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Musical and Theatrical Declamation in Richard Wagner's Works and a Toolbox for Vocal Music Analysis

1. Introduction

Every culture in the world has or did have some form of elevated speaking which sometimes can be described as singing, sometimes as recitation.¹ The transitions between everyday speech and elevated ways of transmitting a text differ from place to place² and from time to time. The latter makes them an object for the music historian because not only the techniques of singing but also those of speaking have changed over time. Historical recordings show these differences that can be enormous in comparison to modern standards. The older the sound documents are, the more strange they appear to the ear of a twenty-first-century listener. And there is one more aspect which is crucial for all evaluations and analyses of vocal music: speaking and singing correlate; that is, the music – no matter whether art, popular or folk music – is to some extent always shaped by the rules of speech.

Given this fundamental fact and the great number of research publications about vocal music that has been produced during the last centuries, it is astounding to find that there is no music analysis that addresses this fact in a systematic way; there is no type of analysis that allows the researcher to establish the various connections between spoken and sung language comprehensively, let alone to investigate the exact musical parameters relevant for how speech influences music. What I am aiming at, is the very sound of spoken language and the way it is transferred into, transposed to, kept in and contradicted by – in the Hegelian sense, sublated – the setting to music. In this essay, I would like to present an analytical model that allows the researcher to do exactly this; to establish precisely how the influence of speech on music is made

1 “[...] it seems to be a fact that all societies, including those that use a term like ‘music’ or seem to have a unified conception of it, as well as those that do not, have a type or kind of stylized vocal expression that is distinguished from ordinary speech. Most commonly it is something readily called or associated with singing, but ‘chanting’, elevated speech, stylized utterances consisting of vocables, screaming, howling, weeping, or keening may all be included.” (Bruno Nettl, article “Music” in *New Grove Online*. Accessed January 31, 2016).

2 For instance, Koran recitation may sound in the ears of a Westerner rather like singing.

manifest. This model has been developed for analysing a certain sort of music from a certain historical epoch. Its methods derive from those contemporary descriptions and textbooks about the rules of recitation and declamation that can be verified when analysing music written down in the Western notational system. Besides such musicological research, research from the area of (historical) speech science will also be considered for developing analytical tools for investigating this specific style. Nonetheless, some of these methods may be relevant for other musical styles and forms as well. For that reason, the generality or language specificity respectively of each method will be indicated briefly where it is opportune.

2. *The task: Analysing nineteenth-century declamation*

The chosen object is the music of Richard Wagner (1813–1883) whose soloist vocal parts are said to be very close to spoken language. In early musicology, the term *Sprechgesang* was established to express the proximity of his vocal lines to the sound of speech.³ What can not be explained extensively in this context but only mentioned, is that it was not everyday speech but the artistically elevated speech of early nineteenth-century actors that influenced him. More exactly, it was the declamatory style that he experienced during his childhood and youth in 1820s and 1830s Dresden and Leipzig and that also became his own.⁴ This circumstance has disadvantages and advantages for the researcher. First, there is no recording of an early nineteenth-century actor preserved,⁵ and one has to accept the fact that this practice of reciting and declamation has gone forever and can only be partially reconstructed. This is a clear disadvantage. Second, the advantage in this particular historical context is, that many books and articles were written during this time which tried to give a systematic or analytical overview about the practice of declamation and recitation that was in use. One famous example is Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia or a treatise on rhetorical delivery* that was published 1806. In it, he tried to develop a notational and graphical system for describing declamatory accents and gestures. It was translated into German some years later⁶ and shows many similarities with German declamation books from this period.⁷ Because

3 Cf. among many others Guido Adler, *Richard Wagner. Vorlesungen gehalten an der Universität zu Wien* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1904), 222–223 and August Halm, *Von Grenzen und Ländern der Musik. Gesammelte Aufsätze* 2nd edn. (Munich: G. Müller, 1916), 37–38.

4 Besides my dissertation (Martin Knust, *Sprachvertonung und Gestik in den Werken Richard Wagners. Einflüsse zeitgenössischer Rezitations- und Deklamationspraxis* [Berlin: Frank & Timme Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur, 2007], 524 pages printed + 308 pages on CD-ROM with separate paginations), I have depicted this theatrical background in my book *Richard Wagner. Ein Leben für die Bühne* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2013), 13–29.

5 The earliest recordings of speech we have are from actors who were active in the second half of the nineteenth century, for instance this recording of Sir Henry Irving (1838–1905). Accessed August 24, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Z4gXiNKR4s&feature=youtu.be>.

6 Gilbert Austin: *Die Kunst der rednerischen und theatralischen Declamation nach ältern und neuern Grundsätzen über die Stimme, den Gesichtsausdruck und die Gesticulation*, trans. Chr. Friedr. Michaelis, Leipzig 1818, Reprint (Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 1969).

7 For instance, Johann Jakob Engel, *Ideen zu einer Mimik* (Berlin: Mylius, 1804).

declamation was part of the high school education in Germany at that time, quite a number of textbooks about recitation and declamation were published in the early nineteenth century.⁸ This is a clear advantage to the researcher because it enables the comparison of theories and textbooks about the spoken word with the composed vocal music of the time in order to prove or falsify that these theories and rules were followed in reality.

The following analysis derives from the rules and customs that are reported in contemporary textbooks, theoretical texts and other descriptions about spoken language. I have extracted eighteen different aspects from them that constitute a comprehensive group of methods for musical analysis. They will be presented extensively in section 4.

3. *The object: Wagner's solo parts and their sources*

Richard Wagner finished thirteen operas. The last ten of them constitute the main body of his oeuvre. Here is a list of all works and fragments investigated in this essay including the time frame of their genesis, that is, the time from the first sketch of the action to the finished score:

1. *Die Hochzeit* (fragment) WWV 31 (1832/33)
2. *Die Feen* WWV 32 (1833/34)
3. *Das Liebesverbot oder Die Novize von Palermo* WWV 38 (1834–36)
4. *Rienzi, der Letzte der Tribunen* WWV 49 (1838–40)
5. *Der fliegende Holländer* WWV 63 (1840/41)
6. *Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg* WWV 70, state 1 and 2 (1843–45)
7. *Lohengrin* WWV 75 (1845–48)
8. *Siegfried's Tod* (fragment) (1848–50)
9. *Das Rheingold* WWV 86 A (1852–54)
10. *Die Walküre* WWV 86 B (1852–56)
11. *Siegfried* WWV 86 C (1850–1869)
12. *Tristan und Isolde* WWV 90 (1857–59)
13. *Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg* WWV 70, state 3 and 4 (1860/61; 1867; 1869; 1875)
14. *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* WWV 96 (1845–67)
15. *Götterdämmerung* WWV 86 D (1848–74)
16. *Parsifal* WWV 111 (1857; 1877–1882)

He and his contemporaries report that he employed the recitation of the libretti – which he without exception always wrote himself – in his creative process. This means, he recited his libretti during the time when he was writing and when he was about to compose them. Moreover, he advised his singers to recite his texts before starting to sing them; a practice that he used himself when rehearsing individually

8 Heinrich August Kerndörffer published several books about declamation, among others his two-volume *Handbuch der Declamation. Ein Leitfaden für Schulen und für den Selbstunterricht zur Bildung eines guten rednerischen Vortrags* (Leipzig: Fleischer, 1813).

with the singers of his works as the voice instructor Julius Hey (1832–1909) reports.⁹ This raises the question: whether, and to what extent, he shaped his solo vocal lines according to the model of spoken language. To answer this question exhaustively, I have evaluated all vocal soloist parts in the printed scores of all Wagner operas. Additionally, I have also evaluated all sketches and music fragments of his dramatic pieces since the recitation and declamation seems to have played an important role in the genesis of his works. What emerged as a rule in the analysis of his composing strategy is that the vocal lines were fixed in their definite form in the so-called first drafts – early in the composition process – while the instrumental part of the scores often was not fixed until the second drafts or even later in the composition process. In other words, the first drafts show the vocal lines as they appear in the printed score and thus the musical declamation was clearly his main concern during the first steps of composition. This corroborates the thesis that the recitation had a strong impact on his music because – as I have shown elsewhere¹⁰ – those passages that were especially close to the sound of spoken language were easy for him to sketch in one go despite their considerable diastematic and rhythmic irregularities.

