WORSHIPPING AT THE SHRINE OF WAGNER:
FANDOM, MEDIA AND RICHARD WAGNER

EMILIE HURST

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

DECEMBER 2022

Abstract

Nineteenth-century opera composer Richard Wagner has long inspired passionate responses, with contemporary commentators often noting the cult-like reverence with which lovers approached his operas. In the years since, however, interest in Wagner's art has not disappeared. In this dissertation, I explore the contours of modern Wagnerism using as my primary case study the Toronto Wagner Society, asking how members incorporate opera into their lives and what Wagner means to them. To do this, I employ a multimethodology of ethnography, an examination of Wagner's art and rhetoric, and a consideration of the materiality of opera. These findings are analyzed through a dual lens of fan studies and cultural techniques, with which this dissertation makes two principal moves: first, to highlight how fandom of high culture is different in nature, not in kind to fandom of popular culture; second, to propose a networked model of fandom, one which conceptualizes fandom as a dynamic assemblage of audience, media and text.

Chapter 1 opens by asking what is a fan, which I resolve through the introduction of cultural techniques, and subsequently, my networked model of fandom. I also consider how cultural techniques research might expand to include ethnography. Chapter 2 lays out the main findings of my interview. Particularly, I examine how aging intersects with reception, how fans re-enact the distinction between German and Italian opera, and the joy of opera as an explicitly performance art. Chapter 3 tackles the dual description of Wagner as both "work" and "overwhelming." By taking seriously Theodor Adorno's criticism, I illustrate how his music and rhetoric exert their agency onto fans. The final chapter studies the materiality of reception. Employing the metaphor of Michel Serres' parasite, I analyze how the media which host opera shape reception through an examination of the role of the theatre, and by tracking mentions of Wagner in Toronto's *Globe* newspaper in the years 1875–1876.

Acknowledgements

Writing this dissertation has been a long, and at times frustrating, journey. Throughout this process, I have been supported by many people, all of which helped shape the final document in countless ways. First, I want to extend a big thank you to the Toronto Wagner Society, whose member and executive welcomed me with open arms. I am especially thankful to the society members and opera professionals who took the time to talk to me. Without these interviews, this dissertation would not exist.

Second, I also want to recognize the nurturing community of the Communication and Culture Graduate program at York and Toronto Metropolitan Universities: in my coursework and conversation with faculty and colleagues, I frequently found my academic boundaries expanded in unexpected and exciting ways. I especially want to highlight the support of my supervisor Steve Bailey and committee members Kevin Dowler and Rob Bowman. Steve Bailey provided a supportive voice throughout the entire process, helping me to navigate the at times byzantine administration regime of York. I want to thank Kevin Dowler for introducing me to cultural techniques, a framework which provided the backbone of this dissertation and Rob Bowman's complementary attention to detail who helped refine my prose. In addition, I am also grateful for the writing support I received during the writing retreats organized by Natalya Androsova and the dissertation cafés led by Keith O'Regan and Laura Allen. These forums helped me develop a sustainable writing practice and to embrace my unique voice as a writer. Outside of York and Toronto Metropolitan Universities, I also want to thank Alexandra Saunders who lent her eagle eye to my dissertation and helped me stamp out some of the most stubborn typos and ensure a consistent style throughout.

Finally, on a more personal note, a thank you to my ComCult friends, Kait Kribs, Daniela Mastracola, and Lauren Cullen (among many others), whose conversations and burrito runs provided much needed levity to this endeavour; my family, especially my parents Joëlle and Ian who have always encouraged me to pursue higher education; Saxon, whose feline presence has meant that I'm never really alone when working from home; and of course, my partner Peter Saunders, for moving to Toronto so that I could pursue my graduate degree, for being my constant companion in the depth of the pandemic, and providing me with the patience, support and love I needed throughout this entire process. That I've made it to the end is in no small part because of you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Near the conclusion of his analysis of Richard Wagner's Ring cycle, M. Owen Lee—known by most as simply Father Lee—writes about how the abstract world of myth depicted in the four-opera epic could become personal:

> The Ring is about us. About our unarticulated dreams and awareness. At the end of the Ring, it is as if a door has opened, as if the sky has turned round, as if, in the words of C. S. Lewis remembering his childhood, we have "tasted heaven": Yes, that is I. That is the center of my feeling and awareness. That expresses a longing in me I hardly know I have.
>
> Wagner's mythic Ring tells us what we are. We are the world in which Wotan confronts Alberich and Brunnhilde and Siegfried, and Fricka and Erda and Loge. Each of us is a world flawed and fallible and destined to die, full of destructive impulses, yet capable too of goodness and heroism, open to beauty and joy, and destined for greater things than we know.
>
> Like all great art, and in concert with the great religions of the world, the Ring assures us that our lives have meaning—even, perhaps especially, the sorrows and the pain and the deaths in them, for those are transforming experiences. And though our consciousness is, like Wotan himself, finite, we sense that we are meant to move towards something beyond consciousness that is infinite. That comes rushing in on us on a wave of sound as the Ring reaches its last page.[1]

[1] M. Owen Lee, *Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Around* (New York: Limelight, 2004), chap. 4.

Far from being simply a vehicle for cultural capital, Lee emphasizes that Wagner's music can teach us about the inherent meaningfulness of life and that listening to his music speaks to a longing inside us we might otherwise have difficulty expressing.

I start with Father Owen Lee in part because he had a unique gift for distilling opera to its core and unpacking the powerful parables and lessons that art can hold. But what I also want to highlight was that opera was not just for Father Lee a scholarly interest: it was a lifelong love affair. As he would often tell the story,[2] he first discovered opera at the age of 11 when his piano teacher suggested that he broaden his musical knowledge beyond the pop tunes of the day by listening to classical music. And so, on February 14, 1942, he tuned the radio to the longstanding Metropolitan Opera broadcast for a live transmission of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. The experience proved transformative: he felt swept away by the rich musical language and the mythical story. He continued attending opera whenever he could. In one year spent teaching in Rome he saw 154 operas, one almost every two to three days. Wagner was a particular favourite: in an interview with Iain Scott, he described his technique for getting last-minute tickets for performances at Bayreuth, a theatre legendary for its decade-long waiting lists and arcane ticketing procedures. As soon as he saw someone reach into their coat pocket, he would make a snap decision whether they spoke German, English or French and quickly ask whether they were looking to sell. The moment they said "yes," he would immediately respond with "I'll take it." When he was interviewed by Iain Scott in 2013, he was approaching having watched 2,000 operas with over 450 seen live.[3]

---

[2] See one such retelling here: William Littler, "Classicist Who Loves Classics Writes Rings around Wagner," *Toronto Star*, July 14, 1990, H12.

[3] I draw much of the biographical information here from the memorial website maintained by Iain Scott and in particular the seven-part video series featuring interviews with Owen Lee filmed in 2013. Along with several video interviews, the website also features a collection of his Met broadcasts, a biographical essay and links to various other resources. Iain Scott, "Seven Video Interviews," Father Owen Lee: archive in memoriam, 2022, https://www.fatherowenlee.com/video-interviews/.

Over the years, Father Lee was known for many things: a Basilian priest, part of the congregation of St. Basil; a professor of classics at St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto; a prolific author; a film buff; and an accomplished pianist. But it was by virtue of the very Met broadcasts that had entranced him as a child that he reached millions of listeners across the world, appearing during intermissions both as a regular lecturer and as a panellist on the weekly opera quiz from 1983 to 2006. Flying to New York from Toronto over many weekends, he delivered 45 intermissions features and sat on 75 opera quizzes, charming audiences with his encyclopedic knowledge and acute analysis of opera which often drew upon his classics expertise. Several of the lectures he delivered were subsequently collected and published, such as in the Ring cycle analysis exerted above. By all accounts, he was a hit: according to Iain Scott, the Met received more fan mail about Father Lee than any other person who appeared on the broadcasts. He was also a frequent lecturer here in Toronto, delivering the 1998 Larking-Stuart lecture series on the topic of "Wagner: The Terrible Man and His Truthful Art,"[4] and a regular guest of the Toronto Wagner Society. After teaching for 18 years, he retired in Toronto. I had hoped that I would be able to speak to him as part of my research: sadly, just as I had secured a possible introduction, he passed away in July of 2019.

In many ways, Father Lee was exceptional: few opera enthusiasts are able to share their passion with so many and so eloquently. But in other respects, his love of opera is one that many of us have felt, if not for opera, then for other media: a compulsion to return to the same material again and again, a deep, intellectual and visceral reaction when encountering something new, the joy of experiencing our love with a like-minded community. Roberta Pearson argues that lovers of high culture, though usually resisting the appellation of "fan," often engage in similar fannish activities, citing

[4] Later published as: M. Owen Lee, *Wagner: The Terrible Man and His Truthful Art*, The 1998 Larkin-Stuart Lectures (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

the example of connoisseurs of J. S. Bach who are "every bit as emotional as their popular culture counterparts and every bit as bloody minded about their own particular preferences."[5] Similarly, Matt Hills notes that theatre-goers often function as an "implicit fandom," a kind "of fandom operating through the practices of the 'connoisseur' or 'aficionado' but not using discourses of fandom."[6] The vocabulary and practices might be different, but the love is the same. In opening this dissertation with the words and story of Father Lee, I want to similarly emphasize that for those that love it, opera is not just notes on a page or an intellectual exercise: it can spark passionate, embodied responses. Opera can be all-consuming. It can be life changing. This ability of opera—and more specifically, Richard Wagner—to inspire such deep love is the subject of this dissertation. In particular, I will explore the phenomenon of Wagnerism by sharing my experience with members of the Toronto Wagner Society. I am interested in the role opera has played in their lives and how the practices of fans of high culture both converge and differ from those of popular culture. I also examine how the conditions of reception—technology, historical practices, and the text—shape how we interact with media, by advancing a networked model of fandom. Finally, I ask the question: why Wagner?

Standing among the most influential musical figures of the nineteenth century, German composer Richard Wagner penned a total of thirteen operas between 1833 and 1877. His specific brand of opera—or music drama, as he preferred to call it—looked to unite all art forms into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* or "total work of art" which he achieved by writing his own libretto, more closely integrating vocal lines with instrumentation, and emphasizing the importance of staging and movement on stage.

---

[5] Roberta Pearson, "Bachies, Bardies, Trekkies and Sherlockians," in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray et al. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 107.

[6] Matt Hills, "Implicit Fandom in the Fields of Theatre, Art, and Literature," in *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, ed. Paul Booth (Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 609, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119237211.ch30.

Other innovations included pushing the existing tonal music system to its limits, the expansion of the orchestra, increased prominence of the conductor, and the extensive use of leitmotifs, that is, musical motifs that represented characters, objects, and ideas and provided the structural backbone of his later operas. His crowning achievement, however, remains *Der Ring des Nibelungen,*[7] a four-part series colloquially known as the Ring cycle. Loosely based on Norse mythology, the Ring cycle premiered over four days in 1875 at the purpose-built Bayreuth Festspielhaus. Today, Bayreuth remains the spiritual home of Richard Wagner's legacy, with an annual summer festival usually featuring performances of *Parsifal*, the Ring cycle, and two smaller scale works, drawing in audience members from all over the world.

Though all opera can inspire passion, no composer seems to command such a dedicated following as Wagner. Soprano Adrianne Pieczonka described to me her observation of Ring fans as she was sitting in front of the Metropolitan Opera House on her nights off, and how they differed from other opera audiences:

> It was a lovely summer's evening, and I would stand, I would wait outside of the big fountain in front of the Met. Let's say it was like Götterdämmerung which starts I think at six o'clock. As of five o'clock, you saw this wave of beautifully dressed [people]—sometimes kind of crazily dressed, some people were wearing the horns— but you saw these people coming toward the Met with excitement, joy. There was a definite buzz that doesn't happen for most other operas. There is something special. And the word in German is "Pilger," which means

[7] A note on opera titles: in general, there is a preference toward using original titles rather than their English equivalents, mirrored by the increased presentation of operas in their original language (made possible by the near-universal adoption of surtitles in major opera houses). Nevertheless, some works, such as Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, still tend to be referenced more often in English. I have opted for the language which appears in heavier usage by fans, though it is admittedly not a precise science. Thus, regarding Wagner, I prefer *Götterdämmerung* over *The Twilight of the Gods* but *Flying Dutchman* instead of *Der Fliegende Holländer*. Similarly, fans tend to speak of "The Ring" rather than *Der Ring des Nibelung*, a usage I mirror from here out.

> pilgrims. And that's what the audience is called in Bayreuth: "Das sind die Pilger." They're the Pilgrims that year after year will beg or borrow to get into a seat or show up with a white placard saying "Suche karte"; people show up saying "I'm looking for a ticket," they'll sleep outside. And that is the mania, the passion for this particular genre. [...] The Ring is the most sort of fanatic, you get fans, I've met many that travel the world going to various Rings. They're in Australia, and then they're in, you know, the Netherlands, and then they're at Seattle. You know that they're wealthy people that can just... and they love it, again. And you think, Well, haven't you seen it enough? No. It's like, the more you see it, the more... it's really quite extraordinary.

Nor is this solely a modern phenomenon. Despite assumptions that fans of high culture are generally immune to narratives of pathologization,[8] Wagner audiences have long been subject to pseudoscientific metaphors of hysteria and religious analogies. Contemporaries eyed Wagner with a touch of suspicion, as someone who embodied the excesses of modernity and signified larger trends of regression and degeneracy precipitated by the rapid urbanization and industrialization of the late nineteenth century. Philosopher, journalist and physician Max Nordau, in a chapter titled "The Cult of Richard Wagner," drew from the vocabulary of pathology in his biting critique of the composer:

> Wagner displays persecution mania, megalomania, and mysticism; in his instincts vague philanthropy, anarchism, a craving for revolt and contradiction; in his writings all the signs of graphomania, namely: incoherence, fugitive ideation, and a tendency to idiotic punning; and

[8] Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, eds., *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 8.

> as the groundwork of his being, the characteristic emotionalism of a color at once erotic and religiously enthusiastic.[9]

Importantly, these were not understood as mere individual failings: degeneracy was believed to be contagious, transmitted through Wagner's endless, hypnotic, bombastic melodies, which were apt to cause hyperstimulation and fatigue (and thus, hysteria).[10] In this way, his music was viewed as a threat to society as a whole.

This narrative of degeneracy and decadence followed Wagner throughout the century. In his pamphlet "The Case of Wagner," Friedrich Nietzsche famously renounces his previous championing of the composer, opposing, "the dissolution and atomization of Wagner's compositional logic with the idea of genuine organization embodied in 'grand style.'" By contrasting "the theatrical effects of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* with the ideal of autonomous creative production" and differentiating "the pathological affective state of Wagnerian listening from a healthy, enlightened experience of musical contemplation,"[11] Nietzsche thus charged Wagner in eliciting a passivist response antithetical to modernity. Theodor Adorno advanced a similar critique, dedicating an entire book to the subject. Applying a Marxist framework, Adorno saw in Wagner's repetitive use of leitmotifs and bombastic music the seeds of the culture industry of the twentieth century.[12]

---

[9] Max Nordau, "The Richard Wagner Cult," in *Degenerations*, trans. Howard Fertig (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), 171, https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Degeneration/ZkISAAAAYAAJ.

[10] Thomas Grey, "Wagner the Degenerate: Fin de Siècle Cultural 'Pathology' and the Anxiety of Modernism," *Nineteenth Century Studies* 16 (2002): 83, https://doi.org/10.2307/45196870.

[11] Katherine Fry, "Nietzsche's Critique of Musical Decadence: *The Case of Wagner* in Historical Perspective," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 142, no. 1 (2017): 167, https://doi.org/10.1080/02690403.2017.1286130.

[12] Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2005).

And where there is a cult leader, there are followers. A 1908 entry in Toronto's *Globe* (1844–1936)[13] reported on "a fight between the rational admirers of Wagner and the fanatics at the Vienna Opera" over a series of cuts made to the score.[14] More dramatically, in his account of the second Ring cycle at Bayreuth, French composer Camille Saint-Saëns describes the following scene between "a charming young lady" and Wagner, the Master himself:

> This lady was imploring the Master to play her on the piano this unparalleled, indescribable chord she had discovered in the score of Siegfried.
>
> 'Oh, Master, this!'
>
> 'But my dear child, it is simply the chord of E minor, you can play it quite as well as I can.'
>
> 'Oh Master, Master, please, this CHORD!'
>
> The Master, in the end went to the piano and played E G B—whereupon the lady fell back on a couch with a cry. It was more than she could bear![15]

In this vignette, we see encapsulated the fears of Wagner's detractors: that his music encouraged wild abandon and induced listeners into fits of hysteria. It was not only women who were vulnerable: many other reporters talk of otherwise sensible young men falling prey to Wagner's irresistible music.

Nor is this simply a case of the once avant-garde now become decidedly tamed through adoption into the classical canon. Modern journalistic accounts still tend to treat Wagnerism as a distinct phenomenon, one which elicits responses unseen in other operas. Even when ultimately sympathetic, articles are often laden with the language of addiction, a warning to others lest they find

---

[13] The *Globe* merged with the *Mail and Empire* in 1936 to form the *Globe and Mail*, which is still in regular circulation.

[14] E. R. Parkhurst, "Music and the Drama," *Globe* (Toronto), July 25, 1908.

[15] Camille Saint-Saëns, "Saint-Saëns," in *Bayreuth: The Early Years: An Account of the Early Decades of the Wagner Festival as Seen by the Celebrated Visitors & Participants*, ed. Robert Hartford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 58. For those less familiar with music theory, an equivalent scene would be asking Shakespeare to recite the first three letters of the alphabet!

themselves similarly drawn in. For example, journalist Gabe Meline, in his report of the 2018 production of the Ring by the San Francisco Opera, describes himself as surrounded by "lunatic Wagner-worshipping fans all around me in lederhosen and horned helmets"[16] even as he prepares to join their ranks. Closer to home, a 1978 article by Lawrence O'Toole painted an unflattering portrait of the then-budding Toronto Wagner Society, by stating that "Wagner is the heroin of opera," referring to Wagnerians as "worshippers" and describing the Toronto Wagner Society as having "orgies of sound every month or so."[17] I even encountered some of this language when discussing my thesis topic with others. In one incident, a man reacted with surprise that I was so interested in studying what he called "troglodytes," implying a sort of regressive behaviour on the part of Wagnerians. Another differentiated in his comments between what he saw as the well-adjusted Wagner fan who still enjoys a healthy smattering of other composers, and the "SCA [Society for Creative Anachronism] type" who *only* listen to Wagner and wear horns to see the Ring Cycle (behaviour I have heard mentioned on several occasions, though no one I talked has admitted to partaking). These examples demonstrate that far from being limited to the popular, pathological accounts of listening have long been part and parcel of how observers have described Wagner and his fans.

It should go without saying that I am not interested in participating in this tradition. Such narratives infantilize listeners, denying opera fans the agency they bring to the music. Still, I also want to be careful not to "rescue" the aficionado from being classified as a fan, as doing so perpetuates the stereotype of the mindless consumer of popular culture. As such, I will be explicitly studying Wagnerism through the lens of fandom. Though I will detail my definition of fandom at length in chapter

---

[16] Gabe Meline, "How Crazy Do You Have to Be to Sit through 15 Hours of Opera?," *KQED*, June 26, 2018, https://www.kqed.org/arts/13835968/how-crazy-do-you-have-to-be-to-sit-through-15-hours-of-opera.

[17] Lawrence O'Toole, "Finding the Ultimate Fix in the Strains of Wagner," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), January 21, 1978.

1, there are two objections I'd like to address here. First, my usage of "fan" will at time be ahistorical. The word arose in the 1880s as a short form of "fanatic" to describe avid baseball followers[18] and was later expanded to include early lovers of cinema.[19] Daniel Cavicchi argues, however, that "in retrospect, a historian can see how mid-century music lovers and modern pop fans might be connected in their complex embrace of commodified participation. Even though the mechanisms and contexts may be different, the actions of music loving and music fandom are similar."[20] More specifically, Wagnerism was part of a larger shift from domestic music listening to public concerts, enabled by the rapid urbanization of the nineteenth century, characterized by an "interest in sensation," "emphasis on celebrity and selfhood," and contesting "the expected limits of consumption."[21] In this way, we can think of the emergence of the term "fan" not just as a beginning but also as a culmination of "mania, unruly crowds, and gendered passivity" which took place over the course of the nineteenth century.[22] Thus, my usage of "fan" is meant to stress the continuation of practice to the present day.

Second, precisely because of the negative connotation and ongoing association with popular culture, the word "fan" is not always in active circulation in Wagnerian circles. This aligns with Roberta Pearson's observation that fans of high culture often position themselves outside contemporary fan discourse by preferring to use expressions such as aficionados or connoisseurs.[23] Though

---

[18] Cavicchi notes that besides being derived from "fanatic" the term might also have a parallel history as a shortening of "the fancy," also in reference to sport followers. Daniel Cavicchi, "Fandom before 'Fan': Shaping the History of Enthusiastic Audiences," *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History* 6, no. 1 (2014): 54, https://doi.org/10.5325/reception.6.1.0052.

[19] Daniel Cavicchi, "Foundational Discourses of Fandom," in *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, ed. Paul Booth (Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 477–94, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119237211.ch30.

[20] Cavicchi, "Fandom before 'Fan,'" 60.

[21] Cavicchi, "Fandom before 'Fan,'" 58–59.

[22] Cavicchi, "Fandom before 'Fan,'" 70.

[23] Pearson, "Bachies, Bardies, Trekkies and Sherlockians"; Joli Jensen, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 9–29.

rehabilitated to some degree in recent years with the mainstreaming of fan practices online, "fan" still retains some pathological undertones. That being said, acceptance of the term and other monikers is nuanced. Interestingly, in Martin Barker's viewer survey of live-casting events, opera audiences were more likely to self-identity as fans than enthusiasts of theatre or ballet.[24] Similarly, Herbert Lindenberg writes that "when opera fans send pirated tapes of performances to distant fellow fans, or when they recite statistics about individual singers, they display a form of passion that, except for the adulation granted an occasional instrumental star, does not ordinarily manifest itself among other types of classical music."[25] The obvious assumption here is that opera fans are somewhat prone to excesses, in a way that symphonic music listeners are not. Despite outsider expectations, opera buffs often understand such activities or passionate responses as the norm, not the exception.

More specific to Wagner, although audiences of high culture usually remain nameless,[26] lovers of Wagner join the company of dedicated Janeites (fans of Jane Austen), as one of the few groups of consumers of high culture with a name in heavy circulation. On an informal basis, "Wagnerian" is the collective noun of choice, though it is sometimes used slightly tongue in cheek. This is partly because, as Linda Hutcheon explained in an email to me, the term arose in the context of French Wagnerism in the latter half of the nineteenth century and thus historically implied embracing Wagner not only as a music lover, but as an all-encompassing philosophy—something much harder to do in the wake of Wagner's association with the Third Reich. Still, it is generally used unproblematically and is preferred over "Wagnerite," popularized by George Bernard Shaw.

---

[24] Martin Barker, *Live to Your Local Cinema: The Remarkable Rise of Livecasting* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[25] Herbert Lindenberger, "On Opera and Society (Assuming a Relationship)," in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, ed. Victoria Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 307.

[26] Pearson, "Bachies, Bardies, Trekkies and Sherlockians."

Some even embrace explicitly fannish collective nouns. Wayne Gooding, for example, happily takes on the term Ring junkie (among others) to describe himself:

> Wayne Gooding: I certainly call myself a Ring junkie. [...] I mean taking it as a whole, it truly is one of the greatest works of art. A Ring junkie in the sense that I never get tired of it. I mean, there's always something, even seeing productions repeatedly, there's always something different that's going to come out of it. It's just so big. And so textured. I mean, every level. [...] So yes, I would call myself a Ring junkie. I have not seen a Ring... I wasn't, last year, it was the first year in 10 years, that I did not see a Ring somewhere. And this year, I probably won't either [...] But coming up, Leipzig opera is actually—not next year, I think the year after—is actually probably going to do all the Wagner operas. So yes. And so I mean, that one is definitely in my diary as a good possibility, but I will have to go and see a Ring, because [laughs]...
>
> EH: You've got to get your fix.
>
> WG: I've got to get my fix. No it's true!

Jim Warrington claimed a similar variation, Ring nut, again playing up the almost addictive quality of loving Wagner's music and drawing a subtle distinction with the more common "Wagnerian":

> Jim Warrington: I forget when I first heard that term, it wasn't too long ago, but I said, Oh my god, I've been a Ring nut my whole life.
>
> EH: What qualifies you as a Ring nut?
>
> JW: When you hear there's going to be Wagner you actively pursue it and go and get tickets or listen to it or go to the Cineplex and watch it. It's like *zoop*. It's almost like you sniff it out. [...] And, yeah, the experience is worth it.

EH: Fair enough. Do you resonate at all with terms like Wagnerian? Or Wagnerite, I've kind of heard a lot as well, or...

JW: Yeah, I've heard Wagnerian [...] but if someone identifies as a Wagnerian means they are pretty, like Wagner himself, pretty, not impatient with, but pretty dismissive of lower-level Italian...

EH: That's interesting, I haven't...

JW: ... Italian-type table and chairs operas. You couldn't pay me to go to the Barber of Seville!

EH: No?

JW: No, you could offer $10,000. I'm. Not. Going. To. Go. It's as simple as that.

Here, Ring nut implies an almost insatiable need to consume Wagner, while Wagnerian conjures a stronger aesthetic stance, one rooted not only in passion, but also in the process of exclusion.

On the flip side, others feel quite strongly that these terms serve only to equate a love of Wagner's music with sensationalized accounts of consumption and fail to capture the profound connection, transcendence and joy that Wagner has brought to their lives. Frances Henry wrote the following on the questionnaire in response to my question on naming: "I think ring junky and ring nut and other terms are the result of media popularization attempts and the need for people to simplify and dumb down serious and complex issues." In other cases, people eschewed any clear descriptor, insisting that they were not "true Wagnerian" or, alternatively didn't seem at all bothered what I referred to them as, with more than one person declaring enthusiastically "all of the above" when I listed some possibilities.

What these accounts illustrate is that naming is a contested territory: at times, Wagnerians do operate as "implicit fandom" who, while possessing many affinities, reject the label of fan; other

times, the opposite is true—I think for example of my conversation with Barbara Japp, who happily related her history of science fiction fandom with her love of opera. In light of this, I argue that fan is a useful noun to retain precisely because of its ability to evoke such dialectics: a serious, deep, loving connection to the music, but also, simultaneously, narratives of addiction, abandon, and unabashed consumerist tendencies. In my view, no other word does this work quite so efficiently. My own usage is thus meant to be neutral in tone—that is, non-evaluative—but rich in meaning, and to work towards bringing down some of the disciplinary and cultural silos that continue to persist between high and low culture.[27] In my questionnaires and interviews I tried my best to ask participants what terms they preferred and have endeavoured throughout this text to respect individual preferences.

Toronto, Opera and Wagner

In this dissertation, I use as my primary case study the Toronto Wagner Society, through a series of interviews and participant observation at meetings which I subsequently analyze using a networked model of fandom. Unlike cities such as Paris, London or even New York, Toronto has not traditionally been a hub of operatic activity. As the history of opera in Toronto from 1783 to 1980, including the founding of the Canadian Opera Company, has already been detailed at length in Dorith Cooper's nearly 1500-page dissertation on the topic,[28] I shall here only provide some brief outlines for this period, and concentrate mainly on the ensuing 40 years. Slower to develop than in Montreal, then the more populous and affluent city, opera from the establishing of York in 1793 and up to the 1850s was a piecemeal affair. Though the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 allowed for travelling theatrical stock companies to visit York with some regularity, the settlement was still very much a

[27] Hills, "Implicit Fandom in the Fields of Theatre, Art, and Literature."

[28] Dorith Rachel Cooper, "Opera in Montreal and Toronto: A Study of Performance Traditions and Repertoire 1783-1980" (PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1983).

frontier town, with rowdy and often inebriated audiences, and makeshift theatres.[29] By the time York was incorporated into the city of Toronto in 1836, opera—and theatre in general—had gained a reputation as morally suspect. In these early years, opera was usually presented as an "afterpiece" to other theatrical affairs, with repertoire consisting of light ballad or comic operas sung in English. It is not until June 1849 that Toronto witnessed opera staged as the main event, with a series of "Operatic Soirées in Full Costume" performed by a small itinerant ensemble. As was to become the norm, the operas were performed in truncated form with the libretto sung in English.[30]

Following these initial forays, Cooper identifies three main periods: first, the creation of local amateur groups in the first half of the nineteenth century, performing a rotating set of stock operatic repertoire later supplemented with wandering musicians and singers; second, the rise of the star system coupled with the increase and eventual monopolization of syndicated touring companies, facilitated in part by improvements in transportation during the second half of the century, and declining following the rise in popularity of cinema; and finally, the flourishing of local companies who filled this void, with a new concern for Canadian repertoire following the Second World War.[31] Though a number of smaller companies also made their mark, the history of opera in Toronto in this final post-war period is dominated by the Canadian Opera Company (COC), now the oldest in the country.

Since the 1980s there have been three major developments in opera in Toronto. The first is the building of the Four Seasons Centre, which serves as the venue for both the COC and the National Ballet, opened to great fanfare with a Ring cycle in September 2006. More than just a permanent home, the Four Seasons Centre not only addressed the acoustic shortcomings of Meridian Hall

[29] Cooper, "Opera in Montreal and Toronto," 39.
[30] Cooper, "Opera in Montreal and Toronto," 70–71.
[31] Cooper, "Opera in Montreal and Toronto," ix.

(then O'Keefe Centre) but also offered better storage, rehearsal space and long-term stability. As opera critic John Gilk explained to me in an interview, previously, director Richard Bradshaw was forced to operate on a one to two-year production cycle, making it difficult to book the most sought-after singers. By contrast, his successor Alexander Neef was able to work on a planning cycle of four to five years. The move to the Four Seasons provided a sizable boost in attendance, with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reporting in 2009 that the company had enjoyed three straight years of an average attendance of 99 percent—this despite the intervening 2008 economic crisis.[32] In the last couple of years, however, this boost has died down considerably. By 2017-18, the average attendance had fallen to 84 percent capacity, with the number of total performances cut from 70 to 53, though the company remained financially sound.[33]

The second major event was the death of beloved COC general director, Richard Bradshaw. Bradshaw, credited with fighting the long 30-year war to bring the aforementioned dedicated performing arts centre to Toronto, passed away suddenly on August 15, 2007, at the age of 63, only one year into a newly signed ten-year contract. His position was divided into two, with Alexander Neef appointed as general director in 2007, and Johannes Debus as music director in 2009. Formerly the casting director of the Paris Opéra, Neef came to Toronto with a host of valuable connections with agents and singers and has been able to lure top-tier talent to the city. Though the COC had long been an important national company and had had glimpses of international acclaim, such as performances of *Erwartung* and *Bluebeard's Castle* at the Edinburgh International Festival, these two

[32] CBC Arts, "Canadian Opera Company Maintains 99% Attendance Average," CBC, May 26, 2009, https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/canadian-opera-company-maintains-99-attendance-average-1.845328.

[33] John Terauds, "Canadian Opera Company Stays in the Black despite Falling Attendance," *Star*, October 24, 2018, https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/music/2018/10/24/canadian-opera-company-stays-in-the-black-despite-falling-attendance.html.

changes have given the company a stronger international profile. On July 24, 2019, Alexander Neef announced his intention to leave the Canadian Opera Company to be director of the Paris Opéra after the 2019/2020 season. His final season at the COC was unfortunately curtailed by COVID-19 which forced the cancellation of the second half of 2018/2019 as well as the entirety of 2020/2021. Perryn Leech, prior managing director for the Houston Grand Opera was later appointed to the role in March 2021. Leech thus enters at a crucial crossroads for the opera house: how will it recover from the financial uncertainty of the pandemic and adapt to the new digital landscape of opera going forward?

Unlike other major opera houses which were able to dig into their archives to provide streaming content, the COC was limited to a single one-night watch party of *Hadrian* and a smattering of digital concerts and artist talks for the first year and a half of the pandemic. This lack of streaming was the culmination of several long-standing issues: withdrawal by CBC TV from opera coverage both as a result of funding cuts and shifting programming priorities; collapse in the negotiating between artists' unions and the COC (in part because the CBC no longer pays rights fees); high upfront cost for in-house streaming production; inability for individual companies to access the Canada Council for the Arts' Digital Strategy Fund.[34] As a result, the COC has largely missed out on the streaming boom that had started even prior to the pandemic. On the flip side, as a large cultural institution, the COC has been able to access almost $8 million in COVID aid from various levels of governments as well as leverage the deep pockets of its patrons: the company posted a relatively modest operating deficit of $677,000 for 2020 and surplus of $1,022,000 in 2021.[35] How the company will fare

[34] Lydia Perović, "Live-Streaming: Why Are Canadian Opera Productions Missing from the Worldwide Phenomenon?," *Opera Canada*, September 28, 2018, http://operacanada.ca/live-streaming-opera-canada/.

[35] Canadian Opera Company, "20/21 Annual General Meeting," October 28, 2020, www.coc.ca/AGM2021. See in particular the document "Financials at a Glance."; See also Michael Vincent's

once subsidies fall, however, is still to be determined. The 2021/2022 season saw a return to live performances, though the situation remained fluid: for example, all performances of *Madame Butterfly* were cancelled in response to the Omicron wave. In addition, after partnering with the National Ballet of Canada and receiving grant funding through the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund, the COC was finally able to invest in digital architecture. As a result, they launched a free digital membership for 2021/2022, streaming all performances.

In the background of these larger changes at the COC, Toronto has also seen a continued growth in independent production companies, playing catch up to the traditionally more diverse operatic scene of Montreal.[36] Opera Atelier (1985-), Tapestry Opera (1979-), and Against the Grain Theatre (2010-) have perhaps the highest profile, but they represent only a small slice of the now numerous operatic opportunities in the cities. The latter two, for example, are also members of Indie Opera Toronto, a loose collective of eleven companies founded in 2015. The collective is both a sign of the renaissance of opera in the city, but also its precarity: though the collective's Twitter account still reposts content on a semi-regular basis, the website no longer lists upcoming performances and at the time of writing, at least two of the listed companies have been dormant for over a year. Still, these smaller associations—unburdened by the overhead of the COC or the need to negotiate with labour unions—have to some degree proven more agile in the wake of COVID-19 with companies such as

detailed analysis of the 2019/2020 season: Michael Vincent, "Canadian Opera Company Annual Report Shows Impact From COVID-19," Ludwig van Toronto, November 2, 2020, https://www.ludwig-van.com/toronto/2020/11/02/the-scoop-canadian-opera-company-issues-annual-report-showing-early-impact-of-covid-19/.

[36] Cooper, "Opera in Montreal and Toronto," 1364. By the 1980s, Cooper writes that the presence of "alternate associations" in Montreal "has been a distinctive shaping factor of that city's lyric scene especially since the Second World War." By contrast, Toronto "has been less active in the matter of forming secondary outlets, for operatic activity in this city has largely been anchored at the Opera School and its most successful professional offshoot."

Against the Grain Theatre, Opera Atelier and Essential Opera streaming multiple opera productions (both live and on demand) since the beginning of the pandemic.

Independent opera has also led the charge on what opera journalist Jenna Simeonov notes as two key trends in opera: miniaturization and productions that speak to contemporary issues. Many have turned to chamber opera as an alternative to traditional costly and labour-intensive productions, paring down older works or creating new ones which require only a limited number of musicians and singers. These are often performed in unconventional settings, in a bid to make opera more accessible and less intimidating. Against the Grain Theatre, for example, is perhaps best known for its signature Opera Pub performances, including the acclaimed *La Bohème*, which has been presented in English in bars across the country. The Bicycle Opera Project (2012-) takes this trend of miniaturization to an extreme featuring an eco-conscious company which tours solely on bicycles. Even Opera Atelier, which specializes in historically informed productions and is thus more traditional in many regards, largely draws from the smaller scale Baroque Repertoire. Outside of the COC then, the trend has been less is more.

Independent opera has also been more open to tackle contemporary themes as well as invest in new opera. For example, Loose Tea Music Theatre (2013-) premiered in the fall of 2019 a modern retelling of *Carmen*, responding to the hashtag #YesAllWomen. Amplified Opera's (2019-) concert series AMPLIFY 1.0 featured three new pieces "MisogyME," which confronts toxic masculinity, "Spotlight: Out on a limb," on the topic of disability and identity, and "Wreckoncilation" which looks to bring Indigenous voices into the Western Classical music tradition. By contrast, the COC premiere of *Hadrian* by Rufus Wainwright, in the fall of 2018, marked the first mainstage commission since 1999. The COC has however started reacting to these trends, beginning for example a company-in-residence program to foster fledgling organizations (which later evolved into the "Disruptor-in-

Residence" for 2021), and two world premieres as part of its return to live performances at the Canadian Opera Company Theatre. This new, 450-seat venue, previously housing the company's rehearsal hall, "will augment the COC's main performance space and offer greater programming flexibility, particularly for new works and experimental pieces."[37] This perhaps signals a return to regularly commissioning homegrown opera and a commitment to smaller-scale production.

Apart from occasional performances in concert format—most often by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra—Wagner in Toronto since the 1960s has almost exclusively been the domain of the COC. [38] Over the course of its history, the company has staged Wagner on twenty-five separate occasions. Of his mature operas, only *Parsifal* and *Tannhäuser* have yet to receive a premiere. Aside from the '90s, when the COC only mounted a single Wagner opera, the composer has generally appeared every two to four years. While this makes Wagner the fourth most popular composer at the COC, this pales in comparison to the fifty appearances of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart or the 68 by Giuseppe Verdi.[39] Similarly, *Die Walküre*, the most popular Wagner opera, has been performed six times—by contrast Puccini's *La Bohème* and *Madama Butterfly* have been part of seventeen separate seasons. Wagner has thus been a regular feature at the COC, but not quite considered a venerable "warhorse" trotted out when necessary to draw in big numbers: unsurprisingly the lighter *Die Walküre* and *The Flying Dutchman* remain the most popular selections. Still, that the company chose

[37] Joshua Chong, "Definitely Not the Same Old Canadian Opera Company: Two World Premieres and a Focus on New Voices Revitalizes 'Old-Fashioned' Repertoire," *Toronto Star*, February 22, 2022, https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/music/analysis/2022/02/22/definitely-not-the-same-old-canadian-opera-company-two-world-premieres-and-a-focus-on-new-voices-revitalizes-old-fashioned-repertoire.

[38] For a comprehensive list of Wagner performances in Toronto see appendix A.

[39] I base these numbers in part on the list of performances at the back of Schabas and Morey's history of the COC Opera Viva, published in 2000. For performances past this date, I relied on a combination of the COC website and Operabase, a website which has catalogued opera performances worldwide since 1996. Ezra Schabas and Carl Morey, *Opera Viva: Canadian Opera Company, the First Fifty Years* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2000).

to inaugurate the Four Seasons Centre with a Ring cycle, speaks to the prestige that continues to be attached to Wagner. What Neef's departure will mean for Wagner in the city in the coming years is unclear: in an interview with the Toronto Wagner Society, Leech expressed willingness to program Wagnerian repertoire, but due to the cost of Wagner, new productions appear unlikely in the near future in the wake of COVID-19. *Parsifal*, a co-production with the MET and the Opéra de Lyon by Canadians François Girard and Michael Levine, originally scheduled for the 2020/2021 season, has been delayed twice already and has now been postponed indefinitely.

Outside of the COC, the last full staging of a Wagner opera was in 1984, when the Metropolitan Opera performed *Die Walküre* as part of the Toronto International Festival, in celebration of Toronto's 150th anniversary and Ontario's bicentennial.[40] In part this reflects the fact that though once the core of Toronto's opera scene, travelling productions by major opera houses are no longer a major player in the city. Smaller independent companies have generally shied away from Wagnerian opera in part because of the need for a large ensemble cast as well as the length, but also because as previously discussed, many independent companies prefer tackling new or underperformed repertoire rather than the well-trodden classics. A notable exception to this is Opera by Request, helmed by conductor, pianist and vocal coach William Shookhoff. As the name suggests, repertoire is determined by singers, rather than the director. They have performed several Wagner operas in concert or semi-staged format with piano accompaniment including a full Ring cycle in collaboration with the Berlin Wagner Group in February 2020, demonstrating that even Wagner can be miniaturized to a degree.[41] Nor have there been many recent offerings in other parts of Canada: Operabase, an online

[40] Gillian Mackay and Shona McKay, "A Treat for the Eye and the Ear," Maclean's, June 18, 1984, https://archive.macleans.ca/article/1984/6/18/a-treat-for-the-eye-and-the-ear.

[41] As far as I am aware, this is only the second Ring cycle performed in Canada—the first being, of course, the COC.

opera database, lists only eight Wagner performances between 1995 and 2020 outside of Toronto. Five of these have been stagings of *The Flying Dutchman*, by far the least demanding of Wagner's operatic compositions, reflecting the smaller resources available to companies outside of Toronto.

The Toronto Wagner Society (TWS) was founded in 1975 by Dorothy Graziani in the context of the post-war growth of local opera. She had been a member of the London Wagner society and felt that Toronto could use one too, and in these early years, it was her passion and drive that made the Wagner society successful. Though Wagner societies had by then a long history—the first was created in 1871 as a scheme to raise money for the first Ring cycle—this was the first of its kind in Canada, and among the first modern Wagner societies in North America.[42] Members were partially recruited through placing ads in opera programs, but also through colleagues and friends: notably, because Dorothy's husband René was part of the faculty at the Department of English at the University of Toronto, many of the first members were colleagues. Later, the society also placed ads in Opera Canada and event notices in the *Globe and Mail*. An initial planning session took place on May 22 with a group of about 20 core members, in order to assess interest, elect officers, and discuss ideas for future meetings. About five months later, the society hosted its inaugural meeting on October 17 on the topic of "Wagner in Toronto—the Past and the Future" at which several committee members spoke. By December 8, they had drummed up enough interest in the society to advertise in the *Globe and Mail*, a meeting with guest speaker Boyd Neel, long time Dean of the Royal

[42] Zena Cherry, "After a Fashion: Ring of Wagner Fans to Meet," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), January 6, 1976, 11. The article states that "as far as they can find out, this is the first one in North America." Though they were almost certainly the first in Canada, there were prior examples in the US. Hannah Chan, for example, documents the formation of a "Verein" (union) dedicated to Wagner as early as 1872 in New York. More recently, the American Wagner Society was founded in 1973 or 1974 by Arthur Clifton, beating out the Toronto society by a couple of years. Hannah Chan, "'Der Ring des Nibelungen' in the New World: The American Performance and Reception of Wagner's Cycle, 1850-1903" (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois, 2014), 65; Trevor Jensen, "Arthur U. Clifton Jr.: 1944-2008," *Chicago Tribune*, November 26, 2008, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2008-11-26-0811250533-story.html.

Conservatory of Music at the University of Toronto. According to the founding treasurer, the meeting took place

> at the newish lecture theatre of the Faculty of Library Science (now the Faculty of Information) attached to Robarts Library. The lighting wasn't working, so an engineer was sent for. When he retreated to find the source of the problem, Neel referred to him as [the dwarf] Alberich entering the realm of the Nibelungs [from the Ring cycle].

Over the following year, the society invited a number of guest lecturers, many of them faculty at the University of Toronto, such as William Blissett, Father Owen Lee and Carl Morey. Programming featured a mix of recordings, presentations by various members, and film viewings, before expanding to feature talks with various opera professionals.

The society continued to thrive over the ensuing years. Meetings were also moved from the Library Science lecture theatre to the George H. Locke Public Library on Yonge Street; they hosted a concert with mezzo-soprano Jean MacPhail to celebrate the society's first anniversary; Canadian heldentenor Jon Vickers was appointed as honorary president; they became officially registered with Bayreuth, allowing members to access tickets for the yearly festival.[43] Initial membership hovered around 50, but by 1978, the society had grown to 235.[44] And in 1977, the society even hosted Friedelind Wagner, granddaughter of Richard Wagner.[45] Though the dedication of Dorothy Graziani undoubtedly played a role in the society's success, two other factors likely contributed to its swift growth: first, the one-hundredth anniversary of the Ring cycle. To celebrate the occasion, Bayreuth

---

[43] Bayreuth eventually stopped offering ticket allocations to Wagner Societies—because of this, the Toronto Wagner Society has opted not to pay affiliation fees.

[44] O'Toole, "Finding the Ultimate Fix in the Strains of Wagner."

[45] Zena Cherry, "After a Fashion: Churches Back Program," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 11, 1977, 11.

mounted a centennial Ring directed by Patrice Chéreau and conducted by Pierre Boulez. The production was subsequently televised worldwide in 1979 and 1980, turning the Ring cycle into a global media event. Even in Toronto, the University of Toronto School of Continuing education hosted a multi-day Wagner seminar to mark the occasion.

Second: over the course of the '70s, the COC mounted six separate Wagner productions, only one of which was a repeat. This included stagings of three out of the four Ring cycle operas, in anticipation of a complete cycle first in 1975, and then 1976.[46] Not since the turn of the century did Torontonians have as many opportunities to listen to Wagner. This was a measure of the maturing opera scene in not only Toronto but Canada as a whole: twenty years prior, the country had yet to establish a permanent professional company; by the 1970s most major cities boasted at least one operatic association. Still, while no longer a scrappy upstart, the COC, like several other opera companies, struggled with finding sustainable funding models. Flipping through issues of *Opera Canada* from the decade—which until 1976 was subsidized by the COC—reveals discussions over the role of public money in opera, and fundraising calls evoking the spectre of inflation. It is perhaps not a surprise then that the plan for a Ring cycle never came to fruition. Writing in *Opera Canada*, director Herman Geiger-Torel vents his frustration over being criticized for being too conservative, as he juggles the pressure to stage quality productions with mounting costs:

> We are planning to implement a split season with the presentation of Wagner's entire Ring cycle, together with other Wagner works, in the spring of 1976—a Wagner Festival in commemoration of the 100th birthday of the first Ring cycle at Bayreuth (1876). [...] We would like, we would like, we would like... All this costs much, very much money. Extra money! It

[46] John Kraglund, "Selection of Wagner Is Symbolic," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), September 8, 1973.

> cannot be achieved by 'holding the line.' The financial limitations under which we are presently operating are stifling our imagination, our courage and our vitality.[47]

By the following year, there are no more mentions of any plans to stage a Ring cycle.

In the *Globe and Mail*, Geiger-Torel cites the lack of government grants as the primary reason for the postponement of the planned Wagner Festival.[48] In truth, he was also under increased pressure to rein in deficits. Despite strong attendances, going over budget had become an "old story at the COC": but as Morey and Shabas write, "few expected the deficit to mount to over $100,000 by spring [of 1974] because of miscalculated sales tax, costly trucking of scenery, expensive costumes ($45,000 over budget for Boris alone), excessive stagehand costs, and expensive publicity and advertising."[49] As a result, the board of directors instilled strict budgetary controls for the subsequent seasons: instead of the mini festival envisioned previously, 1976 instead saw a remounting of *Die Walküre* so stripped down that Murray Laufer, the principal designer, asked to have his name removed from the credits.[50] Under duress from the COC board of directors, Geiger-Torel announced that he would retire at the end of the season. He was, however, not to make it to his retirement: he passed away on October 6, 1976, from a heart attack on his way to deliver a lecture to the Toronto Wagner Society on the subject of *Die Walküre*.

In addition, reception of these Wagner operas was mixed. Several reviewers found it difficult to follow the story as a result of cuts made to the score, hearing the operas out of sequence, and the

---

[47] Herman Geiger-Torel, "C.O.C Report," *Opera Canada*, 1973, 26.

[48] John Kraglund, "COC Looks Financially Healthy, but Torel Has a List of Worries," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), April 5, 1974.

[49] Schabas and Morey, *Opera Viva*, 118. Schabas and Morey do not actually mention any plans for a 1970s Ring Cycle in their history of the COC. I suspect that though Geiger-Torel outlines his ambitions several times in *Opera Canada* he never received approval from the board of directors.

[50] Schabas and Morey, *Opera Viva*, 125.

as yet unsolved challenges of listening to an opera without knowing the language.[51] When I asked one founding member whether the COC efforts at mounting a Ring cycle might have inspired the creation of the Toronto Wagner Society, they stated bluntly "that would have DE-inspired anyone": by their accounts, the singing of Siegfried by Karl-Joseph Hering was not up to the task. Still, despite this turbulent history, the increased availability of opera—even in less-than-ideal form—in Toronto coupled with the Ring centenary likely heightened interest in Richard Wagner, making membership to the TWS an attractive proposition. In the ensuing decades, the society moved to the Arts and Letters Club where it remained until the advent of COVID-19 forced a pivot to digital meetings on Zoom. The TWS currently meets about once a month from September to May and publishes a sporadic newsletter. Recent programming has largely focused on interviewing singers and directors, with a lesser emphasis on scholarly presentations. Like many fan organizations, the society is primarily kept alive by a core group of enthusiasts. The most dedicated members will travel the world in search of Wagner productions: many others, however, are content to attend meetings when possible, enjoying sharing their love of opera with others.

Mapping the Territory

As part of my research, I had the opportunity to conduct one-on-one interviews with several members as well as attend meetings. This forms the core of my dissertation. In particular, I explore how members of the Toronto Wagner Society incorporate opera into their lives and what Wagner means to them. As part of my argument, I highlight how carefully cordoning off the aficionado from the fan risks reproducing the unequal cultural power dynamics already at play: fandom of high culture is different in nature, not in kind, to fandom of popular culture. Using as a framework cultural

[51] Schabas and Morey, *Opera Viva*, 105–6.

techniques—which falls under the larger umbrella of German media theory—I argue for a networked model of fandom, with reception taking form in the nexus of audience, media and text. My research has three goals: first, to uncover the "cultish tendencies" within the works of Wagner, that is to begin to unpack the qualities embodied by Wagner and his oeuvre that might have predisposed them to become the centre of such a dedicated fan base; second, to better comprehend the activities of both historical and modern Wagner fans and to situate them in relation to other media fandoms; and third, to investigate how media, as used by both Wagner and fans, might shape reception by enabling and constraining certain modes of consumption. By viewing Wagner through these three lens I argue that the cult of Wagner is not so much an anomaly, but part of larger patterns of intense textual love, with practices that cross the line between the popular and the classical and which have been shaped by emerging media practice.

My research exists in the intersection of three primary disciplinary boundaries: Media Studies, Fandom Studies, and, to a lesser extent, musicology. From Media Studies, I take my principal theoretical lens, which I lay out in chapter 1. In particular, I use the framework of cultural techniques—primarily as elaborated by Bernhard Siegert[52]—in order to conceptualize a networked model of fan and fandom, one which incorporates both people and things. From fandom studies, I borrow not so much a methodology as an ethos: that is, to take seriously the study of love of media. I also bring from fandom studies a desire to challenges the longstanding divide between so-called high and low culture and to see beyond pathological narratives of audiences. Though my research will refer to numerous fan scholars throughout these pages, the work of Matt Hills has been particularly

[52] Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); Bernhard Siegert, "Cultural Techniques: Or the End of the Intellectual Postwar Era in German Media Theory," trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 48–65, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413488963.

influential to my own. I especially appreciate Hills' attention to the complicated push and pull between commoditization and the agency of fans, and his willingness to theorize the fan experience.[53] Finally, my background in musicology, and of course, my subject matter of Wagner means that I regularly draw from the work of musicologists. There is no central scholar I can point to here, but I see my work as an evolution of what has been variously called "new musicology" or "critical musicology": a wave of scholarship starting in the late 1980s which challenged the primacy of the Western musical canon and insisted that music was much more than simply notes on a page.[54] As such, my research is concerned with music, yes, but as a complex assemblage of people, meaning and things, rather than an immutable platonic ideal.

In the following pages, I explore the contours of Toronto Wagnerism, placing at its centre the experience of contemporary fans. The previous scholarship on Wagner and his devotees is immense and as such I will not attempt here to provide a summary: those who are interested in exploring the literature further can peruse Michael Saffle's excellent Wagner research guide, which provides annotated references for a wide variety of topics;[55] or Alex Ross' whirlwind tour of Wagner's reception in *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* and the accompanying work cited and bibliographic essay available on his website which, while not academic in nature, is the most extensive

[53] Hills' contributions to fan scholarship are vast, but I have found myself returning again and again to the following volume: Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[54] For a summary of the major outlines of new musicology see Robert Fink, "Elvis Everywhere: Musicology and Popular Music Studies at the Twilight of the Canon," *American Music* 16, no. 2 (1998): 135–79, https://doi.org/10.2307/3052563.

[55] Michael Saffle, *Richard Wagner: A Research and Information Guide*, 2nd ed., Routledge Music Bibliographies (New York: Routledge, 2010). I would especially direct readers to chapter 14 which catalogues literature relating to the reception.

synthesis of previous research on the composer's influence to date.[56] Instead, I would like to highlight a handful of trends and how they relate to my own work.

