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'Alienated from his Own Being': Nietzsche, Bayreuth and the Problem of Identity

CHRISTOPHER MORRIS

FEW critics have confronted Richard Wagner and the cultural phenomenon of 'Wagnerism' with Nietzsche's insight and severity. It was with some justification that Nietzsche presented himself as an inside observer, someone in the know. He writes of having shared suffering with Wagner, of knowing better than anyone what Wagner was capable of and what he was responsible for. From 1869 until the mid-1870s Wagner had considered Nietzsche one of his disciples: here was a sympathetic intellectual whose relative youth allowed Wagner to adopt a father-figure role, while Nietzsche's academic credentials – he was appointed Professor of Classical Philology at Basle University in 1869 – lent scholarly authority to Wagner's cause. With the appearance of Nietzsche's first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872), Wagner found himself presented as nothing less than the inheritor and renewer of the promise of Hellenic culture. But increasing doubts were soon to undermine Nietzsche's commitment, and the opening of the Bayreuth Festival in 1876 proved to be for him a thoroughly alienating experience. The result was a painful process of withdrawal and critical re-evaluation that continued after Wagner's death with the publication of *The Case of Wagner* (1888) and *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (written 1888, published 1895). Now the intimacy and familiarity that stemmed from his association with Wagner became part of Nietzsche's critical arsenal. It is as if everything that had once held promise now only disappointed and repelled Nietzsche.

But Nietzsche's shifting perspective on Wagner is riddled with ambiguity. The later Wagner criticism represents far more than a reversal of opinion or a collapse of faith. Characteristic of these writings is a strong sense of reflexivity, something Nietzsche acknowledged. Nietzsche may have likened his Wagner criticism to a psychological case study, but the subject under examination is open to question. His writing here opens up perspectives on a recovering Wagnerian, a Nietzsche whose investment in this subject matter forces him into a confessional mode. It seems essential to say 'a Nietzsche', given the energy with which Nietzsche's texts resist any attempt to establish a single, stable, centring authorial identity. The reader is always dealing with 'Nietzsches', with

Note on translations. Previously published English translations of German texts are used in this article (and cited in the footnotes) where they are satisfactory; elsewhere the translations provided are my own and the footnotes refer to editions of the original German texts.

a play of Nietzschean identities.¹ But there is something about his writing on Wagner that seems to cut close to the bone, suggesting not so much play as a genuine search for identity and a reflection on the very meaning of identity. There is a sense here that the Wagner question spills over onto anything with which it comes into contact, that it filters Nietzsche's thinking on a range of issues, including himself.

This article explores the question of Nietzschean identities and Wagner's overshadowing effect, beginning with an examination of layered meaning in the enigmatic 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' (1876). Here the immediate and obvious impression of homage is tentatively compromised by a critical undertone that never quite coheres into a subtext, as though it were exploring the possibilities and limits of opposition. In the later Wagner criticism the critical gloves appear to be off, and *Parsifal*, in particular, comes to stand for everything in Wagner that Nietzsche now renounces. But there are signs that the layered meanings of 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' have merely been inverted and that Wagner is still an extraordinarily complex and ambiguous subject for Nietzsche.² Relevant here is Nietzsche's characterization of Wagner as actor. Nietzsche claims that Wagner's art embodies the theatre's cheap illusionism and its appeal to a collective, stupefied mentality. Running through all this is a strong sense of resentment at having been taken in so completely, as though the theatrical trope stood for a uniquely compelling and deceiving aspect of Wagner that explains and justifies Nietzsche's capitulation. But embedded within this particular Nietzschean critique is a more sympathetic reading of Wagnerian theatre and theatricality. Here the impression is of gratitude for the model that Wagner provided Nietzsche, for the insight he yielded into the meaning of the mask. As a figure in Nietzsche's writings, Wagner stands as both a corrupt danger and a liberating stroke, one who represents the artifice and fluidity of the self in both its positive and negative forms.

TYRANNICAL OMNIPOTENCE

'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' seems to pick up where *The Birth of Tragedy* left off, exploring the potential of music drama as a force for cultural renewal and assessing the role that Bayreuth might play in Wagner's project. Summing up his discussion of the *Ring*, Nietzsche writes:

And now ask yourselves, you who are living today! Was this created *for you*?
Have you the courage to point to the stars in this celestial vault of beauty
and goodness and say: it is *our* life that Wagner has set among the stars.³

¹ For a reading of some possible identities within Nietzsche's Wagner criticism, see Jeremy Tambling, *Opera and the Culture of Fascism* (Oxford, 1996), 62–9.

² Thomas Mann detected in Nietzsche's Wagner criticism an 'analysis whose most venomous insights are ultimately a form of glorification and a further expression, simply, of passionate devotion'. Mann, *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, *Thomas Mann: Pro and Contra Wagner*, trans. Allan Blunden (London, 1985), 51–65 (p. 52).

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge, 1997), 195–254 (p. 253). All italics in the Nietzsche quotations are the author's own.

Here the flowery language of Wagnerism is deployed in what is ostensibly a homage. A more dazzling tribute is hard to imagine, and yet the very zeal of the language might warn us to be wary of the intent. Nietzsche's lofty words – 'this celestial vault of beauty and goodness' – seem to mock Wagner's pretensions. There is a sense that the typically exaggerated Wagnerian claims, presented here in their boldest form, defeat themselves in their sheer brazenness. It is as if Nietzsche were adopting a Wagnerian voice to force Wagner to state his case as directly as possible and thus to force his thinking out into the open, warts and all. This is something Wagner seemed to recognize, as his remarks to his wife Cosima suggest: 'That bad person has taken everything from me, even the weapons with which he now attacks me.'⁴ Critical opinion has tended to be united in viewing 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' as a tribute. R. J. Hollingdale, for example, views the essay as a 'final effort to heal the split' that had developed between Wagner and Nietzsche in the period leading up to the inauguration of the festival in 1876. 'Wagner', he adds, 'has never been more sympathetically described'.⁵ In fact there is much here that anticipates the themes of the later, more explicit Wagner criticism. Nietzsche's characterization of Wagner as a dilettante whose theatrical talent encouraged him to draw the arts together in the service of drama foreshadows *The Case of Wagner*, where Nietzsche asks whether Wagner 'was a musician at all'.⁶ Equally, his reference in 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' to 'drawing together all the arts into a great histrionic manifestation' ('einer großen schauspielerischen Offenbarung') might remind us of his focus in *The Case of Wagner* on Wagner as an overblown actor, 'an incomparable *histrio*'.⁷

Alerted to the possible doubt emerging from beneath the facade, we might look with suspicion at the bloated biblical language with which Nietzsche describes Wagner's mission. In music drama, Nietzsche writes, Wagner has asked this question of mankind:

Where are you who suffer and desire as I do? Where are the many which I long to see become a folk? The sign by which I shall know you is that you shall have the same happiness and the same comfort in common with me: your suffering shall be revealed to me through your joy!⁸

Wagner emerges as a self-proclaimed prophet, and one who shares the traditional prophet's fate of being misunderstood in his own time and place. His realization that his art would have to wait to find a favourable reception sprang from the peculiar talent of the dramatist for penetrating to the 'souls' of his audience and recognizing their needs and

⁴ *Cosima Wagner's Diaries: An Abridgement*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, trans. Geoffrey Skelton (New Haven, 1994), entry for 2 August 1878 (pp. 317–18).

⁵ R. J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and his Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1965; rev. edn 1999), 97.

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1992), 601–53 (p. 628).

⁷ Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', *Untimely Meditations*, trans. Hollingdale, ed. Breazeale, 223–4; *The Case of Wagner*, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Kaufmann, 628.

⁸ Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', *Untimely Meditations*, trans. Hollingdale, ed. Breazeale, 231.

desires.⁹ Nor was he above responding to those needs and desires, not in order to meet them but to dominate and manipulate them. Nietzsche identifies the quest for 'tyrannical omnipotence' as the 'ruling idea' of Wagner's life, and for Wagner this meant knowing those whom he sought to dominate: he 'saw to the bottom of the spectators and listeners, and though he was often disturbed by what he learned he nonetheless reached at once for the means of mastering it'.¹⁰ Wagner, then, was repelled by the nature of his audiences, but this did not deter him from mobilizing theatrical effect in a way that adapts to those audiences and overwhelms them. The response to the question cited earlier – 'Was this created for you?' – is a decisive 'no', because Wagner demands a non-existent, as yet unthinkable audience. But the imagery with which Nietzsche presents Wagner's hope for a future audience is far from flattering. Nietzsche compares Wagner's guardianship of his work to an insect which lays its eggs in a safe place and dies at peace knowing that 'they will one day find life and nourishment'.¹¹

A further indication of the ambiguous nature of Nietzsche's tribute is to be found in his discussion of Wagner's attitude to the Franco-Prussian war. Wagner, he tells us, had lost faith in the hope of German renewal. Instead of a great *Volk*, he was left with an isolated group of supporters whose loyalty and enthusiasm could never compensate for their small numbers. All that was to change:

A great German war made him look up, a war of those same Germans whom he knew to have degenerated and fallen so far from the German high-mindedness which he had come to know from his observation of himself and from the other great Germans of history – he saw that in a quite tremendous situation, these Germans had exhibited two genuine virtues, simple bravery and presence of mind, and he began to think that perhaps he was not the last German and that one day his work would secure the protection of a more formidable power than that of his self-sacrificing but few friends.¹²

There is some hint of the ironic tone that would soon prevail in his Wagner criticism. The idea, for example, that Wagner found German greatness in himself already suggests the later ridiculing of Wagnerian megalomania. But the undertone is truly brought to light when 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' is compared with another of the essays published under the collective title *Untimely Meditations*. In 'David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer' Nietzsche laments the German reaction to victory in the war, singling out the 'manufacturers of novels, tragedies, songs and histories' for their celebration of the 'successes of German culture'.¹³ What disturbs Nietzsche is the extent to which

⁹ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹² *Ibid.*, 233.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer', *Untimely Meditations*, trans. Hollingdale, ed. Breazeale, 1–55 (p. 4).

