Wagner to Emil Heckel: With a Brief History of the Bayreuth Festivals*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: G. Richards, 1899), 4-6.

¹⁰⁰ Although scholars disagree whether it was Feustel or Tausig who initially conceived of the patron system, passages in *Letters of Richard Wagner to Emil Heckel* seem to indicate that it was Tausig, a fact blurred by his death on July 17, 1871, before the system was implemented.

Wagner's dividend only guaranteed a seat at all the Ring Cycles, a season ticket of sorts. Even though this plan ran against the demographic and democratic spirit of the festival plans outlined in the artwork and drama stages, Wagner seems to have acquiesced with little resistance.¹⁰²

Financial realities eventually eliminated some of the intended audience, but this paring down had limits. David Large assigns purely monetary reasons to Wagner's choice of fund raising methods and misunderstands Wagner's political ideals.¹⁰³ It was not financial oversight that oriented Wagner's campaign toward the aristocratic elite rather than the more lucrative families of the socially mobile business classes. The owners of capital and moderate liberals were deliberately not invited in mass to be patrons. Wagner may have become more conservative later in life, but his socialist ideas recurrently envisioned an accompanying guard of elite bearers of culture and power. The enemy of industrial capitalism remained the same, but it seems that by the dream stage Wagner saw the engine of revolution coming from above rather than below.

¹⁰¹ Michael Karbaum, *Studien zur Geschichte der Bayreuther Festspiele (1876-1976)* (Regensburg: Bosse, 1976), 19.

¹⁰² Scholars often fail to realize that the patron schemes and societies were not Wagner's ideas, but the fact that he supported them, when other violations of his vision were met with such harsh opposition, suggests that some ideas about the audience and participants in the musical discourse had changed. Geoffrey Skelton and David Large both criticize Wagner for abandoning his idealized Volk for a wealthy elite, an admonition that blurs the complexities of Wagner's changing ideas. Clearly Wagner's experiences in trying to establish a festival in Zurich and Munich shattered his hope of a community rallying around him. However, fund raising for a festival that highlighted the evils of the monetary system was somewhat of a contradiction, which Wagner struggle with, finding compromises that he deemed acceptable. See Large, "Background," 168-71; Skelton, 22.

¹⁰³ Large points to this perceived oversight as "poor business acumen." See "Background," 168-69.

In 1872 the timber framing of the *Festspielhaus* proceeded quickly, but by spring 1873 the patron societies had only managed to bring in 340 subscriptions.¹⁰⁴ By all measures the societies were unsuccessful in mobilizing the necessary capital. This clear lack of support affected the construction of the *Festspielhaus* and the experience of it by reinforcing its provisional and almost utilitarian nature.¹⁰⁵ In addition to shaping the conditions of the festival performance, this financial crisis persuaded Wagner of the need to sell the remaining tickets. Such diversification of fund raising drew a less sympathetic audience, who purchased the experience as a commodity to be used and disposed of rather than becoming society members. These successive failures of Ludwig and the patron societies turned Wagner consciously and increasingly toward seeking governmental support from the new Reich.

Despite Schleinitz's Berlin connections, her intimacy with the Kaiser actually alienated her, and therefore much of the Wagnerian movement, from Bismarck. In a decade of *Kulturkampf* her Catholic connections raised Bismarck's suspicion of the Bavarian and potentially ultramontane trajectory of Bayreuth.¹⁰⁶ For several years, through the connections of Schleinitz, Wagner tried unsuccessfully to convince Bismarck to back the festival as national theater and as an "artistic sister" to unification. Although Bismarck realized the necessity of a

¹⁰⁴ Spotts, 45. It was no coincidence that construction on the *Festspielhaus* slowed in 1873 as that year marked the beginning of an economic depression in Germany.

¹⁰⁵ In the words of Frederic Spotts, 42: "Frugality was now an obsession with Wagner, and he constantly admonished his architect to be ruthlessly economical and to omit even the most modest of decorative frills."

¹⁰⁶ Large, "Background," 167.

cultural underpinning to the new political state, he would not allow it to be colored with Wagnerian socialism or aestheticism. In fact in 1875 Bismarck persuaded the Kaiser *not* to loan 30,000 thalers to the festival.¹⁰⁷ This essentially ended Wagner's appeal to Berlin and the new Reich, which had slowly increased since 1869 as his own financial crisis became more desperate. Nonetheless, the nationalist propaganda accompanying patron societies put the festival on national terms, but not on the state bank roll.¹⁰⁸

When Wagner first moved to Bayreuth, Ludwig gave him 25,000 thalers for the festival and for Wagner's new house, but disavowed all future contribution to the cause. After the topping out of the *Festspielhaus* in August 1873 Wagner unsuccessfully appealed several times to Ludwig for more finances. In early 1874 with construction all but halted, Ludwig conceded that the festival must go on, having heard of the project's deplorable state and Wagner's appeals to Bismarck.¹⁰⁹ However, Ludwig's donation of 100,000 thalers was not a gift, but a loan to be paid from future *profits*. Ludwig may have saved the project, but the project's new indebtedness ensured that not only the first, but subsequent festivals would have to sell tickets. The composite financing of the first festival from Ludwig and the patron societies, given both the structures of the contributions and the ideological

¹⁰⁷ Manfred Eger, "The Bayreuth Festival and the Wagner Family," in Müller and Wapnewski, 491.

¹⁰⁸ Large over emphasizes Wagner's fervent hope that it would become a national theater. See Large, "Background."

¹⁰⁹ Spotts, 49.

baggage attached, moved theatrical discourse unapologetically into a nationalized and commoditized space, while bringing into being a facility devoted completely to participation in that discourse.

Constructing the Theater

Nothing like the *Festspielhaus* had ever been built before, so Wagner enlisted the help of a core group of technical specialists to help him realize his ideal theatrical experience. Project manager Carl Brandt had proven his reliability by building machines for the Munich premiere of *Das Rheingold*.¹¹⁰ On Brandt's recommendation the original architect, who was in Wagner's mind dragging his feet, was replaced by Otto Brückwald from Leipzig, whom Brandt knew from working on the *Hoftheater* in Altenburg. Brückwald brought along another Altenburger – Carl Runkwitz – as a technical assistant.¹¹¹ These three men with the aid of local masons and carpenters can be credited with realizing Wagner's vision of a modernized version of the Greek amphitheater. Previous designs had given some suggestions about how one might tackle problems of perspective, size, and acoustics, but the Bayreuth team had to almost entirely invent a new kind of building.¹¹² At this time Brückwald was a fairly inexperienced architect, but Rica Lorbeer suggests that during his education in Dresden he may have studied

¹¹⁰ On the important role of Brandt in the Wagnerian enterprise see Patrick Carnegie, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 84-88.

¹¹¹ For more information on Brückwald see Rica Lorbeer, "Paul Otto Brückwald: Ein Architekt in Leipzig, 1841-1917," (master's thesis, Universität Leipzig, 2002).

¹¹² Spotts, 46.

Gottfried Semper's famous opera house.¹¹³ In the end the Bayreuth team built the world's largest timber-framed, free-standing building with dozens of important innovations for the history of architecture.

The team constructed the *Festspielhaus* technically and metaphorically around Wagner's idea for a sunken orchestra pit, hidden from the sight of the audience just under the front of the stage. However, despite this emphasis on acoustics, all the architectural innovations and planned theatrical effects were actually optical in nature. That the building had favorable acoustics was largely a fortuitous accident.¹¹⁴ Rather than designing the auditorium in the traditional horseshoe of box seats, they used a steep wedge of rowed seats with only a few boxes in the back.¹¹⁵ To make up for the lack of seats or boxes the proscenium of the stage were extended into the auditorium to fill up the sides and focus attention on the enormously large and deep stage. All 1800 seats, a comparatively large auditorium, faced the stage with clear and uniform lines of sight that would not be detracted by the audience, by the utilitarian auditorium, or by the orchestra's operations. With the installation of gas lighting, the theater could be more easily dimmed, further focusing the attention of the spectator on the dream-like and symbolic action of the stage.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Lorbeer, 6.

¹¹⁴ Spotts notes this irony. Spotts, 47.

¹¹⁵ The juxtaposition of the uniform auditorium seats and the uniform prince's boxes give us a architectural manifestation of Wagner's political theory. The amphitheatrically seats point to Wagner's socialism, while the few overseeing box seats suggest the role of the cultural vanguard.

Wagner's long-standing desire to sink the orchestra was not only to purify the visuals, but likewise to expand the number of instruments without drowning out the all important poetry of the singers. In Wagner's discussions with Semper, the architect had always warned him not to bury the pit too deep, but the first time Wagner entered the pit he realized that it needed to be larger. Burning the candle at both ends Brückwald and company wedged the pit further under the stage as well as cut out two potential rows of seats.¹¹⁷ They erred on the side of making it too large, since the sound could always be later subdued (though with qualitative side effects) with dampeners.

The "acoustic miracle," first heard in the 1875 rehearsals, was tremendously affected by the financial struggles of 1872-74. The construction team utilized large amounts of wood, lath and plaster walls, hollow pillars, and sail-cloth ceiling with economizing in mind, yet these materials absorbed and refracted the sound with favorable resonance.¹¹⁸ The high ceilings and sunken pit, built largely for observation of the stage drama, blended the sound of the orchestra, especially the abrasive tendencies of the violins and brass.¹¹⁹

Technically the building was not completed until spring 1876, just months before the beginning of the festival, but small scale rehearsals began on August 1,

¹¹⁶ Carnegie and Schulster confirm Wagner's intension to create a theater of "total illusion." See Carnegie, 72-3; Schulster, 244.

¹¹⁷ Spotts, 48.

¹¹⁸ Skelton, 35.

¹¹⁹ Leo Leroy Beranek, *Concert Halls and Opera Houses: Music, Acoustics, and Architecture* (New York: Springer, 2004), 283-88.

1875. Into a seatless, but tool-filled auditorium three Rhine maidens and an Alberich sung the very first music in the new *Festspielhaus*, appropriately the opening of the *Ring*. Apparently the singers and composer of the music were quite pleased with the effect and scheduled a full-scale sound check for the following day.¹²⁰ Wagner filled the pit with an orchestra and the still seatless auditorium with soldiers from a local garrison, who were in some respect Wagner's ideal audience, a fact not lost on him.¹²¹ Semi-official Wagnerian biographer Carl Glassenap recorded the composer as having said that the sound was just what he wanted and that "now the brass instruments no longer sound so harsh."¹²² Although the singers remained much longer, the orchestra in 1875 rehearsed for less than two weeks, just long enough to make preparations for the more rigorous practice the following summer.¹²³

Artists and assistants began trickling into Bayreuth in the spring of 1876, with the final rehearsals for the *Ring* getting under way in June.¹²⁴ Since the move to Bayreuth, Wagner had anticipated this moment and had asked Heinrich Porges, co-editor of the *Süddeutsche Presse*, to record it for the history of theater.¹²⁵ It was

¹²⁰ Spotts, 61.

¹²¹ Hartford, 34.

¹²² Quoted in Spotts, 61.

¹²³ Richard Fricke, *Wagner in Rehearsal: The Diaries of Richard Fricke*, ed. James Deaville and Evan Baker, trans. George R. Fricke (Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1998), 19.

¹²⁴ Williams, 125.

¹²⁵ See Heinrich Porges for a systematic account of Wagner's orchestral directions that follows the narrative of the *Ring*. Heinrich Porges, *Wagner Rehearsing the 'Ring': An Eyewitness Account of the Stage Rehearsals of the First Bayreuth Festival*, trans. Robert L. Jacobs (Cambridge:

Wagner's first opportunity to totally direct his creation and in William's words:

"provided the most extended opportunity that Wagner had ever had to realize on stage the ideas of the total work of art."¹²⁶ Spotts describes it as the birth of "professional operatic production," in the undertaking's seriousness and attention to detail.¹²⁷

At one point choreographer Richard Fricke, who recorded many aspects of the rehearsals in his diary, noted that the rehearsal provided Wagner a sort of second opportunity at composition.¹²⁸ This summarizes well the importance of analyzing the experience of Wagner's music-dramas in the context of their theatrical settings. Fricke also records Wagner's tendency to change his mind from day to day and completely infuriate the actors.¹²⁹ I suggest that part of Wagner's oscillation stemmed from the various and contradictory theories wrapped up in the composition of the *Ring*. Despite the independent articulation given to music in the dream stage, in the rehearsals Wagner often repeated the crux of the drama stage theory that the singing was most important and that the orchestral accompaniment must be toned down.¹³⁰ In this final realization of Wagnerian theatrical discourse the experiences

Cambridge University Press, 1983). On the other hand Fricke's diaries record a day by day account of Bayreuth society and activities with special consideration for the rehearsals and Wagner's staging direction.

¹²⁶ Williams, 125.

¹²⁷ Spots, 55, 62.

¹²⁸ Fricke, 80.

¹²⁹ Fricke, 67, 76, 80, 83.

¹³⁰ Spots, 65.

and theories of Wagner's past intermingled.

Theory: The Dream Stage in Practice

The final dress rehearsals began on August 6, with a performance of *Das Rheingold* for an auditorium empty save for the presence of the composer, a select group of guests, and the king of Bavaria. Ludwig had desperately wanted to see the completed cycle, which he had financially brought into being, but he also refused to intermingle with the other dignitaries. Therefore, Wagner scheduled the dress rehearsal in advance to be for the king exclusively.¹³¹ In a sense Ludwig had purchased the solitude of the *Festspielhaus* for four days to experience the *Ring*, but Wagner persuaded him after the first day that a full auditorium was necessary to get the right acoustic affect, to accurately participate in the theatrical discourse.¹³² Despite the fact that listening to music was for Ludwig and others an increasingly individual and introspective experience, it required a social context of sympathizers. Ludwig was not in the least disappointed with the crowd and the *Ring*, which restored to him a sense of life not experienced for years.¹³³ Next to the unrelenting energies of Wagner it was Ludwig's support which had brought the festival into being, in part shaped it, and finally demonstrated on the eve of the actual festival how Wagner wished his audience to participate.

¹³¹ Spotts, 68.

¹³² Newman, 2:480.

¹³³ King, 215.

We do not have a record of how well Ludwig understood the drama's associations through the remembrance of the leitmotifs, but he nonetheless seemed able, as the dream king, to immerse himself in the fantasy. From the production side the dress rehearsals worked particularly well in keeping theatrical illusion unbroken by distractions, as was all important to Wagner.¹³⁴ Such theatrical concerns were likewise fueled and justified by the theory of the dream stage, in which Wagner sought to induce trance-like states of theatrical experience wherein the music spoke to the hypnotized individual, a conversation understood consciously upon waking. The primary goal of the actualized music and stage craft was to create a sedated form of theatrical hypnotism, so that participants could most fully participate in the theatrical experience and understand the voice of the music.

As a metaphor for this process Wagner poignantly chose Schopenhauer's theory of clairvoyant phenomena. In his *Beethoven* essay Wagner compared the world essence communicated in the hypnotic state of musical listening with Schopenhauer's theory of clairvoyant, waking dreams. Just as, according to Schopenhauer, the dream organ converted prophetic understanding in the deepest of dreams into symbols within waking dreams, which can be remembered upon waking, the brain converted the essence of the music (the clairvoyance so to speak) into a penetrable consciousness of the spellbound listener.¹³⁵ As two thinkers trying to mediate natural philosophy and materialism, Wagner and Schopenhauer purported theories of double consciousness as a way to make sense of and bring

¹³⁴ Fricke, 91-93.

¹³⁵ Wagner, *Beethoven*, in *SSD*, 9:68-69; 75-76.

meaning to physical phenomena, including art.¹³⁶ With the theory and actualities of the dream stage we see Wagner appropriating the latest ideas of mind to support the meaningfulness and intelligence of music, including hypnotism.

Wagner's interest in hypnotism directly corresponded with a broader cultural concern. Anton von Mesmer's (1731-1803) somnambulant states cultivated interest throughout the nineteenth century in trance and magnetism. These states developed purportedly more scientific footing in 1843 when James Braid (1795-1860) explained trance in terms of animal magnetism and introduced a less controversial term – hypnotism.¹³⁷ Although few other researchers applied themselves to the topic at the time, magnetic demonstrations became a popular mid-century form of entertainment. According to Alan Gauld, however, "the modern hypnotic movement began" with the Parisian physician Charles Richet (1850-1935), who in the 1870s began experimenting with somnambulism after attending one such show.¹³⁸ One of Richet's immediate and universal discoveries was his subjects' increase in "passive" memory capacity, the ability to recall the items learned in the past.¹³⁹ The scientific and clinical application of hypnotism really got under way in 1878 with the work of J. M. Charcot (1825-1893). Sparked by the research of Richet, Charcot used hypnosis for his work with hysteria and even generated a

¹³⁶ Wagner, *Beethoven*, in *SSD*, 9:67-69

¹³⁷ Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Treitel, 35.

¹³⁸ Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 298.

¹³⁹ Gauld, 300.

school of followers.¹⁴⁰ By all accounts the 1880s was the peak decade of interest in hypnotic phenomena.¹⁴¹ We will return to this cultural phenomenon in the following chapters' analyses of *Ring* and *Parsifal* reception.

As seen in accounts of the rehearsals, Wagner's theatrical discourse in practice retained its features as an experiment with memory. One may even see the new element of hypnotism as potentially increasing mnemonic and associative abilities. Yet, with the increasing appropriation of hypnotism, Wagner largely discarded memory and its societal implications. With the liberation of the music throughout the composition of the *Ring*, Brünnhilde's final immolation engulfed not only the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but also the societal orientation of his theatrical discourse. Wagner had assumed melodic memory to be a universal capacity in which people could equally participate, but hypnotism was only for the few who could achieve such a mental state that would allow the liberated music to speak to and liberate individual unconsciousness. Despite these tensions between memory and hypnotism, the actual theatrical discourse of the first Bayreuth festival remained immersed in both of these avenues of identification.

¹⁴⁰ See Gauld 306-15; Teitel, 43.

¹⁴¹ See Derek Forrest, *Hypnotism: A History* (London: Penguin, 2000), 228; Brian Inglis, *Trance: A Natural History of Altered States of Mind* (London: Grafton, 1989), 110; Waterfield, 279.

