Interstitial Redemption: Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and the Dramaturgical Vicissitudes of Music Drama

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Every movement has its bad objects, even a movement as constitutively allergic to organizational and ideological coherence as modernism. And Richard Wagner surely had a special place in modernism's pantheon of bad objects. The most radical innovations on the operatic stage were programmatically conceived in opposition to Wagner's legacy: Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's denunciation of the culinary in opera was also, and more vociferously, a denunciation of the absorptive aspirations and mesmerizing practices of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[1] And when the Kroll Opera in Berlin (following the lead of provincial theaters, in Darmstadt and Münster for instance) famously challenged the entrenched romantic idiom of operatic stage aesthetics, inviting the likes of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Leopold Jessner, Giorgio de Chirico, and others to re-make opera in a modernist image, Wagner's works formed an especially inviting—and intensely controversial—target.[2] Thus, to cite a brief example, in February of 1929, the German National Party demanded that the Prussian State Parliament launch an investigation into "the transformation of the State Opera at the Platz der deutschen Republik [known as the Kroll Opera] into a laboratory for Bolshevik art experiments."[3] The crisis erupted in the wake of the Kroll Opera's production of *Der fliegende Holländer*, which had premiered a few weeks earlier on 15 January 1929, and which, according to the party, brazenly "mocked the spirit of Richard Wagner."[4]

The terms are relatively clear: Wagner was a bad object for the modernists, which in turn made the modernists into a bad object for the many cultural conservatives who defined themselves as Wagnerians. In this essay I will be less interested in recounting this history than in exploring its terms. For it turns out that the pendulum swinging between modes of aesthetic expression (say, between reverence and irreverence, between a melodramatic and a modernist mise-en-scene, between conventionalized spectacle and *Neue Sachlichkeit*) is not restricted to the reception of Wagner's works; rather, it arguably swings with notable force *within Wagner's works*. Put most directly and rather too

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simplistically: I wonder whether we might describe the stylistic dramaturgy of Wagner's works (and his middle-period works in particular) in terms of a proto-modernist dramaturgy of stylistic profusion? I suggest this view not just because they are (still) operatic works, characterized, as the cliché would have it, by a profusion of expressive forms, but rather, it strikes me that Wagner front-loads his works with a *specific* and not a generic profusion of stylistic forms, forms that he deploys ultimately for pedagogical reasons, that is, to locate himself and his works in relation to them, to teach us a lesson in stylistic discernment. In this account Wagner's works themselves bear in interesting ways the very dramaturgy that is brought to bear upon them by the oppositional forces of modernism, whose actions so infuriated the German National Party in February of 1929. I will leave to others an assessment of the extent to which Wagner's works indeed became an historical forum for "Bolshevik art experiments." (Eisenstein's production of *Die Walküre* in Moscow in 1940 certainly suggests as much.[5]) For my part, I wonder whether they were not always already such an aesthetic forum, whether such experimentation and its oppositional—even Manichaean—terms were not an important feature of their dramaturgical logic?

In the background of this claim is a second set of concerns, primarily historiographical in nature. How, I wonder, do the oppositional terms of Wagner's works—something I will explain shortly—compare to a similar set of terms that have informed the early history of cinema? The latter terms are familiar enough. For a number of years scholars have been charting cinema's emergence out of distinct and even competing aesthetic identities: on the one hand, a cinema of attractions, affiliated with the paratactic form of the fairground; on the other hand, a cinema of absorption, associated with extended narrative forms.[6] I wonder whether this model of bifurcated expressive inclinations—on the one hand, the parataxis of attractions; on the other, the aspiration to narrative continuity—might not provide us with a helpful model for the emerging logic of Wagner's music dramas.

