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The Fade Out: Metaphysics and Dialectics in Wagner

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Abstract: This article is a critique of the failure of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. It considers this as a metaphysical problem rather than an aesthetic or formal one. The article, considering Wagner's inheritance from Haydn, claims him as the first composer of the culture industry. This will lead the author to conclusions regarding a gendered *Das Unheimlich*, the distinction between technology and technique, and the philosophy of aesthetics.

Keywords: Wagner, Adorno, Zizek

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‘*Meine feinste und tiefste Kunst möchte ich jetzt die Kunst des Überganges nennen.... Das ist denn nun auch das Geheimnis meiner musikalischen Form...*’ -Richard Wagner, Letter to Mathilde Wesendonk of 29 October 1859¹

‘*But here, too, it would be better to begin at the extreme, with the noise itself, to emphasize the creative brilliance of Wagner's sound in those instances where it stands in opposition to the mean of moderate enjoyment, and simply cannot be listened to with delectation.*’ –T. W. Adorno, ‘Wagner’s Relevance for Today’

The Fade Out: Technique and Technology

Significantly the earliest composed example of the fade-out is rather than merely technically determined too technologically determined. It is only because such a strategy of supplementation is presumed to be necessary that the fade-out is revealed as pseudo-technical rather than truly technical: the pseudo-technical is ontologically insufficient and so must be supplemented by the technological. Haydn’s Symphony No. 45 (1772), admitting the technical inadequacy of the fade-out, doubly stages the end, re-presents it precisely by technological de-presentation: i.e., by relying upon the artificial light of candles. In the assimilation of the auditory and visual, the gradual silencing of the auditory phenomenon is the gradual obfuscation of the visual field. Thusly is proved the truth of the non-distinction of these senses in the Ancient Greek *tuphlós*.²

Because the minimal difference between *il più pianissimo possibile* and silence is infinite, the transition from silence to music will never have been seamless enough. The music will always be interruption. Only because of this is it a properly technological effect: the impossibility of any human to perform such infinitesimal gradations. The very effect necessitates the machine, here the fader. Likewise, the physiological incapacities of the human, meaning the necessitation of the technological, show themselves again in that below a specific decibel,

¹ Richard Wagner, *Wesendonck Briefe* (Herausgegeben von Julius Kapp, Leipzig) 262.

² <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CF%84%CF%85%CF%86%CE%BB%CF%8C%CF%82> Accessed 15 March, 2019.

although the auditory phenomenon may continue, it will not be perceived by the human listening subject. The fade out can only be realized and heard technologically. It is opposed to the human insofar as the divine is precisely that which is not human because is supra-human. The technological is godly: *deus ex machina*.

The pseudo-technique of the fade-out offends because it belongs to the technological effects of the sound-engineer rather than to the proper technical composition of the composer. This will thus be again another case *contra* Wagner, why Wagner - not having attended conservatory, not possessing the requisite keyboard skills, etc. -, is a man of theatrical effects, a prestidigitator of phantasmagoria rather than a musical composer.³

That the composer whose self-proclaimed ‘finest and deepest art [is] the art of transition’ and whose formal secret the transition is should literally stop composing at the moment of the transition of the transition music is symptomatic:

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Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, Scene II

³ ‘[A]s if himself a musician – and is in this respect, too, the counterpart of Wagner’ (613); ‘Ah, this old magician...’ (616); ‘Was Wagner a musician at all?’ (628), etc. Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘The Case of Wagner’ in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (Modern Library Classics, 2000); I refer to the chapter ‘Phantasmagoria’ in T. W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* (Verso, 2009).

The fade out is a way to not to have had to compose. The fade out is the mocking antithesis of the through-composed or *durchkomponiert*. The *Verwandlungsmusik* fails precisely at the moment of its transition: the transition of the transition.

