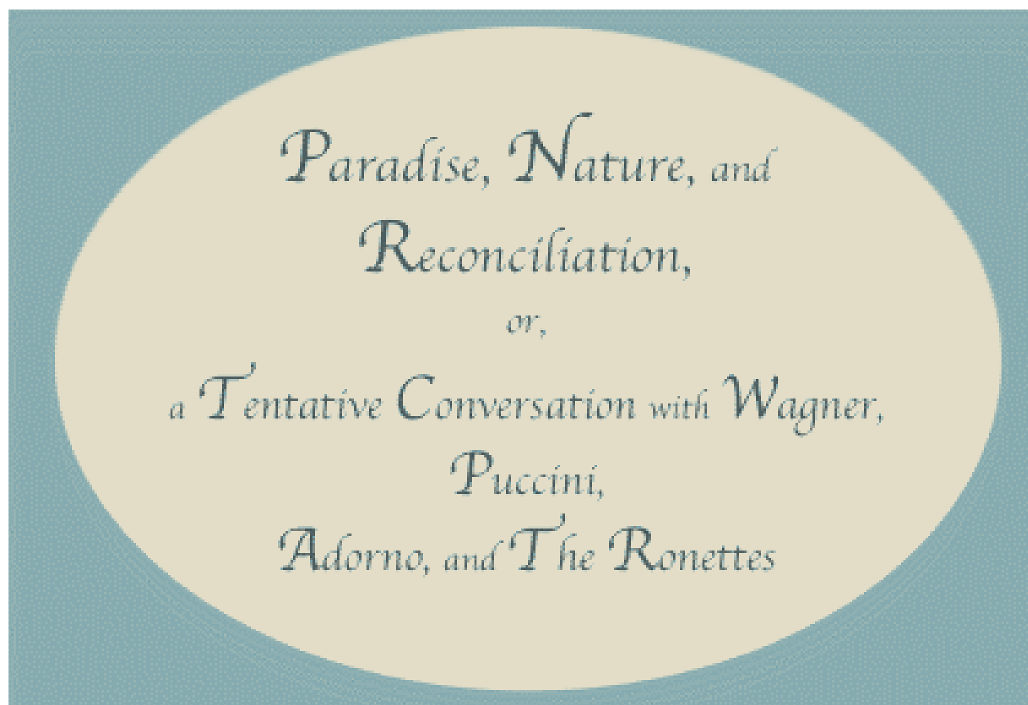


Richard Leppert
University of Minnesota

1. The setting is near Venice:

> After a night spent in fever and sleeplessness, I forced myself to take a long tramp the next day through the hilly country, which was covered with pine woods. Returning in the afternoon, I stretched dead tired, on a hard couch, awaiting the long-desired hour of sleep. It did not come; but I fell into a kind of somnolent state, in which I suddenly felt as though I were sinking in swiftly flowing water. The rushing sound formed itself in my brain into a musical sound, the chord of E flat major, which continually re-echoed in broken forms: these broken chords seemed to be melodic passages of increasing motion, yet the pure triad of E flat major never changed, but seemed by its continuance to impart infinite significance to the element in which I was sinking. I awoke in sudden terror from my doze, feeling as though the waves were rushing high above my head. I at once recognized that the orchestral overture to the *Rheingold*, which must long have lain latent within me, though it had been unable to find definite form, had at last been revealed to me. I then quickly realised my own nature; the stream of life was not to flow to me from without, but from within. I decided to return to Zürich immediately, and begin the composition of my greatest poem. (Wagner 2: 603)

2. These remarkable and notably self-aggrandizing remarks from *Mein Leben* take up an account of the composer in a state of near total physical exhaustion. Having gotten

himself out of Venice for a day, he seeks relief from the city's noise in what he terms "the absolute calm" of a village (Spezia). He sleeps there but poorly, and the next day he forces himself into the woods for a solitary walk. He finds no relief. Returning to his hotel, he stretches out on a sofa and falls into a quasi-dream state. His dreaming is slightly nightmarish but hardly unique—not least it's immensely productive. Wagner slips beneath the waves; it's as though he's drowning; indeed, he tells us that he awoke in a sudden terror. The dream he describes is musical, and in a key (and who else but Wagner would recount musical dreams of such specificity?). He is submerged in the flow of a river—a primordial soup, a river of life, whose movement slowly "progresses" toward history itself. The river is trying to "say" something in its re-echoing broken forms; melodies of increasing motion try to break through. The E-flat major chord never changes, and this changelessness, as Wagner puts it, "seemed by its continuance to impart infinite significance to the element"—water—in which he was sinking.

3. In the dream narrative, Wagner and water are each distinct and yet the same, the confirmation of which comes at the end of the quoted statement. In the river, wholly at one with it, Wagner recognizes that the Nature external to him—the flowing water—was also latent within him: what he describes as "my own nature; the stream of life." In his dream Wagner is momentarily reconciled with nature, hence reconciled with his own nature (though the experience produces a terror so startling that he awakens). The strikingly productive result, so Wagner is keen to tell us, is the *Ring,* which is after all very much about nature, including human nature. As Wagner put it elsewhere in his autobiography: "it was in this great prelude that [the] foundations of the entire [*Ring*] had to be laid" (2: 611).