But which musical parameters were affected by this influence and how did it happen exactly? Which composition techniques did Wagner employ to achieve a musical declamation that resembled theatrical declamation so much that listeners grasped this similarity intuitively and immediately?¹¹ Below I will present these techniques by first describing the analytical methods deriving from the contemporary rules for declamation and then summarizing my findings in the Wagnerian oeuvre.

4. *The analytical toolbox and the results*

In this section, eighteen different methods will be presented. Some of them consist of several sub-methods and point b) has most sub-methods of all. There is no hierarchy or other ranking implied by the order the methods are presented in. In some cases, certain methods may overlap – though only partially and occasionally – even though it has been of utmost importance to avoid such overlapping and redundancies when designing this analytical checklist. Each subsection has two parts: in the first part, the objective and validity of the method are presented plus some hypothetical remarks on what the outcome of the analysis might be. In the second part, the actual results of the analysis are presented. In the next section, no. 5, a summary overview about the results will be given.

9 Hans Hey, ed., *Richard Wagner als Vortragsmeister 1864–1876. Erinnerungen von Julius Hey* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1911), 119 and 130. Hey developed a method for teaching singing from Wagner's way of rehearsing his vocal solo parts: the three-volume *Deutscher Gesangs-Unterricht. Lehrbuch des Sprachlichen und Gesanglichen Vortrags* (Schott: Mainz, 1885).

10 Martin Knust, "Music, Drama, and Sprechgesang. About Richard Wagner's Creative Process," *19th-century Music* 38 (2015) no. 3, 219–242.

11 Knust 2007, 50–64, 305–319.

a) Melismatic and syllabic declamation

Everybody who wrote about musical declamation – including Wagner¹² – postulated a dissimilarity between melismatic musical declamation, which demands emphatic singing, and the rather volatile sound of spoken language.¹³ Melismas, as they manifest in their most extreme form in the coloratura, make it difficult or even impossible for the listener to understand the text. Spoken language never consists of long melismas. In spoken German, a syllable can only be pronounced with maximum two distinct tones in moments of great emotional affection. For instance, a penetrating questioning word can be spoken with a glissando upwards. This gives the word a very strong accent and emphasis. In other words, if a composer wants to write vocal lines close to the model of spoken German language, then syllabic composition should be preferred over the use of melismas.

And this is exactly what Wagner did throughout his career as a dramatic composer. In his works composed after *Rienzi*, there are only very occasional long melismas and even before *Rienzi* he used them rarely; in *Die Feen*, melismas had marked intensification of the dramatic tension and most coloraturas appeared in his second opera, *Das Liebesverbot*. Coloraturas were used in his first three finished operas and the fragment of *Die Hochzeit*. He stopped using them after *Tannhäuser* with the exception of *Die Meistersinger*. Ornaments like the trill or the turn occur in his early operas but their use is gradually reduced. In *Lohengrin*, the musical declamation is basically syllabic and in *Rheingold* even almost exclusively syllabic. After *Lohengrin*, embellishments typical for opera singing occur only sporadically or even not at all (as in *Parsifal*). In *Tristan* and *Meistersinger*, Wagner resuscitates melismatic singing within certain limitations and returns to a strict syllabic declamation in the last four *Ring* acts. Two-tone melismas, which imitate certain means of spoken language as described above, can be found in all his works. Generally, however, Wagner's musical declamation is mostly syllabic.

b) Diastematic, rhythmic and accentual similarities to spoken language

Spoken language is a complex acoustical phenomenon. There are many rules about the correct pronunciation of German language in rhythmic and diastematic respects. Some of these rules, which are relevant for the musical shaping of a sung text, are listed below. Accents are likewise important and serve different functions as will be shown. This part of the analysis may be the most language-specific because the rules for accentuation and the distinction between short and long syllables are generally different in Indo-European languages from, for instance, tonal or agglutinative languages.

Spoken German normally moves diastematically in rather small intervals, which in the Western system of tonality are imitated best by choosing unisons, seconds or thirds. To make them appear less distinct, chromaticism can be applied. This will be

12 Richard Wagner, "Bericht über eine neue Pariser Oper," in Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen* (GSD) 1, 4th edn. (Leipzig: C.F.W. Siegel's Musikalienhandlung [K. Linnemann], 1907), 255.

13 In Ancient Greece, Aristophanes made fun of Euripides' use of coloraturas and even such compositional authorities like Mozart were criticized for employing them, for instance, by Hector Berlioz (quoted in: Bernhard Zimmermann, *Die griechische Komödie* [Heidelberg: Verlag Antike e.K., 2006], 49–50).

investigated in another step of the analysis (see j). Especially in everyday speech, the intervals will remain narrow. The theatrical delivery, however, was much more expressive in the German-speaking areas during the nineteenth century than it is today,¹⁴ and even larger intervals can thus be expected in passages of increased dramatic tension. In the early nineteenth century, German theorists wrote that the declamation of poetry should approach the sound of recitative singing, which for its part was understood as located in the middle between lyrical declamation and emphatic singing.¹⁵ Generally, any kind of a central tone is lacking in spoken German, as it would make the speaking sound mechanical. The speech melody moves freely up and down and will never arrive on the same tone where it started. It is prosaic and does thus not comprise any fixed rhythmic or melodic patterns. Motivic or thematic repetitions in the vocal melodies are, as Adorno has already postulated,¹⁶ not per se speech-like. Like melismas, long tones on one constant frequency are also non-existent in spoken German. Instead, a relatively – that is, relative to the chosen tempo – short rhythmic basic unit like a quaver or an even shorter unit gives the vocal melody one important characteristic of the speech melody.

The rules of vocal delivery affect the intervals of the voice melody on different linguistic levels. On the phonetic level, a certain group of words ends on a short, non-accentuated final syllable with the reduced vowel “-e-”,¹⁷ words like “gehen”, “erste”, “Schauer”. In those words the voice melody has to sink on the final syllables. They were never spoken sonorously in nineteenth-century German theatre either.¹⁸ On the syntactic level, in spoken German one class of questions is always pronounced in the same manner: if a ‘real’ – as opposed to a rhetorical – question is posed, the speech melody rises at the end of the sentence. Nineteenth-century textbooks about declamation demand another voice melody for the delivery of rhetorical questions. In this case, the sentence had to sound like a declarative sentence, not like a ‘real’ question.¹⁹

Among the accents, theoreticians in the nineteenth century distinguished two fundamentally different kinds that are relevant to musical declamation. In each single word, the root syllable has an accent and in each sentence one word has an accent that determines the expression and content of the sentence on a logical level. The first was

14 Audio documents that prove the employment of large intervals are, among many others, Josef Kainz’s and Alexander Moissi’s declamation recordings of Hamlet’s monologue from the beginning of the 20th century.

15 Hermann Heimart Cludius, *Abriß der Vortragskunst* (Hildesheim, 1810), 93 quoted in Irmgard Weithase, *Anschauungen über das Wesen der Sprechkunst von 1775–1825* (diss.) (Berlin: Ebering, 1930), 69; Johann Karl Wötzel, *Grundriß eines allgemeinen und faßlichen Lehrgebäudes oder Systems der Declamation nach Schocher’s Ideen für Dichter, Vorleser, Declamatoren, Redner, Lehrer und Kunstschauspieler aller Art, für deren Zuhörer und Zuschauer zur richtigen Würdigung der Ersteren* (Vienna: Stöckholzer von Hirschfeld, 1814), 637–638.

16 Theodor W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner* (Munich/Zurich: Droemer Knauer, 1964), 109.

17 It is transcribed “ə” according to the International Phonetic Alphabet.

18 Irmgard Weithase, *Goethe als Sprecher und Sprecherzieher* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1949), 77.

19 Wilhelm Kienzl presumed that Wagner had distinguished between rhetorical and real questions in his works according to the model of spoken language (Wilhelm Kienzl, *Die musikalische Declamation dargestellt an der Hand der Entwicklungsgeschichte des deutschen Gesanges* [diss.] [Leipzig: Heinrich Matthes, 1880], 122).

often called "word accent", the second "logical accent".²⁰ In Western music, the measure is a repetitive combined rhythmic and accentual pattern in which the words to be sung have to correspond to its accentuation order. Additionally, the composer can use accent marks when the measure's accent pattern is not sufficient for imitating the accent structure of a word or a sentence. Another way to accentuate a syllable is a rhythmic irregularity like syncopation or rhythmic extension of a certain syllable or the use of a significantly higher pitch.