German culture has unified behind this celebration, puffing up a ridiculous war as sign of renewal and a confirmation of superiority:

One might have thought that the more thoughtful and learned among cultivated Germans would have recognised the dangers inherent in such a *misuse of success*, or at least have felt this spectacle as painful: for what could be more painful than the sight of a deformed man pluming himself before the mirror like a cockerel and exchanging admiring glances with his reflection?¹⁴

Wagner seems fully implicated in this ‘misuse’, and the account of his interpretation of the war in ‘Richard Wagner in Bayreuth’, so neutrally presented, now takes on the character of a façade.

Indeed, if we compare the essay with Nietzsche’s unpublished notes from the period of its gestation we begin to realize how carefully he couches his criticism. The published reflections on Wagner’s ‘tyrannical nature’ and his search for a future audience become, in the notes from early 1874, more blunt observations:

The ‘false omnipotence’ [‘falsche Allmacht’] gives rise to something ‘tyrannical’ in Wagner. The feeling of having no *successors* – that is why he seeks to disseminate his ideas of reform as widely as possible and to procreate, so to speak, by means of adoption. Striving for legitimacy. The tyrant acknowledges no individuality other than his own and that of his confidants.¹⁵

Here Wagner’s disciples become the guardians of the insect eggs discussed in ‘Richard Wagner in Bayreuth’, and Wagner’s hope for a future audience becomes a grasping for acceptance. On the question of rejection by contemporary audiences, Nietzsche’s notes position Wagner as a petulant and ‘naïve’ figure who fails to understand how anyone can fail to experience what he experiences and who criticizes the public for their failure rather than question himself.¹⁶ The theme of Wagner as actor also recurs frequently in the notes, but again the negative implications of that characterization are more apparent here than in the published essay:

As an actor he wanted to play the human being only at his most effective and most real: experiencing extreme affect. For his extreme nature saw weakness and untruth in all other states. For the artist, the peril of portraying affect is extraordinary. The intoxicating, the sensual, the ecstatic, the impulsive, being moved at any price – these are horrible tendencies!¹⁷

Here the published reference to music drama as a ‘histrionic manifestation’ is linked with the stronger language of the later Wagner criticism and its focus on Wagner’s overindulgence and decadence. It also surely colours our understanding of Nietzsche’s characterization in ‘Richard Wagner in Bayreuth’ of the ‘potential dramatist’ as ‘a figure

¹⁴ Nietzsche, ‘David Strauss’, 5.

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, ed. Giorgi Colli and Mazzino Montinari, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford, 1999), notebook 32, note 32, p. 323.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, notebook 32, note 11, p. 316.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, notebook 32, note 16, p. 318.

without any constraint or lacunae'.¹⁸ And the essay's characterization of the dramatist as having a tendency to 'think in all the arts at once' takes on a different light when compared to the notes: 'The music does not have much value, nor does the poetry, nor does the drama; the acting is often mere rhetoric – but everything forms a totality on a large scale and at the same level'.¹⁹ Here the carefully poised argument in 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', so open to positive or negative interpretation, becomes an open critique.

In the spirit of Nietzschean perspectivism, we should avoid the temptation to view the notes, reductively, as a form of confession in which the concealed meaning of the published essay is laid bare: read as sketches for future publication, the notes too can be seen as a form of posturing. But they do add yet more uncertainty to the ambiguity of perspective that surrounds the essay and warn us against any single-minded or literal reading. Next to moments of apparent irony are appreciations of Wagner that can be read ironically only with the greatest determination, and given the chronological proximity of *The Birth of Tragedy* – with its genuinely positive assessment of Wagner – the reader can be forgiven for oscillating between interpretations. One of the major themes of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the transfiguring potential of tragedy, is still assessed here in a positive, sympathetic light. Nietzsche reads tragedy as a means of 'looking into the face of reality', of identifying with, and drawing strength from, the hero's confrontation with destruction and death:

thus transformed into tragic human beings we return to life in a strangely consoled mood, with a new sense of security, as though out of supreme dangers, excesses, and ecstasies we had found our way back to the restrained and familiar.²⁰

No dramatist, in Nietzsche's view, would be more suited to representing these excesses and ecstasies than Wagner, and despite fears that Wagner may overindulge these qualities, Nietzsche can still credit him with a unique understanding of their effect.

What we are confronted with, then, is a pluralism of perspective that Nietzsche's later writings will often deploy, but there is also a sense here of a nascent redefinition of self that goes beyond conscious authorial strategy. In Chapter 7 Nietzsche hints at the effect of Wagner on his own identity. Wagner's overwhelming presence, he writes, prompts the observer to enter into reflection on the nature of his own existence. At the end of this reflection, however, there is no real answer, so that the observer feels 'alienated from his own being'.²¹ In other words, Wagner

¹⁸ Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', *Untimely Meditations*, trans. Hollingdale, ed. Breazeale, 224.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, ed. Colli and Montinari, trans. Gray, notebook 32, note 10, p. 315.

²⁰ Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgi Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich, 1980), i, 429–510 (pp. 469–70).

²¹ Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', *Untimely Meditations*, trans. Hollingdale, ed. Breazeale, 222.

provokes a loss of identity by encouraging a kind of comparative self-seeking that yields no satisfactory answers. Nietzsche interprets this process as having a positive outcome. Self-alienation, he continues, is precisely the point, for by giving up a secure identity the observer participates in the ‘demonic *transmissibility* and self-relinquishment’ that is the crux of Wagner’s power.²² His identity becomes, like Wagner’s, fluid, and he thereby gains an inside, empathetic knowledge of Wagner’s nature and methods: ‘By apparently succumbing to Wagner’s overflowing nature, he who reflects upon it has in fact participated in its energy and has thus as it were *through him* acquired power *against him*.’²³ In this way Nietzsche turns a power relationship on its head, so that the apparently powerless in fact gain the upper hand. Nietzsche’s own submission to Wagner becomes in this reading a form of access, part of a wider strategy of opposition through knowledge. The logic is impressive but ultimately unconvincing: there is a strong sense of *ex post facto* justification and indeed of resentment and desire for revenge. There is a telling combination here of frank acknowledgement and defensive reaction. If this is a Nietzsche with inside knowledge, it is a Nietzsche who pays a price for that intimacy. We might in fact put a negative slant on Nietzsche’s logic and argue that his power against Wagner depends on his intimate and overwhelming experience of him. First-hand experience might suggest a close knowledge, but it might also imply being situated too close to the subject of criticism, so that the ‘succumbing’ to which Nietzsche refers is not merely apparent. In other words, behind the intimacy-as-weapon façade is the question of Nietzsche’s entanglement with Wagner or, better, with Nietzsche’s ‘Wagner’. This entanglement is presented not as a positive redefinition of self, but as a loss of centre that can be justified and redeemed only by turning it against Wagner. The later Wagner criticism, outwardly a shift toward sustained critique and open hostility, can in fact be seen to offer a more positive reinterpretation of this loss of self. There the stakes will be raised as the question of ‘Wagner’ intertwines further with the question of ‘Nietzsche’.

THE CYNIC SPEAKS

In *The Case of Wagner* Nietzsche confronts the issue of loss and fluidity of identity, and here too it is presented as a key element of Wagner’s power. What Nietzsche now develops further is the association of this slippage of identity with an essential theatricality, implying both performance (the roles of the actor) and reception (the spectators’ willingness to become one and to submit en masse to illusion). *The Gay Science* (1882) consists of brief observations and aphorisms structured as a dialogue between a number of voices – sometimes explicitly identified – that weave through the text. Section 368, entitled ‘The

²² Nietzsche, ‘Richard Wagner in Bayreuth’, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. Hollingdale, ed. Breazeale, 222–3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 223.

'Cynic Speaks', addresses itself to Wagnerian theatre. The cynic confesses to having an 'essentially anti-theatrical' nature and relates an argument with an 'upright Wagnerian' on the value and effect of music drama: 'One leaves oneself at home when one goes to the theatre, one renounces the right to one's own tongue and choice, to one's taste, even to one's courage.'²⁴ Theatre operates in a very public environment – it demands audiences – and the thought of being part of an audience repels the cynic. In *The Genealogy of Morals* the cynic is associated with the asceticism of Schopenhauer,²⁵ and in *Human, All Too Human* he is portrayed as an embittered and miserable figure who 'walks abroad naked in the teeth of the wind and hardens himself to the point of feeling nothing'.²⁶ The cynic is suspicious of pleasure, and we have a sense that beneath his ascetic attitude lies the kind of misanthropy that Nietzsche associates with Schopenhauer.

