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CHAPTER 2

# From Gesamtkunstwerk to Music Drama

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More than any other individual composer's music, Wagner's music has its own special terminology. "Gesamtkunstwerk," "absolute music," "music drama," "*Stabreim*," "music of the future," "leitmotifs" and other terms formed part of an aesthetic theory that he developed in a series of publications, the so-called Zurich writings, from 1849 to 1851.[1] However, in their original context, these terms were used so casually that it is hard to believe Wagner was aware he was coining new catchwords. It was in the response to his writings, where they were summarized, explicated, interpreted, and criticized by both advocates and detractors that the terms emerged and crystallized. They became part of the Wagner lexicon, despite the fact that Wagner himself rejected some of them and favored others that did not catch on. In this chapter, I offer the perspective of a music historian. My aim lies not in examining how the term "Gesamtkunstwerk" came to take on a life of its own and be interpreted creatively, a task that falls more to the volume as a whole. Rather, I offer a historical account of the circumstances and influences that led Wagner to use the term in the first place, as well as a hypothesis about why he did not favor it as a descriptor for his stage works.

The term Gesamtkunstwerk appears in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (*The Artwork of the Future*, 1849) but not in the following treatise *Oper und Drama* (*Opera and Drama*, 1851). My essay surveys the main points of scholarly contention regarding these Zurich texts, all the while recognizing that there is no foreseeable end to the quest to understand writings that, at times, verge on complete opacity. By examining key passages where Wagner describes how the different arts come together to make up an opera, my reading finds that Wagner's outlook changes significantly from one text to the other. My excavation of the way Wagner himself used the term before it started being widely used has consequences for understanding the crucial issue of Wagner's political ambi-

tions for his artworks. In particular, I propose that "Gesamtkunstwerk" properly refers to Wagner's plans for a politically motivated artwork, in distinction to "music drama" (*Musikdrama*) which speaks primarily to Wagner's views on operatic reform. Of course, Gesamtkunstwerk will continue to accrue different meanings for which Wagner's original definition is irrelevant.[2] But for those interested in how it relates to Wagner, I offer a musicological investigation of his distinction between Gesamtkunstwerk and music drama as a way to understand some central issues in Wagner's thought. Briefly stated, I suggest that the differences between the two terms can function heuristically to articulate differences between theory and practice, and between his political and aesthetic priorities.

I begin with a brief overview of the history of opera as a total work of art in order to put Wagner's aesthetics in musical-historical context. Then, I trace the emergence of the term Gesamtkunstwerk and how it became part of the special vocabulary associated with Wagner. A discussion of recent scholarship on Wagner's aims for Gesamtkunstwerk follows, which reveals a range of opinions regarding the extent and duration of Wagner's political commitment. Against this background, I explore Wagner's aspirations by comparing the two major Zurich writings, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* and *Oper und Drama*. Finally, I examine Wagner's shift in views over this relatively short period with reference to a change in his use of rhetoric. In sum, I contend that Wagner's writing gradually shed the political hortatory style evident during the revolutionary years of 1848–1849 and became more figurative, relying increasingly on extended metaphors and analogies to describe his plans for creating a new kind of opera. In *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, Wagner envisions a Gesamtkunstwerk by and for the people. By the time he writes *Oper und Drama*, though, he depicts his new kind of opera as the result of music and drama coming together like woman and man in the act of sexual love.

## The Gesamtkunstwerk in the History of Opera

The concept of the "total work of art" is much larger than a chapter on Wagner in the history of opera. In fact, the history of debates about opera's integration of its individual components is as long as opera itself. As Christopher Morris has recently observed:

> Measured against the possibility of rediscovering a lost unity—between poetry and music in Hellenic theatre—a conviction shared by so many of the theorists and practitioners of opera, from the Florentine Camerata through the eighteenth-century philosophers to Wagner—opera was always haunted by an ancient ghost and found wanting by comparison. That ghost was Aristotle.[3]

Aristotle's requirements for unity were part of the discussions of the Florentine Camerata, which is credited with creating the first works in the operatic genre at the end of the sixteenth century. Their reconstruction of ancient Greek tragedy was based on the idea that it had been sung rather than spoken throughout, so that the meaning of the words was inseparable from the expressive and musical aspects of their sound.[4] Although this background was well known to musicologists in the eighteenth century and had been extensively described by early nineteenth-century historians and critics, Wagner never acknowledged that the first works in the operatic repertoire came into being as an attempt to bring together arts that had gone their separate ways.[5]

Wagner's lengthiest theoretical text, *Oper und Drama*, includes his most detailed historical account of opera. As part of a polemic attacking the opera of his time, his version departs from the standard narrative that had been established by the mid nineteenth century, and presents opera's history as a descent into corruption. Any historical attempts to restore dramatic unity to opera that Wagner deigns to mention are dismissed. This includes the reforms called for in the eighteenth century by Christoph Willibald von Gluck, who famously supported the call to make the music subordinate to the drama in a formulation that is close to Wagner's own declaration in bold type at the onset of *Oper und Drama*, "that a Means of expression (Music) has been made the end, while the End of expression (the Drama) has been made a means."[6]

*Oper und Drama* devotes far more pages to decrying how the whole has been split into isolated parts than to strategizing how to restore unity. It follows the premise of the other Zurich writings in attributing the downfall of art to its being severed from sociopolitical life and becoming merely commercial entertainment. But nowhere else does Wagner go so far in denigrating music as an art unto itself. Music on its own here is deemed "absolute" music, meaning "just" music or "only" music in a dismissive sense. For Wagner, the problem with absolute music is precisely that it is "absolute"—so autonomous that it has no relationship to anything but itself. Gluck, Weber and Mozart were, in his eyes, first and foremost composers (or, as he calls them, absolute musicians), and therefore could not subordinate music in order to achieve a greater integration in their operas. In contrast, Wagner presents himself as the anti-absolute: selflessly reaching out to create connections (words as well as music) for the sake of the drama.