First, though I do not dwell on questions of national identity, this dissertation adopts geography as a major limiter of scope. This is in line with the ample literature which frames reception in terms of national context. Canada provides an interesting case study as a country which has only in the last couple of decades firmly established itself on the international opera stage and with a less developed tradition of Wagnerism. Unlike French[57] or even American[58] reception, for which there have already been sizable contributions, research on Canada has been limited to two essays: Carl Morey's work on Toronto and Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre on Montreal, both largely limited to documented reception and performances prior to 1914. Morey's essay in particular pointed me to the wealth of articles and reviews available in the archives of both the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*, the first of which forms the foundation of the second half of chapter 4. Though not focused exclusively on Wagner, I would be remiss here not to also note Dorith Cooper's dissertation *Opera in Montreal and Toronto*, covering the years 1783–1980, which documents a number of Wagner performances in the

---

[56] Alex Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2020); Alex Ross, "Wagnerism," The Rest Is Noise, accessed April 6, 2022, https://www.therestisnoise.com/wagnerism/.

[57] French Wagnerism is by far the most researched context of reception. See for example Myriam Chimènes, "Élites sociales et pratiques wagnériennes: de la propagande au snobisme," in *Von Wagner zum Wagnérisme: musik, literatur, kunst, politik*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Manuela Schwartz (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1999), 155–97; Thomas S. Grey, "Eine Kapitulation: Aristophanic Operetta as Cultural Warfare in 1870," in *Richard Wagner and His World*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 87–122; Kelly J. Maynard, "Strange Bedfellows at the *Revue Wagnérienne*: Wagnerism at the Fin de Siècle," *French Historical Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): 633–59, https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-3113839; Mrozowicki Michal Piotrà, *Le musicien de l'avenir 1813-1883*, Richard Wagner et sa réception en France 1 (Gdask, Poland: Presses Universitaires de Gdansk, 2013); Gerald D. Turbow, "Art and Politics: Wagnerism in France," in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. David Clay Large, William Weber, and Anne Dzamba Sessa (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 134–66; Noel Verzosa, "Wagner Reception and French Modernity before and after Baudelaire: The Case of the *Revue Wagnérienne*," *Music Research Forum* 22 (2007): 1–33.

[58] American Wagnerism has not been the subject of as many authors as French, but includes the following two major works: Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Chan, "'Der Ring Des Nibelungen' in the New World."

city and gives my own research much needed context. To my knowledge, there are no major scholarly works which provide a survey of opera in Toronto after this period—the closest would be Morey and Schabas' history of the Canadian Opera Company which covers the company's first 50 years.[59] Though my own research is focused on Wagnerism, rather than Toronto opera as a whole, I see my contribution as filling in some of the gaps in the knowledge of developments of opera in the city since the 1980s.

Second, in contrast to Hannah Chan's study of American reception, though I do touch briefly on critical reception in the press, this is not the principal concern of my study. I also do not discuss Wagner's influence on other artists.[60] Instead, I am principally concerned how audiences might encounter and understand Wagner both within the theatre and out. Previous studies have treated Wagnerism in the past tense, rather than an ongoing project, sidelining the voices of contemporary fans: yet Wagnerism, like opera in general, is capable of adapting and evolving to a wide variety of social contexts.[61] To find research on modern opera audiences we must turn to other disciplines, such as sociology. Similar to Claudio Benzecry's ethnography of Argentinian opera lovers, I am both looking to centre the experience of modern fans in my research as well as move past Pierre Bourdieu's

---

[59] Schabas and Morey, *Opera Viva*.

[60] Examples of this type of study include Michael Allis, "The Diva and the Beast: Susan Strong and the Wagnerism of Aleister Crowley," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 50, no. 4 (2014): 380–404, https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqu026; William Blissett, "Bernard Shaw: Imperfect Wagnerite," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (January 1958): 185–99, https://doi.org/10.3138/utq.27.2.185; Marie-Bernadette Fantin-Epstein, "Richard Wagner - Emile Zola: analogies et correspondances," in *Les cahiers de littératures: Textes, images, musique*, ed. Andrée Mansau and Louis Cabanès (Toulouse: Université de Toulouse II, 1992), 8; Theresa Muir, "Wagner in England: Four Writers before Shaw" (PhD Dissertation, City University of New York, 1997); Mary Simonson, "Dancing the Future, Performing the Past: Isadora Duncan and Wagnerism in the American Imagination," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65, no. 2 (2012): 511–55, https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2012.65.2.511.

[61] Vlado Kotnik, "The Adaptability of Opera: When Different Social Agents Come to Common Ground," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 44, no. 2 (2013): 303–42.

metaphor of opera as cultural capital.[62] Yet despite the seemingly obvious fit, none of the authors who discuss modern fans have studied opera audiences through the lens of either fandom or media studies. These works have also tended to engage with opera fandom within a narrow temporal setting. Though these focused perspectives have yielded important observations, they ignore the role that both specific composers and their works play in the formation of taste and the diversity to be found among opera fans. By choosing Wagner as the common denominator, it allows us to track the development of a single fandom over the course of a prolonged time. What is missing then from the literature is a sustained study of the fandom of a single composer, and which puts these adherents of high culture into dialogue with work previously done on popular media audiences and fans. This is the project which I am undertaking.

In chapter 1, I outline my method and methodology for the rest of the project. Taking as a starting metaphor the "field guide to fandom," I begin by sketching out a definition of fan and fandom. In particular, I explore two principal tensions in defining fandom: first that between individual affect vs. communitarian models of fandom; second between fandom as praxis vs. fandom as identity. To resolve these tensions, I introduce a networked model of fandom. To make this move, I propose a guiding theoretical framework of cultural techniques, which requires a shift from a focus of ontology towards praxis. Cultural techniques allow us to move away from the question of what is a fan towards asking how the differentiation between fan and non-fandom arose in the first place. Research

---

[62] Claudio Benzecry, *The Opera Fanatic: Ethnography of an Obsession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); As a prime example of a Bourdieuan analysis of opera see Jörg Rössel, "Cultural Capital and the Variety of Modes of Cultural Consumption in the Opera Audience," *The Sociological Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2011): 83–103, https://doi.org/10/fxcsfn; Interestingly, Bourdieu has cast less of a shadow on research on historical reception. See Jane F. Fulcher, "Symbolic Domination and Contestation in French Music: Shifting the Paradigm from Adorno to Bourdieu," in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, ed. Victoria Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 312–29; Lindenberger, "On Opera and Society."

on cultural techniques has often neglected the human subject in favour of the technological, which betrays the flat ontology touted as one of its key advantages. In order to integrate ethnography into cultural techniques, I use as my model Bruno Latour and actor network theory and argue for a multi-methods approach to the study of fandom. In the remaining balance of the chapter, I outline my research process, with a goal to make visible the messiness of academic research before finally reflecting on my own relationship to Wagnerism and my how-I-chose-my-dissertation-topic story mirrors the typical outlines of becoming-a-fan-stories.

In the second chapter, I focus on the modern fan. At the core of this portion of my dissertation are my interviews with members of the Toronto Wagner Society. I ask three key questions: who, how and why. In reality, the three categories are not mutually exclusive; more specifically, I see the category of "how" as the generative force behind the other two. Still, by approaching each in turn, it allows us to map the terrain where Wagnerism operates. I begin with "who." Electing to forgo the exercise of tallying demographic traits, I instead think of how certain categories matter in different ways. Specifically, I focus on a key concern raised several times in my interviews: aging. Rather than strictly a biological process, I argue for understanding aging as a dynamic cultural technique. Age inflects fandom, instead of acting as a prerequisite for love of opera. In "how," I explore how Wagner is woven into the lives of participants, with a specific focus on the technologies which enable and constrain practice. I also note the tendency for Wagner fans to be affirmational rather than transformative in their engagement with Wagner, which I argue is a product of the performative nature of the genre which generates renewal through performance. Finally, in "why," I examine the motivation behind loving Wagner. I begin with a consideration of Wagner the man vs. his music, and how the tension plays out in reception. Though fans keep Wagner himself at arm's length due to his known antisemitism, they find within the music and narrative important kernels of truth. I also explore the contention

that Italian and German opera lovers are fundamentally divided between singers vs. production: in reality, I argue, the boundaries are much more fluid than at first glance, with singing playing a crucial role in reception. In addition, debates around contentious productions are a key source of pleasure for many Wagner fans and an important reason why fans will return to opera again and again. Through my exploration of these three facets of Wagnerism, I demonstrate how reception is produced as part of networks of actors.

Chapter 3 looks to take seriously the compelling nature of Wagner's music by unpacking the dialectical relationship between Wagner as work and Wagner as overwhelming. In my conversation, fans often spoke of the intellectual challenge of Wagner and the joy in "working" to understand and appreciate the music. However, alongside this rationalized active account of opera consumption, I also uncover a secondary thread of affective abandon to the music. Taking inspiration from Adorno's claim that Wagner's music prefigures the rise of the cultural industry in the twentieth century, I argue that Wagner presents a microcosm of the "Great Divide," that is, the debates between high and low culture and active and passive listening which continue to play out in discussions of reception to this day. This dialect, I contend, highlights countervailing claims of agency, with audiences oscillating between the role of subject and object. Key to my argument is the cultural techniques contention that agency resides not just in people but also in things. Such a distributed model of agency means that it is imperative to consider the role of Wagner in producing fandom. The second part of this chapter attempts to do just this by investigating some of the cultish tendencies embedded into the work. To do so, I take as my starting points the "family resemblances" of cult media proposed by Matt Hills: auteurism, hyperdiegesis and endlessly deferred narratives. By exploring how these family resemblances play out in Wagner's music and rhetoric, I argue that music calls into action both the being and the agency of the listener.

In my final chapter, I use as my starting point the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic—and resulting explosion in streaming opera online—to reflect on how media of access can shape reception. At its core then, this chapter is concerned with the materiality of opera. Drawing from the work of Michel Serres, I propose the concept of the parasite as a way of unpacking how the material realities of opera unfold. Parasite refers to a third element—"a mediate, a middle, an intermediary"[63]—between sender and receiver which sets the stage for communication to take place. Importantly, the parasite is not a neutral entity: it is transformative by default. I relate the concept of the parasite to that of the paratext, materials which surround but are not officially part of a text. Precisely because of the difficulty of accessing live opera on demand, paratext hold the potential to transform how we understand Wagner. In the second half of the chapter, I listen for moments of noise in reception. I start with exploring the role of the theatre as host to opera. To do so, I examine the case of Bayreuth, Wagner's purpose-made theatre and how the physical theatre transforms the listening experience. Finally, I consider Wagner's reception in Toronto from 1874 to 1875 through the lens of the *Globe*. This portion is largely focused on the role of newspapers in Wagner reception but also widens to theorize how other pre-recording technologies have facilitated Wagner's migration over the Atlantic such as sheet music and the telegraph. Through these media, we can not only glimpse the prehistory of Wagner in the city but also how his music has been continually fragmented and reworked.

[63] Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 63.

Chapter 1

On Flora and Fauna and Fandom: From a Field guide of Ontology to Assemblages

Fans love things. Television shows, comic books, films or even celebrities or sports. They engage with their affective objects in numerous ways such as discussing and critiquing endless minutiae, seeking out obscure paratext and filling in with their own creations any remaining semiotic gaps. When fans congregate in large enough numbers, we invoke the collective noun of fandom. There is also an urge to label, to draw a line in the sand to decree who is in and who is out. *You* are a fan, or *I* am a fan, but so-and-so is or is not. We invoke the phenotype of the fan with ease, as if they are yet another flora or fauna which can be neatly categorized and taxonomized. But are fans and their fandom real? The question might seem deliberately obtuse, but though we might all profess to be able to spot one in the wild, a closer look at the requirements for identifying exactly what is and what isn't a fan proves a thorny question.

How much do you have to like something before you can call yourself a fan? What rituals do you have to partake in? Does entry into fandom require active engagement with community or can it be a solo enterprise? Quickly, the diligent researcher, eager to pin down their "object of study," realizes that there is no field guide with an easy-to-follow checklist. Even sticking to criteria of self-identification becomes problematic, as the label of fan is often discarded by some groups as a matter of principle rather than one of practice. Indeed, one can imagine a creature that behaves much like a fan—performing close textual analyses, arguing about authorial intent, attending conferences, writing analyses and circulating them among like-minded individuals—but who insists on other labels, such as

critic, connoisseur or even (and here things start to get a bit uncomfortable) the academic.[1] The definition becomes even more complicated when we consider that the types of behaviours that were once understood as the exclusive purview of fans have, with the assistance of digital technologies and the increased fracturing of the media landscape, become increasingly mainstreamed and coveted by media producers as a way to increase audience engagement.[2] In addition, usage of the term "fan" is also at times anachronistic, having only surfaced in the late nineteenth century. Does continuity in practice justify retroactive attribution? While it might seem that these questions are simply in service of satisfying our taxonomic itch, I propose that it is worth a moment of pause, as how we categorize our objects of study ultimately influences how we study them. What then is a researcher to do? Do we follow established nominative practices and carefully cordon off fans to be studied separately from an equally amorphous "general audience"?[3] Do we accept the hopelessly vague statement that fans are people who love things but that not all people who love things are fans? What began as a concise field guide to fandom quickly threatens to descend into mystical statements that one will know a fan once one sees one!

---

[1] For an insightful discussion on the frequent "othering" of fans by academics, and the sometimes uncomfortable similarities between the two see Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 1–20; See also, for a delightful account of academic "theory" fans Alan Mckee, "The Fans of Cultural Theory," in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray et al., 1st ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 88–97.

[2] Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, eds., "Introduction: Why Still Study Fans?," in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 1–26; Philip M. Napoli, *Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Sonia Livingstone, "The Challenge of Changing Audiences," *European Journal of Communication* 19, no. 1 (2004): 75–86, https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323104040695; Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

[3] For an example of how our understanding of "the audience" has evolved see Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

There are two principal tensions at play. The first lies with the decision to either define a fan in relation to their association with certain communities or as an individual affective experience. Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington note that the initial wave of fandom studies took the former approach:[4] Thus, in his seminal book *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins distinguishes between the fan and follower, drawing a line between the explicit and communitarian forms of fandom he studies versus the siloed fans of *Dallas* described by Ien Ang.[5] Francesca Coppa argues that this division remains useful as it emphasizes how fandom is not only an inherently social enterprise, but is also tied to the construction of self-identity.[6] In addition, thinking of fandom as a community can be a political statement, a way to resist the encroaching tentacles of industry into fannish territory. For Coppa, broadening fan studies to include those for whom fandom is not a way of life represents not so much a necessary corrective to an original oversight, but rather, a change of subject altogether.[7] Yet where does one draw the line? As the internet continues to lower the bar to participation—offering opportunities for fans to "lurk" on community message boards or the ability to like or subscribe to various profiles and posts—I would argue that it is increasingly unclear at what point one ceases to be a follower and instead becomes a fan. This definition also risks denying the label to those who might, through circumstances of geography or lack of access to the internet, find themselves without knowledge of a wider community.

Contra Coppa, Sandvoss proposes that we stick with an affective definition, suggesting that "the regular emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text" is grounds

---

[4] Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, *Fandom*.

[5] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*, 20th Anniversary edition (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[6] Francesca Coppa, "Fuck Yeah, Fandom Is Beautiful," *The Journal of Fandom Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 73–82, https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs.2.1.73_1.

[7] Coppa, "Fuck Yeah, Fandom Is Beautiful," 74.

enough for the classification of fan.[8] In this formulation, fan studies moves from the collective to the personal, a hallmark of the third wave of fan studies.[9] This orientation not only gives stronger deference to the ability of individuals to claim the identity of fan, but also works to reclaim the excess of emotionality and obsession which has on occasion been downplayed in fan studies to get away from earlier, more pathological assessments of fans both in the media and in academia.[10] As Lawrence Grossberg sees it, being a fan simply means that it matters, producing a type of affect that "always returns some interest on the investment through a variety of empowering relations."[11] For many, indulging in a television program or a certain band in a private setting is *precisely* what lies at the core of what it means to be a fan.[12] Without this personal affective experience, fandom quickly becomes obsolete. Here too, however, there are hiccups. Karen Hellekson, for example, argues that "fans who, say, merely watch a particular TV show are not actually fans, who by this definition must actively engaging [sic] in fandom. They are just people who watch a show; this is not an expression of the fan experience."[13] As she points out, thinking of fans as atomized individuals ignores that for many being a fan is foremost a communitarian experience and risks diluting the definition of fandom as a unique mode of consumption. Why claim you are studying fans at all?

The second tension in defining fandom lies in whether to think of fans and fandom as categories of identity or descriptions of a set of activities or feelings. Certainly, many fans do use fandom as

---

[8] Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 7–8.

[9] Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, "Introduction: Why Still Study Fans?"

[10] See for example how "Trekkies" were frequently portrayed as feminized "brainless consumers" with few social skills in Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 9–12.

[11] Lawrence Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 50–65.

[12] C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby, "*Soap Fans* Revisited," in *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, ed. Paul Booth (Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018).

[13] Karen Hellekson, "The Fan Experience," in *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, ed. Paul Booth (Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018).

a means for identity formation, a point made explicit by the many names that are claimed and disclaimed by fans of different media texts.[14] To think of fandom as *only* a category of identity, however, risks limiting our scope of study in unhelpful ways. For example, as Joli Jensen points out, the label of "fan" is often projected onto an "other" to denote pathological love, upholding cultural hierarchies between the deviant fans of mass culture and the more rational "aficionado" of high culture—this, despite the many similarities in activities.[15] To cut off definitions of fans and fandom to exclude those who do not explicitly identify as such not only fails to recognize the continuity in activity between the two, but also serves to potentially re-enforce the unequal division that these labels create. On the flip side, criteria based on what one does, once again run into the problem of where to draw the line. Nor can any list ever claim to be exhaustive: fans are forever finding new and innovative ways of interacting with media. In addition, not every activity means the same thing to the same person. Narrowing our definition to set activities ignores intent and the pleasure—or displeasure—that can arise when we perform them.

Perhaps then we must resign ourselves that the field guide to fandom will forever remain unwritable. Matt Hills suggests as much, arguing that "[a]ttempts to define fandom, or cult media, in this way make a potentially fatal error; they assume that by fixing terms in place they can isolate an 'object of study.'"[16] Paul Booth concurs, linking the struggle to the fate of the discipline as a whole: "To define fan studies is to (artificially) define the fan; a limitation of disciplining fan studies would therefore be imposing an (already hypothesized) identity of the fan onto the investigative subject."[17] In

---

[14] David Peyron, "Fandom Names and Collective Identities in Contemporary Popular Culture," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 28 (2018), https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2018.1468.

[15] Jensen, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization."

[16] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, xi.

[17] Paul Booth, *Digital Fandom 2.0: New Media Studies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Peter Lang, 2017), 233.

short, if fan studies is to continue to flourish, we cannot be too insistent on clamping down on a singular definition. I would contend, however, that this does not mean that we should ignore the issue altogether. Fan studies, as argued by Evans and Stasi, has often relegated discussions of methodology to the sideline, which risks "taking for granted the way the discipline is organized, which raises concerns of single-sightedness and forecloses possibilities for the future of knowledge."[18] In short, implicit assumptions of ontology can have unforeseen consequences.

How then might we proceed? Hills seeks to resolve this dilemma by seeing fandom as performative, "an identity which is (dis-)claimed, and which performs cultural work."[19] The question then shifts from identification, to thinking about what it means to assume the identity of fan in certain times and places. Later, he refines the concept of performativity first proposed by Judith Butler to one of *performative consumption* to emphasize how fan identities, which are formed through consumption, oscillate between moments of willful action and non-volitional citation; That is, "the cult body is neither a product of an entirely volitional subject nor is it the product of such a subject trapped in a total consumer code."[20] This approach moves fandom away from something one *is* to something one *does* without ignoring identity altogether. It is also flexible enough to encompass both solitary and communitarian forms of fandom, thus responding to both of the tensions at play in defining the fan.

Yet this still leaves an important question unanswered: where do these identities come from in the first place? Hills, in remarking how fans are often at their most performative when reflecting on

---

[18] Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi, "Desperately Seeking Methodology: New Directions in Fan Studies Research," *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 11, no. 2 (2014): 20; A recent collection which seeks to address this gap is Melissa A. Click and Suzanne Scott, eds., *Routledge Companion to Media Fandom* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[19] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, xi.

[20] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 131.

the beginnings of their fandoms, suggests that "[f]andom, perhaps unlike gender, possesses a moment of 'emergence' rather than always already being citational."[21] While it might be true that becoming a fan marks the beginning of a new, non-iterative identity *for that individual* I would contend that becoming a fan is never an identity claimed (whether willfully or not) in a vacuum, even when a fan remains in relative isolation from larger communities. The issue here is that despite Hills' complications of Butlerian-performativity, he does not follow the line of reasoning to its logical conclusion by moving away from a subject-centred approach. I would thus concur with Hills that fandom is a process rather than a "thing," but rather than performativity, I propose that fan identities and communities are better understood by adopting a networked model of fandom.

Thus, like Hills,[22] Booth,[23] and Jenkins and Tulloch,[24] I conceptualize fandom as a community organized around a common interest, but one which is multiple and constantly in flux. Drawing from cultural techniques, I propose a networked model of fandom, one conceived as an assemblage in which "signs, instruments, and human practices consolidate into durable symbolic systems capable of articulating distinctions within and between cultures."[25] Though not a concrete entity, fandom is thus real in the sense that its structures, communities and practices engender real effects for those who engage with them, in which meaning is both produced and circulated. In turn, fandom—or indeed, any distinct audience—is generated through the spaces created by these networks. In this sense I am also inspired by Bruno Latour, who argues that the social is not a material object, a thing that we can touch, study and manipulate, but rather an ever-changing set of relationships that connects

---

[21] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 160.

[22] Hills, *Fan Cultures*.

[23] Booth, *Digital Fandom 2.0*.

[24] John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[25] Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, "After Kittler: On the Cultural Techniques of Recent German Media Theory," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 67, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413488962.

actors in often surprising and unpredictable ways.[26] Like Hills' model, this allows us to account for differing levels of engagement and to accommodate communities of all shapes and sizes. To adopt a networked model of fandom thus means to embrace its dynamic nature and to resist the urge to impose order ahead of time.

If a fandom is an assemblage, what then of the fan? Here cultural techniques insist that seeking to pin down the fan and assign it a neat label is beside the point. Instead, we must ask how the difference between actors is produced in the first place, seeking the "*a priori* of a given technical and cultural system."[27] As a consequence, cultural techniques also works to dissolve the idea of a fully sovereign subject by pointing to the way that the properties of media and things determine "the scope of the subject's field of action."[28] This is because under this approach, non-human actors such as music, text, technology, and the foundational cultural techniques of listening, not only enable but actively work to produce this difference through specific configurations. The framework thus allows us to move beyond asking exactly *what* is a fan and instead ask *how* the concept of the fan is differentiated from a non-fan through various cultural techniques. While I am favouring a definition of the fan predicated on praxis rather than ontology, this is not to suggest that we do away with identity altogether: rather, I propose that it is through our embeddedness in these networks that underpin fandom that identity is made possible. From this point of view, identity is not a fixed property of a given actor: it is instead continually enacted through a series of cultural techniques. Adopting a networked model allows for the fact that how an individual fan identifies with fandom(s) can operate on a large

---

[26] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[27] Geoghegan, "After Kittler," 70.

[28] Cornelia Vismann, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty," trans. Ilinca Iurascu, *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 84, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413496851.

spectrum, from casual appreciation, to forum lurking, to full-blown public participation. Finally, it helps sidestep some of the debates on active vs. passive audiences that have often plagued audience studies by proposing a value-free dialectic between fan and media, mediated through cultural techniques.

Why fandom studies has favoured subject-centred approaches is in part to do with the roots of the discipline. Fandom studies has long been interdisciplinary in nature, or as Sam Ford calls it, an "'Undisciplined' Discipline"[29] emerging as a sort of "melting pot area, with scholars coming from disciplines including English literature, anthropology, sociology, psychology, film studies, communication studies, gender studies, and media and cultural, along with these disciplines' attendant methodological perspectives."[30] As fandom studies has steadily gained legitimacy and established spaces for itself within the academy, with dedicated conferences, journals and programs, there has been increased awareness of the fact that "the formation of a discipline is always political—disciplinary functionality is deployed for particular reasons, in particular spaces, and with particular incentives."[31] For some, the growing fear is that fandom studies might stagnate and ossify as it becomes formalized. This would at first seem to suggest that the discipline was from its inception a methodologically open field. Yet I would argue that this perhaps overly romanticizes the field's beginnings. To keep fandom studies dynamic, we need to think about how its intellectual lineages have privileged certain methodologies and epistemologies over others and how we might begin to press beyond them. Thus, though fan studies continues to be largely multidisciplinary, it is not infinite in its approaches, nor has this ever been the case.

---

[29] Sam Ford, "Fan Studies: Grappling with an 'undisciplined' Discipline," *The Journal of Fandom Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 53–71, https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs.2.1.53_1.

[30] Evans and Stasi, "Desperately Seeking Methodology," 6.

[31] Booth, *Digital Fandom 2.0*, 227.

What is more, I argue that these legacies have led to methodologies that are largely subject-centred, rather than the networked model of fandom that I am proposing. As Evans and Stasi argue, the seminal texts of the field, such as Jenkins' *Textual Poachers,*[32] Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women,*[33] and Lewis' edited collection *The Adoring Audience,*[34] had already significantly tied fandom studies to a "methodological baggage" of "ethnography, textual analysis, and psychoanalysis."[35] Of the three, ethnography is perhaps the most widespread, with the goal of giving voice, and thus agency to fans. This stems from fandom studies' roots in cultural studies and the Birmingham School, where scholars such as Dick Hebdige, Angela McRobbie and Paul Willis employed ethnographic methodologies to great effect. Though it cannot be denied that this was in many ways a necessary corrective to both the historical silencing and pathologizing of the fan—especially in the case of the young women often at the centre of fan culture—ethnography used in isolation might close our eyes to the material contexts in which fandom is lived and subjectivities are articulated, ascribing too much agency to its subjects. By contrast, textual analysis risks substituting the fan in favour of the texts they produce and prioritizing those fans who are materially productive, a point I will return to in later chapters. More relevant to my argument for a networked model of fandom, textual analysis, with its singular emphasis on discourse, places an undue burden on language as the unique site of both meaning-making and formation of subjectivity. Finally, psychoanalysis, a structuralist approach to psychoanalysis, coming via its usage in film studies, is perhaps the methodology with the smallest footprint in fan studies. Evans and Stasi criticize the methodology for its underlying biological

---

[32] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 1992.

[33] Camille Bacon, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

[34] Lisa Lewis, *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[35] Evans and Stasi, "Desperately Seeking Methodology," 9.

essentialism as well as the positioning of the fan in a "spectator position, not a lived experience."[36] While psychoanalysis does find some sympathy with cultural techniques by emphasizing the ways that audiences are situated or positioned by media, the method through which psychoanalysis is typically deployed—textual analysis—once again ignores the effects of technology on the forming of subjectivity and can erase relevant cultural contexts.

As a discipline, then, Fandom studies, even when moving towards deconstructed subjectivities, has largely stopped short of a fully networked model. As an intrepid researcher in the world of fandom, I see this as an opportunity for growth. As Latour emphasizes, "groups are not silent things, but rather the provisional product of a constant uproar made by the millions of contradictory voices about what is a group and who pertains to what."[37] Rather than insist on firm boundaries, Latour argues that it is precisely within these zones of conflict that the most fruitful places of enquiry lay. To understand the fan, it becomes imperative to widen, not narrow, our scope. I would further argue that my metaphorical ditching of the field guide of fandom is not merely a project of semantics but rather has important implications for the types of research methods used. By paying attention to the voices and the actions of both the human and the non-human which form the assemblage we label as "fandom," we are forced to reconsider how best to document them. Instead of moving forward with our field guide of fandom in hand, let us proceed pencil at the ready, ready to sketch and diagram what we encounter in all its messy contradictions.

---

[36] Evans and Stasi, "Desperately Seeking Methodology," 12.
[37] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 31.

Cultural Techniques

If I have belaboured the point of (not) defining fandom, it is not only because a networked model of fandom provides a useful way of conceptualizing our object of study. It is also because the insights garnered from this somewhat arduous exercise—and the solution offered by the introduction of cultural techniques—point to a larger potential for methodological renewal. Throughout this project, the study of cultural techniques and the greater umbrella of German Media Theory provide both my methodological and theoretical lens for the study of Wagner fans. I would thus like to further explore the disciplinary contours of cultural techniques before reflecting on the implications for studying fans and how it might be expanded to include ethnographic methods.

Like many disciplinary turns, "cultural techniques"—or *kulturtechniken* in German—has an oft-repeated genesis story: that is, of the three separate entries into the German lexicon.[38] I will briefly partake in this ritual retelling as, as is often the case with language, the previous usages have seeped into the final one, and, to a degree, the three tracks still co-exist.[39] As Raymond Williams' reminds us, such an etymological exploration helps gives us a glimpse of vocabulary "as a shaping and reshaping, in real circumstances and from profoundly different and important points of view: a vocabulary to use, to find our own ways in, to change as we find it necessary to change it, as we go on making our own language and history." The term cultural techniques was coined in the nineteenth century to describe large-scale agricultural engineering projects such as irrigation and flood protection. *Kulture*, in this sense, hearkens back to its Latin roots of *colere*, "to cultivate." These types of

[38] Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, "Cultural Techniques: Preliminary Remarks," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 3–19, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413500828.

[39] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), xxxv. Perhaps unsurprisingly, "culture," the first half of cultural techniques, is the term which inspired Williams to write Keywords in the first place and which inspired he identifies as among the most complicated terms in the English language. William's definition of culture—including its agricultural roots—is relevant here, even if it forks into the territory of cultural studies, rather than media.

kulturtechniken have at first glance little to do with media theory. Yet already, this first entry hints at the continued enmeshment of the environmental and the technological, as well as the process of distinction between nature and culture, highlighted by its academic cousin.

Cultural techniques' second emergence is in the 1970s, when the term is used to describe the skills and aptitudes necessary to engage with various media, akin to what is sometimes referred to in English as "media competence" or "media literacy." This foregrounds the action-oriented nature of cultural techniques. In addition, as this second usage was stretched to include elementary skills such as reading and writing, it raised the question of which takes primacy: *Kulture* or *Technik*. That is, is technology an intruder into the human dominated realm of culture or do cultural techniques instead reveal, as Geoffrey Winthrop-Young suggests, that "there was a never a document of culture that was not also one of technology."[40] By drawing out these implications to their logical extremes, later theorists were able to address some of the perceived shortcomings of German media theory.

This brings us to the third entry, which took place in the early 2000s. Since the 1980s, German media theory had looked to use media as a general frame of reference, taking seriously the materiality of technology, and shifting away from "the representation of meaning to the conditions of representations."[41] Unlike much contemporary Anglo-American communication and media research, which tended to zero in on mass media and its role in the public sphere or the discourse-oriented approach of French theory, German media theory sought out the arcane and the archival, largely expelling the human in the process. It was particularly attentive to media which, through successive naturalization, no longer appeared technological at all. Though fruitful, German media theory hit several roadblocks as it entered the new millennium: a struggle to say much about new media; a tendency to

[40] Winthrop-Young, "Cultural Techniques," 6.
[41] Siegert, "Cultural Techniques," 2013, 50.

ignore non-Western technological contexts; and an unwillingness to take any political or ethical stances.[42] Repurposed cultural techniques emerged as a way to continue the interest in mundane technicity, but also reoriented the field towards praxis and allowed the re-entry of human agency into what had become a machine-dominated field.[43]

Building on cultural techniques' agricultural roots and the action-oriented definition of the second entry, cultural techniques, in the term's third incarnation, enlarged to include other symbolic forms beyond traditional media. What then are cultural techniques? In short, they are the "operative chains that precede the media concepts they generate."[44] At their most basic, they denote activities such as counting, which long preceded the formalization of numbers.[45] Cultural techniques often perform symbolic work at such an elementary level that they have a tendency to disappear. They are also often liminal: a door, for example, is neither inside nor outside but creates the distinction between the two.[46] What this means is two-fold: first, that cultural techniques describe "a more or less complex actor network that comprises technological objects as well as the operative chains they are part of and that configure or constitute them";[47] second, that our attention shifts "from ideas to techniques, from nouns to the specific steps in the operation" and "towards the execution of a particular act."[48] From here, there are several important implications which I'd like to touch upon.

To start, objects are viewed as capable actors in their own right, imbued with a certain amount of agency.[49] As a consequence, this requires a methodology that is sensitive to the material

---

[42] Geoghegan, "After Kittler," 68–59.
[43] Geoghegan, "After Kittler," 67.
[44] Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 2015, 11.
[45] Thomas Macho, "Second-Order Animals: Cultural Techniques of Identity and Identification," trans. Michael Wutz, *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 179, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413499189.
[46] Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 2015, 193.
[47] Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 2015, 11.
[48] Vismann, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty," 87.
[49] Vismann, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty."

conditions in which culture is produced. However, unlike earlier Kittler-inspired German Media Theory, the research of cultural techniques is positioned as post- rather than anti-hermeneutics, which allows room for meaning to emerge: "we can look at a door, for example, as *both* a material object and a symbolic thing."[50] As such, "[c]ulture is no longer a matter of monolithic immobility congealed in works, documents or monuments, but liquefies into our everyday practices with objects, symbols, instruments and machines.[51]" This duality returns the human to media research and abandons the ontological for the ontic. In addition, cultural techniques suggest a model of the collective which hinges on the continual assembling "of actors and objects, bodies and media, and not least of all symbolic orders."[52] The resulting assemblages are "dependent on constant stabilizations, on those 'processes of assembling,' in other words, that 'thinking in verbs' attempts to comprehend."[53] Cultural techniques, however, move beyond tools for modelling—rather their study is predicated on asking certain questions. How is identity produced and through what operations? What cultural techniques, both material and otherwise, are at play?

Though the concept of cultural techniques emerged in a German context and is most obviously indebted to Kittler, we can identify a number of other kindred spirits. The Toronto School, principally represented by Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis, has long been a point of reference for German media theory, with their focus on how media, rather than content, work to shape

---

[50] Bernhard Siegert, "Material World: An Interview with Bernhard Siegert," interview by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, *Artforum* 53, no. 10 (Summer 2015), https://www.artforum.com/print/201506/material-world-an-interview-with-bernhard-siegert-52281.

[51] Sybille Krämer and Horst Bredekamp, "Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques: Moving beyond Text," trans. Michael Wultz, *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 24, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413496287.

[52] Jörg Dünne et al., eds., "Introduction," in *Cultural Techniques: Assembling Spaces, Texts & Collectives* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 11, http://www-degruyter-com/view/title/550154.

[53] Dünne et al., "Introduction," 12–13. This use of the term "assemblage," though Deleuzian in origin, comes via Manuel De Landa and emphasizes its co-constitutive nature and the inseparability of the whole.

society.[54] More specifically, Liam Cole Young argues that within Innis' studies of trade and infrastructure, "we can also anachronistically observe a convergence of the original terrain-based definition of *Kulturtechniken* and its more recent media theoretical incarnation."[55] More recently, the work of Jonathan Sterne on the logistical media of the MP3 and accompanying *audile technique*, highlights a similar concern with the constant interchange between bodily techniques and technology.[56] In American scholarship, resonance can be found in posthumanist traditions, which bring together a "mixture of deconstruction, postcybernetics and critical animal studies" in the works of scholars such as Donna Haraway and David Wills.[57] Bernhard Siegert also acknowledges that cultural techniques are akin to Bruno Latour's "immutable mobiles," as "'hybrid objects' that connect matter and form via a discontinuity (a gap)."[58]

What then is new in this approach? First, the focus on techniques: this allows us to link together the ecological and cultural by considering how the material enables culture.[59] Second, rather than dissolving the difference between human, animal or machine, cultural techniques insists on the importance of asking how these differences are produced in the first place.[60] From a practical standpoint, cultural techniques provide me with a way of thinking through reception as an ongoing process

---

[54] For an in-depth exploration of the transatlantic exchange between Canadian and German media theory see Norm Friesen, ed., *Media Transatlantic: Developments in Media and Communication Studies between North American and German-Speaking Europe* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2016).

[55] Liam Cole Young, "Cultural Techniques and Logistical Media: Tuning German and Anglo-American Media Studies," *M/C Journal* 18, no. 2 (2015), https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.961.

[56] Young, "Cultural Techniques and Logistical Media."

[57] Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, "The Kultur of Cultural Techniques: Conceptual Inertia and the Parasitic Materialities of Ontologization," *Cultural Politics* 10, no. 3 (2014): 386, https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-2795741.

[58] Siegert, "Material World."

[59] Jussi Parikka, "Afterword: Cultural Techniques and Media Studies," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 150, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413501206.

[60] Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 2015, 8.

arising from the interactions of a multiplicity of actors. Though I am proposing cultural techniques as a general methodological approach to fandom, its features are particularly well suited to the study of Wagnerism, a phenomenon that has spanned multiple continents and almost 150 years. The resulting diachronic, rather than synchronic, approach highlights the ways fandom has been produced through changing technology and cultural configurations, by actors both human and non-human. As a consequence, cultural techniques provide me with a road map for integrating varied sources, from newsletter clippings, newsletters, and memoirs drawn from interviews, by insisting that they are all part of what constitute "Wagnerism." This connection to the archival allows us to establish lineages of practice while still giving us the ability to answer contemporary concerns. As to Wagnerism's high culture associations, cultural techniques also help me bridge the divide with more popular forms of reception by pointing to the shared cultural techniques at play.

Finally, cultural techniques do not demand that we envisage music as an ontological object: rather, they invite us to envision music as something which evolves through praxis, through the assembly of not only certain notes, instruments, or themes, but also venues, and audience. This responds to Clemens Risi's criticism of musicological analysis, which treats opera as a two-dimensional text. Opera, he argues, when experienced live, is ultimately a phenomenological event.[61] Cultural techniques are also not dissimilar to what Christopher Small terms "musicking."[62] In short, Small argues that we should not think of music as a static score, but rather as something that people do. As such, he expands the process of musicking to not only include the performers and audience, but also the material surroundings of performance venues and music stands, all of which enable and constrain

[61] Clemens Risi, "Opera in Performance: In Search of New Analytical Approaches," *The Opera Quarterly* 27, no. 2–3 (2011): 283–95, https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/kbr025.

[62] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998).

the musicking process. For my part, I see cultural techniques as a generalization of this approach, which allows us to expand reception beyond the moment of contact between audience and music.

Cultural Techniques as Methodology

As a lens of study, cultural techniques provide me with a way of conceptualizing fandom. This, however, leaves the question of what does research informed by cultural techniques look like? I will answer this in two ways: first by discussing how cultural techniques research has generally proceeded to date, and second, how I think it might be refined to better reflect its stated mandate. John Durham Peters, drawing from Elihu Katz, identifies three distinct streams of media studies research: the first, employing largely sociologically inflected methodologies, sees media as "givers of information"; the second, a coalition of critical paradigms, is largely concerned with ideology and power; and the third, employing a technological lens, focuses on "how media technologies shape underlying psychic and social order."[63] Research conducted in this final tradition often hinges on a series of (usually) historical case studies, assembled through meticulous archival work, that demonstrate the far-reaching impact of often seemingly insignificant properties of technologies. Typical examples include Kittler's *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* which explores moments of discursive break from the monopoly of writing caused by the titular technologies[64] or Jonathan Stern's *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* which details the history of the format precipitated by the paradigm shift from physics to cognition in auditory research.[65] When done well, research in this vein can produce dazzling grand narratives out of philosophical exegesis, and archival and technological minutia, making a compelling case for the

[63] John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago; London, 2015), 17.

[64] Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

[65] Jonathan Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

profound effect that technology has had on society and culture. These tendencies have also at times led to charges of technological determinism,[66] though I would argue that most media research in this category is perhaps not as totalizing as its detractors claim.

Research on cultural techniques have been firmly located in this third camp and has largely followed a similar methodological trajectory, even if it sees the relationship between culture and technology as perhaps more dialectical than previous iterations. In most cases, research consists of detailed case studies, substituting a particular cultural technique for the more usual technology. As I have previously discussed, cultural techniques have generally favoured technologies outside the purview of media studies. For example, Bernhard Siegert—whose book on cultural techniques represents the most significant publication on the topic currently available in English—dedicates a chapter to the role played by the door in both marking and creating the distinction between open and closed, and another to sharing a meal as a way of dividing human and non-human. Often practising what Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan refers to as a "militant untimeliness,"[67] his illustrative examples are almost always historical in nature. A recalcitrance to speak to our digital everyday is by no means universal—Sebastian Vehlken, for example, uses cultural techniques to explore how computer modelling of swarms has led to swarming serving as a more general metaphor for modern human activities.[68] But part of the mandate of working with cultural technique is a need to look outwards across both time and space to trace the constitutive forces that shape a current assemblage. Historical research is thus often the default position.

---

[66] See for example Raymond Williams' well-known critique of Marshal McLuhan in Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, ed. Ederyn Williams (1974; repr., London: Routledge, 2003).

[67] Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, "Untimely Mediations: On Two Recent Contributions to 'German Media Theory,'" *Paragraph* 37, no. 3 (2014): 420, https://doi.org/10.3366/para.2014.0138.

[68] Sebastian Vehlken, "Zootechnologies: Swarming as a Cultural Technique," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 110–31, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413488959.

Consequently, human subjects, when they make an appearance at all, tend to be part of collected anecdotes—such as Mauss' observation from his 1934 lecture on body techniques that a certain walking gait had travelled from New York to Paris via cinema[69]—or as purely historical subjects, reconstructed through archival research. Though this past lens is important—and will play a part in my understanding of Wagnerian reception—an unfortunate side effect has been the silencing of contemporaneous human subjects. In his detailing of the three streams of communication research, Peters argues that research conducted under the banner of technology/media studies has tended to ignore the two other traditions, and closed its eye to "audiences, institutions, and political economy."[70] While there has been some cultural techniques research that discusses institutions and political economy—such as Jussi Parikka's examination of the cultural techniques behind cognitive capitalism[71]—the third piece, the audience, has been more or less missing. This is perhaps because cultural techniques are usually positioned as transcending traditional media; that is, rather than having as a goal studying media per se, cultural techniques seek to "scrutinize established objects (including history, consciousness, society, the human) from the point of view of media."[72] In the excitement to reverse the frame of reference, cultural techniques have left the traditional media audiences behind.

This to me is an oversight in cultural techniques research that goes against its core philosophical tenets. In her article on sovereignty, Cornelia Vismann likens the ability of objects to assert some degree of agency to the grammatical concept of the "medium voice" in Greek, which occupies the space between the active and passive. The medium voice resists the usual attribution of agency to a

---

[69] Winthrop-Young, "The Kultur of Cultural Techniques," 383.

[70] Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, 17.

[71] Jussi Parikka, "Cultural Techniques of Cognitive Capitalism: Metaprogramming and the Labour of Code," *Cultural Studies Review* 20, no. 1 (2014): 30–52, https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v20i1.3831.

[72] Winthrop-Young, "The Kultur of Cultural Techniques," 382.

subject who acts on an object. Instead, it "creates a relational middle ground here, which does not simply amount to a reversal of the two positions."[73] This allows us to envision "the relation between things, media and cultural techniques as mutually interdependent."[74] With this in mind, I would argue that Vismann's analogy illustrates that it is not enough to give voice to non-human actors in lieu of humans. This would amount to a simple reversal and ultimately flattens out humans into theoretical ideals. We need instead to acknowledge their complexities, including the capacity for self-reflection. In short, we need to talk to people. Failure to do so not only risks an unequal balance between people and things but also prevents us from observing cultural techniques in action and exposing a bias towards the written text.

As outlined by Krämer and Bredekamp, part of the remit of cultural techniques research is precisely to move beyond the "culture as text" metaphor long central to the humanities and to embrace cultural techniques as existing "in a reciprocity of print and image, sound and number."[75] This includes pushing back on the default position of textual analysis and hermeneutics as the methodologies of choice.[76] In the existing corpus of cultural techniques research, this has been accomplished by expanding the types of primary sources consulted, such as images, maps or computer algorithms. But how we act on an everyday basis is not always accessible in a series of artifacts—sometimes, if we want to know what people do then we have to actually ask them, deploying one of academia's own key cultural technique: the interview. Engaging in conversations with our subject acknowledges that cultural techniques cannot always be read off documents and other symbolic inscription systems, but instead must be observed and coaxed out in real time. This is not to suggest that the spoken word is

[73] Vismann, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty," 85.
[74] Vismann, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty," 84.
[75] Krämer and Bredekamp, "Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques," 27.
[76] Krämer and Bredekamp, "Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques," 21.

somehow transparent or unmediated but rather simply that recorded conversation have the ability to capture cultural techniques that might otherwise prove ephemeral. By taking a closer look at how people understand their love of opera, we can get a better sense of how cultural techniques are internalized, re-enforced and subtly transformed both in the actions they describe, but also in the very act of narration.

What might ethnographic work informed by cultural techniques look like? To answer this question, I will be drawing from Actor-Network Theory (ANT), as formulated by Bruno Latour. Latour can be infuriatingly contrary at times, (in)famously recanting the entirely of ANT (including the hyphen) in 1999,[77] only to write a handbook on the subject five years later. He acknowledges as much in a fictional dialogue with an exasperated sociology PhD student, in which they despair at Latour's insistence that he is, among other things, a firm objectivist who believes in relativity and that ANT is not really about describing networks.[78] In part, this inconsistency is because Latour is ultimately, as John Durham Peters puts it, "a philosophical pragmatist, one who recognizes both the making of facts and their terrific grip on the world, both the human shaping of nature and its recalcitrance to our plans."[79] At the core of his thinking is what he sees as the linchpin of modernity: the purification of nature and culture into separate domains, what I would contend is a cultural technique par excellence. Latour contends that this "modern constitution" has always been false: in fact, our world consists of a multitude of hybrids, which we, as supposed moderns, have looked to suppress. He therefore proposes that we ratify a new constitution, in which we recognize these quasi-objects,

---

[77] Bruno Latour, "On Recalling ANT," *The Sociological Review* 47, no. 1 (1999): 15–25, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1999.tb03480.x.

[78] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 141–56.

[79] Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, 40.

erecting a Parliament of Things, and attend to the networks they create.[80] This is coupled to a rejecting of "the social" as a distinct thing to be studied, and a resistance to structuralist explanations.

In this vein, Latour insists that ANT is not a framework of analysis, but rather a method. To perform this kind of sociology involves first confronting moments of controversy and uncertainty and seeing how they are stabilized by the actors in question. To do so,

> Using a slogan from ANT, you have 'to follow the actors themselves', that is try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish.[81]

In other words, ANT research should not look to create presupposing categories or to add a framework. Rather, the work of the researcher is to provide descriptions. It is up to the actors to "make everything, including their own frames, their own theories, their own contexts, their own metaphysics, even their own ontologies."[82] A good description will move beyond cataloguing actors to treat them as mediators, participants who transform meaning and effects as they pass through them. Conducting such research requires slowing down; it is, as Latour puts it, a *slow*ciology.[83] It involves description, keeping meticulous notes on the journey of research, of approaching your object of study without predisposed categories. It involves notebooks (Latour recommends at least three) and software and pens.[84]

---

[80] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[81] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 12.

[82] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 147.

[83] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 122.

[84] On when to stop, Latour offers this pragmatic advice: "You stop when you have written your 50,000 words or whatever is the format." Or, even better, by putting "the last word in the last chapter of your damn thesis." Advice taken. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 148.

As previously mentioned, ANT and the study of cultural techniques have much in common, such as an interest in materiality, a lack of a clear definition of "media," a more distributed conception of agency, and a mandate for thick description. The differences are more subtle: ANT tends to start from the actors and then to set them in relation and can have a propensity to multiply actors to bridge the gaps. By contrast, cultural techniques are envisioned as engendering the differences between actors in the first place.[85] The focus of cultural techniques is thus shifted away subtly from the actors, and the gap between them, to the techniques that they simultaneously engage in and are formed by, embracing their liminality. Cultural techniques are perhaps better suited to move beyond simply mapping actors, which I see as a distinct strength. What I propose that cultural techniques research, however, can take from ANT is threefold: first, to approach ethnography in a value-free way by letting the cultural techniques emerge as organically as possible through observation and by embracing the vocabulary of the actors' own accounts; second, to transpose the thick descriptions and attention to detail that is already inherent to cultural techniques to the actions of humans; and finally, to confront head on the fact that research is never a transparent process: it is always to some degree transformative.[86] In this way, I will be using ANT as my guiding method and cultural techniques as methodology.

I propose that in order to have a more holistic view of both the actors and cultural techniques at play in the reception of Wagner, the best way to move forward would be to employ a multi-methods research design, one that combines ethnographic research methods with the type of archival

---

[85] See Veronika Pöhnl, "Mind the Gap: On Actor-Network Theory and German Media Theory," in *Applying the Actor-Network Theory in Media Studies*, ed. Markus Spöhrer and Beate Ochsner (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2016), 256. Pöhnl is here discussing the differences with German Media more broadly and ANT, but her observations are still largely relevant.

[86] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 122.

research that is more emblematic of current cultural techniques approaches. One of my main models is Janice Radway's study of the activities of readers of romance novels, which strikes me as one of the most successful studies of fans.[87] Radway's scope is impressive: she begins by outlining the market forces which shape romance fiction, exploring how the genre works to semiprogramme audience by capitalizing on repetition. In the following chapter, she analyzes her extensive interviews with a number of avid readers and separates out the act of reading itself from the women's critique of the texts. Reading is understood as praxis, an act that allows an escape from the demands of being a mother and wife. Radway's interpretation, however, resists easy celebration of agency by deploying a sophisticated psychoanalytic reading of several romance novels. She concludes that women, while certainly not cultural dupes, do not in the end challenge patriarchal structures. By moving between these three methodologies—a political economic examination of the industry, an ethnography of readers, and a psychoanalytic analysis of the text—she offers a nuanced portrait of romance novels. Radway's model demonstrates the breadth that multimethods research affords.

Her approach, however, differs from mine in one key way: psychoanalytic theory is at its heart predicated on a concept of depth, that is, that there are hidden meaning and desires that can only be uncovered through analysis. By contrast, a model built on cultural techniques is flat, seeing talk not as evidence of hidden psychological desires but rather able to point us to lateral connection to other actors and the practices and enabling material structures. What I take from Radway is that reception "cannot be reduced to a simple interaction between a book and a reader"[88] and a multimethodology helps us gain a wider snapshot of all the actors at play. In my own research, I will thus

[87] Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

[88] Radway, *Reading the Romance*, 20.

take a three-pronged approach: interviews with members of the Toronto Wagner society and other opera professionals, consideration of the media through which Wagner art and thoughts have been deployed, and finally, Wagner's prose and music. This allows us to see reception as happening in the nexus between individual, text and larger technological context. In writing my dissertation, I have sought to layout (and to write) my chapters in a way that reflects my overall methodological goals. Rather than start with historical context and work my way to the many Wagnerians I talked to, I have instead started with my interviews and worked outwards from there. This forensics approach, I feel better fits with a cultural techniques approach to research, which is focused on the operative chains that precede a certain concept. It is no use starting at the beginning if I don't know where that beginning is. Instead, starting from the accounts of my interview subjects allows me to trace some of the origins of the cultural techniques at play. My interviews also inspired me to expand cultural techniques in several ways: in chapter 2, I propose aging a cultural technique; in chapter 3, I draw on Adorno's critique of Wagner as manipulative to argue for the agency embedded in the music; in chapter 4, my experience of the pandemic led me to Michel Serre's concept of the Parasite to explore how the materiality of opera has shaped reception. In the final parts of this chapter, I will detail how my research unfolded, as I sought to put these principles into action before reflecting on my own relationship to Wagnerism.

Putting Down the Field Guide

It is one thing to write about Wagnerians in a theoretical sense: it is quite another to meet them out in the wild. While we might claim that humans, in many ways, are equal to non-humans, this does not mean that we can approach them in the same way. For one, enlisting fans for research requires a certain amount of social finesse—media devices and newspaper articles do not have to be convinced to

participate, and care little about your thesis statement. The divide between human and non-human is also re-inscribed in the research protocols of academia, which tend to sort researchers into those who work with human subjects and those who work with inanimate ones. One of the hallmarks of my research has been navigating how it is that one "does" ethnography, once one has decided to include live fans within your research—or as Tia DeNora puts it in her critique of textual analysis, you will, indeed, have to leave "the comfort of an ergonomically designed armchair"[89] to include live fans within your research.