Adorno identified the relationship between discontinuity, technology and specialization: ‘The fractures in the Wagnerian work are themselves already the consequence of a claim to totality that is not contented with the specialized artwork, in which Wagner, too, participated through technology’ (58).⁴ If one fades out, one need not have bothered to study terminal compositional techniques: secondary dominants; authentic, inauthentic, and plagal cadences; *la tierce picarde*; codas, etc. Because of this the fade out is the paradigmatic sign of the identificatory populism of the culture industry. The culture industry distrusts the specialist as it does any skill that is not mass-marketable. Fungibility is the sole criterion of the culture industry. The technical knowledge of the specialist forces the public to confront its own inability and is thus an object of its *ressentiment*. For the fade out, the technical knowledge of the specialist is not necessary: anybody can do it! This ideological demand is precisely the reason for its prevalent use in contemporary popular music. It is part of what Adorno called the ‘demagogy’ of ‘the self-affirmation’ of the public: the public can only abide that which abstractly affirms itself (35).⁵ It is this for Adorno, abstract self-affirmation, not the authoritarian personality, that is the origin of totalitarianism. This same ideology explains why it becomes permissible to do at a popular music concert that which would be unthinkable at an art music recital: sing along. The culture industry has materially re-conceptualized the concert: with popular music the concert does not fall under the category of event in all its contingency as attending and attending to the other: the concert is abstracted as the pre-released recording, which means precisely that one will not have to listen – this is why it is of no matter whether the concert is in fact live or is lip-synced. It is not mere accident that the fade out’s introduction into history as the worker’s protest (1772) is contemporaneous with that of industrial capitalism. Wagner is the culture industry’s prototypical composer: ‘Such a synthesis, with its unlimited possibilities, promises to intensify the impoverishment of the aesthetic material so radically that the identity of all industrial cultural

⁴ Adorno, ‘Wagner’s Relevance for Today’, Trans. Susan Gillespie. *Grand Street*, No; 44 (1993).

⁵ Adorno, *Ibid.*

products, still scantily disguised today, will triumph openly tomorrow in a mocking fulfillment of Wagner's dream of the total art work...' (97-8)⁶ The fade out will be a way to not have ended.

The complaint is often lodged that one does not see oneself represented in the media - in countries such as France, the media has become a way of ensuring the cohesion of the state, the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel* being pledged 'veille[r] au respect de l'expression pluraliste'.⁷ This complaint is nothing more than the demand that the fantasy be sustained that one be able to imagine oneself as famous. Its belief is the fungibility of any objective, material situation: it could very well be me up there; that it is not the material objectivity of an inhumane system that determines my situation, but mere chance. *Fortuna* is capitalism's false god and scapegoat. All one's successes are due totally to the individual's self-will, and are thus entirely deserved; all failure is attributable to outside circumstance, unless it be others' failures which are again a product of their own lack of self-will: of a refusal to 'rise above' in a false transcendence their material, objective circumstances.

But fungibility is the mutual interchangeability of goods. For this fungibility the individual identity needs already to be a good. This is what is heard in the reference to 'one's brand' on social media: it is that, in one's own self-exploitation, one has made a commodity of the self. It is the demand that the culture industry allow that the totality of desired identification be produced in the viewer. In this way, this demand for representation does not critique the culture industry; it asks that the culture industry please phagocytize oneself too. The ideal of popular music is a pure mimesis, that is, a mimesis without technique. The culture industry must disavow its use of technique as technique as such threatens to interrupt total identification.

De Prima Philosophia

As the most metaphysical time, our time distrusts metaphysics. The transition offends our sense of contemporaneity; for us is the break: *la béance*, *la coupure*, the *incrédulité par rapport aux métarécits*, the pronouncement of the end of history, etc. Our historical situation must be unprecedented. Mere chronology is insufficient to guarantee unprecedance: unprecedance cannot merely be asserted from historical situation. Such an unprecedance would remain only an

⁶ T. W. Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 2007).

⁷ <https://www.csa.fr/Protoger/Garantie-des-droits-et-libertes/Protoger-le-pluralisme-politique/Le-pluralisme-au-quotidien> Accessed 18 March, 2019.

intuition, and insofar as mere intuition, not cognized. It remains abstract, a formal outline devoid of determinate content. This is the fallacy of left-wing politics. In the desire to abstractly singularize ourselves the transition goes untheorized. Derrida is typical in this way and can begin his essay only by refusing all transitions: ‘I would like to spare you the tedium, the waste of time, and the subservience that always accompany the classic pedagogical procedures of forging links, referring back to prior premises or arguments, justifying one’s own trajectory, method, system, and more or less skillful transitions, reestablishing continuities, and so on’ (3-4).⁸