Wagner's contributions to the practices of cinema are most often associated with his compositional technique. Thus, Theodor Adorno suggests that "the evolution of the opera, and in particular the emergence of the autonomous sovereignty of the artist, is intertwined with the origins of the culture industry. Nietzsche, in his youthful enthusiasm, failed to recognize the artwork of the future in which we witness the birth of film out of the spirit of music."[7] I think there are other, less familiar, but equally promising ways to conceptualize Wagner's role in the pre-history of cinema. These would derive from Wagner's polemical convictions and theatrical practices as well as his compositional achievements.

The tensions between attractions and absorption, between the manifest discontinuities of spectacle and the aspiration to continuity associated with

conventionalized dramatic narrative, are not new to the historiography of art. Indeed, if Wagner represents a pre-history to the appearance of this struggle in cinema, then we could surely trace a pre-history to that pre-history: in painting of the second half of the eighteenth century, for instance, or in the shift from Metastasio to Calzabigi associated with Gluck's reform operas at about the same time.[8] In this essay I do not explore the historical arc of the tensions between spectacle and narrative, theatricality and absorption. Rather, I focus on the disposition of these tensions within Wagner's work. In short, I argue that Wagner's published writings repeatedly model a motivating tension between attraction and absorption, between spectacle and narrative, one that provides us (and him) with a suggestively bifurcated aesthetic field on which to launch the project of music drama, which sees itself as a sublation of each set of oppositional terms. More importantly, Wagner's stage works repeatedly allegorize this aspiration, rendering the bipolar appeals (and manifest shortcomings) of spectacle and absorption in order, of course, to clear the way for the advent of Wagner's own aesthetic practice. In the larger project from which this essay is derived, I seek to thread this argument through a host of Wagner's works, but for the purposes of this essay I will restrict myself to a particular moment in *Tannhäuser*.

Tannhäuser was first performed in Dresden in 1845; Wagner undertook revisions between 1847 and 1852, then again for Paris in 1861, and finally, for Vienna in 1875. Although the title figure is officially a "knight" (as in Sir Heinrich Tannhäuser), the piece is routinely interpreted as an artist-opera and Tannhäuser as an artist. We can trace the most recent emergence of this interpretive consensus back to Götz Friedrich's 1972 production of the work at the Bayreuth Festival.[9] In Friedrich's account Tannhäuser is a rebel, an aesthetic and social pariah—something of a cross between Mick Jagger and Michael Moore: sexually depraved and yet earnestly political. Friedrich's Bayreuth production clarified the extent of Wagner's concern with the untenability of true art in the face of a hostile, uncomprehending world, or indeed, worlds. For the title character ends up shuttling between worlds, between the netherworld of Venus (which Wagner inflects as a kind of high-class massage parlor, a place of intoxicating, intolerably pleasurable excesses) and the aristocratic world of the Wartburg society (which Wagner inflects as a world of aesthetic impoverishment, wholly devoted to monitoring, constricting, and stigmatizing the expression of pleasure). Tannhäuser, of course, is miserable in both worlds: in the Venusberg, where he spends the first two scenes of act 1, and back in the real world, among his erstwhile colleagues and his true love Elisabeth in the Wartburg society, where he arrives for the final scene of the first act. The duality is familiar enough: way too much pleasure in one realm, way too little in the other. The autobiographical terms of reference in the work are just as familiar. Wherever he goes, Tannhäuser is perennially unhappy—and

largely unwelcome—by virtue of his unflagging aesthetic integrity. He is until the very end of the piece damned if he gives voice to his acute perceptions and damned if he does not. As such, he is readily recognizable as an idealized (which is also to say: a masochistic) image of Wagner himself.

Tannhäuser has always held a rather uneasy place in operatic history, not in the repertory, of course, where its popularity has been enduring, but rather in the history books, where its status has been hard to fix. Carl Dahlhaus encapsulates the problem with characteristic acuity when he describes *Tannhäuser* as caught between a "no longer and not yet"—that is, no longer opera (in the sense of Wagner's youthful, conventional works) and not yet music drama.[10] There are some obvious reasons why the work would appear to be thus caught between two chairs, since Wagner kept returning to and revising the work, and those revisions span the composer's extraordinarily productive middle-to-later years.