Rather than present an abstracted detailing of my research methods, I have instead opted to write more openly about my journey. I do this in response to Latour's call for us to make visible the research process and acknowledge its messiness. Too often we portray "research" as a rational procedural exercise, a black box in which we input well-articulated "research questions" and "data" to produce neatly categorized "results." Yet as Latour argues, this glossy final appearance is largely smoke and mirrors.[90] He contends that the only way that we can create a text that is "accurate, faithful, interesting, or objective" is by exposing its very constructed nature as a feature, not a bug.[91] After all, the research process is always to some degree formative, as well as descriptive—the act of studying a group is part and parcel of what causes it to exist in a particular time and place. I would thus propose that what we term "research" is comprised of its own series of cultural techniques. Some of these are regularly rendered visible—like "textual analysis" and "interviewing"—while others, like "research grants applications," "funding deadlines" and notebooks, pens and word-processing software, tend to fade once we move on to produce our polished prose account. Thus, in detailing my method in

[89] Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 22.
[90] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 123.
[91] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 127.

some (though by no means exhaustive) detail, I hope to elucidate some of the cultural techniques and actors at play, and how in my involvement with the Wagner Society, I also played a part (at times unexpected) in its formation. Rather than the ordered series of events which the term research often conjures, my experience was one of unfolding connections, facilitated by websites, telephones and email, delayed by bureaucracies on one hand (ethic review) but unexpectedly helped in another (scholarship banquet). It was also one finished under the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic. Even at its most clinical, research, as Latour reminds us, is built, negotiated, and always messy.

I first became interested in Wagnerism while taking a seminar course on Wagner during my Master's. Because of my previous background in fandom studies, I opted to write a paper on reception, which led to the discovery—through a handful of newspaper articles and some blogs—of the existence of dedicated Wagner societies. The quick turnover of a term paper meant that interviewing anyone was not going to be possible: instead, I thought about how Wagner's prose and music might encourage the formation of a dedicated group of fans (a precursor to chapter 3). When it came time to expand this paper for my doctoral studies, my starting point for this project was a quick Google search to confirm the existence of a Wagner Society in Toronto. The dated design of the website, however, left me unsure of both its scale and current status. Was this the work of a handful of enthusiasts, or a more organized group of dedicated music lovers? My questions were at least partially answered when a couple of months later the website was revamped with a more modern design, complete with blog posts, newsletters and clear indication of upcoming meetings—the more put together appearance suggested a more robust operation. I opted to wait to make first contact until I had completed my ethics review, a university mandated exercise necessary when dealing with human subjects.

This proved to be my first real obstacle in moving from planning to execution. Though submitting the proposal and ethics review is typically a quick process, my participation in the longest academic strike in Canadian history, coupled with some administrative mishaps meant that my application languished well past the standard four to six weeks, to take eight months to approve. In these ways, cultural techniques such as "collective bargaining agreements" and "ethics review" left an indelible mark on my production of research. In part this was simply reflected in a longer timeline, as much of my time and energy was dedicated to standing on the picket line—but it also meant that I had to redirect my efforts to other avenues that could be performed without my interviews. For me, this took the form of refining my methodology and thinking about how cultural techniques—suggested to me during the proposal stage—could prove useful. After we were finally mandated by the provincial government to return to work in mid-July, I rushed to submit my proposal and ethics clearance before course remediation. During the ensuing chaotic months, I continued to wait to make first contact with the Toronto Wagner Society.

My plans were altered by an unexpected connection at a scholarship gala held by the university. As I detailed my research to a fellow student, who had astutely noticed that I knew no one there, I was surprised to hear them exclaim that they knew a couple who were long-time members. Taking up their offer to provide an email introduction, I was subsequently connected to four members in total, including a founding member. All agreed to talk to me. It was not until March of the following year, however, that I was able to follow through, as I was still waiting on my ethics approval. This also meant that I was unable to attend the society meetings for much of the fall and winter seasons. Later, when my ethics application was finally approved, I emailed the current chair of the Wagner Society, requesting permission to attend a meeting and for them to circulate my questionnaire through their channels. Permission to attend the meeting was granted in short form but with a slight

rebuke from society chair Frances Henry: a request not to use the term fans, as "We are not really fans in the sense that the term is popularly used... if anything we are more 'lovers'!" With this point of nomenclature noted, I proceeded to attend the next meeting (the final one of the season, as it turned out), where I was requested to give a short spiel regarding my project and circulated a sign-up sheet for those interested in participating. Thus, I had two distinct avenues of recruitment for interviews: the first through my unexpected contact at the scholarship gala, and the second, through a more formal introduction via official society channels. At the meeting itself I collected a list of names and emails, which I later messaged with a questionnaire and an invitation for an interview.

On the day of my first interview, I found myself nervous and feeling largely ill prepared. I had never received explicit training on the best practices of interviewing. Though I had crafted a schedule of interview questions to submit to my ethics review, I envisioned something a bit more organic, even though I wasn't sure how to actually make that happen. I also realized, barely an hour beforehand, that I would need something to record my conversation: like many a millennial researcher, I turned to my phone to provide my solution. The built-in option provided me with a basic setup. My first conversation is halting at times, and neatly conforming to the one-hour time limit I had laid out, with awkward pauses as I scribbled down, what I later realized were too many notes. Later conversations flowed more naturally, helped by the fact that I was armed not only with more knowledge about the Wagner Society, but also some of the key debates and questions within the community.

After a couple of rounds, I settled into a general format: for my opening questions I asked for some general introductions and a description of how they came to love Wagner's music, as well as opera more generally. I would then try to allow the conversation to flow as organically as possible, but with some themes in mind: live vs. recorded opera, opinions on what made for a good (or bad)

production, how they felt after attending a good performance, thoughts on how the physical theatre affected their experiences, and why they preferred Wagner over other composers. Often, however, I would simply let people talk. My closing question was to ask them to give me an elevator pitch to a hypothetical newcomer to Wagner and to try to answer the question "why Wagner." Though I had initially given a time estimate of one hour, in many cases, interviews extended well over two, partially as a result of the general enthusiasm for the topic at hand (scholars of fans, undoubtedly, have an advantage in that regard), but also partly because the majority of my respondents were either retired or working freelance and thus had the luxury of time.

In total I conducted 16 interviews, with one interview featuring two people. Of these, all but four had been involved with the Wagner Society to varying degrees. The remaining four consisted of two Toronto-based opera critics, soprano Adrianne Pieczonka (who has sung Wagner on numerous occasions, including at Bayreuth), and the musical director of the COC, Johannes Debus. Because the majority of those I interviewed already engage with Wagner in public capacities—if not as opera professionals, then as educators, journalists, researchers or society executives—in my informed consent form, I gave the option to participants whether or not they wanted to be identified by name in my dissertation. In cases where participants preferred to remain anonymous, I have simply withheld names rather than assign a pseudonym. Except for two interviews, they were recorded using the phone app Otter, which I chose for its live automatic transcription abilities. I also learnt to limit my written notes to dashed reminders to myself either to look something up or to ask about a certain topic later in the interview, in order to prevent the conversation from stalling. When arranging a time and a place, I offered the option of either meeting at York or Toronto Metropolitan, or to come to them. My interviews thus took place on balconies and porches, in living rooms, offices and kitchens, small booked rooms on campus, and in one instance (much to the chagrin of my recording device)

in a very noisy coffee shop. All but one interview was conducted in person, with the final one being conducted on the phone.

Who I eventually talked to was partially shaped through a self-selecting group from my appearance at the Wagner society meeting—however, it was also guided by suggestions from the respondents. Interestingly, many of the people I was directed towards were not within the TWS, but rather people who worked in a professional capacity with Wagner—critics, artists, educators, staff at the COC—with the implied understanding that they would be best suited to speak to the more general state of Wagner in Toronto. This highlights one of the tensions that existed throughout my research: what I saw as the scope of my research project was not always aligned with what my respondents imagined. For the most part I followed up on suggestions but limited my scope to those who had clear connections to Toronto. Unsurprisingly, my respondents skewed largely towards the most active members—society executives, those who travelled extensively or who had made opera their full-time job. In informal discussions with other members, I was sometimes met with an exclamation of "oh, I'm not a *true* Wagnerian"—this despite my assurances that I was interested in talking to people with all levels of involvement. My sample is also influenced by the Toronto context, both as a city with an established opera scene but also with high levels of immigration. While not fully reflective of the diversity of the city, only a handful of my respondents originally hail from Toronto.

Alongside my interviews, I had also given society members the option to complete a questionnaire. Participation was much lower than expected, with only six responses in total. My initial plan had been to have the questionnaires circulated via the society newsletter, which would then serve as a gateway for recruitment for interview participants—this was reflected in my informed consent form in which I included a question asking if they were interested in an interview. Eventually, however, my initial point of contact for many participants was at the society meeting itself, where I

collected ahead of time whether they were interested in the questionnaire, the interview or both, rendering my question on the informed consent form largely redundant. In the end, I received very few questionnaires from participants who wished not to be interviewed. I suspect many people viewed the interview process as generally less tedious than questionnaires: in other instances, participants were hesitant about the formal nature of the questionnaires, as well as being slightly intimidated by the official nature of the informed consent forms which were required for their participation. As a result, the questionnaires largely served as a primer for those I interviewed, a helpful starting point, rather than a fully separate method of data collection.

Parallel to these more formal avenues of research, I also continued to attend TWS meetings when they resumed in the fall of 2019, as well as taking advantage of the generous under 30 pricing offered by the COC. After my initial appearance at the Wagner Society, I had chalked up my role as largely one of observer, but over the summer I was offered via email an invitation to serve on the executive. The reason for the invitation on their part was twofold: first to help me in my project, and second, to inject a younger perspective into the society.[92] My involvement thus shifted from observer to active participant, as I offered suggestions for meeting ideas, helped promote certain guests, and became more involved with the fundraising efforts for the fall 2020 production of Parsifal. On top of handwritten notes, I collected emails, newsletters, society handouts, and Opera Canada magazines.

While the bulk of this chapter was originally written in 2018, later chapters were drafted under the shadow of the COVID-19 global pandemic. While I was lucky enough to have completed my interviews prior to the widespread shutdowns, the pandemic still left traces on my dissertation. The most obvious effect can be seen in my fourth chapter, where the pandemic directly inspired my

[92] Concern over the aging of the society, as I will later explore, emerged as an important theme throughout my research.

central metaphor of the parasite. As they say: when life gives you a lemon, write a dissertation chapter on the subject. More than wordplay, however, the cancelling of all opera performances allowed me to think more clearly about the role of technology in mediating opera when going to live performance was more or less impossible. This made me realize that what I had originally projected to be two separate chapters—one on technologies and another on historical Wagnerism—should in fact be one.[93] On a more pragmatic level, closed libraries and archives limited my access to materials that had been already digitized for considerable stretches of my writing. My choice to focus on articles from the *Globe and Mail*, rather than say, older editions, of the magazine Opera Canada is emblematic of the enforced digital-first paradigm we all had to adopt throughout the pandemic. Similarly, after cancelling the remainder of its 2019/2020 season, the Toronto Wagner Season moved online with my help. This curtailed the type of informal conversations that can be so fruitful for research. I also planned to attend scheduled performances of both *Flying Dutchman* and *Parsifal* by the COC. All of this was put on hold. The pandemic—as much as my interviews and other sources—thus played a vital role in shaping the final form of my research.

On Researchers and Fans

As I conducted my research, one of the most frequent questions I received was whether I myself was a devout Wagnerian, and how exactly had I decided on my topic of study. While I do possess "expert" musical knowledge gained through years of piano lessons, and a BA in music, my knowledge and—truth be told—my appreciation for opera was rudimentary. My introduction to Wagner had taken place in the context of an MA seminar. Before beginning my project, I had listened to only three of his operas in full, only one, *Götterdämmerung,* live. I saw my relationship with Wagner as

[93] Admittedly, time pressures from funding deadlines also aided me in making this decision!

one of fascination, rather than one of love. And yet, driving me home after a lively two-and-a-half-hour interview, Iain Scott gleefully declared that he was accepting me into the ranks: after all, anybody crazy enough to write a full-length dissertation on the topic of Wagner must to a degree be a Wagnerian!

For fandom study, a dual positioning as fan and researcher is often glossed with the portmanteau of "aca-fan." More than simply "an academic writer proclaiming or implying her or his personal fandom," to claim the role of the aca-fan is to claim "participation in the fan community to a point where she or he is willing to represent it—to translate it to an outside audience—and be considerate of the ethical protocols of that fan community."[94] Jenkins was perhaps the first to write explicitly from this perspective,[95] though it has become to some degree the default position of fandom studies. Part of the impetus is to challenge the privileged position from which academia writes and to destabilize the high/low culture divide which often cast popular media as unworthy of study. In some instances this has evolved into forms of auto-ethnography, which make explicit the passion for the topic of research and acknowledge their dual identities. In others, it is about emphasizing the similarities between the two perspectives. As Will Brooker points out, to some degree, all academics are fans of what they study.[96] With the growing normalizing of studying of popular media and the stabilization of fan studies as an academic discipline, claiming the identity of aca-fandom is no longer the radical stance it once was, leading some to doubt whether it is still methodologically fruitful.[97] Still, I think

---

[94] Will Duffett quoted in Will Brooker, Mark Duffett, and Karen Hellekson, "Fannish Identities and Scholarly Responsibilities: A Conversation," in *Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, ed. Melissa A. Click and Suzanne Scott (New York: Routledge, 2018), 67.

[95] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 1992.

[96] Brooker, Duffett, and Hellekson, "Fannish Identities and Scholarly Responsibilities," 64.

[97] Brooker, Duffett, and Hellekson, "Fannish Identities and Scholarly Responsibilities."

that it pays to reflect on our relationship to what we study, as it can help us navigate ethical considerations and help us consider how it might shape both our access to knowledge and interpretations.

Throughout these interactions I found myself neither quite an insider, being largely a Wagner newbie, nor completely on the outside, due to my classical music training. This was complicated slightly by the fact that many of my subjects were themselves retired academics. As Iain Scott put it, only slightly humorously: "The Toronto Wagner Society was the English department at the University of Toronto. Almost without difference—until a professor from York took over!" Thus, the expert/subject divide typical of ethnographic research was at times reversed, with some asking about my sample size, and methodology. While the academics I talked to would likely not identify themselves as aca-fans (revealing a disciplinary and, in some cases, a generational divide), several of them have published on Wagner. I will expand on the phenomenon of the professionalized fan in a later chapter, but part of what this project revealed is thus the need to talk to other academics about their passions, and how our research intersects with the things we love.

For my part, thinking about my own ambiguous positioning on the aca-fan spectrum pointed to one key instance in which I was reproducing one of the cultural techniques of fandom: the becoming-a-fan story. Daniel Cavicchi, in his ethnographic study of Springsteen fans, talks of these stories as a way in which fans can "announce their fandom."[98] These stories are usually a story of personal transformation, detailing either a sudden moment of epiphany or a process of gradual conversion.[99] Listening back to my recorded interviews, I caught several renditions of my "how-I-chose-my-dissertation-topic" story and was struck by the similarities in structure to the accounts described by Cavicchi

[98] Daniel Cavicchi, *Tramps like Us: Music & Meaning among Springsteen Fans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 56.

[99] Cavicchi, *Tramps like Us*, 43.

in his research, as well as those shared with me throughout my own collected narratives. I'm choosing to reproduce two of those tellings in whole below:

WILEY POWELL: Okay, I'm interviewing you. How did you choose Wagner?

EMILIE HURST: So kind of by accident, a bit. So, I did do a music degree, but at that point, I'm a pianist and so piano music has always been kind of my first love. And I had no interest in opera whatsoever. I would kind of go to some of the [department] noon hour concerts, but that was about it. I didn't get opera and no real opportunity to see it in Halifax, you know. But then in my master's [...] one of the electives was specifically just on Wagner, and this was the one that looked the most marginally interesting. I had no idea what I was signing up for. "Sure. Okay. I'll do a course on Wagner." [laughs] And because a lot of my previous research had to do with fandom from the popular side, when I had to come up with a topic... I loath doing musical analysis, it's just not my thing. I can do it but it's just not my thing. Plus he's been analyzed to death, what would I...

WP: What would you add.

EH: What would I add. But I noticed that there is not as much written about people who listen to Wagner. So I wrote a term paper. And that kind of—although I did my master's thesis on something completely different—that kind of stayed in my head and when I started my PhD. I thought, well, maybe I should kind of stretch that out and actually talk to people [...] I knew the literature very well on fandom, and I thought, huh. A lot of what I see in Wagner is not that dissimilar to what I see in pop culture [...]

WP: Have you seen a lot of Wagner yourself?

EH: I have not.

WP: Do you like Wagner?

EH: I enjoy Wagner.

WP: Are you passionate about it?

EH: Um, I'm not sure if I'm passionate, I am very intensely interested [...] I definitely had the opportunity to see the last time the COC put on Götterdämmerung [...] and, I certainly enjoyed it. I know it's funny because a lot of people talk about Wagner being you know, challenging, but for me, because I came kind of from a musical background, and I love playing... I love playing Bach, but I love playing like Debussy, Prokofiev, or Shostakovich.

WP: Okay, so quite a range.

EH: Yeah, so that's the stuff that I find interesting to play. So to me, Wagner wasn't... it kind of fit into some of that mould.

BARBARA JAPP: How did you... I'm really interested in how you got involved with your thesis topic.

EMILIE HURST: So it's kind of funny because... I mean, I was put in piano lessons and I had been playing piano for ages and, I've always loved piano music, because I can connect to it physically. When I listen to it, I hear it as a player. And although I've always kind of enjoyed symphonic music or other things, I don't connect with it in the same way. And my interests, I've always been into, I love Bach, and I love the really weird stuff. I'm kind of on the two extremes. I love Debussy as well. And so... but when I...

BJ: What is really weird stuff?

EH: Well, I mean, maybe not super weird, but like, I love playing Shostakovich, for example...

BJ: Oh okay, that's not really weird.

EH: It's not really weird. No, [...] I'm not listening to twelve-tone in my spare time. But I like it because it's interesting to play [...] So I did my studies in music and I didn't really get opera, partly because I had never seen it live. I never really had experience with it and I just, I didn't really get it. I was like, okay, it's a thing. But then in my master's, I did a master's in musicology, at Carleton, and it's a small program, so there weren't that many courses. But one of them was a course on Wagner. And I thought, sure, why not? And....

BJ: People keep talking about it.

EH: Yeah, I guess this opera thing. And for me, because my, a lot of my research background, as I said, has to do with fandom and fans, and why people love things, but also why people hate things—I'm very interested in why people hate things with a passion—and so when it came time to write an essay, it felt very natural for me to write about audiences. Because I'm not... Wagner has been analyzed musically to death. There's not much I can say that hasn't already been said. So I was interested with audiences and the more I read about it I thought, these are really extremely passionate people. Extremely passionate. And I want to learn more about that. And so it kind of grew from that, that term paper I wrote.

In these two stories—and even woven throughout an earlier section of this chapter written without reference to these transcripts—we see certain repeated themes: locating myself as a pianist (with references to Bach, Debussy and Shostakovich) and a music student, emphasizing the fact that I never really "got" opera throughout my undergraduate degree. Then, a moment of discovery, as I find my research interests in popular fandom collide with the world of Wagnerism as part of an MA seminar, the "naturalness" of the decision. In this way they mirror the epiphany structure outlined by Cavicchi,

demonstrating how the roles of researcher and fan can at times be two sides of the same coin.[100] But here is the important part: in telling my story of academic discovery I am also re-enacting the distinction between researcher and fan. The cultural technique might be similar, but the effect is different. Note especially in the first story in which, when asked if I am passionate about Wagner, I proclaim "interest" instead. This is not to imply some pretension on my part: I do feel that intense interest is the best way to describe my attachment to Wagner, rather than passion. What these stories show in action is simply one of the many cultural techniques in which our identity as researcher is placed in relation to that of our subjects through the process of fieldwork. The act of storytelling belongs neither to myself nor to my listener—it is this very liminal status which allows me to draw a line in the sand. It is neither particularly important nor enough that my story is true: what is most important is that I keep telling it.

In a similar vein, I would like to briefly return to the question which opened this chapter: is it possible to write the field guide of fandom? My answer here is ambiguous: there will never be a pre-existing document from which the intrepid researcher can hope to find a definitive taxonomy of the fan. Fandom, as I have illustrated above, is being continually co-authored in countless actions and interactions between fan, text, researcher and others. But it might be possible to write *a* field guide to fandom, one that captures a particular assemblage of actors in a particular time and place, navigated through the messy lens of "research." Though this might appear to make the entire process a futile endeavour (but what about future applications!), there is value, I believe, in mapping the world around precisely because cultural techniques are never created in isolation. Those that we might find in one guide might appear in another. We just never know which ones they will be. Thus I present

[100] Interestingly, when I've instead been asked to talk about my feelings about opera in general, rather than Wagner as a whole, my story resembles more one of gradual discovery, rather than a sudden epiphany.

my own field guide to (Wagner) fandom, acknowledging that it is but one of the versions I could have written.

Chapter 2

The Modern Fan

It is a bit past seven, and I have just arrived at the Toronto Arts and Letters Club on Elm Street. Built in 1891 by the St. George Society, the building, and those neighbouring, feel out of step with the rest of downtown. In my walk from the subway station, I passed by the glittering digital billboards of Yonge-Dundas Square, an ode to modern capitalism; two separate construction sites, each poised to become transformed into condominium towers; and the tacky neon signs of Zanzibar Tavern promising titillating adult entertainment ("The Girls never stop!"). By contrast, this small stretch of Elm Street is of a refreshingly human scale: Christmas lights are festooned on a series of medium-sized trees. Building heights are briefly restricted to two to three stories. Red brick abounds. The Arts and Letters Club's brownstone facade sits flush with the sidewalk, with "St. George's Hall" inscribed over the Romanesque Revival archway in upper-case Art Nouveau lettering. The overall effect is austere but reassuringly permanent in a city where edifices are torn down and rebuilt in what can sometimes feel like the blink of an eye.

The archway shelters a shallow step and landing leading to a set of wooden doors. I ring to be let in. More stairs lead up to the reception area, now rendered accessible by a modern chairlift. The decor is cozy, if a bit dated, with ample wood panelling, carpeting, and coloured walls. On my right, a small meeting room decorated with a selection of paintings hearkens to the club's historical association to the famous Group of Seven.[1] On my left is a lounge area with crimson walls, full-

[1] For "its layout and décor, its function as a gathering place for artists and patrons of the arts, and its associations with the Arts and Letters Club," St. George's Hall was designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 2007. Parks Canada, "St. George's Hall (Arts and Letters Club) National Historic Site of Canada," Parks

service bar, and portraits of all former club presidents. Towards the back, I can glimpse the Great Hall with its timbered cathedral-like ceiling, stained glass windows, and a large fireplace. The attendant who let me in confirms that my destination is the studio on the third floor.

The Toronto Wagner Society has held meetings here since their 1996–1997 season. Previously, the society had met at the Forest Hill Branch of the Toronto Public Library system, but a strictly enforced curfew of 9:00 p.m. prompted a change in scenery. As Linda Hutcheon explained to me over email, the Arts and Letters Club allowed for a later meeting time, while the inclusion of a bar encouraged socializing afterwards. Though the society is simply a tenant of the club, rather than an offshoot of its operation, the location feels fitting: the Arts and Letters Club, if perhaps past its heyday, still regularly resonates with music, and there is both a reverence for the arts and a sense of cultured gentility which permeates the building. Relevant to my own research, I later learn that Toronto composer Sir Ernest MacMillan—an avid Wagnerian[2]—and media theorist Marshall McLuhan were once members.

We meet on the third floor, in a large room resembling a rehearsal hall. Members have started to congregate in the room, some sitting already, others chatting. I greet those I recognize from my interviews. To my left is a shallow stage, along which stretches a set of practical drywall cabinets, contrasting with the more intentional wood panelling and trim elsewhere in the room. The closets are topped with a festive papier-mâché feast, complete with roast pig and apple. To the back, a set of easels are haphazardly arranged. A handful of padded chairs and a couch running along the opposite wall on a narrow ledge next to the window provide a comfier alternative to the rows of banquet seats

---

Canada Directory of Federal Heritage Designations, June 8, 2007, https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=11835.

[2] Carl Morey, "The Music of Wagner in Toronto before 1914," *Canadian University Music Review* 18, no. 2 (1998): 25–37, https://doi.org/10.7202/1014652ar.

set up in the centre. In anticipation of a screening of *The Nibelungen Ring* for Children, produced by the Vienna State Opera, a projector has been positioned in the middle of the first row. I am hoping that the sound system will cooperate this time—at the previous meeting, the viewing of a documentary on legendary Wagnerian singer Birgit Nilsson had been somewhat marred by feedback every time her voice had soared above the orchestra.

Eventually the meeting is called to order by society chair Frances Henry. I take my place with a notebook and pen in hand. In addition to the film, today also serves as the Annual General Meeting (AGM). Usually meetings are informal affairs, but for the time being Robert's Rules of Order are in force. We are given copies of the agenda, as well as last year's minutes and the society's financial statement. The first item is the financial report. A registered charity, the society runs a tight financial ship. The treasurer gives an overview of the budget: budget lines include room and equipment rental, honoraria and gifts for speakers, hosting costs for the website and a sizable scholarship fund, now large enough to subsist off interest alone. The biggest changes from the previous year are the elimination of the post-office box and a corresponding decrease in postage due to the switch to digital newsletters. The budget is otherwise without major surprises and approved without much deliberation.

In the chair's report, Frances stresses the state of the membership, which currently sits at about one hundred registered members—healthy but a slight decrease over previous years. She also raises concern over the aging of the membership. At just under 30, I am most likely the youngest person in the room. Frances urges us to encourage others to join: "At this point, I consider anyone under the age of 50 as young!" she adds. Lack of access to Wagnerian opera is a key limitation, as the COC is the only company in the city that has the resources to stage his operas in full. While the TWS usually gains members whenever they mount a Wagner opera, Frances is skeptical that the remount

of Christopher Alden's *Flying Dutchman* scheduled for the spring run of the COC will produce such a spike.[3] In Wagnerian circles *Flying Dutchman,* though part of Wagner's mature canon and performed with some frequency, is generally considered a lesser opera. No one falls in love with Wagner after seeing *Dutchman,* especially when watching a production that is being trotted out for the fourth time.

The discussion moves to other concerns, such as the announcement that Alexander Neef is leaving his post of general director of the COC to assume the directorship of the Paris Opera. What this means for the future of Wagner in the city is unclear. Neef's tenure, despite his professed love for Wagner, had not resulted in the hoped Toronto renaissance. The only new production staged by the company since the Ring cycle opened the Four Seasons Centre in 2006 was Peter Sellars' *Tristan und Isolde*, a co-production with the Opéra National de Paris. As one member points out, money is at issue: Wagner's operas, though popular, are expensive to produce. Another makes the case for the importance of inviting the new director, once appointed, to make clear the appetite for Wagner and perhaps apply some polite pressure.[4] A general sense that the COC—though happy to extend the occasional olive branch—is keen to keep the society at arm's length permeates the room. Requests to set up a members' booth during upcoming Wagner performances had been denied. Discussions with COC staff on how the TWS might collaborate to promote the planned production of *Parsifal* had not gone past an initial meeting. Other members debate whether the society was deliberately being left out from a planned conference on the opera. "They'll take our money though!" remarks one

[3] The Spring season of the COC, including the *Flying Dutchman*, was later cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[4] Perryn Leech was appointed as General Director on November 11, 2020. He was later extended an invitation to the TWS and appeared at the October meeting.

member. There is some agreement throughout the room, though others look to put the distancing in context. The mood is one of frustration over the dependence on the COC for survival as a society.

With this, we transition almost seamlessly to the next order of business: *Parsifal*. Performed only once in Canada in 1905, and never by a Canadian company, *Parsifal* is without a doubt the most anticipated event among Toronto Wagnerians. The final opera written before his death, *Parsifal* is monumental even by Wagner's standards, having a runtime of nearly six hours and requiring both a cast and orchestra running into the hundreds. There have been rumblings of a co-production with the Metropolitan Opera and the Opéra National de Lyon coming to Toronto for years but no official announcement had yet been made. Still, it is not so much a matter of *if* as *when* it will happen, with the biggest barrier being cost. To assist on that front, as well as to strengthen the TWS's relationship with the COC, exec member Jim Warrington had established a Partners for Parsifal fund. On the table next to the door is perched what Jim had previously described to me as a "big, ugly fake wine glass" purchased at Winners, serving as the "Holy Grail" from the opera (duly included as its own budget line), to collect donations. Neef's departure, though certainly not dooming the production, puts its timing into question. With an encouragement to contribute to the Parsifal fund, we are assured by the exec that the COC will not see a cent until a date has been announced.

Our final item on the agenda is elections. As well as the positions of chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer, the board consists of an unlimited number of directors drawn from the membership at large. Frances stresses humorously the voluntary nature of the positions, but with no new names willing to step in, there is a slight sense of resignation from the already serving members that they will continue for the following year. With the executive remaining unchanged, the elections turn to the board. My own addition is announced by Frances, who perhaps overstates slightly my contributions so far as describing them as highly valuable (largely limited over the summer to agreeing to

what others had already stated on email). A newer member, Barbara Japp, puts her name forward, citing her previous experience with the Horticultural Society as relevant. She is voted in without opposition. The official part of the meeting finishes with some comments on the upcoming Chicago Ring cycle.

With the AGM over, we proceed to the screening of the children's Ring cycle, a light, comical retelling, squeezing what would ordinarily be a sixteen-hour epic into a little over an hour. The adaptation preserves the main plot beats—the stolen Rheingold, Siegfried's forging of the sword and awakening Brünnhilde (with consent!)—but simplifies the story greatly and spares its main protagonists from death. I am relieved that the audio largely cooperates this time. Reception is mixed: those I talk to largely found the adaptation clever and playful, but I also overhear another member state that they would have walked out if they had been watching live.

Once over, I head downstairs to the bar, where the executive and board convene over drinks to plan our next meeting with guest Robert Wilson, now only a week and a day away. Wilson is a bigger name than usual for the TWS: in Toronto to direct the COC's production of *Turandot*, he is known for his collaboration with Philip Glass for *Einstein on the Beach*. He has also directed several Wagner operas. Frances had only been able to confirm his appearance at the last minute, and the executive is keen to have a strong attendance. We discuss strategies to get the message out. I offer to forward an email to the music and theatre departments at York. Others volunteer to get in touch with contacts such as opera educator Iain Scott and journalist Joseph So, who have larger audiences at their disposal. I mention that I am unsure about my own attendance to Frances: my dad will be in town as part of a business trip. She encourages me to bring him along.

Planning complete, I chat with some members about the progress of my research as I finish my cranberry vodka. I have already interviewed several of the exec but extend an open invitation to

the others. I am told that I should approach Barbara Japp, the newest addition to the board, by another executive who seems relieved to pass the ball. My pitch is simple: talk about why you love Wagner for an hour or two. She agrees and I scribble her email into my notebook under my weekly to-do list. By the time I leave, it is nearly ten. I head back out towards the subway, emerging back into the bustle of the city.

During the first interview I conducted, my respondent, reacting to the fact that my inaugural TWS meeting might be an AGM[5] offered an apology, describing them as "a numbers killer." "The business meetings of the Wagner Society are about as boring as it gets," he elaborated, "There's no controversy, there's nothing much to talk about." A sober warning indeed! And in some ways, this was true. Attendance was lower than usual, there were no heated exchanges, nor was the dryness of the meeting counterbalanced by an exciting guest. Why then take the time to describe the meeting in detail? While it is true that the AGM was mostly focused on procedure, I would also ask how the discussions, the location, and the atmosphere of the AGM assembled and reflected larger issues and concerns raised throughout my interviews. As a cultural technique, the AGM works as an organizational as well as a constitutive force: it is the most explicit enacting of the rules that govern the society and renders visible the various techniques that must be performed for the society to exist in the form of budgets, executive committees, and the labour of dedicated volunteers. But more than that, the AGM gives us a glimpse of the constellations of things that matter.

[5] In the end, it turned out that there was a bit of confusion: the AGM was the first meeting of the fall season, rather than the last of the spring. As such it was the second meeting I attended, not the first. The sentiment, however, remains relevant.

So while there was no "controversy" per se, the meeting highlights what Latour might term "matters of concerns," nodes of what would otherwise be dispassionate and immobile matters of facts to which are added the "whole scenography, much like you would do by shifting your attention from the stage to the machinery of a theatre."[6] These matters of concern "start to move in all directions, they overflow their boundaries, they include a complete set of new actors, they reveal the fragile envelopes in which they are housed."[7] Facts such as the older composition of the society, the difficulty of access to live Wagnerian opera, and the differing productions become something more, tied in with affective judgments as part of larger fan networks: in short, they start to matter, to be "appreciated, tasted, experimented upon, mounted, prepared, put to the test."[8] In this chapter, however, I would like to ask three main questions: who, how, and why? More precisely, what does one do as a fan of Wagner, who are performing these actions and—the toughest question of all—why bother with Wagner in the first place. Through an exploration of these three questions, we can begin to glimpse how fandom is constructed.

Who

The question of how one identifies a Wagnerian is at first glance deceptively simple, easily answered with a series of demographic traits. After all, as Pierre Bourdieu makes clear, audiences invariably operate in social spaces defined by their cultural, economic and social capital, and as such, there is no such thing as aesthetically pure consumption.[9] How does reality then, stand up against the typical

---

[6] Bruno Latour, "What Is the Style of Matters of Concern? Two Lectures in Empirical Philosophy" (Spinoza Lectures at the University of Amsterdam (2005), Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 2008), 39, http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/161.html.

[7] Latour, "What Is the Style of Matters of Concern," 39.

[8] Latour, "What Is the Style of Matters of Concern," 39.

[9] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

opera-goer stereotype of white, wealthy and silver-haired? Anecdotally, some of these generalizations were more or less true: those with graduate and post-graduate certificates were overrepresented in my sample, with at least five having doctoral degrees and many others holding graduate or professional qualifications. Only a handful were originally from Toronto, but all but one was of white, European descent. Indeed, society chair Frances Henry—who was recently recognized for her academic research on Caribbean cultural anthropology and racism by the Order of Canada—commented in our interview that the society had only a single black member. While I spoke to more men than women, observation at society meetings suggests a balanced composition.

Yet I am hesitant to draw from these observations a picture of the prototypical Toronto Wagnerian for several reasons. The first is a pragmatic one: without a more significant survey—one not as skewed towards its most active members and that includes Wagnerians not connected to the society—whether those I talked to are representative of the Wagnerian community in Toronto at large is difficult to ascertain. Second, such a list suggests that opera is akin to a disease with each demographic category a sort of risk factor, rather than complex nodes generated through cultural techniques. Let me be clear: I am not arguing that race, gender or class play no hand in reception. The undeniable whiteness of both opera and classical music are, for example, deeply intertwined with the valuing of the Western Art tradition. Still, such a turn to sociological analysis risks sidelining the importance of affect and reducing opera to a transactional resource. In addition, distilling Wagnerians to a list of identity markers returns us to thinking about fandom as a state of being rather than a continual praxis.

Instead of thinking of opera as cultural capital dispassionately attached to static categories of identity, I want to pull from Lawrence Grossberg's concept of "mattering maps," the divisions of

affective planes "which direct people's investments in and into the world."[10] While our personal mattering maps might be shaped through the identity categories we are ascribed to (either willingly or not), not all of these categories and labels are attached to affect and meaning in the same way or to the same degree. In short, they matter in different ways. These maps subsequently shape how we interact with the world.[11] What I thus suggest is a more focused approach. Rather than trying to capture in its entirety the outline of a Wagnerian, I'd instead like to zoom in on a particular assemblage of cultural techniques and reflect on the ways that it intersects with Wagnerism. For this purpose, I turn to a concern that was raised in the AGM: aging.

Two factors inform my choice to focus on aging, rather than class, gender or race: first, as in the AGM, the aging of the society was raised on more than one occasion throughout my discussions; second, scholarship on aging and classical music, though growing, is still in its infancy, largely limited to cognitive/physiological studies which look at how aging affects musicians and singers,[12] or how music offers therapeutic benefits.[13] Musicological discussions of aging often centre on the concept of the "late style," that is, how a composer's music evolves in response to encroaching maturity and

---

[10] Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 82.

[11] See for example, James Carey's thoughts on communication and maps: James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 28. He argues that "thinking consists of building maps of environments." These models are then, recursively, used to help us navigate the words.

[12] See for example Marie Antoinette Drohan, "The Effect of Aging on the Singing Voice and the Vocal Longevity of Professional Singers" (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2004); Heiner Gembris and Andreas Heye, "Growing Older in a Symphony Orchestra: The Development of the Age-Related Self-Concept and the Self-Estimated Performance of Professional Musicians in a Lifespan Perspective," *Musicæ Scientiæ: The Journal of the European Society for the Cognitive Sciences of Music* 18, no. 4 (December 2014): 371–91, https://doi.org/10.1177/1029864914548912; Miriam A. Henoch and Kris S. Chesky, "Hearing Loss and Aging: Implications for the Professional Musician," *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 14, no. 2 (1999): 76–79; Dianna Kenny, Tim Driscoll, and Bronwen Ackermann, "Effects of Aging on Musical Performance in Professional Orchestral Musicians," *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 33, no. 1 (March 1, 2018): 39–46, https://doi.org/10.21091/mppa.2018.1007.

[13] Susan Hallam, "Music, Cognition and Well-Being in the Ageing," in *The Routledge Companion to Music, Mind and Well-Being*, ed. Penelope Gouk et al. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 291–302.

mortality. This idea has also been troubled and challenged by several scholars, some through explicitly a gerontological lens.[14] How aging shapes the *reception* of opera and classical music more broadly, however, has had less attention.

By contrast, popular music studies have begun to address aging fans more directly. Andy Bennett argues, for example, that the pioneers of rock and roll—now themselves well into their sixties and seventies—are becoming pioneers of a different sort by modelling what it means to age in a genre previously defined as much by its youthfulness as its musical tropes.[15] In his illustrations of the often ageist attitudes displayed towards older rock fans, Bennett plucks this quote published in an English newspaper by Jeremy Langmead: "The point is that both rock 'n' roll and its little cousin, pop, were made for the young. Old people have opera, [Andrew] Lloyd Webber and theme tunes."[16] Opera indeed.

Dispelling the ageist narratives in much of music criticism (and to some extent, in scholarship) not only means talking about the aging fans of popular music, but also the flip side: fans of genres that are stereotypically (whether rightfully or not) associated with old age. Exploring the history of how opera become associated with aging is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I will be focusing on how narratives of aging are continually reinscribed in reception, part of larger discourse networks underpinned by the biological and supported by shifting technological regimes.[17] Some of the

---

[14] For a discussion of how the concept of late-style applies to Wagner see Anthony Barone, "Richard Wagner's 'Parsifal' and the Theory of Late Style," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 7, no. 1 (1995): 37–54, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586700004407; I would be remiss not to also note here the work of Linda and Michael Hutcheon on composers and aging, both of whom are members of the Toronto Wagner Society and participated in my research. See Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Four Last Songs: Aging and Creativity in Verdi, Strauss, Messiaen, and Britten* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[15] Andy Bennett, "Popular Music Scenes and Aging Bodies," *Journal of Aging Studies* 45, no. 1 (2018): 49–53, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2018.01.007.

[16] Langmead quoted in Bennett, "Popular Music Scenes and Aging Bodies," 49.

[17] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Standard, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 369.

questions remain the same as when studying popular music: what role does music play in personal life course narratives and does reception evolve over time? How do the activities we partake in evolve as we age? But it also brings new questions: What are the concerns of fans in a genre which was never particularly associated with youth?

Rather than approaching aging through a biological lens, I would like to reframe aging as a cultural technique. I take inspiration here from Bernhard Siegert's chapter on the act of communion, which positions eating as a series of cultural techniques which create community as well as the distinction between the subject and what is being served on the plate. Through media such as tableware and tablecloths, this divide is continually amplified and reproduced.[18] Similarly, we can think of aging not as an immutable biological condition, but as a dynamic assemblage of which physiological changes are but one part. For example, in pre-modern Europe, age was generally not understood as a distinct category but rather seen at the intersection of "kindred medical, philosophical, and astrological schemes of life [...] positioned in a dialectical relationship between the physical and the spiritual, where the latter could overcome the limitations of the former."[19] Gerontologist Steven Katz, employing a Foucauldian lens, argues that it is only later that the elderly were conceptualized as a distinct demographic group associated with a homogenized medicalized discourse of decline. By using age as their sole requirement, pensions and retirement schemes at the turn of the twentieth century "constructed and justified a normative age for old age that symbolically differentiated the elderly as a population and excluded it from the workforce."[20] But I would also add that behind discourse which

[18] Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 2015, 33–52.

[19] Stephen Katz, *Disciplining Old Age: The Formation of Gerontological Knowledge* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 31.

[20] Katz, *Disciplining Old Age*, 64.

creates the aging subject, are cultural techniques.[21] A useful reference here is Kittler's concept of discourse networks, "the network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data."[22] For example, medicalized aging bodies require technology to diagnose and decode them. Retirement ages presuppose the ability to quantify age and reliable ways of tracking it such as calendars and birth certificates. Aging is as much a media as a cultural history.

Opera is then one of the many actors that have become intertwined with the assemblage of aging. As part of my interviews, the material frequently made visible the biological. I encountered references to "wheelchair alleys" and to the "cane brigade," on some occasions tongue firmly in cheek, including themselves in the description, other times not. While attending a cinema screening of the Metropolitan Opera production of *Dialogues des carmélites*, I noted ads for retirement homes and luxury watches. Iain Scott described opera as a "late-onset disease" enabled by the affordances of time and money associated with retirement:

> Typically, an interest in opera has a lot to do with exposure, and which helps with understanding. But it tends to be correlated with time and money. So a large proportion of people who find an interest in opera—who are from the business world and the medical world, in the professional world, who are not musicologists or whatever—they tend to come to it late. It tends to be one of those deferred gratifications. Once I retire, [...] once I paid off the mortgage, once I got the kids through school, and I retire and have time, *then* I will read all the novels of Proust, then I will read Homer, then I will learn about opera.

---

[21] Young, "Cultural Techniques and Logistical Media." As Young explains, cultural techniques inherits from Kittler a healthy respect for Foucault's works, but differs in one key way: "To sum up this move in one sentence: Kittler went a layer deeper than Foucault's archaeologies did or could, showing the archive and discourse to be themselves always structured by media technologies: no discourse without pens, paper, and typewriters, no archives without recording media and address systems, no governmentality without files."

[22] Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, 369.

Here, the medicalized discourse of aging has been attached to individual narratives of discovery, coupled with the leisure-oriented view of retirement.

The narrative of aging as a precondition for loving opera is doubled with Wagner: not only does one have to develop an interest in opera, but one must also take on the challenge of *Wagnerian* opera. Wagner was often cited as a later stop in the typical development of budding opera lovers. In part, this is a self-fulfilling prophecy, with opera education framing Wagner as difficult to get into, wielding both textual and musical analysis to dissect the music into its constituent parts. But it is also embedded in the inherent difficulties of staging the pieces, with their demanding run-times, large casts and orchestra. Soprano Adrianne Pieczonka emphasized that Wagner is often considered a "no-no" for young developing voices due not only to the technical demands of sustaining a performance over four to five hours, but also the maturity and commitment needed to learn roles of this magnitude. Wagnerian singers—especially those singing the "bigger" roles such as Brünnhilde—thus often reach their prime later than other specialists, with most at their peak between their mid-thirties to mid-fifties. The long process of disciplining the body—"man's first and most natural instrument"[23]—into the rigorous techniques of classical singing almost seem to demand an equally well-trained listener.

The metaphor of opera as a late-onset disease can migrate from the individual to opera as a whole. Precisely because opera is a performance art, fans must rely on outside organizations to keep the art alive. As such, the commercial viability of opera—either through sustained government funding or healthy box office returns—becomes an existential concern for fans. The persistent association with aging—and the difficulty of attracting new members—renders Wagnerism into a cause worth

[23] Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," trans. Ben Brewster, *Economy and Society* 2, no. 1 (1973): 75, https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147300000003.

championing. Frances's worries at the AGM over enlisting younger society members were echoed by several of my other interviewees, who noted the aging of the society and uncertainty about its future survival. Jim Warrington was motivated to join the board in part because he felt that his background as a marketing professional might be useful in helping to attract new members. He detailed a plan to offer the society as a final project for marketing students at Seneca College as a strategy to expose Wagner to a younger audience, which ultimately fell through due to outside circumstances. Linda and Michel Hutcheon felt that the society was in need of "renewal," though they admitted that it was unclear what that renewal should look like.

Nor are these concerns completely unfounded. In the extract below, the ill-fated Mozart Society—the only other composer-centric opera society I am aware of in Toronto—is held up as a grim lesson for the Toronto Wagner Society:

> Teddy (Edward) Hall: A friend of mine used to belong to the Mozart society but it conked out, everyone...
>
> Emilie Hurst: That's what I heard, yeah.
>
> TH: Everyone died!
>
> EH: That's unfortunate... [laughs]
>
> TH: The executive expired as I understand it.
>
> EH: Well, let's hope that the Wagner Society has a better fate than that!
>
> TH: Well, we're all to a certain age there. You're not finding teenagers, you know. I don't know whether we look upon it as a problem of not getting many new members... I don't know what to say to that. If they don't come, they don't come. But what can you do?

More recently, I also witnessed unfold over a series of emails the demise of the Toronto Opera club. After the passing of the current society head, the rest of the board made the difficult decision—based

on the low response on how to move forward and a continued decline in attendance—that it was time to wind down operations. Without extensive discussion with younger Wagner fans, it is hard to quantify to what degree this is simply the result of a generational divide in which younger fans prefer to express their love of Wagner online, or signs of a genuine decline in enthusiasm for his music. This being said, they do illustrate how fans are embedded into larger networks, ones which risk disappearing when faced with human mortality.

There is then, as illustrated above, some truth to the persistent association between Wagnerism and aging. In almost all meetings I attended, I was likely the youngest one there and almost everyone I talked to was, if not retired, then nearing retirement age. In many cases, Wagner lovers *do* follow the stereotypical route of a general interest in classical music, followed by dabbling with Italian composers before finally landing on Wagner. This was the case for Alan Denis, who after developing an appreciation for opera in his thirties, started listening in earnest in his sixties:

> you start off with popular stuff. Puccini, Verdi and gradually... At that time, in 1970s, 80s, I had a work colleague, who was very much into opera, and he lent me a lot of vinyl and they... again, I found Wagner very unapproachable and difficult to appreciate. And Strauss was, argh! I couldn't get Strauss at all. It was a gradual evolution that happened. As I've got older and getting to like the music that is, I guess, most difficult.

In this case, Wagner served as a sort of culmination of a much longer journey that stretched back into his teenage years listening to classical music on the radio in South Africa, followed by several disappointing ventures to the opera house, before the advent of surtitles made it easier to understand what was going on stage. Appreciation and love came through repeated listening, showing that love of Wagner is often about the necessity to condition the ear to listen in certain ways.

Yet as is often the case, the picture becomes more complicated once we take a closer look. It is not clear, for example, that the aging demographic of the Wagner society is necessarily emblematic of the health of opera as a whole. Opera journalist Jenna Simeonov contends that most of the current growth in opera is in small-scale indie productions, rather than the more traditional, and resource intensive, performances put on by the COC. As a further complication, many of those I talked to had not discovered Wagner in their fifties and sixties or onward—rather opera and Wagner represented a lifelong love affair, discovered in childhood or their years at university. What these alternative journeys instead highlight are infrastructures of discoveries enabled by opera houses, to radio programs to CDs.

In some cases, the conversions happened early but still followed the aforementioned route from Italian to German opera. Linda Hutcheon discovered opera as a graduate student in Italy. Her husband Michael, however, took longer to convince:

> I went to my first opera in Bologna in Italy. And I went, Oh. [laugh] It sort of brought together literature, music, theatre, and I went "Oh I like this." So when I, when we got married in Italy, we came back. I said we should go to the opera. Michael had never been to an opera at that point. We went to the COC, and in those days, the COC was not what it is today. And we went to, we both remember this vividly, [...] they had done an English version of Don Giovanni and at intermission Michael turned to me and said, "You like opera?" [Laugh]

As they continued to attend performances at the COC, both eventually formed a strong appreciation and love for the art form. Linda felt at first that Wagner "needed an editor and went on too long." Siegfried proved to be a particularly challenging experience, exacerbated by the lack of surtitles[24]:

> Michael Hutcheon: So we're seeing some Italian opera, then we saw Siegfried. And at this time, I had no idea. I don't think either of us knew what it was.
>
> Linda Hutcheon: Neither of us knew what the Ring or the concept of where [Siegfried] fit into it. Or if we hadn't, we were at the beginning of our careers, so we were working our butts off. And we had no time, we were in graduate school.
>
> MH: And the first act of Siegfried, is just like, what?
>
> LH: We couldn't figure it out. What's this bear doing on stage?!

It was only once they got the opportunity to visit Bayreuth in the late 1980s via a tour hosted by the COC—for which they were among the youngest who applied—that they begin studying Wagner in earnest, taking a course on the subject, studying the libretto and score, and listening to a variety of recordings in preparation.

Edward Hall, who goes by Teddy, developed his love of opera in his early teens alongside his friend John. Kick-started in 1941 at the age of 13 when his friend asked for two tickets for *Aida* for his birthday in 1941. This early infatuation was fuelled by whatever scraps of opera they could get their hands on: LP recordings, broadcast on the radio, librettos borrowed from the library, newspaper reviews and the Metropolitan Opera Guild's *Opera Magazine*. Their mothers, however, were not completely on board:

---

[24] Surtitles were introduced by the COC in 1983.

> My mother and John's mother thought we had an obsession. They weren't sure whether this was such a good thing. I would say better [opera] then, I could think of other things that wouldn't be as good! [laughs] I don't think it's dangerous to a person, but it was the obsession of it. And the first time we'd seen [Aida] that's what started it. And it was the war years, there was very little [to do]. We were on our own, there was very little you see.

Nor was Wagner a late addition: the same year he saw *Aida* live he recalls enjoying a radio broadcast of *Die Walküre* which he felt he understood right away. Though able to attend in person, sustaining his interest depended on the transmission of opera via technology, ones that largely downplayed the visual for the audio.

Similarly, Wayne Gooding had an early chance encounter with Wagner in an LP store bargain bin around the age of 11 or 12:

> And I came across this record [...] It has a beautiful red maroon cover. It's an HMV, had the little dog Nipper on the front and "His Master's Voice" and is in a series called Great recordings of the Century. And I was really attracted to the cover without actually knowing what was on the record. Seriously! [...] And it was Wagner and I, you know... "Wall-ker-re"? I don't know how you ... or "Got-ter-dam-mer-run"? I didn't know what it was, but I did buy it simply on the strength of the cover. And I took it home. [...] Anyway, so I put the record on, I had no idea what I was listening to. But the end of the first side was Friedrich Schorr, singing the "Abschied" from *Die Walküre*. And again, I just fell in love, seduced entirely by the voice. And I played that thing over and over and over again.

Building on a pre-existing appreciation for Beethoven, this discovery helped foster a deep love for Wagner, one that would continue throughout the rest of his life.

For Frances Henry, the connection to Wagner goes back even further:

> So my father was a resident in the city of Kassel in the middle of Germany. They had a, like every city in Germany has an opera house, they had an Opera House. And they were—the year that my mother was pregnant with me—they were doing six performances of Parsifal. And my father would volunteer for all of the Wagner performances to be the duty doctor in the house, and he'd drag my pregnant mother with him, to six performances of Parsifal. So she would have been around, oh, six, seven months pregnant roughly. So I've always believed that I was born with it!

Growing up in New York, she was later able to attend performances at the Met. Although there have been gaps in her appreciation because of commitments to family and career, her love of Wagner has been a constant, only growing stronger as she aged. What these stories show is that for many, the connection to opera –and Wagner in particular—starts young and ebbs and flows throughout their lives: opera is thus not exclusively a late-onset disease, but one that evolves throughout the years. Even in cases where a full love of Wagner comes later, the becoming-a-fan stories I heard often used as their starting point much earlier events: catching the occasional opera on the radio or an initial interest in classical music.

In addition, relationships with Wagner are not static but continue to evolve in response to accumulated life experience and changes in lifestyle. For some, like Jim Warrington, they have found themselves becoming pickier with what productions they now go see, being less inclined to put up with opera they don't enjoy. In other cases, the opposite was true: Wiley Powell explained that retirement has allowed him to see a wider range of opera both in Toronto and Europe, while increased knowledge of opera has enabled him to appreciate Wagner in new ways. For Joseph So, his relationship to opera had deepened, becoming less intellectual and more visceral:

> When I was younger, I was not so emotionally involved. Not so easily emotionally moved. But with age, I am. It's... I cannot explain [it] to you. I don't know why. Maybe it's because I know that my time is limited. Maybe it's because I've experienced so much more in life, that it means more to me. I shouldn't talk about it anymore because I don't want to break down in front of you! But it's because music is transformative, music is transcendent. I don't remember being so moved by Italian opera. Did I cry in Bohème? I must have. Did I cry in Otello? I must have, but those tears are different from the tears in Wagner.