Metaphysics is the study of ends: ‘this must be a science that investigates the first principles and causes; for the good, i.e. the end, is one of the causes’ (692).⁹ The *unendliche* reveals itself as reactionary ideology against metaphysics as such. Wagnerian metaphysics is no metaphysics. Wagner’s *unendliche melodie* cannot be raised to the status of a concept as it does not recognize the finality that defines the concept itself: ‘le concept en ce qu’il se définit par une finalité’.¹⁰ The definition as negative determinateness of the object is the definition as *raison d’être* of the object.¹¹ The end is the encounter with that which in relation to the object it not itself, with the object’s non-being, but ‘[t]he circular, inescapable nature of the conception of the tetralogy - already indicated by the word *ring* in the title - excludes from the start everything qualitatively different, even where it would have been required aesthetically at the critical juncture’ (55).¹²

This same non-conceptualization of the *finis* or *peras*¹³ is the contention of Žižek’s critique of the final pages of *Götterdämmerung*:

‘One of the signs of this inherent status of the disturbance is the failure of big finales in Wagner’s operas: the formal failure here indicates the persistence of the social antagonism. Let us take the biggest of them all, the mother of all finales, that of *Götterdämmerung*. It is a well-known fact that, in the last minutes of this opera, the orchestra perform an excessively intricate cobweb of themes, basically

⁸ Derrida, *The Ear of the Other* (Schocken Books, 1985).

⁹ Aristotle, ‘Metaphysics’ in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (Modern Library, 2001)

¹⁰ Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, *Phénoménologie de l’esprit*.

¹¹ Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Trans. A. V. Miller (Humanity Books, 1969).

¹² Adorno, ‘Wagner’s Relevance for Today’. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book V, Chap. 17.

¹³ For a discussion of these terms cf. Jacques Derrida, *Aporias* (Stanford University Press, 1993).

nothing less than the recapitulation of the thematic wealth of the entire *Ring* – is not this fact the ultimate proof that Wagner himself was not sure about what the final apotheosis of the *Ring* ‘means’? Not being sure, he took a kind of ‘flight forward’, and threw *all* the themes together.... So the culminating theme of ‘Redemption through Love’ (a beautiful and passionate melodic line which previously appeared only in Act III of *Walküre*) cannot fail to remind us of Joseph Kerman’s acerbic comment about the last notes of Puccini’s *Tosca*, in which the orchestra bombastically recapitulates the ‘beautiful’ pathetic melodic line of Cavaradossi’s ‘E lucevan le stelle’, as if, unsure of what to do, Puccini simply desperately repeated the most ‘effective’ melody from the previous score, ignoring all narrative or emotional logic. And what if Wagner did *exactly the same* at the end of *Götterdämmerung*? Not sure about the final twist that should stabilize and guarantee the meaning of it all, he had recourse to a beautiful melody whose effect is something like ‘whatever all this may mean, let us make sure that the concluding impression will be that of something triumphant and upbeat in its redemptive beauty...’ In short, what if this final theme enacts an *empty gesture*?’ (Lacan: *The Silent Partners*, 245).¹⁴

The dissatisfaction of a desire that has been set-up or staged, the failure of the *imaginarium* of the compositional, even the Italianateness of what is meant to be the confirmation of the foundation of a specifically German as opposed to Italian opera –each is worth analyzing, however these are not my concern here. Zizek’s critique is in fact precisely that of Hanslick in that it is a failure of form: whereas for Hanslick this means a corruption of music as abstract music, for Zizek, who is more Adorno than Adorno here, it means the fragmented truth of the dialectic between society and form.¹⁵

This failure however is constitutive of Wagnerian metaphysics as such. Zizek is not Adornian enough here, for Adorno himself later wrote: ‘That Wagner could not succeed equally in the representation of fire is itself a piece of metaphysics, driven by its own metaphysics’:

¹⁴ Slavoj Zizek, ‘The Politics of Redemption, or, Why Richard Wagner is Worth Saving’ in *Lacan: The Silent Partners* (Verso, 2006).