4. The 136 bars on E-flat at the beginning of *Rheingold* (1853–54), evoking the Rhine, unfold like an inexorable sonoric current gradually increasing in intensity, its momentum functioning as a metaphor of creation as regards both the opera's narrative and its musical undertow. That is, the E-flat Prelude, in all its purposeful monotony, constitutes an *Ur*-motive for the opera as a whole, the musical germ, as it were, from which is derived the music that will follow. The audience may not actually hear precisely when the music starts, deep in the double basses and quietly, as though it were always "there," below consciousness: that which simply is—Nature itself.[1]

5. The Rhine is the locus of both literal and allegorical forces that will drive a complicated myth of creation and ultimate destruction. Wagner gives us a foretaste of its energy in the opening, which seems always already to have been present, the terrestrial analogue to music of the spheres. The E-flat pedal sounding in the double basses throughout the Prelude, and the very slow unfolding of quasi-melody, doesn't so much take us out of time as never permit us into time in the first place—until the very end. The music's energy gradually increases and, as the Prelude is interrupted abruptly at its dynamic and harmonic climax, something else, wholly new, wholly different bursts forth via an abrupt shift to an A-flat chord. The human voice comes onto the scene, at first and only momentarily vocalizing linguistic nonsense (Weia! Waga!), followed immediately by the introduction of recognizable language and its unique discursive power. Language emerges, as it were, from nature, but in Wagner's tetrology it ultimately will serve the

needs of humankind's war on nature as an instrumentalized device to advance cunning and guilt—this will be evident within the opera's first few minutes as the Rhinemaidens employ language as a foil against the sexual desire of the ugly Alberich. As the story goes: with love out of reach Alberich turns to power, and plots successfully to steal the gold that designates agency over everything, in essence, over Nature itself.

6. These remarks are not quite sufficient. The conventional account of the orchestral opening of *Rheingold* draws attention to a telos of sorts, specifically the transformation that occurs in the quasi evolutionary move from nature to history—however dystopian. Time, in its relation to Progress as part of the myth of Modernity, is critical to modernity's realization. Yet, time in any ordinary sense as it is experienced in 19th-century music is all but absent from the ponderous opening of this music drama. What matters most about the *Rheingold* Prelude, is, indeed, still time; but it matters precisely by its absence. Well, not quite. There is a better way to describe what Wagner is up to. The *Rheingold* Prelude is "about" time's (relative) absence but in a specific dialectical relation to musical *space*. It is the spatial quality of this music that is so striking, not its temporality. Time dramatically makes its sonoric entrance only at the point at which the Prelude is, in effect, abruptly cut off—that is, when the voice (the human) and language (the human subject) are first heard. Moreover, it is only with the voice that the possibility of Modernity (broadly conceived) emerges, to the degree that the human voice will define human dominion over nature, this dominion providing the central demarcation for the modern (by which I mean history).[2]

7. Arthur Schopenhauer, in *The World as Will and Idea*, commented that he recognized "in the deepest tones of harmony, in the bass, the lowest grades of the objectification of will, unorganized nature, the mass of the planet." He suggested that "Bass is thus, for us, in harmony what unorganized nature, the crudest mass, upon which all rests, and from which everything originates and develops, is in the world." As for melody, "in the high, singing, principal voice leading the whole and progressing with unrestrained freedom, in the unbroken significant connection of one thought from beginning to end representing a whole, [one] recognize[s] the intellectual life and effort of man" (333–35). Schopenhauer held that what he termed "the phenomenal world, or nature, and music [are] as two different expressions of the same thing" (339). He insisted that, unlike any other art form, music was "connected with the inmost nature of the world and our own self," and hence is universal. Unlike other art forms which merely represent the world, music, he claimed, is "as *direct* an objectification and copy of the whole *will* as the world itself, nay, even as the Ideas, whose multiplied manifestation constitutes the world of individual things. Music is thus by no means like the other arts, the copy of Ideas, but the very *copy of the will itself*, whose objectivity the Ideas are" (333).[3]

8. Schopenhauer—to whom, incidentally, Wagner sent the text of the *Ring* in 1854—recognized in music the sonoric trace of a wholeness, and a creative force, upon which life itself depends, as is evident in remarks that summarize his argument:

> The unutterable depth of all music by virtue of which it floats through our consciousness as the vision of a paradise firmly believed in yet ever distant from

> us, and by which also it is so fully understood and yet so inexplicable, rests on the fact that it restores to us all the emotions of our inmost nature, but entirely without reality and far removed from their pain. … Its object is directly the will, and this is essentially the most serious of all things, for it is that on which all depends. (341)

9. I draw your attention to a single phrase from these remarks: music, Schopenhauer insists, floats through our consciousness as the vision of a "*paradise firmly believed in yet ever distant from us*." Music, that is, lets us see something—a vision—in which we believe but cannot reclaim for lived experience. Music posits a utopian reconciliation with nature, that which is us.

10. During the early war years, while living in West Los Angeles, T. W. Adorno and his close friend and colleague Max Horkheimer jointly authored a text they first named *Philosophical Fragments* in a 1944 mimeographed edition, and later *Dialectic of Enlightenment* when the text was formally published in a revised version in Amsterdam in 1947.

11. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the Marxist foundation of Critical Theory is shifted away from class conflict to what Adorno and Horkheimer regarded as something more fundamental, namely, the subject's historical relation to nature as one of conflict that turns the subject against others and, ultimately, against the self. As they put it, "What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men" (4). Adorno and Horkheimer famously (or infamously) argued that the fundamental forms of domination organizing modernity had their roots in the primordial efforts of human beings to survive in a nature—a primordial totality—that men feared. Fearing nature, to be sure, expressed not least a fear of the self to the extent that human beings are not only *in* nature but also always already *of* nature. Stated differently, the alienation of the human from nature was doubly articulated: the othering of nature othered as well as the self.

12. And yet human subjects lament the very separation from nature upon which their subjectivity is ultimately grounded. Thus by the principle Adorno and Horkheimer articulated, the designation of national parks that first occurred during the heyday of the industrial revolution—signaling the final triumph over nature—directly responded to the fractured relation of the subject to nature. That is, the setting aside of small and as-yet "untamed" geographies signified less a nostalgic return to nature than a material acknowledgment of the permanence of the damage done to it. In the same way, contemporaneous salvage anthropology in essence picked among the graves and ruins to remember what "advanced man" had destroyed to become advanced. (There's a parallel here to charity—or as it's now called, compassionate conservatism—that substitutes for social justice, and which functions not so as to alter the foundation of domination[4], but

to make injustice more tolerable to some people's stomach and to other people's conscience).

13. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* critiques the self-satisfied ideology that structures the heart of historicism, the myth of history as progress, which itself underwrites the ideological ground of modernity as the supposed realization of the Enlightenment. The authors' over-riding concern is instrumental reason and its function in domination. Reason instrumentalized is reason not concerned with social truth and its implications for social justice, but reason of the bottom line, whether in economics or cultural politics—reason degraded to wit, smarts, and especially cunning,[5] serving as agent in the subject's war on nature, broadly understood. As Adorno and Horkheimer put it: "As soon as man discards his awareness that he himself is nature, all the aims for which he keeps himself alive—social progress, the intensification of all his material and spiritual powers, even consciousness itself—are nullified, and the enthronement of the means as an end, which under late capitalism is tantamount to open insanity, is already perceptible in the prehistory of subjectivity. Man's domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is almost always the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken" (54).

14. In his last book, *Aesthetic Theory*, not quite complete at the time of his death in 1969, Adorno stakes out his position on natural beauty, which he regards as the defining issue of aesthetics and a good deal more besides. Our longing for nature—for example, ecological regard, wilderness preservation, but also art in Adorno's argument—is a projection of a lack that develops alongside our separation from and domination of nature.[6] As he puts it, "The concept of natural beauty rubs on a wound" (61–62).[7] Art is called upon to answer for natural beauty, in effect to substitute for it; art—wholly artifactual, that is, literally unnatural—perpetuates the attack on nature. And yet art does more, for it acknowledges the natural beauty that the human subject has otherwise degraded yet nonetheless desires in its non-extant "perfect" state; art reflects on this fact. Art, Adorno says, "want[s] to keep nature's promise. … What nature strives for in vain, artworks fulfill" (62, 65–66).[8] Natural beauty, he insists, is "the trace of the nonidentical in things under the spell of universal identity" (73).[9]

15. The Ronettes—from 1965, courtesy of Phil Spector, a song called "Paradise." The Wall of Sound, Spector's evocative metaphor for what he achieved in his favored monaural, is a good deal more than a promotional tag. Set within the sonoric milieu of the mid-1960s, the Spector sound was fundamentally discursive, in ways that I will outline in a moment. Permit me first to remind you how the sound came about.

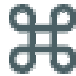
16. For starters, he first crammed into the studio as many instrumentalists as possible to lay down a R & B-derived rhythm track—say, four pianos, ten basses, and five drummers (Senoff 16).[10] (By 1975, several years after his heyday recordings, he had as many as fifty-two musicians in the studio solely to set the rhythm track, though twenty-five to thirty was more typical. This at a time when most other producers were using only five or six musicians) (Williams 29).[11] Next session came the vocalists, then the strings. The three were then mixed (*People Weekly* 84–85). Echo effects were produced by multiple recordings of the same instrument in unison (Tobler and Grundy 51). Each time

something new was added, Spector usually copied from one master tape to another, which produced a certain fuzziness and acoustic deterioration, an effect he liked (Tobler and Grundy 51). The end result was sonoric excess, which in part depended on listeners' awareness of the technological limits against which the sound was pushing: Spector worked with a finite acoustic space and made it seem almost infinite. At the same time, however paradoxically, the sound seems confined. Yet this confinement is crucial to his purpose, to the extent that by the recording process I've outlined, the sound seems to reach beyond the space allotted to it.

17. Like the *Rheingold* Prelude, Spector's "Paradise" evokes nature—and, not coincidentally, replicates the Wagnerian narrative by turning it on its head. (Spector, by the way, is a devoted opera aficionado.) The song tells the story of an as-yet unrealized future of requited love. The lovers will pass over a rainbow bridge, not to Walhalla but to Eden. They will be one with Nature, evoked, as in Wagner, by the sound of water—but real water in this case: recorded waves splashing the shore—as well as by chirping birds, both heard immediately before the music begins. The song evokes ancient tropes connecting love and desire, on the one hand, with a putative reconciliation with nature, on the other, spiritualization of love experienced in the Eden of a paradise regained. It does so by musical means that undergird the lyrics—and in places virtually overwhelms them.