For Frances, the high has stayed the same, but it has become harder to express:

> I think I've always felt it. But you feel highs differently when you're young than when you're older. The exuberance of it all. Now I walk out of, out of an opera that I loved and that's happened... well it happened in New York several times. And it's hard to express the exuberance when you're my age, you know, an old lady being expressive and exuberant, just sort of doesn't fit the mould. Whereas I could more readily when I was younger. But on the other hand, the feeling is the same.

Here, age modulates and amplifies their relationship with Wagner in various ways, rather than acting as a prerequisite.

If not a late-onset disease, then how can we reframe the correlation between age and opera? I would suggest that both are part of larger networks of both material and non-material actors. These range from government regulated pension plans and retirement ages, the growing decentralization of media which make accidental discoveries of opera on the radio or television more difficult, discourses of leisure and self-improvement which paint the later years of one's life as times to indulge rather than save. Because of the cost associated with opera and the time necessary to dedicate oneself more seriously to travelling for productions, aging facilitates more sustained engagement with opera.

Time and money are especially useful for feeding a Wagner addiction rather than a more general operatic affliction: one can fill up a respectable opera calendar by cobbling together a COC subscription with a healthy dose of indie opera performances within Toronto but receiving a steady diet of Wagner and Ring cycles requires travelling abroad. While both Evans and Benzecry suggest that income and love of opera are generally seen by fans as inversely proportionate, contrasting the more passionate, unruly attendees in the standing room to the more sedate moneyed patrons in the boxes,[25] this was not necessarily the case with the Toronto Wagner society. Some might have started in the standing room, but many had since graduated to more comfortable seats at the COC and expressed no qualms about doing so. [26]Money is not a prerequisite for loving Wagner—nor does it always coincide with age—but it does help.

If typical opera stereotypes associate aging with opera because of its supposed sedate nature, I am in some ways suggesting the opposite: one of the reasons that opera is associated with aging is because it demands such large investment not only in time and money but also emotionally. Bennett argues that longer lifespans and better health outcomes mean that individuals are "less prepared to either simply accept the physical limitations of aging as an inevitability."[27] Both middle age and retirement are increasingly a time of action, rather than inaction. Jim Warrington, one of the current

---

[25] Benzecry, *The Opera Fanatic*; David T. Evans, *Phantasmagoria: Sociology of Opera* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[26] This might be because the rambunctious opera culture found in European opera houses—in which practices like booing are common—are virtually absent in North Americans. While the intensity of the applause at the end might vary from one production to another, I have yet to attend a COC performance which did not end with at least a partial standing ovation. At worst, patrons might leave between acts (as I witnessed in the 2017 revival of Harry Sommerville's *Louis Riel*) but voicing of opinions during performance—whether positive or negative—is frowned upon. Without this performative divide, the divisions between the expensive and the cheap seats are not as keenly contrasted as in other cities. Another factor at play might be the acoustics of the Four Seasons Centre which are generally considered excellent no matter where you are sitting unlike many opera houses where the best sound is usually located in the seats furthest up.

[27] Bennett, "Popular Music Scenes and Aging Bodies," 50.

executive members, summed it up neatly: "I retired five years ago, and I've never been busier!" In some cases, opera led to secondary careers, such as in the case of Joseph So who, having left academia, is still active as a music journalist. For many Wagnerians, aging has meant more time to enjoy what they love, amplified by a growing body of experience and knowledge to draw from.

Yet at the same time, narratives of discovery uncover the importance of being in contact with the right infrastructures of listening at the right time. These discourse networks are deeply rooted in time and place and presuppose certain listening cultures, ones in which opera is both available in the theatre as well as parallel technological chains of dissemination from radio, record store bargain bins, to CDs and LPs. These allowed many of my participants to discover Wagner and opera at an early age by providing more accessible streams, even if at times they might have felt that they were, as Teddy Hall put it, "grasping at straws." The stereotype of opera as a late-onset disease misses some of these alternative modes of entry, ones not as closely tied to age but rather a product of infrastructure of music distribution. By reframing age as a cultural technique, we can get away from thinking of age as a direct cause of Wagnerism but rather as a complex assemblage in which age becomes associated in subtle ways to particular technologies through time. These in turn influence the likelihood of discovery and thus love.

In addition, these narratives also emphasize that listening is not a monolithic skill: though opera can be experienced as a coup de foudre, just as often, Wagner's music proves recalcitrant. Repeated listening then becomes necessary to untangle the musical threads. Listening becomes a learned bodily technique, as Marcel Mauss argues, "the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties."[28]

[28] Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," 73.

Media that promote certain techniques of listening—such as lectures, program notes or even surtitles (which emphasize the story-telling aspect of the genre)—direct operaphiles how they are to decode what they hear. For Wagner, the principal kind of hearing that is cultivated is leitmotivic, that is listening for reoccurring musical themes. I will expound on the ubiquitous claim that Wagner requires "work" in the following chapter, but here I want to emphasize repetition, a process which by necessity can only ever unfold through time. When I asked Frances Henry to explain her answer as to how she can return to the same opera again and again, she had this to say:

> It's the height of what artistic genius can absolutely do. So you know, and what has always grabbed me is that I've never gotten tired of Wagner. I never ever get tired of, yes, hearing the same thing over and over again. I can't tell you how much text I know by heart, just because I've heard it so often. But that doesn't mean I'm tired of it. I want to hear how every single singer in the world sings it, you know! It opens the door to experience with a huge capital E, if you're willing to accept it. And it takes time, it does take... it's not anything you can absorb quickly. It does take time and many hearings or viewings until you suddenly begin to realize what this is all about. I mean, for the beginner you suddenly... I've experienced that people just beginning, they suddenly [go], "Oh, I heard that theme! The one that just played. I heard that in Act Two of the..." "Right, so you did! And, you know, it's a different key here," and so on, but... and that happens a lot. I mean, I'm hearing new things in the music that I've heard one thousand times, every time I hear it. Some new tiny bit that suddenly strikes me that some conductors just picked out, maybe an oboe passage or something, just for a few seconds. And I say to myself, I don't think I've ever actually heard that before.

Love then becomes contingent on the willingness for repeat listening with aging as a proxy for this cumulative experience. Even for those, such as Frances, who found Wagner early, the return to music always has the potential to reveal something new.

How

One of my aims in adopting a networked model of fandom is to emphasize that Wagnerism is not a fully formed state of being, but rather emerges through praxis. By exploring the question of "how," I want to stress the countless ways that fans enact and re-enforce their relationship with Wagner and how media provide the conditions of possibilities for these activities. Perhaps the most natural place to begin is in the opera house. Here the inert score comes to life. For many, only live opera could truly satiate their desire for Wagner: nothing else comes close to recreating the immersion proposed by the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the fusion of theatre, music, and art. Most I talked to held yearly subscriptions to the COC (though they did not always attend every opera), supplemented with local indie opera. Visiting Bayreuth at least once is still widely considered a must. Only a dedicated few, however, are both willing and able to spend the time and money to chase Wagner productions across the globe. While counting Ring Cycles is generally seen as somewhat gauche, the most active Wagnerians I talked to had close to fifty Ring cycles under their belt, in addition to countless productions of Wagner's other operas.

Despite this importance, I also want to emphasize Benzecry's point that opera fandom encompasses a variety of practices that often extend outside the opera house.[29] Too often reception is narrowed to evaluating opinions of a certain cultural product—but as cultural techniques underscores, it is vital that we think of culture as "no longer a matter of monolithic immobility congealed in works,

[29] Benzecry, *The Opera Fanatic*.

documents or monuments, but liquefies into our everyday practices with objects, symbols, instruments and machines."[30] To consider the "how" of Wagner thus means moving out of the theatre and into the everyday to examine how various technologies provide the fundamental infrastructure which underpin fandom and these, in turn, shape the practices of fans.

Reflecting on the links between creativity and aging, C. Lee Harrington notes that fan scholars often prefer to study the material output of fans over the activities of the fans themselves, a trend amplified by the turn to the digital. In this paradigm, production is equated with creativity, to the detriment of other activities.[31] Harrington, however, argues that this approach does a disservice to older fans who are often less active on digital platforms and thus often do not produce the same kinds of outputs. Indeed, textual productivity, though present, was for most I talked to peripheral to their love of Wagner's music or, with a few notable exceptions, limited to exchanges over email and occasional comments on blogs and Facebook groups, more akin to enunciative production mediated through digital means. Rather than the "spectacularity" of participatory fandom, the actions were those of "everyday fandom"—regular, non-intensive activities which supplement rather than supplant the live musical event.[32] Such activities included subscriptions to magazines such as *Opera Canada* or COC newsletters, reading reviews, expanding record collections, keeping up with opera gossip or sharing and receiving links to streamed performances with a couple of dash lines on their opinion of the production.

---

[30] Krämer and Bredekamp, "Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques," 24.

[31] C. Lee Harrington, "Creativity and Ageing in Fandom," *Celebrity Studies* 9, no. 2 (2018): 231–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2018.1465295.

[32] Paul Théberge, "Everyday Fandom: Fan Clubs, Blogging, and the Quotidian Rhythms of the Internet," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 30, no. 4 (2006), https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2005v30n4a1673.

In this regard, TWS meetings were the exception rather than the rule—a place to indulge their passion with others in a more public and formalized context, rendering Wagnerism into a larger fan network from the love of individual fans. Like the theatre, the interactions are highly ritualized. The in-person meetings I attended were divided into two main types: viewings of opera-related content, such as the one at the AGM, and inviting opera professionals—singers, producers and COC staff—to discuss their craft with the society. Of the two, the meetings with guests were the most anticipated and cited as key reason members continued attending. The executive will usually start planning the season at the beginning of summer, looking ahead at the opera schedule in the city and determining whether anyone with a Wagner connection will be in town. Most are happy to attend: the opera world is small enough for professionals to be able to spare the time to talk between performances. As a rule, singers are never asked to sing as it is understood that they must preserve their voices for performances. Some of the guests I had the chance to hear from included heldentenor Clay Hilley, sopranos Tamara Wilson and Adrianne Pieczonka, baritones Gerald Finley and Michael Volle, directors Francois Girard and staff from the COC including general director Perryn Leech and musical director Johannes Debus.

These presentations usually take the form of an informal interview with a society facilitator, supplemented with a question-and-answer portion at the end. For in-person meetings, the guests are presented with small favours from the society (usually in the form of a bottle of wine) and invited downstairs to the Arts and Letters Club bar to socialize. Meetings are thus highly codified. COVID-19 resulted in some tweaks to this formula, with the shift to online opening up the list of available guests to those in other locations. As a result, filler meetings consisting of viewings were dropped. The savings from room rentals were redirected towards providing a modest honorarium for the guests, in recognition as well of the loss of work for many of those invited. In addition, lecture format

meetings, which had fallen by the wayside in recent years, were reintroduced with presentations from authors Barry Miller and Alex Ross. I also had the opportunity to present a portion of my own research tracking references to Wagner in the Toronto Globe (see chapter 4).

Outside of TWS meetings and live opera, media allows opera fandom to expand into the everyday. As already discussed, radio reoccurred multiple times in stories of discovery, reflecting the fact that most respondents came of age prior to the current digital media landscape. Radio has long provided opportunities to sample the classical and operatic canon as part of a model of broadcasting predicated on "the ideology of cultural uplift."[33] By far, the most influential program has been the Metropolitan Opera radio broadcast, aired in Canada on the CBC and its predecessor since 1933.[34] For many, the Met broadcasts were their first point of contact with opera (but not Wagner), such as with Barbara Japp:

> My father always had it on, Saturday afternoons. And my memory of my childhood was Puccini, not Wagner. No, I discovered Wagner on my own. My father always sang along to the stuff.

[33] Timothy D. Taylor, "The Role of Opera in the Rise of Radio in the US," in *Music in the World: Selected Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 74–93.

[34] Sponsored by Texaco from 1940 to 2004, they were sometimes referred to as the Texaco broadcasts. Helmut Kallmann et al., "Metropolitan Opera," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica Canada, December 15, 2013), https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/metropolitan-opera-emc; CBC currently carries the Met broadcast as part of its weekly program "Saturday afternoon at the opera." In the past, this program has also featured live Canadian opera with its own in-house company from 1948 to 1963, and later in partnership with the COC. However, since the restructuring of Radio 2 in 2008, the CBC, reacting to shift in taste, policy, and considerable funding cuts throughout the 2000s, has moved away significantly from classical music. Lack of financial support from the government and the public broadcaster has subsequently made it difficult for Canadian opera to gain a footing in online streaming, a fact only highlighted by the boom that took place over the course of COVID-19. See Jennifer Higgs, Sarah Church, and Andrew Mcintosh, "Music at the CBC," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica Canada, March 4, 2015), https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/cbc-emc; Perović, "Live-Streaming."

Another respondent noted listening during their childhood in Saskatchewan to *The Standard Hour* (1926–1955), which featured a mix of symphonic and operatic music transmitted from San Francisco. Unlike the theatre, the radio by default strips opera of any visual component. This meant that for many, opera was first something one heard rather than one saw. To a lesser extent TV also played a role in discovery. In particular, the 1976 Centennial Ring directed by Patrice Chéreau was a major media event and broadcast via television worldwide in subsequent years. Wiley Powell, who was at first convinced he would dislike the Ring cycle, found the production a revelation, opening the door to his current love of opera. Since then, however, opera has almost completely disappeared from Canadian and American television. Several of those I talked to still listen to *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera* (1982–) on CBC, though the program's importance has perhaps diminished in recent years, in light of the digital era.

One of the larger shifts has been towards the importance of personal collections and, increasingly, streaming services in the day-to-day activities of opera lovers. Many owned large physical collections of CDs, vinyl or DVDs, sometimes numbering in the thousands, while others had embraced the affordances of digital streaming platforms such as Spotify and YouTube. This has two principal effects: first, recordings fix performances into repeatable experiences. Fans talk of "the Solti Ring"[35] or "the Centennial Ring," neatly packaging otherwise ephemeral musical performances into discrete nouns. Second, opera is a much less scarce resource, now available on-demand. Both of these mean that it is much easier to compare performances and even the less travelled Wagnerian often has a wide base of knowledge of performance history. Though at-home listening enables more distracted forms of listening, listening practices varied, with a mixture of listening to Wagner both actively (with

[35] This refers to the first complete recording of the Ring cycle, released between 1959-1966 by Decca records and conducted by Georg Solti.

some enjoying on occasion following along with the score) and passively. That being said, because of the difficulty of partitioning Wagner's operas into individual arias, the preferred mode of consumption for several was to listen to operas in full rather than sample select passages. Jim Warrington, for example, attested to being unable to listen to opera in fragments—to take things out of context was to miss the entire point of Wagner. In other cases, Wagner's music struggled to *stay* in the background, making passive listening more challenging. Wiley Powell, for instance, will listen to opera almost daily while he works, taking advantage of the easy accessibility of Spotify. In certain passages, however, the music never fails to draw him in:

> I often have Wagner playing as I'm doing my translation work. And when I'm listening to certain parts of the Ring, no matter what I'm doing, I always have to stop. You know, Wagner can be sort of background [music] for a while, but then there are moments where nothing else can exist, right, especially the end of *Götterdämmerung*, the end of *Die Walküre*, and so forth.

The perceived seductiveness and all-encompassing nature of Wagner's music makes casual listening for some an inherent contradiction, a theme I will return to in the following chapter. Here, I want to highlight the multiplicity of what it means to "listen to Wagner" and how media can subtly change the outlines of both the listening subject and Wagner's music.

As hinted above, many of these listening activities do take place online, though most commented that digital spaces were not central to their love of Wagner and that they were less likely to seek things out themselves. This hearkens back to the second entry of "cultural techniques," which referenced the "skills and aptitudes necessary to master the new media ecology."[36] Yet importantly

[36] Winthrop-Young, "Cultural Techniques," 5.

these competences do not emerge in a vacuum: they represent the continual negotiation between subject and object and in turn work to define both. Indicative of the growing digital literacy of TWS members was the switch in 2019 from mailed to digital Wagner society newsletters. This trend was further accelerated in the wake of COVID-19, with society members frequently sharing links to upcoming Wagnerian streams and attending education workshops via Zoom.[37] Digital literacy, however, was not universal: at least one person I interviewed did not utilize email, and the switch to online meetings left a handful of regular attendees behind.

That being said, it is clear from my research that Wagner fans do use the internet to engage with opera—subscribing to mailing lists, streaming productions online (on YouTube and directly from opera companies), reading reviews, joining forums and Facebook groups. This demographic shift raises questions over how the growing digital literacy of older fans is changing the landscape of online media fandom, which once catered overwhelmingly to those under the age of 30, and how their activities intersect and diverge from those of younger fans. For example, the two most popular platforms were YouTube and Facebook. YouTube's widespread use among participants can be largely attributed to opera's audio-visual format. The wealth of posted materials—both legal and illegal–allows for the comparison of performances. I did not hear of the use of other social media such as Twitter, Instagram and Reddit,[38] which aligns with Anatoliy Gruzd and Philip Mai's observation that Facebook remains in Canada the only social media with an adoption rate over 50% for people

[37] Both opera educators I talked to switched to online Zoom seminars during this period, with mixed results. I will address this further in chapter 4.

[38] For example, while there are hundreds of Facebook groups dedicated to Wagner, the Richard Wagner subreddit has less than 50 posts over the last five years.

above the age of 55.[39] For most I talked to, their discovery of opera predated mainstream usage of the internet, making online venues an extension rather than a core part of their Wagnerian identity.

There are exceptions. For Barbara Japp—who took a more typically fannish approach to her love of opera, in parallel with her love of science fiction—online fandom preceded membership to the Wagner Society and provides a place for both irreverence, but also intense community bonding. After having discovered Wagner by following the career of operatic tenor Jonas Kaufmann, Barbara had joined several opera-related groups on Facebook. When I asked whether the online communities skewed younger than those formed through more traditional venues, she had this to say:

> BJ: When we meet, there are some [younger people]. You know, there are the old Wagner ladies—like me—and there are some who are still working. But still, they are amazingly passionate. Certainly in the Met in HD [Facebook group].... It's hard to tell, I mean they're more men in that one. In the Kaufmann one, there are not as many men. Why is that? [laughs]. There are some, but they don't get involved. Because sometimes the carry-on is really high school, I mean, I've got to admit. These women posting hearts and flowers, I mean, it's embarrassing. It's funny, because I was never a fangirl. I was not into that pop music stuff. But, and I don't know if any of these [posters] were, but you see ladies of 80 who become teenagers. It's, I mean, it's good! But it's funny. [...]
>
> EH: And what do you think, what has kind of, allowed them to express themselves that way? Or allowed them to open themselves?

[39] Anatoliy Gruzd and Philip Mai, "The State of Social Media in Canada 2020: A Canada-Wide Survey about Social Media Adoption and Use in Canada" (Toronto: Ryerson University Social Media Lab, 2020), 7, https://doi.org/10.5683/SP2/XIW8EW.

> BJ: Because, well, it's closed, and we're all doing it. [...] Like, there's serious stuff too. I mean there are wonderful essays. Wonderful. I just read one about Werther, which was a new work for me. And again, that just blew me away. [...] So there's the two sides: first, is that we allow ourselves to be silly. Why not? Because, you know, we're all [at] home there. [...] And then there's also, and this is quite something, that we know each other to the extent that when something happens in our lives, we become sisters. A lot of stuff has happened. I've met so many sisters.

This passage demonstrates how online platforms can create welcoming spaces for older users, where they can simultaneously partake in activities that would normally be seen as too immature, but also form deep, meaningful personal connections that span the globe. It also makes clear how some fans of high culture are happy to engage with opera in decidedly fannish ways. Some of this is facilitated by the fact that the group in question is dedicated to a particular singer rather than Wagner, meaning that membership skews heavily towards women and is influenced by a greater degree to the culture of celebrity. Still, this example demonstrates that some of the presumed differences in consumption between younger and older fans are rooted in expectations rather than feelings.

Outside these closed Facebook groups, I have found that it is not so much that Wagner fans do not engage in textual productivity, but rather, that they are more likely to do so in formalized contexts, or by adopting established cultural techniques such as the review. Similar to the older rock fans interviewed by Bennett, who found ways to link their careers to music,[40] several of those I talked to had become professionalized fans. Wayne Gooding pivoted from a journalistic career in finance to music, eventually taking on the role of editor at *Opera Canada*. Joseph So retired early from an

[40] Andy Bennett, *Music, Style, and Aging: Growing Old Disgracefully?* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

academic career in Anthropology to pursue opera journalism, regularly writing reviews and conducting interviews with opera singers.[41] Linda and Michael Hutcheon—both now retired from their respective positions in literature and medicine at the University of Toronto—are now respected opera scholars, who frequently appeared in the bibliographies of my sources throughout my research.[42] The late Father Owen Lee, a classics professor also from the University of Toronto, published a number of books on opera geared towards a general audience.[43] In some cases, these were a continuation of earlier professional vocations (journalistic or academic) which were then broadened to include opera, in others, they constituted secondary careers. Professionalization of fans is of course not unique to Wagner: Matt Hills for example notes that the new series of *Doctor Who* is driven primarily by fans of the original show.[44] But it is perhaps different in the way that a larger share of the textual production takes place in the hands of those who write about Wagner for a living rather than as a hobby.

Much of the informal textual output I observed tended to follow formats already sanctioned through professional ventures. For example, the TWS newsletter, published two to three times a year, typically includes a selection of travel reports and reviews of Wagner productions written by

---

[41] Prior to his retirement from academia, So also co-edited the following volume on opera, which contains chapters by himself as well as two other Wagner society member: Deanna Davis, Joseph K. So, and Roy Moodley, "Voices from the Gallery: Perceptions, Perspectives, and Pleasures of the Opera Audience," in *Opera in a Multicultural World: Coloniality, Culture, Performance*, ed. Mary I. Ingraham, Joseph K. So, and Roy Moodley (New York: Routledge, 2016), 213–36.

[42] Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: The Art of Dying* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Hutcheon and Hutcheon, *Four Last Songs*; Linda Hutcheon, *Bodily Charm: Living Opera*, The Abraham Lincoln Lecture Series (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996).

[43] M. Owen Lee, *Athena Sings: Wagner and the Greeks* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Lee, *Wagner's Ring*; M. Owen Lee, *Wagner and the Wonder of Art: An Introduction to Die Meistersinger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Lee, *Wagner*.

[44] Matt Hills, *Triumph of a Time Lord: Regenerating Doctor Who in the Twenty-First Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

members, miscellaneous news and commentary, and listings of upcoming Wagner performances across the globe. Newsletters are full colour with both personal and official photographs. Though interpretive articles are not completely absent, much of the content is focused on the *performance* of opera, rather than the source material, with reviews being by far the most common format. If multiple members attend the same production, the newsletter will often feature contrasting reviews. It is worth noting, however, like most fan communities, the visible members represent only a small percentage of the membership at large. Only about a half a dozen are regular newsletter contributors, largely consisting of those who travel extensively and with significant overlap with those who are professionalized fans.

What does not flourish are the types of radical re-imaginings we see in popular media fandoms through fictional genres such as fanfic and vidding. While this aligns with Harrington's observation that older fans tend to be affirmational, rather than transformative—that is fans who "have deep attachments to certain texts/objects but value authorial control and do not transform or rework texts"[45]—I believe that there are other reasons at play. For one, if we think of writing genres as cultural techniques in the sense of "operative processes that enable work with things and symbols,"[46] we can reflect on how they organize communities not only by dictating taste but also by establishing the acceptable boundaries of expression. In his sociology of opera, David Evans identifies a hierarchy of interpretive discourse. These range from formalist musicological approaches which treat opera as a pure musical object untainted by social association; through to analyses of opera as interaction between music and text and more accessible deconstructions by opera educators who present opera as "complex drama" which one must prepare for; to "opera as theatrical entertainment" which speaks to

[45] Harrington, "Creativity and Ageing in Fandom," 237.
[46] Krämer and Bredekamp, "Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques," 27.

the affective experience of opera through singers; and finally opera as a pop culture artifact, sold through magazines, billboard charts, bit-sized arias and more.[47] In all levels of this hierarchy, opera is understood as something that one can *analyze* and *appreciate* through sanctioned genres such as the review, the essay and the lecture—or in the parlance of fan studies, that one can affirm but not transform. While tensions exist, because of opera's classification as high culture, discourses between these different realms circulate more relatively frequently. These modes of engagement are also often reinforced by the media of choice—Facebook, for example, is not built with creative practices in mind but rather operates on a central archival model, by encouraging shorter, decontextualized posts with the ability to comment, like and share.

Prior to COVID-19, noticeably absent in recent TWS programming and newsletters were lectures and other more formal presentations— in fact, there was very little discussion of Wagner the man, or even, his music. Instead, most activities were focused on the production of opera. And herein lies one of the key distinctions between reception of mediums such as TV and film, which have at their heart fixed objects. Opera, by contrast, is performance art and makes explicit the role of mediation in its transmission. Though recording is now capable of providing a repeatable experience—and some versions might be considered more faithful than others—there is always an implicit understanding that it can be interpreted in multiple ways. There is no ur-performance to go back to. In his plea for methodological renewal in the study of opera, Risi argues that the tendency in musicology to reduce opera to its score ignores the materiality and "eventness" of the genre. His analysis suggests instead that reception is framed by repetition, expectation and deviation, with the present. Gestures and vocal utterances go beyond conveying semiotic information, instead, they "create

[47] Evans, *Phantasmagoria*, 54.

effects, initiate something, create a new reality in the moment in which they are carried." I would contend that this phenomenological approach to opera not only helps us better understand the reception of opera but is often mirrored in the activities of fans. The lovers of Wagner declare devotion to the allure of an intangible music object, one whose platonic ideal can only be reached through performance, distilling complex relationships between composer, musicians, singers, and production down to the common denominator of a single composer. This is the paradox at the heart of reception. Fans, however, are not blind to these complexities: their activities reveal an acute awareness of opera as performance. Their love, as Carolyn Abbate argues in her argument for the inherent ineffability of music, "is not based on great works as unperformed abstraction or even as subtended by an imagined or hypothetical performance."[48] It is based on the *experience* of opera. The performative nature of opera thus feeds into the forms of reception that the genre sustains.

What is more, as a performative art, the division between affirmational and transformational do not map out in a one-to-one fashion onto the world of opera. Increasingly, opera *is* being pulled apart and reassembled in different ways, just not by fans; instead, transformational activities are being undertaken by the *producers* of opera in the tradition of *Regieoper.* Wagner, in particular, has been fertile ground for radical stagings which seek to upend authorial intent. Though I will expand on this performative turn in staging and how it has shaped reception in the next section, for now, suffice to say that being affirmational or transformational in the context of Wagner means not so much writing a piece of fan fiction, but rather, your stance on what is happening on stage. By shifting the transformational labour onto the producers, fans have an endless supply of new permutations of Wagner leaving perhaps less reason to re-write Wagner yourself.

---

[48] Carolyn Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): 505, https://doi.org/10.1086/421160.

I want to end with a last example of textual production, one which merges the cultural technique of the review, with a dash of historical research. After my first TWS meeting, Teddy Hall approached me to say that he would happily be interviewed and was keen to show me his weekly newsletter KURTNEWS. Editions 40 to 45 awaited me on the coffee table as I entered his downtown Toronto apartment to chat, with the draft for his next instalment on Orientalism and opera sitting open on the computer. About a year prior, when the declining health of fellow Wagnerian Kurt prevented them from leaving the house, Teddy took it upon himself to produce and mail (Kurt is not on email) a personalized newsletter to keep his friend abreast with the opera world. The editions he presented me with were on the topic of Bayreuth, and by his own admission, an eclectic mix of historical facts gathered from the internet and his own personal recollections:

> I usually get one [completed] for every week. And it's all over the place. I had a quiz for him once and strange outfits, contemporary ones. [...] This is primarily Bayreuth. My experience. All of it, everything I write is from my own viewpoint. And it's all my own writing so it's how I react to it. And so that's, for better or for worse, it's what's there!

The writing is chatty and anecdotal, typed in a large typeface and interspersed liberally with full-colour images he finds throughout the internet. Topics range from Teddy's thoughts on the costumes of the original 1876 Ring cycle ("Camp as you could only do unconsciously") and recollected conversations from his time in Bayreuth in 1954 and 1996 ("I also met Mr. and Mrs. Bird who dressed completely in red. They came from Hollywood: he looked like an old producer and she a faded starlet. Her mother didn't want her to marry Mr. Bird because her name was Robin").

In many ways, KURTNEWS is reminiscent of small-batch zines, "non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by

themselves" which flourish in various DIY subcultures.[49] Like many of those publications, Teddy's newsletters occupy a mid-ground between a letter and more formal genres. The tone is intimate and familiar, juxtaposing opera history with personal memories and opinions with liberal use of images poached from elsewhere. The motivational structure, however, is different. For many involved in zine culture, "its value comes from the continued critique of the producer/consumer binarism of commercial culture as enacted through various forms of cultural independence, as well as more vigorous acts of resistance or protest."[50] Rather than a radical critique of capitalism, KURTNEWS aims to render opera accessible by overcoming physical movement restrictions imposed by age and lack of internet connection. These lovingly assembled newsletters demonstrate how for Teddy opera is more than about just the experience of sitting in the theatre: it is also about the experiences of travel, of meeting people, of learning about its history; and most importantly, it is something which links him with friends. By taking advantage of the affordances of Google image searches, word documents, a printer and the post office, Teddy is able to maintain a friendship with Kurt and continue their joint passion for opera, dispersing the practices of opera fandom into everyday life. To me, this speaks to the networked model of fandom, one which can only be produced in the intersections of media and lived experience.

---

[49] Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (New York: Verso, 1997), 6.

[50] Anna Poletti, "Self-Publishing in the Global and Local: Situating Life Writing in Zines," *Biography* 28, no. 1 (2005): 185, https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2005.0035. Zines have a rich and varied history—Duncombe trace their origins back 1930s science fiction fans, but they have since become a staple of a wide range of communities, both musical and otherwise. Importantly, not all of these are explicitly political or anti-capitalist in their orientation—my point of comparison here is mostly with those growing out of the punk tradition.

Why

In my previous chapter, I conceptualized fandom as an assemblage, in which "signs, instruments, and human practices consolidate into durable symbolic systems capable of articulating distinctions within and between cultures."[51] In exploring the questions of who and how, I principally focused on the first part of this equation, that is, the constituent actors and practices. In this final part, I want to address the second, namely the resultant symbolic orders and how those in turn create the distinction between fan and non-fan, as well as Wagner and other operas. How does this fit under the banner of "why"? Embedded into this question is an assumption of agency, that listening—or at least to keep listening—is a choice, but also that there must be something of value produced in interaction. Approaching the question in this way, however, belies the networked model of fandom I am advancing. For one, agency is never a unidirectional choice, with meaning and affect deriving from already circulating symbolic orders from other fans as well as the affordances of text and media. On the flip side, nor is meaning or value some inert treasure to be unearthed by the lucky fan. Rather, it is negotiated in moments of interactions between subject and object. Part of what I want to argue is that these create a feedback loop which helps create fandom, working as the metaphorical glue that binds Wagnerism together. To answer the question of why is in many ways to peel back the curtain to see how Wagnerism is constantly (de)stabilized and re-inscribed in the minds of fans.

To illustrate how certain symbolic orders are circulated within networks of fan, I want to begin with an example that stands at the antithesis of the question of why: Wagner's antisemitism. Chiefly documented in his now infamous essay "Judaism in Music,"[52] these associations were further

---

[51] Geoghegan, "After Kittler," 67.

[52] Richard Wagner, "Judaism in Music," in *The Theatre*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, Vol. 3 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1894), 79–100, https://books.google.ca/books?id=7MmrGB8v9JkC.

amplified by Hitler's close relationship to several members of the Wagner family and the Führer's championing of the "Music of the Future."[53] A full exploration of Wagner, antisemitism and reception is outside the scope of this dissertation: suffice to say that whether or not Wagner espoused antisemitic theories is without question, but the degree to which these views are reflected in his music and how much he should be held accountable for the actions of the Third Reich continues to be a subject of debate.[54] Because of this, contemporary Wagnerism cannot be described as a cult of personality: time and time again, fans made sure to distinguish the man from the music. Wagner and his art stand not as much in opposition but in an uneasy truce: to love one requires taking a stance on the other. A productive metaphor is that of a text as an atom surrounded by a number of readers in the guise of electrons, neutrons and positrons, all of which are charged with different feelings about the text—ranging from positive to negative—and characterized with unique orbits.[55] In our case, however, we can think of modern Wagnerism as consisting of two nuclei: the music and Wagner himself, with fans oscillating in often uneasy orbits between the two, juggling feelings of intense love and aesthetic appreciation with profound ethical considerations. This creates a paradoxical situation in which

---

[53] For an overview of Wagner and his music's relationship to Nazism, see Ross, *Wagnerism*, 2020, 425–30; 512–61.

[54] For some entry points into the ongoing debate over Wagner and antisemitism see David B. Dennis, "'The Most German of All German Operas': Die Meistersinger through the Lens of the Third Reich," in *Wagner's Meistersinger: Performance, History, Representation*, ed. Nicholas Vazsonyi (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 98–119; Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Berthold Hoeckner, "Wagner and the Origin of Evil," *The Opera Quarterly* 23, no. 2–3 (2007): 151–83, https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/kbn029; Paul Lawrence Rose, "Anti-Semitism in Music: Wagner and the Origins of the Holocaust," in *Richard Wagner for the New Millennium: Essays in Music and Culture*, ed. Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, Alex Lubet, and Gottfried Wagner (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 189–203; Nicholas Vazsonyi et al., "Playing the Race Card: Anti-Semitism and Wagner®," in *Opera in a Multicultural World* (Routledge, 2015), 84–96.

[55] I am inspired here by Jonathan Gray, "New Audiences, New Textualities: Anti-Fans and Non-Fans," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2003): 64–81, https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877903006001004.

Wagner is simultaneously the linking thread between his compositions and what threatens to tear it apart.

In my interviews, respondents were careful to delineate a vision of Wagnerism which acknowledged, but did not centre, his antisemitism. Through these statements, fans continually reinscribe the limits of Wagnerism with boundaries negotiated between the individual and the wider network of fans and non-fans. How fans reconciled this varied greatly but discussion of Wagner the man were often mediated through strategic distance. For example, despite leaving a prodigious body of prose works (including an autobiography) only two of the seven who responded to my questionnaire indicated that they had read any of his prose, with some expressing no desire to do so:[56]

> I cannot imagine that I would like Wagner's prose. While I enjoy his music, his philosophy does nothing for me. His work is probably reflective of the nineteenth century morals and values. Music is visceral, but Wagner's stories, without the music, would be a drudge. No interest in pursuing this.

The music is magical: the man, however, not so much. In cases like this, fans seek to actively push themselves away from Wagner's orbit, to orient themselves towards the music. For others, the distancing was less an active strategy rather than a reluctance to look too closely. For Jim Warrington—who had once had a friend cut off contact due to his love of Wagner—reconciling the man and the music was an ongoing process:

> I don't like the antisemitic background... and it was interesting, at Bayreuth, right in front, there's a beautiful park, right in front of the opera house. And there was a temporary display

[56] Admittedly, as Iain Scott pointed out to me, the lack of modern translations of the majority of Wagner's prose is also partially at fault. Still, most fans do not seek out his prose to start with, so the notoriously opaque translations of William Ashton Ellis largely present a secondary, not primary, barrier to access.

> they had up of a whole bunch of just, like, icons. And they were all the Jewish musicians, singers, and orchestra members that [Wagner's widow] Cosima fired. Because they were Jewish. And that hit hard [...] but I guess I haven't reconciled it in my mind. And if I do reconcile it in my mind, I would have to make a decision probably to not listen to Wagner or see Wagner anymore. And I'm avoiding that.

Jim demonstrates how the decision to keep listening is not simply a matter of individual aesthetic preference but is also intertwined with historical action and laden with the potential negative judgment of others.

For Frances Henry, the connection is more personal. As a young girl, her family fled Germany in 1939 as Jewish refugees. At times her love of Wagner has been challenged by members of her extended family who struggle to understand the appeal. For her, while there are, without a doubt, stereotypical depictions of Jewishness in his operas, they do not take away from the artistic greatness of the works and are tempered by historical context:

> No, I can't dismiss the man because he didn't like my group. He was a person of his time, which explains a lot of people in the nineteenth century. And it's, it would be a stupid thing to shut off Wagner [...], some of the greatest artistic productions to ever be created by the human mind. Why be shut off because you don't like the guy who wrote it? You don't have to interact with him. [...] Sure, there are stereotypes. There are stereotypes everywhere. So it's never bothered me. I've always been up to accept the challenge of debating it.

Here the distance is one of time. Interestingly, though she mentions that you don't have to engage with Wagner himself, those who felt most at ease with their Wagnerism were often those who had the most intimate knowledge of the man. Frances indicated she had read numerous of Wagner's essays and felt that they had given her a greater appreciation for his artistic genius. Like others, there is a

feeling that whatever the personal failings of Wagner, his art is too compelling to dismiss. In other words, she evokes the agency of the music itself.

In this regard, Father Owen Lee's 1998 Larkin-Stuart lectures series on the subject remain representative: he argues that though we cannot fully condemn or exonerate Wagner from the crimes of the Third Reich, Wagner's greatness stems from his ability to draw from his own sufferings and failings and to turn them into art.[57] It is this truthfulness which brings people back into Wagner's orbit time and time again. Lee centres Wagner's capability to get to the heart of human nature as the key to his art's healing capability—it is the art that we might not necessarily want, but that we need.[58] In a similar vein, my respondents often located the humanity and universality of Wagner's art in its mythic qualities, which allowed the stories told by the operas to transcend time and space. Thus, fans construct a version of Wagnerism which continually overflows the boundaries of the music and compels listening in spite of his shortcomings.

Joseph So, for example, attributed a certain "nobility" to the operas which he struggled to explain:

> It doesn't just appeal to the sense: it appeals to the soul. And his *Die Meistersinger*, act 3, scene 3, the opening chorus with the entrance of the Meisters, the chorus... the nobility of the music. Nobility is the only word I can think of. Of course, the beauty, you know, but the nobility brings tears to my eyes every time. Because there's a special, the music touches you in a very deep level that... I guess when I was younger, you know *Otello* touched me, *Bohème* touched me, but not somehow, not to that extreme [...] The story has nobility. Like *Rigoletto*

[57] Lee, *Wagner*.
[58] Lee, *Wagner*.

> has no nobility, not an ounce of it! So I hate the opera, even though the music is so beautiful. But because there's no... none of the characters are redeeming.

The nobility resonates through the music as well as through the ideas behind the story: in *Die Meistersinger*, through the theme of honouring the old as you bring in the new, and in *Parsifal* through the storyline of achieving forgiveness through compassion. It is these grains of truth that moved So deeply. While he sees these elements occasionally in other operas—such as in the works of Richard Strauss or Francis Poulenc's *Les dialogues des carmélites*—Wagner stands out as being uniquely gifted in telling these timeless, mythic stories. As part of his elevator pitch for Wagner, So emphasized the underlying humanity of the works:

> There's a kernel of truth. I would say that if you are willing to face what does it mean to be human, go. And, of course, that is so lofty, people would just say "Oh, get off your high horse." [Laughs] But if you are ready... not everybody is ready. Some people are never ready. [...] I feel that to understand this kind of truth, you have to be chosen, chosen by who? Maybe by the creator, maybe by yourself, maybe how open you are. I think to be a thinking person is the first step.

Loving Wagner becomes more than just a passion: it is a truth that you must be ready to face. This answer to the question of "why" makes a clear case for the importance for treating opera as gnostic, that is, that opera is imbued with "not just knowledge per se but making the opaque transparent, knowledge based on semiosis and disclosed secrets, reserved for the elite and hidden from others."[59]

---

[59] Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?," 534. Abbate argues that musicology has the unfortunate tendency to treat music as solely gnostic, hiding behind either formalist or hermeneutic analysis at the expense of ignoring the phenomenological experience of opera. My point here is not to argue for or against either approach but rather to point out that fans often use similar language in their defence of Wagner, even if, as I will explore later, they are simultaneously acutely aware of the fact that opera is a performative art.

By positioning Wagner as uniquely gifted in this regard, So works to reinforce the distinction between Wagner and other music.

The religious undertones here are also hard to dismiss and while I do not want to make the mistake of equating Wagnerism with religion, it is worth mentioning that for some, faith and music are intimately intertwined. Wiley Powell, for instance, recounts his story of connecting to the divine while listening to Wagner. This ultimately led to his conversion to Catholicism:

> It was the combination of his music, and... it was almost as I said, a religious experience. It was like, you know, how can a human being create this, there must be some kind of channelling from a divine source. And they came together to me as I was listening to the final scene of *Götterdämmerung* [...] and I just dropped to my knees. And was, you know, just I thought this was really a moment of gratitude. That such beauty exists, and that I was able to appreciate it. And not everybody does. And it's just, it's sort of a gift.

When I asked why he thought that it was Wagner and not another composer who was able to reach him in this way, Wiley pointed to the composer's "overwhelming nature" which allowed one to surrender. This points how the love of Wagner does not always feel like a rational "choice" but rather a compelled response from the music. Here transcendence is achieved not so much by universality, but rather through a capacity to overwhelm.

Beyond Wagner's mythic qualities, fans also pinned this overwhelming capability on the structural amalgamation of theatre, singing and music. This is a case in which fan discourse mirrors that of Wagner himself, whose treatises "The Artwork of the Future" and *Opera and Drama*, proposed a dramatic art form that fused music, dance and poetry.[60] This was in contrast to what Wagner

[60] Richard Wagner, "The Artwork of the Future (1851)," ed. Tash Siddiqui, trans. Emma Warner, Special issue, *The Wagner Journal*, 2012, 13–86; Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, trans. William Ashton Ellis,

saw as the predilection of contemporary opera to privilege show-stopping melodies over dramatic unity.[61] Although the term *Gesamtkunstwerk*, usually translated to "total work of art," only appears in the earlier of the two treatises, it has since become emblematic of Wagner's approach to opera as a whole, rivalled perhaps only by the concept of the leitmotif.[62] For Wagner lovers, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* represents the pinnacle of all arts, by creating one complete package, as expressed by Alan Denis:

> And I like the, it's almost a complete artistic form. Then you have stage production, plays. You have music. You have dance. All that comes together in opera. And no art form can pull it all together like that.

In particular, the addition of music to theatre added "emotional colouring," in the same way that a soundtrack might heighten emotion in film. Barbara Japp echoed this feeling, stating that the sum was greater than their parts: "I mean, each on its own is wonderful. You put that together and my god. It's more than one plus one equals two. They potentiate each other." Barbara emphasized in particular the importance of stagecraft and lighting and found great satisfaction in pulling apart productions to try to figure out how they work. Baked into this appreciation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is a deep love for opera as performance. While Wagner's music might be the main draw, it is only once they are able to come to life through the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that the real magic happens. Fans love opera as much for the medium as the message.

2nd edition, Vol. 2 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900), https://books.google.ca/books?id=HEMIAQAAMAAJ.

[61] "The error in the art-genre of Opera consists herein: that a Means of expression (music) has been made the End, while the End of expression (the Drama) has been made the means." Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 17.

[62] I will be discussing leitmotifs in more detail in the following chapter.

Benzecry argues that fans of "Wagner, Puccini, Verdi, or Strauss" generally see singers as "but a medium for their magical relationship with music (for better or worse, they are priests who invite the initiated to share the wonderful and intimate sacred ritual that happens through voice)." By contrast, other fans perform "the spectacular worship of the singer himself or herself, thereby losing the mediated relationship with music."[63] Iain Scott similarly identifies the fault lines between German and Italian opera as existing not between composer vs. singer, but rather singing vs. production. In the world of Italian opera, what matters most is, as Rossini put it, "voce, voce, voce." In German opera, there is a greater emphasis on the overarching interpretation:

> There is a mutual incomprehension between the dominant Italian opera crowd and the German opera crowd—which is more or less the Wagner crowd but not totally absolutely so. If you go across the street to the pub after an Italian opera, you talk about "Did you like the Tenor, what to think of the Soprano?" If you go across the street after the German opera, you say, "What do you think of the conductor? What did you think of the production? What does it mean?" Totally different, two different languages and frameworks of reference for discussion.

In this paradigm, outlined by Scott, the burden of difficulty is partially lifted from the singer and moved to the audience, who must work to unpack what they have just seen. Discourse separating Italian vs. German opera of this kind is pervasive, continually creating and re-enforcing the division between Wagnerians and lovers of Bel Canto, working as a cultural technique of identity.

The reality, however, is more nuanced. First, singing is what continues to differentiate opera from symphonic music, allowing for the insertion of both narrative and a distinct human element to

---

[63] Benzecry, *The Opera Fanatic*, 113.

the music. There is no *Gesamtkunstwerk* without voice. Several people made the case that there are multiple types of Wagnerians, with some being more interested in following the careers of their favourite singers, while others will primarily focus on directors. One person told me they were "always in love with a singer," another called themselves a "groupie." Many admit to having waited backstage to collect autographs, making clear that celebrity culture is very much at play in Wagnerism. Singers are also frequent guests to the TWS. Even for those who are less singer-oriented, bad singing will mar an otherwise strong production.

Still, while musical interpretation is important, what is prized is not so much virtuosity, but rather the ability of singers to embody the characters and convey the emotional story. Singing competently is required: perfection is not. For some, this is one of the distinguishing factors between appreciators of classical music and those of opera, as illustrated in my conversation with opera critic John Gilk:

> It's dawning on me, albeit slowly, that the audience for symphonic and chamber music is really into virtuosity. You know, they don't mind if the music's crap as long as somebody can play it very fast. And I find that really weird because I don't experience music that way. Whether it's opera or symphony, I'm looking for structure and emotional impact. I don't really care if the guy can play "Flight of the Bumble Bee" faster than the next guy. But as I watch the reaction of the audience to especially the chamber portion of this year's Toronto Summer Musical Festival, it's clear that that's what turns them on.

Wagner himself advocated against the virtuoso, whom he saw as compromising the "genius of music" in exchange for glittering effects. From his point of view, the ideal interpreter is rendered invisible in

service of the music.[64] Because his later operas—though certainly physically demanding—are not built around discrete show-stopping arias in the same way as their Italian counterparts, there are fewer built-in moments to simply stand and sing. Again, we see how the question of "why" is not simply a function of individual preferences but also the original framing. Soprano Adrianne Pieczonka finds that in general, Wagner singers are

> down to earth, to be able to sustain a five-and-a-half-hour opera. They are not ego [driven]... they're not super freaked out. But you know, they're usually quite sort of calm and grounded, and not Divas [...] They're quite lovely people. And that's why Bayreuth is my favourite festival. If you compare Bayreuth to Salzburg—and I've sang in both—in Salzburg, they're going to play Mozart and then they're going to do a Verdi opera, and it's... they love having stars there. So it's really star driven. So it's a lot of [Soprano Anna] Netrebko and fancy paparazzi. Bayreuth, Bayreuth is in the middle of nowhere [...] So if you're going to get there, you go there for the music.

As a consequence, while Wagnerians can be quite opinionated about vocal performances and have canonized certain singers—such as Canadian tenor John Vickers and Swedish soprano Birgit Nilsson—flashy displays without dramatic depth to match are less tolerated than they might be in Bel Canto.

Rather than divas, for many, what keeps them returning to opera again and again is the genre's potential for constant reinvention through innovative stagings. Several people noted an increased interest in stagings over the years, mirroring a more general arc of opera throughout the twentieth century from being the "Reign of the Singer" to the "Dictatorship of the Conductor" before

---

[64] Richard Wagner, "The Virtuoso and the Artist," in *In Paris and Dresden*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, Vol. 7 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1898), 167–79, https://books.google.ca/books?id=7v7XSAAACAAJ.

entering the "Age of the Producer."[65] At the centre of this lies perhaps one of the most contentious debates among opera fans: Regieoper. Often referred to as "Eurotrash" by its detractors, Regieoper[66] refers to "well-known 'works'—the works of the classical operatic canon—that regulate the question of authorship through the two poles of composer and director while producing a horizon of expectation located between recognition and surprise through divergence."[67] Borrowing heavily from theatre, where such reworking had been common place for some time, Regieoper challenged the transparency of the performer, insisting that opera was an interpretive art. Directors become self-conscious intermediaries, who not only stage works but also transformed them.[68]

Regieoper originated in Europe, where government funding isolates avant-garde productions from financial risk, but is increasingly common in major opera houses across the globe.[69] Modern productions exist on a sliding scale between literalist readings, which strive to be as faithful as possible to original practices and intent, to the most experimental specimen of Regieoper which radically challenge or rewrite the original narratives. While Wagner left plenty of evidence for literalist approaches through the inclusion of prescriptive stage descriptions, his determination to revolutionize staging has been taken as an invitation for others to do the same.[70] As such, Wagner has long been

---

[65] Evans, *Phantasmagoria*, 293.

[66] The term is also used interchangeably with the more generic "Regietheatre"

[67] Clemens Risi, "Opera in Performance: 'Regietheater' and the Performative Turn," trans. Jake Fraser, *The Opera Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (December 20, 2019): 8.

[68] David J. Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 22–23.

[69] Rosanne Martorella, "The Relationship between Box Office and Repertoire: A Case Study of Opera," *The Sociological Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1977): 354–66, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1977.tb01420.x Martorella's article is largely concerned with repertoire rather than staging. But the fundamental observation—that the box-office driven financial models of North American opera houses result in more conservative repertoire than their government-funded European counterpart—can be easily extended to Regieoper. Only once revisionist stagings stopped becoming avant-garde did they make their way regularly to opera houses. Even now, however, they generally remain much less controversial compared to their European counterparts.

[70] Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 49.

fertile ground for re-imaginings, from the minimalist staging of Wieland Wagner in the wake of World War II, to the controversial centennial Ring directed by Patrice Chéreau and conducted by Pierre Boulez, which traded the mythical for the industrial.[71]

Though there is (almost) universal agreement that a production shouldn't grossly violate the text or cause unnecessary cognitive dissonance, there is considerable debate over where to draw the line. Joseph So described his constant disagreements with a friend over their love of Regieoper:

> He and I are at loggerheads all the time. I would yell at him if I could! Just, I can't understand why we are so different. You know, just the other extreme. No, I don't see myself as extreme, I see myself as reasonable! [laughs]

While Joseph expressed a preference for more traditional productions, this did not necessarily mean that he was looking for a completely literal take on the operas:

> A production that is successful, it has to respect, show respect for the composer's vision. Okay, so in other words, let's take a good example of *Bohème*, okay? It doesn't *have* to be in Paris. It doesn't *have* to be in a garret—it helps if it is, like the Met, old Met production, Zeffirelli's. But if you update it, like did you see the [COC production of *Bohème*]? That's fine! It's perfect, I have absolutely no problem. But the Paris Opera production now is in outer space!

This feeling was echoed by Edward Bain:

> I want to see the opera that Wagner wrote, not a director's interpretation of the opera. For example, Act One of Tristan und Isolde takes place on a ship. As such, I expect to see a ship. It doesn't have to look like a nineteenth-century sailboat, the current production of

[71] Evans, *Phantasmagoria*, 305–9.

> Tristan und Isolde has them onboard a modern warship and I found that it worked—it made the production look more contemporary but it still respected the story that Wagner wrote.

For most, respect for the source material means that the libretto and music must stay intact: but it also means that the action on stage should not directly contradict what is in the music. Doing so risks compromising immersion and distracting from the music. For those who prefer traditional productions, performance should amplify Wagner's message rather than insert a new narrative.

For others, however, experimental productions are a natural extension of the ethos of the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* though any changes must be done thoughtfully and with clear intent. Wayne Gooding, who generally follows directors, rather than singers, similarly felt that a successful production should be respectful of the basic narrative, but also embodied the *Gesamtkunstwerk*:

> I think I want a production that is thoughtful, that is thought through, that does not violate radically the text. I mean, the last Tannhäuser I've seen, the one in Bayreuth, poor Elizabeth in one of them got shoved into a gas oven to die. [...] I mean, it's pointless. It's silly. You know, that kind of thing bothers me because it just seems wilful and it just violates some very basic narrative elements. So I think that needs be done, I want something that recognizes the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk, I don't... I do want a staging that is interesting to look at. And like the plastic side of it, if you like, and the movement side, it needs to be good [...] And so, I want it well acted, because that is, I mean when you've got people singing for, you know fifteen minutes at a time, it's not just a matter of stand and deliver [...] but I do want it acted, and I want it well lit. And I mean, I want the visual element, I want the Gesamtkunstwerk, I do.

The worst offenders for Wayne are productions which are not so much offensive, but those that are boring. Such productions feel like a wasted opportunity. The let down is amplified by the

commitment of time and money necessary for a Ring cycle. Both Wayne Gooding and Linda and Michael Hutcheon described their deep disappointed with the Paris Jeffery Tate Ring cycle during the 1990s, which offered little in terms of staging and was met with deafening boos. By contrast, a thoughtful production can leave audiences thinking for days as they begin to unpick the narrative threads.