Not surprisingly scholars and opera goers familiar with Wagner's work have made a sport of tracking the traces of Wagner's compositional biography through the work, which often bears its stylistic eclecticism quite brazenly. Surely that is part of the point, for this work is preoccupied with brazenness—sketching its etiology, assessing its emotional impact (for mortals and immortals alike), chronicling the injustices, psychological and philological, left in its wake. In his monograph on Wagner's operas Dahlhaus urges us not to insist upon stylistic unity in determining which version of the work to perform:

> The view that, although the musical superiority of the Paris version in some details is beyond dispute, its stylistic inconsistency makes it as a whole inferior to the Dresden version, is questionable insofar as it measures Wagner by a norm that is not necessarily appropriate. The demand for stylistic uniformity and consistency is classical at bottom . . . but Wagner, in short, was a mannerist and a practical man of the theater. The stylistic discrepancies . . . can be seen to express the conflict between the everyday, natural world, to which Tannhäuser longs to return, and the artificial paradise where Venus seeks to keep him.[11]

For the most part this discussion about where to locate *Tannhäuser* in Wagner's compositional trajectory has been about notes, or in any case about compositional and editorial logic, about which version to perform and the implications of that choice for the sense of the work and its place in Wagner's œuvre. Should the work be performed in a fashion that smoothes over some of the compositional anomalies that result from Wagner's recurring interventions in the score, or is it preferable to retain those anomalies as signs of those interventions? While that argument has simmered among practitioners and musicologists, other interpretive questions have been percolating as well. One of the most obvious and vexing is how to make sense of the figure of

Tannhäuser who is unsatisfied with the endless pleasures afforded by a life with Venus and yet also spurned by his erstwhile colleagues for copping to the very sacrilegious carnal desires that have left him so unfulfilled.

I propose to read Wagner's account of the dual dissatisfactions of excess and renunciation in terms of their generic and institutional correlatives, which is to say: the two distinct worlds (of the Venusberg and the Wartburg society) within which Tannhäuser emerges in the opera correspond to the very worlds (of Paris and Dresden) into which *Tannhäuser* would emerge. This analogy between diegetic and institutional trajectories is reiterated—indeed, it gains critical traction—by a further generic term, for the world of Venus and Paris (the world of excess) corresponds in large measure to the institutional and aesthetic world of Parisian grand opera, while the world of Dresden and the Wartburg society corresponds, in interesting ways, to the debased institutional and aesthetic conditions of German opera. In between them is a tiny but enormously important space of aesthetic potentiality. Not surprisingly, this is the space that Wagner reserved for himself, the place of music drama. Thus, music drama forms the anticipated term, one that will follow upon the untenability of both Paris and Dresden, of both grand opera and *Oper*. It is a term given life and license—and an enormously promising, if still nascent form—in *Tannhäuser*.

In order to clarify this point, I propose to focus on one of several crucial moments in the work: the Shepherd's song in act 1. Tannhäuser's appearance at the Wartburg represents a significant and unexpected homecoming; after all, this is the society he abandoned, prior to the opera's beginning, in his pursuit of Venus. At this interstitial moment, on the cusp of his return (no longer with Venus but not yet amidst his erstwhile colleagues), Tannhäuser encounters a lone shepherd. The shepherd's song is, as Carolyn Abbate observes,

> [. . .] part of an operatic soundscape that was unprecedented in 1845 and would remain avant-garde well into the twentieth century. In act 1, scene 3, Tannhäuser is transported from the Venusberg to the upper world, and when he arrives, the pit orchestra drops out [. . .] In its place, the landscape itself shimmers with musical sounds.
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> The stage music in short suggests that nobody produced what one hears other than the figures that sing it and play it or the objects that clang and blow, and this is a critical point. Human beings and instruments are equated, in a pre-lapsarian scene that makes what people sing as inevitable—as rooted in their being—as the tone of a bell whose weight and shape determines the unique note it sounds. This music is unperformed: no one has learned it or repeats it, no *paradis artificiel*, no proclamation of ironic distance with every melodic turn. Wagner has thus labored very hard to produce something that short-circuits consciousness of his presence, that therefore lies beyond reproach, seeming to erase the truth that what is present as sound, after all, is a representation: something someone had to have made.[12]