CHAPTER III: MUSICAL DISCOURSE GOES MUTE, 1876

Friedrich Nietzsche could not be comforted. At the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876 other visitors would compliment him on the timeliness of his latest untimely meditation – the comparatively sympathetic *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* – to which he could only reply “people ought to forget those old stories.”¹ Parisian musicologist Edouard Schuré tried to befriend the disappointed Nietzsche, but neither Schuré, nor Wagner, nor any of his Basel colleagues could bring consolation to Nietzsche’s sense of profound alienation. He had arrived at his Bayreuth quarters – the rented house of writer Malwida von Meysenbug – far too early, before the dress rehearsals or even his sister’s arrival. In a letter to his sister Nietzsche wrote: “I wish I were somewhere else...I’m sick of it all.”² With failing spirits and physical health he escaped to the Bavarian forest, where he spent much time in bed, but managed to jot down a few lines on “the Plowshare” that eventually worked their way in into *Menschliches, All-zu-Menschliches* (*Human All-too-Human*).³

¹ Quoted in Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, *Wagner and Nietzsche*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Seabury, 1976), 141.

² Friedrich Nietzsche to Elisabeth Nietzsche, 1 August 1876, in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 147.

³ In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche states that the beginnings of *Human All-too-Human* were in Bayreuth. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Modern Library, 1964), 740. On Nietzsche’s experience in Bayreuth see Manfred Eger, *Nietzsche’s Bayreuther Passion* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2001); Georges Liébert, *Nietzsche and Music*, trans. David Pellauer and Graham Parkes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Newman, 4:491-539.

At his sister's request Nietzsche left the seclusion of Klingenberg to return to Bayreuth, but only to attend the first Ring Cycle, having given away his tickets for the other, better performances. He had originally looked forward to the festival with hope that the visitors and music-drama would be the vanguard of cultural regeneration and that "those who are permitted to participate in it...[would] be transformed and renewed, so as henceforth to transform and renew other domains of life."⁴ Nietzsche's participation would transform him, but not in the way he had hoped. He would become a psychologist.⁵ As if waking from a dream, Nietzsche found Wagner, Germany, the *Ring*, the tourists, the worship of Wagner, and his own past all-too-human, and began reflecting on these categories with what he later called "hard psychology."⁶ The philologist's new method of "psychological observation" of himself, Wagner, and society became a "means by which man [read

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 211.

⁵ In *Ecce Homo*, 787, among other places, Nietzsche claimed to be a psychologist saying, "Who among philosophers was a *psychologist* at all before me... There was no psychology at all before me." Historians and psychologist have not always taken Nietzsche's claim to be a psychologist seriously. However, recent scholarship has begun to place him more directly within the context of psychology at the end of the nineteenth century. See Jacob Golomb et al., eds., *Nietzsche and Depth Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Ronald Lehrer, *Nietzsche's Presence in Freud's Life and Thought: On the Origins of a Psychology of Dynamic Unconscious Mental Functioning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Gregory Moore and Thomas H. Brobjer, eds., *Nietzsche and Science* (Burlington, V.T.: Ashgate, 2004); Graham Parkes, ed., *Composing the Soul: The Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Paul Roazen, *Political Theory and the Psychology of the Unconscious: Freud, J. S. Mill, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Fromm, Bettelheim and Erikson* (London: Open Gate, 2000).

⁶ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 742.

Nietzsche] can ease life's burden" and the foundation for his later positivist and classicist works.⁷

This birth of a psychologist out the spirit of Bayreuth reflects aspects of the experiences recorded by other participants. First of all, one's expectations and theatrical preparation tended to largely determine the parameters of experience. Additionally, the specifics of the performances, which cycle one attended and with whom, proved to be quite relevant factors. In these experiences, one's feeling of exhaustion or intoxication had a very direct correlation with the ability to converse with the music. Nietzsche's account and experience also had its idiosyncrasies, differing from the norm in critical areas, such as projection and identification. Whereas most critics and reviewers tended to project their own aesthetic interpretation and enjoyment onto the entire audience, Nietzsche rather assumed his experience to be unique. Consequently, instead of dividing the demographics of the festival into "us" versus "them," as most accounts did, for Nietzsche it was "me" versus them.⁸ Despite Bayreuth's nationalist aspirations, for those few visitors, like Nietzsche, for whom the festival had deeper meaning, it was largely a personal, self-reflexive significance.

This chapter explores comparative reactions to the first *Ring* festival in 1876, particularly in regard to Wagner's attempt to make music speak through mnemonic and hypnotic devices. I further compare this experiment with Wundt's laboratory in

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All-too-Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 39.

⁸ In fact Nietzsche went into the festival expecting it to be the ennoblement and affirmation of self-determining individuals. See Nietzsche, *Bayreuth*, 212-3.

Leipzig and Charcot's clinical experiences in Paris. It is necessary then to begin with a contextualization of the festival within the boom in psychological thinking in the 1870s, by looking at the major researchers and their ideas. Following that, the chapter analyzes the successes and failures of Wagner's ability to control the conditions of theatrical experience and experiment. In light of these experiences we look at the voice of music in this theatrical discourse – what people did and did not hear. In a case study we return to Nietzsche and his experience with musical discourse as foundational to his new psychological program. Finally, we look at Wagner's own disappointment with proving music's communicative potential in light of Wundt's and Ebbinghaus's experiments with memory.

Context: Explosion of Psychological Thought

Nietzsche's new method of investigation was just one of many in the virtual explosion of psychological research undertaken in the wake of German unification.⁹ Important publications included Wilhelm Wundt's *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie* (*Principles of Physiological Psychology*) in 1874, Hermann Ebbinghaus's *Über das Gedächtnis: Untersuchungen zur experimentellen Psychologie* (*Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology*) in 1885, Franz

⁹ Although scholars do not often lump Nietzsche in with psychological *researchers*, his conscious turn to positivism, the natural sciences, and methodical observation – while not using experimental apparatuses – shared similarities with the methods, practices, and interests of the 'laboratory' scientists. I put laboratory in scare quotes, because these early work spaces were informal and sparsely populated with equipment compared to twentieth- and twenty-first-century establishments. Additionally, Nietzsche was vaguely aware of the work of Wundt and Helmholtz and sent them both copies of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (*On the Genealogy of Morals*) in 1887. See Robert C. Holub, "The Birth of Psychoanalysis from the Spirit of Enmity: Nietzsche, Rée, and Psychology in the Nineteenth Century," in Golomb et al., 165.

Brentano's (1838-1917) *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* (*Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*) in 1874, Carl Stumpf's (1848-1936) *Über den psychologischen Ursprung der Raumvorstellung* (*On the Psychological Origins of Space Perception*) in 1873 and *Tonpsychologie* (*Tone Psychology*) in 1883/1890, Ernst Mach's (1838-1916) *Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen* (*The Analysis of Sensations*) in 1886, Eduard von Hartmann's *Philosophie des Unbewussten* (*Philosophy of the Unconscious*) in 1869, and Paul Rée's (1849-1901) *Psychologische Beobachtungen* (*Psychological Observations*) in 1875. Although one can hardly call psychology in the 1870s an autonomous and defined field, this decade represented an enormous watershed in psychological thought, being a reaction against mid-century organic physics and its research embargo against the mind.¹⁰

First and foremost in this burst methodological ingenuity was Wundt's propagation of experimental introspection, culminating in the establishment of his Leipzig laboratory in 1879.¹¹ Having originally trained under the guidance of Helmholtz and the inspiration of Fechner, Wundt abandoned their physiological research orientations for a process of rigorous introspection of mental operations. Wundt's reputation did not, however, come from this methodology, other than in the opposition it created, but rather from the technological aids he acquired for his

¹⁰ On the organic physicists see Anderton; Lenoir.

¹¹ On Wundt's work from 1879 onward see Danziger, *Constructing*; Idem, "Sealing Off the Discipline: Wilhelm Wundt and the Psychology of Memory," in Green et al.; Hatfield; Robert W. Rieber and David K. Robinson, eds., *Wilhelm Wundt in History: The Making of Scientific Psychology* (New York: Kluwer, 2001).

research, the accumulation of which became a 'laboratory.' By modern standards, and even compared to the work spaces of nineteenth-century scientists in other disciplines, Wundt's was hardly at first a laboratory, being a few instruments left permanently in the lecture room.¹² In *Constructing the Subject* historian of psychology Kurt Danziger asserts that in this laboratory, considered by many the founding of modern psychology, Wundt and his students pursued trans-situational knowledge about the mind through strict control of the introspectors' environment, which gradually led an unanticipated differentiation between experimenter and subject. The test subject and laboratory had to be created in order for Wundt's experiments, in his own opinion, to be objective enough to obtain effective results.¹³

However, one can attribute much of the explosion in psychology to a reaction against Wundt that Danziger calls "the positivist repudiation."¹⁴ Hermann von Ebbinghaus, who lived in the academic shadow of Wundt, formed an important part of these reactions.¹⁵ Ebbinghaus lacked Wundt's strong institutional support, but nonetheless Ebbinghaus became the first person to analyze a mental function

¹² Other researchers of mind emulated Wundt's experimental techniques more so than his method of introspection, which later he even exchanged for observation of introspection.

¹³ Danziger, *Constructing*, 17-33, 49-67.

¹⁴ On the reaction against Wundt see Kurt Danziger, "The Positivist Repudiation of Wundt," *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences* 15, no. 3 (1979): 205-230. Anderton similarly points to the 1870s as a period of methodological crisis and diversification.

¹⁵ The historical scholarship on Ebbinghaus is quite sparse and usually only undertaken in comparison with Wundt. See Jacqueline L. Cunningham, "A Comparison of *Psychology: An Elementary Textbook* by Hermann Ebbinghaus with Modern Introductory Textbooks," *Revista de Historia de la Psicología* 7, no. 1 (1986): 59-70; Danziger, "Sealing;" Idem, "From Quantification to Methodology," in *Constructing*; Werner Traxel, and Horst Gundlach, eds., *Ebbinghaus-Studien* (Passau: Passavia Universitätsverlag, 1986-7).

using experimental techniques.¹⁶ His topic of research and that for which he is most remembered – memory. Although Ebbinghaus did not publish his findings until 1885, he had completed his research by 1880. Using different series of nonsense syllables he systematically tested his own retention abilities so as to determine memory capacity in achievement-based situations. As a pedagogue, Ebbinghaus then applied his experimental, “non-subjective” findings on memory capacity to more general reforms of education.¹⁷

Whereas Ebbinghaus found the objectivity of introspection suspect, Franz Brentano highly valued the practice as pathway to psychological knowledge.¹⁸ However, Brentano, like Ebbinghaus, considered Wundt’s particular method of introspection not empirical enough. Brentano wanted to study the actual mental processes, rather than their manifestations, but considered researchers unable to observe their own consciousness in action. More purely philosophical than experimental, Brentano proposed methods of imagination and reflection upon past, but real-life mental activity, rather than what he considered the unnatural experiments of Wundt’s laboratory. This concern for the temporal actions of mental life, as opposed to a behaviorist pursuit of the mind’s manifestations, can be seen in one of Brentano’s central concepts – intentionality. For Brentano all mental actions

¹⁶ Hothersall, 140.

¹⁷ Danziger, *Constructing*, 143.

¹⁸ On Brentano see Liliana Albertazzi et al., eds., *The School of Franz Brentano* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996); Geert-Jan Boudewijnse, “The Gestalt Line,” (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 1997); Barry Smith, *Austrian Philosophy: The Legacy of Franz Brentano* (Chicago: Open Court, 1994).

had an external, physical, *intentional* object, giving the mind an active relationship with the objects of perception.¹⁹ Intentionality became a cornerstone for Brentano's students and their schools of thought, which included phenomenology and Gestalt theory.

One of Brentano's students was Carl Stumpf, a philosopher called in 1894 to head up a psychological institute in Berlin, a position many thought would go to Ebbinghaus.²⁰ Stumpf earned this appointment on the strength of his work in the 1880s on the psychology of tone perception, which applied Wundtian research methods of introspection, aided by technical apparatuses. Looking to reform Helmholtz's research on the relation of resonating auditory hairs and the perception of upper partials, which by 1880 had become canonical, Stumpf introduced the language of psychological functions to aural analysis. He is most well-known for the theory of fusion, wherein the mind, both with and without the subject's apperception, intentionally fused the disparate sensations caused by sound. The mind formed these psychological wholes – anything from a single tone to an entire melody – into efficient and logical relationships, whose associative capacities provided a foundation for aesthetics. For Stumpf fusion essentially explained Helmholtz's more automated unconscious inference by transferring the agency of relating sensations from the physiological to the mental.

¹⁹ Like Helmholtz's and Wundt's unconscious inference, Brentano considered perception an active integration of sensations.

²⁰ As in the case of Ebbinghaus, not much literature exists on Stumpf and that which does is usually in the context of his relationship with Gestalt psychology. See Ash; Kim; Barry Smith, ed., *Foundations of Gestalt Theory* (Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 1988).

Similarly, Ernst Mach looked to reform Helmholtz's *Tonempfindungen* (*Tone Sensations*), but by suggesting that it did put enough emphasis on the physiological.²¹ As polymathic as Helmholtz, Mach spent much of his early career working on acoustics, being most well-known in that field for his work on the speed of sound. As one concerned with moving and temporal sounds, Mach proposed the existence of muscular feeling (*Muskelgefühl*) rather than Helmholtz's ear hairs to account for the unities of perception. These elements remembered the amounts and proportions of energy exerted by the various nerve-endings. However, as Andrew Winston notes, Mach's primary contribution to the burgeoning field of psychological research was methodological and theoretical.²² In a positivist repudiation of Brentanian intentionality and psycho-physiological dualisms, Mach proposed an epistemology for scientific research that analyzed experience as temporal and unmediated sensations. In disposing, as far as possible, of causation, Mach did much to shift scientific conceptions from causations to functions, just as Helmholtz had informed the modulation of force into energy.²³ For both Mach and Helmholtz function – and energy – provided a closed circuit of explainable factors. Largely, Mach's scientific program looked to avoid the framework of metaphysics,

²¹ On Mach see Erik C. Banks, *Ernst Mach's World Elements: A Study in Natural Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003); John Blackmore, Ryoichi Itagaki, and S. Tanaka, eds., *Ernst Mach's Vienna, 1895-1930, or, Phenomenalism as Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001); Andrew S. Winston, "Cause into Function: Ernst Mach and Reconstructing Explanation in Psychology, 1872-1905," in Green et al.

²² Winston, 108-9.

²³ Winston, 108.

a program taken up by Ebbinghaus, as well as Wundt's most influential students, Oswald Külpe and E. B. Tichner.²⁴

If Mach enjoyed increasing popularity among the field of experimental researchers, Eduard von Hartmann could boast the same for the more literary and philosophical public.²⁵ Admittedly speculative, Hartmann's metaphysics stood in direct opposition to Mach's methodology. As a part of the discursive boom in psychology, Hartmann's very popular *Philosophie der Unbewussten* proposed "a teleological evolutionist and pan-psychist vision of the world."²⁶ Until Freud, Hartmann's philosophy remained the most important articulation of the unconscious. Along with Wagner, Hartmann was also a key popularizer of Schopenhauer, especially the idea of a collective and irrational unconsciousness to which the individual conscious mind is returning. Many of Hartmann's theories actually shared similarity with Wagner's artwork and nomadic stages. Although Freud's reading of Nietzsche formed a more direct connection between Schopenhauer and *Die Traumdeutung* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*), Hartmann's attempt to apply theories of unconsciousness provided Freud with important clinical inspirations.²⁷

²⁴ Danziger, *Constructing*, 42.

²⁵ On Hartmann see Donald Capps, "Hartmann's Relationship to Freud: A Reappraisal," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 6, no. 2 (1970): 162-175; Dennis N. Darnoi, *The Unconscious and Eduard von Hartmann: A Historico-Critical Monograph* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968); Treitel; Jean-Claude Wolf, *Eduard von Hartmann: Ein Philosoph der Gründerzeit* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006).

²⁶ Burrow, 64-67.

One final, noteworthy philosopher-psychologist from the 1870s was Paul Rée, who, like Hartmann, proceeded inductively from his empirical observations of human actions to form conclusions about hidden motivations.²⁸ Although Rée rejected Hartmann's metaphysical conclusions, Rée similarly applied Lamarckian inheritance to moral sentiments. This evolutionary and genealogical approach, key features of naturalism, rubbed off on Rée's friend Nietzsche. The two became friends in 1875, the year Rée published his aphoristic *Psychologische Beobachtungen*. According to Robert Holub, Rée's influence on Nietzsche can be seen in the philologist's later aphoristic style, moral revaluation, and psychological diagnosis.²⁹ In the winter of 1876-77 the two lived together with Meysenbug, Nietzsche's host in Bayreuth, both working on their new books after having attended the festival together.

Wagner's festival represents on a number of levels part of this surge of psychological interest and reflected similar practices. His concerns with music and the mind, though at times lacking precision and comprehensiveness, participated in a discourse on mind shared by scientists and artists alike. On the other hand, Wagner's festival, though also not on par with the rigor and organization of most

²⁷ Hartmann, Nietzsche, and indirectly Wagner all acted as conduits between Schopenhauer and Freud. Donald Capps argues additionally that Hartmann's connections to Jewish mysticism informed Freud's development of psychoanalysis by introducing him to older traditions of mental healing.

²⁸ On Rée see Brendan Donnellan, "Friedrich Nietzsche and Paul Rée: Cooperation and Conflict," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43, no. 4 (1982): 595-612; Holub, in Golomb et al.; Robin Small, *Nietzsche and Rée: A Star Friendship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

²⁹ Holub, in Golomb et al., 156-163.

laboratories, was for him a long anticipated experiment with musical perception.³⁰ First, by controlling the conditions of theatrical experience and pressing into service new technical devices, he tested his subjects' memory of lyrical and absolute music. Additionally, by inducing trance-like states of mind Wagner hoped to put listeners in contact with their will and therefore prove music's capacity to speak. Such attempts to contain the parameters of experience, introduce various musical samples, and attain specific results mirrored the experiments of scientists.

Experiences of Theatrical Discourse: The *Ring*

Bayreuth 1876

Despite the claims of some participants to the contrary, the experiences of the festival varied with the demographics of the audience. In addition to salient features of the city of Bayreuth and the festival atmosphere, personal tastes mediated this variance in experience. Which of the three cycles one attended and with whom affected visitors' perspectives as much as theatrical preparation. Part of the experience included a noticeably heightened feeling of tourism, which actually encouraged a homogenous education in the music of the *Ring*. Yet the great diversity of the participants in the first festival proved more important than their commonalities.