18. The Ronettes' voices discourse in specific relation to the instrumental sounds that accompany them. On the word "paradise," the back-up voices and instruments come together to form a synchronized acoustic wave, at highest volume and thickest texture, a standard Spector feature (Hinckley). The Wall of Sound washes over listeners like an enveloping and benign tsunami, as if accomplishing sonically what the lyrics note at the start about the land of love, "where time is standing still," that is, outside history and beyond the reach of ordinary reality. The first sounds we hear, water and birds, are wholly natural; the next sounds—instrumental—constitute a transformation of these natural sounds into their cultural-aesthetic analogue. The instrumental-vocal backing sonically and metaphorically supports the lover's voice (Ronnie Spector) as together they build towards climax on the word "paradise," which bursts from the musical fabric with fairly obvious repetitive orgasmic force, reminiscent of those time-lapse films of roses bursting into bloom, or more to the point, the commonplace trope that connects sexual release with the crashing of waves. Put differently, the reconciliation of voiced subject with the natural paradise that mirrors the paradise of requited love is musically realized by the sonoric foreground and background that meld into a single unity: subject and object closing the gap that otherwise divides them. In the absence of the real lover, nature is the stand-in.

19. Reconciliation, in the sense of oneness, is reinforced in the last verse when the back-up singers call out textual instructions, acting like guides: "stand by him," "do right by him," which the soloist immediately, antiphonally, echoes—a call-and-response device metaphorically homologous with the one Mozart used repeatedly in *The Magic Flute*, another musical text that connects the possibility of love to the necessity of reconciliation with nature.



20. Both Wagner and The Ronettes confront us with what might be called "sonoric landscapes"—or what Murray Schafer has more elegantly and more broadly termed in his book *The Tuning of the World* as a "soundscape."[12] My phrase, however, is intended to be more site-specific than Schafer's; I refer specifically to land. Four basic assumptions are embedded in my use of the phrase "sonoric landscape": (1) that sounds surround us and as such help to construct us as human subjects, locating us within particular social and cultural environments; (2) that humanly produced or manipulated sounds are the results of conscious acts, hence carry semantic and discursive charge; (3) that all sounds—even those not produced by humans but ones "merely" heard by humans—are subject to being read or interpreted; and (4) drawn from the preceding three, that sounds are a means by which people account for their sense of reality: as it was, as it is now, and/or as it might be. That is, people do not employ sounds arbitrarily, haphazardly, or unintentionally—though the "intentionally" haphazard may itself constitute an important sort of sonoric discourse.

21. In thinking about the *terrestrial* landscape we tend to make a distinction between the earth as a physical entity and as a landscape proper. Land*scape* is a perception, that is, the sense of a specific and ultimately confined view of a portion of the land which somehow seems to be "worth" viewing, because it is somehow noteworthy—and in this regard it doesn't appreciably matter whether we're discussing a scenic viewpoint of, say, the Grand Canyon, or a Bierstadt painting of the West. Landscape is the different within the same; it is what draws attention to itself. What we tend to define, and separate out, as a landscape is that which appears in our consciousness as something at once "itself" and as a representation of itself. That is, when a portion of land is raised in our consciousness to the status of land*scape*, the physical entity is reconstituted in our minds as something in excess of the factual. I take this excess to be experienced as a representation—and as such to be discursive.

22. By the phrase "sonoric landscape" I wish to evoke the ubiquity of sonority—the broad sweep, like the land itself—of sound encountered by our ears. But I also wish to evoke the particularity of *musical* sonority within the larger agglomeration of sounds and the particularities of musical sonorities of different sorts.

23. Music has played a highly problematic role in the history of Manifest Destiny, to the extent that it has commonly served to aestheticize the violence that accompanies westward expansion. It is not by accident that a concern to link nature to music arose in Western history even before the dawn of modernity which, for convenience, we might date at least as early as the 17th century. Modernity emerges through a self-reflexive conjunction of space and time, whereby time is altered in Western consciousness. Time's primordial cyclical repetitiveness is thrown over in favor of a linear conception

of chronos: time ceases to spiral—time now marches on. The past is not repeated; there is only the future. In short, time emerges as a developmental parameter of human experience, just as space emerges in modernity as a terrain for development.

24. Since music is by definition both a temporal and spatial art, it's not surprising that it was early and often called upon to represent modernity—all too commonly to cheer modernity onwards, sometimes to engage modernity critically. One response, often in protest, was the valorization of nature, increasingly placed in binary opposition to culture. It is this history that informs the rampant increase of interest, in all of the arts—literature, visual art, and music alike—in representations of nature and place: from Wordsworth's daffodils to Karl May's German Westerns, from the paintings of hyper-wild mountain-scapes by Vernet in the 18th century and Moran in the 19th, to the hazy flower-strewn scenes by the Impressionists. In music the list is virtually endless: Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Wagner, Debussy, and, God knows, virtually every note that Mahler composed; Ives, Messiaen, Pauline Oliveros, Alan Hohvannes, R. Murray Schafer, and so on. And musical modernity is similarly obsessed with place (if not always precisely "nature"): *The Pines of Rome, The Fountains of Rome, The Grand Canyon Suite, An American in Paris*, maybe even "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," and "By the Time I Get to Phoenix."