Wagner did know about other manifestos addressing the need to reform opera and integrate its individual elements. His reading of music criticism by the previous generation, especially E.T.A. Hoffmann and Carl Maria von Weber, influenced his own writing tremendously. For instance, the term "music drama," now a fixed part of the Wagnerian lexicon, appears in E.T.A. Hoffmann's praise of Gluck in 1810: "While most of the newer operas are only concerts given on the stage and in costume, Gluck's opera is the true music

drama ["das wahre musikalische Drama"] in which the action proceeds without stopping, from moment to moment."[7]

Weber's writings on opera appear to have given Wagner even more food for thought. In his review of Hoffmann's 1816 opera *Undine*, Weber declared: "Of course when I speak of opera I am speaking of the German ideal, namely a self-sufficient work of art in which every feature and every contribution by the related arts are molded together in a certain way and dissolve, to form a new work."[8]

Using these passages and others, John Warrack has argued that "the ideal of a Gesamtkunstwerk (if not by this name) had a long history in Germany ... [and] what tended to distinguish the German writings from those of other nations was the ideal of a genuine fusion of the arts, rather than their simultaneous stage presence."[9] In *Carl Maria von Weber and the Search for a German Opera*, Stephen Meyer has also presented evidence that demonstrates that the issue of unifying the arts into an operatic whole pre-dates Wagner and even Weber in Germany.[10] In sum, although the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk is overwhelmingly attributed to Wagner, the aim of transforming the separate arts into a single artwork has long been central to the history of opera, and of German opera in particular.

## The Problem with Naming the Gesamtkunstwerk

Wagner did not take credit for the Gesamtkunstwerk concept, nor for the term itself. As Nicholas Vazsonyi's chapter in this volume points out, the fact that Gesamtkunstwerk and music drama became Wagnerian "trademarks" had little to do with Wagner himself; both terms are largely absent from his writings. Vazsonyi shows that the term Gesamtkunstwerk appeared in print before Wagner "coined" it, and I have found evidence that it was used without reference to Wagner for a time both before and after his "appropriation" of it.[11] As previously mentioned, Wagner does not use Gesamtkunstwerk at all in the most elaborate exposition of his artistic system, *Oper und Drama*, preferring instead the simple "Drama" or occasionally "Drama der Zukunft" (Drama of the Future) or "Kunstwerk der Zukunft" (Artwork of the Future) as the genre he proposes to create. It is worth remembering, too, that the titles of the main Zurich essays refer to a "Kunstwerk" and a "Drama" not a "Gesamtkunstwerk" and a "Music Drama." In his most forthright statement from the Zurich years, Wagner declared: "Because I do not care to invent any arbitrary name for these works, I will simply call them dramas, since that at least indicates the standpoint from which they are to be understood."[12]

Gesamtkunstwerk as a Wagner trademark emerged rather slowly. Music periodicals started using the term with any frequency only in the 1870s.

Significantly, it appeared most often in the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*, an independent pro-Wagner journal, and in the *Bayreuther Blätter*, founded in 1878 with Wagner's encouragement. But for the vast majority of music journals in the late nineteenth century, the term is only used once or twice in passing. Moreover, there is no mention of Gesamtkunstwerk in places where we might well expect it. It is altogether absent from contemporary writings on the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876, such as Friedrich Nietzsche's "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth."[13] The term also does not seem to have figured in the tremendous effort to promote *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and its first complete performance at the theater for which it was specially built.[14] If the number and variety of reference works or guides for Wagner enthusiasts had dramatically increased by the end of the nineteenth century, it was only in the twentieth century that such publications began to employ Gesamtkunstwerk as an essential term for understanding Wagner's works.[15]

In a recent article, Lydia Goehr calls attention to the many notable inconsistencies in recent scholarship when it comes to designating Wagner's works as operas or music dramas. Her thesis is that "a significant part of the tension regarding naming and titling, as it manifests itself in Wagner's oeuvre, turns on a move Wagner encouraged, to cease thinking about names and titles as merely descriptive or classificatory and to start thinking about them as pointing toward an *unnamable* ideal."[16] However true this might have been about Wagner's intention, in practice the terms took on a life of their own, as others sought to explain Wagner and his works. To give just one relatively recent example, Jürgen Kühnel, in his excellent overview of the prose writings for *The Wagner Handbook*, calls *The Artwork of the Future*: "A general aesthetic theory which centers on what Wagner referred to only in passing as the Gesamtkunstwerk."[17] He continues by stating that "*Oper und Drama* finally gives concrete form to the aesthetics of the Gesamtkunstwerk as the aesthetics of music drama."[18] He could have said more clearly and more simply that *Oper und Drama* finally gives concrete form to the general aesthetic theory of *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* without ever using the terms "Gesamtkunstwerk" and "music drama."[19] But these "buzz words" are tempting not because they explain the concept, but rather because they substitute labels for definitions.[20]