³⁰ To compare Wagner's festival with the experiments of most psychologists may seem a comparison of apples and oranges – artificially constructed for the purpose of showing a discursive interest in memory, hypnotism, test-subjects, and technology. Yet they are both the fruits of attempts to get at the "night life of the soul."

Audiences and critics alike almost universally hailed the second Ring Cycle the best, the first as the worst, with the third somewhere in between. Important factors leading to success included the effective workings of stage machinery and differences in acoustics. For example, the Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick assessed the performances quite negatively. As one of the most well-respected and anti-Wagnerian reviewers in Europe such a reaction could be expected from Hanslick, but in part this critique can also be attributed to his having only attended the premiere. Whatever brilliance Hanslick thought the music might possess under better circumstances, he considered it have lost its clarity in the deeply buried orchestral pit, which he perceived to have a “muffled and dampened” sound.³¹ London critic J. W. Davison, in attending the first *two* cycles, made an observation that explains part of Hanslick’s critique. Davison noted that “[t]he performances of the second series are a great improvement on the first,” and specifically because the orchestra played louder, having a noticeable brightening effect on the dullness.³²

Certainly visitors interpreted tone quality by their own subjective aesthetic, but also by what comparisons they could make to the unique sound of the *Festspielhaus*. The Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg considered first performance to have not a dull but rather wonderfully “subdued” sound compared with the acoustics of *Das Rheingold*’s dress rehearsal.³³ That had been King Ludwig

³¹ Eduard Hanslick, *Musical Criticisms 1846-99*, trans. Henry Pleasants, in Hartford, 74.

³² J. W. Davison, “The Wagner Festival at Bayreuth,” in Hartford, 99.

II's command performance in which few others were in the empty auditorium, Grieg being one of them only because he snuck in with the orchestra. Others, such as Berlin critic Louis Ehrlert and London critic George Freemantle – who both attended the third cycle – considered the acoustics and tone of the orchestra quite excellent, and incidentally had generally positive reviews of the performances.³⁴ Additionally, Ehrlert wrote, from either personal experience or word of mouth, that in the last rows of the auditorium the tone lacked some measure of fullness and richness.³⁵ In sum, which cycle one attended, and even in what seat, had a decided effect on one's total theatrical experience.

Arguably the 'who' of the festival was an even more decisive factor than 'where' and 'when' in contributing to the theatrical interpretation. The sheer number of writers and critics present in Bayreuth assured that the monumental event would be well scrutinized and documented.³⁶ According to Ehrlert: "The critics were the most completely represented element."³⁷ This element was almost singularly that which Wagner years earlier had hoped his festival setting would

³³ Edvard Grieg, *Bergensposten*, in Hartford, 67.

³⁴ Louis Ehrlert, "Das Bühnenfestspiel in Bayreuth," *Deutsche Rundschau* 9 (1876), 128; George Freemantle, in Hartford, 96. For a list of festival attendance see "Fremdenliste," at the Nationalarchiv der Richard-Wagner-Stiftung, under *Archivschrank* A2500 I, 1-10.

³⁵ Ehrlert, "Bühnenfestspiel," 128.

³⁶ Given such a variety of documentation and literature it is surprising that few, if any, scholars have undertaken a thorough comparison of the festival reactions. Susanna Großmann-Vendrey's source book, though by no means exhaustive, showcases many of these documents, but only analyzes them individually and not in a comparative analysis. See Susanna Großmann-Vendrey, ed., *Bayreuth in der deutschen Presse*, 2 vol., 100 Jahre Bayreuther Festspiele, no. 10 (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1977). Hereafter cited as *BDP*.

³⁷ Ehrlert, "Bühnenfestspiel," 130: "Um vollzähligsten war natürlich die Kritik vertreten."

avoid. While not conducive to Wagner's intent, the presence of such a throng of critics is helpful for historians and also points to the great international and cultural curiosity in the theatrical undertaking.

The factors drawing the critics' interest also attracted a variety of other groups and notables. This led Berlin writer Heinrich Ehrlich to call the first festival "cosmopolitan," at least by comparison with later festivals.³⁸ Regardless of nationality the most prominent groups included members of the old aristocracy and what Berlin critic Karl Frenzel called the "knights of the intellect."³⁹ Frenzel noted that the visual artists were more prominently represented than the composers. Notable painters present were Adolf Menzel, Franz Lenbach, Anton von Werner, and Hans Makart, while the composers were headed by Anton Bruckner, Grieg, Camille Saint-Saëns, Peter Tchaikovsky, and Franz Liszt, a patriarchal figure more or less obliged to come. Important authors received adequate representation, but were largely overshadowed by the host of important critics from Berlin and Vienna. The assembly of these icons made Bayreuth into what one might call a cultural Disneyland.

In addition to the superstardom, the *Ring* festival also possessed a significant spirit of nationalism. After all, present in the caravan from Berlin was Emperor

³⁸ Heinrich Ehrlich, "Der Tag von Bayreuth: *Parsifal*," *Über Land und Meer: Allgemeine Illustrierte Zeitung* 24, no. 47 (1882), 943.

³⁹ Karl Frenzel, "Die Bayreuther Festspiele," in *Berliner Dramaturgie* (Hannover, Rümpler, 1877), 202: "Rittern vom Geist." Louis Ehrkert also noted the distinct absence of Brahms, Verdi, and Meyerbeer. See Ehrkert, "Bühnenfestspiel," 130.

Wilhelm I.⁴⁰ To some degree Wagner was successful in creating an artistic monument to the new Reich and in assembling its demographic makeup in a small Franconian town. Alongside the big names a variety of social classes participated in the festival, including what Grieg observed as “the gentry in all their grand attire and jewels” and “young fanatical intellectuals.”⁴¹ In slightly charged terminology this summarizes well how observers generally divided the festival participants: those primarily interested in the staged drama and those looking for socializing amusement.⁴² Many of the theatrically inclined consisted of Wagnerian sympathizers streaming into Bayreuth for their composer’s big moment. Many writers described this element, even in 1876, as a cult, in order to communicate the intensity and dogmatism of their devotion.⁴³ This hodgepodge of old money and new money, foreigners and nationalists, Philistines and aesthetes, were all, however, united in a similar experience of tourism.

Berlin critic and author Paul Lindau said, “It was predictable that the industry would take advantage of the Wagnerian cult,” going on to mention the sale of Wagner cravats, Siegfried hats, and Nibelungen caps, the latter of which he

⁴⁰ Deathridge and Dahlhaus, 60. The festival was also attended by Emperor Dom Pedro II of Brazil.

⁴¹ Grieg, in Hartford, 66.

⁴² This is also how Joseph Kürschner and Adolf Stern divided the visitors. See Joseph Kürschner, “Bayreuther Tagebuchblätter,” (1876), 3; Adolf Stern, “Bayreuther Nibelungentage,” in *Wanderbuch* (Leipzig, 1877), 196-97.

⁴³ Paul Lindau, *Nüchterne Briefe aus Bayreuth* (Breslau: S. Schottlaender, 1876), 15. It is not uncommon to read in the accounts from the late-nineteenth century or in the secondary sources references to the Wagner following as a cult. It is an important and interesting aspect of the theatrical experience and the cultivation of modern identities and will be explored in more depth in chapter four.

bought.⁴⁴ Even for this first festival the city was on its toes, “making money in abundance out of the strangers within its gates.”⁴⁵ Primarily, the image of Wagner had been converted into every conceivably marketable form. In numerous storefront windows one could find not only portraits, but statues, tobacco-boxes, cigars, wine, collars, toilet ornaments, album covers, and even meerschaum pipes “carved with the heroic features of Bayreuth’s present idol.”⁴⁶ But in addition to providing visual and oral consumables, the touristy atmosphere prepared visitors to consume the music-drama by readily providing information about the music.⁴⁷ This effect of tourism on the theatrical experience will be addressed in more detail at the end of this section.

The touristy activities observers generally recorded seeing reflect the two kinds of participants described above. Literary icon Joseph Kürschner and British minister and writer Hugh Haweis, two favorable critics, reported visitors mostly discussing Wagner’s music-dramas, both before and after performances.⁴⁸ However, according to Tchaikovsky, “food forms the chief interest of the public; the artistic representations take a secondary place.”⁴⁹ The ill-preparedness of the city of

⁴⁴ Lindau, *Nüchterne Briefe*, 15: “Das sich auch die Industrie des Wagnercultus bemächtigen würde, war vorauszusehen.” Translation in Herbert Barth et al., eds., *Wagner: A Documentary Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

⁴⁵ Joseph Bennett, *Letters From Bayreuth*, in Hartford, 88.

⁴⁶ Bennett, in Hartford, 88; Freemantle, in Hartford, 95.

⁴⁷ Bennett, in Hartford, 88-89. Bennett records hearing everywhere loud singers and musicians performing parts of the *Ring*.

⁴⁸ Hugh Reginald Haweis, *My Musical Memories* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 233; Kürschner, 2.

Bayreuth to accommodate over two thousand visitors definitely detracted from the creation of Wagner's theatrical ideal. The inability to consume food inhibited the long hours of artistic consumption. But while the search for open seats and available meals did occupy much time and interest of the visitors, whether art or food was the main topic of conversation likely varied and depended on the interests of one's immediate circle of visitors.⁵⁰ It follows then that the crowd with which one moved during intermissions and afterwards conditioned the visitors' ability to talk either about drama or dinner.

In general the performances did not go as well as planned and many considered the theatrical evenings tiresome and drawn out.⁵¹ Even Ehrlert, who in general remained rather neutral in judging the whole affair, attached "weariness" and "painful fatigue" to the theatrical evenings.⁵² On the other hand, at least some sympathizers reported rapt attentiveness and dialogical engagement. Haweis noted after a rather poor performance of *Das Rheingold* "no sign of fatigue in the audience, who sit in rapt attention to the close."⁵³ After the crowd dispersed from the theater and descended into the city, Haweis suggested that all eighteen hundred participants discussed the experience in the cafes for at least an hour after the

⁴⁹ Peter Tchaikovsky to Russky Viedmosty, 14 August 1876, in Hartford, 53.

⁵⁰ As far as the struggle for existence, Adolf Stern suggests that the lack of food and difficult theatrical conditions bonded the visitors more than the actual content of the music drama. See Stern, 210.

⁵¹ Among those who thought the whole endeavor exhausting were Ehrlert, Grieg, Hanslick, Nietzsche, and Tchaikovsky.

⁵² Ehrlert, "Bühnenfestspiel," 129-30.

⁵³ Haweis, 230.

performance.⁵⁴ The level of post-show discussion and contemplation certainly varied with one's crowd. Haweis and Ehrlert have completely different perceptions, impressions that reflected their own experiences. Neither of the authors were propagandists for or against Wagner, but seem to have honestly participated in the theatrical discourse on different levels of consciousness, and assumed that their fellow audience members felt similarly.

Theater as Magic and Effect

As demonstrated by the disagreement between Haweis and Ehrlert, critics, while providing a wealth of information, also tended to project their own experience on the entirety of the participants, making it difficult to make generalizations about the experiences of the festival. Additionally, the critics as a whole portrayed themselves as listeners above emotional attachment to the drama, always describing the theatrical effect as something experienced by others. Likely, as *critics*, they were unable to be hypnotized in the way the Wagner intended. Yet, in the vast literature of festival reactions, writers made helpful observations about the failures and successes of the dramaturgical dreamscape.

Like the variance of opinion about quality of sound, participants expressed different accounts of their musical hypnotism or lack thereof. Although many audience members described feelings of altered states of consciousness, few

⁵⁴ Haweis, 230. Similarly the enchanted Kürschner and Angelo Neumann report others and themselves contemplating and dialoging about the meaning of the drama. Kürschner even suggests that the long dramatic pauses, not just between the days of the cycle, but also during the breaks between acts, added to the tension and provided ample space for public discussion and soul searching. Kürschner, 22; Angelo Neumann, *Personal Recollections of Wagner*, trans. Edith Livermore (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1908), 21.

acquiesced to Wagner's hope of simulating a waking dream. Among them was Haweis, who described the music-pictures in terms of an extraterrestrial "land of dreams," and specifically the opening scene as a dream of being immersed in water.⁵⁵ As with many accounts, Haweis cited the tremendous impact of the opening prelude, the slowly rising Rhine motif swelling from just a whisper in the darkened auditorium: "The elemental prelude of deep and slumberous sound wafts us away from all account of time and space of the present. The vast hall, full of silent human beings, has been touched by the magician's wand."⁵⁶ More often than as a feeling of dreaming, however, participants described the theater with the latter metaphor of magic, using it both positively and negatively.

Grieg, Hanslick, Kürschner, Stern, and Leipzig opera director Angelo Neumann all concurred with Haweis in describing the festival theater in terms of its magical effect. This stemmed not only from the music, but from the total theatrical experiences, full of optical illusions of proportion, steam, colored lights, harnesses, and mechanical animals. Hanslick derided these "magic tricks" as part of Wagner's ever-present appeal to the senses rather than sensibilities.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Grieg considered such effects, especially the musical, quite effective in carrying the

⁵⁵ Haweis, 226-27. In Wagner's posthumously published autobiography he described the state in which he conceived of the Rhine motif as a somnambulant state of being immersed in water. It is not clear whether Haweis knew this, or could have known this, but nonetheless Wagner's experience of writing the music completely mirrored Haweis's experience of listening to the music, an examples of the unconscious communication of musical discourse. See Wagner, *My Life*, 499.

⁵⁶ Haweis, 226.

⁵⁷ Hanslick, in Hartford, 83.

spectators away and making them *forget* the slowness of the plot.⁵⁸ In general, though, the festival did not alter the musical opinion of its attendees. Those who loved Wagner left singing his praises, those who hated him had more fodder for their criticisms, and the indifferent left indifferent. However, Angelo Neumann presents us with at least one case of conversion into a Wagnerite, a converse case to that of Nietzsche's defection. Given a ticket at the last moment, Neumann went to the festival out of duty and curiosity, but recorded in his memoirs:

From the moment of the introduction with that long-drawn chord of E major [sic], when the green gauze curtains rolled gradually away to reveal the swimming Rhine-maidens, I was under a *spell* that lasted till the final note – a spell of dissolving pictures on the stage, and the incomparable *magic* of the orchestra.⁵⁹

It should be noted that Neumann sat front and center, and attended the second cycle, which was universally regarded to be the best.⁶⁰

As an extension of the connotation of magic, participants also described the production of the *Ring* festival in terms of "effect," and experience of that effect as physiological. Conrad Fiedler, an aesthetician from Berlin, defended the artistic value of Wagner's musico-poetics against sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand's claim that it was purely the "mysterious effect" of chaotic music.⁶¹ Yet, Fiedler conceded that "for a very large section of the public" the effect was the extent of the aesthetic

⁵⁸ Grieg, in Hartford, 63.

⁵⁹ Neumann, *Reflections*, 20-21. Emphasis added. The chord was actually E-flat major.

⁶⁰ Additionally, the case of Neumann reflects the trend that if the spectator was not hooked, or carried away, by the opening prelude, they were headed for an exhaustingly boring night.

⁶¹ Conrad Fiedler to Adolf von Hildebrand, 27 August 1876, in Barth, 234; Hildebrand to Fiedler, 5 September 1876, in Barth, 234; Fiedler to Hildebrand, 20 September 1876, in Barth, 234-35.

attraction and understanding. Similarly, Heinrich Ehrlich suggested that Wagner's physiological impressions on the nerves were necessary in order to hold the attention of the non-artistically inclined majority for such a long period.⁶² At the first festival most of the observers took immediate notice of the art's attempt to create an effect on the nerves and physical constitution of the listener.⁶³ However, commentators at the next festival would see these effects differently, a change explored in the next chapter.

By describing the theatrical discourse of the *Ring* in terms of magic effects, participants voiced on a whole their consciousness of the fantasy's construction, as well as their wakeful – non hypnotic – experience of the music-drama. In as much as participants felt dream-like pulls, they attributed it to the music.⁶⁴ Praise of the musical power of the *Ring* was in part an observation of the music's comparative success vis-à-vis the stage craft. For all of Wagner's anti-modern claims, his dramaturgical ideal appropriated the latest technologies in order to attain a more realistic stage presentation. However, for both the composer and the audience the actual "shoddy pantomime magic" proved to be the greatest disappointment of the festival.⁶⁵ According to the generally sympathetic Ehrlich, more had been less, as the use of more sophisticated machinery, and its failings, actually hurt the

⁶² Heinrich Ehrlich, *Für den "Ring des Nibelungen" gegen das "Festspiel zu Bayreuth"* (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1876), 55-56.

⁶³ Grieg, in Hartman, 68; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Modern Library, 1964), 627.

⁶⁴ Kürschner, 8; Neumann, *Reflections*, 20; Stern, 223.

⁶⁵ Wilhelm Mohr, *Richard Wagner und das Kunstwerk der Zukunft im Lichte der Baireuther Aufführung Betrachtet*, in Barth, 233.

atmosphere of fantasy.⁶⁶ By trying to immerse the audience in an imaginative world, rather than making them use their imaginations, Wagner generally failed to achieve the dream-like theatrical discourse, a necessary prerequisite for the unconscious inferences of the musical discourse.⁶⁷

Constructing the Spectator: Wundt and Wagner

Why did Wagner's experiment fail? In comparing Wagner's *Festspielhaus* with Wundt's laboratory, parallels can be drawn that elucidate the factors necessary for successful, socially-oriented experiments. Since Wagner's incorporation of the philosophy of Schopenhauer, manifested in his dream stage, the methods of Wagner's experimentation with musical memory had shifted from the conscious association of emotions to the creation of a hypnotic environment in which communication could be accomplished unconsciously. Similarly, Wundt needed to create an environment fertile for observation. In the initial experiments, observers did not record the actions of subjects, but experimenters recorded the observations of introspectors for them. As collaborative efforts, Wundt's data retrieval and Wagner's musical prosody required trained introspectors.⁶⁸ Both projects needed sympathetic, active participants and the ability to control the contingent conditions in order get conclusive enough results to make with authority universal pronouncements either on psychological functions or on art.

⁶⁶ Ehrlich, *Ring*, 58-60.