¹⁵ Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

‘In short, musically speaking, it is a reprise, with the element of disappointment that characterizes all reprises. So, too, in *Die Götterdämmerung*. The absolute, redemption from myth, even when it takes the form of catastrophe, is possible only as a reprise. Myth is catastrophe in permanence. What does away with it brings it to fulfillment, and death, which is the end of the bad infinite, is at the same time absolute regression.

If I have succeeded in giving at least some sense of the fact that the aesthetic weakness here is bound up with the core conception, which is of something circling within itself, fatefully self-contained, foreclosing the realization of the thing it nonetheless promises, then it is possible to understand why Wagner's so-called aesthetic errors are not correctable at will. It is not an individual weakness of Wagner's that is responsible for them. They can be criticized only by stepping outside the bounds of aesthetics. To talk about errors may sound pedantic, but as soon as one speaks of truth, in regard to artworks of the highest order, one must also speak of error: otherwise one takes them to be nonbinding. Wagner's aesthetic weaknesses spring from the metaphysics of repetition...’¹⁶

The formal failure is not an aesthetic one, nor even an aesthetic one as determined by objective society, but primarily a metaphysical one. Wagner will not conceptualize what Hegel called the *Zweckbegriff*. This refusal is all that can be understood by the pseudo-concept of *unendliche melodie*. That is, one will not confront the *Zweckbegriff* by which one would ‘garder...à la notion de fin sa fonction organisatrice’ (250).¹⁷ No form could be put in place which would not need the organizing function the end offers in order to ensure coherence: it is only the finite that is coherent. This is precisely where Wagner ‘does himself in’. The pseudo-concept is not a concept, for: ‘It is therefore a concept only because other representations are contained under it by means of which it can be related to objects’ (205-206).¹⁸ That which

¹⁶ T.W. Adorno, ‘Wagner’s Relevance for Today’ 59, 55-6.

¹⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phénoménologie de l’esprit*, Trans. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre (Flammarion, 2012).

¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1998)

contains a finite number of necessarily finite representations cannot be infinite.¹⁹ The transcendental use of a concept makes the concept itself become false.

That which one means in criticizing Wagner's music as sensuous is precisely this: as sensuous he provides 'the most authoritative knowledge of particulars. But [he] does not tell us the 'why' of anything' (690).²⁰ This is why his music proffers itself so profusely to critique; one justifies and accounts for these particulars by providing the universal of the concept. But rather than supply *ex post facto* the universalizing concept (the 'programmatic', the 'empty gesture', etc.), that which one should do is to remain with and attend to the non-conceptualization itself.

Even Wotan, in felling that which is natural in order to erect contractual society, inscribes the end of that which he makes. In not grasping the end Wagner is Mime. It is not enough to claim that Mime is a caricature of the Jew because he does the dirty work: he is a caricature of the Jew because, having done the dirty work, the *telos* of said work eludes him: he does not know how to make the work work for him. This is the materialist difference between the feudal Jew and the properly capitalist Protestant.²¹

When one says 'I would like to die on the beach in Italy', assuredly it is precisely the contrary that one intends to say: 'I want to live on the beach in Italy'. The bourgeois imagination is limited to not being able to figure fulfillment except in death. Fulfillment has been dismissed from life, deferred indefinitely in the name of the incessant reproduction of production until there is no place for it and it must be situated in a *locus nullius*. That which this recognizes is that, under capitalist ideology, there will be no possibility to have lived a life.

This is the proper materialist reason for the metaphysical deliriums of Act III of *Tristan und Isolde*. Even the physiological metaphysics of psychoanalysis with its *petite mort* is here complicit. It is necessary to include Wagner with Heidegger and Schopenhauer as those who 'read this indifference in human nature rather than in men as products of history. Both of them came to regard the lack of metaphysical sense as a metaphysical phenomenon' (396).²² That

¹⁹ 'That the understanding can therefore make only empirical use of all its *a priori* principles, indeed of all its concepts, but never transcendental use, is a proposition that, if it can be recognized with conviction, points to important consequences against enthusiasm' (Kant, 340). For Kant there seems to be no difference between 'appearances, i.e., objects of a possible experience' (Ibid.) and representations 'since appearances are nothing but representations' (Kant, 347-8). Wagner is a merely enthusiastic composer, rather than a true composer of conviction.

²⁰ Aristotle, Ibid.