For many, a large part of the pleasure of Wagner is precisely this layer of interpretation afforded by Regietheatre. Michael Hutcheon argues that because Wagner's stories are mythological in nature, they are particularly amiable to reinvention:

> One of the things about Wagner and why it's so addictive sometimes, is that, you know, the particular operas are almost infinitely malleable. You can do all kinds of things with them. And they stand up very well to all kinds of treatment.

At their best, experimental stagings have something new to say without leaving you scratching your head. For Linda Hutcheon, the challenge of interpretation is part of the fun:

> Opera, its never for me been just an entertainment, like going to a musical. It's always been, because its classical music and because it's theatre. It's literature. It's music. It's the coming together... it always takes a little more for me, [to] concentrate. And I don't expect to just go out for an evening of entertainment. I am entertained, but I expect to be challenged, to be engaged intellectually, musically and artistically.

This challenge is central to why they return to Wagner again and again. And when everything comes together, the resulting performance feels magical. When I asked Barbara Japp how it felt to walk out of a theatre after a good performance, she had this to say:

> Like after a good meal. Remembering all the different flavours. You want to sit and remember certain things. And you go back and look at them again... I want to talk about it! "Alright,

> let's go for a beer, let's talk about this." "Did you see when they did this? See what happened then? And how they did the crescendo?" Just feel it in your body. [...] I really do. And it's such a pleasure to do that. I'm really in it sometimes. And a performer who I know and admire so well, I get into there, I see them, and I think... ooh. I get very involved. And it's my pleasure to do so. [...] I mean if I didn't... I want to get involved, I choose to get involved. Other people go to a baseball game. I don't. This is my... okay. My drug of choice. I know that, particularly Wagner, but not just Wagner. But definitely my drug of choice.

Note the apparent contradiction between Wagner as "drug of choice" and the previous statement that opera is never "just entertainment": yet despite this fact, Wagnerians frequently hold both views at once. I will explore this paradox further in the following chapter, but for now, I want to emphasize that it is through performance that the most powerful affective moments take place. Opera is not opera until it is brought to life. The relationships between singer, audience, text, musician and stage are only activated through action. In this way, my distinction between, who, how and why is a bit misleading—all three are closely interlinked. What I have hoped to make clear is that Wagnerism is produced throughout vast networks in which agency is distributed among a variety of actors, both humans and non-humans. With who, I explored how the cultural technique of aging is intertwined with Wagnerism through mechanisms such as retirement and repeated listening but also through discourse networks anchored in specific a time and space. For how, I examined how Wagnerism flows into the everyday, with an emphasis on how technology enables and constrains reception. Finally, in answering why, I focused on how love goes beyond individual affective experience and is often deeply rooted in preexisting symbolic orders. These in turn create the distinction between both fan and non-fans. Understanding Wagnerism requires thinking about all of these actors at once, rather than isolating simply text or audience. A networked model of fandom allows us to do just this.

Chapter 3

Cultish Tendencies of Wagner

Near the end of each of my interviews, I would ask for people to give me their Wagner elevator pitch: that is, how would they attempt to convince someone to give Wagnerian opera a chance, as succinctly as possible. I had anticipated that the challenge would be the "succinct" part of my question. Instead, I was surprised by discussions such as the following, between myself and Michael and Linda Hutcheon:

> MICHAEL HUTCHEON: Well, it would depend on whether someone was an opera fan or not.
>
> EMILIE HURST: Right. Okay.
>
> MICHAEL HUTCHEON: I certainly wouldn't try to take someone to a Wagnerian opera...
>
> LINDA HUTCHEON: As their first opera.
>
> MH: ... as their first opera
>
> EH: That'd be quite the baptism by fire.
>
> LH: Yes. I think Wagner's something you grow into, in some ways.
>
> MH: It is and...
>
> LH: As someone who was an opera fan, but hadn't been to Wagner, or felt resistant...
>
> MH: ...or was resistant in some way. You know just, Oh, it's too long. So basically, I'd say it's critical—this is what we were talking about before—it's critical to understand a little bit about what Wagner is trying to do and how he tried to do it through the music that he wrote, how he wrote that music. I mean, simple stuff like...
>
> LH: Leitmotifs

MH: Yeah, leitmotifs in his work, you know, you really need to even understand this a little bit of that, in order to appreciate what is going on. And then...

LH. That's how Wagner, rather than why Wagner though. [laughs]

MH: ...then read the libretto.

LH: I mean I think that's...

MH: To really understand the story.

LH: But that's not... that's how you Wagner. Why Wagner?

MH. Oh, because it's just worth it, it's the best stuff around. Why is this even a question?! [laughs]

This three-way exchange, in which Linda does her best to get Michael to answer my question, was echoed multiple times throughout my interviews. One might expect that Wagnerians are generally keen to spread the gospel of Wagner, so to speak: while this is true to some extent, conversion is generally regarded as a delicate affair, one that cannot be forced and takes time and dedication. That it would be worth the effort was seen as self-evident.

In particular, I want to pause to consider the idea that appreciation of Wagner requires knowledge—or more precisely, work. From my conversations, it became evident that part of the pleasure is the ability to dig deeper, to learn more. This type of intellectualized stance to art is certainly not unique to Wagner: John Storey notes that the transformation of opera into high culture was in part instituted through the rise of opera education, taking the form of guidebooks, program notes, lectures and more. This positions the genre as requiring a certain aesthetic gaze, one ostensibly decoupled from the supposed facile bodily pleasures of popular music.[1] According to Benzecry, opera

[1] John Storey, "The Social Life of Opera," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2003): 13, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1367549403006001466.

fans often see the building of knowledge as one of the key parts of becoming a fan: they first "feel an intense attraction that they are compelled to explore and organize in order to maximize the pleasure it produces."[2] The education attached to opera is thus understood not just as an intellectual exercise, but one which is intimately linked to pleasure.

In the case of Wagner this aesthetic gaze is defined not only in opposition to popular culture, but also other composers—largely Italian, but to a lesser extent, French as well. Works such as *Carmen* or *La Bohème* are often painted as good "beginner" operas, with the obvious implication (sometimes stated explicitly and sometimes not) that they were somewhat lesser in depth and quality. Interestingly, the professional opera critics I talked to were wary of this assessment. Jenna Simeonov notes for example that Wagner's music is very filmic, as the typical Hollywood sound draws heavily from late-romantic music. Composers such as John Williams frequently make good use of leitmotifs, rendering Wagner's musical idioms comparatively accessible.[3] In addition, many opera newbies prefer Wagner over Mozart because it has less repetition and a stronger sense of dramatic timing, with action that doesn't stop for each aria. It is also worth noting that the idea that opera is something that one "interprets" is a relatively recent idea. Prior to the late eighteenth century, operas were usually composed on demand and discarded after a number of performances.[4] Novelty, rather than familiarity was the biggest draw. Only once opera began to coalesce around a standard repertoire and works began reappearing regularly did the need to provide interpretation emerge. While Wagner did write

---

[2] Benzecry, *The Opera Fanatic*, 67.

[3] For some starting points on the subject of the influence of Wagner on cinema see Stephen C. Meyer, "'Leitmotif': On the Application of a Word to Film Music," *Journal of Film Music* 5, no. 1/2 (2012): 101–8; Scott Paulin, "Richard Wagner and the Fantasy of Cinematic Unity: The Ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the History and Theory of Film Music," in *Music and Cinema*, ed. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 58–84.

[4] Barry Millington, "'Faithful, All Too Faithful:' Fidelity and Ring Stagings," *The Opera Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (2007): 266.

copious documentation to explicate his art, as I will explore later in this chapter, he was also adamant that his music was immediately comprehensible: prose was a necessary evil to convince people to listen in the first place rather than a prerequisite for understanding.

Despite this, the narrative that Wagner is hard work continues to circulate. Fans pointed to musical details such as leitmotifs and the general maximalist approach to singing and orchestration as key sites of pleasure, as illustrated by Jim Warrington's statement below:

> The analogy is, you know, everybody can go on a hike—the musical journey being a hike—and you can climb different mountains and be satisfied with the view when you get to the top of the mountain, but then it's kind of like, this mountain is a bit higher, it's a bit tougher to climb. There's a lot to learn here. You have to be patient, you have to invest yourself. But the satisfaction when you get to the top of the mountain is just after, [when] you look down at the other mountains. So there's nothing wrong with those now. But this one, this, I'm going to say, I like this mountain, I'm going to climb this mountain. [...] It's just it has more of everything.
>
> And it's not for everybody. It's not *Carmen*, it's not *La Bohème*. And so for that reason some people might accuse us Wagnerians [of] being a bit elitist. And I think to some degree we are, but that's okay, because we are so immersed in this composer's output that, call us what you want, we're sitting here enjoying [the music]. It's just more. [...] More emotion, more brilliance, more orchestra, more harder singing, more production values, more challenges to get the story across because the operas are complex. And you know, just more.

Here, the general "more-ness" of Wagner is equated to the labour that is deemed necessary to fully enjoy his art through the metaphorical act of mountain climbing. The willingness to "climb" the mountain to reach the perceived pinnacle of art works as an exclusionary process, one that produces

the difference between Wagnerians and the more general opera lover. As with the conversation with Linda and Michael above, I also want to draw attention to the slippage between "liking Wagner" and "doing Wagner," through immersion, investment and learning. From a cultural techniques perspective, they are of course two sides of the same coin, with one generating the other.

Despite the continual evocation of the intellectual work required to truly appreciate Wagner, my conversations also uncovered a second contradictory narrative, one of Wagner as an overwhelming force which threatens to consume you. I see these two strands as emblematic of what Andreas Huyssen terms the Great Divide, that is, "the kind of discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture."[5] In this configuration, high art is defined through exclusion, positioned as autonomous and self-conscious, as well as both a producer and carrier of knowledge. By contrast, mass culture is "described as the threat of losing oneself in dreams and delusions and of merely consuming rather than producing."[6] To this is added a clear gender binary, with masculine "authentic" culture contrasted with the shallow fare meant to cater to the feminized masses. I am not arguing for the tenability of this divide—as fan scholars will tell you, the divisions between high and low culture are often foggy at best, with fans of popular culture just as capable of engaging with media in highly intellectualized ways. Rather, in the spirit of cultural techniques, my interest is in observing how the distinctions between these categories are reproduced often despite the contradictions at play. Wagnerism—although at first glance firmly ensconced in the realm of high culture—functions as a microcosm of this divide.

---

[5] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), viii. I should make clear here that most (though not all) of those I talked to listened to and enjoyed popular music. Still, because most viewed Wagner as the ultimate in aesthetic achievement, the division between high and mass culture is still largely maintained.

[6] Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 55.

In part, the totalizing narrative has been imposed from the outside: as discussed in my introduction, there is a long history of casting Wagner as complicit in the goals of mass culture. Theodor Adorno—the "theorist par excellence of the Great Divide,"[7]—saw his music as embodying the process of commodification through the desperate concealing of labour and phantasmagoric melodies.[8] Nietzsche portrayed Wagner as "the paradigm of the decline of genuine culture in the dawning age of the masses and the feminization of culture," thus implying that Wagner "has succumbed to the adoring women by transforming music into mere spectacle, theater, delusion."[9] In that regard, we might be tempted to understand the strong insistence of needing to "work" to understand Wagner as at least partly reactionary, a way to reclaim the composer as belonging to the realm of high culture. But that does not explain why participants frequently described listening to opera as an embodied, but passive experience, firmly on the other side of the Great Divide.

I would propose that we take this incongruity seriously, with a "yes and" approach. As Latour makes the case, as researchers we should not try to suppress contradiction. Instead,

> to regain some sense of order, the best solution is to trace connections between the controversies themselves rather than try to decide how to settle any given controversy. The search for order, rigor, and pattern is by no means abandoned. It is simply relocated one step further into abstraction so that actors are allowed to unfold their own differing cosmos, no matter how counter-intuitive they appear.[10]

---

[7] Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, ix.
[8] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*.
[9] Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 51.
[10] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 23.

To move in that direction, let us return to the mountain climbing metaphor. In my conversation with COC music director Johannes Debus, he likened both conducting and listening to Wagner to an extreme sport:

> What you kind of go through in a Wagner opera, as an audience [...] it's like climbing Mount Everest in a way. And you do that together, with you know, the musicians, everyone, the singers. The adrenaline rush is definitely higher. And I would say, even from an audience's perspective, [more] then maybe a Mozart, and I can tell you that after conducting a Wagner opera it takes me much longer to come down. Just you know, it's a very simple biochemical thing to get the adrenaline out of your body. That's all. And so the excitement that can be created, and I will say with every sort of extreme sport [...] you push the boundaries, you push the limits, you go over it. And the music is even sort of telling you that directly, that you go over certain boundaries, that you reach a different kind of realm.

Numerous Wagner fans echoed the idea that listening to Wagner was as much a physical experience as a mental one, with successful performances able to create a physical high.[11] As Wiley Powell explained:

> It's like walking on air, it's a feeling that tends to last for several days. And I, in my imagination, I see these, some of these things again, or many of the many musical elements will stay in my mind, at three in the morning, they'll be going through my head. So it's an experience that lasts for quite a while.

[11] The word "successful" is key here: along with tales of euphoria came plenty of "horror stories" of performances that failed, sometimes in spectacular fashion, to meet their full potential, as I already discussed in the previous chapter.

Similarly, Wayne Gooding discussed how a Ring cycle—often a week-long affair—could continue to haunt you for hours:

> this is the other thing about Wagner performances that are different I think, I can come out of Verdi, and so on, and it can be good, it can be exhilarating. It'll go away. But Wagner, sometimes, it'll keep you up for hours just pondering it. I mean, again, it's just a different response to his music, and his operas.

Others described the feeling afterwards as almost sexual in nature. Almost all admitted feeling unable to sleep.

There are two things that are striking here: first, the idea of work has been transmuted to a physical journey, one which leaves all participants in a heightened state, almost gasping for air as the final note fades. This points to the inherent nature of opera as a phenomenological experience, not as notes on the page; second, is that agency is often granted to the *music*—notice that when talking of "climbing" the Wagner mountain it is in response to the music "telling you directly." These passages demonstrate that the compelling qualities of Wagner—meant here in a literal sense—play an integral role in the reception of Wagner.

What are we to make of these contradictions? Rather than falling into the trap of seeing this embodied form of reception as inherently pathological, I'd like to look for some more productive approaches. In particular, I want to ensure that narratives of autonomous listening do not obscure the bodily aesthetic joy that comes from opera. As a result, I want to take seriously the contradictions at the heart of Wagnerism that pleasure is neither fully cerebral nor embodied, but instead oscillates between the two: loving Wagner is simultaneously a result of work conducted through musical education and letting go to allow the music to wash over you. In some sense, this is thus a continuation of my previous exploration of "why Wagner." But the dialectal nature of pleasure also reveals

countervailing claims of agency, as listeners take on the role of both subject and object. Fans position themselves as the subject when they describe the pure, intellectual pleasure of "getting" Wagner and as object when they point to the music's capacity to subsume you in service of highlighting moments of greater moral truths. This dialectic works as a cultural technique producing the distinction between Wagner and other operas, as well as the Wagnerian and the casual listener.

Johannes Debus, continuing his description of conducting Wagner, builds on this idea of Wagnerian music forcing musicians and listeners alike to follow his lead:

> In a way, he forces an audience to listen. And he forces an audience, and maybe even a performer, to follow him. And in a way, we could say he is the godlike master and we have to follow his iterations, sometimes his sermons, his, in a more positive way, his great ideas. Great, awesome—I don't mean it in a way of, the quality of it. But the scope of it. The scope of all of his ideas is much larger than anything that happened before, I would say. [...] Having said all this, I myself associate well with [conductor] Leonard Bernstein's quote, "I hate Wagner on my knees." Which means at the same time you adore the music, you might have difficulties with it. Because it is imposing, and because it is manipulative, because it guides you in a certain way and because it forces you to follow in a certain way, on a certain path.

Note the manipulative quality of the man and how it is transferred to the music. This makes clear that to understand reception, we must take seriously the agency of the music. To do so gets at the heart of one of the key debates in audience study: that of an active vs. passive audience.

Early European theatregoers were largely governed by traditions "of audience sovereignty that recognized audiences' right to control performance."[12] As such, it was the spectre of the unruly active audience that was of prime concern. As film and later radio, however, reached mass audiences at unprecedented scales, worries shifted away from rowdy audiences to "what was being done to them, or more precisely what they were learning from the entertainment that they shouldn't."[13] These apprehensions were amplified by larger cultural anxieties precipitated by the rapid industrialization and urbanization taking place at the turn of the twentieth century. In that vein, early media studies from the 1920s through to the Second World War—such as the Payne Fund Studies, Harold Lasswell's research on propaganda,[14] or the Frankfurt School—were often concerned with the potential power held by these emerging media and the effects they might have on their audiences. Adorno and Horkheimer, for example, argue that rather than presenting authentic art objects, the culture industry produces products with minute differences in detail. Style, rather than substance reigns supreme. Faced with what looks like a cornucopia of choices—all carefully designed to avoid confronting us with larger truths—we are more likely to endorse the status quo.[15] Interestingly, they do not argue that we are unaware of the manipulation caused by the culture industry—the proverbial "cultural

---

[12] Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences*, 3.

[13] Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences*, 7.

[14] Deborah Lubken, "Remembering the Straw Man: The Travels and Adventures of *Hypodermic*," in *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Memories*, ed. David W. Park and Jefferson Pooley (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 20–42. Though both sources are often credited as the origin of the "hypodermic model" or "magic bullet" theory of communications, this attribution happened after the fact, through "a combination of metaphor exchange, random acts of punctuation, and apparent instances of perfunctory attention to source citation." Lubken argues that the hypodermic model has developed into a straw man, continually resurrected to "keep the barbarians out."

[15] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94–146.

dupes" of mass culture—but rather, that audiences participate in order to escape the drudgery of labour under capitalism or else risk paying a social price.

By contrast, many other approaches have sought to centre the experience of the audience by highlighting the social component of communication and the varied ways that we interact with and interpret media. These range from social science's tradition of Uses and Gratification,[16] to Stuart Hall's seminal Encoding/Decoding model[17] to John Fisk's concept of semiotic productivity, which have all accorded audiences with differing levels of agency. Early fan studies at times took the idea of active fandom to its extreme: rather than deconstruct the binary, they largely positioned themselves as "a purposeful political intervention that set out to defend communities,"[18] looking to redeem fans as "creative, thoughtful, and productive."[19] Implicit in much of the discourse about active/passive audiences is a battle over the agency of marginalized audiences and the value of popular culture. This debate between active and passive is but another manifestation of the Great Divide.

As I have already made clear, Wagner occupies an ambiguous place in the debate over active/passive audiences, highlighting that we cannot so easily map either mode of reception onto high or popular culture. I want to return to Adorno's critique of Wagner, largely outlined in the monograph *In Search of Wagner*, in part because it remains among the most influential—if highly contested[20]—readings of the composer, but also because Adorno is often trotted out as the quintessential

---

[16] Elihu Katz, Jay Blumer, and Michael Gurevitch, "Utilization of Mass Communication by the Individual," in *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research*, ed. Jay Blumer and Elihu Katz (London: Sage Publication, 1974), 19–32.

[17] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, ed. Stuart Hall et al. (London: Routledge, 1980), 117–27.

[18] Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, "Introduction: Why Still Study Fans?," 3.

[19] Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, "Introduction: Why Still Study Fans?," 3.

[20] For an overview of the reception of Adorno's work on Wagner see Mark Berry, "Adorno's Essay on Wagner: Rescuing an Inverted Panegyric," *The Opera Quarterly* 30, no. 2–3 (2014): 205–27, https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/kbu020. The opening pages of Berry's essay also help contextualize—and somewhat soften—Adorno's stance on Wagner.

academic elitist, whose arguments against the culture industry serve as a convenient straw man.[21] At the same time, echoes of his complaints about popular music—that it is too repetitive, too standardized, possesses little internal coherency[22]—continue to circulate if not verbatim, then certainly in spirit, as means to justify the importance of high art.

But what is sometimes left out, as Andreas Huyssen points out, is Adorno's "even stronger claim that in capitalist society high art is always already permeated by the textures of that mass culture from which it seeks autonomy."[23] As in popular music, Adorno sees Wagner's music as a wash of "eternal sameness" which endeavours to present itself as "eternally new."[24] Repetition in the guise of leitmotifs "poses as development."[25] Through darkened rooms and endless melodies, the means of labour are hidden. And, crucial to my argument, as a consequence of the totalizing effect of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the audience plays a decidedly passive role:

> The audience of these giant works lasting many hours is thought of as unable to concentrate—something not unconnected with the fatigue of the citizen in his leisure time. And while he allows himself to drift with the current, the music, acting as its own impresario, thunders at him in endless repetitions to hammer its message home.[26]

It is not so much that the audience are cultural dupes per se, but rather that the music wears down the listener to such a degree that they cannot help but succumb to the whims of Wagner.

---

[21] See for example how Adorno makes an appearance in a key passage of Jenkins' seminal metaphor of the "velveteen rabbit" for how readers, through the act of textual poaching, bring meaning to a text: Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 2013, 52–53.

[22] Theodor Adorno, "On Popular Music," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard D. Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (California: University of California Press, 2002), 437–68.

[23] Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 35.

[24] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 51.

[25] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 32.

[26] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 22.

As most analyses of Adorno acknowledge, this characterization presents an all-too simplistic gloss of the complex process of reception. Gary Tomlinson, in arguing that Wagner has a "Wagnerism" problem, writes that Adorno's "whole argument, viewed from even a slight distance, cannot but seem rickety, building weighty conclusions on the flimsiest of musical support." Technology—and by analogy music—is never engaged in a one-way exchange: instead, we should consider the relationship between Wagnerian music and audience as a continual feedback loop. Like all music, the interpretant is key. Nicholas Baragwanath, in his takedown of *In Search of Wagner*, concurs, noting in addition that while Adorno appears to fetishize an individualist Kantian model of subjectivity and reason, he simultaneously "presupposes the same collective consciousness that his call for individual and critical awareness claims to fight against."[27] But what if we were to both accept the criticism that Adorno's conception of the listening subject is too narrow *as well as* his proposition that Wagner's music possesses at times a will of its own?

To do so returns us to my own framework of cultural techniques which, as I initially explored in chapter 1, allows agency to reside not just in people, but also in things. As Claudia Vismann argues, "Cultural Techniques define the agency of media and things. If media theory were, or had, a grammar, that agency would find its expression in objects claiming the grammatical subject position and cultural techniques standing in for verbs."[28] In light of cultural techniques' distributed approach to identity, flattened ontologies, and concern with the ontic, Adorno seems like an unlikely fit. Despite this, Bernhard Siegert points to Adorno's short but devastating commentary on the modern inability to close doors quietly as evidence that "Adorno places gesture and mechanisms, human and

[27] Nicholas Baragwanath, "Musicology and Critical Theory: The Case of Wagner, Adorno, and Horkheimer," *Music & Letters* 87, no. 1 (2006): 63, https://doi.org/10.1093/ml/gci177.

[28] Vismann, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty," 83.

non-human actors into a relation in which both sides are invested with agency and in which the non-human actor has the power to decenter and disable the very being of the human subject."[29] Note here, for example, how Adorno juxtaposes the cold demands of machines with a steady slide into fascism:

> What does it mean for the subject that there are no casement windows to open, but only sliding frames to shove, no gentle latches but turnable handles, no forecourt, no doorstep before the street, no wall around the garden? And which driver is not tempted, merely by the power of his engine, to wipe out the vermin of the street, pedestrians, children and cyclists? The movements machines demand of their users already have the violent, hard-hitting, unresting jerkiness of Fascist maltreatment.[30]

Adorno is here drawing a direct link between technology, gesture, and outcome, which we can perhaps read as a pioneering concern with the importance of cultural techniques. There are limits with this interpretation of course—as Siegert remarks, Adorno saw technology as being inducted into the world of humans and not the flatter relationships proposed by cultural techniques, more symptom or tool than independent actor.[31] Thus, in the case of Wagner, music is largely following the lead of the beating hand of the composer, plying the audience in much the same way capitalism treats people as things. Adorno also saw technological agency as inherently suspect, betraying the seeds of authoritarian control. Cultural techniques, by contrast, make no universal claims to the morality of agency residing in things.

---

[29] Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 2015, 192.

[30] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 40.

[31] Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 2015, 192–93.

A cultural techniques approach to agency goes beyond merely allowing non-human actors as agents: it also means shifting our understanding of agency as a one-way transfer of action with clear intentionality, towards something a bit more distributed. In order to illustrate, Cornelia Vismann deploys as metaphor Greek's "medium voice," a grammatical construction in which action is neither attributed to subject or object, but rather defines their relationality.[32] Vismann contrasts how the active voice is used when describing the throwing of a spear, with how the medium voice is employed to express the relationship between the water in a bath and the bather: the one takes a ballistic approach, "an investigation of causes, which presupposes a search for an individual culprit in the matter," whereas with the other, "the doer is deduced from the instrumentalities of the action and the agent is derived from the medium itself."[33] By studying cultural techniques we then look for the patterns that connect subject and object, seeing the agency of non-human actors not as extension of man but as engaged in mutually defining praxis. As part of my project to advance a networked model of fandom, it is thus crucial to turn not only to the activity of fans but also to the structures that precede meaning—or in other words, to contemplate the role that both Wagner and his music play.

In order to untangle how Wagner's music is structured to produce meaning for fans, I take inspiration from Adorno's assertion that his music is in many ways anatomically akin to popular culture. To do so, I will be using as a guide Matt Hills' "family resemblances" for cult media. Cult media is a useful point of comparison for Wagner's music, not only because discourses of "cult" regularly surround Wagnerism—often disparagingly, it should be noted, though that is by no means my intention here—but also because cult media frequently replicate the same debates over high and low culture, active and passive fandom, as well as the dichotomy between aesthetic abandon and cerebral

[32] Vismann, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty."
[33] Vismann, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty," 85.

pleasure.[34] My decision to apply these categories to Wagner is decidedly anachronistic, but I argue that working backwards in time allows us to peel away some of the sediment that has settled over Wagner, displacing the mythology which surrounds both the man and the music.

Unlike other scholars such as Umberto Eco, who takes a semiotic approach, giving us the criteria of the "drillable text";[35] or Roberta Pearson, who resists defining cult media in aesthetic terms, preferring instead to place the litmus test solely on audience reception,[36] Hills takes a third position similar to mine: that cult media is *both* created and found. Borrowing the concept of "family resemblances" from Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hills suggests the traits of "*auteurism*, *endlessly deferred narrative*, and *hyperdiegesis*" as starting points for the constellations of associations that flow across cult media.[37] Importantly, these categories are neither exhaustive nor closed—rather they form nodes of similarity which are sometimes stretched, played with, or eschewed, highlighting the multiplicities of cult media. Thus, while not a foolproof way of identifying which media are likely to generate an enthusiastic and sustained reception, they allow us to think about the precondition for cult media to take shape. In order to fit this concept into my framework of cultural techniques, I want to unpack a bit further some of the assumptions behind Wittgenstein's proposition of "family resemblances," which are largely glossed over by Hills.

The concept appears in *Philosophical Investigations* as part of a larger discussion on the relationship between language and meaning. Rather than conceptualize language as transparently

---

[34] See for example Jancovich's discussion of cult films and how they replicate structures of (sub)cultural capital present in academia, as well as how the academy works at times to preserve this divide: Mark Jancovich, "Cult Fictions: Cult Movies, Subcultural Capital and the Production of Cultural Distinctions," *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 306–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380110107607.

[35] Umberto Eco, "'Casablanca': Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage," *SubStance* 14, no. 2 (1985): 3–12, https://doi.org/10.2307/3685047.

[36] Roberta Pearson, "Observations on Cult Television," in *The Cult TV Book*, ed. Stacey Abbott (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 131.

[37] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 131 (emphasis original).

representational, Wittgenstein proposes that "the meaning of a word is its use in the language."[38] When we attempt to define a word there are no firm boundaries, but rather only ones we draw in use.[39] Yet of course, the mere act of communication means that language cannot exist in a pure state of anarchy, there must be some shared organizing principles. To solve this philosophical problem, Wittgenstein posits meaning as a "complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing." These he terms "family resemblances": meaning rooted in kinship rather than essence. This, along with the insistence on meaning arising from practice, is the principal intersection with cultural techniques. When I speak of family resemblance, I mean to suggest that cult media works as a collection of cultural techniques, smaller quirks of the text which when assembled compel the listener to engage and suggest the label of "cult." This enables us to escape tautologies such as declaring that cult media is whatever fans say it is, or replicating the binaries of quality vs. mainstream media—instead we can think of how these family resemblances work as cultural technique to *produce* discourses of quality and identity categories of cult fandom, as well as activate active and passive forms of consumption. In my own exploration of these family resemblances, I take a similarly open rather than dogmatic approach, looking for moments of resonances with the qualities identified by Hills, but also how they operate within Wagnerism in related but differing ways. By highlighting the family resemblances, we can uncover moments of agency within the music and how it calls into action embodied and intellectual interpretive strategies.

[38] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd edition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 20.

[39] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 36.

Auteurism

Though any work of television or film is the result of the collaboration between numerous writers, producers, set designers and actors (to name a few), both cult shows and their fans tend to attribute ultimate responsibility to a single author, often referred to as "auteurs." Some notable auteurs of pop culture include Joss Whedon, creator of shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Firefly* (2002-2003), as well as the film director Quentin Tarantino, known for *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Reservoir Dogs* (1992). In cult fandoms, they serve as an anchor, "a point of coherence and continuity in relation to the world of the media cult."[40] Hills argues that "auteurism brings with it an ideology of quality," which is often contrasted with the supposed anonymous cook-cutter creations of pop culture. Through this, the cult text is able to recuperate the author-function, serving "to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts: there must be—at a certain level of his thought or desire, of his consciousness or unconscious—a point where contradictions are resolved, where incompatible elements are at last tied together or organized around a fundamental or originating contradiction."[41] By insisting on the "rationality" of cult media, this first family resemblance continues my discussion of the Great Divide.

While I have already outlined how Wagner the man sits uneasily within contemporary Wagnerism, I argue that the initial positioning of Wagner as central to his art has allowed Wagner's music to cultivate such a dedicated audience. After all, despite the later (partial) decoupling, Wagner remains the connecting thread. Appeals to auteurism are also at times apparent in the resentment over Regietheatre productions, which are often seen as violating authorial intent.[42] Even those who have

---

[40] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 132.

[41] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Reading Architectural History*, ed. Dana Arnold (London: Routledge, 2002), 77.

[42] As I already touched on in my discussion of Regietheatre, what counts as a clear violation of authorial intent, or good or bad reimaginings is a subject of continual debate among opera lovers, with tolerances

more experimental taste and relish the unconventional, generally do not tolerate changes to the libretto or score. Where I would expand on Hills' theorization is that while auteurism is often touted as a marker of quality precisely because it implies personal sovereignty over art, creating the impression of authentic artistic expression also often requires languages which emphasizes *letting go* of control. There are two points which I would like to highlight here: first, how Wagner consistently took ownership of his art, carefully outlining his artistic vision and contrasting it to more popular fare; second, that while Wagner took centre stage, he would simultaneously look to erase his contributions, positioning himself as simply a medium to nature, fulfilling an organic artistic destiny. It is with this second move that Wagner worked to move his music from the spectre of commercialization. Wagner was thus simultaneously claiming the role of both active rational subject and passive object of art.

Unlike most composers of the era, Wagner approached his operas holistically, penning the libretto to all his works, remaining heavily involved in the rehearsal process, and often producing prescriptive stage directions. The following, taken from his notes on the performance of *Tannhäuser*, is symptomatic of his enthusiasm for control:

> it is among my greatest torments of later years, that I have not been able to be present at the individual attempts already made to perform my dramatic works, so that I might have arranged with those concerned the infinite variety of details by whose exact observance alone can the executant artists gain a thoroughly correct conception of the whole.[43]

---

for deviance from the original varying wildly. There are also some members who would object to the ideal of "authorial intent," enjoying productions that overtly challenge Wagner's intent or legacy. Still, both positions assume an initial vision on Wagner's part.

[43] Richard Wagner, "On the Performance of 'Tannhäuser,'" in *The Theatre*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, Vol. 3 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1894), 167–206, https://books.google.ca/books?id=7MmrGB8v9JkC.

Wagner goes on to dispense advice for the regisseurs (stage directors), music directors, kappellmeisters (conductors), actors and even scene painters on how they are to proceed. His advice is not limited to matters of interpretation, but also of method, deeming as essential, for example, a full read-through of the libretto with the entire ensemble before a single note be played. This is openly acknowledged to be "a method of performance directly opposite to the customary."[44] If unable to enact these exacting demands, Wagner then declares that it would be better to drop the work altogether. His music dramas are thus constantly marked with heavy authorial intent, positioning him as an auteur par excellence. Adorno's description of Wagner as first and foremost a conductor, rather than a composer is apt: Wagner was concerned not with his music as it appeared on the page, but ultimately as a living practice, crafted with "the imagined reactions of the public" in mind.[45] Though his demands were frequently ignored—opera in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was often performed in truncated form, with little attention to organic unity—Wagner's insistence that there was only one way to perform his operas gave the impression of a singular artistic vision which only he could direct.

Wagner was writing in the broader context of several profound shifts in how music was both produced and consumed. As Daniel Cavicchi argues, the nineteenth century marked the first time "the act of listening to someone else performing first became distinct, marketed, and desired,"[46] made possible by the expanding popularity and availability of professional musical performances and the rise of capitalism. Though liberated from previous systems of patronage which had previously

---

[44] Wagner, "On the Performance of 'Tannhäuser,'" 173.

[45] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 20–25. I am agnostic on Adorno's related claim that Wagner's music is composed in such a way to emphasize the beating gesture of a composer. Confirming this assessment would require a musical analysis that is outside the scope of this dissertation. For some of the issues with Adorno's musicological analysis of Wagner, however, see Baragwanath, "Musicology and Critical Theory."

[46] Daniel Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing: Music Lovers in the Age of Barnum* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 6.

kept opera alive, the newly crowded markets left much potential for failure for aspiring composers. Wagner was painfully aware of the fickle nature of audiences after his failure to make an impression in Paris early in his career, followed swiftly by bankruptcy—this despite the backing of Giacomo Meyerbeer, then the reigning king of the French capital's opera scene. Wagner would later reformulate his image as "the kind of artist who would indeed forget 'that there was a business side to art,'" pitting his own (German) "pure art" against lesser (French and Italian) commodified varieties.[47]

This is but the beginning of what Nicholas Vazsonyi identifies as the building of the "Wagner brand." As part of this strategy, Wagner positioned himself as the inheritor of the entirety of the German musical tradition by, for example, exaggerating his role in the repatriation of composer Carl Maria von Weber's remains, or having a fictional Beethoven in his 1840s novella "A Pilgrimage to Beethoven" explain to an unnamed protagonist "R" that the Ode to Joy chorus was to be the precursor of a new integrated music drama (a fanfic if I have ever seen one).[48] Wagner principally achieved these goals using prose, which worked to construct an idealized version of his music as part of a self-styled music revolution. At the same time, the composer paradoxically engages in the constant promotion of his work, consciously employing techniques and language taken "precisely from the commercial world he was simultaneously vilifying."[49]

This fits with patterns we see with modern day cult media, around which discourses of quality frequently circulate. Cult media often have an uneasy relationship with commodification, both a product of mainstream media but also continually positioned in opposition. As a result, many fans of

---

[47] Nicholas Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 12.

[48] Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner*.

[49] Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner*, 5.

cult media employ the rhetoric of "quality" to distance themselves from the mainstream.[50] But Hills makes the point that cult texts are not exclusively made—they are also *found*. This is especially important when considering the role of the auteur, because while to some extent "[t]he *auteur*'s extratextual 'presence' is in part produced by the fans themselves, but its legitimacy always predates fans' involvement through being offered up as an official extratextual publicity narrative."[51] With good reason too—cult media audiences are often among the most loyal, willing to spend considerable sums of money in their support for their fandom of choice. In an era of increasingly fractured media consumption engagement, not exposure, enables the strongest return on investment.[52]

Composing prior to the emergence of mass media, Wagner similarly had to market himself in order to be heard. One of the great ironies is that despite the insistence that his music spoke for itself, Wagner was a prolific writer of prose, constantly feeling the need to explicate his art in pamphlets, open letters, essays and books, sometimes running to hundreds of pages. Precisely because his writing was portable in a way that opera could never be, prose played a decisive role in reception, with publications like *La Revue wagnérienne* engaging much more with Wagner and his ideas, rather than his music.[53] But it was not just music he was writing about: he also wrote at length about himself, most notably as part of his autobiography *Mein Leben,* and at times directly addressing his audience. In "A Communication to My Friends," for example, Wagner draws a clear distinction between critics and "friends," those "who so far sympathise with [him] both as a man and artist, that they were able to understand [his] aims."[54] As part of this, he sketches out his development as an artist, creating for

---

[50] Pearson, "Observations on Cult Television," 15.
[51] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 133.
[52] Napoli, *Audience Evolution*.
[53] Verzosa, "Wagner Reception," 6.
[54] Richard Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," in *The Art-Work of the Future*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, Vol. 1 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works* (1851; repr., London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895), 273, https://books.google.ca/books?id=oBc5AAAAIAAJ.

himself a narrative arc where he moves from immature composer with ambition to find financial success in Paris, to mature poet who realizes the errors of his ways and eventually revolts "against the whole condition of our modern art."[55]

He also performs a retrospective of his repertoire to date, singling out the *Flying Dutchman* as a clear turning point in his work, [56] painting a picture of a moral struggle between materialistic comforts and a greater artistic vision: the need to "eke out my ways and means" mandates a "distasteful bond" to public affairs;[57] the success of *Rienzi* leads to a "self-delusion, forced upon me by circumstances";[58] he feels an "inner aversion" to accepting a position as Royal *kapellmeister*.[59] Every turn to commercial activities is dismissed as a necessary evil in order to pursue his greater artistic aims. Finally, in the closing pages, he announces his plans for the Ring cycle, revealing that the whole document is an advertisement for his coming work.[60] Many of the markers of auteurism are here: a clear artistic vision, the aversion to the commercial, a need for control over his art. By detailing his trials and tribulations as an interest, he tacitly turns not only his music, but also himself into an object to be consumed.

Yet while it is true that Wagner's personality looms large, his rhetoric, paradoxically, often looked to minimize any signs of authorial intent by mobilizing an appeal to the natural. For example, Wagner's signature fusion of music, poetry and drama into the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, is not played as the creation of the genius of a single man, but rather, as simply rectifying the "unnatural" modern opera

---

[55] Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," 305.

[56] This accords with the usual division of Wagner's work: operas composed before the *Flying Dutchman* are generally considered outside the Wagner canon, understood as somewhat inferior and very rarely performed either at Bayreuth or elsewhere. Even in this regard, Wagner has shaped how we understand his art.

[57] Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," 348.

[58] Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," 317.

[59] Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," 318.

[60] Nicholas Vazsonyi develops this idea even further, talking about, for example, how Wagner created "coming attractions" for his upcoming works. Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner*.

into the more "natural" music drama. Wagner was highly critical of the standard practice of fitting lyrics, usually supplied by a separate librettist, to a preconceived melody, as

> the Poet had à priori to adapt himself to the entire form in which that melody was to declare itself: this Form, moreover, had so imperious an influence over the shaping of the opera-melody, that in truth it prescribed its substantial Content as well.[61]

Artificial music prescribed meaning, he argues, bending poetry into unnatural forms. With "Organic art," on the other hand, the artist is simply the conduit to nature. Along the same lines, Wagner dismissed the idea that he wanted to claim the title of "genius," describing "the un-political, artistic temperament" instead as marked by a willingness to give "himself up without reserve to the impressions which move his emotional being to sympathy."[62] In doing so, Wagner ascribed a receptive, almost mystical quality to authorship and in this he was able to simultaneously play the part of controlling auteur, while further distancing his art from any commercial taint by insisting that he was simply doing what nature dictated to him. These two contradictory threads return us to the Great Divide. On the one hand, Wagner's unambiguous hands-on approach produces an aura of quality and calls into action analytical consumption strategies: intentional creation invites intentional consumption. On the other, Wagner's framing that he was merely restoring the natural order suggests an alternate narrative of possession. If the forms are natural, what is there to do but to give yourself over to music? It is this duality, rather than simply the element of control identified by Hills, that played a role in the persistent cultish reception of his music.

---

[61] Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 108.
[62] Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," 286.

Endlessly Deferred Narrative

The second family resemblance Hills identifies is the "endlessly deferred narrative." This refers to one, or several related questions which drive a cult formation and invite the speculation or recreation of fans. An endlessly deferred narrative thus creates a text which is "unfinished and focused" in scope.[63] Hills presents the example of the unsolved murder of Laura Palmer in *Twin Peaks* (1990–1991) and "the Guide" from Douglas Adams' *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*. If my discussion of auteurism largely pertained to how cult media is framed by the creator, in this category we pivot towards qualities within the work itself.

Out of the three traits, this is the hardest to locate in Wagner's music. There is no overarching question which unites his output. This is partially because the operas do not all take place in the same "universe"—despite some cross-pollination such as Lohengrin's identity as the son of Parsifal (both from their respective eponymous operas)—and apart from the Ring cycle, present self-contained narratives. That being said, although Hills seeks to identify traits that transcend media categories, most of his examples come from television, a format which transpires over a longer time span: overarching questions, such as who will sit on the Iron Throne in *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) are key to ensuring that viewers tune in to the next episode and encourage speculation. Yet often cult fandom does not apply to a single series but rather to the output of a single creator, as implied by the previous section's discussion of auteurs. This is especially the case with more self-contained genres, such as film. Hills admits as much in a footnote, where he acknowledges that fans can at times seek to find endlessly deferred narrative located not in texts, but in the unfolding life stories of the auteur in question.[64] While I certainly agree that the ability to read into Wagner's biography teleological

[63] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 134.
[64] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 194 n.5.

narratives is part of the appeal for fans, this would force us to abandon the idea that some of Wagner's cult potentiality lies in the music itself.

Adorno, however, gives us a clue as to where to begin, when he concludes that when it comes to Wagner "[n]othing is unambiguous:"

> The inexorable progression that fails to create any new quality and constantly flows into the already known, the dynamics of permanent regression, have endowed Wagner's work with an enigmatic quality and even today, in contrast with almost all other music, the listener is left with the sense of a blind spot, of something unresolved—notwithstanding his familiarity with the music. Wagner denies the listener who accompanies him the satisfaction of a thing clearly defined and it is left in doubt the formal meaning of a given moment has been rightly apprehended.[65]

Some of the areas in which he feels that ambiguity is most felt in Wagner include the characters of Kundry, who is both "penitent and seductress," or "Tristan and Siegfried, the faithless faithful."[66] However, it is in the music that Adorno identifies the principal vehicle of ambiguity. He contends that Wagner gestures "towards reason's promise of self-determination whilst simultaneously tending towards phantasmagoria (in which the object appears as its own origin)," reflecting the "fundamental paradoxes of aesthetic modernity."[67] Though Adorno sees this propensity for ambiguity as one of Wagner's key failings, I'd like instead to think of how it is one of the principal drivers of Wagner's appeal, for ambiguity invites the sustained interest of the listener. Indeed, rather than seek the one question that unites them all, it is more productive to distill the idea of the endlessly deferred

---

[65] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 33.
[66] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 33.
[67] Sophie Boyd-Hurrell, "'The Mirage of Eternity:' Adorno's Critique of Wagnerian Temporality," *Context* 39, no. 1 (2014): 37–38.

narrative to its core principle: that is, Hills' observation that "cult texts are marked by *textual absences and the withholding of information* which does not simply allow for an 'exchange' of meaning, but which instead calls certain fan affective-interpretive strategies into being."[68] Ambiguity, I would argue does not just call the *strategies* into being—but the *fan themselves.* The desire engendered by ambiguity then returns us to my previous discussion of the "work" necessary to understand Wagner—by calling into action these active strategies of interpretation, Wagner's music compels the creation of cult fandom.

In seeking to pinpoint this ambiguity, I'd like to point to two particular sources: first that of musical harmony, and second, leitmotifs. Classical music conventions from the first half of the nineteenth century were built around strict musical forms and harmonic progressions that stressed movement from the tonic, a development through the dominant and then a return to the home key. Similarly, operas were typically composed using well-worn generic formats consisting of show-stopping arias strung together by either spoken dialogue or recitative. By contrast, Wagner's music straddled the divide between the romantic era and the atonal revolution that took place in the twentieth century, pushing the tonal system to its extreme. In addition, though Wagner's musical practice sometimes fell short of his rhetoric, he felt that such abstract musical constructs forced music into unnatural forms.

In order to challenge these norms he devised several strategies, such as the use of "endless melodies" to lessen the segmentation between aria and exposition, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* which strove to unite poetry, drama and music into a single art form, increased use of chromaticism, and a

[68] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 193, n. 3 (emphasis my own).

loosening reliance on conventional musical forms.[69] The outcome is music that can at times be difficult to evaluate using traditional musical theory, even if it does not break free from tonality altogether. Thus, when Adorno writes that "ambiguity itself becomes an element of expression,"[70] part of what he is arguing is that devices such as dissonance are no longer simply the foil to resolution and instead become endemic to the music. Ambiguity is no longer purely functional, in the sense that it provides forward momentum towards resolution, resulting in what Adorno sees as "the phantasmagorical emblem for time standing still."[71]

One of the most famous examples is the Tristan chord, which opens the titular opera and is then repeated with an almost obsessive frequency thereafter. The Tristan chord demonstrates how the Western Tonal system relies on well-established cultural techniques to train listeners to expect certain harmonic movements, by strategically breaking from conventions. Because the chord cannot be easily categorized using traditional music theory, it stands as one of the most analyzed chords in history.[72] The Tristan chord juxtaposes two musical intervals, that of the perfect fifth and the tritone. While the first is typically understood as one of the most stable intervals of the Western music system, the tritone has a long history of being cast as "an obstacle to perfect symmetry and closure within such theoretical systems."[73] Being just one semitone (the smallest possible distance between two notes in the Western tonal music system), below the perfect fifth, the interval not only sounds highly

---

[69] For an overview of the general features of Wagner's musical techniques see Barry Millington, *The New Grove Guide to Wagner and His Operas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 28–37.

[70] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 36.

[71] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 76. Adorno was particularly invested in the revolutionary potential of atonality as means of challenging the authoritarian-like control of the tonal system but felt that Wagner's implementation fell short of this potential by turning atonality into its own governing principle.

[72] For an overview of the many attempts to incorporate the Tristan Chord into the tonal music system see Nathan Martin, "The Tristan Chord Resolved," *Intersections* 28, no. 2 (2008): 6–30, https://doi.org/10.7202/029953ar.

[73] Eric Thomas Chafe, *The Tragic and the Ecstatic: The Musical Revolution of Wagner's Tristan Und Isolde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 87.

dissonant to those habituated to tonal music, but also seems to demand resolution upwards. This expectation is reinforced through constant exposure in various genres. The cultural techniques of tonal music provide the rules of composition that orders the music, yes, but also the ears of the listeners. Playing the two intervals at once mimics the tension between extreme pleasure (stability of the fifth) and insatiable desire (instability of the tritone). Wagner toys with this feature by repeating the Tristan chord again and again but denying the longed-for resolution until the finale. Out of all his operas, *Tristan und Isolde* is often the one cited as the most manipulative. Wagner himself was well aware of this effect, writing in a letter to Mathilde Wesendonck: "I fear the opera will be banned—unless the whole thing is parodied in a bad performance: only mediocre performance can save me! Perfectly *good* ones will be bound to drive people mad—I cannot imagine it otherwise."[74]

Here the agency of his music comes out in full force. The opera's prelude, by creating "a seamless dynamic of tension and resolution rather than a sequence of clearly demarcated sectional divides,"[75] works to lure in listeners, making audible the insatiable desire of the lovers on stage. Notably, the consummation of their love never occurs. Instead, Isolde arrives just as Tristan succumbs to his wounds and after singing the "Liebestod," she too collapses in death. Because death is portrayed as "desired, willed, willing, triumphant,"[76] this final moment is not, however, one of tragedy. Linda and Michael Hutcheon, whose comments on Wagner began this chapter, write that from their perspective, the music succeeds in its goal to offer to audiences "the same transcendence of the phenomenal, the same direct access to the noumenal, that the *lovers* attain through erotic love and, ultimately

---

[74] Stewart Spencer and Millington Barry, eds., "Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck, Mid-April 1859," in *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner* (New York: W W Norton, 1988), 452.

[75] Chafe, *The Tragic and the Ecstatic*, 100.

[76] Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, "Death Drive: Eros and Thanatos in Wagner's 'Tristan Und Isolde,'" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 11, no. 3 (1999): 288, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586700005073.

death."[77] While outside the opera house the Tristan chord proffers an opportunity for intellectual "work," inside, listeners find pleasure in succumbing to the waves of music. Resolution in dissolution: the ultimate triumph of ambiguity.

How might we link this back to the idea of endlessly deferred narratives? On an almost literal level, we can reflect on the continual deferred resolution of the Tristan Chord. Here, the cult audience is summoned on two fronts: the first theoretical, by inviting analysis, and second, through the pleasure derived from the final resolution. While all cult texts benefit from leaving some things unanswered, Hills' discussion is largely focused on cult TV, a format that is open by design and thus misses to some degree the pleasure of repetition and the catharsis of release once ambiguity has been resolved. The terminal decline that Hills discusses in the case of *Twin Peaks* once it had revealed the mystery of "who killed Laura Palmer," speaks more to the problem of a text answering a question, but then *refusing to end*.[78] No such problem exists in the realm of opera. Instead, it invites the listeners to restart the process again and again. As Wiley Powell told me, "I jokingly tell everyone, when people say how do you sit through Wagner? I say, well, the problem with Wagner is that it's too short!"

But the Tristan chord is far from the only place where ambiguity reigns supreme. Once again, Adorno proves a useful guide, identifying leitmotifs as the key feature where ambiguity reveals itself musically.[79] Having largely discarded as chief organizing principle the "arbitrary conglomerate of separate smaller forms of songs"[80] demanded by contemporary operatic practice, Wagner instead turned to leitmotifs. The move was announced with much fanfare (and a not-inconsiderable amount

---

[77] Hutcheon and Hutcheon, "Death Drive," 286.
[78] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 136–37.
[79] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 34.
[80] Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," 367.

of self-aggrandizing) in his open letter "A Communication to my friends." Wagner outlines a narrative of composition in which he "unconsciously" planted the thematic seeds of the entire opera *Flying Dutchman* into the opening aria, "The Ballad of Senta":

> it was the picture in petto of the whole drama, [...] In the eventual composition of the music, the thematic picture, thus evoked, spread itself quite instinctively over the whole drama, as one continuous tissue; [...] I should have had stubbornly to follow the example of the self-willed opera-composer, had I chosen to invent a fresh motiv [sic] for each recurrence of one and the same mood in different scenes; a course whereto I naturally did not feel the smallest inclination, since I had only in my mind the most intelligible portrayal of the subject-matter, and not a mere conglomerate of operatic numbers.[81]

While the letter does perform some degree of "retconning"[82] by shoehorning theoretical concepts developed seven years later into *Flying Dutchman*—as Carl Dahlhaus and Mary Whittall remark, "the most cursory analysis suffices, however, to show that this description is a fabrication"[83]—it does highlight the fundamental role of leitmotifs to Wagner's musical thought and the important part they later played in his compositions.

In short, a leitmotif is a musical motif with extramusical associations. Michael Bribitzer-Stull proposes a three part definition: first, that a leitmotif is not static, but developmental; second, that it is bifurcated in nature, consisting of both a musical and associative component; and finally, that leitmotifs play a structural role, working in conjunction with each other by sharing and exchanging both

---

[81] Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," 370.

[82] A term used in fandom culture to describe the practice of subsequent works reinterpreting past events, often with the goal of smoothing over textual inconsistencies.

[83] Carl Dahlhaus and Mary Whittall, "Wagner's 'A Communication to My Friends': Reminiscence and Adaptation," *The Musical Times* 124, no. 1680 (1983): 90, https://doi.org/10.2307/962675.

harmonic and melodic content to furnish the scaffolding onto which the rest of the musical work hangs.[84] In general, leitmotifs are short in length and draw meaning through a combination of temporal correlation and generic, topical resonances.[85] We can expand this definition to identify the repetition of musical material as a cultural technique, one that efficiently ties semantic meaning to otherwise abstract musical tones and encourages a type of listening predicated on identifying patterns and variations.

In *Opera and Drama*, Wagner explains his leitmotifs were not meant to represent concrete objects or things, but rather to stand for the "unspeakable" and elicit certain emotional responses: "Music cannot think: but she can materialize thoughts, i.e. she can give forth their emotional-contents as no longer merely recollected, but made present."[86] In this capacity, leitmotifs were to serve as tools of both foreboding and remembrance.[87] While leitmotifs were not assigned one-to-one correspondences, they were intended to conjure a *specific* response with each return:

> with its return a definite emotion is discernibly conveyed to us, and conveyed to us through the physical agency of the Orchestra, albeit now unspoken by the performer; for the latter now feels driven to give voice to a fresh emotion, derived in turn from that earlier one.[88]

Wagner states here that the emotion elicited by the leitmotif is "definite." Yet crucially, it remains "unspoken." By affirming that there is a true meaning to be found, but never providing the answers, Wagner leaves his leitmotifs semiotically open, giving room for fans to insert their own

---

[84] Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif: From Wagner to Hollywood Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 10.