⁶⁷ On Wagner's "stage realism" see Carnegie, 37-43.

⁶⁸ Although the introspectors were technically the objects of observation, the focus on their mental functions directed research toward the abstract psychological.

In both Leipzig and Bayreuth the distance between subject and object blurred.⁶⁹ This indeterminacy and activity required sympathetic and flexible collaboration between experimenter and subject. Given these challenges part of Wundt's effectiveness can be attributed to his comparative success in finding compliant undergraduates. On the other hand the scale of Wagner's project and its provocation of curiosity attracted an audience ill-suited for purpose of making music speak. More importantly, though, Wundt's success lay in his ability to properly prepare his subjects and control the conditions of the experiment. In order to make universally applicable conclusions about mental processes Wundt required his participants to be trained in his method of objective introspection.⁷⁰ By contrast Wagner had no similarly effective mechanism for making sure that the festival participants had read his prose works or the libretto for the *Ring*, but seemed to assume it from the audience.

Hans von Wolzogen recognized this ill-preparedness of the visitors and tried to remedy it by writing his travelers guide to the festival.⁷¹ As an example of how the experience of modern tourism was not separate from the theatrical experience, one of the main items for sale was Wolzogen's *Thematischer Leitfaden* (*Thematic Guide*), which listed the ninety leitmotifs that he had detected in the *Ring*.⁷²

⁶⁹ On the dynamics between experimenter and subject in Wundt's laboratory see Danziger, *Constructing*, 51-52.

⁷⁰ Danziger, *Constructing*, 52.

⁷¹ On Hans von Wolzogen see David Large, "Wagner's Bayreuth Disciples," in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. idem and William Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 82-89.

Hanslick reported that such a guide was a sad necessity “without which no respectable tourist here dares to be seen and which is on sale everywhere in Bayreuth.”⁷³ Along side the mass production of souvenirs came Wolzogen’s guide and, apparently, musical samples throughout the city, “which the hapless festival visitor should impress upon his memory and recognize wherever they turn up on the tonal mass of the four evenings.”⁷⁴ These preparatory aspects of the festival mood made many visitors into “leitmotif hunters,” but did not fully acclimate them to Wagner’s method of musical listening.⁷⁵ Ehrlert and Tchaikovsky noted the implied requirement that the spectators become theatrically educated, both in the leitmotifs and libretti, prior to the experience.⁷⁶ Yet, Wagner had no method or mechanism for ensuring the preparation of his audience. Consequently, the fate of the festival project was subject to these idiosyncrasies.

While Wolzogen’s educational publication helped some aspects of the experiment, it also undermined Wagner’s ability to control theatrical conditions, by popularizing one person’s interpretation. For some participants the task outlined in the guide clearly disturbed the hypnotic aims of Wagner’s dream stage. However, the greatest infraction on this attempt to give voice to music, and the area in which Wagner’s was least able to control the experimental conditions, was the failure of

⁷² It is not clear the degree to which Wagner sanctioned Wolzogen’s guide, but at the very least it is well known that Wagner discouraged naming the leitmotifs as Wolzogen had done.

⁷³ Hanslick, in Harford, 76.

⁷⁴ Hanslick, in Hartford, 76.

⁷⁵ Hanslick, in Hartford, 80.

⁷⁶ Ehrlert, “Bühnenfestspiel,” 128; Tchaikovsky, in Hartford, 54-55.

the realist staging. In Wundt's successful control of the environment, he was able to ignore, as Danziger points out, the idiosyncrasies of the observer and make trans-situational pronouncements about the mind. On the contrary, the various preparations and perspectives of Wagner's subjects did not allow him to provide universal proof to the world of music's discursive capacities.

Voices of Musical Discourse: The *Ring*

The Failure of Music to Speak

In the actualized theatrical discourse of the *Ring*, most everyone understood Wagner's music to be rooted in the tapestry of leitmotifs – a fact only half true by the dream stage. Technically, most of the motifs in the *Ring* were not leitmotifs, because of their independence from the text, which left much of their interpretation to the mind of the listener. Critics and tourists alike were searching for the recurrences and associations of motifs throughout the cycle. Nevertheless, they still could not interpret the music. The difficulty of understanding the words, combined with the general lack of immersion into imagination, left most feeling that the music was powerful, but chaotic. Therefore, the results of the musical discourse and the reactions of the participants remained quite disappointing for Wagner and his moment in the sun.

Leitmotifs are the dialect in which Wagner's music speaks. This fact was recognized by most all of the critics, and according to one of them, by most of the

audience members.⁷⁷ Yet, each of their experiences emphasized different aspects of the leitmotivic architectonic. For Hanslick, the motifs appeared rather randomly and too often in mysterious relationships that he suspected were not known even to their composer.⁷⁸ Kürschner, on the other hand, seems have been more fluent in this dialect and was particularly keen to note the relationships of the motifs and times when they intermix.⁷⁹ Similarly, with Ehrlich and his careful observance of motif reoccurrence we see a case of strong memory capacity or preparations, as he was able to pick out and associate the different motifs. Two moments he found most musically beautiful and articulate were Siegfried's and Brünnhilde's duet and Siegfried's funeral march. Ehrlich considered the duet to masterfully weave together dramatic ideas, while in Siegfried's Idyll he heard "a life-story in sounds."⁸⁰

Along with Ehrlich, other participants observed in the *Ring* Wagner's drama stage theory – the subjecting of music to the cause of drama. They understood how the music not only told part of the plot, but altered and modified the staged drama.⁸¹ Fellow Berliner Fiedler agreed with Ehrlich that the music had a voice in the theatrical discourse:

In the Bayreuth performances it certainly struck me at many points that through the medium of the music Wagner was stirring up depths

⁷⁷ Hanslick, in Hartford, 76.

⁷⁸ Hanslick, in Hartford, 76.

⁷⁹ Kürschner, 5, 19.

⁸⁰ Ehrlich, *Ring*, 51-54.

⁸¹ Ehrlich, *Ring*, 51.

of the sensations, situations and events depicted on the stage, which would otherwise, without the music, have been incapable of realization.⁸²

However, few if any visitors were convinced of music's ability to speak on an equal footing with language. As a fellow composer, Grieg recognized Wagner's reliance "on the orchestra alone to express the inner sense of the drama," but thought that Wagner overestimated music's ability to clearly expunge the authorial meaning behind the libretto.⁸³ In explaining the central role of music in the cycle Kürschner went as far as to suggest that in conveying the plot and portraying scenes music achieved the clarity of a pen and brush.⁸⁴ Although Wagner would have preferred the first metaphor of the pen, most commentators used the latter to describe the expressive success and limits of Wagner's music.

Ehrlert summed up this impression of expressive capabilities by recurrently using the metaphor of painting to describe Wagner's music. With and without the leitmotifs Ehrlert considered the music of the *Ring* well adapted to creating in the mind static images of the world, rather than the dynamics of ideas, thoughts, or even action. As with Kürschner he was fairly taken with the Ride of the Valkyries and its ability to depict a horse "to the very verge of neighing."⁸⁵ Ehrlert was equally astonished with Wagner's talent as a painter of miniatures in the "Forest Murmurings" of the second act of Siegfried. Yet in perceiving a lack of structure,

⁸² Fiedler to Hildebrand, 27 August 1876, in Barth, 234.

⁸³ Grieg, in Hartford, 64-68.

⁸⁴ Kürschner, 12.

⁸⁵ Ehrlert, "Bühnenfestspiel," 195.

Ehrlert found in Wagner's music an inability to make the characters move and think, and therefore to significantly lack "psychological significance."⁸⁶ For those who could not hear the voice of the music the experience lacked social and personal meaning.

Why Music Failed to Speak

In both theory and action, Wagner tried to sedate the mind in order to make it hear the music. The aesthetics of the dream stage manifested themselves in Wagner's insistence on dimming the auditorium lights, a fairly uncommon effect at the time.⁸⁷ In this respect, the gas lighting system was one of the technologies Wagner successfully employed to create his theatrical discourse. Many commentators cited the powerful effect of being plunged into darkness at the beginning of each drama, only to be led slowly out by the prelude. For example, Neumann at the end of *Das Rheingold* "was incapable of speaking to a soul, so deeply sunk was I in all I had seen and heard."⁸⁸ Yet, as two critics complained, the darkness of the hall also prohibited their consultation of the libretto during the performance.⁸⁹ In this respect, not only was the unprepared visitor disadvantaged,

⁸⁶ Ehrlert, "Bühnenfestspiel," 186-88.

⁸⁷ As with leitmotifs, Wagner was not the first to dim the auditorium lights, but he did much to popularize it. It has been practiced as far back as the seventeenth century, but it was certainly not the norm, despite Wagner's personal penchant for the ambiance. At *Das Rheingold*'s premiere in Munich in 1869 the lights had been dimmed accidentally, to great effect. It was not his wish that audience sit in total darkness, but part of Wagner's theatrical creation was definitely the conscious installation of lights that could be easily dimmed to the right level. See Carnegie, 75-76.

⁸⁸ Neumann, *Reflections*, 21.

⁸⁹ Ehrlert, "Bühnenfestspiel," 203; Hanslick, in Hartford, 76.

but also the non-native speaker, whose poetic – and therefore leitmotivic – understanding suffered in the singing style in Bayreuth. It was hard enough for native German speakers to understand. The necessities of fantastical theater, as designed by Wagner, eliminated the rational and non-dramatic activity during the performances, a perceptual prerequisite not recognized by an audience heavily populated by critics.

Consequently, the festival participants who remained ever soberly conscious in their critical appraisal of the music-drama experienced more difficulty in interpreting the music of the *Ring*. For example, Hanslick considered attendance “a conscious process of comparison and association,” in which the “listeners are abandoned to the diversion of hunting hidden leitmotifs in the orchestra.”⁹⁰ By the time of Wagner’s dream stage application he intended understanding of the musical discourse to be subconscious. The chaos of the motifs was designed to be understood not in terms of memory and association, but in the context of a sedated mind. In making it a laborious task of the critical mind, Hanslick and others seem to have become immune to its effect and deaf to its voice. Another way of looking at it might be to say that they were unsusceptible to hypnosis.

If we turn from comparing Bayreuth with Wundt in Leipzig to Charcot at the Salpêtrière clinic in Paris we can gain a better appreciation for the challenges and struggles of hypnosis as a reliable therapeutic technique. Although audiences were familiar in 1876 with the acts of magicians and demonstrations of animal magnetism, the new craze for shows inducing hypnotism did not become popular

⁹⁰ Hanslick, in Harford, 77, 80.

until after 1878 and the work of Carl Hansen and Charcot.⁹¹ The Parisian neurologist popularized for a time the use of hypnotism for treating patients with hysteria, but did so on the basis of less than twenty “star subjects” susceptible to the effect.⁹² Freud, who visited Charcot in 1886, abandoned the use hypnotism after a few years because it was unpredictable.⁹³ Freud found hypnotic techniques both too powerful and not powerful enough, arousing excessively erratic actions or else not working at all. In fact the general decline of hypnosis in clinical settings in the 1890s stemmed from its lack of universal application – that not everyone can be hypnotized.⁹⁴ As with Wundt’s observations, hypnosis both in and outside of Bayreuth required compliant participants not found in 1876. Wagner’s experiment sunk, especially in the first Ring Cycle, because visitors resisted theatrical “intoxication,” to use a Nietzschean metaphor for the Wagnerian experience.

Friedrich Nietzsche on Forgetfulness

Nietzsche’s critique of the actual staging of the *Ring* reads similarly to that of Hanslick. For them, the length of the performances was exhausting, their tempo too lethargic, the theater effect heavy, and the music formless. Nietzsche reaffirmed

⁹¹ In Germany the Danish-born Hansen did much to popularize hypnotism with the public and scientific community in 1879-80. As an itinerant magnetic demonstrator he traveled throughout Central Europe, even attracting the attention of Wundt while in Leipzig. See Gauld, 302-6.

⁹² Gauld, 311. Equally, the popular associations and appropriation of hypnotism pressured scientists to demarcate the technique of hypnotism outside the bounds of the professional clinic.

⁹³ Waterfield, 298-300.

⁹⁴ Inglis, 110-11. Equally, the popular associations and appropriation of hypnotism pressured scientists to demarcate the technique of hypnotism outside the bounds of the professional clinic.

Hanslick's claims that Wagner merely appealed to the nerves through conjuring tricks, but titled it decadence – a form of forgetfulness. Where Nietzsche differed from Hanslick was in his severe disappointment with the crowd in addition to the music, though as we have seen, the experience of one was intimately linked with the experience of the other. Although Nietzsche's philosophy began to depart from Wagner a couple of years before the festival, Bayreuth marked, in Nietzsche's interpretation, an internal break.⁹⁵ The intellectual space distancing the two was complex, going far deeper than Wagner's nationalist associations. Nietzsche described his Bayreuth disillusionment as a personal crisis over his own Romanticism and career choice, seeing his own pursuit of philology as lost time. Concerning both his personal philosophy and vocation, Nietzsche wrote retrospectively of the festival that: "It stirred my compassion to see myself utterly emaciated."⁹⁶ The process of Nietzsche's intellectual nourishment began with a new project of psychoanalyzing himself, Wagner, Wagnerites, and the will to forget.⁹⁷

Nietzsche carried a number of important factors with him to the experience of the theater. Most importantly, he brought his idealistic (in both senses) hopes for the nobility of the festival, which when compared with its reality gave way to a

⁹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufman, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1954), 675.

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 742.

⁹⁷ Even given the associations of the term "psychoanalysis," some scholars find it appropriate to use in the context of Nietzsche. See Daniel Chappelle, *Nietzsche and Psychoanalysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Jacob Golomb, "Introductory Essay: Nietzsche's 'New Psychology,'" in Golomb et al., 11-19. Chappelle reads the repetition compulsion of the eternal recurrence as analogous to associational techniques of Freudian psychoanalysis designed to articulate authentic personal identity.

revulsion that colored even his artistic experience.⁹⁸ In his original sympathies for the dithyrambic dramatist, Nietzsche had endorsed a certain level of mind-altering frenzy, but surrounded by what he perceived as an ignoble crowd, he would not allow himself to be carried away in the spirit of the music.⁹⁹ Other factors as well militated against theatrical enjoyment. Nietzsche's failing eyesight and migraines flared up during the festival, impairing his ability to read the libretti or Wolzogen's guide to the leitmotifs, and making it difficult to sit through the long hours of the cycle. Yet, Nietzsche's familiarity with Wagner's theories offset some of these setbacks and made him a keen observer of the composer's plans. Particularly, Nietzsche recognized, as a fellow follower of Schopenhauer, the aims of dream stage musical discourse in which Wagner sought to tear down the conscious guard through music and then use that intimacy to communicate directly with the spectators' unconscious.

In his essay *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, published on the eve of the festival, Nietzsche showed an insightful understanding of Wagner's theoretical musical discourse. Ala Schopenhauer, Nietzsche conveyed the inner activity of music-drama by noting that "the music transmits the fundamental impulses in the depths of the persons represented in the drama directly to the soul of the listeners."¹⁰⁰ But he also understood Wagner's means. In order to speak from nature's soul to the soul of the spectator the "dark ocean of the audible" converted

⁹⁸ Nietzsche, *Bayreuth*, 198.

⁹⁹ Nietzsche, *Bayreuth*, 226.

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *Bayreuth*, 239.

the images and ideas into a “dream apparition.”¹⁰¹ Admittedly, this essay treated Wagner more ambiguously than the outright endorsement in 1872 with *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (*The Birth of Tragedy*). Nonetheless, Nietzsche’s intoxicating dreams were initially a positive trait of the tragic artist he imagined Wagner to be. However, a decade after the break in *Der Fall Wagner* (*The Case of Wagner*) Nietzsche continued to recognize Wagner’s success as a tragic artist, but interpreted it insidiously: “He is a master of *hypnotic* tricks, he manages to throw down the strongest like bulls.”¹⁰² Consistent with others’ reactions to the “magic” in Bayreuth, Nietzsche recognized Wagner’s will to effect.

By interpreting Wagner’s theatrical discourse as merely magic and effect, Nietzsche voiced his rejection of musical discourse. In his first publication after the festival, Nietzsche did not yet criticize the physiology of Wagner’s aesthetic, but immediately showed, compared to previous publications, a distinct disdain for music’s ability to speak, especially Wagner’s music. He stated unequivocally:

No music is in itself deep and full of meaning. It does not speak of the “will” or the “thing in itself.” Only in an age that had conquered the entire sphere of inner life for musical symbolism could the intellect entertain this idea. The intellect itself has *projected* this meaning into the sound.¹⁰³

He conceded that drama could “increase music’s capacity for language,” but that music could never become a “direct language of the emotion.”¹⁰⁴ In some sense, this

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Bayreuth*, 226.

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *Case*, 622. Emphasis added.

¹⁰³ Nietzsche, *Human*, 128.

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Human*, 128. See also Nietzsche, *Case*, 629.

seems like a turn towards Wagner's own aesthetics of the drama stage. The dramatic techniques Nietzsche had in mind for increasing music's linguistic capacity – poetry, symbols, staged effects, and “theatrical rhetoric” – were at best, in his mind, able to make music into a graphic art. Still he considered Wagner like most at the *Ring* festival “an inventor and innovator of the first rank,” able to paint with music in shades never before possible.¹⁰⁵

Nietzsche's *new* conclusion, then, that music was mute, had important consequences for his philosophical development.¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche considered Wagner's musical discourse rooted in metaphysical claims, and in his rejection of the Schopenhauerian aesthetic, Nietzsche turned his back on Romanticism generally. More importantly, if Wagner indeed had no claim to such transcendental musical listening, Wagner's means of theatrical effect, used in attempts to connect with the transcendental, became “nothing but effect.”¹⁰⁷ This transition from viewing the festival as edification by tragedy to pure spectacle gave Nietzsche one of his first topics to psychoanalyze. If it was only effect, then what did Wagner produce and what drew his audiences? Nietzsche concluded: forgetting. In his later writings,

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Case*, 629.

¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche's rejection of musical discourse went hand in hand with his rejection of many other things (Schopenhauer, Wagner, Romanticism, philology, metaphysics, Germany). It is not clear then if one rejection was a catalyst for the others or if Nietzsche could be said to have simultaneously turned his back on them all. Nevertheless, I suggest, as is not often the case in the scholarship, that the failure of musical discourse, for Nietzsche and the first festival, was an important factor in Nietzsche's intellectual sea change.

