

The Bayreuth Festspielhaus: The Metaphysical Manifestation of Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen

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Abstract

This essay explores how the architectural design of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus effects the performance of Wagner's later operas, specifically *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Contrary to Wagner's theoretical writings, which advocate equality among the various facets of operatic production (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), I argue that Wagner's architectural design elevates music above these other art forms. The evidence lies within the unique architecture of the house, which Wagner constructed to realize his operatic vision. An old conception of Wagnerian performance advocated by Cosima Wagner—in interviews and letters—was consciously left by Richard Wagner. However, I juxtapose this with Daniel Barenboim's modern interpretation, which suggests that Wagner unconsciously, or by a *Will* beyond himself, created Bayreuth as more than the legacy he passed on. The juxtaposition parallels the revolutionary nature of Wagner's ideas embedded in Bayreuth's architecture. To underscore this revolution, I briefly outline Wagner's philosophical development, specifically the ideas he extracted from the works of Ludwig Feuerbach and Arthur Schopenhauer, further defining the focus of Wagner's composition and performance of the music. . The analysis thereby challenges the prevailing belief that Wagner intended Bayreuth and *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the opera which inspired the house's inception, to embody *Gesamtkunstwerk*; instead, these creations internalize the drama, allowing the music to reign supreme. From this research I hope to encourage scholars to critically examine the connections between theatre design, composition and performance so that we may better understand the process by which works are manifested in performance.

Keywords

Richard Wagner, Performance Practice, Architecture, Philosophy, Opera



**The Bayreuth Festspielhaus:
The Metaphysical Manifestation of Wagner's
*Der Ring des Nibelungen***

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Richard Wagner's Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, Germany, is distinguished by its unique design, as it was built to realize Wagner's artistic vision for *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.¹ This intimate connection between music and architecture—which fulfills one operatic vision but excludes all others—has made Bayreuth one of the world's most controversial structures. By analyzing the inspirations behind Bayreuth's construction—specifically Wagner's opinions, writings, philosophical background, and compositional style—we can expand our understanding of its purpose and potential, thereby eliciting an analysis of Bayreuth that reflects who Wagner was as an artist. This essay will define Wagner as two contrasting composers: Wagner the Librettist, who believes an opera's drama—narrative events and emotional tensions—is rooted in the text; and, Wagner the Musician, who expresses drama *through*

1. From here after referred to as Bayreuth.

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music. Through this distinction, we can understand which Wagner constructed Bayreuth and how this effects our interpretation of its function. Wagner's philosophical development, from anarchist to Schopenhauerian, chronologically and creatively parallels the transition from Librettist to Musician in his operas. As Bayreuth's construction also spanned this conversion, it follows that performances at Bayreuth should reflect the influences of this transition; however, since their inception, Wagner's operas have evaded conclusive interpretations. Cosima Wagner's productions express the ideas of Wagner the Librettist, while Pierre Boulez's interpretations demonstrate those of Wagner the Musician. Through an analysis of acoustic theory; Wagner's compositional style and philosophical development; and, the performance history of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at Bayreuth, I will demonstrate that Bayreuth's architecture was originally conceived to fulfill the vision of Wagner the Librettist. However, reflecting Wagner's aforementioned transition—from anarchist to Schopenhauerian—it ironically elevates the music above the libretto, fulfilling the vision of Wagner the Musician.

Acoustic Theory

In 1875, the final architectural design of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus included a Roman odeum with 1345 seats in 30 steeply descending fan-shaped rows; a sunken pit with a curved

hood; and, a double proscenium.² Wagner claimed that the purpose of these architectural phenomena were to visually enhance the audience's focus and connection to the performance. He forged psychological intimacy between audience and art by cloaking the theatre in complete darkness, thus eliminating all distractions. By establishing an unbroken line of sight, he created a link between the audience and the visual spectacle, while obscuring the source of the music in the orchestra pit. This dramatic vision serves Wagner the Librettist, who is concerned with conveying the drama in his operas through sight and language. All other operatic elements, including music, merely support the libretto.