All these rules, when followed in composition, constitute what is described by the term *Sprechgesang*. Finally, writers on Wagner's music maintained that he succeeded in characterizing his figures via the musical declamation.²¹

Concerning the *Sprechgesang*, Wagner's oeuvre can be divided into four periods. During the first period, which embraces his first three finished operas, the musical declamation followed respectively the models of the German Romantic opera (*Die Feen*), the Italian and French comic opera (*Das Liebesverbot*) and the French Grand opera (*Rienzi*). In them, the diastematic structures show no *Sprechgesang* yet. For instance, the vocal lines of *Die Feen* consists of strictly diatonic material. In the second period, which embraces *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and *Das Rheingold*, the *Sprechgesang* was invented and employed more and more extensively within each work. In *Holländer* and *Tannhäuser*, Wagner used the *Sprechgesang* in two dramatically important monologues – the first monologue of the Dutchman and the Rome narration of *Tannhäuser* – while the other parts of the opera remained free from it. In *Lohengrin*, the *Sprechgesang* conquers the whole opera and this took some effort from Wagner. The musical declamation in the first draft is different from the definitive version in the score and the sketch shows many amendments, changes and revisions of the vocal lines. All these changes made the vocal lines more speech-like.²² One can state that Wagner in *Lohengrin* successfully trained himself in writing music in this way. After *Lohengrin*, the composition of *Sprechgesang* passages was obviously easy for him. The sketches no longer give any hint about difficulties with this way of musical declamation. On the contrary, Wagner was now able to outline long passages of *Sprechgesang* in one brushstroke as, for instance, the sketches of *Das Rheingold* prove.²³ In *Das Rheingold*, the *Sprechgesang* becomes completely dominant and this is the work that contains the largest quantity of it. After *Das Rheingold*, in period three, Wagner reduced the amount of *Sprechgesang* gradually through *Die Walküre* and the first two acts of *Siegfried*. In *Tristan und Isolde*, he used it only occasionally, and abandoned it in *Die Meistersinger*, but, even here, he maintained and even addressed the issue of correct accentuation in the dialogue of Sachs and Beckmesser in the second

20 Heinrich Theodor Rötcher, *Die Kunst der dramatischen Darstellung* (Berlin: Wilhelm Thome, 1841), 56 and 170; already Sulzer had distinguished between "grammatical" and "oratorical" accent in the same way (Johann Georg Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste* 1 (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1771–1774), 9–10, 76–77).

21 For instance, Adler, 222.

22 Knust 2007, CD-ROM, 67–91.

23 Knust 2015, 229–232.

act. During the third period, this compositional method collided with another one, namely, the increasing use of themes and motifs in the vocal lines. This process started with the composition of the first acts of *Siegfried* and resulted in a method conflict that becomes evident in *Die Meistersinger* and also in the third act of *Siegfried* and the *Götterdämmerung* score. In these three works, motifs and themes are abundant in both the vocal lines and the instrumental parts and leave almost no space for another way of composing even though Wagner tried to restore the *Sprechgesang* in the last four acts of the *Ring*. Here, he used other parameters – prosody and voice register – to make the musical declamation appear more speech-like than in *Meistersinger*. These last four *Ring* acts and Wagner's last work *Parsifal* mark the fourth and final period in his oeuvre and can be seen as a rehabilitation phase of the *Sprechgesang*, where he tried to achieve a synthesis of thematically and declamatory generated structures in the vocal parts.

So far, this overview describes changes in Wagner's compositional strategy. But there are also constants, namely the meticulously coordinated word and measure accentuation, the consequent avoiding of melodic or rhythmic accents on syllables with the reduced vowel -e- and the distinction between the vocal declamation of real and rhetorical questions in accordance to contemporary declamation practice as described above, a rule which he observed in all his works from the very beginning of his career. Wagner reduced 'operatic' long and high tones for the soloists immensely after having used such tones frequently in his first opera, *Die Feen*. With the exception of diegetically sung passages – passages in which singing is part of the narrative (see q) –, in his musical declamation no central tone becomes manifest. Rather, the declamation is strictly prosaic and diachronic in all instances.

Works that contain *Sprechgesang* show different levels of it; that is, a musical declamation shifting between speech and emphatic – or 'operatic' – singing is to be found. The dramatic tension affects the range of the intervals and the duration of the notes to be sung; the more excited, upset or forceful a character gets, the wider the intervals become and the greater the variety of tone durations. Alternatively, Wagner employs long tones and high pitches to characterize a figure as vigorous, heroic or powerful. This is another constant in his composition: the more *Sprechgesang* a vocal part contains, the more likely this character is meant to be an intriguer. It is figures like Alberich, Mime, Loge, Telramund, Ortrud, Hagen and Klingsor who sing hardly any emphatic passages but sing almost exclusively *Sprechgesang*. This applies also to Kundry with the exception of her long dialogue with Parsifal in the second act. She is perhaps not to be defined appropriately as an intriguer but at least she is not an entirely positive character. In other words, Wagner has actually used his *Sprechgesang* and the vocal declamation for the creation of individual characters.

c) Prosody

The term 'prosody' (in German: "Prosodie" or "Prosodik") was, in the nineteenth century aiming at the relation between short and long syllables in spoken language,²⁴ the rhythmic proportions of the words so to speak. Correct prosody, together with correct

24 Kienzl, 35, 159–161.

accentuation, is important for making the words acoustically understandable in spoken German.²⁵ It is difficult to determine a certain, fixed rhythmic ratio between short and long syllables and any theoretician or practitioner who tried to give such a ratio was criticized for creating an unnatural way of speaking. Among them was Goethe who maintained that long syllables should be spoken schematically longer than short syllables. According to his contemporaries, this rule led to monotony in recitation and declamation.²⁶ The reason why the prosody was of special interest for him and other poets is that German verse composition since the end of the eighteenth century had tried to imitate the rhythmic models of Roman and particularly Ancient Greek verse metres; Ancient Greek, however, was a quantifying language while German, as an accenting language, is not. To maintain a certain proximity to the sound of spoken language in musical declamation thus means to avoid a schematic division of rhythmic values as this would create the above-mentioned mechanical effect. Instead, changes in the tempo of speaking may occur which means that variations of the basic rhythmic units have to be taken into consideration when analysing musical declamation. That means an analysis of the prosody is more likely to be an analysis of the rhythmic proportion between neighbouring tones than a list of rhythmic quantities applied to a certain piece of music. To keep this part of the analysis manageable, only one class of short syllables in spoken German will be investigated. It is the prefixes and suffixes with the reduced vowel -e- (see b) above for this vowel's characteristics). Such syllables are, among others, in the prefixes of German participles like "gesagt" and "getan" or part of the final syllables of infinitives like "geben" and "nehmen". They are never accentuated and will henceforth be referred to as '-e-syllables'.

In his early operas Wagner, had ignored the prosody of spoken German or had at least shown indifference towards it. For instance, some passages in *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot* consist of long sequences of rhythmically identical notes or chains of schematically dotted ones. The rhythm of the vocal lines is quite inflexible in his first three operas. Like in many other respects, the monologue of the Dutchman opens a new chapter in his way of composing verses. Here, for the first time, relatively long notes bring out all accents – both logical and word accents – and long syllables as well. The remaining part of the opera is set to music in a manner that is prosodically indifferent, as in his earlier operas. After *Holländer*, while he sometimes wrote more prosodically indifferent passages, it was only extremely rarely that he broke the rules of spoken language prosody. He observed this principle of musical declamation most often in all dialogues of *Tannhäuser* and meticulously in *Lohengrin*, the sketches to *Siegfried's Tod*, *Rheingold*, *Walküre*, *Siegfried* act 1 and 2 as well as in *Tristan*. Again, *Meistersinger* is an exception because, here, other compositional principles also became important while Wagner clearly reinstalled the rules of prosody in the last four acts of the *Ring* – with the exception of some emphatically sung passages – and particularly in *Parsifal*. After *Tannhäuser*, Wagner