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Case*, 622, 629. Furthermore, Nietzsche concluded that the effects which Wagner used were not the stimulations of the self-determining individual, but those of “the *brutal*, the *artificial*, and the *innocent* (idiotic).”

Nietzsche would see Wagner's music, for all its unequalled ability in painting, as unhealthy, precisely because of this element of forgetfulness.

In *Ecce Homo*, looking back on his time in Bayreuth, Nietzsche guessed that many of the visitors were similarly suffering under the pain of modernity's desolation and looking to Wagner as a narcotic. For a few hours, by participating in the theatrical discourse the spectators were able "to *forget* themselves, they are rid of themselves for a moment."¹⁰⁸ Even before his trip to Bayreuth, Nietzsche shared this opinion about the dangers of certain art, but only did not yet apply it to Wagner:

And the task of modern art, too, suddenly becomes clear:
stupefaction or delirium! To put to sleep or to intoxicate! To silence
the conscience, by one means or the other! To help the modern soul
to *forget* its feeling of guilt, not to help it to return to innocence!¹⁰⁹

According to Ofelia Schutte, Nietzsche prized memory, especially that of pain, as a necessary precondition to overcome nihilism.¹¹⁰ As a psychologist Nietzsche interpreted the Wagnerian attraction as a neurotic attempt to escape the world, to forget it.

However, according to Nietzsche, Wagner's music as an opiate caused one to forget not just pain, but all sensation. While Nietzsche praised Wagner's ability to bring music to the verge of language, he also recognized that the means of such articulation was to increase all forms of theatrical stimulation. Nietzsche's immediate criticism of Wagnerian musical discourse came in *Menschliches* in 1878

¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 743. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche, *Bayreuth*, 220. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁰ Schutte, in Golomb et al., 116.

in which he concluded that: “The more the eye and ear are capable of thought, the more they reach that boundary line where they become asensual.”¹¹¹ For Nietzsche, the consequence of Wagner’s whole project of making the mind listen to the meaning of music was to *forget* the sensations of it. Whereas for Wagner the drowsiness of a dream-like state was necessary to communicate the transcendental ideas, according to Nietzsche’s physiological aesthetic, clarity, especially of feeling, was necessary for self-becoming.

In an extended section in *Menschliches*, Nietzsche criticized the confusion caused by dreams and similar mental states.¹¹² He started off saying that: “In ages of crude primordial cultures, man thought he could come to know a *second real world* in dreams: this is the origin of all metaphysics.” Nietzsche attributed a similar effect to Romantic artists, who thought that they could gain a higher understanding through similarly trance-like feelings. Specifically, this was misguided, according to Nietzsche, because sleep and “dream imagination” impaired the memory, leading to confused judgments upon waking. In the case of Wagner’s dream stage, Nietzsche’s psychology criticized the forgetfulness of not only the intoxicating effect, but the entire project of musical discourse. In Bayreuth, in the specter of Wagnerism, Nietzsche found his ideal case of decadence, a characterization signified by the fact “[t]hat life no longer dwells in the whole.”¹¹³ In forgetting

¹¹¹ Nietzsche, *Human*, 130.

¹¹² Nietzsche, *Human*, 16-22.

¹¹³ Nietzsche, *Case*, 626.

senses and thoughts, Nietzsche considered Wagner's music to forget the whole, to be decadent.

Finding this decadence in himself during the Bayreuth festival, Nietzsche began to seriously reconsider his career path. Although outwardly connections remained, 1876 marked Nietzsche's departure from not only Wagner, but the academy. The experiences of the festival – the participation in the musical discourse and interaction with the other participants – soured Nietzsche on Romanticism and idealism and turned him sharply toward positivism and psychology. Not only did the festival provide a catalyst experience, but also the original case study of Nietzsche's psychological analysis of decadence – Wagner's musical discourse.¹¹⁴ Nietzsche consciously turned to reading books about materialist philosophies and the natural sciences, including Ernst Mach and Friedrich Lange, who were two large influences on him.¹¹⁵ After the festival he spent the winter with Rée, expanding on those aphorisms begun while in retreat from the depression of Bayreuth. Although Nietzsche's philosophy already differed from Wagnerism before the festival, in some very real sense the experience of the

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche does not consider himself to have been more concerned with any topic more than decadence. See Nietzsche, *Case*, 611.

¹¹⁵ Having been relieved from most of his university duties Nietzsche made long reading lists, encouraged by Rée, on topics such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, physiology, materialist philosophy, and the history of ideas. For a list of these works see Thomas H. Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Reading and Knowledge of Natural Science: An Overview," in Moore and Brobjer.

festival made him into a psychologist.¹¹⁶

Conflicting Identities

By most measures, even Wagner's own, his festival had been a failure. That it went off, in all its grandness and curiosity, was in its own sense a success, but the realization of Wagner's theatrical and musical discourses, in the form of the Ring Cycle, was anything but what he really had wanted. Some performances were better than others, but on the whole Wagner was dreadfully disappointed, especially at seeing the clumsiness of his machinery ruin the magic.¹¹⁷ But given the enormous task, tight budget, and all the hopes riding on the festival, could it have done anything but disappoint? As the culmination of almost thirty years of work, the final cumulative product bore impresses from each of the periods in which it was constructed. The *Ring* and its festival were a composite manifestation of the ideas from the artwork, drama, nomadic, and dream stages. Half the music had been composed assuming its dependence on words and the other half its independence. Similarly, half of the theatrical discourse had been constructed assuming the primacy of the group and half that of the individual. It was a theatrical contradiction, trying to reify species, national, and individual identities.

¹¹⁶ Holub concurs that Nietzsche manifests himself as a psychologist only after Wagner, but like other Nietzschean scholars does not consider the details of Nietzsche's musical experience. See Holub, in Golomb et al., 156.

¹¹⁷ Spotts, 69-70. As with Spotts historians and contemporaries often describe Wagner's reaction to the festival as "depressed." He even told Fricke that next time he would do it all differently.

Although most accounts cite the festival's cultural context as an expression of nationalism, the trend of the theatrical discourse up until the festival had increasingly emphasized the role of individual experience. From the point of view of theory, the Schopenhauerian element saw music as the expression of the "will" speaking only to those in the waking state of a clairvoyant dream and only to their own will. The breakdown of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* with the *Ring*'s forging and the integration of Schopenhauer's aesthetic conceded theatrical ground to egoism, a target once deemed the primary public enemy. Although festival participants partly maintained the social and public orientation of critical dialogue, as had been the original theory behind the festival, increasingly the truly committed Wagnerites engaged privately in pre- and post-performances contemplation.¹¹⁸

Nonetheless, nationalist affirmation flourished at the festival. The emperor himself was in attendance, and despite Wagner's failure to make it an affair of the state, many participants still considered it an expression of German spirit and a cultural sister to political unification. Given this nationalist hope and flavor, the participants attracted to this first festival came from all geographical and social positions of the nation. The concentration of participants made it more a national event than a theatrical one, leading to a lesser degree of participation in theatrical discourse than Wagner had hoped. However ironic, Wagner needed those seats filled in order for just one person to have the necessary acoustics to enjoy the *Ring*.

¹¹⁸ Additionally, social conditions had necessitated making the festival something to purchase, and given its remote location, the festival for many became essentially a tourist attraction and the experience, like the souvenirs, ultimately disposable for both the nation and the individuals.

Just as the festival was divided between seekers of patriotic confirmation and personal transcendence, the context of the discourse was divided between the ideas of the drama and dream stages, and their means of musical discourse. Half of the *Ring* had been composed involving a more purely mnemonic scheme and half assuming hypnotic techniques. The early and more dominating leitmotifs were intimately connected to the text and clearly derived their meaning from it. Nonetheless, Wolzogen's handbook conceptualized the entire spectrum of motifs by naming them. However, given the variance in leitmotivic preparation, the motifs most often remembered by participants were those of the drama stage with strong symbolic and poetic associations. Regardless of Wagner's own ideas and techniques afforded by the musical discourse of the dream stage, the festival remained for the audience something of a test of memory.

Wagner was not the only one at this time to use music in memory experiments. Wundt had some interest in memory, but considered it too diffuse a research topic to remain unspecified, choosing "span of consciousness," "focus of attention," or "reproduction of representations."¹¹⁹ Unlike Wagner's equation that thought equaled memory, Wundt was looking for a way to conceive of idea reproduction in terms of disposition rather than retrieval from storage. One of Wundt's students undertook for him an experiment with tone and interval impressions. However, variance in the subjects' musical proficiency plagued the effectiveness of this experiment for making claims about psychological functions.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Danziger, "Sealing," 48, 58.

As in the case of Wagner, the contingent factors of musical listening proved too difficult to contain.

On the other hand Ebbinghaus, with more limited goals of memorization capacity, was able to find a more effective and stable experimental method by using written language in the form of nonsense syllables. The syllables were not memorized in isolation but in patterns, giving them a melodic quality, and by using a language of sorts (lacking only sense in the German language), the patterns also had a linguistic quality. In this sense both Ebbinghaus and Wagner were dealing with the mind's capacity to internalize, for defined lengths of time, patterns of familiar, but not quite conceptual, phrases. This use of linguistic elements helped Ebbinghaus's experiments produce consistent results, but he also found he could not use words. The capacity to remember these syllable patterns was exponentially increased when known words and sentences were used. Wagner had not premeditatedly planned the division of the *Ring*'s motifs into those that originated in the vocal lines and those from orchestra, but in doing so he made a similar distinction between sense and nonsense phrases. The symbols involved in the orchestral motifs gave them a linguistic quality, but they, nonetheless, did not carry the residue of words and ideas. Similarly, Wagner's audience, like Ebbinghaus's subjects, remembered the leitmotifs that originated out of the vocal line – doctrinal leitmotifs – more than the simply recurring motifs or non-sense patterns.

As with Wagner, in "Ebbinghaus's memory experiments it was not a question of reproducing a conscious experiment but of achieving a certain objective

¹²⁰ Danziger, *Constructing*, 142.

result.”¹²¹ As a pedagogue, Ebbinghaus was concerned with education reform and curriculum. Wagner’s festival was similarly an attempt to teach society, among other things, the need to resign your means when they begin to undermine your ends. With the failure of his memory experiment, especially in the hypnotic sense of the dream stage, Wagner failed to make music speak this message. However, neither was he himself listening to it. Unlike Wotan, Wagner was bent on continuing his reign from Bayreuth and continuing to impregnate music with ideas through a festival of hypnotic music-drama. After a small break to brood over his failures Wagner returned to composing music and planning another festival in Bayreuth.

¹²¹ Danziger, “Sealing,” 48.

CHAPTER IV:

MUSICAL DISCOURSE FINDS ITS VOICE, 1882

On a sunny day in early July 1882, still over two weeks before the premiere of *Parsifal*, Christian von Ehrenfels set out for Bayreuth. He did not, however, like Nietzsche, arrive too early, because Ehrenfels traveled on foot. As the son of an aristocratic family of means, the twenty-three-year-old Ehrenfels did not walk the almost three hundred miles to Bayreuth because he had no other choice, but rather because he wanted it to be a pilgrimage. From his family's castle in lower Austria he slowly made his way toward the seat of Wagnerism for what would be one of the most "eventful" and "meaningful experiences" of his life.¹ He traveled alone with little but the text of *Parsifal*, learning it by heart during the journey so as to get the most of the performance. As a well-prepared and sympathetic spectator Ehrenfels participated in the full extent of the theatrical discourse, describing his experience as something only known in dreams.² The sum outcome of the pilgrimage was Ehrenfels's resolution to abandon the Catholicism and duties of his family title and to become a philosopher and musician.

Only five years prior, as a student of philosophy in Vienna, Ehrenfels had heard Wagner's *Die Walküre* for the first time, which Ehrenfels biographer Reinhard Fabian describes as "an overwhelming and most deeply exciting

¹ Christian von Ehrenfels, "Eine Pilgerfahrt nach Bayreuth," *Bohemia* 96 (1913), 33: "eignisvollsten und bedeutsamsten Episoden meines Lebens."

² Ehrenfels, "Pilgerfahrt," 34.

experience.”³ Shortly afterwards he became a member of the new society of Wagner patrons, securing himself a seat for the indefinitely scheduled premiere of *Parsifal*. In the course of his studies Ehrenfels reached a crisis over his inherited Catholic dogmas and worldview. In later years he considered this falling away to go “hand in hand with his settling into the Wagnerian Weltanschauung,” pointing to his Bayreuth pilgrimage as a culminating moment.⁴ He thought of Wagner as the greatest artist of the century and following the festival Ehrenfels undertook the writing of his own epic tetralogy, *Der Kampf des Prometheus* (*The Struggle of Prometheus*). Although he never finished it, Ehrenfels throughout his life considered German music – of which Wagner was the supreme representative – something of a religion to him.⁵ In a letter to the philosopher Alexius Meinong (1853-1920) in 1884, Ehrenfels suggested that his Wagnerian values could account for half of his personal identity.⁶ This identity as Wagnerian affected his research into the mind and helped him become the progenitor of Gestalt psychology.

The story of Ehrenfels reflects the overall success of the second Bayreuth festival in achieving many of Wagner’s long-standing theatrical and musical aims. As one familiar with the libretto of *Parsifal* the dimmed lights did not take away

³ Reinhard Fabian, “Leben und Wirken von Christian v. Ehrenfels: Ein Betrag zur intellektuellen Biographie.” in *Christian von Ehrenfels: Leben und Werk*, ed. Reinhard Fabian (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986), 11: “...überwältigendes, zutiefst erregendes Erlebnis.”

⁴ Ehrenfels, “Pilgerfahrt,” 33: “Mein Abfall von der katholischen Dogmatik vollzog sich Hand in Hand mit dem Einleben in die Wagnersche Weltanschauung.”

⁵ See Ash, *Gestalt*, 89; Harrington, 110.

⁶ Ehrenfels to Alexius Meinong, 13 September 1884, quoted in Fabian, 11.

from the staged illusion, but rather allowed Ehrenfels to absorb the other-worldly sensations he recorded having experienced. Similarly, his status as a pilgrim reflects both the sacred treatment of the premiere of *Parsifal* by the visitors and the demographic constriction of them to those more enthusiastic toward the Wagnerian cause. This reverence for the theatrical discourse contributed to a significantly different outcome than that of the *Ring*. The more sympathetic listeners responded in most all the ways Wagner intended, even investing the music with psychological agency. Consequently, Wagner's impact on Ehrenfels's development as a philosopher paralleled the more diffuse exposure to the psychological terms and experiences afforded by the Bayreuth staging of *Parsifal*. The reactions to the festival give us a view of both the specific and wide-ranging impact of Wagner on the history of psychology.

In this chapter we look at the composition and staging of *Parsifal* in the shadow of the failure of the *Ring* and the first Bayreuth festival. As a unified manifestation of Wagner's dream stage aesthetics, his last work had a definite coherency and ability to engender hypnotic states. We then look at the reactions to the festival generally and especially in comparison to those from 1876. We see further how context affected performance and reception, specifically how changes and idiosyncrasies contributed to a more successful festival. Following the theatrical responses we look at the reactions to the music and the new language of mind used to verbalize music's verbalization. The chapter then returns to Ehrenfels as second example of Wagner's and the festival's direct influence on psychological

theories following Nietzsche, who functions as a figure of comparison. Finally, the chapter concludes by analyzing the meaning of Wagner's success in making music speak in the context of his long path toward that goal.

Context: *Parsifal*

At the conclusion of the last performance of the *Ring* at the 1876 festival, Wagner stated from his box that he had demonstrated that genuine art *could* come into being. The implication, that the *Ring* was not art, struck some curiously and others as the comment of a rude megalomaniac.⁷ The intention behind Wagner's statement remained unclear, but one thing was certain: the *Ring* had failed, and maybe the festival with it. After the numbers had been crunched, they confirmed the expectation of debt, to the tune of over 150,000 marks.⁸ Wagner was deeply depressed about the way things went and the impossibility of a festival in 1877. He even contemplated, as he often did, immigrating to America as a way to get a fresh start. He decided ultimately to stay in Bayreuth, but give his festival a new start through a stage consecration drama (*Bühnenweihfestspiel*) – *Parsifal*. Wagner had always planned on composing *Parsifal* after the *Ring*, but after the inability to engage his public in musical discourse the redemption in *Parsifal* took on new meaning.

Parsifal was, like the *Ring*, a composite narrative, but Wagner mostly drew his ideas from Wolfram von Eschenbach's epic poem *Parzival*. Wagner first

⁷ Newman, 4:484.

⁸ Spotts, 78.

studied this medieval poem in 1845, before the *Ring* project, and returned to the material about once every decade. In 1857 and 1865 he made prose sketches for a music-drama to based on Eschenbach's story, but did not formalize the plot until just before he wrote the libretto in early 1877.⁹ Rather than the at time laborious flow of the *Ring*'s *Stabreim* and archaic verbiage, the text of *Parsifal* had a much looser meter and little alliteration. By comparison *Parsifal*'s libretto possessed a clarity of expression and streaming ease, with almost one-third of the lines rhymed.¹⁰ Although *Parsifal* broke stylistically from the *Ring*, it continued many of the same themes.

In some sense the story and characters of *Parsifal* can be seen to be an extension of the *Ring*, as a fifth music-drama, or even as an alternate ending. Amfortas is the Wotan character, an old king of the knights guarding the life-prolonging grail. He wishes to die, but cannot, remaining unredeemed by a wound from his own spear lost to Klingsor, the sorcerer, after being seduced by a beautiful woman. It is a stretch to compare him with Alberich, but Klingsor is the villain and the new wielder of power in the realm. Parsifal, as the naïve youth, is the Siegfried character that must go through a process of self-becoming and then redeem others. This awakening begins with a kiss from the temptress Kundry, whom Parsifal resists, which leads to the discovery of wisdom through suffering. As a cursed wanderer, Kundry serves similar functions to that Brünnhilde, but in a twist, can only be redeemed by one who resists her temptations. In the final act, Parsifal

⁹ Millington, *Wagner*, 258.