The tone and orientation of the cynic are echoed in the two Wagner essays of 1888, *The Case of Wagner* and *Nietzsche contra Wagner*. Both essays, in fact, could be prefaced with the announcement 'The Cynic Speaks', so consistent are they with the attitudes expressed in section 368 of *The Gay Science*. *Nietzsche contra Wagner* is in fact a reworking of Wagner discussions from Nietzsche's earlier writings, and this section from *The Gay Science* is included with some alterations. The cynic is no longer identified and is instead conflated with the (imagined) author under the subtitle 'Where I Offer Objections'. It is as if the cynic has become the 'I' of this Nietzsche and is no longer prepared to be so open about his identity. The rhetoric of the cynic has also become further polemicized against Wagner. Where *The Gay Science* refers to 'theatre', *Nietzsche contra Wagner* substitutes 'Bayreuth' and key passages have become more inflammatory. In *The Gay Science* the cynic complains that in the theatre we become 'people, audience, herd, woman, pharisee, voting cattle, democrat, neighbour, fellow man'.²⁷ In *Nietzsche contra Wagner* this list is amended to read 'people, audience, herd, woman, pharisee, voting cattle, patron, idiot – Wagnerian'.²⁸ Some pointed anti-theatrical statements are also added to the passage in *Nietzsche contra Wagner*: 'confronted with the theatre, this mass art par excellence, I feel that profound scorn at the bottom of my soul which every artist today feels'.²⁹ *The Case of Wagner*, an essay in which

²⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1974), section 368, 325.

²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals, Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Kaufmann, 437–599, 542.

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, 1996), section 275, 130.

²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Colli and Montinari, iii, 343–652 (p. 618): 'da ist man Volk, Publikum, Heerde, Weib, Pharisäer, Stimmvieh, Demokrat, Nächster, Mitmensch'.

²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche kontra Wagner, Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Colli and Montinari, vi, 413–46 (p. 420): 'Volk, Publikum, Heerde, Weib, Pharisäer, Stimmvieh, Patronatsherr, Idiot – Wagnerianer'.

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nietzsche contra Wagner, The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1954), 661–83 (pp. 664–5).

Nietzsche warns that ‘one has to be a cynic in order not be seduced’ by Wagner,³⁰ offers an equally blunt assessment of the theatre: ‘But one should tell the Wagnerians a hundred times to their faces what the theatre is: always only beneath art, always only something secondary, something made cruder, something twisted tendentiously, mendaciously, for the sake of the masses.’³¹ The cynic’s resistance to the idea of crowd, mass and group echoes the repudiation in the two later Wagner essays of what Nietzsche (as the cynic) calls ‘herd mentality’, the idea of absorption into a collective. His response is an individualism that he presents as irreconcilable with movements, cults, religions – or the theatre. In the face of demolatry, the worship of the people, he proposes an aristocratic, solitary reappropriation of taste as a means of addressing the decadent decline of modern culture. And nowhere is this more necessary, he insists, than in the arts.

In section 367 of *The Gay Science* a distinction is made between ‘monological’ art and ‘art before witnesses’. The passage is not explicitly associated with the cynic, but the attitude is unmistakable:

I do not know of any more profound difference in the whole orientation of an artist than this, whether he looks at his work in progress (at ‘himself’) or whether he ‘has forgotten the world’, which is the essential feature of all monological art.³²

In the version incorporated into *Nietzsche contra Wagner* the author makes it clear which is to be preferred: ‘whatever is perfect suffers no witnesses’.³³ So, cultural forms that, in a sense, anticipate their reception or lend themselves to mass consumption have the effect of building a broad, shared taste and understanding into them, and this for Nietzsche/the cynic is a compromise. Theatre, it seems, is inescapably ensnared by this compromise – this is its founding principle. He complains that in the theatre ‘even the most personal conscience is vanquished by the leveling magic of the great number; there stupidity has the effect of lasciviousness and contagion; the neighbour reigns, one becomes a mere neighbour’.³⁴

The cynic focuses on Wagner as an embodiment of nineteenth-century theatre, but many of the developments characteristic of the period could be viewed, in the cynic’s terms, as a welcome corrective to what he sees as some of the more repellent aspects of the theatre. Here we might usefully pause to situate the cynic’s comments in the context of theatrical practice in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although its relationship to contemporary theatre is often complex and contradictory, Bayreuth could be viewed as representing

³⁰ Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Kaufmann, 640. Nietzsche adds: ‘Well then, you old seducer, the cynic warns you – *cave canem* [beware of the dog].’ The Greek *kynikos* (cynical) literally means ‘dog-like’.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 638–9.

³² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Kaufmann, section 367, 324.

³³ Nietzsche, *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Kaufmann, 665.

³⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Kaufmann, section 368, 326. The passage was included in abbreviated form in *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Kaufmann, 666.

an extreme realization of the drive for total illusion that characterizes the realist and naturalist theatre of the mid- to late nineteenth century. In his preface to *Un père prodigue* (1859) Alexandre Dumas fils outlined the goals of realist drama:

We have only to observe, to remember, to feel, to co-ordinate and to restore, in a particular form, what every spectator should at once recall having seen or felt without taking note of it before. Reality as a base, possibility in facts, ingenuity in means, that is all that ought to be asked of us.³⁵

Theorists and practitioners of realist theatre attached importance to its social relevance, but their concern was filtered through the ideology of aesthetic autonomy: the stage faithfully reproduces 'reality', while the realities of the performance, audience and venue are suspended. Following Roland Barthes, we might critique realism as a false concealment of the mediating role of signs. The realist sign, Barthes argues, is presented as a direct and natural access to or expression of the object rather than a representation. For the apologists of realist theatre the stage becomes a mirror of social reality, but in making this claim they gloss over the mediating character of theatrical signification. Anything that draws attention to the sign as such is concealed or repressed, and here the auditorium is of decisive importance.³⁶ The spectators' awareness of the audience, of the performed spectacle, is a reminder of the artificiality of the theatre – it draws attention to theatrical signification by situating the staged reality within the context of a broader 'reality' that renders it artificial and constructed rather than natural and immediate. Illusion, in other words, potentially loses its transparency as fellow spectators are 'written in' to the experience.

This was precisely the sort of transparency Wagner sought to avoid, and the form of music drama can be read as a means of addressing these concerns. If the propensity in nineteenth-century opera was toward an effacement and disguise of closed numbers, fixed forms and caesura, music drama seems, at least in hindsight, to represent a culmination of that trend. And yet contemporary critical responses to music drama suggest that it embodied something of a quantum leap in terms of sheer scale and duration.³⁷ The residue of closed numbers, which is often possible to detect in nineteenth-century opera even where the actual gaps between them have been smoothed over, seems here to have been much more fully erased. Not only that, but at points where the practicalities of staging – scene changes, for example – might demand some form of pause, music drama offers orchestral interludes, often accompanied by a scenic transformation.

³⁵ Alexandre Dumas fils, Preface to *Un père prodigue*, *Théâtre complet*, iii, 10, trans. in Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre* (Ithaca, NY, 1984), 273.

³⁶ Roland Barthes, 'Les tâches de la critique brechtienne', *Essais critiques* (Paris, 1964), 84–9 (pp. 87–8).

³⁷ Nietzsche's charge of formlessness is read by Adorno as a sign that 'even he was still listening with the ears of the Biedermeier listener', as though someone with Nietzsche's awareness should somehow make the historical leap in perception and re-tune to the new. Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London, 1981), 55.

We could interpret pauses as gaps in the blanket of illusion, as moments that would break the spell cast by the theatrical experience. They might be seen as opportunities for reflection, for distancing. And if those pauses are accompanied by applause, there is then potentially a much greater awareness of the performed aspect of theatre. In other words the spell is broken and the mode of the theatrical event shifted so that it briefly gives up seeking illusion and acknowledges, even celebrates, its own artificiality. By limiting opportunities for explicit, external audience response, music drama can be seen to resist that possibility.³⁸ Music drama and Bayreuth might be seen to respond to the cynic's qualms about 'art before witnesses'; it might make theatre more 'monological'. It resists those openings that invite and even expect audience participation. It turns away from collaboration, and the stakes are raised if we interpret applause not merely as a reminder of the cynic's 'herd', but as a goad to respond in a particular way, a coordination of critical reaction. In this reading the spectator would be granted more independence in an environment that at least simulates or strives toward the kind of individualistic experience that Nietzsche suggests with the term monological.

Virginia Woolf conveys something of this individualistic inheritance in the twentieth century when she writes of the 'orts, scraps and fragments' of the audience and the 'exile' of the spectator.³⁹ Theorist Keir Elam observes that the spectator 'has his own well-marked private space, individual seat, and relative immunity from physical contact with his fellows (and even from seeing them). The result is to emphasise personal rather than social perception and response.'⁴⁰ Elam's account is based on the twentieth-century theatre, but everything he describes was cemented in nineteenth-century theatre practice. Examining reports of audience behaviour in the nineteenth century, Richard Sennet argues that, although there were regional variations, the period witnessed a gradual suppression of interaction and participatory behaviour. In its place came silence and discipline, a development he relates to a broader erosion of public, shared experience. Bourgeois attitudes toward correct behaviour, he suggests, led to self-imposed isolation, withdrawal and fear of embarrassment:

It was perfectly reasonable for men and women who were having trouble 'reading' each other on the street to worry about feeling the right emotions in the theatre or concert hall. And the means of dealing with this worry were similar to the shielding people practised on the street. To not show any reaction, to cover up your feelings, means you are invulnerable, immune to being gauche.⁴¹

³⁸ Music drama's appeal to myth and timeless themes would seem to separate it from the period-specific, supposedly historically determined stage of realist theatre, but both traditions involve an ideological move in which the culturally specific nature of values is disguised and projected as universal (Wagner) or as freely transposable to a given setting (realist theatre).

³⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (1941; New York, 1969), 188; *Jacob's Room* (New York, 1959), 68–9.

⁴⁰ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London, 1980), 64–5.

⁴¹ Richard Sennet, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge, 1977), 210.

In this view the increasingly passive behaviour of audiences reflected a broader social transformation, and perhaps in turn contributed to it.

Not that withdrawal and silence ruled out enjoyment in gazing at fellow spectators, as the slow acceptance of darkened auditoriums suggests. Already in 1809 we read of a tension in the French theatre between the desire for the primacy of illusion and the maintenance of a more traditional social character:

I do not think that a single artist would object if the chandeliers that illuminate French auditoriums at the expense of the stage were to be removed. But everyone argues against this useful reform by saying that the women want to be seen, and that the public wants to see them.⁴²

Yet, as Terence Rees has shown, even as late as the 1890s, when house lights began to be extinguished during performances of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, there was resistance from the traditionally minded audience.⁴³ It was against this other theatrical spectacle – the audience – that Wagner's reforms were directed, but his intentions were not consciously anti-social. In fact one of his concerns was precisely to resist bourgeois individualism and mobilize the theatre to create a community of believers in art, a new *Volk*. As Sennet points out, though, Wagner's desire for maximum attentiveness and illusion led ultimately to the same isolated passivity and silence discernible elsewhere.⁴⁴ The lack of theatrical boxes, replaced by uni-directional rows of seats and almost complete darkness, offered to reduce awareness of even the closest fellow spectators. In other words, for all Wagner's appeal to community, the aesthetic goals of Bayreuth were bound up with the erosion of more overtly social audience behaviour. In this sense Bayreuth would represent a minimization of the presence of Nietzsche's dreaded neighbour in our consciousness. It is in many ways an audience of monads, an environment that strives toward an impression of individualism.

Nietzsche as cynic, however, never acknowledges this. What his criticism implies is that any outward, obvious resistance to collectivity is a mere surface feature. The impression of individual isolation is nothing more than that because it actually serves rather than undermines the herd mentality of theatre. It feeds into Wagner's principal strength: his ability to seduce and manipulate an audience as a silent, passive and attentive collective. In other words, the audience would be individualized and separated in one respect only to be massed in another. Here the cynic picks up on that 'tyrannical' quality described in 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', the ability to cater to an audience and, in doing so, to dominate them. In *The Case of Wagner* he is described as the quintessential theatre musician; his goal is above all to move, to persuade,

⁴² Jacques-François-Louis Grobert, *De l'exécution dramatique, considérée dans ses rapports avec le matériel de la salle et de la scène* (Paris, 1809), 265, cited in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Angela Davies (Berkeley, 1995), 208.

⁴³ Terence Rees, *Theatre Lighting in the Age of Gas* (London, 1978), 188.

⁴⁴ Sennet, *The Fall of Public Man*, 208.

to seduce his audience: ‘The actor Wagner is a tyrant; his pathos topples every taste, every resistance. – Who equals the persuasive power of these gestures?’⁴⁵ And later: ‘What he wants is effect, nothing but effect. And he knows those on whom he wants to achieve his effects.’⁴⁶ Wagner, then, is the contemporary representative of the theatre principle. The fact that he happens to be a composer is immaterial because his musical instincts are subordinated to his instincts as an actor. In Nietzsche’s view Wagner is not alone. In *The Gay Science* he wonders whether in fact artists in general do not share the actor’s propensity toward falsehood and lying: ‘the inner craving for a role and mask, for appearance’.⁴⁷ But Nietzsche sees Wagner as modernity’s ultimate representative of this instinct: more extreme, more hyped, more conscious of effect than anything that has come before. What really seems to trouble this Nietzsche, though, is the sense that this goal of total illusion in Wagner is really about unanimity of response, that we become ensnared as a collective. Denied the opportunity to ‘pause for breath’, we find ourselves all the more in the grip of the actor-tyrant Wagner. Or, to use more recent critical terminology, we are aligned into a single subject position. And so we sit, mute, motionless, vulnerable – what Adorno would later refer to as an ‘attitude of speechless obedience’.⁴⁸

Consider the technical features of the Festspielhaus: the deeply sunk orchestra pit designed to conceal musicians and even the conductor, the almost total darkness of the auditorium, the steeply raked rows of seats without centre aisles, the absence of boxes on the side of the auditorium, the double proscenium designed to give the impression of distance and produce the optical illusion that characters on stage are bigger than they are. These are features directed at heightening illusion and minimizing potential distraction, and they would seem to facilitate the kind of total captivation that Nietzsche/the cynic resents. He compares the experience of Wagner’s music to

going into the sea, gradually relinquishing a firm tread on the bottom and finally surrendering unconditionally to the watery element: one is supposed to swim. Earlier music constrained one – with a delicate or solemn or fiery movement back and forth, faster and slower – to dance: in pursuit of which the needful preservation of orderly measure compelled the soul of the listener to a continual self-possession. Richard Wagner desired a different kind of movement of the soul: one related, as aforesaid, to swimming and floating.⁴⁹

Here the experience is one of immersion, of loss of bearing, of identity dislodged. Bayreuth would seem only to reinforce a reading like this. Describing the proposed features of the Festspielhaus to his supporters, Wagner enthused at how the auditorium would generate in the

⁴⁵ Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Kaufmann, 628.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 629.

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Kaufmann, section 361, 316.

⁴⁸ Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 35.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, ‘Assorted Opinions and Maxims’, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Hollingdale, 215–300, no. 134 (p. 244).

spectator a 'retuning of the whole sensorium' ('Umstimmung des ganzen Sensitoriums'):

Between him and the image on view there is nothing plainly visible, merely a floating atmosphere of distance . . . The scene is transported, as it were, to the inaccessible world of dreams, while the ghostly music sounding from the 'mystic abyss', like vapours rising from the holy womb of Gaia beneath the Pythia's tripod, inspires him with that clairvoyance in which the stage image seems to become the truest image of life itself.⁵⁰

The spectator is to enter a state in which theatre resembles reality, paradoxically, because it is rendered dream-like. It is the same 'impression of reality' that Christian Metz identifies in cinema when the spectator 'hallucinate[s] what was already there, what at the same time he in fact perceived: the images and sounds of the film',⁵¹ and Nietzsche takes the idea on board in 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' when he characterizes music drama as a dream 'almost more real than waking reality'.⁵²

But, as Friedrich Kittler has pointed out, it is above all the 'acoustic hallucination' that comes to the fore in Wagner,⁵³ a world, as Nietzsche puts it, in which all things animate and inanimate desire an 'existence in sound' and listening becomes paramount.⁵⁴ 'I hear you', sings Hagen, as Alberich appears to him in his sleep. 'Do I alone hear this tune?', asks Isolde as the dead Tristan's 'voice' wells up from the orchestra pit. And when Isolde imagines that the sound of Mark's horns has given way to a 'murmuring spring', the orchestral sound transforms magically, while the stage direction indicates that 'Isolde listens'. Wagner's characters were not alone in their dream-like disorientation: early critical reports from Bayreuth rarely failed to allude to the unique aural experience of Bayreuth. Sir George Grove reported being 'thrown off balance' and Albert Lavignac described the music as 'taking possession of your whole being'.⁵⁵ Eduard Hanslick, meanwhile, compared the orchestral preludes in the darkness to a 'mild opium jag'.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Richard Wagner, 'Das Bühnenfestspielhaus zu Bayreuth' (1873), *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, ed. Richard Sternfeld and Hans von Wolzogen (Leipzig, 1916), ix, 322–44 (p. 338). It is a state Wagner compares, paraphrasing Schopenhauer, to 'hypnotic clairvoyance', a state that 'shuts us off from the outer world, as it were, to let us gaze at the innermost essence of ourselves and all things' ('Beethoven', *ibid.*, 61–126 (p. 78)).

⁵¹ Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington, 1977), 66, 104.

⁵² Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Colli and Montinari, i, 470: 'der Traum fast für wahrer gelten will, als das Wache, Wirkliche'.

⁵³ Friedrich Kittler, 'World-Breath: On Wagner's Media Technology', *Opera through Other Eyes*, ed. David Levin (Stanford, 1993), 215–35 (p. 224).

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', *Untimely Meditations*, trans. Hollingdale, ed. Breazeale, 240.

⁵⁵ Sir George Grove, letter to Mrs Wodehouse (28 August 1889), quoted in *Bayreuth: The Early Years*, ed. Robert Hartford (London, 1980), 139. Albert Lavignac, *The Music Dramas of Richard Wagner and his Festival Theatre at Bayreuth*, trans. Esther Singleton (New York, 1898), quoted in *Bayreuth: The Early Years*, ed. Hartford, 202.

⁵⁶ Eduard Hanslick, review in *Neue Freie Presse* (18 August 1876), trans. Hartford, *Bayreuth: The Early Years*, 84.

