Theorizing 'Death'
The Meaning of Negation as a Hegelian Inheritance in Richard Wagner's *Musik als Idee*

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Introduction

If the phenomenon of, or even 'obsession'[1] with, the aestheticization of 'death' in nineteenth-century German culture was central to Schopenhauer's philosophy,[2] its firm roots lay in Hegel's philosophy.

Hegel is the first thinker to recognize the force of negation; for him negativity creates a positive action: it is brought into presence carried forward by the dialectical activity of the Spirit. It is within this context, as I shall argue in the present article, that Wagner's notion of 'negativity', or the 'utopian celebration of nothingness and death',[3] appears in his work. Consequently, it is within this framework of thought that Wagner's music acts – or is intended to act – as *Musik als Idee*.[4]

In order to clarify the context of the notion of 'negativity', the first sections of the present article will explain Wagner's *Musik als Idee* as interpreted in his theory. What is 'revealed' by Wagner's theory is music's correspondence with an external 'absolute'; this correspondence defines music's symbolic role. By taking into account the changes in Wagner's theory, I shall conclude that this precise

[1] See Margaret Higonnet, 'Suicide: Representations of the Feminine in the Nineteenth Century', *Poetics Today*, 61–2 (1985): 103; Higonnet talks about the popularity of women and death as an aesthetic image in nineteenth century.

[2] See relevant critiques of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* by Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957): 509; also, Siegmund Freud, *On Metapsychology, The Penguin Freud*, vol. II (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984): 322; for more details, see Jeremy Tambling, *Opera and the Culture of Fascism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996): 36–7.

[3] See John Deathridge, 'Post-mortem on Isolde', *New German Critique*, 69 (fall 1996): 99–126: 102; Deathridge talks about Isolde's death scene which I will present in more detail in the last section of the present article.

[4] Nietzsche is one of the first intellectuals who acknowledges the Hegelian quality in Wagner's music by observing: 'Lassen wir die Moral aus dem Spiele: Hegel ist ein G e s c h m a c k … Und nicht nur ein deutscher, sondern ein europäischer Geschmack! –Ein Geschmack, den Wagner begriff!–dem er sich gewachsen füllte! den er verewigt hat!–Er machte bloss die Nutzanwendung auf die Musik–er erfand sich einen Stil, der "unendliches bedeutet",–er wurde der E r b e H e g e l 's … Die Musik als "Idee"– –'(Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Der Fall Wagner' (1888), in *Nachgelassene Schriften*, V13 (August 1888–Anfang Januar, 1889) (Berlin: Vintage Books, 1969): 30.

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symbolic role of music is evident in Wagner's late theoretical work.[5] The latter conclusion proves the importance of Wagner's theory in terms of defining the changing status and character of music's symbolic role.

Death, in Hegel's philosophy, is the existential power of the negative; consequently, 'death', articulated through Wagner's music, has to be more than an aesthetic image, since, as I argue, music in these moments becomes the reality of the listener. Put simply, death, as the supreme power of the negative, unites the musical with the extra-musical by means of performance; in doing so, according to Wagner's intentions, it should signify moments of 'truth', or 'absolute' knowledge.

My comparative analysis of Wagner's early and late theory is, thus, integrated with the Hegelian system of thought; by this means, I argue that the notion of 'death' in Wagner's theory gradually 'seeks' its substance in music as praxis, or better, as an art being performed. Subsequently, in the last section, I look at methods of interactivity between theory and praxis in *Tristan's* 'Liebestod', in an attempt to decode 'death' in one of its most exuberant manifestations in Wagner's music.[6]

On Wagner's Late Theory[7]

Since most writing on Wagnerian philosophy has been of his essays c. 1848–52[8], it is important to sketch out the differences between these and his later writings.

[5] My argument on the changes of Wagner's aesthetics is in agreement with Nietzsche's views on this issue; Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, argues that '[Wagner's] later aesthetic views completely contradict his earlier ones … What most impresses one is the radical change in his notion of the position of music itself …'(Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956): 237). Nietzsche believed that Wagner's later aesthetic views perceive music as playing a metaphysical role in agreement with Schopenhauer's ideas. However, my view, which is developed extensively in my PhD thesis, is that Wagner's late creativity – both theory and praxis – creates a Hegelian historiography of spirit, with music symbolizing the process of the evolution of spirit itself. Wagner's late views and theories construct a united system of thought that controls significant aspects of his stylistic methodologies of that period (the example of *Liebestod* can be seen from this point of view). This is owing to a paradox which I characterize as 'gradual integration of Wagner's theory into praxis'. Through the hermeneutic processes of theory and music, Wagner becomes conscious of their underlying principles. As a consequence, the text's intentions are subsumed in the art's project. (See Anastasia Siopsi, *Richard Wagner's 'Der Ring des Nibelungen': The Reforging of the Sword or, towards a Reconstruction of the People's Consciousness* (University of East Anglia, 1996).)

[6] Prose citations are in English. For Wagner's prose citations I have used the only complete English edition of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, 8 vols (London: Kegan Paul, 1892–99); hereafter cited as PW. The standard edition of the original German prose is Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, 2nd edn, 10 vols (Leipzig, n.d. [1911–16]: reprint Hildesheim, 1976); hereafter cited as SSD.

[7] Wagner's most important late writings that are taken into account in the present essay are as follows: *Zukunftsmusik* (1860), *Über Staat und Religion* (1864), *Was ist deutsch?* (1865), *Deutsche Kunst und deutsche Politik* (1867), *Zum Judenthum in der Musik* (1869), *Beethoven* (1870), *Über die Bestimmung der Oper* (1871), *Über Schauspieler und Sänger* (1872), *Über die Anwendung der Musik auf das Drama* (1879), *Wollen wir hoffen?* (1879), *Religion und Kunst (1880), Metaphisik, Kunst und Religion, Moral, Christenthum* (1870–1882).

[8] Wagner's most important essays of the period c. 1848–52 are *Entwurf zur Organization eines deutschen National-Theaters für das Königreich Sachsen* (1848), *Die*

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In contrast to his earlier writings, in which a more politically oriented theory of historical evolution had been developed, in his later writings Wagner's belief in experience's value was exclusively associated with its moral attributes.[9] Thus, whereas the State was included in Wagner's earlier 'plan' of historical evolution, in his late writings it was removed from his ideology of social advancement, since the concept of reality was divorced from any materialistic concerns. However, these later ideological developments in Wagner's thinking were not just 'flights' from a growing chasm between his ideas and the development of a free market. Apart from his amalgam of absolute idealism with pragmatism, grounded in his historical perspective, Wagner had the 'advantage' of developing a complex aesthetic theory that 'rescued' him from vagueness inasmuch as his theories, referring to both art and society, are to be understood and interpreted through a careful consideration of his artistic works, which, after all, should have the last and most definite word, as is the case with the aim of the present article.

Wagner's theoretical works during the 1860s and 1870s, therefore, are focused on a revised interpretation of his earlier theories concerning the cultural history of his nation, and are developed towards the construction of an aesthetic equivalent of his model for social renewal. Because of the close metaphorical interrelationship between art's role and that of society in Wagner's theories of that period, his works of art become notably important in terms of providing a substitute for social statements and utopian visions. In my view, Wagner's late creativity creates a Hegelian historiography of spirit that negates phenomenal reality, while articulating a normative construction of a utopia based on the principle of a collective identity. Although we observe similar tendencies in Wagner's earlier creativity, it is only in his late works that such a role for music is systematized; this is partly owing to the advancement of a compositional technique that enabled Wagner's theoretical model to find a substantial application in the aesthetics of his art-work.