²¹ Incidentally, the philosopher must identify himself with the negative labor of the *Nibelungen*. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²² T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Continuum, 1981).

which Adorno has called ‘our current death metaphysics’ (369) serves the ideology of bourgeois capitalism.²³ Wagner had good reason to call this *eine Verklärung*: in fact, it is *eine Verklärung*, that is to say, a glorification, but of capitalist ideology. One metaphysicizes the material need that leads us to theft in order to excuse and dissimulate that which creates this need, to wit, late capitalism. Attempting to metaphysicize capitalism, metaphysicization is capitalist.

Metaphysicization is the apology of capitalism.

It is less *Der Ring des Nibelungen* that requires a materialist *mise-en-scène* than *Tristan und Isolde*. In this sense, *Turandot* is truly heir to *Tristan und Isolde*: in the first scene of Act II – Pong declaring that he will prepare the wedding, Ping declaring that he will prepare the funeral –, their lines complement one another until they become identical: ‘Gli incensi e le offerte’. In this identity is the gradual non-difference between life and death. Whatever may happen, the *popolo* demand only the spectacle as false fulfillment. Thus Puccini critiques bourgeois society. Capitalism needs the idea of fulfillment in order to proclaim how it has made the idea superfluous.

Materially it is inapt to criticize the aesthetic movement Mascagni inaugurated and which Puccini perfected. The bourgeois critique against *Verismo* is nothing other than the ideological demand that reality be identical to itself, that reality be positive and immediate. If ‘the whole is the true’, bourgeois ideology wants the real to be the whole. *Verismo* is not simply an over-naturalism. After *Cavalleria rusticana*, good taste reveals itself as the necessary strategy of condemning poverty as an excessive and decadent indulgence. *Verismo* critiques ideological reality its deficiencies, of not being up to materialist experience. *Verismo* sues reality in its own court. *La realtà non è così vera come il verismo*.

This failure to grasp this finality of the concept precludes it from knowing anything about the natural. In imputing it to a failure of aesthetics rather than metaphysics, these critiques miss a cruciality: the relationship between the concept of the end and the natural. That which is of utmost significance is that the concept of the end is definitionally constitutive of the natural or organic itself: ‘Simplement, si l’on prend l’organique tel qu’il a été conçu ci-dessus, il est en réalité la fin réelle elle-même...’ (250)²⁴ By not grasping this Wagner in fact upsets the inane binary opposition between idyllic nature and industrial labor found in the source material, as

²³ Adorno, Ibid.

²⁴ Hegel, Ibid.

distinction which only works *à rebours*: nature can be posited as pre-industrial only from a historical situation of industrialization. As that whose only meaning is that which does not bear the mark of industry, the idyllic is such only by virtue of being pre-industrial; were there to be no industry, there would be no idyllism. It is precisely pre-industrial even under industrial capitalism only because of the impossibility of figuring industrial capitalism as anything other than ineluctable. That which Wagner's source material is not sophisticated enough philosophically to comprehend, his music with Benjamin does, namely that barbarism is constitutive of culture, that without barbarism what one means by culture would have no significance: 'But when, in his work, violence expresses itself in pure form, unobscured, in all its terror and entrapment, then the work, despite its mythologizing tendency, is an indictment of myth, willingly or not' (42).²⁵ The truly dialectical critique would need to be that Wagner offends the nature of music precisely because of his music's use of 'natural effects', which would justify Wagner as having recognized that nature is not natural.²⁶ That which can be object of the senses is natural: the sensible must be physical. That which has no nature cannot be an object of the senses. As history does not permit to bring the event closer to one's own historical situation, but merely to reaffirm the event's absolute remoteness in time and space from one's own locus, the mimetic gesture only betrays the absolute difference between nature and the *techné* that would reproduce it: it is only with the *techné* that nature becomes the natural.²⁷ Wagner's music is the sensibility of the un-naturalness that is nature. The naturalistic fallacy is a fallacy because a morality cannot be derived from nature, but too because the idea of nature itself is not natural.

The *Verwandlungsmusik* in fact never fades out: the music, i.e. the insistent banging of unpitched anvils, continues uninterrupted. This assures the music's unendingness as non-diegeticity: the visually absent and aurally present such that traditional metaphysics is interrogated in its presumption that if a voice, then a body. The interrogation is truthful insofar as it disjoins by the untruthfulness of sophistic artifice the phenomenality of the voice from the

²⁵ Adorno, 'Wagner's Relevance for Today'. Cf. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (Schocken Books, 1969).