Abbate is right on target here (indeed, I would say she is right on multiple targets). At this moment the work is very busy suppressing its status as representation and constructing in its stead a compelling fiction of its status as unperformed, a fiction based on an idealized equation of human beings and instruments. She is right to characterize the scene as pre-lapsarian. Yet, we need to keep in mind the strange sequencing of this fleeting scene of musical utopia, for the pre-lapsarian scene of the shepherd's song distinctly follows upon and only emerges in the wake of the post-lapsarian. Indeed, it might make sense to describe it as an *inter*-lapsarian moment, since it only emerges for the briefest of musical and dramaturgical moments, to be followed by a very different fall, not back down into Venus's den of iniquity, as I have mentioned, but up into the real world of the Wartburg society. The utopian scene, we might say, is perched precariously: this is no longer Oz, and it is not yet Kansas.

This precarious perch is especially characteristic of *Tannhäuser*; it is, to use Abbate's formulation, "a critical point." The challenge is to determine the terms and address of the criticism. In order to do so, we need to consider the scene in a bit more detail. What, then, is at stake in the transition from act 1, scene 2, at the Venusberg, to act 1, scene 3, where, mysteriously and magically, Tannhäuser finds himself (according to the stage directions: amid a blue sky, bright sunshine, and a lovely, inviting valley), back in the Wartburg society? Or, well, on the edges of that society, which is an important part of the point. As suddenly as the shepherd's song materializes from—and in contradistinction to—the Venusberg, it is in turn swallowed up by the reemergence of the aristocratic world of the Wartburg. In so doing, the work figures its compositional itinerary, moving from a "no-longer" of Venus's world to the "not-yet" of the Wartburg world. And these worlds are not just dramatic worlds, but dramaturgical ones. In the remaining pages I will sketch how this is so and explore some of the implications. Let me proceed with what I take to be the essential question: what is the condition from which *Tannhäuser* and Tannhäuser need to recover in the company of the shepherd's song, at the outset of act 1, scene 3? The answer is obvious only in part because Tannhäuser himself keeps telling us: the excesses of life with Venus have become intolerable, "*zu viel*." Meanwhile, the stage directions have alerted us to the terms of that pleasure and the exhaustion that it produces: the visual landscape offers an endless spectacle, replete with wild gesticulation and gyrating bodies, a permanent party.

This is not just Tannhäuser's fall, but the work's, and by extension, the audience's as well. This fallen world is not just any old world, and not just Venus's world, it is also the world of Parisian grand opera. A world about which Wagner had a great deal to say—indeed, one about which he, much like his alter ego Tannhäuser, complained incessantly, for instance, in his essay of 1851 "A Theatre at Zurich." That particular essay occupies its own interstitial

perch: between the Dresden premiere of *Tannhäuser* in 1845 and its subsequent re-appearance in markedly revised form in Paris in 1861. While the essay's titular preoccupation is with a theater in Zurich, its recurring anxiety is with the culture of grand opera in Paris: the very *Grand Opéra* where Wagner would see his revised work performed 10 years later. Reading Wagner's accusations, it is not hard to discern an echo of Tannhäuser's remonstrations to Venus in act 1:

> Now this gold-bedecked Grand Opera is in and of itself a mere husk without a kernel: to wit, a florid, glittering display of the most sensuous expressive means, without an aim worth expressing. In Paris, where this genre acquired its modern finish, and whence it is being transplanted to our stage, there has been distilled from all the native arts of luxury and delectation a dazzling extract, which has gained at the *Grand Opéra* a consistence unapproached elsewhere. All the rich and notables, who settle in the monstrous world-metropolis for its out-of-the-way amusements and distractions, are driven by ennui and unsated cravings to the sumptuous chambers of this theatre, there to get set before them the fullest draught of entertainment. [In Paris,] the most astounding pomp of decorations and stage-costumes unfolds itself in startling multiplicity before the swooning eye, which turns its greedy glance, again, to the most coquettish dancing of the amplest ballet-corps in all the world; an orchestra of unrivalled strength and eminence accompanies in sonorous fill the dazzling march of never-ending masses of chorus-singers and *figurants;* between whose ranks at last appear the most expensive singers, schooled expressly for this theatre, and claim the overwrought senses' residue of interest for their special virtuosity. As pretext for these seductive evolutions a dramatic aim is also dragged in by the ears—its tantalizing motive borrowed from some murderous, or Devil's scandal; and this whole clinking, tinkling, glittering, glimmering show ["Klingen, Schwirren, Flittern und Flimmern"] is paraded as "Grand Opera."[13]

We begin to glimpse the picture that is emerging here: Wagner's lament does not read simply as an itemized critique of the institution of opera; rather, it reads like a detailed scenario for the first two scenes of *Tannhäuser*. In the face of grand opera (or indeed, the *Grand Opéra*), the multiple fantasies of the shepherd's song—that is, the fantasy of music as unperformed, the banishment of an artificial paradise, the end of spectacle and the cancellation of the pit—form a polemical alternative, one with minor bearing upon the drama and major bearing upon *Tannhäuser*'s allegorical program. This sense of *Tannhäuser* proposing—and staging—an allegorical account of the institutional conditions of opera interests me. In Wagner's prose writings operatic staging is part and parcel of the dreaded "culture of opera." As such, it partakes of all that Wagner finds especially loathsome in the opera house: a profusion of luxury, a priority accorded to senseless pleasures, the proliferation of what Wagner famously termed "effects without causes."

That is one side of the story, the Venus side, but *Tannhäuser* does not restrict itself to that one story. Instead it tells of dual forms of untenability: the

too much of the Venusberg elaborated in act 1 contrasted with the too little of the Wartburg society elaborated in act 2. Thus, the song contest of act 2, in which the contestants are challenged to plumb the mystery of love, turns out to be not just a sublimated battle but also a battle about sublimation, about the artful expression of desire. The contest famously spirals out of control when Tannhäuser repeatedly lambastes the paeans to sublimation crooned by his fellow contestants. In Wagner's eyes as in the ears of his protagonist their art of libidinal restraint and expressive convention is no art at all.

The problem, for both Tannhäuser and Wagner, is that the public is hardly on their side, which is to say, when Wolfram von Eschenbach, Walter von der Vogelweide, and finally Biterolf perform their fervent (and fervently conventional) celebrations of libidinal restraint—positions that Tannhäuser finds at once comically stilted and appalling—the assembled crowd of nobles that forms the on-stage audience is utterly enthralled. In this way Wagner stages the impoverishment of the contemporary German cultural landscape. But we need to be clear about the terms of Wagner's critique. The cultural impoverishment he skewers here extends to the culture of German opera. As he puts it in the early, 1834 polemic "On German Opera": "there is no German opera—for the very same reason that we have no German drama. We are too intellectual [*geistig*] and far too learned to be capable of creating warm human figures."[14] While the Italians and the French create warmth on stage, the Germans in Wagner's account create rules. And the sad thing, he claims, is that the German public, impelled by shame and fear, goes along with the German compositional rule-mongers, opting for the mere appearance of intellectual substance but all the while loathing its own inner longing for warmth: "When the composer hides himself in this learned nimbus, it's just as laughable that the public is eager to appear to understand and love this learnedness, so that the people, who would happily go to a lively French opera, are ashamed to do so, and in consternation, swear an oath to the Germanic in the hopes that it is something learned."[15] Here, then, we have the terms of contrast: the warm vs. the learned, the French vs. the German, neither of which, it should be clear, is tolerable in Wagner's eyes. Worst of all, the public seesaws between these two unacceptable alternatives, without recognizing the shortcomings of either or embracing the need for real change.