To summarize briefly the context of Wagner's late writings, community's 'identity' – or else, the search for 'Germanness' (*Deutschthum*), which should set up a 'new reality' – becomes a profound issue in those theories; ethical issues become of prime importance while materialistic aspects of reality vanish in the dream of an idealistic utopia; whereas reason ceases to be an integral aspect of such a reality (since it is associated with 'individualism' in contrast to feeling, which is related to the notion of 'community'), it is still maintained in the abstracted reality of a holistic ideogram of society, faithful to the Hegelian process of 'becoming'; finally, the amalgam of cultural, philosophical and historical experience restructures Wagner's view of reality in relation to its 'otherness' (the 'new', or 'absolute' reality as a negation of what exists) and music becomes the most appropriate medium of the dialectics of opposites created by these two 'realities'.

Wagner's political 'programme' (if we can apply this word to his reconstruction of another reality) in his late writings presupposes the *irrational* autonomy of culture and, eventually, its preservation in a society as a concept

Kunst und die Revolution (1849), *Die Revolution* (1849), *Theater-Reform* (1849), *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1850), *Die Wibelungen* (1850), *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde* (1851), *Oper und Drama* (1852).

[9] It is through the notion of experience that Wagner, in his late theory, perceives humanity's evolution so that the idea of 'time' is heavily bound up with society's experience of a succession of different states.

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through 'rituals' performed by means of art; it is in this context that art is identified with religion. What gives such a significance to Wagner's concept of art being political is that he defines art (especially his own art) as a form that expresses the political in its highest manifestation. In other words, Wagner's belief in the uniqueness of his art in terms of representing culture – and, what is more, of defining and pointing out the future of the people – underlines his intentionality, which is centred upon art's political efficacy. A similar intention does exist in Wagner's earlier period of creativity but it fails to become assimilated into a form because of the contradiction between intentionality and practice, as I explain in more detail later in the present essay. However, in his late works, the abstractions of concepts and their fusion into one integrated theoretical system enable Wagner to subsume the artistic and the political and to proclaim himself as the priest of his era who, like Wotan the ruler, raises his shiny sword and points to the dawning future of the world.

What he intends to evoke by means of music is not 'the unspeakable joy of the unspeakable God',[10] this notion of 'objective inwardness' that, in *Oper und Drama*, is articulated as something to be evoked through the music. Music in Wagner's later writings is coloured by nationalistic models conditioned by the notions of *Deutschthum* and *Christenthum*. However, these notions, for Wagner, are nothing but concepts and have no reference to phenomenal reality unless they are seen as applications of it. On the other hand, if they are 'captured' by means of art, they are depicted and art passes over into history. This is why Wagner's reconstruction of a role for art in his late writings is Hegelian in nature and anti-historical in terms of its reference to a theory, or ideals, abstracted from phenomenal reality. Art, and especially music, by looking at and describing the movement of such a theory, outlines a historiography of this theory that reflects upon spiritual issues. But such a function of art is responsible for an ambiguity in Wagner's compositional practice, since it provides a historical dimension that intrudes into the dialectics of form.

Wagner's Art as the Medium of 'Truth': An Idea 'Completed' in Late Theory

In Wagner's late writings, it is only the 'German spirit', first established in German theatre, that should help society to recover its natural attributes, capable of leading to evolution and reform; this, in turn, as Wagner writes in *Deutsche Kunst und Deutsche Politik* (1867), 'will allow us, as touching the social basis of the State, to take that absolutely-conservative standpoint which we will call the idealistic, in opposition to the formally realistic'.[11] Wagner's proposal for the social progress of German society, in this case, was to 'upheave [the] root defect' of 'the utilitarian law of burgher traffic' or 'at least reduce it to the smallest possible power of harm' (PW, IV: 128); thus, '[the relation developed in a Theatre] in whose naivest form the aesthetic instinct of the Folk-spirit speaks out as a

[10] Meaning through music according to Schiller and, also, in line with Wagner's earlier theories; for the expression see Hans Schulte, 'Work and Music, Schiller's "Reich des Klanges"', in *The Romantic Tradition: German Literature and Music in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. G. Chapple, F. Hall and H. Schulte (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992): 133–64: 163 (note 17).

[11] R. Wagner, *Deutsche Kunst und deutsche Politik (German Art and German Politics)*, [1867], SSD VIII: 30–124; PW IV: 35–135: 123.

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genuine social need – will offer the unique, the incompatible starting-point, replaceable by none besides, for the highest conjoint operation of the spiritual and moral forces of a people's soul of its leading minds' (PW, IV: 128).

Wagner's belief in a rebirth of the 'German spirit' through the medium of theatre transformed its role to a uniquely important one, in terms of its social effect; this can be easily observed by comparing his earlier writings, especially his essay of 1849 on German national theatre, in which theatre should work 'for the ennobling of taste and manners',[12] with his essay of 1867 where Wagner expressed his belief that '[in this institute] *lies the spiritual seed and kernel of all national-poetic and national-ethical culture*, [and] *that no other art-branch can ever truly flourish, or even aid in cultivating the Folk, until the Theatre's all-powerful assistance has been completely recognized and guaranteed*' (PW, IV: 69).

Such importance for the role of theatre appears within Wagner's development of a wider spectrum of ideas that had as a highest standard the identification of life with art. However, Wagner's theories underwent quite significant developments before they arrived at late ideas such as music's exclusive role in expressing religious ideas,[13] and of the redemptive power of history along Hegelian lines of reasoning,[14] without, however, losing connection with the Germanic basis of such a spiritual elevation. Wagner's 'concluding' beliefs are very well articulated in his *Religion und Kunst* (1880) as follows: 'now we have a new reality before us, a race imbued with deep religious consciousness of the reason of its fall, and raising up itself therefrom to new development; and in that race's hand the truthful book of a true history, from which to draw its knowledge of itself…'.[15]

This statement sums up Wagner's conclusion in his search for truth, which, in his late work, acquires a significant dimension in his thinking and is centred upon the idea of art's exclusive capability of expressing 'true morals' or 'true religion'.[16] Such a notion of 'truth' appears to be utopian in its radicalism of negating reality since reality, for Wagner, is perceived as the whole truth that is still to be realized; it is this ideological gesture of negation that brings Wagner to the heart of Hegelian philosophy in the sense that such a negation emerges out of and is specific to what is negated, and this is part of its veritable essence.

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[12] R. Wagner, *Entwurf zur Organization eines deutschen National-Theaters für das Königreich Sachsen (Plan for the Organization of a German National Theatre for the Kingdom of Saxony)*, [1848], SSD II: 233–73; PW VII: 319–60.

[13] See Wagner's *Religion und Kunst* (1880); I quote a characteristic sentence: 'Speaking strictly, the only art that fully corresponds with the Christian belief is Music…' (PW VI: 223).

[14] See PW VI; for example, I quote: 'Have we not the actual documents of life set down for us in our history that marks each lesson by a time example? Let us read it aright, this history, in spirit and in truth…' (PW VI: 246).

[15] R. Wagner, *Religion und Kunst (Religion and Art)*, [1880], SSD X: 211–52; PW VI: 211–52: 247.

[16] See PW VI: 251; here Wagner states: 'I grew convinced that Art can only prosper on the basis of true Morals, and thus could but ascribe to it a mission all the higher when I found it altogether one with true Religion.' Additionally, according to Wagner's later writings, art has the unique ability of being directly related with religion and, thus, in turn, to articulate its principles in the most suitable manner.