25 In other languages like Finnish, Estonian or Hungarian, the duration of the syllables is even semantically important.

26 Weithase 1949, 120–122.

changes the basic unit for a long syllable often from one measure to the next and he was very inventive in finding new ways of accentuating or not accentuating syllables by, for instance, employing accent marks or syncopations. His method for creating correct prosody according to the model of spoken German became increasingly advanced as his compositional repertoire of possibilities for imitating the rhythmic proportions of spoken language became larger. To verify this, the investigation of the musical declamation of the -e-syllables has proven to be a good indicator; for instance, in the analysis of *Lohengrin*, where Wagner did not put a relatively long note on a single one of these syllables and consequently avoided setting them on the downbeat. In *Rheingold*, the musical declamation becomes rhythmically more flexible by frequently changing the meter (see o) below) and often inserting triplets into the vocal lines. By doing so, Wagner achieves a quasi-naturalistic flow in the speech rhythm. An examination of the verses that he set to music twice within a twenty-year interval in *Siegfried's Tod* and *Götterdämmerung* shows the same proportions between long and short syllables and the greater rhythmic flexibility of the latter work. It does not matter whether one analyses a monologue or a dialogue, a quick or an extremely stretched passage like Brangäne's Watch Song: Wagner did not employ incorrect proportions after *Der fliegende Holländer* and remained faithful to this way of rhythmically shaping the musical declamation until his last work (with the exception of *Meistersinger* where some precarious rhythmic proportions occur). The rhythmic organisation of his musical declamation according to the prosody of spoken German is *the* main principle of his vocal composing.

d) The use of rests

Theoreticians in the nineteenth century conceded two functions of pauses in declamation: those creating interrupted speech in order to present the character as excited, breathless, suffering or the like; and those that were to correlate with the punctuation of the written text. Goethe gave an overview about the latter class of pauses, requiring from his actors that a comma should be provided with a shorter pause than a colon or semicolon and these with a shorter pause than a full stop when reciting or declaiming.²⁷ Wagner coined the rule in *Über das Opern-Dichten und Komponieren* (1879) that a parenthesis should be always marked with a rest at the beginning and the end and that the pitch of the words in the parenthesis should be lower than in the remaining part of the sentence.²⁸

When analysing Wagner's musical declamation, these two classes of rests can be easily distinguished. He used rests according to the Baroque musical rhetoric tradition of the *suspiratio*; for instance, in Tristan's part in act 3 of *Tristan* the rests indicate his physical weakness. The second class of rests, those related to punctuation, can be divided into two different types in his works. First, Wagner applies rests at the end of each verse and thus also at the end of each sentence. Second, he also set punctuations like dashes or exclamation marks to music that give hints for the declamatory realisation of a verse.

27 Weithase 1949, 121.

28 GSD 10, 58

And there is one more class of rests that might be called technical rests as their main task is to support the singer's vocal delivery. Wagner employs such rests in order to facilitate the articulation of the text. They give the singer a chance to breathe or to pronounce a consonant or several consonants sharply. Additionally, such technical rests can even help to make the prosodic structure of a phrase clearer when bolstering the differences between long and short syllables. From the beginning of his career, Wagner observed the first three types, *viz.* declamation-, punctuation- and articulation-related rests. The last type mentioned – rests that make the prosody more clear – can be found in his scores after *Tannhäuser*. The punctuation-related type includes rests that appear at parentheses – he also provided the parentheses with a lower pitch occasionally after *Das Liebesverbot* and consequently after *Tannhäuser* – and appositions. Such rests can even – like in the case of Loge's part in the second *Rheingold* scene – evoke or give space for gestures.²⁹ Finally, rests can even serve several of these functions at once; for instance, when helping the singer to articulate clearly while also being declamatory rests and related to punctuation marks. The differentiated and sophisticated use of rests in the vocal lines became an important device in Wagner's last work for creating speech-like melodies.

e) Permanent tempo modifications

Spoken German language never keeps a constant tempo over a longer period of time. In section c), I have already mentioned that Wagner changed the basic units of his musical declamation continuously, in other words, he did "auskomponieren" tempo modifications and agogics. In this section, it is only the verbal tempo descriptions in his scores that will be examined; they are normally in German and they are numerous.

Wagner was, throughout his career, extremely fussy with the choice of the appropriate tempo. It was the central issue for him when judging the delivery of conductors and pianists. He wrote an essay as a young man in which he proclaimed the tempo to be the life-giving pulse of a musical piece³⁰ and was always very critical of conductors of his works in this respect. He even went so far as to declare that no conductor in the world was able to find the right tempi for his music.³¹ From his first opera, he used very detailed and exact verbal tempo directions in his scores. There are fewer tempo modifications in his comical operas *Das Liebesverbot* and *Meistersinger* and, after an increasing number of modifications in his operas composed after *Tannhäuser*, he reduced somewhat the number of verbal directions in the scores. It is apparent that those verbal directions served the ends of making the musical declamation appear more close to the model of spoken language; Wagner disliked the static tempo of the Weimar actors and preferred a flexible tempo that was supposed to follow the increasing and decreasing emotional tensions of the text.³² The fact that he reduced

29 Knust 2007, CD-ROM, 112–113.

30 Richard Wagner, "Pasticcio" (1834) in GSD 12, 8–10.

31 Cosima Wagner reports that the 65-year old Wagner became desperate about it: "Nicht einen Mensch hinterlasse ich, der mein Tempo kennt!" (Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, eds., *Cosima Wagner: Die Tagebücher. Band II: 1878–1883* [Munich: Piper, 1977], 236).

32 Knust 2007, 90–91.

such verbal descriptions after *Rheingold* does, however, not mean that his vocal lines became more static in tempo. As already mentioned (see c) above), Wagner acquired more and more competence in *composing* tempo modifications in his vocal lines after *Tannhäuser* and this made verbal instructions for the delivery superfluous in some instances. His steadily enhanced virtuosity in composing tempo modifications can be traced in the sketches and, after *Lohengrin*, it took him no effort to outline even complex changes in the declamation tempo.

f) The characterization of physical constitutions

Characterization of different figures was a key feature of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century declamation in Germany; this explains the popularity of the declamation of ballads in public and in school which contained direct speech of various characters like Goethe's *Erlkönig* or Bürger's *Lenore*. It was also employed when reciting dramas in what became a performing art form on its own at that time³³ as well as Wagner's favourite hobby.³⁴ In the last two *Ring* dramas he used the tempo for characterizing his figures in a way that distinguishes the music of these dramas from the remaining part of his oeuvre. In these and his other dramas he employed, in addition to rests, dynamics and so on, voice-typical parameters to give characterizations in portraying a figure's physical constitution via voice range and voice register. These physical constitutions were designed musically according to the model of actor's speeches on stage. During the rehearsals for the *Parsifal* world première in 1882, Wagner explained to his singers that the part of Amfortas illustrates the poor health of this figure musically because it lacks loud, high and long notes.³⁵ Given this statement, another remark of Wagner in *Oper und Drama* appears to outline rules for the musical declamation: the composer should be aware that he depicts physical movements and constitutions when writing his vocal parts. According to Wagner, certain tone combinations generate automatically certain gestures on the part of the musician.³⁶ This argument can be proven when studying the highest tones in a vocal part as the nexus between the production of a high tone and the body language of a singer is evident; every singer will take an upright and tensed body posture when singing a very high tone. Otherwise, the singer risks producing an ugly tone or, in the worst case, damage to his or her voice.

33 Among these professional drama reciters was Wagner's Riga boss Karl von Holtei; cf. Martin Knust, "Richard Wagner und Karl von Holtei. Eine Rekonstruktion ihrer gemeinsamen Rigaer Zeit von 1837 bis 1839" in Kristel Pappel, Toomas Siitan and Anu Sööru, eds., *Musikleben des 19. Jahrhunderts im nördlichen Europa. Strukturen und Prozesse / 19th-Century Musical Life in Northern Europe. Structures and Processes* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2010), 111–134.

34 Knust 2007, 229–232, 235–242.

35 Heinrich Porges reports one remark of Wagner concerning measure 970 in the third act: "A. hat keine große Kraft mehr, daher die kurzen Noten in der Höhe." (transcribed in Rüdiger Pohl, ed., *Das Orchester muß wie die unsichtbare Seele sein: Richard Wagners Bemerkungen zum Parsifal, aufgezeichnet während der Proben und Aufführungen 1882 von H. Porges* [Berlin: Deutsche Richard-Wagner-Gesellschaft, 2002], 71).