## Assessing the Political Dimension of Wagner's Works

In general, the explication of Wagner's aesthetics is complicated by the long span of his life, his stylistic evolution, his massive corpus of critical writings (which often contradict each other), and his multiple roles as poet, musician, and thinker. The Wagner literature exhibits a whole range of interpretations on the relationship among Wagner's writings, dramatic works, and political

beliefs. After World War II, Wagner's works were "denazified" by focusing on the analysis of the music's formal features. Carl Dahlhaus, the pre-eminent German musicologist of the second half of the twentieth century, authored many influential books and essays on Wagner, in which he contended that "political convictions meant nothing to Wagner except in relation to the idea of musical drama, the measure of all things for him ... Art was the only idea in which Wagner believed."[21] American musicologists such as Thomas Grey, Anthony Newcomb, and William Kinderman concurred on this point, citing Wagner's later writings, where he seemed to assert the primacy of music in the total artwork.[22] They generally agreed that Wagner abandoned the ideal of the Gesamtkunstwerk following his reading of Schopenhauer, and subsequently reinstated music to its position as the highest of the arts.[23] The corollary to this view, whether or not explicit, was that Wagner invoked Gesamtkunstwerk only when he was most directly concerned with art's political function.

Starting in the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, scholars outside the discipline of musicology approached the tendentious question of Wagner's importance as a political thinker and how this dimension affected the definition of Gesamtkunstwerk. David J. Levin, James Treadwell, Lydia Goehr, Marc Weiner, Linda and Michael Hutcheon, and Slavoj Žižek are examples of scholars from other disciplines who have emphasized Wagner's original, political formulation of the unity of the arts.[24]

In German musicology, the most prolific and prominent figure who has argued that politics was the driving force behind Wagner's creative activity is Udo Bermbach. His 1994 book, *Der Wahn des Gesamtkunstwerks*, is the most prominent and extensive presentation of his argument about Gesamtkunstwerk's fundamentally political nature, a position he has reiterated in many other books and articles. According to Bermbach, Wagner distinguished his views on artistic union from earlier synesthetic concepts by inverting a basic Romantic premise: instead of aiming to aestheticize "real" life, Wagner insisted that life must inform and infuse the artwork.[25]

Bermbach asserts that it is Wagner's new conception of the *Volk* that lies at the heart of the connection between politics and Gesamtkunstwerk. "For him the Volk has social and political significance, and it is only because it is unified socially and politically that it can realize its potential for artistic productivity."[26] Because the Volk is a free association of creative people—an "artistic fellowship of the future" as Wagner put it in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*—only an artwork that is created communally can embody the ideals of a post-revolutionary social order.[27] Bermbach draws special attention to a section at the end of *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, where Wagner envisions an ideal society that would provide for "higher, universal, spiritual needs," through flexible cooperatives of artists that form and dissolve as needed.[28] In one of his most radical statements, Wagner declares:

> Each dramatic artwork, as it enters upon life, will therefore be the work of a new and never-hitherto-existing, and thus a never-to-be-repeated fellowship of artists: its communion will take its rise from the moment when the poet-actor of the hero's role exalts his purpose to the common aim of the comrades whom he needed for its exposition, and will be dissolved the very instant that this purpose is attained.[29]

A political scientist as well as a musicologist, Bermbach is struck by Wagner's grasp of modern organizational theory, calling this passage "a plan for flexible organizational structures, which follow changing demands and in which there is no more place for institutional consolidation and stable, hierarchically ordered rankings."[30] He sees intriguing parallels to initiatives of grassroots democracy where citizens come together in ad hoc organizations for a specific purpose. Bermbach argues, too, that Wagner continued to be informed by his political idealism to the very end. He bases this view on the late essay "Religion und Kunst" (Religion and Art, 1880) and characterizes the 1876 Bayreuth Festspiele as the realization of the Gesamtkunstwerk concept he first outlined in 1849:

> Wagner intended the Festspiel as a celebration of the revolution, as the interpretation of revolutionary events in a particular theatrical form ... With the idea of the Festspiel, the final component that constitutes the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk is specified ... It is based upon music drama, on the synthesis of the individual arts that it achieves, but it reaches far beyond that. It represents above all the performance of Wagnerian music drama in the space of a theatrical festival, a festival play, in a theater whose architecture removes every social distinction; in a social public space where the separation of stage and spectator no longer exists, in which the people take part in the performance, both producing and consulting, and in which life, including politics, is subsumed aesthetically into a perceptible representation.[31]

In sum, Bermbach seizes on the most radical passages from 1849 that propose to dissolve the traditional distinctions of author, work, and audience in order to transform society. He asserts that these aims informed Wagner's projects to the end of his life.

Another, equally prominent, German musicologist who has written extensively about Wagner, Dieter Borchmeyer, takes the opposite view. His entry for "Gesamtkunstwerk" in the current edition of *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (MGG), the most prestigious German encyclopedia of music, presents the provocative thesis that "Wagner's idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk, insofar as it actually aims at uniting all the arts, is a purely ideological construct (soon abandoned) without any concrete significance for his dramaturgy."[32] He argues that the proof is in the pudding: the operas that were actually completed and performed do not realize any of the political aims expressed in the Zurich writings.

That two pre-eminent scholars have arrived at such different conclusions regarding Wagner's political commitment over the course of his career demonstrates that the question of the political dimension of Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk is far from settled. My re-examination of the evidence draws attention to two factors: the specific historical setting and Wagner's rhetorical strategies. This involves, in particular, focusing in on the critical period in 1849 after the revolutions failed, when Wagner had to run for his life after participating in the May uprising in Dresden. Against this context, and drawing on an analysis of major shifts in Wagner's metaphors and figures of speech in the major Zurich texts, I show how and why Wagner's priorities shifted from theory to practice, from politics to aesthetics, and from Gesamtkunstwerk to music drama.