25. With regard to *the* larger trope of nature and reconciliation, I'd like to consider the representation of the natural *place* in music. I'll concern myself with the West, or, to be more accurate, the West of the imagination and to one musical work. That is, my concern is not music's more typical invocation of nature via a transliteration into music of the acoustic phenomena of nature—whether birds, babbling brooks, or thunderclaps—but, of nature's spatial dimension, something rather more rarely addressed in music and for very good reason: namely, because the literal space of nature is, perforce, by definition utterly silent.[13]

26. The setting is the majestic, forested Sierra Nevada, in a deep gulch, in a tiny Gold Rush community, replete with something like fifty sex-starved and largely unsuccessful prospectors. There's just one woman in the camp, and she's something of a saint. Belasco's "Preliminary Note" to the libretto describes the opera as "a drama of love and of moral redemption against a dark and vast background of primitive characters and untrammeled nature" (Puccini *Girl of the Golden West* 5). The composer said that he intended his music as an evocation of the California primeval forest—which he'd never seen—where stand the giant sequoias, and the highest mountain on the continent outside of Alaska: Nature at its most spectacular, and most overwhelming, and least disturbed. This West was experienced only at the greatest geographical and psychic distance; it was imagined by an Italian opera composer who got no farther into the New World than Manhattan's Metropolitan Opera House. So far as I know, he never made it to the Jersey shore. But he wrote an operatic western for the benefit of New Yorkers who, like the composer, knew the West principally from sensational novels about the Gold Rush and, so far as the Sierra Nevada is concerned, the grim history of the Donner Party.

27. Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* is based on the David Belasco play, *The Girl of the Golden West*.[14] It premiered in 1910 with Toscanini conducting, Emmy Destin and Caruso singing the principal roles. What clearly mattered to Puccini was finding the musical means by which to evoke the California of his imagination—"raw" Nature—and also to lend authority to that evocation by means of empirical musical evidence, in a way that even half a century earlier few composers would have bothered with.[15] That is, Puccini's attempt to get it "right" underscores his modernist-businesslike approach to bourgeois music, of which he was a master. So among other things, he nailed down the setting with musico-cultural American facts.[16] Thus, when the libretto calls for a lonely miner to sing a folksong about his loneliness, Puccini finds an appropriate American source and borrows it.[17] The opening act takes place in the Polka Saloon, and the local-color snippets are many, with miners calling out lines like "Hello, Joe" [not: Giuseppe] and "Whiskey per tutti," and singing doo-dah days from "Camptown Races." To be sure, a great deal of this, to modern ears can be pretty hysterical. But I'm actually after something serious, and not least because this opera strikes me as extremely interesting, aesthetically as well as ideologically.

28. Puccini was mesmerized by the issue of vast untamed physical space—as it were, space remaining in the State of Nature—and the challenge to evoke it in sound. He had confronted the challenge to represent the continent's vastness once before in his first operatic success, *Manon Lescault*, set in the 18th century, whose last act places the forlorn lovers in America, specifically on what the libretto describes as "[a] desert plain on the borders of New Orleans, bare and undulating, the horizon boundless." But in that opera, he only needed to figure out in a few measures how to capture the sense of the landscape (however oddly he conceived of it). By contrast, in *La fanciulla del West* he had to deal with the seeming boundlessness of pristine western Nature for the better part of two and a half hours, since everything that happens in the opera in one way or another is determined by its overwhelming setting; indeed, the characters themselves are transformed by the locale, which is largely foreign to them until, at the end, the setting metaphorically morphs into the homeland which the lovers must leave, very much against their will.

29. Puccini's devices are several. (The least interesting and the most predictable, wholly borrowed from Belasco's strikingly filmic theatrical production, involve wind and snow machines to emulate the fierce storm that helps determine the opera's outcome—cosmic sympathy run amuck.) Among the musical devices, one in particular stands out: Puccini made the decision to evoke the vast California wilderness by producing for his audience a sense of distance by means that articulate not only space but also—and crucially—time and memory. Puccini's West, above all, is spatial; this dimension controls his understanding of the West's essence—as would be the case a generation later in the films of John Ford, albeit by means of the backdrop of Utah's Monument Valley rather than the Sierra Nevada.

30. The opera's characters enter as if in a never-never land: when they arrive they bring history with them and when they leave, history exits as well. A natural paradise remains, but only so long as it is un-peopled—when it is only imagined or remembered. Puccini

marks the phenomenological spatial excess that defines everything important about the opera by means of what we might term the fade-in and fade-out. Repeatedly, his characters are *heard* well before they're seen on stage. This might seem a bit old hat, like Manrico in *Il Trovatore*, but there is a crucial difference. In Verdi's opera, Manrico sings from a stationary off-stage position; he is serenading, after all, with feet firmly anchored. In Puccini's opera, the voices are invariably on the move, as though making their way through the deep forest. In each of the three acts, off-stage voices reach our consciousness as if from nowhere, from great distances, ever so slowly approaching the acoustic proscenium separating opera from audience. In one sense, the obvious one, they approach town from working their staked claims, but in another sense, they approach as if being recalled from a faded memory of a time long past—spatial and temporal nostalgia in the heart of bustling 1910 Midtown, the epicenter for the full confidence of modernity's Industrial Revolution in its final moment of near total self-confidence. The gap between the New York setting of the world premiere and the scene on stage, in the first major opera about America and specifically commissioned for an American audience, carries a significant ideological burden. The vastness of the opera's natural setting holds out the promise of an American paradise—eternal, without boundaries, a Utopia of striking visual splendor—despite the fact that the old-growth forests of the Sierra Nevada had long since been exploited by 1910. In other words, Puccini's West of the imagination, aesthetically speaking, provides modernity's rapaciousness with the deniability it ethically craved.