Wagner's works are designed to contest this condition. They do so, first and foremost, by rendering it. Thus, in *Tannhäuser* we are presented with a bipolar aesthetic disorder, a pendulum swinging between a Francophilic spectacle of libidinal excess and a Teutonic paean to sublimation. The dramaturgical terms thus polarized, you would imagine that the next term (in this case, the third act) would produce the predictable synthesis. But it doesn't. In act 3 Venus makes a brief appearance, suggesting that the party at her place rages on, and Wolfram indicates that the gentlemen of the Wartburg remain deeply resentful of Tannhäuser. Wagner leaves the terms polarized, locating

the prospect of resolution in some future realm. In diegetic terms this realm will be metaphysical: Tannhäuser and Elisabeth are conjoined in death. Yet there is another term to the prospect of resolution, the term that interests me here, which is allegorical and aesthetic, for in locating the terms of resolution in a prospective realm, Wagner locates us as its arbiters and, more important, as its agents. This is to say that the proposed resolution can only come about *if we perceive it*. Wagner's works show us the manifest difficulties attending such a project, for the pleasures of fulfillment presented in act 1 and the pleasures of renunciation presented in act 2 suggest two functional, contemporary modes of coming to terms with pleasure in the aesthetic realm. To the extent that it finds expression at all, aesthetic integrity is necessarily relegated to the margins in this piece, to the interstices between the seductions of the Parisian operatic brothel and the castigations of the Teutonic operatic bureaucracy.

The shepherd's song represents one such interstitial moment. Tannhäuser's Rome narrative is another. Both scenes involve the emergence of a nascent artwork and, just as important, the constitution of a new audience (and a new form of apprehension) that educes the new work of art. That is surely part of the critical point. If scenes 1 and 2 of act 1 present the world as lived in the *Grand Opéra*, then act 1, scene 3 presents the dawning of a new compositional day, replete with bright skies and an unaccompanied, non-representational musical idyll. Alas, it will not—can not—last. Nonetheless, for a brief moment, we are presented with a cogent account of an alternative space, one with distinct, unsullied origins and aspirations. Here, then, we witness the birth of music drama out of the solitary spirit of the *Volk*. It is a Wagnerian musical birth with all the trappings, an instance of natural, unrehearsed singing, a musical utterance that comes not from the mind, but from the heart. And, of course, as a shepherd, this singer and his singing are not yet sullied by the representational and commercial lures of the metropolis or the shoddy, fashionable, pleasurable means—the clinking, tinkling, glittering, and glistening—that are its hallmark. All of this is to say: we are presented with an unaccompanied song, not an aria. The difference, according to Wagner, is so great as to be almost incalculable.

For those readers who have not dabbled recently in Wagner's prose from the Zurich period or who do not recall its polemical aggression, let me offer a brief sample, an excerpt from one of the composer's frequent harangues concerning the difference between a folk song and an aria:

> We need not further characterize the repugnant, indescribably repulsive disfigurement and distortion of the folk-tune such as expresses itself in the modern operatic aria. It is nothing but a mutilated folk-tune, and truly in no way a special invention. In utter contempt of nature and all human feeling, and utterly severed from any basis in poetic language, this lifeless and soulless toy of fashion currently tickles the ears of our idiotic opera-theater world.[16]

With the shepherd's song Wagner offers an aural sampling of the alternative, "a specific fresh invention" entirely *respectful* of "nature and human feeling," one no longer severed from, but rather reconnected with the "basis of poetic speech." Here, then, is *substantial* compositional boldness as opposed to its mindless, empty, alluring form. The allegorical implications are rich: here we have a fleeting moment of music-making that is to be taken as authentic, in stark contrast to that which precedes and follows it. Between the no-longer of grand opera and the not-yet of music drama is the authentic voice of the *Volk*, which heralds the nascent artwork of the future. But if this is the case, then what happens to the shepherd's song, what is its fate? And what about the new day? That is, what are the allegory's prospective terms? The shepherd's appearance, as I have been claiming, is fleeting, and the new day will turn out to be a lot less sunny and inviting than our—and Tannhäuser's—initial glimpse had suggested.