## Gesamtkunstwerk and *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*

Compared to Wagner's other writings, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* stands out for its enthusiasm for the Young Hegelian philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, to whom it is dedicated. In his autobiography, Wagner recalled reading Hegel and Feuerbach before he embarked on his own writings at this time. These authors, with their difficult prose, seem to have influenced Wagner's already ponderous writing style, pushing the Zurich-period works toward almost complete opacity. While Feuerbach's philosophy was a crucial influence on critical thought in the lead-up to the revolutions of 1848–49, his popularity waned soon after. His impact on Wagner seems to have taken a similar trajectory. Wagner's discovery of Schopenhauer in 1854 also mirrored a general philosophical trend that favored a resurgence of metaphysics, and treated Feuerbach like yesterday's news.

While under his spell, Wagner expounded mainly on Feuerbach's ideas on the contribution of mutual love to human society and freedom. In the work that, by his own admission, struck Wagner most forcefully, *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit* (*Thoughts on Death and Immortality*), Feuerbach stated:

> Without love, you are inseparable from your particular existence; in love, you and your particularity become nothing. But at the same time this perishing is a new and more excellent state of being. Accordingly, you exist and do not exist in love; love is being and not-being in one, life and death as one life. Love gives life and takes it away, destroys and engenders life.[33]

In Part I of *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, Wagner echoes Feuerbach when he declares repeatedly that the highest human need is love. Love also appears in a section where Wagner calls for reuniting all the arts: not only music, poetry, and dance, but also architecture, sculpture, and painting. Despite this at-

tempt at inclusiveness, dance, music, and poetry receive the most attention, to the point that Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk could more accurately be described as a "Dreikunstwerk."[34] The other arts are certainly superfluous in Wagner's vivid description of how these three "muses" form a single artwork. The detailed imagery, possibly inspired by Botticelli's painting "La Primavera," ends with a picture of the three "sisters" kissing and wrapping around each other to make a single figure:

> As we gaze at this entrancing circle of the purest and most high-born muses of the artistic man, we see the three first stepping forward, each with their loving arm entwined around the other's neck; then, now this one and then the other, slipping out of their entwinement, as though to show the others her beautiful figure in its independence, only brushing with her fingertips the hands of the others; now the one, entranced by the view of the double figure of her two firmly clasped sisters, leaning towards them; then the two, enchanted by the one, greet and do her homage—until finally all, tightly clasped, breast to breast, limb to limb, with heated love-kisses join together into a single blissfully living figure.[35]

Wagner's further commentary on the relationship of the three to each other sounds very similar to Feuerbach's theory that love annihilates the individual in order to give life to a greater whole:

> When at last the pride of all three arts in their own self-sufficiency shall break to pieces, and pass over into love for one another; when at last each art can only love itself when mirrored in the others; when at last they cease to be dissevered arts—then will they all have power to create the perfect artwork; and their own desistence, in this sense, is already of itself this Art-work, their death immediately its life.[36]

If any of the arts is given priority here, it is dance. Wagner declares that dance was the original art because of its primal basis, rhythm, which is also what connects it to music. Towards the end of *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* he returns to the image of the three sister arts and how important love is for their ability to lose their individuality and gain a higher unified existence.

## *Oper und Drama*: Love and Procreation

Wagner began work on *Oper und Drama* about two years after *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*.[37] As discussed above, some scholars see a continuity in the political aims; others detect a shift in *Oper und Drama* from an explicit political program to a more aesthetically oriented discussion of Wagner's plans for the remaking of art. In this much longer essay, Wagner developed different imagery.[38] Instead of three sisters as creators of the artwork, he now described how a loving woman (music) gives herself up to man (poetry) in order to create

the artwork through their sexual love. The three arts have now been reduced to two. Wagner's earlier formulation of dance as the original art is cast differently, so that its rhythmic dimension demotes it to being a part of music. The transformation of Wagner's imagery from three sisters to a man and woman coming together to procreate can be read in a number of ways. In his recent book, Adrian Daub argues for taking the sexual imagery seriously; he "posits that there is a logic to the entwinement of these two fields, opera and sexuality, at this precise point in history—that it was necessitated by a concern with totality that attained renewed importance in aesthetics in the wake of Wagner and with the advent of modernism."[39]

Daub, however, does not find it necessary to distinguish between love and sexuality. He uses the words "erotic," "sexual," and "love" interchangeably. He also elides gender roles and sex by assuming that the nineteenth-century concept of the complementarity of masculine and feminine features is the equivalent of the same era's understanding of procreation. I contend that we need to use these terms more carefully, precisely because of the changing ways in which Wagner's analogies and imagery make use of notions of gender, love, and sex. Wagner's preoccupations and priorities about art shift as he moves away from seeing artwork as the result of the entwining of three loving sisters to the consequence of a loving couple having sex. Wagner's avid description of the sisters' embraces and kisses is erotically charged, but this image does not mark the sisters as sexual females capable of childbearing. Their erotic touching leads to a literal meltdown, which results in the formation of a single being or artwork. In *Oper und Drama*, music is singled out and characterized as a woman. The way Wagner stresses this is rhetorically different than his use of other metaphors. He announces: "*Music is a woman*. The nature of Woman is love; but this love is receiving and in receiving an unreservedly *surrendering*, love."[40] It seems to me that this strident declaration tries to push beyond metaphor, to say "music is not *like* a woman, music somehow *is* a woman." Wagner was trying to understand composition as a natural biological process so that he could create actual works by using music/woman as the receptacle for the man's/the poet's fertilizing seed. Like others at this time, Wagner was in the dark about how and what exactly the woman contributes to the child to which she gives birth. But he takes care to minimize as much as possible the woman's role, making the distinction that although music as woman gives birth, she does not beget music drama ("die Musik ist die Gebärerin, der Dichter der Erzeuger").[41]