31. The arrivals of the voices from the wilderness and from the past make their appearances, speak their peace—and then depart, often with voices fading away. Puccini uses one particular borrowed theme repeatedly throughout the opera—the tune more or less constitutes the opera's defining leitmotif: it is called "Echoes of Home." Whether intentional or accidental, this citation marks a perfect coincidence between time, space, and place, on the one hand, and memory in relation to loss, separation, and alienation, on the other.

32. The opera's conclusion is a musical departure. The two lovers are reunited, the male partner having literally just escaped being lynched, saved by his lover who rides in—armed—from off stage. Announcing herself from the distance, via vocalized screams, she enters astride a horse (at the premiere there were ten horses in all). As with other crucially important entrances throughout the opera, we hear Minnie well before we see her. She rides in, in essence, so as to ride off forever with Dick Johnson (alias Ramerrez).

33. The opera's ending is, perforce, "happy." As everyone knows all too well, Puccini conventionally killed off his sopranos, whereas no one actually dies in *La fanciulla del West*, odd also for a Western. The lover's astride their horses slowly depart, their voices only very gradually fading as the dawn breaks. In short, the lovers move forward into time and history, but not so much with a sense of new beginnings. The audience is left less with a climax and more with the dynamic decay and inevitable disappearance of music itself. With the music's fading, the opera's own time fades into the timelessness

of the vast forest that swallows up the departed lovers as they themselves head off into uncertainty.

> Addio, mia dolce terra!
> Addio, mia California!
> Bei monti della Sierra, nevi, addio!

34. The distinctive and often dissonant rhythmic percussiveness that marks much of the opera, and which delineates the real time experienced by the characters—modernity's freneticism, or something like that—fades into a virtually rhythm-less drone in the orchestra's strings, as the lover's voices trail off above this line. They fade, like time and memory; next to nature they are nothing. Nonetheless, as they voice their goodbyes to their beloved California, what's striking is less the happy reuniting of the young lovers—that fact seems rather an afterthought—but rather the sense that their mutual terrestrial salvation comes with a bill attached: their expulsion from a natural paradise which they had experienced in a perpetual state of paradox if not dialectical contradiction.[18]

35. I'll close with two final examples, one visual, the other sonoric.

36. Among the more curious pictorial subjects popular in northern Europe in the 17th century at the dawn of modernity, were so-called "Bird Concerts", representing the most splendidly imaginary of natural and sonoric landscapes; such images typically gathered together birds both local and exotic, from climates hot and cool, dry and moist, the governing principle being their visual splendor. In this aviary, whose inhabitants come from the old world and the new, predator birds co-mingle with their would-be prey in an Eden without humans—but not without the trace of humans.

37. The painting is organized through the suspension of ordinarily violent intra- and inter-species relations, as though the world were a peaceful aviary: the European swan, the African ostrich, the New World macaw. The binding force for the harmony among species is music, but it is not the natural "music" of the birds themselves, for their sounds are not really musical in the ways that westerners conventionally philosophize about music. Rather, the birds' music is the music of men, inscribed on the choir book propped on the ground around which the birds gather like a *schola cantorum*. What can this mean if not the control of nature by the Word? That is, control of nature by culture, as embodied in language—text accorded privileged status over the things of this earth. Yet the "word" is more than text—it is texted music.

38. This visual-musical trope demarcates aesthetics, wherein music as practice and as a metaphor for society meet in a self-conscious and problematic relation. Music here serves a diverse "society" of birds not only as a sonoric, texted binder that suspends the impossibilities of geography and the likelihood of killing, but also as a practice that draws attention to itself as something separate and momentary. The birds sing what humans have given them. They sing in unison (that much is clear from the notation), following our musical orders—as though the birds' very naturalness is an affront to our

status and as such must be subsumed into a unitary script of our devising, and according to which their world must conform. The music of the bird concert does not define the birds, instead, it violates them by misrepresenting their nature. The pleasure of their "music" is not theirs, but ours. Their "music" is coerced. It is no longer Orpheus who charms the animals, but man's rule that classifies them. So in the end, Platonic metaphors of music serve to define the terms for life itself.[19]

39. The sonoric landscape results from cultural practices—in short, from the history with which it engages. Acoustic landscapes at their best introject themselves on the grid of human subjectivity as expressions of the desire for inter-subjective connection and reconciliation with nature in the broad sense of which the human subject remains a part in spite of itself. In short, musical sound evokes the angel of history. History's angel "wants to go back and fix things, to repair the things that have been broken. But there is a storm blowing from Paradise and the storm keeps blowing the angel backwards into the future. And the storm, this storm, is called Progress."