36 Richard Wagner, "Oper und Drama," in *GSD* 4, 218 or in the critical edition Klaus Kropfinger, ed., *Richard Wagner: Oper und Drama* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), 380.

Wagner thus depicts physical weakness and fatigue via his musical declamation. He does so already in his first opera, not in his second and third, and then again from his fourth opera and further forward. Especially realistic are his depictions of wounded figures like the dying Tristan and Siegfried or the suffering of Amfortas. Rests often interrupt their vocal lines; the voice register remains low and the voice range narrow. None of these figures will sing long, coherent phrases or phrases that rise into the highest register. Again, *Die Meistersinger* prove to be an exception.

g) Dynamic shape

On the German-speaking theatre stage of the early nineteenth century, actors might have employed dynamics in the way actors did around the turn of the century. That means, they made use of extremely strong dynamic contrasts when imitating whisper, mutter, shout or scream as early recordings prove. In nineteenth-century music, composers marked dynamic nuances in their scores and did so with more and more exactness. Parallels to the dynamics of spoken language, if extant, can thus be easily established.

It was perhaps the biggest surprise of my examination when I found that Wagner hardly uses any dynamic signs in the vocal parts³⁷ while he used them extensively in the instrumental parts from the beginning of his career. There are few exceptions, for instance Elsa's "Einsam in trüben Tagen" that is designed to be very onomatopoeic concerning the dynamic hints given in the text; this so called Dream Narration is no *Sprechgesang*, however, and it marks the peak of Wagner's detailed instructions for the vocal dynamics. How can the absence of dynamic signs in Wagner's vocal parts be interpreted? One can probably explain it as a pragmatic way of handling a particular issue: the singer simply has to follow the dynamic level as it is established by the orchestra which means that he or she gets Wagner's dynamic directions indirectly. Alternatively, one can see in this fact the proof for Wagner's statement that the sound of the human voice differs fundamentally from the sound of instruments, something he blamed for errors in his way of sketching music.³⁸ In any event, the dynamics of Wagner's orchestra has a wide range, varies permanently and it takes little effort to find passages where the text has influenced the shape of the overall dynamics. Wagner recited his libretti many times before he set them to music, and one may regard the dynamic levels as enhancements of the declamatory realisation of his texts. Generally, vocal and instrumental dynamics go in parallel. Parallels between the dynamics of spoken language and Wagner's vocal declamation can be established for his Romantic operas – *Feen*, *Holländer*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* – but not for *Liebesverbot* and *Rienzi*. Among his mature works, only *Meistersinger* has a relatively inflexible dynamic shape and different dynamic levels of speaking are imitated only occasionally.

37 Most of them can be found in the *Tannhäuser* score.

38 Letter written May 4 1872 to Carl Riedel (Erich Kloss, ed., *Richard Wagner an seine Künstler. 2. Band der 'Bayreuther Briefe'*, 3rd edn. [Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1912], 19).

h) Modifications of the voice sound

Something that stands out with Wagner's vocal lines is his various and characteristic verbal instructions for the voice sound. They are not in Italian and refer rarely to singing technique. Instead, he used numerous attributes like "screaming", "howling", "shrill", "hoarse" or the like which one would rather expect to occur in a spoken drama. The singing teacher Julius Hey remarked that Wagner regarded such modifications based on the model of spoken language as the singer's "most important device to express moods".³⁹ This is a striking feature that may place the realisation of his vocal parts somewhere between singing and declaiming.

Wagner employed such declamatory voice modifications in all his operas. For instance, already in *Die Feen* directions like "with suffocated voice", "almost speaking", "as if waking up" can be found. They increase substantially in number in *Holländer* and their variety becomes larger after *Tannhäuser*. In *Meistersinger* and the four last acts of the *Ring*, they do not occur as often as in his previous works. Instead, here he uses some directions exclusively aimed at the singing technique; something he did on only very few occasions in his oeuvre. In *Parsifal*, he provides the singer again with many characteristic directions for the vocal delivery. It is a fact that the verbal directions in his scores corresponded to the theatrical reality of Wagner's time. He was eager to give his singers additional instructions in the same manner and contemporary listeners reported that he tried to establish a way of singing that was located and shifting between belcanto singing and melodramatic speech.⁴⁰

i) Redundancy of text, melody and gesture

Nineteenth-century actors coordinated gesture and word expression synchronously. Often, gestures and facial expressions expressed the text content by imitation in a redundant manner. For instance, a word like "high" was stereotypically expressed by lifting the arms or a word like "heaven" by looking upwards.⁴¹ Words like "zart" (soft, tender) or "scharf" (sharp, harsh) that could be characterized through voice modifications were spoken onomatopoeically, that is, the gestures corresponded also to the sound of the actor's voice.⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche and Pierre Boulez maintained that linear redundancy between text, melody and gesture is an important feature of Wagner's dramas.⁴³ Can such a parallelisation between gesture and the shape of the vocal melodies be established analytically?

39 Hey 1911, 33–34.

40 Knust 2007, chapter III plus corresponding appendix.

41 Cf. the illustrations of the declamation of John Gay's *The Miser and Plutus* in the appendix of Austin (Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia or A Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery* [London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1806], plate 12) and the copperplate prints for the melodrama *Lenardo und Blandine* of Joseph Franz von Götz (Joseph Franz von Götz, *Versuch einer zahlreichen [sic!] Folge leidenschaftlicher Entwürfe* [Augsburg, 1783]).

42 Röttscher, 171–173; Wagner's Dresden colleague and friend Ferdinand Heine encouraged declaimers to make use of onomatopoeia (Ferdinand Heine, *Grundzüge eines Unterrichtsplanes in der Kunst des mündlichen Vortrags* [Dresden: Adler & Dietze, 1859], 39–40).

43 Knust 2007, 56–58, 346.

Wagner set high tones in accordance with the text or word content and followed thereby his own guidelines (see f) above). Vocal line shaping corresponding to the implicit and explicit gestures of his libretti can be found in all his operas without exception. But it is not before *Lohengrin*, where the amount of printed verbal stage directions increases considerably, that one can see such parallels between text, melody and gesture pervasively throughout the whole work. Additionally, Wagner gave his singers even more redundant stage directions when rehearsing his works. In *Meine Erinnerungen an Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld* he reports on rehearsing *Tannhäuser* with this singer. Wagner demanded several actions that are not mentioned in the score but that go in parallel, linearly with the voice melody of the title character.⁴⁴

j) Diastematic indistinctiveness

As mentioned in b) above, Wagner tried to imitate the irregularities of spoken language's intervals and rhythm. This section focuses on one separate aspect of the diastematic parameter. It is the question of how he succeeded in creating intervalllic indistinctiveness. Spoken German language does not follow the Western chromatic scale with its twelve pitches nor any other musical scale. Instead, speech melody employs often smaller, in terms of instrumental music, rather indistinctive intervals and develops freely without manifesting certain pitches. Two possibilities seem natural for imitating this feature: employing chromatic rather than diatonic vocal melodies; and avoiding distinctiveness by, for instance, not employing diatonic scales, broken chords and rhythmically mechanic chromatic scales that may appear more proper for an instrumental realisation of the melody. Regrettably, the role of harmonics does not fit into the scope of this analysis.

Wagner employs pronounced diatonic melodies in *Feen*, *Rienzi*, *Meistersinger* and the sketches for *Siegfried's Tod*. In *Das Liebesverbot*, he additionally used rhythmical regular chromatic scale segments. In *Rienzi*, the musical declamation is often limited to the tones of diatonic chords, a characteristic of just this opera. These operas have, therefore, distinct diatonic or chromatic melodic lines that, per se, are not speech-like. In *Holländer* and *Tannhäuser*, chromaticism and diatonism have a dramaturgical function; that is, they are related to certain spheres of the action. Here, Wagner obeyed the tradition of the German Romantic opera; the human sphere is diatonic while the supernatural sphere – that is, Venus and the Venus mountain and the flying Dutchman and his ship – is illustrated by chromatic music. After *Tannhäuser*, Wagner developed several methods of chromatising his vocal melodies, which became more and more subtle over the years.⁴⁵ Broken diminished chords appear most often in the vocal parts of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, but vanished almost completely after the composition of the first acts of *Siegfried*. In *Parsifal*, Wagner employed the smallest interval of the Western tone system, the minor second, more often than before.