Why is this? The short answer is: because in Wagner any instance of unrehearsed musicality—the shepherd's song here, Siegfried's spontaneous exchanges with the bear or for that matter with Fafner in *Siegfried*, Walther's initial version of the prize song in *Die Meistersinger*—is bound to hit up against the enormously powerful forces of aesthetic bureaucratization. These forces, according to Wagner, have gained enormous authority in contemporary culture (occupying positions like the papacy or academic chairs) by expropriating and quashing the naive vitality of the Volk, a vitality that finds expression in just such honest, unrehearsed musical moments as the shepherd's song. The world into which Tannhäuser emerges in the wake of his abandonment of the Venusberg—the world of scene 3, the Wartburg world—turns out to be just as corrupt, just as fallen as the world of pleasure that Tannhäuser recently abandoned. The terms are different, but the result is the same. If the first two scenes of *Tannhäuser* suggest that the artist cannot survive amid the inanity and profusion of grand opera, the rest of the work makes clear that there is no place (yet!) for pure, free musicality amid the intense and overwhelming pressures of aesthetic bureaucratization. The shepherd's performance, we might say, is not just out of place, but it is tellingly out of place. The shepherd and his song are—and from Wagner's point of view they need to be—audibly extrinsic to the culture of opera. The tragedy is the end point of these abysmal facts on the ground (or indeed in the opera house). Until and unless the shepherd has his day (or his music drama), the tragedy of true artistry quashed will repeat itself over and over again, as it does, for instance, in Wagner's works: not just in the Zurich writings (which set out and decry this condition) but also in the *Der fliegende Holländer*, in *Tannhäuser*, and in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. (The obvious exceptions to this repetition are *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Parsifal*, but in both works the terms of resolution are suffused with ambivalence.)

In *Tannhäuser*, as in those other works, Wagner formulates a tripartite

critique of inauthenticity. First, he denounces the institutionalization and bureaucratization of affect (including musical culture and religion), the inevitable impetus in modern culture to codify and police expression rather than to cultivate and celebrate it. Over and over again Wagner's heroes are misunderstood by quotidian institutions. Thus are the hero's intentions violated, his purity besmirched, his impetuosity punished. To put it in terms of one of Wagner's favorite formulations: the singers at the Wartburg and the Pope in Rome (like Beckmesser in Wagner's Nürnberg) are more preoccupied with the *how* (of music, of religion, of *expression*) than the *what.* And in *Tannhäuser*, unlike in *Die Meistersinger*, there is no Hans Sachs, no figure in a position to recognize, mentor, and coronate the fundamental integrity of the hero's outsider art. No figure, that is, except Elisabeth, and us.

The second term of the critique encompasses aesthetic expression produced in the service of excess. Tannhäuser's music and his station in scenes 1 and 2 bear the traces of the excess that he decries. If the bureaucratization of expression is intolerable, so too, according to Wagner's critique, are the music, culture, and life of mindless pleasure. The third term in this configuration is a musical expression that is (ostensibly) free because natural, but naturally restrained because produced in the service of expressing real, lived emotion. This is the redemptive term, but the redemption is necessarily marginalized, relegated to the interstices by the forces of bureaucratization and excess.

Symptomatically the shepherd's song is dramaturgically out of place in the work; it bears no dramatic weight. It serves, instead, as an allegorical cipher, standing in (and standing out) as the alternative to the excesses or impoverishments that render both musical and spiritual life intolerable in this world *and* in the world below, if not beyond. The only alternative for the moment is death. Or music drama. But that is another opera entirely, the shepherd's opera, which, as we can see and hear, is no opera at all.