40. I'm quoting Laurie Anderson who herself paraphrases Walter Benjamin's 9th aphorism from his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (257–58). The song is titled "The Dream Before"; it connects historical time to the mythic time of a violent children's story and thrusts the story's characters, little Hansel and Gretel, into the real time of the aftermath of their escape from the primeval forest and its wicked witch. Now grown up and living in the postmodern metropolis, they take on more or less menial work, and survive—but not happily ever after. They went flying backwards into the future, and history intervened. The historicity of their condition was not a pretty prospect, and it caused them to drown in alcoholic stupor. What keeps faith in the future—to which they're blind—is not the dystopian text that narrates their pathetic circumstance, but the minimalist fragment of a sonoric landscape into which it's set. Anderson's song, in fact dedicated to Benjamin, honors the messianic import of his seemingly hopeless hope: the claim, made in the last lines he lived to write, that any moment in time could serve as a gate through which the Messiah might enter, leading the way towards human emancipation—towards what Adorno termed reconciliation with nature, without which, he insisted, neither emancipation nor a realized human subject was possible. Anderson's music is so minimalist as barely to qualify as music, and precisely by that means effectively evokes music's discursive agency while sonorically engaging a history that posits all too effectively the opposite of the historicist dream of Progress. What's left of music, she seems to suggest, is the barest minimum of what constitutes music, though like Benjamin, Anderson's work taken as a whole makes clear her belief that through that narrow gateway there might eventually still pass a cause for rejoicing in the possibility, however remote, of Paradise.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles Ives employed the same technique, and for the same apparent purpose, in the string-ensemble opening of *The Unanswered Question*.

2. Adorno recognized precisely this feature in Wagner's music generally—though arguably the "tendency" is particularly pronounced in the telling opening to the *Ring* cycle; for example, "In no case [in Wagner's music] does sound go beyond itself in time; it rather vanishes in space" (*Philosophy of Modern Music* 190). See also the insightful commentary on Adorno's critique by Rose Rosengard Subotnik, "The Historical Structure: Adorno's 'French' Model for the Criticism of Nineteenth-Century Music" (224 and 348 n. 62).

3. Original emphasis. Schopenhauer continues: "This is why the effect of music is so much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts, for they speak only of shadows, but [music] speaks of the thing itself" (333).

4. See Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 62. Competition is domination's twin. The necessity of the struggle for survival, and for risk-taking in the name of personal advancement, become "the postulate of a moral excuse for profit."

5. The first and last aphorisms in the "Notes and Drafts" section address cunning. The first, "Why It Is Better Not to Know All the Answers" [*Gegen Bescheidwissen*], (209–211), concerning "cleverness" [*Gescheitsein*]; and "The Genesis of Stupidity," [*Zur Genese der Dummheit*], (256–58) ("Stupidity is a scar" of a child's unanswered queries and unfulfilled needs). Cf. Adorno, "Notes on Philosophical Thinking": "Stupidity is nothing privative, not the simple absence of mental ability, but rather the scar of its mutilation" (Adorno, *Critical Models* 132).

6. Adorno is thus bluntly positioning himself against Hegel, whose disregard for nature is well known. On this point, see *Aesthetic Theory* 63, 75–77; and Wolin 42.

7. See also Paetzold.

8. "Under its optic, art is not the imitation of nature, but the imitation of natural beauty" (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 71). See also Behrens.

9. Cf. composer-philosopher David Dunn. Alluding to a lengthy passage in James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* describing the meanings and intelligence audible in late night calls of two foxes, Dunn comments: "We hear in the world talking to itself a sense of otherness that simultaneously mirrors our deepest sense of belonging" (95); and "Perhaps music is a conservation strategy for keeping something alive that we now need to make more conscious, a way of making sense of the world from which we might refashion our relationships to nonhuman living systems" (97).

10. "The instrumental backing tracks on these classic Phil Spector productions were normally provided by three drummers, three bass players, numerous guitarists and keyboard players, a three- or four-piece horn section and several percussionists" (Tobler and Grundy 51).

11. He also overdubbed: "I can get 23 string players and overdub them 10 times and have 200 strings then I put them onto one track" (Kubernik 8).

12. See also Schafer, "Music and the Soundscape" 58–68.

13. Schafer's conception of soundscape is defined by the plethora of sounds in any environment that may or may not be produced by humans. John Andrew Fisher suggests that "it is natural to begin to speak of the soundscape, defined as it is by the boundaries of a particular physical environment, as the containing space of sounds" (9). My concern is different since what I'm after is how, in music, the space within which natural sounds occur can be sonorically manifested. That space is marked by a segment of the earth, a territorial parameter, at once a reality and an abstraction, which cannot adequately be "captured" by the actual sounds that may occur within or on it by, say, insects, birds, the movement of water, etc.

14. Among the basic historical accounts of the opera's history, see in particular Carner 190–91, 401–15 and Phillips-Matz. Both Davis and Stuart recount details of the Belasco play and its staging, and the Belasco-Puccini collaboration at the Metropolitan opera.

15. Puccini's own love of "nature," notably including speedboats and a passion for hunting, is well known. See Russo 20–22, Phillips-Matz 215, and Carner, *passim*.