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The Idea of *Erinnerung*: Death Forcing Spirit into Itself

Wagner's reconstruction of another reality is based on the concept of art, and especially music, as possessing a relationship to reality. This kind of 'utopianism', which is worked more systematically in Wagner's late writings, provides a juxtaposition between abstraction (the future reality) and immediacy of experience (mainly associated with the experience of listening to music). By this juxtaposition, immediacy of experience is eliminated in a process of inwardization that is attained by means of recollection in music. There is no other concept better related to Wagner's above ideas than Hegel's notion of *Erinnerung*, mainly associated with the term *Aufhebung*;[17] in his *Phänomenologie* (1807), Hegel writes:

> As its [*Erinnerung*] fulfilment consists in perfectly knowing what it is, in knowing its substance, this knowing is its withdrawal into itself in which it abandons its outer existence and gives its existential shape over to recollection. Thus absorbed in itself, it is sunk in the night of its self-consciousness; but in that night its vanished outer existence is preserved, and this transformed existence – the former one, but now reborn of the Spirit's knowledge – is the new existence, a new world and a new shape of Spirit. In the immediacy of this new existence the Spirit has to start afresh to bring itself to maturity as if, for it, all that preceded were lost and it had learned nothing from the experience of the earlier Spirits. But recollection, the inwardizing, of that experience, has preserved it and is the inner being, and in fact the higher form of the substance. So although this Spirit starts afresh and apparently from its own resources to bring itself to maturity, it is none of the less on a higher level that it starts.[18]

It is precisely this meaning of *Erinnerung* that is applied in Wagner's equation between 'recollection' (*Erinnerung*) and 'self-inwardization' (*Er-Innerung*), as it appears in the following quotation:

> whereas in its [i.e. the German spirit's] earlier period of evolution it had most intimately assimilated the influences coming from without, now, when it quite had lost the vantage-ground of outward political power, it bore itself anew from out its most inward store. – Recollection (*Erinnerung*) now became for it in truth a self-[inwardization] [*Er-Innerung*]–;[19] for upon its deepest inner self it drew, toward itself from the now immoderate outer influences.[20]

The same concept is applied even to Wagner's idea of improvisation, which, in *Die Bestimmung der Oper* (1872), he perceives as a 'mimetic' one.[21] In this way,

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[17] The term *Aufhebung* is used by Hegel for the characterization of the transformation by which a constitutive feature of a primitive form of relation is maintained in a modified form within a more sophisticated relationship.

[18] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Baillie (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931): 492.

[19] Although P.W. Ellis has translated *Er-innerung* as 'self-collection', I think that 'self-inwardization' reflects its concept better as I hope might be clear in the overall development of my argument of the notion *Erinnerung*.

[20] R. Wagner, *Was ist deutsch? (What is German?)*, [1865], SSD X: 36–53; PW IV: 149–69: 161.

[21] R. Wagner, *Über die Bestimmung der Oper (On the Destiny of Opera)*, [1871], SSD IX: 127–56; PW V: 127–55: 143.

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improvisation becomes a necessary 'reversal' of the poet's nature since the highest level of expression in Wagner's perception of *Erinnerung* is perceived similarly to Hegel's concept of the same term: 'the immediacy of a new spiritual existence'. Immediacy, for Wagner, in this way, implies the further inwardization of experience achieved through the medium of music. Thus, reality (or truth), for Wagner (in agreement with Hegel), is constituted by memory and articulated by means of music; in other words, through the process of 'inwardization' by means of music, the 'truth' of the present preserves the past.

Hegel's Notions of 'Negativity' and 'Truth'

Owing to their complexity, Hegel's ideas on negativity and truth have to be clarified in the present context, before I continue comparing them with Wagner's development of relevant ideas.

To begin with, according to Hegel, the true being of man is the historical action that 'mediates' his natural given-being through the universalizing negation of his particularity. In this way, universal mediation appears opposed to the immediacy of the subject; immediacy itself, as Hegel observes in *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* (1832), is essentially mediated.[22] If every thing is at the same time spiritual, then experience, which is supposed to be immediately present, is challenged and so is the specific individual; as Hegel writes, 'the individual by itself does not correspond to its concept. It is this limitation of its existence which constitutes the finitude and the ruin of the individual.'[23] This notion of negation, worked through the theory of opposites and depending on the degree of absorption of the opposite that is negated,[24] permits the combination of the idea of totality with the idea of contradiction; T.W. Adorno gives a clear perspective of this process as follows:

> Hegel's own construction, formulated in terms of the philosophy of identity, requires that contradiction be grasped as much from the side of the object as from the side of the subject; it is in the dialectical contradiction that there crystallizes a concept of experience that points beyond absolute idealism. It is the concept of antagonistic totality. Just as the principle of universal mediation, as opposed to the immediacy of the mere subject, goes back to the fact that in all categories of thought the objectivity of the social process is prior to the contingency of the individual subject, so the metaphysical conception of a reconciled whole as the quintessence of all contradictions is based on the model of a society that is divided and nevertheless united.[25]

[22] See G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 vols, I, trans. R.E.B. Speirs and J.B. Sanderson (New York: Humanities Press, 1962): 162; also, in *Phänomenologie* I find a similar thought expressed as such: 'reality is cancelled for spiritual possibilities, … immediacy has been overcome and brought under the control of reflection.' (*Phenomenology*: 91).

[23] G.W.F. Hegel, *Logic: Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* [1812–16], trans. W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975): 353.

[24] According to Hegel, 'mind is this power only by looking the negative in the face [*ins Angesicht schaut*] and dwelling [*verweilt*] with it' (*Phenomenology*: 93).

[25] Theodor Adorno, 'The Experiential Content of Hegel's Philosophy', in *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. S.W. Nicholson (Cambridge, MA, and London: the MIT Press, 1994): 53–88: 78.

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These co-existing dualities ('universal mediation' versus 'immediacy' and 'metaphysical conception', or 'total unity', versus 'division') can also be expressed as a duality of a 'true being': of man, or action, on the one hand, and the finitude of being, or negativity, on the other. Both these opposing states of being are real in the sense that only through their 'subject–object' relationship can a unity (the utopian reality) be achieved. The coexistence of opposites can also be expressed as the opposition of the 'particular' and the 'universal', which are presupposed in a free historical individuality. Freedom, for Hegel, as A. Kojéve observes, 'which is the realization and manifestation of Negativity, consists … in the act of negating the real in its given structure and in maintaining the negation in the form of a work [oeuvre] created by the active negation itself. And that freedom, which is Negativity, is the "essential-reality" of Man.'[26]

This is how, for Hegel, the 'negative absolute', which is 'pure freedom' or 'abstraction of freedom', 'is in its appearance – or manifestation (*Erscheinung*) – death …'.[27] Also, it is realized through history (action) so that man is free only to the extent that he is historical. In other words, death of the individual means that the historical world, manifested by action, has necessarily a beginning and an end. On the other hand, even in his particularity, the individual preserves the universality of action (co-existence of opposites) and becomes truly universal when he realizes the 'general will' of a community (*Gemeinwesen*); in turn, to use again Kojéve's comments on Hegel, 'the real penetration of the Universal into the Particular is the completion of the finitude of this latter, that is, its actual death'.[28]

What is truth, or 'absolute', then, is the process in terms of the immanence of truth as much as in terms of the activity of consciousness. 'Truth', as Hegel writes in *Phänomenologie*, 'is its own self-movement';[29] or, as he writes earlier in the same essay, 'everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance, but equally as Subject'.[30]

Wagner's Notion of 'Negativity' and his Theory of Opposites

In Wagner's writings, the notion of 'negativity', can easily be observed in relation to his notion of 'death'. In Wagner's earlier writings, 'death' has a different meaning from in his later ones; it is either associated with the idea of love as an unfulfilled longing that was to be released at death,[31] or, as a metaphor, with the

[26] Alexandre Kojéve, 'The Idea of Death in the Philosophy of Hegel', *Interpretation. A Journal of Political Philosophy* 3/2, 3 (winter, 1973): 114–56: 139.

[27] G.W.F. Hegel, *Schriften zur Politik und Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. G. Lasson (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1923), vol. VII: 370; trans. in Kojéve, 'The Idea of Death': 139.

[28] Kojéve, 'The Idea of Death': 147.

[29] Hegel, *Phenomenology*: 28.

[30] Ibid.: 9–10.

