

Francis Pagnon¹

Francis Pagnon² is the author of an important study of Richard Wagner and the history music titled *En Évoquant Wagner: La musique comme mensonge et comme vérité*, which was published by Editions Champ Libre in December 1981. This essay showed the living movement of history at work in music in general and in the music of Wagner, more specifically. It undertook a political critique “of mass[-produced] music as totalitarian ideology.” For the author, musical evolution has been liquidated and enslaved to the necessities of a retrograde organization of society. Due to its return to a pre-individual

¹ This essay appears as an anonymous entry in the French version of Wikipedia: http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Pagnon. Accessed 15 June 2014. Translated by NOT BORED! 15 June 2014. All footnotes by the translator.

² Little is known about his life, it would seem. He killed himself on 11 January 1990. In the words of Jean-François Martos, writing to Guy Debord on 19 February 1990 (<http://www.notbored.org/martos-19February1990.html>): “Perhaps you know that Francis Pagnon hung himself on 11 January: of a somber nature, he more keenly felt the blackness of this life than any other. With the exception of several short moments of remission in which he felt better ([talking to] railway workers, high-school students and, more recently, [people from] Romania; I include his last photo, in front of the embassy), he followed an inexorable slope in the last few years. The current period of ebb, and its corollary of reinforced isolation, took its toll on him.” As for Debord himself: ten years previously, on 25 June 1980, he’d written to Gérard Lebovici, Champ Libre’s editor-in-chief: “I agree with you that the book by the musicologist [Pagnon] is publishable. The preface is good and pleasant, although a bit naïve. The technical side absolutely escapes me, but you surely comprehend it perfectly. I do not at all agree that [Erik] Satie is an ‘obvious mediocrity’ and, at the same time, I find the author to be too indulgent towards several other modern composers. Although I cannot stand his music (and yet I prefer it to the music of the Nietzschean Bizet), Wagner is a good example, because he sought a total art. In this sense, I hope that Francis Pagnon will have accorded more importance to his [Wagner’s] liaison with [King] Louis II of Bavaria, the most charming of the crazy architects.” But Debord did not like Pagnon’s second book: cf. his letter to Floriana Lebovici dated 20 November 1984 (<http://www.notbored.org/debord-20November1984.html>).

state, modern mass[-produced] music satisfies the need for annihilation and is only the hallucinatory submission to the violence inflicted by a society whose maintenance is only possible through coercion extended to all aspects of life.

Pagnon's book gives an historical perspective on the contradictions of music in contemporary class society. The subtitle of the book, "music as lie and as truth," refers to the lie that is mass[-produced] music and to the revolutionary truth expressed by great music, which the author considers to be the only real form of music, notably that [composed] by Monteverdi, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Debussy and, of course, Wagner. For the author, Wagnerian music condemns capitalist society in which history is rendered impossible by a form of production that is enslaved to a perpetual cycle of exchange-value. Combat against this market vacuity develops beyond music, which becomes false when it denies the necessity of this combat by posing an aesthetic ideal in which the horrors of the world are offset.

In its ultimate essence, Wagner's music refuses this false role: it unreservedly confronts its enemy, that is to say, the musical tradition that is alienated from a social state of affairs that only exists through the crushing and irrational suffering of the subject. Wagner's hatred of bourgeois society and its culture is part of his compositions. His music is a music of destruction: it reveals the chaos on which civilized barbarity is founded and calls for the destruction of an abhorred world.

Wagnerian music breaks the circle of non-life with the violence of a potential life that it demands to see become real. All of its grandeur incites the listener to the surpassing of music, to its realization. At the moment at which market society is crumbling, art reveals its critical content, which had always been its truth in itself, rendered clear by the movement of history. The privilege of this crepuscular epoch is that it divulged the enigma of ancient art. Wagner's music can, finally, show what it wants and to what it is dedicated.