In terms of acoustics, however, the aforementioned designs are more than just visual enhancements. Frederic Spotts explains:

The irregular surface created by the pillared buttresses along the walls, with their hollow wooden columns, diffuse acoustical energy which is finally grounded in the shallow galleries at the rear. The auditorium is therefore an exceptional receptor of sound, which it blends, distributes and softens while enhancing its clarity.³

Ironically, the innovations Wagner employed to enhance the audience's visual engagement had remarkable acoustic

2. For more information and images of these three architectural innovations please refer to: Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 47.

3. *Ibid.*, 9.

repercussions. For example, the sunken pit, added to remove any interruption of light between the stage and audience, blends the woodwind and brass colours from the back of the pit with the strings at the front, creating a rich dark sound unique to Bayreuth.⁴ The sound of the orchestra is first released onto the stage where it mixes with the voices of the performers; then, this new balance between voice and orchestra is projected into the auditorium.⁵ As a result, Bayreuth's acoustic produces a balance whereby the orchestra does not overpower the voice; unlike theatres without a covered pit, in which the orchestra and voice mix in the auditorium. In this way, the sunken and covered pit emphasizes the intangible nature of music, demonstrating the will of Wagner the Musician. That most of Bayreuth's innovations possess great acoustic abilities can be considered a fortunate accident of history; neither Wagner nor his wife and greatest admirer, Cosima Wagner, disclosed that the architectural innovations of Bayreuth were meant to have such radical acoustic repercussions.⁶ As we further explore Wagner's compositional process it seems as if Wagner the Musician subconsciously worked with, and in some cases as a result of, Wagner the Librettist; this foreshadows Wagner's later operas (e.g. *Götterdämmerung*), in which music is the primary source of expression.

4. Ibid., 11. To further clarify this point, there are no existing opera houses with a similar sized pit submerged beneath the stage. As a result of this architectural phenomenon, the sound, as described above, is unlike any other acoustic space.

5. Ibid., 14.

6. Ibid., 51.

Wagner, an avid publisher of his compositional philosophies, advocated a balance between text and music in his 1852 essay, *Oper und Drama*; however, in practice this means that the music emphasizes—and is therefore subordinate to—the text, reflecting the ideas of Wagner the Librettist.⁷ In *Oper und Drama*, Wagner asserts that the opera’s orchestra should be analogous to the chorus in Classical Greek Tragedy, which heightened moments of tragedy with music, essentially providing accompaniment to the drama. In contrast, his 1872 essay, *Über die Benennung “Musikdrama,”* espouses the ideal of Wagner the Musician, removing the aforementioned balance and arguing that the music dictates the drama.⁸ This change in Wagner’s compositional hierarchy prompts the question of which vision Bayreuth’s architecture serves: Wagner the Librettist or Wagner the Musician. Bayreuth was built during the publication of *Über die Benennung “Musikdrama,”* but the cycle for which it was built, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, was conceived of and composed primarily during the time of *Oper und Drama*’s publication. We must therefore evaluate not only the musical composition, but also the two musical theories *Der Ring des Nibelungen* represents, in order to uncover Bayreuth’s architectural intent.

7. Richard Wagner, *Prose Works, Volume 2: Opera and Drama*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (St. Clair Shores: Scholarly Press, 1972), 296.

8. Richard Wagner, “On the Note ‘Musicdrama’,” in *Prose Works, Volume 5*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (St. Clair Shores: Scholarly Press, 1972), 303.

Compositional Style

The development from Librettist to Musician can be seen in Wagner's use of leitmotifs. They were employed in their most rudimentary form from *Das Rheingold* to *Siegfried* (acts 1 and 2)—written, 1852–1857; however, in the 20 years leading to the tetralogy's completion, their use becomes more complex. This is evident from act 3 of *Siegfried* until the end of *Götterdämmerung*. In *Das Rheingold*, Wagner uses the leitmotif as sub-text to the narrative, suggesting characters (such as Wotan) and places (such as the Rhine) by playing specific sequences of notes and rhythms.⁹ The leitmotif is an almost tangible representation of the stage action; we expect and are rewarded with the leitmotif's appearance when its subject appears or is mentioned. The unity between music and text in the preliminary opera demonstrates the balance advocated in *Oper und Drama* because the leitmotif describes the stage action; thus, the music is submissive to the text. This is evident in the conclusion of the first scene of *Das Rheingold* (see Ex. 1). At this point, the previously established leitmotifs of the rheingold, the ring, and the renunciation of love are played chronologically in the orchestra. In the text, Alberich steals the gold, stating his intent to make it into a ring; to do so he must renounce all love. As the scene unfolds, each leitmotif appears in the orchestra in conjunction with the text, creating the text-music relationship advocated by Wagner the Librettist.