[31] The identification of the unfulfilled 'longing', or 'desire', with death, was expressed in Wagner's *Entwürfe. Gedanken. Fragmente* (1849–51), as follows: 'Where desire in not extant at all, is lifelessness; where the fulfilment of desire is checked unnaturally, i.e. activity is hindered, there is suffering, where fulfilment is altogether denied to desire, there is death' (PW VIII: 371). Wagner applied the same concept to the notion of 'death' in his unfinished dramatic work *Jesus von Nazareth* (Opera in 5 acts (prose sketches), October 1846–1848); trans. in PW VIII: 283–340). In this work, death, as Wagner wrote, meant nothing more than '[the individual's] revolt against a loveless whole, … a revolt which the altogether Isolated can certainly only seal by self-destruction; but yet which is this very-

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political 'death' (loss of freedom) of an individual.[32] However, in *Tristan und Isolde*, death's meaning becomes an affirmative statement of a higher state of life since, here, it is the means to an 'eternal union in unmeasured realms, nor bond nor barrier, indivisible'.[33]

Although the affirmative symbolic meaning of death in *Tristan* can be associated with Hegel's *Aufhebung*, it is only through an analysis of the development of the theory of the opposites in Wagner's aesthetics that we can establish a substantial juxtaposition between Hegel's and Wagner's notion of 'truth' (or 'absolute', or 'negativity'), since 'truth' , for them, requires otherness.

In his *Oper und Drama*, Wagner develops a theory of opposites by using corresponding juxtapositions of 'feeling–understanding', 'inward–outward', 'subject–object', 'music–poetry' and 'male–female'. These opposites are crucial for the definition of a work of art since, first of all, as he writes, 'a great action, one which the most demonstratively and exhaustively displays the nature of Man along any one particular line, issues only from the shock of manifold and mighty opposites'.[34]

The poet has to judge these opposites by using his understanding, or his 'poetizing intellect' (*des dichtenden Verstandes*). The understanding, which is 'the imaginative-force as regulated by the actual Measure of the Object' (PW II: 211), advances through the imagination to the instinctive feeling. Subsequently, the object that mirrors itself to the understanding as what it actually is, is displayed to the feeling in an image that is the work of phantasy. So, according to Wagner,

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destruction proclaims its own true nature, in that it was not directed to the personal death, but to a disowning of the lovelessness around [*der lieblosen Allgemeinheit*]' (*Eine Mitteilung an meine Freude (A Communication to my Friends)* [1851], SSD IV: 230–344; PW I: 267–392: 379–80).

[32] The political context of Wagner's notion of 'death' is included in Wagner's 'plan' of historical evolution, as developed in the 1840s, which may be summarized as follows. To begin with, as soon as the individual commits the 'error' and severs himself from nature, he enters a society where the first ethical concepts are gradually developed into a more permanent form of rules (Law), which are protected by the State. The unchanging nature of the State (in contrast to the constant renewal of art) manifests its role away from people's 'true' inner needs. Political States, then, result in the destruction (death) of free individuality. Thus, every 'self-determining' individual is in conflict with their established society and, therefore, there are the following options, both suggesting the necessary absorption of the individual into human generality: (a) death of the individual, either moral (which makes the individual a proper citizen of the State), or physical and, thus, indicating a spiritual (or metaphysical) passage of an individual into human generality (universality); (b) destruction of the State (necessity of revolution) – a more simple solution, since the State is the problem. In the second case, in the expected post-revolutionary conditions (breakdown of the State), Wagner's art, that embraces all 'true' values of the human spirit, will contribute to the formation of a new culture that, moreover, will ideally be understood by the public.

[33] Translated from the *Bayreuther Blätter*, 1902, from the programme notes written by Wagner for the Vienna concert of 27 December 1863. (See Ellis, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, being an authorized English version of C.F. Glasenapp's *Das Leben Richard Wagners*, 6 vols, VI (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1908): 307).

[34] R. Wagner, *Oper und Drama (Opera and Drama)*, [1852], SSD III: 222–320, IV: 1–229; PW II: 210–11.

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> the Understanding can only grasp the full actuality of an object, when it breaks the image, in which the object is brought it by the Phantasy, and parcels it into its singlest parts; when it fain would bring these parts before itself again in combination, it has at once to cast for itself an image, which no longer answers strictly to the actuality of the thing, but merely in the measure wherein Man has power to recognize it. (PW II: 211–12)

Poetic understanding corresponds to the 'organ of speech'; and the 'tone-speech' that is '*struck-into from the outset*' is turned into an altogether different (heightened) expression by the feeling (see PW II: 234–5). So, the understanding, according to Wagner,

> is … driven by necessity to web itself with an element which shall be able to take-up into it the poet's Aim as a fertilizing seed, and so to nourish and shape this seed by its own, its necessary essence, that it may bring it forth as a realizing and redeeming utterance of Feeling. This element is that same mother-element, the womanly, from whose womb – the ur-melodic expressional-faculty, – there issued Word and Word-speech, so soon as it was fecundated by the actual outward-lying objects of Nature … (PW II: 235)

The necessity of a creative web of music and words within an 'organic art-work', as well as the underlining of their opposing functions, is characteristically expressed as follows: '… Absolute Music has given us Harmonic conditionments; in his Melody the poet would merely impart the thing conditioned, and would therefore remain as unintelligible as she, unless he fully made known to the ear the Harmonic stipulations of a Melody already warranted by the word-verse' (PW II: 299).

Their opposing functions are underlined in another quotation: 'if the work of the sheer Word-poet appears as a non-realized poetic Aim, on the other hand the work of the Absolute Musician is only to be described as altogether bare of such an Aim; for the Feeling may well have been entirely roused by the purely-musical expression, but it could not be directed' (PW II: 344).

These two opposing functions ('understanding–feeling', 'outward–inward', 'words–music', or 'manly–womanly') should have as a common aim the unification of context. It is this unity of opposites that Wagner perceives, at this period, as reality, although in such a reality the essence of context should be expressed only by feeling (and, subsequently, by music, or by 'tone-speech' (see PW II: 222–3)); such a reality presupposes its 'antithesis', which is the outward-looking poetic understanding.

In 1859, Wagner's theory of opposites was altered, in the sense that the opposites should be derived from what Wagner characterized as 'contrasts of moods'; in his well-known letter to Mathilde Wesendonck of 29 October 1859, Wagner writes: 'my music … owes its construction above all to the highly sensitive feeling which directs me to interlink and interrelate every element of transition between the most extreme moods. I should now like to call my deepest and most subtle art the art of transition, for the whole fabric of my art is built up on such transitions…'. Wagner admits that he had come to dislike sharp and sudden changes 'unless the atmosphere has been so carefully prepared for the sudden change that it seems inevitable'. Although he supports the idea of continuation he also describes as 'true art' the one that 'has no other theme than to show … [the] highest moods in their most extreme relationship to one another:

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the only thing that can possibly matter in art, the crucial distinction, can of course only be derived from these extreme contrasts'.[35]

Such a perception of the opposites as 'extreme moods' can be seen in conjuction with *Zukunftmusik*, an essay that Wagner wrote in the following year. Here music 'distances' itself from speech and acquires its own independent power of expression; such a statement is made clear in the following excerpt based on Wagner's historical judgement:

> Music … has been developing a power of expression unknown to the world before. 'Tis as though the purely-human Feeling, intensified by the pressure of a conventional civilization, has been seeking an outlet for the operation of its own peculiar laws of speech; an outlet through which, unfettered by the laws of logical Thought, it might express itself intelligibly to itself. The uncommon popularity of Music in our times; the constantly increasing interest, spreading through every stratum of society, in the products of the deepest-meaning class of music; the ever growing eagerness to make musical training an integral part of education: all this, so manifest and undeniable in itself, at like times proves the correctness of the postulate, that Music's modern evolution has answered to a profoundly inward need of mankind's, and that, however unintelligible her tongue when judged by the laws of Logic, she must possess a more persuasive title to our comprehension than anything contained within those laws. [36]

Being convinced of music's evolution through historical necessity ('inward need of mankind'), Wagner decided to leave two ways open for poetry:

> [i] Either a complete removal into the field of Abstraction, a sheer combining of mental concepts and portrayal of the world by expounding the logical laws of Thought. And this office she fulfils as Philosophy. [ii] Or an inner blending with Music, with that Music whose infinite faculty has been disclosed to us by the Symphony of Beethoven. (PW III: 319)

Hence the opposition 'music–poetry' is suspended; music needs the 'other' no more.