44 Knust 2007, 282–84.

45 I have discerned four types. However, the first type requires further differentiation (Knust 2007, 373–374).

k) Independence of vocal melodies from instrumental lines

If the vocal line is supposed to be understood as something different from the orchestra, it may appear as closer to spoken language than when it is a part of the instrumental sound; that is, when the vocal melody is structurally separated from the instrumental background. This can be achieved by avoiding colla parte structures. These occur when one or more instruments play unisono with the vocal soloist.

Generally, colla parte structures are scarce in Wagner's works except in *Das Liebesverbot*. Here, colla parte is the rule and independent vocal lines are the exception. After *Tannhäuser*, the use of colla parte accompaniment became very episodic. Wagner reduced it even more until composing *Tristan*, after which colla parte structures appear more often, especially in *Meistersinger*. After *Götterdämmerung*, again he reduced them. One reason for this increased use in *Meistersinger* and the final four *Ring* acts is that Wagner set many themes in the vocal melodies colla parte which occur more often there than in his previous works (see b). Despite these slight changes forth and back, Wagner's vocal lines – beside *Das Liebesverbot* – are generally much more rarely colla parte and linked to the orchestral part than in other contemporary operas.

l) Avoidance of verse and word repetitions

Verse and word repetitions are a familiar compositional tool for opera composers. They are constitutive of the aria form, among others. But they do not suit spoken language that unfolds in a rather prosaic way and avoids repetitions of pitches and rhythmic patterns. If a composer wants to write in a way that matches spoken language it is better to avoid verse repetitions and to use word repetitions only occasionally. Wagner himself maintained to have done so.⁴⁶

The early dramatic works of Wagner, in other words, his first three operas and some smaller opera pieces, contain a vast number of verse repetitions. In *Das Liebesverbot*, they even appear in the recitatives. Beginning with the *Holländer*, he reduced word and verse repetitions significantly. In *Lohengrin*, some repetitions might be owing to musical reasons even though most – or perhaps even all – of them are dramatically motivated. After *Lohengrin*, he practically never again used musically motivated verse repetitions in the parts of his dramas where the figures speak and do not sing. There are two major exceptions to this: the love scene in the second act of *Tristan*; and the end of *Siegfried*. The sung motif "Durch Mitleid wissend der reine Tor" in *Parsifal* may be seen as an exception on its own.

m) Asymmetrical periods

Wagner polemicized in his theoretical texts against so-called square periods in music, that is, symmetrical melodic phrases like 2 + 2 or 4 + 4 measure phrases.⁴⁷ Carl

46 Richard Wagner, "Zukunftsmusik," in GSD 7, 123.

47 Among others, in "Halévy und die Französische Oper," in Richard Sternfeld, ed., *Richard Wagner: Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen. Volksausgabe* 12, 5th edn. (Leipzig: C.F.W. Siegel's Musikalienhandlung [K. Linnemann], 1911), 136–138.

Dahlhaus advocated the thesis that Wagner's music becomes less symmetrical after *Lohengrin*.⁴⁸ Spoken language has no fixed rhythmical phrases. Therefore, asymmetry advances the similarity of the musical declamation to the sound of spoken language.

Actually, Wagner's musical declamation is asymmetrical from the very beginning of his career as a composer. Only the phrases in his operas *Liebesverbot* and *Rienzi* are mostly regular. After *Rienzi*, he returned to the asymmetry of *Die Feen* and maintained this until his last work. Perhaps he saw it as a characteristic feature of the German (Romantic) opera. There is no leap detectable when comparing the scores of *Lohengrin* and *Rheingold*, so Dahlhaus's thesis cannot be confirmed. Wagner uses regular phrases in his vocal declamation, however, this is always in the songs that are sung diegetically in *Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Siegfried* and *Meistersinger*. Elsewhere, these regular phrases appear only sporadically in the solo parts or disappear entirely as in *Parsifal*.

n) Voice range and voice register

Spoken German does not exceed a certain pitch range. Nineteenth-century sources provide us with information about the vocal ranges used in different types of speech. Everyday speech did not exceed the range of a fifth⁴⁹ while theatrical declamation could make use of larger intervals and ranges. This means that some larger intervals in Wagner's musical declamation may imitate more extreme types of speaking. Concerning the voice register, similarity to spoken German language emerges when the so-called "Indifferenzlage" is applied. This neutral pitch is defined by German speech science as the register in which one can speak without employing much muscular effort regarding the voice. It is located in the lowest third of the total voice range, about one fourth or fifth higher than the lowest tones. In healthy male voices, it is located around the range of G to c and in female voices, about one octave higher around g to c'.⁵⁰ This provides the means to examine whether a specific use of the different voice types in Wagner's works can be detected.

As in nineteenth-century declamation, the intensity of the emotional tension of a text passage affects the voice range applied to Wagner's vocal lines; the higher the tension, the larger the range. But this is not unique to his works because this method was in use in opera and vocal music long time before Wagner. In one respect, however, his treatment of the voice range differs from the tradition: he considered that his solo passages in the lower voice register should be realised more closely to the sound of spoken language. In operas written before Wagner's, the contrast between the narrow range of a recitative and the larger range of the aria is often abrupt. In his first five

48 Carl Dahlhaus, "Musikalische Prosa" in Carl Dahlhaus, *Wagners Konzeption des musikalischen Dramas* (Munich/Kassel: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag and Bärenreiter, 1990), 60–68.

49 Louis Köhler, *Die Melodie der Sprache in ihrer Anwendung besonders auf das Lied und die Oper. Mit Berührung verwandter Kunstfragen dargelegt* [Leipzig: J. J. Weber, 1853], p. 80.

50 Yvonne Anders, *Merkmale der Melodisierung des Sprechausdrucks ausgewählter Dichtungsinterpretationen im Urteil von Hörern. Sprechwissenschaftlich-phonetische Untersuchungen* (diss.) (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 2001), 40.

operas, where the traditional operatic forms are still employed or at least recognisable, those sharp contrasts still exist. After *Tannhäuser*, the transitions between declamatory and more emphatic sung passages became smoother and more flexible. In his first two operas, the extension of the voice range happened primarily upwards. After *Das Liebesverbot*, he considered extensions into the lower register too. The lower register is more close to the “Indifferenzlage” of spoken German and melodies in this register appear more speech-like than those sung in higher register. He was aware of this as a letter to Peter Cornelius proves.⁵¹ Traditionally in Western art music, emphatic singing means idealizing while speaking in a musical context can be seen as eerie – like in the melodrama used in German Romantic opera – or even diabolic.⁵² This may explain why Wagner used the baritone or bass register for his intriguers who often have *Sprechgesang* parts. Additionally, such intriguers like Alberich, Beckmesser and Klingsor are lacking a central voice register. It is mostly in the *Ring*, *Tristan* and *Parsifal* that Wagner wrote melodic lines that are particularly close to the model of spoken language regarding the use of voice range. For instance, if a character is shouting, the melody will rise; if it is whispering, it will sink. An investigation of the Wagnerian use of range shows significant differences to the opera tradition. Generally, his heroic voice ranges are lower than those of the Italian and French opera. In *Die Feen*, he had used excessively many high tones in the tenor part of Arindal. After *Rienzi*, there are only few spectacular high tenor tones to be found in his scores and they don't correspond to their use in Italian and French opera; Wagner, for instance, does not give the tenor a high, long, strong tone at his exit or at the end of an aria (the end of *Siegfried* is an exception here). With the part exception of Walther von Stolzing, who is presented as a singer, no Wagnerian tenor part after *Rienzi* is ‘operatic’ in the traditional sense. In the case of the female heroic voices, this dissimilarity is not as striking but it is nonetheless present.

o) Metrical structures

Spoken prosaic language has no fixed meter; versified speech, however, does and the metrical structure was presented emphatically on the historical theatre stage. Early recordings of Sarah Bernhardt's (1844–1923) declamation of Racine's works give us an impression about how the Alexandrine meter was realized in nineteenth century. Also, the Weimar declamation emphasized the metrical structure of a dramatic poem. Wagner himself wrote his dramas in verse but he despised both the French and the Weimar theatrical voice delivery and championed a more prosaic way of declaiming verses.⁵³ This leads to the presumption that he avoided or obscured fixed metrical structures in his music.