¹⁰ Millington, *Wagner*, 249.

returns as a much older man who has learned compassion and wrestled the spear from Klingsor. With the spear Parsifal is able to release both Amfortas and Kundry from their cursed inability to die and becomes the new lord of the grail knights. Wagner himself saw the connections between his last two works, even commenting that Siegfried should have gained the ability to redeem Wotan. The interpretations of *Parsifal* have varied extensively and been highly controversial, but of all Wagner's works, *Parsifal* most clearly reflected the ideas of a single philosopher: Schopenhauer.¹¹ As the only music-drama written purely during Wagner's dream stage, it had a singular coherency.

Likewise the music of *Parsifal* reflected the aesthetics of the dream stage with its thick layering of motifs and revised musical techniques for producing hypnotic effects. Compared to the *Ring*, Wagner's last music made clear his desire to have music speak, by weighting the melodies with more ideas, a dynamic that resulted directly out of his compositional method. Wagner's writing process for the music of *Parsifal* incorporated more preliminary footwork and sketches than any of his previous dramas.¹² Generally speaking he formulated the motifs, the building blocks of the score, between August 1877 and April 1879, but worked out their associations through a construction that lasted until January 1882, just a few months before rehearsals were to begin. Through this less linear composition all Wagner

¹¹ Millington, *Wagner*, 271. Many of these arguments revolve around whether or not it is a Christian music-drama and whether or not it is anti-Semitic.

¹² William Kinderman, "The Genesis of the Music," in *A Companion to Wagner's Parsifal*, ed. idem and Katherine R. Syer (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden, 2005), 144, 155.

was able to make the music of *Parsifal*, in its final form, flow essentially out of the lengthy prelude's collage of motifs.¹³

Given such an all-encompassing prelude, and in continuing much of the motivic architectonic of *Götterdämmerung*, only one of *Parsifal*'s motifs originated in the vocal melody.¹⁴ Whereas leitmotifs in the *Ring* were used largely to tie together actions from the long chronology of the tetralogy, the efficiency of the *Parsifal* narrative used the motifs to associate ideas. In describing the texture of the motifs musicologist John Deathridge says: "In none of Wagner's dramas is the technique of variation, derivation, combination and mixture of motifs so highly developed and differentiated as in *Parsifal*."¹⁵ By this point Wagner was not looking for spectators to hunt for motifs, but for their hypnotized minds to understand the music directly and make unconscious associations with the drama.

In the interlude between the festivals of 1876 and 1882, Wagner and Wagnerism did not just alter the music in an attempt to gain its prosody, but they also changed the reception side of musical discourse. The festival's debt to Ludwig and the patron society's failure to procure adequate funding urged Wagner to dissolve the society in 1877 and concede to a future festival with nearly normal ticket sales.¹⁶ However, along side this decision to fully open up the festival to the public, a new patron society was founded for which the first two performances of

¹³ Millington, *Wagner*, 258-60.

¹⁴ Stein, 210.

¹⁵ Deathridge and Dahlhaus, 164.

¹⁶ Mary A. Cicora, *Parsifal Reception in the Bayreuther Blätter* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 12.

Parsifal alone would be given. This created a strong delineation between Wagnerites and the ‘masses.’ The failure of the first *Ring* cycle to become a nationally recognized and sanctioned music festival created a certain amount of insularity and community among the Wagnerians. This new “Bayreuth circle,” under the literary leadership of Wolzogen, even had its own literary organ – the *Bayreuther Blätter* – starting in 1878.

Wagnerism scholar Winifred Schüler considers the founding of this circle to coincide with the publication of the journal, which at first was only sent to patron society members.¹⁷ Strong associations developed between the Bayreuth circle and the forthcoming premiere of *Parsifal*. Members often portrayed themselves as part of a brotherhood of the grail and their mission as cultural regeneration through the modern grail – Wagner’s art. Wagner himself fueled the religiosity of *Parsifal* and the Bayreuth circle by proclaiming *Parsifal* a *Bühnenweihfestspiel* (stage consecration festival), only to be performed at Bayreuth, which, as we will see, became as much a pilgrimage site as a tourist destination.¹⁸ Although Wagner had his qualms about the misappropriation of his ideas, more than anything the elitist nature of this *avant-garde* artistic circle provided him the opportunity to disseminate his ideas and cultivate a sympathetic audience.¹⁹ Wagner now had a system for

¹⁷ Winifried Schüler, *Der Bayreuther Kreis von seiner Entstehung bis zum Ausgang der Wilhelminischen Ära; Wagnerkult und Kulturreform im Geiste Völkischer Weltanschauung* (Munster: Aschendorff, 1971), 69.

¹⁸ With the exception of rouge performances by Ludwig in Munich after Wagner’s death and the Metropolitan in New York in 1903, *Parsifal* was not performed elsewhere until 1914. See Whittall, in Beckett, 87-94.

¹⁹ Cicora, 23-27.

making his listeners properly trained introspectors and observers, while the perceived persecution of the Bayreuth circle gave members a sense of importance and unity. For the first two performances of *Parsifal* on July 26 and 28 in 1882, and even beyond, Wagner had an audience willing to listen for the prose of his music, through the clairvoyance of a waking dream.

Experiences of Theatrical Discourse: *Parsifal*

Bayreuth 1882

In addition to the new dramatic and musical material, anticipation for the festival sequel provided a different atmosphere and social setting for musical discourse than in 1876. For one thing the town was more prepared. Contrary to the laws of supply and demand, the expansion of lodging and dining resources at the second festival did not result in lower prices, but rather a sharp price hike.²⁰ This seems to have been more of an inconvenience than anything, seeing as the festival was attended by significantly more members of the business class, people identifying themselves as *Kaufmänner*.²¹ However, it was not the demographic increase of upper middle class participants which took most people's notice, but rather the increased seriousness of the whole affair. Life imitated art as participants latched onto Wagner's pronouncement of a *Bühnenweihfestspiel*, which Berlin

²⁰ Heinrich Ehrlich, "Der Tag von Bayreuth: Parsifal," *Über Land und Meer: Allgemeine Illustrierte Zeitung* 24, no. 47 (1882), 114.

²¹ See "Fremdenliste Bayreuth: *Parsifal*, 1882," at the Nationalarchiv der Richard-Wagner-Stiftung, under *Archivschrank A: 2500 II*. The participant lists from 1882 onwards are very thorough and organized.

writer George Davidsohn found quite appropriate in 1882 compared to the atmosphere of 1876.²² Even at the time festival visitors noted the treatment of Bayreuth as a “Mecca” and the often long journey as a pilgrimage, though few likely took the route of Ehrenfels.²³ The religious overtones of the *Parsifal* premiere rang discordantly with the trendy getaway imagined six years earlier.

Alterations in clientele were some of the most important variables behind the more reverent Bayreuth atmosphere in 1882. According to Ehrlich, the *Parsifal* festival was less cosmopolitan than 1876, with the participants figuring into fewer different categories.²⁴ Many members of the high aristocracy made their presence known, but no heads of state.²⁵ Arguably more conspicuous, however, was the absence of many of the famous artists and cultural figures.²⁶ The two demographics that saw a significant increase in numbers, and two types of visitors not necessarily, but often, mutually exclusive, were the commercial classes and devoted followers of Wagner.²⁷ The separation of the festival into showings for patron members and showings for ticket holders further reinforced this bifurcation of the festival.

²² George Davidson, “Die Aufführung des *Parsifal*,” in *BDP*. Spotts, 83, confirms this sacred treatment of the festival.

²³ See and Max Kalbeck, *Das Bühnenweihfestspiel in Bayreuth*, in *BDP*, 2:172; Felix Weingartner, *Buffets and Rewards*, in Hartford, 129.

²⁴ Ehrlich, “*Parsifal*,” 113.

²⁵ Spotts, 83.

²⁶ Paul Lindau, *Bayreuther Briefe vom reinen Thoren* (Breslau: S. Schottlaender, 1883), 2.

²⁷ The sale of tickets made the *Parsifal* festival more accessible for less affluent Wagnerians. Additionally, the combination of the publication of the *Bayreuther Blätter* and the premiere of *Parsifal* signified something of an intellectual consolidation of Wagnerism.

Finally, the critics again came out in droves, preserving detailed documentation of many aspects of the performances and the participants.

Just as the city was more prepared for the extravaganza, audience members seem to have been more prepared to spend long evenings in the *Festspielhaus*. The publication of Wolzogen's *Bayreuther Blätter* provided Wagnerites with a constant flow of musical and social ideas in the long intermission between *Götterdämmerung* and the *Parsifal* prelude. However, for this festival Wolzogen did not have the monopoly on leitmotif handbooks. Although his was the most often referenced, the industry of music criticism diversified the interpretations of *Parsifal*'s music and seems to have delivered their products to participants long before their arrival in Bayreuth.²⁸ Despite the fact that Wagner did not finish composing the music until January 1882, leitmotivic education was by spring in the hands of interested parties, as well as even sheet music. An R. Sternfeld mentioned having spent three months "preparing" for the *Bühnenweihfestspiel* on the piano.²⁹ The preparation and composition of the participants and Bayreuth atmosphere contributed to significantly different reactions than that of the premiere of the *Ring*.

Theater as Sacred and Mystic

It is difficult to pronounce a general impression shared by the participants, something Berlin critic Paul Lindau resisted in the face of such a diversity of

²⁸ Several commentators mention the large and already existent musicological literature. See Ehrkert, "Wagner's Parsifal," in *BDP*, 2:132; Karl Frenzel, "Die erste Aufführung des *Parsifal*," in *BDP*, 2:43.

²⁹ R. Sternfeld, "Zum erste Male in Bayreuth," at the Nationalarchiv der Richard-Wagner-Stiftung, under *Archivschrank A*: 2525 II, 11.

reactions.³⁰ Yet, surprisingly similar descriptions emerge in an analysis of literary responses to the theatrical experience, even if aesthetically the commentators disagreed. As with the first festival visitors cited the magic of the *Festspielhaus*, but rather than primarily describing the festival in terms of magical and physiological effect, participants consistently used religious, mystic, and psychological language. Although the metaphor of dreaming was not necessarily used more than in the *Ring*, the language of transcendence suggests and even outlines experiences of other worldly transportation, amounting to Wagner's clairvoyant world of dreams. In general, the second Bayreuth festival succeeded in creating the theatrical discourse of Wagner's dream stage ideal, at least compared to the first festival.

Writer Max Karbecks, who was more in tune with the circle of critics around Johannes Brahms, criticized Wagner's theatrical obsession with maintaining the sense of wonder and illusion at all cost: "There we sit in front of an inscrutable riddle, giving ourselves over to a dream that powerfully seizes our senses, knowing not if we are in church or in the theater, in heaven or on earth."³¹ Harkening back to Wagner's long standing desire to transport the spectator, *Parsifal* finally brought together Wagnerian theory and theater. The Leipzig writer Hans Marbach, more sympathetic than Kalbeck, welcomed this sense of being carried away to strange surroundings. For Marbach, who gives us a perfect example of Nietzsche's

³⁰ Lindau, *Bayreuther Briefe*, 3.

³¹ Kalbeck, in *BDP*, 2:177: "Da sitzen wir vor einem unerforschlichen Rätsel, geben uns einem unsere Sinne mächtig ergreifenden Traume gefangen, wissen nicht, ob wir in der Kirche oder im Theater, im Himmel oder auf der Erde verweilen."

diagnosis, the music and scenery caused him to forget where he was, or even who he was, finally waking into a different life and a new world.³² This sense of morning drowsiness with regards to the exploration of new mental territory seems congruent with Wagner's aims of simulating a waking dream in his theatrical discourse. With the opening of the curtain, Marbach, and those who shared his experience, would "walk into this world" of illusion and dream.³³

However, more often than not, the transcendental experiences of festival-goers were conveyed in ecclesiastical and mystic terms. Nearly every writer, supporter or critic, used the language of sacredness and extra-scientific explanation.³⁴ As the largest difference from the *Ring* festival, spectators brought an arsenal of adjectives and metaphors to bear on the religious associations with this stage consecration. The ritualistic structure and tempo of the music did much to give the impression of a religious service. In a parallel to this sense of a holy theatrical discourse, visitor response, at least by those on a pilgrimage, simulated lay reverence. Based on the projecting tendency of writers at the first festival, we should be skeptical of claims involving the experience of the total audience. Nevertheless, Neumann summarized well many people's feelings: "Words fail me to express the deep impression this work made upon us all. A lofty ecstasy came

³² Hans Marbach, "Nachträgliches aus Bayreuth," in *BDP*, 2:127-28.

³³ Marbach, in *BDP*, 2:124.

³⁴ Examples of the church-like perception of *Parsifal*'s music (all in *BDP*) include Gustav Engel, "Die Aufführung des Parsifal in Bayreuth," 2:93; Frenzel, "Parsifal," 2:41; Franz Gering, "Richard Wagner's 'Parsifal,'" 2:62; Hermann Kretzschmar, "Richard Wagners Parsifal," 2:148; Paul Lindau, "Parsifal von Richard Wagner," 2:31; Hermann Messner, "Richard Wagner's 'Parsifal,'" 2:54.

over me and I felt I had taken part in a sacred service.”³⁵ With Franz Liszt,³⁶

Haweis, an ordained British minister, emphasized the solemnity of the drama and the audience:

I looked round upon the silent audience while these astonishing scenes were passing before me; the whole assembly was motionless – all seemed to be solemnized by the august spectacle – seemed almost to share in the devout contemplation and trance-like worship of the holy knights.³⁷

Clearly, the narrative content had a large impact on the theatrical experience. Even if the effects of the stagecraft performed smoothly, the trance-like states of participants in the grail worship of *Parsifal*, which far exceeded similar reactions to the *Ring*, seems more closely related with the dream-qualities of holy ceremonies.

After ecclesiastical the next most frequent description of the theater and the music of 1882 was the closely related comments about its mysticism.³⁸ Whereas the *Ring*, in its best moments, was described as by and large magical, the ‘mysticism’ of *Parsifal* seems to add an element of ‘mystery’ that remained – somehow differently than magic – agnostic of the cause behind the illusion. Additionally, mysticism has more personal associations with the one who experiences the mystic – the spectator – rather than the stagecraft associations of magic. However, such divisions between

³⁵ Neumann, 120.

³⁶ Liszt to Wolzogen, 27 July 1882, in Barth, 241.

³⁷ Haweis, 211.

³⁸ References to the mystic nature of *Parsifal* (all in *BDP*) include George Davidsohn, “Die Aufführung des ‘Parsifal,’” 2: 69; Frenzel, “Parsifal,” 2:42; Wilhelm Frey, “Die Musik des ‘Parsifal,’” 2:153; Eduard Hanslick, “Briefe aus Bayreuth über Wagner’s ‘Parsifal,’” 2:101; Lindau, “Parsifal,” 2:31; Marbach, “Nachträgliches aus Bayreuth,” 2:128; Eduard Schelle, “Parsifal: Erinnerungen an Bayreuth,” 2:165.

reactions of dream-like transportation, church-like devotion, magic, and mysticism blur the total impressions of visitors who usually combined these ideas. For example, Frenzel, despite finding the music contrived, confessed that the undeniably wondrous and ominous music mixed the mystic and the heavenly.³⁹ The reactions to the premiere of *Parsifal* were all over the map, but in general they reflected inner and personal qualities of a festival experience, which was quite spiritual for many of the pilgrims.

Introspection and Hypnotism

Even the redoubtable critic Hanslick hailed the first performance of *Parsifal* for the patrons on the twenty-sixth of July an “unqualified success.”⁴⁰ Although some confusion lingered over when and when not to applaud, even Wagner was happy with the outcome of what would be his last composition.⁴¹ Such successful execution of the music-drama, which continued for fifteen more performances, had significant basis in the context of the entire operation. Although *Parsifal* had its own theatrical innovations, on the whole these effects were not as demanding, and therefore as potentially devastating, as in the *Ring*. The theater also lessened its burden by allowing a day’s rest between performances, as well as double-casting the main characters and alternating their appearances. For the audience, on a very pragmatic level, the *Bühnenweihfestspiel* only required the spectator to sit through

³⁹ Frenzel, “Parsifal,” in *BDP*, 2:42.

⁴⁰ Hanslick, in *BDP*, 2:122.

⁴¹ Spotts, 83.

one evening. The compression of back story through a narrator figure significantly decreased complaints of theatrical exhaustion, a relief buffered by more plentiful availability of food and drink. The weather too must also be accounted for in this ease of theatrical listening and even the immersion in fantasy. The summer of the Ring Cycle had been somewhat warm, making the *Festspielhaus* stuffy and feel even more cramped, while 1882 proved to be fairly cool.⁴² Even the weather allowed the actors, orchestra members, and spectators to give their utmost attention to the music-drama.

Similarly, the above mentioned cultural atmosphere of Bayreuth contributed to the successful premiere of *Parsifal*, which signified for Wagner, not only increased popularity, but a remotely successful experiment in making music speak. Wagner finally had the sympathetic and prepared spectators necessary to be acute observers of the various theatrical dialogues. The proliferation of *Bayreuther Blätter* and guides to the leitmotifs educated the audience as to what ideas it was to be listening for and how to ‘correctly’ do that.

With these publications, the ideas propagated and the associations of a *Bühnenweihfestspiel* attracted a different kind of visitor – a Wagnerite – more willing to participate in the intoxication and introspection necessary for Wagner’s experiment to achieve its preordained goal. In general, these participants were not leitmotif hunters like many of the critics, but listening within themselves for an essence unheard to the hunter. This hypostatization between two kinds of listeners parallels the Wundt-Stumpf debate about introspection. Whereas Stumpf argued

⁴² Frenzel, “Parsifal,” in *BDP*, 41.

that only the trained musician (read critic in the case of Wagner) should be used in experiments involving the observation of musical perception, Wundt insisted that one more cognizant of psychological functions would be more apt to observe music's impact on the mind. As we will see in the next section, *Parsifal* and Wagnerites seemed comparatively sensitive to the gears and operations of the inner self, including mind, and therefore Wagner here concurred with Wundt that the trained introspectionist rather than the professional musician was better able to observe musical discourse.⁴³

In general, the success of the premiere of *Parsifal*, and its theatrical and musical discourses, can be attributed to the performances' aptitude for hypnotizing its audience. This was a realization of Wagner's dream stage aesthetic and a confirmation of its effectiveness vis-à-vis the pure mnemonics of the drama stage. If anything sleep increased memory capacity. This was accomplished through what both Wagner and the audience brought to the discourse of the *Festspielhaus*. The very content of the *Parsifal* narrative, with elements of ritual and sorcery – and the whole perceived in terms of the sacred and mystical – seems to have been more conducive to inducing trance-like states of consciousness. As we saw in the last two chapters, public interest in hypnotism peaked significantly between the two festivals, manifested in everything from the clinic to the crowd pleaser.⁴⁴ In some sense the 1880s represent a high point in occult and mystic interest, with hypnotism

⁴³ The untraditional nature of Wagner's music made it difficult at times for classically trained musicians and critics to enjoy it, for it seems all wrong. In general Wagner's biggest fans were not trained musicians, and those who were tended to be younger.