However, the theory of opposites is preserved in Wagner's writings, although monopolized by music's language. This conclusion may be clarified by reading Wagner's later essay *Über die Anwendung der Musik auf das Drama* (1879); here Wagner talks about 'two themes of diametrically opposite character' existing in Haydn's and Beethoven's symphonies, which 'always supplement each other as the manly and the womanly element of one whole character'.[37] In the same essay, Wagner gives a musical example from *Der Ring* in which two opposing themes 'supplement each other' (Ex. 1). The example is heard in *Die Walküre*, Act II, at Wotan's 'surrender of world-sovereignty to the possessor of the Nibelungen-hoard' (see PW VI: 185–6). This theme is produced by the 'mixture' of two contrasted themes: that of 'Rheingold' (=Nature) (Ex. 2) and that of 'Walhall' (=Culture, or symbol of Wotan's world-domination) (Ex. 3).

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[35] Richard Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck, Paris, 29 October 1859; trans. in *Richard Wagner: A Documentary Study*, ed. Herbert Barth, Dietrich Mack and Egon Voss (London: Oxford University Press, 1975): 189.

[36] R. Wagner, *Music of the Future*, Paris and Leipzig 1861 (written September 1860), SSD VII: 87–137; PW III: 293–345: 319.

[37] R. Wagner, *Über die Anwendung der Musik auf das Drama (On the Application of Music to the Drama)*, [1879], SSD X: 176–93; PW VI: 173–91: 176–7.

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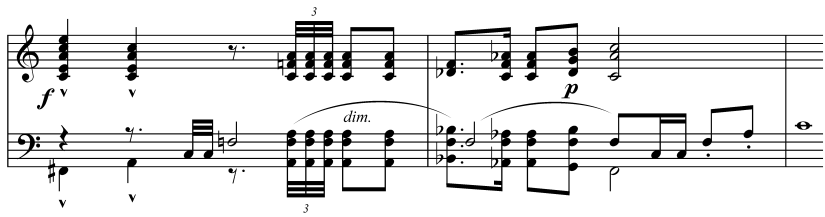
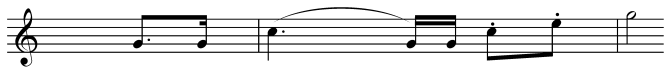
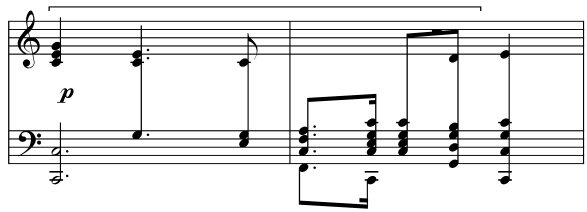
Ex. 1 ***Die Walküre*, Act II, scene ii, bars 2507–2509**



Ex. 2 **Motive of 'Rheingold'**



Ex. 3 **Motive of 'Walhall'**



By this combination, and 'with the help of a digression in the harmony', Wagner argues that '[he] could present them knit in such a way that, more than Wotan's words, this tone-figure should give us a picture of the fearful gloom in the soul of the suffering god' (PW VI: 186). Wotan's 'fearful gloom' is, thus, produced by the juxtaposition of two different themes, which represent, broadly speaking, nature and culture respectively. The pairing of these two opposed themes, in this way, would produce a unity expressed metaphorically as the combination of the manly and the womanly element in a human being.

The exclusive application of Wagner's later theory of opposites to music is not due to his belief in music's expressive power *per se*, but in its ability to correspond to inner reality ('truth', or 'absolute'), which, nevertheless, is perceived as something distinguished, or detached, from it. It is this later development of Wagner's perception of music's role that brings his theory of opposites closer to the Hegelian ideology, for one main reason: the opposites' 'struggle' for unity is not taking place within a simple dualistic antithesis of different means of expression, as in Wagner's earlier theories, but is defined as something external to music.[38]

[38] Dahlhaus's observations on the aesthetics of absolute music around 1870 in Germany (including Wagner's) are in agreement with my own. (See, for example, Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute in Music*, trans. R. Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989): 26.) In another essay Dahlhaus refers to Wagner's manifestation of 'a philosophy of absolute music' and '[Wagner's] being in tune with a realistic epoch that demanded immediacy'. (See Carl Dahlhaus, 'Wagner's Place in the History of Music', in *Wagner Handbook* (London: Harvard University Press, 1992): 99–117: 105).

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Wagner's Music as a Medium of 'Truth'

Wagner defines inward reality (the 'thing in itself' as he calls it) and distinguishes it from the 'outward' one, by relating it directly to Schopenhauer's theories,[39] in his essay *Beethoven* (1870):

> it must be obvious to us that musical conception, as it has nothing in common with the seizure of an Idea (for the latter is absolutely bound to physical perception of the world), can have its origin nowhere but upon that side of consciousness which Schopenhauer defines as facing inwards. Though this side may temporarily retire completely, to make way for entry of the purely apprehending 'subject' on its function (i.e. the seizure of Ideas), on the other hand it transpires that only from this inward-facing side of consciousness can the intellect derive its ability to seize the Character of things. If this consciousness, however, is the consciousness of one's own self, i.e. of the Will, we must take it that its repression is indispensable indeed for purity of the outward-facing consciousness, but that the nature of the Thing-in-itself – inconceivable by that physical [or 'visual'] mode of knowledge – would only be revealed to this inward-facing consciousness when it had attained the faculty of seeing within as clearly as that other side of consciousness is able in its seizure of Ideas to see without.[40]

The importance of Wagner's ideas here rests on two aspects: (i) the distinction made between the 'inward-' and 'outward-facing consciousness'; these different states of consciousness, therefore, being perceived as separate entities, and (ii) the perception of 'musical conception' as dependent upon 'inner consciousness'. 'Musical conception', in Wagner's late theories, however, is a notion that concerns not only music but also the 'musicality' of each of the arts, although music's role, by definition, is based on 'the nature of the Thing-in-itself'. Moreover, it is within this perspective that music's role can be compared with Hegel's prescribed role for language.

In his *Phänomenologie*, Hegel defines language's role as follows: 'In speech, self-consciousness, qua independent separate individuality, comes as such into existence, so that it exists for others.'[41] As Adorno sharply observes, 'it appears that Hegel, remarkably enough, did not admit language, which he accorded a place in the third book of the Logic, to the sphere of objective spirit but essentially conceived it as a "medium", or something "for others", as the bearer of contents of subjective consciousness rather than an expression of an idea.'[42]

Wagner, in his late writings, perceives music's role in a very similar way.[43] Music should bring up the inner life (the 'inward-facing consciousness') as a vision in a process that can be metaphorically expressed as our waking from dreams; this process will coincide with a gradual awareness of someone's veritable essence through his active participation as a listener. Thus, music, for Wagner, can become a medium, or, to use Adorno's words, 'the bearer of contents of subjective consciousness' because, like Hegel's language, it can

[39] We can accept Schopenhauer's influence on Wagner since he was one of the primary philosophers who organized the concept of music's reference to an 'absolute' into a definite ideological structure.

[40] R. Wager, *Beethoven*, [1870], SSD IX: 61–126; PW V: 57–126: 67.

[41] Hegel, *Phenomenology*: 308.

[42] Adorno, 'Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel', in *Hegel: Three Studies*: 89–148: 117.