51 Written June 14 1861, Werner Breig, ed., *Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Briefe* 13 (Wiesbaden/Leipzig/Paris: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2003), 149–50.

52 In Hildegard von Bingen's mystery play *Ordo virtutum*, one of the earliest Western compositions, the devil speaks.

53 Knust 2007, 90–91, 189–190.

This presumption can be corroborated but rather indirectly and sporadically. Even though abrupt and often metrical changes are a rather rare event in his scores, he had composed such changes already in his first opera, *Die Feen*. Metrical changes in quick succession or irregular meters occur in moments of extreme affect in his works. Two moments in his oeuvre stand out in this respect and both may be best defined as moments of male madness: the madness scene of Arindal in the third act of *Die Feen*; and the febrile monologues of Tristan in the third act of *Tristan*. Polymetry, like in the song of the wood bird in *Siegfried*, is an exceptional case in his works.

A survey of the general metrical developments in his compositions shows that the young Wagner preferred the duple meter. In his first three operas, the meter does not change within such a single form complex that Wagner termed 'opera number'. In *Holländer* and *Tannhäuser* he started experimenting with metrical changes here and there. He did not pursue such experiments in *Lohengrin*, which became Wagner's most homogeneous opera in metrical respects, and almost the entire score is in quadruple meter. This uniformity seems to have struck him afterwards because his next projects became his most heterogeneous with respect to meter. In the sketches for *Siegfried's Tod*, the meter changes permanently; in the case of the Siegfried part, nearly from one measure to the next. This fragment has the most complex metrical structure of all music Wagner composed. It is even more complex than the metrical structure of *Das Rheingold* that became Wagner's most heterogeneous finished work as regards metrical structures. After *Das Rheingold*, he again wrote longer passages that remained in one specific meter. It is likely that this drastic change in his music after *Lohengrin* had to do with his efforts to create a prosaic flow from declamation because the use of accent signs in the vocal lines decreases significantly after *Lohengrin*. Given the fact that he started outlining his works by jotting down the vocal parts first, the hypothesis can be advanced that such frequent changes in metrical structures served to let the musical declamation appear more unpredictable. This would explain why the quantity of metrical changes decreased after *Das Rheingold* because Wagner could now rely on his increasing skills in writing speech-like passages by using or obscuring the accents in a certain meter (see b) and c) above). In short, he did not need to change the meter anymore when he wanted to make the speech accents more irregularly prosaic. Metrical changes remained rare after *Rheingold* and, if used, they do not necessarily refer to the model of spoken language anymore.

p) Melodramatic effects

The melodrama employs spoken language together with instrumental music. The speaker has to consider some musical parameters like rhythm and tempo and the musical expression as well but has liberty to shape the intervals of the speech melody. It is the sound of spoken language, not song, that is required when realizing the score. Wagner disliked melodrama as a genre.⁵⁴ He did not compose one but did use some

54 GSD 4, 4; Kropfner, 130; in *Oper und Drama* Wagner discards the changing between sung and spoken word as "incomprehensible" and "ridiculous" (GSD 4, 101; cf. GSD 3, 160, footnote).

melodramatic effects in his score, that is, short moments in which the singer may perform quite freely. Such effects are primarily the scream and the laughter and they first occurred in eighteenth-century melodrama.⁵⁵

Melodramatic effects in Wagner's scores are verbally or notationally fixed; even though limited in number, their variety is notable. Besides laughing and screaming, Wagner wanted his singers to also perform sighs, moaning, crying, gagging and voice cracking. He applied them to figures of both gender. In his first opera, he used laughing written in notes but, after *Das Liebesverbot*, verbal instructions appear in his scores. Their quantity increases in the scores written after *Tannhäuser* and, furthermore, in the first acts of *Siegfried*. After a substantial reduction in *Tristan* and *Meistersinger*, he reintroduced them into his music and intensified their use for the last time in his last work; the part of Kundry in the beginning of the second act of *Parsifal* is the most melodramatic passage he ever wrote.

For once, the performance history of Wagner's music shall be addressed as it completes the picture. In the twentieth century, singers used to insert additional screams and the like.⁵⁶ They could rely on a tradition of high dramatic singing in Germany that went back to the days of Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient who became the prototype of a high dramatic soprano and who employed her speaking voice often freely when performing her parts.⁵⁷ Wagner as a performance instructor was part of this tradition, too. He demanded from his singers additional melodramatic effects during the rehearsals for the Bayreuth world premières of *Ring* and *Parsifal*.⁵⁸ While the effects in the female parts are usually performed even today according to the directions in the score, this is no longer the case for the melodramatic effects of the male parts.

q) Musical form and diegesis

There is consensus in Wagner research that the *Holländer* is his last opera written in traditional forms. Wagner demanded in his theoretical texts from the 1830s that opera composers ought to surmount the traditional number division of the music. There are different theses about the formal models for his mature style as a vocal composer. Some researchers have speculated that the *accompagnato* recitative could have had a substantial impact on Wagner's composing of *Sprechgesang*.⁵⁹ To verify or falsify this, Wagner's first four operas, which follow the tradition of opera forms, will be examined closely.

55 For instance, Ariadne's scream at the end of Jiří Antonín Benda's melodrama *Ariadne auf Naxos* from 1778.

56 For instance, Leonie Rysanek (1926–1998) as Sieglinde in a live recording from Bayreuth 1967 (published on CD, Philips no. 412-478-2).

57 Martin Knust and Ingela Tägil, "The Careers of Jenny Lind and Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient: A Comparison," in Christine Hoppe and Melanie von Goldbeck, eds., *Begegnung – Vermittlung – Innovation. Annäherungen an Musik- und Kompositionspraktiken im Europa des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, 2015), 85–132; Knust 2007, 206–215.

58 Cf. Heinrich Porges's rehearsal protocols transcribed in Pohl and Knust 2007, appendix to chapter III.

59 Carl Dahlhaus, *Die Bedeutung des Gestischen in Wagners Musikdramen* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1970), 11–24; Karl Friedrich Richter, *Die Antinomien der szenischen Dramaturgie im Werk Richard Wagners. Untersuchungen über das Verhältnis von Illusion und Stilisierung in seinen Musikdramen* (diss., typewritten) (Munich, 1956), 137.

Another formal aspect is the synchronicity and diachronicity of the verses to be sung. Max Kalbeck (1850–1921) has pointed out that the strictly diachronic way of singing – that implies avoiding of ensembles – of Wagner's figures is a parallel to spoken drama.⁶⁰ Finally, the dramaturgical function of a piece of music in Wagner's scores could play an important role for its form. If, for instance, a character sings a song, its music is part of the diegetic world of the character. Of course, all characters in all works of Wagner sing always, but in this case the form may be a good way to distinguish a piece to be sung by a character from the parts of the score in which the characters are imagined as speaking.

The *accompanato* is marginal in Wagner's early operas. He composed only one, however, without marking it as one. If one wants to employ the traditional distinction between *accompanato* and *secco recitative*, it is the *secco recitative* that is much more common in his early works.⁶¹ In *Das Liebesverbot*, he even employed spoken dialogues and solo parts that are unique in his entire oeuvre as an opera composer. This means that the *accompanato recitative* could hardly have been the model for Wagner's *Sprechgesang* and, generally, it cannot be argued that it derives from the traditional *recitative* at all. Rather, it can be seen as an imitation of declamatory speech, that is, a reproduction of the non- or para-musical phenomenon of "the emotionally delivered speech", as Wagner put it.⁶² After having written extensive, long chorus passages in his first three operas, his main compositional interest turned to the solo vocal line when composing the *Holländer*. Wagner's ambitions as a chorus composer vanish after *Lohengrin* and it is only in *Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* that longer and coherent chorus passages can be discovered and where the chorus figures act as more than just a form of stage decoration (as in *Tristan* and *Götterdämmerung*). After *Lohengrin*, the solo verses are almost exclusively to be sung diachronically. Wagner tried to avoid the synchronous singing of two characters in his *Ring* and *Parsifal*. In them, ensemble singing of three or more characters is more common than passages of two soloists singing at the same time. *Tristan* and *Meistersinger* are exceptions because, here, synchronous singing recalls operatic duets and ensembles can be established; the second act of *Tristan* is an exception on its own in this respect also as the libretto proves because, here, Wagner planned to repeat certain verses before setting them to music. The dramaturgical aspect turns out to be crucial for the form analysis of the music. Songs, which are imagined as being sung diegetically as a part of the action, differ from the prosaic vocal lines of the music that surrounds them. In these songs,

60 Max Kalbeck, *Richard Wagner's Nibelungen: Erste Aufführung vom 13.—17.VIII.1876 in Bayreuth*, 3rd edn. (Breslau: Schletter'sche Buchhandlung [E. Franck], 1883) quoted in Susanna Großmann-Vendrey, *Bayreuth in der deutschen Presse. Ein Beitrag zur Rezeptionsgeschichte Richard Wagners und seiner Festspiele 1* (Regensburg: Bosse, 1977), 191.