What we have, then, are two possible readings of the Wagnerian audience: one that emphasizes Bayreuth's attempt to isolate the spectator from coordinated response, and another that focuses on its ability to persuade collectively. For the cynic everything in Bayreuth would contribute to Wagner's seductive, domineering instinct, so that the first reading would merely be absorbed by the second. Against the cynic, though, we might emphasize the double nature of the Wagnerian audience so that neither reading – as assimilated mass or collection of isolated individuals – would necessarily outweigh the other. Here the issue broadens out because the cynic's concerns about the 'herd mentality' in theatre reflect broader misgivings about plurality. Seeking a 'firm tread' and a singular conclusion, he seems to resist the very idea of doubleness and voices suspicion of its role in Wagner's technique. One very cynic-like passage in *The Case of Wagner* describes Wagner as being 'distinguished by every ambiguity, every double sense . . .'. But then it continues: ' . . . everything quite generally that persuades those who are uncertain without making them aware of *what* they have been persuaded'.⁵⁷ In other words ambiguity is not a neutral feature in Wagner: it is another tool in Wagner's seductive arsenal of thoroughly modern histrionics. Perhaps, though, ambiguity in Wagner might also work against persuasion – its effects might be . . . ambiguous. This is a perspective that Nietzsche's texts as a whole seem to acknowledge: the cynic's desire for the singular, for the monological, for the unambiguous, is repeatedly refuted in Nietzsche's writing on Wagner. In fact the issue of the monological versus the plural is mobilized on two levels: it is a recurring theme within the texts, and it is also reflected in their very structure and rhetorical strategy.

EVERY DOUBLE SENSE

Relevant here is the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who problematizes the monological as a suppression of the inherently dialogical nature of discourse. Bakhtin argues that built into any utterance is the voice of a recipient, a potential addressee who conditions the utterance and whose answer is anticipated. The voice of this other can manifest itself in an obvious form as an explicit internal dialogue between voices, but Bakhtin stresses that all levels of discourse, down to the individual word, have the potential to incorporate the voice of the other:

A dialogic approach is possible toward any signifying part of an utterance, even toward an individual word, if that word is perceived not as the impersonal word of language but as a sign of someone else's semantic position, as the representative of another person's utterance.⁵⁸

Certain modes of discourse, such as professional language, may suppress the dialogical, presenting themselves as single-voiced and independent of the other, but Bakhtin views this in ideological terms

⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Kaufmann, 639.

⁵⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, 1984), 184.

as an attempt to summon authority by minimizing the plurality of discourse. In fact, he suggests, all discourse is 'shot through with intentions and accents',⁵⁹ and scholarly writing, as a form of professional language that relies heavily on rhetoric, always anticipates its own reception. Viewed in Bakhtinian terms *The Gay Science* could be seen as dialogical on a macro level, weaving voices in a manner that Bakhtin, discussing the novel, terms 'polyphonic'.⁶⁰ Each section potentially suggests a new voice, some flagged ('The Cynic Speaks') and others implied. But dialogism can also be detected within the sections, where it surfaces in reversals of intent, parenthetical remarks and slippages of authorial identity.

The cynic's dialogue with the 'upright Wagnerian' in *The Gay Science*, for example, ends with a twist. After listing off his negative associations with the theatre audience (people, herd, audience, etc.) and lamenting that 'one becomes a mere neighbour', he concludes in parentheses: '(I forgot to mention how my enlightened Wagnerian responded to these physiological objections: "Then you really are merely not healthy enough for our music?")'⁶¹ Not only does the placement of the response at the conclusion cast doubt on all that preceded it, but the use of parentheses (which has the effect of ushering the comment in as an aside) and the preface 'I forgot to mention' form part of a rhetorical strategy that only draws attention to it further. This 'Wagnerian' might be the kind idealized by Wagner, or perhaps the kind of Wagnerian Nietzsche had hoped (in vain) to encounter at Bayreuth, but his/her suggestion is that it is not Wagner who is sick/corrupt/decadent, but rather the cynic, whose own lack of health impedes his ability to experience Wagner's music and theatre. The following section expands upon this question of health, taking a pluralistic view that distances it from the cynic. It discusses and redefines the distinction, established in *The Birth of Tragedy*, between Apollonian and Dionysian art, and asks whether creativity in each case springs from 'hunger or abundance' ('der Hunger oder der Überfluß'). But it resists endorsing one at the expense of the other, arguing instead that both sets of values are potentially ambiguous. Apollonian art, associated with 'being' and the attempt 'to fix, to immortalise', can emerge from a sense of 'gratitude and love' for the way things are, but it can equally express the 'tyrannical will of one who suffers deeply . . . and would like to turn what is most personal, singular, and narrow . . . into a binding law and compulsion'. For its part, Dionysian art, associated with 'becoming' and the desire for destruction and change, can represent 'an overflowing energy that is pregnant with a future', but it can also stem from 'the hatred of the ill-constituted' who 'destroy because what exists, indeed all existence, all being, outrages and provokes them'.⁶² Both sets of

⁵⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX, 1981), 259–422 (p. 293).

⁶⁰ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 8.

⁶¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Kaufmann, section 368, 326.

⁶² *Ibid.*, section 370, 329–30.

values, then, are ambiguous, resisting any attempt to set one off against the other, and the cynic might be associated with the negative connotations of each: he seems 'outraged' by life, but he also values the 'singular' and 'narrow'. Here the tables seem to be turned on the cynic, but it is not the first time that a Nietzschean dialogue on Wagner has turned back on itself.

In *Daybreak* (1881), section 255 is entitled 'Conversation about Music'. Here, during a performance, a character ('A') who sounds like the cynic confronts an admirer ('B') of a certain music that he has allowed to overcome him with pleasure. A anticipates the cynic's arguments when he warns of its 'shattering elemental effects' and suggests to B that 'you have thrown away the finest part of your integrity!' Then, foreshadowing the cynic's definition of the monological, he suggests that B has lost the ability to distinguish between 'innocent and guilty music'. Innocent music he defines as 'music which is concerned completely and exclusively with itself, which believes in itself and has forgotten the world thinking of itself – the self-resounding of the deepest solitude'. But just when we are convinced that the music in question must be guilty, A adds:

Finally: the music we have just heard is precisely of this noble and rare kind, and everything I said about it was untrue – forgive me my malice, if you feel inclined to do so! – B: Oh, then you love *this* music too? Then many sins are forgiven you!⁶³

The effect here is first to distance, then to align this music with a particular set of values ('innocence') that seem to be presented as positive. But the reversal of A's position might be read as an appropriation of this music to his own values, as though he wanted to love it and was prepared to judge it in terms that were positive for him. B's comments, which imply his total captivation by this music, suggest that the actual positions are less important than finding a way through personal objections. Throughout the dialogue he seems untroubled by any of A's reservations, and his delight in the end seems to be based not on A's approval, but on his ability to share the pleasure of the music. So not only is the question of this music's 'innocence' thrown up in the air, but the value of 'innocence' itself is potentially destabilized, becoming a perspective and a form of justification rather than a fixed set of values that can adhere to the music.

The dialogue also complicates a passage in section 87 of *The Gay Science*, later incorporated into *Nietzsche contra Wagner* under the subtitle 'Where I Admire'. This Nietzsche, who sounds like the cynic, contrasts the grandiloquent, public Wagner with the hidden, solitary Wagner who 'prefers to sit quietly in the nooks of collapsed buildings . . . only then does he become wholly good, great, and perfect'.⁶⁴ This writer shares with the cynic and with A the preference for solitude and

⁶³ Nietzsche, *Morgenröthe, Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Colli and Montinari, iii, 9–332 (pp. 207–8).

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Kaufmann, section 87, 143.

the monological, and, like A, he can find much to admire in Wagner's music. The position here – a wish that Wagner had catered to his real strengths and turned his back on 'public' art – seems quite unambiguous. But is the monological actually to be preferred? Read against A's shifting demand for 'innocence' or the cynic's repeatedly undermined positions, the 'I' in 'Where I Admire' becomes only one – not necessarily authoritative or credible – voice. The use of the first person seems to suggest a confessional mode, but its resemblance to other voices undermines any extra authority it might command. In other words the very construction of Nietzsche's texts tends to undermine the monological by positioning any authorial voice as merely relative to other voices.

THE CYNIC'S POLEMIC

Compared to *The Gay Science*, *The Case of Wagner* seems single-voiced and whole. It suggests a coherent, single authorship and its rhetorical strategy seems less transparent. In this sense it has a monological quality, with an authorial voice that has much in common with the cynic's writing. The tone of the essay is dominated, for example, by the cynic's characteristic anti-theatrical stance and, as we have seen, the cynic identifies himself and addresses himself to Wagner ('Well then, you old seducer, the cynic warns you'). Yet, given the intensely dialogical pattern of Nietzsche's texts, the obvious impression of single-voicedness here should warn us to look again at Nietzsche's purpose. The arguments are clearly presented as a polemic, a form of rhetorical discourse to which Bakhtin draws particular attention. For Bakhtin discourse of this kind is charged with a 'polemical blow toward the other's discourse on the same theme, at the other's statement about the same object'.⁶⁵ The discourse of the other need not be reproduced, but its presence permeates the language as an active, adversarial response; the hostile reception is built into and anticipated in the statement. At its apparently most monological, then, Nietzsche's writing could be seen to anticipate, engage with and oppose other voices. Addressing itself directly to Wagner would only be the most explicit form of polemical discourse: other seemingly less transparent moments might still harbour a 'hidden polemic' (Bakhtin's term) against Wagner, the Wagnerians, the Wagnerian Nietzsche, and so on.⁶⁶ At the end of the Epilogue, for example, Nietzsche refers to Wagner as a symptom of modernity so extreme, and therefore instructive, that the philosopher

⁶⁵ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 195.