9. For more information on leitmotifs and their associated meanings in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* refer to Ernest Newman, *Wagner Nights* (London: Putnam, 1949), 475–669.

EXAMPLE 1: Leitmotifs at the end of Scene 1. Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, 58–9.

Leitmotif Legend

- Motive of the Rheingold
- Motive of the Ring
- Motive of Renunciation

The musical score shows the following lyrics and their corresponding leitmotif highlights:

- feuch-tes Ge-zücht! (Er strack die Hand nach dem Gold aus.) Das Licht
- lösch ich es aus, ent-rei - ße dem Riff des Oehd.
- schmiedend-rächenden Ring; denn hör es die Flut;
- So ver-fluch ich die Lie-be!

Wagner the Musician—post-1865—however, used the orchestra to illustrate the evolving emotions of the characters and elaborate on—not merely imitate—the libretto. *Götterdämmerung*, for example, uses numerous leitmotifs from all four operas, making it impossible for the audience to perceive the end of one leitmotif and the beginning of another. The increasing complexity of the composition surpasses the audience’s cognitive experience of the work; in other words,

not only does the music tell us more than the text, but also an audience watching the work without a score cannot clearly discern each leitmotif apart from the musical fabric. Bryan Magee confirms this: “It goes without saying that orchestral writing of this kind could not possibly, even in theory, have a note-to-word or phrase-to-line relationship to the poetic text.”¹⁰ Because the audience cannot follow each individual motif in correlation with what occurs on stage, the music becomes an expression of its own, forsaking the balance between all art forms as stated by Wagner in *Oper und Drama*.¹¹

In *Das Rheingold*, the text (emphasized by the music) drives the drama of the opera; however, in the act 2 trio of *Götterdämmerung* between Hagen, Gunther, and Brünnhilde, the orchestra illustrates and drives the emotions of the singers. The orchestral leitmotifs foreshadow the characters’ changing psychological states—anger, revenge, and sorrow. The interlude leading into the trio presents the leitmotifs in quick succession: Heroic love (from Brünnhilde and Siegfried’s love duet); Motive of Penalty (the consequence of Siegfried’s oath broken); Motive of Vengeance (Brünnhilde’s vengeance); Motive of Destruction (the Ring’s destruction); The Curse (the curse on the Ring); and, Hagen (Hagen’s spear) (see the Appendix).¹² These leitmotifs depict Brünnhilde’s sorrow regarding Siegfried’s deceit; however, her fury and

10. Bryan Magee, *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 262.

11. Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 335.

12. The leitmotif categorization is according to Ernest Hutcheson, *A Musical Guide to the Richard Wagner Ring of the Nibelung* (New York: AMS Press, 1972), 203–15.

determination still force her to pursue revenge. The distance between the stage and audience in an opera house makes it difficult to portray these psychological states; therefore, leitmotifs convey emotions in Wagner's later works. Although, the complexity of their combination inhibits the listener's ability to identify—completely—each leitmotif without a score, the listener perceives the impression of the original leitmotif within its new complex environment and can infer its meaning. Daniel Barenboim, a regular guest conductor at Bayreuth, believes we experience Wagner's operas first by “understanding through the ear and only then the perception through the eye,” congruent with practices of Wagner the Musician.¹³

Further emphasizing Barenboim's point, in the nineteenth century it was a common practice to read the printed libretto while—at the same time—watching an opera because of the obscured nature of hearing text when sung operatically.¹⁴ This was possible because the architecture in opera houses—up until the creation of Bayreuth—left the auditorium as well as the stage well lit by gas lamps, and later electric lighting, during the performance.¹⁵ It is plausible that Wagner—while composing *Der Ring des Nibelungen*—created new music using a synthesis of music and poetry as well as a continuous form in order to effectively perform his music in absolute

13. Daniel Barenboim, *Music Quickens Time* (New York: Verso Books, 2008), 30.

14. Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera: the Last Four Hundred Years* (New York: Allen Lane, 2012), 3.