61 Nathan described the recitatives in *Die Feen* as Romantic successors of the *secco recitative* (Hans Nathan, *Das Rezitativ der Frühopern Richard Wagners (Ein Beitrag zur Stilistik des Opernrezitativs in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts)* (diss.) [Berlin: Dobrin, 1934], 7, 11, 20; cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner*, in Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, eds, *Nietzsche: Werke* vol 6, 3 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969), 25–26; of course, Nietzsche's statement has a polemic overtone.

62 GSD 4, 325–326; cf. Knust 2015, 225.

Wagner employs symmetrical phrases, fixed meters, melody repetitions and the like. Here, he followed traditional form models. For instance, the songs in *Tannhäuser* and *Meistersinger* are written in the bar form. Wagner's intention may have been to create historicizing music by referring to this authentic form. Diegetic songs occur also in *Holländer*, *Siegfried* and *Tristan*.

r) A cappella singing

If the voice sound as such evokes similarity to the spoken language, the similarity may be best recognizable when no instruments interfere with its frequencies. This is why a cappella passages belong, according to some researchers, to the most speech-like parts in Wagner's scores.⁶³ Perhaps even an abrupt reduction of the orchestral accompaniment can create such an effect as it lifts the voice acoustically into the centre of the listener's attention. An investigation of such passages and the a cappella singing in Wagner's scores seems, therefore, to be a promising task.

However, the result of the analysis turns out to be not very palpable. First, an a cappella-composed passage does not mean that a character speaks here. The diegetic songs of the young shepherd in *Tannhäuser*, the steersman in the *Holländer* or the sailor in *Tristan* are not – or just very sparsely – accompanied. Second, even though existing in all scores of Wagner, the a cappella passages cannot be classified systematically. They may or may not resemble or represent spoken language accurately and *Sprechgesang* passages can be accompanied without disguising their speech-like structure. These are the more or less consistent tendencies I found when analysing Wagner's oeuvre: heroic characters, which often sing with emphasis, appear more like a speaking character when the orchestra stops playing; and Wagner often silenced or reduced the accompaniment when verses or verse parts are sung that are crucial for the understanding of the action in order to make the text more easily perceivable regardless whether the singing character is a hero or an intriguer. Regarding the dynamic interplay between orchestra and soloist, it can be stated that Wagner became more and more masterful as a composer in letting such important text passages sound through the sound of the orchestra. The quantity of a cappella passages decreases after *Tannhäuser*. Wagner's orchestral accompaniment became steadily more coherent and dense. In *Tristan*, *Meistersinger* and the last four acts of the *Ring*, only a handful of measures in the entire scores are composed a cappella. In *Parsifal*, Wagner thinned out the orchestra much more compared to his previous works and used a cappella more often when composing even though not for writing longer passages that way but rather for frequent short interruptions of the orchestral accompaniment.

63 Ulrich Schreiber, *Opernführer für Fortgeschrittene 2* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2005), 477–78; Rudolf Kirsten, *Streifzüge durch die musikalische Deklamation in Richard Wagners Parsifal* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1907), 22.

5. *The Sprechgesang in Wagner's oeuvre – The genetic aspect*

In this section, a summary of the results of the eighteen analyses from the former section will be presented in order to give some final conclusions about the development and compositional use of the *Sprechgesang* in Wagner's oeuvre. But first, the results of the sketch analyses will be presented and linked together within this overview of Wagner's oeuvre.

The analyses of the sketches – in particular the first drafts – showed that the same sketch type served different functions during Wagner's career. The first draft of *Die Feen* is not the first sketch of the music; there are no mistakes and the voices are neatly arranged, as in a piano score. Apparently, the first drafts of Wagner's first four operas present a more advanced stage than the latter ones. Wagner's outlining strategy can be divided into three different periods. The first period embraces his first four operas. Here, the first drafts almost look like a vocal score and, in this manner, resemble the second drafts of his later periods. During the second period, from *Tannhäuser* to *Tristan*, the first drafts were much more sketchy and written from the beginning to the end exactly the way a reciter recites his texts. In *Tannhäuser*, this consecutive outlining was still a laborious process for Wagner, as the sketches show. Except for *Rheingold* and *Walküre*, all works after *Holländer* were outlined in a so-called second draft that Wagner wrote almost parallel with the first one. During this middle period, it is the vocal line that emerges first. The accompaniment is only vaguely perceptible in the first drafts. Often, Wagner does not give more than a chord or some tones for outlining it. Passages close to spoken language were now easily jotted while the more 'operatic' passages required some time and effort before being finished. During the third period, which embraces all works composed after *Tristan*, Wagner preferred to proceed in outlining his works by inserting thematic or motivic material into the sketches. This led to a less speech-like musical declamation.

This work genesis had an impact on the shape of the musical declamation. In the case of the *Sprechgesang*, a similar temporal structure can be postulated as for the sketches. After having written his three first operas, Wagner 'invented' the *Sprechgesang* in *Holländer*; thereafter he used it only sporadically, as in the next opera *Tannhäuser*. In *Lohengrin*, the *Sprechgesang* becomes used more frequently – throughout the entire drama – in *Rheingold* it dominates the score and, after that, it becomes one of several techniques for forming the musical declamation. A successive reduction can be seen in the next works until *Tristan*. In *Meistersinger*, the *Sprechgesang* is absent only to be carefully reinstalled in the last four acts of the *Ring* and more forcefully in Wagner's last work, *Parsifal*. It is thus the works of the second period that show most unaltered how early nineteenth-century actors declaimed.

6. *Outlook: Further applicability of the analytical toolbox*

As demonstrated, my analytical toolbox served well my aim of investigating the structure, genesis and frequency of the *Sprechgesang* in Wagner's works. In this last section, I would like to outline briefly the potential applicability for vocal music research in

other areas and contexts. It is apparent that some methods – or even the whole toolbox – may be useful when trying to establish the proximity of spoken language to musical declamation in the context of operatic and Western art music in general. Western music that is written down and constrains itself to the traditional tonality and pitches can be analysed without any larger modifications by these methods.

A greater challenge might be to establish connections between spoken and sung language in generally non-notated music, for instance, in popular and folk music. But even here, the methods in some sections and sub-sections might be analytically promising, especially those presented in methods a) to e) and j) to n).

Whatever the genre, the application of one or several of these methods can give an answer as to whether and to what extent the genesis of a certain piece of music has anything to do with the sound of spoken language. For example, in popular music, two strategies exist for creating a song: the voice melody and text are put onto a ready-produced accompaniment; or a text is set to music as in classical music composition. In the latter case, the melody will show more and significant similarities with spoken language than in the former.

Analysis and production of music are symbiotic in the Western classical tradition. Many music analysts are composers and vice versa. One could therefore also use the methods of my toolbox as criteria for composing vocal music with good text perceptibility. In particular, the rules of the diastematic and prosodic shaping may, when obeyed, lead to a satisfying result, not only in solo song but, for instance, also in choral composition. The more a melodic line corresponds to the rules of spoken language, the more grateful it will become for a singer.

Returning to my starting position in this paper, my analysis has proven that substantial analogies between Wagner's vocal lines and nineteenth-century declamation and recitation exist. This opens a fascinating perspective on the performance practice in German theatre of this time that was in use several decades before the first recordings of declamation and recitation were made. In other words, this analysis allows us to catch a glimpse of the actual sound of spoken language in the pre-recording era. In Wagner's music, we can face directly the exaggeration, pathos and ponderousness that were abundant on the theatre stages of early nineteenth-century Germany.