⁴⁴ The important hypnotists here were Charcot and Hansen.

as one of its primary elements.⁴⁵ The second festival, in attaining the dream simulation of Wagner's theories, contributed to that movement, but also benefited from greater public experience with hypnotism. As a result festival participants – often seeing themselves as knights of the grail – were more reverent and sympathetic to whole theatrical discourse, suspending any disbelief in the illusion.

Voices of Musical Discourse: *Parsifal*

Music speaks

With the positive reception of the festival, Wagner was also significantly more successful in getting music to speak. Rather than trying to dissect the musical structures and symbols, many spectators – especially the more Wagnerian – listened to the complicated aural tapestry and heard the rumination of a mind. Some visitors even criticized the Wagnerian obsession with the psyche as both the subject and audience of the voice achieved by music. For those immersed in the mystical dream state music seemed to achieve an articulation only comprehensible to the correctly trained Wagnerian.

As during first festival, listeners to the music of *Parsifal* were keenly aware of the presence of the leitmotifs. Given the increase of musicological education, it seems possible that the audience of the second festival had an even greater sensitivity to the riddle of the motifs, but given their usage and the diversification of

⁴⁵ See Forrest, 228; Inglis, 110; Waterfield, 279.

literature, much of the audience had more difficulty with the interpretation.⁴⁶

Hanslick, politely agreeing to disagree with the Wagnerian aesthetic, saw the “tyrannical domination of the leitmotifs” in *Parsifal* as a “serious shortcoming.”⁴⁷

Likewise, Heinrich Ehrlich noticed the differentiation of the “always recurring motifs” as a prerequisite to understanding the musical goal of characterization.⁴⁸

They were not the only ones to recognize the motifs as the structural centerpiece of the work, but also did not think of them in the same way as the ‘disciples’ of Wagner, who consider the leitmotivic architectonic the most evolved musical form. Not only did the motifs recur more frequently, but, most importantly, in “ever-new combinations,” so that Lindau proclaimed the chaos of this “symphonic web” to appear even motif-less.⁴⁹ Yet, not everyone found it difficult to unweave Wagner’s musical tapestry in *Parsifal*, cited by some as having motifs easier to remember and by others more difficult than the *Ring*. For Haweis, who “need[ed] no interpreter,” every motif was “first distinctly enunciated” and then “wondrously blended together.”⁵⁰ Clearly, the leitmotifs of *Parsifal*, and their density, were known to most observers, but whether this density was interpreted as chaotic or blended had other factors, germane to music’s ability to speak.

⁴⁶ Hanslick notes the different numberings and categories of motifs leading the listener to confusion. See Hanslick, in *BDP*, 2:122.

⁴⁷ Hanslick, in *BDP*, 2:123.

⁴⁸ Ehrlich, “Parsifal,” in *BDP*, 2:117.

⁴⁹ Hanslick, in *BDP*, 2:122; Lindau, *Bayreuther Briefe*, 8.

⁵⁰ Haweis, 203-4; Gering, in *BDP*, 2:66. Gering similarly applauded the frequent musical combinations.

Far more so than with the *Ring*, and its exhausting and unsuccessful effects, participants in *Parsifal* found the music's intention comprehensible. In addition to the ever-supportive Haweis, several other critics attributed to the music capacities normally reserved for verbal language. Franz Gering, a Viennese mathematics instructor appearing as a critic for the *Deutsche Zeitung*, highlighted first the music's "ability to write."⁵¹ The detailed conceptualization associated with the pen stands in contrast to the brush, with its wide impressions, the metaphor for Wagner's music most used at the first festival. Gering went on to say of the musical preludes that "the essence of the [theatrical] matter comes still entirely through the analogous [*entsprechende*] music."⁵² For others the descriptive powers of music warranted the terminology of a tone- or music-language. For example, Schelle noted that visitors did not talk about visual elements of the theater, such as the stage and tableaux, but of the music, which according to him had reached a new level or artistic expression as a tone-language.⁵³ Likewise, Frenzel stated that under its ecclesiastical spell the music of *Parsifal* "spoke...an understandable and heart-pressing language."⁵⁴ While the clarity of this language varied with the listener and certainly varied with the subjectivity of personal aesthetics, some audience members

⁵¹ Gering, in *BDP*, 2:65: "Fähigkeit zuschreiben."

⁵² Gering, in *BDP*, 2:66: "Dazu kommt noch die dem Wesen der Sache vollkommen entsprechende Musik."

⁵³ Schelle, in *BDP*, 2:159; An anonymous critic from the *Neue Preußische Kreuz-Zeitung* in Berlin similarly cites the music's commentarial function. See "Richard Wagner's Bühnenweihfestspiel: Aus Bayreuth," *BDP*, 2:71.

⁵⁴ Frenzel, "Parsifal," in *BDP*, 2:43.

of the second festival confirmed Wagner's hope, by affirming their ability to understand the language of *Parsifal* – Wagner's musical discourse.

Although Wagner would have been thrilled just to know that his music had conversant agency, the exercise of that ability was not without content. As the entire theatrical discourse was described in psychological terms, so also, as Wagner had intended it, the listeners perceived the music as an agent of mind, between minds. Even Nietzsche, having later heard just the prelude to *Parsifal*, noted to Peter Gast that the music possessed the "greatest possible psychological awareness," and as far as a medium of description, even great clarity.⁵⁵ Although Nietzsche considered Wagner's music more graphic than articulate, with *Parsifal* the composer seems to have gone for the smallest of brushes. For Berlin critic Albert Heintz, the music of *Parsifal* articulated to the mind a metaphysical transcendence, by using the narrative itself as a "psychological drama."⁵⁶ For Heintz the narrative of *Parsifal* resided not in the noise of the outer world, but in the "territory of the inner-psyche" as a "developmental history of ethical people."⁵⁷ Much of this message came through the music as an expression crafted from Wagner's own consciousness, shaking the psyches of others through its "vibrating pulses of sensation."⁵⁸ However, most importantly, the musical style of *Parsifal* not only

⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche to Peter Gast, 21 January 1887, in *Selected Letters*, 260.

⁵⁶ Albert Heintz, "Die Parsifal-Aufführungen in Bayreuth," *BDP*, 2:78.

⁵⁷ Heintz, in *BDP*, 2:78: "Der 'Parsifal', der als die ideale Fortsetzung des 'Siegfried' bezeichnet werden muß, liegt schon ganz auf dem inner-psychischen Gebiete: er ist die Entwicklungsgeschichte des sittlichen Menschen, das Werden einer sittlichen Welt."

⁵⁸ Heintz, in *BDP*, 2: 78.

spoke to the psyche, but about it: “The language of the Wagner’s orchestra, particularly in *Parsifal* reveals the whole of psychological gears, making for the us the characters as truly transparent as clock work.”⁵⁹ This interpretation of the Wagnerian experience completely acquiesced to Wagner’s designed theatrical discourse in how and what to talk about. The advent of virulent Wagnerism with the second festival seems to signify a significant upshot in psychological thinking, largely through success of musical discourse.

The Psychology of Wagnerism

The focus on the inner self and the inner mind facilitated by the second festival even took on the analytical categories of psychology, something not really seen in the first festival. The explanation of the theatrical discourse as physiological effect seems largely absent from the commentaries by festival participants, having in some sense been replaced by concerns for the mind and functions of the psyche. Wilhelm Lübke, a professor of art history, derided the Wagnerians for being obsessed with words such as “psychological,” and considering characters or narrative segments to be expressive of inward machinations.⁶⁰ Lübke might have been thinking of Wagner sympathizer Heintz, who wrote particularly extensive reactions to the festival’s psychological experiences. For Heintz, Wagner’s musical style was both an expression of the unconscious and an expression that contributed

⁵⁹ Heintz, in *BDP*, 2:79: “Die Sprache des Orchesters bei Wagner, namentlich im „Parsifal“, enthüllt das ganze psychische Getriebe, macht uns wirklich die Charaktere durchsichtig wie ein Uhrwerk.”

⁶⁰ Wilhelm Lübke, “Bayreuther Nachklänge,” *BDP*, 2:168.

to the dramatic process. Particularly, Wagnerites tended to see *Parsifal* as a soul drama of self-becoming made possible in part by a revelation of the “gears” of the mind.⁶¹

Marbach, who relayed quite sympathetic accounts of his participation in the dream-scapes and forgetfulness of *Parsifal*, wrote further of the diminution of consciousness in the entrance to other worlds.⁶² Those most active and sympathetic participants in Wagner’s theatrical discourse saw the effect and narrative in terms of the mind. Although the mystic-religious content of *Parsifal* may have engendered such an interpretation, the *Ring* was no less, in the mind of its creator, the story of personal becoming and the passage from unconsciousness to consciousness. However, in the passage of time from 1876 to 1882, the language of reaction changed slightly, as did the quality of performance. This terminology lagged somewhat behind the professional upsurge in psychological thought in the 1870s, but not by much. The festival audiences, especially the doctrinaire Wagnerites according to Lübke, participated discursively in shift of scientific and cultural orientations from physiology to psychology. One of Wagner’s largest impacts on the cultural history of the mind was this generation of interest in states and levels of consciousness within the festival participants. The Wagnerian experiment to make music speak provided a template of experiences, exposing psychological ideas to a broad public, to Nietzsche, and, as we will see, to Ehrenfels.

⁶¹ Heintz, 2:79.

⁶² Marbach, 124.

Christian von Ehrenfels on Remembering

Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* gave Ehrenfels the mnemonic and linguistic experience of music helpful for the conceptualization of his new psychology of Gestalt. As with Nietzsche, the Bayreuth festival provided the impetus to become a psychologist, as well as material for the development of important theories. Although Ehrenfels had a generally more positive experience than Nietzsche, and remained committed to Wagner's ideas and music, Ehrenfels also found the Bayreuth circle somewhat disconcerting and distanced himself from this orthodox Wagnerism, as he had similarly distanced himself from Catholicism. In as much as Ehrenfels remained Wagnerian, this worldview gave him a perspective vastly different from Mach, Stumpf, and Nietzsche, against whom his theory of Gestalt was designed to argue. As Ehrenfels's ideas about tone perception developed out of his experience with Wagnerian melodies, so too he used these theories to ultimately justify his own Wagnerism.

Ehrenfels made a career for himself as a philosopher in Prague, teaching the likes of Franz Kafka, Felix Weltsch, Max Wertheimer, and Max Brod, who called him Prague's great philosopher. Trained under Brentano and Meinong, Ehrenfels remained a philosopher of a distinctly Austrian persuasion, lecturing and publishing primarily in the fields of psychology, aesthetics, and value theory.⁶³ Despite a productive philosophical output and the failure of *Prometheus*, he did manage to compose and stage smaller scale operas in Prague. The Bayreuth pilgrimage had inspired both Ehrenfels's philosophical and musical interests, two fields which

⁶³ Ash, *Gestalt*, 105.

occasionally intersected. This can be particularly seen in the vast number of articles he published on musicology and Wagner specifically.⁶⁴ Despite this varied and voluminous productivity, Ehrenfels remained primarily known for his comparatively early work on Gestalt qualities.⁶⁵

In his 1890 article “Über ‘Gestaltqualitäten’” (“On ‘Gestalt Qualities’”) Ehrenfels posed the question. Is a melody “a mere sum of elements or something novel in relation to this sum, something that certainly goes hand in hand with, but is distinguishable from, the sum of elements?”⁶⁶ In siding with the second option he called this novel quality a Gestalt quality, *Gestalt* being a common German word most often translated as *form*. As a psychological function the Gestalt “is added,” passively by the mind, and is something separate from the elements of sensation as the outcome of their synergy.⁶⁷ Starting from melodies Ehrenfels went on in his article to suggest the application of Gestalt to other forms of perception, integration, and evaluation. However, Gestalt psychology started with melodies, a fact confirmed in an essay Ehrenfels dictated weeks before his death where he stated unequivocally: “The starting point of the theory of Gestalt qualities was the attempt

⁶⁴ See Gerhard J. Winkler, “Christian von Ehrenfels als Wagnerianer,” in Fabian. Ehrenfels wrote no less than 18 articles on Wagner.

⁶⁵ On Gestalt psychology and Ehrenfels (as he is often only addressed in histories of Gestalt psychology) see Ash, *Gestalt*; Boudewijnse; Kim; Barry Smith, *Austrian Philosophy*; idem, *Foundations*.

⁶⁶ Christian von Ehrenfels, “Über ‘Gestaltqualitäten,’” *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie* 14 (1890), 250: “eine blosse Zusammenfassung von Elementen, oder etwas diesen gegenüber Neues, welches zwar mit jener Zusammenfassung, aber doch unterscheidbar von ihr vorliegt?” All translations of this articles are from Barry Smith, *Foundations*.

⁶⁷ As far as evidence Ehrenfels argued that melodies have an identifiable, overarching form, even when they are played in keys which have none of the same notes or physiological sensations. The similarities must stem from something other than the sensations.

to answer a question: what is melody?"⁶⁸ Ernst Mach had in 1886 suggested that a melody could be sensed by muscular feeling as a single perception. In compressing temporal sensations into a single space of time this position remained untenable for Ehrenfels, but it nonetheless gave him a starting point and curiosity about the psychological presentation of melodies.

Important in Ehrenfels's evidencing of Gestalt qualities was a melody's ability to be remembered. The memory required to perceive a melody and the ease with which one can remember the complex of sensations involved suggested a Gestalt *separate* from the tone-presentations. Concerning apparently non-operative music he wrote that: "in order to apprehend a melody purely aurally it is necessary to possess, with it dying away, a *memory-image* of every one of its notes."⁶⁹ However, later in the essay Ehrenfels did not refer to purely aural music, but to the ease with which he could remember Wagner's Valhalla leitmotif, adding: "It is possible that musical works such as the Wagnerian, with an exceptionally strong harmonic character, are particularly suited for the fixing in memory."⁷⁰ Clearly Ehrenfels thought of his favorite composer's music as easy to remember. Likewise, it seems plausible that the structure of Wagner's music – the *leitmotiv* character – would also lend itself to being remembered. It is no coincidence then that all the

⁶⁸ Christian von Ehrenfels, "Über Gestaltqualitäten," *Philosophia* 2 (1937), 139. Translation by Barry Smith, in *Foundations*.

⁶⁹ Ehrenfels, "Über 'Gestaltqualitäten,'" 252: "um eine Melodie rein tonal aufzufassen, es nöthig sei, bei ihrem Ausklingen ein Erinnerungsbild ihrer sämtlichen Töne zu besitzen." Emphasis added.

⁷⁰ Ehrenfels, "Über 'Gestaltqualitäten,'" 261: "Es ist möglich, dass Tonwerke mit ausgesprochenem harmonischen Charakter, wie die Wagner'schen, besonders geeignet sind, die Tonarien im Gedächtnisse zu fixiren."

musical examples given by Ehrenfels in “Über ‘Gestaltqualitäten’” are from Wagner. In conceiving of musical Gestalt, of forms separate and apart from the notes of the melody, Ehrenfels was not thinking of symphonic music, but Wagner’s music-drama, wherein each melody was heard repeatedly and invested with conceptual form through the drama, through Wagner’s attempt to make music speak.

Given Ehrenfels’s personal constitution as “half Wagnerian,” we can see why he would interpret melody differently than Stumpf and Mach.⁷¹ Ehrenfels’s training under Brentano and Meinong had given him an interest in observing the actual processes of the mind, a prerogative which differentiated Ehrenfels from the positivism of Mach. Stumpf was similarly a student of Brentano and interpreted tone perception in presentational language, but the associational orientation of his mental process of fusion did not give perceptual authority to the separateness of an outside Gestalt quality. As a classically trained musician, Stumpf thought that he could still hear the pure individuality of the note, should he choose, and that any larger synergetic form could not violate the autonomy of individual sensations. Ehrenfels, on the other hand, with his Wagnerian experiences of repetitive, ideological, and narrative music, was experimenting with a speaking music, far easier to remember and conceptualize into a form, and for that reason was able to interpret melody perception differently.

⁷¹ On the positions of Stumpf and Mach see chapter three.

Gestalt qualities sparked a “terminological watershed” in the field of perception.⁷² The mantle of this discourse was eventually assumed by Max Wertheimer and the Berlin School, who formalized and institutionalized Gestalt psychology in the 1910s and 1920s. The Berlin School successfully expanded Gestalt principles to evolutionary biology, educational theory, and clinical settings. For Wertheimer, who was a student of Ehrenfels, Gestalt psychology was not just a theory of perception, but a philosophy with which to revolutionize the Western cognitive tradition. The end product of this project against atomistic and abstract thinking was a book called *Productive Thinking*.⁷³ Similarly, thinking in Gestalt terms became for Ehrenfels a way to make sense of the chaotic elements of the world and the self.⁷⁴ Although Ehrenfels’s Gestalt arose in the mind simultaneously and passively with the perception of the elements of sensation, the perceiver could choose which elements to include in the perception.⁷⁵ It follows then that infinite possibilities exist for Gestalt combinations. At the close of “Über ‘Gestaltqualitäten’” Ehrenfels used this argument to subtly critique Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence of the same. Ehrenfels juxtaposed the displacing staleness of what he called “eternally recurring elements” with Gestalt psychology’s existential

⁷² Smith, *Austrian Philosophy*, 247.

⁷³ Max Wertheimer, *Productive Thinking* (New York: Harper, 1945).

⁷⁴ In focusing on the way the mind imaginatively and logically groups the building blocks of existence, Ehrenfels saw Gestalt as a frame of reference in modernity. In terms of individuals, Gestalt could provide belonging and a sense of place in the universe. But in its universal application, he claimed, Gestalt would not totalize the individual, but give them a sense of meaning and uniqueness.