[85] Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif*, 100.

[86] Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 329.

[87] Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 335.

[88] Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 329 (emphasis original).

interpretations. Wagner's leitmotifs, even as he purports to be quite precise, are thus able to generate the "sense of romantic 'excess' and unknowability" which Hills identifies as pivotal for cult media.

When lovers of Wagner described the work necessary to appreciate opera, much of this referred to knowledge of leitmotifs—not only a basic grasp of how they worked, but also, being able to recognize them in different contexts and better understand their usage. Leitmotifs provide a point of familiarity in a wash of sound. The desire to pin down otherwise ephemeral music is evident in the long middle-brow tradition of leitmotif "catalogues." Contrary to popular belief, Wagner never used the term "leitmotif," preferring the more generic "motiv." Instead, the label was popularized by Hans von Wolzogen's 1878 publication "A Guide Through the Music of Richard Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung*."[89] Still, though anachronistic, the use of the term has since become so ubiquitous in reference to Wagner's treatment of thematic material that it has long ceased to be controversial—all those I talked to used "leitmotif" freely, demonstrating how on occasion even Wagner's ironclad grip on interpretation can be pried loose. Though von Wolzogen's guide is often derided as being overly simplistic in its approach to leitmotif, largely equating melodies with characters and objects rather than emotions, and a little bit overzealous in its naming, many of the labels remain in current use. There are some parallels here with the activities of fans who maintain wikis for their favourite television universe, which Paul Booth argues is at least partly in response to increased narrative complexity.[90] Through these archival means, fans are able to interact with, rewrite, and reread their source material. Similarly, indexing and spotting leitmotifs in the wild provides an alternative prism with which to understand the opera in question, refracting and recombining meaning in interesting and unexpected

[89] Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif*, 20.
[90] Paul Booth, *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 81–82.

ways. As part of this process, fans discipline their ears to be able to pick up these repetitions and variations.

But if it were simply a matter of cataloguing, the fun would be over soon enough: a single guide would suffice. Adorno's quip that Wagner's leitmotifs are "miniature pictures, and their supposed psychological variation involve only a change of lighting,"[91] misses not only the allure of identification, but how intriguing the "change of lighting" can be. Indeed, the music beckons fans by remaining slippery. Though current Wagnerism has largely moved away from excessive cataloguing, there is still joy to be found in the detective work of hearing how leitmotifs appear and transform throughout time. The type of musical complexity it enacts—in conjunction with other musical devices such as metre and orchestral colour—encourages continual engagement through a specific type of leitmotiv listening, whether for those who jumped straight to Wagner or for those who followed the more conventional routes through Italian or French opera first. Barbara Japp described how she enjoyed turning to the score to see the "shape on the page" and understand how the music is able to pull off the effects it does, including leitmotifs. For her, "complexity is easy," a clear entry into his music and an invitation to pull things apart. Leitmotifs are even accessible for those without the ability to read sheet music, with the most obvious being discernible to the untrained ear. Those who came to Wagner later in their opera journeys discussed how the complexity, though initially a barrier to entry, quickly became one of the key reasons Wagner remained their favourite composer. When asked what he found initially intimidating about Wagner, Alan Denis pointed first to the inability to immediately pick out hummable melodies, but also the importance of familiarity:

[91] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 35.

> it's familiarity with the music and immediately hearing it, and then knowing, what is happening on stage in that particular piece or song. [...] The first time you hear [the leitmotifs], you really have a hard time knowing exactly what is this noise. And then you get the tune, and then next time around, "I recognize that tune, I know that, what is that, I know it." You identify something that is familiar but you can't really pin it down.

Leitmotifs first often identified by this kind of informal process developed through repeated listening, can then be further refined via intellectual work, providing endless entry points for those dedicated to the music. The endlessly deferred narrative thus invites these active strategies through ambiguity.

Hyperdiegesis

The final family resemblance I will be touching on is *hyperdiegesis*: "the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension."[92] Such textual consistency encourages deep immersion. While endlessly deferred narratives principally call into play intellectualizing strategies, hyperdiegesis, I argue, instead points to the constant portrayal of Wagner's music as overwhelming. This is the other side of the dialectic between active and passive audiences. Hills views hyperdiegesis as providing "ontological security" in order to "stimulate creative speculation."[93] Opera, though, is (rarely) subject to the reimagining common in popular fan communities, such as fan fiction or vidding.[94] I would argue, however, that the "ontological security"

---

[92] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 104.

[93] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 138.

[94] An interesting exception can be found in Hans Fuch's *Eros zwischen euch und uns* published in 1909. For an account of Wagner's role in the novel's plot see Morris (2002). In more contemporary contexts, I would argue that the role of textual poacher could be ascribed to producers of opera through the tradition of *Regietheatre*—that, however, is a topic for another essay.

provided by hyperdiegesis also speaks to how fans describe embodied joy. By attending to the importance of immersion, Wagner set the stage (pun intended) for an intense affective experience, one that appears to compel a passive response. Once again, this reveals how the agency of music comes alive.

In the case of Wagner, this is perhaps best illustrated by the (literally) epic scale of the Ring cycle: over sixteen hours of music, a large multi-generational cast, a multitude of backdrops including Valhalla, the home of the gods. In addition, the cycle is governed by a number of fantastical "rules" which put the plot into motion, such as the curse placed on the ring which dooms whoever who holds the Ring to be killed by its subsequent owner. Finally, because of the mythological setting, the world feels innately bigger than what we can see on stage. This hearkens back to the general "moreness" I previously discussed: the overabundance of material gives us precisely the impression that there is always more to be found. As already hinted above, the worlds created by Wagner, despite featuring mystical elements, operate using a consistent internal logic, allowing spectators to remain unquestioning. Wagner was attuned to this need: according to him, the most adept poet was capable of producing "an image wherein [man's life-energy] is condensed into an utmost-strengthened 'moment,' which, taken apart, most certainly seems wondrous and unwonted yet shuts within itself its own unwontedness and wondrousness and is in nowise taken by the beholder *for a Wonder* but apprehended as the *most intelligible* representation of reality."[95] For Wagner, this is obtained by a deeper understanding of "Nature's essence,"[96] casting away unnatural operatic protocols demanded by artificial "fashion."

[95] Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 216 (emphasis original).
[96] Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 218.

As I previously discussed, Wagner turned for inspiration to the musical traditions of ancient Greece, theorizing in "Artwork of the Future," that returning to more "natural" art practices would require the seamless integration of music, poetry and drama into the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[97] Casting aside generic conventions allowed for a stronger relationship between music and text, and speaks to Wagner's awareness of the need for an "internal logic," one that could only be uncovered through immersion. Mythic themes complement this more holistic approach to music and drama, conferring an almost timeless quality. For the spectator, this results in a world on stage which feels believable and promotes absorption. By ensuring that his audiences were not jolted by elements which seemed out of place, the opera would cease to be a media at all and instead be presented as simply an extension of reality. This returns us to the idea that Wagner's music is overwhelming, the other side of the dialectic between active and passive.

We can once again return to Adorno for some insight, who argues that there is a key contradiction at play: while leitmotifs result in an atomizing of the music,[98] one I would contend that is further perpetuated through the compulsion of intellectual analysis, other features such as "endless melodies" are "kept as continuous as possible and since the listener's memory is denied any small-scale musical unit to latch on to, this has the effect of harnessing him all the more inexorably within the total effect."[99] Adorno links this to capitalist commodities, where the leitmotifs hold a commodity-function, "anticipating the universal practice of mass culture later on, the music designed to be

---

[97] Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Unlike "leitmotif." Wagner did use the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* on a handful of occasion, most notably in "The Artwork of the Future." Interestingly, however, it does not appear in the later publication *Opera and Drama*, even if the concept remains. Wagner was principally concerned with art theory, not with giving his compositional approaches names.

[98] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 39.

[99] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 44.

remembered, it is intended for the forgetful."[100] Simultaneously, Wagner creates a phantasmagoria in which a single moment is stretched over the entire opera by concealing the means of productions. The result is a totalizing musical space in which time seems to stand still.[101] Nestled into this contradiction lies Wagner's appeal: the infinite fragmentation made possible through analysis and the total engulfment by a wash of sound, rendered difficult to parse to the uninitiated ear.

This need for immersion was not only embedded into the music, but also the construction of Bayreuth. Built to Wagner's specifications, the theatre features a sunken orchestra pit to hide the technical means of productions, encouraging spectators to remain fully engaged during the length of the opera. Galleries and boxes were cut from the design in favour of ascending rows, all with an uninterrupted view of the stage. A proscenium serves as a "mystic abyss," separating "reality from ideality," and creating the illusion "that the action is very remote" while providing "the clarity of actual proximity."[102] Wagner also insisted that the auditorium be plunged in darkness, a practice which stood in stark contrast to contemporary Paris opera houses, which were above all places that one went to be seen. All of these features were meant to promote the undivided attention of those in attendance:

> Having taken his seat, the spectator now find himself in a veritable theatron, in other words, in a space that exists for no other purpose than for looking [...] Between him and the picture that he is to look at, nothing is plainly discernible [...] the stage picture appearing in consequence to be located in the unapproachable world of dreams, while the music, rising up

---

[100] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 21.
[101] Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 74.
[102] Richard Wagner, "The Bayreuth Festival Theatre," Bayreuth Festspiele, May 22, 1872, https://web.archive.org/web/20150823111926/https://www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/documents/_the_bayreuth_festival_theatre_341.html.

> spectrally from the "mystic abyss" [...] transports him to that inspired state of clairvoyance in which the stage picture that he sees before him becomes the truest reflection of life itself.[103]

Wagner speaks above how music "transports" the spectator from their seat onto the stage. It seems that Wagner sought to render the theatre as transparent as water. In order to prevent the audience from drowning in the mystical abyss, music, acting as ship, was to ferry them from their seats into the mythical land portrayed on stage. Yet once on board, music would no longer be perceived as an artificial medium, but rather its own self-sustaining environment. Passengers were then invited to become fully immersed into this dream world; a dream world designed to return us to direct communion with nature. Though most contemporary fans view Wagner's work in other venues than Bayreuth—or in "foreign waters" we might say—music still holds the potential to fulfill this role. By treating media as nature, Wagner thus set the stage for an unmediated experience between audience and author which could facilitate intense affective engagement, giving agency to the music.

Throughout this chapter, I have explored how author and music can work to co-produce cult fandom, using as my principal guides Adorno's analysis of Wagner's music and Hills' family resemblances of cult media. From Adorno, I take away the lesson that the so-called high and low arts are often two sides of the same coin. However, I reframe the so-called "manipulative" nature of Wagner's music as instead a symptom of the inherent agency of any work of art. Hills' family resemblance can help guide us towards some of the sources of this agency: from Wagner's positioning as an auteur, thus manufacturing an aura of "quality"; to the ambiguity of the music which call into action the interpretive strategies of fans; to hyperdiegesis, where vast narrative and musical universes invite listeners to lose themselves in a world of sound. Importantly, however, I do not see agency as a one-way

[103] Wagner, "The Bayreuth Festival Theatre."

street: instead, it is continually negotiated between audience, text, performers, theatre and more. When fans talk of the importance of "work" or the addictive qualities of Wagner, we can see this continual give and take between rationalization of the music and the intense bodily affective experience of listening to Wagner. These strategies do not sit in opposition to each, but rather both are key to the pleasure of Wagner. While Adorno might have understood the profoundly compelling nature of Wagner's music, he misses that the resulting responses can *also* call into action the agency of the listener.

Finally, I want to emphasize that Wagner's agency over his music is frequently challenged. For example, the explicit "natural" lens with which he frames his music is rarely invoked by fans: on the flip side fans often discuss leitmotifs, a term he never used. Reading Wagner's prose has also fallen somewhat to the wayside in Wagnerian circles, with most relying instead on secondary analyses by musicologists. The hypothetical transparent theatre can also insert itself into the experience of opera in unexpected ways and even Bayreuth is not immune to this, a theme I will expand on in the next chapter. Likewise, contemporary staging practices increasingly dispense with the prescribed staging instruction. Directors often inject into the music meaning that was never intended to be there, such as in the numerous productions which directly confront Wagner's associations with the Third Reich. Thus, I do not want to leave the impression that he was always successful in his goals of framing his art. Rather, I want to make the point that if fans love Wagner, it is because they found something compelling to start with. Rather, the continual give and take between audience, music and author is part and parcel of my networked model of fandom. If we are to understand Wagnerism, taking seriously the agency of both Wagner and his music is a vital exercise.

Chapter 4

Pandemics, Parasites and Paratexts: Materialities of Reception

In mid-March of 2020, COVID-19—previously confined to remote news report from China—arrived in Toronto. Over the course of a single weekend, the city shut down in one fell swoop with the province of Ontario declaring a state of emergency. After initially announcing that they would pause performances for one month's time, the COC, on March 27, cancelled the remainder of its 2019/2020 season. The subsequent season was soon similarly shelved, including the highly anticipated Canadian debut of *Parsifal*. Through email, the Toronto Wagner Society executive discussed whether to cancel the final meetings: one exec member makes the point that the majority of the membership qualify as high risk. These cancellations were mirrored the world over as opera houses across the globe closed their doors. As of the spring of 2022, the return to the opera house remains tentative, with scattered productions often still having to navigate capacity restrictions, and isolation and testing protocols.

During the height of the pandemic, opera, like almost all other facets of life, moved online. Companies rushed to provide streaming opportunities: the Met opera, with perhaps the deepest pre-existing catalogue, began streaming a free opera every night. The COC, who were not so fortunate, invested in recording equipment to create alternative programming to share with subscribers, streaming occasional digital concerts and uploading to YouTube check-ins with newly appointed director Perryn Leech and chats with members of the orchestra. Smaller companies such as Against the Grain Theatre proved somewhat more agile, able to produce full productions such as a multilingual version of Handel's *Messiah* as well as Gustav Holst's chamber opera *Sāvitri*. As for the Toronto Wagner Society, after initially cancelling the remainder of the season, the society moved online in the fall of

2020, with myself in the role of technological facilitator, armed with my institutional Zoom account. Though digital spaces already played a part in reception prior to the pandemic, with streaming increasingly taking over the sale of DVDs, as I explored in chapter 2, the wholesale shift online was unprecedented in scope and scale.

For lovers of Wagner and opera more generally, the reactions to these moves were mixed. Links to Wagner productions—often streaming for a limited period—began circulating at an increased pace in Facebook groups and email chains. For some, such as Frances Henry, the ability to stream provided a way to scratch the operatic itch and pass time throughout lengthy shutdowns. Seeking largely productions of either Wagner or Strauss, she found watching streamed opera "easy and comfortable" preferring the intimacy of sitting at a computer over tuning in to the radio. Video also allowed her to continue comparing and analyzing different productions. Wayne Gooding, by contrast, adopted the practice of listening to opera and other musical favourites during his daily five kilometres walk. Listening on the go, rather than watching opera, removed the distracting barrier of the screen. Though he continued presenting opera education workshops via Zoom, the experience was less than ideal, missing the ease of spontaneous social interactions of the classroom. For Iain Scott, the pandemic marked a distancing from opera, with very little listening and downsizing of his personal collection. He shared that it would take the promise of something special for him to want to return to the opera house. Like Wayne, Iain converted his opera education workshops online, but felt that in general they had been a success, training a generation of opera lovers in the art of Zoom. The Toronto Wagner Society, meanwhile, was able to extend its geographic reach, with guests from all over North America and even as far as Europe. As the pandemic begins to recede, this has started a conversation on how the society will continue to meet moving forward, with a sizable contingency wanting to stay online. Though digital meetings have proved more accessible for some, other members—

including at least one member I interviewed for this project—have been left behind, not attending any meetings since the transition. At the moment, a hybrid solution seems likely.

Although the study of opera reception often assumes liveness, the pandemic makes visible the ways that opera can continue to flow even as theatres grow silent. While COVID-19 is unusual in the scope of disruption, it is far from the first time that Wagnerians have been unable to access live performances. As I will explore, early Wagnerism was plagued by a lack of access to quality productions of the works in question. Even contemporary fans frequently discover opera in alternative formats such as radio, TV and increasingly, online. This reveals a tension at the heart of reception: though music is inherently immaterial, dissipating as it unfolds through time, experiences of opera are also continuously fragmented, fixed in place and transmitted through various technological material means. Importantly, however, while Wagner's music might be considered transcendental, how it is translated from the notes on the page matters, whether live or in mediated form. With this in mind, I would like to unpack some of the constituent parts of opera, partially by thinking about what it means to be in the opera house in an embodied, material sense as well as how print culture allowed Wagnerism to flow prior to the invention of sound recording technology. As I discussed in my previous chapters, research of cultural techniques takes seriously the agency of non-human actors. In this chapter I would like, however, to move away from the music of Wagner, and towards the media which render it possible, the perennial third in my networked model of fandom. To that end, I have found it useful to reflect on the effects of the pandemic not only in a literal sense, but also in a metaphorical one in the form of the parasite.

Paratext and Parasite

In discussing how we might reconcile cultural techniques with communication theory, Bernhard Siegert points to the concept of "parasite" as developed by Michel Serres as key. In French, "parasite" refers not only to insects or unwanted leeches, but also to noise. Serres plays with this dual meaning by recasting the parasite, not as an unsolicited intrusion but rather what creates the condition for communication in the first place. Instead of a bivalent mathematical model, defined by the transmission of a message between sender and receiver, with noise acting as an impediment,[1] Serres posits a trivalent alternative by making two related observations: first, that any exchange of information involves excluding or suppressing a third party; second, that all communication requires a channel for the signal to travel through, one which, even at its most transparent, filters and shapes the transmitted message.[2] The parasite is this third party or space, what is in between points A and B, both interrupter and intermediary. As the perpetual third, the parasite feeds off its hosts, while simultaneously being necessary for their survival. Thus, from Serres' perspective "there is no system without the parasite." As Siegert explains: "For Serres, then, communication is not primarily information exchange, appeal, or expression, but an act that creates order by introducing distinctions; and this is precisely what turns the means of communication into cultural techniques."[3] The parasite invites us to consider these moments of disruption and how they inevitably create a new system of relationships.

---

[1] Serres, *The Parasite*, 19. Serres does not cite Shannon and Weavers influential Mathematical Theory of Communication or other related literature directly but the linear model of communication from which he develops his own trivalent one appears to at least owe a partial debt to this tradition of communication theory.

[2] Serres, *The Parasite*, 185. "That noise is a straightener, filtering a meaning, creating a meaning. [...] The parasite straightens things out, creating an irreversible circulation, a meaning, making meaning."

[3] Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 2015, 23.

To expand on this point, I want to pull in the idea of the paratext. Originally introduced by literary theorist Gérard Genette, paratext refers to materials which are adjacent to, but not officially part of, a given media text. These can include indexes, covers, and credits, but also texts which are more clearly outside of textual boundaries, such as advertisements, interviews, or even contextual knowledge such as an author's nationality or their gender.[4] They can appear before the original text, such as in the case of an advertisement or much later, in the case of anniversary prefaces of reprinted books. In addition, as Jonathan Gray adds, paratexts can also encompass texts which escape authorial control, such as fan-made interpretations, and immaterial paratexts such as industry genre designations.[5] For Genette, what unites these disparate categories "is a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its raison d'être."[6] Because of this auxiliary function, paratexts are frequently ignored in media analysis. Both Genette and Gray argue, however, that they are integral to media consumption, serving a number of important functions.

Paratexts often work as "thresholds," an "airlock" of sorts, which admit us into a primary text.[7] Typical paratexts in this regard include titles and cover art, or introductions and opening credits. They prime us to read and understand texts in certain ways and as such are integral to meaning making. This priming function means that paratexts "constitute a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction."[8] Even before we watch or read or listen to the first moments of a text, we have already some guidelines on how to understand and interpret it. In fact,

---

[4] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[5] Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

[6] Genette, *Paratexts*, 12.

[7] Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 25.

[8] Genette, *Paratexts*, 2.

paratexts also play a key role in what we choose to consume in the first place, primarily, though not exclusively, in the form of advertisement, extending the threshold function beyond the original text. Media industries are well attuned to this fact, as Gray points out, spending millions of dollars each year on advertisements and promotions.[9] In some cases, when we decide not to proceed to the main event, our judgment and impression of a text can be formed through paratext alone.

In these instances, paratexts do more than simply prime us for entry: they can also serve to interrupt or even overtake the original. Gray points to the importance of temporal flow, for example, when considering media consumption.[10] Interruptions, whether self-imposed (putting down a book to continue later) or administered from the outside (waiting for the next episode to come out), are often filled by paratext such as reviews, behind-the-scenes materials and informal speculation online or in person. In some instances, paratexts become primary and not secondary to media consumption. Grey gives us the example of the parody, but we might also consider the case of children's programming which is often little more than an excuse to sell toys, or communities organized around fan fiction. Paratexts thus take on many important roles, and to ignore them is to ignore how media consumption unfolds in the real world.

How then are paratexts linked to the concept of the parasite? Gray provides an initial connection when he argues

> that paratexts are not simply add-ons, spinoffs, and also-rans: they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them, just as we ask *para*medics to save lives rather than leave the job to others, and just as a *para*site feeds

[9] Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 7.
[10] Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 91.

> off, lives in, and can affect the running of its host's body, a paratext constructs, lives in, and can affect the running of the text.[11]

Gray sees the parasitic function as two-fold: first the aforementioned dependence on its host for its initial existence, but additionally that paratext can be transformational. I would take this one step further: as Serres argues, parasites are by their very nature always in some ways productive, by operating as "exciter" to a larger system.[12] By introducing difference, they immediately change a system's state. I would thus propose that paratexts are not *potentially* transformative: they exist as such by default. Gray drops the metaphor of the parasite almost as soon as it is invoked, but there are other parallels we can tease out.

First, for both paratexts and parasites, "what is essential is neither the image nor the deep meaning, neither the representation nor its hall of mirrored reflections, but the system of relations."[13] In short, each presupposed that media exists as part of larger systems and that these relations are not simply incidental but rather fundamental to how the receivers understand and decode texts. In addition, just as the parasite can be either an invited guest or unwanted intruder,[14] so do paratexts exist both within and outside authorial control in the form of commentary and fan interpretations, as well as more overt reworking. Most importantly, while Serres identifies the relationship between host and parasite as operating as a one-way flow, the direction of this flow can, and often does reverse, with the host taking on the role of parasite and vice versa:[15] we see this reversal at play, for example in the

---

[11] Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 6 (emphasis original).
[12] Serres, *The Parasite*, 191.
[13] Serres, *The Parasite*, 8.
[14] Serres, *The Parasite*, 16.
[15] Serres, *The Parasite*, 5.

existential dependence on advertisements for a film to survive or when paratexts become the focal point of fandom.

Paratext and parasite are a useful entry point into discussing opera, in part owing to the logistical barrier of accessing live opera on demand. How easily you will be able to go to the opera house is a function of time, location, and the whims of any given opera company director. This difficulty is exacerbated in the case of Wagner because of the large casts and orchestras required by the score, which make productions expensive and challenging to miniaturize.[16] Because of this, paratext such as recordings, reviews, and opera handbooks not only provide a way to access opera after hours, but also work to fragment, overtake and transform opera in various ways. Yet even when experienced live, paratext and parasites are an integral part of the opera experience. From program notes to pre-performance talks, opera is almost always explicitly framed with auxiliary paratext. Wagnerian opera—with its reputation for being more challenging overall—is particularly prone to this instinct to prime patrons. Wagner himself is at least partially responsible for this impulse, producing a steady stream of paratext to explicate his art, including at times detailed program notes.[17] Here in Toronto, the practice of pre-performance talks at the COC was started by members of the Wagner society: I was told, half-joking, by Linda Hutcheon that when the COC decided to stage the *Flying Dutchman* it was decided by the Wagner Society "that there was a danger that people would go in unprepared." Pre-performance lectures were thus conceived as a tool to help contextualize and understand the opera.

---

[16] It is by no means impossible to stage a no-frills Ring cycle: all four operas are frequently performed in concert format, for example, and I would also be remiss not to mention Opera by Request here in Toronto which mounted a full, semi-staged Ring cycle with musical backing providing by piano and handful of brass instruments. Still, the length of the operas and the size of the cast means that the Ring cycle will always have a slightly higher barrier of entry than minimal stagings of most other operas.

[17] For example, when Wagner example extracts of the Ring cycle to raise funds for its premiere, he also produced ample program notes in order to orient the listener. See Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner*, 191.

More than that, part of the appeal of opera lies in the imperfection and disruptions that happen on stage. On more than one occasion, Wagner lovers told me that the reason that they returned to the music again and again was because it felt new and different every time, as explained to me by Frances Henry:

> The end, the broad outlines are the same, but you know, the interpretation is different. And one of the nicest things about doing this is that you can compare them so readily, because they're all singing the same thing, playing the same things. And yet, they're so different. So the element of comparison is crucial to your understanding of the whole Wagnerian world as it plays out.

To some extent, this is a function of varying productions and sets, paratext in their own right. Beyond that, however, there is often joy in the parasitic noise that disrupts the idealized performances. Teddy Hall, for example, described how he feels when listening to *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera* on CBC after they had switched focus from rebroadcasting live productions to recordings:

> I find that I'm not interested as much now as I used to be in recordings. I was much more interested when they had a rebroadcasting of a live performance [...] I don't like recordings because every mistake has been taken out and—it's wonderful, don't get me wrong— [...] It's live, that's the thing. And for better or worse, that's what I want to hear.

It is intrusions such as small musical hiccups, deviances in interpretation, or a stray cough from the audience which seem to make the performance dynamic and real.

Importantly then, I do not want to make the mistake of only attending to other media texts in my analysis. Part of my argument here is that media is at once parasite and host: sheet music, recordings, and theatres function as host to opera in a literal sense, yet also feed off opera and transform it. When I speak of a networked model of fandom, I want to emphasize then that it is not simply a

matter of listing a number of actors and then setting them in relation: it is also about thinking of how each element transforms the others. In order to pick through some of the complexities, I would like to listen to moments of noise in the reception of Wagner's opera, starting from the theatre and the live experience and then moving outward to consider what happens when access is curtailed. For this second part, I will be looking at Wagner reception in Toronto during the years 1874–1875 as told in the Toronto newspaper the *Globe* (1844–1936). In this interplay between the live and the overtly mediated, we can uncover some of the materiality of opera.

The Theatre

In a trade magazine article, several engineers detailed how they tackled the difficulties of building the Four Seasons Centre, Canada's first performance venue designed specifically for opera and ballet. These challenges ranged from providing flexible and easy-to-maintain lighting, to ensuring even distribution of heating throughout the auditorium, and the suspension of a large set of stairs in the foyer.[18] However, most pressing was that all these moving parts perform work without being heard. The theatre was thus built to the exacting standard of N-1, that is, all environmental noise is below the threshold of human hearing. To achieve this, the entire hall was floated on rubber isolation pads to keep out any rumbling from the subway below or the streetcars on Queen Street. Electronic controls were placed outside the main hall to prevent the hearing of any electrical buzz. Air ducts were lined with acoustic lining, and great attention was paid to the velocity of the air as it exited into the auditorium. The hall was also outfitted with an extensive system of microphones and loudspeakers to

[18] Canadian Consulting Engineer, "Intimate Sound," *Canadian Consulting Engineer*, April 1, 2006, https://www.canadianconsultingengineer.com/features/intimate-sound/.

enhance performances as necessary, but all carefully concealed from view.[19] In the same way that Serres argues that the "[t]he parasite must keep quiet" to avoid being expelled, so too did the engineers work to silence the inner workings of the theatre in order to produce an ideal neutral backdrop for opera.

Yet simultaneously, Bob Essert, one of the principal engineers in charge of sound space design, described the ways in which the room itself is not simply a passive receptacle for performance but instead an instrument in its own right:

> In opera, clarity of text and natural vocal tone are important, but so are the warmth and resonance of the orchestral sound. Singers should be able to "float" their voices, feeling the room as an instrument, while the orchestra musicians in the pit should be able to hear each other well so they can play together in tight ensemble. All in all, there is to be a high degree of intimacy and envelopment in the sound to allow the artists to communicate their artistic intent and to draw the audience into their world.[20]

A clear paradox is at play: the theatre is to be both silent and direct and transform the sounds from both singers and orchestra.

We often conceptualize live music as authentically unmediated in contrast to the "falsifying" nature of sound recording. Simon Frith argues that this distrust relies on outdated models of communications in which "A plays to B and the less technology lies between them the closer they are, the more honest their relationship and the fewer the opportunities for manipulation and falsehoods."[21]

---

[19] Alan Hardiman, "Electro-Acoustic Support for Opera in Toronto's Four Seasons Centre for Performing Arts," *Theatre Design & Technology* Fall (2006): 41–44.

[20] Bob Essert, "Room as Instrument," *Canadian Consulting Engineer*, April 1, 2006, https://www.canadianconsultingengineer.com/features/intimate-sound/ (emphasis mine).

[21] Simon Frith, "Art versus Technology: The Strange Case of Popular Music," *Media, Culture & Society* 8, no. 3 (1986): 267, https://doi.org/10/bn68wh.

Frith underscores that while pop and rock music frequently position technology as somehow anti-art, they remain reliant on it to produce the final product: Technology, then is not the enemy of musical authenticity. To build on this, I would argue that to think of the unamplified, live performance as unmediated is also a mistake. In that regard, I am inspired by Clemens Risi, who makes an argument for a phenomenological approach to the study of opera, one which attends to the "eventness" of the genre.[22] I thus want to highlight the importance of thinking of the theatre, not only as it moulds sound acoustically, as suggested above, but also in how it shapes the embodied visits of its guest, at times taking on a life of its own. The theatre plays hosts to not only us, the audience, but also the opera itself. As such, it is a key technology in the production of opera. Toronto's Four Seasons Centre, if lacking some of the grandeur of other opera houses, is a particularly well-behaved specimen, working in conjunction with singers and musicians, and not, generally speaking, against them. "There are no bad seats," I was told on more than one occasion during my interviews.[23] But what of theatres that are not so well-behaved and insert themselves more forcefully into the experience of opera?

In some cases, the intrusions can be built into the bones of the theatre itself, generating the metaphorical noise which sets the conditions for communication between stage and audience. By and large, those I talked to preferred smaller, more intimate theatres over larger ones, which are generally classified as "barns." One of the top offenders in that regard is the Civic Opera Building (home to the Lyric Opera of Chicago) with a capacity of more than 3,500. The Metropolitan Opera House also

[22] Risi, "Opera in Performance," 2011.

[23] Having sat in some of the cheapest seats of the Four Seasons Centre myself, I would say that there are undoubtedly seats with less-than-ideal sight lines but none that compromise the acoustic quality of the music. This raises the question: what makes a bad seat? There is no clear consensus in this regard, with some preferring the more blended sound you get from sitting a bit further back, while others like as close as possible to the stage to be able to clearly see the expressions on the faces of the singers. In general, however, fans will tolerate bad sight lines over bad acoustics, suggesting that while Wagner spoke of an equal relationship between music, voice and staging, in reality, music often takes precedence.

falls into this category, with room for nearly 4,000. The distance from the stage to the cheaper seats makes it difficult to discern all the details on stage. This is especially pertinent with the Wagnerian ethos of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which drama is as important as the voice and orchestra. Wiley Powell, for example, saw a production at the Met of Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues des carmélites* during which he was unable to tell apart the singers from afar, due to the fact that the majority of the cast wore identical habits. By contrast, operatic paratexts which aid in the storytelling are welcome additions, such as the widespread adoption of simultaneous translation first pioneered by the COC in 1983, but now standard in most major opera houses.[24] I encountered no one who argued against the use of surtitles, though some no longer consulted them due to familiarity with the works or preferred the Met's solution, with individual screens for every seat rather than projections over the stage. For several people, including Alan Dennis, early encounters with opera were less compelling because of the disconnect from the drama, such as in a visit to Covent Garden:

> I was sitting way up in the back and couldn't really see. Plus there were no surtitles. Didn't understand the story and opera acting in that time was not terribly good. People used to stand in the middle of a stage and belt out arias. That was the standard norm and no subtitles, no surtitles, so you really had trouble following what was going on.

It was only once surtitles were introduced—and opera singers became more theatrical in their delivery—that he felt better able to appreciate opera as the synergy between music and drama. Here, the surtitles work both as a third standing in between singer and audience and as translator,

[24] The COC holds the copyright for the term "Surtitle"—so named because they appear above the stage—but not for the technology itself which is considered too generic to copyright. Despite the copyright, however, the term is used frequently to refer to all systems of simultaneous translation in opera houses and not just the COC by fans.

"transforming the flows that pass through the exchange."[25] Here the parasite is a welcome guest rather than unwanted intruder.

Sometimes, the physical experience of opera becomes more mundane—what to do about food, for example, when a performance of *Parsifal* can surpass five hours in length? Others noted the lack of women's washrooms at the Metropolitan Opera House as a source of frustration. When asked how the theatre shaped her experience of opera, Barbara Japp outlined how inaccessible architectural designs impacted her ability to navigate as someone who uses a mobility aid, such as at the Scotiabank theatre in Toronto when viewing the Met simulcasts:

> There is the occasional young person but mostly, it's the cane brigade. It's very difficult because I go to Scotiabank theatre and very often the elevators are out of order. Sometimes, at the same time, the escalator is out of order. You know, it's a killer. I walk with sticks for balance, and I can't go down [inaudible] for some reason visual. So I had trouble last year. I was able to go up the escalator but [when they were out of order] then I would ask someone to take me down the freight elevator. So you have to know how to get around it. Just lately, at the theatre, they put in the handles on the edge of the aisle. But prior to that? It was horrible.

The design of opera houses, as opposed to the cinema, did not necessarily fair better:

> There's a thing that—I've noticed it in some other opera houses—when you sit in the orchestra [seats], if you go in... Well, usually the way it's built is the entrance to the orchestra is down [...] And you go in, and the floor, the approach to the doors, is sloped. And then you go into the orchestra and you go down, you may go around and enter from there. So you're entering... it's a complex curve entering into another complex curve. And sometimes, they are not

[25] Serres, *The Parasite*, 42.

> designed in such a way that, you know, a person who does not have perfect balance can walk in. I notice it because I don't.

Here, architecture intersects with ability and aging, turning the theatre into a much less hospitable space and reminding us that opera is an embodied experience not only for the performers, but also the audience.

In addition, sometimes a theatre can also transform the way opera is perceived in unwanted ways. This was the case with Meridian Hall (formerly the O'Keefe Centre and Sony Centre[26]) which was home to the COC from 1961 to 2006. Though a marked improvement over the Royal Alexandra Theatre—with a larger orchestra pit and stage, additional backstage facilities, and a modern reception area—the venue was at its core a multi-use theatre and ultimately proved a frustrating location for the company. In a passage which Dorith Cooper quotes at length in her dissertation on the history of opera in Toronto and Montreal, then director Herman Geiger-Torel alternates between bemoaning the too-small orchestra pit, the lack of stage depth, the inadequacy of the lighting bridges and towers, and the rehearsal hall being more or less permanently relegated to extra scenery and props storage, with the counterbalancing statement that "in 1961 it seemed to be heaven."[27] Indeed, despite these challenges, the move to the O'Keefe allowed the company to tackle a number of Wagnerian operas for the first time, such as *Götterdämmerung* and *Tristan and Isolde*, even if in less-than-ideal fashion: there was only room for 74 musicians in the orchestra pit rather than the 88 to 110 required in the scores.

---

[26] The theatre has cycled through several names: O'Keefe Centre (1969-1996); Hummingbird Centre for the Performing Arts (1996-2007); Sony Centre for the Performing Arts (2007-2019); and finally, Meridian Hall (2019-present). At the time of interviews, the theatre was still known as the Sony Centre, but because the tenure of the COC coincided largely with the original name, the name "O'Keefe" was still in somewhat common use among fans.

[27] Cooper, "Opera in Montreal and Toronto," 880–82.

One member of the Toronto Wagner Society, categorizing the venue as "a barn," described how the poor acoustic design made for an unpleasant experience:

> BC: Early years with the COC meant going to what's now called the Sony Centre. And it's a barn, it has a lot of dead spots, acoustically. And the singers always had to be miked. This is not good for opera! And a lot of singers wouldn't sing it. And it also limited...
>
> EH: Right, so it limited who was going there?
>
> BC: Who, what artists could they recruit? The new hall has fixed all that. People want to come, just like Koerner [Hall]. These are the two halls that have terrific sound and are very friendly to artists as well as audience. [Roy Thomson] Hall is not. That was a disaster they've been trying to fix ever since it was built. [...] The two theatres, Koerner and the Four Seasons Centre, are just wonderful places to hear music.
>
> EH: And you find that kind of makes it more enjoyable because you're not frustrated while you're listening.
>
> BC: It took us years to get decent seats in the Sony Centre where we could—then the O'Keefe—that we could hear well. It's not a place you want to have to go.
>
> EH: Yes, I haven't been to the Sony Centre but I've read lots of complaining about it. So...
>
> BC: It was all justified!

Wiley Powell similarly found that sitting in a different location could completely transform his listening experience:

> I had an interesting experience in terms of acoustics at the O'Keefe. In 1984, Joan Sutherland, my idol, was here. And it was the first time that she'd ever performed the role of Anna Bolena [...] And I knew that I wanted to see it at least twice. So I bought a ticket for... I forget where it was for the first time that I went, and the sound was so dead in that particular place

that I was sitting, and I thought: Oh my gosh, Joan, have you lost it? Have you, you know, what's happening? And then I went several nights later, and I was sitting in a completely different place. And it was glorious beyond words. And this was at the very same auditorium!

The acoustic problems of the O'Keefe not only provided a less than ideal setting for listeners, but as alluded to above, also made it difficult to attract star performers. Singers were often reluctant to return once they had sung there once. As a result, the COC would seek to sign singers upfront for multiple operas before they had the chance to set foot in the auditorium.[28] Compounding the difficulties of attracting top talent to the company, because the company was a tenant and not owner of the building, John Gilks described to me how Richard Bradshaw, then the director of the COC, could only run on a one- to two-year planning cycle. These problems led to the so-called "thirty-year war," the decades-long quest to secure a dedicated theatre for the company before finally being resolved with the opening of the Four Seasons Centre in 2006.[29]

As paratext and parasite, the theatre can thus work both with, and against the music. This was not lost on Wagner, who felt dissatisfied enough with contemporary theatres to commission the building of a custom one in Bayreuth, which has since been home to the annual Wagner Festival. Based partly on the plans of Gottfried Semper and realized by architects Wilhelm Neumann and Otto Brückwald,[30] Bayreuth features a sunken orchestra pit which hides the musicians from view, amphitheatre-like seating to ensure clean lines of sight—in lieu of the horseshoe design common in most

---

[28] Nicholas Hune-Brown, "The Wizards of Opera: How Two Dapper Germans Made Toronto Fall in Love with Opera," *Toronto Life* (blog), March 10, 2014, https://torontolife.com/city/alexander-neef-johannes-debus-wizards-of-opera/.

[29] For an overview of the several failed attempts at securing a new opera house throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s see Colin Eatock, "The COC Builds Its Dream Home," *Queen's Quarterly* 113, no. 4 (2006): 528–37; Schabas and Morey, *Opera Viva*.

[30] Robert Hartford, "Introduction," in *Bayreuth: The Early Years: An Account of the Early Decades of the Wagner Festival as Seen by the Celebrated Visitors & Participants*, ed. Robert Hartford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 32.

European theatres of the time—and a double proscenium to make the action appear further from the stage. Though these individual attributes were not necessarily novel in isolation—some of the inspiration, for example, came from the Riga opera house which had already instituted the practice of dimming the lights during performances and was similarly built of wood with raked seating[31]—Bayreuth helped popularize many of these innovations. The theatre is also unique in the sense that no other theatre is tied exclusively to a single composer.

Interestingly, Wagner viewed the Bayreuth Festival and accompanying theatre not as a luxury, but as an integral part of the "Artwork of the Future." In his early pamphlet "A Theatre at Zurich," for example, he contends that Grand Opera, originally conceived for Paris stages, could never be reproduced successfully in Germany, as it would be impossible to recreate the "conditions of time and place." Thus, in order to thrive, a theatre had to turn to expressly composed original works.[32] Acting as a sort of parasitic third then, Wagner recast the theatre as fundamental to the act of communication between audience and performer: "[t]he stage's first task is to provide the appropriate space for a communal dramatic performance: then it must solve the question of communication with the audience by relaying this dramatic action to eye and ear in a comprehensible fashion."[33] Without the right host, music would turn to noise. The theatre in his formulation was not merely a building, it was the medium in which communication took place. In this way, Wagner was as much a media theorist as a composer.

For contemporary Wagnerians, Bayreuth retains much of its appeal, with most aspiring to attend the Bayreuth music festival at least once—dissenters typically cite a distaste with the current trend

---

[31] Hartford, "Bayreuth: The Early Years," 17.

[32] Richard Wagner, "A Theatre at Zurich," in *The Theatre*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, Vol. 3 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, 1894, 31.

[33] Wagner, "The Artwork of the Future (1851)," 72.

for heavily revisionist stagings, not the quality of the theatre itself. Yet there is always the risk of contributing to the sedimentation of what Nicholas Vazsonyi refers to as Wagnerian "permalore," that is, the "narrative web of such glacier density that impedes alternative accounts," much of which was set into stone by Wagner himself.[34] Indeed, despite Wagner's best intentions and what are, by all accounts, stellar acoustics and sight lines, the material realities of Bayreuth can sometimes insert themselves in unexpected ways into the opera-going experience. Listening for moments of disruptions, however, allows us to peel away some of the layers of sedimentation that surround Bayreuth.

The idea of the paratext-as-threshold suggests a useful starting point: the purchasing of tickets, which has long been an onerous affair, mediated until relatively recently by the infrastructure of the post office. Prior to 2013, there were two principal routes to acquire tickets: first, by writing a letter to the box office or second, through membership with an official Wagner society. In the first instance, aspiring festival goers would need to mail a letter—no fax or email—to the box office, after which they would be put on a waitlist which could stretch up to ten years.[35] For those hoping for shorter wait times, a certain number of tickets each festival were allocated to the various Wagner Societies, which could then be made available to members as they saw fit. As a final resort, one could always simply show up on the day of performance and hope to be able to get your hands on one of the seats made available by cancellations and no-shows, though this is obviously a somewhat riskier strategy. Overall, the difficulty of access helped build an air of exclusivity to the festival, with the acquiring of tickets a considerable hurdle to the opera.

---

[34] Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner*, 9.

[35] Vincent Vargas, "How to Get Tickets to the Bayreuth Festival," accessed July 17, 2021, http://www.wagneroperas.com/indexwagnerhowtogettickets.html.

Unsurprisingly, access to tickets was often a key motivator for initially joining the Toronto Wagner Society, even if the programming later prompted them to continue paying membership dues and attending society meetings. When the practice of ticket allocation was eventually ended by Bayreuth—though not without protest, it should be noted, with Frances Henry describing to me a North American letter writing campaign she helped lead—the TWS lost a key attraction for new members. Starting in 2013, a limited number of tickets were offered online for the Bayreuth Festival, on a first come, first served basis: in 2021, due to COVID-19, all available tickets were purchasable online, though at the time of writing it is not clear whether this will be a permanent change in ticketing policy. Though undoubtedly more democratic in nature, the shift online means that purchasing tickets is now more akin to the experience of that of acquiring tickets to a rock concert, complete with crashing websites, continual refreshing, and a hope that tickets will remain available once it is your turn.

Once this initial barrier has been conquered, Bayreuth inserts itself into the experience in sometimes unexpected ways. As several people pointed out to me, the theatre's wooden seats are a source of not-inconsiderable discomfort. Though they now do include some amount of padding, the prodigious length of most of Wagner's opera almost guarantees an uncomfortable experience. Bayreuth is also without air conditioning, despite being held in the warmest period of the year. Soprano Adrianne Pieczonka described how the conductor and orchestra, hidden from the gaze of the audience, generally wear shorts to combat the heat, with the conductor changing into formal attire before coming onto the stage. Wiley Powell similarly described the transformation of the audience throughout the Ring cycle:

> All the men, I noticed them starting off with the coat and tie. And by the end of—well there was no intermission for *Das Rheingold*—but all the other operas, people arrived in short

sleeves, and if they had a jacket, it was hanging over their shoulder. And there were no ties any longer! So you have to dress down after a while.

Beyond physical discomfort, Linda and Michael Hutcheon recounted the psychological effect of the dramatic closing of the doors at the beginning of the performance:

LH: The beginning of a production, they, there are these young women who are known as the Valkyries, of course, who are just the ushers. And they close all the doors almost at the same time, they must coordinate this before the production begins. And then you hear a lock [...] it's just a latch, but still it's this kind of like, Oops! I'm in here for the next three hours.

MH: Well, not only that, but the other great thing about it is when you go outside there's usually a fire engine there.

LH: The real reason is that it's a wooden building.

MH: So for the performance you think, do I really want to be locked in here?!

The closing of the doors here serves, quite literally, the "threshold" function of the paratext, settings the stage for the remainder of the evening as a dramatic event, one in which you are expected to remain captive to the music until intermission comes.

Beyond the confines of the theatre, the rural nature of the town, and length of the Ring cycle also play a role in the appeal of Bayreuth. Wagner explicitly chose Bayreuth, a small provincial town in Bavaria, for its rurality, so that the audience would attend opera not as a "distraction at the close of a worrying day at the counter, the office, the desk, or any other professional toil,"[36] but rather as a

[36] Richard Wagner, "Preface to the Public Issue of the Poem of the Bühnenfestspiel 'Der Ring des Nibelungen,'" in *The Theatre*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, Vol. 3 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1894), 277, https://books.google.ca/books?id=7MmrGB8v9JkC.

dedicated day-long leisure event. As such, Bayreuth presents operas as part of a yearly festival in which they typically produce a handful of Ring cycles and three additional operas.[37] Wagner adopted this festival format as a way of escaping the repertoire theatre system still common in Germany today, in which operas houses rotated frequently between set repertoire, often with little to no rehearsal time: but it also has the dual effect of making attendance a week-long affair.

The Bayreuth Festival—and to a lesser extent, Ring cycles presented at other opera houses—are therefore able to generate a strong feeling of comradeship, particularly among those who attend an entire Ring cycle, as explained by Wayne Gooding:

> When I go to a Ring I generally will not go to anything else during the week. Maybe a, you know, a chamber concert or even a symphony, depending on where we are, but certainly not another opera. So the focus is, you know, pretty complete, and at Bayreuth, you have no choice. I mean, really, in a sense, because everything is just so focused on Wagner there, the talks in the day, if you're so inclined, or go to the new museum now and so on. And then opera from four till 10 or 11. Every day, I mean, pretty well. So it is much better as a group experience. [...] Another thing is that over the years, I've met a lot of people and, you start to see them, you know, at other Rings. I have friends, good friends in Australia, who are entirely Ring buddies, I met them, I think in Bayreuth. [...] So, usually I find if you're going to a Ring cycle, generally speaking, you're going to have the same people on either side of you. Because if they go to everything, the tickets are usually the same. So you start talking to people, and people are happy to start talking about how they react and you know, so on. [...]

[37] If there is no Ring cycle, they will instead stage the five other operas that are in rotations at Bayreuth (his earliest operas, *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot* having been excised from the Wagnerian canon). As with every other opera house, the festival was cancelled for 2020 due to COVID-19 and returned in 2021 in a scaled-down fashion.

> And it's kind of very Greek really, isn't it? I mean, the shared experience, no, the shared festival experience, which is what Wagner sort of had in mind, but I think it works very well.

Certainly, though Wagner wrote of the disappearances of the means of productions to facilitate the rapt attention of the audience, this was to be in service of a *communal* experience. Criticizing modern art for becoming "the personal property of an artist class," Wagner argued that the Artwork of the Future should seek to democratize art. The artist, then, "can only be fully satisfied in the union of all art forms into a communal artwork: in the isolation of his artistic faculties he is unfree, not fully that which he can be; whereas in the communal artwork he is free and fully that which he can be."[38] Though undoubtedly a romanticized ideal—despite what Wagner might have wanted, the barriers between artist and audience remain stubbornly in place –for Wayne, Bayreuth and the Ring cycle do create an optimal atmosphere to experience music as a group, not as isolated individuals.

This highlights that although abstract descriptions of opera going might paint a picture of isolated listeners sitting in a darkened theatre in silent rapture, going to the opera is often bookended by social interactions. While some are happy to attend on their own when necessary, most found the group experience much more rewarding. Joseph So, for example, discussed how he preferred more intimate theatres which allowed for some people. The ability to socialize after a performance was part of the joy of opera. In the same vein, Frances Henry talked both of her preference to attend opera with others, but as with Wayne, how Wagner communities form even outside of Bayreuth, simply because Wagnerians repeatedly track performances of the same handful of operas across the globe:

> I like the sharing of experience a lot. And most of my, not all, but most of my opera-going experience has been either with another one or two people or in small groups. For example,

[38] Wagner, "The Artwork of the Future (1851)," 71.

> if we buy tickets to some European thing, we usually, it's a small group [...] It's always nice. And the debriefing after a show, even if it's lousy, you know—or you think it's lousy—it's always part of the experience. It's hard, I find it very hard to go to an opera by myself. And then I have nobody to talk to afterwards who has shared the experience. It's... and I try not to do that. Occasionally, you know, it happens. But not a lot. Because part of the whole experience is sharing it with like-minded nutty people like you! Even if they're not like-minded, I mean, we had some, I remember talking after performances with some of our own folks from the Wagner Society, who didn't like at all what I thought was wonderful! [...] But I think that's part of the explanation of the world Wagnerian phenomenon, that we actively seek people like us. And because of the incredible togetherness in the worldwide Wagnerian community. I know I've gone to a lot of things—I don't know the people, but I recognize them. I've seen them two years ago at whatever, walking around in the intermission. I see familiar faces that I've seen many times before.

It matters then, that live opera is by default a communal affair, a configuration enforced by theatre designs which typically allow several thousand people to gather in one place and intermissions which give time for audience members to intermingle, discuss, or simply recognize others they have seen before. Part of the pleasure of opera is the ability to unpack what they have just experienced, dissecting directorial decisions and the performances of singers in a sort of spontaneous and ephemeral paratext to the event. Even if some of those friendships begin and end at the opera house, there is joy in experiencing music together.

Nor is this communality limited to the audience: we often encounter language of the parasite when talking about the art of performance, with artists "feeding" off the audience, a relationship

mediated by theatre and music. I would like to end this section with the words of COC music director Johannes Debus, who spoke of the relationship between audience and performer:

> it's almost like osmotic. Or it's kind of a symbiosis, let's put it that way. And we feed off each other, actually. And it's not just that an audience sits there and receives and digests. [...] An audience that is willing to perceive and to receive on that level, that gives the performers so much back, that in an ideal case. It really becomes one entity that is somehow flying to the stars, or, you know, the sky's the limit, and that's what makes it so great. I mean, yes, of course, the art form itself, is in its complexity and in its vastness of elements of different elements already great and phenomenal. And so, some of it, you can already grasp when you just, while you listen to the recording, and so on, you know, sometimes listening to recordings, you weep, you are overjoyed, you get goosebumps, and so on and so forth. But now, imagine it being sort of magnified, and multiplied by sitting there in an audience with all those many people, that somehow form this one body, I mean it's just a bit of a mystery [...] But for me as a performer, it's clear that this relationship exists in a very, very strong way. And that it's again, not a one-way street.

Though the act of performance can be understood as an act of communication—or as "sender and receiver" as Debus himself put it earlier in the interview—the metaphors at play suggest an alternate configuration in which the performer plays the part of the parasite, feeding off the energy of the audience in order to produce music. At times, the relationship flips, with the audience amplifying the music in intelligible ways. It is in these complex relationships between artist, music, performance and theatre that opera comes alive.

"Brilliant Gathering at Bayreuth"

On October 22, 1857, the *Globe* (1844-1936)—one of the precursors to the modern Toronto newspaper The *Globe and Mail*—published an in-depth reportage on the four-day meeting of Emperor Napoleon III and Tsar Alexander II hosted by William I of Württemberg in Stuttgart. After the conclusion of the higher-profile imperial talks, the reporter follows the movement of the Tsar on to Weimar, to meet with the Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria. Details of the political discussions, conducted behind closed doors, remain sparse, largely left to conjuncture based on countenance. Instead, the article focuses on the cultural activities of the emperors and their entourage, including an opera gala.