⁶⁶ Bakhtin centres his discussion of hidden polemic on Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, in which the narrator's sense of identity rests entirely on how he imagines others view him. In a letter to his friend Franz Overbeck, Nietzsche described his first acquaintance with *Notes from the Underground*: 'The instinct of kinship (or how should I name it?) spoke up immediately; my joy was extraordinary . . . (It is two novellas, the first really a piece of music, *very* strange, *very* *un*-German music; the second, a stroke of genius in psychology, a kind of self-derision of the "know thyself".)' Letter of 23 February 1887, *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Kaufmann, 454–5.

should be thankful: 'this essay is inspired, as you hear, by gratitude'.⁶⁷ Here the sarcastic edge loads the language with polemical energy, embracing a negative reading of Wagner, but also an acknowledgement of his sheer importance to modern culture.

There are other hints of multi-voicedness here too. The essay concludes with a definition of modernity and the claim that Wagner embodies the concept. Modernity, according to the Epilogue, has become decadent; it is based on values that are sick, weary, in decline. The emphasis on decadence is typical of Nietzsche as cynic, but the argument here touches on a broader critique in Nietzsche's writing, one that subjects prevailing values – moral, religious, scientific, as well as aesthetic – to a thoroughgoing reassessment with the aim of uncovering a deeply ascetic impulse that is firmly entrenched in modernity. Nietzsche sees moral values, for example, as having been moulded by the weakest, by the sickest, by those who have most to resent, so that value is placed on self-denial and suffering (this sounds like the unhealthy Apollonian from *The Gay Science*). Asceticism is predicated on this disgust for life, but it also offers a means of protection from suffering and pain by encouraging guilt.⁶⁸ The very energy and intensity of guilt masks the ascetic's sense of decline and sickness. So asceticism elevates self-denial and suffering and provides a palliative for it. What modernity has done is to find new means of expressing this ascetic ideal: modern, positivistic science, for example, with its valueless 'will to truth', represents an attempt to dominate and subdue life.⁶⁹ Modern art, with its 'false intensification', works the same way: it covers over a 'feeling of deficiency' with a 'cult of excess of feeling'.⁷⁰ Wagner, of course, is seen as exemplary here. In *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche asks: 'What does it mean when an artist like Richard Wagner pays homage to chastity in his old age? In a certain sense, he had always done this: but only in the very end in an ascetic sense.'⁷¹ In other words, Wagner became an ascetic – he became his own opposite – and that opposition is represented in *Parsifal*, which celebrates chastity over sensuality, expressing the ascetic's disgust for life and sexuality, and offering a very modern, hysterical indulgence in guilt. Critical to the opera's outlook is the suffering of Amfortas, the leader of the chaste knights of the Holy Grail who sustained a spear wound when, in a moment of weakness, he capitulated to sexual desire. The wound's refusal to heal symbolizes his self-torment at having broken his vow of chastity, and his ability and authority to perform the rites of the brotherhood are shattered. Nietzsche interprets *Parsifal* as the self-negation of an artist who had once opposed the ascetic ideal, and *The Case of Wagner* picks up on this in its discussion of the blind contradictions embodied in Bayreuth.

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Kaufmann, 648.

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, *ibid.*, III, section 15, 561–4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, III, section 25, 589–92.

⁷⁰ Nietzsche, unpublished note from 1887, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Colli and Montinari, xii, notebook 10, note 25, pp. 469–70.

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Kaufmann, III, section 2, 534.

Wagner's noble celebration of life has been replaced, he claims, by a sickly Christian withdrawal.

This reading of asceticism forms the background to the critique presented in *The Case of Wagner*, but now only one side of the question is emphasized: the concern is not with Wagner's asceticism as such, but his modern, hysterical, seductive palliatives for that condition. Not once is the term 'ascetic' ('asketisch') used in *The Case of Wagner*, yet the author finds dozens of ways to describe Wagner's seductive decadence. Perhaps this shift in the argument away from the root causes of modernity's problems and toward its symptoms can be attributed to the cynic, whose own stance could be characterized, as we have seen, as ascetic. In other places, though, the language questions the cynic's authorship. At one point Wagner is described as the 'artist of decadence' and compared to Schopenhauer, the 'philosopher of decadence', an alignment that does not suggest the normally Schopenhauerian cynic. In other words, *The Case of Wagner* voices the cynic's characteristic aversions – toward sensuality, toward the theatre – but in the context of an argument that would not be his. Could the cynic be anticipating, in Bakhtin's sense, the arguments of his adversaries? Might he be distancing himself from Schopenhauer so as to avoid appearing reactionary, or worse, Wagnerian? No simple solution seems possible or desirable here. The dominant voice in the essay constructs an author who sounds like the cynic but who is more critical of asceticism than the cynic. Viewed intertextually, the essay represents a slippage from the broader Nietzschean critique of asceticism and from the typical voice of the cynic. The result is an ambiguity surrounding authorial identity that depends on context, on our familiarity with other Nietzschean masks.

The Epilogue provides another instance of this kind of intertextual conflict. It discusses the reversal represented by *Parsifal*, arguing that Wagner never acknowledged this reversal, to others or to himself. Once, his life and art had celebrated a whole spectrum of attitudes to life. Now they celebrate Christian ideals, and Bayreuth carries on as if nothing had happened:

What alone should be resisted is that falseness, that deceitfulness of instinct that refuses to experience these opposites as opposites. . . . Such innocence among opposites ['Unschuld zwischen Gegensätzen'], such a 'good conscience' in a lie is actually *modern par excellence*, it almost defines modernity.⁷²

At issue here is a form of hypocrisy, but a hypocrisy that is built into modernity in an unconscious way. The net is cast wider than Bayreuth with the claim that we all embody 'values, words, formulas, moralities of opposite descent' – but 'unconsciously, involuntarily'. The desire expressed here above all is that we would become aware of these opposites and at least acknowledge them for what they are.

⁷² Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, *ibid.*, 647.

The theatrical doctrine espoused at Bayreuth underplayed the material, embodied, sensual character of theatre and music because these characteristics threatened to contaminate the metaphysical experience to which music drama aspired. One strategy was to clothe Bayreuth in a mystical, religious aura: this would not be mere theatre, this was a temple in which art served to redeem. Here, for Nietzsche, is the ascetic ideal brought into the aesthetic realm, and what an extraordinary attitude to theatre, he suggests, for an artist who had never been afraid to exploit it for maximum sensual effect. Illustrative here is Wagner's reaction to the first *Parsifal* staging in 1882. Wagner announced that 'no curtain calls would be taken' so as to avoid breaking the spell during the performance. The result was that the audience sat silent at the end of the performance. This did not please Wagner. On the contrary: 'now', he complained, 'I don't know whether the audience liked it or not'. He addressed the audience again and the applause began. But at the next performance similar silence ensued, and those who attempted to express their approval were hissed.⁷³ The misunderstanding was never resolved and continued on and off for decades. Wagner the man of the theatre was confronted here with the anti-theatre that he and his disciples had promoted – he seemed taken aback by the lengths to which his idea has been taken. At the close of the festival Cosima reported on her husband's particular enthusiasm for the Flower Maidens scene: 'He had been unable to show sufficiently how pleased with them he was, even though at every performance, he had loudly called "Bravo!" over the heads of the entire audience.'⁷⁴ Here again is some very un-Bayreuth-like behaviour, and it would seem to confirm the argument put forward in *The Case of Wagner*. There the claim is that Wagner never really saw through the contradiction between Bayreuth's worldly means and its metaphysical aspirations, that Wagner and the Wagnerians continued to embody two sets of ideals simultaneously. There is, the essay suggests, no sense of awareness or closure in Bayreuth, no understanding of its (unconscious) doubleness. Nietzsche calls for an acknowledgement of duplicity that might close this open wound so characteristic of modernity. This could be taken to imply a cynic-like desire for the single, resolved and monological, although Nietzsche's language here ('What Alone should be Resisted') isolates the question of acknowledging doubleness rather than doubleness as such. That Bayreuth is contradictory is not the issue here, but that it should openly embrace its plurality.

AN EMBARRASSING ANTITHESIS

This desire for consciousness of contradictions needs to be contextualized within Nietzsche's broader oeuvre. Outside *The Case of Wagner*

⁷³ Cosima Wagner's Diaries, ed. Gregor-Dellin and Mack, entries for 26 July 1882 (p. 482) and 11 August 1882 (p. 484).