²⁶ Nietzsche too criticizes Wagner for being more natural than is natural: 'Let us dare, my friends, to be ugly. Wagner has dared it. Let us dauntlessly roll in front of us the mud of the most contrary harmonies. Let us not spare our hands. Only thus will we become *natural*'. Nietzsche, *Ibid.* (624).

²⁷ '[F]or art [*techné*] is concerned neither with things that are, or come into being, by necessity, not with things that do so in accordance with nature...' (1025) Aristotle, 'Nicomachean Ethics', *Ibid.* (1025)

corporeality of the body. This is the philosophical significance of architectural design of the Bayreuth orchestra pit. However the anvils being the phenomenalization of a morally negative critique of modernity means it is not meant to be heard as the cultural capital ‘music’. This means that, the most that can be predicated of this music is that it is non- or un-musical, but still for all that, music. Unmusical music: the negative that still precisely insofar as it is negative takes part constitutively in the positive identity. The musical transition is the grammatical conjunction; this Wagner underscores at the word ‘Doch’: it is the opposition of the same to itself.²⁸

One is here not unaware of the *Gestell* that is the enframing.²⁹ By incorporating or enframing the anvils within the properly musical material, Wagner incorporates or enframes the noise of modernity as technological. It is simply this that is meant by the anvils. Music is so extremely abstracted that it is devoid of pitch and/or melody, reduced to a mere rhythmic *ostinato*. This serves to put at ontological risk music itself, as defined by its distinction from noise. It also serves to trans-valuate noise: noise no longer intrudes or penetrates - the builders or demolishers whose labor the porousness of the window does not shut out and up in the fantasy of the identity of the physical border and the auditory field (it would only be in the absolute space of a vacuum that sound as a phenomenon would cease), a political fantasy which explains sound’s essentiality to protest-, but is installed as the picture’s subject by the music itself: ‘Barbarism ceases to be barbaric through its reflection in great art; it becomes distanced, is even, if you will, criticized. Where Wagner goes to the extreme, it has a precise function: the objectification of the chaotic, undomesticated element that his works confront unreservedly’ (50).³⁰ A means of containing this, of re-establishing and maintaining such discrete cultural categories, might be to introduce here the notion of ‘sound effect’ as intermediary, in order to resolve the dialectic between music and noise - if one wished to provide resolutions.

²⁸ ‘Doch wichtig acht’ ich vor allem...’ Directly upon this conjunction is heard alternately in the violas and the horns the *leitmotif* which properly characterizes the *Verwandlungsmusik*. Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, Scene III.

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ in *Basic Writings* (Harper Perennial, 2008).

³⁰ Adorno, ‘Wagner’s Relevance for Today’, *Ibid*.

Deafening and *Das Unheimlich*

Noise is precisely that which is not listened to willfully. With *L'oreille de l'autre* Derrida was trying to say: auditory perception disproves as untruth the 'will of the self'. The irresistible, as the trope of the Sirens, is the indictment of the will as not sufficiently willful. No technology is required in order not to see something (one can merely put one's hands over one's eyes), to not taste something (one can simply close one's mouth), etc., but in order not to hear technology is required: 'the ear is the most tendered and most open organ, the one that, as Freud reminds us, the infant cannot close' (33).³¹ It is to this curious fact Derrida means to draw our attention when he predicates simply: 'The ear is the uncanny' (33).³² Technologically, the Ancient Greeks used beeswax, as today we use foam, but these stop up and do not close the ear: the stopgap. Still today the masculinist paranoid fantasy of closure remains and is catered to by the culture industry in contemporary technology's marketing of 'noise-cancelling' headphones.