After an unfavourable comparison of the dress and stature of the audience to that of Stuttgart, the article pivots to an impromptu review of the opera in question:

> We had the renowned Liszt to conduct and the much talked of opera by Richard Wagner, Tannhauser, to listen to. The great folks bore this for two acts, probably on account of their curiosity to hear this dawn of a new school of music and to see the very splendid manner which it has been put on the stage. The story of the contest of the singers on the Wartburg being one of historical and local interest to this Grand Duchy, the opera has nowhere been treated so well as here. Nevertheless no amount of care and splendour in the getting up can save such a production as a dramatic composition, constructed on the principle of anti climax, as an inverted pyramid, with the apex of interest vested in the beginning, and languishing rapidly into insipidity as it proceeds. As a musical work possessing stray claims to admiration by sporadic passages of beauty, but on the whole a wild screaming jumble of inharmonious instrumentation, snatches of melody that never amount to a tune, and a constantly recurring succession of forced modulations, interrupted cadences, diminished sevenths, and fearfully impressive passages from the whole orchestra in union, all about nothing,—it may be

> true that this is the music of the future, but the more remote we calculate that future, the more correct will be our judgment; and it may also be true, as Wagner's admirers say, that this music will be heard with delight when that of Mozart and Beethoven is forgotten, but it certainly will not be before.[39]

This scathing review marks the first mention of Wagner or his music in the pages of the *Globe*. That it comes tacked onto what is otherwise a piece of political reporting is instructive: that opera was often a key diplomatic tool and that if the reporter felt the need to recount the evening in full, it is that because he assumed that readers would be interested. Was it significant, for example, that the guest "bore" the opera for only two acts, when those in the know would know that *Tannhäuser* was three acts long? Would the poor review serve as an indication of the state of the negotiations?

Additionally, this appearance also gives us some insight into how opera, prior to the invention of sound recording, could still be a transcontinental affair. It would be two more years before *Tannhäuser* would receive its North American debut in New York and another thirty before Toronto would see a fully staged Wagner opera.[40] Yet precisely because the written word is not bounded by time and space, paratext such as reviews could present audiences far away their first glimpses of an opera. In this instance, Wagner's *Tannhäuser* takes on the role of the parasite, hitching a ride on the backs of the political report to make its way across the Atlantic. When access to live opera is limited—as it was in 1857—such paratexts are charged with the potential to not only supplement but to transform and overtake the original.

French Wagnerism is instructive in this regard. After the disastrous 1861 premiere of *Tannhäuser* at the Paris Opéra, in which the Jockey Club protested the lack of ballet, disrupting

---

[39] "The Imperial Meeting at Weimar," *Globe* (Toronto), October 22, 1857, 2.
[40] Morey, "The Music of Wagner in Toronto before 1914," 33.

performances with dog whistles and heckling,[41] a de facto ban was placed on any staged performance of Wagner. Anti-Wagner sentiment was only strengthened by the publication of a French translation of Wagner's *Eine Kapitulation*, a satirical comedy, now largely relegated to the dustbins of history, set during the siege of the capital during the Franco-Prussian war, and which lambasted French culture and republican heroes.[42] As a result, except for an uncontroversial abridged version of *Rienzi* performed in 1869 at the Théâtre Lyrique, Wagnerian opera was effectively banished from Paris until the 1880s. It is only as the century waned and Wagnerism became part of the newly fossilizing canon and a staple of elite, snobbish taste that Wagner's opera was able to return to the city.[43]

Yet despite this paucity of access, Wagnerism flowered in Paris over the ensuing decades, centred largely around the city's artistic and intellectual avant-garde. One of the most conspicuous manifestations of French Wagnerism was the short-lived publication, *La Revue wagnérienne* (1885-1887), a journal dedicated to advancing the Wagnerian cause. The *Revue* was primarily associated with the symbolist, and to a lesser extent, decadent artistic movements, though as Kelly Maynard points out, contributions were eclectic in nature, with articles approaching Wagner through varying lenses "including Spencerianism, biological structures, Aryanism, Christianity, and socialist."[44] This more experimental approach meant that *La Revue wagnérienne* largely alienated more musically minded readers.

---

[41] Though not always portrayed as such, the protest was at least partly politically motivated: the performance of *Tannhäuser* was backed by Emperor Napoleon, while the Jockey Club had Legitimist ties. See Turbow, "Art and Politics," 149–50.

[42] For an overview of the writing, plot and reception of *Eine Kapitulation* see Grey, "Eine Kapitulation."

[43] Chimènes, "Élites sociales et pratiques wagnériennes: de la propagande au snobisme"; William Weber, "Wagner, Wagnerism and Musical Idealism," in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. David Clay Large, William Weber, and Anne Dzamba Sessa (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 28–71.

[44] Maynard, "Strange Bedfellows at the Revue Wagnérienne," 637.

A secondary effect, however, was that the periodical dealt not so much with the music or even the man, but rather the *idea* of Wagner. While some of the most prominent contributors, including founders Édouard Dujardin, Téodor de Wyzewa and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, did travel to Bayreuth, many of the others were writing blind, drawing their impressions from occasional orchestral performances, sheet music and what of Wagner's aesthetic theories received French translations. In fact, when operatic performances of Wagner resumed in Paris some felt, contra Wagner, that symphonic performances were superior to fully staged ones, as it left the music symbolically open to interpretations.[45] As Rachel Sloan argues, this was part of a larger movement that worked to soften Wagner's image as a controversial political revolutionary "into a collection of conceptual tenets that were co-opted by an increasingly conservative avant-garde as the century drew to a close."[46] Only once Wagner had been politically neutralized could fully staged performances resume. Medium, however, was also important: if one couldn't easily listen to Wagner, then one could at least read and write on the subject of his aesthetic idea. Paradoxically, Wagner was controversial in part because of his writings, but prose could simultaneously also work to formulate his ideas in order to make them palatable for a larger audience.

Unlike in Paris, the barriers to access in Toronto were not political, but ones of indifference and logistics. At mid-century, opera in the city did not have a long history: the first performance of Grand Opera, a staging of *Norma,* had only occurred in 1853.[47] There were no local opera schools producing a reliable stream of homegrown talent, or theatres that could accommodate the opulent productions often seen in Europe. In addition, unlike in New York, there was no major wave of

---

[45] Verzosa, "Wagner Reception," 25.

[46] Rachel Sloan, "The Condition of Music: Wagnerism and Printmaking in France and Britain," *Art History* 32, no. 3 (2009): 549–549, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8365.2009.00681.x.

[47] Cooper, "Opera in Montreal and Toronto," 118.

German immigration to spur demand.[48] As such, a staged production of Wagner in Toronto would have to wait until 1887. That being the case, between the first mention of Wagner in the *Globe* and the Toronto premiere of *The Flying Dutchman* thirty years later, residents had various opportunities to acquaint themselves with Wagner, glimpses of which we can catch by tracking the references in contemporary newspapers.

Thus in the balance of this chapter, I would like to survey mentions of Wagner in the *Globe*, focusing on the years 1875 and 1876 (see appendix B). Founded in 1844 by Scottish immigrant and later Father of Confederation George Brown as an organ of the Reform Party, the *Globe* had by 1872 established itself as the leading newspaper of the country. Between both its daily and weekly publications, the *Globe* could boast a circulation of over 45,000, almost double the next leading competitor the *Witness* from Montreal.[49] Though readership was later overtaken by rivals throughout the 1880s, the newspaper retained its position as one of Canada's premiere producers of news at the turn of the century. In 1936, the Globe merged with the *Mail and Empire* (1895-1936) to form the *Globe and Mail* and continues to publish under this banner to this day.

My choice of the *Globe* is in part because of the far reach of the publication but it is also pragmatic: because this chapter was written in the shadow of COVID-19, I was limited to digitized publications. I recognize that I am participating in the general trend of over-representation of the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* in doctoral research that Ian Milligan attributes to the

---

[48] Morey, "The Music of Wagner in Toronto before 1914," 26; This is not to say that immigration played no role in the growing interest in Wagner, but rather that it was significantly bolstered by other home-grown means. For an overview of the many channels through which the Germanic canon became widespread in Canada see Elaine Keillor, "Auf Kanadischer Welle: The Establishment of the Germanic Musical Canon in Canada," in *Music in Canada/La Musique Au Canada: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Guido Bimberg, vol. 1 (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1997).

[49] Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 49.

digitization of both newspapers in the early 2000s.[50] Milligan also stresses the "illusionary order" which OCR searches can give researchers, as the well-ordered result pages obscure the imperfect nature of OCR technology. This point was made clear to me when I reread Carl Morey's article on Toronto Wagnerism and noted that he had found an article in the *Globe* after each of the four operas in the Ring cycle: my own searches, using a wide variety of keywords, had only turned up three. Combing (digitally) through the pages of August 18 uncovered the culprit: a fold in the paper which obscured the majority of the text when it was scanned.[51] Even here, the parasite intrudes in unexpected ways. To counteract some of the limitations of keyword search, I manually looked through the papers in the weeks surrounding the Ring cycle, as well as all the "Art" columns I was able to find, a strategy which turned up several additional mentions. Still, my research was largely based on keyword search and not a fully comprehensive survey of the two years in question.

I have chosen the years 1875 and 1876 for three reasons. First, spurred by rapid urbanization, developments in communication and transportation technologies, growing literacy rates as well as the rising middle class, the latter half of the Victorian era marked the emergence of Canada's first truly mass medium. As such, the 1870s serve as a transition decade from the older tradition of partisan, largely geographically bounded publications spread over four densely packed pages, to that of the modern newspaper with a front page dedicated to the top stories of the day, display advertisement, editorials, and sections dedicated to sports and entertainment.[52] Taking a closer look at coverage throughout these years allows us to see some of this transition in action.

---

[50] Ian Milligan, "Illusionary Order: Online Databases, Optical Character Recognition, and Canadian History, 1997–2010," *The Canadian Historical Review* 94, no. 4 (2013): 540–69, https://doi.org/10.3138/chr.694.

[51] Luckily, the Baldwin Collection of the Toronto Public Library holds an almost complete set of the *Globe and Mail* and so I was able to request a clear picture of the article in question.

[52] Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority*, 115–55. See in particular chapter 4, in which Rutherford performs a content analysis of an issue of the *Globe* from both 1850 and 1900.

Second, 1875 marks the debut of a semi-regular "Art" column in the *Globe*, part of the aforementioned trend towards distinct columns and pages catered towards niche interests. According to contemporary Robert Sellars, Brown dictated as late as 1856 that "theatrical performances were neither reported nor advertised, nor were horse races and the like."[53] Opera, straddling the divide between music and theatre, seems to have escaped such a blanket ban, first sneaking into the pages of the *Globe* in 1844 as part of the prospectus for a new music magazine.[54] At first, music coverage appeared sporadically throughout the paper's pages, as part of advertisements, reviews, snippets of news, or the paper's "miscellaneous" section. Starting on April 7, 1875 and published somewhat inconsistently every five to fourteen days thereafter, music-related news and reviews under about 300 words typically appeared under the "Art" heading on page 2 or 3. The column consisted of a mix of reviews, notices, and art-related gossip and news. Though theatre and the fine arts do get coverage, music is by far the art form with the heaviest amount of reporting. In October of 1879, the feature splits into two, with the Art column more tightly refocused on the fine arts (appearing approximately one to two times a week) and the newly created "Music and the Drama" becoming an almost daily feature.[55] As was common practice, all articles remained anonymous unless they were excerpted from music journals or magazines with explicit authorship–even then attribution remains sporadic.

Third, perhaps in part because of the newly minted arts column, coverage of Wagner grows rapidly during these two years. From 1857 through to 1874, Wagner and his operas appear about 18 times. Many of these mentions are parasitic in nature, such as incidental mentions of Wagner in a

---

[53] Robert Sellar, "Reminiscences of 1856," in *A History of Canadian Journalism: In the Several Portions of the Dominion with a Sketch of the Canadian Press Association, 1859-1908*, ed. Canadian Press Association (Toronto, 1908), 177.

[54] "To the Musical World: Prospectus Musical Monthly," *Globe* (Toronto), July 16, 1844, 4.

[55] A one-off column also titled "Music and the Drama" was published three years prior on January 5, 1876, but does not appear to be related.

biographic feature on the Prince of Bismarck in 1871.[56] Even a report of Wagner's failed production of *Tannhäuser* in Paris in 1861 seems more concerned with the wine the composer was sent in consolation then the music (note especially the use of quotation marks around "great work"):

> A Great Consolation—To console the eminent transcendental composer, Mr Richard Wagner, for the playful and irreverent treatment of his "great work," the Tanhauser [sic], by the Parisians, the Prince de Metternich, Austrian ambassador at the French court, has sent him twenty-five bottles of Johannisberg. This wine is probably the "sunshine" mentioned by Hawthorn in "The Marble Faun." At all events, it is produced at the Metternich estates, is kept by the family for their own use, and presents of it are seldom offered, to any but royal palates. Within the present century, the few exceptions to the rule have been twenty-five bottles each to Goethe, Canova, Jules Janis, and Wagner.[57]

Four years later, Wagner's fortunes seem not to have improved, with the following appearing under the "Miscellaneous" section:

> Wagner, the Musical transcendentalist and the hero of the future, has been banished from Bavaria by his patron and best friend, the King. Arrogance, impudence and extravagance, were the cause. The King Allows him, however, a pension.[58]

How seriously readers were to take this "hero of the future" becomes much clearer when we consider the general composition of the Miscellaneous section, which seems designed primarily to entertain rather than inform. The odd assortment of random facts ("Facts about Tobacco"), scandalous hearsay ("A woman near Paris murdered her daughter, and then ate her breakfast with the bloody knife she

---

[56] "Prince Bismarck: A Visit to His Estate in Pomerania—His Character and Habits," *Globe* (Toronto), September 12, 1871, 3.

[57] "Miscellaneous Items," *Globe* (Toronto), June 19, 1861, 1.

[58] "Miscellaneous Items," *Globe* (Toronto), December 28, 1865, 4.

had used for that purpose"), stale jokes ("Why is the Atlantic cable, in its present condition like a schoolmaster? Because it's supported by buoys—boys"), and occasional piece of actual news ("Capital punishment is abolished in Austria"), bears striking resemblance to the context collapse we are familiar with from social media feeds. Such relegation tells us something of how Wagner was still largely thought of as a curiosity. The only lengthy treatment of Wagner throughout this period, a reprinting of an excerpt from the *Atlantic Monthly* (1857–)[59] titled "Wagner and the Pianist Bülow" on March 30, 1872, is not particularly flattering to the composer, describing some of his antisemitic views and propensity for eccentric dress.

In 1875, however, the tides appear to turn both in terms of awareness and esteem: Wagner appears an astonishing 25 times in a single year in the *Globe*; the following year, there are 24. What I would like to do then is to examine the references to Wagner throughout these two years in order to better understand how, similar to Paris, Wagner and his art were translated and transformed through paratext on its journey across the Atlantic to Toronto, and how reception consequently changed. The *Globe* provides a window on two fronts: first, the article gives us clues to the types of contexts in which a Torontonian might encounter Wagner and how those encounters were facilitated and filtered by material means; second, newspapers reports are themselves paratexts, feeding off real-world events and repackaging them for audiences to consume. Especially in a context when access to Wagner was otherwise limited, we might assume that such coverage both reflected and helped shape public opinion of Wagner in the city.

The most direct evidence of access to Wagner's music in Toronto is listings and reviews for concerts. In 1875, the *Globe* published both for two concerts which featured a selection from

[59] The magazine is currently published under the shortened title *The Atlantic*.

Wagner: the first by the Mendelssohn Quintette on April 13,[60] and the second, by the Beethoven Quintette Club assisted by vocalist Mrs. Carter on June 18. Both quintettes hailed from Boston, with some overlap in membership throughout their existence, though of the two, the Mendelssohn Quintette was the more famous.[61] Credited by Roger Phelps as "the first professional group organized in [the United States] which devoted itself *exclusively* to the performance of chamber music,"[62] the Mendelssohn Quintette Club was active from 1849 to 1898. The group toured extensively across the United States and Canada—even venturing so far as Australia—and were frequent visitors to Toronto.[63] They performed in the city on April 13, 1875, at the Music Hall, with tickets available for purchase from the Nordheimer music store for $1 each. In the lead-up, The *Globe* published three advertisements, one each on April 3 and April 10—the latter including the full program for the evening—before finally including a reminder the morning of the concert as part of the "City News" section. This final mention speaks favourably of the program and points to as "particularly worthy of mention" Schubert's Grand Quintette in C and the Bridesmaids' Chorus from *Lohengrin*, though the author expands on the qualities of the Schubert quintette but not on the Bridesmaids' Chorus. The Wagner is notable, but not enough to warrant further discussion.

This visit by the Mendelssohn Quintette Club was part of a larger Canadian tour, with the first classified ad listing sixteen other stops, including St. Catharines, London, Cobourg, Brockville,

---

[60] Though later sources sometimes use "quintet" as a spelling, contemporary sources appear to prefer "quintette" for both chamber groups.

[61] Richard Mace Dowell, "The Mendelssohn Quintette Club of Boston" (PhD Dissertation, Kent State University, 1999), 87.

[62] Roger P. Phelps, "The Mendelssohn Quintet Club: A Milestone in American Music Education," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 8, no. 1 (1960): 39, https://doi.org/10/bhb6f3 (emphasis original).

[63] Dowell, "The Mendelssohn Quintette Club of Boston," Dowell documents a large number of the Quintette's concerts in Toronto (see in particular chapter 4) but misses several of the club's earlier visits, likely because they were using the *Toronto Mail* as their primary source for listings in the city, which only began publication in 1872. The earliest record I have found is a short review published on May 20, 1870, under "city news."

Ottawa and Montreal.[64] By contrast, the Beethoven Quintette Club appeared as guests of the Toronto Philharmonic Society, a semi-permanent amateur music society led by F. H. Torrington and chiefly known for its chorus.[65] The two groups were frequent collaborators: in addition to the June 18 concert, the Beethoven Quintette Club was also in Toronto in early April of the same year.[66] On both occasions, the club performed several concerts in collaboration with the chorus of the Toronto Philharmonic, and separately in their signature "Miscellaneous" recitals. For the June concerts, a review published on June 18 mentions that a Wagner selection was included in the program, though no other details were provided. A program held by the Toronto Public Library for a similar "Grand Miscellaneous Concert" held in November of the previous year, however, gives us a likely contender, listing a "Scene from 3rd Act of 'Lohengrin'" as the ninth selection of the evening.[67] Though there are no further specifications, this is almost certainly once again the Bridal Chorus from act 3, scene 1, by far the best-known selection from this act.

These two references to Wagner tell us a number of things: first that while there was some Wagner being heard in the city, the music often travelled through circuitous paths to get there. Material conditions had a role to play here, as the expansions of the transportation networks, first with the opening of the Erie Canal and later, expansion of rail networks, made touring to Canada much easier for US-based ensembles.[68] As Morey notes, Toronto was at this point still struggling to establish a

---

[64] "Concert Tour: The Mendelssohn Quintette Club!," *Globe* (Toronto), April 3, 1875, 2.

[65] Ruth Pincoe and Helmut Kallmann, "Toronto Philharmonic Society," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica Canada, December 15, 2013), https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/toronto-philharmonic-society-emc.

[66] As noted in an article from June 12, this visit was to be their last, with the Beethoven Quintette Club disbanding over the following summer "The Philharmonic Society," *Globe* (Toronto), June 12, 1875, 2.

[67] Toronto Philharmonic Society, "Toronto Philharmonic Society Programme," 1874, Baldwin Collection, Toronto Public Library, https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/detail.jsp?Entt=RDMDC-1874-PHILHARMONIC-VS&R=DC-1874-PHILHARMONIC-VS.

[68] Cooper, "Opera in Montreal and Toronto," 105.

permanent orchestra in the city, instead relying on touring orchestras and chamber groups to provide musical backing to its chorus societies.[69] This dependence is frequently lamented in reviews, with reviewers noting that high quality orchestral and chamber music is heard relatively infrequently in the city. Both quintettes are representative of this trend with Wagner finding a host in the musicians travelling to the city, detouring first through Boston.

Second, the types of selections are instructive. Like Paris, Toronto did not have access to fully staged productions of Wagner, instead relying on orchestral excerpts or instrumental reductions. Interestingly, the advertisement published on April 10 for the Mendelssohn Quintette not only provides the program for the evening (with the Wagner listed as the final selection), but also specifies that the Bridal Chorus is arranged by member Thomas Ryan. There is also no vocalist listed unlike several of the other pieces, despite the fact that the Bridal Chorus, as the name implies, is not a purely instrumental passage. Nor was this unusual: the program for the Beethoven Quintette Club mentioned above also does not list any vocalist, this despite being guests of a music society boasting a strong choir.

While it is easy to think of the fragmentation of media as a distinctively modern phenomenon, these two concerts point to how fragmentation was very much the norm in the nineteenth century. This is particularly interesting because of how adamant Wagner was that the strength of opera lies in the union between voice, music and drama and in his explicit resistance to composing musical numbers that could be easily extracted. Despite this, Wagner was ultimately a pragmatist, authorizing transcription, selling scores and arranging concerts of his own work. Beyond official channels, there

[69] Carl Morey, "Orchestras and Orchestral Repertoire in Toronto before 1914," in *Musical Canada: Words and Music Honouring Helmut Kallmann*, ed. John Beckwith and Frederick Albert Hall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 100–114.

was also a proliferation of illicit transcriptions. Thus, if opera companies capable of producing Wagner were few and far between, orchestral and other instrumental renditions posed far fewer barriers for entry. As a result, arrangements helped tame Wagner and made it much more portable. This is a case in which hosts such as sheet music, and human networks which were necessary to transport Wagner to Toronto, required a transformation of the parasite. Arrangements—neither paratext nor original—served this function. In addition, beyond public concerts, Wagner's music might have been even further decontextualized in domestic settings. It is difficult to know for sure whether Wagner was resonating in the drawing room of the city, but there are clues: for example, Morey notes that a performance by local Wagner enthusiast William Waugh Lauder of excerpts from the Liszt transcription from both *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* in 1877, speaks favourably to the ability to procure sheet music within the city.[70] Similarly, a notice on April 6, 1875, notifying readers of "four important books on music" including "*Wagner's Autobiography and Essay,* edited and translated by Mr. Burlingame"[71] makes implicit the assumption that the books would be of interest to the city's music enthusiasts.

Thus, in these articles, we can glimpse a secondary track of reception, one centred on the domestic sphere in which Wagner's work was fragmented, decontextualized, and commoditized. In the nineteenth century, a key driver of this process was the proliferation of print culture. Matthew Blackmar demonstrates how the success of Wagnerian sheet music, especially for the piano, in the US predates widespread availability of staged performances and paved the way for the Wagner mania of the 1880s and 90s.[72] Some of these arrangements, like the Liszt piano transcriptions mentioned

[70] Morey, "The Music of Wagner in Toronto before 1914," 27.
[71] "Literature," *Globe* (Toronto), April 6, 1875, 3.
[72] Matthew D. Blackmar, "Wagner Domesticated, Wagner Democratized: The Parlor Reception of Musikdrama" (MA Thesis, California State University, 2012), http://proquest.com/docview/1112916425.

above, were relatively faithful but firmly in the realm of the virtuosic; more common were tuneful extracts arranged with the amateur in mind. Because sheet music cannot transmit sound or image, and instead encodes instructions for a potential sonic event, the score and actual performance practices can only ever exist in parallel to each other.[73] Arrangements widen this gap even further, straddling the divide between original and paratext, by transforming the music through extraction, omission and simplification. If Wagner's theory of *Musikdrama* was disparaging of the practice of treating opera as a series of individual musical numbers hastily strung together, sheet music publishers held no such scruples, lifting his more musical passages and branding them as musical "pearls" or "gems," fitting them, however awkwardly, into predetermined categories such as "Quadrille, Galop, Polonaise, Waltz, Polka—and, incredibly, Seguidilla."[74] Here, the demands of the host shaped the transmission of Wagner, acting at times like a game of broken telephone.

While low-brow reworkings of Wagner might appear antithetic to the propagation of his music, James Parakilas makes the point that it is precisely through the process of domestication that the music canon is formed: "The canonic is always a domestication, a work doubly arranged, doubly resisted, doubly transformed through insinuated differences—first by authoritative mediators and later by individual, 'domestic' users—so that it can function in the memories of those users as a template for what is not itself."[75] Thus, rather than see these imperfections as noisy intruders, we can understand them as essential to the system as a whole. After all, "we know of no system that functions perfectly, that is to say, without losses, flights, wear and tear, errors, accidents, opacity—a system whose

---

[73] Leo Treitler, "History and the Ontology of the Musical Work," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 3 (1993): 483–97, https://doi.org/10.2307/431520.

[74] Blackmar, "Wagner Domesticated, Wagner Democratized," 33. Though the first wave of transcriptions were largely authorized by Wagner, as his popularity grew, so too did the appetite for illicit arrangements. Many—though not all—of these more creative transcriptions fall into that latter category.

[75] James Parakilas, "The Power of Domestication in the Lives of Musical Canons," *Repercussions* 4, no. 1 (1995): 25.

return is one for one, where the yield is maximal, and so forth. Even the world itself does not work quite perfectly. [....] Everything happens as if the following proposition were true: it works because it does not work."[76] Making concessions in the name of domestication was thus integral to the success of Wagner's music.

In this way, extracts such as the overture from *Tannhäuser* and the Wedding March from *Lohengrin*, could become musical hits in themselves largely divorced from the dramatic and intellectual baggage of Wagnerism with a capital W. For example, the *Globe*'s report of a high society wedding in New York between Miss Consuelo Yznaga and the Viscount of Mandeville makes not one, but two mentions of Wagner: the first, "a selection from the opera of 'Lohengrin'" played as part of an opening program preceding the ceremony, and "the famous 'Wedding March' from Tannhauser" as the newlyweds walked out of the church into their carriage.[77] We can imagine that the fashionable Toronto bride might make note of the musical selection for use at her nuptials. Rendered portable through the act of transcription and arrangement, Wagner's music was thus able to assume a variety of roles and functions outside of the opera house.

Of course, not every listener was content with such superficial engagement. Indeed, as Daniel Cavicchi explains, the nineteenth century marks the emergence of new cultures of listening which fostered a loose community of "music lovers" who "refused to accept the limited and temporary musical participation afforded by the purchase of a concert ticket."[78] This music culture did not displace

---

[76] Serres, *The Parasite*, 12–13.

[77] "A Fashionable Wedding: Marriage of Miss Consuelo Yznaga Del Valle to the Viscount Mandeville," *Globe* (Toronto), May 26, 1876, 4. This is likely a mistake on the part of the journalist, as *Tannhäuser* has no wedding march. There is a grand March (act 2, scene 4), which had some popularity as a stand-alone concert piece, but considering that it is prefaced as THE famous Wedding March, the Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin* seems much more likely. I would speculate that the operas of origins were accidentally swapped, with the opening selection perhaps consisting of either the Pilgrim's Chorus or the Overture, both of which were frequently performed in concert settings.

[78] Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 139.

amateur music making, as I have already made clear: rather, it changed the interrelationship between the two. We can see this entanglement at play with the sale of tickets for the two Quintette performances discussed earlier at A. & S. Nordheimer (1844–1927), a known Toronto sheet music dealer, and later, piano manufacturer. Concerts were likely understood by Nordheimer as another means of commoditizing the music experience. The music lover, however, unwilling to treat music as a simple musical transaction, was often portrayed in the media as at best an annoyance, and at worse, a victim to a pathological obsession.[79]

We can see hints of this disparagement in an article reprinted from London's *Saturday Review*, which details the many irritants of drawing-room music, including the dreaded Wagner enthusiast. The author not only laments being subjected to subpar renditions by nervous performers, but also having to listen to the amateur "who has a good deal of talent for music and so much enthusiasm that his mind is incapable of taking thought for anything else": if, once cornered, "his victim attempts to make a diversion to any political question of the day, his talk glides with surprising swiftness from Bismarck to Wagner, the King of Bavaria, and the Theatre at Bayreuth." Such a "fanatic" has his life "written upon music, his minutes are counted by crotchets and quavers, and he is unable to perceive that yours can possibly have any other interests."[80] Presumably, the editors of the *Globe* felt that Toronto readers might empathize with the difficulty of trying to ward off a too enthusiastic Wagner lover whose passion for music spilled out from the concert hall to poetry and politics.

In addition, as part of this change, music *listening* was also recast as an acquired skill, one fostered through education as a sign of moral self-improvement, with the goal of cultivating a "musical

[79] Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 156.
[80] "Drawing-Room Music," *Globe* (Toronto), August 28, 1875, 2.

ear."[81] Evidence of this can be seen in some of the coverage of foreign Wagner performances, which often wrestled with the question whether Wagner was indeed "the music of the future." While earlier reviews had little patience for the demands of Wagner's music, the majority of those printed in the *Globe* in 1875 and 1876 appear more willing to engage with some of his theoretical ideas and are more attentive to details of plot rather than simply execution of the music or the socialites who are attending. For example, as part of the coverage of the English premiere of Lohengrin on May 8, 1875, a lengthy quote from Ebenezer Prout not only emphasizes the overwhelming qualities of Wagner's music, but also the importance of preparation:

> To record a personal impression, I may say that never in my life have I been so overpowered with any operatic performance as with Lohengrin [...] Those who would appreciate the work, however, must lay aside all their preconceived ideas of opera, and be prepared to accept dramatic truth instead of pretty eight bar phrases. Moreover, to understand the music fully, intimate acquaintance with it is needed, as otherwise much of the significance of the introduction of the chief subjects ("Leitmotive," as they are termed) will be lost altogether, though the general impression of power and beauty cannot fail to strike the unprejudiced hearer, even if he have no previous knowledge of the work whatever.[82]

This oscillation, between overwhelm and intellectualization, recalls my discussion in chapter 3 of the dual discursive strategies employed by modern Wagner fans who position their experience as simultaneously active and passive. In these reviews, we can see such listening cultures taking root, one facilitated by paratext such the mass dissemination of musical scores, leitmotif guides, program notes and explanatory lectures.

---

[81] Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 72.
[82] "Art," *Globe* (Toronto), June 15, 1875, 2.

This last review of the London premiere of *Lohengrin* also demonstrates how the *Globe* was embedded in larger global networks of print media and, as I will discuss below, telegraph lines. The principal sources of opera news in the *Globe* come from London, the United States and Continental Europe. While the newspaper did report on stories from Africa, Asia, and South America, often mirroring the contours of the British empire, music from these continents is largely silent, reflecting the hegemonic position of the Western art tradition. Of the 46 articles which mention Wagner in 1875 and 1876, 13 appear under the "Art" heading. Frequently, however, I also found mentions of Wagner filed under geographic headings, such as "City news," "United States," "Great Britain," or "Continental" (understood here to mean Europe). This is especially the case in 1876, during which only 2 articles appear under "Art." These headings, paratext in their own right, help make visible complex geographic networks in which Wagner's music flowed as well as the mental maps of editor and reader: opera was not cordoned off exclusively as part of the arts but told us something of place.

For Wagner, the locations are clustered in four main geographic areas: the United States (New York and to a lesser extent, Chicago), Vienna, London and finally, Bayreuth. Rather than deploying an art correspondent overseas, the *Globe* regularly clipped and quoted content from foreign newspapers and music journals, working as an aggregator and gatekeeper of art news. At times excerpts were quoted verbatim, other times paraphrased ("*The London Telegraph* reports..."), with selection ranging from a couple of sentences to over 2000 words. Because of this practice, even news about Bayreuth was often first filtered through American and English press before arriving to Toronto: interest in the composer must then partly be considered as an extension of these pre-existing political, cultural and technological ties to both countries. This is consistent with developments in Quebec, in which Wagner's music travelled to Montreal in two distinct streams: the first originating

in Germany filtered through the travelling troupes in the US, and a second originating in France.[83] In Toronto, this second stream is, unsurprisingly, largely British rather than French in character.

Except for a lengthy piece on a performance of *Lohengrin* at the Met,[84] anticipating the American Wagner mania of the 1880s and 90s,[85] the American mentions are largely incidental. Of the six, half centre on the American centennial celebrations held in conjunction with the 1876 International Exhibition in Philadelphia. Conductor and noted Wagner proponent Theodore Thomas was entrusted with overseeing the music of the opening ceremonies, and, with the financial backing from the Women's Centennial Committee, commissioned a piece of music for the occasion.[86] The result was Wagner's now largely forgotten "Centennial Inauguration March"[87] which premiered on March 10, 1876, with an orchestra composed of 150 members, to 25,000 spectators.[88] The *Globe* includes mention of Wagner's Inaugural March in its description of the upcoming programming on March 5,[89] lengthy coverage of the opening ceremony on May 11,[90] and finally, plans for a music festival

---

[83] Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre, "La musique de Wagner au Québec au tournant du XXe siècle," *Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, no. 14 (1994): 61, https://doi.org/10.7202/1014311ar.

[84] "'Lohengrin' in New York," *Globe* (Toronto), March 11, 1875, 2.

[85] Horowitz, *Wagner Nights*.

[86] Often just referred to as "The Centennial March" Lieselotte Z. Overvold, "Wagner's American Centennial March: Genesis and Reception," *Monatshefte* 68, no. 2 (1976): 179.

[87] For a thoughtful re-evaluation of the circumstances surrounding the commission—which involved a dispute between Wagner and conductor Theodore Thomas over the copyright terms—as well as an analysis of the score, see Chan, "'Der Ring Des Nibelungen' in the New World," 73–93.

[88] The concert also included a chorus of 800 which performed Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus." Though undoubtedly large, it paled in comparison to the "monster concert" format which became increasingly popular starting in the 1860s. See Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 119–23. The largest of such "monster concerts" were at the two World Peace Jubilee's held in 1869 and 1872. The *Globe* reported in 1869 that "Wagner, the German composer, who styles his compositions 'The music of the Future,' has been invited to write something for the mammoth concert in Boston next month"—an invitation which Wagner either ignored or turned down. Instead, both concerts featured the overture from *Tannhaüser*. "United States," *Globe* (Toronto), May 10, 1869, 4; "International Peace Jubilee: The German Day Reception of the Musicians from Vaterland," *Globe* (Toronto), June 20, 1872, 1.

[89] "The Opening Ceremonies at the Centennial," *Globe* (Toronto), May 5, 1876, 2.

[90] "The Centennial Exhibition: Opening Day," *Globe* (Toronto), May 11, 1876, 4.

again hosted by the Women's Centennial Committee, on September 20.[91] In all three cases, however, no musical commentary is provided: the inclusions tell us more about the *Globe*'s audience interest in consuming American news, then Wagner. By contrast, the articles from Vienna are all focused on Wagner explicitly. After a glowing review of Wagner's first presentation of excerpts from the Ring cycle in Vienna courtesy of Dr. Theodore Helm from the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt,*[92] the *Globe* provides twice almost identical reports of plans to mount a Ring cycle in 1877 in Vienna, one filed under Continental and the other under Art. Revivals of *Lohengrin* and *Tannhaüser* in the city, however, are marked as failures, with the *Globe* reporting on the financial loss of $5,000, and an unruly horse on stage taking out an unsuspecting baritone.

The most extensive foreign coverage, both in number and in length, however, come from London, with nine separate articles either filled under "Great Britain" or otherwise referring to opera in London. Two thirds are concentrated on the London premiere of *Lohengrin* in 1875. Canadian interest would have been bolstered by the appearance of Emma Albani, Canada's first international operatic star, in the starring role of Elsa for the Covent Garden production.[93] The coverage in the *Globe*, however, does not emphasize her role: it is only in the following year, when Albani took on Elizabeth in *Tannhäuser* and (some) of the novelty of Wagner had died down that the *Globe* talks of Wagner using Albani as the main point of reference.[94] Such an approach demonstrates the close ties

---

[91] "United States," *Globe* (Toronto), September 9, 1876, 2.

[92] "Art," *Globe* (Toronto), April 7, 1875, 3.

[93] Born Marie-Louise-Emma-Cécile Lajeunesse to French-Canadian parents, Albani completed most of her musical training in the United States and Europe. In February of 1875, she sojourned to Dresden and Munich to learn several Wagnerian roles from conductor Franz Wüllner, which would become one of her specialties. When she returned to tour Canada in the latter half of her career, her concert repertoire frequently included Wagner. Lefebvre, "La musique de Wagner au Québec au tournant du XXe siècle"; Cooper, "Opera in Montreal and Toronto," 287–99.

[94] "Last month there was performed at the Royal Italian Opera, London, for the first time in England, Wagner's Opera of Tannhauser, with Mlle. Albani, the celebrated Canadian *cantatrice*, as prima donna. Her

to British culture that many Canadians retained. Throughout the nineteenth century, most Torontonians felt no real contradiction between holding the identity of both British and Canadian at the same time, a loyalty that "was strengthened by an increasingly complex web of family, cultural, commercial, and professional networks that linked the British in Britain with the British overseas."[95] Frequent updates from the London opera scene were but one tool that helped maintain this connection.

Though Wagner's music had been performed in England prior to this occasion, the *Lohengrin* premiere drummed up a flurry of coverage. The renewed interest in the opera, almost 25 years after its debut in Germany, can be attributed to a handful of factors: first, the public was better primed to appreciate Wagner by the founding of the first London Wagner Society in 1872, and the publication of the first sizable English treatises on Wagner;[96] second, *Lohengrin* would be premiered by *both* of the city's leading opera companies, stoking the continued rivalry between opera impresarios James Mapleson and Frederic Guy. The race would eventually be won by Guy, who premiered the opera on May 8 at Covent Garden[97]—the rival production took place a month later on June 12 at Drury Lane.[98] As a result, the Wagner opera became the musical event of the season.[99] In total, Londoners had the chance to hear *Lohengrin* an astounding 17 times in a single year.

---

singing on this occasion surpassed the highest expectations that had formed by the expectant public." "Art," *Globe* (Toronto), June 17, 1876, 3.

[95] Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, "Introduction," in *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration and Identity*, ed. Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 7.

[96] David Cormack, "Of Earls and Egypt: Founders of the First London Wagner Societies," *The Musical Times* 150, no. 1907 (2009): 28.

[97] The company in question is currently titled the Royal Opera but was known in the 1870s as the Royal Italian Opera. As the name suggests, *Lohengrin* was performed in Italian by both Mapleson and Guy, demonstrating the dominance of Italian opera at the time.

[98] Mapleson's company was called Her Majesty's Opera (H.M.O.), after the theatre of the same name which burnt down in 1867. Afterwards, Mapleson took his company—preserving the company name—to The Theatre Royal (Drury Lane). He would later return to the rebuilt Her Majesty's Theatre in 1877.

[99] Paul Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles, 1875-1918* (London: Routledge, 2013).

The coverage in the *Globe* spans from initial rumours,[100] to two reviews each of both the Covent Garden and Drury Lane productions, and one lengthy description of the antics of Wagner's patron King Ludwig of Bavaria, framed in light of the upcoming *Lohengrin* premiere.[101] The *Globe*'s reporting reflects the mixed reception by the London press: in an article presumably written by an exasperated *Globe*'s arts editor, the paper complains that "the effect of its rendering on the London critics has been such as to make them contradict one another, even in matters on which it might have been thought they would have agreed."[102] To emphasize the disjointed accounts that the *Globe* was receiving from its overseas sources, on July 10, the art column features two contrasting excerpts from reviewers of the Drury Lane production:

> The *Athenæum* says:—
>
> "We do not mean that this should apply to the orchestra, for never have the preludes to the first act, the introductions to the second and third acts, and the accompaniments been played to greater perfection than they were last Saturday night. The inner parts of the composer's subtle and skilful score come out with wondrous accuracy. [...]"
>
> Mr. Prout writes:— "On the other hand, the orchestra was horribly coarse. Wagner's scoring is so full that the greatest delicacy is required in many parts from the players in order not to overpower the voices. Unfortunately, one of Sir Michael Costa's chief characteristics seems to be love of noise; and the brass instruments throughout the evening blared away with an effect that was simply distressing. [...] As it was, listening to the orchestra on Saturday evening was

[100] "Art," April 7, 1875, 3.
[101] "Great Britain," *Globe* (Toronto), May 25, 1875, 3.
[102] "Art," June 15, 1875, 2.

> nothing less than a musical martyrdom. At Covent Garden one could hear how Wagner's accompaniments ought to be, at Drury Lane how they emphatically ought not to be, played."[103]

While these passages address the interpretation of Wagner's music, others grapple more directly with the underpinning philosophical principles. In particular, the article on June 15 takes the time to provide the general outlines of the plot, before quoting Mr. Prout writing for *The Academy* discussing the importance of the leitmotifs and staging. Though agreement over Wagner's artistic merits were in flux, we can see writers working to untangle a clear narrative.

By 1876, however, the London press appears much more united in its praise of Wagner, with the *Globe* acknowledging that even those who do not enjoy his works "admire his genius and the dramatic spirit of his works."[104] The buzz was now from an even bigger event: the premiere of the Ring cycle at Bayreuth. The planning stages of the festival start trickling into newspapers several years prior to the event itself, initially treated as somewhat of a curiosity, such as this report from 1869, filled under "miscellaneous":

> Wagner has finished the third part of his "Niebelungen," an opera of such gigantic proportions that it will take several nights to act. One scene in it requires an aquarium, so that the characters—mermaids and mermen—may swim about and skip from rock to rock, and dive beneath the depths, singing all the time.[105]

As the 1870s advance, however, the *Globe* begins to take Wagner more seriously, aided in part by the introduction of the telegraph into arts reporting. Canada saw its first telegraph lines installed in December of 1846: by the following year, lines connected Toronto to Halifax via Montreal, and New

---

[103] "Art," *Globe* (Toronto), July 10, 1875, 2.
[104] "Great Britain," *Globe* (Toronto), September 2, 1876, 7.
[105] "Miscellaneous," *Globe* (Toronto), February 25, 1869, 4.

York via Buffalo. The *Globe* had been an early adopter of the telegraph, with them and the *British Colonist* (1858-1980) assuming significant costs for the initial dispatches from the United States.[106] This investment contributed to the paper's success. The telegraph not only facilitated timely reporting on news within Canada and the United States, but telegraph lines based in port cities also allowed quicker consumption of European news as the final leg no longer had to be completed by train.[107] Viable transatlantic transmissions began in 1865, and with that the floodgates opened. Telegraph news initially appeared under the heading "By Magnetic Telegraph"; By 1875 there is still a separate section for telegraph news within the page of the *Globe*, but the sheer volume of information transmitted meant it had also overflowed to other sections.

James Carey makes the case that the telegraph, by widening geographic reach and through limitations imposed by costs, worked to standardize and rationalize journalistic prose.[108] In addition, correspondent letters, previously replete with detailed description and analysis made way for shorter, fact-oriented reports. With the introduction of wire services, news was also increasingly treated as a commodity with a quick sell-by date.[109] Constraints of geography were now replaced with the geometry of the telegraphs wired connecting Canada to the United States and England. Yet I want to emphasize that as with all technological revolutions, this transition happened in fits and starts, with older, residual models of journalism built upon physical modes of transportation co-existing with the

---

[106] The *Globe* explains this arrangement—and their grievance over other eastern papers copying their reports without paying—in an article published in August of that year. "The Telegraph!," *Globe* (Toronto), August 28, 1847, 2 Colonist.

[107] Interestingly, the *Globe* uses the increased speed of arrival of European news—and not American or Canadian—to defend its investment in the technology in 1847; This is despite the fact that European news still had to first traverse the Atlantic by boat for over a week! "The Telegraph," *Globe* (Toronto), June 5, 1847, 2.

[108] James W. Carey, "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph," in *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, rev. ed. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 162–63.

[109] Carey, "Technology and Ideology," 162.

increasingly dominant telegraphic regime.[110] We can see this transition in action when we compare the coverage for the London *Lohengrin* premiere, with that of Bayreuth.

Reporting on the London premiere—as extensive as it had been—was regularly delayed by over a month as the news traversed the Atlantic the old-fashioned way: by boat. The first Covent Garden performance took place on May 8, 1875: the first review comes a month later, on June 15. There is little sense of timeliness in these articles, with no dates attached to the performance, and the prose reads more like criticism than journalism. By contrast, the Ring cycle premiere, a full-fledged international media event, marked the first time that major American dailies sent journalists to Europe to cover a musical performance, with reports telegraphed back home in real time.[111] Because The *Globe* did not send a correspondent and instead relied principally on the detailed dispatches of the American and British press,[112] coverage was not as comprehensive as it was in the major dailies in the United States.[113] Despite this, Toronto readers were greeted with next day features for all four operas prominently on the front page.[114] The first few of these telegraphed reports are short in length and generally fit the telegraphic style identified by Carey, with unadorned prose well suited to a large audience and a focus on the "facts" rather than commentary:

> BAYREUTH, Aug. 16.—The performance of Siegfried, the second of the Wagner Trilogy, postponed from yesterday, took place today. It lasted seven and a half hours, including two

---

[110] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121–28.

[111] Chan, "'Der Ring Des Nibelungen' in the New World," 113.

[112] Some of the reports are specifically credited to other sources, such as the New York *Herald* and London's *Daily News*. For those without a source there are occasionally some clues, such as references to recent London opera offerings which speak to a possible English origin.

[113] For example, the New York *Herald*'s full-page coverage for each opera not only included detailed description of the plot and the performance, but also extracts from each score.

[114] "The Wagner Musical Festival: Brilliant Gathering at Bayreuth," *Globe* (Toronto), August 14, 1876, 1; "The Wagner Festival: Wonderful Operatic Scenic Representations," *Globe* (Toronto), August 15, 1876, 1; "Wagner's Trilogy: Representation of the Second Part," *Globe* (Toronto), August 17, 1876, 1; "Wagner's Trilogy," 1.

> intermissions of an hour each between the acts. The audience manifested the greatest enthusiasm. The scene in which the dialogue between Siegfried and Waldvoegeldin [sic] occurs produced marked impressions, as did also the finale of the first act, in which Siegfried forges the sword. The closing scene of the opera, where Brunnhilde is aroused from sleep on a fiery rock, made striking effect. Among the distinguished persons present tonight was the Austrian Prime Minister, Count Andrassy.[115]

After the conclusion of the first cycle, other telegraphed reports trickled in, detailing for example a feast to be held in Wagner's honour,[116] and later Wagner's journey to Italy to "recruit his strength after his arduous labours at Bayreuth."[117] These elements, as well as the successive natures of the reviews worked to construct the festival into a bona fide media "event," and Wagner into a celebrity. This is no longer simply a musical festival: the newspapers transformed it into *News*.

Still, older forms of journalism continued to exist in parallel, where the timeliness is traded for the more eclectic mix of "miscellaneous" facts. Throughout the latter half of August and into September, the *Globe* continues to publish pieces on Wagner and Bayreuth both short and long. Rather than a retrospective of the event, these dispatches provided context in drips and drabs, ranging from the composition of the orchestra to a brief sketch of the town of Bayreuth, to a quick one-liner on Wagner's mounting financial woes. Three longer articles supply additional musical assessment, but unlike with *Lohengrin*, there is no attempt to juxtapose contrasting opinions. All three critical pieces present relatively glowing assessments on Wagner's impact on opera, concealing the somewhat more

---

[115] "Wagner's Trilogy." The title of this article described the Ring cycle as a trilogy rather than a tetralogy—this is because *Das Rheingold* is officially a prologue and thus somewhat separate from the core trilogy.

[116] "Latest by Telegraph," *Globe* (Toronto), August 21, 1876, 1.

[117] "Wagner Is about to Recruit His Strength," *Globe* (Toronto), October 12, 1876, 1.

mixed reception among European critics. Overall, an otherwise uninformed reader would walk away with the feeling that Wagner very much might be the Music of the Future.

The most interesting article, however, appears on August 23. This article, credited to the New York *Herald,* provides a description of a rehearsal of *Rheingold* as well as a lengthy summary of the opera in question. The prose is somewhat abridged, with the *Globe* editor choosing to summarize some of the lengthier passages. Like the other two, the assessment is generally positive. Tracing the article to its original printing in the August 17 edition of the New York *Herald* reveals that it was written July 31. Thus, unlike the next day dispatches, this account almost certainly traversed the Atlantic via boat. This discontinuity is striking: why reprint an article about a *rehearsal* now over three weeks old, especially when readers already knew of the performances? [118] As the strict chronological telling of telegraphic news collides with the slower rhythms of journalism imposed by transatlantic travel, we can see noise inserted itself into the timeline. Consequently, Bayreuth was simultaneously a media event, with Wagner at its centre as a distinct celebrity personality, but also transformed by the newspaper into a slower paced musical revolution, one that could not be contained by linear accounts.

By way of conclusion, I would like to fast forward to Toronto's Wagner premiere, a performance of *The Flying Dutchman* in June of 1887. The review from the *Globe* is glowing, with the writer declaring that the night "might well rank as the finest operatic performance ever witnessed in Toronto."[119] Yet even here the parasite was at work: the National Opera Company had originally advertised the performance of *Lohengrin*, but continued "indisposition" of the tenor William Candidus required a change of plans: "Opera lovers," the *Globe* asserts, "will, however, accept 'The Flying

[118] This is amplified even more in the New York *Herald* where the article on the rehearsals originally appears directly alongside the cabled report on *Siegfried*.

[119] "The 'Flying Dutchman,'" *Globe* (Toronto), June 17, 1887, 8.

Dutchman' as a fair substitute for the 'Lohengrin.'"[120] The host to the event, the Toronto Opera House, also needed to change, with the first four rows of seating removed in order to accommodate the 60 piece Thomas Orchestra. Even once underway, the opera was subjected to "the detestable tardiness of some of ultra-fashionable people who displayed the bad taste of coming in during the half-hour following the opening of opera."[121] Noise struggles to be contained. What I have hoped to make clear is that opera is never performed in isolation: instead, it exists in a complex network. The metaphor of the parasite helps us attend, first to moments of disruption, but also to the necessarily transformational nature of media: technology, like print, the telegraph and the theatre, which all play an integral role in reception.

[120] "The National Opera Company To-Night in 'the Flying Dutchman,'" *Globe* (Toronto), June 16, 1887, 1.

[121] "Musical and Dramatic," June 17, 1887, 8.

Coda

It's April 2022 and the Toronto Wagner society is in need of a guest. The shift online has both simplified and complicated the process of finding new speakers: no longer limited to who is in town, the world is our oyster. On the flip side, it's no longer always obvious whom to contact next. After a series of successful talks with singers, there is agreement that it's time to mix things up from the usual format. Eventually, I offer myself over email to present part of my own research on the prehistory of Toronto Wagnerism, which I hope would be of interest to some members. To prepare, I create a PowerPoint presentation to share my findings, carefully screenshotting select articles from Proquest to add to my slides, complemented with pictures of Toronto and Wagner sourced from the web. I have a full hour, so I am able to keep cuts to a minimum, but largely pencil out references to parasites and paratexts. A couple of days before, our chair Frances emails me to let me know that she has also heard from a second guest, a singer who was a member of the chorus at the Bayreuth Festival the previous summer. Rather than reschedule, we opt for a Wagner double feature.

On the night of the meeting, I am the one to launch the Zoom meeting, entrusted with society credentials. I have asked my partner to keep my cat at bay: he has a tendency to jump on my desk just as I am speaking to others. I have come to accept the blandness of my Zoom background: a window looking directly on a brick wall, and an armoire topped with a number of Blue Jays caps. Monitoring the meeting waiting room, I let in other executive members as they appear. After some chit-chat in the handful of minutes leading up to 7:00 p.m., I close the waiting room and admit the remaining members. Frances delivers her usual introduction. Most members know me by now, but not all know that I am writing a dissertation. Taking advantage of a dual monitor setup, I share my screen and launch my presentation. The presentation goes well: I am glad to see the occasional

reaction in the chat. Though I had not rehearsed my timing—relying on estimations drawn from my prior experience at conferences—I am able to wrap up after about forty-five minutes, leaving plenty of time for questions. I am pleased to hear that several found the talk interesting. One asked for more information about Emma Albani, another about opera in Montreal. Soon, our second guest has also logged in and it is time to mute my own microphone and let the second half of the meeting unfold, interceding when necessary to help facilitate the question-and-answer portion. There is a bit of chit-chat once the guest leaves, but after a handful of minutes, I log off, ending the Zoom session in the process.

I end with this anecdote in part to contrast with the meeting described in my second chapter: the red brick of the Arts and Letters club swapped for the decidedly less aesthetic beige brick of the neighbouring apartment building; the post-meeting chatter no longer over drinks and limited to a handful of remarks before we collectively log off; the misbehaving AV equipment during a film viewing replaced with worry about internet connections as I spoke my talking points into what at times felt like a void; the drudgery of returning home on the subway gone. I also cannot help but reflect on the many layers of mediation introduced in order for me to share some of the prehistory of Wagnerism detailed in my last chapter, when the telegraph was still the cutting edge in communication technology. What is gained and lost when a hundred-and-fifty-year-old newspaper clip is scanned to microfiche and then converted to PDF, screenshotted on a computer and then shared online via video conference? I suspect that the authors of these news snippets, largely written as ephemeral dispatches, would be perplexed to see their works now put to such use!