15. *Ibid.*, 31.

darkness, thus assuming the beliefs of Wagner the Librettist.¹⁶ In other words, using the leitmotif to decompose old closed forms and describe the plot (enhancing its visual effect), Wagner composed *Das Rheingold* up to Act 3 of *Siegfried*. However, in the latter half of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*—as we have seen—the music becomes more complex, so much so that music becomes the prime form of expression—opposed to sight—helped by the darkness of Bayreuth. We can further explore the reason for and effect of Wagner’s emphasis on the music by analyzing his philosophical influences.

Philosophical Development

In addition to his theories on music, Wagner was immersed in Romantic philosophical thought, from the revolutionary statements of Feuerbach to the renunciation of our will-to-live suggested by Schopenhauer. Their writings influenced many of Wagner’s own radical and innovational ideas for libretti and musical composition. Wagner came into contact with Ludwig Feuerbach’s writings during the years preceding the Dresden Revolution of 1849. The revolution was fueled by the participants’ desire to be treated as purely ‘human’; thus, they demanded an end to the illusions of religion and politics.¹⁷ The ideas of Feuerbach inspired Wagner to write *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, starting with the first draft for *Siegfried’s Tod*.¹⁸ This later became *Götterdämmerung*, a myth exposing the flaws in political and religious hierarchies

16. Ibid., 356.

17. Magee, *The Tristan Chord*, 52.

18. Ibid., 51.

of nineteenth-century society. Feuerbach argues that humanity idolizes manifestations of human qualities and values in myths, as evident in their portrayal of gods and kings. It follows that, in order for humanity to be released from its own enslavement, we must acknowledge these human qualities in our politics and religion, before finally disassembling them.¹⁹ Wagner harnessed this ideology by creating a myth (the very concept Feuerbach was trying to deconstruct), *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, which emulates the qualities we associate with contemporaneous political hierarchies. *Der Ring des Nibelungen* depicts the inevitable destruction of political hierarchies and thus, myths themselves. We must free ourselves from the illusion of our own myths because through them, politicians have taken our freedom—something that can only be forcefully removed (this is portrayed by the theft of the rheingold in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*); thus we surrendered our freedom based on a myth. The gods in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* represent politicians, or people of power who control others' fates, and Siegfried, a visionary, was to lead a new human order.²⁰ Wagner depicts this revolutionary message in the libretto: the German people must realize the humanity within figures holding power, and the susceptibility for those with power to abuse it.²¹ To solve this problem, Feuerbach, and consequently Wagner, suggest that the people must come together to destroy the political hierarchies plaguing their society.²²

19. *Ibid.*, 53.

20. *Ibid.*, 54.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

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Wagner believed that musical form in opera needed to be radically changed in order to portray his revolutionary message, resulting in his essay, *Oper und Drama*. His aim, as summarized by Peter Caldwell, was to discredit the traditions of French and Italian opera using Feuerbach's ideology:

The music, became an end, while the end, the expression itself, became a mere means, so in politics the means, embodied in the state, came to stand over its end, the people. It reflected a world where a separate "political state" stood above and apart from the people, and where religion in the form of Christianity sought to control the state—a world where state and religion, armed with artificial myths of origin, conspired to wring the spontaneity and authenticity out of social relations.²³

Wagner believed that opera was not representing the voice of the people, but amplifying the voice of the state. To portray his ideal of art, contrary to French and Italian opera, Wagner argued for *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which means "to pull together different representational forms for a fuller artwork."²⁴

Wagner's idea was to combine the plot (which was reduced to only those words necessary to the drama) with the emotions of the music so that each reflected the other—thus elevating the work through its unity. *Gesamtkunstwerk* communicates Wagner's revolutionary message of social unity through the

23. Peter C. Caldwell, *Love, Death, and Revolution in Central Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 101–2.