[43] See especially Wagner's *Beethoven* (1870).

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express such an inwardness directly, although such a directness is continuously 'negated' by the mediation of itself in a process of heightening the subjective consciousness to an 'absolute'.

However, the observation that music is the only art that can have such a privileged role owed most to Wagner's belief in the 'decadence' of the other arts, which prevented them from being as 'musical' as music itself. Nevertheless, Wagner believed that 'musicality', as an idea in the spirit of Schiller,[44] is not music's exclusive quality, even though his historical interpretation concluded with such a statement of exclusivity because of his attempt to define an intellectual force with distinguished spiritual attributes other than those which were thought to be responsible for Germany's cultural decadence. In other 'idealized' times of the past, Wagner recognized in painters, such as Albrecht Dürer, as well as in Goethe and in Shakespeare, an ability to express inner reality.

The directness of presentation for Wagner is, thus, not exclusively applied to music but also to painting and poetry as long as they are able to transfer the essence of reality to the perceiver for him to experience. In this way, painting, drama and poetry can become compatible with music as long as they fulfil the role that art should fulfil, that is, to communicate the notion of 'truth' directly yet, at the same time, to retain an inner eye so that such a directness would be simultaneously opposed by the Hegelian gesture of inwardization (*Erinnerung*), or mediation.

In Wagner's earlier writings, the notion of 'becoming' (*Werden*)[45] is fragmented into different conceptualizations, depending on the field of application; that is,

[44] On the issue of Schiller's notion of 'musical', see Schulte, 'Work and Music'. Schiller's notion of 'musical' refers not simply to music but also to other genres of art. The main reason for using the term 'musical' as a metaphor is his priority given to feeling in the 'genetic triad' of his creativity which is 'from *music* – through *work* – to *music*' (see Schulte, 'Work and Music': 153). Moreover, Schiller – and also Wagner – believed feeling to be projected in the most pure and authentic way by music.

[45] The term 'becoming', or 'organic growth', is mainly derived from a historically oriented idea that Herder developed in his theory of the evolutionary growth of culture (see Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* [1784–85]). Herder's idea of the organic development of culture was also developed by the early Romantics. (For the issue of the Romantics' organic concept of society, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought 1790–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.) According to Ergang, Herder developed an 'organic-genetic conception of culture as the expression of the national soul', which 'led the romanticists to place the beginning of [the German] national development in the Middle Ages. They saw the Middle Ages as the heroic age of the German nationality' (see Robert Reinhold Ergang, *Herder and the Foundations of German Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966): 234). Such a historical mode of thought, which traces the inner relationships of historic events, was elaborated in Hegel's philosophy, which had an ideological power among the intellectuals in Germany, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century. Even more, it was as if they were 'under the spell' of the Hegelian 'absolute spirit', which had transformed life into a system for it to experience; for this reason, it is difficult for us to understand whether their belief in social evolution was owing to actual historical events that were taking place in front of their eyes, or were due to the embodiment of the 'idea of progress' and of 'cultural organic growth' in their structural thinking, which Sheeham names as 'historical structure of German thought' (see James Sheeham, 'Liberalism and Society in Germany 1815–48', *Journal of Modern History*, 45 (1973): 583–604: 601). Marx's unfortunate critique of the French revolutions is a characteristic example of the case. (See some very interesting comments on Marx's critique of the French revolutions in Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér, 'Marx and the Permanent

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one cannot define a juxtaposition between Wagner's plan of historical evolution[46] and his aesthetic notion of 'becoming', which is mainly developed in his *Oper und Drama* (1852) and his *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde* (1852). The latter notion is not fully elaborated in these texts and this is largely due to the development of a 'leitmotivic system' that made external references to linguistic patterns of structure. More specifically, Wagner's attempts to create a link between music and poetry resulted in musical forms based on irregularity, a phenomenon that is commonly found from *Das Rheingold* onwards. This is of course due to the basic structure of Wagner's dramatic form, which is the dialogue, and is musically supported by the *unendliche Melodie* of the orchestra. Wagner's irregular patterns are like a musical prose and are articulated in dramatic parts where a large number of motives are employed (that is, monologues where previous events are recapitulated). According to Dahlhaus, Wagner's abandonment of regular periodicity resulted in his adopting other means of achieving a unity within the drama: the thematic connection and motivic development. Thus, as he writes, 'the idea of founding musical drama on dialogue could not be realized until it occurred to Wagner that leitmotivic technique was not only a dramaturgical means, like the old use of reminiscence motifs, but could also be a formal means.'[47]

The point to be made here is that leitmotivic technique was developed in relation to Wagner's attempt to elaborate the dialogue in his music-dramas. Additionally, thematic motifs, as we read in *Oper und Drama*, were to be directed either outwards, by advancing the perception of an object (individual and palpable), or inwards, by developing an idea; they alone could not 'secure' the idea of inwardization, to be achieved only by means of music, within the scheme of 'becoming'. The latter direction becomes an exclusive one in Wagner's later writings and this allows him to formulate a new concept: that of the 'emancipation of melody'. Melody's 'emancipation', according to Wagner's *Beethoven*, was initially founded in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and was meant to take it away from 'the tyranny of Mode' (see PW V: 122). Such an idea, however, has nothing to do with the irregular music patterns that Wagner developed for the sake of a substantial unity between music and words in the form of dialogue in his music-dramas. Emancipation, according to the above essay, is supposed to bring music into a direct alliance with the inner spirit, and poetry can support or contribute to this state of music's expression of ideas only to the extent that its 'general character' is 'in accord with the spirit of this melody' (see PW V: 122). In this way, music's linguistic reference is completely cancelled

French Revolution', in *The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1991): 163–76; see also A.W. Gouldner, 'Artisans and Intellectuals in the German Revolution of 1848', *Theory and Society*, 12/4 (Jul. 1983): 521–32: 525.)

The inhabitation of such a mentality (belief in the 'idea of progress') within the historical context of nineteenth-century Europe corresponded to a series of ideologies (all of them having in common the belief that nations have 'destinies', or 'missions') that all pointed to a desirable perfect social order at a distant time: from nineteenth-century anarchists (some being followers of Saint-Simon) to social Darwinists and Marxist followers. The same framework was merely carried to opposite extremes in the development of the racial ideology of Gobineau.

[46] On Wagner's 'plan' of historical evolution see note 32 of the present article.

[47] Carl Dahlhaus, 'What is a Musical Drama?', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 1/2 (1989): 95–111: 109.

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out in favour of an inwardization of reality that coincides with the Hegelian notion of *Erinnerung*.

Music that 'lacked' the 'moral will', according to Wagner's earlier writings, becomes, in his late views on art, the art that expresses morality. In one of his earlier writings, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1848), Wagner described music that is played by the orchestra as follows: 'even in her most infinite enhancement, she still is but emotion; she enters in the train of the ethical deed, but not as that Deed itself; she can set moods and feelings side by side, but not evolve one mood from out another by any dictate of her own Necessity; – she lacks the *Moral Will*.'[48]

Music's lack of 'moral will' stems from Wagner's belief during that period that the 'infinite' character of music could not communicate such a 'will', which could only gradually be articulated by the development in a music-drama of a metaphorical correspondence between outer and inner reality. The outer reality – thought, or logic – expressed mainly through speech, is, in this way, perceived as a necessary 'opposite' for the symbolic representation of advancement of consciousness. However, music for Wagner's later writings becomes a medium between inner reality and the perceiver; thus, not only can music communicate such a 'moral will' to the audience, but also it is perceived as the ideal art to perform such a task.

The political implications of the idea of music's ability to express 'morality' are evident in Wagner's critiques of the development of culture in different nations. For Wagner, in the 1860s, to criticize the music of any given culture is enough in order to prove the signs of that culture's moral decadence. Thus, it is because of the notion of 'Jewishness' in music, according to Wagner, that both German and French culture have morally been deprived.