By *Oper und Drama*'s conclusion, Wagner abandoned any pretense and named himself as the one person who could create music drama. The original vision of a communal creation and a coming together of all the arts, not just music and poetry, was no longer in evidence. There is a possible pragmatic explanation: once Wagner started thinking in terms of actual operas, he acknowledged that he was going to do it all himself. Rather than admit that his

expertise did not extend to all the arts, he focused on the way the librettist and composer came together to create a new artwork, implying with his imagery that a new opera only requires words and music. In "Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde" (A Communication to my Friends), which was written soon after *Oper und Drama*, he more clearly described that the masculine and feminine interactions occur within the one person of the artist. Instead of feminine music and masculine poetry, he equated the feminine with art and the masculine with real life. Wagner acknowledged the danger that the artist's receptive force could be completely absorbed by art, leading to writing absolute music, becoming an absolute artist, and therefore absolutely feminine. But if the artist's receptive force was able to form his ability to receive life impressions, his masculinity could be retained and his life force channeled into an artistically productive force. By the time he was writing "A Communication," Wagner had completely adjusted his theories so that they pointed directly to himself. But I believe Wagner also moved away from his radical long-term vision of a Gesamtkunstwerk because of a pressing need to address the immediate future of art.

## The Doubtful Future for not only Gesamtkunstwerk, but *any* Kunstwerk

After the revolutions of 1848–49 failed, most writers on art abandoned their political rhetoric and tried to regroup. The fear could hardly be suppressed that art had come to a dead end; it had lost its vital force and was petering out. Metaphors and comparisons of art to a living organism that is either dead or dying abound.[42] Empirical evidence indicating that composers' creativity had already dried up was offered as early as July 1848. Leipzig's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* noted a significant drop in the quantity of new music being published. After conceding that being inundated by "floods" of music in previous years had not been optimal either, the anonymous writer described the current situation with revulsion: "Now look where the flood has receded, look at the creeping plants, the weeds that overrun it, look at the vermin that live there, the breed that wiggles and squirms in the slime! Who would want to inspect these grounds?"[43] In the aftermath of the wave of revolutions, only the lowest forms of life and art had not been washed away.

This image of repulsion was echoed in Wagner's notorious contribution to the same journal in 1850, "Das Judenthum in der Musik" (Jewishness in Music). Towards the end of the text, he depicted art as a corpse, with the Jews as the worms that decomposed the body:

> As long as the separate art of music had real, organic life necessity in itself, up to the time of Mozart and Beethoven, a Jewish composer was nowhere to be found; it was impossible that a completely foreign element could occupy a part of the

> living organism for the formation of this life. Only after the inner death of a body was evident did the elements lying outside win the power to seize it, but only in order to decompose it. Then the flesh of this body disintegrated in the teeming life of worms: who looking at this body would take it as still alive? The spirit, that is, *life*, flew from this body to kindred bodies, and that is only life itself: *and only in real life can we also find again the spirit of art, not in the worm-devoured corpse.*[44]

Like the earlier article's image of the filth left behind from a receded flood, Wagner's view of art as a corpse betrays charged feelings of revulsion and disgust with the musical situation. Wagner expresses abhorrence of the corpse, but adds to this his revulsion of the devouring worms. While Wagner spent most of his essay venting his anxiety and frustration over the loss of music's vitality by denigrating the Jews, this particular image sees art as already dead and the Jews as worms living off it.

While his contemporaries seemed mostly resigned to a period of decline, Wagner continued to spout political rhetoric and plans for new artworks, which did not go down well, as he acknowledged in his preface to *Oper und Drama*: "A friend has told me that, with my earlier utterances on Art, I angered many persons far less by the pains I took to unmask the grounds of the barrenness of our nowadays art-making, than by my endeavors to forecast the conditions of its future fruitfulness."[45]

Wagner's claim that his contemporaries were hostile toward any plans for Art's future is supported by another scandal. Contentious exchanges in the musical press that began towards the end of 1852 centered on the term *Zukunftsmusik* (Music of the Future). The origin of the term is not clear, but several common phrases that use Zukunft were "in the air" and probably engendered it together.[46] The vehemence surrounding "Music of the Future," as opposed to the more muted skepticism regarding other terms and concepts, indicate that it hit closest to home in the overall controversy about Wagner. The musicologist Dietmar Strauß has also argued that this term was the most important for characterizing the polarizing debate between musical camps, starting in 1853: "At this time the concept of the future was a central point of discussion, from which the concepts of program music, Neudeutsche, Gesamtkunstwerk and music drama were distinguished as secondary."[47] Wagner's subsequent behavior is also telling: in 1861 he felt compelled to write to Berlioz and disavow any responsibility for the phrase. He even wrote an essay later that year entitled, *Zukunftsmusik* (*The Music of the Future*) in which he attributed the "invention of the specter of a music of the future" to popular reports in the press, which merely picked up on a title without trying to understand his writings. Attention was focused on Wagner because he dared to plan new artworks. His dejected and pessimistic contemporaries split into two groups: those who were angered and those who were inspired by his grandiose plans.