24. *Ibid.*, 104.

text by combining all of the arts for the greater goal of revolution, as expressed in the libretto. Feuerbach's principle is recreated theatrically using the reflection of the opera's stage action in the music. For example, *most* leitmotifs in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* are first played in connection with the text, as heard in the renunciation motif sung by Woglinde in *Das Rheingold*. Wotan's leitmotif, which describes the power he wields through his spear, however is only played by the orchestra. By orchestrating Wotan's leitmotif without his voice, Wotan is disassociated from his power because it does not originate from himself; rather, the orchestra—which Wagner associates with the Greek chorus, representing the voice of the people—plays the leitmotif, providing Wotan's spear and thus Wotan himself with power. In other words, Wotan's power resides in the myth's we create. Wotan's power originates from the people who give it to the myth, as depicted by the orchestral leitmotif. The leitmotif exposes the connection between the stage and the music which is analogous to the connection between political power (Wotan on stage) and the people (the leitmotif within the composition). In Wagner's view, the leitmotif not only illustrates the connection between the people and political power, but the leitmotif also destroys closed forms in music. Wagner associated closed forms with political (French) power; thus, the leitmotif served to expose political corruption, and in effect began decomposing closed forms (political hierarchies). Because the leitmotif depicts the power we give to myths (political structures) which limit our freedom, using the leitmotif Wagner attempted to illustrate musically his belief in the current state of political corruption and how we must destroy it.

Gesamtkunstwerk, in its strictest form, is the methodology of Wagner the Librettist. However, upon discovering the works of Schopenhauer, Wagner shifted the balance essential to the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in favour of the music (rather than the unity of all art forms). It became the music's function to initiate and sustain the drama, distorting the previous balance between music and text. During the 1850s, while Wagner was composing the first three operas of the *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, up to act 3 of *Siegfried*, he became interested in Arthur Schopenhauer, whose ideas, specifically regarding music, changed Wagner's political views and compositional style. This transformation took place during the break in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*'s composition while Wagner wrote *Tristan und Isolde*.²⁵ *Tristan* is Wagner's realization of Schopenhauer's philosophy in the form of music. Here, he rejects the balance between music and drama and focuses on the music. This idea is emulated in Schopenhauer's argument:

Music lacks clear references to ideal forms (unlike poetry or painting), it doesn't exhibit Ideas of the unconscious Will-to-live, that animal urge to stay alive at all costs and propagate the species. Rather, music is

25. After composing act 2 of *Siegfried*, Wagner ceased his work on *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. It is not explicitly stated by Wagner why he broke from this composition in 1857, but it has been suggested by scholars like Bryan Magee that he was creatively tired of the leitmotivic restrictions he set forth in *Oper und Drama*. *Tristan und Isolde* became the outlet for Wagner's excess creativity involving freer forms. Thus, the orchestra became more independent, affecting the composition of the final two operas of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

“the most powerful of all the arts” because it “exhibits the Will itself,” which is why it acts directly on our “feeling, passion and emotions,” so that it quickly arouses these or even alters them.²⁶

Schopenhauer argues that music is the voice of the metaphysical Will, the unconscious driving force behind existence, offering our disparate personal wills a unified connection to the one universal Will. Music has the ability to affect our emotions, disturbing us with dissonance and relaxing us with resolution. Schopenhauer considers this constant musical struggle the best demonstration of the eternal suffering of human existence. Music is the most effective of all the arts because it is intangible like the Will.²⁷

Wagner’s understanding of Schopenhauer permeated his musical thinking, changing his view of composition. Music became the expression of unconscious being, something we know exists, but cannot identify—like the complex web of leitmotifs during the completion of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. As such, the innovations in the Festspielhaus, originally created to psychologically connect the audience to the stage, can be reinterpreted as a channel for the subconscious Will of the music. In other words, the orchestra dictated the drama during

26. Laurence Dreyfus clarifies Schopenhauer’s ideas which are expressed by Arthur Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne in Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 65.

27. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume 1*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (Indian Hills: Falcon’s Wing Press, 1958), 255–67.

Wagner's completion of the *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. It is a force we cannot identify by sight as a result of the covered pit, but it affects us through the complex network of leitmotifs, which we cannot completely understand or grasp. Although Wagner reuses the leitmotifs from the first three operas in *Götterdämmerung* because he is unable to dispose of his previous theoretical construction, the composition molds old and new leitmotifs with such complexity that they do not retain their original character. This creates a psychological web of developing recurring material that guides the listener through the work. Like Schopenhauer's Will, the audience can unconsciously feel the music's effect, but they cannot give it concrete shape. Leitmotifs are no longer sung first by the characters, as in *Das Rheingold*, to align the text with the drama, like a librettist; rather, the leitmotifs appear in the orchestra, without the assistance of the vocal line, disconnecting the dramatic narrative from the libretto and passing it to the orchestra. Magee emphasizes this point:

Starting out with a libretto embodying the principles of [*Oper und Drama*] Wagner has managed, untroubled, to do something for which he excoriated his earlier contemporaries in the same book: he takes what is in effect a libretto written by a different man and treats it as a clothes-horse on which to hang the glorious apparel of his most gorgeous music.²⁸

28. Magee, *The Tristan Chord*, 262.

Wagner began with a libretto following the principles of Feuerbach yet completed *Der Ring des Nibelungen* with music emulating the Will of Schopenhauer.

Magee goes on to distinguish that Wagner did not abandon his earlier principles; rather, he moved beyond them.²⁹ Not only is this transition of ideologies embodied in Wagner's philosophical development, as we have seen, but also in Bayreuth's acoustic make-up. Peter Schneider, who conducted *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in the 1980s, confirms Magee's argument, "Wagner began scoring the work, from the third act of *Siegfried* onward, for his dreamed-of opera house. From this point on the dynamic indications, the enrichment and strengthening of the instrumental texture correspond with the house acoustics."³⁰ Whether knowingly or not, Bayreuth's construction emulates Wagner's move towards music drama, thus at the same time moving beyond his concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Performance Practice

The performance history of Wagner's operas provokes the question of which dramatic medium Bayreuth exhibits. Following his death in 1883, his wife, Cosima Wagner, became the director of Bayreuth. She is noted to have controlled every detail of production: each movement on stage; the pronunciation of the text; the volume and colour of the orchestra; and, the choice of operatic voices. She wished to

29. Ibid., 263.

30. Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 11.

emphasize the realism of the stage production rather than preserve the delicate balance between the voice and orchestration.³¹ Ernest Newman, a famous Wagnerian biographer, argues against Cosima Wagner's concept, in which the orchestra is quietened in order to hear the singers. Instead, Newman argues that the delicate acoustic at Bayreuth allows the voices to be easily heard; therefore, the emphasis should be on bringing out the orchestra, not obscuring it.³² This is clearly in opposition to Cosima Wagner's rendition of *Tristan und Isolde*, in which she removed instruments from the pit to subdue the orchestra and give the text superiority, recreating the ideals of Wagner the Librettist.³³ However, having examined the acoustic of Bayreuth and Wagner's compositional and philosophical development, we can see that Cosima Wagner's perception of Wagnerian productions did not coincide with the objective of Bayreuth's construction.

Pierre Boulez, the famously controversial conductor who performed the 1976 centennial production of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, wrote:

The two worlds [dramatic and musical], without ceasing to corroborate each other, establish a

31. Skelton, *Wagner at Bayreuth*, 99. In Cosima Wagner's production of *Tannhäuser* she deliberately avoided an operatic Elisabeth and chose two young and inexperienced singers because she felt they could provide the childlike quality she desired.

32. Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 10.