⁷⁴ Diary entry for 6 September 1882, cited in Martin Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner: His Life, his Work, his Century*, trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn (London, 1983), 508. Wagner was known to have developed an infatuation for one of the Flower Maidens, English soprano Carrie Pringle.

the concern is not with the need to acknowledge opposites, but to undermine the very construction of opposites in the first place (a critical project that has been taken up by theorists like Foucault, Barthes, Lyotard and, particularly, Derrida). Western thinking, Nietzsche argues, has been dominated by a metaphysical belief in opposing concepts: good–evil, truth–error, and so on. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he argues that ‘the fundamental faith of the metaphysicians is the faith in opposite values’ and goes on to suggest that there may not in fact be opposites, that there may be only perspectives. On our need to set positives off against negative opposites, he adds:

It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of these good and revered things is precisely that they are insidiously related, tied to, and involved with these wicked, seemingly opposite things – maybe even one with them in essence. Maybe!⁷⁵

But how does Nietzsche’s questioning of antitheses square with his wish in *The Case of Wagner* that Bayreuth and modernity would acknowledge opposites as opposites? Perhaps the answer is that it never does. The Nietzsche of *The Case of Wagner* seems to approach the same problem from a different perspective. When he attacks the whole Western tradition of binary opposites, Nietzsche is aiming at a tradition that has asserted those opposites explicitly. In *The Case of Wagner*, where the focus is on Wagner as representative of modernity, it is as if that clarity of assertion is missing, buried in self-deceit. So with Wagner we are not even at the point where we could begin to question antitheses because first we would have to uncover those antitheses, to bring them out in the open and make them conscious. Then the larger critical project could be applied.

One of the supposed antitheses he repeatedly questions is that between sensuality and spirituality. And he adds that Wagner had once understood the relationship between the spiritual and the sensual as one of interdependence rather than taking sides with one against the other. He describes him as having aimed for ‘the highest spiritualisation and sensualisation of his art. And not of his art only; of his life, too.’⁷⁶ He takes Wagner to task precisely for polarizing the two concepts in *Parsifal*, describing them as an ‘embarrassing and superfluous antithesis’.⁷⁷ If Acts 1 and 3 centre on the Grail brotherhood and the suffering of Amfortas, Act 2 reveals the source of Amfortas’s temptation: the magic garden of Klingsor. The traditional view of the message of *Parsifal* is that there can be no mediation between the extremes. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, ‘the authentic *vita activa* dissolves into the empty shell of superficial excitations and the denial of the will, the stepping out of the cycle of life’.⁷⁸ There is no attempt to find a reconciliation between the ascetic

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Kaufmann, 179–435, section 2, 200.

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, *ibid.*, III, section 3, 536.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, III, section 2, 535.

⁷⁸ Slavoj Žižek, ‘There is No Sexual Relationship’, *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, NC, 1996), 208–49 (p. 225).

withdrawal symbolized by Monsalvat and the worldly, corrupted, hysterical obverse as found in Klingsor's domain, and this is embodied musically in the contrast between the static, religious modalism of Monsalvat and the restless, sometimes tormented, sometimes beguiling chromaticism of Klingsor's garden. *Parsifal* insists on establishing an irrevocable breach; opposites are what it depends on because the Grail brotherhood is defined against the hysterical, feminized otherness of Act 2.

In Nietzsche's view Wagner has polarized values that are not necessarily opposed. That would make those opposites susceptible to deconstruction, revealing that they are 'insidiously related, tied to, and involved with' one another. Polarization might in fact be seen to expose the underlying connection between apparent opposites. Nietzsche's reference to an antithesis that is 'embarrassing' would be the key here, because it suggests that Wagner might have taken the polarization of values so far that he begins to highlight the very process of polarization – in other words, a polemic. Here the isolation of the opposites is so rigid that it draws attention to the void between them. For Nietzsche modernity has lost its sense of shame, 'concealing neither its good nor its evil'.⁷⁹ This shamelessness, this sense of letting it all hang out, is a form of polarization, and in *Parsifal* this means that the metaphysical opposites are very much on show and open to a critique of their binary opposition. Following Nietzsche's critique of the sensual-spiritual polarity in *Parsifal*, we could deconstruct the meaning of the Grail scenes. As the Flower Maidens emerge in Act 2 (beginning five bars after Figure 153 in the Eulenburg full score), a parodied form of the 'Grail' motif from the Prelude and Grail ceremony in Act 1 is briefly presented in imitative entries. The motif returns in the final Grail scene as the melodic basis of the choral entries to the words 'Erlösung dem Erlöser!' ('Redemption for the Redeemer'; four bars after Figure 292) and the reference is most obviously to the corresponding scene in Act 1. But could its layered, imitative presentation here not equally recall the Flower Maidens scene? In other words, is the original form necessarily privileged? Are the terms here necessarily stable or is the relationship of original to parody reversible?

Rigid opposition in *Parsifal* could be seen merely as a front for 'insidious' relationships. As Gary Tomlinson has observed, the clarity and independence of motivic articulation in *Parsifal* is combined with an unprecedented plasticity to the point where 'all things in the work seem relatable to all other things'.⁸⁰ He draws attention, for example, to a three-note descending chromatic pattern that accompanies Amfortas's suffering and also features in the interior voice-leading of the 'Prophecy' motif. Amfortas's cries, then, would allude to the redemption that will bring them to an end, while the prophecy contains a

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Kaufmann, 612.

⁸⁰ Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton, 1999), 139–40. Expanding on Adorno's reading of *Parsifal*, Tomlinson relates the exchangeability of motifs to commodity form, while their self-sufficiency is seen as a trace of the modern subject's (futile) assertion of autonomy in the face of commodification (see pp. 129–31).

musical trace of the suffering it promises to heal. Read in this way, the final moments of the opera take on a rich ambiguity, for this rapturous celebration of the prophecy and its fulfilment ('Miracle of Supreme Salvation', Figure 292) is still haunted by the chromatic spectre of pain in the tenor line that introduces and ultimately dissolves into the motif. Always shadowed by the 'other' that they seem to supplant and redeem so decisively, the leitmotifs in *Parsifal* simultaneously affirm and question their identity.

Nor are these ideas articulated solely by leitmotifs. An accompanying pattern of running triplets in upper strings is one of the characteristic musical features of the Flower Maidens scene (beginning at Figure 154), and it returns, minus some of its melodic directionality, to provide a mystic aural sheen around Parsifal's redemptive act (Figure 292). We might look, too, at the prominence of the harp. Silent for much of the opera, it briefly accompanies Gurnemanz's narration of the shooting of the swan by Parsifal in Act 1, scene i. But it is only in the magic garden that it becomes a sustained and integral component of the orchestral sonority. It falls silent again in Act 3, returning, reinforced by a second harp, only for the final Grail ceremony. These allusions could be read as a kind of redemption, a reappropriation of music out of the clutches of sensual temptation and into the service of the Grail. But the relationship is just as valid in reverse. It could equally represent a secret longing for the decadent pleasures of the magic garden, even as Monsalvat is restored to spiritual health.⁸¹

Parsifal suggests, then, that polemicization and secret allusion are two sides of the same coin: both potentially undermine supposed antitheses. And could this reading throw light on Nietzsche's understanding of his relationship with Wagner? In *Nietzsche contra Wagner* he subtitles one section 'We Antipodes', language that surely demands to be deconstructed in this way. If *Nietzsche contra Wagner* and *The Case of Wagner* are read as the polemized opposition to Wagner, *The Gay Science*, with its more open slippages between voices, could be seen as what Nietzsche calls an 'insidious' connection. Taken together, they imply that Nietzsche and Wagner are perspectives of each other. In 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' Nietzsche had described Wagner as a figure who caused the observer to be 'alienated from his own being'. Wagner, whose own identity bore the fluidity of the actor, prompted the observer into a similar flux.

MULTIPLICITY, ABUNDANCE AND ARBITRARINESS

This is one of the questions that Nietzsche tackles in his autobiography of sorts, *Ecce homo*. There he returns to 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' and explores its role in his self-becoming. The conception of the tragic that we observed in 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', with its emphasis

⁸¹ Here we can detect a parallel with Nietzsche's own criticism and his reference to acquiring power through Wagner to use against him. *Parsifal* appears to demonstrate the advantages of knowing temptation in order to overcome it, but just as Nietzsche's logic proved reversible, so we can conclude that defeating temptation involves a first-hand knowledge of what temptation offers.

on consolation, gives way in Nietzsche's later writing to a reading that stresses the affirmative character of tragedy, the need to embrace life both in its joy and in its pain. Tragic thinking now means working through even the negative to find joy in the whole spectrum of existence.⁸² *Ecce homo* registers this shift and distances itself from the earlier redemptive, Wagnerian model of tragedy. There was a need for the transforming potential with which Wagner credited tragedy, but not for redemption, with its connotations of guilt. It is as if Wagner asked the right questions but in the wrong way, and Nietzsche's goal is to salvage the good Wagner from the bad, the knowing Nietzsche from his naive self. In fact, in his discussion of 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', Nietzsche presents Wagner as a mere pretext for his own self-realization: 'the absolute certainty about what I am was projected on some accidental reality – the truth about me spoke from some gruesome depth'.⁸³ Here Nietzsche both confirms and limits Wagner's role in the formation of his identity: Nietzsche had mistaken Wagner for something that he was not, but the space that Wagner filled was decisive. What he had been writing about, Nietzsche claims, was himself: 'in all psychologically decisive places I alone am discussed – and one need not hesitate to put down my name or the word "Zarathustra" where the text has the word "Wagner"'.⁸⁴ The extent to which Nietzsche is reading retrospectively into his essay is perhaps of less importance than the fact that he expresses a desire here to interpret his identity as having been intertwined with Wagner's. What emerges in this association is a Nietzschean voice that represents a foil to some of the harshest rhetoric of his Wagner criticism. As we have seen, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' at times views Wagner's overwhelming impact and his histrionic nature with suspicion, even contempt. The notes from the period, too, seem wary of his actorly ability to 'take up residence in alien souls'.⁸⁵ *Ecce homo* now seems to re-evaluate those suspicions and present them in a positive light. Nietzsche writes approvingly, for example, of the 'fifty worlds of alien ecstasies for which no one but he had wings', an observation that seems to welcome the overwhelming capacity of Wagner's music and theatre and its appeal to a loss of self.⁸⁶ But we can see anticipations of this re-evaluation of Wagner's fluidity in the writings between 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' and *Ecce homo*. In section 87 of *The Gay Science* he had described the effect of Wagner's music as something beyond rational experience: 'he knows a sound for those secret and uncanny midnights of the soul, where cause and effect appear to be out of joint and where at any moment something can come into

⁸² As Gilles Deleuze points out, Nietzsche's concept of the tragic is unthinkable without his pluralism, since it demands an embrace of the seemingly incompatible. For Deleuze the Nietzschean tragic 'is only to be found in multiplicity, in the diversity of affirmation *as such*'. See *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London, 1983), 17.