## Conclusion: The Difference between *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* and *Oper und Drama*

*Oper und Drama* tries to specify how a new artwork can be generated. Wagner evidently abandoned the imagery in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* because it could not supply the necessary details. He found the biological procreative analogy, a basic and common trope used over and over in religious, philosophical, and literary imagery, more "naturally" compelling as a depiction of how to make an artwork, while the image of three sisters entwining their limbs provided only a salacious picture.

One can conclude that Gesamtkunstwerk, standing in for the whole of the text *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, is the more political, more utopian, and more egalitarian vision for opera. Love is seen as a universal that ennobles every human being. It is the "glue" that melds people into a single whole, where they give up their individuality in order to be part of a higher unity. *Oper und Drama* is much more focused on the problem of the artist as creator of vital artworks in a pessimistic period when music as a natural resource seemed to have dried up. The creator of music drama, the term usually associated with the thoughts expressed in *Oper und Drama*, is not the human race, or even the three arts of dance, music, and poetry. The creator is a single artist, a poet, who uses music to serve his needs. This difference can be noted by distinguishing between Gesamtkunstwerk and music drama. As fruitful as the term "Gesamtkunstwerk" has been in other contexts, for a true evaluation of its significance to Wagner we must read it in the light of his constantly developing musical style and aesthetics.

## Notes

1. See, for example, explication in Josef Chytry, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), 287–88.
2. For instance, Gottfried Kiesow, *Gesamtkunstwerk—die Stadt: zur Geschichte der Stadt vom Mitteralter bis in die Gegenwart* (Bonn, 1999); Rudolf Sühnel, *Der Park als Gesamtkunstwerk des englischen Klassizismus am Beispiel von Stourhead* (Heidelberg, 1977); and Christian Breuer, *John Lennon und Yoko Ono als Gesamtkunstwerk* (Munich, 1999).
3. Christopher Morris, "'Too Much Music': The Media of Opera," in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, ed. Nicholas Till (Cambridge, 2012), 95.
4. See Tim Carter, "Early Opera," in *Music in Late Renaissance and Early Baroque Italy* (Portland, OR, 1992), 202–21.
5. Some treatments of the early history of opera that could have been available to Wagner include: Johann Georg Sulzer, "Oper; Opera," in *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste in einzeln, nach alphabetischer Ordnung der Kunstwörter auf einander folgenden Artikeln abgehandelt*, exp. ed. (Leipzig, 1787) 3:466–91; Friedrich Rochlitz, "Entstehung der Oper (Schreiben an einen Freund)," in *Für Freunde der Tonkunst* (Leipzig, 1824),

2:281–330; Carl von Winterfeld, *Johannes Gabrieli und sein Zeitalter* (Berlin, 1834); Gottfried Wilhelm Fink, "Merkwürdiges Berühmtwerden der Oper zur Zeit als sie noch nicht ihren Namen erhalten hatte," in *Wesen und Geschichte der Oper: ein Handbuch für alle Freunde der Tonkunst* (Leipzig, 1838), 83–105.

6. Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London, 1900), 2:17. For the sake of consistency, I refer to Wagner's writings using their German titles, even if I have often relied on Ellis' translations of the prose works.
7. Cited in John Warrack, *German Opera: From the Beginnings to Wagner* (Cambridge, 2001), 272.
8. Carl Maria von Weber, *Writings on Music*, ed. John Warrack, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge, 1981), 201–2.
9. Warrack, *German Opera*, 392.
10. Stephen Meyer, *Carl Maria von Weber and the Search for a German Opera* (Bloomington, 2003).
11. Christian Hermann Weisse's *System der Aesthetik als Wissenschaft von der Idee der Schönheit* uses Gesamtkunstwerk as early as 1830. Friedrich Theodor Vischer's important *Aesthetik, oder Wissenschaft des schönen* uses it in 1854 with regard to ancient Greek music, not Wagner, as does Josef Bayer's *Aesthetische Untersuchungen* (Prague, 1863). Julian Schmidt uses it with reference to Goethe in his *Bilder aus dem geistigen Leben unserer Zeit* (Berlin, 1870). A.W. Ambros actually argues that the Gesamtkunstwerk does not occur in the theater, as Wagner says, but rather in the church with sacred music; see A.W. Ambros, *Die Grenzen der Musik und Poesie: eine Studie zur Aesthetik der Tonkunst* (Leipzig, 1872).
12. Wagner, "A Communication to My Friends," as cited in Thomas Grey, "A Wagnerian Glossary" (entry on "Music Drama") in *The Wagner Compendium: A Guide to Wagner's Life and Music*, ed. Barry Millington (London, 2001), 236.
13. Indeed, Nietzsche does not appear to have ever used the term "Gesamtkunstwerk" in his published writings.
14. None of the following titles, for example, employ the term "Gesamtkunstwerk": F. Filippi, *Richard Wagner: eine musikalische Reise in das Reich der Zukunft* (Leipzig, 1876); Gustav Engel, *Das Bühnenfestspiel in Bayreuth: kritische Studie* (Berlin, 1876); Oskar Berggruen, *Das Bühnenfestspiel in Bayreuth im Hinblick auf die bildende Kunst* (Leipzig, 1877); Paul Lindau, *Nüchterne Briefe aus Bayreuth* (Breslau and Leipzig, 1877); Martin Plüddemann, *Die Bühnenfestspiele in Bayreuth, ihre Gegner und ihre Zukunft* (Colberg, 1877); Heinrich Porges, *Das Bühnenfestspiel in Bayreuth. Eine Studie über Richard Wagner's "Ring des Nibelungen"* (Munich, 1877); Max Kalbeck, *Das Bühnenfestspiel zu Bayreuth: eine kritische Studie* (Breslau, 1877).
15. None of these popular guides from the late nineteenth century, for instance, use the term: Carl Giessel, *Bayreuth: Ein Wegweiser durch die Stadt und Umgebung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bühnenfestspiele. Zugleich eine kurze Chronik von Bayreuth ...* (Bayreuth, 1889); Max Chop, *Vademecum für Wagnerfreunde: Führer durch Richard Wagner's tondramen (mit über 400 notenbeispielen)* (Leipzig, 1893); Friedrich Wild and Richard Pohl, *Bayreuth ...: Praktisches Handbuch für Festspielbesucher* (Leipzig, 1896).
16. Lydia Goehr, "From Opera to Music Drama: Nominal Loss, Titular Gain," in *Wagner and His World*, ed. Thomas Grey (Princeton, 2009), 66. Emphasis in original.
17. Jürgen Kühnel, "The Prose Writings," in *Wagner Handbook*, ed. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski, trans. John Deathridge (Cambridge, MA and London, 1992), 582.