In these years, Wagner's notion of 'Jewishness' in music was defined in relation to an ideology that had as a central idea the elevation of the conservatism of the German spirit; this ideology was used as a standard *tableau* of critique against types of art which, according to Wagner, did not correspond to the folk's spirit. Thus, for example, Jews could not produce any kind of higher cultural music because Jewish music was not derived from the Jewish folk since its spirit had been lost. The Jewish intellectuals' attempts to restore the old purity of the Jewish songs were fruitless since they could not find their artistic material in the real source of life among the folk, because the songs' nature could not be reflected in this source. So, even if they controlled public taste, the Jewish intellectuals were alien both to the public's 'true' needs and to those of their own people.

Such cultural observations, according to which Wagner specifically applied the role of expressing morality to music, carry on his earlier thinking of the 1840s, which perceived music as a superior form of art directly connected with the essence of things and which, therefore, had the ability to express better than the other arts the inner development of history. However, in Wagner's later theories, the above directness of the connection between music's expressive potential and socio-political realities became a means of expressing both genetic and normative moments of 'truth': genetic because of its functioning – according to Wagner – as the very origin of every authentic moment of action in German culture, and normative because the 'truth' (realities) that music reflects constructs a reality of its own by means of allegory. Such a normative new reality, in a music drama, could mainly become articulated by means of musical form and should take place

[48] R. Wagner, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft (The Art-work of the Future)*, [1850], SSD III: 42–177; PW I: 69–213: 123.

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through an active process of the formal construction of orchestral and verbal music towards awareness within the spectator, aiming at a unity of concept and reality. Consequently, Wagner placed new demands on his audience by means of form (mainly musical form). Not only did he believe that he expressed by his art the 'folk's language', but he claimed to do so without conforming to the people's expectations. The increased importance that Wagner gives to artistic forms is evident in his *Invitation to the Production of 'Tristan' in Munich* (1865), where he states that the main concern in *Tristan* is with purely artistic problems and, thus, the audience's participation would be expressed as a share in the solution to such problems; by doing so, the audience will also have a share in the highest and deepest things in art. Going further, according to Wagner's thinking of that period, through the spectators' participation in solving artistic problems, the questions themselves will widen and, thus, penetrate actual life by becoming, in this way, a political guide for social improvement. However, since there is an inadequacy in current conditions in terms of an ideal correspondence between art and audience, art becomes a normative object expressing an assertive power for 'betterment'. Artistic forms provide self-awareness to those who are 'truly' educated and, since 'true' education for Wagner is based on 'instinctive' knowledge, music becomes the medium that is substituted for reality in an attempt to point towards a – more – distant ideal point in the future.

As a conclusion, Wagner's choice of music as the most appropriate art to act as a medium between inner reality and the perceiver creates a role for music that signifies the process of 'becoming' towards the 'absolute' itself. Although such a role for music brings Wagner close to Schopenhauer's theories, his whole system of thought becomes substantially related to Hegel's ideology since music acts as a medium between the perceivers and a construction of a Hegelian historiography of Spirit.

'Death' through Wagner's Music: *Tristan*'s 'Liebestod'

The Hegelian role of Wagner's music, as argued in the previous sections, should be evident enough in Wagner's late works. The question that remains unanswered is whether Wagner's changed aesthetic views on music are indeed evident in his music-dramas. However, it falls beyond the scope of the present article to explore in depth the ways that the extra-musical context (Wagner's 'anxiety' that music 'should be dominated by a set of concepts'[49]) forces itself upon musical form. Therefore, I will only talk about *Tristan*'s 'Liebestod', a scene that, according to the previous arguments, should manifest 'death' through music in agreement with Hegel's notion of 'negativity'. My arguments are formed by juxtaposing the findings of different interpretations of this scene (that is, that of Tambling,[50] Daverio[51] and Deathridge[52]) with Hegel's, and Wagner's Hegelian views as interpreted in previous sections of the present article; this takes place in search of 'clues' as to how to listen to Wagner's music as being under the spell of Hegel's 'absolute' spirit, or else, on how to listen to Wagner's music as *Musik als Idee*.

[49] See Tambling, *Opera and the Culture of Fascism*: 46.

[50] Ibid.

[51] John Daverio, *Nineteenth-Century Music and the German Romantic Ideology* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1993).

[52] Deathridge, 'Post-mortem on Isolde'.

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Hegel's notion of 'death' has multiple meanings. 'Death' can be a mere biological event. As such, 'it is a state which has been reached *immediately*, in *the course of Nature*'; also, it is 'not the result of an action *consciously done*' but is a mere ceasing to be.[53]

However, 'death' for Hegel's philosophy, to quote a well-articulated brief clarification by Wyschogrod,

> is a notion which inheres in the historical process, as cultures are organic entities which rise, flourish, and disappear when they become moribund. Death renders existentially explicit the inner conflicts potentially present in a moment of Spirit's history. Through death, a cultural episode which can be canceled, is canceled, allowing the work of spirit to proceed without becoming stultified through repetition of endlessly sinking back into some immediate and, therefore, naive expression of culture. But death does not merely annul a decaying historical moment; it forces Spirit into itself. The interiorization or self-reflection opens up a new dimension of conscious life which generates further activity and novel productions of Spirit.[54]

The interiorization of Spirit is 'the night of its self-consciousness' in Hegel's notion of *Erinnerung*.[55] Thus, for Hegel, Spirit's absorption into itself is a necessary stage that transforms its existence on a higher level.

The process of *Aufhebung* advances itself toward the 'Absolute', which is the wholeness of the world. Opposition, or contradiction (*Widerspruch*), then, which, according to Hegel, determines things, does not produce any dichotomies but seeks to reconcile dialectically the opposites. For Hegel, the whole is united and the unity of the whole is the ultimate meaning of the Absolute. All these ideas can be perceived as signified in *Tristan'* s 'Liebestod' through the act of Isolde's death.

According to Tambling, both Tristan and Isolde are 'wounded' and, thus, are incomplete; both of them, therefore, long for wholeness.[56] 'Wound', for Tambling, is a sign that means fragmentation and, consequently, suffering of a being in Wagner's dramas. Tristan fantasizes that Isolde has wounded him; Isolde sings a fantasy about wholeness in her narrative in Act 1 (*Den hab ich wohl vernommen*).[57] Finally, her fantasy of wholeness leads her to the plan of Tristan's death along with her own.[58] But, for Tambling, who fails to see the musical events, that is, to listen as Isolde listens to the orchestra's music of the 'Liebestod', Isolde is 'inscribed by loss', something that is evident in the 'Liebestod'.[59] However, as I will argue later, the fantasy of 'wholeness' can be experienced as realized if one focuses on the orchestra's music.

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[53] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979): 270.

[54] Edith Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes: Hegel, Heidegger, and the Man-made Mass-Death* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1985): 67.

[55] See note 18 of the present article.

[56] See Tambling, *Opera and the Culture of Fascism*: 58–61.

[57] For more details, see ibid.: 61.

[58] See ibid.: 61.

[59] See ibid.: 61. However, Tambling states in his introduction that his study, which attempts to see opera's history (from the nineteenth century up to the 1930s) as 'one "discourse" among many, inflected by culture and ideology, and inflecting those in its turn', … 'inevitably says more about librettos than the music'; thus, as he admits, 'this reflects [his] own limits of competence' (see ibid.: 8).