⁸³ Nietzsche, *Ecce homo*, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Kaufmann, 655–800 (p. 731).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 730.

⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, ed. Colli and Montinari, trans. Gray, notebook 32, note 55, p. 331.

⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Ecce homo*, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Colli and Montinari, vi, 255–374 (p. 290): 'die fünfzig Welten fremder Entzückungen, zu denen Niemand ausser ihm Flügel hatte'.

being "out of nothing".⁸⁷ This breakdown of cause and effect recalls Nietzsche's interpretation of being as a form of chance, a throw of the dice,⁸⁸ and it is as if Wagner's music acknowledges this experience when it isolates itself from causal, rational processes.

In *The Case of Wagner*, in a discussion of Wagner's writings and world-view, Nietzsche referred to Wagner's 'multiplicity, abundance and arbitrariness' ('Vielheit, Fülle und Willkür'),⁸⁹ characteristics that are not presented in a positive light here but which surely reach beyond their immediate context to touch on the core issues of Nietzsche's reading of Wagner. 'Multiplicity' suggests a non-singular, irreducibly plural quality in Wagner, and it can be set against the cynic's concerns about Wagner's ability to channel the masses into one, or against the argument put forward in 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' that Wagner 'subject[s] a multiplicity of demands and desires to the rule of a single will'.⁹⁰ 'Abundance' seems to supplement this plurality with a sense of that overwhelming quality that Nietzsche attempts to come to grips with throughout his Wagner criticism. 'Arbitrariness' affirms the idea of chance and it would challenge the cynic's reading of Wagner's unifying, dominating will with a sense of dispersal and of randomness.

Pierre Klossowski reads *Ecce homo* as the account of a disengagement from the illusion of ego and its false sense of completeness and self-determination.⁹¹ What *Ecce homo* proposes instead, he argues, is affirmation of the dispersal of identity, an acknowledgement of the 'arbitrary manner by which one feels existence'.⁹² 'The phenomenon of the *actor*', writes Klossowski, 'became, in Nietzsche, an analogue for the simulation of being itself'.⁹³ What this involved for Nietzsche was a rethinking of the mask so that it ceased to be a concealment or disguise of a fixed identity but became part of a continuum in which even his own ego would be treated as the effect of a particular mask. This histrionic gesture, this affirmation of the mask, finds its source in Wagner as actor, but, Klossowski maintains, Nietzsche would attempt to make 'authentic' what he had seen as 'tainted and corrupt' in Wagner. Wagner had not recognized or acknowledged the simulated, false nature of the histrionic, and it was this consciousness of the simulacrum to which Nietzsche appealed. Identity here becomes a theatre that acknowledges its illusory character, a transparent theatre far from the total illusion celebrated by realism or Bayreuth. It would be a self-proclaiming spectacle of the actor: 'Every profound spirit needs a mask:

⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Colli and Montinari, iii, 445: 'er kennt einen Klang für jene heimlich-unheimlichen Mitternächte der Seele, wo Ursache und Wirkung aus den Fugen gekommen zu sein scheinen und jeden Augenblick Etwas "aus dem Nichts" entstehen kann'. This passage was incorporated verbatim into *Nietzsche contra Wagner* under the heading 'Where I Admire'.

⁸⁸ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra, The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Kaufmann, 103–439 (p. 278).

⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner, Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Kaufmann, 634.

⁹⁰ Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', *Untimely Meditations*, trans. Hollingdale, ed. Breazeale, 243.

⁹¹ Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Chicago, 1997), 224.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 223.

even more, around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually, owing to the constantly false, namely *shallow*, interpretation of every word, every step, every sign of life he gives.⁹⁴ This brings us back to *The Case of Wagner*, with its frustration at Wagner's self-blindness, and it suggests that for Nietzsche the identification of Wagner's 'good conscience in a lie' was the key to separating what was good and worthwhile in him from what was merely symptomatic of modernity. In other words Wagner's lack of self-awareness and histrionic character would not be problematic – far from it – if only they were embraced and affirmed instead of being smoothed over and denied.

Another way to look at Nietzsche's reading of Wagner would be to take the cynic's distinction between the grandiloquent, public Wagner and the hidden, solitary Wagner, and approach it in the plural, dialogical fashion that Nietzsche applies to the Apollonian and Dionysian (as we saw, Nietzsche interpreted both sets of values as double, and resisted endorsing one over the other). The cynic-like author of section 87 in *The Gay Science* seems to endorse the Wagner who 'prefers to sit quietly in the nooks of collapsed buildings'. This could be the subtle Wagner who understands and makes way for 'midnights of the soul' and who quietly disengages cause and effect. But this might also suggest the inauthentic nature of Wagner's seductive craft, a fluidity of identity that deceives itself and others so that the actor becomes merely the charlatan. More tellingly, it might suggest characteristics embraced elsewhere in Nietzsche's writings but disapproved of by the cynic: this quiet, subtle Wagner would also be an indeterminate Wagner who refused the singular and narrow, who would always be multiple and 'arbitrary' in Nietzsche's best sense. The overwhelming, 'abundant' Wagner, meanwhile, is associated by the cynic with all the worst qualities of the theatre: its grandiloquence, its cheap effects, its capacity to collect individuals into a passive mass and dominate them. But the reference in *Ecce homo* to 'fifty worlds of alien ecstasies' points to another side of this larger-than-life Wagner, a capacity, unique among artists, to make us forget where we are and who we are. And the impression here is not of mass seduction, but of diversity and dispersal. Indeed the question of the mass versus the individual seems to lose its relevance as the traditional parameters of subjectivity are called into question – not so much the mass becoming one as the one becoming plural.

Placed against each other in this way, Nietzsche's writings refuse to follow the cynic and embrace one Wagner over the other, but open up to what seems most valuable or undesirable in both. In the Preface to *The Case of Wagner* Nietzsche writes as a (partially) recovering disciple:

I understand perfectly when a musician says today: 'I hate Wagner, but I can no longer endure any other music.' But I'd also understand a philosopher who would declare: 'Wagner sums up modernity. There is no way out, one must first become a Wagnerian.'⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil, Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Kaufmann, section 40, 241.

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, *ibid.*, 612.

The way forward here is far from clear. Does the philosopher become a Wagnerian as part of a dialectical progress toward a critical understanding of and detachment from Wagner, or does he share the fate of the musician, whose ears are forever unable to accept alternatives? Perhaps Nietzsche pursued another path, which was for the philosopher to take on the characteristics of the artist/actor and share his 'craving for a mask'. In the final passage of *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (taken from the preface to *The Gay Science*) Nietzsche identifies himself as an artist, one whose profundity would require and embrace the superficiality of the mask. The tone here is contra Wagner, but this is one more mask, a complement to Nietzsche the Wagnerian. To cast aside the superficial profundity of the philosopher and replace it with the vantage point of the artist, one whose shallow histrionics see through to the depth of things: this is Nietzsche's goal and Wagner is seen to gesture toward it more vividly than any other model. But the histrionic gesture amounts to more than a conscious decision to don a particular mask. It implies a relinquishment of intention and an acceptance of the outcome of the dice throw. We no more choose our identities than the actor decides the outcome of a performance, or than spectators at Bayreuth predetermine their experience of music drama. Theatrical performance and spectatorship are processes that, while shaped by individual identity and experience, also involve an element of chance and submission, and Nietzsche mobilizes this theatrical trope to understand both music drama and Wagner, or rather, what was Wagnerian in him. Far more than mere stages in his development, the Wagner masks remained central to Nietzsche's conception of his identity, and of identity itself.

ABSTRACT

A central theme of Nietzsche's Wagner criticism is the theatre and acting. Nietzsche professes a deep suspicion of the 'herd mentality' promoted by theatre and the shallowness and persuasive power of the actor. Wagner and Bayreuth, he claims, embody these characteristics in their most intense form, compounding the theatre's worst features with a thoroughly modern set of blind contradictions. But Nietzsche's writings can also embrace theatrical masks and 'histrionics', presenting them as the key to a conception of identity as plural, mobile and random. In fact the very form of his writings, with its weave of multiple authorial identities, reinforces this view. This article argues that Nietzsche's anti-Wagnerian rhetoric is a mask that conceals more sympathetic attitudes. While repelled by Wagnerian theatre on many levels, Nietzsche also positions Wagner and the experience of music drama as a model for new definitions of identity.