18. Ibid.
19. Jack Stein also refers to *Opera and Drama* as Wagner's "central exposition of the Gesamtkunstwerk," in *Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts* (Detroit, 1960), 6.
20. Nicholas Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand* (Cambridge, 2010), 161.
21. John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus, *The New Grove Wagner* (New York, 1984), 95–96. In my view, Dahlhaus overreaches by attempting to derive Wagner's concept of "absolute music"—a term that was unmistakably pejorative for him—directly from the Romantic glorification of music as the ultimate art. See Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago, 1989); and Sanna Pederson, "Defining the Term 'Absolute Music' Historically," *Music & Letters* 90, no. 2 (2009): 240–62.
22. Carl Dahlhaus, "The Music," in Müller and Wapnewski, *Wagner Handbook*, 297–314; Dahlhaus, "Wagners Begriff der 'dichterisch-musikalischen Periode'," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Musikanschauung im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Walter Salmen (Regensburg, 1965), 179–94; Thomas S. Grey, "Wagner and the Problematics of 'Absolute Music' in the Nineteenth Century," in *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* (Cambridge, 1995), 1–50; Klaus Kropfinger, "Beethoven's Role in Wagner's Writings on Art," in *Wagner and Beethoven: Richard Wagner's Reception of Beethoven* (Cambridge, 1991), 68–154; Anthony Newcomb, "The Birth of Music out of the Spirit of Drama: An Essay in Wagnerian Formal Analysis," *19th-Century Music* 5, no. 1 (Summer 1981): 38–66; Newcomb, "Those Images That Yet Fresh Images Beget," *Journal of Musicology* 2, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 227–45; William Kinderman, "Dramatic Recapitulation in Wagner's 'Götterdämmerung'," *19th-Century Music* 4, no. 2 (Autumn 1980): 101–12.
23. Dieter Borchmeyer, *Richard Wagner: Theory and Theater*, trans. Stewart Spencer (Oxford, 1991), 66, 111–15.
24. David J. Levin, ed., *Opera Through Other Eyes* (Stanford, 1993); James Treadwell, *Interpreting Wagner* (New Haven and London, 2003); Lydia Goehr, *The Quest for Voice: On Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998); Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, *Opera's Second Death* (New York, 2002); Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln, 1995); Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* (Lincoln, 1996).
25. Udo Bermbach, *Der Wahn des Gesamtkunstwerks. Richard Wagners politisch-ästhetische Utopie* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 229.
26. Ibid., 247.
27. Wagner, *Artwork of the Future*, 196.
28. Ibid., 203–4.
29. Ibid., 204.
30. "Jahre, denn Wagner entwirft hier—sicherlich mit großen Strichen gezeichnet und in eine weite Perspective hineingestellt—den Plan von flexiblen Organisationsstrukturen, die je wechselnden Bedürfnissen folgen sollen und in denen für institutionelle Dies ist gewiß eine der erstaunlichsten Stellen in den politische- ästhetischen Schriften der Züricher Verfestigungen und dauerhaft hierarchisch gestufte Ordnung kein Platz mehr ist." Bermbach, *Wahn des Gesamtkunstwerks*, 250.
31. "Wagner will im Festspiel die Feier der Revolution, die Interpretation der revolutionären Ereignisse in singulärer theatralischer Form ... Mit der Festspielidee ist die letzte konstitutive Komponente der Konzeption des Gesamtkunstwerks benannt ... Er gründet sich auf das Musikdrama, auf die in ihm geleistete Synthetisierung aller Einzelkünste, aber er reicht weit darüber hinaus. Er meint vor allem auch die Aufführ-

rung des Wagnerschen Musikdramas im Rahmen eines theatralischen Festes, eines Festspiels, und zwar in einem Theater, in dem schon durch die Architektur alle gesellschaftlichen Unterschiede wahrnehmbar beseitigt sind; in dem als einem öffentlichen gesellschaftlichen Raum die Trennungen von Bühne und Zuschauerraum nicht mehr existieren, das ›Volk‹ produzierend wie konsultierend an der Aufführung teilnimmt, das ›Leben‹, also auch die Politik, im Musikdrama ästhetisch aufgenommen und zur sinnhaften Darstellung gebracht wird." Bermbach, *Der Wahn des Gesamtkunstwerks*, 266, 270.