More than anything, however, these sudden changes in circumstance underscore for me the very malleability and resilience of Wagnerism. In my interactions with members of the TWS, I continue to see evidence that Wagnerism is still alive and well, with opera playing an important part in

their lives even as the pandemic has forced many to stay at home. While the love for the music might not be much different, how it is expressed and what it means to be a Wagner lover continually changes. This is by no means unique to Wagnerism—there are many other fandoms which have stood the test of time. But what makes studying Wagnerism particularly compelling is precisely because Wagner was writing at the cusp of massive changes in communication technology as well as the increased distinction between high and low culture. Taking the time to talk to opera fans provides us with a unique opportunity to study how reception can evolve over 150 years, as well as the ways that high art stands not only in opposition to popular media but also in parallel. I would thus like to make the case that studying Wagner through the lens of fandom not only helps us break down some of the mysticism surrounding opera, but also, I hope, provides a further invitation for fan scholars to think through how we might trace the emergence of cult models of consumption to the nineteenth century. While there have been some starts to research on audiences of high culture, such as theatre, ballet and symphonies as well as opera,[1] I welcome more voices on this topic, especially studies which take the time to talk to modern fans. I am particularly interested in hearing more of the diversity of practices among fans of high culture. I hope that my own insights into Wagnerism provide inspiration for other scholars to take up this work.

I am also making the case for cultural techniques as a theoretical framework for studying fandom. First, as I argued in chapter 1, cultural techniques allow us to move beyond debates of what

[1] I reference some of this research in my introduction, but some other work on high culture audiences which integrate modern fan practices include Matt Hills, "Popular Theatre and Its 'invisible' Fans," *Zeitschrift Für Literaturwissenschaft Und Linguistik* 47, no. 4 (2017): 487–503, https://doi.org/10.1007/s41244-017-0074-2; Davis, So, and Moodley, "Voices from the Gallery: Perceptions, Perspectives, and Pleasures of the Opera Audience"; Rössel, "Cultural Capital"; Catherine Anne Willshire, "Modes of Listening and Their Implications to Audience Experience of Orchestral Concerts, with a Case Study of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra" (MA Thesis, York University, 2017), https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/34384; Alexandra Edwards, "Literature Fandom and Literary Fans," in *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, ed. Paul Booth (Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018).

constitutes a fan towards how the distinction is produced in the first place. This subtly shifts our focus from ontology to praxis. As such, in this dissertation I have striven to demonstrate Wagnerism as something one *does* not simply something one *is*—from the act of listening, to the careful delineation between Italian and German opera, to the training of the ear through intellectual work. In addition, because fandom is inexorably linked to media, having a theoretical approach that is sensitive to how technology has the potential to shape reception is incredibly valuable. As I explored in my methods chapter, cultural techniques provide just such a productive approach. By advancing a networked model of fandom, I have sought to portray Wagnerism not as a single, immutable thing, but rather as a dynamic assemblage that includes, people, places and things. My exploration of Wagner's musical techniques, the theatre and the various media which transport and transform his opera are meant to illustrate that how Wagnerism is experienced is very much dependent on our material surroundings. Cultural techniques, and media studies more broadly, provide a crucial lens on the bridge which connects audience and text.

At the same time, I want to make the case for scholars of Media to be careful not to evacuate the human in the process and to consider interviews as a way of thinking through the role of media and technology as they unfold in the day to day. As a self-professed (recovering?) theory addict, I have tried to do just this, allowing the voice of Wagnerians to dictate the starting points of some of my more theoretical detours. My hope here is that other researchers consider that ethnography might at times prove a useful supplement to the detailed exegeses that are the bread and butter of much of media studies. Yes, often times the medium is the message, but observing how media is used in action—such as the shift from the analogue to the digital throughout COVID-19—can help us better understand how they are embedded in complex assemblages, and more importantly, how they are used in real time. In addition, making space for the reflexive capabilities of human subjects helps us

capture the often contradictory narratives that surround media. For example, in my conversations with members of the Wagner society, I was able to tease out the complex ways that fans simultaneously understand opera as an intellectual and embodied pursuit. In other instances, my conversations uncovered personal stories—a fraction of which I have been able to share—which are often only accessible in oral form: from stories of discovery, friendship, travel, as well as a deep connection to the music. Throughout these pages, I have looked to make the case that oral histories and ethnography more broadly, are powerful tools in cultural techniques' remit of combating the stranglehold of the written text.

Presenting part of my research to the Toronto Wagner Society in many ways felt like coming full circle. As a society which largely began in an academic department and with a long history of scholarly contributions—such as those of Father Owen Lee, who opened this dissertation—I was humbled to be able to continue this tradition. I am thankful to those who shared their experience with me but also for the opportunity to contribute what I could. In my first chapter, I asked whether it would be possible to write *the* field guide of fandom, concluding that *a* field guide to fandom might be possible. This dissertation has had many unexpected detours: when I first began, I certainly did not expect a record-breaking strike,[2] and even less could I have predicted a global pandemic would make me the tech facilitator for the Wagner Society. The resulting marks on my research are undeniable. In that way, this document stands as a field guide for just one of the many ways that research could have unfolded. But it also provides, I hope, a fruitful snapshot of how the love of Wagner continues to thrive and shape the lives of so many.

[2] On the other hand, one could argue that being a member of CUPE 3903, striking is simply an occupational hazard, an argument I would be hard pressed to dispel!

Bibliography

Abbate, Carolyn. "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): 505–36. https://doi.org/10.1086/421160.

Adorno, Theodor. *In Search of Wagner*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. London: Verso, 2005.

——. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. London: Verso, 2005.

——. "On Popular Music." In *Essays on Music*, edited by Richard D. Leppert, translated by Susan H. Gillespie, 437–68. California: University of California Press, 2002.

Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, edited by Gunzelin Schmid, translated by Edmund Jephcott, 94–146. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

Allis, Michael. "The Diva and the Beast: Susan Strong and the Wagnerism of Aleister Crowley." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 50, no. 4 (2014): 380–404. https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqu026.

Bacon, Camille. *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.

Baragwanath, Nicholas. "Musicology and Critical Theory: The Case of Wagner, Adorno, and Horkheimer." *Music & Letters* 87, no. 1 (2006): 52–71. https://doi.org/10.1093/ml/gci177.

Barker, Martin. *Live to Your Local Cinema: The Remarkable Rise of Livecasting*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Barone, Anthony. "Richard Wagner's 'Parsifal' and the Theory of Late Style." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 7, no. 1 (1995): 37–54. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586700004407.

Bennett, Andy. *Music, Style, and Aging: Growing Old Disgracefully?* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013.

——. "Popular Music Scenes and Aging Bodies." *Journal of Aging Studies* 45, no. 1 (2018): 49–53. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2018.01.007.

Benzecry, Claudio. *The Opera Fanatic: Ethnography of an Obsession*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Berry, Mark. "Adorno's Essay on Wagner: Rescuing an Inverted Panegyric." *The Opera Quarterly* 30, no. 2–3 (2014): 205–27. https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/kbu020.

Blackmar, Matthew D. "Wagner Domesticated, Wagner Democratized: The Parlor Reception of Musikdrama." MA Thesis, California State University, 2012. http://proquest.com/docview/1112916425.

Blissett, William. "Bernard Shaw: Imperfect Wagnerite." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (January 1958): 185–99. https://doi.org/10.3138/utq.27.2.185.

Booth, Paul. *Digital Fandom 2.0: New Media Studies*. 2nd ed. New York: Peter Lang, 2017.

——. *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies*. New York: Peter Lang, 2010.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Boyd-Hurrell, Sophie. "'The Mirage of Eternity:' Adorno's Critique of Wagnerian Temporality." *Context* 39, no. 1 (2014): 37–45.

Bribitzer-Stull, Matthew. *Understanding the Leitmotif: From Wagner to Hollywood Film Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Brooker, Will, Mark Duffett, and Karen Hellekson. "Fannish Identities and Scholarly Responsibilities: A Conversation." In *Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, edited by Melissa A. Click and Suzanne Scott, 63–74. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Buckner, Phillip, and R. Douglas Francis. "Introduction." In *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration and Identity*, edited by Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, 1–9. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006.

Butsch, Richard. *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Canadian Consulting Engineer. "Intimate Sound." *Canadian Consulting Engineer*, April 1, 2006. https://www.canadianconsultingengineer.com/features/intimate-sound/.

Canadian Opera Company. "20/21 Annual General Meeting," October 28, 2020. www.coc.ca/AGM2021.

Carey, James. *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

Carey, James W. "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph." In *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, Rev. ed., 155–77. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008.

Cavicchi, Daniel. "Fandom before 'Fan': Shaping the History of Enthusiastic Audiences." *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History* 6, no. 1 (2014): 52–72. https://doi.org/10.5325/reception.6.1.0052.

——. "Foundational Discourses of Fandom." In *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, edited by Paul Booth, 477–94. Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119237211.ch30.

——. *Listening and Longing: Music Lovers in the Age of Barnum*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011.

——. *Tramps like Us: Music & Meaning among Springsteen Fans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

CBC Arts. "Canadian Opera Company Maintains 99% Attendance Average." CBC, May 26, 2009. https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/canadian-opera-company-maintains-99-attendance-average-1.845328.

Chafe, Eric Thomas. *The Tragic and the Ecstatic: The Musical Revolution of Wagner's Tristan Und Isolde*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Chan, Hannah. "'Der Ring des Nibelungen' in the New World: The American Performance and Reception of Wagner's Cycle, 1850-1903." PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois, 2014.

Cherry, Zena. "After a Fashion: Ring of Wagner Fans to Meet." *Globe and Mail* (Toronto). January 6, 1976.

——. "After a Fashion: Churches Back Program." *Globe and Mail* (Toronto). February 11, 1977.

Chimènes, Myriam. "Élites sociales et pratiques wagnériennes: de la propagande au snobisme." In *Von Wagner zum Wagnérisme: musik, literatur, kunst, politik*, edited by Annegret Fauser and Manuela Schwartz, 155–97. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1999.

Chong, Joshua. "Definitely Not the Same Old Canadian Opera Company: Two World Premieres and a Focus on New Voices Revitalizes 'Old-Fashioned' Repertoire." *Toronto Star*, February 22, 2022. https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/music/analysis/2022/02/22/definitely-not-the-same-old-canadian-opera-company-two-world-premieres-and-a-focus-on-new-voices-revitalizes-old-fashioned-repertoire.

Click, Melissa A., and Suzanne Scott, eds. *Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Cooper, Dorith Rachel. "Opera in Montreal and Toronto: A Study of Performance Traditions and Repertoire 1783-1980." PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1983.

Coppa, Francesca. "Fuck Yeah, Fandom Is Beautiful." *The Journal of Fandom Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 73–82. https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs.2.1.73_1.

Cormack, David. "Of Earls and Egypt: Founders of the First London Wagner Societies." *The Musical Times* 150, no. 1907 (2009): 27–42.

Dahlhaus, Carl, and Mary Whittall. "Wagner's 'A Communication to My Friends': Reminiscence and Adaptation." *The Musical Times* 124, no. 1680 (1983): 89–92. https://doi.org/10.2307/962675.

Davis, Deanna, Joseph K. So, and Roy Moodley. "Voices from the Gallery: Perceptions, Perspectives, and Pleasures of the Opera Audience." In *Opera in a Multicultural World: Coloniality, Culture, Performance*, edited by Mary I. Ingraham, Joseph K. So, and Roy Moodley, 213–36. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Dennis, David B. "'The Most German of All German Operas': Die Meistersinger through the Lens of the Third Reich." In *Wagner's Meistersinger: Performance, History, Representation*, edited by Nicholas Vazsonyi, 98–119. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003.

DeNora, Tia. *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Dowell, Richard Mace. "The Mendelssohn Quintette Club of Boston." PhD Dissertation, Kent State University, 1999.

Drohan, Marie Antoinette. "The Effect of Aging on the Singing Voice and the Vocal Longevity of Professional Singers." PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2004.

Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. New York: Verso, 1997.

Dünne, Jörg, Kathrin Fehringer, Kristina Kuhn, and Wolfgang Struck, eds. "Introduction." In *Cultural Techniques: Assembling Spaces, Texts & Collectives*, 1–22. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020. http://www-degruyter-com/view/title/550154.

Eatock, Colin. "The COC Builds Its Dream Home." *Queen's Quarterly* 113, no. 4 (2006): 528–37.

Eco, Umberto. "'Casablanca': Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage." *SubStance* 14, no. 2 (1985): 3–12. https://doi.org/10.2307/3685047.

Edwards, Alexandra. "Literature Fandom and Literary Fans." In *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, edited by Paul Booth. Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018.

Essert, Bob. "Room as Instrument." *Canadian Consulting Engineer*, April 1, 2006. https://www.canadianconsultingengineer.com/features/intimate-sound/.

Evans, Adrienne, and Mafalda Stasi. "Desperately Seeking Methodology: New Directions in Fan Studies Research." *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 11, no. 2 (2014): 20.

Evans, David T. *Phantasmagoria: Sociology of Opera*. London: Routledge, 2018.

Fantin-Epstein, Marie-Bernadette. "Richard Wagner - Emile Zola: analogies et correspondances." In *Les cahiers de littératures: Textes, images, musique*, edited by Andrée Mansau and Louis Cabanès, 8. Toulouse: Université de Toulouse II, 1992.

Fink, Robert. “Elvis Everywhere: Musicology and Popular Music Studies at the Twilight of the Canon.” *American Music* 16, no. 2 (1998): 135–79. https://doi.org/10.2307/3052563.

Ford, Sam. “Fan Studies: Grappling with an 'undisciplined' Discipline.” *The Journal of Fandom Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 53–71. https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs.2.1.53_1.

Foucault, Michel. “What Is an Author?” In *Reading Architectural History*, edited by Dana Arnold, 71–81. London: Routledge, 2002.

Friesen, Norm, ed. *Media Transatlantic: Developments in Media and Communication Studies between North American and German-Speaking Europe*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2016.

Frith, Simon. “Art versus Technology: The Strange Case of Popular Music.” *Media, Culture & Society* 8, no. 3 (1986): 263–79. https://doi.org/10/bn68wh.

Fry, Katherine. “Nietzsche’s Critique of Musical Decadence: *The Case of Wagner* in Historical Perspective.” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 142, no. 1 (2017): 137–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/02690403.2017.1286130.

Fulcher, Jane F. “Symbolic Domination and Contestation in French Music: Shifting the Paradigm from Adorno to Bourdieu.” In *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, edited by Victoria Johnson, 312–29. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Geiger-Torel, Herman. “C.O.C Report.” *Opera Canada*, 1973.

Gembris, Heiner, and Andreas Heye. “Growing Older in a Symphony Orchestra: The Development of the Age-Related Self-Concept and the Self-Estimated Performance of Professional Musicians in a Lifespan Perspective.” *Musicæ Scientiæ: The Journal of the European Society for the Cognitive Sciences of Music* 18, no. 4 (December 2014): 371–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/1029864914548912.

Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Translated by Jane Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Geoghegan, Bernard Dionysius. “After Kittler: On the Cultural Techniques of Recent German Media Theory.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 66–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413488962.

——. “Untimely Mediations: On Two Recent Contributions to ‘German Media Theory.’” *Paragraph* 37, no. 3 (2014): 419–25. https://doi.org/10.3366/para.2014.0138.

Gray, Jonathan. “New Audiences, New Textualities: Anti-Fans and Non-Fans.” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2003): 64–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877903006001004.

——. *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

Gray, Jonathan, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, eds. *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. 2nd ed. New York: New York University Press, 2017.

——, eds. "Introduction: Why Still Study Fans?" In *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, 2nd ed., 1–26. New York: New York University Press, 2017.

Grey, Thomas. "Wagner the Degenerate: Fin de Siècle Cultural 'Pathology' and the Anxiety of Modernism." *Nineteenth Century Studies* 16 (2002): 73–92. https://doi.org/10.2307/45196870.

Grey, Thomas S. "Eine Kapitulation: Aristophanic Operetta as Cultural Warfare in 1870." In *Richard Wagner and His World*, edited by Thomas S. Grey, 87–122. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Grossberg, Lawrence. "Is There a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom." In *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, edited by Lisa Lewis, 50–65. London: Routledge, 1992.

——. *We Gotta Get out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Gruzd, Anatoliy, and Philip Mai. "The State of Social Media in Canada 2020: A Canada-Wide Survey about Social Media Adoption and Use in Canada." Toronto: Ryerson University Social Media Lab, 2020. https://doi.org/10.5683/SP2/XIW8EW.

Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis, 117–27. London: Routledge, 1980.

Hallam, Susan. "Music, Cognition and Well-Being in the Ageing." In *The Routledge Companion to Music, Mind and Well-Being*, edited by Penelope Gouk, James Kennaway, Jacomien Prins, and Wiebke Thormahlen, 291–302. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Hardiman, Alan. "Electro-Acoustic Support for Opera in Toronto's Four Seasons Centre for Performing Arts." *Theatre Design & Technology* Fall (2006): 41–44.

Harrington, C. Lee. "Creativity and Ageing in Fandom." *Celebrity Studies* 9, no. 2 (2018): 231–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2018.1465295.

Harrington, C. Lee, and Denise Bielby. "*Soap Fans* Revisited." In *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, edited by Paul Booth. Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018.

Hartford, Robert. "Introduction." In *Bayreuth: The Early Years: An Account of the Early Decades of the Wagner Festival as Seen by the Celebrated Visitors & Participants*, edited by Robert Hartford, 15–41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Hellekson, Karen. "The Fan Experience." In *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, edited by Paul Booth. Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018.

Henoch, Miriam A., and Kris S. Chesky. "Hearing Loss and Aging: Implications for the Professional Musician." *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 14, no. 2 (1999): 76–79.

Higgs, Jennifer, Sarah Church, and Andrew Mcintosh. "Music at the CBC." In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada, March 4, 2015. https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/cbc-emc.

Hills, Matt. *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge, 2002.

——. "Implicit Fandom in the Fields of Theatre, Art, and Literature." In *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, edited by Paul Booth, 477–94. Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119237211.ch30.

——. "Popular Theatre and Its 'invisible' Fans." *Zeitschrift Für Literaturwissenschaft Und Linguistik* 47, no. 4 (2017): 487–503. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41244-017-0074-2.

——. *Triumph of a Time Lord: Regenerating Doctor Who in the Twenty-First Century*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010.

Hoeckner, Berthold. "Wagner and the Origin of Evil." *The Opera Quarterly* 23, no. 2–3 (2007): 151–83. https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/kbn029.

Horowitz, Joseph. *Wagner Nights: An American History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Hune-Brown, Nicholas. "The Wizards of Opera: How Two Dapper Germans Made Toronto Fall in Love with Opera." *Toronto Life* (blog), March 10, 2014. https://torontolife.com/city/alexander-neef-johannes-debus-wizards-of-opera/.

Hutcheon, Linda. *Bodily Charm: Living Opera*. The Abraham Lincoln Lecture Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

Hutcheon, Linda, and Michael Hutcheon. "Death Drive: Eros and Thanatos in Wagner's 'Tristan Und Isolde.'" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 11, no. 3 (1999): 267–93. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586700005073.

——. *Four Last Songs: Aging and Creativity in Verdi, Strauss, Messiaen, and Britten*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

——. *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996.

——. *Opera: The Art of Dying*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

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

Jancovich, Mark. "Cult Fictions: Cult Movies, Subcultural Capital and the Production of Cultural Distinctions." *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 306–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380110107607.

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

——. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*. 20th Anniversary edition. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. *Spreadable Media: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2013.

Jensen, Joli. "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization." In *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, edited by Lisa Lewis, 9–29. London: Routledge, 1992.

Jensen, Trevor. "Arthur U. Clifton Jr.: 1944-2008." *Chicago Tribune*. November 26, 2008. https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2008-11-26-0811250533-story.html.

Kallmann, Helmut, Richard Haskell, Kenneth Winters, and Gilles Potvin. "Metropolitan Opera." In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada, December 15, 2013. https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/metropolitan-opera-emc.

Katz, Elihu, Jay Blumer, and Michael Gurevitch. "Utilization of Mass Communication by the Individual." In *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research*, edited by Jay Blumer and Elihu Katz, 19–32. London: Sage Publication, 1974.

Katz, Stephen. *Disciplining Old Age: The Formation of Gerontological Knowledge*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.

Keillor, Elaine. "Auf Kanadischer Welle: The Establishment of the Germanic Musical Canon in Canada." In *Music in Canada/La Musique Au Canada: A Collection of Essays*, edited by Guido Bimberg, Vol. 1. Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1997.

Kenny, Dianna, Tim Driscoll, and Bronwen Ackermann. "Effects of Aging on Musical Performance in Professional Orchestral Musicians." *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 33, no. 1 (March 1, 2018): 39–46. https://doi.org/10.21091/mppa.2018.1007.

Kittler, Friedrich. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Kittler, Friedrich A. *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*. Translated by Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens. Standard, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.

Kotnik, Vlado. "The Adaptability of Opera: When Different Social Agents Come to Common Ground." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 44, no. 2 (2013): 303–42.

Kraglund, John. "COC Looks Financially Healthy, but Torel Has a List of Worries." *Globe and Mail* (Toronto). April 5, 1974.

——. "Selection of Wagner Is Symbolic." *Globe and Mail* (Toronto). September 8, 1973.

Krämer, Sybille, and Horst Bredekamp. "Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques: Moving beyond Text." Translated by Michael Wultz. *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 20–29. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413496287.

Latour, Bruno. "On Recalling ANT." *The Sociological Review* 47, no. 1 (1999): 15–25. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1999.tb03480.x.

——. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

——. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

——. "What Is the Style of Matters of Concern? Two Lectures in Empirical Philosophy." Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 2008. http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/161.html.

Lee, M. Owen. *Athena Sings: Wagner and the Greeks*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.

——. *Wagner and the Wonder of Art: An Introduction to Die Meistersinger*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.

——. *Wagner: The Terrible Man and His Truthful Art*. The 1998 Larkin-Stuart Lectures. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

——. *Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Around*. New York: Limelight, 2004.

Lefebvre, Marie-Thérèse. "La musique de Wagner au Québec au tournant du XXe siècle." *Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, no. 14 (1994): 60–76. https://doi.org/10.7202/1014311ar.

Levin, David J. *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Lewis, Lisa. *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Lindenberger, Herbert. "On Opera and Society (Assuming a Relationship)." In *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, edited by Victoria Johnson, 294–311. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Littler, William. "Classicist Who Loves Classics Writes Rings around Wagner." *Toronto Star*. July 14, 1990.

Livingstone, Sonia. "The Challenge of Changing Audiences." *European Journal of Communication* 19, no. 1 (2004): 75–86. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323104040695.

Lubken, Deborah. "Remembering the Straw Man: The Travels and Adventures of *Hypodermic*." In *The History of Media and Communication Research: Contested Memories*, edited by David W. Park and Jefferson Pooley, 20–42. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

Macho, Thomas. "Second-Order Animals: Cultural Techniques of Identity and Identification." Translated by Michael Wutz. *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 30–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413499189.

Mackay, Gillian, and Shona McKay. "A Treat for the Eye and the Ear." Maclean's, June 18, 1984. https://archive.macleans.ca/article/1984/6/18/a-treat-for-the-eye-and-the-ear.

Martin, Nathan. "The Tristan Chord Resolved." *Intersections* 28, no. 2 (2008): 6–30. https://doi.org/10.7202/029953ar.

Martorella, Rosanne. "The Relationship between Box Office and Repertoire: A Case Study of Opera." *The Sociological Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1977): 354–66. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1977.tb01420.x.

Mauss, Marcel. "Techniques of the Body." Translated by Ben Brewster. *Economy and Society* 2, no. 1 (1973): 70–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147300000003.

Maynard, Kelly J. "Strange Bedfellows at the *Revue Wagnérienne*: Wagnerism at the Fin de Siècle." *French Historical Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): 633–59. https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-3113839.

Mckee, Alan. "The Fans of Cultural Theory." In *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, C. Lee Harrington, and Henry Jenkins, 1st ed., 88–97. New York: New York University Press, 2007.

Meline, Gabe. "How Crazy Do You Have to Be to Sit through 15 Hours of Opera?" *KQED*, June 26, 2018. https://www.kqed.org/arts/13835968/how-crazy-do-you-have-to-be-to-sit-through-15-hours-of-opera.

Meyer, Stephen C. "'Leitmotif': On the Application of a Word to Film Music." *Journal of Film Music* 5, no. 1/2 (2012): 101–8.

Milligan, Ian. "Illusionary Order: Online Databases, Optical Character Recognition, and Canadian History, 1997–2010." *The Canadian Historical Review* 94, no. 4 (2013): 540–69. https://doi.org/10.3138/chr.694.

Millington, Barry. "'Faithful, All Too Faithful:' Fidelity and Ring Stagings." *The Opera Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (2007): 265–76.

——. *The New Grove Guide to Wagner and His Operas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Morey, Carl. "Orchestras and Orchestral Repertoire in Toronto before 1914." In *Musical Canada: Words and Music Honouring Helmut Kallmann*, edited by John Beckwith and Frederick Albert Hall, 100–114. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.

——. "The Music of Wagner in Toronto before 1914." *Canadian University Music Review* 18, no. 2 (1998): 25–37. https://doi.org/10.7202/1014652ar.

Mrozowicki, Michal Piotrà. *Le musicien de l'avenir 1813-1883*. Richard Wagner et sa réception en France 1. Gdask, Poland: Presses Universitaires de Gdansk, 2013.

Muir, Theresa. "Wagner in England: Four Writers before Shaw." PhD Dissertation, City University of New York, 1997.

Napoli, Philip M. *Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Nordau, Max. "The Richard Wagner Cult." In *Degenerations*, translated by Howard Fertig, 171–213. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895. https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Degeneration/ZkISAAAAYAAJ.

O'Toole, Lawrence. "Finding the Ultimate Fix in the Strains of Wagner." *Globe and Mail* (Toronto). January 21, 1978.

Overvold, Lieselotte Z. "Wagner's American Centennial March: Genesis and Reception." *Monatshefte* 68, no. 2 (1976): 179–87.

Parakilas, James. "The Power of Domestication in the Lives of Musical Canons." *Repercussions* 4, no. 1 (1995): 5–25.

Parikka, Jussi. "Afterword: Cultural Techniques and Media Studies." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 147–59. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413501206.

——. "Cultural Techniques of Cognitive Capitalism: Metaprogramming and the Labour of Code." *Cultural Studies Review* 20, no. 1 (2014): 30–52. https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v20i1.3831.

Parkhurst, E. R. "Music and the Drama." *Globe* (Toronto). July 25, 1908.

Parks Canada. "St. George's Hall (Arts and Letters Club) National Historic Site of Canada." Parks Canada Directory of Federal Heritage Designations, June 8, 2007. https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=11835.

Paulin, Scott. "Richard Wagner and the Fantasy of Cinematic Unity: The Ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the History and Theory of Film Music." In *Music and Cinema*, edited by James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer, 58–84. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2000.

Pearson, Roberta. "Bachies, Bardies, Trekkies and Sherlockians." In *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, C. Lee Harrington, and Henry Jenkins, 98–109. New York: New York University Press, 2007.

——. "Observations on Cult Television." In *The Cult TV Book*, edited by Stacey Abbott, 7–18. London: I.B. Tauris, 2012.

Perović, Lydia. "Live-Streaming: Why Are Canadian Opera Productions Missing from the Worldwide Phenomenon?" *Opera Canada*, September 28, 2018. http://operacanada.ca/live-streaming-opera-canada/.

Peters, John Durham. *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media*. Chicago; London, 2015.

Peyron, David. "Fandom Names and Collective Identities in Contemporary Popular Culture." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 28 (2018). https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2018.1468.

Phelps, Roger P. "The Mendelssohn Quintet Club: A Milestone in American Music Education." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 8, no. 1 (1960): 39–44. https://doi.org/10/bhb6f3.

Pincoe, Ruth, and Helmut Kallmann. "Toronto Philharmonic Society." In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada, December 15, 2013. https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/toronto-philharmonic-society-emc.

Pöhnl, Veronika. "Mind the Gap: On Actor-Network Theory and German Media Theory." In *Applying the Actor-Network Theory in Media Studies*, edited by Markus Spöhrer and Beate Ochsner, 249–65. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2016.

Poletti, Anna. "Self-Publishing in the Global and Local: Situating Life Writing in Zines." *Biography* 28, no. 1 (2005): 183–92. https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2005.0035.

Radway, Janice A. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Risi, Clemens. "Opera in Performance: In Search of New Analytical Approaches." *The Opera Quarterly* 27, no. 2–3 (2011): 283–95. https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/kbr025.

——. "Opera in Performance: 'Regietheater' and the Performative Turn." Translated by Jake Fraser. *The Opera Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (December 20, 2019): 7–19.

Rodmell, Paul. *Opera in the British Isles, 1875-1918*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Rose, Paul Lawrence. "Anti-Semitism in Music: Wagner and the Origins of the Holocaust." In *Richard Wagner for the New Millennium: Essays in Music and Culture*, edited by Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, Alex Lubet, and Gottfried Wagner, 189–203. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Ross, Alex. “Wagnerism.” The Rest Is Noise. Accessed April 6, 2022. https://www.therestisnoise.com/wagnerism/.

——. *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music*. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2020.

Rössel, Jörg. “Cultural Capital and the Variety of Modes of Cultural Consumption in the Opera Audience.” *The Sociological Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2011): 83–103. https://doi.org/10/fxcsfn.

Rutherford, Paul. *A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982.

Saffle, Michael. *Richard Wagner: A Research and Information Guide*. 2nd ed. Routledge Music Bibliographies. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Saint-Saëns, Camille. “Saint-Saëns.” In *Bayreuth: The Early Years: An Account of the Early Decades of the Wagner Festival as Seen by the Celebrated Visitors & Participants*, edited by Robert Hartford, 57–61. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Sandvoss, Cornel. *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*. Cambridge: Polity, 2005.

Schabas, Ezra, and Carl Morey. *Opera Viva: Canadian Opera Company, the First Fifty Years*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2000.

Scott, Iain. “Seven Video Interviews.” Father Owen Lee: archive in memoriam, 2022. https://www.fatherowenlee.com/video-interviews/.

Sellar, Robert. “Reminiscences of 1856.” In *A History of Canadian Journalism: In the Several Portions of the Dominion with a Sketch of the Canadian Press Association, 1859-1908*, edited by Canadian Press Association, 176–80. Toronto, 1908.

Serres, Michel. *The Parasite*. Translated by Lawrence R. Schehr. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Siegert, Bernhard. *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*. Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015.

——. “Cultural Techniques: Or the End of the Intellectual Postwar Era in German Media Theory.” Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young. *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 48–65. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413488963.

——. “Material World: An Interview with Bernhard Siegert.” Interview by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young. *Artforum* 53, no. 10 (Summer 2015). https://www.artforum.com/print/201506/material-world-an-interview-with-bernhard-siegert-52281.

Simonson, Mary. “Dancing the Future, Performing the Past: Isadora Duncan and Wagnerism in the American Imagination.” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65, no. 2 (2012): 511–55. https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2012.65.2.511.

Sloan, Rachel. "The Condition of Music: Wagnerism and Printmaking in France and Britain." *Art History* 32, no. 3 (2009): 545–77. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8365.2009.00681.x.

Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998.

Smith, Matthew Wilson. *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Spencer, Stewart, and Millington Barry, eds. "Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck, Mid-April 1859." In *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, 452. New York: W W Norton, 1988.

Sterne, Jonathan. *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

Storey, John. "The Social Life of Opera." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2003): 5–55. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1367549403006001466.

Taylor, Timothy D. "The Role of Opera in the Rise of Radio in the US." In *Music in the World: Selected Essays*, 74–93. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Terauds, John. "Canadian Opera Company Stays in the Black despite Falling Attendance." *Star*. October 24, 2018. https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/music/2018/10/24/canadian-opera-company-stays-in-the-black-despite-falling-attendance.html.

Théberge, Paul. "Everyday Fandom: Fan Clubs, Blogging, and the Quotidian Rhythms of the Internet." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 30, no. 4 (2006). https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2005v30n4a1673.

Toronto Philharmonic Society. "Toronto Philharmonic Society Programme," 1874. Baldwin Collection. Toronto Public Library. https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/detail.jsp?Entt=RDMDC-1874-PHILHARMONIC-VS&R=DC-1874-PHILHARMONIC-VS.

Treitler, Leo. "History and the Ontology of the Musical Work." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 3 (1993): 483–97. https://doi.org/10.2307/431520.

Tulloch, John, and Henry Jenkins. *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Turbow, Gerald D. "Art and Politics: Wagnerism in France." In *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, edited by David Clay Large, William Weber, and Anne Dzamba Sessa, 134–66. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984.

Vargas, Vincent. "How to Get Tickets to the Bayreuth Festival." Accessed July 17, 2021. http://www.wagneroperas.com/indexwagnerhowtogettickets.html.

Vazsonyi, Nicholas. *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Vazsonyi, Nicholas, Mary I. Ingraham, Joseph So, and Roy Moodley. "Playing the Race Card: Anti-Semitism and Wagner®." In *Opera in a Multicultural World*, 84–96. Routledge, 2015.

Vehlken, Sebastian. "Zootechnologies: Swarming as a Cultural Technique." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 110–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413488959.

Verzosa, Noel. "Wagner Reception and French Modernity before and after Baudelaire: The Case of the *Revue Wagnérienne*." *Music Research Forum* 22 (2007): 1–33.

Vincent, Michael. "Canadian Opera Company Annual Report Shows Impact From COVID-19." Ludwig van Toronto, November 2, 2020. https://www.ludwig-van.com/toronto/2020/11/02/the-scoop-canadian-opera-company-issues-annual-report-showing-early-impact-of-covid-19/.

Vismann, Cornelia. "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty." Translated by Ilinca Iurascu. *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 83–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413496851.

Wagner, Richard. "A Communication to My Friends." In *The Art-Work of the Future*, translated by William Ashton Ellis, 296–292. Vol. 1 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*. 1851. Reprint, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895. https://books.google.ca/books?id=oBc5AAAAIAAJ.

——. "A Theatre at Zurich." In *The Theatre*, translated by William Ashton Ellis, 167–79. Vol. 3 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, 1894.

——. "Judaism in Music." In *The Theatre*, translated by William Ashton Ellis, 79–100. Vol. 3 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1894. https://books.google.ca/books?id=7MmrGB8v9JkC.

——. "On the Performance of 'Tannhäuser.'" In *The Theatre*, translated by William Ashton Ellis, 167–206. Vol. 3 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1894. https://books.google.ca/books?id=7MmrGB8v9JkC.

——. *Opera and Drama*. Translated by William Ashton Ellis. 2nd edition. Vol. 2 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900. https://books.google.ca/books?id=HEMIAQAAMAAJ.

——. "Preface to the Public Issue of the Poem of the Bühnenfestspiel 'Der Ring des Nibelungen.'" In *The Theatre*, translated by William Ashton Ellis, 274–83. Vol. 3 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1894. https://books.google.ca/books?id=7MmrGB8v9JkC.

——. "The Artwork of the Future (1851)." Edited by Tash Siddiqui. Translated by Emma Warner. Special issue, *The Wagner Journal*, 2012, 13–86.

——. "The Bayreuth Festival Theatre." Bayreuth Festspiele, May 22, 1872. https://web.archive.org/web/20150823111926/https://www.bayreuther-festspiele.de/documents/_the_bayreuth_festival_theatre_341.html.

——. "The Virtuoso and the Artist." In *In Paris and Dresden*, translated by William Ashton Ellis, 167–79. Vol. 7 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1898. https://books.google.ca/books?id=7v7XSAAACAAJ.

Weber, William. "Wagner, Wagnerism and Musical Idealism." In *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, edited by David Clay Large, William Weber, and Anne Dzamba Sessa, 28–71. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984.

Weiner, Marc A. *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

——. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

——. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. Edited by Ederyn Williams. 1974. Reprint, London: Routledge, 2003.

Willshire, Catherine Anne. "Modes of Listening and Their Implications to Audience Experience of Orchestral Concerts, with a Case Study of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra." MA Thesis, York University, 2017. https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/34384.

Winthrop-Young, Geoffrey. "Cultural Techniques: Preliminary Remarks." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013): 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413500828.

——. "The Kultur of Cultural Techniques: Conceptual Inertia and the Parasitic Materialities of Ontologization." *Cultural Politics* 10, no. 3 (2014): 376–88. https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-2795741.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. 3rd edition. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984.

Young, Liam Cole. "Cultural Techniques and Logistical Media: Tuning German and Anglo-American Media Studies." *M/C Journal* 18, no. 2 (2015). https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.961.

Appendix A:
List of Wagner Performances in Toronto

Note: Performances were initially gathered by cross-referencing Copper's dissertation on opera in Toronto and Montreal, Morey's article on Wagner in Toronto, and Morey and Schabas fiftieth anniversary book on the COC. Later performances were identified using a combination of the COC website and the website Operabase. Additional performances were discovered through the interview process or my own search through newspapers. Details for all performances, including dates, have been confirmed using listings and reviews in either the Globe and Mail or the Toronto Star, correcting a handful of mistakes in prior sources. I have excluded from my list concert or extracted performances—truncated performances, however, have been retained.

Year	Date (s)	Venue	Company	Opera	Notes
1887	Jun 16	Toronto Opera House	National Opera Company w/ Thomas orchestra	Flying Dutchman	Originally scheduled to perform Lohengrin but switched due to "indisposition" of tenor
1888	Jan 3	Toronto Opera House	National Opera Company	Lohengrin	
1890	Oct 20	Academy of Music	Emma Juch Grand Opera Company	Lohengrin	
1891	Oct 17	Academy of Music	Emma Juch Grand Opera Company	Tannhäuser	
1893	Nov 15	Grand Opera House	Tavary Grand Opera Company	Lohengrin	
1901	Oct 11	Massey Hall	Metropolitan Grand Opera	Lohengrin	Part of a musical festival to celebrate royal visit
1904	Nov 7, 12	Princess Theatre	Savage English Grand Opera Company	Lohengrin	"English" refers to language of performance, not nationality of company

1904	Nov 10	Princess Theatre	Savage English Grand Opera Company	Tannhäuser	
1905	Apr 24, 25, 26	Princess Theatre	Savage English Grand Opera Company	Parsifal	Two performances on final day (evening and matinee)
1905	Nov 20, 25	Princess Theatre	Savage English Grand Opera Company	Tannhäuser	
1905	Nov 22	Princess Theatre	Savage English Grand Opera Company	Lohengrin	
1905	Nov 23, 24	Princess Theatre	Savage English Grand Opera Company	Die Walküre	Extra matinee performance for the 24th announced on 22nd
1912	Sep 20	Royal Alexandra Theatre	Aborn English Grand Opera Company	Lohengrin	
1914	Jan 28	Royal Alexandra Theatre	National Grand Opera Company of Canada	Lohengrin	Sung in a combination of Italian and German
1937	Apr 13, 14	Massey Hall	Opera Guild of Toronto	Tannhäuser	First local production of Wagner
1939	Feb 28, Mar 2	Massey Hall	Opera Guild of Toronto	Lohengrin	
1953	May 28	Maple Leaf Gardens	Metropolitan Opera Company	Lohengrin	
1962	Oct 23, 25, 27	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Die Walküre	
1971	Sep 25, Oct 1, 7, 13	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Die Walküre	Part of failed plan to stage full Ring cycle in '75 or '76
1972	Sep 15, 21, 27, 30	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Siegfried	

1973	Sep 7, 12, 15, 20	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Götterdämmerung	
1974	Sep 7, 13, 18, 21, 26, Oct 1	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Flying Dutchman	Plans for '76 Ring cycle postponed indefinitely
1976	Sep 25, 29, Oct 8, 12	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Die Walküre	
1979	Oct 23, 26, 29, Nov 1,4	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Tristan und Isolde	Toronto premiere
1981	Mar 25, 27, 29, 31, Apr 2, 4	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Flying Dutchman	
1983	Sep 16, 20, 24, 28, Oct 2, 6	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Lohengrin	
1984	Jun 7	O'Keefe Centre	Metropolitan Opera Company	Die Walküre	Part of the Toronto International Festival
1985	May 21, 24, 27, 30, Jun 2	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Die Meistersinger von Nuremberg	Toronto premiere
1987	Sep 23, 26, 29, Oct 2, 5, 8, 11	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Tristan und Isolde	
1996	Jan 26, 28, 31, Feb 2, 6, 8, 10	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Flying Dutchman	

2000	Jan 20, 23, 26, 29, Feb 1, 4	O'Keefe Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Flying Dutchman	
2004	Apr 4, 8, 14, 17, 20, 23	Hummingbird Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Die Walküre	O'Keefe Centre renamed to Hummingbird Centre
2005	Jan 27, 30, Feb 2, 5, 8, 11	Hummingbird Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Siegfried	
2006	Jan 30, Feb 2, 4, 7, 10, 12	Hummingbird Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Götterdämmerung	
2006	Sept 12-17, 19-24, 26-Oct 1	Four Seasons Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Ring cycle	Opening of Four Seasons Centre; First performance of complete Ring cycle in Canada
2010	Apr 24, 28, May 2, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20	Four Seasons Centre	Canadian Opera Company	The Flying Dutchman	
2013	Jan 29, Feb 2, 8, 14, 17, 20, 23	Four Seasons Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Tristan und Isolde	
2015	Jan 31, Feb 4, 7, 10, 13, 19, 22	Four Seasons Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Die Walküre	
2016	Jan 23, 27, 30, Feb 2, 5, 11, 14	Four Seasons Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Siegfried	

2017	Feb 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 25	Four Seasons Centre	Canadian Opera Company	Götterdämmerung	
2020	Feb 14-17	College Street United Church	Opera by Request w/ Berlin Wagner Gruppe	Ring Cycle	Semi-staged performances
2022	Oct 7, 9, 13, 15, 19, 21, 23	Four Seasons Centre	Canadian Opera Company	The Flying Dutchman	Original performance for March 2020 cancelled due to COVID 19; Performance of Parsifal originally scheduled for 2020 and then 2022 postponed indefinitely

Appendix B:
Globe Articles Referencing Wagner 1844-1876

Note: All articles are anonymous unless otherwise noted in the summary. In cases where entries appear under a column without a separate header (such as in the "Art" column), I have provided in lieu the column name. In a handful of cases, articles were published with no title.

Year	Date(s)	Title	Page	Summary
1857	Oct 22	The Imperial Meeting at Weimar	2	Describes meeting between emperors; Includes a scathing review of "Tannhauser," attended by the royal party
1859	Feb 24	The Accouchement of the Princess Frederick William	3	Princess Frederick William attended Lohengrin the night before she gave birth
1861	Jun 19	Miscellaneous Items	1	Failure of Tannhauser in Paris, Wagner sent bottles of wine in consolation
1862	Apr 9	The Concert Last night	2	Review of four hand piano concert; programme includes march from Tannhauser
1865	Dec 28	Miscellaneous Item	4	Wagner banished from Bavaria by the King, due to "impudence and extravagance"
1866	Mar 10	Herrmann's Soiree Magical	2	Concert review; Program included Grand March from Tannhauser
1868	Oct 17	Continental	4	Singer Mlle. Mallinger who "achieved great success in Wagner's latest opera" signs large contract
1869	Feb 25	Miscellaneous	4	Wagner finished third part of Ring; One scene will require aquarium
1869	May 10	United States	4	Wagner has been invited to contribute to upcoming "mammoth concert" in Boston
1871	Sep 12	Princess Bismarck: A visit to His Estate in Pomerania	3	Character portrait of prince; Mentions in passing that he "swears by Wagner"
1872	Mar 30	Wagner	4	Exert from *Atlantic Monthly* by Alice Ashbury; Discusses Die Meistersingers, antisemitism, eccentric sense of dress

1872	Jun 20	International Peace Jubilee: the German day	1	Report from large 18-day festival to honour end of Franco-Prussian war; Tannhauser overture included in program
1873	Jan 15	Continental	4	Herr von Bülow, "Wagner's prime minister" (i.e., frequent conductor at Bayreuth) offered post of conductor at the Warsaw opera house
1873	Jun 17	Continental	4	Wagner celebrates 60th birthday; slab affixed to house he was born in at Leipsic by "enthusiastic admirers"
1873	Oct 4	Theodore Thomas' Concert	4	Glowing review of concert; Second part opened with Tannhauser Overture
1873	Oct 27	Dangers of Discounting in Politics	2	Criticizes newspapers and politicians for announcing and exaggerating results of an inquiry prior to release: Declaring the actions of gov. were constitutional "was not unlike trying to render an overture of Beethoven or Wagner with a band of jews' harps and penny whistles"
1874	Jan 9	Louis II of Bavaria	3	Character portrait of the prince which details his opulent and eccentric taste; Discuss his obsession with Wagner and how the bed chamber and grounds frequently reference his operas
1874	Aug 1	Under the Septennate: At the Petit Trianon	4	Description of the French parliament summer session; includes a description of a picnic by legitimist ladies at the Petit Trianon where King Louis of Bavaria once had "Wagner's music brayed"
1875	Mar 11	"Lohengrin" in New York	2	Description and review of second ever Lohengrin performance in New York at the Academy of Music; Includes detailed description on room and crowd
1875	Apr 3	N/A	4	The *Republic Française*, in a letter from Dresden, gives details for Wagner's plan for the complete Ring cycle, including rehearsal in July and two series of each opera over two weeks
1875	Apr 6	Literature	3	Notice of the publication of four books on music, included *Wagner's Autobiography and Essays*, edited by Mr. Burlingame
1875	Apr 7	Art	3	Two separate entries: one announcing the upcoming performance of London Lohengrin; Second details Dr. Theodore Helm's glowing assessment of first public performances of Nibelungen extracts in Vienna

1875	Apr 10	Display ad for Mendelssohn Quintette Club	2	Ad for upcoming performance; printed programme includes Bridal Chorus from Lohengrin arranged by member T. Ryan
1875	Apr 13	Mendelssohn Quintette Club	4	Reminder for that night's concert; Singles out the selection of Wagner's Bridal chorus as "particularly worthy of mention"
1875	May 25	Great Britain	3	In anticipation of London premiere of *Lohengrin*, London *Daily News* correspondent gives an extended anecdote of Wagner's patron King Ludwig of Bavaria
1875	Jun 3	Art	2	Description and review of London premiere of *Lohengrin* at Covent Garden; Includes *Athenæum* criticism of the libretto
1875	Jun 15	Art	2	Contradictory reviews of London *Lohengrin* from the *Athenæum* and Ebenezer Prout in the *Academy*; Mentions upcoming rival production at Drury Lane
1875	Jun 18	The Philharmonic Society	2	Description of concert with music supplied by the Beethoven Quintette Club; Programme described as "excellent," included a selection from Wagner.
1875	July 10	Art	2	Description of Drury Lane production of *Lohengrin* in London; Contrasting reviews from *Athenæum* and Prout in the *Academy*; Second entry, Verdi commending Wagner's instrumentation and dramatic innovation but he "goes too far in the form as in the manner"
1875	Jul 17	Art	2	Wagner has completed the "Nibelungen" and begun work on *Parsifal*
1875	Jul 22	N/A	4	London *Daily Telegraph* describes packed performances of Drury Lane *Lohengrin*; laments inability to clap during Wagner performances
1875	Jul 24	Liszt at Weimar: The Story of His Life and How He Became an Abbe How Liszt Became an Abbe	5	Biography and description the authors visit with composer Franz Liszt; Mentions that his daughter Cosima married Wagner
1875	Jul 26	Sir Sterndale Bennett	3	Obituary for English composer Sterndale Bennett; Talks about his opinion of Wagner's music, which he said, "appears to be spasmodic effort after originality."

1875	Aug 28	Art	2	Wagner begins orchestral rehearsals at the Bayreuth National Opera House; Theatre to completed next year
1875	Aug 28	Drawing-Room Music	2	Article from London's *Saturday Review*; Complain about the annoyances of Drawing room music including the amateur whose "talk glides with surprising swiftness from Bismarck to Wagner, The King of Bavaria, and the Theatre at Bayreuth"
1875	Sep 11	Art	3	The *Academy* comments on Wagner's decision to hide orchestra from view during performances
1875	Sep 18	Art	3	Rehearsals at Bayreuth as told by the correspondent of the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*; Second entry reporting on invitation for Wagner to direct Tristan und Isolde in Berlin
1875	Sep 25	Art	3	Description of the new Bayreuth theatre, including elaborate machinery and lighting system
1875	Oct 9	Art	3	Nibelungen Drama to be performed in Vienna in 1877 with hopes to obtain dress and scenery from Bayreuth; Fear that next year's performances in Bayreuth will be a financial failure
1875	Oct 16	Art	3	Wagner has written a new introduction from *Tannhauser*; Second entry, *Revue et Gazette Musicale* of Paris corrects misconception that Wagner's 35-year-old piece "A Visit to Beethoven" is fresh material
1875	Oct 23	Art	2	Wagner has "secured the services of the greatest machinist of Berlin"; Wild animals will appear to move on stage
1875	Dec 11	Continental	2	Reports of plans to stage full Ring cycle in Vienna in 1877, converting the Vienna International Exhibition in an opera house
1875	Dec 28	Continental	1	Vienna productions of *Tannhauser* and *Lohengrin* are financial failures, resulting in a loss of $5,000
1876	Jan 5	Music and the Drama	3	Horse on stage in Vienna *Tannhauser* ran across the stage and kicked baritone

1876	Feb 2	Chicago affairs: coloured minstrelsy	2	Article about minstrelsy in Chicago but mentions in passion that the city has "our Wagner enthusiasts, and our devotes of the Italian school"
1876	May 1	Great Britain	3	London *Telegraph* states that *Tristan and Isolde* is unrelenting, the major resolution point "a very pandemonium of sound"
1876	May 5	The Opening Ceremonies at the Centennial	2	Opening ceremonies for the US Centennial celebration; a "Wagner Night" mentioned as part of the musical festival organized by the Women's Centennial Committee for the coming fall
1876	May 11	The Centennial Exhibition: Opening day	4	Detailed description of opening ceremonies included performance of Wagner's especially commissioned Inauguration March under the baton of Theodore Thomas
1876	May 26	A Fashionable Wedding	4	Wedding of New York socialite Consuelo Yznaga Del Valle to Viscount Mandeville; ceremony included a selection from *Lohengrin*; and "the famous Wedding March from *Tannhauser* [sic]"
1876	Jun 17	Art	4	Canadian soprano Emma Albani starred in Tannhauser at the Royal Italian Opera in London
1876	Aug 8	Continental	3	King of Bavaria has become fat; German Musical papers predict that Bayreuth Festival will surpass expectations
1876	Aug 14	The Wagner Musical Festival: Brilliant Gathering at Bayreuth	1	Telegraphed report of first day of Ring Cycle, included list of who was there and brief description of performance
1876	Aug 15	The Wagner Festival: Wonderful operatic scenic representations	1	Performance of *Die Walküre*; Applause interrupted performances multiple times despite Wagner's wishes
1876	Aug 17	Wagner's Music: Representation of the Second Part	1	Performance of *Siegfried*, postponed from previous day; Short positive review
1876	Aug 18	Wagner's Music: The Representation at Bayreuth	1	Performance of *Götterdämmerung*; Seen as a general success, greatest work of composer
1876	Aug 21	Germany: Honours to Wagner	1	Five hundred attend banquet held in honour of Wagner
1876	Aug 21	The Ring of the Nibelungen	1	Lengthy piece on Wagner's development as a composer and theory of art in light of premiere of Ring cycle

1876	Aug 22	Continental	4	"The Baireuth [sic] festival is to cost about $225,000"
1876	Aug 23	Wagner's Great Opera: The Character of the Performance at Baireuth	2	From the Bayreuth correspondent of the New York *Herald*; Lengthy summary of plot and description of the dress rehearsal for *Rheingold*; Positive review of cycle
1876	Aug 24	Continental	3	Description of location of Bayreuth as well short history of town
1876	Sept 2	Great Britain	7	Everyone is Europe is now talking about Wagner; Fortunes have turned since him being booing in Paris and lackluster reception of Wagner's conducting of Tannhauser overture in London
1876	Sept 4	Continental	1	Lists the composition of Wagner's orchestra
1876	Sept 9	United States	2	Music Festival organized by Women's Centennial Committee will take place later in the month; Will include the inauguration March as well as a Wagner's night
1876	Sept 16	Art: Wagner's Music	3	Wagner's composition mark "a new era in the history of operatic music"; music divests itself of typical formal conventions; Arias are in service of drama, not singers showing off
1876	Oct 12	N/A	1	Wagner heading to Italy to recruit his strengths; will stop in Bologna for production of *Rienzi*
1876	Oct 14	Art	3	Several French composers are copying Wagner, writings librettos based on the same source material as Tristan and Isolde and Siegfried
1876	Nov 11	Miscellaneous	7	"It is said that Wagner's Bayreuth performances resulted in a loss of nearly £3,000"
1876	Dec 27	Chicago Affairs	2	Performance of *Flying Dutchman* given in Chicago to "great success"; Starred soprano Miss Kellogg