⁷⁵ Ehrenfels, “Über ‘Gestaltqualitäten,’” 281-89.

vigor and potential for eternally recreating the world of the Cartesian subject through new Gestalt.⁷⁶

In place of a revaluation of all values powered by Nietzsche's psychology of eternal return, Ehrenfels suggested that his psychology of Gestalt could serve as the foundation of a new theory of values in which Wagnerian music-drama played a prominent role. Nietzsche, who Ehrenfels considered a Wagnerian apostate, had recently published *Der Fall Wagner* and *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, accusing Wagner's music of decadence, as we have seen, a critique Ehrenfels sought to rebut.⁷⁷ Ehrenfels considered the whole spectrum of existence subject to Gestalt principles, including emotions, ideas, and ethics. About mid-way through "Über 'Gestaltqualitäten,'" Ehrenfels began to introduce the idea that these qualities could be compared.⁷⁸ Doing so enabled one to create new Gestalt and to create a hierarchy of Gestalt orders as an evaluative matrix. In a footnote to this discussion he wrote:

Consider, e.g., the orchestral passage accompanying the sunset in the Prelude to the *Götterdämmerung* of Wagner, whose works in general, because of the parallelism which is developed in them between musical and theatrical occurrences, provide an inestimable wealth of material for the comparison of Gestalt qualities of all kinds.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ehrenfels, "Über 'Gestaltqualitäten,'" 292: "ewig wiederkehrender Bestandtheile."

⁷⁷ See Christian von Ehrenfels, *Richard Wagner und seine Apostaten: Ein Beitrag zur Jahrhundertfreier* (Vienna: Heller, 1913); Nietzsche, *Case*; Idem, *Contra*.

⁷⁸ Ehrenfels, "Über 'Gestaltqualitäten,'" 278.

⁷⁹ Ehrenfels, "Über 'Gestaltqualitäten,'" 280: "Man betrachte etwa den Orchestersatz während des Sonnenaufgangs im Vorspiele zu "Götterdämmerung" von Richard Wagner, dessen Werke überhaupt wegen des in desselben verwirklichten Parallelismus zwischen musikalischen und

In forcing the spectator to make connections Wagner's music-drama was rich in Gestalt comparisons, which essentially meant for Ehrenfels that the individual could always find new meanings in it, but also that Wagnerian music-drama was an ethical cornerstone. In sum, Ehrenfels's Gestalt qualities emerged theoretically out of his Wagnerian aesthetic as not only a psychological apparatus for understanding sound perception, but also a musicological tool for accessing and praising Wagner's operas.

Modern Identities

Ehrenfels's path towards Gestalt psychology and its existential implications began on the road to the *Parsifal* premiere in Bayreuth. As a patron Ehrenfels was among those at the close of the first performance who saw Wagner appear on stage amidst the thunderous applause to give further instruction about his theatrical discourse. He urged the audience not to applaud during the performance – not to disturb the illusion – but this clarification was an acceptable loss.⁸⁰ That Wagner appeared on stage rather than crawling into a hole as after the Bayreuth premiere of *Das Rheingold*, speaks to his own feeling about the success of *Parsifal*, and to the success of getting music to speak. The performances continued to meet Wagner's expectations. During the final showing he even snuck out of his box and into the orchestra pit, despite failing health, to conduct the last twenty-five minutes of his

dramatischen Vorgängen den reichsten Stoff zur Vergleichung von Gestaltqualitäten aller Art darbieten."

⁸⁰ See Newman, 4:689-90.

last music-drama.⁸¹ *Parsifal* was a final success to which Wagner could confidently put his name. The festival even turned a surprising profit of 135,600 marks, which guaranteed a festival for the following year and repayment of the debt to Ludwig.⁸² As this chapter has argued at different points, *Parsifal*'s success lay in a multitude of contextual factors. In general, though, it provided a coherent and unified expression of the theory and practicalities of Wagner's Schopenhauerian aesthetic.

Berlin critic Heinrich Ehrlich had described the demographics of the *Ring* festival as "cosmopolitan," a descriptor apt for the entire endeavor. By contrast *Parsifal* was more demographically homogenous and its theatrical discourse simplified through a unified presentation. The libretto, the music, the staging, the audience, the scheduling, and the atmosphere all fit squarely under the heading of Wagner's dream stage aesthetic, all having been altered after the disappointment of 1876. Wagner drew the text primarily from Eschenbach and crafted lyrics that were easy to understand, even in the darkened auditorium and with Wagner's distinct vocal requirements. Likewise the music of *Parsifal* reflects this unified expression with its heavy usage of motifs, interwoven so as only to be understood by the unconscious mind in a more hypnotized state. Wagner also prepared better stage plans in order to facilitate the illusionary theatrical discourse. The experience was no longer hampered by clumsy machinery and the whole of the narrative was fit into a single night, so that the spectators did not have to remember the motifs overnight

⁸¹ Newman, 4:692.

⁸² Spotts, 88.

or lose concentration and hypnotism in the exhaustion of a tetralogy. Finally, the spectators themselves were a more homogenous bunch, more sympathetic to the theatrical goals. In a solipsistic feedback loop the tight-knit circle of supporters enabled successful festival staging and musical discourse in part because the fans were initially sympathetic enough listen for the music's deeper meaning. As patrons and readers of the Wagnerian literature these visitors entered the *Festspielhaus* with the composer's wishes in mind and heard of voice of music.

When Wagner originally conceived of staging a music festival in 1849, he had very specific intentions in mind. The festival was to be a space of socio-political dialogue and the voice of music a psychological bond between participants. If anything music was supposed to reveal a universal unconsciousness with which the nation and humanity should return as a solution for the hyper egoism of modern society. Wagner wanted his musical discourse to speak against the determination and adequacy of the individual. However, by 1882 Wagner's music spoke to the individual in support of their own perspectival reification. Following the disintegration of Wagner's orthodox *Gesamtkunstwerk*, he himself liberated music and by extension the self sufficiency of the spectator listening to the music. With *Parsifal*, nearly all the motifs originated in the orchestra, in the clear pronunciation of the prologue, allowing the spectator to develop his or her own associations before these musical sentences became interlocked into paragraphs and with the libretto. Additionally, the aesthetic creation of the world into logical wholes through Ehrenfels's Gestalt is another example of someone who considered Wagner's music

well adapted to individualized reflection. Wagner had originally imagined the listener response of theatrical discourse, the post-show discussion, to be collective, but following the tradition of Wagnerites like Ludwig, this reflection became isolated and divorced from the necessary social setting of production.

The mystic content of *Parsifal* further supported this solemn, silent, and quite serious response to Wagner's theatrical discourse. With the *Ring* Wagner had wanted a mythical topic void of associations, but in some ways this proved too remote. With *Parsifal* he found material with extensive ecclesiastical associations that engendered the overall aim of his aesthetic. The familiar transcendental associations of religious symbolism created greater sympathy among spectators for the inner life of humanity. Bayreuth became a haven for soul – and psyche – seekers, like Houston Stewart Chamberlain who came to Bayreuth because of “its stress on the inward condition of the individual and on self-realization through art.”⁸³ Just as Albert Heintz had seen *Parsifal* as a purely psychological narrative of ethical maturation, other Wagnerian sympathizers flocked to Bayreuth after Wagner's death in 1883 to hear the music, its ideas, and its reification of identity

⁸³ Geoffrey Field, *Evangelist of Race: The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 54-55.

CONCLUSION:

WAGNER AND MODERNISM

In his preface to *Der Fall Wagner* Nietzsche made the epigrammatic statement that “Wagner sums up modernity.”¹ This declaration, pregnant with useful insights, is appropriate to orient our concluding thoughts on Wagner’s relationship with the history of psychology, modernity, and ultimately, modernism. Definitions of modernism vary widely, but almost all scholars locate the excavation of *mind* – specifically the subconscious – within the top priorities of modernist artists and scientists. For example, Carl Schorske’s classic work on Vienna categorizes the modern individual as the “psychological man” and *fin-de-siècle* modernism by its sensitivity to states of consciousness.² Similarly, more recent works searching for the discursive intersections of modern science and art identify in the last decades of the nineteenth century a “massive turn inward,” in pursuit of the “night life of the soul.”³ In establishing Wagner as a figure in the cultural history of psychology, this thesis also suggests the close, if at times ambiguous, relationship of Wagner with the rise of modernism.

¹ Nietzsche, *Case*, 612.

² Schorske, 4-7.

³ Mark S. Micale, “The Modernist Mind: A Map,” in *The Mind of Modernism: Medicine, Psychology, and the Cultural Arts in Europe and America, 1880-1940*, ed. Mark S. Micale (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 2; Treitel, 34.

While the passageways between the history of Wagner and the history of psychology abound with potential traffic, the focus of this thesis has been Wagner's attempt to make music speak and draw the unconscious mind into its discourse. This project was central to Wagner's theatrical theories and practices, manifesting itself most prominently in the Bayreuth festival. As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis uses the analytical categories of discourse, experience, and influence. In concluding, then, we will summarize our findings according to these categories and in the context the existing scholarship on Wagner and modernism.

In establishing the connection between occultism and German modernism, Corinna Treitel points to the 1850s and its political disappointments as the genesis of the modern, "psychological point of view."⁴ Concerning this turn she writes that the transcendent "was the no man's land of late-nineteenth-century psychological thought, a territory in which philosophers, psychologists, physiologists, physicists, psychiatrists, doctors, clerics, educators, spiritualists, and ordinary lay people were all staking their claims."⁵ It seems that we should add musicians to this list. In post-1848 Europe, Wagner was part of an at first small but influential group of thinkers exploring the psyche past conventional limits to the doorstep of modernism. Using mnemonic and later hypnotic techniques, Wagner initiated his musical discourse as a way to understand the human consciousness.

As we saw in the first two chapters Wagner's ideas of double consciousness shared a *discursive* interest with the canon of early psychologists. In the 1850s and

⁴ Treitel, 30.

⁵ Treitel, 21.

1860s these non-reductive materialists included Carus, Fechner, Helmholtz, and Schopenhauer. But just as much of the scientific academy at the time discouraged exploration of a topic like “mind,” so also Wagner experienced trouble instituting his festival. Concurrent with the explosion of interest in psychology in the 1870s and 1880s, Wagner was able stage his music-dramas – an undertaking which shared many of the same social challenges as laboratory experiments with the mind. Wagner’s greatest success in making music psychological lay in the appropriation of hypnotism, a popular means of early modernist psychiatry. Indeed, given the scale of the Bayreuth festival and its reliance on sympathizers, much of the project took on characteristics determined by the cultural interests of the participants.

In looking at the historical *experience* of Wagner’s music, this thesis has also emphasized the importance of the cast of characters surrounding Wagner. Beginning in 1849 his associations with Bakunin informed much of Wagner’s revolutionary ideas and involvement. Furthermore, with the writing of the *Ring* and the construction of the *Festspielhaus* Wagner was both dependent on and malleable by these patrons. Given the demands of such a large and socially contingent project like the Bayreuth festival, Wagner essentially sold his product to Ludwig, the Wagner societies, and the city of Bayreuth, who more or less treated music-drama as a commodity. In this context, the experience became at first unsuccessfully nationalist and then a quasi-religious rite of personal transcendence. In order for music to become discursive, Wagner had to cultivate a sympathetic audience, which he finally achieved with the premiere of *Parsifal*.

For the initiated, the experience of musical discourse created a sensitivity to states of consciousness. In the negotiation of this experience, visitors translated *Parsifal* in highly modernist language. So not only did Wagner's ideas participate in a broader interest in mind, but the manifestation of those ideas nurtured concerns for the "night life of the soul" amongst the broader public. Until the First World War *Parsifal* was almost exclusively performed in Bayreuth and remained the cornerstone music-drama of festival and the Bayreuth circle.⁶ For those who made the pilgrimage, *Parsifal* was a unique avenue of exposure to psychological concepts, which prepared the way for the reception of psychology as an autonomous, legitimate, scientific, and meaningful category.

As Treitel points to the 1850s as the beginning of the inward turn, Andreas Huyssen considers 1848 the genesis of the divide between mass culture and the avant-garde:

Ever since the mid-19th century, the culture of modernity has been characterized by a volatile relationship between high art and mass culture. Indeed, the emergence of early modernism in writers such as Flaubert and Baudelaire cannot be adequately understood on the basis of an assumed logic of "high" literary evolution alone. Modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture. Both the strengths and the weaknesses of modernism as an adversary culture derive from that fact.⁷

In creating an audience for his works, Wagner also cultivated a circle of followers that excluded the "others" of modern, mass culture. Although Huyssen and Adorno

⁶ The *Ring* was not performed again in Bayreuth until 1896.

⁷ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), vii.

note the tension in Wagner between high and commoditized art, they generally agree that Wagner's festival and compositional method, more than anything, reinforced the creation of a culture industry that devalued privatized artistic reception.⁸

In part this tension in festival interpretation can be relieved by taking cognizance of the bifurcation at the *Parsifal* premiere between the performances for patrons and those for the public. The festival remained a touristy get-away, but larger ticket sales financially preserved an elite and insular group of devoted Wagnerites that might rightly be considered a modernist (as Huyssen describes Flaubert and Baudelaire) *avant-garde*. Interpreters of Wagner often point his early appraisal of the Volk and of the individual's sublimation into the nation as emblematic Wagner's cultural contribution.⁹ However, by the institutionalization of the festival Wagner himself and his musical discourse supported the consolidation of a critical elite who could hear the meaning of the music. Within the parameters defined by the *avant-garde*, and rooted in the financial independence afforded by Bayreuth's "mass culture," the music actually affirmed individuality.

Understanding the musical and political aesthetics of Wagner's dream stage can also help us mediate the disagreement between Nietzsche and Ehrenfels as to whether Wagner's music encouraged forgetfulness or remembrance. In essence they are both right. The hypnotism of the artistic experience allowed the self-selecting *avant-garde* member to forget mass culture and modernity. Yet, within

⁸ Huyssen, 36-38.

⁹ Aberbach; Huyssen, 38; Jelavich, 25.

the *avant-garde* the listener is, like Ehrenfels, able to infinitely recreate their world through new aesthetic associations and memories, as demonstrated by the psychological sophistication of Wagner's music.

The cases of Nietzsche and Ehrenfels bring us around to Wagner's actual direct *influence* on modernist thinkers. For both the acceptance or rejection of musical discourse became jumping off points for psychological projects central to modernism: psychoanalysis and Gestalt psychology. Yet, the impact of Wagner's ideas reached into much more disparate corners of the *fin-de-siècle*. In Schorske's "multiple analytical categories" – theater, literature, architecture, music, and painting – Wagner figures strongly in the intellectual development of key modernist figures. However, Schorske does not expand on this comparison. Wagner is written into the intellectual genetic code of almost every member of the modernist pantheon. In the field of literature Flaubert, Baudelaire, Joyce, Proust, Mann, and Elliot all expand on Wagnerian themes and techniques, including the leitmotif.¹⁰ As far as painters, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Art Nouveau and the Blue Rider, as well as the aesthetic religiosity of many expressionists came directly from Wagnerian circles.¹¹ Finally, in music Strauss, Mahler, and Schoenberg, concomitant with

¹⁰ For Wagner's influence on literature see Andrea Gogroff-Voorhees, *Defining Modernism: Baudelaire and Nietzsche on Romanticism, Modernity, Decadence, and Wagner* (New York: P. Lang, 1999); Erwin Koppen, *Dekadenter Wagnerismus: Studien zur europäischen Literatur des Fin de Siècle* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973); Timothy Martin, *Joyce and Wagner: A Study of Influence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Emma Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Gerald D. Turbow, "Art and Politics: Wagnerism in France," in Large and Weber.

¹¹ On Wagner influence on modern painting see Ester da Costa Meyer and Fred Wasserman, eds., *Schoenberg, Kandinsky, and the Blue Rider* (New York: Jewish Museum, 2003); Clare A. P.

reacting against Wagner, all had deep roots in his use of chromaticism and atonality.¹²

Despite the close relation of Wagner with most every tenet of modernism, something about Wagner's "regressive" ideas leads scholars to place him outside the circumscribed territory of modernism.¹³ In fact, if broader intellectual histories include Wagner at all, it is usually only as an auxiliary figure in discussions of Nietzsche or anti-Semitism.¹⁴ Yet just because Wagner was in such close intellectual proximity to the pillars of modernism, does not necessarily make him a modernist. Huyssen is largely right in placing Wagner as a whole on the threshold of modernism. However, I would place Wagner's musical discourse, as a phenomenon, just inside the door. Perhaps this was what Nietzsche meant when he said one must first become Wagnerian – Wagner was the doorway to modernism.¹⁵ The success of *Parsifal* in 1882 cleared a path, using the latest technologies and techniques to make music speak in praise of personal redemption. In the process,

Willson, "Klimt's Beethoven Frieze: Goethe, *Tempelkunst* and the Fulfilment of Wishes," *Art History* 19, no. 1 (1996): 44-73.

¹² On Wagner and modernist music see Hermann Danuser, "Musical Manifestations of the End in Wagner and in Post-Wagnerian *Weltanschauungsmusik*," *19th Century Music* 18, no. 1 (1994): 64-82; Constantin Grun, *Arnold Schönberg und Richard Wagner: Spuren einer aussergewöhnlichen Beziehung* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2006); Kramer; Charles Youmans, *Richard Strauss's Orchestral Music and the German Intellectual Tradition: The Philosophical Roots of musical Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

¹³ Walter Frisch describes Wagner's relationship with modernism, as well as German modernism generally as ambiguous. This refers to a Janus-faced embrace of the future, while at the same time remaining nostalgic and regressive. See Walter Frisch, *German Modernism: Music and the Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 34.

¹⁴ See Jefferies; Stromberg; Winders.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Case*, 612: "Through Wagner modernity speaks most intimately, concealing neither its good nor its evil – having forgotten all sense of shame... There is no way out, one must first become Wagnerian."

Wagner created an *avant-garde* interested in the psyche. Given his discursive interests in, created experiences of, and influences on psychology, future scholarship should take stock of Wagner as an important popularizer of the penetrability of mind.

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Abbreviations

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- SLRW* Wagner, Richard. *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*. Edited and translated by Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington. New York: W.W. Norton, 1988.
- SSD* Wagner, Richard. *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*. 12 vols. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1900-1925.

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