32. "Wagners Idee des Gesamtkunstwerks, insofern sie wirklich auf eine Vereinigung aller Künste zielt, eine bloße (bald aufgegebene) ideologische Konstruktion ist—ohne jegliche konkrete Bedeutung für seine Dramaturgie." Borchmeyer, "Gesamtkunstwerk," *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2d edn (Kassel, 1995), 3:1285.
33. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Thoughts on Death and Immortality: From the Papers of a Thinker, Along with an Appendix of Theological-Satirical Epigrams*, ed. James A. Massey (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), 38.
34. Frank Glass makes this point in his book *The Fertilizing Seed: Wagner's Concept of Poetic Intent* (Ann Arbor, 1983).
35. "Beim Anschauen dieses entzückenden Reigens der ächtesten, adeligsten Musen, des künstlerischen Menschen gewahren wir jetzt die drei, eine mit der andern liebevoll Arm in Arm bis an den Nacken verschlungen; dann bald diese bald jene einzelne, wie um den anderen ihre schöne Gestalt in voller Selbstständigkeit zu zeigen, sich aus der Verschlingung lösend, nur noch mit der äußersten Handspitze die Hände der anderen berührend; jetzt die eine, vom Hinblick auf die Doppelgestalt ihrer festumschlungenen beiden Schwestern entzückt, ihr sich neigend; dann zwei, vom Reize der einen gerissen, huldigungsvoll sie grüßend—um endlich Alle, fest umschlungen, Brust an Brust, Glied an Glied, in brünstigem Liebeskusse zu einer einzigen wonniglebendigen Gestalt zu verwachsen." Wagner, *SSD*, 3:83.
36. Wagner, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, 155.
37. Klaus Kropfinger, "Nachwort," in Richard Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, ed. Klaus Kropfinger (Stuttgart, 1994), 449–53.
38. See Thomas S. Grey, "Metaphor," in *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*, ed. Nicholas Vazsonyi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 297–99.
39. Adrian Daub, *Tristan's Shadow: Sexuality and the Total Work of Art after Wagner* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 11.
40. *Opera and Drama*, 1:111. Emphasis in the original.
41. *Opera and Drama*, 3:315.
42. See my "Romantic Music under Siege in 1848," in *Music Theory in the Age of Romanticism*, ed. Ian Bent (Cambridge, 1996), 57–74.
43. "Sehet nur jetzt, da die Fluth zurückgedrängt ist, den Boden an, sehet die Schlingpflanzen, das Unkraut, das ihn überwuchert, blicket an das Ungeziefer, das darinnen lebt, das Gezücht, das sich im Schlamme krümmt und windet! Diesen Boden zu untersuchen, wer hätte dazu Lust?" "Kritischer Anzeiger" of 1 July, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (hereafter *NZfM*) 29 (1848): 7.
44. "So lange die musikalische Sonderkunst ein wirkliches organisches Lebensbedürfniß in sich hatte, bis auf die Zeiten Mozart's und Beethoven's, fand sich nirgends ein jüdischer Componist: unmöglich konnte ein, diesem Lebensorganismus gänzlich fremdes Element an den Bildungen dieses Lebens Theil nehmen. Erst wenn der innere Tod eines Körpers offenbar ist, gewinnen die außerhalb liegenden Elemente die Kraft, sich

seiner zu bemächtigen, aber nur um ihn zu zersetzen. Dann löst sich wohl das Fleisch dieses Körpers in wimmelnde Viellebigkeit von Würmern auf: wer möchte bei ihrem Anblicke aber wohl der Körper selbst noch für lebendig halten? Der Geist, das ist: *das Leben*, floh von diesem Körper hinweg zu wiederum Verwandtem, und das ist nur das Leben selbst: *und nur im wirklichen Leben können auch wir den Geist der Kunst wieder finden nicht bei ihrer würmerzerfressenen Leiche.*" K. Freigedank, "Das Judenthum in der Musik," *NZfM* 33 (1850):111.

45. "Ein Freund teilte mir mit, daß ich mit dem bisherigen Ausspruche meiner Ansichten über die Kunst bei vielen weniger dadurch Ärgernis erregt hätte, daß ich den Grund der Unfruchtbarkeit unseres jetzigen Kunstschaffens aufzudecken mich bemühte, als dadurch, daß ich die Bedingungen künftiger Fruchtbarkeit desselben zu bezeichnen strebte." Wagner, *Oper und Drama* (Stuttgart, 1984), 7.
46. Besides *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, Wagner had given Part III of *Oper und Drama* the subtitle "Dichtkunst und Tonkunst im Drama der Zukunft" (Poetry and Music in the Drama of the Future). For a detailed investigation of the term's origin, see Christa Jost and Peter Jost, "'Zukunftsmusik.' Zur Geschichte eines Begriffs," Musiktheorie 10 (1995): 119–35.
47. Dietmar Strauß, "Eduard Hanslick und die Diskussion um die Musik der Zukunft," in *Eduard Hanslick. Sämtliche Schriften. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Dietmar Strauß, Band I, 4 Aufsätze und Rezensionen 1857–1858 (Vienna, Cologne and Weimar, 2002), 407.

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