16. The "West" came to Puccini in Milan in 1890 in the form of Buffalo Bill's *Wild West Show*. Puccini liked the spectacle and, characteristically, noting the take, also admired the business enterprise (Russo 20).

17. The song's text narrates a tale about missing home, mother, and faithful dog, and is borrowed from a 19th-century song called "Old Dog Tray" by Stephen Foster; Puccini's tune is an adaptation of a transcription and arrangement of a Zuni Indian melody first published in 1904, as Allan Atlas has shown in "Belasco and Puccini." See Atlas "*Lontano-Tornare-Redenzione*."

18. Nelson makes a similar point and compares the opera's conclusion to the final act of *Aida* (404–405). As the lovers ride off, the miners' chorus on stage repeats a motive from "Old Dog Tray" (see previous note).

19. On the discourse concerning bird song during the period in question, see Austern, especially 19–20.

WORKS CITED

Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*. Ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

---. "Notes on Philosophical Thinking." *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. Trans. Henry W. Pickford. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. 127–34.

---. *Philosophy of Modern Music*. Trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wes Blomster. New York: Continuum, 1985.

Adorno, Theodor W., and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. John Cumming. New York: Continuum, 1972.

Anderson, Laurie. "The Dream Before: For Walter Benjamin." *Laurie Anderson: Strange Angels*. Warner Brothers, 1989.

Atlas, Allan W. "*Lontano-Tornare-Redenzione*: Verbal Leitmotives and Their Musical Resonance in Puccini's *La fanciulla del West*." *Studi Musicali* 21.2 (1992): 359–98.

---. "Belasco and Puccini: 'Old Dog Tray' and the Zuni Indians." *Musical Quarterly* 75.3 (Fall 1991): 362–98.

Austern, Linda Phyllis. "Nature, Culture, Myth, and the Musician in Early Modern England." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51.1 (1998): 1–47.

Behrens, Roger. "On Music in Nature and Nature in Music." *Issues in Contemporary Culture and Aesthetics* 5 (1997): 17–26.

Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1969. 253–64.

Carner, Mosco. *Puccini: A Critical Biography*. 2nd ed. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1974.

Davis, Shelby J. "David Belasco and Giacomo Puccini: Their Collaboration." *Opera and the Golden West: The Past, Present, and Future of Opera in the U. S. A*. Ed. John L. DiGaetani and Josef P. Sirefman. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994. 129–39.

Dunn, David. "Nature, Sound Art, and the Sacred." *The Book of Music & Nature*. Ed. David Rothenberg and Marta Ulvaeus. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001. 95–107.

Fisher, John Andrew. "What the Hills are Alive With: In Defense of the Sounds of Nature." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56.2 (Spring 1998): 167–79.

Hinckley, David. *Phil Spector Back to Mono (1958-1969)*. Booklet. Phil Spector Records, 1991.

Kubernik, Harvey. “He’s a Rebel.” *Melody Maker* (31 May 1975): 8.

Nelson, Byron. “The Isolated Heroine and the Loss of Community in Puccini’s Belasco Operas.” *Yearbook of Interdisciplinary Studies in the Fine Arts* 2 (1990): 385–407.

Paetzold, Heinz. “Adorno’s Notion of Natural Beauty: A Reconsideration.” *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory*. Ed. Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997. 213–35.

People Weekly 31 (6 February 1989): 84-85.

Phillips-Matz, Mary Jane. “Puccini’s America.” *The Puccini Companion: Essays on Puccini’s Life and Music*. Ed. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini. New York: Norton, 1994. 202–27.

Puccini, Giacomo. *Girl of the Golden West*. Libretto. New York: F. Rullman, 1910.

---. *Manon Lescault* (full score). 1915. Dover: New York, 1995.

Russo, John Paul. “Puccini, the Immigrants, and the Golden West.” *Opera Quarterly* 7.3 (Autumn 1990): 4–27.

Schafer, R. Murray. *The Tuning of the World*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977.

---. “Music and the Soundscape.” *The Book of Music & Nature*. Ed. David Rothenberg and Martha Ulvaeus. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001. 58–68.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Idea*. 1818. Trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.

Senoff, Pete. “Spector on Pop Today.” *Melody Maker* (11 October 1969):16.

Spector, Phil. “Paradise.” *Back to Mono 1958–1969*. Phil Spector Records, 1965.

Stuart, Roxana. “Uncle Giacomo’s Cabin: David Belasco’s Direction of *La fanciulla del West*.” *Opera and the Golden West: The Past, Present, and Future of Opera in the U. S. A*. Ed. John L. DiGaetani and Josef P. Sirefman. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994. 140–48.

Subotnik, Rose Rosengard. “The Historical Structure: Adorno’s ‘French’ Model for the Criticism of Nineteenth-Century Music.” *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991. 206–38.

Tobler, John, and Stuart Grundy. *The Record Producers*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982.

Wagner, Richard. *My Life*. 2 vols. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1911.

Williams, Richard. “The Man Behind Spector’s Sound.” *Melody Maker* (6 December 1969): 29.

Wolin, Richard. “Utopia, Mimesis, and Reconciliation: A Redemptive Critique of Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*.” *Representations* 32 (Fall 1990): 33–49.