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Producing the effect of a Hegelian contradiction (*Widerspruch*) through music, which aims at its 'wholeness' at the end of 'Liebestod', is something noticed to a certain degree by Daverio,[60] although Daverio is mainly concerned to compare Wagner's 'art of transition', which is evident in *Tristan*, with the early Romantics' 'rhetoric dialectics'. Daverio analyses the harmonic progression in Isolde's Act III *Verklärung* as starting from an A/C tonal pair and ending up to its 'shadow' pair, A♭/B, a semitone lower.[61] This 'principle of tonal dualism' characterizes not only this scene but the entire opera; as Daverio argues, 'the harmonic plan of the scene (like that of the entire opera) describes a descent, not just from C to B but from one diatonic tonal pair to its chromatically lowered neighbor, a descent whose scenic enactment takes us from ecstatic reunion to otherwordly and self-annihilating embrace.'[62]

The principle of 'tonal dualism', effectively substantiating Wagner's 'extremes of mood', or his 'art of transition',[63] can be perceived as signifying Hegel's principle of *Widerspruch*, a necessary condition to advance the Spirit into itself 'in the night of its self-consiousness' (Hegel's process of *Erinnerung*), which Daverio sees as 'the otherwordly and self-annihilating embrace'.[64]

However, Daverio, according to my interpretation so far, ends his analysis at the point where Wagner would like his audience to begin to 'see', that is, at the moment when 'truth', or 'absolute', is signified through music.

The one who 'really' sees, in *Tristan*'s 'Liebestod', is Isolde, since she experiences the process of *Musik als Idee* towards 'wholeness'. Wagner himself is the first interpreter to be found in support of this argument; as he wrote in his first sketches of *Tristan*, Act III: 'Isolde, bent over Tristan, recovers herself and listens with growing rapture to the ascending melodies of love, which appear to rise up as if out of Tristan's soul, swelling up like a sea of blossoms, into which, in order to drown, she throws herself and – dies.'[65]

The whole description of Isolde's death can be seen as a metaphor of a listener (Isolde) who experiences reality in a Hegelian sense. The reality felt by Isolde is constituted by memory since truth of the present moment should preserve the past.

The idea that music signifies has already been assimilated inwards in the course of the opera through its musical repetition and transformation, its process being corresponding to Hegel's *Aufhebung*. At the very last moment before Isolde's death, the fullness of her experience as a listener (since fullness of time should be manifested through music) leads to her complete overcoming of time, which is death, and, in Hegelian terms, to the attainment of 'absolute' knowledge.

Deathridge's interpretation of *Tristan*'s 'Liebestod', which is consonant with the preceding arguments, defines to a certain extent the meeting points between music and extra-musical context within a Hegelian framework of thought.

One of his most important arguments, in this respect, is the substitution of the orchestra for the voice, at the end of Isolde's 'death' scene, which corresponds with Wagner's intention, as interpreted so far in the present article, that

60 See Daverio, *Nineteenth-Century Music*: 189–95.
61 Ibid.: 189.
62 Ibid.: 190.
63 See Barth, Mack and Voss, eds, *Richard Wagner*: 189.
64 Daverio, *Nineteenth-Century Music*: 190.
65 R. Wagner, BII a5, *Nationalarchiv der Richard-Wagner-Stiftung*, Bayreuth. Cited in Deathridge, 'Post-mortem on Isolde': 109.

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wholeness should be attained through music alone. The orchestra's dominance in the last pages of *Tristan*, in particular the substitution of the orchestra for the voice that completes Isolde's monologue, is already observed by Michel Poizat.[66] Since music, at the end of Isolde's monologue, is a repetition of the climax of the love duet in Act II, the orchestral climax here, according to Deathridge, replaces Brangane's cry of horror.[67] The cry of horror, being replaced by the orchestra, recalls Wagner's idea expressed in his *Entwürfe. Gedanken. Fragmente* (1849–51), which runs as follows: 'Artwork of the Future, for none but those awaking from the dream of the "Now-time" [*Jetztzeit*]. He who feels not the terrors of that dream sufficiently strongly to drive him to wake, let him dream on!' (PW VIII: 383–4).

The cry of horror, a symbolic gesture that repeats itself in Wagner's music-dramas,[68] is a reaction that signifies the 'awakening' from the dream of the 'false' present (in other words, *die Jetztzeit*). Music, in this way, manifests the 'fullness of time' (the 'real' present), which Isolde listens to and which leads her to the overcoming of time through death.

The wholeness of the particular moment of Isolde's *Liebestod* is further guaranteed by music's own autonomy at this moment of the music-drama. Wagner himself intended to grant autonomy to this part since he wrote it in such a way that it could be performed without Isolde's voice. Deathridge advances this idea further by arguing persuasively that music, in Isolde's last scene, gradually separates itself off from the rest of the opera.[69] Such gradual attainment of autonomy by means of music is necessary for the signification of the 'absolute' since, in this way, music breaks from the concreteness of external references (that is, the stage action).

The last but not the least important argument is that 'negation', signified by means of music, corresponds to Hegel's idea of the end of history. The orchestra's music in Isolde's 'Liebestod', as I have argued, attempts to reconstruct Hegel's theory of culture, which is dominated by the logic of presence. In this respect, Deathridge gives us another level of interpretation of this scene by juxtaposing Nikolaus Lenau's poem, called 'The Bust of Beethoven' (*Beethoven's Büste*), with Isolde's words in the final section of her death scene.[70] As Deathridge argues, Wagner recomposed Isolde's vocal line of this section starting 'at precisely the point … where she appears to begin referring to Lenau's poetic celebration of the deceased Beethoven. Indeed', as Deathridge continues, 'she seems to invoke the memory of the dead hero of music almost as if he were to come alive again in an

[66] Michel Poizat, *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992): 166. Cited in Deathridge, 'Post-mortem on Isolde': 111.

[67] See Deathridge, 'Post-mortem on Isolde': 111.

[68] For example, in *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, scene 3, the witnesses of the raising of Siegfried's hand to protect the ring react by remaining motionless with terror. Such a reaction – which, for Wagner, is supposed to be 'the culminating expression of all the horrors that have heaped upon us' (Heinrich Porges, *Wagner Rehearsing the "Ring": An Eye-Witness Account of the Stage Rehearsals of the First Bayreuth Festival*, trans. R.L. Jacobs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 143) – is necessary for the awakening of the 'folk', the 'folk' being represented on stage by the community of Gibichungs.

[69] See Deathridge, 'Post-mortem on Isolde': 116–18.

[70] See ibid.: 106. The following juxtaposition between Lenau's *Beethoven's Büste* and Isolde's final section of her death scene has been created by J. Deathridge:

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intoxicating sea of melody, but one which envelopes her own voice and eventually kills her.'[71]

The memory of a composer who dominated a whole century of music history in Germany is the best musical reference to fulfil the Hegelian logic of presence according to which true present is memory. Isolde's death, seen from such a perspective, signifies the end of a cultural episode (the era dominated by Beethoven) in a moment in the history of Spirit; Spirit, thus, forces into itself in order to open up a new dimension of life.

In conclusion, *Tristan*'s 'Liebestod' embodies all Hegel's definitions of 'death' and 'negativity'. The overcoming of time, death, in its very Hegelian essence, is manifested musically. By articulating such a notion, Wagner's own fantasy of 'wholeness' becomes a real possibility for the listener to experience, something that is felt in different degrees in the interpretations of 'Liebestod' presented in the last section of the present article. Nevertheless, Isolde is the ideal listener for Wagner, since the realization of 'wholeness' is experienced by her *through* her death. Isolde, as substantiating the existential expression of the negative, communicates with the Spirit of music, which – as Hegel would have put it – 'sinks in the night of its self-consciousness' in order to transform itself to 'the new existence', which is 'a new world and a new shape of Spirit'.[72]

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LENAU	ISOLDE
Sanftes Wogen	Heller schallend,
holdes Rieseln;	mich umwallend,
Sind des Weltmeers	sind es Wellen
kuhle Wellen	sanfter Lufte?
Suss beseelt	Sind es Wogen
zu Liebesstimmen?	wonnige Dufte?
Wie sie steigen,	Wie sie schwellen
sinken, schwellen!	mich umrauschen.

[71] Ibid.: 111.

[72] Hegel, *Phenomenology*: 492.

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