33. By removing instruments from the orchestration of *Tristan und Isolde*, designed for the Munich opera house's open pit not blessed with Bayreuth's sensitive acoustic, Cosima Wagner's interpretation served the drama using the text and visual effect.

relationship of increasing complexity which sometimes becomes even rivalry, and in this competition it is usually the musical world which proves its superiority over the [staging and text] in the richness of its texture and the abundance of its meanings, and in the range of its extensions. The musician Wagner surpasses the dramatist Wagner in his powers of conviction in a remarkable way. But it is also clear that the musician Wagner could never have existed without the dramatist Wagner.³⁴

Boulez argues for the dominance of the music over the drama, insofar as the music surpasses what the drama initiates. While I make a similar distinction to Boulez, his use of “dramatist” is confusing because the drama is still vital to the music. Wagner, in his use of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, would be better labelled as the Librettist. Each conception of Wagner—as a Librettist and as a Musician—accomplishes the overriding goal of drama, albeit in crucially different ways. Boulez’s terminology suggests that Wagner creates music for music’s sake, however we have seen that this is not the case. Instead, of enforcing the text and staging, the music is the drama; classifying Wagner as a Librettist or Musician allows us to retain the role of drama, albeit changing the *locus* of that drama. Regarding the construction of Bayreuth, we see that the visual innovations were necessary to form the acoustic consequences that resulted.

34. Pierre Boulez, *Boulez in Bayreuth* (Baarn: Phonogram International, 1981), 27.

Nevertheless, it is the altered understanding of drama that cements the value of those innovations.

We may infer that Wagner, who wanted to construct the ideal theatre for his operas ever since *Der Ring des Nibelungen*'s inception in the early 1850s, incorporated the theories of *Oper und Drama* into his concept of Bayreuth. However, during the early 1870s, the opposing views of *Über die Benennung "Musikdrama"* were at the forefront of his mind, as seen in the composition of the latter half of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. It is possible that if Wagner had lived to stage another complete *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, he would have adjusted the orchestration, so that the beginning would have reflected the end, thus not only complimenting the final realization of Bayreuth acoustic, but also his epiphany of music as drama. Due to Wagner's lack of acoustic theory and rejection of social operatic architecture, it could be assumed that Wagner designed Bayreuth to accommodate a visual aesthetic goal rather than a musical one.³⁵ In spite of this, the Bayreuth Festspielhaus is an acoustic marvel. Philosophically speaking, it is as if a Will beyond Wagner aided the ultimate goal of music as drama rather than his own understanding of

35. "Social operatic architecture" was the most common construction of opera houses during the nineteenth-century. Opera houses were built in semi-circles with boxes for the financially able to purchase, removing them from the middle class who sat in the present day orchestra seats. As a result, Wagner considered this architecture to only emphasize social status and distraction, rather than promote audience engagement with the opera. Furthermore, this type of construction did not consider the function of acoustic in an opera house. For a comprehensive analysis of Wagner's rejection of social architecture see Chapter 1 of Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

acoustics or even the musical conception he left with Cosima Wagner. What results is not a controversy of Bayreuth's uniqueness to only one composer; rather, it is a controversy of which Wagner this theatre is created for, Librettist or Musician. We must address this issue, not in the hopes of ultimately confirming one vision, but rather to broaden the scope of Bayreuth's possibilities. Bayreuth can further illuminate who Wagner was as a composer, performer, and thinker, potentially offering more depth into his unrecorded ideas about music. I hope that this essay will generate further study about the importance of architecture in composition, not only for Wagner, but also for other composers and their performance venues. Live performance is vital to the operatic tradition, and understanding these venues will enhance the study of performance practice as well as increase a greatly neglected direction in musicological discourse.

Appendix

Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*, Act 2, Scene 5, 220–1. Catalogue of leitmotifs from Hutcheston, *A Musical Guide to the Richard Wagner Ring of Nibelung* (New York: AMS Press, 1972), 203–15.

Fünfte Scene.

Leitmotif Legend

- Motive of Gutrune
- Motive of the Curse
- Motive of Renunciation
- Motive of Destruction
- Motive of Penalty
- Motive of Heroic Love
- Motive of Forgetfulness
- Motive of Bondage
- Motive of Murder
- Motive of Vengeance
- Motive of Fate

(Pauken Wirbelruf Ges.)
piu p
(marking) sempre piu p.
(cresc.)
Sehe miächtig
(stärker)
Wcl.
ches Unholds List liegt hier ver. ho. Wcl.
pp
pp

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