The ear proves that the house is never house enough: the ear makes that which is improper be proprietized - Derrida is wrong economically in assuming the ideology of the *laissez-faire*.³³ It precisely is not *laissez-faire*: is only ever the over-propriety of the proper which un-houses. *Das Unheimlich* ceases to be homely only because its presence enters consciousness: 'everything is uncanny that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light' (4).³⁴ That which is to be homely must remain in the background. In forcing one to become conscious of that which is properly background, in insisting upon drawing attention to the backsplash behind the stove because it must be cleaned, one de-houses the home. This is why the sterility of the hospital jars. The impropriety that is properly *das Unheimliche* is dialectically constitutive of the house itself: it is not that one is housed and *das Unheimliche* becomes an effect of housing. This is an apology for uncleanliness, or how the pseudo-apology of 'Please

³¹ Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, Ibid.

³² Derrida, Ibid. Freud, by translating the sense to that of sight, permits himself the masculinization of the concept: 'no doubt that the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached [...] to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes' (7). Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Vol. XVII. As the (masculine) uncanny, in the unseen and unscened scene whose trace only will be represented, Wotan has had his eye torn out.

³³ I will not be the first in this. Cf. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Ghostwriting' in *Diacritics*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (65-84); 'Speculations: On Reading Marx after Derrida' in *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge University Press, 1987); 'Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value' in *Diacritics*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (73-93).

³⁴ Freud, Ibid. Recalling our epigraph, it is precisely because of this, that it 'ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet [came] to light' that Wagner's transitions are properly uncanny: '*Das ist denn nun auch das Geheimnis meiner musikalischen Form*'.

excuse the mess' when one enters another's house is truly the principle of hostility because what is really being said is 'This is not your home'. *Das Unheimlich* does not un-house, but is the necessary condition of the house.

In principio, Wotan and Fricka are homeless, *sans abri*. *Der Ring des Nibelungen* could very well be inscribed within the narrative genre of the *nostos*, but it would have to be conditioned thusly: the homecoming of those who are in principle homeless to a place which will not have been their home: the homecoming of the essentially and not merely accidentally homeless. As the only possible *nostos* for our time, it is this and nothing else – not the unending melody, not the dissonant harmony, not the novelty instrumentation – that makes it a properly modern epic.³⁵

When Nietzsche boasts in *The Gay Science* 'it is even part of my good fortune not to be a home-owner' (147), he makes the metaphysics of fate lie for what is an objective fact of late capitalism: that one cannot anymore be a home-owner.³⁶ Ideology instructs one that one should be happily thankful for one's precariousness: it is an opportunity. It has something of the home-owner who, obliged all himself to clear leaves from the rain-gutter, mockingly telling his renter friend 'You're so lucky you don't own your home': need is mocked by prosperity secure it its ideology. If indeed 'it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home' (39) this is because under late capitalism one can own a home only by exploiting those who cannot afford to buy a home.³⁷ Late capitalism has materially re-conceptualized man as essentially homeless.

Of course the anvils do become deafening and overrun the music. Deafening is not deaf in the sense that one will have been unable to hear; one will be hearing, but hearing too much of too little: hearing a/one phenomenon (*un phénomène*). It is that hearing cannot be reduced to such singularity without being ontologically undone. The attendance of the ambient must be possible in order for hearing to be hearing. The ambient, defined as the dialectical negative of that which is the object of one's hearing, is that which is constitutive of hearing itself. The essence of hearing is the interference running between: without this dialectic of interference it will not have been hearing.

³⁵ Cf. Adorno, 'Wagner's Relevance for Today': 'Wagner's instinct sensed clearly that epics – in which subjectivity, the free individual human being, does not yet exist but arises only as the antithesis to fate...' (52).

³⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁷ T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (Verso, 2005).

Deafening does not refer to the gradual diminution of the sound, but rather to the amplification of the sound to such a level that one becomes deaf; that is, the sole locus of signification that would make this adjective comprehensible is that of a listening subject: the presupposition somewhere within the aural field of such an earful subject is necessary. The phenomenon can be true only within the consciousness of the subject. If it were to cease to be a cognition of human consciousness, it would cease to be. Absolute objectification becomes impossible, that is, a minimal degree of anthropocentrism inheres in the concept itself. In this way, it properly belongs to the Platonian philosophy of aesthetics in that it is structured by the effect induced upon the perceiver, rather than any essential *qualitas* one prescribes that the aesthetic object must possess. For such a philosophy of aesthetics, one is referred to the encounter with the beautiful boy in *Phaedrus*.³⁸

³⁸ Plato, *Phaedrus* (Echo Library, 2006).