[1]See Bertolt Brecht, "Das moderne Theater ist das epische Theater," Brecht, *Schriften zum Theater* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1957) 13–28, especially 21. In English: "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre," *Brecht on Theatre*: *The Development of an Aesthetic*. Ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 33–42, especially 37–8.

[2]See Walter Panofsky, *Protest in der Oper: Das provokative Musiktheater der zwanziger Jahre* (München: Laokoon, 1966); Vibeke Peusch, *Opernregie/Regieoper: Avantgardistisches Musiktheater in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt am Main: tende, 1984); Hans Curjel, *Experiment Krolloper: 1927–1931*. Ed. Eigel Kruttge, foreword by Ernst Bloch (München: Prestel, 1975); and Susan Cook, *Opera for a New Republic: The Zeitopern of Krenek*, *Weill*, *and Hindemith* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988).

[3]See "Zensur der Inszenierungen," *Abendblatt der Frankfurter Zeitung* 73.140 (21 February 1929). Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own. The anecdote is recounted in Peusch, *Opernregie/Regieoper* 24.

[4]Peusch, *Opernregie/Regieoper* 24. Production stills and several reviews of the Berlin production as well as articles documenting the controversy that engulfed it can be found in Curjel, *Experiment Krolloper*, plates 47–52 as well as 252–59 and 380–82. Additional stills can

be found in *Das Theater des deutschen Regisseurs Jürgen Fehling*. Ed. Gerhard Ahrens (Berlin: Quadriga, 1985) 130–33.

[5]On Eisenstein's work on *Die Walküre*, see *Eisenstein und Deutschland: Texte*, *Dokumente*, *Briefe*. Ed. Oksana Bulgakowa (Berlin: Henschel, 1998). Rosamund Bartlett, "The Embodiment of Myth: Eizenshtein's Production of *Die Walküre*" in *The Slavonic and East European Review* 70 (1992) 53–76, and Dieter Thomä, *Totalität und Mitleid. Richard Wagner, Sergej Eisenstein und unsere ethisch-ästhetische Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006).

[6]See Tom Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker (London: BFI, 1990), 56–62.

[7]Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: NLB, 1981) 107.

[8]On the implications for painting, see Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1980). On Gluck's reforms, see Herbert Lindenberger, "Music and the Dramatic Principle," in his *Opera: The Extravagant Art* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984) 56–8, or Dietmar Holland, "Glucks Opernreform." *Christoph Willibald Gluck: Orpheus und Eurydike—Texte*, *Materialien*, *Kommentare*. Eds. Holland and Csampai (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1988) 250–53.

[9]Philips released the production on video featuring Spas Wenkoff as Tannhäuser and Gwyneth Jones singing both Venus and Elisabeth. The cast further includes: Hans Sotin as Hermann, Bernd Weikl as Wolfram, and Robert Schunk as Walther. Götz Friedrich directed; Jürgen Rose designed the stage and costumes; Sir Colin Davis conducted. The video director was Thomas Oloffson. Philips, VHS: 070 412–3; a Unitel production, 1978.

[10]Carl Dahlhaus, "*Tannhäuser*," *Richard Wagners Musikdramen* (München: Piper, 1988) 37. In English: *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*. Trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1992) 33.

[11]Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, 28.

[12]See Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001) 124–25.

[13]Wagner, "A Theatre in Zurich" (1851), Wagner, *Prose Works* (New York: Broude Brothers, 1966) 3: 36–37, trans. modified.

[14]Wagner, "On German Opera" (1834), originally published in *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* on 10 June 1834; in Wagner, *Prose Works* 8: 55–58, here 55, trans. modified.

[15]Wagner, "On German Opera" (1834), Wagner, *Prose Works* 8: 57, trans. modified.

[16]Wagner, "The Art-Work of the Future" (1849), Wagner, *Prose Works* 1: 119, trans. modified.